Wolfgang Berg
Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh (Eds.)

Exploring Transculturalism

A Biographical Approach

Wolfgang Berg · Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh (Eds.)

Exploring Transculturalism

VS RESEARCH

CrossCulture

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CrossCulture is committed to a new understanding of culture: individuals or communities do have in common a particular set of cultural items, but other sets of rules and tools differ. There are no cultures which have borders like territories or states. Cultural change can thus be explained as cultural exchange.

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Editors' Introduction: Exploring Transculturalism

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh and Wolfgang Berg

The nation state has been at the heart of political discourse since its invention in the nineteenth century. Before this, crossing state borders did not have the same cultural implications as it does today: there was no sense that one was transnational simply because one moved from one political state to another. The idea that states/countries and their cultures are congruent emerged from the widespread perception of the state as the legal and political expression of a sovereign, unified and culturally unique nation. This connection between national boundaries and culture persists in the popular imagination even today: when we travel to Germany, for example, it is German culture that we expect to find people practising. This relationship between the state and its culture is also at the heart of debates about national identity. In Benedict Anderson's influential text on the function of nationalism in contemporary societies, the nation is defined as a kind of cultural metanarrative or ideological framework within which a group of people experiences a sense of unity:

> It is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (B. Anderson 2003:6).

A country's culture is, according to this formulation, the glue that binds its inhabitants together and marks them as a distinct ethnic group. Moreover, members of this group work together to create a social identity, which they use to perform their distinct national character into being (H. Tajfel 1981; R. Jenkins 2004). The function of this social identity is to promote certain values, norms and behaviours considered central to the well-being of the state, and reward those who adhere to these values. By extension, those who cannot or will not subscribe to the socially-sanctioned values are marginalized and othered. This includes, most visibly, ethnic, racial or religious minorities within the state; but also, more invisibly, gender, sexual and other groups perceived to deviate from the "norm". It is little wonder that many debates about the role of cultural nationalism in contemporary state-building have focused on its limiting,

homogenizing narratives predicated on categorization and differentiation (E. Hobsbawm 1990).

1.1 Culture and Identity

In his book *Keywords*, Raymond Williams claims that: "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (R. Williams 1985: 87). The word "culture" has historically been used in a variety of ways. However, it always implies a contrast with nature. In other words, the things that human beings produce or do are culture, whereas things that occur naturally in the world are nature. Williams was one of the first theorists of cultural studies to insist that definitions of culture be extended to include the entire "way of life" common to a certain nationality, race or other social group:

> Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land (R. Williams 1997: 6).

For the purposes of this book, we follow Williams' definition of culture as a multilayered system of rules (meanings, values, views, habits) and things (symbols, products, tools) that people apply or use in daily life. Moreover, we acknowledge that these elements of culture are learned behaviours that mark an individual as belonging to a particular social or national group. Identity after all is based, at least in part, on how we define ourselves in relation to other people in our environment: there are those with whom we identify and those with whom we do not. Such binary categories enable us to define ourselves as members of a particular national, ethnic, racial, gender, etc., group. Nor is such identification a static process: on the contrary, every time we experience something new (job, travel to a foreign country, relationship, cultural text, etc.), we come into contact with new ideas, learn new skills and maybe even adopt different mannerisms or styles of clothing in order to express these new elements of our identities. Because of the increasingly globalized nature of our world, cultural differences are no longer as clearly delineated as they were in the past. Worldwide travel and even television programmes have arguably decreased many of the differences that existed in the past between cultures and make crossing borders an easier experience for the contemporary traveller who is bound to recognize at least some of the cultural rules and values he encounters.

1.2 Culture and Identity in a Postmodern World

Michel Foucault's statement that: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition" (M. Foucault 1986: 22) heralded a new approach to identity in the contemporary world by suggesting that one's identity is formed not as a result of the cultural and national values and history one has inherited, but rather as a result of the different spaces through which one travels. In other words, one's identity is no longer perceived as an inherited construct but rather as something flexible that changes as one moves through the more fluid spaces of the contemporary, globalized world and internalizes a mixture of the different cultures and ideas that one encounters. The idealized contemporary traveller will thus effortlessly cross national and cultural borders and negotiate a constantly changing and flexible identity for himself. Andy Bennett argues that it is no longer even possible to conceive of identity as a static entity, forged from a communal history and value system, because all of the traditional certainties on which identity formation were based in the past have been fatally undermined by a postmodernist flux and fluidity: "Once clearly demarcated by relatively static and ethnically homogenous communities, the 'spaces' and 'places' of everyday life are now highly pluralistic and contested, and are constantly being defined and redefined through processes of relocation and cultural hybridisation" (A. Bennett 2005: 4). Contemporary migrants are thus liberated from the binary oppositions that functioned in the past to define and inscribe them within clear-cut narratives of belonging, and are now free to assume multiple and hybrid identities.

This focus on liberation and hybridity has given rise to a range of terms designed to express the adaptability of the contemporary traveller. Words such as "sojourners" and "commuters" imply an effortless crossing of borders and integration into new cultures, while the rise of family holidays "abroad" and an increase in academic exchange programmes suggest that people today are crossing borders and interacting with other cultures without experiencing any difficulties at all. However, it is important to acknowledge that moving to another country can be a difficult and challenging transition, even if one is somewhat familiar already with the culture and language of that country. The scale of research into the difficulties experienced by migrants as they try to adapt to life in a new country indicates that optimistic accounts of the effortless globalized traveller may be exaggerated and that cultural differences continue to isolate and marginalize those who are not native to a particular society. The problem, as Williams conveys in his use of the phrase "way of life" to define culture, is that many of a society's rules and expectations are assumed rather than

expressed. One can learn all about a society's history, values and language before traveling to it and still find communicating impossible because of one's ignorance of these taken-for-granted rules and expectations. This phenomenon is at the heart of research into "culture shock", the anxiety and confusion experienced by people who find themselves having to operate in an unfamiliar social environment without the requisite skills or cultural knowledge (C. Ward et al 2001). The prevalence of culture shock in the literature on adaptation suggests that contemporary migrants continue to experience the same barriers to inclusion as their historical forebears in spite of globalizing forces. It is in an attempt to explore this contradiction between the supposed flexibility of postmodern identities and the rigidity of inherited cultural divisions that this book focuses on the biographies of a number of people we term transcultural.

1.3 Exploring Transculturalism

In a bid to transcend the limitations of traditional static and binary conceptions of identity and nationality, contemporary theories of culture tend to focus instead on the modern state as a multicultural rather than monolithic society, which accommodates a range of different cultural groups within its own borders, while reaching out to its diaspora. This sense of multiple cultures living together in a single state suggests that a straightforward opposition of belonging/not belonging, us/them is no longer valid. However, the term "multicultural" is in itself problematic, suggesting the presence in society of a number of different – but not necessarily interacting – cultures. As Wolfgang Welsch points out, theories of multiculturalism do nothing to challenge traditional conceptions of culture as a monolithic, homogenous construct and that, in fact, such a "culturalist" approach highlights the presence in a society of cohabiting but crucially *distinct* cultural groups, thus perpetuating the divisions that exist between them (W. Welsch 1999: 194-213). Instead, Welsch advocates the use of the term "transculturality" to convey the complex interconnections that bind different cultures together today. He suggests that this contemporary condition of interconnectivity is a consequence of three distinct developments: the internal complexity of contemporary societies, the external networking in which they engage to build and develop links with other societies, and the tendency in all cultures today to be hybrid, as a result of increased mobility and communications technologies. As a consequence of this condition, he concludes, nothing today is "absolutely foreign" any longer.

Welsch's concept of transculturality offers a useful starting point for the discussion contained in this book. Our focus is on identity and the modern quest

for belonging without conforming. The contributors explore the lives and works of a range of curious, open-minded protagonists who managed, through perseverance and affinity, to adapt to new, alien cultures. The basic premise of this book is that some individuals find ways to transcend their native cultures, in order to explore, examine and infiltrate new, seemingly alien cultures. These people we define as "transculturalists" and their experiences show that in the future it will become increasingly difficult to identify and separate people according to previously accepted delineations. In essence, we are saying that transculturalism defies race, religion, sexuality, class and every sort of classification known to sociologists and marketers. Transculturalists lead unusual lives. They date and marry outside of their race or religion; they date and marry inside of their gender; they travel on a whim and venture into faraway lands; they dress unconventionally, and customize new dress codes regularly; they live in areas from which their parents were once barred, and take jobs previously considered outside of their leagues; they listen to, create and criticize music they are not supposed to listen to; they display high levels of creativity in the arts and other progressive disciplines.

Crossing borders – transnational mobility – is an interesting and exciting phenomenon. It has a big impact not only on the lives of the individuals who travel to another culture and go through the process of learning how to adapt and survive there, but also on the host culture itself whose hegemonic rules and values may be challenged by the influx of different ideas and behaviours. Identifying transnationally mobile persons and engaging with their experiences and careers is one of the best ways to learn about the conditions under which cultural change takes place. The focus underlying all of the essays contained in this book is on the strategies used by the transcultural protagonists to cope with the challenges they experience when confronted with situations in which they are forced to follow different rules. In order to gain an insight into the process they underwent, firstly to learn the rules of the new culture and, secondly, to adapt these rules so that they could engage with the surrounding culture without losing their own individuality and cultural heritage, it is mainly on biographical resources that we concentrate. Many of our protagonists are writers and academics who faithfully recorded and analysed their transcultural journeys even as it was unfolding. From these autobiographical texts we gain a fascinating, first-hand insight into the challenges confronting even the most well-educated and urbane contemporary traveller. Some of our protagonists also wrote fictional texts, in which they explore the process of border-crossing and its emotional toll on the individual and family involved. What makes all of our protagonists interesting is the level of self-conscious scrutiny and analysis they bring to their acts of transcultural mobility. Because all of the protagonists demonstrably

undergo a process of learning new cultural behaviours, we can call them transcultural personalities. We do so in spite of some reservations we have with the term. As many of our protagonists demonstrate, Welsch's optimism about the transcultural state of the contemporary world and his belief that advocating transculturalism can help the migrant to overcome feelings of isolation, dislocation and foreignness are perhaps overly optimistic: heterogenous cultures do still dominate and people who cross borders continue to struggle with unfamiliar social norms and behaviours. When we use the term "transcultural" in this book, therefore, we do so in full acknowledgement of the challenge that migrants continue to face as they strive to adapt their own inherited value systems to that of the new culture in which they now find themselves living.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two, Serine Haghverdian presents the results of qualitative interviews she conducted with six young women of Middle Eastern backgrounds now living in Sweden. The interviews were focused around the participants' lived experiences as members of an othered ethnic and cultural group. Haghverdian rejects models of identity that posit immigrants as living *in-between* two different (conflicting) cultures and thus positioned on the margins of both cultures. Instead, she suggests that immigrant groups frequently construct a third, hybrid identity for themselves which goes beyond the simple combination of two competing identities (that of the ethnic group and the new host society). The participants describe their ongoing negotiation of identities that straddle the borders between traditional Muslim and more permissive Swedish norms, and more crucially between socially conscribed and personally constructed norms of behaviour. By negotiating their identity claims like this, the participants' stories exemplify the construction of social identity as a process – a fluid, constantly changing and negotiable process which runs through all aspects of their life-stories.

In Chapter Three, Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh explores the writings of Eamonn Wall. A member of a group of migrants called the "New Irish", distinguished by their frequent and seemingly facile transitions between the homeland and the new host society, Wall strives to identify a new narrative voice that accommodates the hybrid identity he wishes to adopt. After a number of years in America, he makes the crucial discovery that transculturalism involves not only the *ability* to live between different cultures, but crucially the *willingness* to actively engage with and question the values and assumptions on which these cultures are based. Wall thus begins the process of exploring what it means to be

a transcultural being, interrogating and exploring a dual identity and heritage. The construction of a transcultural identity will require not the postmodern ambivalence of a commuter, but an active engagement with the process of multiculturalism. For a transcultural writer like Wall, this involves opening himself up to the language and rhythms of the culture in which he now finds himself living in order to develop a dynamic and inclusive poetic voice.

In Chapter Four, Magda Danciu presents the work of Petru Popescu who has, perhaps uniquely, acquired the status of a Romanian-American author, popular and critically acclaimed in both countries. Popescu defected from Romania to the United States in 1973 and was immediately struck by the challenges and opportunities of living in a country which championed individual freedom above all other values. His most famous novel, *The Return*, was written after his first visit back to Romania in 1994, and reflects on the twenty-five years he lived "in exile" in the United States. The book juxtaposes his reflections on his past with a contemporary narrative voice, thus transcending the gaps that exist between past and present, America and Romania. Popescu confesses that for a transplanted writer, as for any immigrant, adaptation is baffling and never complete. Indeed, his own sense of identity has taken a number of interesting turns. Popescu became an American citizen and assumed the status of an American writer, making a huge effort to adopt the signifiers of American writing, its heroes, themes and genres. However, after writing in English for most of his career, Popescu has recently completed a book in Romanian as part of a contract with a Romanian publisher. The role of language as the transmitter of one's identity, values and culture is thus a central concern of his. Danciu suggests that Popescu is best summed up as a Romanian-American (writer), in a liberal multicultural environment, thus exemplifying the condition of postmodern in-betweenness and multiplicity of identity.

In Chapter Five, Márta Fülöp examines the transcultural experiences of noted Japanese intellectual, Natsume Soseki, who journeyed to London at the turn of the twentieth century, becoming an early cultural mediator between East and West. Soseki was what nowadays would be called a "sojourner". He was sent to England to study English language and literature. For a sojourner, who stays in a place only temporarily, it is important to adapt to the new culture rapidly in order to operate effectively. However, Soseki, the product of an isolated and inward-looking culture, was unable to cope with the fundamental and widespread differences between Japanese and English societies and as a consequence suffered a massive "culture shock" which led to severe mental trauma. In spite of this, however, he made full use of his time in England and returned to Japan with a new theory of literature which combined traditional Japanese forms with a western emphasis on psychology. He also began to

promote ideas about autonomy and individualism, which clashed with the Japanese privileging of group-oriented behaviour. Soseki was among the first Japanese writers to be influenced by Western culture. His experiences of alienation and fear resonated with many of his readers, and created a bridge between East and West.

In Chapter Six, Cristina Chevereşan explores the journey undertaken by Julia Alvarez, the successful Dominican-American writer, to assert her right to a hyphenated identity. Born in the United States, spending some of her childhood in her native homeland, before returning to the United States at the age of ten, Alvarez' experiences of transculturalism have had a profound impact on her sense of identity and belonging. The inherent traumas of dislocation and the often troublesome negotiation of identities in the ambiguous regions of the hyphen, are the constitutive elements of Alvarez's identity and are dramatized in the experiences of the characters of her debut novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Like Alvarez, the García girls of the novel's title find themselves living between the dual cultures of their by now distant and romanticized homeland and contemporary New York. What makes them interesting as examples of transcultural personalities is their active engagement with the surrounding environment and awareness that identity is neither static nor preordained but is rather in constant flux. The García girls thus live decisively in the world of the hyphen, drawing on both aspects of their cultural backgrounds and forging new, dynamic narratives of identity and belonging. Alvarez does not claim that this embrace of a hyphenated identity is easy. On the contrary, she demonstrates that attempting a transcultural existence, trying to come to terms with the traumas of dislocation and go back and forth between literal and symbolic homes, families and settings is undeniably problematic. In her writing, Alvarez manages to document the inherent challenge and uniqueness of a life lived between and across national boundaries, describing it to the world and exploring the potential of transcultural living as a personal option.

In Chapter Seven, Catherine Leen examines the work of director Luis Buñuel, whose career took him from his native Spain to France, Hollywood and Mexico. Her chapter focuses on his work in Mexico, and particularly on his initial experiences as a director there. In spite of the high regard in which Buñuel is now held, his initial foray into Mexican filmmaking was less than successful, with his third Mexican film *Los olvidados* (1950) particularly badly received. The reason for this was Buñuel's refusal to adhere to the tenets of romantic-nationalistic *mexicanidad*, which portrayed rural family life in Mexico in positive, idealistic terms, preferring instead to parody its conventions in order to draw attention to the underlying violence and poverty of contemporary Mexican society. In spite of the hostility that greeted his films, Buñuel's uncompromising

look at Mexico paved the way for a complete reimagining of Mexican culture and identity. Leen suggests that it was precisely Buñuel's outsider status that enabled him to transcend the narrow, nationalistic representations of Mexico and critically engage with its contemporary problems.

In Chapter Eight, Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh explores the writings of Hugo Hamilton, who was born in Ireland in 1953 to a German mother and an Irish father. Because of his father's extreme Irish nationalism and his mother's outsider status, Hamilton grew up in a household significantly at odds with the surrounding society. Teased for speaking Irish and bullied for being German, he found himself constantly struggling to find a personal identity neither his family nor society would allow him to express. What is interesting about his situation is that he manifests many of the feelings of dislocation, confusion and isolation characteristic of transcultural migrants – without ever actually leaving the country of his birth. Language becomes for Hamilton the most obvious manifestation of his isolation. Forbidden by his father from speaking English – for a nationalist the language of the "coloniser" – he becomes overwhelmed by the weight of the narratives of history and identity with which the Irish and German languages are loaded. His bilingualism, instead of facilitating an easy embrace of multiculturalism, thus renders him effectively voiceless. Hamilton's ongoing challenge is to try to find a way to transcend the strict binary oppositions imposed on his sense of identity by his father and embrace the contradictions and multiplicities he has inherited.

In Chapter Nine, Gerald David Naughton traces the engagement of Irish writer Colm Tóibín with James Baldwin, the prominent African-American author. In a number of essays and reviews of Baldwin's work, Tóibín has repeatedly resisted the prevalent tendency to categorize Baldwin as a black, homosexual, even American writer, insisting instead that the multiplicity of influences on his writing renders him the exemplary transcultural figure. In so doing, Naughton suggests, Tóibín is also rejecting attempts to subject Irish literature and identity to a similarly reductive act of categorization. What is interesting is that this refusal by Tóibín to impose a metanarrative on Irish culture and identity is in contrast with Baldwin's faith in an American (Emersonian) privileging of individualism. Naughton's essay focuses on the connections between Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Tóibín's *The Story of the Night* (1996), both of which ignore the limiting narratives of nationalism and race in order to focus on homosexuality as a type of exile, both geographic and symbolic. However, the outcome of the acts of exile in the novels reveals a crucial difference between the cultural contexts of their respective authors: while Tóibín's post-nationalist context enables him to depict the exile of his protagonist as a voluntary state, Baldwin's act of exile ends in tragedy as his

protagonist is unable to resist the limits of American heteronormativity. Naughton suggests that whereas Tóibín's transcultural protagonist could ultimately transcend the limitations of national and political narratives of identity, Baldwin's protagonist (and arguably perhaps the author himself) could not.

Chapter Ten presents a snap-shot of the research carried out by lecturing staff and students on the Masters programme in Applied Culture and Media Sciences, in the University of Applied Sciences, Merseberg, Germany into the historical development of transcultural mobility. In the first section, Wolfgang Berg focuses on transcultural movement in the 17-19th centuries, investigating whether any awareness of cultural differences could exist in pre-nation state Europe. In the second section, Franziska Scholze, Janina Lehr and Christin Buchheim examine the lives of three twentieth century figures, whose travels through different cultures were complicated and compounded by a variety of significant social, political and racial upheavals. The biographies of the selected protagonists illustrate a wide range of strategies and responses adapted by those whose lives and careers bring them to engage with a variety of different cultures.

Exploring Transculturalism presents a series of essays reflecting the contributors' own interests in the crossing of borders. A wide variety of different political, geographical and cultural borders are discussed. However, the different borders and acts of crossing reflected upon in this book share a common theme, namely a concern with issues of identity. Our protagonists can all be defined as transcultural personalities because of their willingness to rise to the challenge of living in unfamiliar, sometimes even hostile, societies, and forge new, hybrid narratives of identity for themselves, without compromising their own individuality and cultural heritage.

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"It's my own stuff": The Negotiations and Multiplicity of Ethnic Identities among Young Women of Middle Eastern Backgrounds in Sweden

Serine Haghverdian

> I have never heard anybody in the media talk about a good immigrant girl. She's always subjected to something, like for instance, her dad, or brother, has threatened her or something (….) So, it's always a problem when it comes to immigrant girls (Yasmin).

This quote, expressed by one of the participants in this study, points to a dominant stereotype of young immigrant[1] women in Sweden today. This category of young women is primarily identified as originating from the Middle East. Their voices have not been considered enough in the official debate, for instance in the news media. Previous research has shown that the news media have since the 1970s been involved in objectifying immigrant women as isolated and passive *victims* of their own (patriarchal) culture (Y. Brune 2004; G. Hultén 2001). This stereotype conceptualizes the immigrant woman as "oriental" (E. Said 2000). In this light, it is assumed that as females they are particularly subject to oppressive cultural and religious regulations concerning the freedom of movement and sexuality of the unmarried woman.

Taking these components of the stereotype into consideration, Swedish emancipative gender equality values are not applicable to immigrant women (A. Towns 2002: 157-179). Much of recent research into Swedish identity draws on gender related determinants of ethnic identification. Ann Towns argues that "(a)t the same time as Sweden emerges as a gender-equal state in the mid-1990s (….) gender equality became a salient terrain of differentiation between people residing in Sweden, between 'immigrants' and 'Swedes'" (A. Towns 2002: 158). The immigrant girl thus personifies the *Other* from a Swedish gender equality point of view. Drawing on this social context, this chapter explores lived experiences among young women of Middle Eastern backgrounds living in Sweden. The goal of the research is to seek a deeper understanding of the subjective meanings of the lived experiences of the participants using the general

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[1] In this chapter, the word "immigrant" refers to individuals who have actually immigrated to Sweden or are born in Sweden to immigrant parents.

methodological principles of *phenomenology* (J. Creswell 2007; C. Moustakas 1994; A. Schutz 1967). The core theoretical concept for the analysis of the empirical material is the construction of social identity, as understood by social psychologist Henri Tajfel and his Social Identity Theory (H. Tajfel 1981).

2.1 Immigrant Identities in Previous Studies

The literature on young immigrants in Sweden often characterizes this heterogeneous category as living with a multitude of values and norms in their everyday lives. Aleksandra Ålund argues that young people of immigrant backgrounds are to be seen as *multi*cultural, meaning that they can identify with several ethnic groups or cultures simultaneously. These fragments of cultural identities are perceived as merging with each other and as intertwined in a complexity of identifications (A. Ålund 1997). Christina Spännar, on the other hand, describes the experiences of having immigrated to Sweden or having immigrant parents through a dichotomous model. The model suggests that the identity of the immigrants is built on the basis of having a *double* cultural background, which results in identification with both the homeland culture *and* the (new) Swedish culture. As a result, the young immigrants have two distinct views on reality and must constantly reflect upon their position in society. Spännar further argues that young immigrants share some common experiences that are typical for a "stranger's" encounter with a postmodern society (C. Spännar 2001). Fuat Deniz and Antonios Perdikaris argue that young immigrants live *in-between* two different (conflicting) cultures, and are thus positioned in the margins of both cultures. This suggests that these young people are placed somewhere in a "no-man's-land". This position, according to the authors, results in a split identity and an unstable foundation for the process of building one's identity (F. Deniz and A. Perdikaris 2000).

Deniz and Perdikaris' perspective, along with Spännar's explanation of living with two *different* cultures, is problematic in my opinion. It might be better to acknowledge that cultural identifications are ambiguous and not fixed positions, taking into consideration the changeability of the young immigrant's identity formations. Like ethnologist Magnus Berg, I am more open to alternative identity descriptions. Berg formulates the concept of a *third position* (M. Berg 1994). I interpret this as an ambiguous position that is not equivalent to a static conception of having or carrying two different cultures (a homeland identity *plus* a Swedish identity). Instead, I see this position as something beyond the quantitative sum of two cultures. Simply put, one (culture) plus another

(culture) does not equal two (cultures), but *three,* as in something complex and something beyond the simple combination of two value systems.

     Increased attention has been paid to the topic of young immigrant *women* in particular in recent years, probably due to the intense media coverage of up to ten cases of young immigrant women exposed to honour related oppression and violence/killing in Sweden. However, identity research on young women from the Middle East of both Muslim and Christian backgrounds is yet to be sufficiently explored. Some recent dissertations have focused on other groups of young immigrant women in Sweden[2]. However, I believe that the current research field needs expansion when it comes to studying the interrelations between several identity categories, such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, etc. This perspective is in line with an *intersectionality* approach, which also takes into account the power-relations in society and their consequences for identity claims among, for instance, minority group members (P. de los Reyes and D. Mulinari 2005).

2.2 Empirical Research and Analysis

The following section is based on the analysis of qualitative interviews[3] I conducted with six young women (ages 16-18). Four of them were born and raised in Sweden. The other two immigrated to Sweden in their early childhoods. Five are more or less practising Muslims – one of whom wears the veil – the other is a practising Orthodox Christian. The mother tongue for three of them is Arabic (originally from Iraq, Palestine and Syria), for two of them Kurdish and for the other Persian. The social class of their parents ranges from lower to upper middle class.

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[2] See Lundström, Catrin (2007): *Svenska latinas: ras, klass och kön i svenskhetens geograf.* Göteborg: Makadam; Karlsson Minganti, Pia (2007): *Muslima: islamisk väckelse och unga muslimska kvinnors förhandlingar om genus i det samtida Sverige.* Stockholm: Carlsson. Other scholars have discussed certain subjects such as female sexuality and virginity as part of a wider analysis of immigrant and Swedish young women's everyday lives. See Ambjörnsson, Fanny (2004): *I en klass för sig: genus, klass och sexualitet bland gymnasietjejer.* Stockholm: Ordfront; Andersson, Åsa (2003): *Inte samma lika: identifikationer hos tonårsflickor i en multietnisk stadsdel.* Eslöv: B.Östlings bokförl. Symposium; Forsberg, Margareta (2007): *Brunetter och blondiner: sex, relationer och tjejer i det mångkulturella Sverige.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

[3] Two interviews were conducted separately. The first was a group interview with four participants, whereas the second interview was with two participants (originally planned to include a third participant). Each participant was interviewed once. The language used in the interviews was Swedish. All quotes have therefore been translated by me from Swedish to English.

2.3 Public Images – the Stereotype of Oppressed Immigrant Girls

An important theme discussed in both interviews was the common stereotype of immigrant girls as "oppressed". The participants acknowledged that the dominant stereotype of young immigrant women in Sweden today is a Middle Eastern victim of her collectivistic honour culture. Although their own first hand experiences of stereotyping varied, they generally agreed that Muslims (both men and women) are regarded as the immigrant group that are most deviant from a conceptualized "Swedishness"[4]. Given the media debate on honour related violence and so called "honour killings", the participants have experienced an unfair media generalization of all ethnic groups originating from the Middle East. Fatima strongly feels that the media have "exploited" and "exaggerated" the reported incidences involving immigrant girls. Nadia thinks that the media generalization is equivalent to "bad-mouthing" immigrants in general.

One of the most striking shared experiences among the interviewees is the feeling of "always" being regarded as the *Other* in the public eye. There are few, if any, opportunities to come across as a "non-immigrant":

> Maybe I am the negative person here, but I think that we are always branded, or (….) Immigrant girls, honour killings (….) will always be branded. We'll never be able to change it (Aisha).

Although four of the six participants were born in Sweden, they all carry the feeling of never being accepted as a Swedish-born person. Fatima, who immigrated to Sweden at the age of eight, often feels unwelcome in Sweden:

> We came here to Sweden, ok (….) Swedes look at us with different eyes, ok. We are totally strange: "What are these people? She has a veil, she wears long clothes, she's not allowed to go out. What kind of a girl is she? God, she is locked up!" But it's not their fault, and it's not my fault either. We are trying to create some connection between two different worlds (Fatima).

The participants all commonly experience acts of stereotypical behaviour from school staff, medical doctors, employers and superficial acquaintances. Nadia shares her story about a consultation with her doctor who acted in a discriminatory fashion and presupposed that she was lying about her sexual

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[4] In the annual national survey called "Mångfaldsbarometern" concerning attitudes towards ethnic diversity in Sweden from 2008, the following statement was supported by 61.7% of the population: "Muslim women living in Sweden are to a larger extent oppressed than other women in Sweden". Mella, Orlando and Irving Palm (2008): *Mångfaldsbarometern*. Uppsala, Sociologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet (my translation).

experiences. The doctor thought she was afraid her parents would find out somehow if she told him the "truth". This male doctor, himself an immigrant, insisted that Nadia should tell him the truth about her sexual relationship with an assumed boyfriend:

> I said: "I don't have a boyfriend! What is it that you don't understand? I don't have a boyfriend!" He said: "But tell me you have one. You don't have to be afraid. As doctors we have professional secrecy" (….) I said: "Just because I'm an immigrant doesn't mean that I go around lying about what I do and don't do" (….) I was really irritated all day (Nadia).

Nadia felt "violated" by the doctor's distrust of her statements. She felt that the mere "fact" that she was an immigrant girl made the doctor behave in that way. Could it be that the doctor, being an immigrant himself, shifted his role as a professional to the role of fellow immigrant who acted on some kind of responsibility towards Nadia – the responsibility being part of a sense of a shared group identity? From Nadia's perspective, the doctor violated her privacy in his construction of a group identity based on their shared experience of being immigrants. Even though Nadia was just another patient, her ethnic background, as evaluated by the doctor, was made salient in that situation. In addition, her gender and young age most likely contributed to his perception of her as a "controlled immigrant girl".

2.4 The Immigrant Family Crisis

At the heart of every topic discussed in the interviews was the participants' relationships with their parents. When discussing "proper" female behaviour and the importance of sustaining a respectable reputation, the valuable opinions of their parents functioned as a social yardstick. It was evident that the participants felt a strong sense of responsibility to respect their parents' conflicting "immigrant situation", which is also described as a "clash of two world-views":

> The foundation of all these problems is the family, because the family has not lived in this society. They have lived in a totally different world. They have other roots, been raised by other traditions, an entirely different culture, another background (Fatima).

This is how Fatima explains the recurrent conflict many immigrant families face in Sweden today. Given that the participants express their cultural background in terms of a generalized Middle Eastern value-system – which they think unavoidably clashes with present-day Swedish norms – their parents have difficulties adjusting to traditions differing from what they were taught. Having a

different cultural background causes friction in the everyday lives of these families. Fatima further explains: "The parents face new challenges. The parents are in some kind of *crisis*. They don't know: 'How should we do now?'" The difficulty experienced by the participants lies in the combination of the traditional and collectivistic values that the parents are used to from back home, and the more individualistic modern Swedish values. According to the participants, their parents' adjustment to Swedish society is to some extent dependent on how they can handle the reaction of their ethnic or religious community. The participants feel that it is crucial for the immigrant family to sustain a respectable public image. Therefore, the attempt to adjust to Swedish norms, for example "to let your teenage daughter come home late after a gender-mixed party", is hampered by the fear of losing respectability in front of the group. For this reason, the parents feel obliged to control the environment of the daughter who could easily destroy her family's reputation with one wrong move.

Aisha describes how her mother changed her previously open attitude to a more strict approach when she began to feel the collective pressure:

> Mother was open to everything. But, during a period when it was really, like, when all the immigrants came to our city, she heard how everyone started talking about all the others' daughters. Then she became like: "Aisha, I don't think you should go to that party". That's when I noticed that my own mother started changing (Aisha).

This pressure from the collective group – the extended family, neighbours, other members of their ethnic and/or religious community – not to abandon the core values of their cultural background influences how the parents choose to deal with their crisis. For instance, the parents can express a "fear of losing face" in front of their cultural in-group. Often, it has the effect of trying to keep what is familiar and discard the unfamiliar and new. Thus, the societal adjustment of the parents can take the form of a reproduction of "old" norms and values, and not considering change even though their relatives back home have "modernized" their traditional values.

An important factor in this attempt to balance societal adaptation and a more or less complete withdrawal from the new cultural values is the *time* aspect. In time, the parents become more tolerant of an extended freedom for their children. The older siblings experience greater pressure from their parents to become role models for their younger brothers and sisters. Fatima is the eldest and she compares her relatively restrained freedom with her younger sister's freer lifestyle. Fatima believes that her efforts to ease her parents' restrictive approach have paid off for her younger sister who can now do things that Fatima

never could, or still cannot.[5] At the other extreme, a solution for parents who are unable to adapt to the new system in Sweden can be to arrange a marriage for the daughter in the home country. Fatima explains that some parents see a "solution" to their problem or crisis in arranging a marriage for their daughters:

> Then they think that the only solution to our problems is to take a vacation down to Iraq or Kurdistan or Iran or whatever country it is. Telling the daughter that it is a vacation: "Yes, we haven't been there for ten, eight years. We are going to meet cousins" etc., etc. They talk a lot of stuff (Fatima)

In such cases, the parents' crisis immediately becomes the daughter's burden. Her fate is determined by her parents' inability to adjust to Swedish (gender equality) norms. Instead, the parents arrange for their daughter to marry the man of their choice, just to assure that the family's reputation remains respectable. According to the participants, whether or not their parents experience such a crisis depends on how the daughters choose to live their lives. These young women describe ways of dealing with conflicting situations and have found creative strategies to do so. For instance, the difficult task of getting permission to attend a gender-mixed party is managed by negotiation: "You have to be smart about these things", says Fatima with great pride.

2.5 Female Respectability, Sexuality and Ethnic Markers

Another central theme in the interviews concerned female respectability and sexuality. These are instantly related to negotiations of ethnic identity but also to religious and bodily expressions. Based on the information I gathered in the interviews, the underpinning principle for determining the value of a young woman's respectability relies on the central concepts of *honour*, *shame* and *self-respect*. Because this theme is so complex and seemingly a pervasive issue in the lived experiences of the participants, it deserves a more detailed presentation.

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[5] Another crucial factor at play here is the question of whether the families become more integrated into Swedish society as time passes, or if the adjustment process is hindered by for instance living in segregated areas with the majority population being immigrants themselves, or not entering the labour market and thus unable to have a regular contact with the Swedish system. Since most of the participants' parents have respectable jobs and live in fairly integrated parts in an urban city, I would say that with time their families have become more integrated rather than segregated in the Swedish society. This has had the effect of adjustments of various kinds among their families.

2.5.1 Shame and Honour – in Relation to the Parents

The participants all expressed a responsibility to adhere to their parents' rules of "proper" conduct. This is also articulated as "having self-respect" or "having honour" as a young (unmarried) woman. In Nadia's view, the more rules prescribed by the parents, the greater the temptation to break those rules: "The more rules, the more you will break them!" This applies to both regulation of the environment or freedom of movement, and everyday practices such as being allowed to come home late. In order to gain an expanded freedom of movement, it is crucial to maintain a trusting relationship with the parents. To do so, the girls use different techniques of negotiation in order to remain respectable and worthy of freedom in front of their parents.

Often, the parents do not actually verbalize these rules and expectations of decent behaviour. The girls "know" what is and what is not acceptable. This knowledge is part of the "freedom with responsibility" which most of the participants recognized as descriptive of their relationships with their parents. The girls also stress the importance of respecting their parents. Out of respect for her parents, Nadia would never break the unwritten rule of not being allowed to have a boyfriend: "My parents have never told me: 'Nadia, you are not allowed to have a boyfriend'. It's just something I have subconsciously always known, do you know what I mean?" Here, Nadia implicitly refers to feelings of shame, or rather avoiding situations that potentially cause the feeling of shame in front of her parents. Sarah is the only one of the participants who can consider bringing a boyfriend home without feeling ashamed. She has never felt that her parents have forbidden her to have a boyfriend. However, this does not mean that Sarah "has the same freedom as Swedes do". "Just because I can, I don't push it", says Sarah, comparing her type of freedom with that of her Swedish peers. Nadia also views the concept of freedom in ethnic terms, stating that: "I don't want the freedom that Swedes have". This concept of freedom – referring to being allowed to do whatever one likes, to be promiscuous, having several sexual partners and coming home late at night – is thus ethnically and emotionally charged. Swedish freedom is clearly not desirable to the participants.

Intrinsically connected to this topic is the extent to which social control over the young women is upheld by male relatives or male friends. For instance, Yasmin is allowed to go out with her friends in the evening if her brother accompanies them. Having a male "custodian" is reassuring for the parents. The male "protectors" are supposed to monitor the young women's social behaviour. In this way, the parents can be guaranteed that the honour of the family is not damaged (M. Buitelaar 2002: 462-489). These examples illustrate how the young women must consider to what extent their families and wider community

scrutinize their everyday actions to draw conclusions about their honour. Nobody wants to have their honour taken away from them, but sometimes the measures required to preserve one's honour come into conflict with individual choices. So the challenge for the participants seems to be to always calculate what kinds of consequences their choices in life will have. An analytical concept for this is *border-crossing practices*, which will be further described below.

2.5.2 Female Sexuality, Reputation and Bodily Symbolism

Another recurring topic in the interviews was the significance of a young woman's reputation. It is clear that all the participants desire a good, respectable reputation. Sarah declares: "Seriously, everything is about your reputation. It's really all about your reputation". A respectable reputation is the key to success. Aisha describes its importance with a metaphor: "I think that reputation is like a drop of water. When you lose a drop of water you can't take it back. Same thing for a reputation". Some of the participants express a fear of getting a "bad" reputation. Damage to a girl's reputation can be done by spreading rumours, which commonly happens in school. It is difficult for a teenage girl to rehabilitate a stained reputation. Such a "bad" girl is someone about whom everybody talks, who is called a "whore" behind her back, and who is perceived as sexually experienced and provocative. The participants *dis-identify* (B. Skeggs 1997) themselves from the characteristics of the "bad" girl, e.g. heavy partying, drinking and constant changing of boyfriends.

Furthermore, the "bad" girl is ethnicized, which means that her ethnicity determines how far she is allowed to go before she will be called a "whore" for instance. The boundaries for a "good" versus "bad" reputation are thus connoted with ethnic symbols. Drawing from the interview discussions, an immigrant young woman has a much smaller margin of failure in the eyes of her ethnic group than a Swedish girl, who is already assumed to have a wider freedom to act promiscuously and allowed to be sexually active before marriage. Since Swedish girls are supposedly not as restricted by their cultural boundaries as Middle Eastern girls, they are not breaking many significant rules if they act "promiscuously". On the other hand, an immigrant "bad" girl suffers harsh judgements not only from her immediate family but also her extended family and community. In that sense, being called a "bad" girl is worse for immigrant (Middle East) girls, according to the participants. The "bad" girl is also assessed according to bodily symbols. Her clothes are adjudged sexually provocative. Her typical clothes are tight trousers or short skirts along with tight, low-cut tops. This is the opposite of a "decent/proper" dress code, which is essential for

respectable immigrant girls. In this way, the sexualized clothes also function as ethnic markers. As the experiences of the participants demonstrate, respectable female sexuality is thus ethnically coded and juxtaposed with an undesirable Swedish "free" sexuality.

2.5.3 The Veil and Virginity as Evidence of "Purity"

While the "bad" girl is visually provocative and recognizable by her revealing clothes and inappropriate conduct, her opposite, the "obedient" girl, is identified as those immigrant girls who wear clothes that cover their bodies for the purpose of not attracting male attention. Most commonly, girls like Fatima who wear the veil are instantly assumed to be "obedient" since they visually portray subordination to religious practices and are thus qualified as "pure". Wearing the veil indicates chaste behaviour and is further evidence of (religious) "purity". For Yasmin, wearing the veil is enviable. But this religious act requires committing "one hundred percent" to other religious regulations which she does not feel that she can live up to at the moment.

In western eyes, the veil is often negatively associated with female oppression. Fatima has had first hand experience of this, for example when a previous employer told her that the veil was not "suitable" at their work place because it would give the impression that Fatima was oppressed, which would "upset the customers". Fatima does not see herself as an inferior and "oppressed" Muslim girl. Rather, she views herself as "independent" in the sense that she has chosen to express her religious identity by a visual symbol. "I am proud of my veil. I will never want to, ever, want to take it off, even if the entire society is against it", says Fatima. She stresses that people often discredit her *own* choice of practising Islam. Nadia also declares herself an independent, non-victim with a high amount of self-respect:

> I myself don't think that it affects me that much how people see me, because (….) I have my principles. Everyone knows about my principles. I don't want a boyfriend. I don't want to drink. I don't want to have sex. Nobody forces me to think that way. It's my own stuff. I want to be abstinent or conservative, or whatever it is called (Nadia).

Within this discussion of sexualized clothes and (mis)conduct linked to ethnic markers, the participants recurrently touch upon the subject of virginity or abstinence before marriage. The virginity itself has a high symbolic meaning and is most valuable to all the participants. Their shared perspective is that any "decent" immigrant girl should respect herself enough to wait for the right man before having her sexual debut. The participants understand their self-worth as

young women in terms of how well they can manage to keep their virginity until the right man comes along. This qualifies them as respectable and honourable young women not only to themselves, but also in the eyes of their collective in-groups such as their family and peer group. With this fairly conservative approach to female sexuality from a Swedish point of view, the participants dis-identify with what they conceptualize as a free Swedish (female) sexuality. Thus, the virginity concept becomes the focus when intersecting ethnic identity and female sexuality. As other scholars have also noted, the virginity of immigrant girls from collectivistic cultures can provide a higher social status within the ethnic group, because she then maintains the honour of the family (A. Andersson 2003; M. Forsberg 2007; A. Sjögren 2006). In this way, the girl's virginity functions as a kind of social capital – or even an intragroup currency – for the (extended) family.

2.6 The Multiplicity and Ambivalence of Identity Work

The various identity claims expressed in the interviews bring us to the question of ethnicity. The general notion is that there are no correct answers to the definition of ethnic identity. Rather, there is a constant re-invention of the concept depending on the experiences of the participants. To start with, the participants all share the feeling of being proud of their ethnic heritage, with the result that anyone who neglects his/her cultural background is regarded as a "fraud". This emotionally charged topic is exemplified by the participants' recurrent talk about "becoming Swedicized". This is an ascribed identity for immigrants who challenge the boundaries of ethnic belonging. The concept is built on ideas about embodying a "false" Swedish identity by wearing revealing clothes and practising stereotypical Swedish values such as free sexuality. Here are some of the reflections concerning the concept of "becoming Swedicized":

> If somebody asks where I come from and I say: "I'm Swedish", even though I'm not Swedish. That's what I call becoming Swedicized (Sarah).

> To become Swedicized, that's bad. Those who become that are false (….) Why not be proud? There are those who say like this: "No, I'm Swedish". But why? You're not! (Aisha)

> Why should we become Swedicized? Absolutely not! I don't want that because I'm proud of my roots. I will always be an Arab, but at the same time I want to be able to live in another, to be able to handle another, like, ethnic group (Fatima).

> Those who dress little more low-necked. That's what I see as the stereotype of becoming Swedicized (Nadia).

The latter quote shows how intimately linked the concept of ethnic identity is with bodily symbols and gendered sexuality.

So, what does it take for an "immigrant" to qualify as a Swede? The shared belief is that being born in Sweden does not suffice as a criterion either to be recognized by others as "genuinely" Swedish or automatically identifying oneself as ethnically Swedish. None of the Swedish-born participants would ever think that they could come across as Swedes, because their physical appearances convey otherwise. The participants feel that they look like the Other (with dark features) in Sweden. Yasmin states: "If a Swede looks at me, then he will say: 'An immigrant'". Their "oriental" facial traits and dark hair are obvious ethnic markers and thus immediately exclude them from looking Swedish. Drawing from their discussions, physical appearance is a crucial factor in describing the ethnicity of a person. However, the participants are hesitant about the value of such a marker for inclusion and exclusion when it comes to themselves. This is because they also acknowledge that ethnicity is a feeling of belonging and a personal matter. Both external and internal factors are thus involved in the definition of ethnic identity. Furthermore, the participants argue that immigrants need to be successful if they are to be publicly acknowledged as Swedish. Yasmin cites the famous football player Zlatan Ibrahimovic as an example of an immigrant who is officially called a Swede due to his success. However, as Linda points out: "If he misses a goal, then it's like: 'Damn immigrant!'" In a sense, the ascription of "Swedishness" further depends on the dichotomous relation between an immigrant's success or failure.

Trying to summarize the everyday situation for herself and other girls like her, Fatima gets to the core of all the themes discussed in the interviews, namely that immigrant girls live in a "mixed world": "She has neither both her feet in the Middle East nor both feet in Sweden". To make her point even clearer, Fatima uses her hands to draw a line across the table around which we all sit during the interview and says: "Now, the big question is (….) should I go over there, or should I go over there? And who decides? Is it me? And what happens then? Do I get kicked out?" Choosing one way or the other has negative consequences for the immigrant girl, according to Fatima. The problem is that neither the parents nor the outside world understand the immigrant girl's dilemma or ambivalence towards social belonging. Fatima asks in minor desperation: "Who should I turn to?" Yasmin provides an excellent insight into the interrelation between public and self-images in formulating one's sense of ethnic identity:

> Yasmin: I don't think anybody sees me as Swedish. Nobody. I don't see myself as
> Swedish either.
> Serine: Why not?

> Yasmin: I view myself more like a Swede (….) as in an ordinary Swedish *citizen*. I have as many rights as everyone else. But if you think about culture and stuff, then I see myself more as an Arab.

In cultural terms, Yasmin does not recognize herself as a Swede. However, she has embraced the democratic values and social rights of every Swedish citizen and has made them part of her self-image. In this sense, she has internalized a Swedish national identity in the technical sense of the word – i.e. being a Swedish *citizen* – but *culturally* she distances herself from Sweden. For Yasmin, her cultural (ethnic) identity as an Arab outweighs her national identity as a Swedish citizen.

The question of where to call "home" is seemingly central to the identification process for all the participants. For Linda, her "mind belongs to Syria" whereas her "heart is here" in Sweden. She was born in Sweden and therefore loves this country. Simultaneously, she loves her "home-country Syria" too. She is emotionally invested in both countries. Depending on where she is at the moment, she will enhance one or the other part of her ethnic identity. To further illustrate the shared feeling of ambivalence towards belonging and ethnic identification, here is Sarah's story:

> I can't say I'm Swedish. But I can't say I'm totally Iranian either. Because even if I go back to my home-country Iran, I'm not (….) I'm not like them (….) I can't go back. I can't imagine a life in Iran. But I can't imagine my life as a Swede. Because I'm not all-Swede (….) I feel more Swedish than I feel as an Iranian (….) Like, in Iran, I want to come home. Because I see Sweden as my home. That's me (Sarah).

In other words, as Fatima reiterates: "You can never be completely, completely, completely (….) like a girl from the Middle East." Clearly, there are no distinct categories to rely on at all times. Depending on the context, these young women adjust their sense of identification and belonging accordingly.

2.7 Negotiating Social Identity and Border-Crossing Practices in Everyday Life

My overall (holistic) interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants as young women of Middle Eastern backgrounds can be summarized in the concepts of border-crossing practices and negotiations of social identity in everyday life. In relation to different (geographical) places, time and social groups (e.g. the family, peer groups), the young women construct their self-images by negotiating them in a given social context. For instance, the girls have to deal with generational and cultural conflicts in everyday life and find a

balance between integration into society and maintaining some of the values that correspond to their parents' cultural heritage. At the same time, they express an aspiration to make individual and independent choices that might cause problems in relation to their families. As Nadia stated: "It's my own stuff".

Undoubtedly, both collectivistic and individualistic value systems are present in their everyday encounters with their ethnic in-groups as well as representatives of Swedish society (e.g. at school). Each person has her own way of implementing these values that sometimes conflict with each other, but the common approach among the participants is to strive to be "equal but different" in Sweden (H. Tajfel 1981). In their view, as a minority they should still be entitled to the democratic right to practise their own religion, and to be culturally different from the majority society. Being as proud of their ethnic heritage as the participants are probably stimulates the process of attaining a positive self-image in Tajfel's sense of the word.

Another significant factor here is the concept of female respectability as a social yardstick for determining the honour of a young woman. As illustrated by the use of bodily symbolism to mark belonging, there are different categories of girls when one discusses female respectability. At the extreme, there is the "bad" girl who is called a "whore". On the other side of the continuum – in the "good" girl's corner – is the "obedient" girl who personifies the victimized stereotype that exists in the official debate on young immigrant women in Sweden. In connection to this latter category of girls is also the "independent" girl, who lives by the democratic and individualistic values proclaimed by Swedish society. In contrast to these three categories, those girls who have "become Swedicized" are viewed as frauds. This implicates that a "cross-over" from being an actual immigrant (in the technical sense of the word) to claiming an "all-Swedish" identity is not accepted as "authentic" or real. Calling oneself a "Swede" while having parents from a "different world" is equivalent to self-deception, according to the participants. The participants say that they are not "Swedicized", but partially Swedish in the national sense of the word.

By negotiating their identity claims like this, the participants' stories exemplify the construction of social identity as a process – a fluid, constantly changing and negotiable process that runs through all aspects of their life-stories. The interrelation between self- and public images is the driving force supporting this process. Within the conceptualization of the self, a group image plays a crucial role. Drawing from the theoretical framework of Tajfel, depending on both who the Other is and how the in-group is defined, the individual will evaluate her self-image accordingly. This has implications for the person's self-esteem.

As several of the participants state, people around them tend initially to treat them as victims. People question the girls' free choices of wanting to fast, or wearing the veil, or being conservative in sexual matters. They are thus discredited and assumed to be forced by their fathers to act in a "proper" way. In this sense, the girls are put in a position of having to declare themselves as either the "independent" girl who stands up against her family's rules, or the "obedient" girl who succumbs to the traditional values of her ethnic and/or religious background. Both of these are ideal types. They are also recognized by the participants as constituting the dominant public (double) image of young immigrant women. Neither of the ideal types completely fits the self-descriptions of the participants. Instead, they negotiate their social identities in reference to each ideal type across a continuum between total subordination (obedient) and ultimate freedom from cultural restraints (independent). They implement different individual strategies to maintain the respect towards themselves as well as their respectability in front of others. Two strong emotions are constantly present in this process, namely pride and shame. These young women are proud of their ethnic heritage and their self-descriptive independence. They are aware of the fragility of a young woman's respectability and thus try to avoid anything that is shameful, primarily in the view of their families.

2.8 The Multiplicity of Ethnic Identification – Doing Belonging

The multiplicity of ethnic identification can be interpreted as a way to describe the fluidity of identifications in a qualitative rather than a quantitative sense. The multiplicity of identities does not correspond to a multiple set of identities as in two or more separate identities, for example described as a "double cultural identity" (C. Spännar 2001) or as being "in-between" those two cultures (F. Deniz and A. Perdikaris 2000). The analysis of the participants' sense of social belonging, of which the ethnic identity is a central part, suggests that their social identity is continuously negotiated in relation to the family, close friends and peer groups, superficial acquaintances, people they randomly meet on the bus, in the grocery store, and so on.

The concept of a "third position" (M. Berg 1994) is helpful in this context. The participants' sense of ambivalent social belonging can be better understood by an analysis based on flexible analytical concepts such as a third position. However, I would like to introduce another concept that stresses the active and creative strategies used by the participants in negotiating their self-images, namely *doing belonging*. By adding this analytical term to the social identity approach, more emphasis is put on the contextual and temporal aspects of ethnic

identity formation. The ongoing, active and negotiable processes of constructing ethnic boundaries and the meaning attached to each group membership are to be treated as products of *both* individual and group processes. There are also wider societal and structural mechanisms (e.g. school, the media) that contribute to the dialectical process of internal and external formation of social identity. In sum, as the boundaries of one's in-group and out-group are continuously contested because of temporal and contextual changes, ethnic identification cannot solely derive from traditional ethnic markers such as sharing the same language, religion and birthplace. Rather, it is the lived experiences of each individual that will shape, challenge and reconstruct ethnic identifications.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how the lived experiences of young women of Middle Eastern backgrounds in Sweden can be interpreted in the light of a social identity approach. With the examples of family relations, coping with stereotypical public images and dealing with different cultural codes determining self-worth and respectability in the eyes of others, I have tried to demonstrate how negotiable practices of identity can take form. The interplay between self- and public images is confirmed by the ongoing border-crossing practices along ethnic, cultural and social identity lines. The negotiability of social identity – together with border-crossing practices – can be said to represent the phenomenological "essence" of the empirical material.

The findings of this study argue against some of the prior literature on how immigrant youth construct their social identifications. The reality for the participants shows that the question of self-imaging is far more intertwined with themes such as female respectability than has been previously acknowledged. This chapter has highlighted the complexity of conceptualizing a sense of belonging as a minority member in a multicultural society like Sweden. The ambivalence and constant changeability of identity claims urges future theorizing of such issues to take new directions applying re-invented concepts concerning ethnicity, gender, sexuality, family ties and cultural conflicts. It is hoped that the themes raised in this chapter can contribute to more extensive analyses in coming research on immigrant youth in general and young women in particular.

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Eamonn Wall: Transculturalism, Hybridity and the New Irish in America

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Eamonn Wall, the poet and critic, was born in Enniscorthy, Ireland, in 1955. He emigrated to the United States in 1982 to attend graduate school. He was associate professor of English at Creighton University from 1992-2000, and director of the Creighton Irish Summer School. He is currently the Smurfit-Stone Professor of Irish Studies at the University of Missouri-St Louis. Wall has published eight volumes of poetry and regularly writes book reviews and articles on Irish and Irish-American literature for newspapers and journals, including *The Washington Post* and *The Review of Contemporary Poetry*. Wall is a leading member of the New Irish Writers movement, a group dedicated to reassessing and updating representations of the Irish emigrant experience. He is also the author of a study of the Irish diaspora in America entitled *From the Sin-é Café to the Black Hills* (2000), which was the co-winner of the Durkan Prize from the American Conference for Irish Studies for "excellence in scholarship" (A. Ní Éigeartaigh 2008: 905). His inclusion in a number of anthologies and encyclopaedias of both Irish and Irish-American literature testifies to his success in achieving the status of a transcultural poet[1]. Wall's volumes of poetry give an exciting insight into his gradual transition from Irish graduate student in America to American dad and finally American citizen, detailing his personal journey to engage with his adopted homeland and struggle to make its language and culture his own. His essays attempt to contextualize his own personal experience of migration by relating it to other historical and literary accounts of diaspora formation. His essays offer us both an academic exploration into his own status as a transcultural being and a significant engagement with theories of migration

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[1] See Bolger, Dermot, ed. (1993): *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers* Abroad. Dublin: New Island Books; Glazier, Michael, ed. (1999): *The Encyclopaedia of the Irish in America*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Came Press; Pierce, David, ed. (2000): *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*. Cork: Cork University Press.

and assimilation. It is thus on Wall's essays rather than his poetry that this chapter will focus[2].

Wall is part of a group of Irish emigrants to America commonly referred to as the "New Irish" (E. Wall 2000: 1128). The function of this label is to differentiate between this group of well-educated and self-possessed migrants who, enabled by communication technologies and cheap airfares, transition frequently and easily between Ireland and America, and their historical forebears for whom emigration was a final and irreversible act. In his foreword to *The New Irish Americans*, Peter Hamill notes that whereas earlier migrants were forced to hide their true identities and adopt expected attitudes and behaviours in order to fit into their adopted homeland, contemporary migrants are free to explore their own personal and more flexible narratives of identity: "The Stage Irishman was the creation of people who need masks (….) The new Irish immigrants don't require masks. They can be themselves, create their own American narratives, and with the help of technology, maintain a powerful connection to the old" (P. Hamill 1998). Wall's poetry and essays document his journey from Ireland to America, and give a fascinating insight into his bid to achieve a truly transcultural identity. In the Preface to *From the Sin-É Café to the Black Hills: Notes on the New Irish*, Wall succinctly summarizes the challenges he continues to face as he strives to engage with the complexity of living between two cultures: "As a citizen of Ireland and a permanent resident in the United States who gets back to Ireland frequently, I am both hybrid immigrant and hybrid exile" (E. Wall 1999: xii). This chapter will examine the hybrid nature of Wall's identity, arguing that the contemporary migrant faces both opportunities and challenges which set him apart from his forebears, for whom the act of migration constituted a definite separation from the homeland. It is clear that in the globalized world of the present, many of the traditional certainties on which diasporic identity were based are no longer tenable or suitable. The challenge for the contemporary migrant is to conceive of new narratives of identity that can comfortably accommodate the fluidity and uncertainty that characterize migration and exile today. Only when he has embraced this flexibility and celebrated the potential of an identity that transcends cultural and national boundaries can he be said to have truly achieved the status of a transcultural being.

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[2] For a discussion of Wall's exploration of identity and space in his poetry, see Ní Éigeartaigh, Aoileann (2009): "Changing Places and Merging Spaces: The Poetry of Eamonn Wall". In *POST*, vol. 1, 41-58.

3.1 Writing and Identity in the Postmodern World

The role played by writing in the creation and expression of identity is a recurring interest of Wall's. As a poet, he explores language as a means by which he can engage with American culture and express the new hybrid, transcultural voice he is striving to forge. As an academic, he delves into the narratives of both his historic Irish forebears and his international contemporaries in order to situate his own voice within the diasporic tradition. For many contemporary critics, the diasporic subject is the ultimate embodiment of a transcultural being, forgoing the security of traditional signifiers of identity for the freedom to define himself amidst the fluidity and uncertainty of the liminal spaces he now inhabits. John McLeod celebrates the potential for forging new and exciting narratives of identity which transcend traditional signifiers of self based on place and nationality: "The 'in-between' position of the migrant, and his or her errant, impartial perceptions of the world, have been used as the starting point for creating new, dynamic ways of thinking about identity which go beyond older static models, such as national identity and the notion of 'rootedness'" (J. McLeod 2000: 216). Bill Ashcroft et al note that migration brings about not only a displacement from the familiar and comforting spaces of the homeland but an engagement with and usually a challenge to the deep-rooted assumptions about identity and belonging that such displacement brings to the fore: "Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces" (B. Ashcroft et al 2004: 217-8). For many critics, it is the literature produced by the diaspora that most successfully deconstructs any traditional assumptions about identity and nationality: "Writing is one of the most liberating and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global and problematize national, racial and ethnic formulations of identity (….) The diasporic writer provides the prospect of fluidity of identity, a constantly changing subject position, both geographically and ontologically" (B. Ashcroft et al 2004: 218). The fluidity engendered by such texts has had a devastating effect on traditional modes of narration, according to John Berger, who suggests that the role of the contemporary writer is not to impose a coherent structure on the reality he is describing, but rather to serve as a fluid conduit through whom multiple voices and narratives can coalesce: "We hear a lot about the crisis of the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the *mode of narration*. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline *laterally*" (J. Berger 1974: 40). In other words, the chronological mode

of narration popular in the past has been disrupted and replaced with a network of competing and simultaneously unfolding micro-narratives.

This postmodern insistence on the rejection of the metanarrative and the use of free-floating signifiers to construct and deconstruct a multiplicity of identities has had significant implications for the narration of the experience of the contemporary migrant. Irish emigrants have, after all, long depended on the traditional narratives and motifs of displacement to express their experiences of dislocation and homesickness. In an interview in *The Irish Times*, Wall suggests that the literature of the traditional Irish diaspora in America tends to be rather "bleak and old-fashioned" and "hackneyed" in its depiction of the experience of migration. He further complains that its emphasis on the trauma of forced displacement offers little to the contemporary migrant for whom the ability to belong simultaneously to two different cultures is a cause for celebration: "Our formative experiences are Irish. But we have a hyphenated status in Ireland because we don't live here. We navigate our way between the two, simultaneously inside and outside" (E. Wall 2000b). Fintan O'Toole suggests that the emergence of a fractured, globalized Ireland, dislocated from the traditional nationalist and geographical certainties of the past, has driven the development of a new style of Irish writing more in tune with contemporary realities: "The only alternative is to find a new way of writing about the place with a rhythm which matches the angular, discontinuous, spliced-together nature of contemporary Irish reality" (F. O'Toole 2001). Creating a coherent narrative out of this experience of discontinuity is particularly difficult for the contemporary migrant, as both the experience of migration and the homeland have changed.

Dermot Bolger succinctly summarizes some of these difficulties in the Introduction to his anthology of recent Irish emigrant literature writing, entitled *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad*. He notes that the act of emigration is no longer as definite and final as it was in the past and that many migrants now return home after a period abroad. This increased fluidity means that even the terminology traditionally used to define and describe the experience of emigration is now out of date: "*Exile* and *departure* suggest an out-dated degree of permanency. Irish writers no longer go into exile, they simply commute" (D. Bolger 1993: 7). This new experience of migration is liberating in one way, enabling its subjects to inhabit the twin spaces of home and away without being defined and limited by either. However, it also robs them of a comfortable engagement with the narratives and identifiers of either the homeland or the host society. An added complication is that the contemporary migrant also finds himself at odds with traditional diasporic culture and its formulaic narration of dislocation and loss. As Bolger explains: "The experience I have wished to have

articulated in this anthology is that of a modern Ireland, often at odds not only with the Ireland they have left but also the Ireland (of older Irish emigrants….) they have to confront abroad" (D. Bolger 1993: 8). The challenge faced by Bolger's "commuters" is to find a narrative voice that transcends the narrow and limiting categories of identity offered by traditional narratives and comfortably accommodates the flexibility and transcultural nature of the contemporary experience of migration.

In an essay entitled "Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café: Notes on the 'New Irish'", Wall explores some of the obstacles he has confronted in his bid to establish his identity as an Irish emigrant in the contemporary world. Robbed of the traditional certainties that defined the experience of emigration – the clean break from home, the concerted effort to become part of the host society - the contemporary experience of migration, he claims, is much more blurred and less deliberate: "As for becoming an exile, well that's just something I sort of fell into. I didn't actually decide in some rational manner that I was going to stay in the United States, I just realized at some point that I was staying, since the work was here" (E. Wall 2000: 1128). This casual acceptance of his status of migrant, and his unwillingness to define it more specifically, is further echoed in Wall's insistence that his decision to leave Ireland is a personal matter, unconnected to any historic or cultural legacy: "Emigration, for me, although it's the subject of much political debate, is fundamentally a personal matter (….) By emigrating I have become part of a history and politics, which doesn't always sit well with me" (E. Wall 2000: 1129). By defining himself as a "commuter", Wall thus circumvents any attempts to link him into Ireland's long history of emigration to America.

Wall's initial engagement with life in America reflects this postmodern fluidity. He immerses himself in an environment familiar to him from the literary and cinematic representations of America with which he grew up: "Before coming to live in the United States, I lived in that vast country through books, music, and the rich visual images presented in the movies I watched in Dublin cinemas. I was enthralled by the diverse products of the American imagination, by a world which seemed larger and more vital to me than what was available at home" (E. Wall 1999: 30). One of the things that attracted him most to life in America was the sense that unlike Ireland, a country mired in its own historical legacy, it offers its citizens a chance to constantly reinvent themselves and take sole responsibility for the life choices they make: "In Ireland, being raised in an intensely political culture, I grew weary of having to produce opinions on historical and political issues, of collective belonging, and looked forward to the opportunities for distance and not having to belong which America offered" (E. Wall 1999: 32). The language he uses to describe his early years in New York

reflects the romance and potential he sees all around him: "On these weekday mornings the streets were alive and sparkling, and I felt very strongly the romance of living in New York" (E. Wall 1999: 25). The contrast between the freedom offered to him in his new life and the more defined and closed spaces of his childhood home in Ireland is evident in a poem entitled "River Slaney: New Year's Day", which recounts a holiday he spent in Ireland with his American family:

> Home again. Walking on the prom into the heaviness of
> short-pansed hurling, hand-in-hand memory, and confusion
> in the summer about when and how the day might end. I do not
> doubt the river now or the insistent voices in the elms
> excluding no one, but I have entered into other loves beyond
> this solid town and landscape. A boychild builds a
> snowman in a Pennsylvania backyard (E. Wall 1994: 49)

In these lines, the emotional weight of the word "home", and the "heaviness" and "confusion" that suffuse memories of his childhood in Ireland, are contrasted with the certainty and confidence that characterize his life in America ("I do not doubt") and have enabled him to transcend the limitations of life in a small Irish town ("I have entered into other loves *beyond* this solid town and landscape"). The very American demand for the right to self-definition is apparent in the repeated use of the personal pronoun "I". In his early engagements with America, Wall thus seems to have achieved the liberation of the contemporary transcultural subject, free to travel between multiple locations and celebrate his right to define himself outside of the restricting narratives of history and nationality: "At the end of the day I was no longer a mere foreign graduate or a cultural tourist, but I wasn't an American either. I was somebody in between" (E. Wall 1999: 69).

3.2 Displacement and the Narrativizing Impulse

Before too long, however, Wall is forced to rethink his sense of himself as the quintessential postmodern being, liberated by his travels from the nationally constructed narratives of history and culture. After living in New York for a number of years, he makes the crucial discovery that transculturalism involves not only the *ability* to live between different cultures, but crucially the *willingness* to actively engage with and question the values and assumptions on which these cultures are based. What he comes to realise is that a postmodern insistence on fluidity and change sits uneasily alongside the narrativizing impulses of surrounding historical, cultural and political pressures. Postmodern

theories of identity also fail to take the toll of human emotions into account when they celebrate flux and fluidity. Commenting on the extent to which developments in communications technologies have shrunk the world and enabled the migrant to stay fully abreast of developments at home, Wall suggests that such a close connection to the homeland results not in a confident transculturalism, but rather in an uneasy sense of dislocation. He explains that he had to stop buying an Irish daily newspaper in New York because instead of enabling him to feel connected to both countries, it served only to emphasize the distance that remains between them:

> After a couple of years, I gave up buying these papers: It was unsettling to get this news so fast, to seem to be living in Ireland, but to be so distant from it (….) The Internet provides us with information, but it doesn't allow us the illusion of forgetting and fails to nourish us. We are reminded that we are not over there, which makes adjustment to America more difficult. To survive, we need to be able to begin the process of forgetting (E. Wall 1999: 24-5).

The problem, as Wall discovers, is that feelings of loss and displacement lie at the heart of even the most contemporary and fluid experiences of migration, and that these sentiments provide a link back to more traditional narratives of displacement and loss:

> Although we are the commuters Dermot Bolger calls us, we still carry the same heavy emotional baggage which Irish exiles have always carried with them. Those of us, and I place myself in this group, who enjoy living in the United States are not immune from being drowned in the feelings O'Connor so eloquently describes. All of us, at home and abroad, in our edgy ways are concerned with locating internal and external "damage" and "treasures" (E. Wall 2000: 1129).

Note that Wall is beginning here to link his own experiences of migration with those of his contemporaries – he has foregone the right to self-define and become part of a collective "us". He concludes that it is impossible for him to conceive of his own experiences in isolation from those of his fellow members of the Irish diaspora and he begins finally to explore the historical legacy which frames his own personal narrative of migration: "Being an Irish exile is a heavy business because it's so tied up with mythology, pain, and history. When I left Ireland, I thought I was getting away from history; little did I know that I was walking right into the middle of a historical web from which there would be no escape (E. Wall 1999: 71).

Wall relates his decision to begin to see himself as part of an historical metanarrative of migration with a sense that he has a responsibility to explore and document the culture in which he now finds himself living. He realizes that he was wrong to view his move to America as an opportunity to escape from

history and that by refusing to engage with the inequalities and tensions inherent in American society he is reneging on his duties both as an academic and a father. Moreover, by isolating himself from the Irish diaspora, he is denying himself the opportunity to explore and learn from its long history of adaptation and assimilation:

> Given that political opinion and action have grown increasingly hostile to immigrants, it is rather immoral for me, as a breadwinner and taxpayer, to observe but not vote. Also, to stand outside Irish America is to deny both its complexity, energy, and considerable achievement and who I have become. Ambivalence is a postmodern condition, but it is, or at least it should be, secondary to faith and commitment. More than anything else, parenthood has taught me the limits of ambivalence, because being a parent is concerned with the personal, cultural, and political future. One cannot be ambivalent about one's own flesh and blood. One should not be ambivalent about one's fellow human beings (E. Wall 1999: 32).

One of the first things that prompt Wall to look more deeply into his level of engagement with American culture is the realization that the romantic vision of America he has cultivated since his childhood has blinded him to the tensions that lie just beneath its surface. Reflecting on the contradictions between the positive, inclusive vision of America marketed by the Hollywood films he used to consume as a child and the obvious ethnic and social demarcations he sees around him, he starts to interrogate the nature of America's much-heralded multiculturalism:

> Why do I find these accounts so shocking and disturbing? Certainly they undermine the view of America presented by the movies I saw in the Astor Cinema in Enniscorthy as a child, but I had a long time ago learned that that vision was false, that Hollywood presented the West as a cartoon with "real people". No, it's more than this. As an adult, I had built up an idea of the romance of America – generated by books, music, and the imagination – which was generally positive….In itself, within its own borders, the United States represented an idea and a movement toward a benign resolution of its difficulties: there was a feeling that things would be worked out. My visit to the Black Hills has not only forced me to examine the concerted attempts by the United States to exterminate the Indians, but it has also made me think again of slavery (E. Wall 1998: 15-6).

A holiday in Mexico causes him to acknowledge that the act of emigration is not always as positive and empowering as his own experience was, but is often based on massive political and economic inequalities as he explains in the poem "Below the Border":

> Our Lady of Guadalupe's sandstone continent:
> (….)
> plaster images of one who spoke for the poor

> who allowed the father's children to leave for
> Uncle Sam's dominion of steel and monument
> (E. Wall 1994: 9).

This realization prompts him to rethink his casual acceptance of the status of carefree "commuter". He is particularly critical of the treatment of immigrants by the federal officers who process their residency applications with open distain, and the realization that he too is subject to their scorn causes him to reassess his own status of immigrant. He records this change in the poem "Outside the Tall Blue Building: Federal Plaza":

> A woman without English pleads in Spanish
> is turned from the screen by an officer of the State:
> "Gawd, these dumb aliens," he whispers.
> He is right. We know we are.
> (E. Wall 1994: 12).

Note that in this poem, Wall has replaced the personal with the collective pronoun "we", a sign that he is beginning to rethink his place within the wider metanarrative of migration.

In an essay entitled "Irish Voices, American Writing, and Green Cards", Wall describes how his experience of applying for his Green Card prompted him to rethink earlier assumptions he had made about the ease and fluidity of the contemporary experience of migration. What strikes Wall about the process of applying for residency is that when dealing with bureaucracy, ambivalence is impossible and one is forced to define oneself according to specific and clearly delineated categories of identity. Although he had initially relished the opportunity to leave traditional signifiers of identity behind him, he comes to realise that identity in the contemporary world is neither as fluid nor as flexible as postmodern theorists would have us believe. Indeed as McLeod comments, the narratives of identity available to the migrant are often as static and rigidly defined as those they have left behind:

> It is important to understand that this space is *not* some kind of postmodern playground of "anything goes", where all kinds of identities are equally valuable and available as if in a "multicultural supermarket". Discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalize others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging (J. McLeod 2000: 225).

Wall is confronted by this reality when, in the process of applying for his green card, he realises the enormity of the cultural legacy he now finds himself a part of:

> Under pressure in the INS office that morning, alarm bells went off: For the first time in my life, I began to feel utterly Irish. Ironically, this declaration of nationality began at a moment when I was beginning the process of surrendering that same nationality. If I wished to define myself in the future, I would have to begin with two huge words: Irish and American (E. Wall 1999: 72).

Wall thus begins the process of exploring what it means to be a transcultural being, interrogating and exploring a dual identity and heritage. He realises that as an immigrant in America, his identity will never again be a taken-for-granted birthright as it would had he stayed in Ireland. Instead, he will have to construct a new, hybrid identity for himself that will reflect his transcultural status. This construction of identity will require not the postmodern ambivalence of a commuter, but an active engagement with the process of transculturalism: "Of course, I'd grown up in Ireland and carried an Irish passport; however, after a day spent in the INS offices, I began the process of learning what it means to be Irish and of trying to locate myself within the great multicultural experiment we call the United States" (E. Wall 1999: 69). Moreover, he realizes that the metanarrative of emigration to which he is now linked is not merely an Irish, but a global, phenomenon:

> On this day, I was completing the ritual of leaving Ireland: After getting a green card, I'd have the papers to prove I was an Irishman who'd committed myself to America. At the same time, I understood that by becoming an immigrant I was joining a larger movement of people, one which was not exclusively Irish. I learned that I shared a common bond – excitement mixed with loss – with all the other people living in America but born outside its borders (E. Wall 1999: 70).

Wall comes to understand that in order to forge an identity for himself that successfully negotiates between the Irish and American spaces he inhabits, he also has to familiarize himself with the metanarrative of global migration and resettlement of which he is now a part. His realization that it is not enough for him to retain his air of detached fascination with American culture but that he has a duty as a poet to explore and question the status of immigrants in America spurs his interest in both traditional narratives of the Irish diaspora, as well as those of other migrant groups in America. Self-definition, as he learns, comes not from isolating oneself from the surrounding culture, but rather from actively engaging with all it has to offer: "I was starting to take note of my own place within the Irish diaspora" (E. Wall 1999: 69).

3.3 Reading the Diaspora

Wall begins his journey towards transculturalism by turning to the historical narratives of the Irish American diaspora, which he had initially rejected as being too limiting in their conception of self to be of relevance to his own experience of contemporary migration. He acknowledges that one of the main reasons he resisted reading such texts was that they forced him to acknowledge that thinking of himself as a commuter, effortlessly living between two cultures, was ultimately unsustainable and that he had to face up to the fact that in leaving Ireland he had irrevocably changed his relationship with it:

> More slowly have I come to read the work of Irish American writers. I suspect that the reasons for this have more to do with my own anxieties than with misgivings I entertained about the books themselves (….) I live in America, and my reluctance to read Irish American writing was, I suspect, an effort at denial. To read Irish America is to read about the self I have become, though I still cling to the notion that I am Irish and living in America (E. Wall 1999: 31).

This quotation is extremely interesting because it indicates that Wall's initial reluctance to engage with Irish-America is due to his inability to fully let go of his Irishness. It is only when he realises that both the Irish and American elements are central to his newly forged sense of self that he ceases to view them as binary oppositions and to celebrate the richness and potential this dual identity can offer him as a writer. He looks to his Irish-American literary forebears to help him achieve this sense of duality and discovers that the ability to adapt and assimilate cultural influences has long been a central part of the Irish emigrant experience: "Adaptability has been the key to survival for the Irish, and the written word has been vital in this struggle in Ireland and in the United States. Books have helped me locate myself" (E. Wall 1999: 72). In his essay "Irish Voices, American Writing, and Green Cards", Wall reflects on some of the lessons he has learned from his study of Irish-American literature. Most significantly, he is reminded that as a culture with a long history of colonialism and a legacy of bilingualism, Ireland has always produced writers with the ability to write in a hybrid voice. This legacy has enabled the development not only of a distinctive Hiberno-English, but also of an exciting and dynamic Irish-American literature, which combines the poetry and richness of Irish culture with the energy and optimism of contemporary America:

> Adaptability insures survival and guarantees a future. In both countries the fact that writers have adopted and adapted another language has distinguished them. They have emerged from a countertradition, one which historically has operated in opposition to

the standard, whether British or WASP and this has resulted in innovative and combative writing (E. Wall 1999: 74).

What Wall also discovers in his engagement with Irish American writing is that it is far more multicultural than he initially presumed and that many of his Irish American forebears celebrated the opportunities for transculturalism that living in America afforded them. Of particular importance to Wall in this regard are the poets James Liddy and John Montague, both of whose poems were greatly enriched by their dialogue with American culture. Liddy is resolute in his embrace of American multiculturalism and transcends the limitations of a fixed identity through his explorations of ethnic writers: "(H)e celebrates the freedom that being away from Ireland brings. In his explorations of Milwaukee, Liddy is drawn toward a variety of ethnic worlds – Polish, Slovakian, German – with all the circles meeting at two points, church and bar, in a poetry forever loaded with possibility" (E. Wall 1999: 76-7). Far from constituting a cultural legacy that Wall will need to resist if he is to explore his identity free from the constraints of history and nationality, Irish-American writing thus offers him an exciting and dynamic conduit into the heart of multiculturalism:

> Many writers are best read in a multicultural context. Alice Walker and Mary Gordon are not as far apart as some would have us believe, and Michael Stephens's concerns about language are similar to those voiced by Sandra Cisneros. Irish American writers describe a teeming, explosive, and varied world. This is our language. We speak it. It belongs to us. For an immigrant like me, Irish American writing is a journey into light, a journey home (E. Wall 1999: 80).

From the poet John Montague, Wall also learns that it possible to immerse oneself in American culture, while still acknowledging a haunting sense of loss engendered by one's separation from Ireland: "Montague's voice is an important one, not just for the quality of his work, but also because it shows the extent to which modern Irish men and women, for all their sophistication and education, are subject to ancient feelings of separation from Ireland" (E. Wall 1999: 78). This discovery is important to Wall as it allows him to reconcile his seemingly contradictory emotions of homesickness and joy to be free from the restrictions of living in Ireland. Discussing the prevalence of such contradictions in the work of contemporary Irish American writers, Wall insists that they constitute an opportunity to forge a new, dynamic voice that captures the excitement and complexity of contemporary transculturalism:

> It is in part because so many of us New Irish are able to feel what Boland feels one minute ("thrillingly rootless") and O'Connor feels the next (bitter, ironic, disaffected) that we have developed hard edges, or "attitudes". What has been interesting to me has been discovering similar points of view expressed in the work of such writers as Bharati

Mukherjee and Sandra Cisneros about their own cultures and divided loyalties. Given that the movement of peoples from country to country is likely to increase rather than diminish in the future, it is certain that this pot-pourri of alienation and excitement which one finds in contemporary writing is likely to continue to be vital in the writings of the future (E. Wall 2000: 1130).

3.4 Forging a Transcultural Poetic Voice

It is this mixture of "alienation" and "excitement" that most accurately describes the cultural contribution that transcultural writers can make to new narratives of identity. As a poet, Wall incorporates American vocabulary and cultural references into his writing as he strives to find a poetic voice that can accurately describe the experience of living between two cultures. He emphasizes the importance of listening to the unfamiliar sounds and cadences of American speech and being willing to incorporate these into his poems: "To be able to write convincingly about America, contemporary Irish poets must be able to partly unlearn what they have picked up in Ireland, and produce newer hybrid forms which are part-Irish and part-American" (E. Wall 2000: 1131). Wall's poems illustrate his own journey to learn to engage with the unfamiliar American landscape in which he now finds himself living. He initially found that his vocabulary was inadequate for describing what he saw around him. Addressing his poetic muse in a poem called "A Prairie Poet!", he complains that:

> I say to you:
> "I'd like to
> write prairie
> dogs and Sandhill
> cranes but I don't
> feel comfortable:
> I just blew in" (E. Wall 1997: 44-5)

This inability to find the words to engage with the surrounding landscape initially alienates Wall and emphasizes his status of outsider. The admission that "I just blew in" also exemplifies how transient and dislocated a migrant feels when he moves to an unfamiliar place with which he appears to have little in common. It is only when he discovers similar emotions of fear and loneliness in the artistic output of fellow immigrants that he begins to forge a poetic voice that can bridge the gap between his own lack of cultural references and his desire to understand and narrate the surrounding environment, a development he recounts in the poem "Yellow Band":

> That day I found the centre of the prairie on an upstairs
> wall painted by an immigrant from Russia. It was what I
> had been searching for since County Wexford had given
> me no language to describe this unfixed loneliness out-
> side my door (E. Wall 1997: 58).

The most important lesson a transcultural writer can learn, he concludes, is the ability to open himself up to the language and rhythms of the culture in which he now finds himself living in order to develop a dynamic and inclusive poetic voice. In his essay "Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café: Notes on the 'New Irish'", he makes an important statement about what defines a truly transcultural writer. It amounts almost to a mission statement for both a new style of writing and a new way to conceive of identity:

> The New Irish drink deeply of America, but retain their edge (….) These recent exiles
> have not bought into the ancient culture of emigration, but have fallen backwards into it,
> updating and transforming it in the process. But here a distinction should be considered,
> if not insisted upon. When I think of these artists, I am concerned with people who did
> not arrive in the United States with artistic identities in place, but who came here to
> begin, or continue, the process of gaining or developing identities as poets, novelists,
> musicians, or painters. Some Irish writers who arrived before the current wave have
> ignored the immigrant experience altogether – they have not felt it or have been moved
> by living in the United States, and it has little or no effect on their themes or forms –
> whereas other writers have been absolutely energized by their experiences of America
> (….) But the raw new Irish are very much engaged with American culture and none are
> afraid of it, having spent their childhoods in the Sixties and Seventies growing up on it.
> They haven't come to the United States to reap the rewards for their artistic endeavours,
> but to learn the artist's ropes on American, not native, soil (E. Wall 2000: 1130).

What is most apparent here is Wall's insistence that transculturalism is an ongoing, dynamic process. In order to be a transcultural being, it is not enough simply to travel between countries: it is crucial that one remain open to and excited by the possibilities on offer in these new and unfamiliar cultures. Reflecting on his own journey as a poet, Wall describes the moment when he surrenders to the American landscape and allows it to begin defining the new, transcultural personality he is becoming:

> But what landscapes and the humans and animals that people them do is draw you into
> history: that hill over there, after all, has a name and a story to be told. Wherever I go, I
> am drawn toward the human voice. I am a good listener. When I travelled to the Black
> Hills, I was drawn into history. There was nothing I could do about it, and I felt the
> landscape invited me: first to listen, then to speak (E. Wall 1998: 18).

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Petru Popescu and the Experience of Fragmentation

Magda Danciu

When referring to writers who migrate to other places, Julian Barnes observes that *the other country* stands for whatever the first one was not, and that commitment to it involves idealism, love, sentimentalism and – crucially – a certain selective vision. In time one might realize that the apparent and challenging differences do but partially hide painful similarities (J. Barnes 2008: 38). For most migrants, moving to an unfamiliar country brings feelings of difference and otherness to the fore, thus highlighting the importance of one's identity and culture as a site of "interconnection and interaction". According to Lestinen et al, in this situation, identity is regarded as being a "relatively stable element of objective cultural reality and (….) a defining element of subjective reality"; while culture, far from only embellishing human nature, is a "fundamental condition of human existence (….) a vision of reality between an individual and the world" (L. Lestinen et al 2004: 2).

4.1 The Great Shift: from Romanian Identity….

One writer who acts as an interface between two cultures is Petru Popescu, widely acclaimed as both a poet and the most popular prose writer of the 1970s in Romania. Popescu was celebrated by a whole generation of young people who admired his innovative mode of writing and his shocking sincerity and frankness, who understood his directness and most of all his chafing against his communist background as a way of rising against the proliferation of restraints, rules and the constriction of individual freedom. Almost twenty-five years after his 1973 defection to the United States of America, and subsequent to his 1994 return home, he published *The Return* (1997, translated into Romanian in 2001). This book recounts the most important moments of his life, juxtaposing an innovative mode of perceiving and reacting to contemporary issues in an immediate and unrestrained manner, with an authoritative narrative of his personal experiences as recorded during his years in exile. The book thus demonstrates his ability to successfully cohabit two cultures simultaneously, by conflating the distance between the immediacy of the present and a more balanced reflection on the past.

It also indicates Popescu's desire to fairly and sincerely present his experiences of living in – and between – two different cultures. Finally, the book offers a textual demonstration of the way in which our identity is conveyed by the small life events, which add up to render our particularity, our difference, our genuineness, our otherness. It accomplishes this through the deeply emotional and private thoughts generated by the author's return "home" – he ponders, for example, on his own oxymoronic status as an "Americanized" author, highly acclaimed in the 1970s in his homeland, and once considered "a Commie star" (P. Popescu 1997: 7).

Transgressions from a dominant identity dimension to others subjacent to it, as a response to certain chrono-spatial requests or priorities, are constituents of the general instability of our present world and of the changing framework in which we evolve and to whose permanent re/configuration this category of personalities contribute with more or less awareness. Apparently, the identity model of our new world is the minority identity (H.R. Patapievici 2001: 329), a more popular option in a kaleidoscopic world, nationally, ethnically, biologically and politically multidimensional. In the case of forced exile, the minority identity is stated with the pride of the alien determined to cross any obstacles, to overcome the pains of exclusion in order to reach certain professional, intellectual and emotional aims, living in a constant doubleness of the self, a necessary division to survive outwardly and to preserve a balance inwardly within this long process of re/finding oneself. Whereas within the perimeter of domestic and everyday life, alterity and difference operate moderately, even mechanically, under the circumstances of exile, when the individual has to face both a new space and a new time, when the self is acknowledged as an opposed *othe*r outside on the one hand, and as different inside on the other hand, his/her own stances turn him/her into a multiple individual, a "plural One" (St. Doinaş 2002: 23), incorporating the entire identity archives of that person.

4.2.…to American Identity

This national heritage, as a discursive practice, is the negotiable value within the process of one's acculturation. For Popescu, this process was tortuous, painful, sometimes funny and always fascinating, as he had to experience deracination with such detachment that it became a fact of a particularly emotional loss and nostalgia generating the need for biographical re/invention and identity self/definition. He often confesses that for a transplanted writer, as for any immigrant, adaptation is baffling and never complete: "Individual identity is formed by our own acts and their outcomes in relation to our goals and by a

continuous comparative process between the self and the others" (M. Fülöp 2008: 8). Awareness of the self emerges from awareness of one's affiliation to a certain social or cultural group, be it ethnic or national or linguistic, due to which individuals, as members of one or more groups, discover that their identity has "its own beliefs, expectations and behaviours" and can be defined "by reference to the norms of a particular group" (L. Lestinen et al 2004: 3).

Popescu's host society displayed values and models of which the author had originally been deprived, values such as democracy and justice – both invisible values in Ceausescu's Romania. Democracy especially was unknown, even though there was a certain equality, a kind of peerhood, among professionals and friends, or within families. Some people were honorable, some people did care about what others thought or strove for. Nevertheless, it was a personal revelation for Popescu to witness how liberal democracy showed respect for the plurality of expression, values and beliefs, emerging from a diversity of populations, in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, class, even gender orientation and ability. The awareness of democracy, of a principled attitude towards life, had a big influence on his personality, especially due to the possibilities it opened up for talking back to authority, or arguing one's case or suggesting another way, completely unimaginable in his former life experiences in the communist system. In spite of appearances – coming from Romania, a country with a high degree of academic culture and a long history – he knew as little about being a member of a normal free society as an Amazonian tribesman, as he likes to put it when referring to that initial period of exile in his life. He soon realized the importance of "the role of cultural elements in the construction of individual identity" as indicated by the degree to which one feels "connected to geographical spaces, from the home town to the wide world" (L. Cajani 2008: 12). He also realized the importance and relevance of identification with a group, either social or cultural, rooted in a common history of past and present, and manifested in an expression of solidarity, responsibility and the dignity of being a representative of that group.

In his everyday life and practices, Popescu demonstrates a constant attempt to balance the "diversity" of his own family against the multi-ethnic background of Beverly Hills. This attempt manifests itself in the names of his children, Chloe and Adam, juxtaposed with their surname Popescu, a name usually recognized as Romanian, and in a variety of other everyday practices such as celebrating American holidays, as well as his wife's Jewish ones ("her parents were holocaust survivors from Czechoslovakia", mentions the writer who dedicated his book *Oasis* (2001) to them) and in dietary choices. In the electronic interview I conducted, Popescu admitted that: "Food-wise, we cook, and like, all kinds of Romanian, Czech, Italian, middle-Eastern and other exotica; food and diet, as

elsewhere in California, are probably our most cosmopolitan trait" (M. Danciu 2009). His children have travelled to Romania many times, and feel quite connected to it, despite not speaking the language. The Popescu children also have many strong personal opinions on Europe and on Communism, unlike other Americans their age, due to their complex family situation. However, Romania, although ever-present in their lives, is also a mystery to the rest of his overseas family, not least because the language is mysterious and the children have learned it only at a shallow level. As Popescu acknowledges: "I did not discourage my wife or kids from trying to learn Romanian; truth be told, America is English-lazy, if not English-imperialistic" (M. Danciu 2009). Popescu's life in Romanian, which exists alongside his life in English, is due to the existence of his friends: "Easily, one third of my friends here are Romanian, and their number keeps growing". Recently, his Romanian life has included a new, thrilling experience that makes him even more of a transcultural person: after writing in English for the last thirty years, he has just finished writing a book in Romanian as part of a contract with a Romanian publisher: "I had longed to write again a book in Romanian, had great palpitations about doing one, loved doing it, and these very days I am getting the first reading reports. They are positive!" (M. Danciu 2009).

Becoming an American citizen also implied assuming the status of an American writer. Popescu, in fact, chose this status and made a huge effort to adopt the signifiers of American literary culture, its subjects and themes, its heroes, true and imaginary, and even its genres (in his case, the so-called "young adult" series). As in the case of any relocated writer, his dominant struggle was with the language employed to be the best expresser of his worldviews, of his life records and of his emotions and thoughts, that is, the constituents of his particular cultural formation. One's culture is mostly a linguistically rendered asset of values, dispositions, desires, aspirations, perspectives, practices and histories. In a postmodern world marked by multiculturalism, linguistic pluralism, provisionality and instability, identity is shaped according to the changes recorded in the individual's social status and roles, according to political changes, to the unity of personal and emotional components, and eventually it might become a hyphenated identity. This is what has happened in Popescu's case, and he is best summed up as a Romanian-American (writer), in a liberal multicultural environment, thus experiencing the condition of betweenness which implies the Derridean concepts of being "two-faced, contradictory, and undecidable" (V. Leitch 1996: 31).

No wonder then that Popescu's aspiration continues to be his becoming an international writer, read all over the world by people who are neither aware nor interested in his nationality. His ambition, perseverance and optimism in a world

of competition where failure exists for any writer at any time, supported by his determination and talent, has turned him into the first novelist from Romania to climb onto the US bestseller lists, first locally in California, and eventually nationally in the *New York Times*. He has successfully gained readers and critical support for his literary achievements, for books including *Amazon Beaming* (1990)*, Almost Adam* (1995)*, Weregirls* (2007 and 2008)*, Footprints in Time* (2008) and *Girl Mary* (2009). Much of the praise he receives centers around his linguistic achievement, raising critical debates about whether language is less or more important for writing fiction today. Popescu also highlights the importance of identifying oneself with a social or cultural group, and taking responsibility for the values and shared history of that group. His insistence that this group identity should manifest itself in one's behaviour and attitude is perhaps more Romanian than American: "While I am a democrat-voting liberal, voted for Obama, etc, I tend to be less obedient to what is politically correct than the average Californian. I feel I have life experiences that are harder and more dearly paid for than most Americans my age. Does that make me conservative? No, thank god. Most of my 'Romanianism' is plain old-country common sense" (M. Danciu 2009).

Being aware of the fact that to feel foreign is a very complex question – it can be a drag but also a joy – Popescu focuses on the status of in-betweenness in *The Return*. The most interesting passages here deal with differences in culture and the degrees of freedom permitted in various societies, and suggest ways of overcoming these differences in order to prosper in an overcrowded and increasingly inter-connected world. He describes the relationship between space and identity in a multicultural society as one defined by a permanent "culture of recognition" (W. Berg 2005: 374), marked by an overt acceptance of difference in traditions, values, norms, modes of expression and performatives. American identity is built on the ideal of diversity, where one's own individual life history, experiences and practices are supported by a specific manner of thinking, re/acting and behaving. Popescu's bio-fiction reflects on this idealism, recounting his reactions to relocating to a democratic country, where the characteristics of democracy – "principles of equality, tolerance, participation in regular and free elections, a multiparty system, rule of law, accountability and transparency, prevention of abuse of power, human rights and responsibilities, economic freedom" (W. Berg 2005: 374) – are basic principles of co/existence, where equality is regarded as a crucial aspect of social interrelations, after the years of totalitarianism and dictatorship lived in a country like Romania.

4.3 The Novelization of Identity

The biographical narrative emphasizes the feeling of "continuity and consistency of self-identity", that "emotionally charged description of ourselves", and is substantiated by rendering life as a story or narrative, chrono/logically developed, from an origin/start/principle/reason/cause to an aim/achievement/ telos (L. Lestinen et al 2004: 12-3). Auto/Biographic narrative includes events that tend or pretend to be organized sequentially in terms of comprehensible relationships (P. Bourdieu 1999: 59), focusing on the *Genius loci* or the spirit of the place which implies the idea of conveying the "sense of the histories of previous inhabitants and the events that have been played out against them" to the landscape described (M. Coverley 2006: 33). In *The Return*, Popescu, already an international name by now, tries to tell the world about his people, and their long history of overcoming hardships and hostilities while still preserving their: "roots inside them, slashed to stumps just like mine (….) And then, we watched the roots sprout up again. Slashed stumps, growing back" (P. Popescu 1997: 5). These words depict not only the troubled history of Romania, but also the complex individual history of the author, whose life brought him through four distinct reincarnations – the child; the artist, young and full of illusions; the defecting artist, first rootless and desperate, then rediscovered; and finally, the man becoming a father and submitting himself to the destiny of any man aiming to perpetuate his bloodline, whether an artist or not. It is an exemplary metamorphosis worthy of a writer whose national affiliation stirs so much interest and generates so many queries. Much of this interest is due to his frequent juxtaposition of his own identity features with those of his people, as they emerge from their history, their beliefs, their recollections of local or regional histories. He often uses clichés – for instance, when referring to the country's nationhood formed around the Orthodox church, or the commonness of the name Popescu (like Smith in England) – in order to facilitate this conflation of his individual history and that of his countrymen: "a brusque liberation, for the old me was not in me anymore, except as a trove of memories. Was it a sense of loss, a sadness, a reflective nostalgia, a pensive strength, what?" (P. Popescu 1997: 297).

Popescu's illustration of Romania and Romanians in this book demonstrates Edward Said's idea about the way in which people construct their own history, as reflected in geographic, cultural and historical entities, such as places, regions on the maps, which are but human creations and epitomize the past and the tradition of thinking, imagining and expressing (E. Said 1995: 16-7). History, in general, may contribute to the enhancing of a sense of community and belonging and to the crystallization of one's identity, in moulding one's future as a member of a

certain group: "stories root people in their past and provide common heritages which can be shared" (P. Harnett and W Newman 2005: 155). National identity is seen to be a highly resonating inner self that turns into a dominant self whenever it is exposed to conditions of deracination against one's own volition; when the subject reflected upon is an artist/writer who most often perceives this detachment with a greater sense of difference, national identity can become a signifier of a particularly emotional loss and nostalgia, as from this vantage point a boundless nation is no fantasy (S. Rushdie 2003: 67). The concept of national affiliation, so deeply imprinted in oneself, generates the strength, stamina and belief of any individual who happens to be living outside his/her own country to be in the need of biographical re/invention and identity self/definition.

4.4 Cultural In-Betweenness

Like any hybrid individual, Popescu's experiences were very enriching, but beginning his career as a writer was a problem in terms of how and what to write for his American readers. The most important difference between himself and his new surroundings was his awareness of being both an adopted American – being a member of an American family and fostering American friends – and a lingering European. Making references to his earlier life and worldview was most often a useless endeavour, and he frequently mentions that stories about his stoic Communist upbringing, his dealings with censorship, poverty and the lack of freedom, were incomprehensible to his children, for instance, who were born in California and went to school in Beverly Hills. Once he made his huge decision to become a writer in America, the urge came from his "other self" who found a perfect refuge in writing and in the resistance that seems to be the fate of the displaced person. *The Return* illustrates its author's struggle to resist adaptation, for fear he might lose his identity, his search for balance in preserving past values and emotions, for fear he might be bitterly isolated – a misfit in the new world.

Through the writing of *The Return*, in which he forces himself to confront his fears: "I was afraid of opening the past and facing it" (P. Popescu 1997: 29), Popescu succeeds in recovering those roots he left behind when emigrating to the United States, and retrieving the *lieu de memoir* that he had abandoned in favour of freedom and the right to reflect on freedom. His return to his homeland almost automatically triggers a reactivation of the national identity, of the latent self hidden by the deliberately acquired status of American citizen, husband and father – a mental imposition conditioned by the process of pursuit and hope for an enduring spiritual balance and harmony. The book demonstrates how the

preservation and record of a migrant's experience can turn into an inward-outward scrutiny:

> Romania didn't make sense outside herself. She just didn't. And I would be nothing without her. Without my nationhood and my past (….) I felt organically built out of the ancestral experience of my nation, and honor bound to enshrine that experience into my writing (….) So I reckoned, if I defected, I wouldn't be able to write of Romania for all mankind to read. Therefore I'd be nothing" (P. Popescu 1997: 124).

As Seán Cubitt notes: "Globalization and the problems of the formation and construction of identities cannot be understood without a sense of history, and their futures too demand a crafted understanding of the past" (S. Cubitt 2002: 7). In this respect, *The Return* is the record of the long journey of finding oneself, unfolding on two alternative plans of present and past hi/stories, of truth and fiction, of facts and feelings: "ambitiously fighting to demonstrate that his roots, displayed from the position of the American present, are still there, in the original country, strong and firm, as his nation itself, a nation that progressed in history with dignity, in spite of the many betrayals, humiliations, resignations it had to go through almost regularly, culminating with the period which 'produced' the author-character, Petru Popescu, that is, communism" (M. Danciu 2008: 153).

Popescu's need to immerse himself in the underground of his own self after a fifteen-year time loop comes as a response to an existential necessity marked by alterity which has become a permanent condition for both his family and professional achievements. He still preserves his identity split as that undercurrent in his being that sustains the physical and psychological continuum of identity fashioning, as an inner voice that: "lies somewhere at my core, maybe inside my bones, mixed within my bone marrow, or perhaps spread among all the cells that make up my body (….) it is the very foundation of my being in the dark down there" (P. Popescu 1997: 1). Material and spiritual entities are brought forth in a continuum meant to emphasize the nature of memory as recorded recollections and personal or collective histories: "memory is life. It is subject to remembering and forgetting (….) It can be dormant for long periods, only to be reawakened suddenly" (Z. Celik 2002: 62). *The Return* was successful and drew public attention to Popescu. Since then, Popescu has become best known for being a Romanian author on the American stage, a journey he has carefully explained and illustrated in the book. The book, as I have discussed, originated in the author's huge need to communicate with his international readership and to share some of his country's history. He has made Romania more known and that was his main goal as a writer. He also expresses his commitment to his Romanian readers, who should bear with him the grandeur of this moment of

return, when "the roots I once severed had sprouted back inside me", after more than fifteen years of "long undisturbed" silence (P. Popescu 1997: 1). This acknowledgement is a demonstration of the extent to which Popescu always treasured the Romania inside himself, never having tried to exorcize it.

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Natsume Soseki: Culture Shock and the Birth of the Modern Japanese Novel

Márta Fülöp[1]

When an individual comes into contact with a culturally disparate society, this experience tends to have an impact on his/her personality, value system and way of thinking. The nature and extent of this change can be manifold. It can result, for example, in either total assimilation into the new culture or the total rejection of it. Some people, however, seem to be able to synthesize the various cultural influences, both at the personality and the intellectual levels. According to Ward et al, such individuals, to whom they refer as "mediating persons", are relatively rare (C. Ward et al 2001: 31). What distinguishes them is that they are able to maintain their core cultural identities, while also learning and incorporating important features of the other culture into their identities. The following chapter describes the painful journey of an exceptional Japanese intellectual, Natsume Soseki, who journeyed to London at the turn of the twentieth century, becoming a kind of cultural mediator between East and West via the highest level of literary scholarship.

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) is widely considered to be the greatest Japanese novelist of the Meiji Era. He was born just one year before it started and can, therefore, be considered a "child of the new era". In 1868, due to pressure from Western powers, Japan, which had closed itself off from the world for more than two hundred years, opened its borders and engaged in an overall modernization. For the sake of this modernization, it was necessary to familiarize more and more of its people with the scientific-technological and cultural achievements of the western world and to make Japan equal with the most civilized powers. The Meiji-era was characterized by an intensive Westernization and the merger of western culture with traditional Japanese culture. This is a period in Japan's development when intercultural contact became a reality for a whole society, when millions of Japanese citizens were exposed to novel and unfamiliar cultural phenomena. Every aspect of life changed: the government system, the banking system, the military, judicial and legal systems, the

education system, and at the same time Japanese people began to learn about western music, sports and literature. The Meiji era also witnessed a vast social transformation. According to Reischauer, all these changes happened very quickly and successfully (E. Reischauer 1994: 78-86). Within two decades, Japan won military and economic security from the West. These social transitions undoubtedly required a great deal of technical knowledge, an educated work-force, and quick learning and cultural adaptation from the Japanese people.

It became important for Japanese professionals to communicate in the English language and English studies were particularly popular as a symbol of an advanced culture (E. Reischauer 1994: 84). In 1884, Soseki enrolled at the Tokyo Imperial University (now University of Tokyo) where he studied English language and literature, and became the second university graduate of this subject in Japan (T. Doi 1976). In 1900, he was chosen to become a Government Scholar and was sent to England at the expense of the Japanese government to further his studies. He stayed in London for two and a half years and returned to Japan in 1903.

5.1 Culture Shock: Soseki in London

Those who were fortunate enough to experience travel and study in the West were considered the most talented young intellectuals and much was expected of them. However, four years after his return from England, in his preface to *Bungakuron* (*Theory of Literature*, 1907), a major work that was a direct product of his stay in London, Soseki wrote about the period as follows:

> The two years I lived in London were the unhappiest two years of my life. Among the English gentlemen I was like a lone shaggy dog mixed in with a pack of wolves; I endured a wretched existence (….) The English people who observed me called me neurasthenic. A certain Japanese person even sent a report back to Japan that I had gone mad. Who am I to question the pronouncements of such wise persons? (N. Soseki 2009: 48-9)

Details about Soseki's life in London are recorded in a variety of sources, including accounts from his contemporaries, information from his wife (Natsume Kyoko), sporadic diary entries, essays, some letters and his famous lecture "My Individualism" delivered in 1914. Based on these sources, it is possible to identify the "culture shock syndrome" from which he suffered. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this phenomenon was not recognized. It is only in the last fifty years that systematic research has been done into this group of cultural

travellers (C. Ward et al 2001). Previously, Soseki's strong psychological reactions to his stay in an alien country were attributed solely to his fragile personality and his poor mental state.

Soseki was what nowadays would be called a "sojourner". He was sent to England for a defined period of time with a more or less specified goal, to study English language and literature. For a sojourner, who stays in a place only temporarily, it is important to adapt to the new culture rapidly in order to operate effectively. However, there are huge individual differences in how quickly this happens and how much it affects one's psychological well-being, and mental and physical health (C. Ward et al 2001: 73). Nowadays, the process of adaptation is helped by initial intercultural training, but in Japan, at the beginning of the twentieth century, this was not the case. A great number of young people who had never had any experience of travelling abroad, not to mention being essentially cut from their own cultural environment and social network for years in an alien country, had to find ways of adapting by themselves.

Oberg, the first researcher to use the expression "culture shock", defines it as a form of anxiety that results from the loss of commonly perceived and understood signs and symbols of social intercourse (K. Oberg 1960: 177-182). As the familiar cues and clues of cultural understanding are removed, the individual becomes disoriented and rejects the environment causing the discomfort (P. Adler 1975: 13-23). Based on this definition, we can conclude that Soseki went through a tremendous culture shock. All aspects of this mental state can be identified during his London stay: strain due to the effort of adapting; a sense of loss and feeling of deprivation with regard to social contacts, status, profession and possessions; feeling rejected by and rejecting the members of the new culture; confusion about role, role expectations, values, feelings; surprise, anxiety, even disgust when becoming aware of cultural differences; feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment.

5.2 Predicting Culture Shock

Lonner identifies different classes of "predictor variables" that determine how seriously a specific person may be affected by culture shock. Four are considered here: control factors, intrapersonal factors, organismic-biological factors and interpersonal factors (W. Lonner 1994: xv-xx).

5.2.1 Control Factors

Control factors refer to how much control one has over initiating the other-culture experience, and how motivated one is to go and discover another place, society or culture. Although it was a privilege to be chosen to be a Government Scholar and be sent abroad, and it also meant that one was recognized as a highly talented, promising intellectual, it was nevertheless not Soseki's *own* decision to go to England. The Japanese government needed fluent English language professionals as they wanted to replace foreigners in crucial positions with their own citizens. Soseki agreed to the government request in exchange for a prominent academic position in Tokyo: after his return to Japan, he was to replace Lafcadio Hearn at Tokyo University. In spite of this, Soseki was initially reluctant to make the journey to this far-off land. Although his marriage was not without major conflicts, he was not happy to leave a pregnant wife and child behind and to have only sporadic communication with them while he was away (M. Marcus 2009).

5.2.2 Intrapersonal Factors

Intrapersonal factors also influence the success of cultural adaptation. Among them is the age of the sojourner. Young adults adapt more quickly than old people. Soseki was between young adulthood and early middle-age (33-35 years-old) at the time of his stay in London, therefore his age could have predicted an easier adaptation as adolescents and old people are the high-risk groups in terms of adaptation in a culturally different environment (C. Ward et al 2001: 94). However, in this case, his age did not appear to help Soseki overcome his culture shock. The extent of one's previous travels and encounters with diversity also affects the process of adjustment. Travelling to England was the very first time Soseki had been abroad. He was born in a society that was literally cut off from the outside world for almost two hundred years. Travelling and meeting people from other countries was not a topic of discourse in Japanese families, and there were no travel accounts or stories about studying in a foreign university to read and learn from. Soseki himself had no previous experience of travelling, had not been exposed to people from other cultures and had no previous experience of living in other countries.

Language competence is a vital requirement for getting along in everyday life in a foreign country. Although Soseki majored in English language and literature in the University of Tokyo, his spoken English was not fluent and he

had few opportunities to practise. In the preface to *Theory of Literature*, he writes:

> You're unfamiliar with the language. You don't feel like saying something bold. It's also a little off-putting. Even if it doesn't put you off, you don't quite know where to start. It seems fuzzy, as if you're looking at someone's face through a silk cloth (N. Soseki 2009: 234).

In his "Letter from London" (1901), he further explains that:

> Coming to the West and attempting to socialize awkwardly in broken English is something I positively loathe (N. Soseki 2005: 53-76).

Personality factors can also impede or facilitate the acculturation process. Neuroticism has been proven to strongly relate to adjustment problems, depression, anxiety and psychosomatic complains. However extraversion and agreeableness result in fewer difficulties (C. Ward et al 2001: 84). Okada writes that Soseki was introverted, insular, unsociable, awkward, of a nervous disposition (S. Okada 2003: 10): in short, he had all the handicaps to receiving favourable treatment from his British hosts. He had experienced his first nervous breakdown as a student, and his first bout of depression during his first year of work after graduating from the university. He had a high level of anxiety back in Japan and, as he states in "My Individualism": "when, at last, I journeyed to England, the anxiety was still there, deep within me" (N. Soseki 2009: 249). A Japanese scholar who lodged with Soseki for a short period in London reported to the Japanese Ministry of Education that Soseki had gone insane (D. Flanagan 2005: 12).

Tolerance of ambiguity and personal flexibility are also associated with the sojourner's general adjustment and psychological well-being (C. Ward et al 2001: 85). Triandis defines Japan as a non-flexible, tight culture, meaning that norms are clearly defined and there is little tolerance for deviance from these norms (H. Triandis 1989: 506-520). Tightness also refers to the need for predictability and order, and this is manifested in the strength of socially constructed situations. Strong situations, in contrast to weak situations, create predictability by limiting the number of behavioural patterns that are generated and acceptable. An individual whose psychological processes have consistently prepared him for strong situations will be ill-suited and unprepared for weak situations that require individual innovation in generating and choosing desired response patterns (M. Gelfrand et al 2007). Tight societies have many clear norms, thus stress deriving from uncertainty may be lower among its citizens. However, if the learned behavioural norms are not functional, as happens when one moves to a very different culture, the anxiety becomes more intensive than

among those who are brought up in a loose society. As well as cultural tightness, Hofstede characterizes Japan as a country with strong uncertainty avoidance, meaning that people are less willing to take risks, there is a low degree of tolerance for unpredictable behaviour (what is different is dangerous) and security is a powerful motivator (G. Hofstede 1983: 75-89). Herbing agrees that: "A strong uncertainty avoidance value system does not make the average Japanese person flexible abroad; nor does it facilitate understanding among the Japanese public for other countries' values" (P. Herbing 1995: 170). Although these are country level characteristics, and Soseki's personal flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty were never measured by proper psychological means, we can assume from descriptions of his personality that it reflected the Japanese national stereotype. Entering a completely unknown society, where one does not know the implicit and sometimes explicit norms of everyday behaviour, and has to learn the basics of everyday life from shopping to dressing codes, implies millions of unexpected and unpredictable situations that require quick social understanding and learning. Soseki clearly was not able to tolerate this stress, so he withdrew into his room in London and hardly ever left it[2]. In this manner, he set up a kind of comfort zone for himself within which he felt in control.

Being a sojourner involves being deprived of one's social network and significant relationships with family, friends and colleagues. It also includes having to deal with physical variables such as food and weather (A. Furnham and S. Bochner 1994: 196). The sojourners experience a kind of loss and this may lead to feelings of grief and bereavement. Moreover, previous exposure to separation, especially if those experiences were traumatic, also strongly influences the adaptation process. Since early childhood, Soseki lacked security and experienced separation extensively. He was put up for adoption before he was two-years-old (M. Marcus 2009: 2) and moved back-and-forth between his parents and his foster parents (S. Okada 2003: 10). Lack of security and repeated separation traumas could have made him less tolerant of leaving the well-known and safe comfort zone of his home country, family and friends. When he left Japan, in September 1900, he had a 15 month old daughter. In January 1901, his second daughter was born and he had to wait six weeks after her birth to learn that mother and daughter were well. He would not see them until January 1903 (D. Flanagan 2005: 14). In September 1902, during his stay in London, his closest friend Masaoka Shiki, who encouraged him to become a writer and tutored him, died in Tokyo. Soseki wrote three letters to Shiki during his stay in

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[2]Entry on "Natsume Soseki" in *New World Encyclopedia,*
http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Natsume_Soseki?oldid=687081 (accessed August 18, 2009).

London and Shiki edited and published them under the title "Letter from London". In November 1901, Shiki had asked for more letters from Soseki but he refused saying he was too busy with research. It was a lasting regret that Shiki died and Soseki had no opportunity to see him again (D. Flanagan 2005: 204). Soseki had to work through these losses alone. He did not establish close contacts in London and had nobody to whom he could turn for comfort.

5.2.3 Organismic-Biological Factors

Besides intrapersonal variables, organismic-biological factors – i.e. one's overall physical condition and the ability to physically tolerate the demands of stressful adaptation – are also decisive in a sojourner's experience. Soseki had fragile health. According to one of his biographers, he was constantly depressed from his early adult years. The first period of his depression is attributed to the death of his sister-in-law who is regarded to have been his secret lover. Soseki had extremely high ambition and intended to become very successful. His first gastric ulcer was diagnosed at the age of nineteen after he failed to pass his exams in the university. His whole life was accompanied by the alternation of depression and gastric ulcers; once his mental state improved, his stomach got worse, and vice versa. He worked at full stretch until his death from a gastric haemorrhage in 1916. In addition, since he was 20 he had trachoma and when he was 27, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. His sensitive stomach reacted strongly to the unfamiliar English food and this was an extra burden during his stay abroad. In February 1901, for example, he had to take Carlsbad salts to ease the onset of a stomach ulcer (D. Flanagan 2005: 47-9). Yamada Futaro, a twentieth century Japanese writer, has tried to reconstruct the social situations in which Soseki would have found himself in London. In a short story, entitled the "Yellow Lodger", he depicts Soseki in the following way: "Well, he is a strange man. He scarcely eats anything at all, reads nothing but fusty books" (Y. Futaro 2005: 177). In another part of the story, "Soseki" says: "Ah, that's because my stomach was starting to hurt. It's always been bad. It had become unbearable" (Y. Futaro 2005: 194).

5.2.4 Interpersonal Factors

Interpersonal factors and social support are also significant in predicting psychological adjustment. The presence of social support is negatively correlated with psychiatric symptomatology. A protective factor may be the quality of the

social relations established with the host people (C. Ward et al 2001: 85). Soseki isolated himself in London. He buried himself under books in his room and had virtually no English contacts, apart from Professor Craig the literary scholar, who was his personal tutor. Nor did he have extensive contacts with his fellow countrymen. He knew only a few members of the tiny Japanese community who lived in close vicinity to him. This monocultural network reconstructed to a small extent the Japanese "home" environment for him. A good quality spousal relationship is also a significant predictor of psychological well-being in an alien country, but Soseki did not have a harmonious relationship with his wife, nor much opportunity of keeping in contact with her. He did not establish any relationship with women and in "Letter from London", he proudly reported that he never kept company with prostitutes (N. Soseki 2005: 60). Therefore no human support could buffer the effects of his transitional stress.

His approach towards his host society was also hampered by his experience of racial prejudice. Reischauer writes that although since the Meiji-restoration Japan had been in continuous rapid change and the Japanese people craved being considered part of the civilized world, they continued to be considered half-barbarian by the Western world (E. Reischauer 1991). Soseki did not have a very positive self-image. Being Japanese, he had a manifest sense of racial inferiority and "otherness", and he frequently encountered racial prejudice, i.e. being called "Jap" during his stay in England (N. Soseki 2005: 61). In the "Yellow Lodger", a kind of crime story featuring Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, Futaro describes a meeting with Professor Craig during which Soseki refers to himself as the "yellow-coloured man" and Craig calls him "Oriental" and makes fun of his name and origin:

> "This is a Japanese student, Mr Jujube…."
> "Mister….?"
> "Jujube….or 'Natsume' as they say in Japanese. Still a little unripe and yellow, though!"
> Professor Craig appeared to be greatly amused by his own joke and burst into high peals of laughter, but the Japanese man, Mr Natsume, looked neither amused nor sad but stood with expressionless countenance (Y. Futaro 2005: 166).

The Professor's manservant, moreover, refers to the Japanese as "those yellow Japanese monkeys" (Y. Futaro 2005: 170), while a young woman is quoted as saying that it is shameful that Japanese people do not believe in Jesus and misplaces Japan in India somewhere. At the end of the tale, "Soseki" says to Sherlock Holmes:

> I have taken sudden fits of wanting to break into gales of tears or burst out laughing. Perhaps moreover it's because of the terrible sense of inferiority which anyone from an

undeveloped country tends to experience when they come to a civilized country, but I have become obsessed with the idea that everyone in England is incessantly making fun of me, watching me, following me and speaking ill of me (Y. Futaro 2005: 194).

5.3 Identity and Social Roles

In addition to Lonner's predictive variables as outlined above, other factors also play a role in adjustment. For instance, the success of adjustment to a new cultural environment is also related to identity and social roles. Soseki, like anybody who moves from one country to another, experienced a kind of identity loss. He lost his social status and role as a talented and promising intellectual, as a respected "sensei" (teacher) in a highly regarded higher school (a kind of proto-university), and as an adult who had a job and regular earnings that were enough to provide for his family. In London he had no status or identity. Rather, he was a poor and looked down upon Oriental man:

> I have a strong sense that I am not the same person I was in Japan, I am a mere student (….) I have forgotten having my own house and employing maids (N. Soseki 2005: 60).

He was a highly educated person and the uneducated families with whom he stayed horrified him with their vulgarity and constantly hurt him with their assumption that he knew nothing of English culture (N. Soseki 2005: 63). He expressed this loss of identity in *The Theory of Literature*:

> I had been no better than a rootless, floating weed, drifting aimlessly and wholly centered on others - "other centered" in the sense of an imitator (N. Soseki 2009: 249).

When somebody is a sojourner, there is usually a clearly defined goal to the stay abroad: to study, to work, etc. The extent to which these goals are reached is, therefore, crucial in terms of the success of the mission. The young Japanese who were sent abroad had a very strong need for task-fulfilment. Soseki's original wish was to study in Cambridge. He had a letter of introduction to the vice-principal of Westcott House, but he realized that he could not afford to pay for his studies in Cambridge on his very low government stipend. This was a major disappointment for the highly ambitious Soseki. He decided to dive into heavy studying on his own, attended a weekly tutorial with Professor Craig and spent all his money on books (D. Flanagan 2005: 47). While he had many emotionally stressful experiences and cultivated a profound distaste for the English society and people, he learned and understood more and more about English literature. He spent his time usefully, working very hard, writing, reading and starting to develop a literary theory in which he tried to combine

Japanese tradition with a western psychological approach. He was a good example of what later research showed, which was that while psychological well-being can be severely affected in the case of a sojourner, academic success is unrelated (I. Babiker et al 1980: 109-116). Although Soseki suffered from loneliness and alienation, he could still work very hard, immersed himself in research and acquired all the necessary knowledge about English literature that made it possible for him after his return to be the founder of the Western style of modern novel and literature in Japan.

Babiker et al postulate that the degree of alienation and psychological distress experienced by migrants is based on an interaction. In other words, it is a function of the distance between the individual's own and the host culture. The culture-distance index (CDI) takes into consideration differences in climate, clothes, language, religion, food, material comfort, etc. CDI was found to be significantly related to the degree of difficulty constituted by everyday encounters and the degree of anxiety experienced (I. Babiker et al 1980: 109-116). If Soseki's CDI could have been measured in 1900, we can speculate that it would have shown a great distance, as there were differences in basically everything between England and Japan at that time. Ward and Chang's cultural fit hypothesis postulates that it is not personality per se that predicts cross-cultural adjustment, but rather the "cultural fit" between the acculturating individual and the norms of the host culture (C. Ward and W. Chang 1997: 525-533). One significant normative factor is religion. Religious or ideological dissimilarity was a constant source of conflict for Soseki. He became acquainted with an English lady who repeatedly tried to convert him, but he was very critical of what he considered Christian icon-worship. Once in answer to the lady's question about whether he prayed, he happened to answer that he knew no God worth praying to (D. Flanagan 2005: 201).

5.4 The Process of Culture Shock

Culture shock, however intense, is not a static state of mind, but has a course and dynamic and those who migrate do not stagnate in this psychological condition forever. Adaptation usually happens in stages. According to Oberg's theory of cultural contact, it normally starts with the honeymoon stage, which is characterized by positive emotions, and this is followed by the crisis stage, the gradual recovery and finally the adjustment (K. Oberg 1960: 177-182). Adler's five-stage model of culture shock development more closely reflects what can be reconstructed from Soseki's accounts. Adler outlines the initial contact phase (which is a kind of excitement), followed by disintegration (confusion, apathy,

disorientation, loss, isolation, loneliness, inadequacy). The third phase is reintegration (rejection of the host culture, irritability, anger, rebellion, being opinionated). This phase, according to Adler, is already a form of self-assertion and growing self-esteem. The following stage, called autonomy, means that cultural differences are legitimized, the person becomes relaxed and self-assured. Finally, in the independence phase, the individual even starts to value the differences, gains back his creativity and is capable of exercising choice in terms of what he likes and what he dislikes in the other culture (P. Adler 1975: 13-23).

From what is known about Soseki's sojourn, he had no so-called "honeymoon" phase: he felt miserable in England right from the beginning. Most of his time in England was spent in crisis or disintegration, feeling lost, depressed and withdrawn. He was confused because social and cultural cues did not mean the same as in Japan. For instance in England, it was impossible for him to know the status of a person from his clothes. This was puzzling for a Japanese person: "even the butcher's boy, when Sunday rolls around, will proudly put on his silk hat and frock-coat" (N. Soseki 2005: 61). He had problems sleeping: "I go to bed telling myself that it is a matter of persevering, persevering, persevering" (N. Soseki 2005: 62). He wanted to escape, but it was impossible: "I felt as if I had been sealed in a sack, unable to escape" (N. Soseki 2009: 249). As the differences in daily routine, in tradition, in history and philosophy, and in life-style and outlook gradually became more noticeable to him, the personal, social and cultural differences intruded more and more on his sense of security and control. He felt different and began to lose his self-esteem:

> Once outside, everyone is depressingly tall. Worse yet, they all have unfriendly faces (….) In any case, I feel small (….) We are indeed yellow. When I was in Japan I knew I was not particularly white but regarded myself as being close to a regular human colour, but in this country I have finally realized that I am three leagues away from a human colour (N. Soseki 2005: 61-62).

He increasingly felt less like a human being than an animal roaming the streets of London. Okada considers his novel, *I am a cat* (1905) to be a product of his non-human stay in England (S. Okada 2003: 10).

In the reintegration phase, Soseki was irritable and "bordering on madness" (M. Marcus 2009: 2). The irritability of the reintegration phase can be recognized in his "Letter from London" (1901). For instance he wrote: "The most minor things will get on my nerves. It may be that I have got some nervous disorder" (M. Marcus 2009: 19) and "Yet, at the same time, many irritating things crop up. Sometimes I find myself hating England and desiring quickly to return to Japan" (N. Soseki 2005: 53). When the English people he met repeatedly wanted to Christianize him, he angrily denounced their ethnocentrism and inability to take

an alternative perspective. Rather than damaging his self-esteem further, however, this insistence on converting him made Soseki more self-assertive, and he rejected and despised what the English considered in a self-centred way to be so precious:

> English think that one size suits all, and being born in England they know nothing outside of England and no religion apart from Christianity. They think the entire world will feel the same when they hear a church bell, or become tearful when they hear a sermon, or have a feeling of ecstasy when they hear an organ. But the bell actually sounds like a fire alarm; the sermon like a platitude; and the organ gives out nothing more, than a vast amount of meaningless noise (D. Flanagan 2005: 201).

Soseki was an introverted person, with a low need for social contact, but he was intellectually very open and curious, and even during his worst emotional crisis he made observations and tried to understand the society in which he lived. He looked and listened to everything around him, and asked questions that searched for explanations for cultural differences, like how literature and art influenced the national character of the English. His letters describe his observations, his amazement over the shops being closed for three days because of Easter, the underground being like a system of caves and passengers being like moles, etc. His observations are humorous, ironic and intellectually engaging. This again proves that his mental state did not affect his brilliant intellect and he was able to distance himself from his difficult personal experiences and take an observer's position. Maybe this ability helped him to move forward and recover from the brink of nervous breakdown. He was also able to take both the Western and the Japanese perspectives into consideration simultaneously. For example, in his "Letter from London" (1901), he described his experiences in London to the Japanese readers by connecting them to Japanese parallels in order to bridge the cultural gap. For instance he described himself descending to the London Underground as the reverse of a Kabuki character being lifted up on the stage (D. Flanagan 2005: 36).

The turning-point came when he decided not to be dependent on others' judgements any longer but to be self-centered and construct his own world. This stage of autonomy helped him to make a new start. A clear sign of the autonomy state is that he gained back his self-esteem, stopped defining himself according to English standards, and no longer needed their approval of his taste, but he did not denigrate the taste of the English either, he just recognized and accepted confidently the difference:

> However, the idea that came to me at the time – the idea of self-centeredness – has stayed with me. Indeed, it has grown stronger with the passing of each year. My projected work ended in failure, but I found a belief that I could get my hands on, the

> conviction that I was the single most important person in my life, while others were only secondary (….) our contemporary taste will not necessarily correspond to contemporary English taste. Just because they don't correspond, there is no need to be embarrassed by it (N. Soseki 2009: 252, 238).

In spite of his fragile physical and psychical dispositions and also his very intense culture shock, by the time he returned to Japan he was in the independence phase. As a result of this self-conscious and hard fought independence, he also felt stronger than before: "I would return to Japan with a strength, I did not possess when I left for England" (N. Soseki 2009: 252). Soseki could now describe what he suffered in England and what he had learned from the experience:

> England, as you know, is a country that cherishes liberty. There is not another country in the world that so cherishes liberty while maintaining the degree of order as England does. I am not very fond of England, to tell you the truth. As much as I dislike the country, however, the fact remains that no nation anywhere is so free and, at the same time, so very orderly (N. Soseki 2009: 258).

Soseki's personal experience also reflected a crisis that evolved from the clash of two culturally different self-conceptions. According to the East-Asian conception of the relational or interdependent self, a person does not exist in himself but can only be determined in his mutual relations with others (H. Markus and S Kitayama 1991: 224-253). Until Soseki achieved a sense of self-esteem that was independent from the English lifestyle, he suffered. Once he realised that his only way of surviving was to develop an autonomous and independent self typical of western culture (H. Markus and S. Kitayama 1991: 224-253), he could adapt better to the surrounding English culture, and his suffering and anxiety decreased: "My anxiety disappeared without a trace. I looked on London's gloom with a happy heart. I felt that after years of agony my pick had at last struck a vein of ore. A ray of light had broken through the fog and illuminated my way" (N. Soseki 2009: 251). Soseki strengthened his individual and independent identity, and from this time on, he did not wish to assimilate to the English people and to judge himself from their viewpoint. Paradoxically, being independent meant identifying with the basic guiding principle of the English society that had been considered the cradle of individualism:

> However, the idea that came to me at the time – the idea of self-centeredness – has stayed with me. Indeed, it has grown stronger with the passing of each year (....) the conviction that I was the single most important person in my life, while others were only secondary. This has given me enormous confidence and peace of mind, and I feel that it will continue to make it possible for me to live (N. Soseki 2009: 252).

This identification with the English autonomous self resulted in a somewhat contemptuous view of the Japanese interdependent self. Soseki described the modern Japanese person as a "crippled personality", incapable of independent thought or action (S. Napier 1995: 188).

5.5 Working at the Brink of Two Cultures

In 1903, Soseki returned home and became a professor of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University. His career as a writer began in 1904, and in 1907 he ceased lecturing in order to concentrate fully on his writing. Soseki was among the first Japanese writers to be influenced by Western culture. He drew on his experience of living in a Western country and being forced to temporarily adapt to its culture in his novels, which thus reflected those ambivalent feelings between acquiring and rejecting the foreign culture that were shared by Japanese society at the time. In other words, Soseki's personal difficulties were those of all modern Japanese people. He described it as a national nervous breakdown (S. Napier 1995: 188). His readers were sensitive to his messages and he became so famous in Japan that his most productive eleven years were called the "Natsume-years". Today, his novels still enjoy immense popularity in Japan, and contemporary Japanese writers continue to be influenced by his work[3]. His main scholarly work in literature, *Theory of Literature*, was published in 1907, and was the fruit of his stay in London. It is widely regarded as the pinnacle of Meiji literary scholarship (M. Marcus 2001: 24).

In the Introduction to *Theory of Literature* and in a lecture entitled "My Individualism" (1914), Soseki emphasized the importance of the individualism he had observed and identified with during his stay in the West. With the self-confidence he gained by identifying with the individualistic values of the society that surrounded him, he gave an astonishing insight into the position of a non-Western intellectual faced with the hegemony of Western culture, while he argued against the universality of the literary standards that Western (English) literary scholarship naturally implied. Takeo Doi, the Japanese psychoanalyst, whose main endeavour was to separate the universally human from the culturally specific in psychoanalysis, wrote a book about Soseki's work, called *The Psychological World of Natsume Soseki* that was published in the USA in 1976. Doi saw Soseki as a sensitive observer of psychic phenomena. His works were particularly interesting for Doi because Soseki lived his whole life on the boundaries between Western and Japanese cultural influences and he intended to

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[3] For more information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natsume_Soseki

combine Japanese traditions with western psychological approaches. According to Albert Craig and Ezra Vogel who wrote the preface to Doi's book, the psychic patterns Soseki wrote about are universally human and simultaneously unmistakably Japanese. His heroes lived in the clash of old and new, traditional and modern, Asian and Western values. Therefore his heroes were often confused and frightened (T. Doi 1976: x).

One of the most obvious conflicts illustrated in Soseki's works existed between the group-oriented behaviour central to Japanese society and the Western emphasis on individualism. Soseki's novels did not propose a solution to this dilemma. As a writer, he did not want to leave behind traditional Japanese behaviour, though at the same time he stressed the advantages of personal independence and striving for freedom. His heroes were ruined because they were not able to find a balance between social responsibility and their personal freedom. As a consequence they chose passivity or suicide. At the intellectual level, Soseki could provide a solution to this dilemma. In "My Individualism", he explained how a society that was based on individualism could function in harmony. This required on the one hand giving freedom to others to follow their own individuality, and on the other hand the self-discipline not to follow individuality at the expense of others:

> Unless we have a very good reason, we must not be allowed to obstruct others from developing their individuality
>
> If you want to carry out the development of your individuality you must respect the individuality of others
>
> I simply believe that freedom without the sense of duty is not true freedom, for such self-indulgent freedom cannot exist in society
>
> If society is going to permit you to respect your own individuality, it only makes sense if you recognize the individuality of others and respect their individuality (N. Soseki 2009: 256-259).

In England, he realized that this ability has to be ingrained from an early age and taught and learned systematically in a society that is based on the principle of individualism. For Japanese people, who are socialized from an early age in a different paradigm, there is no easy solution: "they are not merely free. They receive social education from their childhood as to how to respect the freedom of others as much as they themselves love their own freedom" (N. Soseki 2009: 258). With these ideas, Soseki differentiated himself from the collectivistic cultural milieu of Japanese society that placed high emphasis on other-directed behaviour, groups and interdependence rather than on individual, self-directed behaviour and independence. In the Meiji Era, the whole notion of the individual

was still regarded as a potentially dangerous even frightening import from the West (S. Napier 1995). Soseki, who became an advocate of individualism, had to experience a kind of "re-entry culture shock" after his return to Japan (C. Ward et al 2001: 188). From his account it is known that he had another nervous breakdown not long after his return (N. Soseki 2009: 252). Although he himself attributed this to exhaustion from overwork in order to make ends meet, cross-cultural psychology research almost a century later proved that up to 80% of those sojourners who worked abroad experience stress due to reculturation after they return to their homeland (C. Ward et al 2001: 188). His loneliness continued because this time he was somewhat alien within his own society, following his own reason and conscience rather than the dictates of the group psyche (S. Okada 2003: 12). As Sensei, the main character of his famous novel *Kokoro* (1914) says: "You see, loneliness is the price we have to pay for being born in this modern age, so full of freedom, independence, and our own egotistical selves" (N. Soseki 1995: 30).

Soseki also clashed with a number of Japanese nationalists who considered individualism to be irreconcilable with Japanese identity and nationalism (S. Okada 2003: 12) and wanted the modernization of Japan in terms of technological change and industrialization, but without affecting traditional Japanese values (S. Napier 1995: 22). For instance he was attacked by a right wing nationalistic group called "Japan for the Japanese" (S. Okada 2003: 12). Nevertheless, Soseki continued to boldly state his opinion and argue for the possibility of integrating individual, group/national and global identity:

> Many people seem to think of individualism as something opposed to – even destructive of nationalism. But individualism in no way justifies such misguided, illogical interpretation (….) Nowadays some people are spreading the idea – and they believe it – that Japan cannot survive unless she is entirely nationalistic. Many go so far as to assert that our nation will perish unless this terrible "individualism" is stamped out. What utter nonsense! All of us, in fact, are nationalists and internationalists and individualists as well (N. Soseki 2009: 261).

Being a sojourner in the West was, for a Meiji Era intellectual, a decisive, life-changing experience. It certainly had a profound effect on Soseki's life and work. His struggles and sufferings were paralleled by an intense learning, not only in terms of the English language, literature, Western psychology and sociology, but also in terms of a different society, customs, values and behavioural norms, which had a long-lasting effect on him. Soseki brought back to Japan what he had learned. He changed his value system and became an advocate of controlled individualism. He established a Western style of literature in Japan that was based on modern psychological understanding and conveyed these ideas to the Japanese audience in a way that made it possible for them to

relate to and understand them. In this way he created a bridge between East and West.

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Becoming "*Un-Dominican-York"*: Julia Alvarez, Transculturalism and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

Cristina Chevereşan

> I was born in New York City during my parents' first and failed stay in the United States. When I was three months old, my parents, both native Dominicans, decided to return to their homeland, preferring the dictatorship of Trujillo to the U.S.A. of the early 50s. Once again, my father got involved in the underground and soon my family was in deep trouble. We left hurriedly in 1960, three months before the founders of that underground, the Mirabal sisters, were brutally murdered by the dictatorship.

This is how Julia Alvarez, the successful Dominican-American writer of the past two decades, introduces herself on her personal website[1], describing her tormented first years. A childhood of displacement and confusion, the inherent traumas of dislocation, the steady and often troublesome negotiation of identities in the ambiguous regions of the hyphen: such are the constitutive elements that have shaped the profile of this transcultural author and the subjects of this chapter.

As early as 1996, the chapter on Dominican-American literature in a comprehensive critical introduction to *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States* presented Julia Alvarez as "the best-known Dominican writer in the United States" (C. Tirado 1996: 213). It had been only five years since 1991, the year in which she had published the book that instantly propelled her into the public eye. She was immediately perceived as an integral part of the impressive wave of US Latina writers whose voices were beginning to be heard with increasing force towards the end of the 20th century. Looking at *Postmodern Ethnicity and Commodity: Containment and Resistance in New Latina Narrative*, Ellen McCracken writes: "A first novel by Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (….) received dozens of laudatory reviews in major newspapers across the country" (E. McCracken 1991). Its echo was certain, its impact indubitable.

The book's success was easy to explain and was due, not least, to its ingenious narrative, multilayered structure and alertness of style. It was,

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[1] http://www.juliaalvarez.com/about/

however, its considerable autobiographical insertions that made for a captivating plot, as well as its characters with whom many US citizens had something in common: the transnational condition. The story of the García family's arrival in their adopted country after fleeing the Dominican Republic to escape the horrors of the Trujillo regime is largely based on the writer's personal experience. Her intimate knowledge of the causes, mechanisms and effects of Dominican immigration to the United States is put to optimal use in her minute psychological investigation of the protagonists. A critical approach to the work cannot but take into account the fact that: "like her family, the García family is Dominican and displaced in America. Like Alvarez and her sisters, the García girls struggle to adapt to their new environment and the American culture"[2].

Nevertheless, the book does more than merely describe private episodes in the lives of individuals, interesting though they might be. It captures the essence of living with the acute awareness of one's belonging to two different cultures, and the inherent tensions and constant adjustments that this entails. In order to do so convincingly, it presents the background and vocabulary of both first and second generation Dominican inhabitants of New York, whom it follows as they learn and internalize the unwritten rules of the city. This chapter will focus on Julia Alvarez and her García characters viewed as transcultural personalities: complex and enticing, vivacious and fascinating offspring of an intriguing Caribbean-American relationship.

6.1 A Transcultural Self: Between Fact and Fiction

In the eighteen years that separate us from the novel's initial date of publication, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* has become one of the most frequently quoted books as far as Latino sensitivity and its manifestations in the US are concerned. It has drawn critics' attention and made its way into readers' hearts by appearing symptomatic of the joys and sorrows, celebrations and ordeals of one of the fastest growing communities in America's symbolic capital of immigration - the haven of exiles and newcomers, New York. There are hardly any accounts of recent American literature that fail to mention Alvarez' debut work. The readiness of readers and specialists to embrace and include it in a rapidly shaping new literary canon seems precisely due to its combination of fiction and autobiography, real-life history and emotional response.

Gilbert H. Muller's study of immigrant literature in *New Strangers in Paradise* succinctly explains the book's appeal to a wide audience:

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[2] http://www.notablebiographies.com/A-An/Alvarez-Julia.html

> Each section projects the nature of exile on a spatial or geopolitical grid that is far broader than the enclosed world of the aristocratic García clan during their years in Santo Domingo or the reconstruction of their immigrant lives in metropolitan New York. The structural trajectories of the novel result in an interesting convergence of family and imperial history at the specific moment in 1960 when Dr. Carlos García, his brothers, and their families, are implicated in a failed CIA plot to overthrow Trujillo and must flee with few possessions and an uncertain immigrant itinerary, propelled into new national space (G. Muller 1999: 119).

Thus, the scope of the novel surpasses the mere fate of its protagonists, and its plot feeds on Alvarez's own family history. Upon informed scrutiny, one can recognize fragments of factual reality blended into the colourful García saga: the circumstances of their political exile, the subsequent process of adaptation to the newly discovered territory of simultaneous freedom and constriction, the constant vacillation between homelands, the mixed sense of association and dissociation, discovery and loss. In Alvarez's case, which she has openly discussed in essays and interviews, homesickness, alienation and prejudice were constant elements that came to shape the experience of acculturation[3]. These elements are passed onto the fictional characters, who are meant to take over the author's emotional and experiential load.

To these characters, just as had happened to the young Alvarez, emotional and cultural enrichment in a promised land of opportunity is twinned with the imminent threat of material and spiritual impoverishment. Leaving a country behind may well be a wise and commendable option under certain circumstances, but it may trigger the fear of losing an incomparable legacy. With this knowledge in mind, Alvarez foregrounds melancholy as the Garcías prepare for their journey. Despite their pressing wish to leave their native country for a safer harbour, its fulfillment inevitably brings about nostalgia. The mother Laura's reaction to the long-awaited news is telling:

> So the papers have cleared and we are leaving….She will miss this glorious light warming the inside of her skin and jewelling the trees, the grass, the lily pond beyond the hedge. She thinks of her ancestors, those fair-skinned Conquistadores arriving in this new world, not knowing that the gold they sought was this blazing light. And look at what they started, Laura thinks, looking up and seeing gold flash in the mouth of one of the *guardias* as it spreads open in a scared smile (J. Alvarez 1992: 212).

The events that have forced the Garcías into leaving the land of their forebears are consciously placed towards the end of the novel. They belong to a quite distant moment in time, with which the four Americanized daughters of the

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[3] See http://www.lasmujeres.com/?m=alvarez_julia

family stand in rather fragile connection. The characters' plunge into memory thus imposes a reversed order on the narrated events. Redefining the self as able to reconcile the double determinations of the present starts with a reconsideration of the past. Although a certain mythical aura may at times envelop the "land of plenty" that was left behind, cruel memories of everyday life in the clutches of dictatorship keep the Paradise Lost utopia at bay.

When asked about the educational dimension of her work and her presumed intention of illuminating tragic historical events to a most likely un/mis-informed American readership, Alvarez makes it a point to emphasize her first commitment – that of creating an engaging and aesthetically pleasing epic. Nevertheless, she also finds it necessary to explain that her fiction can hardly be read independently of her life-story, since they co-exist, intertwine and call upon each other: "Because of who I am, where I come from, what my heritage is, the stories I have to tell come out of a certain history, background and a certain spot on this earth which is to say that it is coming out of my own Dominican, Dominican-American background"[4].

6.2 Trauma, *Trans*formation

The transcultural experience can thus be regarded as a "common good" or a "private property" which Alvarez and her characters share. Although ineffable, it will turn out to be an inalienable possession, a defining factor in the context of identity construction. In the writer's case, living between worlds was the road naturally taken. Born in the US, Alvarez spent her childhood in the Dominican Republic, surrounded by the respectful recognition and reverence of an "otherness" status acquired by birth. As the daughter of a family whose ties to the US could hardly be ignored or suppressed, she enjoyed both the actual Dominican surroundings and the perpetual fantasy of an American homeland[5]. Therefore, her own process of assessing and appreciating cultural values is a two-way street rather than a mere road to a permanent new residence.

In the novel, however, the distinctions are initially as clear-cut as the direction of adjustment. The García parents' ability to appropriate the values of the new country and successfully integrate may slightly differ, considering that the father is far more inclined than the mother towards a conservative preservation of his country's patriarchal values. The ghosts of the past are, however, irrepressible, constantly present in their (un)conscious. By the time the

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[4]TBR interview with Julia Alvarez, September 22, 2000, available online at
  http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-alvarez-julia.asp
[5] Ibid.

epic starts unfolding, the exiles have managed to secure a respectable position in their newly-defined environment. Nevertheless, it is in the little gestures and hidden reactions that their instinctive fears shall always lie, as painful, disquieting reminders of trauma. Carlos, the head of the family, is still haunted by visions of oppression, and Alvarez captures them in brief, yet intense, scenes. In the very privacy of their American home, when awakened by his wife, the husband panics:

> *"¿Qué pasa?"* What is wrong? There was terror in his voice, the same fear she'd heard in the Dominican Republic before they left. They had been watched there; he was followed. They could not talk, of course, though they had whispered to each other in fear at night in the dark bed. Now in America, he was safe, a success even; his Centro de Medicina in the Bronx was thronged with the sick and the homesick yearning to go home again. But in dreams, he went back to those awful days and long nights, and his wife's screams confirmed his secret fear: they had not gotten away at all (Alvarez 1992: 139).

Thus, on the one hand, Alvarez chooses to acknowledge and transpose into her writing the traumatic experience of the generations directly affected by the peak moments of the dictatorship. On the other hand, the four daughters, Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofía, are all designed to function as voices and actors in the story of border-crossings. Their reactions to the inevitable changes that appear throughout their New York initiation are different. Their identities are literally *trans*-formed, shaped by and in between two geographical and mental spaces (the one that is part of them and the one of which they become part), across physical and psychological frontiers. Just like Alvarez and her own sisters, they are compelled by circumstances to make their own way into a world which needs to become their own, by comparing and contrasting realities.

6.3 Return to the Roots

Long accustomed to bridging the gap between cultures, Alvarez narratively focuses upon Dominican-Americans who are willing to acknowledge and accept the hyphen. Unlike some who, for various reasons, may choose to sever all ties with their mother country, the Garcías intend to gradually reinvent themselves in their adoptive homeland as a transcultural family, whose connections to the Dominican Republic remain firm. To some extent, what is at play is their own adapted variant of the mythical, eternal return. To the girls, grown-up women by the time the actual narration begins, the territory of childhood and innocence still exerts a somewhat magical attraction. Their quest reverses that of their parents: while Carlos and Laura have taken their daughters to a place where they can

enjoy normal lives away from the political threats of the regime, the daughters'
path takes them back to Santo Domingo precisely in search of the secret
ingredient that has been missing from their lives. If one reads how Alvarez
describes her own transcultural evolution, an overlapping of trajectories with her
fictional alter-egos most clearly surfaces. In an interview, the novelist points out:
"I left the D.R. when I was 10 and by the time we were 15 we were going back
regularly, my sisters and I; and when we got older, we went back to work on
projects"[6].

In his essay "A Search for Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls
Lost Their Accents*", William Luis reads Alvarez's novel in the context of
Caribbean displacement, and warns that: "As time passes, for the immigrant, the
rupture with the past, strongest in political exiles, is transformed into a desire to
recover a lost moment in time. But the past ceases to exist as an island reality
and is interpreted from the perspective of the mainland culture" (W. Luis 2000:
839-849). This is exactly what happens to Yolanda García on the trip to the
Island that tragi-comically opens the novel. Her visit provides the pretext for
Alvarez to expose the two distinct types of discourse and mentality that clash and
blend in the young woman's (and one can surmise Alvarez's own) emerging
transcultural profile. Upon her arrival, Yolanda is intent on finding her true self,
the idealized place within her, the cut-off limb the memory of which still lingers
and hurts. To a certain extent, her longing to live out the fantasy is a reversed
mirror-image of Alvarez's own excitement upon returning to the US of her birth
and dreams. The wish Yolanda is urged to make when blowing out the candles
on her welcome cake is illustrative of her somewhat misconstrued expectations:

> There have been so many stops on the road of the last twenty-nine years since her
> family left this island behind. She and her sisters have led such turbulent lives – so
> many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them. But look at her cousins, women
> with households and authority in their voices. Let this turn out to be my home, Yolanda
> wishes (J. Alvarez 1992: 11).

Alvarez's own American homecoming was not the joyous event she had
imagined, particularly after the considerable time she had spent with Dominican
relatives whose warmth and affection she would undoubtedly miss. Similarly, no
matter how ardent Yolanda's desire for the local Dominican lifestyle, it is
evident from the very first minutes of her symbolic return that it will not be a
success: "Here she comes, Miss America!" (J. Alvarez 1992: 4) are the first
words of the family gathering to greet her. Whether admiring or ironic, this
initial greeting epitomizes a central feature of Yolanda's dilemma: on the Island

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[6] Ibid.

she is perceived as alienated "Other". Although her blood indissolubly binds her to the community, she is no longer a full-fledged member. Not only has she been physically estranged, she has also been subjected to the undeniable influence of the foreign culture in which she has been formally and informally educated. Her first impression of her relatives testifies to the representational gap which is widening between the two spaces: while her cousin Lucinda "looks like a Dominican magazine model", her fashionable appearance is not at all impressive to American(ized) eyes: it "made Yolanda think of call girls" (J. Alvarez 1992: 5). Alvarez uses this example to illustrate to the reader how confusing these shifting perspectives can be to returned migrants, who find themselves living between two competing systems of cultural consciousness, awareness, representation and expectation.

Yolanda's return to the natural paradise involves both surprise and disappointment, and she soon comes to realize that her wishful thinking might be constrained by her own prejudices, by the stereotypical perception instilled by her American upbringing. Though eager to wander through the lush wilderness of the Eden-like realm, she finds herself prey to the uneasiness caused by that which has become practically unknown to her: "The rustling leaves of the guava trees echo the warnings of her old aunts: you will get lost, you will get kidnapped, you will get raped, you will get killed" (J. Alvarez 1992: 17). To the working men she encounters during her wanderings, she is easily and unmistakably identifiable as "Americana. No comprende". Such examples of cultural and linguistic misunderstandings are indicative, as Fatima Mujcinovic points out, of the difficulties experienced by those who try to re-cross borders:

> The author uses this situation to call attention to the complexity of the exile: the return may be physically possible but not necessarily psychologically attainable, even though the physical danger has been removed. The Garcías manage to go back to their homeland after the fall of the regime, but they never stay for good (….) Later on, the García children go to the island for summer visits and, in spite of their initial homesickness – "we sisters wailed and paled, whining to go home" – they learn that the Dominican Republic does not signify home any longer (F. Mujcinovic 2003: 179-180).

6.4 Identity, Identification

One of the most significant lessons Alvarez learned from her own experiences was that although physical borderlines can be easy to cross, other types of limitations are harder for the inexperienced immigrant to transcend. This is the ultimate truth that the García family encounter during their formative years in the US. Maybe one of the most important aspects of the immigrant experience is the challenge of linguistic adjustment. Language is the first and most prominent

barrier to arise in the course of common, everyday exchanges, transactions and negotiations. However, fluency and accuracy are disrupted in the case of individuals whose means of verbal expression vary according to the "current homeland" they inhabit. In the case of the transcultural personalities that Alvarez depicts, the issue is even more complex, considering that multiple border crossings trigger a constant, two-way adaptation, much like her own.

Even the title of her novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, is both indicative of the way in which the cultural context acts in terms of leveling and assimilation, and thoroughly ironic, given the sisters' inability to fully erase the audible traces of either background – be it Dominican or American. Yolanda's return to the Island offers the perfect setting for meditation upon problems of this kind: "In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she is scolded, *'¡En español!'* The more she practises, the sooner she'll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist. Yes, and when she returns to the States, she'll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase" (J. Alvarez 1992: 7). The troubling condition of the cultural go-between is what Yolanda is confronted with throughout her life. Dislocated from her homeland and transplanted into a second, permanent one, she struggles to master the language of the new surrounding majority.

Complying with dominant expectations has altered her native data, yet not as significantly as to indicate the complete transformation she wished for, particularly as a teenager. Through Yolanda, Alvarez provides her readers with a subtle analysis of her ethnic group's innermost dilemmas. As an insider to the issue, she is perfectly aware that faltering oral expression may cause insecurity on the part of the speaker and varying interpretations on the part of the listener. This is what makes the losing or keeping of accents essential: the accent becomes a status marker, the clearest indication of group inclusion or conversely exclusion. Language gains utmost importance in defining personal and communal identity. It can sketch out new continents of (mutual) understanding, annihilating formal barriers. As Julie Barak states: "language, asserts Bakhtin, 'lies on the borderline between self and other'. It is on this borderline that Julia Alvarez situates her characters in her first novel" (J. Barak 1998: 159).

Although essential to comprehending the scope and dimensions of the universe unfolding around them, language is not the only obstacle the Garcías need to surmount in order to be able to successfully establish a transcultural household in the new land. Alvarez offers minute illustrations of the hardships transcultural adaptation entails – hardships sometimes imperceptible to outsiders to the group. Thus, while the parents, particularly the father, are happier sticking to the ways of their Dominican upbringing, the girls make it a point to

demonstrate their cultural flexibility, to affirm their right to belong to a country whose upsides they start appreciating, along with their gradual integration. Alvarez thus manages to illustrate different versions of the shaping of the transcultural self, offering her readers a colourful parade of characters whose reactions differ according to their inner structures.

Since the sisters are in their teens, their mental frameworks are not yet rigidly fixed, therefore they can easily incorporate certain elements encountered in the new environment. Consequently, any sign of being perceived and treated as different comes as a severe blow to their strenuously built self-confidence. In school, where her Dominican education sets her apart from her colleagues and her potential boyfriend, Yolanda is subjected to various kinds of mockery and peer-pressure. She sees her otherness as castigation, which makes her violently resent and complain about the effects of cultural isolation:

> Suddenly, it seemed to me, not only that the world was full of English majors, but of people with a lot more experience than I had. For the hundredth time, I cursed my immigrant origins. If only I too had been born in Connecticut or Virginia, I too would understand the jokes everyone was making, on the last two digits of the year, 1969; I too would be having sex and smoking dope; I too would have suntanned parents who took me skiing in Colorado over Christmas break, and I would say things like "no shit", without feeling like I was imitating someone else (J. Alvarez 1992: 94-5).

The Garcías' ability to (re)articulate themselves within the confines of the dominant territory must be seen both in the context of their forced exile and that of the cultural climate of the US in the 1960s. This is the historical era with which Alvarez herself became acquainted during her (second) transition, at the age of ten, when she arrived back to America – this time to stay. She gives a memorable description of her return to the US, the wonderland she had been dreaming about:

> All my childhood I had dressed like an American, eaten American foods, and befriended American children. I had gone to an American school and spent most of the day speaking and reading English. At night, my prayers were full of blond hair and blue eyes and snow (....) All my childhood I had longed for this moment of arrival. And here I was, an American girl, coming home at last (J. Alvarez 1992: 94-5).

What followed was admittedly a troublesome adaptation, in which her uprootedness seemed to alienate her from her new peers. These difficulties are reflected in the struggle experienced by the García girls as they try to adjust to American culture. Paradoxically, one of the biggest difficulties they face as teenagers is confronting the *excess* of freedom that characterizes American society at the time. While trying to adjust to what appears to be a fully tolerant and open-minded environment, the young girls also have to deal with the

inherent restrictions/rejections it might impose on the outsider to the system. Thus, belonging is no longer just a matter of "speaking the same language", but also one of sharing standards, values and ideas. As Ibis Gómez-Vega points out:

> becoming Americanized is a matter of pride for Yolanda and her sisters, and part of that includes changing the conservative Catholic attitudes about sex into the more liberal attitudes developing around them during the turbulent sixties….The language of intimacy and sex that her American boyfriends speak fluently becomes a painful learning experience for Yolanda and often renders her speechless, inarticulate (I. Gomez-Vega 1999: 90).

Although Yolanda is the most autobiographical character and the voice that the reader will most prominently hear, all four sisters undergo changes at various speeds and to varying degrees. Alvarez follows their subtle, yet constant, transcultural formation as though documenting an anthropological case-study. This mode of narration was, in fact, one of the author's main artistic revelations in the US, after reading Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: "The realization that you could make American literature out of (experiences that were) not mainstream literature like I had been led to believe was the subject of sociology. It gave me a great sense of permission" (I. Gomez-Vega 1999: 90). This heavy reliance on real life experiences is at the heart of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. Carla García, for example, is the sister who initially finds dislocation extremely hard to bear. On the day that the family celebrates its first American year, she is convinced that she has lost everything and, although aware of the unlikelihood of this prospect, ardently wishes for a return home. Interestingly enough, despite her unpleasant first experiences in the US, later on she will be part of the "regular revolution" that sweeps the García teenagers off their *dominicana* feet and into the swirl of American culture. Their headlong immersion into the mainstream is colloquially – and thus all the more convincingly – narrated:

> But hey, we might be fish out of water, but at least we had escaped the horns of our dilemma (….) We began to develop a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man (….) By the end of a couple of years away from home, we had *more* than adjusted (….) Things had calmed down on the Island and Papi had started making real money in his office up in the Bronx. The next decision was obvious: we four girls would be sent summers to the Island so we wouldn't lose touch with la familia. The hidden agenda was marriage to homeland boys, since everyone knew that once a girl married an American, those grandbabies came out jabbering in English and thinking of the Island as a place to go get a suntan (J. Alvarez 1992: 108-9).

In this particular excerpt, Alvarez offers a skilful illustration of the differences that both generations are, in time, forced to learn to reconcile. Autobiographical

inspiration for the creation of such discursive passages is once again obvious, as the novelist herself grew up in a hyphenated-family governed by sometimes contradictory impulses. In an interview, she talks about the confusing dimension of such an upbringing, regarding it as a personal incentive for her later resorting to literature as a source of statement and rebellion. She refers to the prohibition of stepping outside the Latino culture as follows:

> although my parents wanted us to make our way in this new country, they still wanted us to maintain our Dominican-ness, to live at home with Mami and Papi, to marry someone from our culture, to raise a family. And so to go outside this tight circle of *familia-religión-cultura* and become a writer, telling stories outside the culture, why, that was to jump all three binding hoops of my upbringing and make my own way in the world (H. McClellen 2000).

In terms of self-affirmation as transcultural individuals, the characters in the novel echo this option in the sense that they look for alternatives to the life-picture the parents seem to have drawn for them in advance. Drawing on both experience and wish for mutual comprehension and compromise, Alvarez places the two generations in the family in a position to rethink, reshape and re-evaluate the essential values of both homelands. Although the starting points seem mutually exclusive, a lifetime of experience may bridge the gap and annihilate the hyphen. What initially appears to be a lifetime of binary opposites may gradually *trans*-form, the transition being made from the exclusive *neither….nor….,* to the inclusive *both….and….* position. However, Alvarez's account does not go as far as that; in this first novel, her protagonists are left somewhere mid-way, suspended in an open-ended process. Ricardo Castells' analysis in *The Silence of Exile* emphasizes the amends that need to be made to both the *americano* and the *dominicano* heritage in order for the Garcías to feel complete. The typical immigrant narrative recalls four stages in the transition from foreignness to assimilation: (1) the childhood in the native land, (2) the journey from the old country to the new, (3) the first educational or work experiences in the United States, and (4) the eventual success in the adopted homeland (R. Castells 2001: 36). While *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* exhibits basic structural similarities with the first three characteristics of ethnic autobiography, in the end Alvarez does not follow the themes or the conclusions of traditional immigrant narratives.

6.5 Hyphenated Self-Articulation

Alvarez's novel does not have a happy Hollywood-like ending. Identities are not yet complete and Americanization does not quite turn out to be the key to ultimate fulfillment. Neither does the Island, romantically (and theoretically) invested with regenerative power. There are still uncertainties to fight in both territories, questions to answer, decisions to make. What Yolanda finds on her return to the Dominican homeland is neither a different self altogether, nor one capable of turning her life around. Thus, Alvarez proves to be an ambitious writer, whose aim is that of capturing as many hypostases of the transnational individual as possible.

The complexity of her alter-ego Yolanda's and her sisters' experience is illustrated in several ways. In the family tree that the author provides at the opening of her novel, the four sisters' names are illustrative of multiplicity. Apart from Carla, the other siblings have been attributed diminutives (Sandi for Sandra, Fifi for Sofia), which rather correspond to alternative versions of the self. The most striking case is, once more, Yolanda's – "nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo* – or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, *Joey*" (J. Alvarez 1992: 68). This series of homonymous nicknames is the perfect, compound denomination for a character whose every type of environment carves a different facet to her personality. It is not accidentally that the most concise, almost onomatopoeic, name is the Spanish "Yo" – *I, me, myself.* Jacqueline Stefanko comments upon Alvarez's choice of epic self-translation:

> The author may be decentering and questioning her own return to the island via a narrative that moves backward in time and place to the memories of the four sisters before they were forced to leave their home in the Dominican Republic. By purposefully fictionalizing her own historical, autobiographical life story in a polyphonic novel, Alvarez creates a new way of telling that crosses the boundaries between genres, between individual and community, between national identifications, and between continuity and disruption, giving definition to her writing as diasporic articulation (J. Stefanko 1996: 56).

One further aspect of self-articulation which Alvarez, as a Dominican-American, could not have omitted is, of course, gender. The male vs female sensitivity dialogue/confrontation is an important component of identity construction. In the context of the Garcías' adaptation to US culture, the difference is most obvious as far as the parents are concerned. The father's intentions are noble, he willingly provides for his daughters, but he remains the most conservative member of the family, the one who traditionally makes its rules: "Warnings were delivered communally, for even though there was usually the offending daughter of the

moment, every woman's character could use some extra scolding" (J. Alvarez 1992: 28). Such an attitude fits the expectations of the Garcías' Dominican background, where males tend to be regarded as first-class citizens. Once more, the reader can observe the writer's appeal to her own intimate knowledge of the mentality of the Latino background she has her characters expose, for better or worse. Recalling her experience within the island community, she points out several aspects of this patriarchal world:

> *Las mujeres* around me were strong and resourceful and full of compassion, but they exercised that power privately, within the home. How many times as a child did I hear, "*los hombres son de la calle, las mujeres de su casa.*" Men belong to the streets (the world), women belong at home. Latinas of my generation were not encouraged to have public voices or to seek any fulfillment outside the parameters of *la familia* and the church [7].

The author inserts into her novel various references which echo such episodes from her past. The Garcia family's four daughters, a blessing and a fortune in themselves, are an obvious disappointment to the community. "'No sons?' 'No', the mother said, apologetically. 'Just the four girls'" (J. Alvarez 1992: 41). The emancipation that living in the US brings for the women in the household changes the attitude and mentality of the mother, who no longer wishes to return to a position of silent submission: "Laura had gotten used to the life here. She did not want to go back to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave" (J. Alvarez 1992: 143-4).

What is remarkable is the emphasis Alvarez places on Laura's ability to discover, invent and reinvent her world and herself. She endows her with agency and empowers her to rise against the self-understood submission of a Latino home. While her husband's dreams and actions are grand and demonstrative, Laura is the one who internalizes the little things that make up the tissue of everyday life: "Her ideas always came after sightseeing visits she took with her daughters to department stores to see the wonders of this new country. On his free Sundays, Carlos carted the girls off to the Statue of Liberty or the Brooklyn Bridge or Rockefeller Center, but as far as Laura was concerned, these were men's wonders" (J. Alvarez 1992: 133). Mujcinovic comments upon gender differences in the process of adjustment to a culturally new environment as follows:

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[7] Ibid.

> While the male experience of exile continues to be debilitating and frustrating, the
> female experience of exile becomes more positive and affirming. The García girls
> quickly adjust to the American mainstream, which consequently distances them from
> their Dominican roots. Their mother opposes their Americanization only at first since
> later she herself adopts some new practices; she becomes more emancipated and self-
> reliant (F. Mujcinovic 2003: 181).

Such differences in terms of individual openness and disposition are not
necessarily meant to convey an exclusively feminist message. They are means of
indicating Alvarez's informed belief that a dialogue between cultures may,
eventually, be possible, and that the establishment of a transcultural household is
the ultimate aim, one that the members of the García family are all trying to find
ways to attain. Their background holds them together; their trajectories are,
however, different. In this respect, A. Robert Lee best summarizes the situation:

> Carla, the eldest and the most still-Dominican on arrival in America, and viciously
> taunted in childhood by Irish boy schoolmates and surprised by her own body in
> adolescence, becomes a psychologist. Her advocacy of assimilationist behaviour, or
> "fading into walls" becomes a mask to cover Dominican and all other difference. Sandi,
> in contrast, becomes a compulsive, the self-consuming lister of books and a woman
> quite unassimilable, indeed broken, by an America so abundant in choice. Fifi takes yet
> another turn, American errant teenager sent back to Dominica, "rescued" by her sisters,
> and finally the maverick lover of a German and mother of two. Having been repudiated
> by her father, she, ironically, becomes the good Dominican daughter in supplying him
> with the grandson heir he craves (A. Lee 2003: 207).

6.6 Transcultural Living as a Personal Option

It is both inside and outside the palpable space of their Dominicanness that both
the Garcías and Julia Alvarez live. Attempting a transcultural existence, trying to
come to terms with the traumas of dislocation and to go back and forth between
literal and symbolic homes, families and settings is undeniably problematic.
Recreating the past, reformulating the present, talking, listening and sharing:
these seem to be the most effective ways of dealing with the simultaneously
straining and rewarding combination of revelation and dispossession that
transcending borders entails. In Alvarez's own case, writing seems to have been
the natural choice:

> It's not like I didn't know some English at ten when we landed in New York City. But
> classroom English, heavily laced with Spanish, did not prepare me for the "barbaric
> yawp" of American English - as Whitman calls it. I couldn't tell where one word ended
> and another began. I did pick up enough English to understand that some classmates
> were not very welcoming. *Spic!* a group of bullies yelled at me in the playground. Mami

insisted that the kids were saying, *Speak!* And then she wonders where my storytelling genes come from![8]

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents stands as proof of its author's innate ability to tell the story of her and her community's experiences. Like the author's entire and diverse body of writing, it draws on Alvarez's watershed experience of arriving in the United States and having to literally train herself in the art of using words to the best and most accurate of effects. The Dominican family experience is also carefully incorporated into her fictional account. In terms of private becoming and self-growth into a transcultural personality, Alvarez seems to have found the perfect solution to practically bring life and writing together: together with her (American) husband, she has started a foundation which uses the profits of (Dominican) organic coffee production to fund a literary and arts center for the mountain population. In terms of fiction writing, Alvarez manages to document the inherent challenge and uniqueness of a life lived between and across national boundaries, describing it to the world and exploring the potential of transcultural living as a personal option.

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How Not to Make a Mexican Musical: Luis Buñuel and the Perils of *Mexicanidad*

Catherine Leen

Luis Buñuel is a truly transnational and transcultural figure whose cinematic work took him from his native Spain to France, Hollywood and Mexico. After completing his studies in Madrid in 1925, he went to Paris, where he made his first film, in collaboration with Salvador Dalí, the surrealist *Un chien andalou* (1929) (L. Buñuel 2004: 89-119). When he returned to Paris a decade later, having fled the Spanish Civil War, he produced propaganda films for the Republic. He then moved to the United States, where, during World War II, he was employed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York to edit and dub "nontheatrical films, on topics ranging from defence production to science and health, for distribution in Latin America" (J. Jones 2005: 19). In 1961, he returned to Spain from Mexico to make *Viridiana*, which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes but was banned in Spain. The uproar surrounding the banning of the film led Franco himself to watch it, and though according to Buñuel, he did not consider it offensive, neither did he overturn the decision to censor it (L. Buñuel 2004: 279). The year 1966 marked the beginning of the very successful late period of his career, during which he made six films in France, including *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, which was awarded the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1972 (B. Krohn and D. Paul 2005: 167).

Since Buñuel's career spans almost half a century and an extraordinary geographical and thematic range, this chapter will focus on his work in Mexico, and particularly on his initial experiences as a director there. Contemporary critics unite in paying tribute to Buñuel's contribution to the Mexican film industry. In a survey of 300 members of the public conducted between December 1990 and February 1991, on the occasion of the exhibition "Revision of Mexican Cinema" at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Buñuel ranked third in a list of favourite directors (N García Canclini 1993: 68). More recently, Jason Wood has observed that Buñuel is "inextricably linked to the development of Mexican cinema and remains one of its most prominent and influential figures", adding that his unsentimental examination of social problems and his ability to work creatively with small budgets link him to 21st-century directors (J. Wood 2006: 3). Given such glowing tributes, it is surprising to note that the director's

initial foray into Mexican filmmaking was less than successful and that this rocky start was compounded by the hostile reception of his third Mexican feature, *Los olvidados* (1950). This unfavourable reaction to his work says much about the importance of *mexicanidad*, or the portrayal of a distinct Mexican identity, in the films made during the so-called Golden Age of Mexican cinema. This chapter examines the ways in which the director's refusal to adhere to the tenets of cinematic *mexicanidad* was to cost him dear in his early career in Mexico and how his failure to observe the generic staples of the Mexican musical in particular led to the poor performance of his first Mexican feature *Gran Casino*.

7.1 *Mexicanidad* and Golden Age Cinema

Mexicanidad has been defined as "a movement that gave Mexico a sense of its own identity and produced a creative explosion in literature, painting, and film" (D. William Foster 1996: 243). One of the most notable initial expressions of this distinct identity was through mural art, which grew out of a:

> Mexican cultural renaissance, the roots of which were clearly present and developing before the revolution. The renaissance synthesized with the political revolution to form a unique relationship between a tide of radical national politics and a cultural rediscovery of national definition and identity that would in the end reach beyond the purely Mexican (….) The growth of popular art (….) led to an explosion of work representing each and any subject that was Mexican (D. Rochford 1993: 15).

While the roots of *mexicanidad* were inextricably linked to a burgeoning nationalist consciousness that rejected the Eurocentric ideas of dictator Porfirio Díaz, it was not a provincial movement. The great muralists to emerge in early 20th-century Mexico, among them Diego Rivera, certainly concentrated on Mexican themes and images in their work, but they also travelled widely and were inspired by global influences. This synthesis of the national and the international is also evident in the films that were made during arguably the most successful period of filmmaking in Mexico, the Golden Age. As Dolores Tierney points out, its name derives from the dual character of the films produced within its rubric:

> The name "Golden" clearly refers to this cinema's gilded, idealized representations of Mexican life. Yet the Golden Age was also a period when, despite the use of Hollywood structures of production and its stylistic and narrative technique, Mexican filmmakers were able to forge what is perceived as a distinctly national cinema (D. Tierney 1997: 360).

Perhaps the most enduringly popular and influential film of Mexico's Golden Age, Fernando de Fuentes's 1936 *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, combines a strong nationalistic flavour with an adaptation of Hollywood formulas, such as the singing cowboy films popularized by Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, to Mexican tastes[1]. As Ramírez Berg observes, de Fuentes's film established the Mexican genre known as the *comedia ranchera* and prescribed many of its conventions: "generously interspersed musical numbers punctuating a romantic story – typically a boy-meets-girl, gets-girl story or a tale of rivals (best friends, brothers, cousins) vying for the favour of a beautiful girl" (C. Ramírez Berg 1992: 98). *Allá en el Rancho Grande* revolves around a romantic conflict between Felipe, who has inherited the Rancho Grande from his father, and José Francisco, Felipe's best friend from childhood and the foreman of his ranch. Both men are in love with the beautiful Cruz. Cruz's godmother arranges to prostitute the unwitting Cruz to Felipe for a night, but the asthmatic girl faints and her virtue remains intact, while Felipe discovers that Cruz and José Francisco are in love and apologizes to her. José Francisco learns of the meeting and plans to kill Felipe, but the latter convinces him that nothing happened between himself and Cruz. Harmony is restored when Cruz and José Francisco marry at the film's conclusion.

 Allá en el Rancho Grande is characterized above all by its glorification of rural life. Its nostalgic tone is suggested by the song that gives the film its name, which is sung from the point of view of a person looking back on the idyllic life he enjoyed on the ranch. The film's sentimental quality is further underscored by many other musical interludes, which both appeal to female viewers in their presentation of tender yet masculine male characters and form a sense of group cohesiveness in their use of well-known traditional songs familiar to the audience. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the *mise en scène* is the extremely close-knit community at the heart of the Rancho Grande. To view the film as a microcosm of an ideal Mexico takes no great leap of the imagination. At the time it was made, most Mexicans lived in rural communities and mass migration to Mexico City had not become a widespread phenomenon. While the film has been criticized for portraying the ranch owners as benevolent dictators, thus echoing the nostalgic view of the deposed Porfirio Díaz still held by many Mexicans in the wake of the Revolution, the film's success was more the result of its articulation of *mexicanidad* through music. As García Riera notes:

> habría que esperar el enorme éxito de *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) para que se entendiera lo que después pudo parecer obvio: sería la explotación del folclor mexicano,

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[1] See C. Monsiváis in J. King (1993): 141; and C. Ramírez Berg (1992): 98.

del color local y, sobre todo, de las canciones, lo que daría al cine mexicano su solvencia comercial en todo el continente americano.
(*The enormous success of Allá en el Rancho Grande (1936) was to be expected, and it allows us to understand what might seem obvious in its wake: that the exploitation of Mexican folklore, local colour, and especially, songs, would give Mexican cinema its commercial success throughout the American continent*) (E. García Riera 1998: 81).

As the above comment suggests, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* transformed the Mexican film industry and delighted audiences in Mexico and throughout Latin America, as well as in the Spanish-speaking regions of the United States (E. García Riera 1995: 128). Its success revitalized film production in Mexico, moreover. In 1936, 24 Mexican films were made, a number that increased to 38 a year later and to 58 in 1938 (E. García Riera 1998: 102). The *comedia ranchera* genre was virtually exhausted as early as 1939 because of market saturation with films that presented an idealized depiction of ranch life. Nonetheless, De Fuentes's film remained a watershed that pointed to new possibilities in the presentation of the nation and its culture.

Despite the obvious limitations of genre films such as the *comedia ranchera*, they led to a renewed confidence in native talent, to the extent that in 1939 President Cárdenas decreed that every cinema should screen at least one Mexican film each month (C. Monsiváis 1998: 1520). The films produced from the 1930s to the 1950s both reflected life in Mexico, albeit with an emphasis on the positive aspects of society, and profoundly shaped it. One of the most enduring genres to emerge at this time was the melodrama, which normally centred on the family. The Revolution remained a popular theme, and many films were set in distinctly Mexican locales such as the cabaret, the dance hall, the cantina and the boxing ring. The very banality of these stories and their settings proved to be the key to their popularity, as Monsiváis argues:

The so-called Golden Age, between 1935 and 1955 more or less, was in reality the period of an alliance between the film industry and the audiences of the faithful, between the films and the communities that saw themselves represented there. During those years, in many parts of Latin America, those communities watched those films and saw themselves in them, distinct and recognisable. What today is described as an exasperating naivety in the majority of these films had more to do with the technical ineptitude of directors and "stars" in particular, and with the lack of any critical response on the part of the audience. For a long period they considered films to be neither art nor spectacle but rather the continuation of everyday life, the believable explanation of the meaning of their lives (C. Monsiváis 1993: 142).

The overwhelming success of the films produced during the Golden Age certainly suggests that audiences were not keen to be challenged by polemical examinations of society and were happy to passively enjoy spectacles that

confirmed the *mexicanidad* of their own lives. Monsiváis dismisses the aesthetic qualities of the films too lightly, however. The film boom during this period owed a great debt to the high production values of national cinema, as well as the availability of a diverse range of stars with whom audiences could identify. Economic factors also played a significant role. In 1942, the Banco Cinematográfico was established to provide loans that would foster the cinema industry (J. Tello 1988: 23). An added boost came from Mexico's chief cinematic rival, the United States. As World War II raged, the United States sought the support of as many allies as possible. Mexico's cooperation was fostered through Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Mexico, which supported the Allies, was granted loans, technical aid and precious film stock, the production of which was restricted because cellulose was needed for the manufacture of explosives (É. Soberón Torchia 1995: 218). The end of the war brought an end to the support of Mexico's film industry by its northern neighbour, however. Hollywood dominated local markets once more, and the amount of film stock allocated to Mexico sharply declined (C. Ramírez Berg 1992: 39). What is more, the increasing sophistication of audiences, who had by now seen almost 20 years of North American, European and national productions, made the established genres seem lacking in novelty. The rapid urbanization of Mexico meant that films glorifying rural life no longer reflected the experiences of a large proportion of the population. The films of the late 1940s and early 1950s reflected this crossroads in the tension between filmmakers who sought to prolong the Golden Age style and a new generation who began to make unromantic, gritty urban dramas.

7.2 Buñuel's Early Career in Mexico

Buñuel's first Mexican feature clearly sought to emulate the success of Golden Age musicals. He was employed by producer Óscar Dancigers to direct *Gran Casino* in Mexico in 1946, after he had moved from New York. The films made by Buñuel in Mexico seldom attract critical acclaim. As Robert J. Miles notes, the director had voiced a reluctance to visit Latin America before he went to live in Mexico, and this may well be reflected in the uneven quality of his work there (R. Miles 2006: 169). Buñuel's Mexican directoral debut in particular has been afforded little critical attention. It merits only a passing reference, for example, in Iván Humberto and Ávila Dueñas' study of the director's Mexican films and is not analyzed in detail like his other Mexican films (I. Humberto and Á. Dueñas 1994: 285). Moreover, Caryn Connelly and Juliet Lynd, who argue persuasively

that the sheer volume of films made by the director in Mexico means that they "demand a reconsideration," do not so much as mention *Gran Casino* in their study of his work (C. Connelly and J. Lynd 2001: 235). Although the combination of the acclaimed Spanish director and the leading Mexican musical star Jorge Negrete in the lead role must have seemed like the recipe for a sure-fire hit, there is general agreement that *Gran Casino* is far from his greatest work. At the time of its making, the director had been away from film directing for a number of years (G. Edwards 2005: 7). Moreover, it was made at a time when the genres that had led to the unprecedented success of Mexican cinema in the early years of the Golden Age, particularly the musical, were becoming less popular. As Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, observes:

> Not only was Buñuel new to Mexican cinema (if certainly not to the musical melodrama), but Mexican cinema was changing. Despite the stability of "family" melodramas and comedias rancheras, the conservative classical musical was evolving into the more risqué cabaretera film that was so culturally specific to the sexenio of President Alemán between 1946 and 1952 (E. Acevedo-Muñoz 2003: 46).

Although *Gran Casino* is set in a cabaret, its style owes much more to the classic musical than to the more daring *cabaratera* genre. The musical numbers that permeate the film are not confined to the stage, so that it more closely resembles the *comedia ranchera* in its use of music to punctuate the film. Even the numbers that are sung on stage do not conform to the tendency of *cabaratera* films to use rumba and mambo to denote a daring, permissive atmosphere. Moreover, Buñuel could not bring himself to adhere rigidly to stock musical formulas. As Víctor Fuentes suggests, even in his Mexican films that are regarded by critics as inferior or frankly bad, the director insisted that he always found a way to put his own mark on them:

> Yo procuraba que en cada película hubiera siempre un escape, que siempre tuviera un senderillo por donde me iba a hacer lo que quería.
> (*I tried to ensure that in every film there was always an escape route, that I would always have some little path that would allow me to do what I wanted*) (V. Fuentes 1993: 39).

In *Gran Casino*, a commissioned film that would to a large extent determine whether Buñuel would have a career in Mexico, such pathways were severely restricted. Much more problematically for a Mexican audience, Buñuel was faced with the prospect of dealing with two world-famous musical stars from different countries, Negrete from Mexico and Libertad Lamarque from Argentina (B. Krohn and P. Duncan 2005: 58). It was Lamarque's first appearance in a Mexican feature, after she was forced to leave Argentina for criticizing Eva

Duarte's inferior acting on the set of the film *Circus Cavalcade* (S. Levine 2001: 69). Lamarque was as famous in her country as Negrete was in his, thus she required equal billing and an equally prominent role, which lent a distinctly Argentine musical flavour to the film that must have been baffling to audiences accustomed to the reinforcement of *mexicanidad* through the songs that punctuated typical musicals. The romance between Negrete's *charro* and the glamorous but prim Argentinean would in fact have been far more plausible in real life than it plays on the screen. It is so unconvincing that it was bound to be rejected even by audiences well used to suspending disbelief.

Like *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, the film opens to the accompaniment of Mexican folk music as we are introduced to Negrete's character, Gerardo, and his friend Heriberto in their prison cell. Having been denied release, they decide to escape by sawing through the bars of their cell. To distract from the noise, Gerardo bursts into the film's first musical number, the love song "Dueña de mi amor," ("Mistress of My Love"). Gerardo and Heriberto flee to Tampico, where they have heard that they can make a fortune working in oil fields. The camera cuts to an oil field called La Nacional, and its Argentine owner, Don José Enrique Irigoyen, being threatened by Fabio, a henchman working for a shady company called Van Eckerman. This company wants to control all the oil production in the area, and thus Fabio attempts to intimidate Irigoyen into selling, while also threatening workers so that they will not work his fields. Gerardo and Heriberto agree to work for the Argentine, however, and La Nacional becomes a thriving business. Gerardo and Irigoyen celebrate at the Gran Casino, but after going upstairs with the seductive salon girl Camelia, Irigoyen disappears. Gerardo is left to explain the situation to Irigoyen's sister Mercedes. In order to investigate the situation, she takes a job as a singer in the Gran Casino, where she discovers the truth about the murky dealings of the Van Eckerman company. A final confrontation occurs between Fabio and Gerardo at the casino, with the latter being taken prisoner. Mercedes agrees to sell La Nacional to Van Eckerman in exchange for Gerardo's life. After blowing up La Nacional's oil wells, Mercedes and Gerardo flee the town.

As Agustín Sánchez Vidal notes, it has become customary for critics to look for typical Buñuel touches that redeem his less well-received films. He identifies these touches in *Gran Casino* as follows:

> Uno de ellos es la resolución de una escena amorosa intercalando entre el beso de Negrete y Lamarque la aparición de una rama que remueve el lodo. Otro podría ser la inverosímil presencia de un gaitero escocés con cuerpo de baile incluido en el escenario del casino o los insospechados lugares en los que se coloca al Trío Calaveras, acompañando a Negrete en cuanto éste rompe a cantar.
> (*One of these is the resolution of a love scene that inserts in the middle of the kiss between Negrete and Lamarque a shot of a branch stirring mud. Another could be the*

> *incongruous presence of a Scottish piper and a dance troupe on the stage of the casino,*
> *or the unexpected places where the Trío Calaveras appear, accompanying Negrete*
> *every time he bursts into song*) (A. Sánchez Vidal 1994: 48).

The second example listed here is indicative of Buñuel's irreverent approach to
the musical genre, which may well have been the primary reason for his film's
lack of success. Although it was commonplace for trios to accompany a
musical's stars, nowhere has the sudden appearance of the Trio seemed as
unlikely and even startling as in *Gran Casino*, particularly when they pop up in
Gerardo's prison cell to provide a chorus in the establishing scene. Indeed,
Buñuel's constant placing of the Trio in improbable and often impossible
locations or situations amounts to a parody of the presence of these groups in
such films. Similarly, the presence of diverse musical styles, from Scottish pipes
to opera, on the stage of the Gran Casino was a dramatic and jarring departure
from the use of music to signify *mexicanidad*. This is particularly true of the
scene in which Irigoyen and Gerardo bond over music, which sees Gerardo sing
a paean to Argentina, "Adiós, pampa mía," ("Goodbye, My Pampa") in a radical
departure from his characteristic hymns to Mexico. Lamarque's musical numbers
are also too coloured by her nationality to have been overly appealing to
Mexican audiences, as she specialized in tangos that were intimately associated
with Argentina and not *mexicanidad*. Writing of the success of the films of
Emilio Fernández, David Ramon notes that there was one crucial factor that any
successful director grasped:

> Él se da cuenta de que las cosas fundamentales que habían interesado al público tanto
> del cine más verdadero come en el muy falso…eran el héroe y las canciones.
> (*He realizes that the fundamental elements that have captured the public in both the*
> *most true-to-life and false films were the hero and the songs*) (D. Ramon 1977: 96).

This view that the songs were as important as the hero in ensuring the success of
a musical is reiterated by Carlos Bonfil, writing on *Nosotros los pobres*, an
enduringly successful film made in the same year as *Gran Casino* and starring
Jorge Negrete's counterpart Pedro Infante:

> En el Cine Colonial una congregación de feligreses hace de *Nosotros los pobres* una
> película de culta *avant la lettre*, y si no memoriza los diálogos de Pedro de Urdimales, sí
> conoce en cambio a la perfección las canciones de Manuel Esperón, y se identifica con
> la galería de personajes que es catálogo entrañable de prototipos
> (*In the Colonial Cinema, a congregation of parishioners makes* Nosotros los pobres *a*
> *cult film* avant la lettre*, and if it doesn't memorise the dialogues written by Pedro de*
> *Urdimales, it certainly knows by heart the songs written by Manuel Esperón, and it*
> *identifies with the gallery of characters that is a lovable catalogue of prototypes*) (C.
> Monsiváis and C. Bonfil 1994: 26).

Indeed, a comparison between the function of music in *Nosotros los pobres* and *Gran Casino* illustrates just how much Buñuel deviated from the typical use of music in Mexican films. *Nosotros los pobres* opens with a lengthy written introduction warning audiences that they will see some disturbing scenes but assuring them that poverty, far from being a sin, is a virtue. The camera then pans across an urban *barrio*, where the characters join in singing the song "Ni hablar, mujer" in a joyous manner. The lyrics of this song are suitably light-hearted and sung with relish by all:

> Que retechula es la mujer
> Cuando nos quiere de verdad
> Pero caray a la hora de pelear
> Que le aguante su mamá
> ¡Ni hablar mujer!
> Nací pelado, sí señor,
> Pero me gusta, ¡Que caray!
> (*Women are so beautiful*
> *When they really love us,*
> *But man, when it comes to fighting,*
> *Their mother can put up with them.*
> *Don't even mention it!*
> *I was born broke, yes sir,*
> *But I like it, what a fix*!)

This song performs several functions within the film. First of all, it establishes the locale, an impoverished but happy neighbourhood in Mexico City, which is seen to be united as all of its members, led by Pepe el Toro, the character played by Infante, join in song and dance. It also tells us a great deal about the plot, which has as one of its dramatic twists the idea of the troublesome women alluded to playfully here in the form of the unfit mother La tísica, Pepe's sister, whose moral and social transgressions have led her to be banished from her community and left him to bring up her daughter as if she were his own. This verse also suggests Pepe's key flaw – his inability to forgive – which has compounded an already difficult situation and will lead to problems in his romantic relationships. Finally, and most importantly, the song touches on the real-life issue of the poverty endured by many migrants to major cities in the Mexico of the 1940s. Pepe is poor but noble, and he not only endures his situation as someone in straightened financial circumstances but actually celebrates it, insisting that being poor makes him happy. Thus he is presented as the ideal Mexican *barrio* dweller, poor but content with his station in life and a shining embodiment of *mexicanidad* in his singing prowess and success with the women in the film.

In contrast, the opening song of *Gran Casino*, "Dueña de mi amor", does little or nothing to establish the plot of the film:

> Tengo un cantar en el pecho
> Que dice de tus promesas vanas
> Tengo una sed que me abraza los labios
> Puede que no se apaga.
> Tanto en mi amor y en mi pena
> Quiero decirte mi dueña
> Que jamás quiero olvidar
> No me importa que pueda pasar.
> (*I have a song inside me*
> *That speaks of your hollow promises*
> *I have a thirst on my lips*
> *That may never be quenched*
> *Both in my love and my pain*
> *I want to declare you my Mistress*
> *Whom I never want to forget*
> *Come what may*).

Here, the lyrics have no bearing on the narrative as the film opens, for Gerardo has yet to meet Mercedes, and she never betrays him like the woman remembered in this song. Even if it is read as presaging their relationship, their passion is something of a damp squib that never approached the depth of passion felt by the lover here. This song is thus reduced to a musical interlude that allows Negrete to showcase his singing skills. Lamarque fared little better with her musical numbers. One of these in particular, "El reflector de mi amor", has her shine torches into the crowd as she sings of her quest to find a decent and solvent man. This frivolous number does not suit her rather regal and haughty bearing and has the effect of being farcical rather than amusing.

Buñuel appears to have disregarded the extent to which Mexican audiences saw the songs that punctuated their favourite films as a key marker of their unique Mexican identity and thus an aspect of filmmaking that was to be taken very seriously. Although he does acknowledge that local audiences prefer their own country's music through his portrayal of the casino audience violently rejecting Scottish and opera music, he was unable to present Argentine music in anything other than a positive light because Lamarque was one of his stars. As a consequence, life imitated art and the audience of *Gran Casino* did not appreciate a film whose music was as international as it was Mexican and thus failed to reflect their own idealized notions of what constituted a faithful reflection of Mexican culture. The many departures from the standard musical in *Gran Casino* led Acevedo-Muñoz to conclude that:

> By slightly overemphasizing and parodying the management of the musical numbers, the violence (….) and the romantic conventions (….) Buñuel turns *Gran Casino* into a parody of itself and of its dying genre (E. Acevedo-Muñoz 2000: 50).

Buñuel was to pay a high price for his irreverence – he did not work again for three years and even then he was forced to make another commissioned film, *El gran calavera* (1949), a generic comedy that displays little if any of his characteristic iconoclasm.

7.3 *Los olvidados* (1950)

Despite the failure of *Gran Casino*, Buñuel's continuing delight in disrupting the expectations of Mexican audiences is clear from his discussion with Dancigers about their most famous collaboration, *Los olvidados* (1950). He had evidently not relinquished his desire to experiment with music, as he proposed the inclusion of decidedly disruptive musical elements in a pivotal scene:

> Al escribir el guión, yo quería introducir algunas imágines inexplicables, muy rápidas, que habrían hecho decir a los espectadores: ¿he visto bien? Por ejemplo, cuando los chicos siguen al ciego en el descampado pasaban ante un gran edificio en construcción y yo quería instalar una orquesta de cien músicos tocando en los andamios sin que se les oyera. Óscar Dancigers, que temía el fracaso de la película, me lo prohibió.
> (*While I was writing the script, I wanted to introduce some inexplicable, very fleeting images that would have made the spectators say: Am I seeing things? For example, when the kids follow the blind man onto the waste ground they passed in front of a huge building under construction and I wanted to put an orchestra of 100 musicians playing on the scaffolding in complete silence. Óscar Dancigers, who was worried that the film would be a flop, wouldn't let me do it*) (L. Buñuel 2004: 234).

Ultimately, music plays a minor role in the film and Buñuel came under fire instead for portraying a grim, impoverished and violent urban *barrio* far removed from the romantic portrayal of urban poverty in *Nosotros los pobres*. The action begins as the delinquent Jaibo reunites with his gang, having escaped from a reform school. He is the oldest and is far more streetwise than the others, who look up to him for precisely this reason. Pedro, a younger boy who is presented as having the possibility for change at the outset of the film, is utterly corrupted by Jaibo. Jaibo plans the gang's first attack on Don Carmelo, a blind beggar, as he sings at the local market. Don Carmelo defends himself by lashing out with a nail-encrusted stick, but a few days later, the gang catches up with him and they beat him savagely.

Episodes such as this were met with horror by audiences who insisted that as Buñuel was a foreigner, he was unqualified to comment on the situation of

marginalized people in Mexican society. The characterization of Don Carmelo certainly seemed to lend credence to the notion that the film was at least as much about Spain as it was about Mexico, as his character is closely related to the Spanish picaresque tradition, as Tómas Pérez Turrent confirms (T. Pérez Turrent 1995: 206). Like the blind man who keeps Lazarillo de Tormes, the protagonist of the famous novel of the same name, in hunger and misery, Don Carmelo abuses an abandoned country boy, Ojitos, even as he depends on him, and his cruelty leads the good-natured boy to contemplate violence. Ironically, throughout the film Don Carmelo complains about the decline in society's standards since his youth, but he does not apply these strict moral standards to his own conduct. As well as abusing Ojitos, he attempts to fondle the teenage girl Meche when she delivers milk to his house, tempting her to stay by offering her sweets. Iván Humberto points out while attacks on seemingly helpless characters such as Don Carmelo were a principal motivator for the antipathy that the film inspired in Mexican viewers, the subsequent development of his character leads to a reassessment of this initial sympathy for him (I. Humberto 1994: 54). The complexity and contradictions of the characters in the film ultimately point to Buñuel's wish to separate the portrayal of poverty from the sentimentality of genres such as melodrama:

> In *Los olvidados*, Buñuel visualized poverty in a radically different way from the traditional forms of Mexican melodrama. Buñuel's street children are not "ennobled" by their desperate struggle for survival; they are in fact ruthless predators who are not better than their equally unromanticized victims (C. Mora 2005: 95).

To an even greater extent than the portrayal of Don Carmelo, Buñuel's depiction of a distant, unloving mother was the particular target of local criticism. Marta, the mother of Pedro, a sensitive young boy who is ultimately destroyed by his involvement with the gang, treats her son with indifference and cruelty. This element of the film again violates the norms of *mexicanidad*, where the mother, who is the real-life reflection of the Virgin de Guadalupe, is endlessly giving and self-sacrificing and would rather die than see her children suffer. As Joanne Hershfield notes, in classical Mexican cinema the mother was predominantly portrayed as "self-sacrificing, virtuous, and living only for the well-being of her family" (J. Hershfield 1996: 126). The harried mother in *Los olvidados*, who is left to fend for several children on her own and has no patience with her delinquent son Pedro, was portrayed in a hard-hitting manner that proved too much for Mexican audiences. Throughout the film, she rejects Pedro, who is forced to seek an alternative family through his connection with the gang. Marta is violent towards Pedro, annoyed by his efforts to win her affection, and on one

occasion even denies him food, forcing him to steal, an event that is prefaced by Pedro's pitiful complaints:

> Pedro: ¿Por qué me pega? ¿Por qué tengo hambre?
> Marta: Y lo voy a matar, sinvergüenza.
> *(Pedro: Why are you hitting me? Why am I hungry?*
> *Marta: And I'm going to kill you, you brat.)*

Marta's refusal to feed her son led to a virulent rejection of the film even from crew members, including the set hairdresser, who resigned in protest as she insisted that no Mexican mother would behave in this manner (L. Buñuel 2004: 235). Similarly, Pedro de Urdimales, who collaborated on the script, asked not to be mentioned in the credits of a film that he judged to be inaccurate and "wretched" (J. Ibáñez and M. Palacio 2003: 55).

Not only is Marta far from the ideal mother, but *Los olvidados* is also notable for a complete absence of positive male role models for the young delinquents, as Teshome H. Gabriel remarks:

> The theme of the "absent father" and the lack of a stable family unit dominates *Los Olvidados* (….) there are no positive father figures for the youth to emulate. Jaibo stands, therefore, as the only model of urban survival for the boys (T. Gabriel 1982: 52).

Through the evocation of an environment in which children are forgotten by their own parents and left to fend for themselves, Buñuel exposes their vulnerability and calls into question the centrality of the family to the functioning of Mexican society. By undermining both the Mexican ideal of motherhood and having no positive father figures, his film becomes the antithesis of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* – if the ranch owner is the benevolent dictator Pofirio Díaz, then the Mexico portrayed in *Los olvidados* is fatherless and leaderless, so that any hope of a better society seems misplaced and the government is seen as absent or ineffectual.

Despite its uncompromising view of poverty, the film is not entirely realistic, as it features a dream sequence in which Marta offers a huge piece of meat to Pedro as a bolt of lightning flashes, but Jaibo appears and snatches it from her hands. This dream reflects Pedro's desire to have a closer relationship with his mother and to receive nourishment and affection from her. She in turn, in sharp contrast to her brusque treatment of him in real life, acknowledges his goodness. Although this scenario represents what Freud has termed wish fulfilment on Pedro's part, even his dream is invaded by Jaibo, who disrupts the loving exchange between mother and son in an action that foreshadows his seduction of Marta, whereby he receives the tenderness denied to Pedro. By giving Pedro's character an inner life and a powerful imagination, Buñuel

transcends the hyperrealistic constraints of neorealism, as Marsha Kinder observes:

> By using this kind of Freudian dreamwork in a realistic text on poverty, Buñuel exposes the limits of the neorealist aesthetic, which, in focusing on the surface, fails to address the subversive power of the desiring machine (M. Kinder 1999: 18).

The complex nature of Buñuel's reflection on poverty and the hard-hitting portrayal of its effects meant that the film caused outrage when it was first screened in Mexico City. In fact, it was withdrawn from public presentation as a result of public indignation only days after it opened and provoked such animosity towards Buñuel that it was suggested that he be expelled from Mexico as "un extranjero indeseable" (I. Humberto and Á. Dueñas 1994: 34). The reaction to the film was no less extreme when it was released:

> After the film's premiere, influential members of the Mexican film business and intellectual circles accused Buñuel of betraying the country that had granted him refuge, and of painting a false picture of Mexico's displaced. The film only screened for four days in the capital's cinemas before being withdrawn (J. Ibáñez and M. Palacio 2003: 55).

The director himself remembers the public reaction to the film as follows:

> Estrenada bastante lamentablemente en México, la película permaneció cuatro días en cartel y suscitó en el acto violentas reacciones. Uno de los grandes problemas de México, hoy como ayer, es un nacionalismo llevado hasta el extremo que delata un profundo complejo de inferioridad. Sindicatos y asociaciones diversas pidieron inmediatamente mi expulsión. La prensa atacaba a la película. Los raros espectadores salían de la sala como de un entierro.
> (*Screened rather lamentably in México, the film stayed on screens for four days and provoked violent reactions. One of the great problems of México, both now and in the past, is a nationalism that is so extreme that it suggests a profound inferiority complex. Unions and various organisations demanded my immediate expulsión, The press attacked the film. The few viewers left the cinema as if they were leaving a funeral*) (L. Buñuel 2004: 195-6).

The support of Octavio Paz and the film's success at the 1950 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Palme d'Or, radically changed its reception in Mexico. Overnight, the film was feted and went on to be a smash hit, assuring Buñuel's position as an imminent director in Mexico. While it is understandable that audiences so accustomed to romantic portrayals of their nation would react strongly against such an unvarnished depiction of troubling social problems, it was easy to accuse a foreign national, especially one from a former colonial power, of being out of touch with the nation he sought to represent. The

deceptively generic *Gran Casino* and the much more overtly radical *Los olvidados* thus marked a transition from a sanitized portrayal of a society to a more personal and decidedly more critical independent film practice. Although film styles did not change overnight, Buñuel's film paved the way for a more critical, challenging cinema that was to reach its apex in the 1970s, particularly after the events that took place in Tlatelolco square in 1968. These independent films, some of which were made by young directors who had previously collaborated with Buñuel, such as Luis Alcoriza and Arturo Ripstein, reflect an increased willingness on the part of audiences to accept a less saccharine vision of their country. The influence of Buñuel is also evident in the often unconventional, even anarchic, styles employed by several contemporary directors. Significantly, the much-lauded *Amores perros* (2000) has drawn constant comparisons with *Los olvidados* that reflect the changes in the presentation of Mexican society that began with Buñuel's film, as it has been noted that the more recent film "makes abjection and degradation into distinguishing markers of *mexicanidad*" (S. de la Mora 2006: 173). His influence extends beyond Mexico, moreover, to his native Spain and Pedro Almódovar's iconoclastic presentation of authority figures in religious or secular society and to Argentine films such as Bruno Stagnaro and Adrian Caetano's *Pizza, birra, faso* (1997), which virtually remakes scenes from *Los olvidados*. Despite the controversies surrounding his early Mexican films, paradoxically, it was precisely the detachment of Buñuel's position as an outsider in a carefully controlled, hypernationalistic cinematic industry that allowed him to bypass cinematic norms and present a new vision of a violent, dysfunctional Mexico that was to influence generations to come. Moreover, his mingling of his distinctly Spanish influences and his characteristic surrealist style with a quasi-documentary view of Mexican urban poverty foreshadowed the exchange of ideas and styles that is the cornerstone of contemporary transnational and transcultural cinema practice worldwide.

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Homesick while at Home: Hugo Hamilton and *The Speckled People*

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh

Hugo Hamilton was born in Dublin in 1953. His father was an ardent nationalist, who forbade the use of the English language in their home as part of his fight to restore Irish traditions and cultural sovereignty. His mother was German, homesick for her family and a country that was imploding in the aftermath of the Nazi reign. Hamilton thus grew up in a household significantly at odds with the surrounding society. Teased for speaking Irish and bullied for being German, he found himself constantly struggling to find a personal identity neither his family nor society would allow him to express. In his memoir *The Speckled People* (2003), he paints a searing and poignant portrait of a childhood dominated by feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Reflecting on his alienation from his peers, Hamilton describes himself in terms we would usually associate with someone forced to leave behind their country of origin and go into exile: "We were 'the homesick children', struggling from an early age with the idea of identity and conflicting notions of Irish history and German history"[1]. Without moving from his place of birth, therefore, Hamilton constitutes a fascinating example of a "transcultural personality", growing up in a family whose values and tropes of identity were unrecognised by, and unacceptable to, the surrounding culture. Living during a period when Ireland began to move away from its history of colonization and its strict binary categories of identity and embrace a more complex and flexible definition of self, Hamilton's memoir provides an invaluable insight into the difficulties faced by dislocated people when they try to engage with the rules and social mores of the society in which they find themselves living. Caught within a network of competing colonial, postcolonial and global narratives of history and identity, Hamilton struggles to define himself and engage with his complex heritages.

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[1] H. Hamilton. "Speaking to the Walls in English" (undated). Essay published on www.powells.com/essays/hamilton.html

8.1 *The Speckled People*

When he wrote *The Speckled People*, Hamilton joined a long line of contemporary Irish writers who have turned to the genre of autobiography to interrogate not only their own personal histories, but that of the emerging postcolonial Irish society. In her book *Contemporary Irish Literature: Transforming Tradition*, Christina Hunt Mahony suggests that the profusion of such texts is indicative of a country coming to terms with its own complex history of invasion and dispossession:

> (T)his newer form of Irish memoir, nearly exclusively male, is unusual in that it is very much connected with the current cultural debate on identity (….) This is not just the autobiographical essay or sketch, nor is it the summing up of advanced age. Rather these works are probings of self and country by men middle-aged or younger who wish to illuminate their caste, religion, or region and to, by extension, define national characteristics (C. Hunt Mahony 1998: 269).

Although the genre of autobiographical writing is traditionally associated with those who look back on their lives from the perspective of old age, recent Irish memoirs are often written looking forward, as the authors try to define an identity for themselves that reflects the uncertainties and complexities of contemporary Irish society. This apparently anachronistic narrative – where one "recalls" one's life even as it is unfolding – is particularly useful when the surrounding environment is itself in a state of flux. In his editorial to the section devoted to "Autobiography and Memoirs", in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Séamus Deane suggests that all recent Irish autobiographical writing is, at its heart, an attempt to confront the legacy of colonialism and rewrite the national narrative in terms more accommodating of the complexities of contemporary life:

> All the authors included are seeking, through personal experience, self-examination, reconsideration of historical events and circumstances, to identify the other force, the hostile or liberating energy, which made the self come into consciousness and thereby give to existence a pattern or the beginnings of a pattern of explanation (S. Deane 1991: 380).

For Deane, narrating one's memories constitutes a struggle with external social and historical forces for the right to define the self.

The Speckled People conforms closely to Deane's definition of an Irish memoir and takes the form of a struggle for self-definition between the author and the forces that surround him. For Hamilton, the tragedy for humankind is that a child is compelled by those around him to subscribe to the often limiting

terms of his inherited identity: "When you're small you're like a piece of white paper with nothing written on it. My father writes down his name in Irish and my mother writes down her name in German and there's a blank space left over for all the people outside who speak English" (H. Hamilton 2003: 3). Hamilton's childhood is defined by his struggle to find room for himself amidst all of the histories and languages that fight for his loyalty. His status as the child of an Irish father and a German mother confers upon him a legacy of shame, guilt and confusion. Even the very clothes he wears communicate mixed messages about his identity: "So my brother and I ran out wearing lederhosen and Aran sweaters, smelling of rough wool and new leather, Irish on top and German below" (H. Hamilton 2003: 2). What becomes clear is that this mixed heritage confines rather than liberating the author. Although fluent in three languages, the pressures of the cultures and traditions invested in each of the languages, makes communication an almost impossible task for him:

> So we have to be careful in our house and think before we speak. We can't speak the words of the Garda or the workers, that's English. We speak Áine's words from Connemara, that's Irish, or my mother's words, that's German. I can't talk to Áine in German and I can't talk to my mother in Irish, because she'll only laugh and tickle me. I can talk to my father in German or Irish and he can speak to the Garda and the workers for us. Outside, you have to be careful, too, because you can't buy an ice pop in German or in Irish, and lots of people only know the words of the Garda and the workers (H. Hamilton 2003: 29).

Trapped within this morass of competing loyalties and traditions, it is little wonder the author describes himself as "invisible (….) isolated and reticent"[2].

Hamilton uses the image of "the speckled people" to describe the plethora of competing cultures out of which his own identity has been formed:

> (W)e are the new Irish. Partly from Ireland and partly from somewhere else, half-Irish and half-German. We're the speckled people, he says, the "brack" people, which is a word that comes from the Irish language, from the Gaelic as they sometimes call it (….) It means speckled, dappled, flecked, spotted, coloured (H. Hamilton 2003: 7).

Hamilton's parents celebrate the wealth of opportunities and cultural richness that this mixture of heritages confers upon their children. This idea that a mixed background enables its subjects to transcend the often limiting terms of a monocultural identity conforms to a postcolonial celebration of diasporic identity as something that can transcend and deconstruct the strict, often binary, categories associated with national definitions of selfhood. Homi K.Bhabha

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[2] Ibid.

claims that being forced to live on the margins between two different cultures enables the diasporic subject to:

> (T)hink beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and….focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity[3].

In spite of this postcolonial optimism about the opportunities for new, more liberating narratives of identity available to the intercultural being, however, defining oneself at the intersection of competing cultures is not always straightforward. As Anne Massey notes: "If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can be either, or both, a source of richness or a source of conflict"[4]. Moreover, as John McLeod warns us, postcolonial theorists, in their rush to celebrate diversity and novelty, often ignore the ongoing presence in society of strict and insurmountable boundaries to identity formation:

> It is important to understand that this space is *not* some kind of postmodern playground of "anything goes", where all kinds of identity are equally valuable and available as if in a "multicultural supermarket". Discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalize others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging (J. McLeod 2000: 225).

In fact, these limiting categories are clearly evident throughout Hamilton's childhood. For all his father's celebration of his "speckled" heritage, Hamilton's permitted identifiers are rigidly confined to the Irish and German parts of his heritage: English, as symbol both of colonial past and postcolonial present, is strictly off limits to him: "It's forbidden to speak English in our house. My father wants all the Irish people to cross back over into the Irish language so he made a rule that we can't speak English, because your home is your language and he wants us to be Irish and not British" (H. Hamilton 2003: 12).

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[3] Quoted in J. McLeod 2000: 216.
[4] Quoted in A. Bennett 2005: 4.

8.2 Homesick while at Home

In his inability to communicate because of the restrictions imposed upon him by his political and ideological heritage, Hamilton personifies the plight of the migrant, cut off from the comfortable and easy signifiers of the homeland and struggling to engage with the unfamiliar environment in which he now finds himself. His plight is reflective of a recurring theme in diasporic narratives, as identified by Roger Bromley: "Almost all the fictions are by, and concern themselves with, those for whom categories of belonging and the present have been made unstable as a consequence of the displacement enforced by post-colonial and/or migrant circumstances. Language, home, memory and marginalization are recurring problems" (R. Bromley 2000: 1). Hamilton draws heavily on the metaphor of "home" to explain the isolation and sense of dislocation that permeated his childhood. Home, after all, is central to the construction of personal identity. However, for the migrant subject, home constitutes a fundamental locus of trauma and alienation, for home is always an imagined space which serves only to remind the migrant subject what he has lost. As Bill Ashcroft et al suggest:

> What does "home" mean in the disrupted world of colonial space? How can "home" become the transformative habitation of boundaries? For certainly that *unheimlichkeit*, that "unhousedness" or "uncanniness" which characterizes much colonial displacement, is a primary force of disruption in postcolonial life. Can it also be a source of liberation? The phenomenon of diaspora, with its exemplary model of dislocation and displacement begins the answer to this question (B. Ashcroft et al 2002: 218).

Although many theorists of the postcolonial celebrate the opportunities the disruption of traditional narratives of home provide for the postcolonial subject, for Hamilton, the web of competing narratives of identity and belonging with which he is surrounded serve only to isolate him. He becomes metaphorically homeless without ever leaving the place of his birth: "We still end up living in a foreign country because we're the children from somewhere else" (H. Hamilton 2003: 33). He elaborates on this point in his essay "Speaking to the Walls in English", in which he reflects on the loneliness and alienation that transfused his childhood:

> We were meant to be speckled, a word that my father took from the Irish or Gaelic word *breac*, meaning mixed or coloured or spotted like a trout. But that idea of cultural mixture became an ordeal for us, full of painful and comical cultural entanglements out

of which we have been trying to find some sense of belonging ever since. There were no other children like me, no ethnic groups that I could attach myself to[5].

An important element in the quest to define oneself is association with other people in our environments. Sociologists refer to this process as "socialization" and explain that we base our social identities on a series of binary oppositions, into which we divide those with whom we have something in common from those with whom we do not. In other words, we create categories of "us" and "them" in order to categorize and consequently identify ourselves as members of particular society, class, race, ethnic or gender groups. As Mahony suggests, the function of autobiographical writing is often to interrogate these categories of belonging so that the author can begin to consolidate and limit his sense of self:

> All such exercises are, of course, apparently and in the first instance inclusivist, defining who "we" are by means of shared traits. They must also be seen as equally exclusivist. Where there is a "we", there must be a "they". The "us" and "them" in these narratives does not always divide predictably at the religious border one would expect, either. Sometimes the "other" in the narratives is the equally predictive divide of the English versus the Irish. Sometimes it is the less predictable female/male gap that also figures indirectly in defining national identity, since that process is almost exclusively connected with maleness. Finally, these narratives can find the male protagonist or narrator defining himself against the "other" of his father's generation, for whom national identity was defined in colonial or premodern times (C. Hunt Mahony 1998: 269).

The problem faced by Hamilton is that there are few, if any, categories of identity in his environment with which he can engage and use to shape his sense of self. Instead, he seems to be surrounded by "othering" forces, against which he is constantly fighting for the right to define himself. Even his home – the place which theorists tell us offers us the most simple and deep-rooted sense of belonging – is destabilized by the pressures being put on him by his father (who inhabits an imagined precolonial Gaelic Ireland) and his mother (whose sense of home as a German is permanently disrupted by the collective shame of her countrymen about their Nazi legacy). In fact, the heritages represented by his parents are so rife with contradictions and inconsistencies, it is little wonder Hamilton struggles to find his own narrative voice.

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[5] H. Hamilton. "Speaking to the Walls in English".

8.3 Nationalist Narratives of Identity

Hamilton's father is an uncompromising nationalist, who is willing to resort to violence, both against his own children and his fellow countrymen, in his bid to return Ireland to traditional precolonial values and traditions. In his irrational determination to construct a "perfect" Irish society, in which no vestige of British colonial influence remains, he is typical of the colonized imagination pinpointed by Deane. Such people, Deane suggests, are unable to confront the realities of the present, and so immerse themselves in stereotypical representations in order to forge and preserve a sense of self they can use to isolate themselves from surrounding society: "Inevitably, in a colonial or neo-colonial country like Ireland, the forms of 'otherness' available are multiple and blatant, so much so that they rarely escape stereotyping. An idea of Ireland has to be fashioned, discovered, recreated over and against that which threatens to disallow it" (S. Deane 1991: 380). His particular focus is on the revival of the Irish language and the complete and final banishment of the English language from Ireland. He represents the antithesis to the flexible narratives of selfhood advocated by postcolonial theorists, aiming instead to enforce a rigid, narrowly defined category of Irishness on his country, starting with his own family. The irony, as Hamilton comments, is that in his stubborn imposition of linguistic rules and sanctions on his family, he replicates many of the abuses of power typical of colonial and dictatorial regimes:

> (S)he married an Irishman from Cork whose initial courage and idealism increasingly began to resemble the stark, uncompromising principles she had experienced under Nazism. Before they met, my father founded a political party in Ireland and made speeches on the streets of Dublin. To us, he was always making a speech and "foaming at the mouth". He seemed like a man who had failed to convince the nation and who then tried to create a republic of his own inside the home, a country that would be fully Irish and fully German[6].

In the opening scene of *The Speckled People*, Hamilton describes a dog barking at the waves until he is hoarse: "You can hear a dog barking at the waves. You can see him standing in the water, barking and trying to bite the foam (….) he's barking and barking so much that he's hoarse and lost his voice" (H. Hamilton 2003: 2). His mother uses the dog's irrational behaviour to reassure her sons that the neighbouring children who call them Nazis do not understand what they are saying: "You know that dog that belongs to nobody and barks at the waves all day until he is hoarse and has no voice any more. He doesn't know any better" (H. Hamilton 2003: 4). In an essay, however, Hamilton suggests that the fruitless

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[6] Ibid.

but unceasing attempt to stop the waves better reflected his father's irrational idea that he could forcibly halt the Irish embrace of modernity and reinscribe traditional values on Irish society once again:

> (T)rying to hold back the waves as my father wanted us to do. We were conscripted into his battle, holding back British and American culture at a time when pop music and TV influences were beginning to march into Ireland, the time of Nat King Cole, the time of Elvis and *The Virginian*. My father saw it as a matter of winning and losing, surviving or going into extinction[7].

Hamilton's father epitomizes an uncompromising narrative of Irish nationalist history, more concerned with achieving Irish sovereignty than engaging with contemporary reality. His desire to start a new master race of "new Irish" has chilling echoes of the recently defeated Nazi regime:

> After the war was over he met my mother in Dublin and decided to start a German-Irish family. He was still making speeches and writing articles for the newspaper and going around on his motorbike wearing goggles. But what better way to start a new country than marrying somebody and having children. Because that's what a new country is, he says, children. In the end of it all, we are the new country, the new Irish (H. Hamilton 2003: 39).

Of course, the new Ireland he imagines does not exist outside the boundaries of his own home and depends, therefore, on the construction of an idealized past. Reality is subverted in order to accommodate this revised narrative of history: "My father pretends that England does not exist. It's like a country he's never heard of before and is not even on the map" (H. Hamilton 2003: 37). Hamilton describes how his father encouraged – even forced – his sons to live up to this idealized and imagined Irish identity, even though they are as aware as he is that it is but a construct: "My father says we don't care about the people outside, because we'll show them how to be Irish. We have to be as Irish as possible and make a sacrifice" (H. Hamilton 2003: 159). Hamilton's father thus demonstrates an extreme nationalism, predicated on the strict maintenance and cultivation of the binary oppositions on which anti-colonial movements are based (because he forces them to speak only Irish, his children are Irish and crucially, therefore, not English). His ability to ignore the realities of the present in favour of a constructed narrative of the past confines his sons within a narrow and barren mythology of selfhood that undermines their ability to celebrate the richness of their inherited multiculturalism. It is only after the death of his father, that Hamilton and his siblings begin the process of transcending these narrow

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[7] Ibid.

categories of identity and exploring the other identities and cultures available to them.

8.4 German Identity in Postwar Europe

Hamilton's father, through his rigid adherence to strict binaries of identity, effectively turns his family into a minority diaspora, living on the fringes of Irish society, privileging a mythological and constructed past over the realities of the present. The family, as I suggested earlier, thus find themselves living in exile without ever having left their home. Within the family, only his mother has physically migrated from her homeland. Hamilton's mother is a fascinating character, exemplifying the complexities of defining place and identity in the confusion of postwar Europe. Coming to Ireland to improve her English, she finds herself at the heart of a family to whom the English language – and thus any hope of communication with the outside world – are forbidden. Unlike her husband, she firmly believes that nationality does not have to be a binary choice and she encourages her sons to open themselves up to their mixed heritage and celebrate the complexities they have inherited, rather than attempting to deny them.

Although happy in Ireland, Hamilton's mother is often homesick for her family and native land. As a German living in postwar Europe, however, her relationship both to her homeland and to memories of her childhood are necessarily fraught with contradictions. Her very status as a German woman in Ireland is constructed by external forces and imposed on her, so that she becomes trapped inside an exterior she does not recognise: her husband sees her as an ally in his fight against the English (indeed many Irish nationalists during the war supported Germany against the British army) even though she herself has no problem with the English and supports her sons when they begin to rebel against the linguistic restrictions imposed on them by their father; while her Irish neighbours unthinkingly conflate German with Nazi, even though her own family resisted the Nazis often at considerable personal cost. Her problems, however, do not stem from these external assumptions alone. Like many Germans in the aftermath of World War II, Hamilton's mother finds herself robbed of an easy identification with her homeland and native culture. When she eventually brings her children to Germany to visit her family and reconnect with their heritage, she finds herself lost and dislocated from streets and a society that she thought would be familiar to her: "The streets and the people still had the same names in German, but she was sometimes lost and couldn't find things she remembered. It was like being six years of age again and maybe she was

homesick in her own hometown" (H. Hamilton 2003: 210). Her plight is that historical events have made it impossible for her to celebrate her German identity and love for her homeland. The sadness underlying his mother's alienation from her native identity is indicative, as Hamilton later realises, of a society trying, but failing, to come to terms with its history: "Much has been written about the silence that befell the German language after the Second World war (….) My mother described it as a kind of homelessness"[8]. Hamilton's mother, therefore, constitutes yet another example of a displaced person, but this time it is shame and guilt at Germany's Nazi past that has exiled her from the landscape of her childhood memories.

Hamilton's childhood, as described in *The Speckled People*, is fraught with tension and conflicting accounts of history and selfhood. Presented with a dual heritage and culture, he struggles not to drown in the often contradictory messages and traditions he has inherited. Under pressure from his father to conform to a rigid, repressive narrative of identity, he self-consciously wears his Irish and German nationalities as though they were external to him, without fully understanding or identifying with either of them. Most notably, he never loses the feeling that he is being defined by the people surrounding him and that he has no alternative but to perform the personas he has been allotted: "Everyone on the bus turns around to look at us because we're German again. Then we have to behave and sit quietly and bless ourselves whenever we pass by a church, to prove that the Germans are decent people and we did nothing wrong. I pretend to be Irish" (H. Hamilton 2003: 99). This quotation exemplifies the tenuous grasp Hamilton seems to have on his dual identity. It is almost as though he finds himself always defined in the negative: Hamilton is neither Irish nor German, but instead is both "not-fully-Irish" and "not-fully-German".

Hamilton's initial reaction is to simplify his fraught relationship with his history and identity by refusing to acknowledge it at all. He finally stands up to his father and rejects the narrative of Irish nationalism his father has tried to impose on him: "I went home and told my father that I would kill him. I said I would not speak any dying language any more (….) Then I talk to myself in English. I pretend that I'm not German or Irish at all" (H. Hamilton 2003: 279). He then confronts his mother and criticises her support of his father's repressive regime: "I ask her why she was trying to bring me up to live under the Nazis. We have to behave as if the British are still in Ireland and the Nazis are still in Germany" (H. Hamilton 2003: 280). He describes how angry he feels that he has to try to come to terms with the complex and bitter histories contained in his heritage, and imagines reneging on his responsibilities and escaping from it all:

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[8] Ibid.

"I have to pretend that I had no father. I have to go swimming a lot and dive underwater and stay down there as long as I can. I have to learn to hold my breath as long as I can and live underwater where there's no language" (H. Hamilton 2003: 290).

A number of things happen that cause Hamilton to change his mind and confront the complications of his heritage rather than denying them. One day, when pretending in a fit of anger to be a Nazi, he throws a dog into the sea and is then unable to save him. The guilt he feels about his behaviour, combined with a beating he receives from a group of neighbourhood boys simply because he is German, reminds him that injustices will continue to be visited on the innocent if the strong in society do not take responsibility for telling the truth. This lesson is echoed by his mother who left a well-paid job in the "de-nazification court" in Germany after the war when she realized that some of the German people were so eager to prove their anti-Nazi credentials, they were in danger of perpetuating the same intolerances on which Nazism bred:

> (O)ne day, there was an old man before the court, a gynaecologist. He said he had no time for Hitler because he was only helping women with babies getting born. He said he didn't care if babies were German or not, they were all good babies to him. But they didn't believe him (….) He said he liked German music and German books, but that didn't make him hate other people. He was one of the last good men in Germany and they were trying to turn him into a Nazi (H. Hamilton 2003: 292).

Hamilton's mother plays a crucial role in helping him to negotiate his often contradictory dual heritage. She warns him of the dangers of passivity – the "silent negative" that was her family's term for their passive resistance to the Nazis – and encourages him to actively interrogate and challenge the identities and histories he has inherited. The diaries she kept as a young girl, which recount a life growing up in an extremist society, constitute a conduit for Hamilton into the past and finally enable him to break through the silence that has descended upon postwar Germany. She also helps him to uncover some of the secrets that lie at the heart of his family history. Most intriguingly, he finds out that his nationalist father's father (Hamilton's "Irish" grandfather) had fought for the British army during World War I, a secret his father has carefully guarded and which undermines the extremist nationalism he has tried to impose on his sons. This discovery has major implications for Hamilton, suggesting that the two strands of his heritage are both more contradictory and more intertwined than he had imagined: "I didn't know that my Irish grandfather, John Hamilton, and my German grandfather, Franz Kaiser, must have stood facing each other in the Great War. Or that my mother and father were both orphaned by that same war. Or that I was wearing the medals of two different empires side by side" (H.

Hamilton 2003: 12). Faced with this seemingly insurmountable distance between the two strands of his ancestry, he turns to his mother for help in reconciling them:

> "You can't love two countries," I said. "That's impossible."
> "Why not?"
> "What if they start fighting against each other?"
> "I don't just love one of my children," she says. "I still love all my children, even when they start fighting" (H. Hamilton 2003: 120).

Armed with his mother's diaries and her unshakeable belief that contradictions can be resolved and differences transcended, Hamilton sets about finding an identity for himself that will enable him to engage with all of the different elements of his past history and present reality. What he learns is that identity does not have to be a neat, easily defined and coherent narrative but that, on the contrary, it can easily accommodate contradictions and multiplicities:

> Ireland has more than one story. We are the German-Irish story. We are the English-Irish story, too (….) We don't just have one language and one history. We sleep in German and we dream in Irish. We laugh in Irish and we cry in German. We are silent in German and we speak in English. We are the speckled people (H. Hamilton 2003: 283).

In coming to this conclusion and finally acknowledging his multicultural background, Hamilton is ready to construct a new, more flexible identity for himself that will transcend the rigid binarity of his dual heritage. This interweaving of the different elements of one's background is, Deane suggests, the goal of autobiographical writing: "One of the advantages gained from this self-reflexive meditation is that the writers are compelled, in their confrontation with the obduracy of existing conditions, to create alternatives to them" (S. Deane 1991: 380).

8.5 Writing the Self

In spite of the optimistic note on which *The Speckled People* ends, however, for Hamilton the quest to reconcile the conflicting elements that constitute his history and identity continues. It is interesting given the role his mother's diaries play in opening a channel of communication for him with her past, that he too turns to his writing in order to interrogate and engage with the ongoing sense of dislocation he feels. In an essay, Hamilton explains that it was only when he began to write down his memories, and impose some kind of narrative structure

on them, that he begins to liberate himself from his fear that he will never find an identity with which he can feel comfortable:

> Becoming a writer was the only way of liberating myself from this silence, the only way that I could come out from my hiding place and finally tell the story of my childhood, a story that was so full of shame and embarrassment that my only impulse was always to run away from it. People often remarked on how extraordinary it was for children to be brought up with three languages in Ireland. But they never realised how difficult that was, how the opposite was true. We were homeless. I was always a person without a story, without identity, without language. In many ways, I never thought I had a story until I began to write it down[9].

In the essays and novels he has written since the publication of *The Speckled People*, Hamilton has continued to wrestle with the legacy of his dual nationality and culture. The central, repressive presence of Hamilton's father in his memoir, and the quotations from theorists such as Mahony and Deane suggesting that Ireland's colonial past constitutes an ongoing site of trauma and dislocation for Irish writers, would seem to suggest that Hamilton's inability to embrace his identity is an Irish phenomenon. However, Hamilton himself seems to conclude that the German half of his identity is at least, if not more, problematic for him. In a number of essays, he suggests that the postwar German people are akin to a disenfranchised diaspora, who are prevented from celebrating their history and homeland because of the shame and guilt engendered by their Nazi legacy. In an essay entitled "The Past is Not a Weakness", Hamilton describes the loneliness inherent in the contemporary German people, who have been exiled from their homeland without ever moving away from it: "Up to the present, they have lived with a forbidden identity. The unresolved loneliness of being German forced them to live beyond spontaneity, beyond sadness, beyond any collective self-awareness other than their perpetrator status" (H. Hamilton 2004). This statement closely echoes something Hamilton's mother told him when, as a young boy, he had complained that his mixed heritage was too much for him to shoulder:

> "I don't want to be German," I said. She had tears in her eyes and said the Germans would never be able to go home again. Germans are not allowed to be children. They're not allowed to sing children's songs or tell fairy tales. They cannot be themselves. That's why Germans want to be Irish or Scottish or American. That's why they love Irish music and American music, because that gives them a place to go home to and be homesick for. "It's like a birthmark," she said (H. Hamilton 2003: 227).

Hamilton, as an adult, becomes interested in exploring the bonds that German people have built up with other cultures and societies as a kind of substitute for

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[9] Ibid.

the love they dare not express for their own homeland. He also believes that exploring this relationship will help him to achieve some resolution to his own complicated feelings of loyalty and belonging.

8.6 *Die redselige Insel: Irisches Tagebuch*

In 2007, Hamilton published a German-language travelogue entitled *Die redselige Insel: Irisches Tagebuch* (the novel, which has yet to be translated into English, has been given the tentative title of *The Island of Talking: An Irish Journal Fifty Years after Heinrich Böll*). The book retraces the footsteps of Heinrich Böll, the German writer, who spent a brief period living on Achill Island in the West of Ireland in the early 1950s. Commenting on the reception of Böll's *Irisches Tagebuch* (*Irish Journal*) on its publication in 1957, Hamilton notes that the "Irish hated it and the Germans loved it", and explains: "In fact, it was not a book about Ireland at all, but a book about all the things that were missing in Germany" (H. Hamilton 2004). Elaborating on this statement, he suggests that the innocent, war-free environment of the West of Ireland represented for Böll, and his German readers, an escape from the depressing reality of postwar Germany and its inability to transcend or come to terms with its legacy of guilt:

> The emotional attachment to home, to the place in which you are born, is something that lies deep in the human psyche, which is why it could be so abused by Nazi ideology. The results of this abuse is the systematic denial ever since of any feelings of belonging, a denial that has become so pervasive in German consciousness that it has erased these human instincts almost completely (H. Hamilton 2004).

What I find fascinating is why Hamilton is drawn to Böll's diary and what answers to his own identity dilemma he expects to find in it. Afterall, the differences between the two men are much greater than any similarities they might appear to share. Böll was a German citizen, who spent a short time living in Ireland. Hamilton, on the other hand, is, in spite of his mixed heritage, essentially an Irishman, living in Ireland, who has visited Germany on holiday but has never lived there. Why would Hamilton need to adopt the persona of a German tourist and retrace Böll's journey to the West of Ireland in order to engage with his own homeland? This question resonates throughout Hamilton's book and suffuses his narrative voice. In comments he has made about his book, he slips uncomfortably between the competing Irish and German elements of his identity. Commenting on the title he gives his book, for example, he explains: "The title of my book "Die redselige Insel – The Island of Talking" refers to the

Irish traditional of inventing themselves in the art of talking" (H. Hamilton 2007b). The use of the objective third person in this statement ("the Irish….themselves") implies that Hamilton is detached from the subjects of his book and that he is thus writing as an outsider (from his German side, perhaps). However, in the same essay, he refers to the fact that: "*The Germans* still admire *our* skilful ways"; and claims that: "*We* are not only the great optimists of Europe, spending to make up for centuries of poverty, but *we* have also become the great opportunists". Perhaps, more confusingly, he later states that: "I'm not saying that *the Irish* have lost everything, *they* are still great singers, *we* have a unique way of creating a feeling of home, something *the Germans* have always found magical here"[10].

This constant shift from first to third person, with its contradictory notes of inclusion and exclusion, also permeates the narrative voice in Hamilton's book. In the introduction, for example, Hamilton describes flying over the Irish sea on his return home after attending a conference in England. The invisible national border he crosses causes him to reflect on the other borders he feels have been defining him his whole life, borders which have prevented him from ever feeling completely at home in the land in which he has always lived: "I stand with one foot in Ireland and one in Germany, I am in both countries a stranger as well as a local" (H. Hamilton 2007a: 9). The ongoing confusion he demonstrates is in itself considerably more interesting than the content of Hamilton's book, which concludes (rather banally and unsurprisingly) that some elements of life in Ireland have changed considerably since Böll's visit (poverty has been replaced by affluence, isolation has been exchanged for globalization) and others have remained the same (people's friendliness and warmth, Irish traditional music, the rain….). However, he does make a number of interesting observations. He comments that the experience of globalization has significantly eroded the differences that used to exist between Ireland and Germany, and that increased mobility means that there are far more people of mixed race and ethnicity now living in Ireland (H. Hamilton 2007a: 144). This means, perhaps, that Hamilton need not feel so isolated any longer. He also indicts the Irish propensity to keep secrets about its history and to airbrush shameful memories from the national consciousness, describing Ireland as a place where there is much talking, but very little said (H. Hamilton 2007a: 146). Commenting on this phenomenon in an essay, he warns that burying one's past behind a wall of silence is the worst thing a country can do and that it will lead to ongoing trauma and shame: "The title of my book 'Die Redselige Insel – The Island of Talking' refers to the Irish tradition of inventing themselves in the art of talking. It was also the country of

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[10] The italics throughout are mine and used for emphasis.

talking about nothing, the country of talking up a great silence about its own problems" (H, Hamilton 2007b). Given that his book has been published only in Germany, it is difficult to assess whether Hamilton believes he is addressing an Irish or a German audience. However, his conclusion that it is important to engage with one's past, whether it be on a personal or a national level, gives us a good insight into his own ongoing pursuit of an identity which can bestow upon him a sense of belonging.

At the end of *The Speckled People*, Hamilton's mother reflects on her own quest to find somewhere she can call home: "My mother took out a cigarette because she was free to smoke after my father died. We stood on the road and watched her face lighting up with the match. We smelled on the road and watched the new smoke in the clean air and waited. She said she didn't know where to go from here. We were lost, but she laughed and it didn't matter" (H. Hamilton 2003: 298). Her embrace of uncertainty and the confidence with which she now faces the future, liberated from the repressive presence of her husband and his old-fashioned, rigid structures of identity, suggests that the concepts of "home" and "belonging" have a different meaning in the contemporary world. Perhaps people are no longer confined to narrowly defined categories of identity, and perhaps contemporary identity is no longer conferred upon a person at birth but is something that is developed and earned through the experiences and cultures one encounters during the course of one's life. At the start of *The Speckled People*, Hamilton likens a child's identity at birth to a blank piece of paper, which is gradually inscribed by both his inherited history and culture and his own encounters with the external world. Certainly he is doing his best, by interrogating his own memories and attempting to forge connections between Irish and German history, culture and contemporary society, to take control of his own identity and forge his own distinct transcultural narrative voice.

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Confronting the "Foreigner from Within": (Sexual) Exile and "Indomitable Force" in the Fiction of James Baldwin and Colm Tóibín

Gerald David Naughton

In his 1996 novel *The Story of the Night*, Irish writer Colm Tóibín addressed the issue of homosexuality for the first time in his fiction. The novel weaves a manifold tale of nationality, identity and sexuality – and displaces that tale, as Tóibín himself acknowledged, onto "another country", avoiding the "personal or polemical" in favour of the displaced and figuratively exiled (C. Tóibín 1996: 2). In so doing, Tóibín was following a model provided by one of his great literary idols, the African American novelist, essayist, playwright and poet, James Baldwin. Baldwin's own first direct treatment of homosexuality in fiction, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), was similarly set outside of the borders of his home nation and exceeded the confines of political or racial identity building. The similarities between the two novels go far beyond superficial confluence. Both texts narrate tales of repression and desire, presenting a queer aesthetic of the concealment and revelation of homosexual pleasure. The "room" of Baldwin's title – a chaotic and disordered space of the marginalized, though potentially transformative, homoerotic – finds a resonant echo in the run-down Buenos Aires apartment that forms one of the most telling spaces of Tóibín's text. As a contemporary Irish writer engages with an iconic twentieth-century African American antecedent, a complex political dialectic is created between issues of Irish and (African) American exile. Both narratives present their tales of homosexual identity through exiled subjectivities, but in engaging with and, to an extent, writing through, *Giovanni's Room*, Tóibín adds a further level of exile to his text: a challenging and potentially problematic dialogue across "Black" and "Green" Atlantics.

Oscar Wilde once suggested that exile in America had had a transformative effect on Irish identity. In Wilde's words, America provided the "Celtic intellect" with an "education" that would have seemed impossible before the great nineteenth-century diasporas. What is learned, according to Wilde's model, is the terrible paradox of nationality: its "pathetic weakness" and its "indomitable force" (O. Wilde 1998: 136) – two themes that are played out in the works of the

writers discussed in this chapter. *The Story of the Night*, like *Giovanni's Room*, plays on this paradox by writing a potentially debilitating awareness of the past into its aesthetic of individual choice. Both texts reveal a similarly complex relationship between language and temporality – one that displaces and redraws nationality and sexuality.

There is, of course, an essential and unavoidable distinction between "Black" and "Green" Atlantics. If Wilde had imagined the Celtic intellect, when removed to the United States, "matur(ing) its powers (….) concentrat(ing) its action, (and) learn(ing) the secret of its own strength" (O. Wilde 1998: 287), it is a vision of exile validating nationality that had historically been withheld from black America. In a 1967 essay, Baldwin questions "whether Americans already have an identity or are still sufficiently flexible to achieve one" (J. Baldwin 1985: 432). The Irish in America, he suggests, "cling (….) to those credentials forged in the Old World, credentials which cannot be duplicated here, credentials which the American Negro does not have" (J. Baldwin 1985: 432). Those "credentials" involve history as the collective memory of a mythical past. Nationality, according to Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, requires a "genealogy of origin" that is necessarily fictional (H. Bhabha 1990: 307), and Baldwin's model presumes the same. Ernest Renan rhetorically asks "(w)hat is a Nation" and returns the paradoxical solution that "(t)hose who wish to make up a nation must possess much in common and also be willing to forget many things"[1]. Within Baldwin's framework, what Irish Americans "possess in common" are "Old World credentials" that are at bottom pure fiction; what they wilfully and intransigently forget is their complicated and involved history in the United States. For these reasons, America itself remains a provisional country in Baldwin's imagination. As will be discussed, however, though unclaimed and unacknowledged, that troublesome past returns to interrupt and disrupt the narrative of exile-as-liberation towards which Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room*, tentatively moves, rendering the displacement of nationality an eternally incomplete act. It is a framing of national identity that is, I would argue, notably absent in Colm Tóibín's versioning of James Baldwin.

Tóibín engages with Baldwin as a singular entity and never maps his appropriations of Baldwin – or his similar engagement with Henry James – onto some overarching image of America. Indeed, he seems inherently suspicious of American influence on Ireland. A century after Wilde had seen the "Celtic intellect" discovering its strength in the United States, he worries that Irish identity has become obscured by American globalization. He wonders about a country in which the literature that most speaks to aspiring writers is the modern

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[1] Quoted in C. Hitchens 2000: 97.

American novel and even laments the fact that "Irish people adore American country music". Ireland, he has claimed, has become "in certain ways (….) an *aspect* of America and (the Irish people) are happy for that to continue" (C. Tóibín and C. Abani 2006). If America is presented here as contaminant, rather than inspiration, what can be made of Tóibín's direct engagement with an African American from an entirely different, even alien, context?

The comparison between these two writers is suggested, in the first place, by Tóibín's repeated and multilateral engagement with the figure of Baldwin as antecedent. Tóibín has been interviewed several times on Baldwin; he has also written several essays on him, one review for the *London Review of Books* and an introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of one of Baldwin's best-known novels *Another Country*. At every stage of his engagement with Baldwin, Tóibín presents him as a figure of the transnational – a transcultural personality *par excellence*. Though his introduction to *Another Country* acknowledges that Baldwin was "an American before he was anything else" (C. Tóibín 2001: x), when it comes to the pertinent issue of influence, America disappears. Indeed, Tóibín makes only one effort to situate the writer in anything like a national canon when he notes that in writing of the black experience, Baldwin had "looked to Henry James rather than Richard Wright" (C. Tóibín 2001: vii) – a statement that serves only to emphasize Baldwin's internationalism and freedom from anything other than aesthetic concerns. Instead, Tóibín presents Baldwin as a writer conditioned primarily by "things which had nothing to do with his background or his own experiences": "the sort of darkness and sense of gloom you get in French fiction and philosophy of the period" and "the pessimism and claustrophobia of Ingmar Bergman's films", for example (C. Tóibín 2001: viii-ix).

Tóibín places the accent on Baldwin's transculturalism – deliberately ignoring outmoded national, racial or sexual identity discourses. As such, Tóibín's introduction is a representative example of current readings of Baldwin. However, such readings have not always been well received. In a recent roundtable discussion, simply entitled "A James Baldwin Tribute", novelist, activist, professor of African American Studies and former friend of Baldwin, Michael Thelwell, cited an "attempt to diminish" his "extraordinary contributions" and "to completely misunderstand (Baldwin's) provenance, and the sources which influenced him – giving them an Anglo-European context, which is totally false" (W. Muyumba 2008). Thelwell refers here specifically to the academic response to Baldwin's work, in which there is now a far smaller focus on racial politics than at any previous stage of criticism. The present

reception of the writer emphasizes his transcendence of identity politics[2]. Over twenty years after his death, Baldwin's relevance is increasingly felt as an international and transnational event.

9.1 (De)Categorizing James Baldwin

In all of his readings of James Baldwin, Colm Tóibín has been particularly suspicious of the ways in which the older writer had been appropriated and misappropriated by other readers. As he put it:

> (James Baldwin) has such a complex legacy. All sorts of people want to claim him as theirs; some want the black element, some want the fiction, some want the essays, others want only the gay side of him. That makes him difficult to assimilate in total. It's much easier to understand, say, someone like Saul Bellow than James Baldwin (Tóibín and Abani 2006).

The idea of "assimilating" any writer "in total" may provide a faulty predicate for Tóibín's analysis here. We probably should not assume that an author as rich as Bellow could be "understood" on the level that he suggests. However, unlike Baldwin, Bellow was never subject to the reductive efforts of "all sorts of people" to "claim him as theirs". In many ways, Baldwin's literary elusiveness only manifests itself in the failures of the efforts that Tóibín describes. To give one example, in a major editorial, published the year after Baldwin's death, *The New York Times* tried to hail the term "African American" as a testament to "the nation's success":

> Blacks may now feel comfortable enough in their standing as citizens to adopt the family surname: American. And their first name, African, conveys a pride in cultural heritage that all Americans cherish. The late James Baldwin once lamented, "nobody knows my name." Now everybody does[3].

The editorial sounded a triumphal, even false, note – one that "the late James Baldwin" himself had already guarded against. In 1972, he had defined the term "Afro-American" as nothing "but a wedding (….) of two confusions, an arbitrary linking of two undefined and currently undefineable proper nouns" (J. Baldwin 1972: 193). In fact, that term was but one of the labels from which Baldwin had

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[2] Two critical texts – the Dwight A. McBride edited *James Baldwin Now* (1999) and D. Quentin Miller's volume *Re-Viewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen* (2000) – should probably be considered the most indicative of current reception. Both texts reject the privileging of race or sexuality over other forms of difference in Baldwin's work.
[3] Editorial. *The New York Times* (22 December, 1998).

tried to flee during his lifetime. This rejection is characteristic of a writer who, though black and bisexual, refused to be categorized as a "gay writer" or even as a "black writer", stating that: "I was not born to be defined by someone else, but by myself, and myself alone"[4].

Tóibín categorizes Baldwin as, paradoxically, a figure that refuses categorization – a figure that cannot be claimed through any reading. His most revealing statement on what he sees as the true value of Baldwin's legacy comes in a 2006 conversation with Nigerian writer Chris Abani:

> (James Baldwin) remains a haunting figure simply because of the way he tried to solve a number of very difficult problems, and he's one of the people that I most admire of the century (….) (*Giovanni's Room* contained) only white characters and mostly gay characters. His agent told him to burn the book, his publishers wouldn't publish it — it was first published in Britain — and you know, suddenly deciding to support William Styron when he wrote *Nat Turner*. And insisting, in the essays, in the polemics, and in *Another Country*, on actually holding the fort for Art. That "we're artists, and we will write our essays and polemics as we please, but the novels are sacred space, which will not be invaded by anything other than stylistic concerns and the deep-seated private concerns of the author" (Tóibín and Abani 2006).

Is Tóibín here guilty of the crime with which he himself had charged other readers of Baldwin: of the desire "to claim him" as his? Baldwin becomes in this passage a useable and tractable influence for Tóibín, who has repeatedly declared his lack of interest in nationality and sexual identity as reductive categories: "I don't really know what a 'gay' novel is," he recently stated, "just as I couldn't really tell you what an 'Irish' novel is". He has also claimed, interestingly, that "the 'gay' novel is a sort of *American* phenomenon" (Tóibín and Abani 2006, emphasis mine). There seems an unavoidable linkage between Tóibín's stated ignorance of what constitutes the gay novel or the Irish novel and several similar statements made by James Baldwin.

To give just one example, in one of his final essays, "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood", Baldwin writes:

> (A)ll of the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered, thank heaven, very early on in my life. Not without anguish certainly, but once you have discerned the meaning of a label, it may seem to define you for others, but it does not have the power to define you to yourself (J. Baldwin 1985: 817).

There is a crucial difference here, however. Through his refutation of generic "American" binaries, Baldwin ironically positions himself within a well-worn national type. His insistence on being defined "not by someone else, but by

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[4] Quoted in S. Troupe 1989: 193.

(him)self, and (him)self alone"[5] marks him as an inheritor of Emersonian individualism. "A country", he once proclaimed, "is only as strong as the people who make it up and the country turns into what the people want it to become"[6]. In this final description of America as a nation of absolute possibility, we get an impression of the crucial point of divergence between my two protagonists. Baldwin's yet-to-be-created "nation of individuals" calls to mind Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*, which envisions a nation that will "emerge (as) a self-creating Ireland produced by nothing but its own desire" – a country in which "everything (….) might yet be remade" (D. Kiberd 1996: 579).

It is notable, therefore, that Kiberd's thesis is brutally refuted in Tóibín's review of *Inventing Ireland*, which presents the book as wallowing in "some very old-fashioned views on Irish nationalism and Irish history", even claiming that Kiberd is guilty of "adher(ing) to the story we all read in the schoolbooks which he is the last to believe" (C. Tóibín 2000: 1137-9). Though one may take issue with his critique of Kiberd, the reasons for these criticisms reveal a great deal about Tóibín's relationship to the idea of Ireland – and also about his admiration for Baldwin. What he imagines is, as he puts it himself, a hypothetical "book called 'Not Inventing Ireland' (….) in which writers ignored the idea of Ireland" (C. Tóibín 2000: 1139). The review indicates an emotional attitude towards Irish nationalism that may even exceed Baldwin's more fervent denunciations of narrowly defined identity politics. What I mean to suggest, then, is that Tóibín's deep-seated antipathy towards Irish nationalism is transferred onto what he perceives as Baldwin's deep-seated antipathy towards American or African American nationalism. Could it be that, as he reads James Baldwin, he finds the author of "Not Inventing (Black/Queer) America"? If so, does he not produce a reading that may prove to be just as difficult to support as any other appropriation of Baldwin? Moreover, in writing so consistently and energetically of the "uncontained" Baldwin, Tóibín is involved in what, to an older generation, looks like an ungendering, unsexing and unracing of one of the twentieth century's most important black or gay writers. His versioning of Baldwin's fiction as "sacred territory", uncontaminated by racial or sexual politics, sits rather uneasily with the high polemics exercized by the African American – especially in the most critically neglected period of Baldwin's writing (c1964-1978).

Ironically, for a writer who tried to evade epithets throughout his career, Baldwin seems to have been posthumously captured as a writer of the "post-

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Quoted in D. A. Miller 1988: 3.

national", "post-gendered" or (most forcefully) of the "post-racial". Peter Kerry Powers has recently attempted to explain the new consensus:

> Baldwin's finely tuned individualism, his refusal of racial and sexual identities, his world travels, his intellectual homelessness, all these position Baldwin as a fellow traveller with contemporary thinkers such as Anthony Appiah or Paul Gilroy as prophets of post-racial consciousness and of a resurgent internationalist cosmopolitanism [7].

Powers notably emphasizes mobility, cosmopolitanism and exile as indices of post-racial prophecy. Interestingly, he figures Baldwin's exilic travels as both geographical and intellectual. Like Powers, Colm Tóibín tends to present Baldwin as a "natural exile" – a phrase which he actually coins to define another contemporary Irish writer, Dermot Hogan (C. Tóibín 1993: 13). The concept suggests that exile is an aesthetic disposition, rather than a biographical fact.

9.2 Voluntary Exile: Tóibín's *The Story of the Night*

Of course, as Edward Said reminds us, exile can be both "actual" and "metaphoric," "voluntary" or "involuntary" (E. Said 2000: 172-5). According to Said: "(t)o see a poet in exile — as opposed to reading the poetry of exile — is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured" (E. Said 2000: 174). It is a crucial distinction, and one that guards against what he terms the singular danger of "making a fetish of exile", a practice that distances (the exile) from all connections and commitments. "To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial", Said continues, "is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness" (E. Said 2000: 182). This shallow and ahistorical state becomes, at the extreme end of Said's model, the *sine qua non* of voluntary exile.

If the fetishization of exile is a danger, it is one with which Richard Garay, the central character of Tóibín's *The Story of the Night*, continually flirts. Garay is not a figure of exile, but rather a figure of displaced alienation. The blond-haired homosexual son of a British émigré family in Buenos Aires, he constantly feels his apartness from the rigid strategies of identity building in Argentina. For a long part of the novel, Garay is a consummate player of the game of masculinity. He is initially rejected, for example, by the object of his affection, Pablo, for being "good at playing the straightest boy in the class" (C. Tóibín 1996: 188). Garay does, however, learn to truthfully express his sexual identity –

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[7] Quoted in C. Hardy 2007.

and it is telling that this expression can happen only in the isolation of Garay's apartment life with Pablo. Outside of that private space, he continues to sublimate his personal identity to a larger nationalistic power game. The spatial solution that he finds to his sexual dilemma is foreshadowed in his childhood attitude towards nationality:

> My mother had come to Argentina with her father in the early 1920s just after her own mother had died. When I was a small boy I always wanted her to tell me the story of the voyage one more time. Days and days at sea, without a single sight of land, the sea flat and monotonous, going on for ever. The story of a man who died and whose body was thrown overboard (….) And then the port of Buenos Aires, and the long wait to disembark, and this new language, how they did not understand a single word anybody said. I knew this story as though its details were more real and absolute than anything that happened in our apartment, or in school, or in our lives during all those years of childhood (C. Tóibín 1996: 13-4).

As a young man, then, Garay situates himself within a moment of exile that is not absolutely his own – within the provisional transnational chronotope that transcends logos ("they did not understand a single word anybody said") and temporality ("the sea flat and monotonous, going on for ever").

In *The Master*, his 2004 novelization of the life of Henry James, Tóibín highlights a similar moment of liminal spatial and national transcendence. The novel places Tóibín's James in a dark street outside the home of Paul Joukowsky, contemplating the final fulfilment of a long repressed desire. Ultimately, James knows that he "(cannot) move, either to return to his own quarters or – he held his breath even at the thought – to gain access to Paul's rooms" (C. Tóibín 2005: 10). His characteristic inaction lasts for several hours. Later he contemplates that long moment of hesitation:

> He wondered now if these few hours were not the truest he had ever lived. The most accurate comparison he could find was with a smooth hopeful, hushed sea journey, an interlude suspended between two countries, standing there as though floating, knowing that one step would be a step into the impossible unknown (C. Tóibín 2004: 10).

Like Richard Garay, James connects sexual and geographical exile. Both position their sexuality in the "interlude suspended between two countries". Both long for a borderless condition, a transcendence of categorization. In Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, we are reminded that the exile longs not for home, but for "that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond" (J. Kristeva 1991: 5). Like Henry James pondering a step into an "imponderable unknown", Richard Garay hesitates to take a step towards any definitive sexual identity. For both, exile becomes as much an act of evasion as a key to self-expression.

Later in his narrative, Garay admits that "one side of (him), the English side maybe, was a way of hiding from the other side, which was Argentinean, so that (he) never had to be a single fully formed person" (C. Tóibín 1996: 182). He finally escapes from what Said describes as the danger of the "querulous lovelessness" of voluntary exile, by finding genuine, transcendent love in his relationship with Pablo (E. Said 2000: 182). However, in a novel that maps Garay's contested sexual identity onto the political vacuum of post-Falklands War Argentina, that relationship can only exist in private spaces that are dislocated and divorced from national politics. Like his childhood efforts to solve the dilemma of uncertain nationality through self-willed exile, Garay's very real love for Pablo can only thematically fit as an act of escape, a way of avoiding the question of his identity.

9.3 "Deliberate Untimeliness": Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

Giovanni's Room sees Baldwin deliberately exiling himself from the home ground of "race literature" (as has been mentioned, the text does not include a single African American character). However, the novel ends in the tragedy of failed exile. In rejecting a potentially redemptive homosexual relationship with the eponymous Giovanni, the white protagonist, David, confines himself to the limits of American heteronormativity. Though exiled from America, David allows his sexual identity to be eclipsed by his nationality – a danger to which Baldwin the artist was all too alive. Baldwin cited James Joyce's directives for artistic freedom, "silence, exile and cunning", as the necessary "system" that he used to sustain his own life (F. Standley and L. Pratt 1989: 106). In 1948, he left America for Paris – a move that made possible the bold statement of delivering *Giovanni's Room* into a marketplace that demanded from him another novel of race. He later remembered his time in Paris as the period in which he learned "about (his) own country, (his) own past, and about (his) own language" (F. Standley and L. Pratt 1989: 106).

This discussion of exile as something that teaches him about "his own language" is crucial. The twentieth-century writer, according to a famous observation by George Steiner, is a "poet unhoused and (a) wanderer across language. Eccentric, aloof, nostalgic, deliberately untimely"[8]. Baldwin had first revealed his own feeling of "unhousedness", "eccentricity" and "untimeliness" in an early essay in which he defined himself as a "bastard of the West," an

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[8] Quoted in E. Said 2000: 174.

"interloper," a "suspect latecomer" (J. Baldwin 1985: 83). As has often been noted, Baldwin's writing is polyglossic – "wandering across" languages, idioms and linguistic codes. It is infused not only with Black English, but also with the cadences of the Old Testament and with the labyrinthine eloquence of Henry James's later fiction. James, a writer of "amphibious elegance," "an artist obsessed by dualities, paradox", is, according to Charles Newman, Baldwin's most obvious stylistic antecedent: "The Atlantic Ocean separated James's mind into opposing hemispheres, and the gulf of colour so cleaves Baldwin" (C. Newman 1966: 44). Though he initially likened Henry James's idiom to a "foreign language" (W. Weatherby 1989: 96), Baldwin eventually credited the master with the completion in exile of his first novel *Go Tell It On the Mountain* (J. Elgraby 1984: 54). That reading James should be such a critical catalyst for the necessarily exilic process of learning "about (his) own country, (his) own past, and about (his) own language" is important (F. Standley and L. Pratt 1989: 106). Baldwin discovers in Henry James – as Tóibín later discovers in both Henry James and James Baldwin – a transcultural and transnational touchstone: an American antecedent who can teach the lessons of exile.

David, the American protagonist of *Giovanni's Room*, comes to Paris needing to learn similar lessons, but is hampered by his failure to honestly address his cultural past. The novel is framed by the familiar classical plot of the attempt to escape from fate. David's exile stems primarily from his first homosexual encounter as a teenager with a boy named Joey, whom he quickly rejects — and his life in Paris, which results from that rejection, is therefore doomed to failure. In the scene where David meets Giovanni, the Italian mocks his simplicity. David believes that "(you) feel in Paris all the life gone by", whereas in America "you feel (….) all the life to come". Giovanni retorts:

> The Americans are funny. You have a funny sense of time – or perhaps you have no sense of time at all, I can't tell. Time always sounds like a parade *chez vous* – a *triumphant* parade, like armies with banners entering a town. As though with enough time (….) everything will be settled, solved, put in its place (J. Baldwin 2001: 37).

While for the Americans everything can be "settled, solved" in this world, Giovanni longs to "escape (….) this dirty world, this dirty body," and tells David that he "never wish(es) to make love again with anything more than the body" (J. Baldwin 2001: 28) – a statement that indicates not contempt for the flesh, but rather contempt for the fictions that the flesh represents. He longs to express a physical love that will elude the projections that are placed onto the body. Giovanni's relationship with David – like his cramped, disordered and never-quite-finished room – indicates a desire to create an alternative reality beyond categorisation.

9.4 Unhomely Spaces

In *Giovanni's Room*, David disdains the gay circle in Paris for being "of *le milieu*":

> While this milieu was certainly anxious enough to claim me, I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company. I did this by being in their company a great deal and manifesting toward all of them a tolerance which placed me, I believed, above suspicion (J. Baldwin 2001: 32-33).

This is a strange process of denial and projection, couched in benignity that Baldwin frequently identified with American Liberalism. It is also highly suggestive of the games that Tóibín's Richard Garay plays in simultaneously hiding and revealing his homosexual identity. It is notable that Garay begins his narrative in the squalid apartment left to him by his mother: a setting evocative of the unfinished room of Giovanni – an "overcrowded", "overfurnished" version of home that is characteristically provisional and eternally incomplete. Here again, Tóibín is playing with the theme of symbolic exile. We first encounter Garay's apartment as the site of his English mother's descent into jingoistic hysteria and, finally, quiet death. She has cluttered the home with foreign ill-fitting furniture, and even "plastered the apartment with tourist posters of Buckingham Palace and the changing of the guard and magazine photographs of the royal family" and other "emblems of empire" (C. Tóibín 1996: 3) that comfort her, but alienate her son. "The exile", according to Julia Kristeva, "is a stranger to his mother" (J. Kristeva 1991: 5). Garay has lost his mother, and, like Camus' "Stranger", typically "reveals himself at the time of his mother's death" (J. Kristeva 1991: 5). It is only on leaving his mother's room that Garay can process the significance of her death: "As soon as I opened the door and went into the hall," he recalls, "I began to cry (….) I was alone now (….) I had lost whatever anchor I had in the world: nothing I did mattered to anyone" (C. Tóibín 1996: 61). For the rest of the novel, Garay does not seek to restore this "anchor", but rather transfers identity into an "imponderable unknown" (C. Tóibín 2005: 10). Wilfully turning away from the great dilemmas of his identity, he does not, like Giovanni, attempt to make disordered space into truthful self-representation, but simply moves to a larger building, with less furniture, further from the centre of the city.

Giovanni's room is similarly cramped, dishevelled, and claustrophobic. It marks his doomed effort to construct a space that somehow articulates his identity – doomed because that identity remains eternally unspeakable. The room, which is "always in process" and "never quite finished" (R. Reid-Pharr 1997: 372), is a manifestation of the life that Giovanni and David attempt to

build there: its amorphousness reflects their life together, which holds, in the early stages, "a joy and amazement which (is) newborn every day" (J. Baldwin 2001: 69). It is also a space that terrifies David as much as the unkempt decaying apartment in Buenos Aires panics Richard Garay. David concludes that:

> it was not the room's disorder which was frightening; it was the fact that when one began searching for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places. For this was not a matter of habit or circumstance or temperament; it was a matter of punishment or grief (J. Baldwin 2001: 84).

Giovanni is condemned for his failure to be, in William Faulkner's phrase, "articulated in this world" (W. Faulkner 1995: 171): that is to say, for being a character incapable of playing a game of categorization that would "place him above suspicion" (J. Baldwin 2001: 33). His ultimate punishment is the execution that follows from his manipulation, abuse and misidentification at the hands of his brutal employer Guillaume. However, it is more essentially the result of his desertion by David, who – still playing at being a heterosexual American – returns to a self-denying engagement to a white American woman, Hella. His return to Hella, a sort of surrogate for a homeland that has already rejected him, is an act of wilful amnesia. David is clearly motivated by a desire to refute and escape the past:

> Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering (....) or forgetting (....) Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both. People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence; and the world is mostly divided between madmen who remember and madmen who forget. Heroes are rare (J. Baldwin 2001: 36).

David clearly sees himself as a "madman who forgets". The French setting of *Giovanni's Room* thus becomes a metaphor for the distance that he, an expatriate American, has attempted to put between himself and his past. His is an act of voluntary exile that wishes to elude his private history.

Remembering Giovanni's longing to "escape (....) this dirty world, this dirty body," we begin to see where this act of elusion leads. In Giovanni's formation, "world (....) body" are similarly corrupted and polluted by mutual dependency. His solution is to take "world" from "body": to "never (....) make love with anything more than the body" (J. Baldwin 2001: 28). Giovanni's final tragedy is that he cannot take the "dirty world" away from his relationship with David. Indeed, David makes the point clear when he imagines the door that will lead to the place of Giovanni's execution as the "gateway he (Giovanni) has

sought so long out of this dirty world, this dirty body" (J. Baldwin 2001: 158). Of course, Giovanni had longed for love, not death; he had imagined the single-room home that the two lovers had shared as the "gateway" of which David now speaks. Moreover, it is David who lets the "dirty world" into that home. He leaves Giovanni's room to drift towards the simulacrum of heteronormative marriage. What Baldwin is writing here is what Homi K. Bhabha has described as an "unhomely" text. This is, to quote Bhabha, a narrative in which the world impacts on the home to reveal a "double-edge, which (….) represents (….) a difference 'within'" (H. Bhabha 1992: 148). In such texts, according to Bhabha:

> home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of the recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the world (H. Bhabha 1992: 141).

As David tries to locate the "key to (….) disorder" in Giovanni's room, he imagines "mortal and unavoidable danger" and feels a vague "malevolence", which he connects to the room's yellow light, hanging "like a diseased and undefinable sex". David cannot tolerate undefinability and he instantly decides, as he sardonically puts it, to "play the housewife" in an attempt to apply definition (J. Baldwin 2001: 84). Unhomeliness, as Bhabha points out, is typically associated with the world of political reality invading the home and disrupting domestic order. In *Giovanni's Room*, however, homeliness is located not in any established domestic order but in the effort to render the home "newborn every day" (J. Baldwin 2001: 69). David's need to push his relationship with Giovanni into definable domestic gender roles is his great failing – and it is crucially an American failing. Elsewhere he admits that he "resented being called *not* an American because it seemed to make (him) nothing" (J. Baldwin 2001: 86), and his need to fit the home of Giovanni into what Baldwin describes as "the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white" (J. Baldwin 1985: 817) follows the same logic. David is thus revealed as what Julia Kristeva calls the "foreigner (….) from within" (J. Kristeva 1991: 14). He creates "the shock of the recognition of the world-in-the-home" (H. Bhabha 1992: 141), not by disrupting domestic order, but by imposing it.

It is an imposition for which Giovanni will ultimately pay with his life – and in this "punishment" (J. Baldwin 2001: 84) it may be tempting to see a further parallel between Baldwin's and Tóibín's texts. Writing about Tóibín's *The Story of the Night*, Robert L. Caserio has noted that the "protagonist's homosexuality help(s) him to grow beyond his conservative Anglo-Argentine origins" (R. Caserio 2006: 218). As Caserio states, in Argentina in the 1980s: "(n)ationalism, global internationalism, and intensifying privatization paradoxically go

together", and in Tóibín's novel "(b)odily life repeats the paradox" (R. Caserio 2006: 218). The novel's two lovers contract AIDS – a disease that will "torture and punish" them (C. Tóibín 1996: 251), in a way that Caserio presents as a reflection of the brutal political regime that forms the backdrop to their tale. Though Garay does his best to ignore the political persecution going on around him, according to this reading, he is metaphorically "punished", as is his country, for complicity in that persecution. However, an assessment of a superficially similar "punishment" at the end of *Giovanni's Room* calls into question Caserio's reading. Unlike *Giovanni's Room*, Tóibín's text ultimately rejects as false the confluence of national and personal stories. Reading Tóibín's *The Story of the Night* as a reworking of Baldwin's novel (*Richard Garay's Apartment*?), the difference between the two writers becomes apparent. In *The Story of the Night*, Richard and Pablo's journey ends in the quiet tragedy of their mutual and terminal illness, but this is not tragedy in the Aristotelian sense. Richard is able to return to his cluttered unwieldy apartment at the end of his journey and is able to reform its rooms with his lover's help. The two can thus create a separate space that ultimately places their story outside of the corrupt polity of an unreformed Argentina. Death here is not vengeful punishment, but private escape – an escape that simply does not follow the contours of James Baldwin's thought. Though Baldwin's narrator may view execution as Giovanni's only "gateway" out of the "dirty world", this view has been significantly obscured by his acceptance of American categorization. Thus, in what is ostensibly Baldwin's least "polemical" novel – which Tóibín suggests may be his most "sacred", most "private" novel (C. Tóibín and C. Abani 2006) – we find a deep critique of what Baldwin perceives to be America's greatest failing.

Both *Giovanni's Room* and *The Story of the Night* narrate stories of political, linguistic, social and temporal exile. However, in the novelists' respective negotiations of sexual exile, we find two significantly different transcultural personalities. Richard Garay is simply a "voluntary exile"; Baldwin's figuring of David, however, reveals the "indomitable force" of American identitarianism.

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Transcultural Biographies: A Cultural Perspective

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The nation state is an invention of the nineteenth century. Before this, mobility could include the crossing of state borders without being "transnational" in the contemporary sense. As culture and the state were not claimed as congruent, cross border mobility was not necessarily transcultural either. When people moved from one place to another, and entered another state, they may have had to apply for permission to enter and reside there, or paid fees or customs. They may even have encountered cultural difficulties. On the other hand, they may not have encountered any of these obstacles as the country, or perhaps more accurately the empire in which they lived, was a multicultural society. Many of Europe's great cities, like Vienna, Trieste, Prague, Krakow, Chernovtsy, Vilnius, Riga, and St Petersburg, to mention just a few, were multicultural (or indeed multinational) communities.

Advocates of the nation state tend today to identify citizens of the earlier (prenational) period, in terms of nationality – which is, from an historical point of view, not correct at all. It is very popular, not only among nationalists, to refer to a famous scientist or artist as German, Polish, Italian etc. claiming that s/he used to live and work in a territory which is today part of Germany, Poland, Italy and so on. Such claims are not without controversies and contradictions, as contemporary states like to perform their history continuously, by celebrating anniversaries, erecting memorials or issuing commemorative stamps and coins. A couple of years ago, public opinion in Austria was more than excited when a German poll announced that W. A. Mozart was one of the most important "Germans"!

From an historical perspective, transnational mobility is really not a relevant category. Certainly travelling in earlier centuries included frequently crossing borders, to move onto the territory of a Duke, or Prince or a Free Town, or to become a subject of a particular political regime. Mostly, however, the travellers themselves were not even aware that they were crossing borders unless they encountered problems or were specifically entering or leaving a territory for political reasons. Even though the German poet Heinrich Heine has written of his pain at being forced to live in exile in Paris due to the banning of his books by

the German government, who objected to his progressive, libertarian political ideas, it would appear that for many Europeans, living in a multicultural society made it easy for them to cross borders. After all, everyday life consisted of a huge variety of competing customs and rituals, values and attitudes, religious and political beliefs, which depended on social class and background, regions, professions, ethnic communities, etc. Hence people who moved to another place were able to cope with all those cultural differences they experienced. It is interesting that the protagonists that will be discussed in the first section of this chapter do not mention any difficulties relating to crossing borders in their biographies. It must surely be concluded that an interest in cross-cultural issues is a category of relevance only in recent times.

10.1 Examining Transcultural Mobility

This chapter presents some of the research conducted by lecturing staff and students on the Masters programme in Applied Culture and Media Sciences in the University of Applied Sciences, Merseberg, Germany. Our research was focused around a number of key questions. Is there historical evidence of mobile persons who were afraid of going abroad? Did they have any expectation that they would be challenged by customs or conventions with which they were not familiar? We also had to take into consideration strategies of avoidance: People who moved physically to another place, but remained in the same society, the same class and subculture. We present here some of our findings, based on biographical studies of six figures who crossed borders throughout their lives and engaged with their host societies on a variety of levels. The first half of the chapter focuses on movement and mobility across state borders in the 17-19th centuries, whereas the second half details three twentieth century figures who moved to other places, and hence experienced situations and life conditions, in which people used "rules and tools" other than those they had learned.

Transculturalism, to extend the ideas of Williams and Welsch, not only reflects the fact that "cultures" involve exchange among others or are – as far as national cultures are concerned - heterogenous, but to make clear that each rule and each tool, every particular cultural item might have a particular range of use and importance. A simple rule like "You shake hands when meeting a person you (get to) know" is, for instance, valid in particular situations and social shifts in some parts of Europe, while a greeting formula like "Grüß Gott" is only articulated in Austria and South Germany. Hence if I take into consideration these two elements of "my culture", it is obvious that I share one element with many people, the other with fewer people.

Transcultural personalities, the crucial focus of this research, concern themselves with the practices of daily life and the challenges of acting "abroad" under conditions which might differ to the place from which they come. Persons who give up this formula of greeting or start to hug or bow instead might do so politely as visitors or guests in a foreign country. As soon as the protagonist begins to change a rule (which includes "forgetting" or neglecting a rule that was – until this day – normal for her/him) a cultural process is starting, about which the person involved is mostly unconscious. It might take some time until the new rule becomes routine and even irreversible. With regard to the cultural system (the set of internalised rules and self-comprehensive tools) of a particular person as well as of a group of persons or community, an element from outside has been integrated into the reservoir of normality, inserted into the "culture" which existed to date. The element itself moved from one community to another, crossed in this moment existing borders between two "cultures" and is trans-cultural in just this sense.

Hence we look at persons who record details about their daily lives or about whom reports are available. The leading question is which rules, tools, and language are considered most important and are thus most commonly – and in some cases intentionally – changed. Some people might become aware of this process and at a certain point realise that they have changed substantially – but not totally. Such people feel that they have succeeded in living between two cultures. Others develop strong illusions about how much or how little they have (already) integrated new tools and rules into their personalities. We have to make a distinction between the claims and feelings of the protagonists as well as of the social environment on the one hand and the actual thinking and behaviour on the other hand. There are people who want to be "Italian" (as they have acquired all of the elements of the Italian way of life, they think), but remain very German as far as particular values are concerned.

The autobiographical material we consider in this chapter provides evidence of the self-image of people, including both those who want to be transcultural and those who suffer from it. Whether they are transcultural (to that extent), is an empirical question which is not to be answered easily. In general there are not so many biographies available which report how the person (re)acted in particular situations, i.e. which rules and tools he/she applied. However, there are some hints and even data which can give provide us with some evidence. Firstly there is the symbolic act. If, to give just one example, emigrants give their children names which fit into the country in which they now live, this might be an indication of better acceptance (in a country of strong pressure of assimilation) or moreover a bid for a new normality. On the other hand, if they continue to celebrate the "National holiday" of their homeland, they continue to confess to

their culture of origin (and their rules and tools remain unchanged). Secondly there are situations in which persons act or "react " and apply rules and tools, not only the "old" ones, but increasingly the new ones. Are they punctual? Do they spend lots of money on gifts? Does the extended family remain as important as before?

Our focus is on analyzing a process in which the transcultural personalities are in interaction with societal conditions which hamper or promote transculturality. This has much to do with the question of whether immigrants are welcome and have all the opportunities to preserve most of their rules and tools. In the case of exile, the protagonists usually do not like to give up any of their traditions, and in the case of wealthy and prominent artists they need not. As we will see, transcultural processes do happen also in these cases.

10.2 George Frideric Händel (1685-1759) – Wolfgang Berg

The famous composer and master of baroque music died two hundred and fifty years ago in London, where he is buried in Westminster Abbey. Apart from some brief family visits, he lived in his hometown Halle/Saale (today Saxony-Anhalt /Germany) for only 18 years. As at this time some Huguenots had settled in the town, he grew up among these French Protestants and learned French. Apart from a number of years spent in Hamburg, Händel lived all of his life outside (what is today) Germany. He spent about four years in Italy, initially to do an apprenticeship, but he immediately became a famous musician (Cembalo) and composer of operas and oratorios, called "il Sassone" (The Saxon). In those times, the Italian masters dominated music in Europe, not only as far as techniques and theories were concerned, but also with regard to libretti and arrangements. Händel's first opera, *Almira*, was first performed in Hamburg in 1732. Although composed before his "Italian period", *Almira* adapted its subject and also parts of its composition from Italy (Pancieris/Boniventis). During his sojourn in Italy, mainly in Rome, Händel looked for communication and exchange, also competition with contemporary composers and musicians like Domenico Scarlatti. He, a Lutheran Protestant from a German region which can be deemed the heartland of the reformation, did not hesitate at all to work for cardinals in Rome who employed him for small pieces of "divertimento" and even cantatas (operas without a backstage and costumes). Rich cardinals like Benedetto Pamphilj and the Marchese Ruspoli supported him. Händel's opera *Agrippina*, firstly performed 1709 in Venice, solidified his popularity all over Europe, far beyond the Italian courts.

After a short sojourn in Hannover, Händel moved to England in 1712, where conditions for his work appeared to be better. He continued to live there, mostly in London (except for some trips to Germany, Ireland and Italy), until his death forty-seven years later. In the year 1727, he became an English citizen. He had formally applied for citizenship, and due to his popularity, his talent and his wealth, the English Parliament conferred it upon him immediately (W. Pieck 2001: 168). His famous oratories, which made him so popular in England, include *Water Music* (an occasional composition for a festival at the king's court, etc.) and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, and his operas (in Italian style, with Italian singers) which are still performed worldwide – this huge and extraordinary oeuvre he created in England. An estimated 90 percent of his first performances took place in England.

To some extent, his success was based on his ability to change the style of his compositions according to popular tastes. In the 1720s, he re-established (for a while) Italian (serious) opera in England (for example in the Royal Academy of Music until 1728) by recruiting the best musicians, particularly the best singers like the Italian primadonne Margherita Durastanti or Faustina Bordoni. In the 1740s, as Italian music theatre lost popularity, Händel concentrated his work on the "oratorio style" in the English language, which contributed remarkably to his popularity as an "English" composer. Although his work for (mostly private) opera houses had not been too successful in terms of money, his income was decent; the court, since 1714 under George I from Hannover, with whom Händel was quite friendly, guaranteed him a stipend. For a certain period of time, Händel lived with the Earl of Carnavon and composed there so-called anthems (text in English) which began to be included before too long in the songbooks of the Anglican Church. Anthems and oratories, both in the English language, were very well received in English society. Although he enjoyed his comfortable life in London, Händel did not hesitate to accept an invitation by W. Cavendish, the Crown's representative in Ireland. In 1741-2, he spent almost nine months in Dublin, where the English Anglican noblemen crudely governed Catholic Irish countrymen and Protestant Flemish merchants. The first and extremely successful performance of his oratorio *Messiah* took place in Dublin in 1742.

Händel's importance for the cultural history of England is evidenced by the fact that only one year after his death in 1759, the English theologian John Mainwaring published the first Händel biography (London, 1760), which was to become the basis for all following generations of biographers (W. Pieck 2001 and M. Heinemann 2004). In London, there were also a number of other Germans who knew and even worked with Händel, for instance J.J. Heidegger (a manager) or J.Chr. Pepusch (also a composer, instrumentalist, director of orchestra) and a couple of other compatriots. Of course, the King from Hannover

gave him moral and also financial support. If we talk about a "colony" in London, however, then it is more an international one, including many Italians as well as people from German states. Although Händel spent most of his life in London, and even became a subject of the English king, the city of Halle and the public in Germany like to celebrate his memory as one of the greatest German musicians. The festival in Halle/Saale has a long tradition, and in 2009 a particular festival was held in memory of the 250th anniversary of his death.

Händel decided himself to go to England and definitely, prior to his application for citizenship, to stay there. The reasons are manifold. Besides the freedom and tolerance which existed in England at the time with regard to religion, there was also the famous English "common sense" which he admired very much (W. Pieck 2001). There was of course also the fascinating atmosphere of London, the biggest city in Europe at the time (about 700,000 inhabitants), and no doubt his success as a composer and musician, particularly his economical success, which determined this decision. We have almost no details about his daily life in London. He remained in contact with his relatives in Halle and other German states, exchanging letters and paying visits to those places from time to time. Almost nothing is known about his love life; he did not marry and had no children. Most biographers remain reluctant about how they should characterize Händel's personality and his social life – as there are no facts available, and most anecdotes seem to be inventions from later times. Heinemann, for instance, risks the following judgment: "Händel, though a man of travel experiences, familiar with various places and people in Germany, Italia and England, open minded and able to speak foreign languages, appeared to be a 'monoman' personality, i.e. living his life for music only" (M. Heinemann 2004: 73). With regard to foreign languages, a biographer like Pieck remains cautious. Händel "might have" prepared himself and acquired knowledge of English, French and Italian prior to his voyages and during his sojourns there (W. Pieck 2001: 92). Those doubts are not justified, however, as from the early years letters written by Händel in French and English are archived, and there is reason to wonder whether he was not also fluent in Italian. What is fact is that Händel wrote his will in English.

As far as the impact on his oeuvre is concerned, Italy was a long and intensive period of apprenticeship for him. Händel learnt so much about music and composition, yet did not lose his own style. Pieck claims that Händel's music, though he had benefited from the state of Italian music, remained "Un-Italian". He had totally understood the genius of Italian music, but applied it to his own very German tradition. Nor did Händel did mind changing his name while in Italy and in England to "Hendel" or "Handel" respectively, as the

German Umlaut was not acceptable to his hosts. The tomb in Westminster Abbey definitely honours an Englishman called "George Frederick Handel".

10.3 Angelika Kauffmann (1741-1807) – Wolfgang Berg

Angelika Kauffmann was a neo-classical painter. Her family originated in Schwarzenberg, close to Bregenz (today Austria). Kauffmann herself was born in Chur (today Switzerland), and spent her childhood in various places in this region, and also at Lake Como, Milan and other towns in Lombardy (today Italy), as her father moved according to his work as a church painter. From a young age, Kauffmann demonstrated considerable talent as a painter and she often assisted her father in his work. She was fluent in German and Italian, and also learned English and French. After extended travels to cities like Parma, Modena and Naples, she was permitted to enter the gallery of Florence and the academy of Bologna. She then lived for two years in Rome. Due to the recommendation of a noblewoman from England, she decided to go to London, where she spent 15 years (1766-1781). She succeeded in making contact with several important painters and got invited to join the Royal Academy. It is reported that she had romances with a number of English noblemen. She completed portraits of many important people, including members of the Royal family. Several paintings were of high relevance to the national history of England. Her landscape-paintings and presentations of Greek mythology were also attractive. After her marriage (based on a contract in English) to an Italian painter, Antonio Zucchi, she left England in 1781 for Venice. One year later, the couple moved to Rome and acquired a sizeable palace. From here, she worked hard as a painter, but also hosted famous and influential personalities from all over Europe, like the Austrian Emperor Joseph II or J.W. Goethe. She built up a remarkable collection of art, particularly Italian paintings, and invited prominent people to garden parties. Private letters, also household papers and her will, are written in Italian. Commercial correspondences are mostly conducted in French. However, she corresponded in German with her relatives in Schwarzenberg and never ceased to refer to the region of Bregenz as her "Vaterland" (Fatherland). She drew three self-portraits displaying herself in the regional costumes of a country woman. She died 12 years after her husband and is buried like him in a Roman church (T. Natter 2007).

Kauffmann produced paintings in a range of European styles. They remain widely popular and many of her drawings have been reproduced in great quantities as decorations on cups and plates. Traveling to Italy was a long tradition which started, as far as German artists are concerned, with Albrecht

Dürer and his sojourn in Rome at the very beginning of the 16th century. Dutch painters like Pieter van Laer also used to spend a certain period of time in Rome, where they founded a sizeable colony or network (H. Arnhold 2008: 97). In the 18th century it was not only painters or artists, but the European noblesse in general, who used to pay a visit to the eternal city. Italy attracted painters for various reasons. Besides the special light and warm climate, the antique monuments and the landscape as a particular subject and the Italian "school" as the model and program for everybody who wanted to become acknowledged, attracted the young generation of artists and noble persons. As it was a must for all young artists, particularly painters, to go to Italy for their apprenticeship, Angelika Kauffmann did the same, but to an even greater extent than most of the others: she returned to Rome and resided there for the rest of her life (25 years). She immigrated and immersed herself in the local community, she – together with her Italian husband – shared the daily life of the local high society. This was also true for some other German painters like Meng, whose palace Kauffmann purchased, and J.P. Hackert (1739-1809) whose life-story is similar to Kauffmann's. He migrated from Berlin and other places in the north of Germany via Paris to Italy (1768) where he became famous and wealthy as a landscape-painter. He lived many years with the court of King Ferdinand IV in Naples and died in Florence where he is buried (Arnhold, 2008, 98).

10.4 G.F.W. Struve (1793-1864) – Wolfgang Berg

At a first glance, the prominence of G.F.W. Struve may not be obvious. There is, however, included in the world heritage of culture, as acknowledged in 2005 by UNESCO, an item called a "geodetic arc" and sometimes also "Struve-Bogen": a line from Norway to Ukraine consisting of 34 marked spots (out of an original 265). This geodetic arc is the work of Struve. There are various biographies about Struve as a scientist. As daily life is of concern in this chapter, biographical detail here is based on information given by his son Otto, though obviously he might not be critical enough.

Wilhelm Struve was born in 1793 in Altona, a town close to Hamburg (and nowadays part of it), but at the time this town was part of the Danish Kingdom. At the age of fifteen, with a Danish passport, he moved to Dorpat, at this time part of the Russian Empire (today Tartu/Estonia). He was enrolled at Dorpat University which had been founded a couple of years earlier under Russian governance. However, the majority of the faculty there was German and the lectures were given in the German language. In the Baltic countries, since the 13th century, noblemen and afterwards a type of bourgeoisie from Germany had

been dominant. Struve lived close to the family of his brother (who was a teacher) and other Germans, among them the counts von Berg. After having studied philology, the influence of the German Professor Parrott led him to physics, mathematics and increasingly to astronomy. As professor for astronomy and director of the observatory of Dorpat, from the 1820s he published important research about double stars and fixed stars (in Latin). He married a German woman of Huguenot decent. In the 1820s, he also started his geodetic surveys, in cooperation with other land-surveyors, particular in the Russian army, finally completing them for the 25.30[th] degree of latitude. In 1831, the Tsar promoted Struve to state functionary and made him a noble. He became charged with the project to build a new observatory next to St Petersburg. He lived there, in Pulkowa, from 1839 until the end of his life in 1864. His and his (second) wife's tomb (inscription in German) are still to be seen there, in the park of Pulkowa (O. Struve 1895).

Struve's career was not all that unique. Since the time of Peter I, the Tsars used to recruit experts from "Europe", be it scholars or craftsmen; Tsar Nicholas I, for instance, had employed a Minster for Foreign Affairs who was a German and did not even know the Russian language well. Immediately prior to World War I, one sixth of the Russian general staff was German. On the one hand, Struve was part of the German upper class which continued to dominate the Baltic countries at that time, economically, politically but also with regard to education and science. On the other hand, he built up a type of colony in Pulkowa to which scientists from Germany were recruited. Struve and his team used to work during the night, and, as the observatory was sited on its own in a forest, had almost no communication with the Russian villagers around them, only with visiting scholars from all over Europe. Communication with colleagues was no problem, as Struve was fluent in English, French and Latin. Struve also understood Russian. His son realised only later, when his father was in a state of retrograde aphasia, that he also knew Estonian and Latvian. For the most part, however, his communication was restricted to the academic community (German colleagues preferably); he did not really engage with the community around him, nor did his children who had private lessons.

As far as his performance in geodesy and the observatory in Pulkova are concerned, Struve is highly regarded in Russia even today (E. Litwinowoi 1993 and A. Narbut 2004). Although Struve lived in the Russian Empire for sixty years and served the tsarist system without any reluctance, however, he remained a German in all relevant aspects, including his daily life, e.g. having a coffee table with German cake like "Guglhupf" every Sunday afternoon. He used to celebrate his birthday according to the Western calendar. Struve had eighteen children, twelve of whom survived him. His son Otto and his grandson

Herrmann Otto followed him as directors of the observatory, and only a few nephews and nieces married outside the German community. Incidentally, his son Bernhard served the Tsar as governor of Astrakhan-Perm; while one of his grandsons, Peter Struve, became one of the most important Marxists in the Tsarist empire. Most of his family, however, left the area after the bolshevist revolution and the independence of Latvia and Estonia in 1920. His astronomic findings are of relevance to the scientific community worldwide. With regard to the discipline of geodesy, he contributed strongly to the modernization of the Tsarist regime, which he enabled to administer the recently conquered territories in the Baltic region and Bessarabia.

10.5 Transcultural Movement in the 17-19th Centuries: Conclusion

These three historical case studies show the mobility of elites in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. Interestingly enough, neither the protagonists nor the biographers paid much attention to cultural differences – indicating that it was quite usual at the time to ignore or overcome them. What the three examples show us is that there were two different options open to these elites who crossed borders. These options related both to the given situation and to the personal choices made by the protagonists: while Struve opted for living in a "colony", which might be called a parallel society today, Händel and Kauffmann immersed themselves in the surrounding community and truly became transcultural personalities.

10.6 Josephine Baker: Dancer, Singer, Actor – Franziska Scholze

On the 3rd of June 1906, laundress Carrie Mc Donald gave birth to her illegitimate daughter Freda Josephine McDonald. Little Josephine was predestined to lead a poor life in the east of St Louis, Missouri, which was one of the worst slums in the USA in those days. Carrie McDonald's ancestors were Native Americans and African slaves who had taken part in the mass migration of African-Americans from the rural south to the urban north of the USA. The former slaves often used the allegory "Flight from Egypt" for their migration. Josephine Baker's father, Eddie Carson, had Spanish roots. He was a drummer and a passionate dancer. Living for – and from – music and parties, he was not a reliable family man (P. Rose 1989: 26; L. Haney 2002: 1-9). He soon abandoned the one-year-old Josephine and her mother. From that point on, Baker's life became increasingly difficult. Her mother remarried and when Baker was sixteen

months old, had a baby boy. The new family discriminated against and excluded Baker because of her lighter skin and her different temperament. Fortunately Baker was often left with her grandmother and her aunt, who inspired and encouraged the child with Indian songs and fairytales. These traditional texts conveyed the idea that people do not have to remain at their miserable birthplaces but can move to a different life with more freedom if only they want to. Baker's starting point, however, was her hard childhood, overshadowed by poverty, exclusion, refusal, illtreatment, violence, force and child labour. These basic experiences might have caused a feeling of homelessness. Every now and then (when she was not forced to work) she had the opportunity to go to school. However, she preferred to spend her time on the streets and in the backyards, playing, singing and having little dance performances (P. Rose 1989: 27; L. Haney 2002 : 9)

Another shocking experience that marked Baker's life was a pogrom against African-Americans in the east of St Louis in July 1917: officially organized and tolerated, white racists attacked the slum, destroyed houses and killed more than hundred black people, intending to take over the area, which the African-Americans had purchased during the Civil War. In general these pogroms had the specific aim of smashing the African-American campaign for emancipation[1]. However, Josephine Baker was not broken by her experiences of a hard childhood and witnessing so much discrimination culminating in this pogrom. Instead she learned to use her experiences as a strong motivation for a lifelong fight against injustice, racism, war and for the welfare of children.

In the streets of eastern St Louis, where – influenced by various traditions (including African and Spanish dance elements) – a huge number of new dances developed and spread (such as *Mess Around, Itch, Tack Annie*), Baker learned to dance (P. Rose 1989: 76-7). As a result of another violent argument with her mother, Baker left home at the age of thirteen and worked as a waitress and later as a costumer for show troops. Due to these jobs, she sometimes got the chance to replace sick dancers, and step by step her talent emerged. She decided to escape from her mother's way of life, which was characterized by disappointment and frustration. She managed to get divorced from the worker with whom her mother had arranged a marriage in 1919 and started a tour through the USA with "The Jones Family Band" and "The Dixie Steppers". In 1921, she married the rail conductor Willie Baker but this relationship did not last very long. In his family and in her everyday life, as well as in show business,

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[1] See http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/3/5/4/7/p35474_index.html; also Phyllis, 1989, 32/33; Haney, 2002, 21ff.)

Baker continued to face racism and discrimination (P. Rose 1989: 33, 80; L. Haney 2002: 31)[2].

   Between 1922 and 1924, Baker gave numerous performances in clubs and theatres all over the USA, but especially on Broadway. There she played a role in *Shuffle Along* – the first musical that was composed and performed solely by black people. During this tour, Baker met the wealthy (white) Caroline Reagan, who engaged her for the "Revue Nègre" in Paris (P. Rose 1989: 78; L. Haney 2002: 49)[3]. Consequently, in October 1825, Baker left her husband and the USA for Paris and the career of an entertainer. Later, looking back at those days, she remembered: "One day I realized that I was living in a country, in which I was afraid of being black. This was only a country for the white people. Not for the blacks. That's why I went away. I suffocated in the USA (….) I felt freed in Paris" (P. Rose 1989: 370). Through her exotic dancing and the "Jazz hot" she achieved international fame and established the American Jazz form in Europe. People from all classes and nations, even intellectuals and artists like Pablo Picasso and Max Reinhardt, adored the young Josephine Baker. However, she also made quite a number of enemies who protested against her performances, calling them "immoral" and "unaesthetic exhibitionism" (P. Rose 1989: 119; L. Haney 2002: 63, 84)[4].

   In 1926, the Italian gigolo Pepito Abatino became Baker's lover and manager. They travelled all over the whole world together and he helped her to gain more and more fame. By now she had become quite a celebrity and opened the legendary nightclub "Chez Josephine" in Paris. Moreover, she appeared as an actor in the film *La Sirene des Tropiques* (1927). In short, Josephine Baker became one of the most popular and successful entertainers in Europe (P. Rose 1989: 30; L. Haney 2002: 23)[5]. However, it became increasingly difficult for her to perform in conservative, Catholic and nationalistic countries in Europe, especially in Germany, Austria and Italy. There were movements that tried to prevent her performances, because of so-called religious and moral reasons. From 1933 onwards, Baker was no longer allowed to enter Germany and Italy. In 1938, the Nazis defamed her art in an exhibition "Entartete Kunst" (P. Rose 1989: 183)[6]. Nevertheless, her international success continued to grow. She produced music, played roles in French films and had a world-tour. During this

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[2] See also http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/kalenderblatt/505756/;
http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/biografien/BakerJosephine/index.html
[3] See also http://www.dradio.de; http://www.dhm.de
[4] See also http://www.dradio.de; http://www.dhm.de
[5] There was an exhibition held in 2006 entitled *Josephine Baker – Schwarze Diva in einer weißen Welt* (Black Diva in a White World). See http://www.dhm.de
[6] See also http://www.dhm.de

tour, Baker took the chance to get in touch with influential politicians and personalities. These contacts would later be of importance for her social and political activities (P. Rose 1989: 365).

Ten years after leaving the USA, having charmed audiences all over the world, Baker returned to her home country and sought to make a similar impact on Broadway. Unfortunately her show turned out to be a flop, mainly for racist reasons. So Baker returned to Paris, where the people were loyal and loved her. In 1937, Baker adopted French nationality by marrying the French Jew, Jean Lion. However this relationship lasted only three years (P. Rose 1989: 234; L. Haney 2002: 199)[7]. After the occupation of France, Josephine started to work for the French Red Cross and the *Résistance,* smuggling secret messages and giving fund-raising performances. Fighting for "Free France", she spent most of the time between 1940 and 1944 in northern Africa and the Middle East. Despite her ill health (she suffered first from pneumonia and later from peritonitis), she continued struggling and working. In 1946, Josephine received the "Croix de la Guerre*"* and the "Medaille de la Résistance" for her political and social activities. However, the greatest compliment to Josephine Baker was being personally honoured by Charles de Gaulle (P. Rose 1989: 281; L. Haney 2002: 218, 228)[8]. In 1947, Baker remarried. Her fourth husband was the wealthy French orchestra director Jo Bouillon, who helped her to realize the dream of a "rainbow family" (at least for the nine years that their marriage would last). Between 1954 and 1965, the couple adopted twelve war orphans and victims of poverty from all over the world as a symbolic act against racism and nationalism. The "rainbow family" lived in a castle in the Dordogne (P. Rose 1989: 289; L. Haney 2002: 237, 274)[9].

Although very busy with her political work and family life in Europe, Baker never forgot the problems in her native country. During her tour of the USA in 1951, she fought for the rights of the African-Americans and succeeded in persuading some clubs and theatres to open their doors to coloured people also. Because of this, Baker was honoured by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, which named her the "most excellent woman" of 1951. Her political activities made Baker a person of interest and even suspicion for the FBI (P. Rose 1989: 294, 319-20; L. Haney 2002: 247, 257). After systematic investigations, the FBI had to admit that Baker was "not (….) procommunist, but for the blacks and mainly interested in the fight for racial equality" (P. Rose 1989: 320). In 1963, Josephine Baker took part in the legendary mass demonstration for the rights of the African-Americans in

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[7] See also http://www.dradio.de; http://www.dhm.de
[8] Ibid
[9] Ibid

Washington, where she was one of the speakers at the side of Martin Luther King (P. Rose 2002: 289, 370; L. Haney 2002: 237, 274)[10]. Baker's last "marriage" was unofficial and secret. In 1973, she swore everlasting fidelity to the American Artist Robert Brady in an empty church in Acapulco (Mexico). In 1975, Josephine Baker experienced a glamorous come back in France, but then her life was abruptly ended by a stroke. The funeral of the great star in Paris was attended by more than seven thousand people. Guns fired a salute of twenty-one shots for the American native (L. Haney 2002: xi, 325)[11].

Based on my research into the life, artistic career and political activism of Josephine Baker, I conclude that Josephine Baker is a clear example of a cross-national and even a transcultural personality. I have reached this conclusion based on a number of clear criteria for transculturalism.

10.6.1 Origin/Roots

Baker's origins and roots are clearly multicultural. Her ancestors include Native Americans, Africans and Spanish. Her upbringing in St Louis gave her a lot of multicultural impressions, because different cultures were mixed and mingled there. Although these cultures generally lived peacefully side-by-side, Baker also experienced significant racism.

10.6.2 Mobility/Transnationality

Baker was an extremely mobile woman. As a young girl she started to travel all over the USA and then emigrated to Europe. She continued to travel throughout Europe and also beyond its borders. Her tours, journeys and longer stays for private and/or political reasons carried her through the whole world, including to Israel, Cuba, Northern Africa and Germany (P. Rose 1989: 365).

10.6.3 Artistic Transculturality

Integrating elements from various cultures in her dancing (e.g. traditional African elements, American Jazz dance elements and later European dance styles), Baker's art had a significantly transcultural dimension. Her singing was

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[10] See also http://www.dhm.de
[11] See also http://www.dradio.de; http://www.dhm.de

also strongly influenced by European voice teachers and the French *chanson* culture specifically (P. Rose 1989: 76-7).

10.6.4 Language/Interaction/Integration

In addition to her mother tongue, Baker spoke French perfectly. Moreover she had the desire to communicate at least basically in every country on her tour. Concerning her art, she suggested that: "Only if somebody sings a song in many different languages, is it ready for everyone. What is too regional, too specific in the vocals, too banal, disappears" (P. Rose 1989: 365). For this reason, she could speak and pronounce Spanish, Italian, German and Portuguese. Baker lived, learned and was active in many different nations and cultures. Her work was well received almost all over the world. She established her art across ethnic, cultural and social borders. Wherever she was, Baker involved herself personally, professionally, socially and politically. As an international star she influenced a huge number of cultural scenes and fashions. Moreover she acted as an important activist against discrimination, violence and injustice, especially in Europe and America. Influencing and inspiring all these different cultures, Baker also caused a number of important controversial discourses (P. Rose 1989: 23, 57)[12].

10.6.5 Social Transculturality

Being open minded, Baker broke through the border between stage and audience, as well as through the borders between different social classes or cultural milieus (P. Rose 1989: 364). This behaviour was deliberate and principled, and can perhaps be attributed to Baker's own upbringing. As her biographies demonstrate, she had to overcome the anonymity, poverty and powerlessness of her origin in order to achieve the popularity and power of the "highest" social class. She could connect with people from all social classes and professions, from taxi drivers to political heavyweights like Golda Meir, Charles de Gaulle and Fidel Castro. In addition to that social mobility, the social transculturality of Josephine Baker can be proved by the fact that she had private friends, lovers, husbands, children and also enemies from all over the world. Her social and political work was similarly transnational and cross-cultural, as she fought for the rights of all socially, racially and politically disenfranchised groups, from the African-Americans in the USA to the *Résistance* in Europe and Northern Africa.

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[12] See also http://www.dradio.de; http://www.dhm.de

10.6.6 Home

According to her biography and her own statements, Paris was Baker's adopted home. She called it her hometown and her big love (P. Rose 1989: 370[13]). The Parisian writer Sidonie Gabrielle Colette once said: "She is the most Parisian of all panther cats" (L. Haney 2002: 125). However, when giving speeches in the USA, Baker always referred to Americans as "my people"[14]. This is proof that Baker felt and was closely connected to more than one country and culture is, in my opinion, the most clear and important sign of transculturality.

10.7 Mascha Kaléko (1907-1975) – Janina Lehr

Mascha Kaléko was a Jewish poet who wrote in the German language. Her poems have frequently fallen into oblivion, only to be rediscovered and appreciated for their lyricism and the insight they give into her life and experiences. The focus of this research will be on Kaléko's transnational mobility and the multicultural influences on her poetry, which range from Heinrich Heine on the one hand, to the artistic *Bohème* in the Roman Café of Berlin in the 1920s on the other hand. I will conclude by discussing the recent reception of Kaléko's poems, both in Germany and abroad.

Kaléko was born in Galicia, grew up in Berlin, emigrated to the United States of America during the National Socialist period and to Israel in 1959, and as a result felt homeless and foreign from early childhood on. Even though she felt comfortable in interpersonal relations and found an intellectual home within her poetry, she stayed the everlasting seeker: „Ich habe manchmal Heimweh. Ich weiß nur nicht, wonach" (*Sometimes, I feel homesick, but I do not know why*) (M. Kaléko 1945). As Marcel Reich-Ranicki has commented:

> Sie blieb überall eine Fremde: In Deutschland eine polnische Jüdin, in Israel eine deutsche Jüdin, in Amerika eine unbelehrbare Europäerin. Und in Polen? Da kannte man nicht einmal ihren Namen.
> (*She stayed a foreigner all over. In Germany a Polish Jew, in Israel a German Jew, in America an unteachable European. And in Poland? There her name was and still is unknown.*) (M. Reich-Ranicki 2007).

The reasons for Kaléko's transnational life seem obvious: being Jewish, she was forced by political and social circumstances in National Socialist Germany to go

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[13] See also http://www.dradio.de
[14] See *Josephine Baker – Schwarze Diva in einer weißen Welt* (2006) http://www.dhm.de

into exile in the 1930s. Her deep love and affection for her second husband Chemjo Vinaver pushed her to Israel in the 1960s. After her son and husband died in 1968 and 1973 respectively, she thought seriously about returning to Germany. The state of her own health prevented this, however; Mascha Kaléko died on a journey through Zurich on January 20th, 1975.

Born in Chrzanów (Schidlow), a small village about 20km from Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Kaléko lived there until she was seven years old. In her poem "Die frühen Jahre" (The early years), she describes her childhood as formed primarily by her strong feeling of homelessness and being a stranger: "Zur Heimat erkor ich mir die Liebe" (*I chose love to be my homeland*). In 1914, Kaléko moved to Germany with her parents and her younger sister. They stayed in Frankfurt for two years and spent two further years in Marburg, before the family settled down in Berlin in 1918. This is where Kaléko experienced the most untroubled period of her life: she began to write and to publish, she joined the literary *Bohème* in the Roman Café where she met popular authors such as Tucholsky, Lasker-Schüler, Kästner, Ringelnatz and others. Her style was characterised by exhilaration and wordplay as well as the melancholy of that time. She wrote poems about everyday life in the metropolis of Berlin. Her private life also prospered during these years: after a ten year marriage to the philologist Saul Aron Kaléko, she got divorced in 1938 to live with the father of her son Evjatar, who was born in 1936. For two years before this, she had convinced Saul Aron Kaléko that Evjatar was his child. Kaléko describes the extraordinary charges of this time and the end of hiding in her poem "Signal":

> Wußten es alle.
> Der eine. Der andre.
> Das Schweigen.
> Und ich.
> *(Then, everyone knew.*
> *The One. The Other.*
> *The silence.*
> *And I).*

With her second husband Chemjo Vinaver and their son Evjatar, Kaléko emigrated to New York in September 1938. In 1940, they moved to Hollywood for a short period of time, but returned to New York in 1941. Life in the United States of America turned out to be very difficult. Kaléko only occasionally published some poems in the Exile Magazine of German Jews called *Aufbau*. Her husband, a musician and choirmaster, did not get enough work, so Kaléko had to write advertisements for a living. The feeling of being a stranger continued to dominate her life. In 1956, Kaléko visited Europe for the first time since emigrating. On her journey, she also visited Berlin. In her poem

"Wiedersehen mit Berlin" (Reunion with Berlin), it becomes apparent how much she longed for her former life in Berlin in the 1920s:

> Und alles fragt, wie ich Berlin denn finde?
> - Wie ich es finde? Ach, ich such es noch!
> (*And everyone asks, how I like Berlin so far?*
> - *How do I like it? Well, I am still looking for it*).

In 1960, Kaléko was nominated for the *Fontanepreis*, but she refused because of the SS-membership of one of the panellists, Hans Egon Holthusen. On October 10th, Kaléko and her husband Chemjo Vinaver arrived in Jerusalem. Whereas it played an important role for Vinaver's work, Kaléko lived the life of a tourist in Jerusalem. She was ill and lethargic, did not learn Hebrew that well and stayed isolated. After the sudden deaths of her son in 1968 and her husband in 1973, Kaléko had a final creative period. Her poems were no longer as alacritous as in her early years, in fact they were characterised by sustained loss. On her last journey to Europe in 1974, her health deteriorated rapidly. She was admitted to hospital in Zurich, where she died on January 20th, 1975.

10.7.1 Kaléko's Transcultural Literary Influences

Mascha Kaléko's entire life was marked by unintended transnationality. Her yearning for a place to call "home" was never satisfied, but her deep love for her son and husband and her own writing seemed to be an adequate substitution. Kaléko drew on two primary intellectual and literary influences in her poetry. By the time she arrived in New York in 1938, her intellectual relatedness to Heinrich Heine had already become highly visible. Like Heine, her thoughts circled around such topics as the loss of the homeland, the suffering of Germany and life in foreign lands. There are lots of references to Heine in her poetry. The most overt ones are found in the two works "Emigranten-Monolog" (Emigrant-monologue*)* and "Deutschland, ein Kindermärchen" (Germany, a children's fairytale). Kaléko echoes Heine's feelings of regret about his homeland: "Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland" (*I once had a beautiful homeland).* In the course of this poem, she includes – almost unnoticed – lines and fragments of three other Heine poems, which express his frustration at the death of his dream of a homeland. Germany had turned into a place of death, and consequently Kaléko's visions of the homeland are dead. The wound, caused by being uprooted, seems irremediable. When Kaléko travelled to Germany for the first time after seventeen years in exile in 1956, her journey significantly parallels Heine's journey in 1843. In her poem „Deutschland. Ein Kindermärchen", which

is written in four parts, Kaléko wrote sarcastically and ironically about the way her life has turned out and compared her existence as a poet with Heine's life. She paid homage to Heine by calling him a "rebel", "patriot" and "satirist", and she mocked the half-hearted Heine–Renaissance in postwar Germany: „Der Kaléko-Ton des Exils, eine Balance zwischen Witz, Schärfe, Trauer, Melancholie und Selbstironie, entwickelte sich nicht zuletzt aus einer schöpferischen Nachfolge Heines" *(The Kaléko-style of exile, a balance in between esprit, acuity, dolour, melancholy and self-irony, developed from a creative succession of Heine).*

The second significant literary influence on Kaléko's writing was the literary *Bohème* in Berlin in the 1920s. Reich-Ranicki remarks that:

> Sie käme aus der Welt von Eugen Roth, sie sei eine Tochter Christian Morgensterns, eine Schwester von Joachim Ringelnatz. Vor allem aber: Sie habe viel von Kurt Tucholsky und Erich Kästner gelernt – und das trifft am ehesten.
> (*She came of the world of Eugen Roth, she was a daughter of Christian Morgenstern, a sister of Joachim Ringelnatz. Most of all: She learned from Kurt Tucholsky and Erich Kästner – and that marks it best)* (M. Reich-Ranicki: 2007).

In the late 1920s, Kaléko began to mingle with the artistic Avantgarde of Berlin, who would meet in the Roman Café. She joined artists, actors and writers such as Lasker-Schüler, Kästner, Tucholsky, Ringelnatz and Mehring. Here, she made her first literary attempts and developed her characteristic style of simple, light poetry of the everyday paired with melancholic gloom. By this time, Berlin had tired of expressionism. Even specialists in German studies such as Kästner and the solicitor Tucholsky immersed themselves in naïvety. However, theirs was a conscious naïvety which they promoted successfully. Kaléko, on the other hand, did not end up with naïvety - she emanated from it:

> Aufs natürlichste verbindet sie trockene, ironische, gewissermaßen augenzwinkernde Sentimentalität mit pfiffiger, etwas zynischer Ernüchterung. Das ergibt sehr rasch und ganz ohne Umstände eine neuartige Großstadtlyrik.
> *(She naturally combines dry and ironic sentimentality with smart and cynic disenchantment. This quickly led to a new metropolis – poetry)* (M. Reich-Ranicki: 2007).

10.7.2 *The Transcultural Reception of Kaléko's Work*

Even though Kaléko's life must be seen as an individual fate against the background of social and historical upheavals, she highlighted the small moments of everyday life and emotion in her poetry. This apparently frivolous handling of the banalities of daily life marks Kaléko's transcultural way of life:

whether she was in Berlin, New York or Jerusalem, Kaléko was forced to get along in various cultural contexts, she had to sustain her position and feed her family. With enormous effort, strength and courage, she handled all circumstances by studying the national language and working on the spot. It went better for her in New York than in Jerusalem, because in New York she had to earn a living (Chemjo did not make enough money for a living) and take care of her son Steven (she was without Steven in Jerusalem). Therefore, the everyday life of Mascha Kaléko can be seen as an expression of her transcultural identity.

Although Kaléko's poetry has been translated into Russian, Italian, French and English, the authenticity of her characteristic style does not translate well. Therefore, her work is almost exclusively known and discussed in German-speaking communities. In other countries, only institutes of German language and literary studies engage with Kaléko's work and acknowledge her cultural impact. It must be acknowledged that Kaléko did not explicitly have a lasting effect on diverse cultures, despite the fact of her transnational mobility. She lived – forced by political circumstances – in different cultural areas, but she mostly got along in her everyday life and easily learned different languages. In spite of this, Kaléko did not expand into these cultural areas with her poetry. In fact, the exact opposite is the case: Mascha Kaléko chose her poetry to be her homeland, a fixed point within the unreliable external conditions of her life.

In 2007, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of her birth, a number of publications by and about Mascha Kaléko were issued. An international symposium on her work and influence was held in New York. A new biography was released, and several reviews and obituaries appeared in the national press in Germany. The attempt to define the transcultural value of her opus beyond her death highlights the fact that Mascha Kaléko fell into oblivion and had to be rediscovered several times within the last decades. Unfortunately, this happened almost exclusively in German-speaking circles with a great passion for literature. Kaléko's intellectual relatedness to Heine and her attempt to find a home within her poetry perhaps explain why she did not have any interest in using her poetry to transculturally immortalize herself. As Reich-Ranicki suggests:

> Sie dichtete ihr Leben, und sie lebte ihre Dichtung.
> *(She composed her life and she lived her composition)* (M. Reich-Ranicki 2007).

Mascha Kaléko is back at the heart of the German literary scene, her work has a deep cultural impact and immanence, but not necessarily a transcultural importance. Her life, characterized by the biggest crimes of humankind, her relation to loneliness, home and identity, seem soft and disturbing at the same time. Through her poetry, we are part of the recent past: „Ihre Heiterkeit ist

munter, aber ernst und elegisch, ihre Schwermut in der Regel ganz leicht sogar keck und scherzhaft" *(Her gaiety is blithe, but serious and elegiac, her melancholy for the most part light, even bold and jestingly)* (M. Reich-Ranicki 2007). To conclude with a phrase from Heine: Mascha Kaléko saw the world with a laughing teardrop in her eye.

10.8 Leonel Roberto C. Fuentes (1950--) – Christin Buchheim

In the book *Kubaner im realen Paradies – Ausländer-Alltag in der DDR – Eine Erinnerung* ("Cuban in a real paradise – Daily routine of a foreigner in the GDR – A recollection"), written by Leonel Roberto C. Fuentes, one gets an insight into the thoughts and feelings of a foreign contract worker in the GDR. It describes his social circumstances, the relationships and conflicts he had with fellow citizens and his attitudes to local inhabitants. The young Cuban men depicted in the book have four main problems: discipline, cleanliness, beer and women. Fuentes has to deal with these problems too and he writes about his own experiences in his book, focusing in particular on his numerous romantic liaisons, but also on his many physical fights.

10.8.1 *Biography*

Fuentes was born in Cuba in 1950. He was 26 years old when he went to Zeitz in the GDR on September 16th, 1976. He wanted to get a professional education in the chemical industry. Over the years he learned the German language very well. In 1979, he finished his education as a skilled chemical worker. Because he spoke German so well, he was asked to stay in the GDR as an interpreter in the Leuna Factory. After a short holiday in Cuba, he returned to the GDR for another seven years and moved into a flat in a residential home in a small town called Merseburg. In 1987, he left the GDR and returned to Cuba. He continues to live and work in Havana. In 2007, Fuentes published a book reflecting on his time in the GDR. In the same year, he revisited some of the German towns in which he had spent time, places like Zeitz, Weißenfels and Merseburg.

10.8.2 *Background to his stay in the GDR*

A permanent shortage of workers in the GDR economy forced the government to request foreign contract workers. Because of interstate agreements, contract

workers were requested collectively. During the political convergence between Cuba and Moscow, the GDR also intensified its contact with Cuba and these countries became close partners in the 1980s. On May 5th 1978, Cuba and the GDR declared an agreement for "Employment with coincident qualification". The young Cubans had to qualify for different jobs in four years. In the first six months they were educated in the German language. They were trained as electricians, chemical factory workers, technicians or metal workers. They had to send sixty percent of their wages to Cuba.

More than 30,000 Cuban workers were educated in the GDR. They lived mainly in residential homes on the outskirts of cities. Their working and living conditions were governed by interstate agreements. They were guaranteed certain rights: duration and location of occupation, amount of compulsory language course and the possibility of dissolving the employment contract. Moreover there were country-specific regulations for visiting their homeland, additional leave or financial support. The Aliens Act and international agreements tried to prevent uncontrolled individual initiatives by foreign workers. This policy was managed by the inner system of the GDR, which allowed only limited immigration. The GDR never considered itself an immigration country, especially because of its closed political system. Therefore, although foreign workers were integrated into the national economy for work reasons, more integration into the host society was neither encouraged nor desired by the contracting states. The economic need for additional manpower was the only basis for the GDR Aliens Act.

Because of the restrictive information policy followed by SED-leaders, the local inhabitants were not prepared for living with foreign workers. The media in the GDR did not give any information about the real background to the need for foreign workers. They only stated that it was an act of solidarity and interstate partnership. However, the Cuban workers soon encountered some problems because they were not trained for the life of an industrial worker. These problems included lack of punctuality, leaving the workplace during the working day and inattention during language lessons. After German reunification, the BRD canceled contracts with foreign workers because they had no need for them anymore.

10.8.3 The Transcultural Activities of Leonel Roberto C. Fuentes

Before they left Cuba, Fuentes and his fellow migrant workers were given preparatory lessons about living in a foreign country, as well as information about German culture, habits and mindset. They then travelled to the GDR and

went to a small town called Zeitz to start their education. They were expected to survive for a long period without much contact with their homeland. Fuentes barely got letters from home and mentions only a few home visits. He lived in a residential home with other foreign workers from different countries. This collective organized accommodation resulted in isolation from the local inhabitants, making it very difficult for the foreign workers to get to know some local inhabitants and live together with them. This enforced isolation additionally supported the prejudices of the GDR population against the foreign people. However, the Cubans wanted to have some contact with German people and so after work they would go to a dance in their neighborhood. They got to know many Germans who were very friendly:

> Because we want to be free we have to go by bus to our flat alone. But we want to do this because we want to contact the Germans (….) Concerning our mentality – speaking very loud and talking by using hands and arms – we are more successful than other foreigners in getting to know Germans (L. Fuentes 2007: 13).

Fuentes, for example, recounts that his German friends were very happy about the fact that the Cubans brought some Havana-Rum for the men and some Banana-liqueur for the women. They danced together to the sound of "Guantanamera" in the German bar. This indicates that Fuentes tried to introduce his German friends to some elements of Cuban culture. After a short time, Fuentes had his first liaisons with German women. With help from his girlfriends, he came to know German culture better:

> After leaving hold of her hand I pick a beautiful flower for her. She laughs, says something I cannot understand, and then she says thanks. She takes my dictionary and I understand that she is happy about the flower. But she tells me that the flowers at the street and in the gardens are supposed to support the beauty of the town. If I want to give her a flower as a present I have to buy one. Boy, oh boy, I have no luck. At home it is different (L. Fuentes 2007: 17).

Fuentes had lots of positive experiences with German women but inevitably the relationships broke up because of cultural differences. On special public occasions, for example during sports events, the German-Cuban Partnership was celebrated. The authorities organized lots of excursions for the Cuban workers. Fuentes tells in his book about trips to Leipzig, Berlin, the island of Rügen, Buchenwald, Eisenach, Potsdam, and so on. He determined that he travelled more times in the GDR than he ever did in Cuba. On the island of Rügen, he even got to know a GDR-special: the FKK-beach (a nudist beach!):

> One day Miguel, Raul and Ramiro say: Hi, Folks! Come with us, we discovered the FKK-beach. Immediately we set out for this place like mad. What I can see there is like

> from another planet. Clearly, we are Cubans. We have a different mentality. But suddenly one or two of us are naked, too. Not me, I have some complexes (….) I think: How can it be? Everybody is naked. Fair enough, I look at this culture and everything is alright (L. Fuentes 2007: 32-3).

Fuentes often states that he came to an arrangement with German culture. Nevertheless, he always held on to his Cuban habits. For example, on one occasion a German family invited him to celebrate a traditional Christmas party with them. Fuentes accepted the invitation and was very happy about it, but he preferred to cook a Cuban meal for his German friends. Unfortunately he also had some unpleasant encounters with German people and other foreign workers. Often he got into fights or had to smooth down differences because he knew both mindsets. So he had the ability to solve problems like these:

> Then I have to go with Escalona, the chief executive officer, to Bitterfeld. There we come upon a typical problem: The German and the Cuban mentality are colliding. But we can smooth down the differences. Everybody notices: Here are no guilty ones. Here they have to dovetail with each other (L. Fuentes 2007: 90).

This situation exemplifies the extent to which Fuentes was interacting transculturally during his time in the GDR because he was able to gauge and negotiate the differences between the two mindsets. He understood the sources of many of the problems between the Germans and Cubans, and played an important role in building mutual trust. His work as an interpreter developed into a 24-hour job, because the Cuban workers needed his support and liaising skills not only at work, but also at the doctor, the hospital and the police station. At all times of the day, Fuentes had to help when there were any communication problems in order to avoid misunderstandings. After a certain time, he was interpreting not only for Cuban workers, but also for important party officials and diplomats in Halle or Leipzig.

The longer Fuentes lived in the GDR, the more he began to adopt German habits:

> The man asks me what I would like to drink. Mojito, Daiquiri, Kubanito? I say: My favorite drinks are beer and brandy (L. Fuentes 2007: 144).

On a trip to the small German town of Weißenfels, Fuentes met his big love Ramona. Together they visited her parents and there he experienced traditional German family life. From the beginning, her family was very friendly towards him and Fuentes felt very comfortable. The relationship between Fuentes and Ramona lasted over a year but this relationship also broke up because of difficulties caused by their different origins. Fuentes left Ramona because he had

to go back to Cuba. Ramona could not accompany him because she had a better life in the GDR than he could give her in Cuba.

In 1987, Fuentes left the GDR and returned to Cuba. Today he reflects on his time in the GDR with gladness and states that he feels lucky to have had the opportunity to live in this foreign culture:

> There is one thing I know: Whenever I meet German people, I will talk with them about my time in the GDR. I will tell not so much about the difficulties, but I will talk about all the good things I experienced. Well, the different things. Every country has its own mentality and every human, too (L. Fuentes 2007: 158).

Leonel Roberto C. Fuentes is an interesting example of a person whose work took him to live for a while in a foreign country. While living in the GDR, he succeeded – to a far greater degree than many migrant workers – to engage with and learn from German culture. However, he never lost his connection with his homeland and never succeeded in transcending his cultural origins to the point where he could imagine putting down roots in the GDR or even sustaining a relationship with a German woman. His memoir gives us an interesting insight into his attempts – and ultimate failure – to fully embrace a transcultural life.

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