3. Children of Immigrants in American Literature

> The novel has always been about the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them, which are relations of power. The novel does not seek to establish a privileged language, but it insists upon the freedom to portray and analyze the struggle between the different contestants for such privileges.
> (Salman Rushdie quoted in Ponzanesi 41)

> Although I have written a genuine personal memoir, I believe its chief interest lies in the fact that it is illustrative of scores of unwritten lives.
> (Mary Antin in the introduction to her *Promised Land*)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint the exact literary debut of children of immigrants in US-American literature, much less provide an abridged thematic "literary history."[1] Depending on what we count as a literary text and as a sufficiently extensive "instance," the time span into which such a "debut" might fall ranges anywhere from the 1780s with Crevecoeur's *Letters from an*

1 | The length of Werner Sollors' chapter on ethnic modernism (200 pages) is not owed to loquaciousness. What can be said summarily is that the early short stories that contain children of immigrants as characters display an impressive range of topics and concerns, from socio-economic considerations and exploitation in Willsie's "What is an American," language and food in van Slyke's "The Tooth of Antar," religious misunderstanding and pedagogy in Kelly's "H.R.H. The Prince of Hester Street," revenge in Hamm's "Kalaun, the Elephant Trainer," to bureaucracy and venality in Sui Sin Far's "In the Land of the Free," whose plot in turn significantly resembles Zitkala-Sa's recollections "School Days of an Indian Girl" published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900.

American Farmer[2] to the late 1890s and early 1900s with an increasing number of contributions to the immigration debate in the form of short stories, poems and essays by numerous authors, for example Abraham Cahan, Mary Antin, or Sui Sin Far, to the first extensive fictional narratives such as Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925), James Farrell's *Young Lonigan* (1932), Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934) or Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1939).[3] Children of immigrants were of some interest throughout the second half of the 19th century, although predominantly in political, legislative and demographic, later eugenic debates; as peripheral figures, they appear in a number of more "literary" texts such as early autobiographies, letters and diaries, then short stories and poems.

It is worth recalling at this point that the idea, and much less the fact, of a uniquely American identity, culture and attendant literature and literary history was, even at the end of the 19th century, by no means self-evident, despite the perennial calls for such an identity by politicians, essayists, artists, and others.[4] As John Lowe points out in his survey of "Multicultural Literature in the United States" (2000), "indigenous" (which here implies fourth or fifth generation immigrant, but not Native and African American) US-American literature by now canonical authors such as Melville, Chopin or Dickinson occupied an uncertain position in US-American culture; many of them were out of print, forgotten or unknown. US-American literature was, for example, far from being established in school and university syllabi, whose focus was on Latin and Greek, with a smattering of British literature. Unsurprisingly, literature about marked cultural practices or minority groups occupied an even more precarious position. Nonetheless, the theme of children of immigrants slowly gained discursive and literary ground at the end of the 19th century (for the reasons I have pointed out in the previous chapter) and continued to do so to the point that, during the last years, it has become one of the most important themes in US-American literature and, with the customary retardation,

2 | At this time, most "political philosophers [...] regarded nationality in terms of race" (Levine 54). It is worth noting that Crevecoeur does remark that not all races are equally likely to melt into this "new race" of Americans, Germans being more amenable than Irish.

3 | I am convinced some readers will point out earlier examples.

4 | Many older – early/mid 19th century up to the 1960s – anthologies of American literature feature chapters specifically about the recurrent call for a national literature and, by extension, identity. Samuel Knapp notoriously prefaces his 1829 *Lectures on American Literature* with a rhetorical gesture to the absence of an American literary history and to the claim by foreigners that there was no such thing as an American literature. Incidentally, most of the "literature" he discusses is expository, essayistic, in diary or sermon form.

literary criticism.[5] By now, there is a host of anthologies and too many novels to count that feature children of immigrants in one way or another. Although the extensive corpus of this essay takes into account about three dozen texts in addition to those discussed in detail, the selection must still be considered exemplary, not representative, as I have emphasized in the previous chapter.

Before I begin the detailed discussion of the selected texts, let me shortly summarize my procedure, including some last caveats. For each text, I will first analyze in detail its various transdifferent identifications and differentiations – auto- and hetero-, personal and communal – in order to draw out its system of differences and faultlines. Since we are dealing with long fictional narratives and accordingly with complex possible worlds, we may expect a large number of identifications and differentiations, which, moreover, change and develop over the course of the narrative. Moreover, we have to distinguish between differentiations and identifications constituted via characters or via commentary, which is in turn prefigured by the narrative situation. It will be impossible to exhaustively trace all differences and their changes over the course of the respective narrative; that would require a close reading of several hundred pages. This means that I will have to focus on the most important faultlines in the most important passages, and then adumbrate the system of differences and its dynamics for the rest of the narrative. Where necessary and productive, the analysis will include a discussion of the degree of departure of the possible world of the fictional narrative from its contemporaneous actual world and its particular segmentation, as well as its structure of fictionality/referentiality. In most of the chosen texts, we may expect the departure of possible world from actual world to be minimal in terms of ontology and epistemology on the content level; on the discourse level, fictionality may be highlighted and thus increase the degree of departure, except where the techniques are easily naturalized or narrativized because they have become conventional and familiar. An important question here will be just how the discursive structure influences and prefigures the system of identifications.

3.1 Henry Roth: *Call It Sleep*

In a kernel, the prologue of Henry Roth's novel *Call It Sleep* already adumbrates many of the identificatory structures, patterns and themes that characterize the bulk of the narrative; together with the last climactic chapter, it forms a kind of

5 | An important factor in the distinct and increasing visibility of children of immigrants in US-American literature in the last decades is the landmark "Immigration and Nationality Act" of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act), which gave rise to what would eventually be called "the new immigration."

external, contextual bracket around the story of child protagonist David Schearl with its predominantly internal focus.[6] It starts with prototypical references to US-American immigration. There is an epigraph about "that Golden Land" (9; written by Roth), and the very first sentences describe the arrival of a ship – tellingly named after Peter Stuyvesant, the last Dutch head of New Amsterdam before it was ceded to the British Empire and became New York City – that delivers immigrants "from the stench and throb of the steerage to the stench and throb of New York tenements" (9). The prologue then specifies the historical context as 1907 and as the year with the largest number of immigrants to the USA so far. It continues with a "polyethnic panorama" (Sollors 1996b, 155) that describes "foreigners, natives from almost every land of the world" (9) with a long list of different nationalities and regions as well as garbs and physiognomies. The predominant words used to describe their looks are "colourful," "matrix," "speckled," and "motley;" to describe their utterances and sounds, "guttural," "voiced," "pitch," "cries," "gasps," "reiterations," and "billow of sound." No single specific word, much less a whole sentence, is given (9).

This crowd is then contrasted with three latecomers: a woman and a young child from the ship, and a man that has waited for them on shore, apparently a family. The text makes clear that these exceptional latecomers are not exceptional because of their looks or sounds: "About the appearance of these late comers there was very little that was unusual" (10). The man wears the "ordinary clothes" of an "ordinary New Yorker" (10); "[a]s for his wife, one guessed that she was European more by the timid wondering look in her eyes as she gazed from her husband to the harbour, than by her clothes. For her clothes were American" (10). "Only the small child in her arms wore a distinctly foreign costume," namely a straw hat that the man later throws into the water for precisely that reason. It follows that "[e]xcept for this hat, had the three newcomers been in a crowd, no one, probably, could have singled out the woman and child as newly arrived immigrants" (10). Yet, the text states, there is something atypical about these three people that has nothing to do with their looks or paraphernalia: "The truth was there was something quite untypical about their behaviour" (11). There follows another list of "races" and their "typical behaviour" upon being reunited before it is specified just what is so exceptional about these three people: there is no joy to their reunion. The father is "aloof" and "offended," his "hostile eyes" "glare" with "harsh contempt" (11) while his wife is conciliatory and the child simply scared.

The reunion continues with a harsh and accusatory conversation about the wife's alleged mistakes and a number of apparently minor interspersed narrator comments that later turn out to be important or revealing, such as "[s]he spoke

6 | In fact, it appears that Roth wrote the prologue after finishing the novel (Sollors 1996b, 140) with exactly this in mind.

in Yiddish" (11), about his shaved-off beard (as a Jew), thin look and the "same old poverty" (12). This dialogue is interrupted by a description of the Statue of Liberty as "charred with shadow," her "depths exhausted" and "masses ironed to one single plane," the "rays of her halo [...] spikes of darkness" and her torch a "black cross against flawless light – the blackened hilt of a broken sword" (14). At some point toward the end of the prologue, the narrative for the first time provides the child's perspective: "Without knowing the cause, he knew that the stranger's anger was directed at himself" (15). The prologue ends where it began, with a reference to the Golden Land and to the ship on which the immigrants came (16).

I have provided this detailed description of the prologue not only because it introduces the major themes of the novel, but also because it almost prototypically shows how the whole novel sets up and patterns identifying and differentiating structures. At a closer look, we find a dialectic of particular and general, unique and typical, as well as oppositions and contrasts that turn out not only to be less clear cut than first indicated, but whose opposing sides also show structural similarities, or are in themselves hybrids or ambivalent. In fact, all of the fundamental identifications and differentiations (family, childhood, language, friendship, religion) are ambiguous. A syntactical example of this is the segment "foreigners, natives from almost every land of the world" (9). Separated only by a comma, the sentence juxtaposes the words "foreigners" and "natives," which are so loaded in the context of immigration, only to then make clear that all of these foreigners are natives in some other country. The panorama lists large national, regional and creedal groups but modifies them by a whole list of words that are all part of the semantic field of mixture, multifariousness and hybridity; this is augmented by the description of their unspecified sounds as a "billow." In contradistinction to these large, "typical" groups, the three protagonists are specified. However, their specification is not along the lines used earlier for the aggregate groups (looks, sounds) but regards behavior, making them stand out ironically not in contrast to US natives ("no one, probably, could have singled out the woman and child as newly arrived immigrants"), but in contrast to the other immigrants. All of this is placed in the context of a Golden Land that, if the description of the Statue of Liberty is any indication (charred, shadow, exhausted, darkness, black, blackened, broken), is far from bright, cheerful and welcoming (the epigraph also reads "ask no questions"...). Yet, the major theme introduced is precisely not that of cultural difference and identity, of immigrant versus native, country of origin versus country of destination, but of father versus child (and, insofar as the mother protects her child, the mother); as will become clear later, the conflict of father versus child is not even a stand-in for the generic conflict of diasporic first generation immigrant against acculturated second generation immigrant that is the topic of so much critical literature and research.

It is probably due to this pervasive ambiguity and heterogeneous typicality in the identificatory structure that there has been a long debate in secondary literature about how exactly to categorize the novel (Jewish? American? modernist? all of the above?) – a debate that has abated and been replaced by a focus on the construction and function of this complexity itself.[7] When the novel first appeared in 1934, it was a significant success and compared with the work of James T. Farrell, another once popular and now neglected author, and James Joyce. In retrospect, it is easy to see that, while the novel is exceptional in its complexity and participation in modernism[8] – Joyce is not the only one to be mentioned: the dialogicity reminds of Faulkner, some of its repetitions of Stein –, it builds on an at that point already more than thirty-year-long tradition of fictional stories (not only autobiographical) about Jewish immigrants, for example by Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, and Mary Antin.[9] It also lays the foundation for the later Jewish Renaissance and writers such as Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Isaac Singer, and Philip Roth. Shortly after its publication, there seems to have been a contemporary, and perhaps in hindsight exaggerated, debate about its (purportedly insufficient) communist engagement, started off by an anonymous review in the *New Masses*.[10]

After this, however, the novel quickly disappeared and was mostly forgotten and out of print for almost three decades. Ever since its rediscovery by critics such as Leslie Fielder, Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin – all of whom considered

7 | Almost all critics at one point or another address the issue of categorization. Sarah Kerman comments on the trend in secondary literature to either categorize the novel (which has proven difficult) or to argue that the novel is such that a categorization is not to be had (because it transcends these categories) (48); Wirth-Nesher resolves the issue by calling Roth "a representative Jewish, American, and modernist writer" (1996, 2), arguing that to "discuss *Call It Sleep* as an ethnic novel can be constructive, then, if we discard the notion that ethnicity provides an essential and stable identity in confrontation with a monolithic mainstream culture" (1996, 10). For Werner Sollors, this makes the novel more universal than "typically" Jewish (1996b, 129) and thus part of an "ethnic modernism" because the author refuses "to go for the narrowly authentic, the typical, and the ethnically representative appeal" (128). Brian McHale also provides an illuminating note on the difficulties of categorization (100; note 1).

8 | It is, for example, far more ambitious in narrative technique, use of language, and characterization, than the almost ten years older *Bread Givers*.

9 | Eastern Ashkenazi Jews had been fleeing pogroms and persecution in Russia and all throughout Eastern Europe since the 1880s; most of them settled in New York and later "took over" "Kleindeutschland" after the Germans had left (see below).

10 | The review criticizes the novel as too much focused on the inner life of its protagonist. Mario Materassi provides an excellent survey of the initial reception of the book as well as of its critical reception since the 1970s (1996).

it a clearly Jewish novel – there has been a steady flow of excellent criticism. Its diversity notwithstanding, this criticism shows mainly four critical foci: family/oedipal conflict, language and multilingualism, (autobiographically inflected[11]) typicality/representativeness, and religion. While criticism during the 1970s and 1980s is predictably interested mostly in psychoanalytical[12] and religious aspects of the novel, the majority of recent criticism focuses on typicality and language, and increasingly on the pervasive ambiguity in the novel, rather than trying to disambiguate its complexity. Hana Wirth-Nesher, editor of a collection of essays on *Call It Sleep* and one of the novel's most prominent and prolific critics, writes that Roth's words often "drift away from their naturalistic environment to a textual play that signals both Christian and Jewish culture simultaneously" (1996, 6), challenging tidy oppositions. In a later essay, she continues this argument by looking at the complex and ambivalent multilingual use of language in the novel (2003). Mario Materassi writes that the temporal and spatial discontinuity of the novel and the "maze of semantic possibilities proffered by the text" (50) renders "any single frame of reference to originate and validate a comprehensive interpretation" (48-49) inadequate; none supersedes the others or takes precedence, none is dominant, there is no "totalizing energy" (50). Materassi calls this an impasse that many critics try to resolve by disambiguation. I would call it heterarchy that is irresolvable. Lastly, in her recent essay on the "limits of typicality," Sarah Kerman writes that the novel at one and the same time "promotes and refuses generalizations" (47).

In the following, I will continue this line of argument in combination with my methodology by tracing the evolving system of personal and communal auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations as well as its ambiguities along the most important faultlines (family, childhood, friendship, language, religion) in the novel; this will be augmented by taking into account the degree/segmentation of departure and the narrative structure.

Excursion: Plot

Mother Genya and child David arrive in New York in 1907 almost two years after the husband and father Albert. All of them are part of the large wave of immigrants at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, which

11 | Many critics draw parallels to Roth's life and his various alienations (from communism, intellectualism) and apostasies (from Judaism). As it turns out (and as most contemporary critics accede), neither can Roth's memories and claims be entirely substantiated, nor are they clearly counterfactual. As so often, the autobiographical is only an unspecific index.

12 | As Materassi points out, many of the Freudian readings do not, in the end, significantly differ.

consisted mostly of immigrants from Asia (specifically China) and Eastern Europe. Among the latter were many eastern Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants that succeeded the western Ashkenazi Jews from Northern Europe who had started immigrating about four decades earlier. The actual story begins four years later. In the beginning, David tries to stay in the apartment with his mother as much as possible. He is afraid of the choleric and violent father, who, as it turns out later, suspects that David is not his own child. Slowly, David ventures out into the world, meets other boys, has the "usual" adventures of a boy his age (tussles with other boys and girls, harassment by older boys, getting lost, etc.) and comes to know more about the world (e.g. about burials, marriages, thieves, and generally other people). Eventually, he starts cheder, a Jewish elementary school teaching Hebrew and Judaism.

The father works as a printer but gets fired from this job (and apparently from many others before that) for his aggressive temper; he later gets a job as a milkman, which suits him much better because he can work alone and outside, but which also leads to the family moving from Brownsville to the Lower East Side. Early on, Albert brings home a friend, Luter, who seems to like Genya. There are some vague allusions to a possible affair, and Luter stops coming to the apartment.

As the narrative progresses, there are many more incidents about the uneasy family life, especially after Genya's outspoken and not easily intimidated sister Bertha arrives, and about David's experiences (he has a first dreamlike epiphany at the river and witnesses his father beat up a thief, gets lost and taken to the police after a fight with another boy), especially regarding cheder (where he turns out to be a gifted learner and reader). At some point, several incidents combine to start off the disastrous turn of events that lead to the climax: first of all, David overhears a conversation between Genya and Bertha which he cannot fully understand, but which suggests enough to him to surmise that his mother was in love with a "goy" organist before hurriedly marrying Albert. Secondly, after reading (without literally understanding) a passage from the prophet Isaiah that describes his being called upon, David experiences a kind of (circumstantially forced) epiphany at the railroad tracks when other boys make him insert a zinc ladle into the electricity circuit of the tracks in order to elicit a bright pulse. He connects this experience with the coal involved in the prophet's encounter with god. Thirdly, he meets a Polish-American, Catholic boy (Leo) who seems much superior to David and who extorts him (in exchange for skates and a rosary) to introduce him to aunt Bertha's stepdaughters.

Leo and one of these daughters, Esther, "play bad" (we never get to know just how bad), which the other, Polly, informs her parents about. David runs away and hides in the cheder, where the rabbi finds him and squeezes an explanation out of David. In his predicament, David invents a story about his mother having died and him being the offspring of an illegitimate affair with a goy. The rabbi

promptly goes to Albert and Genya, causing a severe fight because Albert sees his suspicions confirmed. During this fight, David runs away and seeks the "divine light" coming out of the railroad tracks. As a result of his successful attempt to draw out this light, he nearly fatally electrocutes himself. In this trancelike state, his thoughts and visions are counterposed to the polylingual and polylogical fragments of conversations in a bar close to the tracks. He is found by the guests, and taken care of and accompanied home by a policeman and a medic. Meanwhile, his parents seem to have reconciled somewhat and anxiously await David, who is taken to bed where he drifts of into what "one might as well call [...] sleep" (440).

It is crucial to note that the entire narrative and the world it creates hinges on the often ignored or marginalized fact that it is a narrative whose dominant focalizer is a very (!) young child.[13] In fact, the protagonist David Schearl is not even two years old when the novel commences with his arrival in the USA (in 1907) and only five, going on six, when the main part starts (in 1911).[14] It is quite fitting, then, that the identificatory structure of the novel parallels the growing older of the protagonist by evolving like slowly widening and overlapping circles of identifications and differentiations, all of which turn out to be transient, unreliable, ambivalent and ambiguous for the protagonist.[15] As David grows older and acquires more knowledge of the world by coming into contact with more of it, he finds not clarity and identity, but more and more puzzling complexities and differentiations, and a world that is not made for him and for children in general. Instead of resolving ambiguities, the narrative piles ever more on top of each other, so that no identification

13 | The majority of the narrative is actually written in a figural narrative situation with David as the reflector figure; however, there are several crucial breaches where the narrative projects the thoughts and/or sensory impressions of other characters (for example the rabbi) or provides information that David could not possibly have access to (for example during the climax).

14 | Obviously, considering his age, there is no point in the narrative where David seems to be able to recall anything about his life prior to arrival in the USA. Not only does this support the book's eligibility for my purposes, it also emphasizes that David's conscious life only begins in the USA, his life before that being a lacuna which ironically is of crucial importance for the father, who suspects his biological parentage.

15 | Brian McHale succinctly describes the dominant speech modes in the novel and their shift from FID of David's thoughts to FID of other's conversations to direct interior monologue (stream of consciousness during David's near electrocution), to direct spoken discourse (bar conversation fragments during the climax) (McHale 82); it seems to me that this development parallels the widening circles of David's interaction with the world.

offers lasting integration. The overarching identificatory theme and structure, then, is neither simply family, nor religion, nor language alone, but their combined dynamic in David's childhood search for safety from the various threats of the world and for his place in it. Significantly, the narrative rarely explicitly contradicts David's own view of his perilous position in the world, the perspective structure being dominated by his view of things and events; other characters' views are subordinate; correlatively, much of his perception is rendered in FID and interior monologue, so that his auto-identification is indirectly corroborated by the hetero-identification of the covert narrator and other characters.

The narrative is divided into four "books" whose titles announce the dominant, though by no means exclusive sectional theme, each of which is of concrete as well as symbolical importance: The Cellar, The Picture, The Coal, The Rail. In the very beginning, however, there is just the small thirsty child David who cannot reach up to the sink to get water because he is too small (despite the fact that the prologue states that he is actually big for his age): "Standing before the kitchen sink and regarding the bright brass faucets that gleamed so far away [...] David again became aware that this world had been created without thought of him" (17). He wonders where the water comes from and where it goes, assuming that "a strange world must be hidden behind the walls of a house" (17), as he is going to find out it indeed is. Innocuous as it seems, this beginning is important because it introduces the central differentiation in the novel – small child/world – which underlies almost all other identifications and differentiations. In addition, this world is characterized not only by inaccessibility and "uncaring" rejection, but also by strangeness and unknowability. Time and again, David is confused because he does not understand that world; factually, linguistically, emotionally, socially, and so on.

Also, he reaches up to get water because he is thirsty, so right in the beginning he is unable to satisfy a fundamental need; fittingly, the very first word he utters in direct speech in the novel is "Mama" in calling for her help. During the next pages, the close and harmonious relationship between David and his mother is described: they banter for tokens of intimacy, joking, teasing and laughing. The father is tellingly absent, and the first mention of him is when David, who collects calendar leaves, sees the red marked leaf of Sunday approaching, the day his father will be home all day, and is filled with "a little qualm of dread" (19). Obviously, the unspoken conflict introduced in the prologue is still smoldering, differentiating the large opposition child/world into a family framework where David sides with the mother and against his father.

The scene continues with the mother ushering David out of the safety of the apartment onto the street, against his will, not only because he wants to be in her presence, but also because going out means he has to pass the cellar door,

which "bulged with darkness" (20), and which he is terribly afraid of because of the unknown and unknowable things in that darkness; it is not coincidental that he later seeks the light and brightness of the electric pulse elicited from the rail tracks.[16] On the street, he meets a boy from the neighborhood, Yuzzie, who initially "totally disregard[s]" him (20), and with whom he develops some kind of friendship. However, even this relation is fraught: A little later, Yuzzie's sister Annie "molests" David while hiding in a cupboard, "playing dirty," and Yuzzie and David get into a fight that leads to David hiding in the cellar and then, for the first time, fleeing from home and getting lost. During the entire narrative, David is never comfortable with his peer group, neither boys nor girls.

The first chapter ends with David hearing a song about a little boy, Walter Wildflower, who lives "in Europe, far away," where David knows he, himself, was born. Even though he remembers almost nothing other than "[f]ragments of forgotten rivers, [...] dusty roads, fathomless curve of tress, a branch in a window under flawless light" (23), he is filled "with a warm, nostalgic mournfulness" (23). At last, he longs for the whistle that will signal his permission to return home to his mother.

In addition to the central opposition introduced in the first paragraph, this first chapter at a closer looks also introduces almost all other identifications and differentiations that play a role in the narrative: family, subdivided into father and mother, inside (apartment) and outside (cellar, street, block), language ("In the street, David spoke English;" [20]), friendship/peer group; religion follows only a few pages later (28) in the form of the preparations for Passover. These identifications and differentiations will now be discussed in more detail.

Child/World

David's major concern is safety and protection, and his major problem is that the world does not offer it, least of all for small children. His search for safety and some kind of meaningful "safe harbor" structures all other identificatory patterns. As I have noted above, the novel structures David's experiences during growing older in widening circles of "world acquisition."

This happens spatially and cognitively/emotionally. He – not quite willingly – moves out of the isolation of the apartment, onto the street, further into the block, onto a roof, and later to the river, the cheder, and the railroad tracks. When his father gets a new job early in the narrative, the family has to move

16 | Much has been made of the cellar, especially by psychoanalytic criticism. It literally underlies the entire house and may stand for a dark and unknowable subterranean world; symbolically, this world in turn could stand for David's "incomprehensible" and taboo desire for his mother. It is all the more ironic that after his first fight with another boy, he seeks refuge in exactly this cellar before fleeing down the street.

from quiet Brownsville to the significantly more busy (and thus even more threatening) Lower East Side.[17] Cognitively, and as a concomitant of David's physical movement, he also makes an array of diverse and important experiences: he learns of his father's violent inclination when he collects his pay for him or when Albert beats up a thief; he witnesses a burial and a marriage (which seem the same to him, fusing life and death [69]); he has his first epiphany at the river; he goes to cheder and experiences a kind of enlightenment; he seemingly becomes friends with an older Catholic boy who only exploits him; and, most importantly, he nearly kills himself. His movement ultimately comes full circle and ends in the apartment, specifically in bed, where he finds at least temporary physical and cognitive respite in something like sleep.

During the entire narrative, there is a spatial opposition between the safe inside world of the apartment, identified mostly with his mother, and the outside world, identified with strange incomprehensibles and dangers, such as a dark cellar with rats, hostile neighborhood boys,[18] unfriendly adults, and a potentially lethal environment. At one point David thinks about "how the whole world could break into a thousand little pieces, all buzzing, all whining, and no one hearing them and no one seeing them except himself" (54). As Materassi writes about the city-setting of the novel, it is "a place of division and isolation where the individual's aspiration toward self-fulfillment is thwarted into a haphazard struggle to conquer or retain a minimum of integration both within the self and within the social context" and to "somehow heal" the "[r]ifts within the self, the family, and the community" (31).

However, not even the inside world of the apartment is really safe. It is "unsafe" when his father is home because of his temper and simmering hostility; also, right from the beginning, the outside world "invades" the apartment, for example when Annie molests David in the cupboard. The situation becomes even more complicated when Albert brings home his friend Joe Luter, whom David wants to like because he softens his father, but who also makes him feel uneasy: "he resented this forcing of self-awareness [by Luter's attention to him] upon him, this intruding of questions like a false weave into the fabric and pattern of his thought" (30). Shortly after, the latter takes a liking to Genya. Although no clear evidence is provided, there are some allusions that there might be an affair. David senses the complication brought on by this

17 | This is an ironic reversal: the "typical" movement of Jewish migrants immediately after arrival was to the Lower East Side, and then to the more comfortable outskirts of the city. The Schearl family's movement is doubly ironic because there is no indication in the narrative that they partake of the one advantage of the Lower East Side neighborhood at that time: a dense Jewish community network.

18 | The other boys say about David that he is a "boob. [...] he neveh hengs oud wid nodoby" (173), which, of course, is true, since David is reluctant to leave the apartment.

rival for his mother's affection and accordingly becomes somewhat disaffected, spending more time outside now that the apartment is no longer only his and his mother's "pristine" realm.

On the other hand, the outside world also offers some safety. He does, after all, make some friends, and the tussles with other boys are mostly not out of the ordinary and usually end with reconciliation. More importantly, he has his first epiphany at the river, whose white "brilliance" hypnotizes him and makes his spirit "melt" and "yield" (244). This is the first time he experiences pure bliss and an inexplicably joy. Even the "electric light" that the other boys force him to draw out of the railroad tracks by means of a zinc rod[19] is literally a revelation to him since it reminds him of Isaiah's calling by God and of the involved "coal" and saves him from a whipping when he tells the rabbi about it after breaking into cheder (252ff). Ultimately, he is only able to return to a somewhat more reconciled inside/home after he has fled that home and almost killed himself in the outside world; incidentally, the members of that world help him and bring him home. The differentiation between safe inside and perilous outside is not so tidy after all, then. Like all differentiations in the novel, it is ambiguous and flexible.

David being a child, a "kid," is also highly significant on another level, which Hana Wirth-Nesher analyzes in detail in her remarkable 2003 essay (especially 124-126). The only Jewish ritual that seems to matter in the novel is Passover. During the Passover seder, the commencement feast of the holiday, the Haggadah is read. This is a text that not only specifies the proceedings of the feast but also – this is a scriptural commandment in the *Book of Exodus* – tells of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and includes the song "One kid, only one kid" (called Chad Gadya; David repeatedly refers to it as Chadgodya). This cumulative song, in turn, relates the chain of death from one kid over cat, dog, etc. to the Angel of Death that is destroyed by God. The exodus from Egypt happened after the tenth plague, which was the death of all first-borns that could only be avoided by the sacrifice of a lamb and mark of blood on the door frame.[20] This Jewish feast to celebrate the escape from slavery then became Jesus's Last Supper, which for Christians marks the sacrifice of God's only "kid," whose killing by Jews in turn led to their persecution and thus to

19 | Again, psychoanalytic criticism has made much of this, as the junction into which he has to insert the rod is described as "wide grinning lips like a tongue in an iron mouth" (249). However, the secular and brutally (i.e. potentially lethal) physical aspect of this is balanced by the sacred and spiritual "enlightenment" it brings into David's life.

20 | This is the only mistake in Wirth-Nesher's brilliant essay: she writes that it is a kid that has to be sacrificed, whereas Exodus 12:3 reads "lamb" in all canonical versions.

immigration.[21] As Wirth-Nesher observes, the remark "Christ, it's a kid" by one of the customers of the bar that finds David after his near-electrocution "partakes both of American slang and of a familiar English translation of an Aramaic song in a Jewish ritual. The phrase enables multilingual and intertextual wordplay *because* it is in English" (124; emphasis in the original). The relevance is obvious: David is the only kid that is nearly sacrificed to the (new) world, though unintentionally, by the violent and hostile father, and the child's sacrifice brings some peace and absolution to the family. It is doubly ironic that David seeks what he thinks is a divine light for protection from the world in one of the most dangerous places of that world (the railroad tracks) because he connects it to the calling of the prophet Isaiah. David himself, of course, is only a small child that has absolutely no idea what his place and purpose in life is.

In the end, there is some reconciliation between child and world, as he drifts into his dreamlike state. It is "only towards sleep" that "one knew himself" and that there is "not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence" (439).[22] However, the safety, the protection, and thus the narrative closure, is, and only can be, temporary. None of the recourses he has sought has proved to be durable, and we know that at some point he has to go back out into the world, and that for a long time he will continue to be a small child. In a Biblical analogy, one could say that just like the Israelites fled Egypt and then strayed around the desert for forty years without a home or safe keep, David "flees" home and is expunged from childhood into the desert of the world and of growing up, which is why some critics argue that in the novel childhood is portrayed as "archetypal immigration" (Wisse 61).

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21 | Jesus, of course, is of the house of David. I owe the last part of this chain to Hana Wirth-Nesher.

22 | There is no resolution as to what exactly the "it" is that one might call sleep. Werner Sollors's essay contains an interesting list of suggestions by other critics, among them slumber, vision, rebirth, death, hope, peace, etc. (1996b, 156). It should not be forgotten, nonetheless, that whatever "it" is, it is brought about by the sheer force and brutality of a nearly deadly electric shock. Sollors himself writes:

> The ending brings together the central images of the novel, and bridges the dichotomies and ruptures [...]. Cellar, picture, coal, and rail, sword, dipper, electricity, transcendent vision, and polyethnic setting all come together in David's action so that father and mother, parents and child, Old World and New World, vulgarity and the sacred, sexual imagery, cusswords, and metaphysical yearning, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and secularism, revolutionary action and betrayal, fear and triumph, coexist in one powerful surge of dangerous brightness that lasts for only a moment *but holds in suspension all the tensions* under which David suffered. (157-158; emphasis mine)

Child/World – Friendship/Peer group

The topic of friendship and peer group can be seen as a subdivision of the child/world relation and is therefore placed here rather than after the more central topics of family, language and religion. Generally, it can be said that while David's relations to other boys (and occasionally girls) in the neighborhood are quantitatively significant in that he often engages with them on the street and more often than not perceives them as part of an aleatory and potentially threatening world (he is definitely not a favorite peer among them), they are for the most part not qualitatively significant as constituting another, distinct identificatory pattern. He plays with them, fights with them, reconciles with them, but they are almost exchangeable. There is, however, one important exception.

At one point, David hides on the rooftop of his house again (a much safer hiding place than the cellar, and one that he has entirely to himself) and meets an older boy who is flying a kite. At once, without even having talked to him yet, "David felt a bond of kinship growing up between them" (297) because he assumes that this boy, too, has come up to the roof to take refuge. It quickly becomes clear, however, that as much as David wants to identify and be like this boy, there are some important differences.[23] The boy is not only older, he is also a Catholic Polish-American (his looks do not fit the neighborhood, David notices, as he has blond hair and blue eyes); contrary to David, who has come up to the roof for lack of other safe places, Leo has not come up to the roof to hide but because he wants to fly his kite. To David, Leo is freedom become manifest. He belongs to a "carefree" and "bold" world, and, perhaps more importantly, David quickly realizes that Leo is "[*n*]*ot afraid! Leo wasn't afraid!*" (302), which is repeated: "*Not afraid!*" (emphasis in the original). In light of this perceived superiority and difference, David makes everything about himself "smaller" and obsequiously acquiesces to the denigrations of Leo, even regarding religion.[24] In fact, since Leo appears to be so safe and free in a world that David experiences as just the opposite, Leo's insignia of that protection and safety – cross and rosary – exert an irresistible attraction on David, who at this point has already joint cheder and discovered his fascination for reading from the Torah and for Isaiah, but for whom the latter do not coalesce into a firm and

23 | Ironically, while the narrative highlights the differences between Leo and David, it simultaneously diminishes the differences between their communities in a comparison of their parents' apartments ("Nor were goyish kitchens so different from Jewish ones." [316]) that focuses on the similarities rather than differences.

24 | At this point, it becomes clear how much things have already changed for David: where he was reluctant to leave the side of his mother in the beginning, he now envies the other boy because he has "no father, almost no mother, skates" (300).

empowering Jewish faith (which in addition he is bound to relate to his father), much less identity. Once more, it is David's overpowering desire for safety, freedom and protection, this time in the form of rosary and (funnily enough[25]) skates, that leads him to do as Leo bids, with the attending consequences. In the end, this "friendship" (and its tokens) as well turns out to be no safe haven, as Leo exploits and betrays David's credulity and affection.

Family

The familial structure is, of course, part and parcel of the world of the child protagonist, also because of his age. While the narrative's temporal commencement is clearly marked (1907/1911), its duration is not. Passover can serve as an indicator. It takes place twice, the first time quite early in the narrative when Albert brings home Luter. Thus, we can deduce that the narrative covers a time span of roughly one and a half to just under two years, making David not even eight years old when it concludes. That renders his dependency on his family necessarily quite high. The family conflict that permeates the entire narrative and that directly and indirectly causes most of the relevant incidents is delineated in the prologue and in the very first pages, even though its source is only revealed much later, and not conclusively. In addition, David's full name is revealing: his first name means "beloved," but his last name "Schearl" means "scissors," indicating the rift and separation that fundamentally structure his world. Apart from his innate volatile temper, the father is apparently suspicious of David being his own son, which is insinuated in the discussion immediately after arrival about his age and size – he is quite big for his age – and the missing/forgotten birth certificate. Taken together, these circumstances further Albert's lurking suspicion. As a result, he is more or less openly hostile to the child, impatient and abusive. David, in turn, clings to his mother for protection and affection and eschews his father. This (dis-) affection is described not only from David's perspective, but also externally from the perspective of Genya and Luter (40) and several other characters, making it an auto- as well as hetero-identification.

The conflict comes in many realizations, manifestations and symbols in the narrative. Right from the beginning of the main part, David perceives his father as threatening, unpredictable, impatient, and hostile. This never changes throughout the novel. He learns of his father's reputation at work (where Albert apparently was on the verge of killing someone with a hammer without provocation except an imagined one) and why he constantly has new jobs, witnesses him beat up another man, and is beaten himself. Not once is there any indication that his father's tone of voice toward David is anything but

25 | On a side note, the entire novel is full of humor, a fact often forgotten.

curt and commanding (not even at the very end, where his father is depicted as somewhat rueful). David's impressions are supported by various other characters in the book. The climatic events as well are started off by the furious father beating wife and child. In contrast to this, David clings to his mother for sustenance (water and food), affection (kisses and embraces), and protection (she comes between David and Albert when the latter tries to beat the child). A symbolic representation of this family structure comes in the form of two objects mother and father bring home at some point: Genya brings home a picture of fields and grass, which reminds her of her rural home country. Albert, in turn, dislikes this picture because there is no "life" in the form of an animal in it. He responds by bringing home a set of bull's horns, which he says remind him of his home country and the work on the farm, where he herded the bulls. These horns come to stand not only for the father's physical power and violence (it is later indicated that the father killed his own father by letting a bull trample him) but also for the father's sexual prowess. Following the only scene where there is some indication of intimacy between father and mother (his mother has a "look of repose" [295]), David looks at the bull's horns and feels that they are a threat, "a challenge he must answer" (296), though he clearly has no means to do so. Psychoanalytic readings have made much of this family constellation, arguing that the conflict is Oedipal. As interesting and textually dense as these readings are, they usually end up describing the conflict as it is and are thus not very controversial. Moreover, it is a very imbalanced and rudimentary conflict, since there is nothing whatsoever David can do to actively influence it other than run away, which, of course, is an evasion rather than an engagement with the father.

As it turns out, the family set up is dynamic and, while it causes David's flight from home and thus his contact with the outer world, seldom reaches into that world: his mother cannot offer David protection in and from that world. In fact, she hardly ever leaves the apartment, her English is almost nonexistent, and, as she herself says, she knows almost nothing about the outside except the basics of her neighborhood.[26] On the contrary, time and again she forces him out into that world. The situation becomes more complicated when Luter enters. While he seems to soften David's father, he also seems to like Genya more than what is considered appropriate. As a result, David becomes somewhat disaffected from his mother and spends more and more time outside.[27] When Bertha arrives,

26 | As she herself says about the mispronounced street name (bath street in German), church, vegetable market, railroad tracks, broken rocks and store window, "within this pale is my America, and if I ventured further I should be lost" (33).

27 | He later discovers that his mother can be (and actually has been by neighborhood boys) seen naked from the rooftops. This perception by others of his mother as a woman increases his distance from her.

the father's anger is directed at her, allowing David even more "invisibility." Lastly, it turns out that Genya had an affair with a Christian organist before she married Albert, and that both married and left their home country because of their respective pasts (Wisse 61). Even though the possibility that David is the offspring of that affair is later refuted, in David's imperfect (re)construction and imaginative complementation of the fragments of an overheard conversation between Genya and Bertha, the temporary possibility that Albert is not his biological father takes on an ominous, but ultimately ambiguous and vague significance.

Conclusively, one can say that the identificatory pattern engendered by the family constellation is somewhat, but not much, less ambiguous and dynamic than the dominant relation between child and world, which it complicates and overlaps with. As is to be expected, neither father nor mother can simply be correlated with either outside or inside, child or world. Crucially, the conflict is not one of first generation immigrant parents versus second generation acculturated child, as Werner Sollors writes. He argues that in "the novel the themes of technological modernity and urban polyethnicity build up the American side of David's bilateral descent line, balancing his parents' country origins and Jewishness. The novel also offers an externalization of the problem of the second generation" (Sollors 1996b, 152). Neither do his "parents' country origins" and their diasporic memories of them play much of a role (their rural background seems to have no detrimental effect, and it is mentioned but three or four times in the entire novel), nor is their Jewishness of central concern, as I will show below. As Pascal Fischer notes in his detailed analysis of the novel, there are no fights between family members that have to do with American culture (Fischer 122). Almost all conflicts derive from the father's disposition and suspicion. Not much, in fact almost nothing, is said about David's acculturation apart from the fact that he speaks English fairly well, which the father also does.

Language

Language plays an integral role in the novel. Few aspects have been given as much critical attention, and even in discussions that focus on other topics, language is reflexively invoked. Probably the most influential (and almost comprehensive) analyses are those by Hana Wirth-Nesher in a number of essays. As she points out, there is a host of different languages that make the novel multilingual. The main languages are English (spoken and thought mainly by David, and, of course, the language of the narrator) and Yiddish (translated, but also present in dialogues), as well as Hebrew (during readings in the cheder), Aramaic (in the rituals and prayers), and Polish (spoken by mother and aunt). In addition, there are "dialect, reproduction of 'foreign'

languages, internal translation and untranslatability, cultural literacy through non-English triggers, interlingual puns, liturgy, sacred and secular language, linguistic home and exile" (2003, 122). Other critics add that many passages are left untranslated (Sollors 1996b, 131), that the rendering of linguistic differences is quite heterogeneous (135) and that some passages "may be inaccessible to readers of *any* linguistic background" (136; emphasis in the original).

As a result, Wirth-Nesher argues, the novel portrays an "internal struggle for self-definition," a "*kulturkampf*" (sic), and a "battleground of languages" (1996, 7) on which a "hybrid Jewish-American identity" is "forged in the clash of languages and dialects" (10). This "battleground" constitutes an "in-between zone" and "communal space of a particular generation in Jewish-American culture" (10). Leslie Fiedler adds:

> Many critics have commented on the multiple languages spoken in Roth's novel, but none that I know of seems to have noticed that what especially obsesses him are the negative aspects of that heteroglossia. [...] even within single ethnic groups, the generations are more separated than joined by their imperfect shared languages, old and new. (21)

To some degree, I concur. There is no doubt that the narrative is multilingual, and that the various linguistic codes are not only heterogeneous, but often indecipherable, ambiguous or polyvalent, even for multilingual readers. I would, however, at least attenuate some of the consequences and interpretations that are drawn from this; and some of the terms used are, I think, outright inapposite. First of all, much is made of the fact that the book's conceit is that it is a translation of Yiddish. The very first instance of direct speech, an utterance made by Genya in the prologue when she greets her husband ("And this is the Golden Land"), is followed by a short sentence: "She spoke in Yiddish" (11). In the more than four hundred pages of the book, this is the only time this is mentioned. The bulk of the narrative is in standard English, especially the psychonarration of David's thoughts. The fact that much of the dialogue contains Yiddish words, syntax and idioms (and occasionally entire sentences, sometimes untranslated) is certainly important, because it implies an interesting doubling, since we are to assume that the protagonists think in Yiddish anyway. Of course, as the narrative also announces (though again only once, and shortly), David speaks English when on the streets (20). This English is, in turn, printed as presumably pronounced, showing it as a mixture of young learner's language and sociolect. I would, nevertheless, argue that for most readers, the short utterances that announce the book's linguistic conceit are quickly forgotten. More importantly, the narrative's multilingualism stands out so sharply not only because there is much of it, but also because it is contrasted with the standard English of the narrative voice, which to boost

narrates the perhaps most important part of the book: David's thoughts. Wirth-Nesher herself writes that the original source language is "almost entirely absent" (1996, 7). Yiddish, then, is certainly not the primary arena for David's "internal struggle for self-definition."

More importantly, there is no "*kulturkampf*" (as there is no clearly definable "kultur"), no "battleground," and most definitely no "hybrid Jewish-American identity" that is "forged" in the "communal space of a particular generation in Jewish-American culture," since at least in this narrative, there is no communal space to speak of at all, as there is, for example, in *Bread Givers*. David's identifications are much too manifold to talk about any kind of Jewish-American identity, on the contrary: as I have tried to show, he is still very much lost and afloat in the world. Being the very young child that he is, and given his overarching desire for safety no matter where it offers itself, there is (yet?) no kind of stable identity to talk of, not to mention the fact that considering the Babel and heteroglossia of his environment, there is no linguistic identity or home for him.[28] The "sleep" that he falls into at the end cannot count as closure, since the narrative makes abundantly clear that it is transient; as well, it bears repeating once more that we are talking about a very young child, so it should not be surprising at all that there is no closure, just the opposite.[29] The almost lethal epiphany is at least as brutal, violent and blunt as it is sacred and spiritual, and universal, not Jewish. Hebrew, Wirth-Nesher writes, "is the unchallenged 'home' language as the holy tongue uniting Jews historically and geographically" (1996b, 8). While this is generally true, and while David immediately recognizes Hebrew as God's language the first time he hears it (as opposed to Yiddish [210]), David mostly repeats the Hebrew he has learned by rote without understanding it: "Translation, which was called Chumish, would come later" (217). Hebrew is powerfully evocative, but also "empty." David is a foreigner to it, it is symbolic without concrete denotative content (like so many symbols in the book), a foreign tradition and past about which he knows almost nothing. Tellingly, he constructs his own past when "confessing" to the rabbi after his first contact with the rail road tracks, and that past is one of mixed Jewish and Christian parentage.

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28 | Wirth-Nesher does write that his identity remains indeterminate, but then continues to write about Jewish-American identity, hedged by words like "interstices."

29 | The fact that so many critics tend to forget that this is a narrative about a very young child (with a narrative situation that has no experienced I to counter the experiencing I, as does, for example, *The Tin Drum*) written in *really* good and advanced standard English supports, I think, my claim that readers would also forget that the narrator's language is "really" Yiddish. Sollors is one of the few to emphasize that, after all, David is still in the process of language acquisition (1996b, 136).

Lastly, while it is true that parts of the narrative stress the "negative aspects of that heteroglossia" and that at least one member of the older generation is more and more separated from David – his mother at one point says: "Your Yiddish is more than one-half English now. I'm being left behind." (118) – other parts of the narrative stress that many others are not left behind – after all, other Jewish characters speak English very well – and that the linguistic and cultural Babel also has positive, possibly even utopian aspects. The climactic epiphany is interspersed with profane barroom dialogue that, despite the lingustic diversity, indicates many different people with many different languages and backgrounds in one common room, who then quickly and in masses flock to David in order to help him when his parents cannot. I think Wirth-Nesher is absolutely right that "[m]ultilingual reading enables us to experience translation at the heart of every communicative act and the foreignness of language itself" (127); but I do not think that this is particularly Jewish American in *Call It Sleep* (as I do not think it is a predominantly Jewish book predominantly about Jewish identity), nor particular of Jewish American literature. The latter has, indeed, "opened up a new cultural and linguistic arena in American letters" (127), but only one of many, as my other analyses will show.

Religion

Literary history firmly situates *Call It Sleep* in the lineage of Jewish-American literature, but there is no clear-cut, reliable Jewish identification available to David, much less a Jewish community, neither extant nor remembered. The differentiations between Jewish and Christian are, at a closer look, equally blurred. This is, improbably, nowhere as obvious as regarding cheder.

Even before David joins cheder, there is little in the book to indicate a firm Jewish belief and tradition, not in the family, nor anywhere else. The first time a Jewish festival is mentioned, it is in passing and without details (it serves as a prologue to the arrival of Luter). This feast, Passover, is in fact the only one that seems to play any role at all, other customs and traditions are not mentioned.[30] When Passover comes around again, there is a description of David trying to burn leavened bread in the street and being stymied, but not much more other than some references to the Haggadah and the "only kid." When Jews and Judaism are mentioned, it is mostly cursorily, and not conclusively. There seems to be no Jewish community (at least none is mentioned), and the family

30 | There are some very minor exceptions. At one point, an old Jewish woman asks David to help her light her stove, which he does. As it is the evening before Sabbath and already after sundown, she is not allowed to do this, and neither is David, for that matter, who does it unwittingly. This is another indicator that Jewish rules and customs are not strictly observed in the Schearl family.

is isolated anyway. As Wisse writes, David cannot "benefit from accumulated family or tribal tradition" (67) because there is none; the diasporic memories are vague and, because related to troubling and almost taboo events, hardly ever mentioned, and then in another language (Polish) that David cannot understand. There is no meaningful Jewish way of life, no shared community, no religious and/or cultural tradition as an empowering resource to balance the severance caused by immigration. Any kind of "sentimental notion" is crushed (68), even cheder.

There are some indications that there is Anti-Semitism (for example when Leo reiterates the common clichés about the relationship between Christians and Jews; there also are some comments by passer-bys in the streets), but only far and few between and almost immediately countered by a contradictory or relativizing comment or description (for example when "Jewish" and "Christian" kitchens are compared, see above). There are no stereotypically marked (clothing or physiognomy) Jews in the novel; and Albert is a strong and powerful person. At one point, Bertha says to Genya "you weren't truly Jewish. You were strange. You didn't have a Jew's nature" (162), to which Genya replies "And what kind of nature is that?," concluding with an exasperated "Ach." On another occasion, Albert himself voices prejudices about Russian Jews, which are immediately opposed by Genya saying "A Russian Jew is also a man" (176). Finally, as Kerman remarks, David's magical associations with commonplace household objects are solely his own, and even though there are religious overtones, these cannot be clearly delineated to one source but often mix allusions (47).[31]

When Albert enrolls David in cheder, as tradition demands, it is not because he himself is a firm believer: "I mean I'm little enough a Jew myself. But I want to make sure he'll become at least something of a Jew also. I want you to find a cheder for him and a rabbi who isn't too exorbitant" (207). It is true, of course, that cheder is of primary importance for David, it becomes the center of his life. For the first time, he hears God's language. He seems to have an intuitive understanding of the sacredness of the scripture he reads (and he is good at reading), and of the import of the particular passage (presumably the book of Isaiah, chapter 6ff). It is, after all, his imagination of the angelic coal on Isaiah's lips that makes him seek the light inbetween the railroad tracks. However, while cheder and scripture are definitely crucial, their importance is anything but unambiguous. First of all, though it is not elaborated in the novel, the cheder David attends represents more assimilated, secular Judaism. The cheder of Haredi (i.e. Orthodox) Judaism would be a full-day school without a

31 | Jesus, for example, is of the House of David. Isaiah is an important prophet for Jews and Christians alike. Also, David (the character) seeks protection from his Jewish father in the rosary that is the token of the betrayal by Leo, as well as in a profane place.

significant secular part. The cheder David attends is clearly an afternoon school in addition to public schooling. Secondly, much about that cheder is comic and not particularly sacred. The rabbi Pankower, himself, is a comic figure whom his students are afraid of, but do not take seriously. For example, he accepts lollipop pointers as bribes (215), and as Pascal Fischer notes in his detailed analysis of Jewish symbols in the novel (100-102), these pointers can be seen as a humorous reference to real Yads, Torah pointers, which are used to turn the pages of the Torah so that no one actually touches it, and which should be sacred objects made of silver or ornate other materials. While they would not be used in the situations described in the novel, the humorous allusion is obvious. Thirdly, more significantly, the children read and learn Hebrew scripture by rote, but do not understand it, since translation is only learned later (see above). Although David grasps the importance of the passage he reads, he ironically seeks revelation and redemption outside the cheder and literally in the earth, below. Lastly, the stereotypical generational conflict that is so often invoked in critical literature between genuine first Jewish generation and apostate second generation is macerated in several ways. As has been discussed several times now, it is David who seeks the sacred, not his parents. His revelation is a mixture of sacred and profane, and it is mostly his very own, very idiosyncratic revelation, which mixes a host of different symbols and allusions. When he is found and saved, it is accompanied by the exclamation "Christ, it's a kid!" (418). The generational cliché is undercut even more explicitly by the rabbi himself. In an exceptional passage that uses the rabbi as focalizer (the only time there is longer and ostentatious focalization other than through David) and contains almost only the psychonarration of the rabbi's thoughts, he thinks about the second generation on his way to David's parents to ask them about the "yarn" the latter has spun about his being "half goy:"

> A curse on them! He glared about him at the children and half grown boys and girls who crowded the stoops and overflowed into the sidewalks and gutter. The devil take them! What was going to become of Yiddish youth? What would become of this new breed? These Americans? This sidewalk-and-gutter generation? He knew them all and they were all alike [...] Corrupt generation! [...] And it is strange that true Yiddish children of pious parents should prove such God-forsaken dolts and this one – only half-a-Jew – [...] an iron wit. (371-373)

Only a few moments prior, when David reads from the Torah, and reads well, the same rabbi appreciates David as a "true Yiddish child" where the others are "American Esaus" (362). The focalization through the rabbi in this passage perspectively and stylistically personalizes this view of things, which is important because heretofore, the rabbi has been portrayed in a rather humorous and not really respectful manner: he himself is venal, has less than full control over the

children and resorts exclusively to physical punishment, and never makes the least effort to explain to David the significance of the passage that so fascinates the latter. When David relates his epiphany, the rabbi only scorns him and laughs. All this discredits his view of things to some degree. Moreover, the reference to Esau is at least ambivalent. It is clearly negative and implies some kind of apostasy; yet in the Bible it is Jacob that tricks Esau into giving up his birthright as a firstborn. Biblical exegesis might shed a negative light on Esau for giving away his birthright so easily (in fact, for food), but it might just as well shed a negative light on Jacob for his deception (indeed, he is later punished by being deceived himself). Lastly, the rabbi's sweeping generalizations ("He knew them all and they were all alike") are not only untenable of their own but also mark the internal outburst as that of a frustrated teacher rather than a credible commentator of an entire generation. Once more, identifications and differentiations are ambiguous in and of themselves, and they are blurred.

(Almost) Absences & Minor Differentiations

As can be expected in a narrative of this length and complexity, there are a number of further identifications and differentiations. Most of them are minor and/or play almost no role, although one would perhaps expect them to. It also worth noting that there are some surprising absences.[32]

Gender. Except within the family constellation, gender is a relatively subordinate identificatory pattern. We have a physically intimidating father with a really bad temper and an almost inhumanly patient mother, who only stands up against her husband to defend her son. The gender roles are fairly traditional: the father works, the mother stays at home and takes care of the child (as well as cleans, cooks, washes, etc.). Leaving aside contemporary contextual plausibility for now – gender roles in most Jewish immigrant families (and most immigrant families in general) were relatively traditional at that time – the issue of gender is almost entirely subsumed under the issue of father and mother, which in turn makes sense because the dominant focalizer is a young child for whom gender does not matter much. There are inklings that he begins to understand his mother is also a woman (for example when other boys have seen her naked in the bath tub) and his father a man (for example when David sees the bull's horns), but these are few. It should not be forgotten that much of the narrative consists of David being outside without mother or father near. Apart from this, there are a number of other characters who balance the traditional gender roles of Genya and Albert, for example Bertha and Nathan

32 | It is probable that the secondary identificatory patterns are less complex and elaborate than the dominant ones. Of course, many more other identifications and differentiations are imaginable (school, health, age) than the ones mentioned here.

(who are somewhat clichéd), but also strong girls, weak boys, and many others who appear so shortly that we just cannot tell. In short, the "primal antinomies [of female and male] assume a myriad of shapes and forms" (Fiedler 27) without being prominent.

Sex & Sexual Orientation. For David, naturally, sex and sexual orientation play almost no role, except in the negative: every time he encounters some kind of "sexual activity," it is within a crude, literally dark and not entirely consensual situation and accompanied by profane descriptions ("pretzel," "knish"). Annie "plays dirty" with him in a closet, Leo and Ester "play bad" in a dark shed, and both times there are unpleasant consequences. The sexual intercourse between Genya and Albert is only alluded to, as is the attraction between Luter and Genya. Both instances are oppressively connoted to David.

Class & Money. Perhaps most astoundingly, the narrative contains very few explicit references to socioeconomic issues. After it is mentioned in the prologue (Genya notices Albert's haggard look and says "Then here in the new land is the same old poverty"), poverty hardly plays a role anymore. The family lives in a four room apartment, there is always food (and plenty; Genya at one point buys larger amounts because it is so cheap), the father always has a job. As Fischer remarks, the irascible character of David's father is more important in the context of his working environment than the depiction of that working environment (78-79). Bertha comments on poverty and on industrial working strictures once, but only on the side. She and Nathan have enough money saved to open up a candy store, if a small and rather decrepit one. Only once does the narrative depict a scene of socioeconomic contrast: on the occasion of Bertha and David visiting the museum (145ff). David notices the different houses, the different speech, and the reduced level of noise, but he does not further comment on these differences, and the visit itself is short and dominated by his and Bertha's search for the museum's exit. In fact, for David, the world consists almost entirely of Brownsville and the Lower East Side, and in the description of that world, socioeconomic aspects play no role, much less any coherent notion of any kind of coherent class. I would therefore contradict Materassi's claim that the novel actually shows and describes "economically defined neighborhoods" (31). More aptly, Sollors writes that "David can hardly be considered 'representative' of any social stratum" (Sollors 1996b, 141). No wonder the early review in the *New Masses* excoriates the novel for its lack of political (i.e. communist) engagement: the novel is much more concerned with David's consciousness.[33]

33 | Just how astounding the near absence of economic aspects should be becomes perhaps clearer when we remember that poverty and (lack of) money feature prominently in many stories by Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin; the drastically blunt depiction of poverty in Yezierska's *Bread Givers* is only excelled by its complementation

Diasporic Jewish & Other Communities. Putting it bluntly, there are no diasporic communities in the world of the novel, neither religious (e.g. Jewish or Catholic) nor cultural/national/regional (e.g. German, Italian, Polish, Hungarian).[34] First of all, the Schearl family is reclusive. The family is not really part of the neighborhood community because the mother keeps to herself, the father has a reputation as hostile, and David is wary of his peer group and spends much time alone (46). "Genya and Albert are only accidentally part of a 'Jewish' 'mass migration' that was looking for opportunity in a freer land. Their anomalous presence in the optimistic immigrant tide increases their claustrophobia, and our sense of their entrapment" (Wisse 64). David, consequently, is "part of a family that has used immigration as a means of escaping from the past" (67) and thus does not "benefit from accumulated family or tribal tradition" (67).[35] There are no references at all to any kind of Jewish community such as interaction or contact via religious services or visits to the synagogue. The cheder indicates that there must be a community, but nothing is said about that community, much less about any kind of cultural or religious identity. Granted, it is easy to deduce from historical record that the Lower East Side at that time was mostly Jewish, so that contemporary or informed current readers may be presumed to know this. In the novel itself, however, it plays no role. Furthermore, while Roth, himself, claims that he remembers a completely homogeneous neighborhood where and while he grew up, Materassi points out that Roth's statements about the creation of David's environment and about his own life in the Lower East Side are neither provable nor explicitly nonfactual (42):

> the New York City we study in *Call It Sleep* is Roth's idea of the city and, as such, does not have to stand up for verification and certification against the 'real' New York – except

with violence in Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete*; many of Farrell's Chicago stories also leave nothing to be desired regarding explicitness.

34 | There is also no mention of the influential Zionist movement at the beginning of the 20th century, which is surprising, also because at the time Roth was writing the novel, the American Palestine Committee was quickly growing in size and power.

35 | Wisse's commentary about the Schearl family is correct, but her implications about Jewish migration in general have to be treated cautiously at least. Much Jewish migration was prompted by discrimination, persecution and progroms, so in a way, many families were seeking to escape that past, even if their personal family history was not fraught. Despite much folklore about them being homogenous, stable and unchanging, many shtetls grew as institutionally enforced enclaves of segregation and not necessarily idylls of untainted "Jewish life." Moreover, as letters and diaries show, many members of the "immigrant tide" were indeed happy about escaping persecution but not throughout "optimistic" or naive about what awaited them in the "Golden Land."

insofar as an understanding of the peculiarity of the writer's possible alteration of his model sheds light on the function his treatment of the environment has within the whole. (41)[36]

Contradicting Roth's statements about his memories, Materassi notes the high improbability of the neighborhood being so homogeneous that no contact with non-Jews was possible (43) since 10th Street, as a dividing line between different neighborhoods, was a place of encounter. What is more, drastic changes in composition were possible from one block to the next (43).[37]

With regard to other nationalities, some are mentioned in passing (Chinese, Italian, Irish, Russian, German), but nothing specific is said about them other than that they exist. The most patent evidence that there are people with many different cultural, regional and national backgrounds living

36 | This is or course true for the entire fictional world created in *Call It Sleep*. Materassi shortly discusses the pitfall of recognizing factual aspects of a text and by default relating them more or less unequivocally to the cultural context, which may prove deceptive and misleading, not only because we bring our own (fore)knowledge to the text, but also because factual details are altered already simply by them being in a fictional textual universe (47).

37 | If we trust Will Eisner's depiction of the tenements in the 1930s in *A Contract With God* (or Jacob Riis's much earlier *How the Other Half Lives*, for that matter), drastic changes in composition were possible *within* one block and even within one building. A look at a demographic composition map of New York at the beginning of the 20th century shows that Little Italy, the Irish district and the Jewish district partially overlapped or crossed streets. Moreover, the Jewish population itself was highly diversified. Cahan describes a block of the East Side in *Yekl*:

> Hardly a block but shelters Jews from every nook and every corner of Russia, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Roumania [sic]; Lithuanian Jews, Volhynian Jews, south Russian Jews, Bessarabian Jews [...]; Russified Jews expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kieff, or Saratoff; Jewish runaways from Justice; Jewish refugees from crying political and economical injustice; people torn from a hard-gained foothold in life and from deep-rooted attachments by the caprice of intolerance or the wiles of demagoguery [...]; students shut out of the Russian universities [...]; artisans, merchants, teachers, rabbis, artists, beggars–all come in search of fortune. (13-14)

Taken together, he calls them a "human hodgepodge with its component parts changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole" (14), which, of course, they never would be. On a side note: Many Jewish immigrants moved into the area that was, until then, occupied mostly by Germans, whose community began to disintegrate at the end of the 19th century due to internal migration to other cities and communities and suffered a fatal blow by the General Slocum (a passenger steamboat) disaster in 1904 that killed over a thousand Germans.

in the neighborhood is the barroom polylogue. Here, people are marked by their speech and linguistic patterns, not by an alleged "cultural" or "national" "identity," apart from the fact that, since the remarks are only partly and with difficulty traceable to their authors, the impression is more of a communal kaleidoscope than of individuals.

In conclusion, we can summarize the identificatory pattern thus:

1. The extant differentiations are consequential but seldom clear cut. The identifications are almost always ambiguous. Both are dynamic and are often realized in a dialectic of the concrete and the general, putting a limit to typicality. The identificatory pattern is not only dynamic, but also increases in complexity. Of course, in one way, all fictional worlds, if they develop at all, are likely to increase in complexity to some degree as they unfold, except perhaps for the most bare and minimal ones. In *Call It Sleep*, the particular way in which this increase occurs is owed to the mostly chronological plot structure and to the particular protagonist: it increases parallel to the child's increasing contact with and knowledge about the world. Also, it is heterarchical, i.e. the significance of one part of the pattern – say the religious aspect – may eclipse another part – say peer group – during a particular scene, and vice versa.
2. Identifications and differentiations are dominantly hetero-modal rather than auto-modal. This is in part owed to the heterodiegetic narrative situation, and in part to the protagonist's age, as the child cannot really reflect himself on identificatory patterns yet. However, hetero-identification and -differentiation occur seldom through other characters in the fictional world, and rarely explicitly through the narrator. Rather, the identifications are inflected through the internal focalization and dominant FID of David.
3. Some identifications and differentiations are expected (child/world, family, language, religion), the (near) absence of others (community, class) is not.
4. The degree of departure between possible fictional world and actual world is minimal in terms of ontology (setting, events, causality, characters) and epistemology (perspectival structure, cognition, motivation). Except for the (radically divergent) climax and the abrupt shift in focalization to the rabbi in one section, the discursive structure does not significantly call attention to itself.[38] The occasionally puzzling sections of multilingualism (not all are puzzling) serve as a mechanism of estrangement that emphasizes fictionality.

38 | This is assuming that internal focalization (especially through a small child) and free indirect discourse are entirely naturalized and narrativized by contemporary readers.

3.2 John Okada: *No-No Boy*

Roughly three months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized the declaration of certain areas of the USA as military zones, from which people or groups could be excluded. The order did not specify areas or groups (Roosevelt 1942). In effect, however, it led to the creation of internment camps[39] predominantly for people of Japanese ancestry, and predominantly in the West, where most Japanese immigrants had settled. The internment was clearly racially motivated: several thousand Italian Americans and German Americans were also interned, but the vast majority – somewhere between 110,000 and 120,000 – were Japanese immigrants (Issei) and their children (Nisei) and grandchildren (Sansei). The latter two were American born and thus US-citizens and constituted more than sixty percent of the interned; they were interned despite their citizenship allegedly because their loyalty could not be determined due to their radical racial difference (Girst 90).[40] Via racial association and conflation, members of other groups such as Koreans were also interned. In Hawaii, the Japanese Americans escaped internment simply because their part of the population was much too large (approximately one third). For most people, the internment meant the loss of almost all property and valuables; the order was ultimately rescinded at the beginning of 1945.[41]

The internment built on a long history of racially based discrimination against Japanese immigrants and their children. The Japanese started arriving on the West Coast in greater numbers only in the 1880s. Before then, Japan forbade emigration by penalty of death. When the Japanese did begin to arrive, there was already an extant, virulent, anti-Asian racist sentiment in the USA in general, and in the West specifically, directed primarily against the

39 | There is some critical debate about terminology. Historical records and also some critics call the camps "concentration" camps. I have refrained from this in order to mark the difference from the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, most of which were designed for the extermination of the imprisoned. Moreover, there were several different kinds of internment camps for different categories of interned, and under different authorities. However, these details play no role for the novel. Incidentally, many camps were placed on Native American reservations, in turn causing another set of conflicts.

40 | In her *Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian*, Sui Sin Far describes scenes in which some people repudiate that the Chinese are human and have a soul; they also differentiate between Japanese and Chinese, the former being higher up on the racial ladder.

41 | For a detailed and impressively thoroughly researched discussion of the internment, as well as of the novel and its critical reception, see Thomas Girst's excellent book (2015).

Chinese. After the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 with the help of Chinese immigrant labor, legislation was rapidly passed to preclude the Chinese immigrants from naturalization in 1870. This was followed by a Californian anti-miscegenation law in 1880 and the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. For a majority of the population, the (substantial) differences between the Chinese and Japanese were not readily discernible, nor did they matter much – not to mention the differences *within* these large (nationally) aggregated immigrant groups.[42] Legislation against the Chinese was quickly extended to the Japanese and Koreans: the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement between the USA and Japan did not restrict Japanese immigration, but demanded from Japan that it restrict emigration. Around that time, private organizations also rallied against the "Asian invasion:" In 1905, the Asiatic Exclusion League was founded and quickly grew influential. The 1913 Californian Alien Land Law prohibited Asian ownership of land; finally, only two years before the more or less plainly racist National Origins Act (the so-called quota laws) that effectually reduced immigration from the Eastern hemisphere to next to zero, the 1922 *Takao Ozawa vs. US* case ruled that Issei Japanese could not gain citizenship because they could not lay claim to being "racially white," i.e. Caucasian.[43] In 1923, this was expanded to include all Asian Indians. Only after World War II did this change somewhat due to the Cold War and US-American containment policy in Asia.[44] All in all, legislation up to the time *No-No Boy* commences gives evidence to the drastic and opportunistic rapidity, whim and volatility with

42 | With reference to the origins of Chinese immigrants, Helena Grice writes:

> For example, so-called 'Chinese Americans' may trace their ancestry to mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong [...], or Singapore. Depending upon their ancestral region, they may speak Cantonese, Mandarin, or one of any number of local dialects. In addition, class differences and levels of economic security may also be obscured: there is a great deal of difference between an educated and financially secure immigrant from Hong Kong and a refuge from Vietnam. (134)

43 | Japanese Americans and Asian Americans in general had a long tradition of being considered so racially different (and inferior) as to render them unassimilable. A then-popular eugenic and social-Darwinist discourse argued for a racial ladder, on which (naturally) white Caucasians (here meaning Anglo-Saxons and the descendents of White Western European immigrants) ranked above "Hispanics," Asians, and, of course, Africans and Native Americans. One argument forced by the various Exclusion Leagues was that the influx of inferior races would ultimately diminish and ruin the Anglo-Saxon gene pool.

44 | There was a brief hiatus of open governmental resentment against the Japanese during World War I, when Japan was an ally.

which the US government and its legislature made decisions regarding certain immigrant groups, depending on the circumstances.[45]

Despite similarities to other aggregate immigrant groups from the Eastern hemisphere especially in their reception, Japanese immigration shows some particularities that are important for the novel, also due to legislation. Like the Chinese, the Japanese settled primarily in the West and preferred urban communities.[46] However, from the beginning, and contrary to the Chinese, whole families arrived, not just men.[47] While the majority apparently (as much as can be ascertained) did not plan to stay, there quickly sprang up a "second generation" of children and thus regionally focused, growing communities with the attending communal life, practices and productions.[48]

It is against this background that the narrative of *No-No Boy* unfolds. Its central theme is the identificatory conflict of its protagonist Ichiro, a conflict that involves several larger aggregate categories – Japanese, American, Japanese-American and more – and permeates almost all identifications and differentiations in the novel. This conflict is due to the particular, eponymous status of Ichiro being, unlike Okada himself, a so-called no-no boy: During internment, the interned had to answer questions for an "Application for Leave Clearance" form. Question 27 asked them whether they would be willing, if the occasion arose, to serve in the Army Nurse Corps or the Women's Army Corps (if eligible according to gender and age); question 28 asked them to swear allegiance to the USA and to foreswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor or any other foreign government. Those who answered "no" twice to these consecutive questions (roughly 10%) were subsequently called "no-no boys" and faced severe discrimination by their own group because they seemed to validate the government assumption that the Japanese-Americans were disloyal to their country of birth and could not be trusted.[49]

Now, as critics have pointed out, the two deceptively simple questions actually caused a number of complex conflicts in the people that had to answer them, and replying with "no" could have several different reasons. For one,

45 | For a quite comprehensive historical timeline of Asian Americans in the USA, see Bella Adams ix-xxvi.

46 | Unlike the Chinese, there were very few Japanese immigrants to the East coast.

47 | In fact, legislation forbade Chinese immigrants to bring their families with them in order to preclude their staying.

48 | While these communities were *relatively* homogeneous, intermarriage did exist. As the 1940 US census – sadly – indicates, Korean-Japanese, Chinese-Japanese, Filipino-Japanese, but also Mexican-Japanese and Cherokee-Japanese were also interned as "Japanese," if in small numbers.

49 | Originals and facsimiles of all important documents can be found in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

their internment and their imputed potential disloyalty had already caused resentment among the Issei and Nisei: here was a government that blatantly did not trust a particular group of people, many of them citizens or residents for many decades, that had not granted them rights it granted to many others (citizenship, land ownership), that had disowned them and taken away their property, and that now asked for a proof of loyalty. Many feared that answering with yes to the first question would lead to their later draft (which it did), and that it thus was a "trick" question; the Issei feared that answering yes to the second question meant, firstly, that they had sworn an oath of allegiance to Japan in the first place (making the question also a "trick" question), and, secondly and correctly, that since they did not possess US-citizenship (from which they were statutorily excluded), giving up Japanese citizenship would in effect render them stateless.[50] Of particular additional importance for the novel is the (often forgotten) fact that Ichiro is not only a no-no boy, but a draft resister, which is the reason he is sent to prison for two years after two years of internment.[51]

Okada's *No-No Boy* was first published in 1957 but, while it was reviewed and noted (among other places in *The New York Times*), it did not sell well and was out of print for almost twenty years. Like so many other texts by women, African American, Native American and "ethnic" and immigrant writers that were rediscovered and unearthed during the 1970s, and the attending debate about canons, university curricula, educational institutional structures and legitimate research fields, *No-No Boy*'s rediscovery and induction into academia was accompanied by critical debates about authenticity, representation, racism, and literary traditions. The myth instigated by Lawson Inada and Frank Chin (who unquestionably deserve much credit for bringing the book back to light and notice) in preface and afterword,[52] respectively, that the novel was entirely ignored, that it was rejected by the Japanese American community because of its taboo subject, that it single-handedly started a tradition of Asian American literature, and that Okada's wife burned the manuscript, only contributed to the heatedness of the debates,[53] for example whether Okada's novel is

50 | Thomas Girst lists all in all ten historically verified reasons for answering "no" to one or both of the questions.

51 | The questionnaire was implemented in 1943; the draft followed in 1944.

52 | First published in a Seattle magazine.

53 | It is Thomas Girst's thorough book that provides compelling evidence that many of Chin's and Lawson's claims (also regarding the absence of a literary tradition of Asian American literature) are, at a closer look, untenable, despite their indubitable service to American literature. It is also much easier to see now that Okada was an early, but by far not the first writer about Japanese Americans, much less about Asian Americans. Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946) is a novel about first generation

indebted to Western literary traditions, and, if so, whether that diminishes its importance as a piece of Japanese American literature; whether the novel as a Bildungsroman is too assimilationist and accommodating (e.g. of the model minority myth); whether it is sexist due to its depiction of Ichiro's mother; or whether it "authentically" represents Japanese American "culture" at that particular juncture in time.

The absurdity of most of these debates reached a high point in the so-called pen war between Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, a debate that eerily echoes the one between Silko and Erdrich: Chin accused Kingston of faking Asian American traditions and cultures in her *Woman Warrior*, while Kingston insisted on artistic freedom and the impossibility and fallacy of "authentic representation" (and in turn accused Chin of sexism).[54] While it is important to ask, as Maria Dürig emphasizes, "[w]elche Verantwortung [...] z.B. ethnische Autoren und Autorinnen gegenüber der Gemeinschaft, die sie darstellen, und gegenüber ihren Lesern [haben]" (20-21) in order to avoid a re-inscription of stereotypes via a distorted picture of a community and its rituals and myths, the answer cannot lie in the simplistic opposition between "real/authentic" and "fake/inauthentic."[55] Thomas Girst in detail discusses the problematic issue of authenticity and of what constitutes a "Japanese American book," along with "standards" of truthfulness, realism, factuality, and the opposition to "white Western" literature. He argues: "*No-No Boy*'s multivalent features always exceed or at least are not limited to rightly positioning its author" as a representative of an Asian American literary collective positioned over and against mainstream traditional American canon (123). Ultimately, he continues, this set of oppositions repeats the opposition between universalism (world literature) vs. cultural relativism (local context specifics) (120). Interestingly, he takes to task the many models and approaches that work within the constraints of "ethnic/

Filipino plantation workers in California; Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California* (1949) is a collection of short stories about Japanese Americans in West, as is Shelley Ota's *Upon Their Shoulders* (1951) on Hawaii; Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953) is an early autobiography, and so is Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950). I have also mentioned several other shorter texts by and about Asian Americans in the theory chapter.

54 | For a detailed overview and discussion of the "pen war" between Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, see Dürig (18-27) and Shapiro (5-28).

55 | Incidentally, Dürig's argument resembles the complaint I voice in the introduction: "teilweise wird die asiatischamerikanische literarische Identität nicht *vis-à-vis* der angloamerikanischen Literatur diskutiert, sondern als Konflikt zwischen den noch in Asien geborenen Eltern und dem in Amerika geborenen Kind. Die Folge ist eine Entpolitisierung der geschilderten Ereignisse" (23), and a blind eye for economic, racial, gender and other forms of discrimination.

minority" vs. "mainstream/Western" not only for their simplistic opposition but also for their neglect of the fact that "the field of literature" in general is "increasingly marginalized" (140). Unsurprisingly, and repeating a trend that was already mentioned in the discussion of the critical reception of Roth's *Call It Sleep*, recent criticism not only acknowledges the inadequacy of such broad labels as "Asian American," it also tends to focus on the ambiguities in the novel, in particular the ending and whether it offers resolution/wholeness/fusion/hope to Ichiro and his perceived conflict, or not.[56]

Excursion: Plot

The main narrative begins with Ichiro returning home to Seattle two weeks after his twenty-fifth birthday. He has just gotten out of prison and is walking to his parents' house when he meets an acquaintance from before the war who, after short enthusiasm, recalls that Ichiro is a no-no boy while he himself has served in the army. Realizing this, his initial friendliness quickly turns to open hostility and he insults Ichiro and spits on him, telling him that he will "piss on him" next time (4). The incident is revealing because it announces Ichiro's (and other no-no boys') standing – hetero- and auto-identified – among what he believes is the majority of other Japanese, Japanese Americans and Americans in the region, and it announces what will happen several times over in different variants throughout the novel, namely Japanese American veterans deprecating the draft resisters and no-no boys. When Ichiro arrives at his parents' home after the incident, it quickly becomes clear that the particular family constellation does not make things easier. His mother is staunchly pro-Japan and fanatically believes that the Japanese have won the war, and that all news to the contrary is faked. She is proud of her son's refusal to serve in the American army. The father is, initially, rather weak, an alcoholic, and silently submits to the mother's will most of the time. Ichiro's brother Taro seems to hate his entire family for their attitudes and behavior, and is about to enlist in the army to compensate for his brother's refusal.

The narrative continues with Ichiro musing about (and never quite finding out) what to do with his life now. He meets old friends and other no-no boys (whose "methods" of coping – drinking, gambling, getting laid and hanging out – he rejects), considers (but also gives up on) taking up his university courses in engineering again, and generally wanders about. Shortly after, he meets and befriends Kenji, a veteran who has lost most of his leg and, due to

56 | Apollo Amoko similarly criticizes "the [widespread] problematic tendency to read minority texts through the trope of resistance/subversion/dissidence (however nuanced and complex these tropes are thought to be in specific arguments)" (36-37) for their reductiveness.

an unexplained infection, is losing more and more of it until later in the novel he dies from the infection. Most importantly, Kenji does not judge Ichiro. In fact, the two have a number of conversations about switching places, which both claim they would. Kenji also introduces him to Emi, with whom Ichiro has a short affair that serves as an alleviation for Emi (and later as much for Ichiro), whose husband is fighting in the war and has just enlisted for another term. Kenji and Ichiro spend time together and share a number of experiences (among other things a bar brawl, an encounter with a venal police officer, etc.) until Kenji goes to hospital one last time and dies. Interspersed in this development are a number of experiences Ichiro has on his own (for example applying for a job at an engineering office which he turns down, despite the sympathetic, generous and understanding American boss, or a nasty exchange with an initially friendly waiter in a café). When he returns home after Kenji's death, his mother has killed herself. There is a funeral which his father seems to enjoy and which Ichiro flees, and more wandering (among other places to the Christian Rehabilitation Center, where he meets another no-no boy and turns down another job offer, and to a dance with Emi). The narrative ends and culminates in a somewhat cathartic fight in a parking lot outside a club during which Freddie (also no-no boy and friend of Ichiro) frantically flees from his opponent (aptly named Bull) in a car, crashes and dies. Ichiro gently pats the crying Bull on the head and then slowly walks away down the alley into the night.

As in *Call It Sleep*, a preface that introduces the wider historical context of the narrative precedes the main narrative of *No-No Boy*; as in *Call It Sleep*, this preface introduces the main themes as well as important aspects of the discursive structure of the narrative. It begins right away with the date and event of Pearl Harbor and its consequences:

> As of that moment, the Japanese in the United States became, by virtue of their *ineradicable brownness* and the slant eyes, which, upon close inspection, will seldom appear slanty, *animals* of a different breed. (vii; emphasis mine)

> [...] the Japanese, [...] in an instant of time that was not even a speck on the big calendar, had taken their place beside the Jew. The Jew was used to suffering. The writing for them was etched in caked and dried blood over countless generations upon countless generations. The Japanese did not know. [...] Bombs had fallen and, in less time than it takes a Japanese farmer's wife in California to run from the fields into the house and give birth to a child, the writing was scrawled for them. The *Jap-Jew* would look in the mirror this Sunday night and see a Jap-Jew. (viii; emphasis mine)

> *The Japanese who were born Americans and remained Japanese* because biology does not know the meaning of patriotism no longer worried about whether they were Japanese-Americans or American-Japanese. *They were Japanese*. (viii; emphasis mine)

These abstract assessments are embedded in short, particularizing vignettes about the consequences of the event for particular people: an embarrassed college professor, a racist drunk in a tavern and his forgiving Japanese landlord, a sympathetic prostitute, a trader, an old man working for a Japanese relief society, and finally a "Japanese-American who was an American soldier" (x) on board a B-24 who tells his comrade about the internment and is met with incredulity and then compassion. When he is asked why he is fighting for a nation that treats him thus, he simply replies "I got reasons" without explaining himself (xi). In terms of content, the preface already announces not only the novel's preoccupation with personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and -differentiation, but also the fact that it complicates these identifications (via comparison, contradiction and – negative – dialectics) rather then perpetuating and resolving them (see emphases). In terms of discursive structure, the preface embeds abstract ruminations into the context of particular people and their lives and perspectives, as does the main narrative, which contains not only Ichiro's story (rendered also in mostly linear episodes) and pervasive ruminations, but also those of other characters that interrupt and complement Ichiro's musings and experiences.

In other important aspects, *No-No Boy* could hardly be more different from *Call It Sleep*. It, too, has a heterodiegetic narrative situation, but it has several different focalizers (Ichiro, Ichiro's father, Kenji's father, Kenji) who may not be of equal quantitative importance in terms of passage length, but who complement important perspectives to the novel's main focalizer Ichiro. The latter is a 25-year-old male adult; this alone allows for an entirely different kind of perspective: he is extraordinarily self-reflective, articulate, and very much aware of identificatory patterns and their causes and consequences in the world. In fact, much of the novel is about his ruminations and reflections. His age makes aspects of life important to him that are not so for the five-year old David, e.g. alcohol and sex.

As the preface indicates, much of the narrative is about the rupture of certain identificatory patterns subsequent to Pearl Harbor and the internment, and the consequences of that rupture for Ichiro as an individual and as a perceived member/representative of a perceived community, *regardless* of his actual membership status, communal typicality, and the composition of that perceived community. In fact, as Stan Yogi notes, through racism and their treatment during the war and internment, "Nisei realize Japanese-Americans are not seen as distinct individuals, but only as reflections of a larger community" (67) so that "the division between individual and community disappears" (67).

This rupture is complex and important in several ways and on several levels: first of all, it is caused by a historical event that in itself, as well as in its consequences, is beyond Ichiro's control and beyond the control of the community that it affects, as it is, by the way, for all others depicted in the novel and, historically, for almost all US-Americans, whatever their particular alleged communal membership.

Secondly, it affects Ichiro as an individual and, inseparably and simultaneously, as a member of a community. This means that, in effect, he has to negotiate his (ever changing and interactive) position in the freshly ruptured and volatile identificatory pattern with regard to personal auto-identification (who and what does he consider himself to be as an individual), personal hetero-identification (who and what do family members, friends and enemies, etc., consider him to be), communal auto-identification (which community/group does he consider himself to be a member of, if any), and communal hetero-identification (which community/group do others – members of the same group but most importantly group-outsiders – consider him to be a member of). All of these overlap, are often ambiguous, and change of the course of the narrative.

Thirdly, the rupture disrupts a pre-existent identificatory pattern about which we get to know relatively little in the novel itself, though, of course, we have access to historical information. More precisely, we know little about Ichiro's life before the internment and imprisonment other than that he had an already contentious mother, had friends, and went to university.

Perhaps most importantly, the narrative commences after the fact, after the rupture. Very little is revealed about the internment other than some short episodes, and almost nothing about Ichiro's experiences in prison. Consequently, the narrative revolves around the aftermath of events and a rupture that themselves are almost absent, while their consequences are continuously, repetitively and insistently reflected upon and acted out by the main focalizer as well as several others, always with small changes and developments and in myriad different formulations and contexts. This kind of structure is typical of trauma narratives, where the actual traumatic event is often absent (because it cannot be adequately represented) but its traumatic effects are "worked through" again and again in repetitions with differences. The traumatic rupture is hardly ever fully resolved, and neither is it in *No-No Boy*.

This complexity is exacerbated by the narrative structure and situation (routinely ignored in secondary literature): not only is Ichiro an extremely self-reflective focalizer who constantly muses about personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation (mostly with regard to large aggregate – dominantly national – denominations), he also has discussions with others about the same topic, who add their own statements. To boot, there are several other focalizers who *also* reflect and comment on this. As a

result, we have, despite the relatively linear and straightforward development and descriptions of events, an almost impossibly complex accumulation of statements about identificatory patterns and consequently an equally complex and dynamic web of identifications and differentiations. Predictably, most of the topics that play any role at all apart from the aggregate personal and communal identifications – such as family, friendship, gender – are part and parcel of the dominant ruminations about personal identification and large aggregate categories such as Japanese, American, and Japanese-American.

Large Aggregations (Japanese, American, Japanese American)

At first look, it might seem as if there were only three fundamental identificatory faultlines in the narrative – Japanese, American, and Japanese-American – and as if the protagonist's main problem is that as a no-no boy he does not know where he belongs. This, in turn, would imply that once he knew, he would be happy, whole, fulfilled. No wonder, really, that a recurrent issue of almost all secondary criticism – much of it excellently argued and detailed – is the ending and whether it offers a resolution or not (or at least the indication and hope of an eventual resolution); if not, this is often interpreted as a severe burden and failure ascribable to the lasting effects of racism. No wonder, as well, that the concept of "Bildungsroman" is usually mentioned in this context. After all, the classical Bildungsroman usually closes with the protagonist finding his or her place in the world. In the case of Ichiro, depending on whether and where one thinks he finds his place, this in turn provides a nice opening for – also popular – discussions of whether the novel is (too) assimilationist.

Up to a certain point, these observations are, of course, indubitable. Ichiro does repeatedly think and muse about these three large aggregate categories and the identificatory pattern they offer, and the ending is important. However, at a closer look, there are a number of aspects that complicate the identificatory patterns and the ending, and that allow for a conclusion somewhat different from an "either/or." The following are different comments throughout the narrative on the larger aggregations and identificatory patterns mentioned above, which I take the liberty to quote at length. The first comments are those of the narrator of the preface as already quoted:

> [...] the Japanese, [...] in an instant of time that was not even a speck on the big calendar, had taken their place beside the Jew. [...] The Jap-Jew would look in the mirror this Sunday night and see a Jap-Jew. (viii)

Here, the Japanese are compared to the Jews because of the similar consequences of a particular hetero-identification, despite the fact that Jews are communally

identified on the basis of religion rather than national origin. And in the same preface:

> The Japanese who were born Americans and remained Japanese because biology does not know the meaning of patriotism no longer worried about whether they were Japanese-Americans or American-Japanese. They were Japanese. (viii)

Here, biology appears to outweigh citizenship and allegiance.

On his way home in the beginning, Ichiro notices the changes in the neighborhood and comments on the presence of "Negroes, of whom there had been only a few at one time and of whom there seemed to be nothing but now" (5), and who tell him to go back to Tokyo:

> Friggin' niggers, he uttered savagely to himself and, from the same place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than did those who where white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal Republicans, the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up. (5-6)

Here, a number of different large aggregations are brought together. Interestingly, this includes the "too short and too fat and too ugly," indicating aggregation based simply on deviating from a norm, which, in turn, is said to consist of the "white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal Republicans." Most importantly, Ichiro's "unrelenting and terrifying" hate is said to come from the same place as his tolerance.

Of the time before the rupture, Ichiro thinks the following and addresses it to his mother in his mind:

> it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and loving it. But I did not love enough, for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese and when the war came and they told me to fight for America, I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half of me which was you bigger than the half of me which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel. (15-16)

This passage seems to suggest a move from wholeness (being Japanese) to an at first unproblematic division (half Japanese and half American) that then

turns sour (as the Japanese half becomes bigger because of war and mother) and eclipses the "whole" that he "could not see or feel." Taking literally, this amounts to the contradictory assumption that one half of a whole (Japanese and American together) can eclipse another unrevealed and unspecified whole ("really the whole of me"). This is then followed by the assertion that "it is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law" (16) and that he is "neither [American or Japanese]" (16) because he has destroyed the half that was American.

About the Issei, Ichiro thinks that they are still Japanese because they avoided long-term commitments in America and did not learn English, "living only among their kind" (26). In contrast, he then thinks about "good people" in the world "who died brave deaths fighting for something which was bigger than Japan or America or the selfish bond that strapped a son to his mother" (31), for the first time alluding to a concept beyond nationality. Thinking about his decision not to fight, he comments: "For each and every refusal based on sundry reasons, another thousand chose to fight for the right to continue to be Americans because homes and cars and money could be regained but only if they first regained their rights as citizens" (34). In effect, this implies that "good citizens" fight for their country, whereas he "was Ichiro who had said no to the judge and had thereby turned his back on the army and the country and the world and his own self" (40), a list which seems to suggest a logically connected chain beyond which there is nothing left. Fittingly, his mother claims shortly after that if you are not Japanese, you are dead (and deserve it) (41).

On his double negative answer, he elaborates:

> Was it possible that he and Freddie and [...] all the other American-born, American-educated Japanese who had renounced their American-ness in a frightening moment of madness had done so irretrievably? Was there no hope of redemption? Surely there must be. He was still a citizen. He could still vote. He was free to travel and work and study and marry and drink and gamble. People forgot and, in forgetting, forgave. Time would ease the rupture which now separated him from the young Japanese who were Americans because they had fought for America and believed in it. And time would destroy the old Japanese who, in living in America and being denied a place as citizens, nevertheless had become inextricably a part of the country which by its vastness and goodness and fairness and plentitude drew them into its fold, or else they would not have understood why it was that their sons, who looked as Japanese as they themselves, were not Japanese at all but Americans of the country of America. (51-52)

Again, a number of different considerations are brought together. The hope of redemption lies firstly in the fact that he is still a citizen and accordingly, has certain rights, and secondly in the fact that people forget and forgive, where people, while left unspecified, may mean the "norm Americans" mentioned

above or the Nisei who did not say no. Note that in this passage, America draws the Issei "into its fold" after having denied them citizenship (see above), and the phenotypically (versus the genotypically Japanese of the preface) Japanese Nisei are (full) Americans after all, contrary to what is said in some of the passages above. Yet, just two pages later, he thinks that "being American is a terribly incomplete thing if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese of the country Japan which attacked America" (54). Also, much later, the Japanese are described as not rating as "first-class citizens because of the unseen walls" (104).

After having befriended Kenji, he comments about their respective status:

> They were two extremes, the Japanese who was more American than most Americans because he had crept to the brink of death for America, and the other who was neither Japanese nor American because he had failed to recognize the gift of his birthright when recognition meant everything. (73)

Here, membership of one of the large aggregations is defined by an act, and non-membership by the failure to act, where non-membership seems to be nothing: he is "neither." In this particular chain of argument, it is a gift and birthright to die for your country.

In a conversation between Ichiro and Emi, she says:

> It's because we're American and because we're Japanese and sometimes the two don't mix. It's all right to be German and American or Italian and American or Russian and American but, as things turned out, it wasn't all right to be Japanese and American. You had to be one or the other. (91)
> [...]
> [T]his country is different. They made a mistake [...] and they admit it by letting you run around loose. Try, if you can, to be equally big and forgive them [...] and prove to them that you can be an American worthy of the frailties of the country as well as its strengths. (96)

According to her, then, the Nisei are two things at one and the same time, but the two do not make up a whole "sometimes" and "as things turn out." Shortly after, identification as American works via attitude (forgiveness) and via strength and weakness.

In a longer chapter that begins with Kenji as focalizer and then shifts to an interior monologue of Kenji's father (chapter 6, 116ff), the latter thinks about his decision to come to American and about his children:

> [T]his country which he had no intention of loving had suddenly begun to become a part of him because it was a part of his children. (120)

[...]
It was because he was Japanese [that his son joined the army] and, at the same time, had to prove to the world that he was not Japanese. (121)
[...]
[T]he shaken faith of an American interned in an American concentration camp was indeed a flimsy thing. (121)

Again, there are sensible paradoxes: the second passage has to distinguish between descent ("because he was Japanese") and consent ("he was not Japanese") in order to make sense, but claims that both work "at the same time;" and the third passage, via emphasizing that those interned (Nisei American citizens) are Americans in a camp that is also American, implies that "American" may come in vastly different manifestations.

Not long before he dies, Kenji as focalizer thinks about the bigotry of people in general and the common struggle for recognition and participation in democracy that various groups ("Negroes," Japanese, Chinese, Jews) share, contesting that "[o]ne has to hope" and that there is reason to hope in this "quest for completeness" (134) where recognition apparently equals (an unspecified) completeness. However, in one of the formally most interesting passages, he continues with "and then," followed by an ellipsis and a sequence of four paragraphs that are each preceded by an "and then" in a single line and that each start with a small letter. Each paragraph contains a vignette with an example of racism and prejudice a member of a group either experiences or enacts him- or herself (134-136).[57] Hope and a shared struggle are, thus, immediately juxtaposed to specific examples betraying them. Noting that, for all they did and sacrificed, the Japanese are still regarded as "Japs" and that what they did "doesn't amount to a pot of beans" (163),[58] Kenji actually suggests to Ichiro that things are as they are because the "Jews, the Italians, the Poles, the Armenians [...] all got their communities" (164) and in order for there to be "only people," everybody should marry outside of their group so that "[a]fter a

57 | At a later point, Ichiro talks to another no-no boy at a Christian Rehabilitation Center, Gary, who remembers that while in prison he was protected by a black fellow inmate against attacks by others. This in turn prompts Ichiro to remember an incident during internment when he and a friend are rejected by a church community for their being Japanese, and that another church gladly accepts them but not another black man (231).

58 | Similarly, Gary remarks that the Japanese veterans that now despise the no-no boys as un-American will "find that they still can't buy a house in Broadmoor even with a million stones in the bank. They'll see themselves getting passed up for jobs by white fellows not quite so bright but white" (227).

few generations of that, you've got the thing beat" (164), an advice that some critics have scathingly attacked as genocide:

> For Kenji, complete assimilation to the point of Japanese-American extinction would be an ideal that represents an America living out its promise of equality. At the same time, though, his dream of assimilation requires the genocide of his own community. From a contemporary perspective, Kenji's means to get 'the thing beat' seems to be a surrender of valuable cultural distinctions to a dominant culture that would obliterate rather than incorporate them. (Yogi 70)

Of course, this is predicated on the assumption that cultural distinctions are necessarily valuable and can, and should be, retained, that both minority and majority "cultural identity" are relatively stable and static, and it ignores the fact that what Kenji describes is not necessarily assimilation but outgroup marriage and has always already been going on for the longest time (to differing degrees at different times and between different groups).

Shortly before, Ichiro on his own has a similar thought while alone in a café. After a waiter tries to be nice to him because he recognizes a "fellow Japanese," Ichiro wishes that everyone was hospitable to everyone else, not just to people from their own "group" because "like for like meant classes and distinctions and hatred and prejudice and wars and misery" (157). Wondering where America is as "advertised" (i.e. cottage, church, grass, steeple, car, two kids, dog and cat, etc.), he comes to the conclusion that it does not exist. So, while Ichiro and Kenji share the basic idea that thinking in "groups" and "communities" can lead to prejudice, the idea is complicated by Ichiro's extension of it from racial and cultural groups to "classes" and further, unspecified "distinctions."

While Kenji is in hospital, Ichiro applies for a job at an engineering firm and finds another glimmer of hope in the person of Mr. Carrick, the boss. He is offered the job, but turns it down:

> Ichiro knew that the job did not belong to him, but to another Japanese who was equally as American as this man who was attempting in a small way to rectify the wrong he felt to be his own because he was a part of the country. (151)

Although he does not take the job (as he does not accept the job he is offered at the Christian Rehabilitation Center later),[59] the personality of Carrick as a "representative American" causes him to once more revise his thinking:

59 | Incidentally, the only two people in the novel to explicitly speak Japanese are the two non-Japanese potential employers.

> Under the hard, tough cloak of the struggle for existence in which money and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing had ostensibly overwhelmed the qualities of men that were good and gentle and just, there still beat a heart of kindness and patience and forgiveness. And in this moment [...] he glimpsed the real nature of the country against which he had almost fully turned his back, and saw that its mistake was no less unforgivable than his own. (153-154)

Lastly, after the final fight, Freddie's death and Bull's breakdown, the narrative concludes with Ichiro walking away thinking once more about America:

> He walked along, thinking, *searching*, thinking and *probing*, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a *tiny bit* of America, he *chased* that *faint and elusive insinuation of promise* as it *continued to take shape* in mind and in heart. (251; emphasis mine)

As nowhere else in the novel, this paragraph accentuates the processual, provisional, elusive and partial aspect of identificatory patterns. It is no wonder that criticism has focused on this ending.

I have quoted and commented upon these passages at such length because they give evidence to a number of important facts:

1. While the three large aggregate categories "Japanese," "Japanese American," and "American" are indisputably important for the identificatory pattern created by the narrative and appear many, many times, they come in a host of different (more or less metaphoric or symbolic) descriptions and manifestations that at times repeat, complement and contradict each other. Clear definitions are nowhere to be found, on the contrary: many of the passages are suffused by hedges, questions and other markers of uncertainty. Obviously, such large categories are, per se, almost impossible to define, and the narrative makes no attempt at disambiguation.
2. In addition, they are seldom the only aggregate categories. Most of the time, they are mentioned in conjunction with various other identifications, such as class, creed, appearance, behavior, attitude, health, allegiance, citizenship, etc.; and they are shown as internally heterogeneous.
3. While many passages have Ichiro as focalizer, he is by no means the only one; various other people also reflect about identifications and differentiations (Kenji, Kenji's father, Ichiro's father). In addition, there are many dialogues that provide the opportunity for two people to voice their thoughts (e.g. Kenji, Freddie, Emi, Gary, Mr. Carrick, etc.). These people, in turn, say different things at different times. It is, for example, regularly overlooked in secondary criticism that Emi, who is often made out to be a simplistic foil for Ichiro and a mouthpiece for easy assimilationism, makes a number of

quite different, even contradictory comments.[60] In fact, no one character is entirely consistent in what they say about identification and differentiation throughout the novel.

4. Lastly, as in the preface, the entire novel is permeated by vignettes about different people and their past, present, and perspective, which personalize and specify the abstract ruminations about aggregations and identificatory patterns.

As a consequence, with regard to these large aggregations (and, as I will show below, to the other relevant identifications and differentiations), the identificatory pattern of the narrative is a highly complex web of direct and indirect personal and communal auto- and hetero-identifications,[61] a web that is also shown as contradictory, dynamic, elusive and processual.[62]

Moving away from early discussions of Asian American (cultural) identity, assimilation, representation and authenticity, more recent criticism has increasingly focused on this complexity and the resilient ambiguities of the novel. For example, using concepts of Dan McAdams's life-story model of identity and Erikson's assumption that "identity is an ongoing process of formulation and revision" (205), Cheung and Peterson argue that Ichiro "lacks unity because he is no longer grounded in the ideological setting of prewar America" (197) and has "no generativity script to animate his life" (197), no prospect, no plans for the future, no concept of what his life should be. Accordingly, "by the end of the novel, Ichiro does not seem to have negotiated an identity that provides unity and purpose" (205). There might be some easing of tension in the end between yes-yes and no-no boys; but "Ichiro still does not join the Japanese American community gathering to bear witness to

60 | For example, Cheung and Peterson write that Emi "represents a form of assimilation into the majority culture that Ichiro feels he cannot assume" (204), which is nowhere supported in the novel by Emi's life, actions or words, and that she offers him the possibility of family and children, which she never does. Ling is one of the few to notice "Emi's contradictory attitudes" (Ling 373).

61 | In fact, few of the other novels under discussion in this book contain so many explicit disquisitions about large aggregate categories.

62 | It is fitting that one of the few scenes of bliss and hope for Ichiro in the novel is on occasion of a *dance* to which he and Emi go (and during which an older white man treats them to a drink for no reason other than their conspicuous youthful happiness). Many critics have commented on this scene and argued that dancing may stand as a metaphor for America and assimilation; I would argue that dancing more aptly stands for constant cooperation and swift (and, for a "successful" dance, constantly re-negotiated) alternation between dominant and subordinate role, dynamic movement and change.

Freddie's death" and "remains an outsider" (206). In a similar vein, Kim notes the pervasive figures of division, hollowness, amputation (68) and that his effort is "doomed to fail because it depends on the false assumption that there could be a rational symbolic order, a unified self" (56).[63] There is, according to Kim, no resolution, only a promise of hope, and a "permanent identity crisis" (56). Entin convincingly bases his brilliant essay on aspects of noir in the novel. He argues that there is a "persistent failure of positive personal feelings to wholly overcome the psychic negativity engendered by the wartime internment" (87), that good feelings in passages of hopefulness are always interrupted and suspended by the novel's "negative undercurrent" (98) and consistent inconsistency: "negative and affirmative feelings continually circle back to and undercut one another in a cycle of intense affective and ideological uncertainty" (88).[64] Ling argues that the novel is an "implicit critique of either/or assumptions about cultural identity" (363) and that the "groping, unsteady Ichiro who emerges from such a narrative process remains highly conflicted, but [...] is never entirely dissolved into the social roles defined for him by the dominant discourse of the era" (363). Consistently, the novel is full of "self-contradictory voices" and is "deeply ambiguous," "entangled," and "divided" (375). According to Yogi, "Okada explores the gray area between the oppositions that develop around polarized definitions of 'Japanese' and 'American,' individuality and community, assimilation and cultural maintenance" (64). Finally, most recently, Girst writes that "Okada's is a novel of nuances providing many models of engagement pertaining both to one's ethnicities and identities, be they singular or plural" (Girst 137).

Perhaps the most succinct indication of the reason for Ichiro's plight and of the complex identificatory pattern of the large aggregations is in the novel itself: "Maybe the answer is that there is no in. Maybe the whole damn country is pushing and shoving and screaming to get into someplace that doesn't exist" (159). In other words, "America has a hollow center" and "the idea of America

63 | Unfortunately, Kim follows this up by arguing that "[g]iven that presumption, woman has to become that order's irrational other" (56), which makes no causal sense at all and for which there is no evidence. Generally, many essays contain excellent and detailed discussions, but then suddenly rush to conclusions (presumably succumbing to the temptation to disambiguate) grounded in simplistic oppositions rather than textual evidence, occasionally even contradicting their original claims.

64 | He also writes that the "intensely self-referential quality of feelings, the way in which the discourse of individual emotions continually shifts questions of blame and injustice from society to the private self, is a problem that the novel cannot finally or fully resolve" (98), to which I would answer: why should it, and, if there is a suspension and consistent inconsistency, in short: cognitive dissonance, how could it?

is a myth that is impossible to achieve" (Entin 99).[65] It is hardly a coincidence that the starkest propagator of "either/or" in the novel is the mother, who is a fanatic and fundamentalist, and who rejects life rather than accepting the impossibility of her stance.[66] The lesson, then, might be that rather than "out of many, one," the novel propagates "out of one, many" (Girst 177). The strife for completeness is destined to fail, double (and more) consciousness might be the cure, not problem (Girst 179).

Caveat: none of this is meant to dispute the very real fact of racism and of the internment. It may sound altogether too easy to note the emptiness of large aggregate categories and the actual complexity of the identificatory pattern in the novel over and beyond "Japanese," "American," and "Japanese American." Kim, Xu and Entin all note that American institutions are seldom criticized in the novel, and that Ichiro's attempt to change his own attitude promotes "private and personal solutions" to social problems (Kim 67) and blacks out political power. After all, as Xu puts it, the constitutional "we" that supposedly means all American citizens often excludes an "ethnic we" that, historically, has had less political and cultural power (Xu 51). However, racism, "ethnicism" and "culturalism" by definition are based on large aggregate categories and imputing an allegedly stable and homogeneous content to them. Contesting these categories and showing how a narrative does so, then, does not turn a blind eye on political power and racism but points out their "empty" underpinnings. It also points out the perfidiousness of demands on individuals and purported communities to "culturally" assimilate (such demands rarely restrict themselves to being law-abiding) when it is impossible to say into what exactly they are supposed to assimilate.[67] In my opinion, the achievement of *No-No Boy* lies in the complexity I have tried to delineate; a complexity that also affects the other identifications and differentiations, though not all.[68]

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65 | Entin relates this to Adorno's negative dialectics, in which there is no sublation and no identity (100).

66 | Many critics have commented on the mother figure and have used it to make a point about gender and sexism in the novel. This will be discussed below.

67 | Concern about the pressure of assimilation is not only found in literary texts about minority cultural practices. Assimilation itself and the pressure to assimilate can take many different forms and work in fields such as gender, class, education, ideology, etc. *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman* are both about individuals failing or unwilling to assimilate.

68 | That would preclude statements such as that "[i]n the world of the novel, 'American' equals 'White'" (Yogi 64) or that the incompleteness of the characters in the novel reflects the "influence of American racism on the Japanese American community and its members" (Kim quoted in Cheung and Peterson 204).

Family

Ichiro's family is not what one could call well-integrated members of a community – neither American nor Japanese American nor Japanese – or models for Ichiro. They run a small grocery store and apparently never meant to stay in the USA ("We came so we could make money and go back;" 19). When Ichiro returns home, he finds his father drinking constantly, his brother full of hate for his family and about to enlist, and his mother further down the road of fanaticism, frantically clinging to the idea that the Japanese have really won the war and that all news to the contrary is faked by the US government. Only when a letter from her sister arrives from Japan that cannot possible have been faked does she succumb to the truth, where succumbing means suicide after a short period of apparent insanity. The father is portrayed as weak and as "neither husband nor father nor Japanese nor American but a diluted mixture of all" (116), and the mother is, due to her hate and fanaticism, "neither woman nor mother" (21). Shortly after Ichiro's arrival, his brother Taro lures him into the parking lot of a bar where some of his friends are waiting to beat Ichiro up.[69] Only towards the end is there some indication of reconciliation or at least acceptance between Ichiro and his father, and, though only in Ichiro's mind, between him and his mother (a reconciliation/acceptance most criticism chooses to ignore).[70] Of course, the mother has to die first for this to happen.

None of his family offer models that Ichiro could identify with, neither in the beginning nor in the end, on the contrary; they themselves are torn and conflicted, and dissatisfied with the options the dominant identificatory pattern of the large aggregations appear to allow for them after the rupture. The father is mostly marked by indecision, allegorized in the novel by his almost constant incapacitating inebriation. Revealingly, the one time that he serves as focalizer in the narrative, he recalls his arranged marriage to the mother long ago, the fact that they liked each other, and the first – fleeting – time they had intercourse (one day before the marriage). Only after the mother's death does he "awake" and do things that he wants to do, such as sending relief packages to family members in Japan. Ironically, it is the ceremonial burial feast for the mother that "reawakens" him. He appears to enjoy the attention he gets from the Issei community, even by strangers, as a sign that he is no longer isolated – an isolation brought about by the mother's fanaticism. Ichiro, on the other hand, flees the ritual even before the actual feast commences: the thought of a communal ritual appears unbearable to him.

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69 | The brother's and his friends' fanaticism and perversely modified racism show in their talking about Ichiro as "it" and "not human" (78); also, they call him a "Jap-lover" (80) in a cynical linguistic and historical twist of racism towards African Americans.

70 | Stan Yogi is one of the few to notice this (72).

The brother plays almost no role in the narrative other than that, as Ichiro surmises, he seems to feel the need to compensate for his brother's "un-American" double negative by enlisting in the army and ascertaining his "American-ness" and rejection of his – Japanese – family that way. After the ambush in the parking lot – from which Ichiro is saved by Kenji – he disappears from the novel. In a way, then, the two characters in the novel that most fanatically cling to one identification to the exclusion of all others both "die."

It is the mother who plays the most important role for Ichiro and for the narrative.[71] Her unrelenting identification with one aggregation only, Japanese, becomes a real problem after the rupture. As Ichiro reflects, "being Japanese" in action and thought was "alright" before the war and the internment (an assessment that is historically untenable for the majority of Issei and Nisei), which meant it was alright to be his mother's son:

> it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and loving it. But I did not love enough, for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese and when the war came and they told me to fight for America, I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half of me which was you bigger than the half of me which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel. (15-16)

In effect, then, it is first his mother's fundamentalism that forces the general conflict brought about by the rupture onto Ichiro. Repeatedly, he claims that he said no-no and went to prison for and because of his parents, meaning his mother. When he returns home, she is proud of him and "displays" him to neighbors whose children said yes:

> It was her way of saying that she had made him what he was and that the thing in him which made him say no to the judge and go to prison for two years was the growth of a seed planted by the mother tree and that she was the mother who had put this thing in

71 | Criticism almost reflexively points to the Momotaro tale in the book, which tells the story of a little boy tumbling out of a peach (15), and the old parents' joy. The story is so short and unspecific (it is, in fact, not substantially longer than summarized here), however, as to be almost vacuous. One can only guess that some criticism here falls into the trap of culturalism that would by default give import to anything remotely smacking of cultural identity.

her son and that everything that had been done and said was exactly as it should have been and that that was what made him her son. (11)

Note, however, that it is not her monomaniacal identification as Japanese alone, but the content she fills the category with – racial and national superiority – that brings about the conflict in the family. This is what leads to her refusal to accept that Japan has lost the war, because accepting it would empty the category of meaning for her. Consequently, the figure of the mother shows not first and foremost the detrimental consequences of singular identification (although that, too), but of a *singular definition* of that identification. Other Issei in the novel are shown as identifying as "Japanese" without behaving like the mother; Kenji's family shows nothing of the conflict that riddles Ichiro's family.

The whole constellation could, of course, be talked about in terms of generational conflict (parents/children) as well as in terms of gender (mother/son). Regarding generation, there are indeed some passages in the novel that refer to a generational rift between Issei and Nisei, a rift that also seems to partially structure the relation between Ichiro and his mother. It is said, for example, that "the reason why the Japanese were still Japanese" (25) is because the Issei live "only among their kind" (26), avoid long-term commitments and do not learn English: "his parents, like most of the old Japanese, spoke virtually no English. On the other hand, the children, like Ichiro, spoke almost no Japanese" (7).[72] The novel also mentions strong bonds between families from the same village (20), bonds which the children do not maintain. While serving as focalizer, Kenji's father recalls the lecture of a sociologist in camp about the rift between the generations and the necessity of the parents to join their children; and Ken and Ichiro talk about differences between parents and their children in immigrant groups, and about the prospect that at some point, eventually, they can sit down and talk (138). Finally, Freddie, shortly before his crash, complains to Ichiro about his parents and how they cling to Japan, and how that annoys him.

However, almost all of these – relatively rare to begin with – statements are relativized, complemented or contradicted at some point. The family that Ichiro's mother takes him to right after his return has apparently decided to make long-term commitments: they have bought a nice house and plan to stay. Kenji's family, which is somewhat of a utopian model in the novel, is neither strictly traditional nor entirely assimilated, and parents and children get along well. The passage about the sociologist also lists the different reactions of the

72 | The narrative is not entirely consistent in this regard: Ichiro never really speaks Japanese in the novel, but there are indications he actually knows how to when he talks to the only people in the novel who do at least try to speak Japanese, two potential employers, and comments on their language abilities.

audience to his lecture, showing that rifts may not run necessarily between generations but also within generations along other faultlines (as between Taro and Ichiro). Freddie is a hypocrite, as he still lives at home and takes his parents' money, as does, by the way, Ichiro. For the latter, lastly, the generational framework offers no identification or differentiation, as the unspecified identificatory pattern he seeks must, as I have discussed above, necessarily move beyond "Issei" and "Nisei."

Gender

The issue of gender is more complicated. Criticism has predictably made much of the mother-son relationship in the novel. Two essays in particular make interesting points regarding gender, masculinity, and mother and son. Daniel Kim places *No-No Boy* into the historical context of the Cold War and the then-virulent discussion of "momism," introduced by Philip Wylie to criticize and ridicule dominant, smothering mothers and their subsequently "sissy" sons.[73] Kim builds upon the familiar argument that the Cold War, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, was an ideological struggle not only about political systems and military dominance, but about a way of life, so that the American Way of Life (here: heteronormative and middle class) was linked to loyalty to the USA and its international policy. The threat of subversive internal communists was accordingly connected to deviance from middle class sexual and gender norms (66). With regard to the novel, Kim then argues that Ichiro's gender performance of masculinity is "nonnormative" and can be described in terms of momism: the mother has a "corrupting maternal influence" on her son that is linked to "a jingoistic Japanese nationalism" (66). Furthermore, "the novel contains no positive character who unambivalently embraces or embodies the ideals of traditional American manhood" (71). The yes-yes boys (e.g. Eto and Bull) are equally negative, and, as Kim argues, both will never be full American masculine men and never part of the dominant forms of masculinity because of the prevailing racism that links "Asian" to "feminine." As a compensation, "the Japanese maternal presence is replaced by one that is American, and one that can effectively be embodied by male characters" (66). "The American identity that the novel insists that subjects like Ichiro can embody is associated not with a paternalistic state but with a maternalistic state of mind" (72); Ichiro must learn a "certain feminine sensibility" (72) that his mother did not possess. However, this valorization of the feminine is countered by the fact that certain men can most effectively accomplish this, for example Mr. Carrick. "The narrative thus ends by intimating that at some future point the sentimental and

73 | In fact, his *Generation of Vipers* (in which the term is used) is mostly an effusive rant about a motley of socio-political issues.

American half of Ichiro's psyche will eventually be reunified with and annexed to the Asian half" (79).

Wenying Xu argues that Okada (sic) is:

> held hostage by the ideology of assimilation that inculcates a myth about the racial and cultural inferiority of US ethnic minorities. This state of being a hostage is shown in his traumatic portrayal of the mother figure and in his impulse to reject the maternal, whose expression includes food practices and rituals. In so doing, Okada rejects a significant component in his ethnic identity–enjoyment specific to the Japanese American community. (55)

Ichiro's struggle to find an identificatory pattern he considers appropriate is "doomed to fail because it depends on the false assumption that there could be a rational symbolic order, a unified self. [...] Given that presumption, woman has to become that order's irrational other" (56). Accordingly, the novel denigrates the maternal and denies its properties of "sexuality, tenderness, intimacy, nourishment, and music, [...] all of which are vital for a community's health" (57). Further, he claims, all "moments of enjoyment [...] are distinctly non-Japanese" (58); on the other hand, Japanese forms of enjoyment, "the very expressions of the maternal," are either absent or detrimental. This lack is expressive of "ethnic insecurity caused by racism and its internalization" (66), most prominently in the "mother figure made abject by the racist American culture" (66).

Both essays provide detailed and thorough analyses, and make points that more or less explicitly recur in many other essays on the novel in one form or another; points which I almost entirely disagree with and which, I believe, are due to working with binary frameworks and to not taking into account the narrative's web of identifications and differentiations, and its ambiguities and contradictions. First of all, the mother's fundamentalist nationalism and, more importantly, counterfactual fanaticism isolate and alienate her from her family and her community, including former friends and even other apparently ex-nationalists. Ichiro is an outsider, but the mother is truly alone. In fact, she seems to have grown so "rock-hard" in her conviction that she is neither mother nor woman and ultimately beyond any binary identification such as "maternal" or "paternal," "male" or "female:" here, ideology trumps ontology. Rather than "made abject" by "American racism" she is made abject by fanatic nationalism, a nationalism with which, after the war, she would have had difficulties in Japan, as well.[74]

74 | In one scene, Bull brings a white woman to a bar exclusively frequented by Japanese (a bar which appears to be run by a Chinese) and from which, earlier, some black men are excluded. Since the nameless woman serves only as an accoutrement for Bull, the

The father cooks and takes care of the sons, but he, of course, is allegedly a diluted mixture of various identifications (Japanese, American, husband, father). Nevertheless, after the mother's death, he does quickly find enjoyment again in the uniting of the community for the burial feast and in the newly acquired freedom to do as he pleases. Generally, there are Japanese forms of enjoyment, though they consist mainly of gambling and drinking.

Emi is compassionate and caring, what one might call "maternal," but not "conventional" enough in her gender role not to have sex with Ichiro for consolation. It is fitting that Emi and Ichiro decide never to talk about their night together and thus avoid giving it a name or associating it with a concept. Kenji and his father are both shown as sensitive and considerate, but also as tough when need be, for example with the police. Kenji's ever shortening stump might stand for a slowly progressing emasculation and castration, but he is the war veteran, the one who has a right to hold his head up high, to lay claim to American-ness, as Ichiro thinks. One might argue that the trauma of war deprives men of procreativity, but this does not constitute a pervasive pattern of male and female, American and Japanese in the novel. Bull is violent, but then breaks down, wailing, and Ichiro tenderly pats his head; and Mr. Carrick is both tough and sensitive, and more of a beacon of hope that there are decent people than a representative of any identification, not even definitively American.

In short, there is no unified, consistent and stable pattern in the narrative of male and female, masculine and feminine, paternal and maternal, that might support such binary frameworks as used above. Since, as I have argued, large aggregate identifications in the novel are also ambiguous and unstable, univocally correlating gender and aggregate identifications and differentiations is unproductive.[75] If one seeks a recurrent pattern and more or less stable pattern at all, one could say that most characters are torn in some way and uncertain about themselves and the world. In terms of gender, however, a clear identificatory pattern is not to be had, other than there is no indication in the narrative that sex is every anything but heterosexual between men and women. Then again, there is not much sex.

(Almost) Absences & Minor Differentiations

As in *Call It Sleep*, there are a number of other minor identifications and differentiations in the novel, including some whose near absence is worth mentioning.

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scene succinctly brings together both sexism and racism, showing that depending on the context, one may preponderate the other.

75 | The novel never insists that there is an American identity Ichiro can or should embody.

Friendship is an important fact in Ichiro's life, as Kenji is the only real friend he has, and a yes-yes boy at that. In terms of narrative dynamic and dramaturgy, he serves mostly as a conversation partner for Ichiro to present and discuss ideas about identification and identificatory patterns, and as an additional focalizer to do the same in his mind. In addition, he propels some important events and developments. The concept of friendship per se, however, as a faultline of identifications and differentiations and as part of an identificatory pattern plays only one role: it is beyond all the identifications that Ichiro finds to dissatisfying and unstable, and thus through sheer existence a glimmer of hope for a world where "like for like" and other distinctions and out-group and in-group mechanisms are null and void. Note, by the way, that this is not limited to male bonding: Emi and Ichiro, as well, develop a friendship that gives little indication of running in the direction of a safe family harbor.

Community. There are some unobtrusive indications in the novel that at least in Seattle there exists some kind of Issei and Nisei community: on his way home in the beginning of the novel, Ichiro mentions a street that seems to demarcate the beginning of an area of mostly "Japanese" and Japanese American inhabitants (where there are now many African Americans), and later, when he and his mother visit "friends," he makes a similar observation. Several "Japanese" families are mentioned, but only in passing. There are gambling and drinking clubs exclusively for members of this community (although only for young men, it seems), and the burial of his mother is attended by many people that also seem to be mostly of that community, and mostly Issei. Other than this, references to a community of people of Japanese origin or ancestry are scarce and vague, and by and large made via the general discussion of "Japanese" and "Japanese American" as identificatory categories and via the opposition between no-no boys and yes-yes boys within this community. Of course, Ichiro's status, his mother's fanaticism, and his father's alcoholism would explain their precarious position in such a community. In addition, it would make sense for Okada to emphasize the individual over the community in light of the fact that, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, "Japanese-Americans were not seen as distinct individuals, but only as reflections of a larger community" so that "the division between individual and community disappears" (Yogi 67), which is a feature of stereotyping, racism and discrimination in general. Girst summarizes:

> It is first and foremost the struggle of the individual that places Okada's *No-No Boy* above a mere depiction of Asian American plight. This makes it possible to read the novel as part of the eternal quest for an autonomous self, more *because* rather than despite its being a work of fiction and not a historical account. Ichiro's struggle is a personal one of non-conformist *self-reliance* [...] as well as a healthy dose of *self-interest*. (172; emphasis in the original)

He also explains that the pronunciation of "Ichiro," a name that means "first born" but also in part ("ro") "route" and "road," is quite close to "each hero" (172).

Language. There is almost no Japanese language in the novel, no "transcription" of a Japanese-inflected English oral idiom, no translation, nothing. The only two Japanese, transcribed sentences in the novel are spoken (but not literally translated or fully explained) by two of Ichiro's potential employers; he himself replies in English. Consistently, Girst points out, "[a]ny attempt to discern the Japanese from the English is a futile undertaking – and bearing in mind Okada's education and skills, this may very well have been intended" (168).

Class and money. Similarly, there is little mention of concrete socio-economic factors and aspects. Ichiro's parents are obviously not affluent, but never mention financial difficulties. They appear to own their store, which is always filled, and there is always food to eat and money for Ichiro to spend. In fact, all families that appear in the novel seem financially secure; all individuals (such as Freddie, Emi, Gary and others) have some source of income, though not necessarily through a job; some do not want to work. The one time that money plays a prominent role is, once again, within the context of large aggregations. When Ichiro and Gary talk about their status as no-no boys and their rejection by other Nisei, Gary says about the latter: "They'll find that they still can't buy a house in Broadmoor even with a million stones in the bank. They'll see themselves getting passed up for jobs by white fellows not quite so bright but white" (227). Racial differentiation clearly outweighs economic differentiation.

In conclusion, we can summarize the identificatory pattern thus:

1. The three large aggregate categories that serve as major identifications and differentiations – Japanese, American, Japanese American – dominate all others throughout the narrative, making the pattern hierarchical rather than heterarchical. At the same time, as the protagonist's and other people's reflections show, these categories are essentially empty and their content variable, often arbitrary, and dependent on constant negotiation, context, and power. As a result, the protagonist never arrives at a conclusive definition. In addition, these large aggregations are continually complemented or inflected by other, equally intangible, categories, such as gender, class, creed, looks, behavior, attitude, health, allegiance, citizenship, etc.
2. There are other identificatory faultlines, but most of them are clearly dominated by the main aggregations. There are some near absences, and once more, class and money are among them. Perhaps more surprisingly, so is language.

3. The identificatory pattern is dynamic, but not in the manner of the pattern in *Call It Sleep*. Rather, it undergoes continuous modification, where one definition is put forward, and then retracted, hedged, modified, etc. There is no resolution.
4. The discursive structure contributes to this complexity. We have a heterodiegetic narrative situation with a highly reflective, articulate main focalizer, and several other, almost equally reflective and articulate focalizers. There are many dialogues and many passages with interior monologues and FID. The vignettes distributed throughout the narrative add further, if only sketched, perspectives. As a result, the identificatory pattern is unusually complex and constructed through the use of all modes: personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation.
5. The degree of departure between possible fictional world and actual world is minimal in terms of ontology (setting, events, causality, characters) and epistemology (perspectival structure, cognition, motivation). The discursive structure does not significantly call attention to itself, but as micro-narratives, the vignettes all over the novel do draw attention to narrativization. There are some minor parts of the narrative that are counterfactual or at least highly improbable considering the historical background. For example, no one in the narrative is in need of money or is desperately seeking a job; and no one is completely rejected from a job for being Japanese.

3.3 José Antonio Villarreal: *Pocho*

Pocho, even though long considered the first Mexican American novel,[76] initially and for many years was ambivalently received by most Chicano/a[77] critics and by the Chicano movement that began to burgeon shortly after the

76 | In their introduction to *US-Latino Literature* (2000), Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernández Olmos list María Amparo Ruiz de Burton as the first Mexican American writer writing in English, author of two novels (1872 & 1885, both historical romances) and a play (1876, a comedy). As another early example one should mention *George Washington Gómez* by Américo Paredes, a novelistic manuscript written between 1936 and 1940 and only published in 1990 shortly before his death. As Martín-Rodríguez notes, "for every known milestone in the history of Hispanic literature in the United States [...], there seems to be at least one earlier ignored or forgotten effort of similar scope or intention" (798). Of course, one could argue that the earliest "Hispanic" writer is really Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.

77 | I will use "Chicano/a" in order to refer to all genders; where only "Chicano" is used, it is used as a historical term or proper noun.

novel's publication in 1959.[78] The wider audience did not receive the novel at all, and it quickly went out of print. It was reissued in 1970 (and "rediscovered" in 1971/1972; see Lomelí 95) and has been a somewhat uneasy staple of university courses on Latino/a and/or Chicano/a literature ever since, but it has never gained much popularity despite its unquestioned status as a "classic." Only recently have critics begun to revise their evaluation of the narrative.

There are several reasons for the novel's initially ambivalent and hesitant reception by Chicano/a critics; reasons that are as revealing of the novel as they are of the cultural historical specifics of the Chicano "movimiento" and the then-prevalent critical concerns and debates; concerns and debates, in turn, which structurally echo/predate the debates about aesthetics and the politics of representation mentioned above.

The Chicano Movement of the 1960s, or more precisely, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, marks an important culmination point in the political struggle of Mexicans[79] and their children, Mexican Americans, in the United States, which can be traced back via the aftermath of World War II (e.g. in the form of Mexican war veteran organizations), the Mexican Revolution and the

78 | 1959 also marks the publication of the first critical work on "Hispanic" literature in (parts of) the United States, José Lopez's eventually influential *Breve reseña de la literatura hispana de Nuevo México y Colorado*. Like Martín-Rodríguez, Francisco Lomelí rhetorically links its publication to the publication of *Pocho* to mark a starting point for Chicano/a literature and criticism in the United States. In his *Handbook of Hispanic Culture in the United States* (1993), Lomelí writes that "a literature by a people of Mexican descent in the United States before 1959 basically represented an unconceptualized entity as a category unto itself; however, this did not deny its existence" (86). The 1950s, then, "offer a pivotal turning point in what it meant to be Chicano in the United States, even if the term itself had not yet gained popular usage until well into the late 1960s" (87).

Note that "Hispanic" is placed in quotation marks above because it is often considered a problematic label due to its first usage in the 1970 U.S. census and its alleged semantic "preference" for Spain and Spanish over "Indio" and "Mestizo;" the current census uses "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino." Since there seems to be no critical consensus as to which label is the most apposite – all of them are used in various current essays and books for different reasons, and all of them are criticized in various other essays and books for very similar reasons – I will variably use all three, though only where absolutely unavoidable: by now it should not surprise one that I find the terms no more useful than "Asian American," "European American," or, for that matter, "multicultural" (see above).

79 | Technically speaking, "Chicano" or "Aztlán" only refers to inhabitants of the Spanish Mexican territory that was annexed by the USA during the 1830s and 1840s. It has come to be an umbrella term for migrants from an unspecified Middle American region.

massive northward migration it caused, back to the U.S.-Mexican War 1846-1848.[80] Originally, the term "Chicano" was used derogatorily on both sides of the border to refer to the children of Mexican immigrants in the USA.[81] Like so many other initially denigrating labels, it was "re-appropriated" as a term of pride and auto-identification by the growing movement; a movement that, similar to other political movements of the time, was initially characterized by separatist, cultural-nationalist and exclusive notions and tendencies and "whose preferred symbol was Aztlán" (Martín-Rodríguez 796). In an essay collection collating his work as a critic, Héctor Calderón writes that "I was a Mexican before I became a Chicano" and that the "Chicano Movement gave historical credence and cultural dignity to my basic Mexicanness–Spanish-speaking, working-class, and mestizo" (xiv). Referring to Luis Valdez's introduction to the famous 1973 anthology of Mexican American literature and to his claim that Mexican Americans are not just another hyphenated minority group, Christina Hebebrand summarizes:

> The use of the term "Chicano" – derived from the Spanish word "Mexicano" – which became popular during the Chicano "Movimiento," has not only served to unite Chicanos/as in their fight against Euro-American oppression, but it is also intended to express that people of Mexican descent are not to be put in the same category as people who voluntarily left their land of origin and adopted an American nationality, i.e. as immigrants to the United States. (xiv)[82]

As many critics note in hindsight, however, and in somewhat surprising consensus, the reality of the movement and its context was much more heterogeneous and complicated, consisting of a "diversity of political views, geographic settings, and cultural traditions of Mexican culture in the United States" (Calderón xiv); the

80 | Roughly 1910-1920, although – often armed – struggles and conflicts continued well into the late 1920s; some historians place the end only in the 1940s. For an historical overview, see Griswold del Castillo and De León 1996; Takaki 1993; see also Calderón 2004, even though it is mostly concerned with literary history.

81 | It was used by the (white) majority of the population north of the border to denote the alleged unwillingness of the children of Mexican immigrants to assimilate; conversely, it was used south of the border to denote their alleged loss of cultural identity through all-too-ready assimilation. Olguín claims that the first usage of the term appears in Daniel Venegas's 1928 novella *The Adventures of Don Chipote* (328).

82 | What is ignored here, as so often, is the fact that "Euro-American" in actuality comprises a host of different descents and migration backgrounds, many of which involve, not "voluntary migration" to adopt an "American nationality," but desperate flight to escape starvation, oppression, persecution and genocide.

restrictive separatism advocated by Elizondo [a Chicano critic in the early 1970s] and many others, though understandable against the background of the social struggles of the time, was more an intellectual construct than a lived cultural reality for Mexican Americans and Chicanos/as.[83] (Martín-Rodríguez 803)

Perhaps the best and most telling characterization of the Chicano movement and its contradictions can be found in the 2005 foreword by Rubén Martínez to Richard Vasquez's famous 1970 novel *Chicano*.

As for me, growing up with a Salvadoran mom and a Mexican-American dad in largely Anglo neighborhoods, I never knew what the hell to consider myself. In elementary school, I invoked "Spanish" to avoid being a "dirty Mexican." In middle school, I said I was Mexican to avoid questions and jokes about Central America. In high school, I wanted to eschew race and ethnicity altogether and play rock 'n' roll (I suppose I just wanted to be "White," or better yet, British). Later, I undertook "roots" journeys and tried to reclaim my Mexican-ness and Salvadoran-ness to the exclusion of my American-ness. Today, I'm just your typical Salvadoran-Mexican-American. (viii)

In effect, he writes, "Chicano" in the narrow sense of a Mexican born in the USA (viii) never captured the complexity of the "Chicano" experience because as early as that time, many like him were not sure whether they were Chicano/a or not because they felt they belonged to two or more larger aggregate groups,[84] and perhaps not even fully/exclusively to those. While he does acknowledge the separatism of the early movement (and others at the time, such as Nation of Islam), he also notes its caricature in conservative commentary and that it simply followed an "epic journey across generations" visible in "language, music, food, style, and even religion" (x). In a revealing argumentative turn found in many current critical essays about Chicano/a & Latino/a literature, Martínez actually ends up arguing that "Chicano-ness has less to do with nationality than it does with the deconstruction of the very idea of a fixed identity" (ix) and that therefore, "I was Chicano all along, precisely because I was Mexican and Salvadoran and American all along as I grew up between Spanish and English" (ix). "Maybe in the end," he concludes, "there is something essentially American about being Chicano" (x). From this (retro-)perspective, *Pocho* is a "poignant effort long before its time" (xiv) in the US-American tradition of "outsiders" and "nonconformists."

83 | It is worth remembering that by no means every Mexican American sympathized, much less identified with the movement.

84 | Martínez in fact voices a very real and conspicuous fact of the last US censuses: more and more people identify as belonging to more than two "races."

This, then, explains why "*Pocho* has always been somewhat of an embarrassment to Chicanos" (Saldívar 76): the early Chicana/o movement called for "littérature engagée," for writers and activists like Luis Valdez and his El Teatro Campesino, for clear political stances and a focus on collective social and racial injustices and suffering. "Because of the exigencies of the moment, the need to maintain ethnic pride and cultural autonomy, Chicano literature was marked by a strong didactic and reformist character" (Calderón 71). *Pocho* was considered simultaneously too ambivalent, too assimilationist, and too accommodating (Saldívar 76).[85] It is written exclusively in English,[86] in what may appear an "American" literary tradition,[87] and focused through a reflective and highly individualistic protagonist who, to make things "worse," explicitly voices deep ambivalence about the demands of groups and communities on the individual. In an exemplary discussion, Timothy Sedore thus argues that because Chicano/a protest literary criticism focuses on the alienation of Mexican Americans in the USA as a group and on the assumed "outsider nature of the literature and the people" (240), "[t]he pervasive restlessness and solitude in Villarreal's stories perhaps accounts for his never having been wholly accepted during the Chicano Renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s, nor even by contemporary Chicano literary critics" (240),[88] for whom "Villarreal represents narrative production from a pre-1965 generation, a generation that avoided recognizing the context of cultural domination and opted instead for assimilation" (Hernandez-Guttierez quoted in Sedore 241). "By taking freely from both cultures and admitting it," Sedore continues, "Villarreal alienated himself from many in the Chicano literary/critical generation that followed

85 | To be fair, Ramón Saldívar calls it a "paradigmatic Chicano novel" (79) as "early" as 1979; at that time, however, Chicana/o literature and criticism had already begun to change and expand away from its early didactic and ideological investment (see below).

86 | The question of which language a text is written in is still an issue in many debates, especially postcolonial ones. Based on the assumption that language is not a transparent tool but an integral and constructive part of cognition and world view, the debates most often focus on whether the language of the oppressor (in this case English) can be used by the oppressed without being compromised by its inherent, particular structure, and on the disappearance of languages through disuse. While the first question is usually based on a simplistic and, despite its focus on cognition, ultimately static view of language, the second issue is a real one. For example, linguists regularly call the USA a "graveyard of languages."

87 | Such was a common accusation, also due to the genre of the Bildungsroman which the novel seems to embrace at least partially. As was discussed in the previous chapter, a similar accusation was leveled against Okada's *No-No Boy*. The accusations usually work (mostly implicitly) with a highly simplified notion of an "American literary tradition."

88 | He cites a number of vituperations and critiques (239).

him. He became a pocho, a sellout" (243), and "[a]s a pocho, Villarreal is not-culturally - Mexican. He is not-ethnically-Anglo-American," and neither is his protagonist Richard, Sedore claims (243).[89] Repeating Martínez's argumentative twist, Sedore concludes that

> if 'the outsider tradition is as American as apple pie,' as historian William Burton puts it (232), then alienation–whether from the landscape or one's own family–is the American heritage. Under this rubric, Mexican American literature–at least as represented by Villarreal's *Pocho* and the response of Chicano critics to his work–is in the mainstream, and *Pocho* is a veritable landmark of U.S. American literature. (243)

Considering the further development of Latina/o literature and criticism in the USA as Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez (2007) or Lomelí (1993) sketch it[90] – moving beyond alleged dichotomies and schisms such as

89 | While Sedore's essay is one of the best argued on *Pocho*, he, too, works with large aggregate categories without further discussing them.

90 | Lomelí's handbook provides an insightful and detailed discussion of Chicano/a literature from 1959-1990. Of particular interest here I find his description of the so-called "Isolated Generation of 1975": writers who rejected or at least did not ostentatiously follow the cultural nationalism of the movement, but instead focused on characters, form, and craft. "Instead of treating glossy overviews of collective suffering, the focus now involved a magnifying glass approach to discern the inner qualities, oftentimes with an emphasis on the contradictions of raw reality" (97), which is very much what *Pocho* does. As important further developments Lomelí notes an increasing number of Chicana and Latina writers (and a broadening of depicted gender roles and sexual orientations), a move beyond "easily identifiable Chicano characters or Chicano-based themes and situations" (97) and a focus on language (98). Alongside Villarreal, he also mentions Sabine Ulibarrí and Américo Paredes as influential early writers (105). Dalleo and Sáez critically discuss the common distinction in critical literature between Civil Rights generation literature and post-sixties literature, noting two consensual points regarding the difference/novelty about post-sixties literature: that it entered the mainstream, and that its politics are no longer only that of social injustice. As two of the few to reject the simplistic opposition between "political" and "creative" literature (3), Dalleo and Sáez argue for finding "creative ways to rethink the relationship between a politics of social justice and market popularity" rather than favor one to the exclusion of the other, and hint that much literature already practices this.
They also note the tendency in reviews to treat "ethnic" or "migration" literature as "another flavor in the multicultural stew," ironically not by entirely ignoring politics, but by conflating some vague kind of "cultural identity" with a political statement under the umbrella of a "politics of recognition" (coined by Nancy Fraser), inadvertently ignoring the "real" politics of money, class, etc. (4).

"between literature with a socially redeemable function and a trend to produce an aesthetically rigorous expression" (Lomelí 101), and including a much wider range of narrative forms and depicted experiences (e.g. regarding gender and sexual orientation) in novels such as *The Rain God* (1984), *The House on Mango Street* (1984), *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986), *Migrant Souls* (1990), *So Far From God* (1993), or the Dominican American *Soledad* (2001) – *Pocho* can indeed be said prototypically to predate and anticipate many later texts.

Excursion: Plot

The book consists of eleven chapters, occasionally subdivided into two or three sections (there are four subdivisions in the long first chapter). The first part details the father Juan Rubio's experiences after his participation in the Mexican Revolution – as a staunch follower of Pancho Villa – and his subsequent incremental and unintended migration north.[91] As the narrative begins, he comes into a small town, shoots and kills another man over a prostitute, is arrested and then released because the commander of the local garrison is an old friend from the Revolution. He has to flee anyway, moves north, shortly considers assassinating Álvaro Obregón (president of Mexico from 1920-1924, who had first aligned, but later broken, with Villa and Zapata; he also broke with Carranza. Obregón was ultimately assassinated in 1928) for a small political group, decides against it and moves to the USA with his wife Consuelo and their two daughters. This part contains a number of micro-narratives about other people and their fates, most of them depicting hardship, exploitation of sharecroppers (Indios) by rich landowners (Spaniards), and violent death and murder. After a number of migration interludes, during one of which Richard is born in the Imperial valley near a creek, the family finally settles in Santa Clara (California), the prune country, when Richard is still very young.

It is only now, with the second chapter, that Richard's narrative actually commences. The chapter begins with him coming from confession for the first time (his mother says he is nine years old, even though the age of discretion in the Catholic Church is seven) and wondering about religion and God. Right from the beginning, he asks many, sometimes highly abstract and fundamental questions (aloud and in his mind, for example about theodicy) and continually wonders about things and the world around him, a characteristic that shapes much of the narrative. The next chapters deal with various episodes in his

91 | The Revolution itself is not as important as one might expect, there are very few details and only little bits of information, the narrative commences after the main conflict: "For all its sociohistorical significance, the Revolution is mainly important in this novel for the tremendous personal meaning Rubio has attributed to it" (Saldívar 74).

youth, for example farm work and poverty of the workers, the depression, violent strikes and labor unions, his friendship with neighborhood boys and girls, and most importantly his relationship to his father; he also makes friends with an intellectual outsider who is later arrested for allegedly raping a young girl. During all of this, and as he grows older, he remains somewhat aloof from his environment as he continues to question rules and conventions, the church (he becomes an atheist), and communal identifications and strictures including his circle of friends, and witnesses his family slowly falling apart. From the beginning, he places high importance on education and learning and independent thinking, proving a good student. With reaching the corresponding age, he engages in sexual encounters with girls from the neighborhood and begins to wonder about gender roles and masculinity. As he enters young adulthood, further episodes relate experiences with other groups of friends (pachucos, university intellectuals) and their rules and categories, more girls, more but also halting institutional education, the police (one of the few episodes in the novel that in detail recounts explicit racist violence), a changing neighborhood and his now fully disintegrated family (his father, having had affairs before, leaves his mother to live with another, much younger woman). At the end of the novel, Richard, after having taken care of his family for some time, decides to leave them to join the army in World War II, knowing that he will never return to his family (not meant as premonition).

In some basic respects, *Pocho* is a mixture of *Call It Sleep* and *No-No Boy*.[92] As in *Call It Sleep*, the main protagonist is, at least initially, a small child (of about 9 years of age) that wonders and asks many questions about the world; the narrative follows the child's increasing contact with, and consternation about, the complexities of that world and the puzzles it presents. However, unlike David's narrative, Richard's covers a large time span of about 10-12 years over a much smaller amount of pages to depict his growing up and coming of age. Inevitably, the narrative makes significant temporal jumps and is episodic. In this regard, it is somewhat similar to *No-No Boy* despite the drastically different time frame (the latter only covers a number of days). More importantly, as in *No-No Boy*, the focalizer for a large part of the narrative is an extremely self-reflective boy and then young man who constantly muses about personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation, mostly with regard to the difficult relationship of the individual to other individuals and, perhaps even more relevant, to smaller groups and communities, including the family. Consequently, where Ichiro muses about national aggregates and their contradictory consequences and manifestations, Richard reflects on his changing and dynamic auto- and hetero-identification and -differentiation in increasingly conflicted relationships to his family, religion, (girl)friends, and

92 | The similarity to Roth's novel has been noticed by Antonio Márquez (1983).

organized groups (political and others), often with a focus on gender roles and sexuality.

In important other basic respects, *Pocho* is quite different from *Call It Sleep* and *No-No Boy*. First of all, there is no preface that could serve as an introductory and general contextualization. Instead, the long first chapter about the father's experiences in Mexico prior to migrating to the USA (including intradiegetic short narratives about his experiences in the Revolution) serves as a historical background. Due to the large time span covered, Richard's reflections change significantly over the course of the narrative, in terms of depth and complexity and in terms of thematic focus; after all, we follow a young boy of the age of ca. nine become a young man of about twenty.[93] While he does occasionally share his reflections with others and attempts to engage them in an exchange – for example his mother or his father, rarely friends or partners – these conversations are often short and/or fail; in the entire narrative, there appears to be only one character with whom he talks at greater length, and that one is, significantly, an older outsider who is later sent to jail for having sex with a young girl (and really, Richard mostly listens). As a result, the narrative, unlike the almost constant conversing in *No-No Boy*, contains much less hetero-modal complication of the identificatory patterns through dialogic exchanges and reflections. The narrative does make use of different focalizers: the entire first part of the narrative (31 pages) is focalized through the father, a formal and thematic fact that announces a strong generational focus. Much later, the narrative once more focalizes through the father in a context that marks this particular focalization as a complement of a short but consequential section in which the narrative for once focalizes through the mother. Lastly, while the narrator is dominantly covert, there are subtle but significant passages in which the narrator's comments mark a sharp divergence from the perspective of Richard as focalizer.[94] This will play a role in discussing the occasionally highly problematic statements about gender roles found in the narrative.

The most important identificatory faultlines in the novel are family, friendship, religion, gender and sexuality, organized groups and communities. Less conspicuous but relevant differentiations are poverty (which is often ignored or overlooked) and language. It is important to keep in mind that, as in *Call It Sleep* and *No-No Boy*, many of these issues are reflected upon in connection to each other (for example friendship and sexuality or family and religion), so that ideally, each and every one would have to be cross-referenced.

93 | We cannot be sure about his exact age. The narrative states that Richard works for some time after finishing school in order to take care of his remaining family, but then leaves his family to join the army.

94 | Throughout the novel there are lapses into zero focalization.

To avoid repetition and maintain readability, focus on interdependence and cross-reference will occasionally be suspended to be discussed later.

Every single one of these issues is, as pointed out above, predominately dealt with in the context of Richard's conscious reflection upon who he is as an individual (in terms of world view, values, autonomy, responsibilities, and plans for his life) and how he relates to others and their demands upon him (individuals and groups). This, of course, is also true to some degree for Ichiro's reflections. However, for the latter, historical circumstances dominantly pre-configure the large national & allegedly racial aggregate categories within which many of his reflections unfold. For Richard, the dominant opposition is not between various national aggregates (for example being American vs. being Mexican American or Mexican), but between being "himself" as an individual and the various hetero-modal identificatory demands of other individuals and organized groups who try to tell him who to be and what to do. Consequently, as the narrative unfolds, the identificatory patterns become more complex as more and more identifications and differentiations enter Richard's world and his reflections, but at the center of his ruminations is always the issue of his unique individuality and his attempts to first realize and then maintain it (via insistent personal auto-identification) over and against various personal and communal hetero-identifications and differentiations. The dominant differentiation, then, is between Richard and the world.

Boy/World

Unlike David, Richard is not looking for safety and protection in a confusing and threatening world (at the beginning of the narrative Richard is older than David), but for answers to all kinds of questions about a complex and intriguing world, and about himself. In a kernel, his narrative is a narrative of intellectual growth and maturation, self-knowledge and (tentative) identity, and the search for independence and autonomy. While he might gain more and more of all these as he grows older, it is in the nature of his inquisitive and studious character as the narrative lays it out that he cannot ever complete his search and achieve closure in the form of full self-knowledge and unified identity; consistently, the narrative end is open, with him going away from home as a young man, quite similar in that regard to Ichiro's narrative.[95]

The groundwork for this pervasive and – as Richard grows to learn more about himself and the world – increasingly stark differentiation between his personal auto-identification and the various and progressively numerous personal and communal hetero-identifications is laid incipiently when Richard

95 | An ending that has been compared to other "Bildungsromane," e.g. by Joyce or Twain (Márquez 1983, 10).

becomes the narrative's focalizer at the beginning of chapter two. At this point, the family has settled and, as we can gather from small pieces of information scattered throughout the beginning of the chapter (e.g. regarding their "house" and the letters on it), presumably been living for some time in Santa Clara. Initially, Richard's name is withheld. The narrative tells of "a child," a "small boy" (32) on his way home from first confession. He is described as keenly aware of his natural environment and as already puzzled by the abundance of life: "as young as he was, things were too complex for him" (32). He is filled with questions about the world and worries both about small things (why bugs are green) and more existential things, such as the transcendence implied by the sky ("his biggest problem these days;" 33): "*Who made the world? God made the world. Who is God? God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth and of all things*" (33; italics in the original). At this stage, he does not yet question the tautology and dogma of some of the answers, as he does later, although he is already aware "that the answer to the second question was nothing more than the answer to the first" (33). Before he reaches home, in the space of one page, the child remembers both an incident with his father that reveals the latter as strict and as having specific ideas about what becomes a man (in this case, a hat), as well an incident at school when a teacher laughed (good humouredly) at him for not knowing something. Only at this point, via the teacher addressing the boy, do we get to know the child's name. When the child arrives at home, he almost immediately begins to ask his mother about things that puzzle him about confession. The mother is described as clearly overtaxed by his questions and his blunt frankness (he asks her about masturbation; 35), so that she resorts to creedal taboos and strictures to evade an answer (35). After she scolds him for his experiences, which he readily and without guilt divulges (he now relates being "played" with by neighborhood girls when he was younger; 36), he is even more puzzled and continues, within the means of a precocious young child, to contemplate problems of theodicy and ethics as they relate to his existence and actions (37). Most of the issues that are going to be relevant for Richard and for the identificatory patterns in the narrative are now in place:[96] individuality and intellectual growth, religion and transcendence (including life and death), family, gender and sexuality. (Hostile) peer groups and friendship follow soon after.

The bulk of the succeeding narrative contains various episodes in which these issues are expanded, elaborated and complicated in different manifestations and contexts, and which show Richard developing intellectual independence and maturity, as well as first realizing and then maintaining his individuality via an insistent auto-identification and -differentiation. Necessarily, as he grows older, the web of the identifications and differentiations corollary of these issues

96 | Some of them already appear in the first chapter in relation to his father.

and their interconnections and -dependences changes and becomes more complex. Consistent with the experiential and dramaturgical plausibility of the narrative's possible world, the older Richard becomes, the more articulate and complex his reflections and questions. The most important of these episodes and the changes they effect or contextualize are worth taking a closer look at, at this point specifically regarding Richard's growing sense of individuality and differentiation from the world.

During a short but indicative episode in school which occurs with iterative frequency, Richard ostentatiously eats his tortillas in the open despite being teased about it by other boys. At this point, he does not seem to have any friends, nor does he seem to mind much. With the beginning of the depression, the other boys actually come to him to ask him for food, which he willingly shares. He does remain an aloof outsider, though. (47)

A longer episode (47-60) follows up on the beginning of the depression and depicts a number of incidents which Richard witnesses. His father takes him along to a meeting of farm workers and other people from the neighborhood who are trying to organize, and who are being integrated, more or less willingly, into the larger labor union movements on the West Coast at that time. It comes to a strike in front of a farm that is instigated by an anonymous labor union man and that is broken up by the police. During the struggle that ensues, a policeman is killed by the son of a man the policeman had previously beaten down. Richard has witnessed all of it and is questioned by the police; however, he refuses to reveal the "culprit" because he appears to have a clear, if inarticulate, understanding of the difference between legally and morally right. About the impact of this incident on Richard the narrator says that "there was a part of his mind that carefully observed from a detached point of view, and he was aware that he was learning something" (51). Even though it is never said what exactly Richard learns – we get surprisingly little insight into his mind during these events and much more description by the narrator – it is fairly clear from what is described that the organized labor union and its anonymous representative unhinges and disturbs the former harmony, the fair working agreement, and even the friendship between the poor farm workers and the farm owner, who is not much better off. While the representative of the political organization remains anonymous, the important participants in the events on the side of the farm workers are given names, characterization, background and motivation, and thus individualized. It is, we may presume, this that Richard learns: an emphasis on the individual and suspicion towards organized political groups. As will be discussed below, this does not devalue or obviate solidarity on the interpersonal level.

One of the most important episodes (60-66) begins with Richard once again asking his mother questions: "He had been asking her questions again, and she was a little angry" and does not answer him; as she admits, "most of

the time it is because I am ashamed that I do not know what you ask" (60-61). At this point, it becomes clear that Richard is quickly "outgrowing" his parents, even though he must still be very young; first his mother (this has already begun earlier), later his father. His earlier identification with them (as part of the family, as their son, as aspiring to be like them, or at least like the father, while the mother provides security and comfort) is turning into distancing differentiation. In a longer speech, the mother tells Richard that they are "simple people" and come from "the poorest class of people in Mexico" (61). She feels "deeply ashamed that we are going to fail in a great responsibility–we cannot guide you, we cannot select your reading for you, we cannot even talk to you in your own language" (61), but she also says that tradition and economic necessity demands that he will have to work, will have to support his family and marry, because he is "the man" (he only has sisters). Richard, in turn, is "angry that traditions could take a body and a soul [...] and mold it to fit a pattern" (63) and replies: "Try to understand me. I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something–I *am*. [...] I have to learn as much as I can, so that *I* can live ... learn for *me*, for *myself*" (64; italics in the original). In a later similar scene, he thinks about his mother:

> Then suddenly, clearly, he saw that she, too, was locked up, and the full horror of the situation struck him. He thought of his sisters and saw their future, and, now crying, he thought of himself, and starkly, without knowledge of the words that would describe it, he saw the demands of tradition, of culture, of the social structure on an individual. [...] And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican, and furthermore he could never use the right he had as a male to tell his mother that she was wrong. (95)

Since this "egoism" and rebellion against extrinsic restrictions is, as the mother proclaims in the first scene, against custom and against the Church, Richard's individualistic plea for independence and intellectual autonomy not only increases the distance to his family, but inevitably means that he will have to distance himself from the Church and from larger aggregate groups (such as "Mexican Americans"), as well. Soon after, he starts doubting what he is told about God, and he starts questioning the authority and wisdom of his teachers as well.[97]

It is only consistent that the next episode introduces an alternative teacher (79-91): João Pedro Manõel Alves, an erudite, intellectual, atheistic, forty-year-

97 | In a last, longer conversation with his mother, after his parents have separated, he emphasizes once more that while he loves them both, he is his own, independent person; he also calmly tells her that he rejects any belief in God, but loves man (170-171). The strand of his development that begins with his first conversation with his mother is now completed, as far as the extant world of the narrative is concerned.

old outcast from a rich Azorean family who has fled his past and now lives impoverished near Santa Clara. He talks to Richard about the wide world, about books, philosophy, transcendence, atheism, but also, subtly, about sexuality. It is here that Richard sharpens and deepens his existential auto-identification and his sharp differentiation from the rest of the world and all its interpersonal and communal demands, rules, customs and prejudices. Finally, João is thrown into jail because he has had sex with an infatuated young girl and has impregnated her.

Over the course of the narrative, Richard becomes, to differing degrees and more or less transiently, part of three circles of friends/peers. The first and most lasting and important one consists of the boys and, initially, girls of the neighborhood. This circle of friends is (racially/ethnically) quite mixed and mostly coincidental. But even in this circle, Richard often feels aloof and, occasionally, superior, and ultimately detaches himself just before he departs to enlist. The first indication of that comes after a boxing match into which Richard is more or less coerced by one of his friends because he needs an opponent that puts up a fight, but takes a dive. After the fight, which he loses, of course, Richard decides never to follow external codes of honor and to "succumb to foolish social pressures again" (108) because "*being* was important, and he *was*" (108). Later, as a teenager/young man, Richard becomes friends with a group of "pachucos" and "zootsuiters" with their own code of honor, which he somehow admires, but again he comes to the conclusion that

> [n]ever–no, never–will I allow myself to become a part of a group–to become classified, to lose my individuality.... I will not become a follower, nor will I allow myself to become a leader, because I must be myself and accept for myself only that which I value, and not what is being valued by everyone else these days. (152-153)

Lastly and shortly, he befriends a clique of intellectuals and liberals whom he meets at university night courses, but their ideas "constituted a threat to his individuality" because they want him to "dedicate his life to the Mexican cause" while "he was quite sure he did not really believe there was a Mexican cause–at least not in the world with which he was familiar" (175). As it turns out, they are interested in him primarily for reasons of exoticism and kick him out when he sleeps with their wives and girlfriends.

The last important episode of this maturation process occurs when Richard and his friends are arrested by the police for a theft offense they are just about to, but do not, execute, so that their arrest is arbitrary and unlawful. They are beaten, abused and interrogated. When the commanding officer discovers that Richard is actually smart and educated, he gives up his intimidation approach and tells Richard that he could do a lot for "his people" if he joined the police. Richard declines the offer and leaves, thinking: "who the hell were his people?

He had always felt that all people were his people–not in that nauseating God-made-us-all-equal way, for to him that was a deception; the exact opposite was so obvious" (162). He continues to reflect on bad people everywhere, regardless of race, a rumination that picks up a train of thought about human nature started earlier.

Ultimately, Richard never forms a long-lasting attachment to anybody; he does have girlfriends, but remains mostly indifferent to them and usually has several at the same time. In the words of Sedore: "The men are alone; the women are alone; nobody gets anybody in Villarreal's novels" (244). Richard loves his family, of course, but still feels no need to stay with them or take care of them, much less emulate their ideas about life and values. It would also be a mistake to think that this process of independence and autonomy comes to an end at the end of the narrative. While he does reach a state of stark auto-differentiation by rejecting all personal and communal hetero-identifications, this auto-identification has no specific content other than that he is, whatever that may mean, "himself." He also has no particular sense of purpose (or "generativity script;" see the discussion of *No-No Boy*). When, in the very last paragraph, he thinks about what to live for, what to fight for, he realizes that because "he did not know, he would strive to live. He thought of this and he remembered, and suddenly he knew that for him there would never be a coming back" (187).

Predictably, secondary criticism on the novel consensually argues in more or less similar terms that the "narratives are wrought of longing. […] An insatiable longing for the horizon" (244); that Richard is "beyond labels" (Sedore 255), that "[t]he issue in *Pocho* […] is not how to make a new culture, but how to transcend collective beliefs and, in the process, become one's own master" (Cantú quoted in Sedore 255), that his protagonists "find solace in the American Adamic destiny of a place apart–the 'infinite complexities' of idiosyncratic solitude" (Sedore 257), and that "[a]mong the various options of absolute value posed for Richard Rubio […] Richard consistently chooses *not* to choose" (Saldívar 75) in an act of spiritual rebellion "against the various imposed forms of cultural reality" (76). It is easy to see at this point why the novel's initial reception by the Chicano Movement was less than enthusiastic: *Pocho*'s protagonist shows no commitment to anything apart from living his life and perhaps, we may presume, learning.[98] "Villarreal's work thus may be said to transcend Chicano *Causa* ideology. The American Adamic quality of nonconformity of *Pocho* is born of a restless and secessionist impulse as stout, unavailing and militantly

98 | It is not without irony that many novels that have come to be considered constitutive and representative of a particular ethnic group feature protagonists who are intent on leaving that group. This is reminiscent of George Lukacs' claim about the transcendental homelessness of the modern individual.

Chicano" as other works more readily accepted by the "movimiento," writes Sedore (254). "The Villarreal Adam fulfills the separatist faith that Chicano protest advocates proclaim for themselves but exclude Villarreal from" (Sedore 254). As I will show further below, the strong focus and insistence on individuality does not, per se, preclude poverty, exploitation, injustice, and solidarity as further important, often overlooked topics in the novel.

Boy/World – Friendship – Religion – Organized Groups & Communities

The topics of friendship, religion and organized groups/communities are placed here rather than behind the dominant differentiations relating to family and gender because they play a role mostly in the context of Richard's increasing rejection of personal and communal hetero-identifications in the process of realizing and maintaining his staunchly individualistic auto-identification.

Friendship. Richard builds friendships with a number of boys and girls, almost all of them part of the three circles of friends already discussed. While these friendships, for some time, are very important to him and influence and shape him (for example with Ricky or with the Rooster, a pachuco), they never persist. Granted, his first group of friends is also his most enduring group. It forms during childhood and lasts until adulthood when most of them move away. But already during adolescence, Richard begins to feel aloof from and superior to his childhood friends, especially Ricky. It is at this point that he starts to befriend the "pachucos," whom he later also leaves behind, just like the college "intellectuals." Once Richard reaches a minimal degree of intellectual independence – as precocious as he is, this already happens during his friendship with João Pedro – he becomes a somewhat reticent (to the point that he becomes wary of any potential pressure to conform), mostly observing participant in his circles of friends and regards them almost like objects of a sociological study. This does not mean that he is not initially loyal to his friends, but that he is fully aware that his independence and the demand for loyalty sooner or later will come into conflict. It is inevitable, in the end, that his friendships cannot last.

Religion. At first glance, religion seems to play an important role in *Pocho*. After all, the second chapter that introduces Richard as focalizer begins with him coming from first confession and thinking about God as creator of all things; many of his musings as a child, for example when he observes births and deaths, relate to God and ethics. But first of all, he is quickly able to differentiate between the dogmatic demands and rules of the Catholic Church – mediated exclusively indirectly via his mother – and his spiritual musings about divinity and transcendence; secondly, Church and religion hardly play any role in the narrative other than in Richard's musings; and thirdly, he soon relinquishes

even those as he becomes more and more of a humanist. In the end, religion is just another social formation to reject.

Organized Groups & Communities. As obvious as it should be at this point that no kind of communal aggregation, be it self-organized, political, or ethnic, or several at once (for example Mexican Americans) can hold attraction for Richard as an auto-modal identificatory pattern and exert little if any hetero-modal influence over him (at least as far as extant in the narrative: there are very few instances in which he is even identified as Mexican American, for example), groups and communities are, nevertheless, given enough space to deserve some attention.

Organized Groups: Interestingly, as noted above, the longer section that deals with the Depression and its consequences (farm workers organizing, labor unions, strikes) contains, contrary to the bulk of the novel after chapter one, almost no thoughts of David. Instead, it is told by a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization. As I have argued above, the unsympathetic portrayal of the labor union representative during the strike and the mostly fruitless labor union meetings and marches ("not much more than a holiday outing;" 60) leaves little room for organized groups as positive identificatory patterns, and their portrayal is not substantial enough for them to be significant as identificatory patterns in general, even if only as foil for auto-differentiation. Their appearance, I would argue, is actually used to point to another issue that does play a role in the narrative: poverty, struggle, and exploitation. This will be addressed below.

Community: The seemingly most self-evident communal aggregation in the novel would appear to be "Mexican American," but it is not. There are, of course, references to the "exodus" of Mexicans fleeing the Revolution, to groups of Mexicans camping out in the backyard of the Rubio family's house, and so on. Richard is hetero-identified as a Mexican (mostly demeaningly) several times, but clearly auto-identifies as American in an off-hand manner that suggests it has little actual consequence for his daily life. Although a longer passage that details the origins of the pachucos and zootsuiters (148-151) describes them as "truly a lost race" because "they attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures" (149), indicating that larger aggregations such as "cultural groups" may heavily impact identifications and differentiations, the same passage also states that "there was much more to it than a mere group with a name" and that "they were simply a portion of a confused humanity" (150), a quite heterogeneous portion at that (151). In short, while the narrative does admit to larger groups and aggregations being not only extant but potentially highly relevant and consequential for individuals as individuals and as members of groups (positively or negatively), larger aggregations are never really or lastingly relevant and consequential for Richard.

Family

The issue of family in the novel is inextricably entwined with the issue of gender and gender roles, and alleged traditions. The first chapter begins with Juan Rubio killing a man over a prostitute, while it shortly after becomes clear that he has a wife and daughters; when his friend, the general, asks him about his family and whether Juan has deserted them, he replies that he does not know yet. This is followed by the general thinking to himself that a "man's family was his personal matter" (12) and that he should thus refrain from further questions. Juan does take his family with him on his trek north, and there are narrator passages that state that he loves his wife, and that his love for his son has nothing to do with him being a boy (31), but the distanced and highly regulated relationship between husband and wife and the obvious power imbalance between the two genders pervade the entire narrative and also many of Richard's experiences and reflections. In fact, his own and his parents' gender shape his initial auto-identification with, as well as his increasing auto-differentiation from his parents, not to mention his relations with women. It is another telling fact that Richard's sisters play almost no role in the narrative and do not even have names.

The difference between mother and father and its relevance for Richard and for the narrative in terms of identificatory patterns is established right from the beginning. The house is the mother's domain, work and the outside that of the father. The father is strict and instructs Richard what it means to be a man, demonstrating it by living it; only later, when Richard has become an adolescent, do father and son really talk. It is, initially, the mother that Richard goes to with queries, and the mother that feeds him and teaches him, even though she quickly lacks the answers for his questions. The contrast becomes clear in two passages:

> In a clear, fine voice, she sang ballads of the old days in her country, and the child was always caught in their magic. He was totally unaware that his imaginary remembrances, being free of pathos, were far more beautiful than her real ones. (34)
> [...]
> At this time, Richard's most enjoyable moments were those spent in the company of his father. He loved his mother. She was always there when he needed her, and her arms and her songs were warmth and comfort and security, but with his father it was a different thing, because pleasure is far different from security. (42)

Consistently, Richard begins to distance himself from his mother much earlier than from his father, and in different ways and for different reasons. He soon realizes that his mother cannot answer his questions and instead resorts to dogma and tradition. Intellectually, he begins to feel superior to her at an early

age until he is not afraid to tell her that he no longer believes in God. As he grows older and reflects about what it means to be a man, he distances himself from her as a man, not only as a child. In the end, for a while after the father has left the family, he is the "man of the house" and provides for his mother and sisters, reversing roles.

As he grows more independent of his mother, he becomes more of an equal to his father until, to achieve full independence, he has to distance himself from his father, as well. During an argument with his father about being a man now, Richard says: "From the moment I first remember, you taught me that I was a man. I was never a niño to you but a macho, a buck, and you talked to me like a man" (130). Before replying, Juan thinks: "He knew now, for the first time, that his son was no longer a child, and the realization made him feel old" (131); then he says: "you are a man, and it is good, because to a Mexican being *that* is the most important thing" (emphasis mine). When Richard insists that "[t]here must be more," the father admits "[t]here is, my son," by which he means the fulfillment of one's destiny. At this point, Richard becomes sad because he realizes that his father, though not weak, has somehow given up on fulfilling his destiny and is happy under conditions that are dehumanizing (i.e. systematic economic exploitation; 132), something which Richard will not accept for himself.

The culmination of his differentiation comes when the father, after much quarrel between him and Consuelo about his affair with the wife of a friend and about her becoming more "Americanized" and independent (in the narrative, this shows in the house being unclean and in her "talking back"), leaves the family to live with a much younger woman. First of all, Richard does not take sides (he even thinks his father has every moral right to do as he pleases, even though he wishes he would not act as he does) although he feels sorry for his mother and clearly recognizes the confines put upon her by tradition and social structure. Secondly, after the violent fight that precedes Juan's departure and during which the father beats his wife, one of his daughters and even Richard, father and son talk one last time. The final message of father to son is: be true to yourself, let nothing stand in your way, do what you think is right (169). Ultimately, it seems, Richard's auto-differentiation from his family is achieved by becoming the superior of his mother (needless to say of his sisters as well) and, ironically, the equal of his father; perhaps even more than an equal, as Richard intends not to succumb as he thinks his father has. In other words, to distance himself from his father, he has to become "the man" his father was at the beginning of the narrative. In the end, Richard abandons all of his family.

There are indications in the text that at least parts of the development of Richard and his family are typical of a generational pattern which critics have linked to processes of assimilation and "loss of culture." Márquez for example points out that the "North from Mexico" immigration pattern is found in many

subsequent novels (e.g. *Chicano*) and that usually, "both the first and second generation become 'Americanized'" (1994, 9). Paredes argues that the "family comes apart at precisely the same rate that Juan advances financially" (1981, 76) and adopts middle-class values. Money corrupts, it seems, and deprives of "cultural identity." To some degree, this is correct. But the text actually provides contradictory and ambiguous evidence about generational issues and assimilation and their effect on the Rubio family, in comments by the narrator and via the behavior and thoughts of the characters.

Even in chapter one before Richard enters the narrative as dominant focalizer, at the end of Juan's migration to the North when he finally settles with his family in Santa Clara, we find the following passage about Juan: "But deep within he knew he was one of the lost ones. And as the years passed him by and his children multiplied and grew, the chant increased in volume and rate until it became a staccato NEXT YEAR! NEXT YEAR! And the chains were incrementally heavier on his heart" (31). His reticence to accept that he will never return to Mexico pervades many of his thoughts and actions. He does not buy a house, and he insists that at least he and his wife are Mexican and should behave accordingly: "You are thinking yourself an American woman–well, you are not one and you should know your place. You have shelter, and you have food and clothing for you and the children. Be content!" (91) When Consuelo begins to question her role and her husband and refuses to do household chores, he begins an affair with the wife of a friend, an affair that, as a man, he thinks he has a right to conduct. While he reflects upon his course of action during a visit to that friend, he thinks about buying a house in the back country in order to get his own "women" away from "foreign" influences. But buying property would mean that a return to Mexico is no longer an option – which it has not been for a long time – and that he would have to admit it. When his friend's wife serves him tortillas, he thinks that "[i]t was good to retain these customs, to preserve the old culture as much as possible" (122) while shortly after commenting to himself that "ten years in this country had made her forget everything she had been taught about being a wife" (123), a fact which makes the affair possible. To boost, at the beginning of the scene, Juan as focalizer reflects on Mexican women's role and lot and pressures, and on the hard fate of his daughters. While these contradictory thoughts and behaviors might simply be attributed to hypocrisy and inconsistency, narrator comments throughout the text make clear that Juan, himself, is torn by the contradictory demands of gender roles and contextual factors. When his wife accuses him of an affair before he has actually begun one (on the basis of her prior experiences with him), he simply refuses to justify himself: "he could have set her fears at ease [...] but he could not do that, for he should not explain, should not admit, should not deny" (92) because he feels he has every right to act as he pleases.

In fact, there seems to be no easy way out for anyone, neither by retaining the traditional family structure and the attending gender roles and traditions and customs, nor by breaking with them. The small degree of independence and emancipation Consuelo establishes for herself manifests only in her refusal to do certain household chores and does not bring her happiness or more opportunities to shape her life in accordance with her desires and ideas. In the only passage in the entire novel in which she serves as focalizer, shortly after Juan begins his affair, she looks back on her sexual maturation and the epiphanic moment in which she, for the first time, felt pleasure sleeping with her husband. When he leaves, she does not feel free, but heartbroken. The fact that she immediately turns to Richard as breadwinner signals not emancipation or full "Americanization" (whatever that may mean), but rather maintenance of what she considers traditional family structure and gender roles.

The same ambiguity is evident in Richard's thinking about family, generation and assimilation. Looking at his disintegrating family, he thinks to himself that too much change too quickly kills (94), and that "the transition from the culture of the old world to that of the new should never have been attempted in one generation" (135). Yet this does not mean that he embraces the rules, traditions and strictures allegedly imposed by his family's cultural descent:

Then suddenly, clearly, he saw that she, too, was locked up, and the full horror of the situation struck him. He thought of his sisters and saw their future, and, now crying, he thought of himself, and starkly, without knowledge of the words that would describe it, he saw the demands of tradition, of culture, of the social structure on an individual. [...] And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican, and furthermore he could never use the right he had as a male to tell his mother that she was wrong. (95)

In fact, given what we know about Richard's desire to be independent and autonomous, it should not come as a surprise that he rejects all "demands of tradition, of culture, of the social structure on an individual," independent of considerations of assimilation, generational dynamics and family traditions. Assimilation, in short, for Richard would only mean changing one set of rules for another one. Yet again, there is little ambiguity in the seemingly self-evidential reference to his "right as a male" and its connection to being "wholly Mexican." What we end up with, then, is perhaps less a "typical" Mexican-American family's fate and generational conflicts under the pressures of assimilation to an unspecified "American master culture" than a very specific family's fate. Not only do the family and its members offer little for Richard in terms of model identification patterns, on the analytical level no stable or unequivocal identificatory pattern can be deduced either. The issue of gender and sexuality is, for better or worse, significantly less ambiguous.

Gender & Sexuality

As my discussion so far has indicated, and as some of the quotations above show, the novel contains a host of problematic statements about gender roles. Already the very first episode of the novel is occasionally hard to read and borders on caricature. In an almost Western-like beginning, "[a] man got off the train and elbowed his way through the crowd" (1). It soon becomes clear that he used to be a soldier fighting with Pancho Villa. Bored with the people and situation around him, "he almost wished for the old days, and carelessly wondered how many men he had killed here" (1). He goes into a cantina, "commands" a "girl" (a fifteen-year-old prostitute) to come to him, takes her away from her pimp and kills the pimp with a gunshot. Literally, this reads: "I have been watching you. You please me. [...] You are with me now. I have not had a woman in a week, and am better for you than your pimp" (2-3). He then takes her to bed, lets her take off his boots, and, when she comments that he has not asked her name, replies: "¿Qué importa?" (4) Throughout the entire narrative, comments abound that indicate a strict and unbending gender hierarchy, within the Rubio family, which might be expected given the patriarchal historical background, but also, in a different manner, between Richard and his female partners.

The power differential is most explicit within the Rubio family, as has already been suggested above. Here are some examples from a key scene:

I have had my fill of your whimpering and your back talk! You are thinking yourself an American woman–well, you are not one and you should know your place. You have shelter, and you have food and clothing for you and the children. Be content! What I do outside the house is not your concern. (91)

[...]

[H]e had beaten her occasionally, but they had never had words. Again she shuddered. [...] Somehow she knew that it was not right that she should do this–not right as it was for her friends Catalina and Mariquita, but then they were not Mexican women. Their lot was a different one from hers. (92)

[...]

It was inconceivable to him [Richard] that there were people [police] who would interfere with matrimony–with the affairs of a man and his woman. (93)

[...]

Once again, he was saddened by the whole thing. Sad because his mother was changing in a frightening way, and sad that it was quite possible that his father was seeing another woman. And although Richard believed that Juan Rubio had every moral right to do so, he wished that it would not be so. (94)

[...]

[H]e could have set her fears at ease [...] but he could not do that, for he should not explain, should not admit, should not deny. (92)

[...]
[B]ecause only a Mexican woman can appreciate the fact that her husband is a man. (94)
[...]
And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican, and furthermore he could never use the right he had as a male to tell his mother that she was wrong. (95)
[...]
Along with a new prosperity, the Rubio family was taking on the mores of the middle class, and he did not like it. It saddened him to see the Mexican tradition begin to disappear. (132)

Conspicuously, harmony and happiness of Richard's childhood are maintained as long as the gender roles remain unquestioned. His mother offers food and security, though no answers or intellectual stimulation; his father offers a role model for being "a man." Roughly parallel to Richard's increasing auto-differentiation from his family (and almost everything and everyone else), the family's gendered hierarchy starts to collapse, as well. The last statement about the "mores of the middle class" occurs in the context of Consuelo starting to "talk back" to her husband and actually threatening, if beaten once more, to have the police throw him out of his house and in jail (see third quote). Again, it is worth recalling that first of all, in all this, the sisters remain near-anonymous and invisible, though they side with the mother and step up to the father during the last climactic fight. Second, the mother's refusal of her subservient position in the family and the attending gender role, and most importantly her refusal to acquiesce to her husband's philandering, in no way lead to her full emancipation from gender roles, much less are they indicative of a questioning of gender roles in general in the narrative, even if some narrator comments suggest at least sympathy for women's lots. The father's behavior is never condemned, nor does Richard ever really question the male role model he has been taught; he rejects the responsibility for a family that comes with it and the pressure of social formations in general, but that is all, which should, given his rejection of almost all hetero-modal identification, be surprising.

Richard's handling of his sexual relationships less ostentatiously follows his father's model, but it is still shaped by a power differential as soon as he is physically and sexually able to establish and maintain it. Initially, this power differential is reversed. Zelda, whom he later has an affair with, is the leader of a neighborhood gang and is described as tomboyish, brutal and domineering. She beats up Richard and any other boy of the gang (and the neighborhood) that dares to question her authority. However, once the clique reaches sexual maturity, Richard, in a game of chicken, tricks Zelda into having sex with all the boys. After this, her power is broken, and whenever she wants to hang out with the gang, she has to pay "with her body" (119). When Zelda and Richard

begin an affair some time later, it is described thus: "Her relationship with Richard ripened into a deep love on her part and an indifferent one on his" (143). Another girl from the neighborhood, Mayrie, whom he also dates, ultimately remains similarly insignificant to him. Part of this might be ascribed to his refusal to commit or bind himself to anyone; one might even argue that his unregenerate refusal to enter into a relationship precludes any exertion of power over a woman on his part (at least within a relationship) and subverts the father's male role model and the mother's exhortation to found his own family. Furthermore, there are numerous discrepancies in the text between narrator comments and the focalizers' thoughts and actions, which could be used to argue that the characters' world views and values are part of the possible world of the narrative but do not exhaust it.[99] Nonetheless, I think the few relativizing and subverting narrator comments and the few complicating statements by the focalizers themselves cannot balance the bulk of the narrative's construction of gender. The gender-related identificatory pattern of the narrative possible world of *Pocho* is dominantly patriarchal. It is only little comfort that "[p]atriarchy within Chicana/o families does not constitute a cultural unique pathology" (Segura and Pierce 80),[100] but can be found in many other groups and many other fictional narratives as well, such as, of course, *Call It Sleep*.

Fittingly, sexuality is just as dominantly hetero-normative. There are indications that Richard's "teacher" João Pedro Manõel Alves is at least bisexual, since he confesses to the desire to kiss men – though he vehemently repudiates anything beyond that. This merely contributes to him being marked as an outsider in all regards. More importantly, in their last conversation, Richard's father admits his long-held fear that his son was "one of those others"

99 | The narrator repeatedly comments on Richard's reflections, sometimes humorously or ironically. For example: "He [Richard] thought this and other things, because the young are like that, and for them nothing is impossible" (153).

100 | Segura and Pierce provide an interesting sociological perspective on the matter. Their quantitative research showed that "young Chicanos are more likely than their sisters to identify with their fathers and with their potential male occupational roles. In sum, the Chicano boy must learn his gender identity as being not female–or not mother, not grandmother, and not godmother" (78-79). This produces an ambivalent stance towards women. The finding, Segura and Pierce point out, "directly implicates machismo, the politically loaded notion that Chicanos are in some sense more dominating or macho than European-American men" (79). While the topic is loaded with many clichés and exaggerations, and while "[p]atriarchy within Chicana/o families does not constitute a cultural unique pathology," there seems to be a grain of truth in the accusation, they argue, in that at least their findings show a majority of Chicano families with "patriarchal privilege structurally, ideologically, and interpersonally" (80). For an extensive discussion of gender and sexuality in Chicano/a literature, see Aldama 2005.

(169), to which Richard replies that he is not, but that even they have their place (a tolerance which the father takes as a sign of maturity and wisdom). This is consistent with Richard's tolerance for different ways of "being," living, and individual world view that are concomitant to his rejection of all extrinsic demands by social formations on the individual. It is the same tolerance, though, that accepts his father's and his mother's behavior on equal terms and leaves the underlying structures and causes unquestioned.

Patriarchal gender construction and hetero-normativity can, of course, be attributed to the historical context at the time of *Pocho*'s publication: the diverse postwar civil rights movements (women's rights, gay rights, etc.) were just beginning to gain momentum. In this regard, one might say that the novel's representation of gender and sexuality in fact (and unfortunately) marks a low degree of departure from the actual world. Another explanation is that the novel attempts to portray characters with flaws and shortcomings: "This novel accentuates, for the first time in a mainstream American literary scene, Hispanic characters as complex and multidimensional who, despite their individual flaws, possess depth and credibility" (Lomelí 88).

Poverty & Exploitation & Struggle

In light of the numerous passages about poverty, exploitation and suffering in *Pocho* it is astonishing to see how little attention these aspects have been paid in secondary literature, which has tended to focus on its status as an early Mexican-American literary text. Calderon for example sets up a contrast between Villarreal and Rivera and asserts without providing much evidence that only the latter writes about a "culture of poverty" as a topic allegedly typical of an "emerging national literature" and a "literature of emancipation" (83); Márquez writes that Pocho "dissolves into a mishmash of platitudes and purported truisms" (1994, 10) and offers no "way out" for Chicanos, much less a sustained, systemic criticism. Contrary to other "proletarian novels" it shows a "desultory and ambiguous demeanor" (11). Only more recently have critics pointed out (not even directly about *Pocho*) that Chicana literature that does not treat "glossy overviews of collective suffering" (Lomelí 97) may still show an emphasis on the "*contradictions of raw reality*" (97; emphasis mine),[101] and that "[b]y isolating Latino/a texts as individualistic narratives [...] such academic readings do not view this contemporary fiction as community-oriented or concerned with questions of *social injustice*" (Dalleo and Sáez 5; emphasis mine).[102] Even the essays that do more justice to the complexity of the novel

101 | Lomelí writes this about the so-called "Isolated Generation of 1975."

102 | The argument is made in the context of a discussion of language choice in contemporary Chicana/o novels.

(e.g. by Saldívar or Sedore, see above) rarely talk about it in terms of poverty and exploitation.

If the novel really did not include passages about poverty, exploitation, injustice and struggle and only concentrated on Richard's intellectual coming of age (in other words, if it was "only" a Bildungsroman, an accusation which in turn does not do justice to the Bildungsroman), its lukewarm reception when it was first published would perhaps be more understandable. But it is suffused with passages either directly describing or indirectly referring to racial and economic injustice, exploitation, poverty and even starvation, though the terms "capitalism" or "racism" never come up. They do not have to. When Juan Rubio flees north to escape the last throes of a Revolution he no longer cares for (since his hero Pancho Villa has withdrawn from the war and is later assassinated), he encounters a host of other refuges, all of them poor and desperate. Throughout the first chapter there are short episodes about Indio sharecroppers being disowned and then killed by Spanish landowners, random killings and other atrocities. Mother and father later relate stories to Richard about systematic exploitation and rape of the rural, poor population in Mexico by the rich ruling class prior to the Revolution.

These kinds of episodes do not stop after the family arrives in the United States. The long section about the Depression makes clear that many people are suffering and starving and that "Richard's family did not suffer as much as the others" simply "because the depression had not changed their diet. They had never had much more than they were now getting" (47). It also refers to the exploitation of Mexican American itinerant farm laborers, along with "Oakies," by bigger farms and farm owners, a reference later contrasted with the friendly farm owner and his daughter who regard the workers as partners and even friends (47ff). Further episodes describe poor and starving people camping out in the backyard of the Rubio's, or the dead bodies of the poor (Mexican and other) being manhandled and taken away by the government, presumably to be used for anatomy courses. Once in the USA, the Rubio family explicitly solidarizes with the lower classes, regardless of whether they are "Spanish" (i.e. Mexicans of Spanish descent) or not, which is, considering the father's often-voiced hate and disdain for the Spanish, remarkable (99).[103] When Richard wonders why humans who used to be pushed around for their race and ancestry push other humans around for their race and ancestry as soon as they have a chance to, the father replies that this has little to do with race, but with human nature in general: "[t]hat is the wonder of this country of yours, my son. All

103 | Even this hate is relativized and "de-racialized." The mother explains to the son: "Your father is a kind man, my son, and when he says the Spaniard, it does not mean that he is against the race, only that it fell upon the lot of the landowners to be Spanish" (100).

the people who are pushed around in the rest of the world come here, because here they can maybe push someone else around" (99-100), forgetful that they themselves were once pushed around. Finally, Richard has an epiphany about his father's existence:

> He was disappointed, and suddenly afraid, that a man who had lived such a life as his father could call this existence happiness. And he cried in his fear of this thing–this horrible, inexplicable, merciless intangible–that held humanity in its power; that made such men as his father go out every morning before sunup to harvest [...], with fingers stiff from the early morning frost and bodies tortured by the midday heat, to return after dark and eat and, too tired to love, sleep. And in the winter months they wallowed in the mud [...]; and, if unable to find jobs, they stood in line to claim a grocery order they had received from the State Relief Administration after having stood in another line, while all the while it rained. [...] This was happiness! (132)

The last sentence could not possibly be more cynical. Richard perceives that his father has resigned himself to his fate even though he might have had entirely different ideas when he was younger. It is clear that, although the "inexplicable intangible" remains unnamed and unspecified, there must be extrinsic, systemic and inescapable mechanisms and structures beyond an individual's control and power that put an inexorable limit to one's plans for life and one's personal auto-identification, and that destine a person like his father to a life of struggle and relative poverty. To Richard, who places such high importance on being in control of his life and beyond the control of hetero-identifications, this realization is shocking (even though at the very end he inconsistently thinks that his "father had won his battle;" 187).

It is, at the very end of the novel, a telling and ironic if only implicit accession on Richard's side of the external demands of the world and of the "various imposed forms of cultural reality" and "[s]ocioeconomic conditions" (Saldívar 76) that he discontinues to work and take care of his family not to attend university and pursue an education, but to join, of all things, the "total system" of the army. As Saldívar summarizes,

> given the fact that Richard has always been a tolerant person among social, religious, sexual, and moral intolerants, and given the fact that he sees the coming war as an event spawned by wrong and bound only to create further wrongs (*Pocho* p. 185), Richard's decision to enlist can be seen either as a supreme contradiction, or as a positive step in a dialectic of developing understanding. (76-77)

While I would side with Saldívar's second suggestion, I do not think the adjective "positive" is accurate. Richard does indeed understand, but given his earlier epiphany, I would argue that what he understands is that identificatory

patterns are never only personal and auto-modal, but always also communal and hetero-modal, and that this, in turn, means that poverty, exploitation, injustice and struggle as he has seen them so often, so far, are always potential realities of life. From this perspective, the next to last sentence of the novel can be read with a different emphasis: "Because he did not know [what to fight for], he would *strive* to live" (187; emphasis mine).

(Almost) Absences & Minor Differentiations

As mentioned above, there are a number of issues and faultlines in the novel that are addressed or even shortly emphasized, but that do not actually impact the web of identifications and differentiations in a dominant way. Aspects of religion and community have already been discussed; large aggregations and language will be discussed now.

Large Aggregations. There are few extensive passages about large aggregations in *Pocho*, and even these few do not paint a consistent or comprehensive picture, quite different from *No-No Boy*, for example. Over the course of the novel, there are perhaps half a dozen situations in which Richard or his family are hetero-identified as Mexican, mostly derogatorily. In school, when Richard is still very young,

> One of the big guys was always mean to him, because he was Spanish and Richard was Mexican... He had asked him one day why he was always picking on him, and he told him because was Mexican and everybody knew that a Spaniard was better than a Mexican any old day. (41)

Remarkably, it is a Spanish-American boy and not a "white American" who picks on Richard. Much later, the police arrest Richard and his childhood friends because they think they are Mexicans and pachucos, and thus by definition potential criminals. This is not only racist but highly ironic since Richard is the only Mexican in his circle of friends, the others are Italian-American, Spanish-American, Japanese-American and Anglo-American. Of course, they really were planning to steal "rims" from a car. One could summarize these incidents not as examples of systemic and consistent racism based on large aggregations, but, to use a phrasing from the novel, as all kinds of people pushing around all kinds of other people for flimsy reasons.

Not even within the family is there consensus about who or what they are. At one point, the mother thinks about Richard: "All indio, this boy of mine, she thought, except inside. The Spanish blood is deep within him" (35). In another situation, she says about their family ancestry: "[Y]ou are Indian, too, as well as Spanish and probably even French" (99), to which the father, who is the only one to consistently and vehemently auto-identify as Mexican, replies: "We are

Mexicans, Richard, that is all. Your mother has the funny idea that we carry the blood of every cuckold who has ever exploited our country, and that would include the whole world–even the gringos" (99). Richard himself reflects that "although he was a product of two cultures, he was an American and felt a deep love for his home town and its surroundings" (129) and that "[i]f we live in this country, we must live *like* Americans" (133; emphasis mine), which seems to indicate that he feels there is a difference between him and "Americans" after all. Ultimately, of course, Richard cares only for humanity and "man," the largest aggregation of all, and auto-identifies accordingly; the last time he hangs out with his friends before enlisting, he makes a plea for tolerance for all kinds of people and their lives and values and desires.

Language. Contrary to many more recent Latina/o novels (*The Rain God*, *So Far From God*, *Last of the Menu Girls*, *Soledad*), astonishingly little is said about language in the novel, and the language of the novel itself is fairly inconspicuous.[104] It appears that Richard talks Spanish at home to his parents because they do not speak English, or only very little (the father seems to know rudimentary English), and English outside the house. He explains to his friend Mayrie: "A long time ago, the Spanish was the only way I could talk. Then I went to school, and they taught me to talk like this. I've been trying to teach my father and mother to talk English, but I don't think they really want to learn" (73). His primary linguistic identification for the majority of the novel, then, is English, with almost no further differentiations. Obviously, since the novel is written exclusively in English (except for very short expressions such as "sí" or "¡Por Diós!"), all Spanish is "translated." However, *Pocho* does contain some Spanish-inflected (i.e. "transcribed") English *oral* idiom (never in the narrator's comments), especially in syntax and phrase, as in "your mother has given light" (30) or "what an ache of the head" (57). Nonetheless, for the identificatory patterns this plays no role.[105]

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104 | It is often overlooked that Mexican American literature is also written in Spanish, "Spanglish," a combination of both, and Caló, a pachuco argot.

105 | Frances Aparicio makes the interesting argument that while

> most recent works by U.S. Latino/as have emerged as English monolingual texts, and while this linguistic trend has been interpreted as a sign of the eventual assimilation of Latinos, or as an indication of this literature's long overdue mainstreaming, I propose that their literary English is a different one, a language tropicalized from within. It constitutes, in its many variations, a transformation and rewriting of Anglo signifiers from the Latino cultural vantage point. (796)

As she shows, "a close reading of their lexicon and syntax reveals the underlying presence of Spanish in most of their works" (797). In effect, she claims, this is not assimilation but a subversive act:

In conclusion, we can summarize the identificatory pattern thus:

1. Richard's personal auto-identification as an individual and his differentiation against any personal or communal hetero-identification dominates the entire system of identifications and differentiations. This auto-identification ultimately has no clear content other than "being himself" and remains open. Appropriate to the large time span covered and the theme of intellectual coming of age from childhood to young adulthood, the system of identifications and differentiations is dynamic; however, unlike in *Call It Sleep* or *No-No Boy*, it is dynamic in that Richard's auto-identification changes from inquisitive, uncertain and rudimentary when he is a child to insistent, reflected and autonomous when he reaches adulthood, and in that the various hetero-identifications are one after the other rejected. It is somewhat static (in this regard similar to Ichiro) in that Richard's dominant concern once he has become conscious of it does not change. As a result, the identificatory pattern is mostly hierarchical regarding auto-modal vs. hetero-modal identification, but the various hetero-modal identifications are heterarchical (none of them persist).
2. The identificatory pattern comes in all modes (personal and communal, auto- and hetero-modal, identification and differentiation), but again: personal auto-identification and -differentiation dominate. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other persons (mother and

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the most important contributions of U.S. Latina/o writers to American literature lie not only in the multiple cultural and hybrid subjectivities that they textualize, but also in the new possibilities for metaphors, imagery, syntax, and rhythms that the Spanish subtexts provide literary English. (797)

In a strange reversal, however, she then excepts *Pocho* from this claim – despite the many passages that do exactly what she points to and that she herself cites – by arguing that here these passages are merely "pragmatic compromising" and opposed to Richard's and the narrator's formal and academic discourse: "Their Hispanicized, uneducated English is positioned as a negative paradigm from which the very literate, formal, and academic discourse of Richard and of the narrator establish a class- and socially-defined boundary" (798). This way, "Villarreal silences and hides the Spanish behind the English signifiers" (798), an example of "internalized colonialism" (798). While I appreciate Aparicio's reminder that language is much more flexible, adaptable, alive and uncontrollable than many people make it out to be, and while I agree with her general point, I find her reversal regarding Pocho unconvincing and inconsistent. Neither does she explain or provide evidence in which way the "tropicalization of English" in Pocho is different from other literary texts (I would argue it is only a difference in degree, not necessarily quality), nor does she address the significant difference between narrator voice and character voice.

father) and groups (circle of friends), hetero-differentiations (e.g. police) are relatively rare. Since Richard mostly reflects about who he is, but does not explicitly engage in many conversations about himself, his ruminations are mostly complicated by himself, i.e. monological, or, importantly, by the heterodiegetic narrator. Caveat: A relatively large space is given to Juan as focalizer. With regard to him, the identificatory pattern is radically personal and auto-modal, hierarchical, and mostly static.

3. There are various other identificatory faultlines, perhaps more than in the previous two novels, but most of them are dealt with in the context of Richard's auto-identification. Surprisingly, large aggregations are not very important, and neither are community and language. For once, socioeconomic aspects feature prominently. The gender-related identificatory patterns are somewhat problematic.
4. The discursive structure is episodic with occasionally significant temporal leaps. The narrative situation is heterodiegetic with multiple, sometimes zero focalization; however, the dominant focalizer is Richard.
5. The degree of departure between possible fictional world and actual world is minimal in terms of ontology (setting, events, causality, characters) and epistemology (perspectival structure, cognition, motivation). The discursive structure does not significantly call attention to itself, but the large temporal ellipses and the often vague temporal allocation do demand an integrative effort by the reader. The singular focalization through the mother is rather abrupt and does call attention to itself.

3.4 Julia Alvarez: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

The complications of discursive structure and narrative perspective in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* are considerable, much more ostentatious than in the other texts discussed so far, and consequential. The narrative consists of fifteen chapters, subdivided into three sections of five chapters each. The chapters vary in length from one and a half pages (chapter 9) to thirty (chapter 11). Most obviously and pertinently, the overall temporal structure of the narrative is one of sustained episodic reversal, sometimes misleadingly called reverse chronology. This means that the chapters, while in themselves roughly chronological (there are analepses and prolepses), incrementally move backwards in time regarding the overall storyline. At the very end of the novel, the narrative "fast-forwards" the narrative "back" to the present, a present beyond that of the intradiegetic storyline determined by the beginning of the

novel. It is, therefore, not quite correct to say that the narrative ends at the beginning.[106]

Specifically, section one covers the period from 1989-1972; section two covers 1970-1960, and section three covers 1960-1956. In a way, then, the novel ends with the "beginning" (the very early childhood of the four García girls in the Dominican Republic), and begins at the chronologically latest point in time of the intradiegetic storyline (all four girls are adults living in the US), making the novel the one with the longest time span out of the texts discussed so far; only Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (next chapter) comes close. Some critics have called this structure an inverse "Bildungsroman" or coming of age narrative; Cantiello argues that there are "two major narratives of becoming: the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman*" (102; emphasis in the original).[107] One could also call it a kind or origin story.

However, it is not always possible to determine exactly where, or rather: *when* along the storyline the individual chapters are located, since clear temporal references are often lacking; within the chapters, cross-temporal references to things that are *temporally* yet to happen (which have already been told *discursively*) and to events in the *temporal* past (which are yet to be told *discursively*) abound. Other events and stories are mentioned but not explicated. Some passages are told in the simple past, some in present tense, but usually not the present tense of an experienced I. As the section titles already indicate, the storyline is temporally not cohesive: there are many smaller and larger temporal gaps, making the chapters and the overall narrative episodic. Several of the longer chapters contain not one, but different, though related episodes; these are unobtrusively demarcated by a space, sometimes by three dots. The longest chapter – the first of section three – has two subchapters, indicated by Roman numerals.

To complicate things, the narrative perspective varies significantly, not only from chapter to chapter, but sometimes within. Since there names of family members above the chapters, one might be tempted to conclude that these indicate the narrative perspective or at least the focus on particular characters. This, however, turns out to be unreliable, as well. The narrative situations throughout the entire novel are as follows:

106 | This is routinely ignored in criticism and will be discussed later in greater detail. The temporal structure is like Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, but unlike Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*. Perhaps the most famous contemporary example of this structure is the movie *Memento*.

107 | The last section of the novel is actually a kind of "portrait of the artists as young children."

1. Yolanda: heterodiegetic;[108] dominant but nonexclusive internal focalization through Yolanda; many passages with free indirect discourse.
2. Sofía: heterodiegetic; internal focalization through the father.
3. Carla, Yolanda, Sandra, Sofía: heterodiegetic; internal focalization through the mother in simple past, then present tense; then focalization through the daughters in present tense.
4. Yolanda: heterodiegetic; internal focalization through Yolanda, first in simple past, but then, in the last section, in present tense.
5. Yolanda: autodiegetic.
6. Carla, Yolanda, Sandra, Sofía: quadruple autodiegetic (in other words: first person plural), but not throughout: at some point, Fifi (the youngest) becomes the object of the narrative; explicit audience address, and once more a switch from simple past to present tense.
7. Mami, Papi, Yolanda: heterodiegetic; nonexclusive internal focalization through Laura, the mother.
8. Carla: heterodiegetic; internal focalization through Carla.
9. Yolanda: autodiegetic.
10. Sandi: heterodiegetic; multiple focalization through all family members.
11. Mami, Papi, the Four Girls:
    a. Section I: heterodiegetic; internal focalization through Carlos (the father) in present tense; then, consecutively (all in present tense), internal focalization through Yoyo, Laura, Doña Tacita, "Tío Vic" (the American CIA operative), Carla, Laura, Pupo (one of two Trujillo henchmen investigating the family's house on suspicion of treason), Sandi (in simple past), and Carlos (again in present tense).
    b. Section II: autodiegetic narration by Sofía/Fifi in present tense as experienced I reflecting on the past as experiencing I in simple past; then autodiegetic narration by Chuca, the maid, in present tense and future tense (prediction).
12. Yoyo: autodiegetic.
13. Sandi: autodiegetic; explicit audience address.
14. Carla: autodiegetic.
15. Yoyo: autodiegetic; the very last paragraph is written in the present tense of the experienced I.

The importance of these formal complications can hardly be overstated. Generally, they make the novel an exceptionally versatile one and constitute a highly apt fit for its contents and themes, among them coming of age, family, memory, and persecution. For my purposes, these complications have, quite obviously, far-reaching consequences for the narrative's patterns of personal

108 | Always covert unless otherwise indicated.

and communal auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations: due to the multiplicity of narrative perspectives, episodes and lacunae, in combination with their temporal complication (not to mention the thematic variety), the identificatory patterns are staggeringly complex, contradictory and ambivalent, even more so than in the discursively already intricate *No-No Boy*, for example.

It is all the more surprising – but at a closer look fully consistent with what I have been arguing throughout this essay – that the formal complications are routinely neglected and their consequences mostly ignored by critics. Not to be misunderstood: most essays on the novel cursorily mention its temporal and perspectival complications, or acknowlegde their importance; but even though some title fragments such as "Widening Gyre" (Barak 1998), "Walking Backwards" (Lovelady 2005), or "Polyphony and Dialogic Resistance" (Rich 2002) may lead one to believe that the respective essay actually includes an extensive analysis of form, this is rarely the case. Instead, there is almost no essay that does not claim, if only in passing, that the novel is autobiographical and Yolanda a more or less straightforward alter ego of the author. In conjunction with this, most essays focus on issues of "cultural identity" (as expressed via gender, family, language, etc.) and migration – which are, of course, central – but much less frequently on equally central issues of illness, class and money, or persecution. Taken together, this leads to some very dubious, if not downright fallacious assessments.

For example, in her otherwise insightful and detailed essay on what she calls "pseudo-memory," trauma, and the re-telling of the gun episode (in this novel and in the follow-up novel *¡Yo!*), Jessica Cantiello writes that Alvarez's "autobiographical" novels are "somewhere between fiction and memory" (83) and that the novels feature an "alter ego named Yolanda García, whose stories draw from Alvarez's own life" (83). She never clearly distinguishes between fiction and pseudo-memory (which is defined as invented memory), nor does she distinguish between the fictionality of the novel per se and the fictionality of the pseudo-memory within the novel, although their indexical and logical relation to the actual world is substantially different. Cantiello even explicitly writes that "storytelling is a complicated confluence of truth, lies, and memory, and memory is not always to be trusted" (85), that "one cannot assume that any version of the story is in fact the best, the most authentic, or the most real" (86), and that the novels are a "conglomeration of pseudo-memories, as the characters' memories and stories from the first book intermingle and contradict each other" (92) and thus contain "many different voices" (93) and a "multiplicity of representations" (94). Yet she never questions her initial argument. On the contrary, like many other critics, she refers to Alvarez's abundant nonfiction publications (essays and interviews), in which the latter repeatedly states that she has drawn material for her novels from her own life and family, in order to substantiate her claim. However, in those same interviews and essays, Alvarez

also repeatedly admonishes that her memories are already "just stories" and are "recast" to fit the demands of the fiction, and that she has altered, added and subtracted so much that she, herself, cannot really tell what is what, and does not see the need to.

These admonitions find their copious, self-reflexive inflections in the novel as well, even before the actual narrative commences: of all the essays on *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* I was able to find, only one (Bess 2007) more than summarily discusses the family tree that precedes the novel. While the illustration is certainly helpful regarding the immediate family members and some of the extended family, a closer look reveals ample, clearly jocular, uncertainties. Dotted lines with question marks, centuries and generations "connected" by a line not even an inch long, and plenty of vague denominations such as "33 other known Garcías," the "hair-and-nails cousins," or the "great-great-grandfather who married a Swedish girl" should make abundantly clear that the narrative that follows has to be treated with caution regarding reliability and (non)fictionality.

Similarly, William Luis, in his attempt to draw out the novel's "autobiographical" similarities to Alvarez's life and to argue that Yolanda is the alter ego of Alvarez, ignores his own point that all four girls show aspects of Alvarez's life and that things are actually quite complicated:

> She is a multiple being. She is North American and Dominican, she is Carla, Sandi, Sofía, and Yolanda and embodies the different narrative perspectives which their voices represent. She is also Yolanda and not Yolanda. This idea is presented in the novel by the multiple names used. (Luis 846)

Not once does he notice his own contradiction or mention the different narrative perspectives in the novel, the differences between first person singular and first person plural, or aspects of focalization and FID. Even worse, he writes that a close reading shows that "Alvarez altered the events of her life to create fiction" (Luis 844). Again, an otherwise wonderful discussion of the novel – and one of the few to evoke the historical context in detail – is almost vitiated by inattention to form and by an insistence on categories that are fallacious and methodologically empty.[109]

109 | A not very subtle reminder in the novel that identity is not easily attributed, unstable and volatile (and that as a consequence an identification of one character with the author is specious) is the fact that Yolanda has many different names. In fact, all of the siblings have at least two names. While this fact is usually admitted and even expounded regarding the personal identity of the four daughters, it is usually not considered in discussions of allegedly autobiographical elements and alter egos.

Lastly, as an example of the culturalist bias I mention above, Carine Mardorossian pointedly and correctly remarks that too often and still, "[e]xiled writers [...] are [...] seen as better equipped to provide an 'objective' view of the two worlds they are straddling by virtue of their alienation" and that they are "ascribed the status of neutral observers" with a "'privileged' status as in-betweens, mediators between two cultures," a notion that is based on a "binary logic between an alienating 'here' and a romanticized 'homeland'" (Mardorossian 16), only to then construct another privilege, couched in cant: "migrant art offers a transnational, cosmopolitan, multilingual and hybrid map of the world that redraws boundaries" (17).[110]

My point here is not to denigrate or wholly reject extant criticism. But it is important to notice these critical biases and the blind spots they create, all the more since regarding this kind of critical reception, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is in good company. Time and again, contemporary US-American narrative fictions that are in some significant way about migration experiences and/or marked cultural practices are, in what can be called "biographical authentification," labeled "autobiographical" or authenticated (if only in an offhand manner) by references to the author's biography, even if they are not paratextually marked as autobiographies, or even if they are explicitly marked as fiction. This happens in reviews as well as in critical essays, and it happens in recent essays about recent fiction as well as in recent essays about older fiction. It is not always central, of course, and often reflexively hedged by comments about the difficulties of distinguishing fiction vs. nonfiction, as is the case with essays on *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, but it is nonetheless pervasive and persistent enough to be significant.

There are a number of explanations for this, some of which I have already discussed abstractly in chapter two. Fictional narratives about marked (i.e. minority) cultural practices have a long tradition of being read as slightly embellished, "authentic"/"true" social reports or ethnographies. Accordingly, their authors were regarded as informants about the life and cultural practices

110 | In her refreshingly and uniquely discordant essay, Sarika Chandra argues that all too often, the immigrant is valorized for being "outside the dominant," for being marginal and, as member of an ethnic identity group, in opposition to dominant groups. This leaves what is inside the dominant intact, she claims, corroborated by notions of ethnic identity and politics of recognition (833). In a vitriolic attack on "the fetishized identity-based reading of immigrant culture and [...] narratives of assimilation within the United States" (841), she criticizes much criticism on the novel as based on "identity-thinking" (835), which is "dual or bicultural" (836) or transnational or global, but invariantly neglects contexts and structures. This argument is very close to mine, with the only difference that I find her implicit a priori assumption that globalization is always necessarily detrimental and needs to be resisted, somewhat simplistic.

of "their" cultural formation. Much, though, of course, not all, contemporary reception and criticism of fictional narratives about marked cultural practices still carries vestiges of this "ethnographic" tradition. The texts are implicitly treated as "authentic" representations of the (cultural) identity of a particular group and/or the author, while hedging the claim with the use of "autobiographical" and its inherent reference to the blurring of fiction and nonfiction.

This creates problems. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson remind us, the problems are put into profile whenever the blurring of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is about sensitive and possibly traumatic subjects or highly politicized topoi such as the holocaust, war, genocide, or, as in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, political persecution and oppression; when fiction is sold as fact (for profit or prestige), as true shocking life story, or as cultural impersonation; when the narrative in question is a "withheld autobiography" by people who never had a chance to speak (Jamaica Kincaid for her mother; Andrea Levy for her grandmother), or a witness report. The literary scandals are legend; in some cases, apparently, it is problematic to be "nomadic with the truth."[111] The use of the term "autobiographical" – or variously "semi-autobiographical" – is a nonchalant and hedged way around that. Basically, what is said is that some events, facts, developments, contexts, cultural practices or conflicts in the fiction resemble some events, facts, developments, contexts, cultural practices or conflicts in the author's personal life and/or cultural formation. This is almost never specified. It is merely used as a rhetorical gesture to lend "authenticity" and thus relevance derived from the imputed partial factuality to a particular narrative. For example, not one of the critics writing that Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* is autobiographical – almost as many as in the case of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* – cares to elaborate what difference it makes that she is female and the protagonist male.

Regarding the novel at hand, all we can say is that Julia Alvarez was also born in the Dominican Republic and had a wealthy family, who had to flee the island to the USA, losing everything, because the father was involved in a plot to overthrow dictator Trujillo. Once said, this is virtually irrelevant for an analysis of the intricacy and complexity of the novel, including its historical and political investments,[112] other than as a general reminder that a real world

111 | This quote is taken from Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* (179).

112 | A word on labels. The novel makes a regular appearance in essays and books on Latina/o aesthetics and literary history, often placed in the context of the mostly consensual "post 1960s"-caesura. It is also variously labeled Hispanic or Hispanic-Caribbean. Luis notes that Alvarez herself identifies as Latina because she is Hispanic born and raised in the USA (Luis 846), but also writes that "Alvarez's contribution to

with terrible things happening to real people exists, and that fiction may say important things about this real world.[113]

Excursion: Plot

The novel begins with Yolanda, the third-youngest of the four García girls, visiting her home and the rest of her family (mostly aunts and cousins) in the Dominican Republic. It has been five years since she visited and 29 years since her family left the island in 1960 when she was a little child. It becomes clear that she is from a very affluent and influential family (various paraphernalia such as maids and chauffeurs are mentioned, she is called "doña"), that she has three sisters, and that they "have led such turbulent lives–so many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them" (11). It also becomes clear, through an episode during which she follows her craving to obtain fresh guavas from a forest grove against better advice, that various issues of home and belonging are

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this literature [*Nuyorican* literature] shows that North Americans do not differentiate between economic and political exiles. They also do not distinguish between the different Hispanic-Caribbean groups" (Luis 841; emphasis mine). Dalleo and Sáez construct an opposition between US ethnic literature and postcolonial literature and argue that although the novel is primarily set in the USA and focuses on US ethnic experience (135) – which I do not think is correct – it is really a postmodern and postcolonial text (135) that is better placed within the framework of hemispheric history to show the connectedness and interdependence of histories of nations, in this case the USA and the Dominican Republic (136). In terms of literary traditions, Alvarez, herself, names Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as model (Dalleo and Sáez 135) rather than, for example, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986), or *Migrant Souls* (which also features a family tree; 1990). In his incisive and clever essay on the difficulties of labeling and literature, Rafael Pérez-Torres comments that "it is clear the term 'American' too often signifies an unproblematic evocation of US national identity. Similarly, then, the notions of a Latino culture or a Hispanic nation may too easily erase too many differences and discontinuities" (Pérez-Torres 539). He is one of the very few to explicitly mention the various identificatory differentiations in the novel (including class and education) and the danger and propensity of large aggregate labels to erase them.

113 | As if the many humorous and self-reflexive pointers to storytelling and fictionality in the novel were not warning enough to readers looking for factual authentification, the successor *¡Yo!* begins with a chapter subtitled "fiction" in which the family, especially the sisters and the mother of Yo, complain about being turned into fiction, and about that fiction actually being factual in that it reveals intimate details about their lives. As it turns out throughout the novel, there are more stories where no one is really sure what "really" happened. PS: The second chapter is subtitled "nonfiction"...

unresolved. The rest of the novel then details, in more or less loosely interrelated and more or less extensively elaborated episodes, and in the temporal fashion explained above, these "turbulent lives" of the entire family. Among the key episodes are the following, going back in time:

- In the second chapter, the family celebrates the father's 70th birthday. The celebration is important and different not only because the family tradition that his daughters belong to him on this night (no husbands allowed) is broken on this occasion, but also because, as it turns out, he has not talked to his youngest daughter Sofía in years: ever since they had a big fight after he found out that she had been having sex. Now that she is married to a famous German chemist and has born a son (her daughter was not a sufficient reason for the father to break his silence), he is open to reconciliation. Many of the conflicts between father and daughters are adumbrated here.
- The next chapter introduces a key self-reflexive pattern throughout the novel: one family member tells a story about one or more of the other family members. In this case, the mother tells her favorite story about Sandra (she has a favorite story about each of the girls), a story whose veracity/version is constantly challenged or modified – another recurrent self-reflexive pattern throughout the novel – by the daughter in question, the other daughters, and the father. The story is abruptly followed by the same daughter being committed to a mental hospital because she is starving herself to death. All that she does is read because she is convinced that she is becoming a monkey, and she wants to read all the great works of literature before she ceases to be human.
- Another episode begins with Yolanda in a mental hospital after the break up with her husband. The chapter details the beginning of their relationship and its disintegration, much of which appears to have to do with different attitudes and uses of words and language. Consistently, she is hospitalized after a breakdown because words cease to have meaning for her. In fact, she grows physically allergic to certain words and begins to quote/misquote all kinds of literature in an attempt to find meaning in language. She recuperates after falling in love with her therapist. This episode is followed by Yolanda's first and frustrating, ultimately unsuccessful attempt at being in a relationship with another student at university, an attempt that also fails mostly because of vastly different attitudes to language and expression. Both hospital episodes emphasize the importance of language, storytelling, and communication.
- The next chapters – the second section 1970-1960 – cover a number of events after the family arrives in the USA and decides to stay for good due to political unrest "at home." Since the girls are still children when they leave the island in 1960, this period covers their teenage years and

their coming of age, including the predictable adolescent "revolutions" and generational conflicts, as well as the entire family's acculturation. Among the themes covered are school, education and acculturation (in their first school the girls are racially insulted and mobbed, then, at a prep-school, tolerated but not integrated), sexuality and gender (the girls enter puberty, with all attending issues such as increasing self-awareness of body, gender and sexuality; one of them is sexually molested), "home" and "new home" (the girls are sent to the island during vacations because the parents are afraid that their girls are getting too "American"; but on the island they also "rebel"), family conflicts (these have, predictably, to do mostly with the girls' increasing self-awareness regarding sexuality, intellectual independence, self-government), and finances (initially very poor upon arrival, the family grows affluent again due to the father's profession as a doctor). All of these themes and stories overlap and intersect; cross-sectional issues are family, gender and acculturation.

- The third and last section covers the earliest part of the storyline and thus the four girls' early childhood as well as the family's persecution and their escape from the Dominican Republic during the reign of dictator Rafael Trujillo. It begins with the longest, formally most diverse, and politically and historically perhaps most crucial chapter of the novel. The family is visited by the secret police, and the rest of the chapter details their narrow and traumatic escape to the USA and the preliminary events leading up to it (plotting, persecution, preparations, etc.) from a number of different perspectives (including one of the members of the secret police). It is interesting to note that only after this chapter has covered the forced departure of the family, the childhood part really begins, including stories about the grandparents and the presents they bring back from their visits to the US, power games between the girls and their cousins (and, of course, between themselves), early indications of oppression, silencing, and persecution, revelatory art lessons and curbed creativity, and, lastly, a story about Yolanda "abducting" a kitten from its mother for a toy, inadvertently torturing it (by placing it in a drum and playing the drum to cover its meowing), and being "haunted" by its mother for a long time even after Yolanda has released the kitten, until she moves to the US.

Significantly, the novel ends with a one-paragraph, "fast forward" summary of her life by Yolanda as autodiegetic narrator that clearly marks her as experienced I and thus moves to an undetermined intradiegetic "present" along the storyline, presumably temporally after the novel discursively begins.

Summarizing so far, we can say that the identificatory patterns in the narrative need to be approached with the following observations in mind:

1. There are multiple different narrative situations in the novel and, as a result, multiple perspectives (not all of which are unequivocally attributable to a single character, e.g. first person plural) on the events and stories in the novel. It is worth noting at this point that this multiplicity is continued in the follow-up novel *¡Yo!*. Although *Pocho* and *No-No Boy* also make use of different focalizers (and even *Call It Sleep* does so, though only once), those instances are exceptions; in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* they are the rule, there is no single anchoring character.
2. The sustained episodic reversal creates a double structure of discursive progression and temporal "regression." It also creates a complicated mix of chronologically linear, as well as inverted "foreshadowings" and "flashbacks."
3. The varying use of tense (present tense, simple past, future tense) creates temporal uncertainty. We often cannot tell what is happening when exactly. Some information is simply not provided.
4. The novel consists of many different episodes, told from many different perspectives of different characters. Within these episodes, characters not only engage in conversations, but also tell more stories about other characters, which in turn are often contested (i.e. remembered differently) and altered by others. At one point, the second oldest, Sandi, exclaims: "I've heard so many versions of that story, [...] I don't know which one is true anymore" (62).
5. There are many different, correlated themes in the novel.

Hence, even though Yolanda is either heterodiegetic or autodiegetic main narrator in six of the fifteen chapters, and "partial" narrator (either as part of a first person plural perspective, or as narrator of a part of the chapter) of four more, there is not one unified or overwhelmingly dominant perspective, not only because there are other narrators and perspectives, but also because even within some of the chapters narrated by or focalized through Yolanda there are other characters telling more stories. One aspect why so many critics make her out to be the key narrator and the alter ego of Alvarez might be because the novel begins and ends with her, particularly with her "summary," leading to an "availability" bias (i.e. beginnings and endings are better remembered; endings prevail in the perception and evaluation of what precedes them).[114] In addition,

114 | Another explanation might be that most critics have clearly read the follow-up novel *¡Yo!* as well, where Yolanda is said to have written a novel about her family, and where many stories and episodes of the previous novel are expanded, explained, or revised. However, here too, things are complicated: the novel consists of chapters that are each told from the point of view of a different person that has at some point played a role in Yolanda's life. Often, their stories feature Yolanda only marginally and tell us

we do not find the kind of dominant perspective that governs *Call It Sleep* or *Pocho*, or the heavy thematic focus (large national/cultural aggregations) that runs through *No-No Boy*. Lastly, none of the other novels discussed so far are as ostentatiously self-reflexive (throughout the novel there are many passages on storytelling, art, and creativity), flaunt their unreliability to such degree, or are as humorous as *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.

All this has consequences regarding the identificatory faultlines to be selected for the discussion, not to mention the system of personal and communal auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations itself. Although there are some easily identifiable major faultlines such as family or gender, they are not linked to one primary character/perspective; many coincide or are "doubled" through contrast and correlation with other major and minor themes, such as language & illness, or coming-of-age & acculturation. Most of the "minor" themes are equally correlated. This results in a longer, occasionally doubled and/or correlated list of themes and pairings, namely: family (which includes gender and coming of age), gender & sexuality (which includes coming of age and family), coming of age & acculturation (which includes large national/cultural aggregations, but also family and language and money), class/money (which includes family), language (which includes illness), persecution, but also illness and creativity. Notable (almost) absences are community other than extended family, the cultural historical context of the USA, and education.

Family

Identifications and differentiations linked to (i.e. caused by/tangential to) family run through the entire novel and are difficult, if not impossible, to separate from other faultlines and issues. In fact, much of what happens in the narrative is in some way prefigured and shaped by the fundamental family constellation and dynamics. Apart from its linguistic meaningfulness, the title already indicates that the novel is not about one girl but about several girls, who have a mother and a father – not to mention, as it turns out, a significantly extended family with a long, if somewhat dubious, history and lineage. It may rightly be expected, then, that basic, as well as important and lasting patterns of auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation arise from this constellation and play a key role in issues of coming of age, gender, and power relations among family members. Even though the reader is discursively introduced to the sources of the family dynamics only during the last chapters of the novel, many of the lasting effects are presented as early as chapter two.

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more about the life of the narrator/focalizer. In fact, there is no chapter that provides Yolanda's perspective.

At this point, we already know from chapter one that the family belongs to a set of very rich and influential families in the Dominican Republic, which for some – presumably political – reason had to leave the island a long time ago (29 years), and now lives in the USA; the family members visit the island and the family they left behind in fairly regular intervals. We also know that the girls were very young when the family fled. Chapter two begins with the summary description of the ritualized annual family celebration of the father's birthday:

> Even after they'd been married and had their own families [...] the four daughters always came home for their father's birthday. They would gather together, without husbands, would-be husbands, or bring-home work. For this too was part of the tradition: the daughters came home alone. [...] They were passionate women, but their devotions were like roots; they were sunk into the past towards the old man.
>
> So for one night every November the daughters turned back into their father's girls. In the cramped living room [...] they grew up in, they were children again in a smaller, simpler version of the world. (24-25)

This time, however, a number of things are different. It is the father's 70th birthday, and the celebration for the first time takes place not at the parent's house, but at Sofía's, and for the first time it includes husbands and partners. All this is circumstantially due to a long-simmering family conflict. A number of years ago, the youngest daughter, Sofía, ran away from home after a vehement fight because the father had found out that she apparently had been having not only boyfriends (it turns out she had been having a number of them) but also sex for some time. She "runs" to her latest boyfriend, a German who then moves to the USA, they marry, and she has her first child, a daughter. Ever since that fight, father and daughter have not talked.[115] At the time of the celebration, she has just given birth to a son, and this changes everything. The father is now reluctantly willing to meet her again and talk to her in order to see his grandson, and the celebration takes places at her house because the child is so young. Even though father and daughter reluctantly and wordlessly reconcile, the party does not end well. In a game fraught with ambivalent meaning, the father is blindfolded and has to guess who is kissing him. At some point, in what is insinuated to be a kind of revenge, the same daughter, Sofía, kisses him on the ear in a clearly sensuous and erotic manner, effectually angering the father and abruptly ending the party:

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115 | Upon pressure by the mother, the parents did visit their daughter after the birth of her first child, but father and daughter did not talk.

His face had darkened with shame at having his pleasure aroused in public by one of his daughters. […] His gaze faltered. On the face of his youngest was the brilliant, impassive look he remembered from when she had snatched the love letters from out of his hands. (39)

A number of identificatory patterns are adumbrated here, patterns which are elaborated and further fleshed out in the following chapters, and which correlate with many of the other identificatory faultlines in the novel; patterns, however, which are also shown as dynamic and unstable. First of all, the family constellation is starkly patriarchal and hierarchical. The father rules supreme, the mother follows, and the daughters are on the bottom tier and expressly called his "harem" (26; sic!). As in this chapter, many of the struggles and conflicts in the family – most of them in turn between the father and his daughters – revolve around this position of the father and are gender- and sexuality-inflected, especially once the daughters actually "come of age" and begin to auto-identify as women and as sexual beings, an auto-identification which comes into conflict and necessitates a differentiation from their hetero-identification by their father as "his" daughters – who are, of course, chaste and obedient. Even as adult women, with husbands and their own children, the daughters still at least partially and temporarily enact their role as their father's daughters when they are with him:

His daughters had to put up with this kind of attitude in an unsympathetic era. They grew up in the late sixties. Those were the days when wearing jeans and hoop earrings, smoking a little dope, and sleeping with their classmates were considered political acts against the military-industrial complex. But standing up to their father was a different matter altogether. Even as grown women, they lowered their voices in their father's earshot when alluding to their bodies' pleasure. Professional women, too, all three of them, with degrees on the wall![116] (28)

Secondly, the daughters are frequently "communally" identified by both of their parents. For example, "[w]arnings [admonitions by the father and the mother to behave properly] were delivered communally" (28), as are punishments, and while they grow up, the mother clothes them identically: "With four girls so close in age, she couldn't indulge identities" (41). The eldest, a child psychologist, later writes in an autobiographical essay that "the color system had weakened the four girls' identity differentiation abilities and made them forever unclear about personality boundaries. The eldest also intimated that the mother was a mild anal retentive personality" (41). This "communal" hetero-identification finds its formal expression in the chapters with a first-person

116 | Sofía does not have a degree.

plural perspective, indicating that at least on some occasions and for some time, the daughters also auto-identify communally as the "García girls."

At the same time, these patterns are shown as dynamic and unstable. Again, indications of this can be found in the second chapter, and many more follow. It is obvious that while the daughters turn "back into their father's girls" for his birthday, it is more ritualized pretense than lived reality at this point. Much of the novel is about the girls' coming of age and their "revolutions" and rebellions, in short their questioning and subversion of the father's imposed identification and power relation. Eventually, they do grow up, move out and start their own families. Even the mother has "her own little revolution brewing" (116): "she had begun spreading her wings, taking adult courses in real estate and international economics and business management, dreaming of a bigger-than-family-size life for herself. She still did lip service to the old ways, while herself nibbling away at forbidden fruit" (116).

Interestingly, the girls' coming of age and the mother's growing independence coincides with the family's move to the USA and their acculturation process; one might argue that the narrative here constructs a parallel between the processes of growing up and those of acculturation, and their attending changes in identificatory dynamics and patterns. As a result, it is difficult to say exactly whether changes in hetero- and auto-identification and differentiation are due to growing up or to acculturation, or a mixture of both. Moreover, creativity and authorship play an important role in many of the "revolutions," further complicating the issue.[117]

It is indubitable, however, that although the USA is not a paradise of freedom and emancipation, as Mujcinovic remarks, it is still freer than "macho societies" (sic; 182) and allows the women to experience acculturation differently from the men, and to emancipate themselves regarding gender roles (181), while men lose some of their power in terms of patriarchal and class hierarchy (182). This is, contra Mujcinovic, not only a question of the older generation trying to "maintain their original cultural identity"[118] (180), but also a question of gender and power:

117 | The mother starts inventing household appliances and other helpful gadgets such as wheels beneath suitcases, the daughter writes a rebellious speech for school. Tellingly, both their efforts are curbed and unsuccessful. More about this below.

118 | An "identity" which is not only *culturally* quite heterogeneous – the USA is everywhere: on the radio, on TV, via presents of other family members who regularly visit the USA, etc., but not only the USA – but also economically, politically, socially, and so on. Once again, the default "cultural identity" remains unquestioned, undefined and virtually empty.

> 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. (144)

Moreover, due to the temporal reversal, the narrative progresses towards a time in which the father's position within the family and his power over both auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations is yet almost unchallenged (the girls are young, but never really depicted as "innocent" and docile, so that emigration cannot be unequivocally correlated with a "lost childhood" and loss of innocence, as some critics claim). Ironically, this is simultaneously the time in which his position and power outside the family are tenuous and precarious because of his participation in the plotting of the assassination of dictator Trujillo, and because of the prevailing political system, with persecution, torture and mass murder. In a revealing episode, Yolanda is punished for making up a story in front of a general about her father having a gun, a story that could spell death for all of the family members. She is severely beaten by her parents with the shower running to drown her screams, a post facto physical assertion of power over the child by her parents that, at the same, time demonstrates their prae facto powerlessness over the child's creativity and over the oppressive political circumstances.[119]

What all this shows is that, as Bess argues, there is a consistent blurring of the line between victim and oppressor, between suffering and inflicting violence, between power and powerlessness throughout the novel (Bess 89). Even before the family leaves the island, the women/wives are powerful (e.g. within their domain of the house, regarding the servants, etc.) and powerless (e.g. to prevent their husbands having lovers, politically) depending on the situation (Bess 90), as are the children. Even the maid Chuca, who is more or less a household "slave," has some power over the family and the children because everyone believes she "knows voodoo." When the family first arrives in the USA, they do not have any money and are dependent on the goodwill of a doctor who vouches for the father. Thus, while his position in the family at this point is still mostly unchallenged (the girls are young, the mother still used to her prior position), his position outside the family is fragile. As the family grows affluent again and his economic power increases, his power in the family wanes. More abstractly, we can observe a long-range power shift from

119 | It is worth noting that even after the family leaves the island, the father continues to be afraid of the secret police. The trauma of threat and persecution maintains its power over him, a fact which Yolanda intuitively exploits to insult her father when he censors a speech she has written for school.

external = low (presence of persecution) / internal (family) = high
to
external = high (absence of persecution) / internal (family) = low.

Interestingly, much of the novel does not explicitly depict the external, but shows its consequences for the internal.

Consequently, we can assert that 1) power comes in many different forms in the novel and is relational and contextual, but more often than not imbalanced; that 2) the control over auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations is never fully one-sided or complete, and that therefore 3) the identificatory patterns linked to family are not only dynamic and dialogic, but also contradictory and unresolved. Perhaps the best example of these contradictions is the fact that although the patterns are dominantly patriarchal, most narrative space is given to the daughters. As the second chapter illustrates, tenuous but tenacious remnants of the "old/original" family constellation and dynamics prior to exile remain.[120] There is no complete "right to exit" here.

Gender & Sexuality

Familial identificatory patterns closely correlate with gender and sexuality (and with acculturation, and with language, and so on). The father dominantly auto-identifies as male patriarch, head of the family, fathering bull (who "sires cows;" 40; sic), and thus as ruler over the hetero- and even auto-identifications of the girls (and the mother), not only regarding family constellation, but also regarding gender roles, sexuality, and acculturation. This identification is supported by the mother throughout the novel, though somewhat less as the mother begins to appreciate her freedoms in the USA. It is enforced by the father also with an eye on the family's hetero-identification (i.e. reputation) by their respective context. Consequently, the father's patriarchal auto-identification structures, or at least impinges upon – as it is corroborated or opposed – almost all auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations of the other family members, especially his daughters, relating to gender and sexuality. Put more simplistically: father and daughters regularly struggle over issues of gender roles and sexuality once these issues become relevant for the daughters' auto-identification and differentiation. His loss of economic means and position once the family moves to the USA, and his loss of the context in which the particular family history, gender roles, and norms of sexuality are substantiated, taken for granted, and perpetually re-affirmed, are hard for

120 | Even the communal hetero-identification of the girls is not consistent. It quickly turns out that the mother has a favorite story about each of the girls (42), which would seem to support identity differentiation.

him. Even when he seems to have lost all hetero-identificatory power over his daughters when they are grown women, this is not quite the case, as his 70th birthday celebration shows: "Even as grown women, *they lowered their voices in their father's earshot when alluding to their bodies' pleasure*. Professional women, too, all three of them, with degrees on the wall!" (28; emphasis mine) The family celebration is a kind of symbolic reassertion of gender roles which have long lost their power, or over which he has long lost power.

It is tempting to construe a simple dramaturgy in which the girls' gender and sexual emancipation (i.e. gaining a maximum of possible control over their auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations, full control being obviously impossible) parallels their coming of age in the USA and an accordant acculturation, and is inversely proportional to the lived reality of the father's hetero-identification as family patriarch and subsequently his power over the others' auto-identifications; as the second chapter shows, his auto-identification never really changes. The particular development of the identificatory patterns linked to gender and sexuality then becomes the result of the family's exile and traumatic loss of homeland, and the generational conflict translates into a cultural conflict of "old" homeland vs. "new" homeland, and their respective gender roles and sexual mores. The very title suggests the adaptation of a foreign language to the degree that the eponymous heroes master or feel at home in it, and can be read as a potent metaphor for linguistic and cultural acculturation, and coming into one's own and growing up.

There is some persuasion to this dramaturgy. We have an apparently innocent childhood on the island, where patriarchy is unquestioned. We have an exile in the USA, where the girls come of age and adopt a different set of values and norms that comes into conflict with that of their parents. Some episodes confirm this: as the girls grow up, they begin to appreciate "American teenage good life" (108) a little too much for their parents' tastes, and the island becomes "old hat" (108). They have "*more* than adjusted" (109, emphasis in the original). When Fifi is sent back to the island as punishment – the fact that this is perceived as such by parents and daughters alike is quite revealing, it is also ironically called her "exile" (117) – she quickly "reverts" to an "SAP" (Spanish American Princess; 118) and appears to fully embrace the local gender roles, dating a local boy. A similar "reversion" is described for their cousin Mundín: "When he's in the States, where he went to prep school and is now in college, he's one of us, our buddy. But back on the Island, he struts and turns macho, needling us with the unfair advantage being male here gives him" (127). It is true that the juxtaposition between the island/old home and the USA/new home broadly structures the identificatory patterns of the novel, generally, as well as regarding gender & sexuality, which is why so many critics focus on cultural identity in combination with gender and a generational "clash of (gender) cultures."

Even without the not very subtle signposting of the formal complications of the novel, such an immediately persuasive construction involving such large aggregate categories, such clear oppositions, and such a familiar macro-narrative should give us pause. First of all, the island is no haven of innocence and unspoiled childhood, so that leaving it, while definitely a traumatic rupture, does not equal an expulsion from paradise or a loss of innocence. The (chronologically) very first episodes deal with gender, sexuality, and power plays and negotiations, though inchoately. Yoyo shows her genitalia to Mundín in the dark of the coal shed in exchange for a doll with removable body parts; Fifi blackmails them into sharing the doll by threatening disclosure. They all hold some power over their parents because they know that the mere mention of the secret police suffices to distract attention from their "misdeeds," although they do not understand the source of this power. This storytelling power, in turn, is repeatedly linked to the gendered storytelling power that Scheherazade holds over the Persian king in the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights* (first published in English as *Arabian Nights*). Fittingly, the father's male gender helps him little outside the family due to the political situation on the island. Like the children in the coal shed, he hides in a small, dark, secret place when the secret police come. During another episode, Sandi receives art lessons from the wife of a sculpturer and spies into his shed, where the husband is sculpting a huge female figure on whose body, it is insinuated, he ejaculates. When the figure is later revealed in a church, it has Sandi's face (255). Also, the island is not culturally homogeneous. For example, influences of the USA are everywhere: on TV, radio, via the visits, stories and presents of the grandparents, etc., not to mention the presence and influence of other groups and communities (e.g. Haitians). Neither is the island socially, politically and economically homogenous, so that gender roles are always inevitably inflected by various other factors.[121]

Secondly, exile and acculturation do not appear to seriously disturb or perennially affect the sexuality of the girls. All of them go through a phase of sexual self-discovery and "revolution," as can be expected in a coming of age narrative. They take "turns being the wildest" (86) and lead "such turbulent lives–so many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them" (11). As Yolanda's lover thinks to himself while her mother unsuspectingly tells him stories about her, although the parents are "old world," "the four daughters sounded pretty wild for all that" (47). There are, of course, some references that it is the parents' "old world" conservative notions and norms of gender and sexuality that cause conflicts and struggles over the girl's auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations. But these references and the struggles over gender roles and sexual self-determination are contextualized:

121 | One might add that "sexism is no one nation's prerogative" (Mardorossian 23).

> His daughters had to put up with this kind of attitude in an *unsympathetic era. They grew up in the late sixties. Those were the days* when wearing jeans and hoop earrings, smoking a little dope, and sleeping with their classmates were considered political acts against the military-industrial complex. (28; emphasis mine)

In other words: an entire generation in the USA is "rebelling" against their parents and the existing norms, not just the García girls, so that it is impossible to clearly delimit the conflicts and struggles as bi-cultural ones where the parents stand in for "the old culture" and the girls for the "new" one, not to forget that these "cultures" are not homogeneous themselves. It bears saying once more that "the term 'American' too often signifies an unproblematic evocation of US national identity," that "notions of a Latino culture or a Hispanic nation may too easily erase too many differences and discontinuities" (Peréz-Torres 539), that "[b]oth countries are [...] represented as dynamic entities" (Mardorossian 22), and that "the García girls' assimilation is complicated by their wealth and social position in the Dominican Republic and their blindness to their privilege until they come to the States and face hard economic times" (Barak 160). So, my point above that coming of age and acculturation overlap has to be extended by asserting that they are further complicated by factors such as class, historical and political structures and contexts, etc. In addition, even though the girls "lower[] their voices in their father's earshot when alluding to their bodies' pleasure" (28), pleasure there certainly is.[122]

Thirdly, all episodes involving gender and sexuality correlate with other issues such as language and class. When Yolanda cannot keep potential lovers interested because she refuses to sleep with them, she does say that "[f]or the hundredth time, I curse[] my immigrant origins" (94), but her wishful thinking about different, i.e. US-American parents, is also clearly class-conscious, as it refers to skiing and other (at this historical time) upper class assets and activities. In addition, she describes herself as a "lapsed Catholic" and "pretty well Americanized." The primary reason she does not sleep with the so-called Rudy Elmenhurst turns out to be his use of language. She finds it too coarse and objectifying. Similarly, when she breaks up with her "proudly monolingual husband," it is not because he is monolingual in contrast to her (which might have been read as a linguistic expression of cultural differences), but because he is pedantic, controlling and uncreative in his use of language. It is one of the many revealing ironies of the novel that the García girls never quite lose their accents – literally and figuratively – and that their native language was never

122 | It is another humorous irony of the novel that the parents' intention to get Fifi/Sofía "back on the right track" by sending her to the island and removing her from "harmful" US-American influences backfires since Fifi and Manuel – the boy she dates – do not waste any time arranging time alone to have sex.

"pure" or "pristine" to begin with, but rather inflected by the complex historical and political history and context of the Dominican Republic.

In conclusion to this section, we can say that broad characteristics of the identificatory patterns relating to gender and sexuality are 1) the unquestioned norm of heterosexuality; 2) the dominant, patriarchal father figure and the ostentatiously patriarchal society on the island; 3) the dominant narrative perspectives of the four girls taken together; 4) the broad juxtaposition of Dominican Republic vs. USA; and 5) the general turmoils of coming of age. Nonetheless, except for 1), all of these aspects are complicated and multifaceted when looked at in more detail, as shown above, and convey the complexities, complications, contradictions, volatility, and *interdependence* of coming of age, acculturation, exile, historical-political context, and economic and social factors. The formal arrangement of the narrative more than adequately corresponds to this.

Coming of Age & Acculturation (including Large National/Cultural Aggregations)

Since coming of age typically involves conflicts over auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations between parents and their children, it is no wonder that it often serves as an evocative metaphor and allegory of acculturation and generational conflict in narratives that feature children of immigrants. Contrary to their pervasive reception, nonetheless, very few of these narratives turn out to be straightforward in their framing of that metaphor and allegory. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is no exception. What makes it particularly difficult to trace the identificatory patterns related to coming of age and acculturation here are not only the ambiguities inherent in extended metaphors, per se, but the fact that coming of age and acculturation are neither identical nor completely exclusive, and overlap with other patterns. The novel also stands alone among the selected novels in that the children are born in another country and only come to the USA when they (or at least the three oldest) are still quite young, but already have a working, though inchoate and fragmented, memory and awareness of their country of birth. This means that they know about this country from firsthand experience rather than exclusively from their parents' memories and stories, which, in turn, creates another potential line of comparison and conflict, as the four children may remember things and events differently from their parents (and among themselves). As I have pointed out above, a recurrent pattern of the novel is one character telling a story of the past that another contests; it turns out that not even one specific story that a character tells and re-tells is necessarily consistent and invariable throughout. Clearly, stories and memories are adapted over time – for example as the girls come of age and acculturate and change their identificatory patterns

accordingly – and to fit the needs of the particular storytelling situation – for example to contradict a not-so-flattering story about them by their parents. The layering of the multitude of stories in the novel introduces a large number of at least provisionally important identificatory aspects and creates a host of sometimes contiguous, sometimes overlapping, and sometimes contradictory identifications and differentiations. This fact complicates any simply dramaturgy of parents vs. children, old world/country of birth vs. new world/country of coming of age, and so on. I have shown it to complicate the identificatory patterns related to family and to sexuality and gender, and it also affects and structures the identificatory patterns engendered/altered by processes of acculturation and coming of age.

Given the title and the basic plot of the novel, there are surprisingly few directly narrated and extensive episodes about the acculturation of the family in the USA. Rather, there are cursory references and short passages about acculturation, and related issues of racism, generational conflict, gender roles, education, language use, and so on. For example, we read that "the four girls used to shock their Island cousins with stories of their escapades in the States" (7), or that Yolanda, out in the hills of the island in the beginning of the novel thinks that "[t]his is what she has been missing all these years without really knowing that she has been missing it. Standing there in the quiet, she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never" (12). The girls predictably begin "to develop a taste for the American teenage good life, and soon, Island was old hat, man" (108). "The problem boiled down to the fact that they wanted to become Americans and their father–and their mother, too, at first–would have none of it" (135), though, of course, the mother, too, begins to "spread her wings" (see quote above). In one instance, the mother scolds her daughters in English and the father wants her to use Spanish, to which she replies that they are in the States, after all, even though she, herself, freely mixes up idioms and sayings (135). In a short prelude to an incident of sexual molestation, Carla is mobbed at school by a gang of boys who shout that she should go back to where she came from, call her a "spic," and make fun of her body: "The girl she had been back home in Spanish was being shed. In her place–almost as if the boys' ugly words and taunts had the power of spells–was a hairy, breast-budding grownup no one would ever love" (153). Even in these short passages it becomes obvious that acculturation is almost always connected to other issues, often coming of age (here puberty) and generational conflict, and often conflicts between the father and his daughters.[123]

123 | In addition, most of these comments are relativized. For example, what seems like a clear-cut opposition between the real but lost home of the island and the acculturated but never fully embraced "home" of the immigration country in the passage providing Yolanda's thoughts is undercut before and after. When she is approached by two men in

In this respect, the novel is rather a novel of coming of age extended into adulthood, of which acculturation within a different cultural context with different cultural practices is one important, but not exclusive aspect.[124] If we understand coming of age broadly as the transition from childhood to adulthood, rather than as another word for puberty and sexual maturation, we can also describe it as a conscious and vital struggle over auto- and hetero-identifications between a young person and her context (parents, siblings, peers, etc.). Seen this way, the coming of age of the García girls begins on the island and is not fully identical with acculturation.

The third section of the novel, which contains the childhood episodes of the girls in the Dominican Republic, fittingly begins with the traumatic events that herald and lead to the family's migration and exile and thus overshadow the remaining chapters, all of which, in turn, contain formative episodes about power (the black kitten), storytelling and creativity (the gun, the sculptor), gender (the boys and girls, the hunter), sexuality (the coal shed), and class (the maids) that make clear that the island is no unspoiled childhood paradise. Even though they do not understand the causes and complexities of the political situation, the children are already fully aware that there is a permanently pending threat to their lives. They also understand the power of storytelling and creativity; a power heightened by a context in which stories, whether true or not, can kill. During an episode which is related early in the novel (and which is given more room in *¡Yo!*), Yolanda makes up a story in front of a general about her father owning a gun. It is not clear whether she knows that her made-up story is actually true, a fact which might get the entire family tortured and killed. Her parents later punish her with a severe beating during which her screams are silenced by running water and which is accompanied by the injunction of her father never to tell stories, which, of course, as a writer she keeps breaking for the rest of her life. This incident and the others in this section mark the girls' commencement of the long process of coming of age and already prefigure and shape many of the acculturation episodes that are told in section II.

Even though section II is about the period immediately after the family's arrival in the USA up to the girls' adulthood and might thus be expected to be dominantly about acculturation, it is not, and the explicit and extensive episodes about acculturation issues there are, are expectedly more complicated.

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the grove and fears being raped (an unwarranted fear, it turns out), she automatically resorts to English for protection. Prior to this, one aunt laments that "You four girls get lost up there" (7), which could be interpreted to mean the USA, but "she indicates the sky with her chin" (7). Once more, nothing is simple.

124 | We could take this to mean that neither acculturation nor coming of age ever reach a conclusion.

One of the book's longest chapters, the first of the section and forebodingly titled "A Regular Revolution," begins with the father deciding to stay in the USA because revolution breaks out on the Island (107) after the death of Trujillo. The girls are unhappy not only because they are called "spics," but also because they are unaccustomed to the lack of luxury; episodes that follow later (about chronologically earlier events) detail the family's initial poverty and dependence on the goodwill of others. As the family stays in the USA and the father obtains his license and practice, and subsequently financial means, the older girls enter puberty and struggle with their parents – mostly their father – over what precisely their hetero- and auto-identification as their parents' daughters entails. A number of events (sexual molestation, menstruation) lead first to their attendance of an expensive all-girl prep-school – where they meet, but do not mingle with, many "white" rich girls, forge their mother's signature, and begin to kiss, have fun, and smoke – and then to them being sent to the island during summers (109) in order to remove them from "Americanizing influences" and retain their "Dominican identity," which here implies quite simply adherence to the patriarchal and sexual norms of the parents. The irony here is that the parents send the girls "home" for both cultural and punitive purposes (in an attempt to maintain their heterodiegetic control over the girls' identifications and to curb their increasing auto-differentiation from their parents and their norms and values), but inadvertently set in motion the most "dramatic" events so far. The girls sabotage Fifi's relationship with an island boy, which threatens to erode her and her sisters' newly acquired sexual awareness and "macho-free" gender role, by exploiting the strict island rules about chaperones and the kind of company man and women keep. In effect, what the parents most fear will happen in the USA is about to happen on the island.

The irony highlights a key aspect of almost all comments and episodes containing an acculturation aspect: they are never only about acculturation. They are also about coming of age (much of the time), creativity and storytelling, authorship, class, sexuality, gender, etc. When the girls are sent home and Fifi is enraged, the first person plural narrators (i.e. the other three girls) comment that she will get over "her fear of her own life. Like ours, it lies ahead of her like a wilderness just before the first explorer sets foot on the virgin sand" (132). Nowhere is there a reference to some kind of "cultural identity." After all, the subtitle is "A *Regular* Revolution" (emphasis mine), which may also mean an expected, conventional one, as in coming of age. In another crucial episode, Yolanda writes a speech for school and, after initial difficulties, follows Walt Whitman among others on inspiration and intuition (she writes "I celebrate Myself," but also "the best students destroy their teachers"). When she reads it out to her father – her mother is enthusiastic – he becomes enraged and destroys it, arguing that this is not what students should say to their teachers.

She in turn accuses him of being a "chapita" (sic), which is a nickname for Trujillo, and all hell breaks loose (144-149). Again, this could be read as a conflict between the "old world" values of the parents and the "new world" values of the children, but this would ignore the specific political-historical background of the dictatorship and persecution the family fled, and the father's traumatic fear of the SIM. Equally important, it would ignore the pervasive theme of creativity and authorship that runs through the novel and is present in other crucial episodes, e.g. the gun episode, the sculptor episode, the mother's time of inventing things, etc.[125] As Mardorossian remarks, "in stories of cultural encounter, difference and the will to change are wrongly assumed to result either in assimilation to the new home or to the vestiges of the other cultural space (tradition)" (32).

As a result, acculturation is shown as one interdependent, dynamic and variegated aspect among others in the web of identifications and differentiations in the narrative. What Mujcinovic writes about exile can be transferred to acculturation: "As its complexity and ambiguity become revealed through diverse and distinct personal experiences, exile ceases to be [...] homogeneous and immutable" and "evades generalization and consistency" (Mujcinovic 169). Like exile, acculturation may have "a universal meaning of physical and mental displacement," but it "is mediated by specific individual and social circumstances. [...] [T]he patterns of adjustment differ according to age and gender" (Mujcinovic 180) as well as, I would add, health, education, money, and so on.[126] This in turn entails that "[b]oth countries [involved in the acculturation process] are [...] represented as dynamic entities" (Mardorossian 22).

Further Differentiations

Due to the many overlaps and in order to avoid repetition, I will discuss the other cardinal differentiations summarily and jointly. These are class, language, illness, persecution, and creativity.

Class. In the novel, the large aggregate category of class and the broad identification/differentiation it effects is concretized along three distinct but interdependent identificatory faultlines, which are social, economic, and racial. The Garcías belong to a set of families on the island that rule it, or at least their "partitions" thereof, feudally, in combination with Trujillo's despotic rule. They are affluent; they form – in addition to constituting large families – one distinct social group on the island that is also marked spatially, as they live close to each

125 | Notice that creativity is almost exclusively connected to female characters.

126 | Acculturation in the novel is discordant: the father changes least of all, the mother some, and the girls most clearly. However, we cannot be certain how the girls would have developed had they remained on the island.

other in guarded, adjoining compounds in the capital; and they identify and are identified as racially distinct and superior, for example from the Haitians on this part of the island, as they claim descendance from the Spanish conquistadors. This is not only signified by their family names but supposedly visible in their light skin color, and it trumps economic differentiation: on the island a poor García or de la Torre (though very unlikely) would still be considered "above" an affluent Haitian.[127] When the secret police come to the house of the Garcías, one of them reacts as follows: "From the minute they enter the house Pupo can tell by the way the old Haitian woman acts that this is a stronghold of something, call it arms, call it spirits, call it money" (213).

However, membership in this social formation does not guarantee safety, nor is it viable outside the Dominican Republic. As the events in the novel show, once the family is suspected of subversion, they have to flee the island in order to escape possible torture and execution. Upon their arrival in the US (New York City), they quickly find out that the "racial ladder" here is quite different. Even after they manage to become affluent again – the father, after all, is an approbated medical doctor –, all their money will not get the four girls accepted in prep-school. In fact, as Luis points out, in the USA the Garcías are treated somewhat like they treat their maids on the island (841).

Language (& Creativity & Persecution). The novel is written in English. There are some Spanish expressions, and the parents' English is sometimes inflected by Spanish syntax and idioms (Wall 129), but on the whole Spanish does not play a major role linguistically, similar to *Pocho*. Language in general serves as a potent metaphor in the novel, as the title already announces, although it does not engender a differentiation that unequivocally demarcates English from Spanish, as could be expected. Of course, in some instances the difference between English and Spanish is of importance. For example, in the first chapter, Yolanda ruefully notes her deteriorated Spanish, a deterioration that, she suggests, is the price for "mastering" English, or, in other words, for losing her accent in that language. This, in turn, could be read as a metaphor for having "lost" her "home," even though what she seeks at this time is not so much the reality of that home than her memories of it. After she is molested, Carla's English does not suffice to explain to the police officers what has happened. Later, Yolanda complains that her husband is "proudly monolingual" (72). However, these instances are relatively sparse, and they are never only about the differentiation between English and Spanish.

127 | This is implied in this novel and made explicit in *¡Yo!*. Of course, the social structure on the island at that time would have made it next to impossible for a Haitian or anyone not belonging to this ruling class to become affluent. The racial reality of this structure took terrible form during the infamous so-called Parsley-Massacre in 1937.

Rather, the differentiation is between reality – the world, the experience of that world, the joy and pain involved in being alive – and the *Creative* capacities and shortcomings of language – any language – to grapple with and give meaning to that reality and the experience of it, e.g. via turning it into a story. Alvarez's poem "Bilingual Sestina," specifically the third stanza, may serve as a succinct summary of this:

> [...]. Even Spanish
> failed us when we realized how frail a word
> is when faced with the thing it names. How saying
> its name won't always summon up in Spanish or English
> the full blown genii from the bottled *nombre*.

Many instances and episodes in the novel in which language engenders an important differentiation and identification involve this, often traumatic, as well as creative, struggle. Yolanda breaks up with her husband not primarily because he is "proudly monolingual," but because she finds his use of language, particularly how he addresses, "labels" and thus identifies her, pedantic, confining and reductive.

The traumatic gun episode is also metaphorically fraught and meaningful because it is caused by Yolanda's creative need to tell stories and give meaning to her world, because it takes place in an environment of *Persecution* in which careless use of language may be lethal, and because it results in her father's injunction for her not ever again to tell stories, all of which she later turns into a story in her novel. Cantiello pointedly argues that the gun episode "comes to act as shorthand for the trauma of dictatorship and the imperative of storytelling" (83-84), and that the different, contradictory versions of the story (in *¡Yo!* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* combined) "illustrate[] the incomprehensibility of the larger trauma of dictator Rafael Trujillo's reign of terror in the Dominican Republic" (85). This compulsive repetition and re-narration, she continues, is typical of trauma narratives: they are always different because no version can capture the trauma (92; she takes this part of the argument from Cathy Caruth). The connection between creativity and trauma is captured in the very last paragraph of the novel after the immediately preceding kitten episode, during which Yolanda "abducts" a kitten from her mother, who, in turn, comes to haunt her in her dreams: "At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art" (289-290).

The focus in the novel (both thematically and formally) on the creative use of language, then, may come to "act as shorthand" for the need and strife to deal with and give meaning to life's experiences, good and bad ones, to tell

stories, and thus to affirm creative authorship in the face of all odds. In her predictions, the maid Chuca says that while the girls "will be haunted by what they do and don't remember" (of their forced and hasty escape), they "have spirit in them" and "will *invent* what they need to survive" (223; emphasis mine). In this regard, one could argue that the García girls never really speak any language without accent. In fact, as acculturation and coming of age may never come to a full close, neither may obtaining linguistic "control" over the world. This finds another metaphorical corollary in the two instances of mental illness in the novel.

Illness. Two of the daughters have a mental breakdown, and both are linguistic and "humanistic." Sandra is committed to the hospital because she begins to starve herself and to read compulsively. In fact, all she does is read because she is convinced that she is slowly turning into a monkey and so wants to read all "great works" and classics of literature and philosophy before she ceases to be human (54). For Sandra, reading is essentially human and literature is about what it means to be human. Yolanda is committed to the hospital after she breaks up with her husband. In the course of their estrangement, she becomes physically allergic to certain words as she feels that she literally becomes what he calls her. Words cease to have any meaning for her, to have any relation to the world, and she begins to quote/misquote all kinds of literature in her attempt to regain her own linguistic access to the world. Only after she falls in love with her therapist does she begin to use certain words again and play with language. The chapter ends with her affirmation that "[t]here is no end to what can be said about the world" (85).

(Almost) Absences & Minor Differentiations

Like all other novels discussed so far, and indeed like all other fictional narratives relevant for this thesis, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* shows some rather surprising lacunae. Naturally, very few novels in general can justifiably lay claim to covering all or even most aspects of life and human experience and the whole spectrum of personal and communal auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations that comes with them (*Ulysses* or *À la recherche du temps perdu* perhaps being among them). But given the relevant themes of this one, it is at least noteworthy that aspects like *formal education* (which would seem to be important for a coming of age narrative), *larger aggregations* (other than national ones) such as community, or the *cultural historical context* of the USA play such a minor role for the web of identifications in the novel. Indeed, it is hard to find more than one or two substantial text passages dealing with these aspects at all. It is, of course, mentioned that the girls go to school in the USA. In passing, we are informed that Carla is mobbed at school and called a "spic." All four girls do not mingle in their private school, even though they

seem to enjoy themselves (so much so that they are "punished" by being sent to the island during summers). Yolanda has to hold a graduation speech that we never get to read because the father destroys it, nor are we informed about the details and delivery of its bland replacement. While still on the island, Carla is sent to an artist to learn how to paint, but her lessons end right away when she discovers the sculptor's secret. Apparently, nothing relevant for the coming of age of the García girls (or their losing of their accent) happens in school.

We learn even less about any kind of community other than the extended family (which operates on the principle of familial ties, rather than the imagined ties of larger communal identifications). As far as we can tell from the narrative, there is no Dominican or even "Latin" or "Hispanic" community wherever the family lives in the USA, which is particularly interesting because for some time they live in Brooklyn. As far as the Dominican Republic is concerned, Haitians and the descendents of the indigenous population are mentioned, but mostly as almost "empty" foil for the socio-economic and racial differentiation of the Garcías or the de la Torres.

The specific cultural historical context of the USA in the 1960s, which would seem to be particularly fraught with meaning considering the diverse upheavals, movements and radical changes taking place at that time, is only summarily (and humorously) noted, usually in the context of a more pronounced identification/differentiation, as in the passage I have quoted twice before:

> His daughters had to put up with this kind of attitude in an *unsympathetic era*. They grew up in the *late sixties*. *Those were the days when* wearing jeans and hoop earrings, smoking a little dope, and sleeping with their classmates were considered political acts against the military-industrial complex. (28; emphasis mine)

In this regard, one could argue that once the family flees the island and the dictatorship of Trujillo, the novel is indeed mostly a family story, even though the traumatic experiences of that early time carry over far into the intradiegetic present.

Caveat: This assessment is true only of this novel. If we consider the extension of this fictional universe in *¡Yo!*, where we are provided much more information about the time covered in section I and II of this one, the picture changes entirely.

In conclusion, we can summarize the identificatory pattern thus:

1. Everything in the novel, including the identificatory pattern, is affected by the fact that we have
   a. Multiple and diverse narrative situations and perspectives, and

   b. Numerous stories within stories, which in turn are frequently contested, retold differently at some other point, or both.
2. As a result, the identificatory pattern is decentralized: there is no dominant perspective or preoccupation. The pattern consists of many different identifications and differentiations, most of which overlap and are interdependent. Although family, as an identificatory faultline, is obviously crucial, its overlaps and interdependencies with other faultlines undermines a clear-cut hierarchy, making the pattern uneven but heterarchical.
3. The identificatory pattern is dynamic, all faultlines undergo changes and modifications, even family. Interestingly enough, although the narrative regresses temporally towards childhood where one could expect "simpler" or more unequivocal identifications and differentiations – after all, some of the chapters are told from the perspective of a young child –, this is not the case. The children, while they cannot give a name or fully understand the complexities and causes of some faultlines, nonetheless are quite aware of them, including their ambivalences and contradictions, and occasionally even know how to exploit them (e.g. gender and sexuality, socio-economic aspects, persecution, creativity).
4. Identifications and differentiations are hetero-modal and auto-modal – which often leads to conflicts –, personal but not communal. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other people (mother and father, sisters) and sometimes extended family; hetero-differentiations (e.g. by police, peers, lovers, US-born Americans) exist but are not pervasive and often inchoate.
5. Some identifications and differentiations are expected (coming of age, gender, family, language), the (near) absence of others (community, cultural historical context) is not. Socioeconomic aspects feature prominently.
6. The discursive structure *does* significantly call attention to itself. The sustained episodic reversal, the temporal ellipses, and the often vague temporal allocation demand a significant integrative effort by the reader, as does the integration of the various narrative perspectives. In addition, the discursive structure is episodic, not to mention the highly self-reflexive diegetic structure (contested stories within contested stories).
7. The degree of departure between possible fictional world and actual world is minimal in terms of ontology (setting, events, causality, characters), but, due to the self-reflexivity and epistemological uncertainty signaled by the diverse narrators, significantly less minimal than in the other novels in terms of epistemology (perspectival structure, cognition, motivation). The narrative self-reflexivity throughout the novel also draws attention to narrativization and fictionality.

3.5 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Lahiri's stories depict fictional worlds in which the characters make all kinds of difficult, fulfilling, or otherwise significant – often allegorical – experiences. These range from more substantial ones regarding love life and relationships, family, health, changing places (intra- as well as internationally), and addiction, to ostensibly more mundane ones regarding cooking, gardening, or interior decoration. Self-deception and subtle humor, for example, inform "Interpreter of Maladies" in the eponymous collection; illness and money matter greatly in "Once in a Lifetime" and "Going Ashore" in the collection *Unaccustomed Earth*; the key issue of "Only Goodness" is alcoholism; and foolish choice of partners and romantic estrangement play an important role in most of her stories, notably in "A Temporary Matter," "Sexy" and "Hell-Heaven." *The Namesake* is about the US-American-born son of Bengali immigrants and covers the first thirty two years of his life, as well as parts of his parents' life before their migration. As can be expected, it is about migration and acculturation, and about a generational rift between the parents and their children; as can also be expected considering that it is a mixture of coming of age narrative and family "saga," it is about family, giving birth, education, language, child- and teenage-hood, gender, first romance, sexuality, death, marriage, divorce, work, food, and so on. These issues are almost always inflected by different cultural practices; they are also never exclusively inflected by different cultural practices. In fact, the dominant issue of names and naming in the novel is such a blatant, as well as complex and universal, metaphor for personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation that one cannot reasonably expect clear-cut oppositions and unequivocal ascriptions. The irony that the epigraph to the novel has in its original context is clearly carried over.[128]

Little of this irony, complexity and multifariousness makes it into the critical reception of Lahiri's work so far. I have already discussed typical response patterns in some reviews of her work in my introduction; many of the longer critical essays on *The Namesake* repeat these patterns. There are a number of essays on hybridity and migration (Friedman 2008), inheritance (Munos 2008), identity and alienation (Sharmita 2010), or cultural practices and dilemma (for example regarding food: Williams 2007) – and of course, all of these aspects matter, but they are not the only ones to matter. In addition, many of these essays work with vaguely or entirely undefined notions of "cultural identity," usually opposing India and the USA, and usually locating

128 | The epigraph reads: "The reader should realize himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question." It is taken from Nikolai Gogol's story "The Overcoat."

the protagonist Gogol – as a child of immigrants – "in-between" (e.g. Kaur 2004) or "beyond" (for example as a cosmopolitan wanderer: Friedman 2008).

Similar to the work on Alvarez, the majority of the critical assessments are accompanied by a reference to Lahiri's biography, who was born in London to Bengali immigrants and raised in Rhode Island; her writing and her characters are labeled "autobiographical" or "semi-autobiographical" (e.g. Batra 2010; Das 2010). Again, the biographical reference appears to authenticate the author's privileged access to the experience of "South Asian American" children of immigrants. None of the essays that engage in this authentication care to elaborate what exactly is meant by "autobiographical," much less what difference it might possibly make that the author is female and the protagonist male. Very few essays, even among the more incisive ones, address the discourse level of *The Namesake,* which should be worthwhile considering that the novel has large temporal gaps, compressions and expansions, is written in present tense (with interspersed simple past and future tense), and employs sometimes brisk changes of perspective.[129]

One explanation for this mono-focus and biographical authentication is the longstanding, though by now diffused or cloaked, "ethnographic" tradition that has shaped much reception and criticism of fictional narratives about marked cultural practices; connected to this is the "authenticity" and "verisimilitude" often demanded even of explicitly fictional narratives that touch upon topics and experiences considered particularly sensitive in a given context and/or a certain time, to which migration and communal identification usually belong.

Regarding Lahiri's work, a number of additional factors play into its lopsided reception. Lahiri belongs to the second generation of the group of migrants commonly labeled "South Asian Americans" that has been migrating to the USA as part of a large migration from the Southern and Eastern[130] Hemisphere ever since the landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (also called Hart-Celler Act) that de facto abolished the (racist) national origins quota system from 1921/1924. To highlight its significance and difference from previous "waves" of immigration, this post-1965 migration is often called the "new immigration" (e.g. Dinnerstein and Reimers 2009).[131] It has turned out to

129 | Min Hyoung Song (2007), despite some precarious claims about postmodernism and ethnic literature (see below), is a noteworthy exception; the same is true of Friedman (2008).

130 | From the perspective of the USA.

131 | Some literary criticism has followed suit in labeling literature about this "new" immigration" the "new literature of immigration" (Mendoza and Shankar 2003), occasionally opposing it and its alleged features – postmodern, formally experimental, self-reflexive, cultural pluralist – to an "old" and more "traditional" immigration literature – non-experimental, realist/naturalist, assimilationist (Song 2007; Friedmann 2008). A

be, in absolute and relative numbers, one of the largest "waves" of immigration to the USA ever (Daniels 2002)[132] and is foreseeably going to have an enormous and long-term influence on the demographic, and thus the overall, development of the USA (Teitelbaum 2006; Jasso and Rosenzweig 2006). Due to the fact that a substantial and above-average portion of the so-called South Asian Americans among these immigrants were, and still are, highly qualified and professionally as ambitious as successful (Portes 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001a), they are frequently labeled the new "model minority" (following in the footsteps of the post-WW II Japanese and South Korean immigrants) and perceived rather homogeneously and predominantly as highly educated professionals and assimilated, if visibly different, resident aliens and citizens (Leonard 1997; Purkayastha 2005). Since Lahiri's life seems at first glance to be in accordance with these large aggregate ascriptions and the historical macro-narrative they adumbrate,[133] and since many of her stories do feature first or second generation immigrants to the USA, biographical authentication should not be unexpected.

The culturalist mono-focus can be explained by a look at the first two chapters of the novel. Ashima, Gogol's mother, serves as main focalizer to relate the time shortly before and after her son's birth. In alternating, analeptic passages between, she recalls how she first met and was married to Ashoke in India and subsequently came to the USA; her perspective is augmented by sections in which Ashoke as focalizer as well reflects on the present and on the past events that brought him to the USA. The two chapters are structured by the binary opposition of India and the USA, the past and the present. This opposition manifests itself not only via present events – which are told in present tense – and memories of past events – which are told in simple past – but also via differences in food (ingredients, preparation, eating), affection (private and public sphere, display of affection, usage of first names), family (alone in the USA vs. surrounded by extended family in India), etc. At least for these two chapters, the opposition seems to be clear-cut and reliable, thus setting the perfect stage for Gogol's cultural "inbetween-ness." In fact, superficially,

look at my analyses so far and at Sollor's long chapter on "Ethnic Modernism" should dispel this opposition.

132 | According to the 2010 US Census, it is the largest in absolute numbers and the second largest in relative numbers next to the period between 1890-1920. Migrants from the South Asian region constitute one of the largest groups in this "wave." On a side note, it is worth noting that more and more people auto-identify in the Census as belonging to two or more groups/"races."

133 | More so, perhaps, than that of other "South Asian" writers such as Gita Mehta, Ved Mehta, Meera Nair, or Anita Desai, despite obvious divergences such as her birth in England.

this opposition and Gogol's lifelong negotiation between its poles appears to structure much of the novel.

None of this holds water. Most obviously, as Rajini Srikanth points out, there is no such single thing as "South Asian American literature."[134] South Asia itself, she reminds us, consists of seven hugely diverse countries ("Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maledives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka;" 1),[135] with dozens of languages and dialects, many different creeds, many different people, and complex constellations: not all categories coincide as one would or could expect them to, for example religion and culture (Srikanth 3), and push and pull factors in migration differ significantly. South Asia is, in short, a "pastiche of contradictions, correspondences, and unexpected linkeages" (Srikanth 3), and so is "South Asian American literature," or rather: the enormous number and variety of texts that are subsumed under this broad category.[136]

Secondly, as I will show in more detail below, the oppositional binary structure of the first two chapters is not only subtly augmented and complemented to the degree that it becomes truly transdifferent in the course of the novel, but is, at a closer look, undercut from the very beginning. For example, it quickly becomes clear that Ashima and Ashoke have a different outlook on life, the present, past and future; have different hopes and aspirations, different motivations and very different pasts. It is Ashoke's near-fatal train accident and the preceding conversation with a doomed fellow traveler advising him to see the world before it is too late that inspires him to migrate to the USA, and as such the event emphasizes the volatility and contingency of the forces one's life is subject to (as well as the always imminent possibility of death); Ashima has little say in all this, she has no idea what to expect. It is the same near-fatal event that inspires Ashoke to – as he assumes provisionally – name his newborn son Gogol after the writer whose book saved his life. The very possibility of naming him in

134 | At this point, most publications that have "South Asian American Literature" in their title at least note the problem of their nomenclature. It continues to be used as a strategic label, some of the reasons for which I have already mentioned in chapter two. Nonetheless, even if those reasons are acceptable, there is no reason that "South Asian American" should mostly be limited to "Indian American," just as there is no reason for equally inconsistent substitutions: even Rajini Srikanth, who so succinctly points out the difficulties of the large aggregate categories in use, continues to write: "You will not find here the linear logic of unimpassioned thought, the neat distinctions of cultural or national categories, or the precision of binaries. I offer these observations in the spirit of heteroglossia, seeking indulgence for the cacophony of analysis" (Srikanth 4).

135 | Srikanth obviously follows the United Nations geographical classification. Other institutions (including university programs) define the region more or less inclusively.

136 | Although she discusses mostly contemporary literature, she offers a short but helpful overview of pre-1965 South Asian diasporic writing (Srikanth 7-9).

the first place is another result of chance, namely the grandmother's missing and forever lost letter with Gogol's intended name. This, in turn, hints at the issue underlying almost everything else in the narrative: the negotiation of auto-identification and differentiation in the face of personal and communal hetero-identifications and differentiations; in the face of the past, in the face of the future, in the face of love and loss, in short: in the face of life.

In addition, 1) there are different focalizers throughout the narrative, all of whom have their own view (and memories) of things and are shown to err and to be inconsistent now and then; 2) there are large temporal gaps and uncertainties, summaries and stretches; and 3) the present simple tends to emphasize the "presence" and "open-ended-ness" of the intradiegetic present somewhat more than the simple past would have.[137] As a result, after the first two chapters it could not be more obvious that in the possible world of *The Namesake*, large aggregate identifications and simple differentiations such as "Indian" and "US-American" or even "in-between" offer only a feeble and mostly illusory defense and classificatory safety against the complexities and vagaries of life. The irony of the epigraph is clearly carried over.

Excursion: Plot

The book consists of twelve chapters, six of which are dated by year (1: 1968; 3: 1971; 4: 1982; 6: 1994; 10: 1999; 12: 2000). The time period ostensibly covered thus ranges from 1968 to 2000, or the first thirty two years of the main protagonist Gogol's life. The narrative begins shortly before his birth, but throughout the entire book, especially during the first chapters, a number of extensive analepses provide the "pre-history" of his parents, so that the covered time period is actually several years longer.

Gogol is born as the son of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali couple who, after an arranged marriage in India, move to the USA because Ashoke has been offered a doctoral position at MIT; at this point, Ashoke has already studied fiber optics in Boston. He has also been in a serious train accident and has taken away from it not only a permanent limp, but also an elderly passenger's advice to see the world, and a deep gratefulness to his favorite writer Gogol, whose "collected stories" saved his life by accidentally drawing the attention of the rescue team. Once the Gangulis have moved to the USA,

137 | Present tense narration has received considerable attention by narratologists in recent years. My claim about its function here is only one part of heated debates about its history, functions and narrativity. One of the best discussions of present tense narration (though homodiegetic unlike here) is still James Phelan's chapter in Phelan and Rabinowitz's *Understanding Narrative* (1994).

and once Gogol is born soon after and Ashoke has been offered a permanent position, it quickly materializes that the family is going to stay.

The major part of the narrative traces Gogol's life in episodes covering...

- ... education (from kindergarten, school, college and university to the first years of his professional life as an architect). Key episodes are his rejection of his "good name" Nikhil in kindergarten, his annoyance with Gogol the writer in high school, and his later name change before he enters college;
- ... family life (his relationship to mother and father, to his sister Sonia, his visits to the extended family in India, his father's sudden death, his mother's impending departure from the USA). Key episodes cover his willed, increasing distance from his parents, his father's death, and his mother's impending departure to India;
- ... important rituals (for example regarding his first food (the rice ceremony/annaprasan) and food in general, family and/or religious celebrations such as Deepavali, Puja, or Christmas – which they celebrate for the sake of the children –, mourning, marriage). Key episodes describe his rejection of the offered symbols allegedly predicting his later profession during the rice ceremony, the mourning for his father, and his wedding;
- ... love life (from his first kiss, his first and second relationship, to his marriage and divorce). Key episodes cover, predictably, his first longer relationships and their dynamics (including estrangement) as well as his marriage and, after his wife's affair, divorce.

Throughout, variable focalization not only provides different perspectives on Gogol's experiences and behavior but also episodes that relate experiences of other characters connected to Gogol.

One could also frame the narrative in terms of Gogol's names and his changing attitude towards them. Initially, he does not have a name and his parents customarily do not bother about it since the grandmother is supposed to provide it in a letter arriving at some later point. Because his parents cannot leave hospital without filling in a form with his name, they provisionally choose Gogol, assuming that his "real name" will arrive later. When it does not because the letter is lost, the name Gogol sticks as "pet name" and as the name on all legal documents. Later, his parents decide on Nikhil (meaning "encompassing all;" Lahiri 56) as his "good name" (i.e. "public" name) before he enters kindergarten. However, Gogol wants to remain Gogol. It is only when he grows up and discovers that his name is odd and unique that he begins to loathe it. From then on, whenever he has the chance to be with people who do not know him, he gives Nikhil as his "real" name; at the first legal opportunity, he officially changes his name to Nikhil. This is the name with which he enters college and makes new friends, girlfriends, etc. Only later does his father tell

him about the real reason for his first name. For most of Gogol's adulthood (the narrator always calls him Gogol), he remains Nikhil, but continues to feel awkward about his other name, keeping it a secret from most people. Finally, at the very end of the novel, he begins to read the short story "The Overcoat" that was so dear to his father.[138]

At first glance, *The Namesake* is perhaps the most "inconspicuous" of the five novels I analyze in detail. It does not have a revealing or almost annunciatory prologue like *Call It Sleep* and *No-No Boy* do; nor does its language draw attention to itself as much as in the former. Its main protagonist is, though certainly reflective, somewhat less articulate and questing than in the latter and *Pocho*; nor is its discourse structure as intricate and heteroglossic as in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. The two most drastic story ruptures in the novel concern Gogol's parents – the father's near-fatal train accident and the parent's migration from India to the USA –, while his own story may seem relatively mundane. He, himself, at the very end ponders: "He wonders how his parents had done it" (make such a drastic move to another country; 281), and admits that they must have "a stamina he fears he does not possess himself" (281). "[F]or all his aloofness toward his family in the past, [...] he has always hovered close" (281), not at all the global wanderer and cosmopolite that Friedman makes him out to be (113), though he certainly does have an "unfixed sensibility" (113), as do most characters in the novel, "whether immigrant or native-born American" (113).[139] As Song argues, Gogol's life has had no catastrophes, no entirely new futures in distant places; perhaps because of this, he feels out of place and directionless, feels he needs to find his own way and his own new direction, but does not know how to do this and where to go (366).[140]

138 | Another way of framing the narrative is suggested by Concilio. She argues that the novel is "a voyage of sentimental education" and that the "novel explores all sorts of rites of passage: birth, baptism, birthdays, graduation, marriage, all symbolizing acceptance in a community and therefore inclusion; then, migration, changing name, divorce, death, all symbolizing expulsion and exclusion" (Concilio 89). While I agree that rites of passage play an important role in the novel, I do not think the opposition is balanced: graduation, marriage, migration, and changing name all symbolize at once departure from one community and inclusion in another.

139 | Friedman actually claims that all characters in the novel have an unfixed sensibility. This is not true: Ashoke, Sonia and most of all Maxine are described as characters who are quite and entirely unselfconsciously comfortable with their life and who they are.

140 | This is very similar to the argument Cheung and Peterson make about Ichiro: he has "no generativity script to animate his life" (197; see my chapter on *No-No Boy*).

Yet, *The Namesake* is no less complex than the preceding novels, and neither is its system of identifications and differentiations. First of all, Gogol's parents, their past, their sentiments, values, their experiences are given a lot of room via narrator commentary and focalization. Often enough, their personal and communal auto-identifications and differentiations come into conflict with Gogol's, apart from occasionally coming into conflict with each other. Since Ashoke and Ashima's identifications/differentiations are themselves a complex – nationally, culturally, socially, economically, and gender-inflected – concoction that is the result of their lives so far (in India and the USA) and still changing, the system of identifications and differentiations is from the beginning markedly transnational and transdifferent: none of the faultlines entirely overlap or are identical, i.e. it is not always possible and often enough simply *im*possible to tell whether identificatory faultlines (for example regarding food) are predominantly national-cultural, regional-cultural, social, economic, or "simply" a matter of personal taste (which in turn is inextricable from socialization). Most of the time they are a complex, sometimes contradictory mixture of all. As Srikanth argues at length, Lahiri's characters all negotiate "between paradoxical impulses" (145).[141] Consistently, the binary opposition between India and the USA that occurs throughout the novel, especially in the context of rituals and ceremonies, at a closer look is almost always made more complex by additional aspects. In other words, when Ashima and Ashoke frown upon something Gogol does because it seems to them a sign of his "assimilation" to the USA and renunciation of his parents' background, this is never only a generational conflict that equals a cultural one but inevitably involves other factors. To complicate things, the parents, too, "give in" (65) and acculturate (or simply change?) over the course of time, even the initially obstinate Ashima, whose grandmother wrongly predicts that she "would never change" (37). Ironically and revealingly, this grandmotherly prediction is accompanied by the paradoxical imperative to "Enjoy it" and to "Do what I will never do" (38).[142]

Second, the novel's apparently straightforward chronological progression is deceiving. As it turns out, there is a host of analepses and prolepses. The temporal leaps between chapters occasionally cover several years, often without

141 | She refers to a study by Sunaina Maira (on club culture of Indian Americans in New York), which highlights that the second generation "simultaneously embraces *and* rejects the expectations of the immigrant generation in the context of gender roles, sexuality, and success" (Srikanth 145; emphasis in the original).

142 | As a result, Concilio writes, "[n]either India nor America are idealized. On the contrary they end up being similar, particularly in terms of social inequality, suspicion and racism towards minorities, and also in terms of educational and artistic opportunities for the upper classes" (116).

any kind of transition. Sometimes we cannot be sure where exactly we are temporally located; large time spans, such as an allegedly important eight-month visit to India, are summarized in just a few pages, deceptively trivial events, such as Gogol's first kiss at a college party, are stretched over the same amount.

Most importantly, the issue of names and naming – important for all characters – that is focused in the character of Gogol and in the particular "pre-history" of the name (intradiegetically: the train accident; intertextually: the actual writer and his story "The Overcoat") brings with it an extended metaphor for personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation that is not only pervasive and suggestive, but at once concrete and universal, and thus ambivalent. It is no wonder that many critics agree that this novel and Lahiri's writing in general depict "dislocation as a permanent human condition" (Concilio 42) via characters who are simultaneously particular and universal, and whose identities are accidental and conflicting (Munos 108).[143]

As a result, we have an impressively complex accumulation of statements about names and naming and their repercussion (e.g. regarding (dis)affection), and, consequently and once more, an equally complex and dynamic web of identifications and differentiations. Predictably, most of the array of topics that play a role apart from the dominant metaphor – such as large aggregations, family, romance & partnership, rituals & ceremonies (including religious & cultural practices, such as eating) – are inflected by the dominant ruminations about personal identification and differentiation. Less conspicuous differentiations are diasporic community, class, and education; notable, and in this case highly surprising, (almost) absences are gender & sexuality, friendship, language, and historical context. Once more, some faultlines will be discussed in combination; others rather shortly because they partly overlap with more conspicuous ones.

Names & Naming (& Affection)

Names in *The Namesake* are not simply "labels" that pragmatically identify a person. They designate a person's position in the world, relation to the world, and relation to other people, particularly his or her (dis)affections. This is made clear from the very beginning. For example,

> When she calls out to Ashoke, she doesn't say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband's name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She has adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety's sake, to utter his

143 | My only bone of contention with this broad claim would be that the particularity is not ethnic, racial or cultural, or in other words: it is not the particularity of a racial/ethnic/cultural identity.

first. It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. (2)

It is not the utterance of the name that establishes intimacy but, on the contrary, the non-utterance. Ashima does not learn her husband's name until after their wedding, but even before she meets him, she slips into his shoes, their sweat mingles and she experiences physical intimacy: "It was only after the betrothal that she'd learned his name" (9). One reason the parents are not really bothered when the grandmother's letter with Gogol's name does not immediately arrive is because they make use of "pet names," which are for family use only, for the intimate, private sphere of home. "They are a reminder [...] that one is not all things to all people" (26) and "[u]nlike good names, pet names are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, even onomatopoetic" (26). When Gogol's sister is born, the parents name her Sonia because it "makes her a citizen of the world" (62) due to the name's usage in Russia, Europe, and South America; it is, moreover, acceptable because it is the name of the Indian prime minister's *Italian* wife (62; emphasis mine). When Moushumi, Gogol's wife, begins an affair with Dimitri, a man she had a crush on when she was a teenager, one key factor that rekindles her affection for him is his use of his old nickname for her, "mouse." There are many more instances like these throughout the novel. It is important to note that the relevance of names and naming is foregrounded by the Indian practice to distinguish between pet names for private use and good names for official use: after all, it is partly due to this practice that Gogol is spontaneously given this name. But names are important for almost all key characters in the novel, regardless of their background, as is the complex link between naming and affection.

The complications of names and naming become most obvious, of course, in the character Gogol and his story. As he grows up, most of the experiences he is described as having are related to his name(s) and to naming. Once he is able to, he begins to reflect upon his name, what it means to him, how it informs the way he leads his life, and what kind of decisions he makes. There are several key episodes that highlight relevance and function of his name(s) for Gogol, his complex reflections upon them, and the changes he undergoes and brings about.

An Indian grandmother is authorized to name the child. She has posted a letter with the name to the USA but the letter fails to arrive; she then falls into a coma and dies without having revealed the name. Not only does the original name from the home country never arrive, but more importantly the letter is lost in transit; it might yet arrive sometime in the future. There is, therefore, a 'real' name for Gogol, his original one, which no one knows and which remains an absence; simultaneously it remains an overshadowing presence because everybody knows it does exist – somewhere. Consequently,

the name in transit is a signifier that, leaving the home country but never reaching its destiny, remains unknown and unknowable; its absence comes to signify without the signifier being named. Gogol's Indian name is therefore at least twice removed and so remains part of the realm of the imaginary, with an imaginary connection to the homeland due to its origin and an imaginary connection to its destiny due to its constantly deferred arrival. At this heart of the fantasy about a true and original name, therefore, is difference: an absence and a constantly deferred presence.

Ashoke and Ashima subsequently bestow on their son a provisional, pet name, Gogol, to identify him for bureaucratic purposes and to tide him over until his real name arrives. But the name they, or his father, give him is not really a first name: it is the last name of a Russian writer. Initially, the young Gogol is not aware of his name's heritage and accepts it simply as signifying who he is for his family. When he is about to enter kindergarten, his parents want him to use his 'good' name, "Nikhil," the name for the outside world.

> There is a reason Gogol doesn't want to go to kindergarten. His parents have told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, which his parents have finally decided on, just in time for him to begin his formal education. The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning 'he who is entire, encompassing all,' but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol. (56)

Gogol, however, does not want this new name: "He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him" (56). So he insists on remaining Gogol.

In a crucial scene during a class excursion, Gogol realizes that his personal name has no history, neither in his family's homeland, nor anywhere else. Looking at the names on graves at an ancient cemetery, he feels strangely moved: "For reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient Puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names, have spoken to him" (71). He realizes that nobody else has his name (68ff) and that, to make matters worse, he has a "last name turned first name" (78).[144] His name starts to become estranged from him, he feels ambivalent about it. Again, details about the his name's fate and his 'relationship' towards it are revealing, for his realization occurs in a cemetery, where names signify people no longer materially present, where personal histories are abbreviated, and names and dates converge in a material location. Divergent pasts and life stories merge into the space of a continual presence: just like star-gazing means looking into a past in which every spot of

144 | No one in the world "shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake" (78).

light has a different age, cemeteries freeze the past(s) of the life stories signified by the names on the tombs into the present moment of scrutiny. Further, his realization about the particulars of his name creates a second absence: that of a cultural history in relation to his name. Even if his father had never told him the particularities of the story behind his name, they would have been perceived as idiosyncratic, accidental rather than cultural. As a first name, "Gogol" is indeed a singularity. No external meaning comes with it: it is Gogol's alone. To complicate things, as a last name it does have a cultural/linguistic history and it relates to his father's survival in a train accident; yet no one else has previously had this as a first name. The simplistic but conventional opposition between invention and authenticity whereby one either innovatively invents one's own identity or discovers one's true authentic self in the process of maturing, is shown as fatuous.[145]

Bit by bit, Gogol begins to hate his name and inquiries about it. He hates that it does not "mean anything" (in Indian), that it is, to him, "absurd and obscure," "that it has nothing to do with who he is" (76). "What dismays him most is the irrelevance of it all;" he begins to regret his childhood refusal of Nikhil, which at least would have provided him with a "B-side to the self" (76). At school Gogol starts hating his name because he realizes that it originally belonged to the mentally troubled Russian writer genius, a heritage he does not want to identify with.[146] At high school his name becomes explicitly linked to affection for the first time when, after initially refusing to date, go to dances or parties (which his parents accept as normal), he finally meets a girl. Reluctant to give his 'awkward' name, he chooses Nikhil – his good name – on the spur of the moment. Kissing her, he is excited, feels brave, "protected as if by an invisible shield" (96). When his friends ask him, "[h]e shakes his head in a daze, as astonished as they are, elation still welling inside him. 'It wasn't me,' he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it" (96). He is only able to make contact because he adopts a name which is formally his, but because it lacks a history, seems not to belong to him. He can presumably fill its emptiness with whatever meaning he chooses. Indeed, he feels safest when he throws on this 'false' identification, the 'wrong' name 'without a past,' someone else's overcoat, although ironically it is part of him, even though marked by an absence. Equating name and identification is misleading – he is not his

145 | In addition, he learns in Calcutta that his last name is "a legacy of the British" (67).

146 | Gogol never reads the story until the very end: "To read the story, he believes, would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow. Still, listening to his classmates complain, he feels perversely responsible, as if his own work were being attacked" (92).

name – and nothing will change physically when he adopts a different name. In despising his name, he does not fully despise himself, yet who he feels he is, does relate to his name, i.e. its singularity and oddity. In changing his name, not only does he change his 'overcoat' and his behavior towards others, but he changes his auto-identification up to this point. Again, this is a play with difference.

Finding that with his good name and allegedly new auto- and hetero-identification he feels different, Gogol legally changes his name when he goes to college, saying "'I hate the name Gogol [. . .] I've always hated it'" (102). One could argue that this change is part of growing up. But Lahiri makes it clear that his new name: "*as* Nikhil" (104) allows him to do things and to feel different. He first has sexual intercourse with a girl whose name, tellingly, he cannot remember (105). "There's only one complication: he doesn't feel like Nikhil" (195). People know him "in the present" not "in the past": he feels like acting the part of twins in a play, indistinguishable, but fundamentally different (105); the narrator likens it to a physical pain.[147] When his parents call him by his new name, he feels it is "correct but off-key" just as when they speak to him in English.[148] Gogol becomes a double, he has a doppelgänger, and with it two different histories, "identities," affiliations, affections. That this is not just a binary opposition but a complex interplay becomes clear when one considers that "off-key" means a note that is inaccurate in pitch, which still carries traces of the pitch that it diverges from, oscillating between the two. Gogol takes on an Indian name, one he has (almost) always had, but has not used. It is part of his family, their past and his past, but it has not been filled with its own past, not in a way that he can identify with. Would he have changed his name had he known the story behind it which his father later tells him?[149] Regardless, his new name allows him to establish several relationships in which the issue of

147 | During a humorous episode, "he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels" (118) and is confused and bored by the academic cant because he feels none of it has any relevance for him, although metonymically, they do talk about him: the academics use "ABCD" for "American-born confused deshi" (Indians). The double meaning is telling: ABCD is also the beginning of the alphabet, and may stand for language, the words it comprises, and, by extension, naming. For the first time, Gogol reflects that he has no "ABCD friends at college" (119) and that his parents have friends mostly because they share a past, not because they like them (119). He also feels "as if an errata slip were perpetually pinned to his chest" (119).

148 | He even feels he is not their child (106).

149 | Sometime later, his father finally tells him about the real origin of his name: "And suddenly the sound of his pet name [...] means something completely new." Gogol realizes that he reminds his father not of the past (i.e. the catastrophe and death) but of "everything that followed" (i.e. the future, life) (124).

his name inevitably surfaces. Interestingly, his affections in these relationships vary according to his changing relations to his family. The more he detaches himself from his family, the better he feels with his "WASP girlfriend" Maxine. When his father dies and he grows close to his family again, he leaves the girlfriend.

The last longer episode covers Gogol's marriage. His latest love – whom his mother sets him up with and whom he marries – knows both his old and new names. She shares some of his cultural/national/economic background and is almost family; yet the relation starts to decline – after only a year of marriage – when she humiliates him, as he perceives it, by revealing his secret (his name change) to her friends (243),[150] and then because someone from her past, Dimitri, affectionately uses her old nickname, starting an affair.[151] Significantly here his wife as the focalizer refers to Gogol only as "her husband." Thus, when affection turns into disaffection, he no longer has a name, but instead becomes 'anonymous' or nameless.[152] The fact that a new name allowed him to approach a woman, while namelessness is a corollary to the loss of affection adds to the irony. In addition, the focalization on Gogol rather than through Gogol allows no access to his feelings and thoughts, turning him momentarily into a cipher, further reinforcing the absence of his name in the focus of the narrative.[153]

Finally, Gogol returns to his family or what remains of it, but his mother is just moving back to India, intending to split the year between the latter and the USA.[154] Looking at his family's and his own life, he reflects: "In so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another" (286); and: "He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible *to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name*. His marriage had been something of a misstep as well" (287; emphasis mine). The novel finishes with Gogol at last reading Nikolai Gogol's story "The Overcoat." It appears that while his mother

150 | To offset her betrayal, he enters the conversation arguing that "[t]here's no such thing as a perfect name. I think that human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen" (245). This is dismissed by the others, and Moushumi disapproves.

151 | Tellingly, her name means "a breeze" (240).

152 | Disaffection, expressed through anonymity, contrasts structurally to the novel's opening, where not using her husband's name is a token of affection for Ashima.

153 | Only later do we read that "for the first time in his life, another man's name upset Gogol more than his own" (283).

154 | Finally but ultimately appropriately considering Ashima's substantial changes over the course of the narrative, the meaning of her name, "limitless," is "implemented:" "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (276).

literally departs for the home country after her thirty years in the USA, Gogol has at least metaphorically arrived at the story that so dramatically changed his father's life and subsequently his own.

Once we describe Gogol's story and the changes and developments he and his names(s)/naming undergo in terms of identification and differentiation patterns, it becomes clear just how contradictory, ambivalent and ironic these are. Initially, Gogol is identified by his parents not by name but by his needs: love and food (26). The only name he "has" is an absence. As long as he is not aware of the particularity of his pet name, Gogol does not mind it, willing auto-identification overlaps with hetero-identification. In fact, he rejects his other name. It is only once he becomes aware of his odd pet name that both of his names begin to crucially influence and shape his auto-identification. This starts to happen before adolescence, so that Munos' claim that changing his name is "a way of negotiating the passage from childhood to adulthood and of indulging more freely in 'all American' teenage pastimes and pleasures" (Munos 109) is only partially true; in fact, since significant parts of the novel cover the intradiegetic pre-history of Gogol's parents, and since the time span reaches far into Gogol's adult life, only about half of the novel could be called a coming-of-age narrative.

It is this internal conflict between two personal auto-identifications signified by the two names that governs his narrative and that determines how he relates to other people both inside and outside his family, and how he wishes to be hetero-identified. His key auto-differentiation, then, is internal and not, as so often in the other novels, a conflict between personal auto- and hetero-identification – no one else has any problems with his name(s); also, he does not have many friends – or personal auto-identification and communal hetero-identification; communal auto-identification does not seem to play an important role for him. It is this auto-differentiation that leads him to increasingly distance himself from his past and his parents and their hetero-identification of him. If Richard in *Pocho* has a strong sense of self that leads to his differentiation from pretty much everything, Gogol has a weak sense of self that accomplishes the same: he does not know who he is, is supposed to be, or wants to be, and thus, does not strongly identify as anything. At first he does not significantly differentiate himself from anything either. When he begins differentiation, it is predominantly from a part of himself, the part denoted by Gogol.[155] Nothing else throughout the entire novel comes close in

155 | His first real – and very telling – differentiation happens during annaprasan, the rice ceremony during which he is not only offered his first food, but a chunk of soil, a pen, and a dollar bill to predict his later career and profession (i.e. landowner, scholar, businessman), Gogol, however, refuses to take anything: "forced at six months to confront his destiny, [...] he begin[s] to cry" (40).

being differentiated against. To further complicate things, he does not reject "Gogol" because it stands for some kind of communal identification (much less some kind of "cultural identity"), but because it stands alone, signifies no group membership at all, and only ambiguously connects to the writer Gogol. When he seeks a new auto-identification, it is Nikhil, of all names, that he chooses: a name meaning "encompassing all" and an Indian name. Thus the name that could be argued to stand for another cultural tradition and background and thus for something "strange" in the USA eventually comes to mean "home" for him, a home that is pretty lonely in turn, since he does not have any Indian-American friends. The diasporic community that his parents cultivate remains strange to him. Of course, that name may have an etymological history, but not a personal one (i.e. no past other than the one he begins to create once he lives as Nikhil, which is when he enters college; a short and odd past indeed). It is another ironic subversion that the meaning of Nikhil, "everything," really differentiates nothing. As a result, uniqueness (Gogol) is placed alongside universality (Nikhil) in one character.

I would argue that it is Gogol's failure to conceive of these two poles as "both/and" and his persistent but futile opposition of them that causes his problems to find his place in the world, his relation to other people, and to decide what direction in life to take (i.e. on a "generativity script," see above). Here I agree with Munos that "Gogol's distress at not sharing his name with anybody hints at his inability to position himself in the world," although I do not think that this is necessarily because he is unable "to locate himself in a community or in any collective myth of origin" (Munos 109) and that, were he able to do so, he would not experience the difficulties he has. Rather, the ending of the novel hints at something else. First of all, we may take the ending to be some kind of reconciliation of Gogol with Gogol, both name and writer.[156] Second, Gogol realizes that "[i]n so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another" (286) and that while "[h]e had tried to correct that randomness, that error" it "had not been possible to reinvent himself fully" (287), as if a reinvention (i.e. an entirely autonomous auto-identification) could have purged life of chance and loss. Actually,

> these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, determined who he is. They were the things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured, in the end. (287)

156 | The narrator exclusively uses "Gogol" as his name, with the exception of the chapter in which Moushumis serves as the focalizer.

As Munos points out,

> [w]hat underlies Gogol's belated acknowledgement of his 'accidental' identity is that there is no such thing as an identity derived from some mysterious 'essence' or myth of origins. History keeps shaping and rerouting the course of one's life to such an extent that it is 'the exteriority of accidents,' as Foucault contends, that stands for the true 'core' of one's being. Although this may sound universal enough, Lahiri suggests in her book that the denial of the role of history in the forging of one's self *can be* even trickier in a migrant context. (Munos 116; emphasis mine)

Free choice (or invention), Gogol finally appears to realize, is just as much an illusion as is complete determination (or authenticity) because of

> the irreducible immediacy in which human beings are born in society: not as pure unattached individuals free to choose their social affiliations (whether gender, ethnicity, or class) but as already ascribed members of society [...T]he question of choice here is itself fallacious, for human beings cannot exist as 'individuals' before they are born. (Chatterjee 232)

This is the context in which the reference to Gogol's short story can best be discussed.[157] The image of the overcoat, if taken as a metaphor for identification and differentiation, represents the continuously changing subject positions that we don, our identifications and differentiations, our affiliations and (dis) affections made *in communicating with our surroundings*. After all, "without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist" (289). By implication one is never totally free of an overcoat or other people, there is no such thing as a pristine and authentic identity which might then be covered by a free choice of cultural, personal "attire," habits, norms, etc. (Brombert 50-55). Looking at the ending of the short story, what remains once the coat is taken away is death.

It is, once again, tempting to interpret all of this in terms of in-betweenness, of a predominantly cultural opposition between "Indian" and "American" which the children of immigrants, due to their particular situation, have to negotiate. The overall fictional possible world or "picture," if you will, and its system of identifications and differentiations regarding naming is more

157 | I have the impression that criticism makes somewhat too much of the relevance of "The Overcoat." As an allegory and intertext, it is far from unambiguous. It is patently not a "rewriting of Gogol's story" (Concilio 90). Which aspect of the original story are we supposed to transfer: bureaucracy? Poverty? Tediousness? Single-mindedness? There is no indication that Gogol is going to return after death to haunt his lost loves...

complex, however, even if "cultural" oppositions do play a significant role. First of all, as I will detail below, and as has been indicated above, the metaphor of names and naming is ambivalent: its terms cannot simply be equated with different cultural categories. Socioeconomic factors, for example, considerably complicates things, to the degree that Friedman concludes that "Lahiri's novel suggests that class is what truly connects people across national or ethnic boundaries" (Friedman 121).

Second, Gogol's story, especially regarding his names and naming, is clearly exceptional among all characters in the novel; in fact, much of it has to do with his name's exceptionality. Therefore, we have to be careful not to extend the identificatory patterns relating to Gogol to the entire fictional world; not even the ones related to names and naming can be equated with those related to other faultlines. Even though Gogol certainly is the main protagonist, there are enough other characters to show alternative identificatory patterns, other life choices, possibilities, accidents. Sonia and Ashoke, it is shown repeatedly, are quite comfortable with themselves and with their lives. Moushumi appears to have problems with any kind of binding personal affiliation and "flees" to a place free of all personal pasts and claims on her (France). Ashima perhaps most insistently pronounces differences between India and the USA, but not only is it made clear by the narrator that these are *her* pronunciations, and do not coincide with, for example, Ashoke's, it is also made clear that they change continuously, apart from the fact that these differences are not only cultural, but also economic (her family has servants in India) and personal (her grandmother singles her out as different – more stubborn – from all her siblings).

So, the identificatory patterns related to names and naming are at once particular, partially overlap with others, but are also somewhat universal in suggesting that we may differentiate between people/characters who are comfortable with their place in the world and their relations (and their names), and those who are not, or less so. The migration, diaspora, and acculturation contexts may "simply" be contexts in which all these issues and processes most patently come to the fore; issues and processes which, once naturalized, are always likely to be ignored or forgotten.

Large – National/Cultural – Aggregations (& Class)

As in *No-No Boy* and *Pocho*, large aggregations matter. In *The Namesake*, these are "Indian" and "US-American," and to a much lesser degree "Indian American."[158] As in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, it is tempting to frame the narrative according to a dramaturgy in which the children of immigrants, because of their particular situation, come into a generational

158 | "ABCDs" are only mentioned once in the novel; see note above.

conflict with their parents that is actually a cultural conflict due to the children's more or less willing assimilation to the US-American mainstream/dominant culture. In criticism, this conflict is most of the time seen dually between "Indian" and "US-American," and much less frequently triangularly between "Indian," "Indian-American," and "US-American." The reason for this is usually an underlying assumption of a fairly straightforward assimilation (the children are "Americanized") rather than a dynamic, perpetual and interdependent acculturation, where all terms of the triangle are in flux; of course, there are really many more terms than just three, even on the level of large aggregations (e.g. class). Also, it is highly problematic to equate a national aggregation with a cultural one, perhaps even more visibly so regarding the Indian subcontinent (because of its history, composition, etc.), although this is never really problematized in the narrative.

As a result, large aggregations matter in that they are repeatedly used by the narrator (over and beyond psychonarration) and in that some, but by far not all, characters in the fictional world of *The Namesake* reflect upon them and consider them important for their lives, for example Ashima. As in the other novels, their content is sometimes relatively clear (e.g. regarding rituals and ceremonies, cooking, language use), sometimes ambiguous or polyvalent (is the fact that Ashima initially refuses to learn how to drive a refusal to assimilate or simply a refusal to drive, or both, or one a subterfuge for the other?), sometimes a matter of perspective (the parents consider Gogol's abstinence from dating "properly Indian," while he considers it an unfortunate result of his pet name and the shyness it induces in him). Moreover, it changes.

Ashima most obviously and most obstinately thinks in large aggregations. She auto-identifies as Indian (personally and communally) and strongly auto-differentiates from being American (mostly communally; she initially minimizes personal contact with "natives"). Much of the sections focalized through her is structured along the opposition she sees between India and the USA. For example, the narrative begins with her noting differences in food and its preparation; when she is taken to hospital shortly before Gogol's birth, she notes that despite the public display of affection, Americans "prefer their privacy" (3), which she diametrically opposes to Indians. Father and mother both note the different childhood the boy is likely to have, but while Ashoke appreciates books and prospective learning and education, Ashima thinks that there is no extended family here, that "the baby's birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true" (25), and that "[s]he has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived" (25).[159] Throughout the narrative, Ashima keeps noting differences between

159 | The fact that Ashima's outlook on life is so different from Ashoke's might, in part, be due to the fact that while he has made a conscious choice to migrate, she had

Americans (the ones she meets) and Indians (or rather: herself), mostly regarding the faultlines introduced in the beginning: food, its preparation and consumption, family life, and affection. In the sections in which Ashima serves as focalizer, the opposition is supplemented by narrator commentary, e.g. on the Montgomerys, an academic couple of "typical" East Coast intellectuals of the time (almost to the point of cliché in terms of dress, food, habitus, tastes, car, stickers) and very different in almost everything from the Gangulis.

> [B]eing a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy–a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that *that previous life has vanished*, *replaced by something more complicated and demanding*. (49-50; emphasis mine)

Bit by bit, the opposition begins to crumble. For one, her previous life has indeed vanished and consists of memories now, of occasional phone calls, and even less occasional visits to Calcutta. Family members in India begin to die, and "[e]ven those family members who continue to live seem dead somehow, always invisible, impossible to touch" (63). The family visits to Calcutta feel strange, like a dream (64); fittingly, the eight month visit is covered in just a few pages. Even their diasporic circle of Bengali friends is cultivated mostly because they share a past, not necessarily because they like all of them (119).

Second, the "something more complicated and demanding" that is her life now begins to become less so, and more quotidian. "She begins to pride herself on doing it [i.e. shopping] alone" (34) while Ashoke is working. When she forgets a bundle of presents on the train and they are all returned, she feels more reconciled with Cambridge (42-43). Once Ashoke has a tenure-track position, the family moves outside of Boston, where they buy a home (and it is literally called home, not house). Unlike the other faculty, they do not look in the historic district but "on ordinary roads" (51) where "[a]ll the houses belong to Americans:" "This is the small patch of America to which they lay claim" (51). They may be the only Bengalis in the neighborhood, but "to a casual observer, the Gangulis, apart from the name on the mailbox, apart from the issues of India Abroad and Sangbad Bichitra that are delivered there, appear no different from their neighbors" (64). As the family in India dwindles, their circle of friends in the USA grows (63). A long passage details the family's material acquisitions, their small acculturations, their "mixings" and "relentings," for example in

almost no say in it. Tellingly, the narrator says about Ashoke: "He was *born* twice in India, and then a third time, in America" (21; emphasis mine). For Ashoke, his new life in the USA literally is a *new* life, which enables him to leave behind the past more easily than Ashima.

form of "a barbecue for tandoori on the porch," Christmas for the children, but also smaller things like clothing and disposable razors (64-65). In addition, while they send their children to "Bengali language and culture lessons" (65), there are hints that their children auto-identify mostly as American.

None of this, however, seems for the worse; nor does it, more importantly, necessarily mean that the children do not auto-identify as members of the family or do not show the affectionate behavior and family loyalty that Ashima initially considers "typically Indian." Many of the conflicts between parents and children, it turns out, are owed at least as much to adolescence as they are owed to acculturation (e.g. Sonia's rebellions about piercings and dates). Gogol does increasingly distance himself from his family, but when Ashoke dies, he spends so much time with his family that his girlfriend Maxine breaks up with him; Sonia even moves back in with her mother. Ashima, in the end, has changed quite substantially, despite her grandmother's prediction. "She has learned to do things on her own" (276): she has sold the house and is going to live half of the year with friends and family in India, and half of the year with friends and family in the USA; and she will miss her life in the USA (279). "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (276), echoing the "both/and" of particularity and universality characterizing Gogol's identificatory pattern. Her initial, clear auto-differentiation no longer holds.

Another episode perhaps even better demonstrates the use and simultaneous subversion/complementation of large aggregations in the narrative. During his college time, Gogol dates Maxine, who is from a family that could not be more prototypically upper middle class WASP. They are a couple of affluent, professionally successful intellectuals with a long Anglo-Saxon family lineage.[160] Everything about their lifestyle, their manners, tastes, preferences, in short: their entire habitus suggests membership in a kind of old, naturalized, self-confident and entirely unselfconscious "white," US-American "aristocracy." Gogol literally loves it (137) and immerses himself in it, also because Maxine has none of the self-doubts that he has:

> as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way. This, in his opinion, is the biggest difference between them, a thing far more foreign to him than the beautiful house she'd grown up in, her education at private schools. (138)

After a short time, he moves in with Maxine in her parents' house and shares in their lifestyle; continuously, he contrasts the Ratcliffs with his own family and

160 | In an ironic doubling, they own the kind of burial slot that Gogol feels himself so attracted to during his first visit to a cemetery.

finds the latter lacking (especially, ironically, in tolerance, or so Gogol believes), another reason for him to increasingly differentiate himself from his parents. In fact, "race" does not seem to exist for the Ratcliffs, they appear to live in and quite literally "own" their own cosmos, exemplified by their rural getaway in New Hampshire, where Gogol feels "free" in this "cloistered wilderness" (158). "And yet for some reason it is dependence, not adulthood, he feels" in this "willing exile from his own life" (142). During a short but revealing episode, it turns out that the Ratcliffs are less understanding and accepting of Gogol's background than they simply are not interested in it.

Predictably, some critics have read this as a conflict between cultural identities and/or ethnicities/races. For example, Munos argues that the "privileged universe of the Ratcliffs" is "a world combining whiteness, ownership, rootedness and guiltless consumerism with cultural awareness and hospitality" (110) where "permanence is coupled with immobility and belonging with submission" (111). The freedom from his family and background that Gogol feels is a "mock liberty," "a lure which naturalizes the absoluteness of their [the Ratcliff's] supremacy" (111) and "'America' as a normative, vampiric force – a world of power gone mad but only in a surreptitious way" (112). What is downplayed here for the sake of argument is that the opposition between Gogol and Maxine (and her family) is at least as much one of money and "class" as it is one of cultural practices. On the contrary, the episode seems to suggest, I would argue, that "cultural" practices *are* also "economical" practices and thus perfectly exemplify Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

In addition, even more often ignored is the fact that the Ganguli family, both on the parental and the maternal side, employ servants and seem to belong to an educated and privileged upper middle class in India somewhat equivalent to the Ratcliffs' position in the USA. Even in the USA, the father, due to his education, relatively soon acquires a full professorship, and with it, the family equally soon acquires most of the insignia of an educated middle class. As Song trenchantly remarks:

> Although her son Gogol is not white, he might as well be. Although he is not sexist or homophobic, his gender and sexual identity never puts him at risk of feeling their punch. Although he does not look down on his fellow South Asian Americans and other minorities who cannot share in his professional middle-class largess, he cannot claim any special knowledge about what it means to be, say, a Bangladeshi taxi driver in New York City. (Song 354)[161]

161 | The argument is not quite fair: neither can he claim special knowledge about Bangladeshi billionaires, and many others; in fact, how much special knowledge can he or we, for that matter, really claim about a whole variety of things?

Consequently, "the children of immigrants have gained a certain kind of power. Their power comes from economic and class ease, not from a sense of ethnic identity that is part of some mythic melting pot" (Friedman 115). Although this does not mean, pace Friedman, that "Lahiri's novel suggests that class is what truly connects people across national or ethnic boundaries" (121), since it most definitely does not "connect" the Ratcliffs and the Gangulis and suggests a rather differentiated "classification,"[162] it does mean that

> [n]either India nor America are idealized. On the contrary they end up being similar, particularly in terms of social inequality, suspicion and racism towards minorities, and also in terms of educational and artistic opportunities for the upper classes. (Concilio 116)

It is a correlative of this that the Anglo Protestant establishment is neither an "indomitable rushing river into which all other cultural groups must learn to swim nor a beleaguered waterway on the verge of irreparable contamination" (Song 358).[163]

To conclude, large national and/or cultural aggregations provide the faultline for *some* auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations (mostly personal, less frequently communal) for *some* characters, and they never do so exclusively, unequivocally, or statically. The particular constellation is interesting: For Ashima, auto-identification and -differentiation along the faultlines of large aggregations are crucial for much of the narrative (although she begins to change and thus "leave" them earlier in the narrative than she herself acknowledges), for her husband, Ashoke, they matter little or not at all – after all, he considers himself figuratively "born" in the USA (21). For Gogol, they matter only where they overlap with the identifications and differentiations he draws along names, and not in and of themselves; his conflicted internal auto-differentiation trumps everything. For Sonia – who hardly appears in the narrative at all; she is the only family member that never serves as focalizer – they are not shown to matter at all. Like Ashoke, she is comfortable with who

162 | This would support my hesitation to use "class" as a concept, since it suffers from the same deficiencies as all large aggregations. See chapter 2.

163 | Gogol's relationship to Moushumi has also been given a somewhat unconvincing culturalist reading in some essays, which argue that their marriage symbolizes a succumbing to their cultural background (i.e. their parents) and to the demands of their diasporic community and thus their communal hetero-identification. This is particularly odd since the novel makes it quite explicit that the opposite is true. Moushumi reflects: "in those early months, being with him, falling in love with him, doing precisely what had been expected of her for her entire life, had felt forbidden, wildly transgressive, a breach of her own instinctive will" (250).

she is and her place in the world, and does not really reflect upon anything (or is not given the narrative space to do so), a "true citizen of the world" (62). Large aggregations, thus, only really matter for one main character in the novel, and in her case they are shown to have a changing content and a "right to exit."

Family

The Namesake is at least as much a "*Familienroman*" (Concilio 89) as it is a coming of age narrative. Some of the key aspects relating to family and family constellation/dynamics as identificatory faultline have already been mentioned in the previous rubrics (e.g. naming and affection, "generational" conflict). That this is inevitable has to do once more with the dominance of the issue of names and naming. As I have argued above, naming and affection are intimately linked. Unsurprisingly, this connection structures much of how the family members relate to each other, and how the family relates to its environment. Since naming in turn is dominantly focused in the character of Gogol, much of the identificatory pattern relating to family is linked to him.

Nonetheless, it is important to recall how the family is constituted in the first place, and which aspects are in place before Gogol is born. First of all, the marriage is arranged, with the acquiescence of both Ashoke and Ashima. This is in itself is never really an issue, problem, or matter of relevance in the narrative to the degree that the fact is almost naturalized. Both seem to come from moderately affluent families; at least Ashoke has studied in Boston. What matters most is 1) the fact that it is the recognition of mortality and of the continuous possibility of sudden death that motivates Ashoke to "start a new life" in the USA (initially only to finish his thesis); 2) that Ashima, though perfunctorily asked whether she is willing to fly and to endure harsh winters, has little say in the matter and thus much less intrinsic motivation to leave her family and migrate; 3) that both equally never once question their gender roles, even in the USA: Ashoke pursues his career, Ashima takes care of the household and the children; and 4) that since it was a book by the writer Gogol that gave Ashoke a "new life" and thus set everything in motion and brought them to the USA, provisionally (as they assume at this point) naming their first child born in the USA after him seems an appropriate symbolic act to both of them.

What is already in place, then, before Gogol begins his ruminations – with all their consequences for his love and family life – is a family who initially have just themselves,[164] who are strangers to their new life almost as much as their children are upon birth, who have a clear division between private and

164 | The diasporic circle of friends that they cultivate later is occasionally considered almost family by the Gangulis. Their biological family dies one after the other.

public life that correlates with a clear division between affection and distance, and whose first born son symbolizes, even though he does not know this until much later, "everything that followed" the near-fatal train accident (124). It is on this stage and within this family framework that his differentiations are played out and affect the family dynamics.

The dynamic between Gogol and his family (or rather: his parents) once he begins to loathe his name is to some degree determined by a mixture of coming of age and discrepant acculturation.[165] The most important factor, however, is his internal auto-differentiation, which begins before adolescence and cuts across acculturation, as shown above. Parallel to the key episodes discussed under the rubric of naming, Gogol not only begins to differentiate between Gogol and Nikhil, eventually choosing the latter name and attempting to make the first and the life/memories connected with it a thing of the past, but he also begins to differentiate himself from his family/parents. This does not come in the form of open conflict, but in increasingly separating his present as Nikhil from his past as Gogol and auto- and hetero-identification as member of his family. It is fitting that he officially changes his name when he goes to college and has the chance to reinvent himself and meet people who do not know him as Gogol. As a matter of fact, he "solves" the problem that everyone he knows (friends, family) so far knows him as Gogol by almost entirely eliminating contact, and thus, all prior hetero-identifications. With his new name and identity, he finds it easier "to ignore his parents" (105) and feels as if he was no longer their child (106). The girlfriends he has almost never meet his parents, and in fact, lead him further away from them. It is with Maxine at her parents' resort in the wilderness where his parents cannot reach him that he at first feels the most free he ever has (158). It is, tellingly, only death, the ultimate differentiation, that brings him back into the fold for some time: when his father dies, he begins to feel and behave as a member of his family for the first time since he moved out. The marriage to Moushumi is only a temporary reconciliation. In a way, since their mothers set them up, and since both are "Indian Americans" and share a past that makes them almost family (their parents are friends and they have known each other since childhood), marrying her may be read as reentering the family. In fact, because both of them feel this way, they are initially reluctant to date. On top, she knows both of his "pasts" and names, so that she might be seen as a kind of unifying force that would allow him to reconcile himself with all of him. This does not work out. Her desire to be free of all hetero-identifications, of her past, her family, of all personal and communal claims, ultimately includes Gogol, so that she differentiates herself from him, as well:

165 | His adolescent rebellion is a very quiet one: not once does he fight with his parents, he simply silently withdraws.

> Though she knows it's not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind. He was not who she saw herself ending up with, he had never been that person. (250)

Thus, in the passage focalized through her, he becomes an unnamed cipher to her.

Only after this "vicarious family" of two breaks up and after all his attempts at getting away from his family have failed does Gogol return to his family and willingly accept their identification, symbolized at the very end by his beginning to read Gogol while his family prepares to celebrate a last Christmas (sic) before the mother moves to India. What kind of family does Gogol return to, though? His father and initial "identifier" (as the one who named him) is dead; his sister is hardly mentioned, but appears quite happy with her non-Indian boyfriend; and his mother is about to move to India, herself having significantly changed her very own identificatory pattern.[166] The return, thus, is not a return to his family of the past and the bygone identificatory patterns and dynamics, but to an open future and with it an as yet open identification and differentiation. Fittingly, the last two sentences begin with a provisional "[b]ut for now" and "[f]or now" (291).

"Romantic" Relationships (& Coming of Age)

In a novel with such a pronounced focus on naming and affection and a story time frame that covers the main protagonist's life from birth to age thirty-two, it would seem almost inevitable that romantic relationships, as an equally inevitable corollary of coming of age, constitute a significant identificatory faultline. Indeed, three relationships are covered in detail (Ruth, Maxine, Moushumi), two of which are given extensive space (Maxine, Moushumi). It would seem equally inevitable that gender and sexuality come as part and parcel of this faultline, but they do not, nor do they significantly matter somewhere else or are mentioned more than in passing. In fact, regarding gender and sexuality, everything *is as is*, for better or worse: all relationships are unquestioningly heterosexual; gender roles are reflected upon, much less questioned, not once, neither in the context of the arranged marriage of Ashima and Ashoke[167] nor in the context of the role division in their marriage once they are in the USA, nor in the relationships of Gogol. Gogol (or the narrator,

166 | One might even say that her movement broadly echoes Gogol's, though not voluntarily: she moves away from home only to return in the end, changed.

167 | All that is said about their married life is that "[e]ight thousand miles away in Cambridge, she has come to know him" (10).

for that matter) not once reflects upon gender, masculinity, or femininity, or sexuality in general, nor do his girlfriends. Moushumi's promiscuity in France is mentioned and explained (she enjoys her newfound freedom), and then left as a fact that appears to have no further import, similar to Gogol's affair with a married woman. The people that are explicitly said to have sex enjoy it, and that is that. The two instances in the novel where sex (in the widest sense of intimate physical contact) might be argued to be linked to coming of age and thus lent somewhat more allegorical significance are so dominantly situated in the context of names and naming – and touched upon so briefly – that their sexual aspect recedes into the background: Gogol first kisses a girl as Nikhil (for the significance of this, see above); and he first has sexual intercourse with a girl whose name he does not remember.

While I am quite sure that the effect – whether intended or not – of this either almost absent or matter of fact portrayal of gender and sexuality is a naturalization of the possible world of the novel, a kind of "goes without saying" that does not problematize what is not considered in need of problematization – and why indeed should every fictional text problematize sexuality and gender? – I am not so sure whether this naturalization is the fictional equivalent of a "casual confidence" and "normalcy" that indicates a "powerful announcement of the coming-of-age of the second generation of South Asian Americans" (Srikanth 147) or simply a blind spot that reveals, as the above quote by Song so caustically states, a privileged position.

This said, romantic relationships play an important role in the novel. Gogol has three serious, and very different, partners, whose outlook on life, auto-identifications, and manner of relating to other people are revealing not only about themselves, but also about Gogol once they form a partnership and relate to each other. Gogol meets Ruth, his first partner, on a train. She is the child of intellectuals/professional academics who encourage her to date Gogol in order to learn about different people and cultures (sic), and she herself is interested in his "cultural heritage" when she learns about his longer stay in India. For Gogol, this is new: "it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend" (112). The relationship to Ruth is revealing firstly because she is a further step in Gogol's auto-differentiation from his parents, as he keeps her completely separate from his family. Second, she inadvertently "helps" him to better understand the particular life, hardships and affections of his parents and thus, though Gogol is not aware of this and though this takes effect only much later, brings him closer to his parents: when she goes to Oxford over the summer to study, Gogol "longs for her as his parents have longed, all these years, for the people they love in India–for the first time in his life, he knows this feeling" (117). The relationship breaks up when she decides to stay another year in Oxford to study. Like Moushumi later, and like his parents,

Ruth does something Gogol recognizes he will most likely never do: move to another country.

Maxine is the complete opposite of this, and of Gogol in many respects. Most importantly, she is completely content with who she is, with her parents, and her place in the world:

> as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way. This, in his opinion, is the biggest difference between them, a thing far more foreign to him than the beautiful house she'd grown up in, her education at private schools. (138)

As a consequence, she is also, unlike Gogol, completely content with her parents, even lives with them, admires them, and emulates their lifestyle and habitus. When Gogol moves in with her and her parents, "he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own. [...] Gerald and Lydia are secure in a way his parents will never be," they live in their own "universe" (141), and so does Maxine. In a way, this implies that Maxine and her family are not only completely at ease with the auto-identificatory patterns, they also seem to have total control over these patterns and are in the privileged position to ignore any (hetero) others outside the family and the claims these might possible have on them. Personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation are entirely harmonious or irrelevant. It is only consistent that Gogol enjoys this care- and conflict-free "universe," but ultimately cannot join and become an integrated and equal part of it: "for some reason it is dependence, not adulthood, he feels" (142). His conflicted identificatory patterns simply do not fit into this smooth, unchanging and rather homogeneous universe.[168] Maxine, of course, has no desire to go anywhere, she is so comfortable where she is. When she does want to accompany Gogol to India after his father's death, he refuses to let her come along, and they break up: she lets him into her life, but not vice versa.

Moushumi, his third partner and the woman he marries, at least in some respects serves as a kind of unifying force for Gogol. Their parents being friends, they have known each other since childhood, although they are actually little more than acquaintances judging by what they really know about each other. Yet, their parents consider them part of one large extended family that is their diasporic community. As a result, "[t]hey talk endlessly about how they know and do not know each other" (211). For Gogol, this means that she knows him as Gogol and now as Nikhil, so that with her, for the first time, he

168 | To be fair, all we know about it is, logically, the information provided in the text, which in turn is focalized through Gogol. We know much about the Ratcliffs at home and at their getaway, but very little about their life outside the family circle.

is "one person" with "one past" at least by name. They also share a history of a conflicted auto-identification. She, too, "regrets" herself as a teenager and young adult, she, too, was shy, alone, isolated (214). Contrary to Gogol, however, she rebels, first academically (she studies French instead of Chemistry; this rebellion she shares with Gogol, who also studies something his parents at first do not approve of), then by going to France to study and live. In this place far away from home, she feels free and transforms, and although she is still "the same person" (looks and behavior; 215) she is now able to have a string of lovers. Gogol "admires her, even resents her a little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life. He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood, will never do" (233). When they marry, and especially during their wedding, they observe that "he and Moushumi are fulfilling a collective, deep-seated desire–because they're both Bengali, everyone can let his hair down a bit" (224); everyone, that is, except for Gogol and Moushumi.

There is a tension, nonetheless, from the very beginning, a tension that ultimately leads to Moushumi's extramarital affair and to their divorce:

> Though she knows it's not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind. He was not who she saw herself ending up with, he had never been that person. Perhaps for those very reasons, in those early months, being with him, falling in love with him, doing precisely what had been expected of her for her entire life, had felt forbidden, wildly transgressive, a breach of her own instinctive will. (250)

Their re-entry into the communal hetero-identification as a proper "Indian couple" at first seems rebellious and therefore holds some attraction, but both, of course, have all their life tried to exit this identification and to avoid re-entry at all costs.[169] Moushumi is the one who has moved to another place and struggled more "mightily;" she is the one who ultimately finds the re-entry stifling and a mortgage on her auto-identification. The man she starts an affair with, Dimitri, has few attachments, few possessions, few affiliations, and apparently no plans for life. In light of all this, it makes sense that "the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her" (266) and that, once Gogol finds out and they divorce, she moves back to France.

If we look at these relationships and what they effect in the narrative and for Gogol in the abstract, we can say that the first correlates with Gogol's increasing auto-differentiation from his family and marks his move from

169 | Both, for example, have a mostly or exclusively non-Indian American circle of friends; for Moushumi, the auto- and hetero-identification as a member of that circle is crucial to the point of alienating Gogol from it.

adolescence to adulthood, a closure to coming of age; the second continues this auto-differentiation to the point of apparently offering a completely new identificatory pattern, an offer that remains an illusion because neither could Gogol shed his past, nor is this new world really open; and the third might at first suggest a reconciliation of his internally conflicted auto-differentiation and of his parental/communal hetero-identification, but is only transient since his partner ultimately rejects both "Gogol" (i.e. the "regretted" past it stands for and that she shares with him) and "Nikhil" (i.e. the shared communal hetero-identification that she so strongly differentiates from). As dramaturgical devices, the relationships serve to propel and delineate Gogol's maturation and self-recognition process, and bring him back home to finally confront, and perhaps reconcile with, "Gogol." It is telling that this happens at a point at which his father is dead, the rest of his family is about to disperse, and he is alone again. In other words: if he does not find his place in the world, no one else can show him.

(Almost) Absences & Minor Differentiations

The "minor" in the rubric title is misleading, at least partly. Some of the faultlines discussed here occupy a prominent place in the novel. For example, the narrative opens and (almost) closes with Ashima preparing food. Inbetween, it "explores all sorts of rites of passage: birth, baptism, birthdays, graduation, marriage, [...] migration, changing name, divorce, death" (Concilio 89). It is mentioned several times that the Gangulis acquire a large circle of Bengali friends in the USA, their own small diaspora; and evidently Gogol goes to kindergarten, school, college, and university, so education must matter. If I have nonetheless placed these faultlines here, it is because they either have, despite a perhaps prominent placing, little content and are not substantially elaborated (e.g. education) or their significance is realized primarily in the context of another, dominant faultline (for example class, most ceremonies and rituals).

Rituals & Ceremonies.[170] The novel mentions and describes a number of rituals and ceremonies. For Ashima, the preparation of food and its

170 | A ritual is a coherent and cohesive series of symbolic acts, often performed by members of a community, which can but does not have to be religious. A ceremony, on the other hand, announces and accompanies a rite of passage. All ceremonies have a ritual character, but not all rituals are ceremonies or mark a rite of passage. For example, certain religious festivities or holidays (here: Deepavali or Puja) and even quotidian family events, such as dinner, are accompanied by rituals but do not mark a rite of passage and thus do not constitute ceremonies. Admittedly, common use ignores this differentiation.

consumption have an almost ritualistic character, especially when the food accompanies a festivity such as a birthday or Christmas. Even the family dinner appears to matter, and so do the regular Sunday dinners with Bengali friends. Since there is no mention that the couple are significantly religious – Ashoke "quietly refuses religion" (21) – the rituals are primarily cultural practices and their significance for Ashima is the tie to the homeland. The slow alternation of these festivities or the adoption of new ones (Christmas!) over the course of the narrative may then be seen as a sign of acculturation. Key ceremonies are annaprasan (for Gogol and Sonia) and the wedding of Gogol and Moushumi. Interestingly, and in accordance with the incremental alternation of the family's rituals, the ritualistic importance of the ceremonies remains (the wedding preparations are elaborate) while their formal structure and even their content may ever so slightly change, either due to formal circumstances (it is forbidden to light fires in the hotel where the wedding takes place) or because the people – individuals and/or entire communities – participating in the ceremony and/or their lifeworld have changed: Ashoke and Ashima's wedding may have been formally similar to that of Gogol and Moushumi, but their significance differs vastly (arranged marriage vs. "love" marriage, "virginal" vs. "experienced" marriage, India vs. diaspora, etc.). Rituals and ceremonies in *The Namesake* consequently are markers and demonstrative acts of communal auto- and hetero-identification (and ever so subtly differentiation: there are several humorous occasions on which the food and eating customs of different people are described as discrepant), while the narrative simultaneously emphasizes that these, too, are subject to change and may mean different things to different people.

Community & Diaspora & Friendship. Most comments and passages about the family's Bengali circle of friends that develops over time are narrator comments and iterative (sometimes multiple) summaries that mostly remain abstract (unlike, for example, in the short story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" in *Interpreter of Maladies*). It is stated repeatedly, but mostly in the abstract that the Gangulis cultivate and cherish a little diaspora of their own; a few single occasions like annaprasan or the wedding of Gogol and Moushumi are given more space, but here it is less the community than the protagonists that matter. Furthermore, the family's little community is literally *their* little community, and it is not a neighborhood community. The Gangulis take care to move into an "American" neighborhood (see above), but do not appear in any way to participate in the communal life of that neighborhood. Over and beyond their own little diaspora, a general "South Asian American" diaspora is virtually absent from the novel except for the academic discussion about ABCDs that Gogol attends but is not interested in. As regards friendship and the community it might constitute, it is mentioned that Gogol has friends once he enters college, but other than that they, too, are absent from the novel. It is

noteworthy that in his relationships, he usually participates in, but does not integrate into, the circle of friends of his partner.

Gender & Sexuality. Little is said about sexuality and gender in the novel. Sexual orientation is heteronormative, other sexual preferences and personal sexual history are mostly irrelevant. Gender roles and attending concepts such as masculinity and femininity are not commented, much less reflected on and appear to be self-evident for the fictional characters. Excepting *Call It Sleep*, where sexuality naturally plays only a small role and gender a subordinate one, none of the other novels discussed contain so little on gender and sexuality. The only point that might be made is quantitative: Ashima serves as the initial and, next to Gogol, most pervasive focalizer. We know significantly more about her part of the family's life in the USA than about Ashoke's.

Socioeconomic Aspects ("Class"). This, too, has been discussed above. The Ganguli's relatively comfortable financial situation in the USA is never broached, nor is their privileged family background in India. What is at least mentioned on several occasions is the fact that despite their (in the widest sense) middle class accoutrements and their educational background (or at least the father's and the children's), their habitus differs from that of their neighbors and is (autodiegetically and heterodiegetically) perceived as differing, though not necessarily negatively, and rarely with any consequences.[171] Even the stark difference between Gogol and Maxine and her family, as foregrounded as it is, is accompanied by hospitable, friendly, but slightly careless indifference rather than superciliousness, rejection or racism.[172]

Language & Education. Both play almost no role in the novel. The narrator states on perhaps three occasions that the children learn but are not proficient in Bengali, and that they speak English so fluently that people outside the family tend to talk to them rather than to their parents (68), although we may assume that at least

Ashoke, due to his profession, must be highly proficient. Later on, Ashima works in a library and teaches children, so she, too, must at some point be considered proficient. There is, as far as I am able to ascertain, no syntactic, stylistic or other subtle transfer of Bengali into English. Bengali itself is absent from the novel. Kindergarten, school and college/university are mentioned, but other than confirming the fact that the children receive a good education, these

171 | In fact, two of three relevant incidences are humorous.

172 | There are very few incidences of either unintended or malicious racism in the novel. On occasion, neighbors or cursory acquaintances make uninformed and/or simply dumb assumptions and inferences. Once, strangers cross out the "guli" of Ganguli to write "GanGrene" on the mailbox (67), but the father simply shrugs it off as a stupid children's prank.

institutions and education in general only ever play a role in the context of Gogol's name(s), which eclipse the issue of education itself entirely.

In conclusion, we can summarize the identificatory pattern thus:

1. Gogol's hetero-identification by his parents for as long as he is a young child and his conflicted personal auto-identification and the ensuing differentiations once he begins to reflect on his name dominate the entire system of identifications and differentiations via the allegory/faultline of names and naming that eclipses all others. This auto-identification changes constantly and is ambivalent and, at times, contradictory (after all, it is characterized by internal conflict), inevitably rendering the entire system not only dynamic, but equally ambivalent and occasionally contradictory. Only towards the end, a reconciliation is suggested; this reconciliation, however, is expressly not static or unequivocal, but points towards a "both/and." The identificatory system is mostly hierarchical regarding auto-modal vs. hetero-modal identification, but the various hetero-modal identifications are heterarchical (all of them change) and mostly insubstantial.
2. The identificatory pattern comes in all modes, but is highly uneven: personal auto-identification and -differentiation dominate. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other persons (mother and father, later partners), but causes little conflict (no one has any problems with his name(s) except Gogol); it almost never occurs communally, and hetero-differentiations (e.g. by "native born" Americans) are relatively rare. Since Gogol, like Richard, mostly reflects about who he is, but does not explicitly engage in many conversations about himself, his ruminations are mostly complicated by himself, i.e. monological, or, importantly, by the voice of the narrator.
3. There are various other identificatory faultlines, perhaps even more than in the other novels so far except for *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, but most of them are dealt with in the context of Gogol's conflicted auto-identification. A surprising number of faultlines are subsumed under others, remain abstract or insubstantial, or even do not appear at all: large aggregations are "only" important for one character; community, diaspora, gender, sexuality, and, once again, socioeconomic aspects play a negligible role, although, of course, they do contribute to the total "information" of the narrative.
4. The discursive structure is episodic with occasionally significant temporal leaps. There is a host of sometimes extensive and temporally far-reaching analepses and prolespes. The narrative situation is heterodiegetic with multiple, sometimes zero focalization; however, the dominant focalizer is Gogol.

5. The degree of departure between possible fictional world and actual world is minimal in terms of ontology (setting, events, causality, characters) and epistemology (perspectival structure, cognition, motivation). The discursive structure does not significantly call attention to itself, but the large temporal ellipses and the often vague temporal allocation do demand an integrative effort by the reader. The singular focalization through Moushumi is rather abrupt and does call attention to itself.

3.6 Extended & Extensive Corpus

In order to provide more quantitative substantiation for my claims – as far as this is possible for a piece of literary criticism without resorting to a strong claim of representativeness that is inevitably open to weak specificity – this chapter is going to provide short summaries of additional novels that have gone into my argument, but were not selected for detailed analysis (*extended corpus*). My selection here is, in accordance with my argument, based on diversity. I have chosen texts that are more or less different from the five texts analyzed so far in order to broaden the spectrum of identificatory patterns, faultlines, discursive arrangement, etc. At the end of this chapter, I have listed further novels that undergird my argument (*extensive corpus*); of course, even this list is not, and cannot be, complete. Both lists are chronological.

Extended Corpus

Willa Cather: My Ántonia (1918)

Story: Willa Cather's novel is one of the first longer fictional narratives to significantly feature children of immigrants. It takes place in a small town and farming community in Nebraska in the 1880s when throngs of European immigrants, as well as US-Americans settled in the great plains of the Midwest. The narrator, Jim Burden, tells of his child- and teenage-hood when he is sent there at the age of ten to live with his grandparents after his parents die. On the way there, he meets the lively and exuberant Ántonia and her Bohemian family, the Shimerdas, who turn out to live on a farm next to his grandparent's. Most of the story then recounts his growing up on the prairie and in the small town, his – somewhat, but never explicitly, romantic – relation to Ántonia, who is a few years his elder, as well as the various incidents, hardships and joys in the lives of the people of the community. Although the title of the novel suggests a heavy focus on the girl, and although she does indeed feature prominently, various other farm and town families and their children, US-born and immigrant, also play a role and are given substantial coverage (e.g. Lena Lingard). The narrative ends with Jim, as an adult and a married man who lives in New York, returning

to Nebraska after about twenty years to visit Ántonia. By now, the latter is married and has a large family – she was left pregnant and unmarried by her first lover – and farm and appears to manage well. The novel ends with Jim leaving and reflecting on their shared past.

Discourse: The "conceit" of the novel is set up in the introduction. It features an anonymous, female, homodiegetic narrator[173] who re-meets Jim Burden, an old friend from childhood days, on a trip west. They reminisce about their shared past, especially about Ántonia, agreeing that one of them should write up their story. When they meet next, Jim hands the narrator a manuscript with that story. It is this mostly episodic narrative that comprises the major part of the novel, with Jim as an autodiegetic narrator. It is subdivided into five "books" (further subdivided into sections), with occasionally large temporal leaps within and between them, and covers a period of roughly thirty years, although the bulk of the narrative covers Jim's coming of age from age ten until he leaves the small town to attend college/university. In the last part of the novel, there are a number of summaries that relate what happens/has happened to some of the main characters.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: One of the key faultlines is struggle and handling of hardship/poverty. An important differentiation is made between the various ways farming people successfully or unsuccessfully cope with the challenge of making a living off the land, not only economically, but also personally and spiritually. The adult Shimerdas, for example, are portrayed as finding it hard to adjust, also because they are reluctant or even unwilling to accept their new harsh life; their children, on the other hand, even though clearly also stubborn, manage far better and are portrayed as tough and ingenious. After all, Ántonia ultimately manages her own farm quite successfully. Jim's grandparents from the beginning auto-identify as "one with the land," and so does Jim after a time. Interwoven with this faultline is the triad of farm/wilderness, small town, and "civilized" city (this more than faintly echoes Crèvecoeur's argument about the making of Americans). There is a clear distinction between people working the land, people living in town – there is even a subtle suggestion of a class of "nobility" of rich town people – and people living "in the big cities." While there is no clear hierarchy attached to this triad in terms of moral character, it is clear that the people working the land, the farmers, are the closest to an "authentic" life and to the original "American pioneering spirit." Connected to this is the faultline of generation. At one point, the narrator at length argues that while their immigrant parents might still struggle, the children of immigrants are superior in physique and character to the children of US-Americans because "they had all, like Ántonia,

173 | Many critics make out Willa Cather to be this narrator due to the many similarities between the descriptions in the narrative and her childhood.

been early awakened and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to a new" (109). Other important faultlines are, predictably, coming of age, family, and education.

Although there are several children of immigrants from different source countries in the novel, and although communication problems and language issues are mentioned alongside certain cultural practices like food and its preparation, there is surprisingly little on divergent cultural practices. The Shimerdas, for example, have difficulties not because of some kind of conflict of "cultural identities" or "ethnicity," but primarily because they are headstrong, incorrigible characters or, like the father, too old and too weak for the hardships of farm life. Unsurprisingly, given the time of publication, issues of sexuality are, despite the focus on coming of age, only insinuated, although they do exist. Gender roles, on the other hand, are given more space than one could expect. Both Lena and Tiny are strong and independent women who lead their lives entirely on their own; Tiny even goes prospecting by herself, Lena never marries, but carries on various affairs, and is shown as quite happy and successful.

Identificatory Pattern(s): The title of the novel is somewhat misleading. While Ántonia does play an important role, she is by far not the only one (Lena Lingard plays an important role), nor is the novel primarily about her relation to Jim, as the introduction might suggest. Actually, the novel portrays quite a number of different people of the town and the farms surrounding it, including an entire circle of children, of immigrants and of US-born. It is more the portrayal of a – quite heterogeneous – community and a number of families, than of just one or two single characters, even though Jim as autodiegetic narrator is given the most room and serves as a observing center. Accordingly, the identificatory pattern involves a number of different characters and smaller and larger groups, and with them quite a number of divergent, sometimes conflicting, personal and communal auto- and hetero-identifications. As the community and the people in it change (which the narrative emphasizes they do due to intrinsic and extrinsic reasons), so does the pattern, and so does its hierarchy, making it heterarchical. Jim's coming of age, however, does mark a kind of closure, and so does the narrative with his visit of Ántonia and her portrayal as a worn, but happy and fulfilled farmer, mother, and wife. As their shared past is closed, so is the novel.

Anzia Yezierska: Bread Givers (1925)

Story: Expanding on many of the themes introduced in her short story collection *Hungry Hearts* (1920),[174] the novel relates the story of the protagonist and autodiegetic narrator Sara Smolinsky and her family during the 1920s from when she is ten to when she has graduated from college and become a teacher. Her parents are Polish Jewish immigrants that presumably have come to the USA sometime during the 1910s, and that now live in the large Jewish community of the Lower East Side of New York. The parents have four daughters, all US-born or without any memory of the homeland, all of whom are teenagers at the beginning of the novel, with Sara the youngest at age ten. The father is an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. Most of the novel is about the conflict between the father and his family, specifically his daughters, that arises because the father, for religious reasons, refuses to obtain work and insists that he read and study the Torah while his wife and daughters provide for him, ergo the title of the novel. Most of the time, the family is desperately destitute. This conflict intensifies when the father decides to marry his daughters off to what he believes are affluent men so that they may further provide for him, despite the fact that some of his daughters already have "acceptable" suitors they love (whom he rejects), and despite the fact that the men he chooses are invariably and quite obviously highly unappealing and not as rich as he presumes. Since the father is in fact both arrogant and incorrigibly foolish, all of his autocratic decisions (e.g. a business venture) lead the family further into misery. Only Sara stubbornly refuses his command and, after an ultimate altercation, leaves the family to study and become a teacher. The remaining part of the novel relates Sara's hard and lonely road to education and, in the end, her successful graduation from college and ensuing employment as a teacher. At the close of the novel, Sara is happily engaged to the principal of her school, but her sisters are all miserable, her mother has died, and her father has quickly married another woman to provide for him, but who refuses to do so and expects his daughters to be, once again, bread givers. While her father remains unrepentant, the novel ends with a hint of reconciliation in that Sara and her soon-to-be husband offer her father to live with them.

Discourse: The narrative is told by an autodiegetic narrator, Sara. It is intensely focused on the protagonist and her family (more so than, for example, in *My Ántonia*), and we learn little about most other characters other than through short summaries. The novel consists of three "books" and 21 unevenly distributed chapters, all in all covering a time span of roughly seventeen years. The book titles themselves – "Hester Street" (which can be seen as a metonymy for the Jewish diasporic community on New York's Lower East Side and by

174 | Most of the stories were published separately prior to their collection in this volume.

extension the tie to the "Old World"), "Between Two Worlds," and "The New World" – already suggest a kind of progression, although we have to be careful not to deduce from this a generic immigrant conversion and assimilation narrative with a fulfilled "American Dream" for closure. Another potential pitfall is, once more, the "autobiographical." The introduction by Alice Kessler-Harris to this particular edition argues that of all Yezierska's publications, *Bread Givers* is the most "autobiographical." However, not only does this raise the problems discussed above in detail, but also vital details of the narrative, in fact, do not fit what we know about Yezierska's life (e.g. her six brothers), and her own reports of her life are contradictory, which Kessler-Harris points out in the foreword. Ultimately, as is emphasized in the same foreword, "fiction and truth, myth and self-creation" are blurred, making it impossible to tell "what was the life and what was the fiction" (xvii).

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: The novel centers around the conflict between the father and the female members of his household; this conflict, resulting from the father's particular view of his belief and its supposed consequences (mostly patriarchal), of himself, and of the world, is the dominating faultline that determines or prefigures almost every other one in the novel. Poverty, generational conflict, acculturation, gender roles, religion, or education – which soon comes to serve as the counter-pole to the father's domination and as the road to independence – are all prefigured by the father's auto-identification and his identification of others versus almost everyone else's auto-identification: the family is poor because he insists that as a rabbi he must study and cannot work; the generational conflict comes about mostly because he chooses terrible husbands for his daughters and thus makes their lives miserable (three of them do obey his command and marry the men he chooses); the daughter's partial acculturation (in terms of dress, hygiene, pastimes, etc.) causes conflict almost only when it deters them from earning money or marrying men that make money; likewise, religion in the novel mostly plays a role for the father's justification of his auto-identification as patriarch and for his gender model in general; and education, being a male domain for the father (again religiously justified), in the "hands" of his daughter Sara, predominantly serves as the antagonist to his identificatory system and protagonist of her auto-differentiation and -identification. Since his daughter Sara, who, of course, is the autodiegetic narrator of the narrative, is the only family member who increasingly defies his identification of her once she reaches a certain age and intellectual maturity, a concomitant faultline is her auto-differentiation from her father and, again with more maturity, increasingly autonomous and self-assured auto-identification as someone who in general wants to govern her own life and specifically wants to be educated and, ultimately, to educate. To some degree, this overlaps with coming of age and acculturation, but it is not entirely analogous. All four daughters come of age, but they all come of age

differently; only in Sara's case does coming of age correspond to defiance of her father. Similarly, all four daughters, especially the oldest, Mashah, acculturate in certain ways; but only for Sara does acculturation mean a thirst for education and independence – a thirst for education and independence that, ironically, is not universal among the "white Americans" she meets in college, a fact which, in turn, undermines a simple model of acculturation. In addition, it is emphasized that she stands out among the "white" Americans in her college class in many other ways and does not "assimilate" to them; also, she becomes engaged to a son of immigrants and of Jewish belief. In consequence, we can say that the narrative is indeed a narrative of successful emancipation, but not a simplistic tale of conversion, heritage rejection, and assimilation.

The rather extreme depiction of the father in the novel raises a problem, since it in parts borders on anti-Semitic stereotypes. It is hard to tell from the novel how much of an exception the father is in this world, or how representative. It appears that, somewhat similar to David's father in *Call It Sleep*, his behavior makes him an outsider in his community, if respected because of his Talmudic erudition. One might argue that the narrative alludes to a very real historical conflict: a conflict between the US-American Jewish communities of the predominantly liberal, educated, middle class Jews that emigrated from Germany to the USA during the 19th century and those of the overwhelmingly rural, poorly educated, poor and orthodox Jews that emigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia to the USA at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Other than this, very few faultlines matter or even appear apart from those mentioned above.

Identificatory Pattern(s): Similar to *Pocho*, much of the narrative is about the protagonist's increasing auto-differentiation – although here it is from the father and not from the world's personal and communal hetero-identifications, per se – and then increasing personal auto-identification. Sara's auto-identification, however, is not abstractly individualistic and open as is Richard's, but specific (being educated) and directed (to educate); in other words, she has a strong generativity script. As a combined result of the autodiegesis of the narrative, of the prevalent faultlines, and of the rather lonesome protagonist, the identificatory pattern is not as diverse, dynamic and ambivalent as in other narratives, and it is hierarchical.

Pietro di Donato: Christ in Concrete (1939)

Story: Set in New York City during the mid-1920s, the novel tells the story of twelve-year-old Paul, the oldest son of Italian immigrants, who has to find a way to provide for his family after his father, a bricklayer foreman, dies in an atrocious construction site accident caused by the recklessness and greed of owner and overseer at the beginning of the novel. The main part of the novel relates Paul's struggle to find a job, to survive the harsh working conditions once

he has found one, and to cope with the fact that all institutions, be they legal, religious, or economic, either carelessly fail to help or exculpate themselves of responsibility, even where they should be held liable. In fact, the world of the novel is shown to be absolutely merciless, hopeless, and devoid of spiritual purpose, reason, or solace. The only exception are family and friends, who try to take care of each other as best as possible. The story ends with the first signs of the oncoming Great Depression and Paul, now several years older and worn in every way, denouncing God, thereby inadvertently causing the mental, and possibly lethal collapse of his already broken mother.

Discourse: The narrative is told by a heterodiegetic narrator with variable internal focalization, although the primary focus is clearly on and through Paul. It makes heavy use of psychonarration, direct discourse, and free indirect discourse, with several passages rendered as stream-of-consciousness. Notably, since the novel is in English, but works with the conceit that the characters really speak and think Italian, the language is an attempt not only to render consciousness but also to render "transcribed" colloquial communication, resulting in various morphological, semantic, and syntactic inflections, in addition to fragmentation, ellipses, etc. The novel is divided into five sections of varying length, with further chapter subdivisions. All in all, the time span covered is somewhere upwards of three years; nonetheless, the majority of the narrative covers the months that follow the father's death.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: Almost everything in *Christ in Concrete* depends on whether one has a job – and in this case, "one" means "man," since the women are rarely said to work, even though it becomes clear they do. Having a job means being able to provide for one's family, a fact from which the main characters in the novel derive their self-esteem and their understanding of their place in the world; having a job also means simply to survive. When Paul's father dies, obtaining a job becomes of such overwhelming importance for Paul that "job" not only begins to be capitalized as "Job" in the novel but metonymically and metaphorically comes to stand for the entire construction site and the building being built, bricklaying, and everything else involved in it. In fact, one could say that "Job" becomes its own universe for Paul, and, as a replacement for the Catholic Church (institution and creed) that fails Paul when he most needs it, a place of brutally exacting worship, a potentially lethal shrine. Indeed, Paul's life consists of little else, so that his work does equal his life. Only later is he said to attend evening school.

Since "job" is so obviously and literally a matter of life and death in the novel – many people apart from Paul's father die or are severely injured – it does not surprise the reader that most other faultlines are interwoven with it or extend it. Gender matters, insofar as there are clearly defined gender roles, leave no doubt that Paul has to replace his father as provider for the family, especially when his uncle Luigi loses a leg; the work itself is also an exclusive male and masculine

domain, it quickly turns Paul into a "man," an adult. Due to his abrupt entry into the adult world of bricklaying at the age of twelve, there is hardly any coming of age for Paul. His body, after initially suffering, adapts, and he is said to be physically and socially/functionally "beyond" his peers; he hardly mingles with them. The only other boy he befriends is an equally precocious, though intellectual Jewish boy who adds a level of reflection/criticism to the narrative that the focalization through Paul alone does not provide. There is an indication that Paul becomes sexually aware (particularly of a neighborhood girl) later in the narrative, but he does not act upon it and avoids contact. Institutionalized religion in form of the Catholic Church is shown as unable and unwilling to help the family; the father's unanswered prayers during his atrocious death – and all other unanswered prayers in the course of the novel – show belief as incapable of ameliorating suffering (it does not help the mother). The punning title is telling: the father literally becomes a Christ-like figure in concrete during his death, but his death does not absolve anyone; and Christianity only comes alive in the concrete solidarity of the workers and friends and family, not in church. Spirituality only enters via the "worshipping" Paul (and the other workers) does on the "Job." Even here, though, it does not alleviate pain and is led ad absurdum once Paul realizes that the "Job" is owned and determined by morally corrupt people with no connection at all to his world, and that it can be "lost." Community does not extend much beyond family, and there is only one longer description of a major communal activity in the entire novel (a wedding). Larger communal aggregations, thus, play almost no role, except for the bond of shared suffering between workers and the occasional instance of racism, mostly in connection with "classism." Language matters only in situations where the family's lack of English makes them easy prey for "official" people; and acculturation is only a faint chimera because work and poverty and the resulting impossibility of an education for Paul simply leave no room for any "acculturation" apart from that of becoming a bricklayer. The family's initial hope of sharing in the dream of prosperity through hard work – the father has just purchased a house – is shattered along with the father. Memories of the homeland are equally faint.

Identificatory Pattern(s): The identificatory pattern created by the faultlines and by the narrative situation is predictably equally focused and hierarchical. Auto- and hetero-identification and –differentiation, personal and in most instances also communal, are almost analogous to having or not having a job and being able to provide. Once Paul takes his father's place – he never ponders the possibility of obtaining another, easier job – he auto-identifies almost exclusively as bricklayer and as working, even though he does not really know the content of the first until he learns it and does initially not qualify as the second because he has no job, which quickly changes. There is a strong indication that, were he not to have a job anymore (as bricklayer, of course),

he would lose all sense of self and, quite literally, his life. His dominant auto-differentiation, then, is from himself not working and from anything in the world that is not part of this small "cosmos." He is also hetero-identified as working, and little else. Only the Jewish boy and the adolescent neighborhood girl remind him – by identifying him as a peer and poor, exploited child that should seek a way out (the boy) and as a potential sexual partner (the girl) – that there is more to life. The larger aggregations (national/cultural/etc.) that one could expect to matter for the identificatory pattern (after all, most criticism discusses the novel as Italian American) turn out to matter only marginally and only in instances of external racism and exploitation. In fact, in the one instance when diverse national, cultural, and religious backgrounds are explicitly mentioned – when the family moves into a tenement house – the emphasis is on the diversity and on a shared fate of struggle and hardship. It is clearly for this reason that the novel is often labeled socialist.

Monica Sone: Nisei Daughter (1953)

Story: The novel tells the story of the autodiegetic Nisei narrator (Kazuko Monica Itoi) and her family from when she is six years of age and living in Seattle to halfway through her college years in Indiana after incarceration in a relocation camp. Through an early extensive analepsis in the first chapter, the narrative also covers the time from her father's first arrival in the USA in 1904 after emigrating from Japan, via his flaunted ambition to study law, his arranged marriage, his opening of a hotel, the birth of the children, to the actual discursive beginning. The first two-thirds of the narrative cover the protagonist's childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in numerous, often humorous – a result of the discrepancy between experienced I and very young and naïve experiencing I – episodes of varying length about major and minor events in her and her family's lives (school, friendship, fights, festivities, neighbors, family games and celebrations, and so on).

The novel opens with Kazuko for the first time realizing that she is also Japanese and that this has consequences when her parents want her to go to a Japanese school in the afternoons. However, other than losing her afternoons, the protagonist has no understanding of what "being Japanese" means and feels strange because she suddenly has "two heads" where she formerly considered herself a "Yankee" only (19). Much of the first chapters, in fact, details the family's rather colorful and – in comparison to the resident Japanese/Japanese American community – unusual daily life and blending of customs and traditions. The father is Christian and well-educated; the mother does not really know how to prepare traditional Japanese dishes, and the food the father prepares is "American" because that is what he learned as a ship cook. On the one hand, the family observes Japanese rituals, customs and traditions, which are described at length; on the other hand, they do not feel quite comfortable

with the majority of their community and its opinions, although they participate in communal events, apart from the fact that their hotel on "Skidrow" near the waterside draws rather colorful customers and is a correspondent playground for the children. Much of the neighborhood is described as equally diverse. In short, the description is that of a happy family and mostly unspoiled childhood, with the protagonist switching personalities from "Yankee" to "Japanese" (when she is in fact Nisei, not Issei) depending on the occasion (and the school). Interspersed are references to differences between Issei and Nisei and Japanese and Americans, to traditions and customs (to which is added another layer of complicating difference during a longer visit to Japan, where the youngest child dies), world politics, as well as occasional episodes of police abuse and racism.

About halfway through the novel, international tensions increase, and the children/family come to feel the brunt of racism more sharply – contrasted, however, by contrary examples. Further differentiations are introduced, e.g. between Nisei and Kibei,[175] the US-American West and the Midwest and East, etc. The protagonist goes to high school and then business school, but contracts tuberculosis; during her stay at a sanitarium, she not only discovers that she apparently is not as "Yankee" as she thought (she finds out she is perceived as shy and standoffish by non-Japanese), but also that other factors, i.e. illness, may override perceived national/cultural differences and unite people.

The remainder of the narrative describes in scathing and unsparing detail the by now well-known events befalling the communities of people with "Japanese ancestry" at the US-American West Coast in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor: the raids, searches, restrictions, dispossessions, and lastly the relocation in internment camps with their often harsh and demeaning living conditions (see chapter 3.2). Kazuko seizes the first chance to leave the camp (after more than a year and after many of the men have been "enlisted") when she is able to obtain a job in Chicago. After some travails, and with the help of friendly people she meets, she is finally able to attend college in Indiana. The terrible experiences in the West and in Camp are set off once more by the good experiences she makes in the – surprisingly diverse – Midwest not despite, but because of her "oriental" face: people are curious, not hostile, although they often mistake her as Chinese or for someone else, and most are willing to help and accept her. The novel ends with her reconciliation with America after the recognition of some "deeper, stronger pulse in the American scene" (238). In the end, she feels whole, no more split, blending Japanese and American.

Discourse: The narrative is the most pronouncedly autobiographical of the novels discussed so far. An introduction and a preface emphasize that

175 | Kibei is a special term for Nisei (US-born and thus citizens, unlike the Issei, who are precluded by law to naturalize) who receive their education in Japan and then return to the USA.

the autodiegetic, eponymous narrator is indeed embodied. The narrative consists of twelve chapters, each with numerous episodes of varying length (and sometimes extreme summaries: high school is covered in one paragraph). Much of the humor and the "defamiliarizing" insights of the narrative derive from the fact that we have a temporally large discrepancy between experiencing I and experienced I, and that the former is a young and curious child for significant parts of the narrative. The explicit time span covered is about sixteen years, with analeptic summaries (though almost no prolepses) adding another twenty-four years.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: Much of the novel is indeed about what it means to be (or *not* to be) Japanese, Japanese American, and American at this particular historical juncture and location. Unlike *No-No Boy*, however, this is narrated not primarily via abstract ruminations, (self-)reflections, and conversations – which is not surprising considering that the narrator is, for the most part, a young child or adolescent – but through a host of smaller and larger, extraordinary and mundane events and episodes; also, Kazuko is never near as pondering as Richard in *Pocho*, whose narrative goes through almost the same stages of age. The larger aggregate ascriptions, then, are given content via an abundance of details of daily life that not only introduce many other faultlines (gender, coming of age, education, generation, community) but so many differentiations and complications that simple differentiations and identifications – along *all* faultlines, and on the personal and communal level – become impossible (indeed, the "naïve" view and questions of the inquisitive child protagonist expose simple ascriptions as fallacious – a common narrative device in narratives with child protagonists), notwithstanding outside efforts by the government to the contrary.

For example, there are the expected differences between Issei and Nisei, who are hetero-identified as "Japanese" by a majority of the surrounding community, but there are also differences within the Issei and within the Nisei, not only regarding gender or class or profession, but also regarding loyalties or customs. The community, it turns out, is actually quite heterogeneous, apart from the fact that the Itois themselves are somewhat of an outsider family, and that their business introduces many more characters and their views. Incidentally, even "America" and "Americans" are portrayed as highly diverse. Communal identification and differentiation, auto- as well as hetero-modal, thus are actually complicated. To add to this, the protagonist grows up and has experiences that lead her to question both her auto-identification(s) (simple and whole in the very beginning: Yankee) and the various hetero-identifications and -differentiations she encounters along the way. Given the overwhelming, simplistic and racist hetero-identification and -differentiation of the resident Japanese and their children (US-American citizens, after all, and their parents long-time residents) by the government during WW II (though primarily on

the West Coast), it is to be expected that the narrative counters with a much more differentiated system of identifications and differentiations. On a very broad level, admittedly, the auto-identification of the protagonist appears to progress from (naïve) holistic, to bipolar, to ambiguous, to holistic again. This somewhat problematic "closure" is suggested only in the very last paragraph.

Identificatory Pattern(s): Although the autodiegetic narrative situation precludes psychonarration of other character's identifications and differentiations, the child's "innocent" perspective and commentary, in combination with the detailed descriptions, renderings of dialogues, and comments ascribable to the experienced I (including analepses) – not to forget the coming of age dramaturgy – make for a highly diverse, differentiated, heterarchical and dynamic identificatory system for most of the narrative. However, the narrative also depicts the powerful and almost inescapable hetero-identification and differentiation as "Jap" brought about – or at least radically intensified: racist anti-Japanese sentiments were, as is also mentioned in the narrative, widespread long before – by Pearl Harbor and WW II. This is only somewhat alleviated in the very last part of the narrative.

Louis Chu: Eat a Bowl of Tea (1961)

Story: At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Ben Loy is in bed with his newly wed wife Mei Oi in an apartment on the edge of Chinatown, New York, when the doorbell rings and a prostitute of whom Ben Loy has been a loyal and frequent customer until his marriage demands entry. He is able to send her away, but the visit insinuates a past – a past which he would rather not divulge to his wife – that is then related in a long flashback and thus becomes the actual beginning of the story of the novel. Ben Loy, a young man in his early twenties who works as a waiter, is the son of a "bachelor" father, one of the many male Chinese immigrants living in the USA at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in relatively close-knit communities who, due to immigration and naturalization law, could neither become citizens nor bring their families to the USA. Ben Loy's father, Wang Wah Gay, has been such a "married bachelor" for more than twenty years, with a wife still in China. He runs a gambling hall in New York's Chinatown, where indeed much of the narrative takes place, and is a well-respected and -connected member of the community. Reflecting in his and his son's age, he decides that his son should get married. After some prevarications, he and his best friend, who has a daughter in China, agree that their children should marry, although they also agree not to tell them of their plan. Both believe Ben Loy to be a hard-working, honest and unobjectionable man who, contrary to many other children of Chinese immigrants, adheres to Chinese traditions, norms and values; his father has even sent him to Stanton (an imaginary town allegedly north of New York) to work in order not to fall prey to the temptations of the big city. What the fathers do not know is that Ben

Loy, who works as a waiter after returning from military service, frequently visits prostitutes with a friend and has suffered from various venereal diseases – this is the past he does not want his young wife to know about.

The plan works out. Ben Loy goes to China, marries Mei Oi – both immediately fall in love with each other – and returns with his wife (another obvious indicator that the novel plays in the late 1940s, after WW II and after an according change in immigration law in 1943). Soon after their marriage, however, for diverse possible reasons suggested, but not really substantiated, he becomes impotent, so that his wife believes he no longer loves and desires her. This, in turn, makes her an easier victim for the advances of Ah Song, a notorious philanderer. After initially pushing himself upon her in a scene that ambivalently suggests, but does not call it rape, they commence an affair. In the close community, rumors (and repercussions) spread quickly, though only belatedly to Ben Loy himself. When the affair continues despite more or less secretive efforts to curb it, and despite Mei Oi's pregnancy (because Ben Loy and Mei Oi have had sex while on vacation, the paternity is left slightly open), Ben Loy's father takes it upon him to act in order to restore "moral order" and "face." The next time he happens upon Ah Song leaving Mei Oi, he slashes off his ear. Due to Wang Wah Gay's good connections and status in the community and its associations and societies ("tongs"), and due to the consequential pressure upon Ah Song, the latter rescinds his assault charges and accepts the district tong's verdict of a five-year exile. Ben Loy and Mei Oi nonetheless leave town and move to San Francisco to start anew and to be rid of their fathers' and the community's influence (the narrator calls it a new frontier and new "golden mountain" for the couple; 246); the two fathers, however, also leave town. At the end of the novel, the child is born (the parentage still unclear, but clearly irrelevant to the parents) and Ben Loy, after following an herbalist's prescription to literally eat a bowl of tea in regular intervals – thus the title –, regains his potence, and the couple its complete happiness. Reconciliation with the fathers is also suggested at the very end.

Discourse: The narrative is told by a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization, although the focalization through Ben Loy and Wang Wah Gay clearly dominates. There is extensive psychonarration, FID, and narrator commentary; the latter especially provides privileged information for the reader over and beyond the knowledge of any one character. This results in frequent humor and dramatic irony. The narrative consists of 57 short chapters and covers an overall time period – significantly expanded by the frequent and sometimes extensive analepses and by summaries – of several years. The language contains many italicized, "transcribed"/translated terms, expressions, and idioms, together with inflected syntax, although the purportedly underlying Chinese dialect is never specified. There also are slang expressions and much cursing.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: *Eat a Bowl of Tea* is a good example of how faultlines (and the engendered identificatory pattern) may be highly particular and so broad as to be almost universal at one and the same time, and of how ambivalence and complications subvert this doubling and make an unequivocal attribution of identifications and differentiations impossible. On the one hand, the novel features a very specific locale (New York's Chinatown) in a very specific historical (1940s post-WW II) and legal and political (regarding immigration and naturalization law) context with very particular consequences for the constitution and daily life of the community of that locale (e.g. the many "bachelors" and patriarchal tongs, the clear generational division) and the protagonists of the narrative (regarding gender roles, marriage, adherence to traditions). In this regard, large aggregations (national and ethnic: Chinese, Chinese American), community, gender, sexuality, family, and generation manifest themselves as fairly clear and specific faultlines. On the other hand, the story is also a fairly generic love story: two young people who are madly in love with each other experience marital difficulties because the husband is impotent and the wife, as a result, engages in an affair. After altercations, the couple overcome their problems (and their domineering family) and start anew (symbolized by a move and a child) to live happily ever after, perhaps. Read this way, the faultlines of gender, sexuality, family, and generation are quite broad and unspecific.

However, a number of details and complications introduce ambivalences and a specificity that run across diverse faultlines and undermine both the specific and the generic account: the Chinatown depicted is clearly a patriarchal and fairly homogeneous community. The exclusively male tongs run everything. Inherited tradition, norms and values are cherished and maintained as far as possible (differentiated against non-Chinese, in this case mostly "white" Americans), and so are gender roles and the attending sexual norms and morals. But: it is also a somewhat curious community. There are almost only men, "bachelors," and almost no women over which to exercise that patriarchy. The "white" America against whose "lure" to uphold traditions is almost invisible in the novel, only a police officer appears once. Pretty much every person that plays any role in the narrative simultaneously praises, and in practice ignores tradition and values. Ben Loy's father, for example, encourages and praises chastity in his son but himself has had various sexual adventures (and is, contrary to his own belief, entirely oblivious of his son's promiscuity). Ah Song logically can only be a notorious philanderer in the community if there are women to philander with. The marriage of Ben Loy and Mei Oi is arranged, but they love each other; her affair not only begins as a rape, but it is also suggested that it might be excusable if the husband was old and ugly. The marriage is salvaged by a cutting of family ties (in this case, only the fathers) and a symbolic move west, to freedom, a new future, and the "Golden Mountain," but this

move, of course, symbolically also places them in the long historic tradition of Chinese immigrants seeking their fortune there (and indeed they become part of the extant community). The title suggests a breaking of tradition (eating tea instead of drinking it), but this cure is suggested by a "traditional" Chinese herbalist. These are only the key examples. Identifications and differentiations, then, personal and communal, auto- and hetero-modal, have to be treated with care. They often seem simple and clear-cut, but rarely are.

Identificatory Pattern(s): The identificatory system is, accordingly, diverse in terms of faultlines and modality; only hetero-identifications and -differentiations from outside the community – both personal and communal – are virtually absent from the novel. This diversity is also made possible by the variable focalization, the many dialogues, and the narrator commentary. The pattern is dynamic and, as a consequence of the frequently ambivalent faultlines, also ambivalent. Although one differentiation appears to have a greater impact than most others (sexual potence vs. sexual impotence), the many details and specifics, the many subplots, summaries, and analepses, undercut a clear hierarchy, making the pattern more heterarchical than, for example, *Christ in Concrete*, but perhaps not as heterarchical as the bulk of *Nisei Daughter* or *My Ántonia*.

Richard Vasquez: Chicano (1970)

Story: *Chicano* is a complex, almost epic family history that spans four generations, more than half a century, and a multitude of family members and protagonists, fates, stories, and tragedies. It tells the story/stories of the Sandoval family that, similar to the Rubio family in *Pocho* and for similar reasons, leaves Mexico during the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution and moves North to Southern California, where through the course of generations its various members struggle to make a living and find happiness and contentment, with very different degrees of success.

The narrative begins – tellingly: much of the story is about coincidence, accidence and mobility – with a train accident that leaves Hector Sandoval stranded in a little village in the Mexican desert (later named Trainwreck). Despite the fact that he already has a family, he decides to stay in the village and marries a young village girl, Lita, with whom he has three children (a son, Neftali, and two daughters, Jilda and Hortensia). Subject to harassment by both regular army and guerillas during the revolution, the family flees to California by yet another train and settles in a barrio, where they soon find a house, work, and some security. However, the father begins to drink and philander, squandering the family's money. On a visit to a brothel, the son discovers that his two sisters (willingly) work there; after the father dies, the mother returns home with a former lover. Neftali moves to the all-Mexican village of Irwindale, marries Alicia, with whom he has numerous children, and settles. Of all the

family and all the generations, he and his wife are the only ones that settle down for good and appear to achieve some sort of contentment; their children, however, are discontent: the oldest child, Angelina, is smart, but only the sons get an education, and only the oldest one really seems to matter in the eyes of the father, much to the chagrin of the younger sons. A widening gap appears between children and parents in terms of language, values, and ambitions. Except for one, all children leave to go their own ways. The oldest son Gregorio is killed in World War II, and the narrative then only follows Angelina, the oldest daughter, and Pete, the second oldest son.

At this point, the narrative introduces another protagonist, Julio Salazar, a young boy aged 13, who is a gifted singer and guitar player. His father is an educated former fighter who brawls and drinks, and who disappears after a fight in which he kills a man. He shortly reappears much later in the narrative, a broken man. After another large temporal leap of several years, the narrative continues with Julio as he teams up with Rosa, a prostitute, who helps him set up a business "helping" illegal immigrants (explicitly called "wetbacks" by Julio) get daily jobs through his contacts with farmers. Making a deal with a farmer who does not want to pay the workers' salary, Julio ultimately sells them out to "la migra," but has to flee when they retaliate. He persuades his wife to prostitute herself once more and, when they are arrested for it, deserts her. She, too, will shortly reappear much later to retaliate against Julio.

The narrative then moves back to the Sandoval family, specifically Angelina, who teams up with, and marries, Julio. They open a taco stand that, due to the cleverness of Angie, eventually grows into a successful Mexican restaurant, which Julio and Sammy, the son of Pete (Angelina's brother), later begin to use as a drug hub, without the knowledge of Angelina. It is in revealing this to the police at the very end that Rosa retaliates against Julio for deserting her. Meanwhile, Julio still drinks and philanders, but contrary to Hector's wife, Julio's wife Angelina, who is "naïve–or perhaps Americanized enough–to believe" that she has rights, too (137), engages the help of the police when he beats her. Shortly after this, Julio befriends Pete, Angelina's brother, when the latter returns from war.

The next part of the narrative details Pete's successful and highly profitable career as a cement finisher in construction work (with considerable help from an older worker). He meets and marries Minerva, with whom he has two children: the smart daughter Mariana, and the problematic son Sammy. It is worth noting that Sammy's descent into drug addiction, dealing, and crime is given much room and a complex history and anamnesis that includes contextual factors such as the school system and teachers and precludes mono-causal and simplistic explanations. Realizing the shortcomings of the schools in East L.A., and having the financial means, the family moves to a "nicer," in other words:

"Anglo" suburb, much to the dismay of the resident "whites," who fear a demise of the neighborhood and become active against the Sandoval family.

The entire second part of the narrative, almost half of the book, deals with these last two generations of the Sandoval family, specifically Mariana and Sammy. It is only now that the surrounding "white" part of the world (other "cultural/racial/ethnic" groups do not appear or matter) begins to significantly feature over and beyond short appearances of flat characters, that labels such as Mexican, Spanish, or Chicano begin to play a role, and that "cultural differences" begin to be addressed; until here, most of the narrative has taken place in Mexico, in barrios, or in the enclave Irwindale. Now, several "white" schoolteachers serve as focalizers, Mariana makes friends with Elizabeth, a "white" girl from school, and, most importantly, the character of David Stiver is introduced, a ("white," middle class, Protestant, almost too stereotypical "liberal") sociology student whose "project" is Sammy, and who falls in love with Mariana. Their affair covers much of the remaining part of the book, with their conversations – in fact, it is mostly the astute Mariana lecturing a somewhat slow David – revolving predominantly around perceived "cultural" differences, identifications, expectations and stereotypes, and discrimination. A number of incidents, for example an unwarranted police raid of a "Chicano" party, serve to illustrate what David and Mariana talk about. When Mariana gets pregnant, David, who appears to want neither her nor the child in his life for an extended period of time in light of the "complications" this would entail for him, persuades her to have an abortion, which her brother Sammy in turn arranges with an illegal backdoor "practitioner." Due to complications, Mariana dies.

The book ends with a series of interrelated incidents. Julio is betrayed to the police by his former lover Rose, and so is Sammy by David. After some research, the latter obtains material from an archive of early Spanish settlers' letters and diaries indicating that the Sandoval family actually has a Spanish background, which to him would have been preferable, since more "prestigious" than a Mexican one, and, it is hinted, might have influenced his behavior towards Mariana (434). In the end, he neither visits her in hospital before she dies nor attends her funeral (he waits outside the church), but instead returns to university to attend his graduation rehearsal.

Discourse: The narrative is told by a heterodiegetic narrator with variable internal focalization through an impressive number of focalizers, though focalization through family members clearly dominates, and here it is the men who predominantly serve as focalizers. Some focalizations are only short and singular (e.g. through the teachers of Mariana and Sammy), some extensive and recurrent (e.g. Julio, Pete). There is extensive psychonarration, FID, and narrator commentary; especially the latter provides privileged information for the reader over and beyond the knowledge of any one character. This results in humor and

dramatic irony, especially where gender roles are concerned: in combination with the narrator commentary, the focalization through the male members of the family often serves to illustrate their hypocrisy. The narrative covers a time span of more than fifty years, with significant temporal leaps (sometimes of several years) and summaries inbetween. The temporal distribution is not balanced, however: the first part of the book (pages 5-284; eight chapters) covers the entire four-generational family history from the beginnings to the narrative's contextual present (late 1960s), making it somewhat episodic, while the second part of the novel (pages 285-437; four chapters) covers the relationship between David and Mariana, which the reader can only guess lasts anywhere between several weeks and a few months, but not longer.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: Given the overall time span the narrative covers, the number of characters, the number of focalizers, and the elaborate detail of some episodes, it is not surprising that we can find a variety of faultlines and that the identifications and differentiations they delineate are complex and constantly complicated by additions, subplots, further episodes, etc. There are some faultlines that permeate the entire novel, and some that matter (almost) only in either the first or the second part.

Since the novel is a family history, it is also not surprising that family, or rather family constellation (i.e. the dynamics between family members and their (self)perceived roles), is indeed one of the key faultlines throughout, albeit in different constellations and with different emphases: as the relation between husband and wife; between parents and children; and between siblings. Of these three, the relation between husband and wife prevails (there are very few men and women in the novel that remain unmarried), in turn entailing the faultlines of gender and sexuality – which, of course, also play a role for Julio and Rosa, and for David and Mariana. Generally, for most of the novel, gender roles are patriarchal and are mostly auto- and hetero-identified with accordingly by men and women. However, there are a number of subtle and not-so-subtle ironic subversions: some of the men (Hector, Julio) behave inanely, drink and philander, and some of the women are smart, controlled, and successful in their own way (Rosa, Angelina, Mariana). Of the men, only Neftali and Pete are reliable providers for their family; Jilda and Hortensia are not forced into prostitution, but decide on this profession because they do not see any other way to earn more than a subsistence income, indicating another key faultline: poverty/economic struggle.

For the first family generations, most of daily life is marked by poverty and is thus about surviving and making a – subsistence – living. Only the third and fourth generation are interested in, and actively pursue, an education and upward economic mobility regardless of gender roles, although they quickly find out that upward *economic* mobility does not entail upward *social* mobility. Generational conflicts are minimal. Angelina and Pete simply leave their

family to move on when they become discontent with their parents' hetero-identification of them, and they regularly visit them. Also, the few generational conflicts that are hinted at are simultaneously cultural ones because the children have acculturated. This is not clearly distinguishable, neither for the 2nd/3rd generation, nor for the 3rd/4th generation.

Perhaps most interesting, in the first part of the novel, the "white" world outside the barrios or Irwindale is almost nonexistent. Some farmers and an occasional "gringo" or "anglo" make short appearances, but have no lasting impact. Most of the world of the Sandoval family is hermetic. As a result, large (national, cultural) aggregations do not play a role, there is hardly any significant auto- or hetero-modal identification or differentiation as "Mexican" or "American" or "brown" or "white." Not to be misunderstood: there are suggestions and incidents of exploitation, abuse, and racism, but they are isolated and unsystematic, and always countered by incidents to the contrary, just as there are sufficient incidents suggesting that not all Mexicans are hapless, honorable victims or entirely innocent of their plight. Similarly, communal auto- and hetero-identifications and differentiations are noticeably absent during the first part of the novel.

All of this appears with a vengeance in the second part of the novel and is given dramaturgical shape in form of the relationship between David and Mariana. It is really only the fourth generation in *Chicano* that makes the experiences and engages in the reflections which in the other novels are the "prerogative" of the second generation.[176] Now, large aggregations ("Mexican"/"Chicano" and "white;" others do not appear except for one short mention of African Americans) and communities are highly important and fairly distinct for auto- and hetero-modal, personal and communal identifications and differentiations: in the conversations and interactions between David and Mariana, their respective families, regarding education, the school districts, neighborhoods, communal activities, police, etc. One could argue that only once poverty and subsistence struggle are overcome, once the insignia of middle class are attained *economically*, and once the children have a secondary education, the issue of communal – where communal = cultural – identification and differentiation gains import. Here, too, however, interdependencies are dynamic and complex and never monocausal and unidirectional.

176 | This makes *Chicano* an interesting case for my argument, since it is strictly speaking not predominantly about children of immigrants and yet depicts a third and fourth generation that make experiences and face struggles that resemble those of the children of immigrants in the other novels. One reasons for this lies in the fact that the first and second generation of the Sandoval family live mostly hermetic lives and have little contact with the larger world surrounding them. In a way, Angelina, Pete and Julio are the "true" migrants of the novel.

Most conspicuously absent from the bulk of the novel or largely insignificant are the faultlines of 1) language – it is rarely mentioned which language characters speak; transcriptions or "transliterations" are absent; only once it is mentioned that Neftali does not speak English (in fact he cannot read or write) while his children do; 2) coming of age – only the growing up of Sammy and Mariana is given some space (that of Neftali, Julio, or Angelina is summarized in a few paragraphs), and here mostly with an eye to education and the school system; 3) religion; and 4), as discussed above, community, which is theoretically reflected on by Mariana and David, but is given concrete shape only in a number of instances: the barrios (which are described as heterogeneous[177] and seem to have almost no outside world), Irwindale (which is also hermetic), the Chicano party (the only extensive description of a communal activity), and the white neighborhood that the Sandovals move into (here it is the communal hetero-identification of the Sandovals as Mexican, the concomitant hetero-differentiation as "not belonging" and "uncivilized," and the communal auto-identification of the residents as "white" and "superior"). One could argue that in *Chicano*, people mostly have to fend for themselves outside of family, and even family is marked by internal quarrel and division.

Identificatory Pattern(s): Given the large time span, the many episodes, the many characters and focalizers, and the imbalance of faultlines between part I and II, it suggests itself that the identificatory pattern is dynamic, relatively diverse, and fairly ambivalent. It is conspicuous, though, that contrary to many of the other novels, there is very little reflection about identification and differentiation either by the characters or the narrator in part I of the novel, where identifications and differentiations are mostly auto-modal and personal, and the faultlines by far not as numerous as, for example, in *Nisei Daughter* or *My Ántonia*. In part II, where identification and differentiation are extensively reflected upon by David and Mariana, and where identifications and differentiations are auto- and hetero-modal, personal and communal, the faultline of large communal/cultural aggregation is very dominant, and the demarcated contents surprisingly unambiguous. In effect, the identificatory pattern in part II is much more hierarchical and static than it is in part I.

Maxine Hong Kingston: The Woman Warrior (1975)

Story: The narrative of *The Woman Warrior* is difficult to summarize for a number of reasons. Like many of the novels I discuss, it is episodic, temporally elliptic, and full of analepses and prolepses. Unlike the other novels, however, there is only the most threadbare overall chronological progression, and the temporal markers more often than not are so vague that an underlying temporal

177 | Note that the description of the barrios in Chicano is quite different from that in Ernesto Galarza's autobiography *Barrio Boy* (1971).

cohesion is virtually nonexistent. It is also not necessary, since the focus of the book is clearly not on temporal narrative coherence. More importantly, like her mother, the autodiegetic narrator engages extensively in "talking-story," as it is called in the book, and in addition retells the "talk-stories" of other characters. These "talk-stories" fuse fact and fiction, real events, myths, fairytales, legends, dreams, and fantasies; in fact, the distinction often seems neither to matter nor to exist in the eyes of the respective narrators.[178] In effect, the book consists of the childhood and adolescence memories of the narrator of purportedly real events, dreams, fantasies, stories and so on, all blending into each other, as well as those stories and fantasies and dreams that her mother and a few other focalizers tell.

The subtitle of the novel, *Memoirs of a Childhood Among Ghosts*, therefore is quite fitting in several ways: it is a memoir in the sense of a collection of important memories more than a coherent, comprehensive "life story" or conventional autobiography; it is a childhood among ghosts in the sense of all "foreigners" (including Americans) being called "ghosts" by the Chinese (including – note the irony – those Chinese that constitute the first generation of immigrants in the USA; their children are "half ghosts"); and it is a childhood among the ghosts *in* the stories, the ghosts of the ancestors, and the ghosts (i.e. reverberations) *of* the stories that "haunt" the narrator. I have therefore decided to relay the most important "talk-stories" rather than attempt to "order" the narrative.

The book begins with the story of an aunt of the narrator (told by the mother to the narrator in second person narration) that has been excised from the family history because she bore an illegitimate child to an unknown father and drowned herself and the child in the family well immediately after having given birth. The story also tells of the villagers – remorsefully – pillaging the family's house, land and possessions for punishment. After having been told the story, the daughter/narrator speculates as to who the father might have been, what the aunt might have felt, and so on. In the context of the story, the narrator also tells and reflects about the hard and poverty-stricken village life, migration, first and second generation migrants, the lure of the "Golden Mountain," and the radical strictures, demands and censures of the village community, including the absence of any private life. Within a few pages, many traditions, norms and beliefs are adumbrated and explained.

In the second, much longer chapter, the narrator – as a child – at length and in significant detail fantasizes about becoming – or rather: becoming like – Fa Mu Lan, a legendary girl warrior that took her father's place in battle. Syntactically marked as a fantasy only by an initial use of the subjunctive that

178 | It is ironic that the book won the National Book Critics Circle Award 1976 for *nonfiction*.

soon disappears, the chapter describes her training (all in all 15 years) by an elderly couple (brother and sister) in the mountains, her acquired skills, a survival test, her return to her village, her gathering of an army, and her righteous war against injustice in general and the emperor in specific. She has a husband, gets pregnant (but still fights) and lastly returns to her family. For most of the story, there is no indication that all of this is a fantasy; it is told in a matter-of-fact way, including impossible feats and skills, and highlighted as "factual" by still more dreams and fantasies within the fantasy. Along the way, the story comments on gender roles, spirituality, and village life. The chapter concludes with a return to the daily – and in comparison quotidian and "disappointing" – life of the narrator as a girl in the USA and with extensive reflections on that life, specifically patriarchal gender roles and the dehumanization of girls, generational conflicts, the emigrant community, school, news from China about the communist revolution and its "implementation" in the villages, etc. It becomes clear that the narrator is highly conflicted because she wants to belong and be accepted by her family and community, but also despises what the community makes her feel like as a girl. She also discovers the power of words for revenge.

The third chapter tells how the mother, after the father has emigrated to the USA and the first two children have died, attends a medical school for midwifery and successfully obtains her diploma. It tells how she also highly successfully practices, buys (sic!) a young girl for help as a nurse, and lives happily, enjoying the luxury of having control of her life and time, and a room of her own. During her training at school, there is another ghost episode during which the mother defeats a "sitting ghost," justifying her Chinese name "Brave Orchid." This story-within-the-story, too, is told "realistically," just like the magic elements and fantastic encounters during the rest of the mother's story. After hearing all these stories, the daughter/narrator tries to make her "waking life American-normal:" "I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories" (87). The rest of the chapter comments on the importance of food, and explains the notion of "ghosts."

In the fourth chapter, the mother's sister Moon Orchid arrives from China after having lived there for thirty years waiting for her emigrated husband to send for her, but living a comfortable life off the money he sends from the USA. Her arrival introduces a number of at times very humorous, but also tragic conflicts: While Moon Orchid is too timid to contact her husband, who is apparently married again to a younger US-American woman, entirely "Americanized," and a successful surgeon (and unsurprisingly disowns her when they finally meet), Brave Orchid pushes her to claim what she argues is rightfully and traditionally hers, illuminating a sharp contrast both in personality as well as in norms, traditions and values. As focalizer, Moon Orchid also provides contrastive commentary on what she perceives as the

acculturated behavior of the "American" "half ghost" children of Brave Orchid. In the end, after pestering the family for some time, Moon Orchid becomes paranoid and is committed.

The fifth and last chapter is mostly about the primary narrator and her experiences in school and at home as she comes of age and struggles with who she is, and with her mother's idea of who she should be. Much of the chapter is about the narrator trying to find her voice and her own language, literally and figuratively, to assert herself and come to an understanding and acceptance of herself as an autonomous person, an "I," mostly over and against her mother (the father hardly plays any role). She reflects upon traditions and beliefs, language, large cultural aggregations and communities, memories, and so on. In a crucial scene, she tortures a girl from her class who, similar to her, is always silent in order to make her speak, crying herself all during the torture and falling mysteriously ill for 18 months afterwards. The novel ends with a story about the daughter of a poet who is abducted by bandits, spends twelve years with them, gives birth to two children, and is finally ransomed. She brings back a "barbarian" song of 18 stanzas which – much has been made of this ending in critical literature – "translated well" (209).

Discourse: Most of the crucial aspects of discourse have already been mentioned. The novel consists of five chapters of varying length and covers a time period of approximately several years between the childhood and late adolescence of the narrator, with significant temporal extension through the stories and memories of other characters, and through reflections by the experienced I. The temporal structure is episodic, elliptic, loose, and includes analepses and prolepses. The narrative is told by an autodiegetic narrator; however, there are other focalizers (her mother, her aunt, never a man) and numerous intradiegetically embedded stories (sometimes on several diegetic levels). It is not always clear just how the narrator has access to the stories and information she relays, making reliability an important issue. To boost, the stories fuse various different forms and genres: legend, myth, fantasy, allegedly factual report, etc. In light of this, *The Woman Warrior* cannot really be called an autobiography or work of nonfiction, at least not in the conventional sense, despite such critical labeling.[179] Given the discursive form and the fact that much of the novel is about storytelling and thus self-referential, it is no wonder that the book is usually called postmodern.

Key Faultlines & Notable (Almost) Absences: The dominant faultline throughout the entire novel is gender, overlapping partly with generation and

179 | *The Woman Warrior* is occasionally positively juxtaposed to *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, one of the first Chinese American "autobiographies," which has been attacked as being assimilationist and simplistic (by Frank Chin, for example). A closer look reveals that the two novels actually share some similarities.

large national/cultural aggregations. Much of the novel deals with and reflects about the content delineated by the identification as female, not always in differentiation to the identification as male: the novel is more about what it means to be female in some contexts and to some people and communities than about what it means to be male, though this is often implied. The main conflict arises from the increasing differentiation between the content (norms, values, expectations) of the personal hetero-identification of the narrator as female by her mother, which is largely archaically patriarchal and – surprisingly – congruous with the content of the communal hetero-identification by the emigrant community of girls and females, and the auto-identification of the narrator as a girl and young woman. At first, this auto-identification is undecided and ambiguous and mostly an auto-differentiation from the hetero-identification by her mother and the community; after all, she is at this point still a child. It is telling that she has difficulties speaking and uttering what to her is a self-assertive "I" in the US-American school – in Chinese school, she is unafraid to speak, but this is because the pupils mostly recite in chorus. As she grows up, her auto-identification becomes more and more assertive (she begins to "talk-story" just like her mother), modeled somewhat after the ideal of the girl warrior in the stories – stories told to her, ironically, by her mother, who herself appears to be quite an independent and strong woman and who counsels her sister to be self-assertive and confident towards her husband. One could actually specify the gender faultline as a mother/daughter faultline; men, in fact, play a subordinate role in the novel (which is ironic in view of the fact that the narrator rebels against a patriarchal familial and social system). The gender faultline overlaps with the generational, the coming-of-age, and the large aggregational faultlines insofar as the mother identifies the daughter not only as female, but, of course, also as her child, with the attending demands regarding respect towards her and elders in general (and, by implication, ancestors). This contrast is exacerbated by the differentiation made between the first generation of immigrants – who communally auto-identify, tellingly, as Chinese and an emigrant village community – and the second generation, the children of the immigrants, who are identified by the older generation as "half-ghosts" (i.e. half Americans and not "pure" Chinese anymore) because they grow up in the USA. As the daughter comes of age, by and large representative for her peers, it is indicated that she and the children in general auto-identify increasingly as individuals and neither "US-American" nor "Chinese," and are equally hetero-identified thus by their parents and the community. But: it "translated well." Other significant faultlines for at least parts of the novel are poverty, exploitation and socioeconomic factors in general (the villagers are exploited by landlords; in the USA, the family works hard, but seems to manage) and language, though not in the sense of Chinese versus English (there are few linguistic reflections), but more in the sense of being able to

properly name things and to "talk-story," that is to give a meaning to life and to maintain some degree of control over it by narrativizing it.

Other faultlines are rather minor or manifest themselves mostly along the faultlines mentioned above: peer group, education, language (as a linguistic system: English, Chinese) or diasporic community hardly matter other than in the contexts discussed above. Sexuality, friendship or religion, for example, do not matter at all.

Identificatory Pattern(s): *The Woman Warrior* projects fewer faultlines than some of the other novels, and one faultline is clearly dominant, as in *Christ in Concrete* or *Breadgivers*, even if it overlaps and merges with others. While the personal auto-differentiation of the narrator from personal and communal hetero-identifications becomes more assured in the course of her growing up, her personal auto-identification remains fairly vague over and beyond being a storyteller, a strong woman (warrior), and an autonomous individual; in this, the novel is somewhat similar to *Pocho*. The identificatory system remains fairly static, then, or at least not as dynamic as in, say, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and it is fairly hierarchical. Identifications and differentiations come in all modes (auto-modal, hetero-modal, personal, communal). It would be misleading, however, to conclude from the identificatory system that the novel is less complex than some of the others. Many of the contents delineated by the identifications and differentiations remain ambivalent and contradictory. The different focalizers provide different, sometimes sharply divergent, and occasionally humorous, perspectives; and the multi-layered, numerous stories in the book with their different forms and differing (and often undecidable) claim to factuality within the storyworld logic of the possible world of the novel makes for a highly complex storyworld.

Extensive Corpus

Ole Edvart Rölvaag: *Giants in the Earth* (1927)
James T. Farrell: *Studs Lonigan: A Trilogy* (1932/1934/1935)
Américo Paredes: *George Washington Gómez* (1940)
Jade Snow Wong: *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945)[180]
Rudolfo Anaya: *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972)
Milton Murayama: *All I Asking for Is My Body* (1988)
Sandra Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
Arturo Islas: *The Rain God* (1984)
Denise Chávez: *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986)

180 | Caveat: this novel is an exception. It features a heterodiegetic narrator with internal focalization through the protagonist, but is, in fact, an autobiography. The introduction explains this with a particular Chinese storytelling tradition.

Amy Tan: *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)
Arturo Islas: *Migrant Souls* (1990)
Gus Lee: *China Boy* (1991)
Ana Castillo: *So Far From God* (1993)
Achy Obejas: *We Came All the Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?* (1994)
Chang-Rae Lee: *Native Speaker* (1995)
Gish Jen: *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996)
Lan Cao: *Monkey Bridge* (1997)
Julia Alvarez: *¡Yo!* (1997)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999)
Angie Cruz: *Soledad* (2001)
Jeffrey Eugenides: *Middlesex* (2002)
Naomi Hirahara: *Gasa-Gasa Girl* (2005)
Junot Díaz: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)
Mengestu, Dinaw: *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008)
Karolina Waclawiak: *How To Get Into The Twin Palms* (2012)
Selasi, Taiye: *Ghana Must Go* (2013)

3.7 Comparison

All in all, my corpus comprises more than thirty novels. Many more novels have indirectly influenced and shaped my argument and axioms, but have not been listed for reasons of expediency and comprehensibility, for example other novels by authors already on the list (e.g. by Amy Tan, Julia Alvarez, Chang-Rae Lee, Ana Castillo, Gish Jen, or Naomi Hirahara). Similarly, I have mostly refrained from listing short stories and short story collections (e.g. by Anzia Yezierska, James T. Farrell, or Maxine Hong Kingston; or anthologies such as the ones edited by Vickey Nam (2001) or Maria and Jennifer Gillan [1999a]), not to mention – and in keeping with the design of this book – poems (e.g. by Li-Young Lee, Cathy Song, Lorna Dee Cervantes), plays (e.g. by Henry David Hwang, Luis Valdez, Denise Chávez), films (e.g. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Spanglish, Crossing Over*), graphic novels (e.g. *American Born Chinese* or the later episodes in Gilbert Hernandez's *Love and Rockets* series), and so on. Moreover, there is, expectedly, no sharp boundary between novels that deal with first generation immigrants and those that deal with their children; in fact, many novels primarily about migrants at least briefly touch upon their (or other migrant's) children, but simply do not do so in a manner extensive (or complex) enough to warrant their inclusion here (e.g. Rölvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, or Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*). It is important to keep in mind,

then, that my qualitative claims and their quantitative derivations are based on many more texts than can be listed and discussed in this context.
Recall that my core corpus consists of five novels:

Henry Roth: *Call It Sleep* (1934)
John Okada: *No-No Boy* (1957)
José Antonio Villarreal: *Pocho* (1959)
Julia Alvarez: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake* (2003)

Note that the temporal gaps between *Call It Sleep* (1934), *Pocho* (1959), and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) are due not to a lack of texts from the times inbetween, but to my selective criteria: in order to prove my point I have chosen texts about diverse geographic/national/cultural migration contexts; most suitable texts from, for example, the 1970s and 1980s would have been about contexts already "covered" by earlier examples. Once the core and the extended corpus are combined, these "gaps" grow smaller:

Willa Cather: *My Ántonia* (1918)
Anzia Yezierska: *Bread Givers* (1925)
Henry Roth: *Call It Sleep* (1934)
Pietro di Donato: *Christ in Concrete* (1939)
Monica Sone: *Nisei Daughter* (1953)
John Okada: *No-No Boy* (1957)
José Antonio Villarreal: *Pocho* (1959)
Louis Chu: *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961)
Richard Vasquez: *Chicano* (1970)
Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior* (1975)
Julia Alvarez: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake* (2003)

If we now look at the joint corpora including the extensive corpus, we see that not only are there texts from nearly every decade of the 20th century up unto the present…

Willa Cather: *My Ántonia* (1918)
Anzia Yezierska: *Bread Givers* (1925)
Ole Edvart Rölvaag: *Giants in the Earth* (1927)
James T. Farrell: *Studs Lonigan: A Trilogy* (1932/1934/1935)
Henry Roth: *Call It Sleep* (1934)
Pietro di Donato: *Christ in Concrete* (1939)
Américo Paredes: *George Washington Gómez* (1940)

Jade Snow Wong: *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945)
Monica Sone: *Nisei Daughter* (1953)
John Okada: *No-No Boy* (1957)
José Antonio Villarreal: *Pocho* (1959)
Louis Chu: *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961)
Richard Vasquez: *Chicano* (1970)
Rudolfo Anaya: *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972)
Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior* (1975)
Milton Murayama: *All I Asking for Is My Body* (1988)
Sandra Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
Arturo Islas: *The Rain God* (1984)
Denise Chávez: *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986)
Amy Tan: *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)
Arturo Islas: *Migrant Souls* (1990)
Julia Alvarez: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991)
Gus Lee: *China Boy* (1991)
Ana Castillo: *So Far From God* (1993)
Achy Obejas: *We Came All the Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?* (1994)
Chang-Rae Lee: *Native Speaker* (1995)
Gish Jen: *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996)
Lan Cao: *Monkey Bridge* (1997)
Julia Alvarez: *¡Yo!* (1997)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999)
Angie Cruz: *Soledad* (2001)
Jeffrey Eugenides: *Middlesex* (2002)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake* (2003)
Naomi Hirahara: *Gasa-Gasa Girl* (2005)
Junot Díaz: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)
Mengestu, Dinaw: *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007)
Jhumpa Lahiri: *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008)
Karolina Waclawiak: *How To Get Into The Twin Palms* (2012)
Selasi, Taiye: *Ghana Must Go* (2013)

... but also about a substantial variety of geographic/national/cultural migration contexts:

"Unmarked"/Welsh American	Ethiopian American
Chinese American	Ghanese American
Cuban American	Greek American
Dominican American	Indian/"South Asian" American
Irish American	Norwegian American
Italian American	Polish/Jewish American
Japanese American	Polish American
Korean American	Russian/Jewish American
Mexican American	Vietnamese American

Of course, one of the purposes of this thesis was to argue and show that this particular allocative "logic" (geographical/national/racial/ethnic/cultural) is of limited use because it is premised on specious and/or amorphous categories and because the kind of diversity supposedly captured by these categories (i.e. of cultural practices) is not the only kind of diversity that matters.

This becomes clear when we look at and compare the identificatory faultlines, patterns, and discursive arrangements of the core corpus. These were the results:

Call It Sleep

1. The extant differentiations are consequential, but seldom clear cut. The identifications are almost always ambiguous. Both are dynamic and are often realized in a dialectic of concrete and general, putting a limit to typicality. The identificatory pattern is not only dynamic, but also increases in complexity. Of course, in one way, all fictional worlds, if they develop at all, are likely to increase in complexity to some degree as they unfold, except perhaps for the most bare and minimal ones. In *Call It Sleep*, the particular way in which this increase occurs is owed to the mostly chronological plot structure and to the particular protagonist: it increases parallel to the child's increasing contact with and knowledge about the world. Also, it is heterarchical, i.e. the significance of one part of the pattern – say the religious aspect – may eclipse another part – say peer group – during a particular scene, and vice versa. The dominance of the child/world differentiation, however, persists.

2. Identifications and differentiations are dominantly hetero-modal rather than auto-modal. This is in part owed to the heterodiegetic narrative situation, and in part to the protagonist's age, as the child cannot really reflect himself on identificatory patterns yet. However, hetero-identification and -differentiation seldom occurs through other characters in the fictional world, and rarely explicitly through the narrator. Rather, the identifications are inflected through the internal focalization and dominant FID of David.
3. Some identifications and differentiations are expected (child/world, family, language, religion), the (near) absence of others (community, class) is not.

No-No Boy

1. The three large aggregate categories that serve as major identifications and differentiations – Japanese, American, Japanese American – dominate all others throughout the narrative, making the pattern hierarchical rather than heterarchical. At the same time, as the protagonist's and other people's reflections show, these categories are essentially empty and their content variable, often arbitrary, and dependent on constant negotiation, context, and power. As a result, the protagonist never arrives at a conclusive definition. In addition, these large aggregations are continually complemented or inflected by other, equally intangible, categories, such as class, creed, looks, behavior, attitude, health, allegiance, citizenship, etc.
2. There are other identificatory faultlines, but most of them are clearly dominated by the main aggregations. There are some near absences, and once more, class and money are among them; perhaps more surprisingly, so is language.
3. The identificatory pattern is dynamic, but not in the manner of the pattern in Call It Sleep. Rather, it undergoes continuous modification, where one definition is put forward, and then retracted, hedged, modified, etc. There is no resolution.
4. The discursive structure contributes to this complexity. We have a heterodiegetic narrative situation with a highly reflective, articulate main focalizer, and several other, almost equally reflective and articulate focalizers. There are many dialogues and many passages with interior monologues and FID. The vignettes distributed throughout the narrative add further, if only sketched, perspectives. As a result, the identificatory pattern is unusually complex and constructed through the use of all modes: personal and communal auto- and hetero-identification and differentiation.

Pocho

1. Richard's personal auto-identification as an individual and his differentiation against any personal or communal hetero-identification dominates the entire system of identifications and differentiations. This auto-identification ultimately has no clear content other than "being himself" and remains open. Appropriate to the large time span covered and the theme of intellectual coming of age from childhood to young adulthood, the system of identifications and differentiations is dynamic; however, unlike in *Call It Sleep* or *No-No Boy*, it is dynamic in that Richard's auto-identification changes from inquisitive, uncertain and rudimentary when he is a child to insistent, reflected and autonomous when he reaches adulthood, and in that the various hetero-identifications are, one after the other, rejected. It is somewhat static (in this regard similar to Ichiro) in that Richard's dominant concern, once he has become conscious of it, does not change. As a result, the identificatory pattern is mostly hierarchical regarding auto-modal vs. hetero-modal identification, but the various hetero-modal identifications are heterarchical (none of them persist).
2. The identificatory pattern comes in all modes (personal and communal, auto- and hetero-modal, identification and differentiation), but again: personal auto-identification and -differentiation dominate. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other people (mother and father) and groups (circle of friends), hetero-differentiations (e.g. police) are relatively rare. Since Richard mostly reflects about who he is, but does not explicitly engage in many conversations about himself, his ruminations are mostly complicated by himself, i.e. monological, or, importantly, by the heterodiegetic voice of the narrator. Caveat: a relatively large space is given to Juan as focalizer. With regard to him, the identificatory pattern is radically personal and auto-modal, hierarchical, and mostly static.
3. There are various other identificatory faultlines, perhaps more than in the previous two novels, but most of them are dealt with in the context of Richard's auto-identification. Surprisingly, large aggregations are not very important, and neither are community and language. For once, socioeconomic aspects feature prominently. The gender-related identificatory patterns are somewhat problematic.
4. The discursive structure is episodic with occasionally significant temporal leaps. The narrative situation is heterodiegetic with multiple, sometimes zero focalization; however, the dominant focalizer is Richard.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents

1. Everything in the novel, including the identificatory pattern, is affected by the fact that we have…
2. …multiple and diverse narrative situations and perspectives, and
3. …numerous stories within stories, which, in turn, are frequently contested, retold differently at some other point, or both.
4. As a result, the identificatory pattern is decentralized: there is no dominant perspective or preoccupation. The pattern consists of many different identifications and differentiations, most of which overlap and are interdependent. Although family as an identificatory faultline is obviously crucial, its overlaps and interdependencies with other faultlines undermines a clear-cut hierarchy, making the pattern uneven but heterarchical.
5. The identificatory pattern is dynamic, all faultlines undergo changes and modifications, even family. Interestingly, although the narrative regresses temporally towards childhood, where one could expect "simpler" or more unequivocal identifications and differentiations – after all, some of the chapters are told from the perspective of a young child –, this is not the case. The children, while they cannot give a name or fully understand the complexities and causes of some faultlines, nonetheless are quite aware of them, including their ambivalences and contradictions, and occasionally even know how to exploit them (e.g. gender and sexuality, socio-economic aspects, persecution, creativity).
6. Identifications and differentiations are hetero-modal and auto-modal – which often leads to conflicts –, personal but not communal. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other people (mother and father, sisters) and sometimes extended family; hetero-differentiations (e.g. by police, peers, lovers, US-born Americans) exist but are not pervasive and often inchoate.
7. Some identifications and differentiations are expected (coming of age, gender, family, language), the (near) absence of others (community, cultural historical context) is not. Socioeconomic aspects feature prominently.
8. The discursive structure *does* significantly call attention to itself. The sustained episodic reversal, the temporal ellipses, and the often vague temporal allocation demand a significant integrative effort by the reader, as does the integration of the various narrative perspectives. In addition, the discursive structure is episodic, not to mention the highly self-reflexive diegetic structure (contested stories within contested stories).

The Namesake

1. Gogol's hetero-identification by his parents for as long as he is a young child and his conflicted personal auto-identification and the ensuing differentiations once he begins to reflect on his name dominate the entire system of identifications and differentiations via the allegory/faultline of names and naming that eclipses all others. This auto-identification changes constantly and is ambivalent and at times contradictory (after all, it is characterized by internal conflict), inevitably rendering the entire system not only dynamic but equally ambivalent and occasionally contradictory. Only towards the end is a reconciliation suggested; this reconciliation, however, is expressly not static or unequivocal, but points towards a "both/and." The identificatory system is mostly hierarchical regarding auto-modal vs. hetero-modal identification, but the various hetero-modal identifications are heterarchical (all of them change) and mostly insubstantial.
2. The identificatory pattern comes in all modes, but is highly uneven: personal auto-identification and -differentiation dominate. Hetero-identification comes mostly in the form of other people (mother and father, later partners), but causes little conflict (no one has any problems with his name(s) except Gogol); it almost never occurs communally, and hetero-differentiations (e.g. by "native born" Americans) are relatively rare. Since Gogol, like Richard, mostly reflects about who he is, but does not explicitly engage in many conversations about himself, his ruminations are mostly complicated by himself, i.e. monological, or, importantly, by the heterodiegetic voice of the narrator.
3. There are a number of other identificatory faultlines, perhaps even more than in the other novels so far except for *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, but most of them are dealt with in the context of Gogol's conflicted auto-identification. A surprising number of faultlines are subsumed under others, remain abstract or insubstantial, or even do not appear at all: large aggregations are "only" important for one character; community, diaspora, gender, sexuality, and, once again, socioeconomic aspects play a negligible role, although, of course, they do contribute to the total "information" of the narrative.
4. The discursive structure is episodic with occasionally significant temporal leaps. There is a host of sometimes extensive and temporally far-reaching analepses and prolespes. The narrative situation is heterodiegetic with multiple, sometimes zero focalization; however, the dominant focalizer is Gogol.

The key faultlines and (almost) absences/minor differentiations are as follows:[181]

Call It Sleep Faultlines:	**child/world**; friendship/peer group; family; language; religion.
(Almost) Absences:	**diasporic Jewish and other communities**; **cultural historical context**; **socioeconomic factors**, gender.
No-No Boy: Faultlines:	**large aggregations** (national/racial/ethnic); family; gender; cultural historical context.
(Almost) Absences:	**language**; **class and money**; **wider community** (a peer group does exist and matters greatly); internment; war.
Pocho: Faultlines:	**boy/world**; **coming of age**; family; religion; friendship; gender & sexuality; organized groups and communities; poverty/ exploitation/ struggle.
(Almost) Absences:	**large aggregations** (ultimately); **language**.
How the García Girls Lost Their Accents: Faultlines:	family; coming of age & acculturation (large aggregations matter only little); gender & sexuality; and many others: class; language; creativity; persecution; illness.
(Almost) Absences:	**education**; **cultural historical context of the USA**; **diasporic community**; large aggregations (ultimately).
The Namesake: Faultlines:	**names & naming (& affection)**; **coming of age**; large aggregations (national/cultural, but not for all characters!); family; romance/ relationships.
(Almost) Absences:	**community**; **diasporic community**; friendship; gender & sexuality; **class**; **language**; education.

What is noticeable first of all is that with the exception of *García Girls*, all novels contain one or two dominant faultlines (**bold**) that pervade and regulate almost the entire storyworld and thus either leave little room for many more other faultlines or subordinate and shape them. For example, the child/world differentiation runs through all of *Call It Sleep* and significantly shapes the faultlines of family, friendship, and religion. The same is true of *Pocho*, where the boy/world differentiation shapes almost everything else in combination with coming of age (for large parts of the narrative, the two are commensurable),

181 | Dominant faultlines and near/total absences are in **bold** print.

as well as for *The Namesake* (also with a combination of two faultlines) and, perhaps most radical in its mono-focus, *No-No Boy*. The heterarchy of faultlines that we find in *García Girls* is due to its impressive array of narrative situations and identificatory modalities. Predictably, where the narrative covers a large time span that includes the growing up of the protagonist(s), coming of age is always an issue, though not always to the same degree; a significant part of *García Girls*, for example, covers their adult lives.

Secondly, it is noticeable – and a conspicuous confirmation of my argument – that the majority of texts are *not* preeminently occupied with "cultural identities," neither explicitly nor in the guise of other substitute large aggregations such as national, racial or ethnic ones. To be sure, cultural practices often play a role (e.g. food and eating in *The Namesake*), but they do not congeal into a "cultural identity" (or two, or three) that functions as a faultline identification and differentiation, much less a dominant faultline shaping the entire identificatory pattern of the storyworld. Where large aggregations do figure prominently as a faultline, or even obsessively as in *No-No Boy*, their content is constantly questioned (usually by the protagonist, but often also by other characters), shown as ambivalent, ungraspable, volatile, and their faultline function criticized/shown as unnecessarily divisive, detrimental, and, because of their amorphous content, essentially useless and exploitable just because of that amorphousness. In *No-No Boy*, as in *Pocho*, as in *The Namesake*, they are eventually shown as identifications and differentiations to be overcome; even for those characters for whom large aggregations play an important role in their auto-identification and -differentiation (e.g. the parents of the García girls or Gogol's mother), they are shown to change their content. This, of course, makes sense: faultlines mark the boundary of identifications and differentiations, not their contents. In fact, they are constitutive for identification and differentiation to be possible in the first place and for their contents to be generated. Since storyworlds (usually) evolve (or rather unfold) as the narrative proceeds, it would be unreasonable to expect the content of identifications and differentiations to remain static.

In general, we can note that in all of the texts, the contents denoted by the identifications and differentiations not only change over the course of the narrative, but often are ambivalent and/or ambiguous to begin with. They are something the protagonists usually muse over or find puzzling, and ultimately reject finalizing; fittingly, most of the narratives have a somewhat open ending, reconciliation is indicated as mostly temporary, if at all. In almost all cases, the faultlines themselves are dynamic and evolve interdependently with the other faultlines, making for a dynamic and quite complex identificatory pattern. While there are texts that have a more hierarchical pattern (*Pocho*) as compared to the heterarchy of others (*García Girls*), none of the texts has a fixed hierarchy in an unchanging pattern. Some faultlines matter initially, but not in the end;

some are global in the storyworld and remain so, others matter only locally for one or two characters. Actually, the diverse modalities of identifications and differentiations that we find in most of the texts (i.e. auto-, hetero-, personal, communal) would seem to make an unchanging and simplistic pattern impossible; not to forget that we find quite a variety of discursive arrangements in terms of temporality, diegetic levels, focalization, narrators, psychonarration, and so on, all of which contributes to the complexity of identificatory patterns.

Looking at the extended corpus, it is easy to see that what holds true for the core corpus also holds true here: we find an impressive variety of dominant faultlines – for example, education and poverty in *Bread Givers*, sexual impotence and diasporic community in *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, espionage and language in *Native Speaker*, or gender in *Middlesex* –, many of which, of course, have to do with identity on a fundamental level – which novel is not about identity? – but very few of which invoke a cultural identity or focus exclusively or mostly on cultural practices. The identificatory patterns are quite diverse, and so are the discursive structures. The same is true for the extensive focus. Notice that we can already say at this point that the complexity of identificatory patterns in a given novel *cannot be causally correlated* with the time of its conception or its poetics. In other words, we can more or less easily identify the broad poetics of a novel (realist, modern, postmodern, etc.), but that does not necessarily tell us anything about its identificatory patterns.

The absences are equally important, but raise more of a problem. It is trivial, but nonetheless true, that everything that is not present in the storyworld is absent from the storyworld. In other words, the number of potential faultlines that are absent from the storyworld is, theoretically, if not infinite, then so vast – we might imagine a storyworld in which the chewing of gum constitutes a significant differentiation – that the deceptively innocuous demarcation of one particular absence as notable (class) over another as insignificant (size of feet) first and foremost reveals what kind of expectations we bring to a text (in terms of genre, scripts, context, etc.). This is unavoidable. The answer to this is not that we entirely ignore absences or, futilely, compile a comprehensive list, but rather that our expectations may be more or less well founded and productive; in the case of the particular topic of this thesis and the respective novels, the expectations are likely and justifiably premised both on the – rather broad and elastic – conventions and scripts of "migration literature" as well as on our cultural historical knowledge of the real world contexts that the novels originated in and almost always directly refer to;[182] it is worth remembering at this point (see my discussion in chapter 2) that in the case of this particular topic there is an unusually strong interdependency of the two (i.e. scripts & contexts).

182 | None of the novels are science fiction or fantasy.

More concretely, key faultlines we might reasonably expect to be present – and whose absence should consequently interest us – given the thematic focus in accordance with which the texts were selected are, for example, class and socioeconomic factors, language, diasporic community, gender, cultural historical contexts, large aggregations, etc., rather than, say, romance, espionage, stockcar racing, dragon fighting, obesity, and so on. Note, by the way, that there are novels among the extensive corpus in which some of these faultlines do play a role – albeit not dragon fighting, admittedly.

When we look at the near absences and only minor differentiations in the texts of the core corpus, we see that there are indeed some surprising (near) absences of faultlines or such that matter only little. In *Call It Sleep*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and *The Namesake*, diasporic communities are almost or entirely absent; in *Pocho*, communities play a role, but not exclusively diasporic ones; and in *No-No Boy*, it is mostly one part of the diasporic community – the peer group of the protagonist – that really matters. Large aggregations matter persistently and globally only in *No-No Boy* (they matter temporarily in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and locally in *The Namesake*), and here they do so negatively. In three of the five novels, class, money and other socioeconomic factors do not significantly matter; in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, class and money matter temporarily, only *Pocho* invokes socioeconomic factors as a key faultline and persistent issue. Lastly, language as a key faultline only plays a role in *Call It Sleep* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, where the title already indicates the metaphoric potential. Some of the novels incorporate transcriptions and transliterations, inflected syntax, idioms and italicized phrases in a language other than English. While this kind of language use significantly influences the reading experience, it does not itself constitute a faultline in the storyworld of the respective novel.

If we look at the extended and extensive corpora, the picture becomes even more diverse. Diasporic communities do constitute an important faultline in *Christ in Concrete*, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, and *Chicano* (as well as in *The Joy Luck Club*, *Migrant Souls*, *Gasa-Gasa Girl*, and the short fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri). Large aggregations, however, are once more not as present as one could expect them to be. They certainly matter in some of the other novels (e.g. *Nisei Daughter*, *Chicano*, or *All I Asking for Is My Body*), but more often than not they matter in the way they matter in the core corpus, i.e. ambivalently, temporarily, or locally. The same is true of language: with a few quantitative exceptions – *So Far From God*, for example, or *Migrant Souls* make more extensive use of the linguistic features mentioned above – language in the texts of the extended and the extensive corpus is used much the way it is used in the texts of the core corpus.

Perhaps most surprisingly, poverty, socioeconomic struggle, and class significantly matter as faultlines only in a handful of texts (ca. 1/5th of all). Apart from *Pocho*, these are *My Ántonia*, *Bread Givers*, *Giants in the Earth*, *Christ in*

Concrete, Chicano, All I Asking for Is My Body, and *China Boy* (and, in parts, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Ghana Must Go*). In the majority of these few, poverty and socioeconomic hardship are ultimately overcome so that they do not matter anymore as faultlines. In some, we cannot be sure because of the time span of the novel or the open ending (*China Boy, All I Asking for Is My Body*); only *Christ in Concrete* more or less clearly indicates that a socioeconomic faultline is going to persist. Abridging only somewhat, we may summarize that a majority of texts depicts upward social and economic mobility (although not all protagonists are expressly shown to "ascend" to something we might call the "middle class"), thus at least partly participating in, and contributing to, the perennial, influential, and problematic discourse of the so-called "American Dream."

Of course, for some migrants, and as a disproportionate probability even for entire groups, upward mobility was and is a historical fact. For example, the absence of socioeconomic matters in the majority of Lahiri's fiction is actually an apposite representation (i.e. low degree of departure in this regard) of the historical context: migrants from India and their children show a significantly higher likelihood of upward mobility than the national average. Nonetheless, even if we evaluate some of the absences and minor faultlines as surprising or unexpected, there is about as much diversity regarding the (near) absent and minor faultlines as there is regarding the present faultlines.

Since extant and absent faultlines, identificatory patterns, and discursive structures tell us much about the fundamental organization of a storyworld both discourse- and story-wise, we should not be too surprised that we find both similarities and differences in other respects, as well; it is where exactly we find them that is revealing.[183]

Thematically, all texts are about children of immigrants, of course, so that we do find marked cultural practices and issues of personal and communal (non)belonging in all of them. However, they are also about many other things, making a generic classification except along the broadest lines very difficult. To begin with, many of the "children" are adults, so that many of the narratives are not even "coming of age" narratives, if one wants to consider this a genre. They

183 | A categorical mistake that is frequently made is to confuse macro- and micro-level. On a broad enough macro-narrative level, most narratives are similar in that they follow less than perhaps two handfuls of plots (Christopher Booker makes out seven); on a micro-level, most narratives are different; if they are not different enough, we call them copies. It is, therefore, entirely possible to make two apparently contradictory statements about one text. Whether we see mostly similarities – for example in aggregate groups of literature such as "Asian American," necessary for discerning certain literary traditions – or differences – necessary to avoid clichés and the flaws of aggregate grouping – depends on the level on which we work, and on what we want to show.

are about, for example, childhood, difficult families, belief, war, espionage, crime, poverty, abuse, illness, brutality, torture, persecution, internment, war, love, romance, sex, alcohol, cooking, trust, education, transcendence, and many more equally mundane and/or fundamental human experiences. Predictably, genres whose storyworlds tend to be more removed from the actual world (temporally and/or spatially) such as science fiction or fantasy, are missing due to my thematic focus and the focus on the actual world it entails. This focus also explains the regularly low degree of departure of the texts from the actual world in terms of story. Nonetheless, there are a few examples of magical realism or fantastic elements, for example, in *The Woman Warrior, Bless Me, Ultima*, or *So Far From God*.

The thematic focus and its inevitable contextual grounding also explains the general shift over the course of time in the country of origin that the texts are about (from Europe to Asia; Middle America is a constant, although that is often overlooked): the texts reflect migration history. As migration flows change (due to laws, politics, economics, etc.), so does the migrational-demographic constitution of the USA, or in other words: who is there to write, and what they write about when they write about migration. It is an almost idiomatic statement by now among many critics and scholars that migration law makes migration literature. As a tangential result, most of the texts are about an urban environment, since this is where much migration takes place.

The texts share another interesting, albeit very general similarity: their protagonists. Many of them are or feel like outsiders in the community they belong to (e.g. most drastically in *No-No Boy*, but also in *Pocho*, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, *Bread Givers*, *Nisei Daughter*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, *Native Speaker*, and many more). They are unsure about their place and future in the world and rebel. Ultimately, however, most of them become more or less comfortable with who they are or think they are, even if they are still unsure about their place or future in the world. Few characters really fail dramatically, so that we could argue that most narratives – in terms of character development – are actually success stories, even if success means a continuous rebellious detachment from the world. Studs, the main character of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, is one of the very few rebels who fails (fatally succumbing to illness and alcoholism), but then again, his rebellion from the very beginning seems self-delusional and ridiculous; that of, say, Richard in *Pocho* does not. In a way, then, many texts cast their protagonist(s) in accordance with the trope of the outsider as prototypical American, placing themselves in a long literary and cultural historical tradition and among writers such as Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau,

Emerson, Dickinson, and Whitman – they thus constitute performances of "American identity."[184]

This reminds us that similarities and differences can be – and almost always are – intra- as well as cross-sectional (a fact that is regularly ignored in the majority of secondary literature on the texts discussed here). An example: let us assume that we collate the novels according to the regional migration background they depict. For the argument's sake, we will choose Mexico and thus – using the conventional label – Mexican American novels. Using the combined corpora, this would give us, in chronological order, *George Washington Gómez*, *Pocho*, *Chicano*, *Bless Me, Ultima*, *The House on Mango Street*, *The Rain God*, *The Last of the Menu Girls*, *Migrant Souls*, and *So Far From God*. Keep in mind that many more texts that are usually called Mexican American are not listed here for the reasons given above, for example the long-lost *Who Would Have Thought It?* by María Ruiz de Burton (1872), or *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) by Ana Castillo. Even a cursory look at these novels shows that there are some broad discursive and thematic traditions and recurrent issues. Most of them take place in the Southwest of the USA, and many depict rural or small town life, or life in the outskirts of a larger city, rather than central urban life (this is the reason for the qualification in my claim above); if they do feature urban life (as in *Chicano* or *Pocho*), it is usually not exclusively. Many of them at least briefly touch upon the long, complicated, and conflicted history of the relationship between the USA and Mexico, and that entails that they touch upon violence, exploitation and discrimination to differing degrees. Since there is a contiguous border that has been the site of many tragedies and struggles for about two centuries, this border often also plays a role. These features would seem to differentiate clearly "Mexican American literature" from the other texts.

All the same, not only is there substantial diversity *within* this collation – crucially so along the faultlines of gender, sexual orientation, family, and religious practice, but also discursively: try comparing *Pocho*, *Migrant Souls*, and *So Far From God* –, there are also important similarities *across* collations. *Pocho* shares similarities with *Call It Sleep* (the world-wondering child) and *No-No Boy* (the ponderous and already world-weary young adult); *Chicano* shares thematic interests with *Christ in Concrete* and *All I Asking for Is My Body* (economic struggle, also at a young age); *So Far From God* shares interesting formal elements with *The Woman Warrior* (myth, magic, discursive complexity); and *The House on Mango Street* could productively be compared with *Mona in the Promised Land* (the female adolescent finding her place in the world, but also narrative situation, style, humor); not to mention that parts of *Call It Sleep*

184 | See also Richard Rodriguez's discussion of what it means to be an "American writer" (1989).

read like parts of *Manhattan Transfer* (which, as a portrait of New York at the beginning of the 20th century, is in part also a novel about immigration), which, in turn, reminds one of Abraham Cahan's fiction, which might or might not have influenced *Babbitt*.[185]

We can summarize the results thus:

1. The present faultlines are diverse:
   a. quantitatively: all in all, there are several recurrent fundamental faultlines such as gender, sexuality, education, or family, as well as more particular ones such as creativity, persecution, affection, naming, impotence, secrecy;
   b. qualitatively: they may matter throughout or only temporally; globally or locally.
2. In most of the texts, there are only one or two dominant faultlines that either leave little room for many others or shape most of the others.
3. "Cultural Identity" is *not* a prevalent faultline, although cultural practices, of course, matter in most texts, but to differing degrees.
4. Even other large aggregations (national, regional, racial, ethnic), which may serve as more or less commensurate and/or coded substitutes for "cultural identity," do not matter more, or more often, than any other given key faultline.
5. Quite often, the contents demarcated by the faultlines and denoted by the identifications and differentiations remain ambivalent and volatile; where the protagonist/s is/are of suitable age, they are usually critically reflected.
6. The absent faultlines and minor differentiations are also diverse, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Nonetheless, some recurrent absences are noteworthy, for example poverty and socioeconomic factors. It has to be noted here that secondary criticism regularly ignores the socioeconomic issues even in the novels that prominently feature them. For example,

185 | To be fair, the more conspicuous of these cross-sectional similarities have been noted by some critics (e.g. Furmann 2000; Gonzales 2013). For each of the texts of the entire corpus, I was able to find one or two critical essays that at least in passing take note of the comparability of texts across the conventional large aggregate collations, and that move beyond a purely culturalist discussion. Systematic, sustained transdifferent comparisons remain the exception. Interestingly – and judging, of course, only by the secondary material I was able to find – the older the primary text, the more likely it is that critical discussion has moved beyond culturalist approaches and is open to cross-sectional comparisons. This is true across decades and for almost all texts of the combined corpus.

China Boy's drastic depiction of poverty and near-starvation has yet to be the topic of a critical essay (as far as I was able to ascertain).

7. In general, the identificatory patterns are diverse in all respects: personal, communal, auto-modal, hetero-modal, identification, differentiation, heterarchy vs. hierarchy, dynamics.
8. The discourses are diverse in all respects (narrative situation, temporality, etc.).
9. The plots are diverse. Nonetheless, there are some recurrent patterns:
   a. many narratives are coming of age narratives (unsurprisingly);
   b. many protagonists ultimately "succeed" (i.e. find their place in the world);
   c. many protagonists are cast as prototypical outsiders.
10. The degrees of departure from the actual world are not diverse (all are low in terms of story), which can be attributed to the particular focus of the thesis. As a result, science fictional or fantastic elements do not or only rarely occur.
11. Nonetheless, we find all kinds of broad poetics: realist, naturalist, modernist, postmodernist, and various combinations and other storytelling traditions (e.g. in *The Woman Warrior* or *So Far From God*).
12. Taken together, this entails that…
    a. … there is no necessary correlation between the poetics and the complexity of the identificatory pattern;
    b. … there is no necessary correlation between the time of production of the text and the complexity of the identificatory pattern;
    c. … there is no necessary alignment of "migration" literature – or "ethnic" or any other kind of marked literature – with realism or any other kind of particular poetics.[186]
13. Similarities and differences are both intra- as well as cross-sectional; and they co-exist.

186 | Song makes an interesting point that she adapts from an argument made by McGurl: on the one hand, many ethnic novels combine modernist autopoietics (here synonymous with experimentation, reflexivity, etc.) with ethnic markers. On the other hand, she claims, many writers who are not ethnic "nevertheless organize their work as if they were writing ethnic novels" (Song 346), for example when writing about the lower classes, war veterans, southern culture, or techno-nerds. Ultimately, the ascription of one mode of writing to one category of literature (especially if the category is large and aggregate) must fail; that is why Gerald Prince's attempt to circumscribe a post-colonial narratology (2008) may do justice to the politics of post-colonial literature, but not its diversity. See also Elda Tsou's discussion of the alleged connection between race and literary form (2015).