Autobiography is a wound where the blood of history does not dry.

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ("Acting Bits/Identity Talk," 172)
TRANS/NATIONAL SUBJECTS:
GENRE, GENDER, AND GEOPOLITICS
IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation project is situated at the intersection of 20th-century American literary and cultural studies, particularly contemporary formulations that urge a comparativist, hemispheric, or transnational approach to American literatures and cultures. Taking up this critical conversation through a study of genre, namely autobiography, I argue for a comparative and transnational approach to ethnic women's life narratives. Scholars of autobiography have examined how the genre, in its construction of the autobiographical subject as model citizen, participates in the project of U.S. citizenship and nation-building. What is less recognized is how ethnic and immigrant women autobiographers have pushed the borders of the genre and, by extension, have challenged the fantasy of the representative citizen-subject in the U.S. I argue that a number of contemporary autobiographers are rewriting the genre in order to represent the transnational subject—that is, the subject who does not identify with a single nation-state or whose national identity is inseparable from global social and economic contexts. These writers, I argue, use genre as a rhetorical strategy in order to redefine identity, citizenship, and rights through a global or transnational lens.

The recent "memoir boom" provides a unique opportunity to examine how ethnic women authors take up or take on national claims, rights claims, and identity claims in various self-representational acts. Because autobiography is characterized by a rhetorical
promise to portray truthfully the unique yet representative person, writers in the U.S. have long used the genre to make strategic arguments about national belonging and political rights and obligations. My project examines how ethnic women autobiographers position themselves in this tradition even as they transform the genre to acknowledge multiple and flexible citizenships constructed in the context of global capitalism. The life narratives I examine foreground the production, circulation, and reception of gendered identities and narratives across cultural and national borders. However, far from simply deconstructing national borders and identity claims entirely, ethnic women autobiographers continue to mobilize, even to reconstruct, both—strategically arguing for expanded definitions of nation and citizen. I argue that ethnic women autobiographers' generic experiments in self-representation must be read not as a mode of postmodernist "play" but as cultural responses to uneven material histories and development. This is particularly the case for autobiographers for whom the U.S. is not the sole space of national identification, namely immigrant and ethnic authors, and for autobiographers whose gendered relationship to citizenship and national rights and protections is problematic, namely women. For these authors, "border crossing" names a contemporary process fraught with risks and burdens that, when inscribed autobiographically, confronts the problem of citizenship at the level of genre.

Each chapter in this dissertation explores a particular autobiographical site at which the intimate and the geopolitical converge. Chapter 1 considers how Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation mobilizes what I call spatial rhetorics of memory in order to write the post-assimilationist, post-Holocaust immigrant subject. Chapter 2 asks what autobiographies of national and transnational displacement, namely Rea Tajiri's
autobiographical film, *History and Memory*, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's multimedia anti-narrative, *Dictée*, reveal about the problem of witnessing and the geopolitics of trauma. Chapter 3 examines how Jamaica Kincaid's memoir of her brother's death from AIDS, *My Brother*, turns to multiple family members in order to write an autobiographical elegy informed by a transnational political aesthetic. Finally, Chapter 4 focuses on three "border texts"—Norma Elia Cantú's "fictionalized autobioethnography," *Canícula*, Ruth Behar's feminist ethnography, *Translated Woman*, and Ursula Biemann's documentary film, *Performing the Border*—in order to interrogate the ethics and politics of cross-cultural and transnational writing and reading practices in an age of globalization. Ultimately, my project offers a significant new approach to the comparative study of ethnic American literatures, one that sees the nation as key in constructing identity, even as it is critiqued, remapped, or multiplied in a "post-national" world.
for my grandmother

and

for Scott, with love
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INTRODUCTION

Trans/National Subjects and the Geopolitics of Genre

In the summer of 2004, everyone seemed to be talking about an extraordinary memoir written by an International Studies professor and Iranian immigrant to the United States, Azar Nafisi. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) tells the story of a clandestine women's reading group that gathered weekly at the author's home in the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1990s. The memoir became a sensation in the U.S. at the height of the "war on terror," spending over 100 weeks on the *New York Times Bestseller List* and inspiring numerous reading groups around the country with its impassioned arguments about the democratic, revolutionary power of reading great works of English and American literature. Reviewers hailed it as a life-affirming treatise on individual and women's rights (Kakutani; Goldberg; Simpson). Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* proclaimed it to be "an eloquent brief on the transformative powers of fiction—on the refuge from ideology that art can offer to those living under tyranny, and art's affirmative and subversive faith in the voice of the individual" (par. 2). The 2003 Random House paperback reprint, whose cover portrays two young women in chadors looking modestly (or is it subversively?) groundward, includes a Reading Group Guide with questions such as "Compare attitudes toward the veil held by men, women and the
government in the Islamic Republic of Iran" and "Do you agree [with Nafisi] that 'empathy is at the heart of the novel'?

*Reading Lolita* is an extraordinary work of life narrative, mixing genres and modes such as personal confession, literary analysis, and political critique; developing an unorthodox approach to canonical Western works of literature that speaks to the concerns of women in post-Revolutionary Iran; and providing a poignant argument for empowering women through education. But it is also an immensely problematic work, particularly when viewed in its geopolitical context—as a nonfiction narrative written about women in Iran and for a U.S. readership at a time of war, heightened "national security," and the curtailment of academic freedom in higher education. This cursory description of the fraught context in which Nafisi's memoir is embedded is meant to highlight the intersections of *genre* ("nonfiction narrative"), *gender* ("women"), and *geopolitics* ("about…Iran and for a U.S. readership at a time of war"). But I also want to suggest the fundamentally *rhetorical* nature of these intersections—that is, the ways in which writers, readers, and texts accrue meaning in contexts that are marked both by the possibilities and constraints of genre and by the convergence of local, national, and transnational forces and discourses.

In the three years since its publication, *Reading Lolita* has been mobilized in the service of conservative military and political agendas in the U.S., promoted on television alongside calls for war and used to call for a return to a "Great Books" approach to literary study (Mottahedeh; Bahramitash; Hewett). The memoir's depiction of women in
Iran reinforces for U.S. readers the Orientalist\(^1\) spectacle of an "utterly helpless"\(^2\) group of women under the thumb of a brutal Islamic regime, veiled and married against their will, their only respite provided by American-style democracy in the form of novels by Nabokov and Fitzgerald. Nafisi's preoccupation with the chador and women's dress more generally reflects her focus on a select group of upper-middle-class, college-educated women in Iran and resonates with U.S. media images of veiled, oppressed women in the Middle East (Hesford and Kozol, "Introduction" 6). Despite the language of reviewers and scholars, the memoir only occasionally mobilizes the discourse of women's human rights in its pages—it seems to be interested in other things, particularly theorizing the novel as an exercise in empathy. However, its deployment of images and tropes associated with women's human rights discourse, such as the veil, positions the text in a familiar rhetorical context characterized by oppressed Muslim women and liberated American feminists. *Reading Lolita* 's picture of women in Iran ultimately aligns it with a defense of women's human rights based in an old colonialist and Orientalist discourse—and mobilized by the Bush administration in order to justify wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.\(^3\)

*Reading Lolita in Tehran* provides a case study for examining the intersection of feminist, imperialist, and nationalist discourses in a contemporary era simultaneously marked by globalization and the proliferation of diverse modes of life narrative (Schaffer


\(^3\) For critiques of this Orientalist, Eurocentric model of "global feminism," see especially Hesford and Kozol, *Just Advocacy?*; McAlister; Mohanty; Narayan; Sandoval; and Shohat and Stam.
and Smith; Smith and Watson). The temporal moment of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, variously named the age of postmodernity or globalization, has also been declared the "age of memoir." Reading publics, publishers, and writers increasingly read, market, and write autobiography, propelled by a culture of confession exemplified by daytime talk shows, reality television, and online diaries or "blogs." Meanwhile, the genre of autobiography is increasingly giving way to a range of self-representational practices, increasingly located in multiple genres, media, and modes, that might be called the autobiographical. But it would be a grave mistake to dismiss the memoir boom as merely symptomatic of postmodern American narcissism and the dominance of pop psychology. Instead, as the case of Reading Lolita makes clear, the autobiographical is a key site at which arguments about identity and rights take shape, often across national or cultural borders. The explosion of published life narratives onto the global scene suggests that, at this cultural moment, the autobiographical is profoundly concerned with processes of identity and subject formation that exceed, but do not escape, the nation-state.

4 "Postmodernity" and "globalization" both name discourses, processes, and practices characteristic of late modernity and late capitalism, including cultural and economic flows and exchanges, flexible accumulation strategies, and the dominance of global media. Broadly speaking, "postmodernity" is used to describe social and cultural responses to the decline of modernity as a system of making meaning, while "globalization" is used to describe the economic sphere. "Postmodernity" is distinguishable from "postmodernism," the aesthetic reaction to early-20th-century modernism. See especially Grewal and Kaplan's "Introduction" to Scattered Hegemonies; Jameson; and Lyotard.


6 Even as autobiographical genres and practices are proliferating, so are the critical terms used to describe them. "Life writing" and "life narrative" have been adopted by numerous autobiography scholars in recent years to name generic combinations such as autobiography and biography as well as autobiographical practices in other genres, including fiction and film. As I explain below, I follow recent theorists in autobiography studies in defining the genre broadly and rhetorically. I have chosen to use "autobiography" or "the autobiographical" rather than "life writing" or "life narrative" because the latter terms privilege written forms of autobiography, while I am interested in both textual and visual forms.
This convergence of the autobiographical and the trans/national can also be expressed as a series of contradictions between private and public, dominant and marginal, local, national, and transnational. Once considered a genre for statesmen whose private lives mirrored key historical events and offered useful lessons for a country's citizens, autobiography has been increasingly taken up by writers whose relationships with the nation-state are complex, fraught, and tenuous. Indeed, as Susanna Egan notes, "explorers of diasporic identity are surely the quintessential autobiographers of the late 20th century" (122). In the last fifty years in the U.S., the publication of ethnic and immigrant women's autobiographies has exploded, resulting in new subgenres and practices from fictional autobioethnography (Norma Elia Cantú) to autodocumentary film (Rea Tajiri) to collaborative, feminist testimonio (Ruth Behar). For these authors, autobiography offers the promise of personhood, traditionally symbolized by liberal democracy's abstract citizen, at once representative and unique, public and personal (Berlant; Gilmore). These new autobiographical voices promise to explode onto the public scene, speaking their personal truth to power. And yet, at the same time, the proliferation of the autobiographical highlights the ironic convergence of globalization with an often uncritical embrace of local, authentic, and native voices—a residual fascination with the "other" left over from high modernism and colonialist discourse.

These twin observations about autobiography's ascendancy—that it heralds progressive new forms of democratic self-expression, and that it is burdened by an uncritical localism and the legacy of colonialism—underscore questions about the relationships among genre, gender, and geopolitics at the heart of contemporary autobiography studies. Developing ever more diverse forms and modes of autobiography
in order to interrogate ever more complex formations of national and transnational identity, the texts I study here suggest the limits of our critical tools for analyzing the autobiographical as genre and practice.

**Trans/National Subjects**

How are we to understand this proliferation of self-representational practices in the past 50 years in the U.S., and how are we to understand their production, circulation, and consumption across linguistic, cultural, and national borders? My interest in ethnic and immigrant women's autobiography is driven by these questions. I am interested in when and how autobiography becomes compelling for writers historically excluded from the promise of inclusive citizenship and for readerships in diverse geopolitical contexts. The works I examine here are notable not just for their generic experimentation or articulation of marginalized identities and experiences but also for the ways in which they circulate across national and cultural borders, forging ties with subjects in other parts of the world, asking for the reader's identification or empathy across cultures. Part of my task is to understand when and how these transnational identifications are forged in autobiography, and to what ends. *Reading Lolita*, for instance, engages U.S. readers, particularly women, through the consumer culture of the women's book group and through a version of feminism that does not threaten dominant narratives the U.S. tells about itself and "others." The case of *Reading Lolita* suggests that transnational identification and textual "border-crossing" are processes that are always fraught and

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7 By contrast, Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman*, which I take up in Chapter 4, develops a transnational feminist listening practice based in the struggle to understand across linguistic, cultural, and national differences.
never simply liberatory. The works I study here, then, invite a comparative and transnational approach that considers the ways in which gender, genre, and geopolitics converge in autobiographical practices that are increasingly global in scope.

This dissertation develops such an approach. Drawing on recent work in 20th-century American literary and cultural studies that situates U.S. literature in a broader geopolitical context, I develop a comparative and transnational approach to ethnic women's life narratives. Scholars of autobiography have examined how the genre, in its construction of the autobiographical subject as model citizen, participates in the project of U.S. citizenship and nation-building (Gilmore, Limits; Kaplan, "Resisting"; Kawash). What is less recognized is how ethnic and immigrant women autobiographers have pushed the borders of the genre and, by extension, have challenged the fantasy of the representative citizen-subject in the U.S. I argue that a number of contemporary autobiographers are rewriting the genre in order to represent what I call the trans/national subject—that is, the subject who does not identify with a single nation-state, whose national identity is not the primary site for the construction of autobiographical identity, or whose national identity is inseparable from global social and economic contexts. These writers use genre as a rhetorical strategy in order to redefine identity, citizenship, and rights through a global or transnational lens.

To examine genre as a rhetorical strategy is to acknowledge the charged contexts, laden with legalistic judgments about authorial credibility, truth value, and representativeness, in which autobiographical narratives are embedded. Moreover, it recognizes the flexibility of the autobiographical in transnationality. Transnationality, as distinguished from "globalization," refers to acts and practices enabled or constrained by
the changing logics of nation-states in late capitalism. Unlike top-down or celebratory models of globalization that either deplore the lack of human agency or romanticize the supposed "end" of national identity, transnationality names the shifting, protean proliferation of nationality and nationalisms in response to global social and economic forces, as well as forms of identification that do not depend on the nation-state but that open outward toward alternative formations of identity, citizenship, and activism.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong's concept of "flexible citizenship" captures the myriad ways in which national identity, political rights and actions, and progressive activisms are being refigured through transnationality. Scholars have long argued that citizenship is governed by discourses and practices that exceed the law and extend to national culture. Indeed, according to Ong, citizenship is a fundamentally cultural process of subject formation. "Flexible citizenship" refers to the globalized practices of both the wealthy entrepreneurial classes who increasingly define citizenship in the terms of global capitalism and the new global underclass of refugees and migrants. This concept is useful for theorizing citizenship as a technology of truth and selfhood (like autobiography itself).

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8 On transnationality, see especially Ong, Flexible Citizenship; Grewal and Kaplan, "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality"; and Hesford, "Documenting Violations."

9 The revival of multiple and regressive versions of nationalism in the U.S. after September 11, 2001 is one example of this phenomenon. These include not only patriotism per se as reflected in the media and popular culture, but also policies such as the Patriot Act and immigration reform, and rhetorics such as the Bush administration's nationalist-masculinist justification of war and imperialism.

10 For example, scholars in autobiography studies are beginning to theorize how global human rights campaigns draw upon personal storytelling in order to serve as evidence of human rights violations or to appeal to potential activists. See especially Gilmore, "Autobiography's Wounds"; Hesford and Kozol, Just Advocacy?; and Smith and Schaffer, Human Rights and Narrated Lives.

11 See, for example, Lowe; Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making," Flexible Citizenship, and Buddha is Hiding; Anderson; Isin and Wood, Citizenship and Identity; Phelan, Sexual Strangers; Flores and Benmayor, Latino Cultural Citizenship; and Stevenson, Cultural Citizenship; among others.

12 In "Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making," Ong defines citizenship as "a cultural process of 'subjectification,' in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administration" (263).
that is "dialectically determined by the state and its subjects" (264) rather than simply imposed upon subjects from the top down.

I begin from the premise that autobiographical narratives and practices, once theorized primarily as a mode of self-expression and "coming to voice," must be examined not only in their production but also in their circulation and reception across cultural and national borders. The parameters of this study are limited both by necessity and by my own expertise: U.S. history and culture. I focus on authors and filmmakers working in the U.S., though often at its borders, and on texts that highlight the problematics of U.S. reception and consumption of "other" cultures. Specifically, I examine how ethnic and immigrant women autobiographers transform the genre to acknowledge multiple and flexible citiizenships constructed in the context of global capitalism. These autobiographers develop a range of strategies for representing multilingual, multi-cultural, and often multi-national identities and life trajectories. Particularly after 1948, when human rights was articulated in international law and policy by the United Nations, writers are positioning their self-representations in a context that acknowledges multiple national ties, whether social, economic, or affective. I am interested in how this process functions, particularly in autobiographies that push the borders of the genre in order to acknowledge the limits of representative citizenship.

13 For example, Eva Hoffman is an immigrant to both Canada and the U.S., and writes about both "Americas"; Jamaica Kincaid's life narrative gets entangled in her brother's as he is dying of HIV/AIDS on Antigua; and Ruth Behar explores and interrogates la frontera, the border between the U.S. and Mexico, in order to "translate" the life story of a Mexican peddler for an academic U.S. audience.
14 Increasingly, rights claims are being made in the transnational context of human rights, enabled by the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I consider the politics of transnational feminist human rights claims in Chapter 4 of the dissertation, "Transnational Realisms, Border Bodies."
15 One way of describing Nafisi's project in Reading Lolita, for example, is the production of a privileged literary sphere that appears to offer refuge from both fundamentalism and nationalism. The text blends the personal, pedagogical, aesthetic, and political into a single romance plot in which the hero is the novel
There are at least three ways in which autobiography and citizenship converge in the U.S. First, autobiography shares with citizenship the fantasy of the unique yet representative subject abstracted from a field of intricate and intimate social relations to stand alone. In the U.S., autobiography has had a long and fruitful relationship with politics—particularly in its construction of the autobiographical subject as model citizen. As Leigh Gilmore points out in *The Limits of Autobiography*, the autobiographical subject "is a metaphor for the citizen": "the cultural work performed in the name of autobiography profoundly concerns representations of citizenship and the nation. Autobiography's investment in the representative person allies it to the project of lending substance to the national fantasy of belonging" (12). Second, the autobiographical subject is both enabled and constrained by existing discourses (Gilmore, *Autobiographics*) and narrative scripts (Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing*) against which its truth-value is measured. These discourses and scripts both make the autobiographical subject intelligible within available cultural epistemologies of gender, ethnicity, and nationality and render certain forms of subjectivity unintelligible. For example, the immigrant success narrative, lent support by the intersecting discourses of equal opportunity and hard work, consolidates a nationalist fantasy of citizenship that masks the history of exploited immigrant labor (Hesford and Kulbaga; Lowe, "Work").
Significantly, this is a nationalist narrative that Reading Lolita fails to challenge, wedded as it is to a progressive view of democratic America.

Third, autobiography is a site at which contestations of "truth" concerning national and historical memory converge (Smith and Watson, Reading). Because memory, like autobiography, has a (geo)politics and does not simply document the past, it necessarily confronts the archive of national images and narratives that structure the stories the nation tells about its history (Anderson; Bhabha; Žižek). For instance, Reading Lolita illuminates the entanglement of U.S. and Iranian histories and interests after World War II, as well as how the national memory of those geopolitical relationships is continually erased through pedagogical distinctions such as one Nafisi gives to her American literature class while they contemplate The Great Gatsby: "We in ancient countries have our past—we obsess over the past. They, the Americans, have a dream: they feel nostalgia about the promise of the future" (108). Reading Lolita's reproduction of U.S. historical amnesia enables U.S. readers to empathize with oppressed women in Tehran without calling into question the fantasy of inclusive citizenship in the U.S. This erasure is reproduced at the level of narrative: the text ends with Nafisi's departure "for the green light that Gatsby once believed in" (341), and does not reveal what her life as an Iranian immigrant woman in the U.S. is like.

Scholars of immigrant and ethnic women's autobiographies have often focused on how these texts either inscribe or resist mainstream stories of assimilation to the U.S. nation-state. Because assimilation is connected to concepts of citizenship and national

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18 Slavoj Žižek has theorized national identity as tautological, recursively constructed through myths of origin that establish the essential "fact" of nationhood while seeming to discover it in the distant past. See "The Nation-Thing."
belonging, attention to this strategy is invaluable. However, an exclusive focus on how ethnic and immigrant autobiographers respond to assimilation is also limiting, since it assumes that arguments about assimilation are the only forms citizenship and rights claims can take. Particularly in the contemporary context of globalization, in which groups of people—immigrants, investors, migrant workers, refugees—cross national borders at an increasing pace, the assimilation model cannot provide the only theoretical approach to ethnic autobiography.

The texts I study here challenge conventional concepts of citizenship and the nation-state by blurring the generic and conceptual boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, text and image, citizen and non-citizen. These autobiographies expose how the nation and its subjects are constructed transnationally, through its relationships with "others" both within and outside of territorial and imaginative borders. I focus on autobiographies written from or about America's border zones, sites of intercultural contact with other nations and with influxes of immigrants, migrants, and refugees. Border zones are productive sites for interrogating the constructed boundaries between immigrant and native, citizen and stranger, self and Other. Rather than focusing exclusively on a single border, I consider how multiple national "borders" intersect with the generic "borders" of women's autobiography. And yet these texts do not use movement across national boundaries—border-crossing, in the fashionable critical

19 Gilmore's "Autobiography's Wounds" and The Limits of Autobiography and Kaplan's "Resisting Autobiography" offer useful parameters for considering how autobiographical experimentation and post-nationalist critique converge. For sociological studies of multiple national "borders," including boundaries constructed within the territorial space of the nation-state, see especially Davis, Magical Urbanism; Sadowski-Smith's collection, Globalization on the Line; and Sassen's The Global City.
terminology—merely to unfix identity or nationality. On the contrary, autobiography has increasingly become a site for their (re)construction and proliferation.

I therefore show how contemporary American autobiographies continue to negotiate various modernisms—specifically discourses bound up with citizenship and the nation-state—in supposedly postmodern, "post-nationalist" conditions. This is a particular problem for autobiographers for whom the U.S. is not the sole space of national identification, namely immigrant, ethnic, and bicultural writers, and for autobiographers whose gendered relationship to citizenship and national rights and protections is problematic, namely women. For these autobiographers, self-representation becomes charged with negotiating multiple and competing identities, claims, histories, and cultural and literary traditions. If the nation persists (albeit in diverse ways and at diverse sites) in post-nationalist times and spaces and does not simply dissolve, as many current theorists insist, then it remains key in constructing autobiographical identity, even as it is remapped, critiqued, and multiplied. In order to see how this is so, it is necessary to understand the cultural and rhetorical work that autobiography performs, how it lends substance to the project of citizenship, and the pressures exerted upon it by new formations of autobiographical subjectivity in transnationality.

The autobiographies I study here forge practices and claims whose logic is constituted by flexible citizehnships and, increasingly, by transnational coalitions that are not tied to the nation-state, such as human rights activists.²⁰ If the autobiographical

²⁰ Other forms of transnational coalitional activisms include grassroots and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to fight AIDS; to support indigenous and workers' rights; and to protect local environmental interests from corporate conglomerates. Autobiographical acts, particularly testimonios such as Rigoberto Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray's I, Rigoberto Menchú, have played a crucial role in these struggles.
subject can be seen as a "metaphor for the citizen" as Gilmore suggests, then the autobiographical can also become flexible, proliferate, and expand outward toward subgenres, forms, and practices that do not consolidate the fantasy of nationalism but that interrogate its limits. The revisionist logic of autodocumentary film, the plural "I" of testimonio, the wounded subject of trauma who calls for an alternative jurisprudence grounded in culture rather than law—these autobiographical forms and practices offer sites for theorizing personhood differently. Considering gender, genre, and geopolitics in a comparative and transnational framework is my contribution to this work.

Genre, Gender, Geopolitics

This dissertation turns to autobiographical acts in both literary works and documentary films in order to situate the autobiographical in diverse texts, media, and contexts. Attempts to define "autobiography" generically have always been troubled, and my own definition is rhetorical rather than formal: I see autobiography as a narrative practice in which a subject takes up various truth-telling discourses, including the confession, the testimonial, the family history, and the autoethnography, in order to represent herself in a life story that also makes arguments about identity. Defining autobiography rhetorically rather than formally allows me not only to examine multiple forms and media, but also to highlight the importance of production, circulation, and reception for theorizing genre (Deavitt; Foss). It also allows me to follow diverse

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21 Kelly Oliver has suggested that subjectivity is profoundly relational: that the self is constituted not through violence and the exclusion of the other but through a necessary opening up to difference—what she calls "witnessing beyond recognition." My (admittedly more skeptical) consideration of the possibility of transnational, cross-cultural empathy and identification is indebted to Oliver's dialogic theory of self and other, as well as to the transnational feminism of Chela Sandoval and Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

22 See Foucault's The History of Sexuality and Technologies of the Self.
theorists, such as Leigh Gilmore, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, in broadening theoretical conceptions of autobiography as a cultural and rhetorical practice rather than simply a form. In the context of the proliferation of the autobiographical and its circulation across national and cultural borders, it also acknowledges genres and forms—such as the testimonio and the autodocumentary film—that draw upon but exceed conventional autobiography proper (Berlant; Beverly; Kaplan; Gilmore; Lane).

As a genre, autobiography has been characterized less by a set of discrete formal characteristics than by a rhetorical promise or "pact" between author and reader that the narrative has been candidly captured from "real life" and has not been made up (Lejeune). This pact, according to French theorist Philippe Lejeune, is sealed by the autobiographical "signature": the matching names of the author on the title page (the authorial "I"), the narrating subject (the narrating "I"), and the narrative's protagonist (the narrated "I"). This textual signature functions as the guarantor of authenticity, the author's quasi-legal oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—encouraging the reader to imagine the text as a sort of candid camera that captures life as it "actually" is and that promises to "document" the existence and experience of an actual subject in the historical world.

Autobiography shares this bond between representation and the "real" with documentary film, a genre that has often been unproblematically associated with a facile, transparent mimesis. In Collecting Visible Evidence, Jane M. Gaines argues that

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23 See especially Gilmore, The Limits of Autobiography; Kadar; and Smith and Watson, Getting a Life and Reading Autobiography.

24 Feminist and other autobiography critics have problematized Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact," arguing, among other things, that it constructs a contractual notion of self-ownership that relies on a liberal humanist ideology of selfhood and that erases the politics of how identity is constructed. However, Lejeune's concept remains a salient one for describing the rhetorical situation in which life writing is embedded.
contemporary critics of documentary have too quickly and easily dismissed realism as ideologically suspect. Though she concedes that the "special indexical bond" (Nichols 12) constructed between the photographic or cinematic image and its "real-world" referent often reproduces dominant ideology transparently, offering a supposedly unmediated access to "reality," she also insists that this bond can be put to strategic political use. Rather than simply dismissing referentiality and verisimilitude as naïve or propagandistic, she argues, critics of realist forms need to theorize mimesis historically, as a rhetorical strategy and a "legitimate form of knowledge" (Gaines 4) in a specific cultural context. Truth-telling discourses, then, must be approached rhetorically and comparatively, a task that reveals not a single "realism" but multiple and strategic "realisms" produced, circulated, and received at particular locations, for particular purposes, and by particular audiences—as the case of Reading Lolita so aptly illustrates.

For ethnic and immigrant women writers and filmmakers in the U.S., nationalist autobiographical scripts such as the bildungsroman or the assimilation narrative offer strategic political choices that allow for the (re)construction of the ethnic subject as recognizable citizen. But these scripts can also position the autobiographical subject squarely within the logic of a naturalized national "real," in which the failure of citizenship's guarantee is masked. As Lisa Lowe suggests, realist narratives inscribe "resolution to the nation" as their representational idiom and position "the subject as representative of the nation or group" (34-35). That is, the intelligibility of the autobiographical subject is an effect of culturally and nationally coherent discourses and scripts that both enable and constrain the conditions of her being. In this context, we might rephrase Gayatri Spivak's question in rhetorical terms and ask: How, when, and in
what contexts can the subaltern speak autobiographically? Or, as Lauren Berlant puts it in the context of globally and digitally circulating testimonial forms made possible by the discourse of trauma, "if there is nothing wrong with autobiography itself, the 'so what' question its post-traumatic versions inevitably generate has to be joined with what we might call the 'for what' question" ("Trauma and Ineloquence" 47-48).

Again, the case of Reading Lolita is instructive. Nafisi's story of life in Tehran is sustained, for a non-Muslim U.S. gaze, by a web of ideological assumptions that are profoundly geopolitical. The Bush administration's post-9/11 "axis of evil" rhetoric is only one thread in this web. Reading Lolita, as much as it reinforces the specter of a radically "other," tyrannical fundamentalist Iran, also naturalizes a profoundly nationalist vision of the U.S. The memoir is articulated through a temporal and geopolitical plot of dis- and re-identification: refusing to identify with Iran and its fundamentalist leadership, feeling increasingly "irrelevant" to Iranian society (167), Nafisi rejects Iranian nationalism for an American patriotism based in the ideology of radical equality and inclusive citizenship. Throughout the text, the U.S. simply is how it is represented in novels by James, Fitzgerald, and Nabokov. The American dream is Gatsby's romantic dream, and Nafisi's reincorporation into a nationalist fold—finally, she has made it to freedom!—endears her to us.25 Our encounter with the "other" in this text, then, is domesticated and made safe through an essentially nationalist American narrative of

25 Reading Lolita thus offers a prime example of the Foucauldian theory of power that operates fundamentally through the discursive production of "truth" rather than through oppression "from above." See The History of Sexuality, vol. 1. Žižek has also theorized how power functions most effectively not through tyranny but through freedom. In Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, he asserts that "all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict—'war on terrorism,' 'democracy and freedom,' 'human rights,' and so on—are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. In this precise sense, our 'freedoms' themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom" (2).
democratic citizenship (Bow). If *Reading Lolita* appears to be "about" Iran, it is only because it so successfully masks the stories it tells about the U.S.

But if Nafisi's memoir reconsolidates a familiar American narrative of progress and equality, it also begins to suggest avenues for theorizing both the possibilities and the limits of an affective politics of transnational personhood (Cheah and Robbins). A significant body of scholarship on citizenship and nation-building has illuminated both the violence and exclusion entailed in the construction of national belonging and the ways in which that violence and exclusion has produced countersites for the articulation of personhood (Anderson; Berlant; Lowe; Oliver; Žižek). Lisa Lowe, for example, has shown how the immigrant is constructed through law as constitutive Other to the American citizen (5-6). Moreover, Berlant and Žižek have theorized the process of citizenship as a violent act of Cartesian abstraction that both produces and masks an abject remainder, a material specificity on which the democratic fantasy of citizenship relies even as it asserts itself as abstract and universal (Žižek, "The Nation-Thing" and "Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself!"; Berlant, *Queen*). In this way the citizen, like the autobiographical subject, is produced through the subject's love of the law and at the intersection of the abstract and the unique, the universal and the particular, the intimate and the impersonal (Berlant, "Trauma"). These contradictions are inscribed at the level of the individual citizen-subject and at the level of the nation, which is likewise defined and given substance in opposition to "Others" both internal and external to the literal or imaginative space of the nation.

These theorists of national identity offer productive sites from which to build a trans/national theory of autobiographical subjectivity in the U.S. Berlant has shown how
"public" citizenship in the contemporary U.S. is paradoxically produced by intimate, personal acts and beliefs related to, for example, sex and family life (Queen). This is why Nafisi's seemingly outrageous statement to a student—"Living in the Islamic Republic is like having sex with a man you loathe" (329)—resonates disturbingly as an expression of American freedom, choice, and love.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, autobiography might be said to produce the representative person through ever more intimate articulations. But these intimacies are increasingly inscribed across national borders and cultural traditions as families take up residence in multiple locales across the globe—by choice or by necessity.\textsuperscript{27} In the texts I take up here, these global intimacies are inscribed autobiographically through the geopolitical of memory (Chapter 1), trauma (Chapter 2), illness (Chapter 3), and family (Chapter 4). Geopolitics names the entanglement of geography and politics in national and transnational policies and practices, and gestures toward the entanglement of nationality and transnationality in diverse localities. It captures how the transnational is always present in the national, and not just in decisions about foreign policy but in the very constitution of national identity and community. Finally, to name autobiographical practices "geopolitical" is to acknowledge how spatial as well as temporal rhetorics and practices structure identifications and subjectivities at diverse locations and in diverse contexts.

My conception of geopolitics is indebted to recent scholarship at the intersection of autobiography studies and transnational feminism (Grewal; Hesford; Hesford and

\textsuperscript{26} Nafisi's rape metaphor, which is further articulated in her reading of Nabokov's Lolita, contrasts strikingly with the breathtaking romance plots in James's Daisy Miller, Austen's Pride and Prejudice, and Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. One of Nafisi's primary concerns throughout Reading Lolita is that her "girls" will never have the opportunity to freely choose a romantic partner.

\textsuperscript{27} Aihwa Ong uses the phrase "family biopolitics" to name the ways in which families function across nations to secure property, for example, or status ("Cultural Citizenship" 282).
Kozol; Kaplan; Smith and Schaffer). This work theorizes how social, cultural, and economic practices related to gender, including theoretical practices, "travel." It builds on the work of postcolonial theorists and U.S. antiracist feminists who have critiqued the Eurocentrism of certain forms of Western feminism and who have reconceptualized the possibilities for cross-cultural, cross-racial, and cross-national feminist coalitional theory and practice (Mohanty; Sandoval). Transnational feminism, then, like the trans/national subjects of my title, is not meant to suggest the irrelevance of the contemporary nation-state. Rather, both are meant to enable ways of theorizing about the nation-state that do not isolate it from global social and economic conditions and that do not consider national identity in isolation from gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and ability.

It is a fundamental premise of this dissertation that globalization and postmodernity do not make agency impossible but instead change its terms. As nationalisms and neonationalisms become flexible and proliferate in response to uneven "flows" of people, capital, and media, so does the range of human agency. Identifying the myriad ways in which autobiographical subjectivity is locally, nationally, and globally constructed, or mapping the rhetorical pathways of the autobiographical as it circulates across national and cultural borders, does not empty subjects and texts of agency. On the contrary, this work helps us to understand how and in what contexts, both temporal and spatial, agency becomes compelling.²⁸ In autobiographical terms, Žižek's concept of "ideological narrativization" describes the convergence of ideology and narrative scripts in autobiographical agency: "whatever we do, we always situate it in a larger symbolic

²⁸ Hesford revives the rhetorical concept of kairos in order to theorize the temporal and spatial "moment" at which truth-telling discourses, such as human rights testimony, become compelling in documentary film. See "Kairos and the Geopolitical Rhetorics of Global Sex Work and Video Advocacy."
context charged with conferring meaning upon our acts….such narratives are always retroactive reconstructions for which we are in some way responsible; they are never simply given facts” (“Identity” 41-42). A choice, for Žižek, is "an act which retroactively grounds its own reasons" (40). Similarly, autobiographical acts are retroactively grounded. These are rhetorical choices that are both constrained and enabled by national—and increasingly transnational—narratives of personhood, including new forms of flexible citizenship.

Questions that guide my project include: How do national discourses continue to figure in "post-national" autobiographies? How do other nationalist discourses (i.e., identity claims, citizenship claims, and rights claims) continue to figure in these texts and films? How do autobiographies accomplish the increasingly urgent task of writing the trans/national subject? What rhetorical strategies do writers and filmmakers use in configuring this subject? How does autobiography function differently in hemispheric and trans/national contexts in which the nation-state is not necessarily the primary site at which the subject is constructed? How does attention to the rhetorical—namely, the trans/national production, circulation, and reception of autobiographical representations—change the ways in which autobiography is theorized?

Scholarly Contributions and Research Methods

My argument draws on contemporary critical work, namely post-nationalist American studies and transnational feminist cultural studies, that situates "American" literatures and cultures in comparative and transnational perspective. Post-nationalist American studies (sometimes termed the "new American studies") urges a comparativist,
hemispheric approach to "American" studies that critiques theoretical assumptions about the logic of American exceptionalism and discrete national and disciplinary borders (Rowe; Pease and Wiegman; Pérez Firmat; Saldívar). Moreover, recent literary and cultural critics have usefully complicated the modernism / postmodernism binary that characterizes critical conversations about 20th century literature. For instance, theorists in transnational feminist cultural studies have examined the ways in which various modernisms persist in "postmodern" texts, contexts, and theories (Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered*; Kaplan, *Questions*; Lowe). Transnational feminist cultural studies and post-nationalist American studies intersect at several key junctures, allowing literary and cultural critics to theorize how cultural productions are bound up with—and respond to—shifting concepts of "nation," "citizen," and "borders."

My dissertation engages these provocative questions by examining the complex relationships among genre, citizenship, and trans/national identity in contemporary autobiographies written by or about America's border zones. In expanding the traditional concept of borders, I follow post-nationalist American studies in theorizing U.S. literary production transnationally and comparatively, at multiple sites of cultural contact and conflict, including spaces "within" the nation-state such as Japanese American internment camps. Moreover, in focusing on autobiography rhetorically, I expand traditional understandings of genre that rely strictly on a formalist disciplinary logic (Deavitt; Foss).

The comparative and interdisciplinary method I develop here is grounded in both post-nationalist American studies and transnational feminist cultural studies. Both critical movements refuse to reconstruct the U.S. as the center of the Americas and refuse to assume a single, unitary, hegemonic explanation or approach for all texts. Moreover, both
movements call for dialogic work that takes seriously the concepts of hybridity and transculturation and does not assume a linear, unidirectional model of immigration and assimilation. Whereas older work performed under the rubric of "multiculturalism" considered cultural difference in the U.S. in isolation from their "intercultural, transnational dimensions and interrelationships" (Lenz 474), this dissertation seeks to examine the intricate and intimate entanglements of culture and nation with transnational processes and practices. This dissertation contributes to this critical conversation analysis of the autobiographical not as stable texts with fixed meanings but instead as rhetorical productions that must negotiate specific local, national, and transnational contexts.

This work therefore also contributes to recent theories (especially locational and transnational feminisms) that interrogate how space as well as time (history) is constructed in the contemporary U.S., particularly at its multiple border zones. For example, Susan Stanford Friedman argues in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* that third-wave North American feminism is marked by a rhetorical turn to the geopolitical, characterized by a spatial logic and rhetoric that emphasizes the conjunctures between national identities and international conditions. Friedman distinguishes the spatial rhetoric of third-wave feminism from a second-wave feminist temporal logic and rhetoric that emphasizes "coming to voice" and narratives of ancestry. My project builds on works such as *Mappings* by asking how genre participates in or distances itself from these trans/national conjunctures, and how conventional approaches to autobiography, informed not by a spatial logic and rhetoric but a temporal

29 See, for example: Anderson; Appadurai; Davis; Friedman, *Mappings* and "Locational Feminism: Gender, Cultural Geographies and Geopolitical Literacy"; Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*; Ortiz; Pratt; Sadowski-Smith; Sassen, *The Global City* and "Analytic Borderlands"; and Seyhan.
(historical) one, fail to see the spatial constructions and rhetorics that inform autobiography by immigrant and ethnic women authors. Moreover, my project takes a materialist feminist approach to the spatial tropes of migration, travel, and border crossing by examining how the trans/national movements of ethnic and immigrant women's bodies challenge citizenship's investment in the abstract (white male propertied) person as representative of the nation.

John Carlos Rowe's concept of "comparative U.S. cultures" ("Future") names both the methodological and the structural ground for my chapters, which examine and compare texts by immigrant and ethnic women authors that do not necessarily participate in traditional terms of self- or national representation. By focusing on the national and transnational geopolitics of intimate autobiographical articulations—memory, trauma, illness, and family—I show how these works intervene in the supposedly "impersonal" logics of globalization.

**Structure and Organization**

Each chapter in this dissertation explores a particular autobiographical site at which the intimate and the geopolitical converge. Chaper 1, "Mapping 'a whole new geography': Lost in Translation and the Spatial Rhetorics of Memory," considers Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989), arguing that an exclusive focus on assimilation obscures how narratives of immigration are structured through what I call *spatial rhetorics of memory*. Specifically, I suggest that an exclusive focus on the assimilation question occludes two interrelated issues: first, the ways in which the text reveals national identification to be a transnational process; and second, the ways in which that process is
increasingly marked by and constructed through spatial rhetorics of memory—tropes that point to an understanding of memory as both temporally (historically) and geographically (politically) located.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I refocus critical engagements with the intimate articulations of trauma and illness. Chapter 2, "Sites of Postmemory: The Geopolitics of Trauma in History and Memory and Dictée," examines the little theorized geopolitics of trauma through an investigation of Asian American narratives of displacement. Specifically, I examine Rea Tajiri's autodocumentary film, History and Memory (1991), and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's multimedia anti-narrative, Dictée (1982), in order to suggest that trauma is not solely an individual response to rare and "extreme" events but is also an effect of the violent construction of citizenship. Both History and Memory and Dictée insist on trauma's proximity to violent and exclusionary citizenship for Asian American subjects—as well as to the nation's investment in erasing this relationship by mobilizing fantasies of equality and inclusion. Chapter 3, "Infectious Narratives: Jamaica Kincaid's My Brother and the Geopolitics of Witnessing AIDS," turns to an examination of how a geopolitics of witnessing can inform our understanding of constructions of suffering and death from HIV/AIDS. I argue that Kincaid constructs herself paradoxically as a privileged but limited witness by writing the temporal and spatial gap between seeing the spectacle of her brother's suffering and making sense of it through memory and narrative. This chapter traces how the narrative confronts—and writes—this gulf temporally and spatially, a process intimately tied to the operations of memory.

Chapter 4, "Troubling the Signature: Cross-Cultural Auto/Biography at the U.S.-Mexican Border," focuses on how three works about subjects at the U.S.-Mexico
border—Norma Elia Cantú's *Canícula* (1995), Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993), and Ursula Biemann's film *Performing the Border* (1999)—write the border subject transnationally. I argue that by interrogating the limits of autobiographical referentiality, each of these texts moves away from an abstract narrative of citizenship and national identification, and toward a transnational feminist narrative of human rights and a rhetoric of listening. *Canícula* exposes the failures of citizenship's "abstract" promise of national belonging and protections through an aesthetic that combines photographic images with written life narrative. *Translated Woman* explores the politics and poetics of "translating" the life experience of a woman from a different country and culture—in this case, Mexico—than the author, a Cuban American feminist ethnographer whose own life story becomes inextricably bound up with Esperanza's. Finally, *Performing the Border* provides a compelling critique of the abstract concept of "national protections" through an exploration of the exploitative effects of globalization and the botched investigation into the Juárez murders by Mexican and U.S. officials. This chapter concludes my investigation of the autobiographical by gesturing outward toward alternate forms of citizenship, identification, and political activism.

Finally, the brief conclusion to the dissertation, "Auto/Biography Studies in an Age of Terror," has two objectives. First, it suggests the continuing importance of an interdisciplinary autobiography studies by offering some points on the contemporary convergence of the autobiographical and the U.S. "war on terror." Returning to the popularity of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, I argue that U.S. popular culture, constructed through a nationalist rhetoric of trauma and victimization after 9/11, has become heavily invested in, and anxious about, concepts of "truth." I suggest some of the
ways in which the national news media has channeled this anxiety in order to transfer popular concern about truth, terror, and torture from the geopolitical to the space of the intimately personal. The "terror" in my title refers not simply to the "war on terror" but also to the ways in which U.S. citizenship is constituted by the twin rhetorics of fear and masculinist bravado. Second, the Conclusion suggests avenues for future inquiry into the convergences of the autobiographical and the trans/national at a time of renewed U.S. nationalism and global terror. These include the continued study of autodocumentary films; the autobiographical as a space for articulating and advocating for human rights claims; and digital autobiographical acts (e-mails, blogs) that appeal for readers' empathy and identification across cultures and nations.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the autobiographical is a site for theorizing the convergences of local, national, and global articulations of personhood. The tripartite genre, gender, and geopolitics offers a set of framing terms for this project. As autobiographical practices become more varied and flexible and "travel" with increasing regularity across cultural and national borders, it is imperative that we understand how Foucault's concept of the discursive production of truth (and the truth-telling subject) can be remapped to consider circulation and reception as well. In an age simultaneously characterized by postmodernity, globalization, and a global "war on terror," the proliferation of the autobiographical requires new critical terms and methods that turns to how truth is produced trans/nationally.
CHAPTER 1

Mapping "a whole new geography":

Lost in Translation and the Spatial Rhetorics of Memory

I have to translate myself. But if I'm to achieve this without becoming assimilated—that is, absorbed—by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced.

When I begin the process of my Americanization, I find myself in the least snobbish of societies and the most fluid of generations. It's that very mobility—upward, horizontal, and of some topological varieties not described in classical symmetry—that makes assimilation an almost outmoded idea.

—Eva Hoffman, Lost in Translation

At the beginning of her memoir, Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language (1989), Eva Hoffman describes her family's departure from Gydnia, Poland, on their way to Vancouver, Canada, in 1959. Devastated, thirteen-year-old Eva feels that her life is ending, and when the Polish anthem begins to play, she is overcome by homesickness, even though they haven't yet left the shore. "I am suffering my first, severe attack of
nostalgia, or ćęsknota—a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing," the narrator explains. "It is a feeling whose shades and degrees I'm destined to know intimately, but at this hovering moment, it comes upon me like a visitation from a whole new geography of emotions" (4). ćęsknota surprises Eva with its timing and its power, confronting her with a clearly nationalist force, even though, as Jews in postwar Cracow, she and her family were never "allowed to be patriots" (74). This scene sets up several key themes of the narrative—immigration, nation, and nostalgia—and signals that young Eva's emotional "geography" is already subtly bound up with national(ist) ideology.

It is perhaps too easy to dismiss Eva's poignant experience as pre-adolescent melodrama or as a sentimental flight of fancy. But in fact, like the remainder of the narrative, this scene strikes a precarious balance between primal emotion and theoretical self-reflection. Throughout Lost in Translation, Eva and the narrator vacillate between the urge to assimilate to American society and the resistant need to hold on to the homeland of childhood, most notably though ćęsknota. The text both mobilizes and troubles the commonplace rhetorics of immigration, mobility, and assimilation that characterize the most prominent and nationalist myth of American origins. This tension, which structures the book, is matched by a tension between modern and postmodern sensibilities as defined by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. On the one hand, infused

1 In this chapter, as in others, I follow the conventions of autobiography criticism in differentiating between Lost in Translation's author (Hoffman), narrator, and protagonist (Eva).
2 Žižek's suggestive work on nationalism argues that national identity is retroactive and tautological, grounding its elusive "Nation-Thing" in a myth of past origins constructed to mask anxieties in the present. See especially "Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!" and "Identity and Its Vicissitudes: Hegel's 'Logic of Essence' as a Theory of Ideology."
3 Grewal and Kaplan importantly distinguish between modernism and postmodernism as aesthetic movements and as historical moments tied to particular colonial and national discourses. I am interested in
with the language of poststructuralism, the narrative acknowledges the constructedness of identity through language and the tenuous nature of translation. On the other hand, the text draws upon—even as it unsettles—the classic model of the immigrant success story, that most ideological of forms, and Eva stubbornly clings to the importance of the internal, expressive, and authentic self. In its nostalgic longing for the war-torn Old World of childhood and its tentative embrace of the rhetoric of New World social mobility, *Lost in Translation* both consolidates and complicates the nationalist narrative of immigration to the U.S. that has circulated with such prevalence at least since the end of the nineteenth century.  

Critics, concerned about the ideological dubiousness of celebratory assimilation narratives, have frequently approached *Lost in Translation* by asking the question "Is this an assimilation narrative or not?" Mark Krupnick, for example, locates it in a recent wave of Jewish American autobiographies that, in their lack of concern with ethnicity, are both postmodern and post-assimilationist (453), while Azade Seyhan argues that it is a narrative of linguistic and national "conquest" (89). As the case of critical response to *Lost in Translation* makes clear, the assimilation question risks the primary assumption that immigration is a wholly voluntary and unidirectional process, a freely chosen, one-way movement from Old World to New, and from traditional self to modern self.  

Focusing exclusively on the assimilation question thus further entrenches the immigrant

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4 I refer here to the "melting pot" or "nation of immigrants" narrative, which is predicated on a rhetoric of assimilation and choice. See Sollors’ *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* for a useful discussion (and reinscription) of this mythic narrative.

5 Immigrant narratives themselves have rarely conformed exactly to this linear spatial and temporal model. However, this powerful national script confronts immigrant autobiographers and shapes the reading practices of American readers.
narrative of free choice, social mobility, and the superiority (or at least inevitable pull) of U.S. culture. Even critics who argue that *Lost in Translation* is a post- or anti-assimilationist narrative remain caught within this ideological frame. Although Hoffman herself suggests, in the second epigraph to this chapter, that "assimilation" in post-WWII America is "an almost outmoded idea" (195), I am not suggesting that critics celebrate the "end" of assimilation, in which resistance to Americanization is everywhere apparent. "Post-assimilationist," conjuring fantasies of a radically post-national, cosmopolitan world culture in which globalization creates unburdened, conflict-free flows of people and capital, begs for the same rich critical debate that numerous other "posts" have received.

In *Questions of Travel*, Kaplan importantly suggests that along with theories, theoretical and cultural tropes also "travel," and that it is the work of cultural critics to trace and question such traveling tropes (5-6). In particular, she is concerned with thinking about how and why Euro-American critical discourses deploy the concepts of travel, displacement, exile, and (im)migration, and to what ends. Arguing that critics have recently abandoned modernist high culture's fascination with the image of the singular American abroad for the postmodern figure of the displaced person, Kaplan suggests that the persistence of metaphors of location and mobility is tied to the continuing production of national and colonial discourses in supposedly post-nationalist, postcolonial contexts. Like Kaplan, I am interested in how discourses of location and mobility are produced and circulated, particularly in immigrant autobiography and the critical responses to it. Thus, I am interested in how *Lost in Translation* consolidates or problematizes the nationalist figures of the "immigrant" and the "exile."
My concern in this chapter is to offer a different approach, one that, instead of focusing on the assimilation question—"does she or doesn't she?"—examines what this question itself assumes, and what it obscures. In the case of *Lost in Translation*, I argue that an exclusive focus on the assimilation question occludes two interrelated issues: first, the ways in which the text reveals national identification to be a transnational process; and second, the ways in which that process is increasingly marked by and constructed through *spatial rhetorics of memory*. Scholars have recently recognized the relevance of both transnational feminism and contemporary theories of memory to the study of immigrant and ethnic women's life narratives. These approaches examine and interrogate the production of national and transnational identities—including the figures of immigrant, citizen, and exile—and point to the increasing mobilization of spatial rhetoric, or rhetorics of location, in narratives of migration and movement. Rather than remaining caught in a binary frame of assimilation or post-assimilation, then, these critics examine the production of nation and national identity as processes that are forged through transnational identifications and processes, including memory (a process

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6 There are many problems with an exclusive focus on assimilation, not all of which I can cover here. Several of the key issues raised by recent critics include: 1) the question of *to whom or what* a given individual or group assimilates (after all, there is not a single "American way"); 2) the assumption that there is a universal experience that all immigrants and immigrant groups share, characterized by free choice, the valorization of American social mobility (contrasted with the rigid social context of the homeland), and the total desire to adopt American economic and cultural customs; and 3) the social, cultural, and economic ties maintained with the homeland after immigration, including, for some immigrants, crossing back and forth from the U.S. to the home country many times over the course of a lifetime.

7 As Lowe insists, nation-building has always taken place through transnational processes, and vice versa. There is no neat separation between national and transnational, local and global (personal conversation). Ong usefully defines "transnationality" as the "transversal, the transaional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism." See *Flexible Citizenship*, 4.

intimately bound up with nostalgia). By spatial rhetorics of memory, I mean tropes that point to an understanding of memory as both temporally (historically) and geographically (politically) located. The spatial rhetorics of memory participate in a broader aesthetic and cultural concern with the politics of location characterized by the rhetoric of borders, interstices, and hybridity. Scholars increasingly recognize that memory is a complex cultural and national process, not simply an individual one, and that it is socially and politically situated (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer; Bennett and Kennedy; Hesford, "Rhetorical"; Hirsch, Family; Smith and Watson, Reading). Immigrant life narratives provide crucial sites for examining the spatial and geopolitical processes of memory, as well as the relationships among autobiographical subjects, national locations, and transnational linkages.

Psychoanalytic theories of the nation developed by Lauren Berlant and Slavoj Žižek, among others, have argued that national identification and belonging are largely constructed through imagination and affect. The content and structure of national affect varies, but all "imagined communities," to use Benedict Anderson's well-known formulation, are not founded on primarily geographical or practical concerns but on affective (even erotic) bonds of desire. Žižek argues, for example, that "the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated," which is structured via fantasy and which resists the logic of symbolization ("Enjoy" 201). Likewise, Berlant points to the importance of affect and sexual desire in constructing national identity and in producing the "abstract" citizen

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9 See Berlant, The Anatomy of National Fantasy; Compassion; and The Queen of America Goes to Washington City; and Žižek, "The Nation-Thing" and "Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!" See also Anderson, Imagined Communities.
(Queen). What has been little recognized, however, is the ways in which imaginative and affective investments are not limited solely to national identifications but also constitute transnational "imagined communities" and rhetorical spaces. I argue that transnational feminist cultural studies needs to take these imaginative and affective investments into account, in order to extend the work of scholars such as Berlant and Žižek into the transnational sphere. Examining the production of spatial rhetorics of memory is my contribution to this work.

Rather than asking whether or not Hoffman's text is an assimilation narrative, then, I ask a different question: how does the narrative problematize the assimilation question itself? I argue that Lost in Translation complicates the commonplace rhetoric of immigration and mobility by sketching a spatial "map" of memory inscribed on the body and experienced via affect, particularly tęsknota. As numerous theorists have shown, and as Lost in Translation bears out, memory is not simply a temporal journey back in time; it is also a future-oriented process, enacted in and for the present and the future, and in this it is a highly ethical enterprise (Fischer; Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer; Bennett and Kennedy). Moreover, for Hoffman, it is also a geographical and geopolitical process of coming to terms with national and transnational identities and locations. Infused with the spatial rhetorics of memory, Lost in Translation resists assumptions about mobility and location, assimilation and resistance, forgetting and remembering. Eva's journey from Cracow to Vancouver to Houston to New York illustrates not just "a whole new geography of emotions," then, but a whole new cartography of memory, one that reveals the affective bonds of both national and transnational identifications.

For an examination of affect as constructive of transnational communities, see Cheah and Robbins, eds., Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation.
Trans/National Identifications

Kaplan and Gilmore have shown that the choice—or refusal—to employ a particular genre or sub-genre can be understood as a form of identification and agency (Kaplan, "Resisting"; Gilmore, Limits). In the case of Lost in Translation, Hoffman self-consciously refuses to write an ethnic memoir, although ethnicity is one identification available to Eva. The narrative is not primarily concerned with Jewish identity and culture, as scholars concerned about the assimilation question have pointed out; moreover, the narrative locates her firmly in the present tense rather than the past of ethnic tradition and historical trauma (Krupnick; Hirsch, "Pictures"). Self-consciously refusing to write a narrative of postmemory, Hoffman instead explicitly follows the pattern of the immigrant or language memoir (A. Y. Kaplan)—forms concerned as much with the present and future as the legacy or burden of the past. Though the narrator acknowledges the force of her parents' wartime experiences—"I come from the war; it is my true origin. But as with all our origins, I cannot grasp it" (23)—she is more concerned in this narrative with mapping out the emotional geographies of her own past, present, and future.

Significantly, each of Lost in Translation's three sections corresponds not just to a particular time (childhood, adolescence, adulthood) but also to a particular national location: Poland ("Paradise"), Canada ("Exile"), and the U.S. ("The New World"). The

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11 Hirsch develops the concept of "postmemory" to theorize the generational transmission of historical and cultural trauma. See Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory. I discuss postmemory in more detail in Chapter 2, "Sites of Postmemory: The Geopolitics of Trauma in History and Memory and Dictée."

12 Hoffman's more recent work explicitly takes up the burden of postmemory. See especially her second memoir, After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust.
text's tripartite structure thus constructs Eva's life and identity spatially—more specifically, according to nation—as much as temporally. Moreover, the narrative's geopolitical logic registers Eva's shifting identifications—most notably a changing relation to Jewish identity and culture. While readers might expect ethnicity to be a central concern throughout the narrative, Eva's Jewish identity is most eloquently theorized in the "Paradise" (Poland) section, and it virtually disappears in the Canada and U.S. sections of the text, in which she begins to identify instead as an immigrant and an Eastern European writer and intellectual. Within this spatiotemporal (one might call it national-mythical) structure, each nation-state serves a specific symbolic and narrative function, eloquently captured in the section titles (Paradise, Exile, The New World). Thus, unlike her time in Canada or the U.S., Eva's life before emigration (entitled simply "Paradise") is characterized by an Edenic happiness and an experience of incontrovertible wholeness, in spite of her family's precarious position in postwar Poland: "the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love. It lives within me despite my knowledge of our marginality, and its primitive, unpretty emotions….All it has given me is the world, but that is enough" (74). In contrast, in the U.S. ("The New World"), Eva experiences tremendous opportunity and mobility in "the least snobbish of societies and the most fluid of generations" (195). This national-mythical narrative structure neatly resembles the narrative models of previous immigrant autobiographies, including Mary Antin's turn-of-the-century autobiography, The Promised Land (1912), and draws upon the classic structuralist model of immigration as identified by William Boelhower's classic 1982 study,
Immigrant Autobiography in the United States. Hoffman patterns her narrative upon Antin's classic Jewish immigrant assimilation narrative, but, significantly, she inverts the pattern. Whereas Antin's chapters progress from exile (or "Exodus") to the promised land of the New World, Hoffman's narrative moves backward from paradise to exile before rejoining Antin's schema in the New World. The narrator is explicit about viewing Antin as an ancestress; however, she also contrasts her story with Antin's, insisting that hers is not "a success story" (164). Even as she acknowledges her influence, Hoffman highlights her historical and generational remove from her ancestress: "The America of her time gave her certain categories within which to see herself—a belief in self-improvement, in perfectability of the species, in moral uplift—and those categories led her to foreground certain parts of her experience, and to throw whole chunks of it into the background" (164). Likewise, the narrator recognizes that her own temporal, cultural, and national locations give her narrative—and her memory—particular shape.

The tripartite structure of Lost in Translation situates Eva at particular memory "sites," both temporal and spatial (national), marked by particular "geographies" of affect and identification. One can trace the spatial construction of memory and its connection to affect by following the ways in which Eva's identity changes from Poland to Canada and the U.S. In "Paradise," memory is rooted in a past paradisal homeland characterized by rootedness, wholeness, and nationalist fantasy as well as, paradoxically, the traumatic legacy of war. In "Exile," memory is experienced through profound loss in the present; its

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13 Boelhower maps out a grand narrative of immigration based on an Old World/New World paradigm and characterized by three key moments: anticipation, contact, and contrast (28-29). As Sau-Ling C. Wong notes in her critique of Boelhower, this model, grounded in European Judeo-Christian tradition, assumes "an identical deep structure" to all immigrant autobiographies and "a rather static concept of culture" (149).

14 For a detailed comparative analysis of Antin and Hoffman's texts, see Krupnick; and Kellman.
spatial idiom is emigration and mobility, a lack of rootedness, and its affective geography is fear, alienation, and tešknota. Finally, in "The New World," memory is most clearly future-oriented, a matter of translation, registering spatially as cosmopolitanism and transnational identification. Of course, this neat schema, conjuring both Antin's The Promised Land and Boelhower's structuralist model of European immigration, is a construction that fails to neatly contain the slippery processes of memory, affect, and identification. However, by proceeding in this chapter according to Hoffman's schema, I am able to both acknowledge the complex spatial rhetorics of memory and analyze how they become bound up with particular national and transnational sites and identifications.

Memory as Traumatic Paradise

A variety of critics have noted Lost in Translation's romanticization of Poland, captured in the title of the autobiography's first section, "Paradise." According to this schema, Poland is the pre-modern—but also pre-ideological—realm, a space outside of history and before language: "We are not yet divided" (74). Characterized by Eva's childlike babble, which she imagines as "a Möbius strip of language in which everything, everything is contained" (11), Poland is sharply contrasted with the narrowly language-bound, highly ideological New World. Hirsch suggests that this romanticization of Poland is based in Eva's radical denial of her parents' wartime experiences, which included her father hiding from Nazi officials in a forest bunker, and her aunt's death in a gas chamber after digging her own grave. "What does it take for Hoffman to consider this place paradise?" Hirsch asks. "Why would she want to recapture a childhood that rests on such a legacy?" ("Pictures" 77). Going further, Sarah Phillips Casteel suggests that
Cracow, which the narrator associates with "the happy, safe, enclosures of Eden" (5), is romanticized through the symbolic narrative function of Canada ("Exile"), which relieves both Poland and the U.S. ("The New World") of the burden of Holocaust memory and immigrant exile: "The no-place to the North provides a narrative space in which the unnarratable can be bracketed, contained" (296). That is, Casteel suggests, the structure of *Lost in Translation* allows the national spaces of Poland and the U.S. to retain hope in the face of post-Holocaust despair. Thus Hoffman is able both to romanticize postwar Poland and to idealize postmodern America, despite the challenges both national spaces pose to her Jewish immigrant identity.

Žižek's work on identity and nationalism has shown how the retroactive process of memory can be tied to identification. Like autobiography itself, which requires a retrospective shaping of experience, identity is retroactive and tautological, grounded after the fact by the subject's act of "ideological narrativization" ("Identity" 41-42). Žižek argues that it is this symbolization process that confers identity, adding nothing new, no new content, but instead "it just translates, transposes, the found empirical content into the form of ground" (49). In this context, memory is charged with far more than simply "holding" memories of the past until the subject is ready to peruse them; rather, it is memory itself that confers identity after the fact. Viewed in this way, *Lost in Translation* 's idealized view of Poland as "Paradise" is remarkable not for any supposed denial or dismissal of the "real" post-war Cracow, but instead for the way it illustrates the strange and dark paradise that is memory itself.

15 Indeed, one could argue that autobiography, as a genre fundamentally concerned with the process of memory, is one form of identification, one form of retroactively conferring identity and ground to the subject.
Indeed, Poland is a strange paradise, ravaged by war and scarred by the traumatic memory of the Holocaust. The narrator describes Polish citizens' disbelief in the official, Russian-sponsored communist system, and describes public participation in political life as emotional performance, a game in which no one believes. But the national mood is one of amused cynicism and irony: "Nose-thumbing the system is a national pastime" (58), and "the coexistence of the official and the popular wisdom, and the disparity between them, is part of a whole package, an accepted order of things" (63). For her part, Eva thinks that Russia, the "parent" (59) country, is a land of "optimism and heroism and brave, clear eyes and good cheer….The Russians have spirit, flair, soul" (59). But she also recognizes that Russia is a land of "secret police, and Siberia, and the Party, which is half joke, half dirty word" (59). And on the occasion of Stalin's death, when Eva's school mourns during an overly tearful assembly ("Without him, we'll feel leaderless, unguided, orphaned" [57]), Eva does not mourn. Without knowing exactly why, she knows, even as a child, that Stalin did not represent her: "I'm holding myself upright, and have an illogical sense of pride in my own resistance….I don't think he was a friend of mine. I think my weeping classmates are sissies" (57). Later, she'll have terrible nightmares in which she runs from Stalin and his "sobered Cassocks" (66).

Eva's intuitive affective dis-identification with the Party is more than a variation on the national rebellious mood; it also constitutes a recognition of her difference. As a Jew, she knows that she may be an easy scapegoat in the case of domestic or foreign conflict. Thus, when the Polish president dies on a visit to Moscow and Cracow breaks out in anti-communist demonstrations, Eva "sense[s] that some dangerous, rumbling upheaval is coursing through our lives" (63). Eventually, these political forces will drive
numerous Jews to Israel, the U.S., and, in the case of Eva's family, Canada. Even as Eva pursues her study of the piano with dedication and passion, and spends long summers with her best friend and first love, Marek, she seems aware of the uprooting to come. In the meantime, however, she clings to Cracow as if it were Eden itself.

But a closer reading shows that "Paradise" is both Edenic and traumatic—indeed, that they cannot be disentangled. Throughout the section, the narrative balances a marked tension between carefree childhood innocence and the weight of too much knowledge. Moreover, the narrator's descriptions are laced with adult meditations on the strange workings of memory: "the wonder is what you can make a paradise out of" (5). While many critics have commented on Hoffman's refusal to explicitly thematize her Jewish identity—Krupnick, for example, notes that "One of the curious features of Eva Hoffman's book is her relative unconcern with her Jewishness" (460); Hirsch says that Hoffman "simply dismisses [anti-Semitism] by calling it primitive" (77)—in the "Paradise" section of Lost in Translation her identity is, in fact, constructed first and foremost in terms of her Jewishness. Indeed, the narrator's idealistic portrayal of Cracow is laced with an undertone of postwar angst and a conscious experience of herself as a Jewish minority in a Christian, communist country. Early in the narrative, for example, she describes the burden of sadness passed to her from her parents, both of whom lost family members during the Holocaust. "It's the middle of a sun-filled day," the narrator states, "but suddenly, while she's kneading some dough, or perhaps sewing up a hole in my sweater's elbow, my mother begins to weep softly. 'This is the day when she died,'

\[16\] Krupnick also suggests that that Hoffman's revision of the autobiographical form resembles Henry Adams's The Education of Henry Adams more than it does other Jewish immigrant autobiographies. Both arguments, in my view, are based on a simplistic concept of both assimilation and narrative form.
she says" (6). Eva "know[s] who 'she' is; I feel as if I've always known it. She was my mother's younger sister, who was killed during the war" (6). The burden of this knowledge haunts the otherwise sunny description of Cracow as Paradise.

Suggesting that her autobiographical memory is propelled in part by her parents' wartime experiences, the narrator writes, "My mother wants me to know what happened, and I keep every detail of what she tells me in my memory like black beads. It's a matter of honor to remember, like affirming one's Jewishness" (24). In Cracow, Eva experiences her Jewishness acutely, and in a largely affective and sensory manner:

The sense of being Jewish permeates our apartment like the heavy, sweet odor of the dough that rises in our kitchen in preparation for making hallah. The Jewishness lives in that bread, which other people don't seem to make; it's one of the markers of our difference. (29)

As Eva gets older, "Jewishness" becomes less amorphous and more defining: "So being Jewish is something definite; it is something that I am" (32). Because her parents are non-observant, it takes on significance mainly in opposition to anti-Semitism, which she learns is "[p]rimitive,…vulgar, unenlightened—something nobody would want to be" (32). As she explains, "That's what it means to be a Jew—a defiance of those dark and barbaric feelings. Through that defiance, one upholds human dignity" (33). For Eva, in the context of postwar Poland, being a Jew means being part of a defiant, dignified minority, struggling against the prejudices that led to so many deaths just a few years before. Rather than constituting a "dismissal" of anti-Semitism (Hirsch) or "unconcern" with Jewishness (Krupnick), identifying with this community provides the very contours of the story of Eva's childhood.
These twin characteristics of Eva's Jewishness—the burden of memory and the pride of righteous struggle—come to articulate her identity in a Poland where "the very mention of the word war sends me into a small panic" (57; italics in original), and where she "was never allowed to be" a patriot (74). Indeed, this identity acquires solidity by virtue of its opposition to an anti-Semitic Polish nationalism. But Eva also associates Jewishness with trauma; if the war is her "true origin" (23), it is also the traumatic origin of her Jewish defiance and dignity. Like other children of Holocaust survivors, whose own lives are overwhelmed by their parents' stories of suffering and survival (Hirsch, Family), Eva is torn between wanting to make up for that traumatic history and wanting to escape it: "To atone for what happened, I should relive it all with her, and I try. No, not really. I can't go as near this pain as I should. But I can't draw away from it either" (24-25). Each story she is told, each image described to her, burdens her memory yet solidifies her identity: "Another image for me to store, another sharp black bead added to the rest" (25). The traumatic images that populate her memory also construct her identity in postwar Cracow.

The traumatic paradise that is the narrator's memory of Cracow, then, is characterized by neither a denial of the past and its power nor a naïve embrace of emigration's "elsewhere" as the only future. Meditating on the strange love that she feels for Poland even at the time of writing, the narrator insists that its force derives from memory and tęsknota: "No, I'm no patriot, nor was I ever allowed to be. And yet, the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love" (74). Poland is a country that lives in Eva's memory as a reminder of her very existence in the world. Moreover, the narrator insists, it extends beyond the past in order to make both the
present and the future possible: "if we're not to risk falling into that other absurd, in
which we come unpeeled from all the objects of the world,…we must somehow preserve
the memory and the possibility of our childish, absurd affections" (75). That is, memory
as a traumatic paradise is bound to specific national and cultural locations, and provides
the very foundation of identity. In this way, then, memory is also a form of agency: by
retroactively grounding her identity in the traumatic paradise of Cracow, the narrator
resists a celebratory model of immigration that constructs the Old World as a place from
which people always desire to leave, and the New World as a place to which people
always desire to arrive.

**Memory as Nostalgic Desert**

Because Eva's is a double emigration, which takes her first to Vancouver and then
to the U.S., her narrative already complicates the linear immigration model offered by
Boelhower and cemented in American myth. Moreover, it complicates the very idea of
"assimilation," which assumes that the newcomer is assimilating to a single "way of life."
Although the young Eva conflates Canada and the U.S. into a single "America" in her
imagination, complete with "the old fabulous associations: streets paved with gold, the
goose that laid the golden egg" (84), subtle differences attach to the very word "Canada."
At the opening of *Lost in Translation*, the narrator prepares the reader for the distinctly
negative portrayal of Canada that will come in the second section, "Exile." She
ruminates:

> Of the place we're going—Canada—I know nothing. There are vague outlines of
> half a continent, a sense of vast spaces and little habitation. When my parents
were hiding in a branch-covered forest bunker during the war, my father had a book with him called *Canada Fragrant with Resin* which, in his horrible confinement, spoke to him of majestic wilderness, of animals roaming without being pursued, of freedom….But to me, the word "Canada" has ominous echoes of the "Sahara." (4)

This childlike image of Canada resonates with early colonialist discourses that imagined the American wilderness as empty and unpopulated, vast and full of natural resources (animals, plants) there for the taking. But in young Eva's imagination, Canada also resonates with the image of an African desert: not only uninhabited but uninhabitable.¹⁷

As Phillips Casteel points out, Canada remains for Eva a land of emptiness and loss, even after she moves to Vancouver and indeed, even after she later forges a career as a writer and intellectual in New York. But although tęsknota weaves through all the sections and national spaces, it is most forceful in "Exile," which narrates the time (adolescence) and the place (Canada) in which Eva experiences homesickness most acutely. Canada contains her rawest experiences of culture shock and homelessness, and she never comes to feel like she belongs in Vancouver. Memory's spatial idiom in "Exile," then, is one of fear, loss, alienation, and, most importantly, tęsknota.

Caren Kaplan has convincingly shown that exile, alienation, and nostalgia are intimately bound up with the imperialist and nationalist discourses of modernism. More specifically, Euro-American discourses that privilege individualism, singularity, and solitude have long played a part in the modernist figure of the "exile," which "marks a mediation in modernity where issues of political conflict, commerce, labor, nationalist

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¹⁷ Interestingly, Žižek invokes the trope of the "desert" in order to theorize the post 9-11"real." See *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates.*
realignments, imperialist expansion, structures of gender and sexuality, and many other issues all become recoded" (Questions 28). In this formulation, exile comes to be associated with expanding spheres of knowledge, cosmopolitanism, and artistic detachment ("art for art's sake")—or, worse, with freedom from ideology (30). This exilic discourse produces, in turn, a rhetoric of imperialist nostalgia; that is, the mourning for an "authentic" time and place free from ideological struggle and usually located in the past tradition of a conquered or industrialized country (34). Unlike much of modernist discourse, Hoffman's eloquent theorization of tęsknota is in fact rooted in material identity and history, Eva's double emigration. However, in Lost in Translation, tęsknota nonetheless participates in a different form of national and transnational cultural work.

As Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer note in their important Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present, nostalgic memory must be understood in its historical, national, and cultural context (xi)—that is, as a rhetoric. In the case of Lost in Translation, tęsknota, which is, after all, not reducible to the English "nostalgia," performs a double function: both consolidating Eva's Polish and Jewish identities and forging a new, immigrant identity.

As a modality of memory, nostalgia is associated with fossilization, a process that preserves images and events intact: "The house, the garden, the country you have lost remain forever as you remember them. Nostalgia—that most lyrical of feelings—crystallizes around these images like amber. Arrested within it, the house, the past, is clear, vivid, made more beautiful by the medium in which it is held and by its stillness" (115). Memories, the narrator suggests, "made more beautiful" by nostalgia's golden glow, are also frozen in time and place. Tęsknota thus resembles traumatic memory as theorized by Cathy Caruth and others (Caruth; Felman and Laub; Rothberg; Tal). Vivid
and immobile, both traumatic and nostalgic memory keep the subject stuck in a perpetual state of wounding or loss, unable to return to the past (even to alter it) or to move toward the future. At roughly the midpoint of Lost in Translation, the narrator meditates on this immobility, captured by the spatial rhetoric of exile: "I can't afford to look back," she states, "and I can't figure out how to look forward. In both directions, I may see a Medusa, and I already feel the danger of being turned into stone. Betwixt and between, I am stuck and time is stuck within me" (116). Eva feels "stuck" in the perpetual present, unable to return to the Cracow of her past and unwilling to move forward in a new country and culture: "I can't throw a bridge between the present and the past, and therefore I can't make time move" (117). Nostalgic memory, like traumatic memory, has a disruptive effect on experience and is characterized by compulsive repetition and an inability to change. In the context of Eva's immigration, it is experienced as exile—a coerced expulsion from the homeland rather than a free choice to be a mobile subject.18

For Eva, then, tęsknota both constructs and maintains transnational, affective ties to the homeland through beautiful memories frozen in time and space. But Eva also sees her nostalgia in clearly oppositional terms, as what keeps her from fully assimilating. In Lost in Translation, tęsknota is constructed as an emotional force that pervades Eva's immigrant identity and sets her apart from native-born Canadians: "It wasn't any good back there, our Jewish acquaintances say, why would you even want to visit, they don't want you anyway. I hang my head stubbornly under the lash of this wisdom. Can I really extract what I've been from myself so easily? Can I jump continents as if skipping rope?"

18 Of course, emigration to Canada literally wasn't young Eva's choice. But she suggests that neither was it fully "chosen" by her parents. When they leave Poland, no one knows what to feel or how to act: "What are the ceremonies for such departures—departures that are neither entirely chosen nor entirely forced, and that are chosen and forced at the same time?" (83).
(115). Later, the narrator will insist that it is tęsknota that allows her to resist full assimilation into U.S. identity and culture: "Ironically enough, one of the ways in which I continue to know that I'm not completely assimilated is through my residual nostalgia—which many of my friends find a bit unseemly, as if I were admitting to a shameful weakness—for the more stable, less strenuous conditions of anchoring, of home" (197). As a key element of Eva's immigrant identity, tęsknota allows her to remain simultaneously inside and outside of Canadian and U.S. national politics and culture.

The narrator registers the alienation of exile and Eva's outsider status not only in the spatial rhetoric of exile but also in the bleakness of the landscape itself, which "hurt[s] my soul" (100). Eva continues to figure the landscape as desolate and forbidding: "As the train approaches the station, I see what is indeed a bit of nowhere. It's a drizzly day, and the platform is nearly empty. Everything is the color of slate" (101). Alienation is also tellingly registered in the affective realm: one compelling emotional "geography" of Canada is fear. The narrator, once again echoing earlier immigrant narratives through the construction of immigration as (re)birth, states that "The primal scream of my birth into the New World is a mutative insight of a negative kind—and I know I can never lose the knowledge it brings me….when it hits with full force, in its pure form, I call it the Big Fear" (104). This fear is only exacerbated by her father's failure to achieve "success" in Vancouver: "So many people have made good; if you don't, it appears that you have only yourself to blame. This—this corrosive logic—is the other side of the New World dream, the seemingly self-inflicted nightmare in which you toss and turn in gut-eating guilt" (129). Indeed, working against the nationalist myth of the "good" immigrant, the narrator exposes "the other side" of immigrant energy and ambition. "I know how unprotected my
family has become; I know I'd better do very well—or else," she explains. "Immigrant energy, admirable name though it has gained for itself, does not seem a wholly joyful phenomenon to me" (157). This ambition, for Eva, is another "version of the Big Fear" (157).

Eva spends her immigrant energy and ambition, meanwhile, not just on schoolwork and learning English, but also on learning the subtler emotional topographies of adolescent behavior. She quickly discovers that in Canada, body language and facial expressions are just as incomprehensible to her as English words and sentences. The narrator eloquently traces the distinct differences between the Polish emotional landscape—marked by irony, defiance, and romance—and the American one—marked by optimism, practicality, and politeness. In Poland, "[t]he best compliment that a school exercise can receive is that it has polot—a word that combines the meanings of dash, inspiration, and flying. Polot is what everyone wants to have in personality as well. Being correct and dull is a horrid misfortune" (71). In Canada, however, Eva's teenage girlfriends aspire to giddiness and gossip: "Why is there so much giggling and exaggeration and nervousness at this party?" (130). These differences, of course, enter into the language: "English kindliness has a whole system of morality behind it, a system that makes 'kindness' an entirely positive virtue. Polish kindness has the tiniest element of irony" (108). Meanwhile, Eva struggles with the divide between how others read her and how she understands herself. "I've never been prim before," she laments, "but that's how I am seen by my new peers" (118). Even her mother complains that she's "becoming 'English.' This hurts me, because I know she means I'm becoming cold. I'm no colder than I've ever been, but I'm learning to be less demonstrative" (146). And she has to learn that
underneath the giggling and optimism of American privilege, there sometimes lurk "gothic secrets, smoldering in the sensible interiors of these intact suburban households" (151).

Of course, as an adolescent ("in Poland, a relatively unidentified species" [131]) girl, Eva's alienation and confusion are bound up with the process of learning how to be a woman—a process that she knows in the Polish, but not the American, vein. "I don't have a silk slip, don't like to put on makeup, and these elaborate preparations are somehow disturbing to me" (129). The rituals of teenage friendship and dating bring back both the Big Fear and the sting of tęsknota. But in the nostalgic desert of memory, living in Vancouver is about learning not just a wholly new gender identification, but also a new national and racial identification: the "white ethnic" or "immigrant." Significantly, Eva's first alienating experiences of Vancouver resemble scenes of culture shock (or, in Boelhower's schema, "contact") in other immigrant autobiographies. As "Exile" begins, in a Montreal train station, thirteen-year-old Eva experiences culture shock first in gendered, then in racial, terms:

There is this young girl, maybe my age, in high-heeled shoes and lipstick! She looks so vulgar, I complain. Or maybe this is just some sort of costume? There is also a black man at whom I stare for a while; he's as handsome as Harry Belafonte, the only black man whose face I know from pictures in Polish magazines, except here he is, big as life. Are all black men this handsome, I wonder? (99)

Eva's first encounter with Canada is thus figured through the "amazing news" (99) that here, thirteen-year-old girls wear high heels and lipstick, and black men are handsome
and "big as life" (99). This scene echoes a similar scene in Antin’s turn-of-the-century *The Promised Land*, which ironically constructs American justice and equality through the presumably deserved punishment of a black "criminal":

> Once a great, hulky colored boy, who was the torment of the neighborhood, treated me roughly while I was playing on the street. My father, determined to teach the rascal a lesson for once, had him arrested and brought to court. The boy was locked up overnight….But the moral of this incident lies not herein. What interested me more than my revenge on a bully was what I saw of the way in which justice was actually administered in the United States….We were all free, and all treated equally, just as it said in the Constitution!….Three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue! (204)

Whereas Antin’s scene constructs the black man as "other"—as well as a buoyant American justice and equality—through black criminal masculinity, Hoffman rewrites the encounter by exoticizing and eroticizing black masculinity. And while Eva identifies in Cracow with a Jewish minority whose position in the Polish nation is precarious at best, in Canada and the U.S. Eva perceives herself first and foremost as an immigrant: "being an 'immigrant,' I begin to learn, is considered a sort of location in itself—and sometimes a highly advantageous one at that" (133). Eva enjoys a brief celebrity status in "uneventful Vancouver" (133), as the local newspaper prints her picture and asks her opinion on all sorts of national and international topics, and her teacher asks her to describe to the class "what life in a Communist country is really like" (131). Highlighting her alienation from the language and culture, her first encounter with otherness in Vancouver also foreshadows the ways in which Eva comes to be racialized (and to
identify) primarily as a white immigrant ethnic in Canada and the U.S. Identifying as an immigrant, if it does not provide "a central ethos" (107), at least provides a strategic identity (and a culturally recognizable narrative form) that positions Eva at a productive remove from the dominant culture. One of the effects of this subject position, of course, is what the narrator calls "triangulation" (170), Eva's ability to recognize the contextual and constructed nature of identity, experience, reality.

But if Eva's immigrant identity is a form of national "location," it is also, through tęsknota, a form of national dis-identification as well. That is, through tęsknota, Eva and the narrator dis-identify with the nationalistic immigrant narrative of linear mobility and total assimilation. Likewise, memory as nostalgic desert, with its attendant spatial rhetoric of exile, enables a retroactive grounding of immigrant identity that is not wholly mobile, free-floating, and progressive. Rather, the rhetoric of exile enables a form of ideological resistance to national identification, even as it reaches across the Atlantic to crystallize a traumatic, originary identity in Poland. As an act of memory, "Exile" problematizes the immigrant narrative of progressive assimilation and success, grounding identity instead in an empty, uninhabitable country that can never be "home": "Vancouver will never be the place I most love, for it was here that I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos" (151). For the narrator, the nostalgic desert of memory is once again a retroactive construction in and for the present, allowing her to maintain a resistant immigrant identity through tęsknota.

Memory as Bodily Map

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In contrast to the first and second sections of *Lost in Translation*, in which memory is profoundly associated with past trauma or present loss, "The New World" section depicts memory as an optimistic force for the future. Its spatial idiom, reflected once again in the section title, is that of the frontier, a space of borderless possibility and dreams realized. Indeed, "The New World," narratively speaking, is the place of resolution, a return to happiness and wholeness, and *Lost in Translation* in many ways bears this out, ending with, if not a return to the paradisal garden of childhood, at least a constructive—and constructed—recovery of an unalienated self. This constructed recovery takes place through the spatial rhetoric of memory as bodily map; that is, Eva's body becomes the site at which language and memories become drawn, organized, "translated," and incorporated into the self. The narrator describes this process as one of ingestion, or eating words: "I've become obsessed with words. I gather them, put them away like a squirrel saving nuts for winter, swallow them and hunger for more. If I take in enough, then maybe I can incorporate the language, make it part of my psyche and my body" (216).

Indeed, in addition to the geographical trajectory that structures *Lost in Translation*, another structure is evident: the story of acquiring familiarity with English. Eva's story traces her linguistic life from childhood babble to comfortable Polish to alienating English, and ends when she feels "at home" in the language. Upon arriving in Canada, when her teacher renames her "Eva" in place of "Ewa" (and renames her sister "Elaine" in place of "Alinka"), she laments in post-structuralist terms, "the signifier has become severed from the signified" (106). Not without irony, she characterizes herself as a metonym for contemporary theory: "I am becoming a living avatar of structuralist
wisdom; I cannot help knowing that words are just themselves" (107). At the same time, she recognizes the limitations of postmodern "play" and shifting identities. She continues:

But it's a terrible knowledge, without any of the consolations that wisdom usually brings. It does not mean that I'm free to play with words at my wont; anyway, words in their naked state are surely among the least satisfactory play objects. No, this radical disjoining between word and thing is a dessicating alchemy, draining the world not only of significance but of its colors, striations, nuances—its very existence. It is the loss of a living connection. (107)

Upon receiving her first diary, she wonders about which language she should use to write her innermost thoughts: "If I am indeed to write something entirely for myself, in what language do I write?" (120). Polish, she decides, "is becoming a dead language, the language of the untranslatable past" (120), whereas writing in English feels like "doing a school exercise,…a slightly perverse act of self-voyeurism" (121). She chooses English because "I have to write in the language of the present, even if it's not the language of the self" (121).

Making English "the language of the self" thus becomes of tantamount importance, and Eva seizes upon language acquisition with desperation. She begins to worry that without sufficient knowledge of English, she will miss large parts of experience, and she therefore begins to hoard words:

The thought that there are large parts of the language I'm missing can induce a small panic in me, as if such gaps were missing parts of the world or my mind….When I write, I want to use every word in the lexicon, to accumulate a thickness and weight of words so that they yield the specific gravity of things. I
want to re-create, from the discrete particles of words, that wholeness of a
childhood language that had no words. (217)

Ultimately, Eva desires to find the deep structure of universal human experience through translation rather than assimilation, to "resolve our antitheses within a wider synthesis" (212) even though she recognizes its impossibility. For Eva, the constant shifting of identifications and the triangulation that attend her experience lead to unreality: "I cannot sustain my sense of a separate reality forever, for after all, the only reality is a shared reality, situated within a common ground" (195). Eva desires not just a language that is as whole and Edenic as her childhood language; she also desires a language that fits her so well that her otherness can virtually disappear. Deciding to pursue a graduate degree in English at Harvard is therefore not just about class mobility and becoming "a professional New York woman" (170)—though it is certainly about that—but it is also about making the language her own, making it "transparent" (243). Once she obtains this level of proficiency, she begins to feel at home in America: "Perhaps I've read, written, eaten enough words so that English now flows in my bloodstream….Words are no longer spiky bits of hard matter, which refer only to themselves. They become, more and more, a transparent medium in which I live and which lives in me—a medium through which I can once again get to myself and to the world" (243).

In the fluid New World of the U.S., Eva suggests, social and class mobility are mostly matters of internalizing the language. This ability, she insists, is a matter of living a "life in a new language," an experience that she associates with a postmodern, post-structuralist worldview: "And what is the shape of my story? Perhaps it is the avoidance of a single shape that tells the tale….If I want to assimilate into my generation, my time, I
have to assimilate the multiple perspectives and their constant shifting" (164). Rather than assimilating, the narrator suggests, she must instead "translate myself" (211).

Translating the self means, in part, translating (internalizing, incorporating) new languages of gender. In Vancouver, while she gets "the fifteen minutes of fame so often accorded to Eastern European exotics" (133), she is considered an exciting specimen. But it is in "The New World" section that gender identity is most eloquently theorized, as Eva becomes exoticized and eroticized as a "dark stranger" (33). She discovers that American men find her tantalizingly different: "They are curious about what I have to say, and fascinated by the fact that I'm a 'European,' which in their minds guarantees some mysterious and profounder knowledge" (179). With characteristic irony, the narrator notes that American men view her simply as "European," a designation that points to Eva's immigrant status but that also implies the absence of a more specific identity, be it Central European, Polish, or Jewish. In the minds of these men, Eva automatically qualifies as a worldly, cosmopolitan type, simply because she is from somewhere in Europe. This assumption of worldliness ironically contrasts with another common assumption held by Eva's peers, namely that Poland is traditional, oppressive, or even backward. The narrator contemptuously pokes fun at the assumption that she is a cosmopolitan woman, but Eva employs the resulting sexual capital to great effect:

I must admit that I do nothing to dispel this impression. Instead of being an uncomfortable glitch in the smooth texture of adolescent existence, I've now gained the status of an exotic stranger, and this brings high color to my cheeks and sharpens my opinions. I'm excited by my own otherness, which surrounds me like a bright, somewhat inflated bubble. (179)
Eva is perceived as an "exotic stranger," then, a bit Bohemian, a bit "Galacian" (202). But when Eva eventually stops being "excited by my own otherness" (179) and starts wanting to "reenter…a state of ordinary reality" (202), she finds that this is harder than it seems. Her peers would like her to remain exotically other even as she becomes tired of being read as a foreigner: "I want, somehow, to give up the condition of being a foreigner. I no longer want to tell people quaint stories from the Old Country, I don't want to be told that 'exotic is erotic,' or that I have Eastern European intensity, or brooding Galacian eyes" (202).

For Eva, however, coming to the U.S. and attending college during the height of 1960s counterculture, the experience of wholeness and belonging she desires is unavailable. The narrator recognizes the high irony in this situation: unlike previous immigrants to the U.S., Eva experiences few social barriers and little overt discrimination; but unlike those previous immigrants, she also experiences a decided lack of unity: "I do not experience the pain of earlier immigrants, who were kept out of exclusive clubs or decent neighborhoods. Within the limits of my abilities and ambitions, I can go anywhere at all, and be accepted there. The only joke is that there's no there there" (196). The narrator here explicitly acknowledges her generational remove from previous waves of Jewish and Eastern European immigrants, including Mary Antin. But this passage also implicitly consolidates the American mythos of social mobility and industriousness and the ideology of meritocracy. However, the narrator suggests that for an immigrant subject struggling to find her place in "The New World," the lack of a unified America is not necessarily desirable. "A hundred years ago," she writes, "I might have written a success story, without much self-doubt or equivocation….But I have come
to a different America, and instead of a central ethos, I have been given the blessings and the terrors of multiplicity" (164).

Crucially, the multiplicity that confronts the narrator in "The New World" is contrasted with an idealized Polish past, which provided an experience of wholeness and a secure, untroubled worldview: "we are not yet divided" (76). In this way, Lost in Translation's national-mythical structure enables not only cultural confrontation, borderlands, or hybrid spaces, but also discrete national and cultural scripts and selves cemented in memory. Hirsch insists, for example, that the narrative displaces the burden of Holocaust history onto a sentimental nostalgia for "home" that fails to recognize the ways in which Eva's childhood in Poland was already divided (88). And Casteel notes that the narrative structure enables both Poland and the U.S. to remain distinct from the barren desert of Canada and to retain their optimism and practicality (296). While the U.S. may lack the luster of paradisal unity, it also remains a forward-looking space in which Eva can forge a future for herself as a New York intellectual.

Because she has experienced the loss of a mother tongue and the fear and rage associated with inchoate emotions and experiences, however, Eva's desire to reconstruct the unified and unifying language of childhood is another variation on the retroactive and tautological forms of memory. The narrator acknowledges that her traumatic childhood paradise, her nostalgic and exilic desert, and her bodily map of the "New World" are constructions, though necessary ones: Because I have learned the relativity of cultural meanings on my skin, I can never take any one set of meanings as final….I know that I've been written in a variety of languages; I know to what extent I'm a script" (275).
Nonetheless, meaning provides a location, a foundation from which to live and speak, no matter how retroactive and tautological that location or foundation is.

As one of these foundations, love and friendship are among the last meanings incorporated into Eva's bodily map. Despite the narrator's flip humor—"How do you talk to an alien? Very carefully" (186)—she knows she has finally "arrived" in The New World when she falls in love. For Eva, even love is attached to the spatial rhetorics of memory: "When I fall in love with my first American, I also fall in love with otherness, with the far spaces between us and the distances we have to travel to meet at the source of our attraction" (186-187). The language of intimacy provide the greatest challenge; when her lover says "I love you," for example, she hears it as "an oddly disembodied phrase" rather than "an intuitive click" (190). But by the end of the narrative, she is able to say "Darling" without irony, and to "read the play of wit and feeling and intelligence on [her friend] Miriam's face, which at first seemed to me flat and impassive" (278). She has incorporated the language into her bodily knowledge, and she therefore shares a commonplace reality with others. In this new world of the future, Eva grounds herself by the future-oriented map of memory.

Except that there are two places in "The New World" section where the traumatic past does, briefly, intervene. The first is when Eva learns of the suicide of Marek, her beloved childhood friend. Although "there's no known cause" (230), Eva identifies Marek's death as a legacy of the war:

I think sometimes that we were children too overshadowed by our parents' stories, and without enough sympathy for ourselves, for the serious dilemmas of our own lives, and who thereby couldn't live up to our parents' desire—amazing in its
strength—to create new life and to bestow on us a new world. And who found it hard to learn that in this new world too one must learn all over again, each time from the beginning, the trick of going on. (230)

Echoing the text's mythical characterization of the U.S. as "The New World," the narrator's language here acknowledges the destructive forces of parental hope and new-world optimism. Likewise, when she visits her parents in Montreal, Eva finds herself embroiled in a lunchtime argument about the fate of Jews who cooperated with German Nazis during the war. Despite the elegant simplicity of the text's tripartite spatial structure, the narrator concedes the narrative difficulties of this scene: "There's no way to get this part of the story in proportion. It could overshadow everything else, put the light of the world right out. I need seven-league boots to travel from this to where I live" (253). These traumatic invasions into the space of "The New World" disrupt the narrative's attempt at resolution, and suggest that memory is not entirely within the subject's control. Instead, memory can intrude even into the space of borderless possibility that defines Eva's life as a cosmopolitan New York writer and intellectual.

This last identity finds its fullest force in Eva's recognition that she is part of a category of Eastern European writers, archivists of memory and loss. The affective geographies of memory have salience here in constructing transnational identifications. Situating herself in America as an Eastern European immigrant writer, Eva is able to incorporate her experiences of tęsknota into a larger personal and historical vision:

> In our highly ideological times, even nostalgia has its politics. The conservatives of the sentiments believe that recovering their own forgotten history is an antidote to shallowness. The ideologues of the future see attachment to the past as that
most awful of all monsters, the agent of reaction….Only certain Eastern European writers, forced to march into the future too often, know the regressive dangers of both forgetfulness and clinging to the past. But then, they are among our world's experts of mourning, having lost not an archaeological but a living history. (115-116)

This passage, infused with the language of trauma, evokes once again the traumatic subtext of the narrative, even as it anticipates Hoffman's own future work on Eastern Europe and traumatic history. Like identifying as an immigrant, Eva's identification with this group of writers grounds her identity at a slight angle to the dominant American ideology. Although "The New World" reinscribes the optimistic narrative of progress and the pull of the future, it also recalls the traumatic remainder on which that narrative rests and without which it would be meaningless. Thus, even as the future-oriented process of memory as bodily map allows Eva a secure foundation from which to live in America, the text warns of the danger of being "forced to march into the future" (116). Instead, the spatial rhetorics of memory that characterize Lost in Translation indicate that the process of remembering is spatial as much as temporal, political as much as personal, and more complex than can be registered on any map.

Trans/National Memory

What the spatial rhetorics of memory in Lost in Translation can contribute to the study of immigrant autobiography is, in my view, an understanding of the cultural work performed by both national and transnational memories and how these memories consolidate or complicate national and transnational identifications structured by affect.
Examining the complex linkages among national and transnational memories and identities in global capitalism requires that critics revise expectations about assimilation and post-assimilation in immigrant life narratives. If Lost in Translation resists the dominant American ideology of linear assimilation, it is also not enough simply to say that it is "post-assimilationist" or that it is "unconcerned" with ethnic identity and traditions. Rather, the fantasy of immigrant experience captured in the American imagination and mapped out by William Boelhower must be reimagined and redrawn in order to acknowledge both persisting national identifications and expanding transnational identifications and connections. Rather than a linear model, then, critics need to construct a spatial "map" of linkages and locations both materially and imaginatively invested with ideological power.

The spatial rhetorics of memory offer one model for imagining such a "map" of immigrant experience. Moreover, they acknowledge the cultural work performed by both identification and affect. Memory is a powerful site at which to theorize the ways in which identity gets retroactively grounded in its own foundations, as well as the ways in which national and transnational identifications are constructed through affective links. Memory need not be understood as merely a storage space or a repository of unconscious, uncontrollable desires; on the contrary, as contemporary theorists acknowledge, it is a process enacted in the present and directed toward the future, and it can therefore be seen as an act of agency. In this sense, memory can be understood as a rhetorical act of identification, an argument about identity (Hesford, "Rhetorical"). As a dynamic process of rhetorical agency, then, memory can be mapped out and examined for the ways in which it is used for and in national and transnational ends and contexts.
At stake, then, is not just the fraught question of assimilation-or-resistance, but also the very procedures by which identity is produced in the first place. As I have shown, the affective bonds that structure national identification also inform transnational identifications, particularly for mobile subjects such as immigrants, migrants, refugees, and the like. That these bonds are cemented in and through memory means that theorists need to consider the transnational processes of memory in addition to national practices of remembering and commemoration. What, for example, do transnational memories of the Holocaust or other cultural traumas enable or constrain? How are these memories constructed, and by whom? And what are the purposes of such memories? Acknowledging the spatial rhetorics of memory that structure both national and transnational locations, critics can begin to examine the cultural work that memory processes perform in global capitalism.
CHAPTER 2

Sites of Postmemory:

The Geopolitics of Trauma in History and Memory and Dictée

I began searching for a history, my own history....I began searching because I felt lost, ungrounded, somewhat like a ghost that floats over terrain, witnessing others living their lives, and yet not having one of its own.

—Rea Tajiri, History and Memory

The meaning is the instrument, memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure, as document.

—Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictée

Introduction: Postmemory and the Geopolitics of Trauma

In her short autodocumentary, 1 History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige (1991), part auto/biography, part documentary, part visual poem, Rea Tajiri recreates for

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1 Jim Lane coins this term, referring to autobiographical documentary films, in his groundbreaking book The Autobiographical Documentary in America, p. 4. For a useful discussion of self-reflexive documentaries in general, see Nichols.
the camera an image of her mother in an internment camp in the Arizona desert during World War II. Bent and kneeling over a water faucet, her mother, played by Tajiri herself, is filling a canteen with cool water; the water spills over the sides of the canteen and splashes onto her hands and arms, cooling her sun-baked skin. "The water is really cold," Tajiri narrates in a voice-over, "and it feels really good." This scene—derived partly from her mother's memory and partly from her own—is repeated several times over the course of the film, and we witness this simple bodily pleasure again and again, from various angles: the back, the front, and the side, the camera focusing on the mother's hair, her hands, her back, and finally her face. This representation of the fragmented body in pleasure is spliced alongside a barrage of images of bodies in prison, in trauma, and in pain. It also occurs alongside a series of disembodied voices, family testimonies with bits and pieces of stories to tell but without the images to go with them. Describing her family as full of ghosts, detached from history and memory by its lack of coherent memories and comprehensive narratives, the narrator explains, "I began searching for a history, my own history....I began searching because I felt lost, ungrounded, somewhat like a ghost that floats over terrain, witnessing others living their lives, and yet not having one of its own."

The haunting image of the ghost as witness at once unsettles and reminds viewers of our own role as witnesses to others' lives. In *History and Memory*, the internment survivor's story—erased and silenced by official history—is precisely what needs to be recovered. What the film documents, however, is the impossibility of such a recovery—at least for the original teller, Tajiri's mother, whose memory of her internment experiences, scarred by tragedy and loss, is largely irretrievable. What is possible, however, is for the rejoining of memory and history through a creative act of the daughter's imagination—
what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" (*Family*). "I remembered a time of great pain before I was born," Tajiri says. "I had never been [to the internment camp], but I had a memory of it. I had no idea where these memories came from, yet I knew the place." For Hirsch, *postmemory*, the existence of secondhand "memories" in the children of survivors of cultural trauma, is "a very powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Situated on the border between memory and history, trauma and survival, postmemory provides a compelling alternative to both the unrecoverable (traumatic memory) and the disembodied (narrative history).

To examine auto/biographical representations of internment—and of Asian American displacement in general—is to necessarily confront the limits of our critical tools for analyzing trauma. Because autobiography charges critics with recognizing what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call "the politics of remembering" (*Reading 18*), it forces us to come to terms with competing cultural narratives of historical traumas such as internment, colonization, and war. Such a task does not simply call for ways of understanding trauma's "belatedness," its temporal dimension, which has been well theorized by a variety of scholars (Caruth; Felman and Laub; LaCapra), but also its *spatial* dimension, its imaginative placement (or dis-placement) inside, outside, or on the borders of the nation. Narratives of cultural trauma marked by postmemory require us *both* to refine our concept of "history" by acknowledging the disruptive past within the present *and* to refocus the critical trope of "borders" in order to acknowledge boundaries constructed within the territorial space of the nation, such as internment camps.² For

² For more on the phenomenon of multiple borders "within" national territory, see Davis.
Asian American subjects, this also requires acknowledging diverse borders constructed
	transnationally through immigration, (neo)colonization, and war.

This chapter examines auto/biographical representations of Asian American
displacement—including Japanese American internment—in order to argue that trauma is
not solely an individual response to rare and "extreme" events but is also an effect of the
violent construction of citizenship. Specifically, I insist that for subjects excluded from
the privileged and fantastical domain of national belonging, trauma marks both memory
and history, and exposes the nation's investment in oppression. Naming Asian American
displacement "traumatic" is not to fetishize the Other's suffering but is instead to point to
the little-theorized geopolitics of trauma. Within the burgeoning field of trauma studies,
scholars have only recently begun to examine trauma, memory, and history through the
lens of geopolitics (Bennett and Kennedy; Hesford and Kozol, Haunting; Tal). The
editors of World Memory, for example, point out that in the U.S., the Holocaust has
become the paradigm figure in discussions of historical trauma. The prominence of the
Holocaust in the U.S. imagination as the primary historical crisis of the 20th century is
linked to a national memory of Americans "not as perpetrators but as liberators" (1).

Bennett and Kennedy ask if the methods of trauma studies, largely grounded in attempts
to understand the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust and its representation, can be
generalized to other forms of cultural trauma, and if responses to and representations of
trauma vary over time and across geographical and cultural boundaries. That is, they are
concerned with situating "trauma" spatially and culturally as well as temporally.

3 Gilmore usefully examines connections among trauma, citizenship, and autobiography in The Limits of
Autobiography.
Throughout this chapter, I likewise insist on the necessity of recognizing trauma's positioning, not solely in the past or always in other national spaces, but "within" the U.S. itself and its violent history. The concept of postmemory is particularly useful for theorizing the geopolitics of trauma because, as Hirsch suggests, postmemory takes the form of a permanent "temporal and spatial exile" (245) that "allow[s] the U.S. domestic interior to be invaded by the painful aspects of its history" (246). Echoing Tajiri's reconstruction of her mother's internment memories in *History and Memory*, Hirsch insists that in rebuilding the past, postmemory creates "a reconstructed village in which, however, no one can live" (248). This concept of the "site of postmemory" (248), developed in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, emphasizes exile from the home country as its spatial idiom. However, for children of internment survivors, such as Tajiri, the traumatic past is not encapsulated "elsewhere" in a foreign, if familial, home country. Precisely because internment created border spaces within U.S. territory, spaces that reconstituted the Asian American subject as outsider, Tajiri's postmemory "invades" U.S. domestic space from within and documents the tenuousness of citizenship for racialized subjects. Likewise, for other auto/biographical representations of Asian American displacement, such as narratives by the children of immigrants who "return" to the U.S. in response to the devastation wrought by American wars in Japan, Vietnam or Korea, the scene of trauma cannot be designated as purely "outside" of U.S. national space. Rather, these narratives attest to the national logics that "invade" the American imaginary with traumatic scenes that are situated transnationally, on the border between the domestic and the foreign, citizen and alien, self and other. In order to understand how auto/biographical
representations of trauma (re)construct sites of postmemory that refuse these nationalist and imperialist distinctions, it is necessary to theorize trauma at the site of citizenship.

I approach these issues through an examination of auto/biographical works by Tajiri, the child of an internment survivor, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, a Korean American immigrant and the child of a survivor of Japanese, French, and American colonization of, and war in, Korea. Both Tajiri's autodocumentary and Cha's multimedia auto/biography of Korean displacement, *Dictée* (1982), insist on trauma's proximity to violent and exclusionary citizenship for Asian American subjects—as well as to the nation's investment in erasing this relationship by mobilizing fantasies of equality and inclusion. I suggest that these representations of trauma facilitate this alternative "re-membering" by creatively exploiting tensions between image and narrative. Specifically, I argue that visual and textual representations of the national(ized) body and its abject "other" in both *History and Memory* and *Dictée* open up an alternative documentary space located at the site of postmemory. If the primacy of the Holocaust in the U.S. national imagination serves to displace other forms of remembering, such as that of internment or of violence perpetrated by the U.S. on others overseas (particularly, in the 20th century, in Asia), how do auto/biographical representations of trauma construct alternate sites through the deployment of postmemory? My point is not to simply oppose auto/biography to "official" historical narratives, as if autobiographical representation had a purely transgressive politics based in the "personal." Rather, my aim is to refocus critical engagements with trauma and its representation through an emphasis on national and transnational politics. As Lisa Lowe argues, "the national project of 're-
members'...is a crucial site in which the terms of 'membership' in the national 'body' are contested, policed, and ultimately redefined" (*Immigrant* 4). If auto/biographical works can unsettle dominant national myths about history and the U.S. role in perpetuating violence and trauma, resituating trauma "within" the space of the nation-state as well as in its encounters with other nations, then they can also urge critics to reconfigure our understanding of trauma and its representation in response to diverse historical traumas situated in various national and transnational spaces.

**History and Memory: Embodying Postmemory**

Because postmemory is grounded not in the conventional autobiographical "I" but instead in the negotiation of self, (m)other, and community, it typically combines autobiography with biography, visual with textual elements, and "documentary" with "creative" approaches to history. Calling upon viewers to witness the integration of memory and history, the rejoining of image and narrative, *History and Memory* draws on and brings into conflict multiple "truth-telling" discourses (Foucault, *History*). These include, in addition to autobiography, biography, and documentary, the testimony—a discourse that, in Arthur W. Frank's words, "implicates others in what they witness" (143). For Frank, "embodiment is the essence of witness" (142) for subjects of trauma, and the narrative contents of any one story serve merely as "openings to their more fundamental testimony, which is the presence of the embodied teller" (142, emphasis in

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4 Indeed, many autobiographies serve the function of consolidating existing national projects. See the Introduction.

5 These are Hirsch's terms in *Family Frames*. Other scholars have taken up the tension between the urge to record and to creatively process in different terms. See especially LaCapra; Felman and Laub; and Rothberg.
original). In the film, a tension is established between testimony and its witnessing function on the one hand, and expository documentary and its abstracting function on the other. Tajiri splices "real" historical footage alongside staged and reenacted scenes, hand-held camera footage and interviews, U.S. propaganda, and fictional Hollywood dramas. Unlike documentary histories that structure an apparently seamless and progressive narrative, History and Memory forges a rhetorical connection with the viewer that positions internment and its traumatic aftermath as a space of embodied witnessing. Situating the embodied presence of the internment survivor within U.S. history, the film troubles coherent historical narratives of the nation-state that are constructed via the fantasy of inclusive citizenship.

Slavoj Žižek and Lauren Berlant have shown how the nation-state is constructed through the imagined "abstract" citizen, emptied of all specific content but clearly white, propertied, heterosexual, and male. In "The Nation-Thing," Žižek argues that this Cartesian abstraction, the disembodied democratic "subject," necessarily ignores all specificity, referring instead to "all people without regard to (race, sex, religion, wealth, social status)" (447, emphasis in original). In this context, the specificity of particular interests is viewed as pathological. But Žižek also argues that the production of the abstract citizen cannot in fact take place without a certain material remainder—usually, in his view, ethnic (national) tension. The three related fantasies of abstraction,
homogeneity, and inclusion, then—concepts central to the rhetoric of citizenship—undergird the violent, traumatic production of the citizen and the nation-state. But in *History and Memory*, embodied testimony and creative postmemory become acts that disrupt the assumption of the abstract and homogenous citizen and that return specificity to the scene of citizenship and national history.

In *History and Memory*, postmemory signifies Tajiri's attempt to witness history through various sources, most significantly her mother's scarred memory of internment. Crucially, however, this project complicates a narrow psychoanalytic understanding of trauma by theorizing internment as the traumatic reconfiguring of national borders and belonging. Drawing on official and unofficial forms of historical and personal "evidence," the film exposes the violence contained in—and masked by—the fantasy of homogenous U.S. citizenship. Internment is thus shown to be a poignant instance of the traumatic consequences of abstract citizenship, in which everyone is imagined to be not only equal but also the same (Berlant, *Queen*). Executive Order 9066 materialized this phenomenon shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor by ordering the construction of internment camps (later to be named "relocation centers") in which 110,000 Japanese Americans, both alien and citizen, were forcefully confined for the duration of the war. Deliberately disregarding the citizenship status of Japanese Americans, some of whom had lived in the U.S. for three generations or more, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) reduced the concept of national "loyalty" to race and national origin, while simultaneously constructing a set of new national "borders" within U.S. territory in order to contain the perceived threat of Japanese collaboration with the enemy. Dispossessed and forcefully relocated, Japanese Americans experienced internment as both personally
and culturally traumatic, threatening not just individual but also communal senses of identity. Moreover, "relocation" exposed the tenuousness of citizenship and national belonging for Japanese Americans who identified as U.S. citizens and who considered themselves loyal even before the coerced signing of the Loyalty Oath. For Tajiri, then, "trauma" is intricately bound up with questions of national and cultural identity, and is as much about the production of space as it is about the destruction of time.

In the film, postmemory operates as a way of negotiating the competing demands of memory and history, image and narrative. Questioning the reliability of conventional documentary film, much of which has misrepresented Japanese American internment in the name of historical "realism," *History and Memory* is less about evidence itself—the objects and artifacts that conventional documentary narratives rely upon—than about the active process of documenting "evidence" of various kinds, both traditional and untraditional. The film actively investigates and questions documentary's promise of realism even as it appropriates many of the genre's techniques in its search for a historical narrative that does not erase the material realities of trauma and suffering. Confounding and blurring the lines between historical, cultural, familial, and personal "evidence," Tajiri builds a "postmemorial" to her mother that situates trauma at the scene of citizenship. In the film, images, spoken words, and scrolling text overlap in a radically discontinuous multimedia collage that defies the narrative ease of expository film. In fact, more often than not, the evidentiary "real"—alien I.D. cards, family photographs, short films from the War Department, oral interviews—serves to disrupt and complicate rather than to corroborate the documentary narrative of the film. Mediating the tension between

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10 For a poignant autobiographical account of how internment affected the family and other social
history and memory, Tajiri deploys postmemory as a creative act of both mourning and rebuilding.

In *History and Memory*, as Tajiri mixes official and unofficial accounts of internment, it is clear that history cannot be separated from memory, and that neither can be separated from citizenship. Their interconnection is echoed in the discontinuous way in which the viewer is confronted with text, images, and voices simultaneously. The film begins silently, as white text scrolls down the screen, noting the date—December 7th, 1961—and describing Tajiri's parents walking and arguing about their daughter. This scene, for which we are given no corresponding image, is "witnessed" by Tajiri's dead grandfather. As Tajiri begins narrating her own story, the scrolling text reads:

The spirit of my grandfather witnesses my father and mother as they have an argument about the unexplained nightmares their daughter has been having on the 20th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the day that changed the lives of 110,000 Japanese-Americans who shortly after were forced by the U.S. Government to sell their property, homes, cars, possessions, businesses; leave their communities and relocate to internment camp.

As the text ends and Tajiri continues narrating, the camera begins to show a series of disconnected images: a short flash of the staged canteen scene, which the viewer will only come to understand later; footage of her sister photographing a boy in the park; and a pile of family photographs, presumably containing images of the grandfather who in 1961 witnesses Tajiri's parents discussing her nightmares. In this collage of text, voice-over, and image, the traumatic history of internment is ever-present, saturating the structures, see Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*. 
memories of Tajiri's family and the nightmares of Tajiri herself as a child. Throughout the film, internment is the site of competing images and narratives, from captured Japanese footage of Pearl Harbor to government photographs of interned families posing in front of the American flag, to Hollywood films, such as *Come See the Paradise*, which depict a sentimental romance between a white man and an interned Japanese American woman. This barrage of information from various sources—framed by text that reads "Who Chose What Story to Tell?"—suggests that the trauma of internment is a site for the contested struggle over the meaning not just of history and memory, but also of national membership and belonging.

Although the family photographs that appear in the film might seem to call upon the viewer to imagine internment as a familial affair, devastating to individuals and their families but not to the nation as a whole, several more "official" photographs expose the repressed connections between cultural trauma and representative citizenship. In one scene, Tajiri's camera pans in on a military photograph, her father's Army picture, taken in 1942, as she again describes her grandfather's spirit as witness, this time to her family's dispossession after Pearl Harbor. Followed by a traditional family photograph in front of the house that was lost, this series of images ironically comments on the simultaneous construction of Japanese American men as both necessary to the military effort (if they passed the Loyalty Oath) and disposable in the economic and cultural spheres. Later in the film, the camera focuses in on two Alien I.D. cards, one her grandfather's and one her grandmother's, issued by the U.S. government. These "official" government portraits reveal the instability of citizenship for Japanese Americans even as they insistently document their presence in the public sphere. Moreover, they importantly complicate a
narrow psychoanalytical approach to trauma that focuses on the individual, insisting instead on the communal violence of racialization and the devastating effects of the fantasy of homogenous citizenship.

But the film's formal juxtaposition of public and private identities, individual and communal traumas, official and unofficial records of internment, is more than an attempt to blur the lines between memory and history. As a creative act of postmemory, this tension at the formal level reflects postmemory's competing impulses both to record and to creatively process. For example, Tajiri describes searching the National Archives in order to find out about a painted wooden bird she finds among her mother's belongings. Shots of the bird are spliced among shots of first her grandfather's Alien I.D. card, then her grandmother's, as Tajiri's voice explains the almost miraculous coincidence that led to her ability to situate the bird in the larger narrative of her family's time at Poston:

I used to ask [my mother] if I could play with it, but she kept saying "No no no, Grandma gave me that. Put that back." 25 years later, I was sitting in a room inside the National Archives, going through a box that contained hundreds of pictures. Suddenly I came across a picture of my grandmother seated in a classroom, taken while she was in camp. I turned it over and the caption read "Bird carving class, camp 2, 1942."

The painted bird, once just a mysterious artifact of her grandmother's life, takes on significance as a creative act, which Tajiri is able to place in context through the documentary photograph. Likewise, the photograph, most likely taken by the WRA in order to "document" internees' happiness and submissiveness in the camps (Kozol), becomes a visual testimony to creative resistance as well as "evidence" that her
grandmother did indeed paint the bird. The photograph and the bird, situated visually alongside her grandmother's Alien I.D. card, illustrate the tension that structures the film between the documentary and testimonial impulses, as well as highlighting how both are bound up with constructions of citizenship and national belonging. In their juxtaposition, moreover, they become for Tajiri a poignant expression of the creative scene of postmemory, marked by competing impulses to document and create, to mourn and to rebuild.

This tension—between the urge to record and the urge to creatively process—is represented formally by the film's pastiche-like juxtaposition of image and narrative. Throughout the film, Tajiri stresses the importance of images for personal and cultural memory. Early in History and Memory, Tajiri's narrative voice explains how the presence or absence of images has material consequences for history and memory:

There are things which have happened in the world while there were cameras watching, things we have images for. There are other things which have happened while there were no cameras watching, which we restage in front of cameras to have images of. There are things which have happened for which the only images that exist are in the minds of the observers present at the time. While there are things which have happened for which there have been no observers except for the spirits of the dead.

Here, Tajiri identifies four levels of historical witnessing: documented, staged, personal, and absent. Crucially, she constructs the force of historical witnessing—of history and memory—in visual terms. As Tajiri speaks these lines, various images appear on the screen: historical footage of the attack on Pearl Harbor, staged footage of a Japanese
hara-kiri pilot, and fictional Hollywood scenes of panicked U.S. soldiers fighting back. Significantly, when Tajiri's voice speaks the last two lines, the screen goes black.

Because images documenting internment are extremely rare—as Tajiri notes, cameras were forbidden in the camps—"official" images created by the WRA constitute most of the visual record. For Tajiri, this lack of images must be acknowledged, mourned, and somehow redressed. Indeed, the film itself can be understood as an extended image created by Tajiri for her mother, whose memory is "shot through with holes" (Hirsch, *Family* 118) and whose history is occluded in favor of a progressive narrative in which internment is deemed a "military necessity." Scrolling text following one of the fragmented canteen scenes emphasizes the force of traumatic memory for her mother:

"She tells the story of what she does not remember / But remembers one thing: / Why she forgot to remember." For Tajiri, whose role as a witness to other's lives characterizes the burden of postmemory, the film becomes a poignant visual testimony to the simultaneous absence and presence of internment in her family's memory and her nation's history.

Strangely, this paradox of absent presence is most forcefully captured not through the incorporation of historical documents or scenes of Tajiri's family during internment, but through the inclusion of a classic Hollywood film starring Spencer Tracy: *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955). Summarizing the narrative trajectory of this film in a voice-over, Tajiri notes that the story revolves around a white detective (Tracy) investigating the murder of a Japanese American man in a small Western town shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The murdered man occupies a central place in the film, supplying the necessary narrative tension, yet his is an absent presence. Tajiri identifies not with the

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11 Hirsch borrows this phrase from Holocaust writer Henri Raczy'now's essay, "Memory Shot Through
Japanese American man but with Tracy's character, the white detective, whose persistent search for the murdered man's body and for his murderers reflects Tajiri's own investigation into the violent history of her family:

Spencer Tracy makes a search throughout the film to find a Japanese American man. He never appears, not even a picture or a photograph. [His] disappearance from Black Rock was like our disappearance from history. His absence is his presence. Somehow I could identify with the search. The search for an absent image, and the desire to create an image where there are so few.

Like her mother's memory, and like official U.S. narratives of WWII, the Japanese American man's absent presence contains the compelling force of the real even as it provides a site for competing cultural narratives of national history.

The murdered man's body in Bad Day at Black Rock becomes a screen for racial anxieties played out in the national imagination after Pearl Harbor. His body is never found, and the story remains unresolved in the film. Likewise, History and Memory insists that while it is necessary to construct images and narratives of internment that do not occlude its traumatic force, it is also not possible to do this by recovering a more "accurate" historical narrative. If the force of internment is perhaps most poignantly expressed in a fictional Hollywood film in which Japanese American bodies are not even visible, Tajiri suggests that it is only through postmemory as a creative act that history and memory can be reconstructed, if not resurrected. The film locates that creative act, the site of postmemory, in Tajiri's return to the actual physical location of her mother's internment. In "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese with Holes."
Internment," Marita Sturken analyzes how the bodily presence of survivors problematizes apparently seamless historical narratives:

Survivors return to the sites of their...experience; they place their bodies within the discourse of remembering to either affirm history's narratives or to declare them incomplete, incapable of conjuring their experience. They represent a very particular form of embodied memory. (34)

The return of a survivor to the location of her history constitutes an embodied witnessing that reminds official narratives of the particularity and difference they struggle to obscure. *History and Memory* draws on this "particular form of embodied memory" through the physical reenactment or staging of specific scenes—for example, the canteen scene, which "offers testimony of her mother's embodied memory" (42)—that return the bodies of internment survivors to the actual scene of the historical event, as well as through the seemingly random inclusion of fragmented images of family members in photographs. But Tajiri deploys this discourse of remembering in another way as well: by positioning her own body into the narrative location of her mother's experience, and into the site of her own "postmemory," she embodies the memories and histories of the previous generation of survivors in a visceral, literal way. When her mother tells her, for example, that she cannot remember the train ride that she was forced to take from the camp at Salinas, California to the one at Poston, Arizona, Tajiri takes the ride herself, in a rental car, in order to film the view for her mother. The (returned or recreated) bodily presence of survivors and their children takes the place of other forms of documentary evidence that do not exist or that obscure the material realities of life in and after internment. As "a deliberate effort...to deploy memory through postmemory" (Sturken
History and Memory offers the testimonial presence of various bodies including her own, returned to the site of trauma as "bodies of evidence" that call upon the viewer to witness the manifestation of history in the flesh. Moreover, Tajiri's return to Poston reminds viewers that traumatic history cannot be located "elsewhere," in another place or time, but are insistently present and located within the territorial space of the U.S. As Tajiri's camera records the site that was Poston, a site that, however briefly, redrew the nation's borders in a deliberate attempt to contain racial, cultural, and national difference, she reminds us as well that for internment survivors, trauma is not just a wound that shatters the individual self, but also one that shatters communal identity at the site of citizenship.

For Tajiri, then, reconstructing traumatic history and memory at the scene of postmemory requires not just documents but creative acts of witnessing, not just images but narratives that place those images in a meaningful context. Hirsch argues that the "aesthetics of postmemory" necessarily draws on multiple representational strategies, documentary and aesthetic, image and narrative context. For Hirsch, images—in particular family photos—have a certain representational power as agents of postmemory because they are characterized by "the particular mixture of mourning and re-creation that characterizes the work of postmemory" (251). But images by themselves are not adequate; context is key as an ethical gesture, particularly in the case of familial photographs of Holocaust victims, which rely radically on context. For Tajiri, likewise, contextualization—imagined as the rejoining of image and story—is a necessary requirement for "postmemorial" witnessing. Beginning with a search for "history, my own history," Tajiri turns to national, cultural, and familial history and memory in order
to reconstruct her autobiography as a "postmemorial" to her mother. At the end of the film, Tajiri returns to the canteen scene once again, but this time, the visual fragments that represent her mother's memory are made whole, and are rejoined to the narrative voice-over as we see—and understand—the entire scene for the first time: "For years I've been living with this picture, without the story, feeling a lot of pain, not knowing how they fit together. But now I found I could connect the picture to the story, I could forgive my mother her loss of memory, and could make this image for her."

The image of Tajiri's mother filling a canteen in camp, she tells us, originates finally in neither memory nor history: "I don't know where this came from, but I just had this fragment, this picture that I've always had in my mind." It is unclear if the scene was described to her long ago by her mother, who no longer remembers, or if she pieced it together from various familial and historical sources, or if she simply imagined it. But in the film, as she literally embodies her mother's absent "memory," occupying a space and time that belong wholly to neither mother nor daughter, she creates a salient metaphor for the repetitive force of history and the creative scene of postmemory. A peculiar scene for a "documentary" film, Tajiri's staging of her mother's memory makes sense as a way for her to reconnect the image with the story, the ghost to its material life. Ultimately, the project of History and Memory is to create a space for postmemory in the domain of national history, to stage a scene in which memory and history confront national fantasy with the embodied force of testimony.

Returning to the traumatic scene of internment, as Spencer Tracy returns to the scene of the crime in Bad Day at Black Rock, Tajiri represents postmemory as a form of embodied witnessing, one that requires multiple and competing—but ultimately
reconstructive—representational strategies in order to reunite history and memory, biography and autobiography, image and narrative. Approaching internment as the traumatic reconfiguring of national borders and belonging, the film finally insists that the bodies of internment survivors constitute the most compelling site of postmemory and the most compelling challenge to official U.S. history. By embodying postmemory through visual, oral, and textual representations of internment, Tajiri performs a belated form of "diva citizenship" (Berlant, *Queen* 223). Berlant uses this phrase to describe the ways in which wounded women's bodies testifying in the public sphere disrupt the fantasy of homogenous and abstract citizenship. Here, however, the disruptive testimony is embodied not by the internment survivor, but instead by her daughter, offering fragments of traumatic images and narratives made whole as a postmemorial to her mother.

**Dictée: History as Wound**

If *History and Memory* theorizes Japanese American internment as a traumatic reconfiguring of national borders, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* explores colonization and immigration as traumatic confrontations in which the specificity of Korean history is multiply threatened, from within and from without. Released in the U.S. in 1982, seven days before Cha's murder in New York City, *Dictée* launches a multimedia assault on readers that includes historical fragments, personal meditations, poems, letters, handwritten drafts, photographs, and diagrams, and that utilizes Korean, Chinese, French and English languages. This barrage of visual and textual representations is structured into nine sections, corresponding to actual and contrived Greek muses. Approaching Korean and Korean American history and memory through fragments of image and text,
Dictée refuses easy categorization. Cha, a filmmaker and performance artist as well as a writer, fully exploits the tension between image and text in order to imagine history, through postmemory, as remnant and as traumatic wound.

Dictée complicates a range of "truth-telling" genres and discursive modes, not just documentary or autobiography. As Lowe argues, it "resists the core values of aesthetic realism—correspondence, mimesis, and equivalence—and approaches these notions as contradictions," effectively enacting "an aesthetic of infidelity" ("Unfaithful" 37).

Another auto/biography in which the evidentiary "real" disrupts the narrative rather than authenticating it, Dictée illustrates the material effects of colonial and diasporic history on the body, in particular the body of a Korean American immigrant woman, in a literary show-and-tell that takes advantage of the distinct creative strengths of both image and text. The epigraph to the text, attributed to Sappho but actually written by Cha herself (Shelley Wong 137 n. 3), unsettles the quote's original, authentic referent even as it establishes a clear connection between language and the body: "May I write words more naked than flesh, / stronger than bone, more resilient than / sinew, sensitive than nerve."

But Dictée has another, "unofficial" epigraph as well, one situated between visual and textual forms: an image of a wall carving opposite the title page, featuring the only Korean characters in the text, which translate into a poignant expression of the pain of exile: "Mother, I miss you, I'm hungry, I want to go home to my native place." Working together, the inauthentic Sapphic quote and the anonymous Korean wall carving create a tension between image, word, and referent even as they poetically evoke the body as a site of creative power. Like Tajiri, Cha aims to expose the disconnect between official

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and unofficial images and narratives of history through representations of the body, the material site of history's effects. Unlike Tajiri, however, Cha does not attempt to repair this disconnect, even at the scene of postmemory; instead, she forges a politics and poetics of the body that remains fragmented, scarred by war, colonization, and national exile.

A map of the Korean peninsula, divided into North and South by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), separates the text roughly in half. Positioned in the "Melpomene / Tragedy" section, the map reminds readers of the geopolitical dimension of trauma and of the violence that marks Korean history in the 20th century. Japanese colonization of Korea, beginning in 1910, forced over two million Koreans to migrate to Japan as laborers, some never to return. In the meantime, the colonial presence of Japan on the Korean peninsula reformed the educational system, severing Koreans from their language and history. After the formal end of Japanese colonization, French and American military forces staged a neocolonial presence, and the ensuing chaos of the Korean War caused another mass exodus (one that included Cha's family), mainly to China, Europe, and the U.S. The tragedy of Korean history, Dictée suggests, expressed in the severed map of the peninsula, is written not in official historical narratives, but instead on the wounded bodies and memories of those who have been displaced, colonized, and exiled, particularly women. Cha's text is precisely not interested in recovering or reconstructing a unified Korean narrative; instead, it places into conflict images and narrative fragments that expose history—even mediated through postmemory—as a persistent wound.
For Cha, as for Tajiri, postmemory is constituted most poignantly in the mother-daughter relationship, represented as a vacillation between first person (as the narrator remembers scenes from her own life) and second person (as the narrator directly addresses her mother). Unlike Tajiri, however, who deploys postmemory as a creative act of contextualization and reconstruction, a rejoining of image and story, Cha's text refuses this reconstructive gesture in favor of a disjointed visual and textual collage that remains fragmented. For Cha, whose traumatic history is multiply located and culturally layered, fragments of memory themselves constitute "the whole":

The decapitated forms. Worn. Marred, recording a past, of previous forms. The present form face to face reveals the missing, the absent. Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole.

The memory is the entire. The longing in the face of the lost. Maintains the missing. Fixed between the wax and wane indefinite not a sign of progress. All else age, in time. Except. Some are without. (38)

Situated on a page opposite a historical photograph of three Koreans facing a Japanese firing squad, this passage insists on the unreconstructed force of memory as "remnant" that is nonetheless "the whole." The narrator, negotiating multiple personal histories—her own, her mother's, those of various historical figures such as Joan of Arc and Korean revolutionary Ya Guan Soon—juxtaposes fragments of narrative and radically decontextualized images in order to approach history as a traumatic wound, the "longing in the face of the lost."

*Dictée*'s disjunctive, deconstructive form has led some critics to celebrate it as a radically "postmodern" text that strictly refuses the constructed bonds of national and
cultural identity. However, as Elaine Kim points out, Cha's challenge to static notions of identity and nationality does not culminate in a celebration of a free-floating, transnational subject (21). On the contrary, the text insists on the cultural specificity of colonial, postcolonial, and immigrant Korean identity, and forces the reader to confront that specificity through images, narrative fragments, and documents that answer the easy narrative of abstract history with a painful testimony to colonial violence and loss:

To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording, that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for

*this* experience, for this *outcome*, that does not cease to continue. (32)

History, in Cha's view, is "[n]ot physical enough," is in fact "[n]eutralized to achieve the no-response" (32). Consumed by "other nations who are not witnesses," history becomes empty of both meaning and force and must be infused with bodily testimony and the ethical imperative of witnessing:

Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound. The past emotions all over again….To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion. (33)
Attempting to rewrite traumatic history on the body, Cha insists, requires not just a new language, but a new representational idiom "extracted" from visual and textual fragments. Put another way, the ethical imperative of witnessing trauma must confront not only the testimonial narratives of survivors but also the proliferation of images of violence and war that circulate globally.

In its testimonial impulse, which positions the reader as a witness to the material effects of history, Cha's project resembles Tajiri's. However, Cha takes a radically different approach to representing trauma, one in which the image and the story remain severed, even in the creative scene of postmemory. Curiously for a text that includes eighteen images, critics have tended to approach Dictée through either its textual or its visual elements in isolation. This is perhaps because the images, printed without captions or other explanatory context, defy attempts to position them "within" the textual narrative. But it is precisely this lack of contextualization, I argue, that allows Dictée to represent history as wound and trauma as a site of witnessing. Attention to the disconnected interplay of text and image reveals a key dimension of Dictée that until now has remained largely ignored: namely, the purposeful severing of content and context in the representation of historical trauma.

In Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma, Ulrich Baer develops the concept of "strategic isolation" (5) in order to theorize traumatic images as sources of narrative and referential unsettlement. According to Baer, historicist approaches to images of trauma are not adequate because, like photography, the experience of trauma is radically contextless, shattering a coherent, narrative experience of time and selfsame identity. For Baer, moreover, historicist approaches often foreclose ethical response,
prompting viewers to understand rather than bear witness to images of trauma: "Unless viewers suspend their faith in the future, in the narrative of time-as-flux that turns the photographed scene into part of a longer story (whether melancholic or hopeful), they will misconstrue the violence of trauma as a mere error, a lapse from or aberration in the otherwise infallible program of history-as-progress" (180-181). "Strategic isolation" privileges "the moment rather than the story" (5, emphasis in original), the "isolated, non-integrated moments" of time that culminate in "snapshots rather than a narrative" (27).

While Baer does not deny that viewers often want to place traumatic images in historical and cultural context, the no-exit quality of those images unsettles this impulse and requires a quite different response: one not of understanding or epistemological mastery, but of witnessing. "To bear true witness," he insists, "means to account for catastrophic events without turning them into a continuous story" (105, emphasis in original). Instead, one must see them as "wounds that will not heal" (105), and it "becomes the viewers' responsibility not merely to view the evidence…but to read, to interpret, to tear open what they think they know, and to respond" (115).

Baer's theory of "strategic isolation" provides an interesting contrast to Hirsch's insistence on the ethical value of historical contextualization. Whereas Hirsch (like Tajiri) insists that joining traumatic images to their narrative context is an indispensable ethical act, Baer (like Cha) suggests that it is often more ethical to refuse this contextualizing gesture, and to let traumatic images remain strategically isolated from stories that might rationalize or intellectualize trauma. Indeed, for Baer, the proliferation of images of Nazi atrocities and other human rights violations beg the question of appropriate viewer response: if viewers can explain the images through recourse to context, then they may be
able to minimize the ethical force of the images. "Strategic isolation" acknowledges the force of trauma without attempting to situate it into larger narratives that the viewer already understands. In Dictée, Cha acknowledges that Korean history lacks the salience of an event such as the Holocaust for American readers; it exists only as a distant conflict in the American past, and a geographically distant part of the ever-proliferating global story of human rights violations. In order to confront the reader with the force of history as wound, then, Cha must "extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (33). This does not mean reuniting the fragments into a coherent and progressive historical narrative, but precisely the opposite: to juxtapose the fragments in isolation and expose them as evidence of "wounds that will not heal" (Baer 105).

Rewriting history as persistent and embodied wound allows Cha to both expose and challenge the abstraction that is maintained in coherent historical and personal narratives, such as conventional autobiographies and expository documentaries. The use of the second person, which signals throughout the text the relationship between mother and daughter negotiated through postmemory, replaces the coherent autobiographical "I" with a "you" that positions the daughter as a witness to the mother's life:

Mother, you are eighteen years old. You were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live. You are not Chinese. You are Korean. But your family moved here to escape the Japanese occupation.... They take from you your tongue. They take from you the choral hymn. But you say not for long not for always. Not forever. You wait. You know how. You know how to wait. (45-46).
Like the staged canteen scene in *History and Memory*, *Dictée's* second-person address situates the mother at the center of the daughter's life story and constructs the mother-daughter relationship as a creative scene of historical witnessing. The mother's story, told through the daughter's narrative address, highlights both the silencing of the colonial subject and the agency involved in "know[ing] how to wait" for the return home. A portrait of Cha's mother as a young woman, placed on the facing page, is positioned as the immediate receiver of the narrative. But the mother's silent image, offered without caption or other commentary, also disrupts the narrative with its unceasing gaze. This gaze will haunt the daughter's story later in the text, when, in a letter to her mother written in 1980 from Korea, she resumes telling her mother's story: "You knew it would not be in vain. The thirty six years of exile.... That one day your country would be your own. This day did finally come. The Japanese were defeated in the world war and were making their descent back to their country" (80-81). But the daughter's next words suggest that, even in 1980, nothing has changed:

"Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile. Here at my return in eighteen years, the war is not ended. We fight the same war. We are inside the same struggle seeking the same destination. We are severed in Two by an abstract enemy an invisible enemy under the title of liberators who have conveniently named the severance. Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate." (81)

Here, the violent repetitions of history constitute a tragic and perverse manifestation of postmemory, in which old wounds do not heal but are in fact exacerbated by new traumas under different names. For the narrator and her mother, then, the return to Korea does not
provide resolution or closure. Whereas Tajiri's return to Salinas and Poston culminates in her ability to forgive her mother's forgetting and to reconstruct a meaningful narrative out of the fragments of history and memory, Cha's return to Korea offers only more incoherent fragments. But it does suggest a need to theorize history and memory differently, through the alternative site of the body as "document" of, and witness to, trauma.

In "Clio / History," Cha addresses directly the complex relationships between body, memory, and history. In radical opposition to the abstract documents of history that are "[n]eutralized to achieve the no-response" (33), she positions the bodies and memories of colonial history's survivors:

Japan has become the sign. The alphabet. The vocabulary. To this enemy people.
The meaning is the instrument, memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure, that rests as record, as document. Of this enemy people. (32, italics in original)

History and memory (as well as their representations in word and image) are not, Cha insists, ghostly abstractions or airy fables, but are like weapons, with the ability to pierce, stab, and maim material bodies. Erased by official narratives and their corroborating documents, the injured bodies of colonial Korea continue to produce their own alternative "records" and "documents" of injury: "the volume of blood...as measure." This alternative record of body and blood, however, is deliberately erased from the official documents of history, the ones that reach other nations. Like official narratives of internment in the U.S., the histories and identities of Korean women are particularly erased in such records. As a text that seeks to rewrite history "to the point where it is necessary to intervene,"
Dictée imagines the injured colonial body as an alternative documentary space with its own story to tell, a visual and testimonial narrative in which the bloody "presence of the embodied teller" (Frank 144) works to "implicat[e] others in what they witness" (143).

In Dictée, this common bond of injury created by a history of colonial violence and oppression replaces the filiality and nationality of original "blood ties" with the historical record of blood ties—the physical traces of history on the documentary body. Just before the "Clio / History" section, a short lyrical poem appropriates and calls into question the rhetoric of relation that posits connection through national or birth origin:

What nationality
or what kindred and relation
what blood relation
what blood ties of blood
what ancestry
what race generation
what house clan tribe stock strain
what lineage extraction
what breed sect gender denomination caste (20)

This parodic listing of the abstract words on which claims of commonality and sameness are grounded is echoed and revised throughout the text's documentation of "blood as measure." For example, in "Melpomene / Tragedy," the narrator, having lived in the U.S. for several years, returns to Korea to the scene of her brother's death at the hands of national officials in a protest fifteen years earlier. Crucially, the only record of violence is in the bloodstains on the pavement: "No trace of them. Except for the blood. Because.
Step among them the blood that will not erase with the rain on the pavement that was walked upon like the stones where they fell had fallen. Because. Remain dark the stains not wash away" (82). These "blood ties of blood" (20), unlike the abstract blood ties of nation and birth that are established in the rhetoric of official history, document the record left by colonial violence, literally written in blood that will not wash clean from the pavement. Unlike the easy abstractions of a historical record "[n]eutralized to achieve the no-response" (33), this blood record will not disappear, but continues to provide testimony and to call for witnesses. As a material trace of the body's injury, the bloodstains constitute a tragic and ironic extension of the non-survivor's body, insisting on its continuing embodied presence even after death.

Sandra Soo-Jin Lee argues that understanding the body as document allows us to approach trauma as a long-term, ongoing process, and to do justice to its cultural specificity (98). For Koreans in diaspora, she suggests, the body becomes "an important marker of memory" (87) and a "testament of the 'truth'" (92). In contrast to Western psychoanalytic approaches to trauma-as-illness, she argues, postcolonial and immigrant Koreans see trauma as necessarily "coexist[ing] with life itself" (94). Stressing the "ownership" of one's suffering rather than its resolution, Koreans in diaspora experience their bodies as "corporeal geography," containing memories of both the homeland and other spaces it has forcefully or voluntarily inhabited. Thus the body "serves as a map in the narration of one's life story" (99), whether serving as a "locus of cohesion" (99) or of fragmentation. For Cha, likewise, the body provides a way to illustrate the ongoing trauma of exile and the "corporeal geography" of memory.
As an alternative documentary site, body and blood offer material testimony for the common bond of violence and injury created by colonialism and its material effects. This body, however, as Dictée shows in its collage of text and image, can often only be recuperated in fragments. Fundamentally divided, like the map of Korea severed in half by the DMZ line, the Korean (American) body is a map of history, an unofficial document of multiple oppressions. Significantly, two "maps" of the body are in fact present in Dictée: a Chinese anatomical drawing of two bodies covered in tiny ideographs, and a four-part diagram of the different parts of the body that are used in speaking (the lungs, mouth, throat, and vocal folds), like an anatomical poster that might appear on the walls of a doctor's office. (Crucially, both of the drawings use the male body to "document" the body's anatomical systems.) In contrast to the neat, labeled diagrams, the corresponding text illustrates the difficulties of speaking for a colonized or immigrant woman with a "Cracked tongue. Broken tongue" (75). As the speaker attempts to put her vocal system to work, she finds that the diagram's simplicity is misleading: "Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before / starts. / About to. Then stops" (75). Her fragmented speech mocks the accuracy of a medical science that fails to take into account the tongue of the colonial woman, "[c]racked" and "[b]roken" by the violent paradoxes of Korean (American) history.

Other "documentary" images, spliced throughout Dictée, perform a similar disruptive function. For example, of the many photographs and photographic portraits included in the text, only one—the photograph of Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo, that appears both on the cover of the 2001 edition and on the first page of the "Calliope / Epic Poetry" section—is named. The lack of captions or other authenticating elements that
would attach the image to a name, a relation, a life, serves to frustrate and confound the reader's desire for clear "real-world" referents. Like the disembodied ghosts of Tajiri's film, these photographs are disconnected from the auto/biographical narrative, even as they serve to document the presence of real, material bodies. Even "official" images and documents, such as the narrator's passport, frustrate the connection between representation and referent. Crucially, the passport, along with other documents that "prove" the narrator's national identity, is written into the text but not visually reproduced, reflecting at the formal level her experience of not belonging either in the U.S. or in the "home" country:

I have the documents. Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Passport. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image. And you learn the executive branch the legislative branch and the third. Justice. Judicial branch. It makes the difference the rest is past. (56)

The narrator's language, perhaps lingering, perhaps tripping, over the word "justice," parodies the performance of the citizenship test even as it emphasizes the necessity of justice (ironically distinguished from the judicial branch of the U.S. government) for colonial and diasporic subjects. Suggesting that the fantastical promise of citizenship—equal and just treatment under the law—is in fact maintained through violent exclusion, the narrator mocks the "proof" of national belonging that her documents supposedly secure.
An immigrant who has "returned" to the (neo)imperial center, the narrator's American identity, like the photograph on her passport, is a front that conceals her identification with Korea, her mother's country and the scene of her own childhood. Created in "[t]heir own image," the passport photograph is designed to subject the narrator to the nation's supposedly divine power. Unlike her mother's portrait, the narrator's passport photo serves to replace her identity with one that conceals the national and cultural tensions that work to secure national membership. Moreover, the status of the passport and other papers as "Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature" is tragically played out when she returns to Korea and her national identity is called into question: "You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity.... Whether you are telling the truth or not about your nationality" (56). Exile, Cha suggests, made necessary by an unjust war and formalized by the passport photograph, makes it impossible to return to the site of the mother's trauma, as Tajiri is able to do in History and Memory. For the narrator of Dictée, "telling the truth" about national identity is marked with contradictions that make the work of postmemory one of recuperating "remnants" rather than returning "home."

Significantly, these remnants of history and postmemory include not just images and narratives situated in Korea, or even in post-war Korean America. Two of the book's sections, "Erato / Love Poetry" and "Elitere / Lyric Poetry," examine two of postmodernity's most powerful visual modes: the film and the photograph. In these sections, the reader seems to inhabit a blank space unmarked by national boundaries or ethnic ties; instead, it is gender—in particular, the global circulation of images of
women's bodies and sexuality—that is highlighted. In "Erato / Love Poetry," Cha mobilizes and parodies the discourses of popular romance and Catholic mysticism. The textual narrative, surrounded by white space, vacillates between the narrator's experience of a French romance film and St. Therèse's erotic mystical writings. Two photographs of women frame this section, both unidentified: in the first, a woman in Victorian dress poses for the camera beside a flower garden; in the second, a woman's face, contorted by rapture, gazes slightly above and to the right of the camera lens. The photographs suggest how women's bodies have been eroticized by the male gaze, but also how women have continued to cultivate passions of their own.

Indeed, the radically different narratives of the narrator, the film's protagonist, and St. Therèse become intertwined in a meditation on love, passion, and women's agency. Recalling the multiple women from Korean and European history—Joan of Arc, Yu Guan Soon, the narrator's mother—who populate Cha's text, these women mimic dominant discourses even as they maintain agency in the face of oppression (Bhabha "Mimicry"). For example, echoing the narrator's language about her mother, the film's heroine "know[s] how to wait" (96). The identificatory connections between the narrator and the heroine are further emphasized in the cinematic language that describes the narrator's entrance into the theater: "Extreme Close Up shot of her face.... Close Up shot of her feet from the back on the three steps leading into the theatre, camera following her from the back.... She selects a row near the front, fourth seat from the left and sits" (96). As the narrator imagines herself through the eye of a camera, she anticipates the on-screen entrance of the film's protagonist, whom she has already visualized: "One expects her to be beautiful.... One seems to be able to see her. One imagines her, already" (98).
The narrator's relationship to this protagonist is one of identification and desire, even before she sees her face. In fact, she suggests, "All along, you see her without actually seeing, actually having seen her. You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces" (100).

Because the narrator's experience of the film is marked by identification with—and desire for—the white romance heroine, it is in part a colonizing relationship. In fact, the words "white" and "whiteness" are repeated nearly thirty times in this section, emphasized by the white space surrounding the fragmented text and the whiteness of the movie set. Suggesting that the circulation of images of beautiful white women is key to the construction of colonial and postcolonial desire, Cha emphasizes popular romance's erasure of non-white women. But she is also interested in the identificatory connections forged cross-culturally between women, none of whom perfectly embody the representative (white, male, propertied) citizen. In this space of identification, the viewer recognizes the heroine's story and becomes her: "Upon seeing her you know how it was for her. You know how it might have been…. It is you standing there…. It is you waiting and knowing how to wait…. It is you in the silence" (106). The beautiful woman seen and desired through "traces" is caught in a narrative of marital betrayal in which "[i]t is the husband who touches":

But he touches her with his rank. By his knowledge of his own rank. By the claim of his rank. Gratuity is her body her spirit. Her non-body her non-entity. His privilege possession his claim. Infallible is his ownership. Imbues with mockery at her refusal of him, but her very being that dares to name herself as if she possesses a will. Her own. (112)
Touching her "with his rank" rather than his love, the heroine becomes a "non-body" and a "non-entity," like the women of Korea who are erased and silenced by masculinist history. But what strikes the narrator in viewing the film is that she does possess a will, a daring "to name herself." Likewise, even the rhetorical spectacle of St. Therèse's submission to Christ ("I am only a child, powerless and weak, and yet it is my weakness that gives me the boldness of offering myself as VICTIM of your love, O Jesus!" [111]) culminates in a pronouncement on love that reveals her status as mystical philosopher and priestess ("The smallest act of PURE LOVE is of more value to her than all other works together" [115]). This section, imagining erotic love as a political site of resistance even as it engages in a powerful mimicry of popular romance and Christian mysticism, culminates in the narrator's fantasy of perfect physical union with the film's protagonist: "In the whiteness / no distinction her body invariable no dissonance / synonymous her body all the time de composes / eclipses to be come yours" (118). As in Tajiri's identification with Spencer Tracy's character in Bad Day at Black Rock, this spectatorial identification insists on the cultural power of circulating images and discourses as well as the possibility of cross-cultural connections among women.

If "Erato / Love Poetry" inserts popular romance into Dictée's meditation on the politics of history, memory, and exile, "Elitere / Lyric Poetry" returns to the relationship between visual representation and national identity. Opening with a photograph of a crowd of Korean protesters, this section recalls the narrator's dead brother and the blood that would not wash from the pavement. In its language, moreover, it also recalls the photograph on the narrator's U.S. passport: "If words are to be sounded,
impress through the partition in ever slight measure to the other side the other signature
the other hearing the other speech the other grasp" (132, emphasis added). Echoing "The
other one. Their signature, their seals. Their own image," this passage insists on
alternative modes of representation including written, oral, and tactile forms that do not
recreate history in another's image. These alternative modes are to be found in the bodies
and memories of those who have been silenced, particularly mother and daughter:

Unspoken. History. Past. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits
nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is diseuse,
one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the
earth. (133, emphasis in original)

Recalling the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, here the mother-daughter
relationship, sustained through postmemory even if unspoken, becomes a seed of hope
from which a new future can be imagined by rewriting history. But the photograph of the
protesters continues to visually haunt this rare fragment of hope. Like the photograph of
the men facing a firing squad, this image, for which no context is provided, frustrates the
reader's desire for an easy narrative of rebirth following upon death. Strategically isolated
from the textual narrative, these photographs confront the viewer with the force of trauma
and violence without allowing her to position them into a coherent narrative.

In Dictée, more often than not, the relationship between photographs and text
remains unclear, or clearly dissonant, or in an unexpected or marginal place, as in the
family photo that does not appear until the reader comes across it on the inside back

13 As Shelley Wong points out, "Elitere" is a fictional muse, whose name echoes "literary" and "elite"
cover of the book. The radical discontinuity between the images and the text exposes the arbitrary relationship between word, image, and referent in histories, documentaries, and autobiographies. Severed off from the story, the photographs reveal the fragmented nature of colonial and diasporic history and memory, questioning the ability of conventional documentary evidence to tell a true story, seamless and whole. Cha's project in Dictée is precisely not to reproduce the kind of documentary history that would presume such seamlessness; instead, it is to open up a space in which colonial history and memory can be made "physical enough…. to the very flesh and bone" (32). As such, she must work with fragments of both words and images, "[t]o extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (33).

**Conclusion: Fantasy, Testimony, and the Geopolitics of Trauma**

I have argued that History and Memory and Dictée confront official narrative history with the embodied force of testimony. Bearing witness to the production of trauma, testimony becomes for both Tajiri and Cha a way to theorize trauma as an effect of violent and exclusionary fantasies of citizenship, fantasies that materialize in the "real" of history. But how precisely does testimony operate, and might it not risk taking part in the very construction of citizens it attempts to challenge (Brown)? As a way of addressing this question, I turn to Lauren Berlant's recent work on trauma, testimony, and the law in order to examine how Tajiri and Cha's auto/biographical projects reframe

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14 It is unclear if this is a photograph of Cha's family or not, since it lacks a caption or any other narrative contextualization.
trauma through the discourse of testimony. In "Trauma and Ineloquence," Berlant complicates the idea that testimony is always purely transgressive. Arguing that testimony has its origins in the subject's love of—and subjection to—the law, Berlant points out that the very "capacity to speak is evidence of the person's formation as a legal subject and of the law's successful protection of him as a citizen" (48). To mobilize testimony, she insists, is to reinscribe the legal fantasy of citizenship, in which the subject's intelligibility is dependent upon juridical (and national) discourses. Indeed, for Berlant, "fantasy is the approximate other of testimony; it too produces a sense of pseudocontinuity between the person and the social" (48). When those subjects not imagined to embody the ideal of homogenous citizenship, such as Asian American women, use testimony, they not only appropriate public space; they also reinscribe the fantasy of citizenship in the public sphere. Berlant traces the genealogy of testimonial thus: "an expression of trauma (the law's violation of itself through the negation of its subject), leads to testimony (an appeal for its reappearance), and to a reclaimed line of captioning or typification (expressing a desire for a world in which one's self-knowledge or aesthetic of the self were recognized as personhood)" (51). In other words, the law creates trauma through abjection; then subjects use testimony in order to appeal for the status of personhood and intelligibility under the law.

If this is the case, how do Tajiri and Cha avoid simply reinscribing fantasies of law and citizenship? I suggest that by juxtaposing testimony alongside other "truth-telling" discourses, and by productively employing the tension between visual and textual representation, both Tajiri and Cha challenge the use of testimony primarily as a call for redress. Instead, their use of testimony exposes trauma as an effect of violent and
exclusionary citizenship, precisely because of its privileged relationship to legal and national discourse. Deploying testimony through postmemory, moreover, positions their stories at a distance from victim narratives while also exploiting concepts such as truth, justice, and equality in order to reveal the nation's investment in violence. In this sense, testimony functions both to reinscribe the subject's investment in justice, citizenship, and the law, and to expose trauma as an effect of citizenship through that very reinscription. Therefore, both History and Memory and Dictée insist on attention to national and transnational geopolitics; specifically, they call for critical engagement with trauma not just as individual symptom, but also as the nation's most violent investment.

As auto/biographical representations of cultural trauma circulate with more frequency and greater critical interest than ever before, they provide sites for refocusing current approaches to both "autobiography" and "trauma." As History and Memory and Dictée show, this calls for a more nuanced understanding of the geopolitics of trauma, memory, and history and of the construction of alternative "sites of postmemory." If both Tajiri and Cha establish a productive tension between documentary and testimonial impulses in representations of cultural trauma, a tension that is most powerfully evoked at the level of the body, they also illustrate the competing ways in which that tension is deployed and mediated. Whereas Tajiri constructs a "postmemorial" to her mother by reuniting image and story, memory and history, Cha utilizes a method of "strategic isolation" that confronts the reader with the decontextualized force of trauma and the ongoing burden of postmemory.

In the U.S., where the Holocaust provides the limit-case for extreme cultural trauma and its historical aftermath, representations of trauma that occur at other
geographical and temporal locations provide alternative "sites of postmemory" that "allow the U.S. domestic interior to be invaded by the painful aspects of its history" (Hirsch 246). Tajiri and Hirsch "invade" the U.S. from different vantage points and different subject positions, forcing critics to examine the repressed relationship between national and personal memories of trauma. For Tajiri, rejoining image and story is a creative and rhetorical strategy that exposes internment as the traumatic reconfiguration of national borders and belonging. Approaching U.S. history and memory from "within," Tajiri's autodocumentary questions the rhetoric of citizenship through embodied postmemory. In contrast, Cha's juxtaposition of radically decontextualized images and fragmented narratives achieves no unified resolution but instead foregrounds the risks and rewards of representing trauma visually and textually. Approaching U.S. history and memory from "without," Dictée charges readers with the difficult task of confronting trauma as a wound that does not heal or wash away, and that continues to demand a witness. But Dictée also insists that such a witness approach the "wound" of history not through an abstract acknowledgment of atrocity "over there," in any one of a body of indistinguishable "Asian" countries, but through an unsettling experience of facing images and narrative fragments that are "to the flesh and bone" (32).

Examining History and Memory alongside Dictée allows for a productive refocusing of the relationships among auto/biography, postmemory, and trauma, as well as a necessary refinement of the fashionable trope of "borders." As both Tajiri's film and Cha's text suggest, national borders extend both into and beyond the boundaries that demarcate the territorial space of the nation, and their reconfiguration, both domestically and globally, constructs sites of trauma not contained purely "elsewhere." Allowing for a
return of the survivor's body to the scene of internment, Tajiri highlights the violence that characterizes citizenship and national belonging. Likewise, Cha, invoking the difficulty of returning "home" for Korean subjects in exile, makes visible the interlocking traumas of colonialism and immigration, and their repressed connection to shifting—yet poignant—national identities. Theorizing cultural trauma at the site of citizenship, and putting postmemory into dialogue with national politics, Tajiri and Cha insist on the necessity of analyzing the geopolitics of trauma.
CHAPTER 3

Infectious Narratives: Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*

and the Geopolitics of Witnessing AIDS

He would never see me in the place I now live, but I could see him in the place in which he was then living. He lived in death. Perhaps everyone is living in death, I actually do believe that, but usually it can't be seen; in this case it was a death I could see.

—Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother*

If transnational feminism did not already exist as a critical practice, it would be necessary to invent it in order to understand the complexity Kincaid embodies.

—Leigh Gilmore, "Autobiography's Wounds"

There is a link between imagining disease and imagining foreignness.

—Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

photos, the picture lies at a skewed angle to the cover, as if it had been playfully tossed atop the book and has just come to rest there. In the photograph, a child in a plain white cutoff T-shirt looks happily off-camera, preoccupied with his own world of work or play. To his left and above him, palm fronds sway in the sun, giving shade to a weary house with a porch and a long window. The title of the book, *My Brother*, displayed prominently above the skewed photograph, suggests that the child in the picture—youthful, playful, and very much alive—is Kincaid's half brother, Drew Devon, the biographical subject of this auto/biographical narrative.\(^1\) Checking the inside jacket flap shows that, indeed, the photograph was supplied by the author: "Jacket Photograph © Jamaica Kincaid." If one cannot finally determine who the child is (might it be Kincaid herself?), the photograph nevertheless inscribes, in visual form, several characteristics of the text itself. Its aged, yellow quality lends an air of authenticity and echoes the text's preoccupation with memory and the past. It is unclear if the photographer meant to capture the child, the house, or both; the child seems unaware that a picture is about to be snapped, and the compositional center of the photograph initially draws the viewer's eye to the background, the frame rather than the subject. Likewise, *My Brother's* narrative gaze captures Devon in candid moments of pain or joy, always framed by Antiguan social, economic, and familial politics. Most crucially, however, the photograph, like Kincaid's epigraph to this chapter, raises questions key to the text's representational ethos:

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\(^1\) Jamaica Kincaid (née Elaine Potter Richardson) and Drew Devon share a mother but not a father. Significantly, unlike her mother, who is a powerful figure throughout Kincaid's body of autobiographical work, Drew and Kincaid's other brothers do not appear in her other works.
Who has the power to see, to look, to depict and to frame? Whose gaze do we, as readers, adopt, and whose body serves as the authenticating function for our look?²

In *My Brother*, Kincaid narrates, with an unflinching gaze, her brother's life and eventual death from complications caused by HIV/AIDS—perhaps the most politicized disease of the contemporary era (Sontag; Browning; Couser; Egan). Devon's illness forces Kincaid to return to her homeland, Antigua, after thirty years as a writer and college professor in the United States. Her visit, and the subsequent writing of *My Brother* several years later, propels her to confront difficult memories and familial secrets as well as complex ethical questions about representing another's life, suffering, and death. She describes Devon's body as a site at which the auto/biographical project breaks down: "there was no metaphor" (107). But his body also becomes a site for confronting a number of other limits and boundaries: those between autobiography and biography, the U.S. and Antigua, self and other: "I am remembering the life of my brother, I am remembering my own life" (167). Devon's vulnerable body confronts her with a wounded testimony to his life (and death) story, a story bound up with the colonial history of Antigua and its legacy of compulsory heterosexuality, the complex migrations that characterize family life in globalization, and the uneven geopolitics of disease and health care.

*My Brother* is characterized by detailed visual accounts of Devon's body in various stages of health and decay—accounts that re-invoke the question of the youthful

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² These are questions that acknowledge autobiography as an interested and intimate practice. Feminist critics and others have long challenged the myth of the singular individual, and have argued that the autobiographical subject is always intimately bound up with—and constructed through—others. See Anderson; Bruss; Cosslett, Lury, and Summerfield; Donnell; Gilmore, *Autobiographics*; Miller; Perreault; Siegel; Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* and *De/Colonizing the Subject*; Whitlock.
image on the cover. More specifically, the narrative is preoccupied with the problematic of seeing another, a brother, in suffering and in pain. The epigraph to this chapter, as well as the photograph on the cover, highlights Kincaid's concern not just with her brother's illness, but with the process of seeing what happens to his body when he presents symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS: thrush, sores, swelling. Although this preoccupation with seeing Devon's body elicits questions about Kincaid's privileged gaze, a gaze that she acknowledges and interrogates, it does not constitute a mode of epistemological mastery. Instead, her ability to see with her own eyes the bodily evidence of his suffering constitutes a specific form of witness, one that suggests the limits of her ability to understand and to narrate. By writing the temporal (and, as I will argue, spatial) gap between seeing Devon's suffering and being able to make sense of it, Kincaid reconstructs the scene of difficult witnessing.

The impossible demand to write the dying body elicits difficult questions about the aesthetics and ethics of witnessing, the spectacle of suffering, and the power of auto/biographical testimony. This chapter aims to interrogate recent theories of auto/biographical testimony and witnessing through the concerns of transnational feminist theory, particularly its emphasis on the production, circulation, and reception of narratives of suffering. Much of the scholarship on My Brother has used the lens of psychoanalysis to theorize the narrative as an expression of grief and mourning (Brophy; Kanter; Pouchet Paquet; Soto-Crespo). While I acknowledge this aspect of the narrative, I want to take a different approach: one that examines how the narrative (re)constructs the

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3 On autobiographical testimony and witnessing, see Gilmore, The Limits of Autobiography; Henke, Shattered Subjects; and Tal, Worlds of Hurt; among others. On the transnational production, circulation, and reception of narratives of suffering, see especially Hesford and Kozol's Haunting Violations and Just Advocacy; and Smith and Schaffer's Human Rights and Narrated Lives.
act of witnessing AIDS as a geopolitical, transnational practice. The global AIDS crisis, along with its textual representation in the emergent genre of the AIDS narrative, has seen a proliferation of theories of witnessing and testimony (Chambers; Couser; Egan; Frank; Miller; Miller and Tougaw; Murphy and Poirier; Sturken). However, we might ask precisely how representations of the suffering body, the body in pain, even the dead body, function in auto/biographical testimony that is profoundly concerned with bearing witness to the devastation of HIV/AIDS. Scholars of autobiography, historical trauma, and human rights have recently examined how the body functions rhetorically as evidence in "truth-telling" genres as diverse as memoir, slave narrative, humanitarian narrative, and detective fiction (Ball; Berlant, "Trauma"; Feldman; Laqueur). These scholars suggest that representations of the suffering body are mobilized in rhetorical situations that risk individualizing, and therefore containing, the traumatic nature of social and political relations. The suffering body is used, for example, as the sympathetic foundation for humanitarian claims (Feldman; Laqueur) as well as a source for claims to a sentimentally universalized humanity (Berlant, "Trauma").

Detailed descriptions of medical signs and symptoms, as well as exhaustive accounts of bodily pain and suffering, often serve to both authenticate narratives of trauma and to establish sites of commonality between sufferers and witnesses. As Ross Chambers puts it in Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author, AIDS narratives raise questions "about witnessing and the authority it borrows…from death" (1). When scholars assert the universal power of illness and disability narratives

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4 In our forthcoming essay, "Forensic Auto/Biography" (in Exterminating Narratives, ed. Timothy Libretti), Wendy S. Hesford and I examine this phenomenon in the context of auto/biographical representations of genocide by forensic anthropologists.
(autopathography) and terminal illness narratives (autothanatography) to evoke responses in readers, we must ask if the reification of pain and death as common experiences works to erase power distinctions among sites and to mask the social, economic, and political contexts that shape HIV/AIDS in particular and illness narratives in general.\(^5\)

In this context, Kincaid's auto/biographical project becomes fraught with risks and burdens related to witnessing illness and death and memorializing the dead. In Chambers' examination of AIDS diaries and their rhetorical strategies, he argues that they are more concerned with "the witnessing impulse" than "the memorializing function" (5). Chambers suggests that although both witnessing and memorializing seek "to create coherence and sense out of discontinuity, incoherence, and disintegration" (6), the witnessing function draws its rhetorical immediacy from the temporal sphere of present and future—the live broadcast—whereas the memorializing function, anchored in memory, retrospectively narrates the past (6). A text's authority as "eyewitness testimony" is thus dependent on its ability to recreate the present-tense scene of witness.\(^6\) But we might ask how theories of witnessing and memorializing that rely on temporal rhetorics can be challenged and reworked through attention to geopolitical (spatial) contexts. As Gilmore argues in her epigraph to this chapter, Kincaid's work requires a theoretical framework that takes into account the spatiality of identity and memory—how they become tied to national, transnational, and (post)colonial sites and movements. Indeed, *My Brother* suggests the limits of our critical tools for analyzing auto/biographical practices that respond to scenes of suffering, illness, and crisis. For

\(^5\) See, for example, Nancy Mairs' Foreword to Couser's *Recovering Bodies*.

\(^6\) Likewise, Susanna Egan argues that AIDS autobiographies and other illness narratives are profoundly concerned with maintaining the dignity of the subject in his or her present moment against the indignity of inevitable death in the future (196-197).
how are we to fit this narrative into existing theoretical or generic frameworks?

Autothanatography? AIDS narrative? Family drama? Postcolonial manifesto? Trauma narrative? My Brother draws from each of these, and more, but also shatters each of them in the process.

If AIDS narratives have served to destabilize and reimagine the genre of autobiography, Kincaid's memoir can likewise be said to destabilize and reimagine the emergent genre of the AIDS narrative. Kincaid explicitly refuses several models, including the diary: "What I am writing now is not a journal," she states; "a journal is a daily account, an immediate account of what occurs during a certain time. For a long time after my brother died I could not write about him, I could not think about him in a purposeful way" (91). Nevertheless, the structural tension in My Brother between present and past, self and other, life and death evokes Chambers' theoretical distinction between the witnessing function and the memorializing function. How, then, might these functions operate in an auto/biographical narrative that, written retrospectively, manifests a preoccupation with memory and the past but nonetheless wants to avoid the epistemological and ethical pitfalls of commemoration, of laying the dead to rest?

Writing the suffering (and dying) body thus evokes crucial questions about how we understand the "project" of speaking and writing of and for the dead. These are questions

7 Autothanatography refers to autobiographical narratives of illness and death (literally: auto "self," thanatos "death," graphos "writing"). On autothanatography, see Miller, Bequest and Betrayal and "Autobiographical Deaths"; Egan; and Couser.

8 As Couser has argued, much of the autobiographical literature of AIDS has been written by or about white, middle-class gay men, the group most visibly affected by the epidemic—and most politically outspoken about its construction in the public sphere—in the 1980s and 1990s. But scholars are just beginning to examine how auto/biographical AIDS narratives written by family members, loved ones, and others confront the problem of witnessing the suffering, illness, and death of another. Much of this work has focused on narratives written by the lovers of those affected by AIDS. Importantly, however, Couser's Recovering Bodies includes a section on AIDS narratives written by sisters.
about ethics and politics but also about representation: what does it mean to witness another's suffering and death? What does it mean to remember them, and to inscribe their memory in writing? How does *My Brother* bear witness to Devon's story, a story that is bound up with geopolitical and postcolonial conditions, without memorializing him?

Kincaid constructs herself paradoxically as a privileged but limited witness by writing the temporal and spatial gap between seeing the spectacle of her brother's suffering and making sense of it through memory and narrative. Moreover, she develops a narrative (authorial) voice that founders in the telling, even as it "tells on" herself for judging her brother and for failing to save him. Rhetorically, she places the reader in contested positions, occupying first the uncomfortable role of voyeur, then the equally difficult role of belated witness. Refusing to write a narrative of redemption in which the witnessing function completes the story through empathetic listening, Kincaid instead reconstructs the painful gulf between witnessing and testimony, seeing and understanding, wanting to help and knowing how to do it. This chapter traces how the narrative confronts—and writes—this gulf temporally and spatially, a process intimately tied to the operations of memory. Ultimately, I argue, *My Brother* poses questions and problems about the ethics of witness and the burden of writing another's story that it fails to resolve. Remaining both "open" and "closed" (Browning 10) to Devon's life story, to her relationship with him, and to the possibility of returning "home," Kincaid's narrative

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9 In "Writing in Blood," Watson develops the concept of "telling on"—the practice of simultaneously identifying with and exposing dysfunctional familial and cultural groups—as a "technology of the 'real'" in autobiography (113-114).

10 Browning develops the metaphor of open (vulnerable) and closed bodies in order to theorize the representation of AIDS in globalization. See especially the Introduction, "Haiti is Here / Haiti is Not Here," 1-16, and the Conclusion, "The Closed Body," 173-192.
begins to chart a geopolitics of witnessing that also points to the geographies of trans/national suffering, familial relationships, and uneven global health care.

**Transnationality, Infection, and Auto/biography**

The line between autobiography and biography, writing one's life and writing another's life, is not just a formal or generic boundary; it is also an *ethical* one, particularly when the balance of power between writer and subject is unequal. Adopting a voice of unflinching honesty in writing about her brother and herself, Kincaid theorizes these difficult in-between spaces (self/other, autobiography/biography, privilege/oppression, life/death) and positions them at the center of the narrative. Acknowledging both her privileged gaze and her inability to make sense of her brother's suffering and death, Kincaid points to the limitations of narrative and scholarly paradigms for comprehending the self's obligation to the other: "when I was looking at him through the louvered windows, I began to distance myself from him, I began to feel I didn't like being so tied up with his life, the waning of it, the suffering in it" (90). My *Brother* is the story of being "tied up" with another across boundaries of nation, class, gender, and sexuality, and about how these ties are tested and transformed through illness and death.

But it is also the story of (re)drawing lines and maintaining boundaries. Contrary to celebratory theories of mobility and hybridity, Kincaid illustrates the material consequences of transnational and familial entanglement. During her brother's illness, the narrator meets a woman at an AIDS workshop who, upon finding out that Jamaica lives
in Vermont, suggests that she bring Devon to the U.S. for treatment. Her response is indignant:

[H]ow could she just say things without asking about my circumstances, without wondering what taking my brother into my life would mean to me. I said, Oh, I am sure they wouldn't let him in, and I didn't know if what I was saying was true, I was not familiar really with immigration policies and HIV, but what I really meant was, no, I can't do what you are suggesting—take this strange, careless person into the hard-earned corner of my life: my life of children and husband, and they love me and I love them. (48-49)

This passage evokes the deep discomfort that attends reading Kincaid's memoir, as well as encapsulating many of its prominent affective themes: Jamaica's self-protective gesture, her vacillation between claims of loving and not loving her brother, her mother, and Antigua, her pride and commitment to her chosen family (her husband and children) in Vermont in contrast to her ambivalence about her birth family, whom she refers to, in this text and in her other works, as "the people I am from" (51). In this memoir, the expected emotional and ethical responses—concern, identification, empathy, love—are bound up with dissociation, disidentification, self-protection, even disdain for the "strange, careless" deceased.

Shortly after Kincaid learns from a friend of her mother's (she and her mother are not speaking at the time) that her brother has AIDS, she makes her first visit to Devon,

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11 The description of Devon as "careless" is repeated at various points in the text and is connected to homophobic constructions of persons with AIDS as well as certain "risk groups": “promiscuous” people; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; intravenous drug users; and poor people in U.S. urban centers and in the so-called "Third World," particularly Africa and its diasporic sites, including the Caribbean islands. In the context of My Brother and Kincaid's construction of voice, however, it functions to expose her hasty judgments about her brother's lifestyle and sexuality.
who is staying in a run-down Antiguan hospital. The hospital, formerly run by the British colonial government, is in a state of severe disrepair: "It was never a great hospital, but it is a terrible hospital now, and only people who cannot afford anything else make use of it" (11). As she sits with Devon on the hospital lawn, thinking that he might have made a life for himself as a gardener had he been able to cultivate his gifts, the narrative shifts in tone from one of elegy and reminiscence to one of anger and the recognition of social and economic injustice: "There are people who complain that a hospital in the United States will charge six dollars for a dose of Tylenol; they might wish to look at this way of running a hospital: bring your own medicines" (34). Devon had had a severe headache one night, and the hospital had nothing with which to ease his pain. Kincaid is determined to supplement the basic treatments her brother is receiving from the hospital for pneumonia and thrush with AZT and other powerful drugs not available on Antigua:

It is felt in general, so I am told, that since there is no cure for AIDS it is useless to spend money on medicine that will only slow the progress of the disease….This was the reason why there was no AZT in the hospital; but even if a doctor had wanted to write a prescription for AZT for a patient, that prescription could not be filled at a chemist's; there was no AZT on the island, it was too expensive to be stocked, most people suffering from the disease could not afford to buy this medicine; most people suffering from the disease are poor or young, not too far away from being children; in a society like the one I am from, being a child is one of the definitions of vulnerability and powerlessness. (31-32)

The political and economic infantilization of persons with AIDS on Antigua, Kincaid suggests, is part of a broader legacy of colonialism that also structures social and familial
relationships. Kincaid's relationship with her brother is mediated through and bound up in her relationship with her powerful and controlling mother, who is a tender and devoted caregiver in Devon's time of need: "Her love for her children when they are children is spectacular, unequaled I am sure in the history of a mother's love. It is when her children are trying to be grown-up people—adults—that her mechanism for loving falls apart" (17). The precise nature of her mother's love for her children evokes for Kincaid the memory of being removed from school, at her mother's request, and for no reason Kincaid can understand. Indeed, she reflects bitterly that her mother's action might have ultimately hindered her ability to bring Devon effective medical treatment from the United States: "Had my life stayed on the path where my mother had set it, the path of no university education, my brother would have been dead by now. I would not have been in a position to save his life" (74).

In My Brother, then, Devon's illness and death, and Kincaid's difficult telling about it, are bound up with postcolonial and more broadly transnational conditions and policies, such as Kincaid's ability to smuggle drugs onto the island, that point to a geopolitical understanding of disease, medicine, and health care. The medications Kincaid brings to her brother from the United States prolong Devon's life but do not ultimately allow her to occupy a heroic role. Instead, as she makes the journey from Vermont to Antigua and back again, her relationship to her brother becomes increasingly fraught and entangled with memories of her family, particularly her mother, and her childhood on postcolonial Antigua. Though Kincaid attempts to write a narrative that maintains her distance and privileged gaze, these entangled memories and relationships interfere in her ability to write a coherent narrative from a vantage point of
epistemological privilege. Thus, even as *My Brother* takes up the burden of writing Devon's illness and death, it also charts the affective and transnational geographies of kinship, complicating facile understandings of what it means to witness.

In order to narrate her brother's illness and death, Kincaid must confront not only her family's complicated history but also the geopolitics of medicine. This is not simply to say, as scholars and activists have said for years, that AIDS has a politics; instead it is to point to the ways in which national fantasies and transnational policies and exchanges together influence the material reality of AIDS incidence and treatment. Devon's disease is not "simply" a disease, even as it is also not a metaphor for anything else (Sontag, *Illness*). Rather, I follow Barbara Browning's argument in suggesting that his condition—as well as the dying body itself—must be read as socially meaningful, particularly in the context of globalization (22-23). The specific nature of HIV/AIDS, it has been argued, belies conventional autobiographical concepts such as the myths of the private autonomous individual and the public citizen (Browning; Couser; Egan; Miller and Tougaw). As Browning argues, and as Kincaid's memoir bears out, AIDS can be read as meaningful—not in a moralizing framework, but as an indicator of social inequality, the legacy of colonization, and the disposability of "Third World" lives. "The reason that my brother was dying of AIDS at the time I saw him," Kincaid writes, "is that in Antigua if you are diagnosed with the HIV virus you are considered to be dying; the drugs used for slowing the progress of the virus are not available there; public concern…does not exist. There are only the people suffering from AIDS, and then the people who are not suffering from AIDS" (31).
Barbara Browning's concept of "open" and "closed" bodies usefully theorizes how individuals and collectives (notably nation-states) are constructed by the dynamics of imagined social and political vulnerability or resistance. Illness, Sander Gilman argues, "is a real loss of control that results in our becoming the Other whom we have feared, whom we have projected onto the world" (2). And Sontag argues that "[t]here is a link between imagining disease and imagining foreignness" (*Illness*, 136). The global threat and spread of AIDS has been linked—in the media, popular narratives, and scholarly work—with globalization as an economic, cultural, and political phenomenon (Bancroft; Barnett and Whiteside; Browning; Ruiz; Villarejo). As Browning and others suggest, immigration law and policy has relied for its validity on fantasies about the immigrant's body as source of pollution and disease (Fairchild and Tynan). Likewise, the rhetoric of AIDS as a virus that festers in socially or morally unclean populations within the U.S.—gay men, prostitutes, intravenous drug users, the urban poor—imagines the nation-state itself as a vulnerable body that must be vigilantly defended against internal as well as external threats. At the level of narrative, G. Thomas Couser has argued that many AIDS narratives written by sisters of gay men remain closed off to the brother's perspective, reasserting the importance of the conventional family and denying the powerful place of the brother's chosen family—his lovers and friends—in his life. In *My Brother*, Kincaid's narrative remains both "open" and "closed" to Devon's perspective: it both reframes his story in terms of her life, and precisely acknowledges the limits of her knowledge and understanding. In doing so, I suggest, Kincaid is ultimately able to make meaning out of Devon's story without becoming swallowed up by it ("this now has a meaning only because my own life can make it have one" [128]) or attempting to speak for him. But in
order to do so, she must construct herself as privileged witness to his suffering, a role that leaves Devon unable to "speak" except through the gaps and fissures of her perspective—the holes in her vision. In *My Brother*, Kincaid strategically crafts a narrator with a limited perspective in order to confront the ethical and political problems of transnational witnessing and the geopolitics of medicine.

In *Infectious Rhythm*, Browning points out that metaphors of contagion characterize U.S. discourses of transnationality and the exchange of cultures, particularly African diasporic culture. She charts the history of this metaphorics from colonial times, when slavery both made possible the economic production that characterized the colonial U.S. and Caribbean islands—that insidious "first step" of global capitalism—and created anxiety about personal and cultural exchanges between slaves and white settlers. Browning locates contemporary discourses on HIV/AIDS in this historical and cultural context. Susan Sontag, while cautioning not to over-read illness, has theorized how disease in general and AIDS in particular provoke national responses informed by phobic constructions of foreigners, people of color, sexual minorities, and the poor.12 Browning's study examines how the links between AIDS and the African diaspora are constructed and reconstructed in literature, music, commercial culture, and the performing arts. She argues that even as AIDS is constructed in the U.S. as a specifically "African" contagion, globalization is enabling "a proliferation of theoretical models for configuring the 'spread' or dispersal of national performative and representational practices," including "the Western account of African diasporic culture that relies on the figure of disease and contagion" (6). Rhetorics of contagion, infection, and dis-ease characterize contemporary

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12 See both *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. 121
discourse in the media and public policy about immigration, cultural flows, transnational "mixing," and global economic relationships and exchanges. These rhetorics evoke long-held beliefs and shared views about cultural and national "others," whose foreignness has long been represented as a threat to the national body politic. That AIDS has been placed in a myth of origins that locates the "source" of the virus in Africa or, alternatively, in a community of unpredictable "strangers among us" (Phelan), has long been recognized—and debunked—by theorists and activists from Sontag to ACT UP. What Browning adds is another theoretical layer that identifies transnationality—that condition of cultural exchanges, mixing, and hybridity that has characterized the "New World" from its origins—as the "carrier" of national anxieties.

Reading *My Brother* through this lens is not to romanticize the reality of AIDS or to make the HIV virus into a metaphor for transnational cultural exchanges. Rather, it is to recognize the ways in which Kincaid's narrative is informed by—and participates in a critical confrontation with—these rhetorics and linkages. I see this concept operating on at least two levels: first, the memoir points to the postcolonial and transnational politics that underlie the global geography of AIDS; second, Kincaid writes her brother's "open" and "closed" body and implicates herself in the process of closing herself off to—or, at times, remaining open to—his own story, the story he tells or would tell about his illness and death. Positioned as an outsider to her brother's illness, her family's narrative, and the culture of her homeland, Kincaid approaches her brother's life story from the position of privileged spectator and with the gaze of a First World subject, a position she critiques in

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13 A significant body of scholarship exists on the link between otherness, disease, and nation-building, not all of which I can cover here. See, in addition to Sontag and Browning, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*; Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*; and Žižek, "The Nation-Thing" and "Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!"
earlier works, most notably her postcolonial manifesto, *A Small Place*. This outsider status—her position as a spectator to her family narrative in general and her brother's illness in particular—brings into view the ethical questions about witnessing and writing another's story that I discuss above, and positions *My Brother* in the genre of postcolonial elegy (Pouchet Paquet) rather than autopathography (Couser) or autothanatography (Miller).

"Autothanatography," a term coined by Nancy K. Miller and theorized by Couser and Egan, among others, refers to autobiographical narratives written in the face of terminal illness and death. Characterized by the breakdown of linear narrative and the refusal to write an ending, autothanatographers such as Audre Lorde (in *The Cancer Journals*, 1980) and Catherine Wyatt-Morley (in *AIDS Memoir: Journal of an HIV-Positive Mother*, 1997) privilege the moment in an attempt "to be recognized as fully present" (Egan 142). *My Brother* adds yet another twist to this already complex, even paradoxical, genre by writing the illness and death of another—a brother—rather than the self. In this, it has more in common with memoirs written by the lovers of persons with AIDS, such as Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (1988), than with autothanatography as defined by Miller and Egan. However, Kincaid's narrative also refuses to be simply a love story. Although Kincaid writes of her mother using the language of family romance—"as if ours had been a great love affair, something that was partly imaginary, something that was partly a fact; but the parts that were imaginary and the parts that were only facts were all true" (119)—she remains ambivalent about her feelings for Devon, whom she barely knows. Kincaid's ambivalence about her feelings for her brother and her on-again, off-again relationship with her family, particularly her
mother, force the reader to struggle to find a familiar framework within which to understand *My Brother*. As Kincaid tells it, Devon's story—the biography in the autobiography—*infects* Jamaica's life as well as her text, rendering it impure, sullied, and decidedly vulnerable. In order to make sense of the multiple linkages that structure Kincaid's auto/biographical narrative, it is necessary to consider how the narrative itself precisely refuses to make sense of them in any comprehensive way. Instead, Kincaid acknowledges how the scene of writing itself—the scene of writing her brother's life, illness, and death—poses unique problems for narrative, genre, and the act of difficult witnessing.

**Writing the Temporal Gap**

One of the reasons AIDS narratives and other illness narratives have primarily been theorized through the discourse of witnessing is that rhetorically, they position the reader in a space that ask them to bear witness to another's suffering—a mode of witness that is intimately linked to the consumption of suffering. What has been termed "literatures of witness"—a term that covers diverse works from Holocaust diaries to Latin American *testimonio* to AIDS narratives—are characterized by this central paradox between witnessing and consuming suffering. As readers in the U.S. and elsewhere are increasingly drawn to auto/biographical works about suffering, abuse, and even death, the editors of *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* ask what it means to be so attracted to the spectacle of suffering, and why readers seek ever more "authentic"

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14 Denny has examined the links between AIDS literature by sexual minorities and what he calls "literatures of witness" by ethnic and racial minorities. See "AIDS Writing and the Creation of a Gay Culture." See also Caruth; Felman and Laub; Frank; Harlow; Rothberg; and Tal.
eyewitness accounts of the other's story of suffering (2). In *Facing It*, however, Ross Chambers suggests that a further distinction be made when theorizing such texts between what he calls "the witnessing impulse" and "the memorializing function" (5). The latter, he argues, is characteristic of classical autobiography, in its retrospective construction of what the ultimate meaning of a life might be, while the former characterizes the AIDS diaries that serve as the primary texts of his study, as well as auto/biographies that explicitly refuse to commemorate an individual, instead privileging the present-tense moments of his or her life (5-6). The "witnessing impulse," for Chambers, is dependent upon this moment-by-moment temporal structure and its refusal to finally "package" an individual or a life into a meaningful commemorative form for readerly consumption.

In *My Brother*, Kincaid acknowledges the problem of writing her brother's illness and death as one that risks the consumptive gaze and the spectacle of suffering. But she does not render his illness in the abstract, either; instead, she positions visual descriptions of Devon's diseased body alongside her unsuccessful attempts to make sense of them through memory or narrative. By explicitly dis-identifying her narrative with the journal form and its moment-by-moment structure in favor of a narrative that writes the temporal gap between seeing and understanding, Kincaid is able to position her brother's story in relation to her own: "all this made me not sad then, only now when I think of it am I sad, at the time when I was taking in the whole spectacle, at some moments I felt disdain, at some moments I felt triumphant, at some moments I felt awe, at some moments I felt bewilderment, at some moments I had a revelation; but never did I feel sad then" (144).

Throughout *My Brother* she exposes and critiques her own privileged narrative gaze, as

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15 See also Yaeger's essay in the same volume, "Consuming Trauma, or, The pleasures of Merely Circulating" (25-54); and Feldman's "Memory Theaters."
when she describes herself looking at her brother through a window soon after she learns of his illness: "When I was looking at him through the louvered windows, I was not thinking of myself in the sense of how it came to be that he was lying there dying and I was standing there looking at him. I was thinking of my past" (90) The narrator's privileged gaze both constructs her brother's story—hers is the vision through which we see his life and death—and constructs barriers to that story. The narrative self-consciously preserves this privileged perspective and interrogates it, posing the question of how auto/biography can do justice in speaking for the dead: "He would never see me in the place I now live, but I could see him in the place in which he was then living" (88).

Kincaid's privileged gaze, and the process of seeing bodily suffering, become constant themes throughout the narrative. Kincaid's ability to see Devon, to see his suffering and his death "in the place in which he was then living" (88), does not translate into an ability to make sense of it; the conventional link between seeing and believing, or between vision and epistemological mastery, is thoroughly debunked in the narrative. Nowhere is this more clear than in two scenes, one that comes near the beginning of the text, and one that comes in Part Two, after we learn that Devon has died. In the first, Kincaid describes attending a lecture about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases given by Dr. Ramsey, her brother's compassionate and devoted doctor (hired by Kincaid herself). Kincaid does not remember the pedagogical contents of the lecture, however, because the photographs Dr. Ramsey shows, of human body parts in various stages of disease,

were amazing. There were penises that looked like ladyfingers left in the oven too long and with a bite taken out of them that revealed a jam-filled center. There
were labias covered with thick blue crusts, or black crusts, or crusts that were iridescent. There were breasts with large parts missing, eaten away, not from a large bite taken at once but nibbled, as if by an animal in a state of high enjoyment, each morsel savored for maximum pleasure. (37)

The epicurean language here—ladyfingers, jam-filled, crusts, morsel—defies medical discourse and its corresponding knowledgeable gaze (Foucault, Birth) and uncannily constructs the human body, and particularly the human sexual organs, as objects of (literal) consumption. This scene, coming so soon in the narrative, conveys the limits of Kincaid's understanding—her ability to see but only to react with awe—and resonates powerfully in all later scenes in which Devon's body is depicted.

The second scene in which the temporal gap between seeing and understanding is evident concerns Devon's body specifically. Throughout the narrative, Kincaid describes how the ravages of various diseases and conditions—pneumonia, sores, thrush and other fungi—operate on his body. In each case, Devon's body becomes a site not of epistemological mastery but instead of bewilderment and pain. Early in the second part of My Brother, Kincaid is remembering the smell of Devon's room in his mother's house, where he lived for his final weeks and days: "now as I write this, I cannot find a simile for this smell, it was not a smell like any I am familiar with" (90). As Kincaid enters Devon's room, he is unaware of her presence: "I stood looking at him a long time before he realized I was there" (90). When he finally does notice her, his desperate action unsettles her deeply:

[H]e suddenly threw the sheets away from himself, tore his pajama bottoms away from his waist, revealing his penis, and then he grabbed his penis in his hand and
held it up, and his penis looked like a bruised flower that had been cut short on the stem; it was covered with sores and on the sores was a white substance, almost creamy, almost floury, a fungus….Everything about this one gesture was disorienting. (91)

Devon's action is "disorienting" not only because of the way his penis looks—eerily recalling the slides from the medical lecture—but because of the way he subjects it to Jamaica's gaze without warning, without explanation, and apparently without understanding or caring about its inappropriateness. His desperation and panic about his body, and his sexual organ in particular, both require and foreclose a response. It is at this point in the narrative that Kincaid insists that "What I am writing now is not a journal" (91). But neither does she attempt to soften or neutralize her brother's unsettling action by explaining it or situating it comfortably in the trajectory of the narrative. Instead, she leaves the reader in the in-between temporal space between seeing and understanding, a space that is characterized by the operations of memory and the scene of writing.

In *My Brother*, Devon's illness and death evoke for Kincaid memories of his birth and his life as a young boy. Moreover, from the beginning of the text, the narrator's relationship with Devon is mediated through—and bound up in—her relationship with her mother. Significantly, learning about Devon's diagnosis conjures the memory of a swarm of red ants who attack him shortly after his birth, when he is one day old, and nearly kill him:

This was an incident no one ever told my brother, an incident that everyone else in my family has forgotten, except me. One day during his illness, when my mother and I were standing over him, looking at him—he was asleep and so didn't
know we were doing so—I reminded my mother of the ants almost devouring him and she looked at me, her eyes narrowing in suspicion, and she said, "What a memory you have!"—perhaps the thing she most dislikes about me. But I was only wondering if it had any meaning that some small red things had almost killed him from the outside shortly after he was born and that now some small things were killing him from the inside; I don't believe it has any meaning, this is only something a mind like mine would think about. (6)

The richness of this passage, typical of Kincaid, is a result of the weaving together of multiple issues central to the memoir as a whole: memory and its refusal, the gaze, the mother, the gesture toward but ultimate refusal of meaning. Establishing a tension between memory and its refusal, meaning and its refusal, My Brother acknowledges the narrator's—and readers'—position as privileged witnesses to Devon's suffering, the acts of meaning-making and remembering acts of privilege and luxury. Moreover, the memory of the red ants points to the vulnerability of Devon's "open" body, which has been under attack literally from day one. But Kincaid's ultimate refusal to attribute "any meaning" (6) to the memory acknowledges that it is memory and writing, rather than some cosmic pattern or force, that retroactively construct meaning out of past events for the present and future.

Memory and writing are, for Kincaid, intimately connected to her ability to witness and memorialize her brother. Indeed, in My Brother, Kincaid returns again and again to the memory of Devon's birth as a way of confronting his death. Significantly, she associates Devon's birth with catastrophe rather than new beginnings: "At that moment in my mother's life, when her youngest child, my brother who was dying, was born, my
mother's life (a life she might have had in mind, or a life that had become a nightmare; how could I, how can I know) collapsed (I could feel that then, I can see it now)" (128). Her mother's husband fell sick and was unable to support the family; Jamaica, as the oldest child, was often responsible for the care of the younger children. "I did not like this," she writes; "I did not like my mother's other children, I did not even like my mother then; I liked books" (128). Kincaid narrates one memory in particular, when she is left to care for newborn Devon for the day, and refuses, choosing to read a book instead. By the time her mother returns, the stool in Devon's diaper "had hardened and taken the shape of a measure of weight" (130):

And in it, this picture of my brother's hardened stool, a memory, a moment of my own life is frozen; for his diaper sagged with a weight that was not gold but its opposite, a weight whose value would not bring us good fortune, a weight that only emphasized our family's despair: our fortunes, our prospects were not more than the contents of my brother's diaper, and the contents were only shit. (131)

The reversal of fortunes that Kincaid associates with Devon's stool is linked to her life in another way as well: Kincaid's mother reacts furiously to her irresponsibility and burns all of her books in the yard. Kincaid admits that for years she had repressed this memory, and that she only recalled the incident after her mother tells her she has burned a tree because she wants to eradicate the parasites that live there. The mother's methodical fury, metonymically encapsulated in the image of consuming fire, threatens to burn anything that presents itself as a nuisance to the smooth running of her household, including Kincaid's books. And although Kincaid does not remember anything about the books her mother burned, she acknowledges that her career as a writer might be characterized as a
way of rescuing her books: "it would not be so strange if I spent the rest of my life trying to bring those books back to my life by writing them again and again until they were perfect, unscathed by fire of any kind" (197-198). The temporal gap between experiencing the burning of her books and reconstructing it through memory and narrative parallels the gap between failing to take care of newborn Devon as a child, and caring for him as he is dying from AIDS.

The ways in which Kincaid's life intersects and intertwines with Devon's are limited by both her age (she was thirteen when he was born) and her personal history (she left Antigua at sixteen years old to live and work in the U.S.). And in her attempts to come to terms with Devon's death through memory and writing, she continually stumbles upon the limits of her knowledge—limits that she narratively reconstructs for the reader. Crucially, the climax of My Brother is precisely not Devon's death, which the narrative treats as a matter of course, but instead Jamaica's posthumous and accidental discovery of his bisexuality (Pouchet Paquet 252). Kincaid withholds this information from her readers until the end as well, strategically aligning us with her presumed epistemological privilege and then with her shocked and saddened knowledge of how much she didn't know. She learns her brother's secret at a bookstore reading in Chicago a week after his death, from a woman whom she recognizes but cannot place. After the woman introduces herself—she and Kincaid were in an AIDS support group together—she explains how she knew Devon: she had opened her home to gay men on Antigua who had nowhere else to love each other, and Devon, she says, "was a frequent visitor…not as a spectator of homosexual life but as a participant in homosexual life" (161). This knowledge, coming so late in the narrative, nonetheless has a retroactive force: Kincaid and the reader alike
are called to look back at the narrative depiction of Devon and to witness its inadequacy and its limits. Kincaid acknowledges these limits both by reflecting on her lack of knowledge and by reconstructing the narrative so that Devon's bisexuality remains a secret until the end. As Kincaid reflects on the limits of her understanding, she once again connects Devon's life to her own through memory and writing:

[H]e had died without ever understanding or knowing, or being able to let the world in which he lived know, who he was;….His homosexuality is one thing, and my becoming a writer is another altogether, but this truth is not lost to me: I could not have become a writer while living among the people I knew best, I could not have become myself while living among the people I knew best….And his life unfolded before me not like a map just found, or a piece of old paper just found, his life unfolded and there was everything to see and there was nothing to see. (162)

The grief and sadness that attend this moment is evident in the difficult syntax, which, like much of the narrative, circles, stops, starts, and qualifies at every turn. Although Kincaid acknowledges the power of both writing and memory—"(but without memory what would be left? Nothing? I do not know)" (163)—she also acknowledges here their inadequacy, the inability of this narrative to capture Devon's life and death. Circling back to the theme of seeing and the privileged gaze, Kincaid here suggests that while *My Brother* can reconstruct her perspective, it cannot do justice to Devon's life: "his life unfolded and there was everything to see and there was nothing to see" (162). By reconstructing the temporal gap between seeing Devon's suffering and death and making sense of it through memory and narrative, Kincaid refuses the possibility of narrative
closure and the memorializing aesthetic. Like memory, then, Kincaid's auto/biographical narrative retroactively offers both "everything" and "nothing" for the readers' narrative gaze.

**Writing the Spatial Gap**

I have argued that *My Brother* reconstructs the temporal gap between seeing suffering and making sense of it, a gap that is fundamental to the narrative's refusal to memorialize Devon and that positions Kincaid and the reader in a space of difficult witnessing. But writing this temporal gap also allows her to consider the spatiality and geopolitics of their intertwined lives. This is evident in the narrative's spatial structure: Kincaid writes her family narrative as an entangled web of relationships constructed through a traumatic legacy of colonial history (Gilmore, "Wounds"). *My Brother* resists incorporation into a conventional family romance because the transnational migrations that characterize Kincaid's family history leave little room for uncomplicated relationships. Kincaid left Antigua at the age of sixteen to work in New York City as an *au pair*; having left the island when Devon was just three years old, she barely knows him when she returns (when he is 34). The thirty years that have intervened in her relationship with Devon have been marked by a profound distance that is not just geographical but also psychological: "I think of my brothers as my mother's children" (21). The long periods in which she and her mother refuse to speak to one another position Kincaid as an outsider to her own family, a role that she is ambivalent about. Her outsider status is registered at the level of language: her mother speaks to her using
standard English rather than Antiguan dialect, and Devon calls her "Jamaica"—not her given name, Elaine, but her chosen one.

As Jamaica moves back and forth between Antigua and Vermont, her epistemological and affective relationship to her brother and his illness change radically. For example, when in Antigua with Devon during her first visit, she is stunned by her love for him: "I felt I was falling into a deep hole, but I did not try to stop myself from falling….It surprised me that I loved him; I could see that that was what I was feeling, love for him, and it surprised me because I did not know him at all" (20-21). When she is back in Vermont, however, she changes her mind: "I did not think I loved him; then, when I was no longer in his presence, I did not think I loved him" (50-51). The narrative vacillates between professing love for Devon and professing a lack of love for him; even after his death, Kincaid is still deciding: "I did not love my brother, I did not like my brother, I was only so sorry that he had died" (106) is later revised:

One day something may happen and I will understand that all the things I now feel, which do not at all seem like love (the word I would use to describe my feelings about my family, the people I have made my own: my husband, my children, my friends, though that word "friend" is so thin to explain that thickness), are in fact love; that I loved my brother and the other people I am from, my mother, my other brothers and Mr. Drew (the father of my brothers, who was a father to me, though at the same time not my father at all). (149)

Kincaid continually and anxiously writes the gulf between "the people [she is] from" and "the people [she has] made [her] own" as if to preserve it from shrinking: "love being the thing I felt for my family, the one I have now, but not for him, or for the people I am
from" (51); "I was so happy to reach my home, that is, the home I have now made for myself, the home of my adult life" (98).

Kincaid's need to draw boundaries and make distinctions between her chosen family in Vermont and "the people I am from" in Antigua indicates not just a critical distancing from his illness but also a preoccupation with the issues raised throughout Kincaid's body of work, namely the difficult mother-daughter relationship and the impossibility of returning "home" to (post)colonial Antigua. Devon's illness invokes a range of emotional responses rooted in familial and historical trauma (Gilmore, "Wounds"), making the memoir as much about the closing off of relationships and identities as it is about opening them up. The narrator's conflict over whether or not she loves her brother—a theme to which she returns again and again over the course of the memoir—must be understood, then, as her difficult relationship with her mother is understood: within the context of postcolonial familial relationships, historical trauma, and the ruptures of affect, identification, and opportunity that attend uneven immigration. As Sarah Brophy suggests, Devon represents for the narrator all that she left behind when she left Antigua: he "embodies her political unconscious in that he represents an extreme example of the vulnerability of those who remain in the place that Kincaid has left, a vulnerability that remains profound even when it is masked by a performance of masculine bravado and indifference" (268). As the narrator's "political unconscious," Devon provokes a crisis of witnessing in her: "I shall never forget him because his life is the one I did not have, the life that, for reasons I hope shall never be too clear to me, I avoided or escaped" (176). But as her brother, he is also more than a symptom of social and economic crisis in postcolonial Antigua. He is also a part of "the people [she] is
from"—her birth family—for whom she feels powerful feelings that she doesn't understand as love: "not love, but a powerful feeling all the same, only not love" (51).

The difficulty Kincaid has with the words "home," "family," and "love"—her continual need to qualify, explain, and draw boundaries—evokes the scene of writing and the auto/biographer's struggle to write the narrative. But it also situates My Brother in the context of Kincaid's work as a whole. As Gilmore argues, Kincaid's oeuvre can be considered a multibook project or "serial autobiography," in which "the proliferation of texts questions the limit of any single text's self-sufficiency" (Limits 96). Gilmore identifies Kincaid's preoccupations with the figure of the mother and with "the deathliness of self-representation" (97) as her signature mark, a mark that cuts across her fictional (Annie John, Lucy, Autobiography of My Mother) and non-fictional (A Small Place, My Brother) writing. Reading My Brother alongside Kincaid's other writing about Antigua illuminates the text's political and ethical concerns, in particular her relationship to her native island and her birth family, both sites of conflict and contestation repeated across her serial autobiography.

In A Small Place, her autobiographical essay and manifesto about postcolonial Antigua, Kincaid adopts the second person in order to rhetorically address white tourists who vacation there. Part explanation of Antiguan politics and part admonishment of tourists who see nothing but the sunny, restful side of the island, A Small Place draws on Kincaid's childhood and specifically her relationship with her mother in order to suggest the complex historical legacies that inform native Antiguans' lives and views of tourists. Antigua, Kincaid insists, has been, from the time of British colonization and African (and native) enslavement forward, a place intimately familiar with what we are now in the
habit of calling "geopolitics" and "transnational ties." Colonization, the slave trade, the tourist industry, and Middle Eastern Japanese car salesmen make daily life in Antigua intricately bound up with the lives and policies of other countries' citizens and leaders.

Armed with the native Antiguan's outrage and sense of injustice, Kincaid ironically takes on the tourist's gaze—albeit fractured and doubled by the native's vision of the tourist's gaze: "You disembark from your plane. You go through customs. Since you are a tourist, a North American or European—to be frank, white—and not an Antiguan black returning to Antigua from Europe or North America with cardboard boxes of much needed cheap clothes and food for relatives, you move through customs swiftly" (4). This fractured, doubled vision characterizes the entire first section of *A Small Place*, lending it a sharp irony and a strange, intensely personal aura of credibility.

Suzanne Gauch examines how *A Small Place* troubles the construction of subjects in globalization as either "tourist" or "native" by mobilizing and critiquing the vision of both through the poetics and politics of ordinariness. Gauch argues that *A Small Place* challenges the tourist-reader's fantasy of the exotic Antiguan "other" by depicting Antigua as a *place* rather than a *space*: "What occurs in the apparently simple but forceful gesture of telling readers all they do not see is a restructuring of *space* into *place*, where space is defined 'as territory that is mappable, explorable' (in the sense of colonizable) and place as 'occupation, dwelling, being lived in'" (910). The ordinary, banal lives of Antiguan natives are demystified and de-exoticized in Kincaid's treatise, as is the exclusionary construction of the reader-tourist's gaze, which must "tur[n] a blind eye to Antiguans' ordinariness" (911) in order to maintain the exotic fantasy of otherness. The

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16 Gauch quotes Elizabeth Grosz's "Women, Chora, Dwelling."
transformation of *space* into *place*, then, is a political act that refuses to perpetuate the image of Antigua as an extension of British and American space or as its Edenic opposite. Kincaid's use of the rhetorical second person is crucial to this project, for it strategically constructs all people everywhere as either tourists or natives, fundamentally linked by the global economy and the mutually constitutive identities it constructs. If the reader feels trapped by the insistent, persistent "you" and the native Antiguan's gaze into an uncomfortable, "ugly" (14) tourist identity, Kincaid exposes how the Antiguan native is likewise trapped by the reader-tourist's exclusionary look.

Gauch's distinction between *space* and *place* is instructive for considering the construction of Antigua in *My Brother*. Like *A Small Place*, *My Brother* theorizes the effects of (post)colonial relations and contemporary geopolitics on Antigua. Unlike *A Small Place*, however, it positions Jamaica as outsider, spectator, voyeur, and associates Antigua with Devon's decaying body rather than the controlling mother (Pouchet Paquet 248). Kincaid must struggle throughout *My Brother* to negotiate her role in her Antiguan family as outsider, a role she has chosen and continues to choose: "That night as he lay dying and calling the names of his brothers and his mother, he did not call my name, and I was neither glad nor sad about this. For why should he call my name?...I had never been a part of the tapestry, so to speak, of Patches, Styles, and Muds [her mother's and brothers' nicknames]" (174-175). And yet Kincaid's position as outsider, a result of her leaving Antigua to come to the U.S. at such a young age, is difficult to categorize as either chosen or coerced: she describes her emigration in *My Brother* and elsewhere as

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17 Of course, *A Small Place* also reveals how both of these identities are shifting and mutable. Indeed, Kincaid uses the phrase "[e]very native everywhere" (18) with irony, and likewise reveals the tourist identity to be an impermanent construction tied to a specific geographical and economic context: "An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist" (17, my emphasis).
necessitated by postcolonial and economic conditions, the need to break from the
formidable mother figure, and the desire to become a writer. Likewise, her return to
Antigua upon hearing that Devon has AIDS is necessitated by family circumstance:
"When I heard that my brother was sick and dying, the usual deliberation I allow myself
whenever my family's needs come up—should I let this affect me or not?—vanished"
(20). Devon's illness both erases the gulf Kincaid has constructed between herself and her
family and constructs new barriers between them, as Kincaid defensively maintains
distinctions between her birth family and her chosen family and manifests a profound dis-
identification with both Devon and Antigua.

The distance the narrator maintains from her family is part geographical and part
psychological. But it also reminds us of the narrator's professed and hard-earned privilege
as a writer, U.S. citizen, and heterosexual wife and mother with views of sexuality that
have been shaped by a postcolonial legacy of compulsory heterosexuality and "proper"
womanhood centered in a limited concept of family. When Devon tells her, for example,
that he has continued to sleep with women because "he could not live without sex" (66),
regardless of his HIV status, the narrator admits that she "grew up alienated from my own
sexuality and…not at all comfortable with the idea of myself and sex" (69). She seems to
understand that her disapproval of her brother's behavior is at least in part informed by
this legacy of sexual repression, and is convinced that she understands her brother's
behavior as this legacy's binary opposite: "he was a powerfully sexual man" (67), one
who "could not go two weeks without having sex" (67) because he identifies above all as
a sexual being. In one scene, Kincaid describes her brother's flirtation with women at the
hospital as pathetic. After being rejected by two visitors, Kincaid wonders "at the
confidence of men. There he was, diseased and dying, looking as unattractive as a long-dead corpse would look, and he could still try to convince a woman to sleep with him" (43). Here, the narrator is dumbfounded and amused; elsewhere, however, she is indignant: "I had gotten myself into debt trying to save his life" (68). But she also recognizes that her perspective is bound up with the legacy of slavery on Antigua, in which women are either ruined or prude: "it must have been such a man that my mother knew of when she communicated to me the grave danger to myself should I allow such a person to know me too well, communicated this to me so strongly that I grew up alienated from my own sexuality" (69). Unfortunately, it is not until after Devon's death, after she learns of his relationships with men, that it occurs to her that his sexuality, including his overly enthusiastic pursuit of women during his illness, might be masking his own fraught relationship to postcolonial Antiguan sexual politics.

Framed recursively through the narrative's (and the narrator's) later knowledge of Devon's bisexuality, this scene prompts a second look, asking the reader to review Kincaid's construction of Devon's hypersexuality through the lens of her ignorance, presumption, and heterosexual privilege. Likewise, the narrator's vacillation between loving and not loving Devon warrants a second look, reframed through the lens of Kincaid's identity as a writer, wife, and mother in Vermont. Kincaid learns of her brother's death at roughly the midpoint of the memoir, when she has just returned to her beloved husband and children after a trip to Miami. The scene is tender and loving: "I stood over [my children], looking down at them and thinking how much I loved them and how glad I was that I had them, and I bent over and kissed them and they woke up and were glad to see me and begged me to get into bed with them and snuggle with them until
they fell asleep again" (98). This cozy maternal scene serves as an important backdrop and contrast to the news of Devon's death, which comes from her husband several hours later. Strangely, Kincaid's response remains centered with this family rather than her brother and her birth family: "when he said 'Devon died' I thought, Oh, it's Devon who died, not one of his relatives, not someone of his, this is not someone he has to grieve for. I was so glad about that….He was not going to suffer a grief" (99). Again, the narrative emphasizes the distance between Kincaid's chosen and birth families, and between Vermont and Antigua. Kincaid's affective identification with her husband can be read as a psychological defense against fully assimilating the knowledge of Devon's death. But it also prompts a consideration of Kincaid's identity as a U.S. citizen and Antiguan expatriate writer. Reframed through her belated understanding of and identification with Devon after his death—"I could not have become a writer while living among the people I knew best" (162)—Kincaid's response makes sense as a way of working through her obligations to multiple loved ones, multiple places.

The narrator's privileged perspective allows her to pass judgments on her brother that expose her constructed role as spectator and voyeur, roles seemingly antithetical to the role of empathetic witness. Her judgments, which are interspersed with acknowledgements that she is, in fact, judging him, participate in the same ideological matrices of compulsory heterosexuality and capitalism that inform her professed love for her chosen family in Vermont (Davidson). The narrator describes the pain with which she notices that a lemon tree her brother had planted had been cut down: "That lemon tree would have been one of the things left of his life. Nothing came from him; not work, not children, not love for someone else" (13). Likewise, in the scene in which she learns that
despite the fact that she "had gotten [her]self into debt trying to save his life" (68), he has continued to sleep with women, the narrator registers her confusion about him and the limits of her understanding of, and ability to identify with, him:

He doesn't make anything, no one depends on him, he is not a father to anyone, no one finds him indispensable. He cannot make a table, his father could make a table and a chair, and a house; his father was the father of many children. This compulsion to express himself through his penis, his imagination passing between his legs, not through his hands, is something I am not qualified to understand. (70)

The narrator's assumption that the productivity of a life should be measured by the making of furniture or children calls attention to the limitations of her narrative gaze, limitations that she herself recognizes and mocks elsewhere in the text.

In another scene in which she laments the death of a tree, she identifies her privileged gaze with irony: "In my now privileged North American way (my voice full of pity at the thought of any kind of destruction, as long as my great desires do not go unmet in any way), I asked my mother what had happened to the tree" (125). And at the end of the narrative, when Jamaica witnesses the funeral not of her brother but of a four-year-old boy whom she does not know, the narrator meditates on death and the spectacle of suffering it can elicit in others:

[T]he sorrow shown by the family excites observers, evoking pity for the mourner and, ultimately, superiority, for to see someone suffer in a moment when you are not suffering can inspire such a feeling, superiority, in a place like Antigua, with its history of subjugation, leaving in its wake humiliation and inferiority; to see
someone in straits worse than your own is to feel at first pity for them and soon better than them. (186)

This passage, which reconstructs and reflects on the scene of seeing suffering, once again prompts readers to look back at the narrative's construction of Devon's suffering and the narrator's gaze. But it is also crucial to note that Kincaid locates the consumption of suffering in the specific context of Antigua's "history of subjugation" (186). This locational move evokes consideration of the geopolitics of My Brother itself: written by an Antiguan expatriate known for her travel and nature writing,18 about an Antiguan relative, and for a primarily upper-class, academic U.S. audience, this text risks participating in a global culture of uncritical consumption, in which globalization excites First World interest in the suffering of the distant "other" (Boltanski; Hesford, "Documenting"). Kincaid forecloses such an uncritical consumption, however, by evoking the scene of writing itself as a scene of difficult witnessing. In this scene, her own narrative gaze is acknowledged and critiqued, revealed to be a construction informed not only by belated knowledge but also by the geopolitical realities of colonial history, immigration, and uneven health care.

Conclusion: The Geopolitics of Witnessing

Attempting to trace the intertwined ethics and geopolitics of Kincaid's project of witnessing her brother's suffering and death from AIDS, this chapter has offered a reading of My Brother as a narrative of witnessing. Writing the temporal and spatial gaps

18 It is interesting in this connection to note Kincaid's 2005 book, Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya, published by National Geographic. In the narrative that accompanies Kincaid's rich descriptions and photographs of the flora of Nepal, Kincaid contemplates risking her own life at the hands of anti-American Maoist guerrillas.
and ruptures between seeing Devon's suffering and being able to make sense of it, Kincaid exposes the challenge illness and death pose to the auto/biographical project and the narrative gaze. Ultimately, Kincaid refuses to end *My Brother* with a narrative of redemptive healing or completion of the process of grieving. Instead, she offers a meditation on the relationship between death and writing:

I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself: I would write about him. I would write about his dying….When I heard about my brother's illness and his dying, I knew, instinctively, that to understand it, or to make an attempt at understanding his dying, and not to die with him, I would write about it. (195-196)

Here, Kincaid explicitly refuses the memorializing gesture. If we take Kincaid at her word—and the narrative bears her statement out—*My Brother* is less about commemorating Devon or preserving a memory of his life, and more about "saving" Kincaid herself by "mak[ing] an attempt at understanding his dying" (195-196). The scene of writing itself thus becomes a space of witnessing in which the attempt to make meaning—through memory and language—is made (and unmade).

Ultimately, Kincaid remains both "open" and "closed" to Devon's story, and her narrative constructs a productive tension between witnessing and memorializing. The narrative's lack of closure is not simply a testament to the difficulty of grief or the unspeakability of death, as Egan and Couser have suggested, although it is this. What I have been suggesting is that *My Brother's* difficulty—its vacillation between self and other, love and not love, witnessing and memorializing—participates in a profoundly ethico-political project of responding to another's suffering. This is a response that
refuses to simply identify with and assimilate the Other, and it is one that refuses to recast trauma, suffering, and loss in a redemptive narrative of healing. Instead, Kincaid's auto/biographical project registers a response to her brother's story that seeks to sustain the difficult, incomprehensible unsettlement that accompanies the death of a loved one from AIDS.

In *My Brother*, Kincaid is not trying to "teach" readers about the global dimensions of AIDS, even as she confronts the geopolitics of medicine. Nor does she finally make meaning out of her brother's suffering and death. Instead, she leaves the narrative in a precarious space in which she has witnessed but refuses to memorialize, she has seen but has not yet fully understood. In the final pages of the narrative, Kincaid turns from her brother's story to an examination of the general incomprehensibility of death: "What to make of it? Why can't everybody just get used to it?" (137). Reflecting on the death of her editor, publisher, muse, and father-in-law William Shawn, Kincaid turns her narrative gaze once again to her chosen family in Vermont and the life she has made there. A strange ending for a narrative about Devon, Kincaid's grief for her father-in-law evokes once again the scene of writing and the problem of witnessing another's suffering and death. But it also reminds readers that the meaning that Kincaid constructs from Devon's story is partial, incomplete—and bound up with the geopolitical realities of the publishing world. As the man who made Kincaid's writing career possible in the U.S.—a career founded upon exposing the legacies of colonialism, racialization, and gender in Antigua and America—William Shawn recalls the fraught context in which

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19 Couser argues that autopathography, and AIDS narratives in particular, take on a pedagogical function by virtue of the rhetorical situation in which they are embedded: readers, unfamiliar with the symptoms and course of disease, seek authentic medical explanations from these texts (15).
auto/biographical narratives of suffering are produced, circulated, and consumed in globalization.
CHAPTER 4

Troubling the Signature:
Cross-Cultural Auto/Biography at the U.S.-Mexican Border

Reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha, When the Moon Waxes Red

life en la frontera is raw truth, and stories of such life, fictitious as they may be, are even truer than true.

—Norma Elia Cantú, Canícula

Introduction: Auto/Biography on the Border

Recent work in border studies has seized onto Chicana feminist experiments with autobiography, such as Cherrie Moraga's Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó sus labios (1983) and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), as sites for complicating simplistic assumptions about immigration and singular national
identification. Situated on the border between fiction and nonfiction, history and ethnography, criticism and narrative, Chicana autobiographical "hybrids" have provided a transnational and transcultural theoretical foundation for deconstructing the fantasy of cultural homogeneity embedded in the idea of the "representative" national subject. Moreover, they have provided a way of theorizing the realities of life experience for women on the border between the United States and Mexico. Propelled in part by these autobiographical texts, border studies has contributed a vast vocabulary for the theory of a hybrid, mestiza/o subjectivity that is multiply located—interpellated within multiple national and cultural logics. It therefore offers a powerful methodology for shifting the focus of national identity from a fixed, linear model of assimilation and abstract citizenship to a more fluid model of cultural hybridity, dialogism, and mixing.

But some forms of border studies have more recently come under attack by theorists who are uneasy about the romanticization of hybridity, "in-betweenness," and syncretism as transgressive challenges to the U.S. nation-state and its imperialist logic. Critics of globalization in particular have pointed out that some theorists' celebration of cultural mixing and border crossing has risked valorizing the supposed "end" of the nation-state in a post-national fantasy of resistance. Perhaps the most famous theory of the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* argues that the border "es

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1 For work in Chicana/o border studies that examines the politics of hybrid genres, see especially Gutiérrez-Jones; Pérez Firmat; Saldivar, *Dialectics of Our America* and *Border Matters*; Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies*; and Castillo and Córdoba.

2 Gilmore argues that autobiography itself is also often invested in the fantasy of the "representative" subject and is therefore profoundly concerned with issues of citizenship and national belonging. See *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 12. See also the Introduction to the dissertation.

3 I am not suggesting that these texts have provided the only foundation for border studies, only that they have recently become foundational. As a subset of postcolonial theory, border studies originally arose out of the Chicano nationalist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. But even for theorists writing before the publication of Anzaldúa and Moraga's texts, Chicana/o autobiographical hybrids—for example, Jose Villareal's 1959 *Pocho* and Ernesto Galarza's 1971 *Barrio Boy*—provided key resources for theorizing border experience.

4 See, for example, Sadowski-Smith; Young; and Werbner and Modood.
una herida abierta [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and
bleeds" (25). Far from offering a simplistic celebration of hybridity, this text has
nonetheless been appropriated metaphorically by diverse theorists eager to seek
alternatives to U.S. imperialism in general and late-20th-century globalization in
particular. Though the rhetoric of "border-crossing," "shifting borders," and "border
identities" offers a certain mode of resistance to the fantasy of singular national
identification, it also risks obscuring the material realities of the militarized border and
modes of mobility and crossing that are less transgressive. Moreover, as Manuel Luis
Martinez argues in "Telling the Difference between the Border and the Borderlands,"
border rhetorics transform the material site of the U.S.-Mexican border into a symbolic
and "purely discursive form of 'opposition'" (54), denying "the importance of 'place' and
'citizenship'" (54) for immigrants and migrants and "turn[ing] a blind eye to the reality of
nation" (62). Particularly in the wake of NAFTA and the increasing power of corporate
transnationals and border officials to regulate movement across the U.S.-Mexico border,
using the border region as a metaphor for the supposedly decreasing power of the nation-
state is not only inaccurate but also politically dangerous.

This danger suggests that critics must more carefully theorize contemporary
agency and its relationship to the nation-state. While some forms of border studies
usefully articulate agency in both national and transnational contexts, others imagine
cultural hybridity to always-already signal the irrelevance of the nation-state and in
particular its reliance on homogenous constructions of citizenship. For theorists of

5 I am thinking, for example, of labor and migration laws such as California's Proposition 187, passed in 1994,
designed to incorporate low-wage Mexican workers temporarily in the service of the U.S. economy while
denying them the rights and protections of U.S. citizens.
auto/biography, this means paying attention not just to hybridity, border crossing, and syncretism as transgressive challenges to homogenous nationalism, but also to new forms of transnational affiliation and new forms of citizenship. Aihwa Ong has usefully theorized "flexible citizenship" as a unique form of human agency concerned with the "production and negotiation of cultural meanings within the normative milieus of late capitalism" (Flexible 3). Ong insists that "in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power" (6). Moreover, theorists such as William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor have offered "cultural citizenship," social practices that enable Latino and other groups to claim rights, membership, and agency in the U.S., as a nuanced alternative to narrow, legalistic conceptions of citizenship (2). What these scholars insist upon is the necessity of more nuanced readings of the social conditions and everyday practices that enable citizenship and agency in the context of globalization.

I want to suggest that transnational feminism offers productive ways of complicating the romanticization of *la frontera*, and that it therefore provides a crucial method for approaching auto/biographical work on the border—particularly in its attention to place, citizenship, and nation (Martinez 62). Transnational feminism, it can be argued, has developed from within border studies, particularly in the same Chicana feminist autobiographical writings that have recently become foundational to the border studies movement: *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In these texts, Moraga and Anzaldúa powerfully distinguish transnational feminism, particularly in its articulation by U.S. feminists of color, from "global feminism," a movement by which North American (and mostly white) feminists attempted to rescue "Third World" women
from a universalized patriarchy of which they were supposedly unaware and over which they supposedly exercised no control. Unlike global feminism, transnational feminism does not assume a single, monolithic patriarchy in all nations, nor does it take white North American feminism as the model for feminisms throughout the world. Like border studies and postcolonial studies, it is concerned with theorizing the spatial in addition to the temporal. However, unlike some forms of border criticism—and some theories of globalization—transnational feminism does not dismiss the nation-state as a powerful mode of interpellation of the border subject, nor does it celebrate cultural hybridity in a fantasy of equal exchange between subjects, cultures, or nations. Rather, transnational feminism is interested in theorizing the multiple and unequal power relations that structure national and cultural borders—with particular attention to the production of gender at diverse sites—and in examining the production, circulation, and consumption of texts across national boundaries.

This chapter aims to construct a dialogue between Chicana/o border studies and transnational feminist cultural studies in order to examine how the circulation and consumption of life narratives across geopolitical borders complicates idealized theories of hybridity and border crossing as well as autobiographical agency. I focus on three narratives about life on the U.S.-Mexico border that employ both visual and textual media: Norma Elia Cantú's "fictionalized autobioethnography" and photo album of Tejano life, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995); Ruth Behar's

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6 U.S. Third World Feminism has provided perhaps the most compelling argument for transnational feminism as opposed to “global feminism.” Other foundational work on transnational feminism includes Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*; Hesford and Kozol, *Haunting Violations and Just Advocacy?*; C. Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*; Sandoval; and Mohanty. I develop transnational feminism more fully in the Introduction.

7 As I will show, the works in this chapter explicitly thematize the spatial and/in the national, abandoning the conventional linear-temporal autobiographical narrative for one that is organized by place.
feminist auto/ethnography, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993); and Ursula Biemann's experimental documentary about life on the physical, cultural, and economic border between the U.S. and Mexico, *Performing the Border* (2001). I argue that these texts illustrate both the possibilities and the risks of auto/biographical representation across national and cultural borders. Through their use of both textual and visual media, they take advantage of multiple realist strategies for representing the material identities and experiences of women on the border, strategies that construct both new forms of transnational identification and affiliation and new forms of cross-cultural spectacle. As such, they call for a method of reading that does not reify the border but that takes into account the material and rhetorical complexities of agency, globalization, national and transnational affiliations, and self-representational practices—a method that is increasingly being developed by transnational feminist cultural studies.

The works I examine in this chapter are examples of what Caren Kaplan calls "out-law genres," transnational forms that struggle to represent the "I" outside of a narrow national framework and that therefore evoke a spatial aesthetic, a politics of location, in addition to—or in place of—the temporal one that typifies conventional autobiography ("Resisting"). Kaplan identifies autobiographical hybrids as forms of resistance that are "marked by geopolitical situation" and that therefore "brea[k] many of elite literature's laws" (209). The spatial aesthetic employed by Cantú, Behar, and Biemann is multiply "mapped" in their texts' construction of the "out-law" auto/biographical subject through text and image, fiction and non-fiction, history and ethnography. I argue that by employing spatial, visual, and textual aesthetics
simultaneously, these texts challenge abstract concepts of citizenship and the nation-state that require a "representative" national subject supported by more conventional autobiographical forms such as the *bildungsroman*. Julia Watson, drawing on Michel Foucault, usefully defines the "real" as a set of multiple, often competing, "technologies" that constitute the self through truth-telling practices (such as life narrative) and other everyday social practices (115). These technologies often serve to strategically authenticate autobiographical narratives. Crucially, however, the "real" in each text I examine in this chapter, rather than solidifying or authenticating the auto/biographical narrative and the national narrative of citizenship, instead *disrupts* both. But it also necessitates critical attention to how image and text are consumed across national and cultural borders.

As a way of framing this investigation of the negotiation of text and image in auto/biography on the border, I respond to the continuing legacy of Chicana/o border studies with a transnational feminist and rhetorical analysis of "borders." In contrast to border studies, which privileges the rhetoric of mobility or cultural mixing, I am interested in how these texts represent the U.S.-Mexican border as a site of cross-cultural representation that requires negotiation as well as risk. This chapter identifies three auto/biographical strategies that arise out of the textual/visual dynamic of these texts and that are central to a transnational feminist examination of auto/biography, citizenship, and cross-cultural consumption. I borrow Philippe Lejeune's classic theory of the autobiographical "signature" (6)—the matching names of the author on the title page and

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8 The *bildungsroman*, a narrative form with significant cultural currency in the U.S., follows a classic narrative trajectory of conversion in which the individual hero embarks on a long journey that ends with his resolution with the larger social community. The temporal structure of the *bildungsroman* lends itself well to the assimilation narrative, which has commonly been adopted by immigrant and ethnic autobiographers in the U.S. See the Introduction and Chapter 1.
the protagonist in the text—in order to develop the alternative relationships between representation and referent constructed by Cantú, Behar, and Biemann. According to conventional autobiography theory as developed by Lejeune and others, the genre is characterized less by a set of discrete characteristics than by a rhetorical promise or "pact" between author and reader that the narrative is from "real life" and has not been made up. This pact is sealed by the autobiographical "signature," which functions as the guarantor of authenticity, the author's quasi-legal oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.\footnote{Feminist and other autobiography critics have problematized Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact," arguing, among other things, that it constructs a contractual notion of self-ownership that relies on a liberal humanist ideology of selfhood and that erases the politics of how identity is constructed. I concur with their arguments; however, Lejeune's concept remains a salient one for describing the rhetorical situation in which life writing is embedded. I examine this issue in more detail in the Introduction.} Rejecting the conventional autobiographical "signature" as defined by Lejeune, these texts offer alternative "signatures" that engage the risks of cross-cultural representation and that trouble the reader's consumption of, and rhetorical relation to, the text.

While these texts cohere in their representation of gendered life on the U.S.-Mexico border and their attempts to create hybrid auto/biographical genres that disrupt the connection between conventional autobiography and the representative citizen, they differ in rhetorical strategy. Specifically, instead of rhetorically appealing to the reader to believe their stories as "authentic" representations of border life, these autobiographical signatures ask the reader to look, listen, or bear witness. \textit{Canícula} exposes the hegemonic logic of the national gaze by combining photographic images—including familial photographs and "real" but strategically altered identification papers—with written life narrative, developing an aesthetic I call the "photographic signature." \textit{Translated Woman} argues that cross-cultural \textit{listening} is a politically necessary act as well as an aesthetic
challenge, expanding conventional generic and disciplinary formulations that categorize ethnography as a "social science" and auto/biography as "literature"—and enacting a problematic but revealing aesthetic I call the "auto/ethnographic signature." Finally, *Performing the Border* illustrates the necessity of transnational feminist *witnessing*, providing a compelling critique of the abstract concept of "national protections" through an exploration of the exploitative effects of globalization, and enacting an aesthetic I call the "testimonial signature." Juxtaposing these three texts allows me not only to examine the problem of citizenship for ethnic women subjects on the border, but also to theorize the possibilities and the limits of cross-cultural auto/biography and transnational feminist politics in texts that circulate across national and cultural borders.

What attention to these alternative signatures reveals is the fraught nature of textual and visual representation in auto/biographical narratives that circulate across national and cultural borders. It therefore illuminates the usefulness of transnational feminism as a critical tactic for approaching life narratives in an age of globalization. Negotiating the relationship between "self" and "other" through visual and textual media, Cantú, Behar, and Biemann construct transnational feminist aesthetics that requires attention to the politics of cross-cultural representation and auto/biographical agency. As racialized and feminized subjects of auto/biographical narratives are circulated textually and visually across borders, each of the rhetorical relations inscribed by these alternative signatures—looking, listening, and witnessing—becomes a crucial site at which to analyze the production and consumption of "self" and "other."
Troubling the National Gaze: *Canícula's* Photographic Signature

A self-proclaimed "out-law genre," *Canícula* joins a number of other Chicana autobiographies that blur conventional generic distinctions. In the book's introduction, Cantú indicates her own ambivalence about the usefulness of rigid generic categories:

In *Canícula*, the story is told through the photographs, and so what may appear to be autobiographical is not always so. On the other hand, many of the events are completely fictional, although they may be true in a historical context….So although it may appear that these stories are my family's, they are not precisely, and yet they are. (xi)

Cantú resists the imperative to settle on a single genre, stating nebulously that "I was calling the work fictional autobiography, until a friend suggested that [these stories] really are ethnographic and so if it must fit a genre, I guess it is fictional autobioethnography" (xi). She is not simply being indecisive here; for as Kaplan argues, the "law" of generic boundaries is inextricably tied to the "law" of national boundaries. Autobiographical works, in reifying individualism while simultaneously appealing to the "representative" national citizen-subject, have participated in "the economy of colonialism" (Kaplan, "Resisting" 214) by which Western nations have secured power and hegemony. By refusing to pin *Canícula* down to a single, coherent genre, Cantú is also refusing to fix the text's subject, Nena Cantú, into a single, coherent national or cultural identity (metonymically represented by the autobiographical "I").

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In stark contrast to narratives that privilege the autobiographical "I," *Canícula* is saturated with the autoethnographic "we," a pronoun that captures familial and cultural affiliations maintained across national borders. This collective subjectivity is inscribed in an early vignette, entitled "Crossings," that effaces the singular experience of the "I" into a familial experience of continual border crossing:

Bueli and Mami and Papi crossed the bridge on foot from one Laredo to the other; they took turns carrying me, or maybe only pushing my blue stroller. Chirinola, our dog, came too, papers and all. It was 1948. For Bueli the move brought back memories, mental photographs gone now, except for the stories she told….She told of crossing from one Laredo to the other and losing everything—Buelito's pride and joy, a black Ford pickup truck and all their belongings—to the corrupt customs officials at the border….But there was nothing to be done, except cry and go on. And in 1948 crossing meant coming home, but not quite. (5)

Bueli's "mental photographs" are recaptured in oral and textual form, as she tells stories of border crossing that the narrator then writes into *Canícula*. The continual crossings that she and her family undertake are both ways of maintaining familial and communal ties across the U.S.-Mexico border (itself blurred by the matching names of the two Laredos), and dangerous journeys marked by the presence of "corrupt customs officials" (5) who represent the power of the official national apparatus. It is thus that "crossing mean[s] coming home, but not quite" (5): this family's home is mobile, not a safe space fixed within a single national location, but a continual "crossing" that reaffirms ties in both Laredos while also giving rise to new forms of border surveillance and regulation.
The narrator's name, combining an apparently "fictional" given name (Azucena / Nena) with an apparently "non-fictional" surname (Cantú) serves to further unsettle the question of genre. In contrast to Lejeune's legal-rhetorical theory of the autobiographical signature, which requires the names of the author and the protagonist to match, *Canícula* uses the "failed" signature—Nena, not Norma, Cantú—to inscribe the failure of the autobiographical promise of individuality and truth-value. But Cantú does not abandon that promise entirely. Through her use of family photographs—which do not function simply to decorate the text but which actually drive the non-linear narrative—Cantú offers an alternative autobiographical "signature," one with a seemingly even greater bond to the "real."\(^{12}\) For as photographs, these images appeal not only to a legal-rhetorical *promise* to tell the truth, but also to the reader's belief in the unblinking eye of the camera as the literal *reflection* of the truth, emphasized by the text's inclusion of "real" photographs of the author and her family and friends. Photographs, like autobiographies, are supposed to capture the "real" candidly. Moreover, they function to "document" the material *existence* of the narrative subject in the real world, aligning them with both ethnography and the Latin American *testimonio* as genres that appeal to the reality of "Third World" subjects for "First World" audiences.\(^{13}\)

Significantly, the narrative frame sets up *Canícula*'s use of photographs through a crucial reference to Roland Barthes, whose *Camera Lucida* (1980) posits the radical

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\(^{12}\) Documentary film theorist Bill Nichols argues that still and moving camera images rely on a "special indexical bond" to the real that makes them part of the "discourses of sobriety" that construct the real world through contemporary media. See *Representing Reality*, 12-13.

\(^{13}\) I use "Third World" and "First World" despite the many problems with these terms. As many critics have pointed out, the First World/Third World binary naturalizes a Eurocentric "othering" of subjects in developing countries, while obscuring the presence of "Third World" subjects in "First World" countries (and vice versa). However, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue, "the term 'Third World' does retain heuristic value as a label for the 'imperialized formations' (including some within the First World)" (27) that construct both "worlds" as dependent and mutually informing entities. See Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 25-27.
referentiality of photography. In the Prologue, the narrator, Nena, laments Barthes's
death. She and her Spanish lover go through his family photographs in Madrid, and she
regrets that "[s]he has no photographs to offer, to share her life through. Her photographs,
silent witnesses of her life, her history, lie an ocean away, across the Atlantic, across the
United States, across Texas, at the borderland where Mexico meets Texas" (1-2). In
conjuring Barthes as a framing device, Cantú acknowledges Camera Lucida's theory of
the referential photograph. Barthes writes: "Photography's Referent is not the same as the
referent of other systems of representation. I call the 'photographic referent' not the
optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing
which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no
photograph….[I]n Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there" (76,
emphasis in original). Barthes' famous theory of the photographic punctum, "that accident
which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27), relies on this radical
having-been-there of the referent. In contrast to more constructionist views of
photography, Barthes insists that "the Photograph is an image without code—even if,
obviously, certain codes do inflect our reading of it" (88); the photograph is not "a 'copy'
of reality, but…an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art" (88). In one sense,
Canícula is an attempt to reproduce the photographs that Nena was unable to produce for
her lover in Madrid, and thus to assert the moving punctum of the having-been-there, en
la frontera. In another sense, however, the text is clearly a constructionist response to
Barthes's assertion that the photograph is "without code" (88). For Cantú reproduces

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14 See especially Hirsch, Family Frames; Mitchell; and Sontag, On Photography, among others.
15 Importantly, Canícula describes many photographs that are not reproduced for the reader's gaze, echoing
Barthes's description of his mother's Winter Garden photograph, which is theorized at length but is never
reproduced in Camera Lucida.
familial and institutional photographs with a difference, at times strategically altering them and at other times describing them textually in ways that precisely do not match the corresponding image.

Cantú employs altered and unaltered familial and institutional photographs in order to underscore the material reality of the narrative, while also warning her reader/spectator that neither narrative nor image is free of representational and national politics. This tension between representation and the "real" is brilliantly captured in two vignettes that visually and textually confound the line between fact and fiction, self and other. In "China Poblana One" and "China Poblana Two," the narrator and her mother perform a gendered Mexican national identity symbolized by the ambiguous figure of the China poblana. According to Mexican legend, the China poblana dress was created by a Chinese-princess-turned-Mexican-housekeeper, Catrina, after she was rescued from pirates by Captain Sosa, a Mexican ship captain. Symbolizing the violent and heterogeneous origins of contemporary Mexican femininity, the China poblana is donned by Mexican women during national holidays. In "China Poblana One" (Figure 4.1), Nena is dressed for "George Washington's birthday parade" in a China poblana skirt and blouse, her hair braided with brightly colored yarn in traditional fashion (38). Her mother, in a much flashier costume complete with a charro hat embroidered with ¡Viva Mexico! and a fake horse, poses at nineteen years old in "China Poblana Two" (Figure 4.2). The narrator points out that her mother "wasn't even born in Mexico, [but] went there as a ten-year-old knowing only to read and write in English because the nuns at Sacred Heart in San Antonio wouldn't tolerate Spanish" (40). While the photographs together parody the performative nature of the gendered Mexicana stereotype—and the First World reader's
ethnographic desire to visually consume the exotic "other"—the text locates mother and
daughter's performances in a material reality that conjures the persistence of nation in
George Washington's birthday and Nena's mother's experiences of linguistic colonialism
at school.

Significantly, the China poblana vignettes echo a later cultural performance in a vignette
and photograph entitled "Cowgirl" (Figure 4.3), in which Nena, dressed in a red-
checkered dress, performs an Americanized cowgirl identity that negotiates Mexican and
U.S. cultural narratives about "Cowboys and Indians" (33). This tension between the text
and the photographs, the real and the performative, exposes ethnic and national identities
as socially constructed but with material consequences in the "real world," echoing
theories of social justice that do not dismiss the power of representation to affect actual
subjects (Hesford, "Rape").
That the photographs in *Canícula* precisely do not live up to the rhetorical promise to candidly capture the "real" has captivated Cantú's critics, including Timothy Dow Adams, a prominent theorist of the relationship between autobiography and photography. In his essay on *Canícula*, Adams traces the "countless small discrepancies" (60) between the photographs and the narrative vignettes. For example, in a vignette entitled "Bueli," which is accompanied by a photograph, the narrator describes five people in the photo: Bueli, Tino, Dahlia, Esperanza, and the narrator. But in the photograph, Bueli is surrounded by only three children. Likewise, in "Nena of Three," Cantú's narrator describes the three-year old "look[ing] off camera" (53), while the photo shows her in fact looking straight at the camera. Adams rightly recognizes that the discrepancies are part of *Canícula*’s representational strategy: "While these small mismatches could be thought of as accidental or beside the point, I believe they are deliberate attempts at keeping the reader off balance in terms of the book’s genre in a way that parallels the more complicated issue of assuming that *Canícula* is autobiographical.
because the narrator and the author are the same person" (62). But his discomfort with this "out-law" strategy is evident in his attempt to finally fix *Canícula* into a single genre—autobiography—in which it is "authenticity" at stake:

Finally Cantú, like all autobiographers, wants to have it both ways, wants her book to be taken as an authentic representation of her Chicana childhood, and yet wants to protect herself from family members and others who might argue that she has made things up. She wants the freedom to reveal details of her life coupled with the freedom to conceal the degree to which she has changed the events to suit the needs of narrative. And in the end she has written a book that I would call simply autobiography, a book that like all autobiographies exists on *la frontera*, the borderland between fiction and nonfiction. (66)

Adams' desire to fix *Canícula* within the genre of autobiography—even as he acknowledges it as a "borderland" genre—is inseparable from his desire to keep the author accountable for the truth-value of her text. It is also indicative of the juridical situation into which autobiography is projected: the author's account is judged primarily for its "authenticity" or "truthfulness" rather than for its aesthetic or political functions or for the cultural work it performs. For Adams, "the presence of photographs of the author within a text constitutes a clear sign that we are reading autobiography" (66), even when the photographs are "fictionalized," as they are in *Canícula*, and even when the category of "autobiography" is not quite accurate, as it is not for *Canícula*. Moreover, Adams' characterization of autobiography as a "borderland" genre reveals problems with conceptions of hybridity that attempt to submerge difference through a fantasy of

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16 For a discussion of the juridical framework surrounding autobiography, see Gilmore, *Limits and Autobiographics*. Gilmore also usefully theorizes how this juridical frame is gendered.
"mixing" resulting in fixity. As Kaplan argues, critics need to pay attention to the production and reception of life narratives like Canícula as methods of resistance. Readers and critics can approach out-law genres by "reading cultural production as transnational activity" ("Resisting" 210), instead of registering an imperialist desire to "fix" the text, as Adams does.

What critiques such as Adams's obscure is the ways in which Canícula's "experiments" with genre crossing are not merely aesthetic or personal choices but are also politically inflected, particularly in representing life on the U.S.-Mexico border. Interestingly, in their more sympathetic discussion of Canícula, Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba use the exact same phrase Adams does to describe Cantú's generic experimentation, but here in order to theorize her use of both English and Spanish: "Cantú wants to have it both ways here: to evoke the sense of a life lived in Spanish while providing sufficient markers for the English-only reader to follow the text" (117, emphasis added). This sense of Cantú "wanting to have it both ways" is, of course, a function of her project, which refuses to represent Nena, her family, or her community within a singular national, cultural, generic, or linguistic framework but instead portrays their multiple affiliations and flexible strategies. Moreover, as Norma Klahn suggests in "Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers," the mixture of fiction and nonfiction, autobiography and ethnography, image and text in Canícula rhetorically performs a Chicana feminist narrative that resists the assumptions and organizing principles of both Chicano nationalism and Anglo feminism (118). Calling attention to its own fictionality, Canícula constructs "a narrative that appears to point to an outside of the text (the referent) while it insists on keeping [the reader] inside
the text (the emplotment)” (119), disrupting facile assumptions about autobiography and photographs as transparent vehicles of the "real." *Canícula's* photographic signature thus simultaneously insists on both the constructed nature of representation and the material existence of the referent.

I have been arguing that Cantú's use of familial photographs, along with autoethnographic textual vignettes, disrupt the rhetorical "pact" upon which autobiography conventionally relies, affirming familial and communal affiliations that are collective and transnational. But photographs have another function in life on the border and in *Canícula*: as guarantors of national identity on official documents, including immigration papers.

![Figure 4.4: The Front Cover.](image1)

![Figure 4.5: The Title Page.](image2)

In *Canícula*, images of immigration papers, complete with photographs of the author, appear in four places: one on the front cover of both the hardcover and the paperback
editions (Figure 4.4), one on the title page (Figure 4.5), and two in "Mexican Citizen," a vignette that describes Nena's dual national identifications (Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

![Figure 4.6: Mexican Citizen I.](image1)

![Figure 4.7: Mexican Citizen II.](image2)

Nena's "official" U.S. immigration document includes a photograph of the author as an infant, under which appears the signature, "Azucana Cantú." On closer inspection, one can see that this signature has been pasted over the original, which reads "Norma Elia Cantú," as one can see by comparing the document with the one represented, apparently in original form, in the image on the front cover. Moreover, on "a document that claims I am a Mexican citizen so I can travel with Mamagrande into Mexico without my parents" (21), Nena's signature has likewise been pasted over the original "Norma Elia," which is partly visible through the thin correction tape. Finally, in the image on the title page, the official immigration papers appear again, this time with no signature at all. These photographs of official and "out-law" documents, far from functioning as guarantors of the authentic "real," instead disrupt the autobiographical signature and trouble the presence of the photograph as guarantor of national identity. The ostensible function of
official government papers—to police national borders by establishing the subject as recognizable citizen—is thoroughly disrupted here. Instead, the papers' multiple and palimpsestic signatures suggest that underneath the photographs' supposedly transparent surface is a subject that is multiply situated, culturally layered, and radically unrepresentative of any single nation.

That the hegemonic logic of the nation-state is unable to recognize this border subject as representative citizen is exposed by the gaze of the "official" camera on the border body in the immigration photographs. Unlike the family snapshots included throughout the rest of the book, these portraits are designed to officially guarantee the photographed subject's national identity through visible means. The close-up shots of the author's face in both the infant photo and the child photo, coupled with the documents' preoccupation with physical descriptors, illustrate a national anxiety that manifests itself in visual surveillance of the border body. In both photographs, the eye of the nation-state, metonymically enclosed in the camera lens, closes in on the recognizable parts of the subject's body—skin, hair, and eyes—and documents her image, ostensibly as proof of national identity. But even these physical descriptors shift and change from one document to the next: in each of the "official U.S. immigration papers" (21), the ones with Nena as a baby, her color is listed as "Blanco"—white. In the Mexican document, however, the one displaying a photo of sixteen-year-old Nena, her color is listed as "Moreno"—brown. The state's visual surveillance of the border body thus exposes the constructed nature of race, as the narrator is marked as "white" when she enters the U.S. and marked as "brown" when she enters Mexico. Cantú's strategy here recalls the legal construction of Chicanos as "white" after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which
moved the U.S.-Mexico border further south and west, increasing U.S. territory significantly. Moreover, the multiple and conflicting immigration papers in Canícula, instead of solidifying the photograph or the signature as guarantor of national identity, document its anxiety as the surveillance of the national gaze, troubled by the presence of a brown/white, Mexican/American subject.

Paradoxically, Cantú ultimately troubles the national gaze by reproducing the very images—official and familial, serious and parodic—that would seem to solidify and "document" the exotic, essentialized subject of national surveillance. Instead of serving this authenticating function, Canícula's photographs insist that identity and subjectivity are matters of perspective. Depending upon who is snapping the picture, who is constructing the gaze, and in what context, the border subject will appear either as Mexican or American, China poblana or cowgirl. Together, however, the multiple and conflicting photographs that drive Canícula's narrative insist on the "reality" of all these identities, refusing to authenticate a single one. The reader is therefore required to negotiate real and fictional photographs and stories, as her gaze is continually troubled by the texts' "out-law" strategies. A First World reader coming to this narrative with a colonialist ethnographic gaze, hoping to secure "the" authentic representation of a Tejano subject, will thus be continually frustrated, forced to recognize her gaze as a technology of power that can nonetheless be challenged from "within" (autobio)ethnography itself.

It is therefore significant that this "fictional autobioethnography" ends on a radically communal note that once again privileges not the autobiographical "I" but the autoethnographic and testimonial "we." In the final vignette, "Martin High," which is framed by a standard class portrait and a more casual snapshot of students in a school
cafeteria, the "I" gives way to a collective "we" that lists a multitude of subject positions, life paths, and futures:

We are victims, perpetrators, embezzlers, philanthropists, humanitarians, politicians, healers, hunters, watercolorists, musicians….And some of us never leave, and some of us never come back. Some of us keep coming back. Some of us love, and some of us hate, some of us both love and hate our borderlands. Some of us remember, some of us forget. (131-132)

This testimonial rhetorical strategy, rooted in "autobioethnography," is in stark contrast to both conventional autobiography and the discourses of abstract citizenship and homogenous national unity. As a strategic alternative to narrow nationalist citizenship and the autonomous "I," this vignette imagines not a transnational form of "citizenship," such as the discourse of human rights or "global citizenship," but instead a politics of strategic affiliations that does not depend on a universal narrative. Inscribing a "common psychic terrain," as theorized by Chela Sandoval, in place of a homogenizing common national terrain, Cantú here enacts what Sandoval terms a "differential form of oppositional consciousness" that emphasizes rhetorics of resistance and transnational ties while simultaneously recognizing difference (182). Affirming the power of communal memory as well as the differences embedded within community, the vignette rhetorically forges connections based not on abstract similarity but on negotiating difference on the border. Like the photographs that simultaneously "remember" and "forget," Canícula's

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17 Although some theorists continue to use the term "global citizenship" strategically as a way of articulating transnational activist ties, it has also been problematically associated with both global feminism and idealized theories of cosmopolitanism. See Hannerz.

18 In Camera Lucida, Barthes argues that "[n]ot only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory…, but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (91). This is because of the photograph's visual
ending vignette captures both the located similarities and the vast differences that constitute subjects on the border.

**The Dual Citizen: Translated Woman's Auto/Ethnographic Signature**

Whereas *Canícula* constructs a dialogic strategy of image and text that troubles the national and cross-cultural gaze through the strategic use and critique of the photograph as autobiographical signature, Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993) explicitly constructs an oral/aural dialogic strategy of listening and responding that attempts to trouble the ethnographic gaze through what I call an "auto/ethnographic signature." Behar employs autobiography as a strategy for constructing feminist dialogue across cultural, national, and generic borders. Another "out-law genre" that blends oral, textual, and photographic media as well as autobiography and ethnography, *Translated Woman*, like *Canícula*, is situated at the U.S.-Mexico border, a border that requires careful, critical attention in the context of globalization. Behar evokes Anzaldúa in an attempt to avoid romanticizing this border or her position opposite Esperanza on the U.S. side: "The concept of the borderlands, so poetically explored by Gloria Anzaldúa, is rooted in the slippery social landscape created by transnational capitalism and migration, in which rural Mexicans rub shoulders with yuppies in the various border zones that now cut through the entire terrain of Mexico and the United States" (15). The paradoxes of globalization are evident at this border, where

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"violence": "The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (91, emphasis in original).

19 Since I am focusing on the autobiographical in *Translated Woman*, I am not focusing on Esperanza's narrative to a great extent. However, I should mention here that the autobiographical (Behar's narrative) and the biographical/ethnographic (Esperanza's narrative) are not easily separated in this text. For a critique of how Behar uses Esperanza's narrative to situate her own life narrative, see Socolovsky.
goods and workers cross with increasing rapidity and flexibility even as immigration laws
become more rigid and militarized. In this context, Behar suggests, "[t]he feminist
ethnographer is a dual citizen" (297):

[She] shuffles between the country of the academy and the country of feminism.
She's an odd kind of bilingual woman. To her subjects she speaks in a tongue
bristling with seductive promises that she will not be able to keep. To her
colleagues, she must speak in a way that will persuade them that "working on"
another woman is a contribution to the discipline she has vowed to serve; they
will ultimately judge her work on the basis of how well she can translate the other
woman's tongue into a language they can understand. (297-298)
The metaphor of the "dual citizen" is based not just on the literal crossing of the U.S.-
Mexico border that the feminist ethnographer must make, but also on the cultural,
linguistic, generic, and disciplinary borders that she must negotiate in both countries. But
the struggle of the feminist ethnographer as "dual citizen" is everywhere shadowed by the
material struggles of people on the border, particularly immigrants and migrants
attempting to cross. If the feminist ethnographer is a "dual citizen," Esperanza, as the
subject of the feminist ethnographer, can only be imagined as a dual citizen in terms of
her story, which crosses the border in translation and in Esperanza's place.

Behar is fully aware of this contradiction between Esperanza's textual border
crossing and her material fixedness in Mexquitic. Indeed, it informs many of Translated
Woman's self-reflexive meditations on the unequal power relations between she and
Esperanza. As a Cuban American in the First World and a gringa ethnographer of and
compadrazgo to Esperanza in the "Third World," Behar is a "dual citizen" in another
sense: caught between two competing national and cultural logics, she is marginalized in the U.S. academy even as she enjoys a space of privilege in Mexquitic. The *compadrazgo* relationship in particular reveals Behar's and Esperanza's unequal power relations: it "is typically forged between persons of high and low economic standing, so that as the better-off person in my relation with Esperanza I would be expected to offer financial or other assistance if she requested it. She would be expected, in turn, to offer me small gifts from time to time,…and to act with extreme courtesy whenever we encountered one another" (5). But even as Behar acknowledges their different positions within the *compadrazgo* relationship, she also effaces them in a fantasy of cross-cultural equality: "As I got to know Esperanza, I realized our becoming comadres had allowed us to forge a relationship of mutual caring, reciprocity, and trust. It made it possible for us to transcend, to some extent, our positions as gringa and Mexicana" (6). The tension here between radical inequality and a fantasy of transcendence is matched by the tension Behar acknowledges between the ease with which she crosses borders and the unease with which others cross, or fail to cross. As she ponders the book's publication as a "gesture of peace," she is struck by this paradox: "I have born my comadre's story across to this side, reterritorialized it here, just when the United States government is gearing up to arrest a million 'illegal aliens' entering from Mexico. I can only hope that her story will find *un rinconcito*, a little space somewhere on this side of the border where there are no aliens, only people….If nothing else, I hope I've made her life in this book too big for easy consumption" (xxii).

Given the text's explicit transnational feminist project—one that attempts to forge connections across national and cultural borders—it might appear strange that this text
opens and closes with conventional ethnographic photographs that capture Esperanza, a Mexican street peddler, in traditional peasant garb and surrounded by rural scenes (fig. 4.8 and 4.9). Recalling anthropology's long tradition of using photographs to objectify and naturalize the "other," this photograph seems to frame the text as a conventional ethnography of the Third World peasant woman by a First World academic.²⁰

![Figure 4.8: Esperanza I.](image1)

![Figure 4.9: Esperanza II.](image2)

Significantly, Behar's text seizes upon the photographic moment as a way into the narrative:

²⁰ Of course, to characterize Behar as a "First World" academic is to occlude her racialized and feminized position in the U.S. From Esperanza's point of view, however, Behar is clearly a First World *gringa*. 173
It was in 1983, during the Day of the Dead, that I first came face to face with Esperanza in the town cemetery while I was busy taking photographs….Between frames, I caught sight of Esperanza. She was striking. She held a bulging bouquet of calla lilies and seemed to me like something out of one of Diego Rivera's epic Indian women canvases. As I drew closer, I asked if I might take her picture. She looked at me haughtily and asked me, with a brusqueness I had not encountered before among local women, why I wanted to photograph her. (4)

In the opening photograph, the exoticized, eroticized Esperanza is indeed carrying a "bulging bouquet of calla lilies," seeming to confirm through the textual description that this image is the one that Behar took upon meeting her. Moreover, the language in this passage, particularly the use of the word "something instead of "someone" in Rivera's art, and Behar's admission that she had not expected such "brusqueness" from a "local" woman, echoes the photograph's conventional ethnographic gaze. But Behar continues: "I think that many of the contradictions of my work with Esperanza were dramatized in that first encounter. I jumped on her as an alluring image of Mexican womanhood, ready to create my exotic portrait of her, but the image turned around and spoke back to me, questioning my project and daring me to carry it out" (4). It soon becomes apparent that this opening strategy, which courts readers' expectations about the ethnographic genre, is a deliberate move on Behar's part to construct an opposition between the conventional ethnographic gaze and the listening project of this book, which she describes as central to feminist ethnography.21

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21 For compelling analyses of the rhetoric of listening, see Ratcliffe; and Royster.
Behar replaces the photographic subject from the opening scene with a feminist
dialogic representational strategy, an auto/ethnographic signature that uses autobiography
and ethnography to portray a cross-national, cross-cultural conversation between women.
This strategy explicitly privileges listening over gazing, collaboration over consumption,
and therefore evokes the ethnographic narrative as an act of translation as well as the
testimonio as a collaborative, transnational production. Behar describes this process as
one of learning to listen:

She called what she was telling me her historias, referring both to the history and
the story of her life. But she did not simply tell her historias, she performed them,
telling virtually the entire story in dialogue form, changing voices like a spirit
medium or a one-woman theater of voices to impersonate all the characters in her
narratives. I did not have to "elicit" her account; rather it was necessary for me to
learn how to listen to her storytelling and performance. (7)

This emphasis on listening to her subject's historias is balanced by the text's other
emphasis on autobiographical storytelling, as Behar includes her own conversations with
and reactions to Esperanza's narrative and even includes a final chapter, "The Biography
in the Shadow," that tells her own life story as a way of contextualizing her work with
Esperanza. Thus the text enacts a back-and-forth strategy that unfolds as a cross-cultural
dialogue between the ethnographic subject, Esperanza, and the autobiographical subject,
Behar.

Significantly, their conversations emerge in the spaces between and around
Esperanza's historias, particularly at moments when the story seems unbelievable or
shocking to Behar. Rhetorically mirroring the First World reader's apprehension, these
conversations remind the reader once again of the radically different social and cultural locations occupied by the two women. For example, in Part One, "Coraje/Rage," as Esperanza tells of her oldest son's attempted rape of his sister, Behar is taken aback by her punishment of both children:

"You hit the girl, too?" I asked, frankly shocked.

"I hit the girl, too."

"Why?"

"Because she wouldn't tell me. It was the younger girl who told me everything. I was a little suspicious of the girl because she seemed to be making eyes at the boy." (144)

Likewise, in Part Two, "Esperanza/Redemption," Behar enters the conversation when she learns how much Esperanza has paid for a spirit healer, Chencha, to cure her diseased gardens:

"You paid a lot of money for Chencha to cure your field," I say, trying to sound neutral. In truth, I'm astounded that she paid the equivalent of five hundred dollars, which for most working-class Mexicans amounts to four or five months' salary, to have her field "cured" by Chencha. "Were you really afraid the land would stop producing?"

"Yes, I was….It was a clear thing, comadre." She gives me a pitying look, astounded, in her turn, that I don't seem to understand the obvious. (177)

In both instances, the narrative proceeds as a dialogue in which both subjects negotiate competing cultural meanings. Esperanza's narrative, for some readers, particularly in the "First World," seems to confirm the ethnographic construction of the Third World
woman as superstitious and backward, an effect emphasized by her story of domestic violence overcome through spiritism. However, the dialogic strategy constructed by Behar attempts to disrupt the reader's ability to consume the narrative simplistically through either distancing or identification, what Shu-mei Shih calls either "the fetishization of difference" or "the return to sameness" (27). Instead of assimilating Esperanza's narrative into a safe and recognizable form for North American readers or rendering it unintelligible, Behar's listen-and-respond strategy aims to position the women's conversation within a space of transnational, cross-cultural negotiation.

This negotiation is most powerfully explored in the final autobiographical chapter, "The Biography in the Shadow," when Behar reveals her identity as a Cuban American scholar and her struggles with education and the elite academy, making herself and her own story visible instead of leaving it "in the shadow" of the text. She is therefore able to take a self-reflexive approach to the problems of feminist ethnography, making explicit her concerns about commodifying Esperanza's story for an academic North American readership and her ambivalence about her role as ethnographer and author:

[T]here is a special burden that authorship carries if you have ever occupied a borderland place in the dominant culture, especially if you were told at some point in your life that you didn't have what it takes to be an authority on, an author of, anything. It means writing without entitlement, without permission. It means writing as a "literary wetback," as the Chicana poet Alicia Gaspar de Alba puts it, without "the 'right' credentials…to get across." (340)

As Behar notes in her preface to the tenth anniversary edition of Translated Woman, her use of autobiography, especially in the last chapter, has elicited mixed responses from
academic readers. This is because conventionally, ethnographers are supposed to leave their own stories invisible, to report as "objectively" as possible on their subjects, even as they become participant-observers within a culture. By refusing to leave her own (auto)biography "in the shadow," then, Behar hopes to make herself as "visible," as vulnerable, as Esperanza, rather than constructing herself as the invisible authority on Esperanza's life. Resisting what Donna Haraway in another context calls "the conquering gaze from nowhere," a gaze that claims "the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (188), Behar employs autobiography and dialogue to establish connections and divergences between Esperanza's story and her own. As a feminist ethnographer, a "dual citizen" (297), she is responsible not just for reporting or translating Esperanza's story, but also for telling her own story of multiple border-crossings in the First World and the Third World.

However, as I have been suggesting throughout this discussion of *Translated Woman*, Behar's use of autobiography as a cross-cultural feminist strategy raises as many problems as it attempts to solve. For instance, by joining in the conversation primarily when she is shocked or disturbed, she unwittingly reproduces the very stereotypes and enacts the very power relations that her feminist ethnography attempts to call into question. Rhetorically mirroring likely First World reactions to Esperanza's story, Behar's reactions legitimate these responses even as she attempts to challenge them. Moreover, despite her explicit concern with translating Esperanza's narrative from an oral, Spanish-language performance to a written, English-language text with feminist care, Behar's autobiographical reflections more often emphasize the narrative as one in which she "comes to voice" through the act of translation. In part, this is Behar's attempt to avoid
naturalizing her translation as one in which Esperanza speaks purely, authentically, and
without mediation. But it also problematizes the rhetoric of listening that she has
constructed throughout the text (as I hope my use of visual metaphors to describe Behar's
"visibility" in the narrative makes clear). In the new preface, she writes:

> When they turned me down for that teaching job, I was advised to get a speech
> coach if I wanted to get anywhere in my career. I didn't know it at the time but
> Esperanza became my speech coach. Esperanza's voice was bold, fierce, earthy,
> uncompromising, raucous, bursting with laughter, burdened by rage, longing for
> redemption. By translating her voice I came into my own voice. (xiv)

This theme is echoed as well in Translated Woman's "Introduction: The Talking
Serpent," in which she states: "By using both a novelistic style and a dialogical style in
this book, I've tried to keep Esperanza's voice at the center of the text, while also showing
my efforts to hear and understand her, efforts that led me, ultimately, to my own voice"
(13-14).

The final chapter, "The Biography in the Shadow," explicitly takes up this
concern with Behar's coming to voice by narrating how her voice was first silenced, then
uncovered through her work with Esperanza. One story in particular, in which her father
tears up a letter she had written to her parents expressing how much she missed them
while she was away at school, reveals the anxiety Behar feels about her position in
academia. This anxiety is juxtaposed with her sense of discomfort with the "gringa" label
in Mexquitic and her desire to forge connections with Esperanza: "How could I explain
that I was not a gringa, not totally a gringa, anyway? Trying to figure out where I stood
on the border between the United States and Mexico, I felt as though the fault lines of
America were quaking within me" (322). It isn't until her work with Esperanza, she writes, and the publication of *Translated Woman* itself, that she is able to articulate her identity as a Cuban American feminist, a "dual citizen," and a "literary wetback"—like Esperanza herself. Crucially, Behar's autobiographical narrative forges identifications between herself and Esperanza that become increasingly problematic. For example, she remembers that "both my Russian and Turkish grandfathers were peddlers in Cuba…. [I]t didn't occur to me at first that my work with Esperanza, the Mexican street peddler, was also a bridge to my own past and the journey my family has made to shift their class identity" (337). Connections like these, which echo Behar's fantasy of she and Esperanza "transcending" their gringa and Mexicana identities (6), seem forced by Behar's desire to translate *herself* and her own life experience into Esperanza's narrative.

This attempt at border crossing, far from transgressing the logic of the nation-state and abstract citizenship, finally ends up revealing more about Behar's desire to identify with and subsume the "other" through translation. Indeed, Maya Socolovsky argues that finally, the text uses autobiography "to turn her false text into a 'true' or 'authentic' one" (83) by turning to her own voice as an authenticating strategy. Socolovsky points out that "Behar tries to perform a translation of experience and to resolve the inevitable inauthenticity of her text by adding her own voice, but the authenticity of her voice, and the loss of Esperanza's, means that this move works as closure and silencing" (84). While I do not share Socolovsky's assumption that Behar's voice is more "authentic," I do think that the way in which the autobiographical privileges Behar's own "coming to voice" raises questions about the possibility of cross-cultural feminist listening. As Rey Chow argues in *Writing Diaspora*, First World scholarship on Third World women risks turning
the "native" "into an absolute entity in the form of an image…whose silence becomes the occasion for our speech" (34, emphasis in original).

This contradiction is evident in the fact that Translated Woman, unlike Canícula, includes no photographs of the autobiographical subject, Behar, despite its use of dialogue and autobiographical narrative, and despite its use of several "exotic" photographs of Esperanza—the two photographs that frame the text, included above, and several photographs throughout the text that capture Esperanza peddling or participating in spiritist healings. Thus, although Behar makes herself "visible" in the text through autobiographical narrative, she does not make herself visible through photography.

Although the textual narrative engages in a cross-cultural dialogue between both women, constructing the "self" and the "other" as subjects with distinct historias and perspectives, the photographic narrative renders only the "other" as an object for First World consumption, and leaves the author invisible ("in the shadow," as it were). The text's rhetoric of listening and understanding the woman across the border is thus not reproduced through the photographs; rather, the photos disrupt and disturb the celebratory narrative of feminist ethnography that the text proposes and enacts.

However, as an auto/biographical feminist ethnographer who is a "dual citizen," a border-crocer who does not attempt to render power relations invisible but instead to expose and critique them even as she takes advantage of them, Behar's use of autobiography and photographs in this ethnographic narrative is perhaps always-already problematic. What my critique of Translated Woman is meant to reveal is not a way to do autobiographical feminist ethnography "correctly," if that means more "authentic" or less problematic. Instead, I am interested in what this book reveals about the limits of cross-
cultural listening and autobiography as transnational feminist strategies. That Behar makes these problems visible through an autobiographical strategy that emphasizes dialogue and listening means that she is aware of the problems of cross-cultural production, circulation, and consumption, particularly for a genre-crossing text that is about a "Third World" woman and translated and edited by a "First World" academic. If Translated Woman's use of autobiography emphasizes Behar's "coming to voice" through translation over Esperanza's "coming to voice" through historia, and if it renders Esperanza in part as an object-image useful for the North American feminist academic gaze, it also does not skirt the thorny issues of cross-cultural consumption. Indeed, as my limited analysis of this text shows, Behar has made Esperanza "too big for easy consumption" (xxii), forcing me to leave much unsaid about her role in this cross-cultural dialogue. By juxtaposing the autobiographical with the ethnographic, Behar's text, if it does not escape the trap of consumption of the "other"—an escape that may be no more than another border fantasy—does make feminist ethnography more aware of its own complicity in such consumption. Moreover, Translated Woman makes feminist ethnography more accountable for its representation of the Third World subject for a First World audience in the context of globalization, in which representations, if not people, cross borders with increasing ease, asking to be heard.

Troubling Witnesses: Performing the Border's Testimonial Signature

Ursula Biemann's 1999 video essay, Performing the Border, is profoundly concerned with the problem of cross-cultural witnessing as a transnational feminist strategy. Witnessing differs from both gazing and listening by rhetorically appealing to
the viewer not to identify with the "other" who is seen and heard, but instead to construct an ethical response to her story, a response that does not require the denial of difference. Biemann's film, which provides a materialist corrective to metaphorical uses of "the border," emphasizes the necessity of transnational feminist witnessing in an era of globalization through its strategic use of the "testimonial signature." Specifically, in its use of autobiographical testimonials by activists, maquila workers, sex workers, and the mothers of missing or murdered young women, *Performing the Border* positions witnessing at the center of transnational feminist activism, as a strategy capable of appealing to a shared ethic of women's human rights.

Kelly Oliver usefully theorizes witnessing as the ethical foundation of subjectivity in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Her theory, drawn from Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's analysis of eyewitness testimonies of the Holocaust, is based on the premise that "victims of oppression, slavery, and torture are not merely seeking visibility and recognition, but they are also seeking witnesses to horrors beyond recognition" (8). In developing "an ethics of witnessing" (6), Oliver argues that theories of subjectivity based on recognition—which "requires the assimilation of difference into something familiar" (9)—need to be replaced by an understanding of subjectivity as fundamentally ethical, "founded on the ability to respond to, and address, others" (15). She therefore sees witnessing as foundational to subjectivity, in contrast to theorists who see subjection and violence at the heart of subject-formation. Witnessing is founded on a different theory of vision as "not an alienating but a connecting sense," revealing the interconnectedness of all subjects and the "ethical obligation at the heart of subjectivity" (15). According to Oliver, a theory of witnessing takes us "beyond recognition" (and therefore beyond
identification) as the sole way of relating to the other, "provid[ing] alternative notions of ethical, social, and political responsibility" (15).

Bearing witness through testimony, Oliver argues, is both necessary and impossible. This comes from the tension inherent in the word's double meaning: "witnessing has both the juridical connotations of seeing with one's own eyes and the religious connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen" (16). Oliver describes this as a "productive tension" (17). Witnessing is necessary because it has "the power to (re)inscribe humanity and subjective agency into both social and psychic life," "transform[ing] our reality, the realness of our experiences" (106). But it is also impossible, because it seeks to perform subjectivity through describing the process of becoming an object. Oliver identifies four paradoxes at the heart of witnessing as both necessary and impossible:

1. the performance of witnessing, which reinscribes subjectivity, is in tension with the constative description of becoming an object; 2. the process of witnessing, which restores subjectivity, also recalls the shame and pain of becoming an object; 3. in an important sense, the experience of becoming an object cannot be described, since it is the experience of becoming inarticulate…[;and 4] testimonies of those oppressed (by sexism and racism) are always "on trial"…their credibility is always at issue. (99)

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22 In this, witnessing corresponds to the discourse of confession, often used in auto/biographical works. See Foucault's analysis of confession in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. For other scholarly examinations of confession, autobiography, and the production of "truth," see Felski; Gallagher; Gammel; Gilmore, *Limits* and "Policing Truth"; O'Rourke; and Tambling.

23 Schaffer and Smith usefully take up the paradox of personal testimony in a human rights framework in *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*. 
For Oliver, the impossibility of bearing witness in no way negates its value as a subjectifying act. Rather, its impossibility makes an ethics of witnessing, as a way of transforming reality and experience through testimony, even more urgent.

Oliver's theory of witnessing provides a context for theorizing activist films like *Performing the Border* and the cross-cultural work they perform. Witnessing and testimony are both concepts that are central to the global human rights movement, a movement in which the film is explicitly situated. Moreover, as Wendy S. Hesford argues, they are both central in connecting autobiography to activist pedagogy (*Framing 92*). That *Performing the Border* can be seen as an activist and pedagogical film is evident in its use of "expert" testimony, personal testimonials, and a voice-over that connects globalization to violence against women in Mexico in a feminist human rights framework characteristic of its U.S.-based distributor, Women Make Movies (New York). The film is an explicit attempt to teach North American, particularly academic and feminist, viewers about the violent paradoxes of women's lives on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border, from their work in transnational *maquiladoras* and the global sex trade to the murder and disappearance of hundreds of young women outside of Ciudad Juárez (a border town just opposite of El Paso, Texas) from 1993 to the present. The film's reliance on rights discourse as a rhetorical strategy raises questions, however, about the fraught relationship between human rights and witnessing. There is a tension between the discourse of human rights, which relies on a standard of shared values, and the strategy of witnessing, which Oliver argues cannot rely on the denial of difference.

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24 Many of the women's testimonials in the film explicitly draw on the discourse of women's human rights in order to both critique the nation-state and appeal to the viewers' sense of justice.

25 By mid-2002, 282 women had been murdered in Juárez and over four hundred had been reported missing. See Fregoso 1.
Moreover, as Wendy Brown and others have argued, rights discourse often assumes a wounded, victimized female subject in need of legal protections provided either by the nation-state or by international law (Brown; Dutt; Grewal, "New Global Feminism"). The question at the heart of my inquiry is: Does Performing the Border move beyond the objectifying gaze and toward Oliver's theory of witnessing beyond recognition, despite its reliance on human rights discourse?

As a film that situates witnessing at the center of transnational feminist activism, Performing the Border is interested in exposing the failure of national protections for border subjects who become visible to the nation-state—and often to the First World—only as fragmented parts in the global production machine. Significantly, it is largely Mexican women activists who explain life on the border to the viewer from their own experiences. Early in the film, activist Bertha Jottar addresses the perception of the U.S.-Mexican border as a "wound" that has to be both healed and protected against. Recalling Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of the border as "una herida abierta [an open wound]" (25) and foreshadowing the film's later treatment of the Juárez murders, Jottar suggests that the wounded woman's body, racialized, fragmented, and "turned into a disposable, exchangeable, and marketable product," is a key site for the production of border culture. Jottar insists that the border is constituted discursively and materially: "There is nothing natural about the border; it's a highly constructed place that gets reproduced through the crossing of people, because without the crossing there is no border, right? It's just an imaginary line, a river or it's just a wall." The border, "rearticulated through the power relationships that crossing produces," is "highly performative"—but also deadly.

26 Hesford has usefully theorized "material rhetoric" as the intersection of discursive and material realms. See "Rape Stories," 18.
Performing the Border illustrates that "documenting" the lived contradictions that constitute experience on the border is a tricky affair. Using the camera as a technology of witnessing, the film revises documentary film's conventional reliance on mimetic realism, which recalls both transnational corporations' use of the camera as a form of surveillance and the Mexican nation-state's use of realist images and discourse to naturalize violence against women in a border economy. In contrast to Canícula and Translated Woman, the "special indexical bond" (Nichols 12) between representation and referent is here interrogated not through the truth-telling technology of the still camera, but through that of the cinematic camera. Tom Gunning argues that, like the still camera, the invention of the movie camera initiated new technologies of and anxieties about surveillance: "private" life was now able to be captured not just in single stilled snapshots, but in moving pictures extending across time (Gunning 48). In contemporary life on the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly in the transnational maquiladoras that employ large numbers of young Mexican women for meager wages, the surveillance camera is a material reality as well as an anxious fantasy. Women are watched by the eyes of management's cameras virtually from the time they enter the workplace to the time they leave, ostensibly in order to ensure speed and efficiency of production. As Rosa Linda Fregoso argues, Performing the Border importantly "portrays women not as being in need of regulation and surveillance, but rather as the very objects of regulation and surveillance" (13). The maquiladora cameras enact a particular form of discipline on the bodies of women workers at the border, and ensure a particular form of protection for the transnational corporations that outsource their labor to Juárez and other border towns. The maquiladoras are granted the national protections that the border workers are denied by
the Mexican nation-state. The infrastructure, as one activist in the film points out, exists for the transnationals, not for the women who work for them.

In *Performing the Border*, Biemann takes up the interrelated technologies of surveillance, the documentary image, and the body, exposing how border workers fail to be recognized except as mechanized bodies on the global assembly line. "The body of the female worker," the narrator says as the camera scans a map of the U.S.-Mexico border, "gets technologized and fragmented in a post-human terminology. Assembly lines—the ultimate fragmentation of labor into its smallest possible particles—are located geographically on the line between capital-intensive production in the North, and female labor-intensive production in the South." Using multiple and strategic documentary strategies, Biemann's camera brings into view the racialized, feminized bodies on and through which the power relations at the border are materialized.

In *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols outlines four modes of representation—expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive—that structure most documentary films. The expository mode mediates between the representation and the viewer through a narrative voice-over that explains what is being shown by the camera. The observational mode is one in which explicit mediation is distinctly absent, and the camera is left to record events without accompaniment. The interactive and reflexive modes, in contrast, are highly self-aware in their use of mediation, characterized by explicit participation in recorded events (in the former mode) or explicit self-reflection and critique (in the latter mode). *Performing the Border* tests the possibilities and the limits of these seemingly distinct realist modes by combining them and allowing them to disrupt and trouble each other. Therefore, even as the film coheres in its activist work—opening
up a transnational space for feminist politics in place of a national or otherwise
hegemonic feminist logic—its multiple realisms perform the disjunctures and
contradictions that constitute life on the border.

For example, in section one, entitled "the plant / la maquila," rather than simply
"observing" life inside a maquiladora—a feat that would likely be difficult anyway, since
non-company cameras are often not allowed inside the factories—Biemann juxtaposes
on-screen images with written text, computerized graphics, and a more traditional
expository voice. Often, the viewer experiences image, text, and voice simultaneously,
disrupting narrative closure through an aesthetic of dissonant representational forms. For
instance, as Cipriana Jurado Herrera, a labor activist, talks about the difficulty of
defending workers' rights in maquiladoras, the camera focuses on the exterior of a
maquila factory, and blue, bolded text appears on the screen that reads: "Maquiladoras
have served as a laboratory for deregulation." Then, a list of the names of several
prominent U.S. transnationals that run maquiladoras in Juárez—General Motors,
Packard Electric, ITT, Ford—scrolls down the screen, overlaying an image of an
assembly line peopled by young girls, as the narrator's voice describes the "transnational
logic" that maps productivity and efficiency onto local workers' bodies. Combining the
expository narrative voice with an observational camera in a highly reflexive
representational strategy, the film is able to strategically "document" the effects of

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27 Coco Fusco's video installation and "docudrama," Dolores from 10 to 10, takes up this theme explicitly. Here
are Fusco's words: "In the summer of 1998, on a research trip to Tijuana, Mexico, I met Delfina Rodriguez, a
maquiladora worker who had been accused by her employer of trying to start a union in the plant. To coerce her
into resigning, her manager had locked her in a room without food, water, bathroom or phone for twelve hours.
She had signed a letter of resignation under duress and then, once she was released, she sued her former
employer for violation of her civil rights. Her boss told the judge that she was insane, that nothing had happened
and that she had no proof. Her coworkers were afraid to testify on her behalf. I was convinced that there must
have been surveillance cameras recording what happened to her during her interment. Dolores from 10 to 10
is my interpretation of what the cameras saw." See http://www.thing.net/~cocofusco/.
transnational power relations on the material bodies of women workers even as it critiques the camera as a technology of national surveillance and corporate protection.

The surveillance camera's invasive, watchful gaze, which functions not to protect but to discipline the border body—is in stark opposition to the dynamic of national protection promised by the rhetoric of citizenship and nation-based rights. The film critically reproduces this surveillant gaze not to legitimize it, but instead to rhetorically appeal to viewers' notions of violation and injustice. Moreover, this critique of national protection appeals to viewers' assumed commitment to women's human rights—rights not connected to national laws or citizenship status. The failure of state protection is most powerfully critiqued in Performing the Border's fourth section, "the killings / los asesinos." Focusing on the hundreds of young women kidnapped and murdered in the desert outside of Juárez, this section of the film exposes the repressed connections between global capital, violence against women, and failed state protection. As Fregoso notes, the Mexican nation-state has responded to the mass killings with two discourses that occlude its own implication in the violence: negation (the murders are not systematic) and disaggregation (the murders are caused by women's nonnormative practices, such as working outside the home or lesbianism) (3). These discourses, bolstered publicly by the use of forensic and other "scientific" evidence, have constructed feminicide as a problem for the state, not as "in fact endemic to it" (19). The Mexican state's official policy of non-intervention in the killings ironically reverses the hyperbolized surveillance of young women in the maquiladoras, while serving a similar
function: constructing the "woman" as a subject in need of regulation and protection. Rendered literally invisible through disappearance or unrecognizable through mutilation, the bodies of the Juárez victims are left literally undocumented by state law enforcement, which often refuses to allow families to view the bodies or run the tests necessary to identify them.

In one scene of the film, as the camera glides over a set of hands examining a missing girl's things, it stops on an official photo ID, much like Canícula's immigration papers. But the ID is unattached to a material body, dead or alive, and marks the state's failure to recognize and protect the body that should be carrying it. The documentary's multiple representational strategies link the ineffectiveness of the identification card with the ineffectiveness of law enforcement, and by extension, the ineffectiveness of conventional documentary representation. Moreover, it links the staggering number of crimes against border women to the logic of economic exploitation in a global economy: "The border," the narrator states, "is a metaphor for the artificial division between the machine and the organic body, between the natural and the collective body, between the sexual and the economic, between conceptions of masculinity and femininity. But the border is also a site where the blurring of these distinctions takes violent forms."

In simultaneously representing and resisting the metaphorization of the border, Biemann situates the Juárez killings in a materialist feminist framework that links global capitalism and feminicide. In this, Fregoso argues, the film also unwittingly "associat[es] the murders of women in Juárez with their nonnormative practices…. [It] equates exploited bodies with exterminated bodies visually through a linear sequence of narrative

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28 For a useful discussion of the infantilization of the female citizen-subject in a U.S. context, see Berlant, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship."
elements that creates a chain of associations: maquila workers—sex workers—victims of feminicide" (13). According to Fregoso, Performing the Border is thus unable to escape the very same logic that the Mexican government has used in order to legitimate and naturalize the murders of the "promiscuous" young women in Juárez. She also argues that the film fails to record the ways in which women resist, as well as the ways in which the Mexican nation-state—not just global capitalism—is implicated in the murders.

However, while the film's visual logic risks constructing the killings as an effect of the women's "nonnormative practices," it also importantly complicates this logic through the strategy of the spoken (and witnessed) testimonial, including testimonials by sex workers themselves, whose words advocate for the rights of sex workers in the Mexican economy. Biemann's strategic use of the testimonial complicates the logic of the Mexican government's official discourse on Juárez and positions the speaking women—and the witnessing viewer—in direct confrontation with those official discourses. Again, it is Mexican women activists who articulate the disjunctures that make sex work a viable option for women, standing alongside sex workers themselves in order to appeal directly to the viewer. For example, Juana Azana, a sex worker, and Sonja Aguiano, an activist, describe prostitution as a strategic and often necessary choice for Mexican maquiladora workers who need to supplement their income. Biemann takes up this theme in an essay

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29 Significantly, Isabel Velasquez's statement in the film complicates this exact logic: "It's as if the victims have no rights, they're dead so they don't have any rights, they're a number. In the news reports, the name of the victim is used, and her family's names are used, but not the name of the maquiladora she worked for. It is suggested that she is a prostitute, she wore a miniskirt."

30 Fregoso contrasts Performing the Border with Lourdes Portillo's 2001 Señorita extraviada (Missing Young Woman), another experimental documentary about the Juárez murders, also distributed by Women Make Movies. In Fregoso's view, the limitations of Performing the Border are resolved in Señorita extraviada, which "provides neither a singular cause for feminicide nor a contrived resolution" (27). Space limitations prohibit me from an extended analysis of Portillo's film, but I agree with Fregoso that Señorita extraviada importantly critiques official discourses on the Juárez murders. However, I do not share Fregoso's view that Performing the Border fails to make this critique.
entitled "Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies, and Technology." She suggests that the sexualization of young Mexican women is constituted through official Mexican and U.S. discourses that do not take into account global capitalism's role in creating the social and economic conditions that lead some women to choose sex work. As if responding directly to Fregoso's critique of her film, Biemann problematizes the notion of causality, a notion that the film in fact critiques: "It's not that I'm particularly interested in tracing simple causality. In an overwhelmingly complex site like the border, it can be more fruitful to record the synchronicity of events and to point out correspondences without necessarily building an overarching theoretical framework" (109). Performing the Border documents these correspondences by drawing on the words of activists, maquila workers, and sex workers. The narrator's expository voice does not interpret their stories but instead allows them to accumulate alongside each other, at times establishing convergences and at other times emphasizing the contradictions between them. Negotiating the tension between border representation and reality, the film turns to the strategy of the testimonial in order to rhetorically appeal directly to the viewer.

Crucially, Fregoso's analysis misses the ways in which Performing the Border critiques the visual logic of the documentary camera—including its own—through multiple realist modes, most importantly the testimonial. The testimony offered by the Mothers of the Disappeared, an activist group comprised of victims' mothers, does make the Mexican state at least partially accountable for the murders, and does reveal the ways in which women in Mexico are challenging the nation-state—as well as appealing to a transnational public—through a testimonial activism. Significantly, "the killings / los asesinos" conjures Oliver's theory of witnessing as both necessary and impossible.
Through the strategy of the testimonial, and its rhetorical function of witnessing, the film succeeds in both disconnecting the "real" from the ideology of the nation-state and remembering the "real" on screen through the testimony of the Juárez victims' families.

By employing a "testimonial signature," Biemann's film replaces the individualistic autobiographical "I" that might separate the Juárez victims and their families from each other with a collective "I" that Doris Sommer argues is essential to the testimonial genre (107). Echoing Oliver's theory of witnessing "beyond recognition," this collective "I" invites something other than identification from the viewer. As Sommer argues, "The testimonial 'I' does not invite us to identify with it. We are too different, and there is no pretense here of universal or essential human experience….The singular represents the group not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is an indistinguishable part of the whole" (108). The testimonials in Biemann's film work rhetorically to both bear witness to the violence in Juárez and to register the difficulty of bearing such witness—what Oliver calls witnessing's necessity and impossibility. They therefore do not appeal to the viewer to identify with the "I" inscribed in the testimonials, but instead to bear necessary and impossible witness to the collective group's oppression and pain. In this, the film unwittingly exposes that human rights discourse, in its appeal to international law for subjects in need of protection, serves a radically different function from that of witnessing—one that is problematized by the film's own effective critique of surveillance.

In Performing the Border, the material effects of the transnational "real"—manifested in the missing and mangled bodies of the Juárez women—precisely cannot be documented by the camera through mimetic representation. Instead, the "real" is
indicated on-screen by the absence of images of the Juárez victims' material bodies, an absence registered in the spoken presence of the family members' testimonials. In a crucial revision of Arthur W. Frank's theory of the illness testimony in The Wounded Storyteller, the family members' testimonials stand in for the bodies of the daughters who are absent or who precisely did not survive. Frank argues that the presence of the survivor's body is the force of testimony (140). But in Biemann's film, the viewer is asked to bear witness to bodies that are missing or that have not survived to tell the story; instead, the family members' testimonials serve the witnessing function. As one of the Mothers of the Disappeared, identified only as "Sylvia's mother," speaks of her absent daughter and the refusal of police to allow her to see the recovered bodies, the testimonial creates what Jane M. Gaines calls "political mimesis"—the visceral connection established by documentary realism between the politicized struggle of bodies on screen and the affective (and ultimately activist) response of the viewer's own body as she watches and listens (89). In translated Spanish, Sylvia's mother states, "I asked the inspector if he would let me see the bodies. No, you can't see them, that will upset you, he said. We will show you all the photographs of the women that have not been identified or claimed by anyone." Recuperating the documentary camera and its realist strategies from the watchful gaze of the nation-state and the transnational maquiladora, Performing the Border uses the testimonial to bear witness to an alternative "real," constructed strategically by border activists in a transnational economy. Like the black crosses on pink backgrounds that have begun appearing on telephone poles throughout Juárez in protest of the feminicide—in Fregoso's words "representations of the unrepresentability of trauma" (29)—the Mothers of the Disappeared and other transnational activist groups
bear witness impossibly but necessarily to the young women who cannot tell their own stories. Moreover, they make it increasingly difficult for the Mexican government to minimize, rationalize, or naturalize the Juárez killings.

Ultimately, *Performing the Border* troubles both the invasive gaze of *maquila* management and the violent nonintervention of the Mexican nation-state through a representational ethic and aesthetic of compassionate witnessing made possible by the film's testimonial signature. As Wendy S. Hesford and I point out in "Labored Realisms," in testimonial and human rights films "the rhetorical function of the camera is not one of passive voyeurism; rather, the gaze constructed for viewers is that of a critical witness" (92). The testimonial "talks back" to the national and cross-cultural gaze, enabling a transnational realism that does not reproduce the ideology of the nation-state but instead exposes the *failure* of national protection. Moreover, the testimonial as transnational realist form illustrates the necessity of supplanting the fantasy of abstract citizenship and its empty promise of protection (read: surveillance) with a transnational feminist politics based in an ethic of witnessing. Although the film relies on viewers' shared commitment to women's human rights, a stance that I have attempted to problematize, it also importantly—if unwittingly—calls into question the discourse of rights and its assumption of women as victims in need of protection. The testimonial signature of *Performing the Border* privileges witnessing as a transnational feminist strategy that is able to travel across national and cultural borders without turning the testimonial subject into an object for First World consumption (Hesford and Kozol, *Just*; Mohanty). Instead, the film appeals to First World viewers' ethical and activist responses, conjuring Oliver's theory of witnessing as the ethical foundation of subjectivity. Like the activism of the
Mothers of the Disappeared documented in the film, *Performing the Border*'s activism is one that seeks not to speak for the victims of the Juárez killings or to create a spectacle of their deaths, but instead to bear witness to their absence.

**Conclusion: Consuming Auto/Biography Across Borders**

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that each of these texts—Norma Elia Cantú's *Canícula*, Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman*, and Ursula Biemann's *Performing the Border*—negotiates a dynamic between visual and textual auto/biographical technologies. This dynamic, I have suggested, requires not just a theory of cultural mixing, border crossing, or mobility—a theory importantly developed by Chicana/o border studies—but also a theory of cross-national, cross-cultural production, circulation, and consumption. I have identified three auto/biographical strategies central to these texts' negotiation of both image and text: the photographic signature, primarily concerned with looking and gazing, the auto/ethnographic signature, primarily concerned with listening, and the testimonial signature, primarily concerned with witnessing. These alternative signatures, I have argued, disrupt the reader/viewer's ability to consume these texts according to Lejeune's model of the "autobiographical pact," which privileges authenticity and truth-value. Moreover, they are strategies central to a transnational feminist theory of auto/biographical representations that travel across national and cultural borders. As "out-law genres" that blend autobiographical practices (including the testimonial) with history, ethnography, photography, and documentary, each of the works examined in this chapter struggles to represent the border subject transnationally, confronting issues of citizenship and "representative" personhood as central to their
projects. Each of these texts, I want to suggest, enacts an alternative version of citizenship in place of the abstract rhetoric of citizenship constructed by the modern nation-state. This construction of citizenship is based not on abstract national identity or legal status but on a transnational conception of "cultural citizenship," which forges connections across national and cultural borders based on what Chela Sandoval calls a "common psychic terrain" (182). Connected to Kelly Oliver's theory of witnessing as an ethics of "response-ability" (7), these auto/biographers' resistance to "official" citizenship results in a form of "out-law" cultural citizenship that is based in an ethical relationship to others, one that does not replicate the national fantasy of homogeneity but that instead confronts difference as "beyond recognition" (8). As Oliver argues, "[o]nly when we begin to think of the recognition of what is beyond recognition can we begin to think of the recognition of difference" (9).

I have analyzed how, in works by Cantú, Behar, and Biemann, the auto/biographical subject is constructed transnationally through the technologies of looking, listening, and witnessing, technologies inscribed by the texts' use of alternative "signatures." Canícula's transnational "real" documents the limits of the autobiographical signature and/in the limits of the national and cross-cultural gaze. Translated Woman attempts to replace the ethnographic gaze with a listening strategy that is ultimately undercut by her use of both autobiography and photographs. Finally, Performing the Border documents the necessity for a transnational feminist project of witnessing by privileging the testimonial as a strategy of resistance to both national and cross-cultural constructions of identification. Juxtaposing these three texts allows me to test the possibilities and the limitations of looking, listening, and witnessing as transnational
feminist strategies. As these texts negotiate image and text as auto/biographical practices, they also reveal how transnational representation is fraught with a productive tension between recognition and what is "beyond recognition." As this chapter has argued, recognition (as identification) is not a necessary or even desirable requirement of cross-cultural auto/biography. Rather, transnational feminism must locate the transgressive potential of traveling auto/biographical representations elsewhere, in the activist logic of transnational, cross-cultural coalition—what I have called "cultural citizenship." Critical consumption of auto/biography across borders must be an ethical and transgressive feminist act, a version of what Kaplan calls "reading cultural production as transnational activity" (210). Only then can the cross-national, cross-cultural consumption of auto/biography move away from the objectifying gaze and toward an ethics of witnessing beyond recognition.
AFTERWORD

Auto/Biography Studies in an Age of Terror

On March 25, 2005, roughly a decade after James Atlas proclaimed the "age of memoir," The New York Times published a column entitled "We All Have a Life. Must We All Write About It?" In it, William Grimes reflected on the public's insatiable appetite for published memoir and asserted (with some dismay) the radically democratic nature of the global autobiographical marketplace. The field of "life writing," he declared, has become "a level playing field crowded with absolutely equal voices, each asserting its democratic claim on the reader's attention" (E27).¹ In this context, he continued, the classic memoir ("important events related by a great man who shaped them") has been displaced by "a sprawling category" that fails to cohere into a single identifiable genre. Memoir has become almost too "inclusive," Grimes suggests. "Is there not something to be said for the unexamined life?" (E27).

Grimes's irony aside, it is perhaps too easy to take his core assumption—anyone can publish a memoir about anything nowadays—at face value. By contrast, this study has suggested the importance of recognizing and understanding the complex forces—

¹ This is only the most recent expression of a long-held assumption in the U.S. that autobiography, unlike fiction, poetry, or drama, is a democratic genre available to all literate persons. William Dean Howells, for example, declared in 1909 that autobiography is the most democratic of all the forms of literature (798). This assumption is rooted partly in the notion that autobiography is a lesser art.
material and discursive, local, national, and global—that both enable and constrain the autobiographical in the contemporary era. Approaching U.S. autobiography in a trans/national framework, I have suggested, illuminates the convergence of multiple, often contradictory, discourses that make autobiographical subjectivity intelligible, including citizenship, and need not point to the demise of nationalism. Indeed, U.S. culture after the September 11, 2001 attacks exhibits a resurgent nationalism, characterized by xenophobia, concern about the porous "borders" of the country, and a hearty return of anti-immigration sentiment. And yet it is in this context that Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* hit the bestseller lists in the U.S.

Choosing autobiography, and blending it with the plural "I" of testimony (Sommer), situates Nafisi as an "authentic insider" (Narayan) for non-Muslim readers, a legitimate, representative voice speaking for oppressed, veiled women in Iran. The book has subsequently raised interest in women's human rights, and has been hailed by Amnesty International and other advocacy groups (Atwood). But Muslim readers in Iran and the U.S. have expressed outrage at Nafisi's presumption to speak for them. In Iran, where *Reading Lolita* is available in English but not Persian, its very accuracy has come under question. "The idea of the book is so brilliant," one resident of Tehran told a *Washington Post* reporter. "But it has nothing to do with Iran" (Vick).

The U.S. popularity of *Reading Lolita* illustrates the ironic convergences of nationalism, feminism, and global humanism in an age of terror. These ungovernable discourses\(^2\) make the text coherent for U.S. readers and yet fail to cohere. They, like *Reading Lolita* itself, are embedded in geopolitical and rhetorical contexts that both

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\(^2\) Hesford theorizes the "ungovernability" of representations and rhetorical contexts in globalization. See "Documenting Violations," 128-130.
reflect and shape U.S. investment in autobiographical practices post-9/11. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were and are narrated in the U.S. through a renewed masculinist patriotism and a "back-to-fundamentals" attitude that profoundly affected the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. "Age of terror" thus refers not only to the U.S. "war on terror" but also to the ways in which U.S. citizenship is currently constituted by the twin rhetorics of fear (victimization) and masculinist bravado.

Goldstein argues, for example, that the cultural "flight from feminism" (17) in the 1980s and 1990s produced "neo-macho men" such as Eminem and George W. Bush who "offer the spectacle of an aggrieved man reacting with righteous rage" (18). These rhetorics have also provided the discursive logic for a conservative backlash against multiculturalism in higher education. In this connection, it is significant that Reading Lolita endorses a "Great Books" pedagogy based in the strategic appropriation of literary classics for anti-authoritarian, pro-democratic purposes. "Every great book we read," Nafisi states, "became a challenge to the ruling ideology" (289). Novels pose this challenge not through an "outright call for plurality" (268) but instead through heteroglossia, the novel's ability to incorporate multiple voices and views. This is how, she suggests, great books produce empathy and resist evil: "Evil…in most great fiction, lies in the inability to 'see' others, hence to empathize with them" (315).

The Bush administration's own rhetoric of evil and righteousness, most notably his description of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil," has served to justify torture and other human rights violations by the U.S. military and CIA, even as the administration has also mobilized the rhetoric of women's human rights to inspire support

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3 For examinations of masculinism and/as patriotism post-9/11, see Cixous et. al.; Goldstein; Tickner; and Žižek, Welcome. On the conservative backlash in higher education, see Hesford, "Global Turns."
and enthusiasm for the global "war on terror." Naturalizing entrenched assumptions about American righteousness and Iranian tyranny, this twist of historical irony consolidates a false choice between democracy and fundamentalism (Žižek, *Welcome*) as well as undergirding the U.S. reception of *Reading Lolita*.

In this context, I want to suggest, the autobiographical becomes particularly salient. U.S. popular culture, constructed through a nationalist rhetoric of trauma and victimization after 9/11 (Anker; Rentschler), has become heavily invested in and anxious about concepts of "truth." The "soft" politics of postmodernism and cultural relativism have been discarded in favor of a reactionary return to the real: the essential substance of American character free of ideology. Truth-telling cultural practices, from daytime talk shows to documentary photography and films to "reality" television, join printed autobiography and memoir in attempting to articulate the self-evident truths of "American" identity in a global age. Meanwhile, the national news media has channeled this anxiety in order to transfer popular concern about truth, terror, and torture from the geopolitical to the space of the intimately personal. The public outrage over James Frey's memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, which dominated the news media for several weeks in January 2006 and which culminated in Oprah Winfrey forcing his confession and apology on national television, is only the most recent example of this phenomenon. Audiences recognized the rhetorical situation in which autobiographical texts are embedded—Lejeune's "autobiographical pact"—and responded with fury to the

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4 Žižek identifies the twentieth century, culminating in the 9/11 attacks, with a "passion for the Real": "In contrast to the nineteenth century of utopian or 'scientific' projects and ideals, plans for the future, the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself....The ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality—the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality" (*Welcome* 5-6). Of course, the paradox is that this passion for the Real "culminates in its apparent opposite, in a theatrical spectacle* (9). 5 Interestingly, academic studies of Oprah culture have begun to emerge. See Farr; Peck; and Rooney.
allegations that Frey had exaggerated parts of his story for literary effect. The idea of
suing Frey and/or his publisher, Doubleday, was seriously considered.

Significantly, the controversy over Frey's memoir registered concern not just
about truth-telling (as distinguished from "imaginative" literary) practices, but about the
misrepresentation of masculinist victimization and trauma in particular. A Million Little
Pieces did not attempt to portray the protagonist, James, as a better person than he
actually was, but as worse: more messed up, more of a junkie, more of a jerk
(Applebaum). Frey's production of what I would call the "traumatic hero," and the public
fury over its accuracy, may seem to be unrelated to the geopolitical contexts I have
outlined here. But the Frey controversy reflects a larger national preoccupation with
white masculinity, traumatic victimization, and heroism post-9/11. Moreover, it registers
larger geopolitical concerns about "truth" and the circumstances of its production in an
age of terror.

While published memoir offers one site for the analysis of these concerns, it does
not exhaust the possibilities. Autobiographical and other truth-telling practices, such as
the confession, that exist within other genres—such as television dramas, "reality" shows,
and documentary films—also point to a national trend in representations of truth and its
violent production through terror and torture.⁶ These popular practices suggest the
continuing importance of an interdisciplinary autobiography studies for theorizing the
contemporary convergence of the autobiographical and the age of terror. Future scholarly
inquiry into the convergences of the autobiographical and the trans/national at a time of
renewed U.S. nationalism and global terror are crucial. These include the continued study

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⁶ The popular Fox series 24, for example, offers the spectacle of terrorism resolved by the masculinist hero,
Jack Bauer, through repetitions of the melodramatic torture plot—all in "real time."
of the emergent genre of autodocumentary films, such as Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1992), Mindy Faber's *Delirium* (1993), Tom Joslin's *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993), and Ruth Behar's *Adio Kerida (Goodbye Dear Love)* (2002). Many of these films challenge established scholarly paradigms about the relationship between personal life narratives, official historical narratives, and ungovernable discourses such as human rights.

Future studies should also build on the recent interdisciplinary and comparative work on *the autobiographical* as a space for articulating and advocating for human rights claims. This exciting work is just beginning. Smith and Schaffer's *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* and Hesford's forthcoming *Spectacular Rhetorics* raise crucial questions about the rewards as well as the risks of personal narratives in global human rights campaigns. Personal narratives are mobilized, for example, as evidence of human rights violations, as human-interest appeals in marketing materials for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, and as the foundation for humanitarian claims about suffering in published narratives and documentary films. The challenge is to theorize how human rights testimonials and other autobiographical practices channel transnational affective responses. Nationalist fantasies of rescue, rather than what LaCapra calls "empathetic unsettlement" (27), often undergird such projects. As Spivak argues, human rights "is not only about having or claiming a right or a set of rights, it is also about righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights" ("Righting Wrongs" 169). If autobiographical acts that circulate transnationally are increasingly ungovernable (Hesford, "Documenting"), it is necessary to carefully
understand the dynamics of production, circulation, and consumption across cultures and
nations.

Digital autobiographical acts provide another promising avenue for future trans/national scholarship. Various forms of weblogs, or "blogs," are increasingly produced for audiences around the world. These range from diary-style confessional blogs, exemplified by the Live Journal model, to political and academic blogs full of theory and calls for activism (Daily Kos, Michael Berubé), to leisure blogs with niche audiences (This Girl Knits, The Naked Chef, Cute Overload) that construct identity through hobbies and consumer spending patterns. Blogs are interesting as autobiographical practices in their often collaborative nature and in their non-linear, often non-textual construction of identity. Likewise, personal home pages often incorporate video, sound, and still images in ways that suggest the increasingly multimodal understanding of identity and its representation. One of the most interesting online experiments in self-representation and confession is the web site and community art project "PostSecret" (http://postsecret.blogspot.com/). Visitors to the site can view anonymous, homemade postcards containing the secrets of others, or they can upload their own. The postcards are often eloquent and artistic, are sometimes funny and sometimes tragic, and always share intimate, secret "truths." The site allows people to make their secrets public without exposing their identities. This paradoxical self-representational act is immensely popular—the site receives thousands of visitors per day and has been made into a book.

Increasingly, blogs, personal home pages, and even testimonial e-mails and letters (Berlant, "Trauma") appeal for readers' identification and empathy across national and
cultural borders. How they do this is a rich area for future inquiry. For example, Human Rights Watch solicits bloggers for human rights and advocates blogging as a form of global activism (https://hrw.org/blogs.htm). And Sabbah's Blog (http://sabbah.biz/mt/archives/category/human-rights/) is a personal weblog devoted almost exclusively to human rights news, stories, photographs, and calls for activism. Scholars need to understand how the autobiographical is constructed online through these emergent forms as well as how it is mobilized in service of particular causes. We also need to investigate how digital autobiographical acts can be productively used in the classroom. Digital autobiographical analysis and production offer pedagogical possibilities as well as potential risks.

Finally, as I have suggested throughout this Afterword, autobiography scholars need to continue to examine autobiographical acts and practices in popular culture. Smith and Watson's *Getting a Life* and Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography* powerfully suggest the need to understand autobiography as a cultural and rhetorical practice that functions across a range of genres and daily practices. To what extent, for example, is confessional pop music, increasingly constructed in the U.S. through the pseudo-democratic and nationalist narrative of *American Idol*, autobiographical? To what extent do autobiographical practices and truth-telling discourses structure the consumption of suffering on "trauma" reality shows such as *Intervention*? How can autobiography studies help us to theorize the ungovernable discourses of feminism, masculinism, and
nationalism as they ironically converge with what Bill Nichols calls the "discourses of sobriety" (3)\(^7\) to produce social reality in an age of terror?

One wonders, given Nafisi's utopian view of the novel as a democratic, heteroglossic textual space and as a producer of cross-cultural identification and empathy, if Nafisi would not claim an equal status for autobiography. Ultimately, this study has suggested the importance of a comparative, interdisciplinary, and transnational framework for the study of contemporary ethnic women's autobiography in the U.S. I have suggested that despite claims about the overly inclusive, radically democratic character of autobiography, in fact autobiographical production—as well as its circulation and reception—is enabled and constrained by ungovernable discourses. Scanning the bookstore shelves with their stacks of colorful, beckoning life narratives, it's easy to believe in the democratic power of autobiography, its unique ability to give voice to the individual across cultures and nations, and to restore personhood in a global world that feels increasingly impersonal. Reading Lolita in Tehran is heavily invested in this view. But we subscribe to this easy narrative of cross-cultural empathy and universal humanity at our peril. I have suggested that ultimately, studying autobiography shows us when, how, where, and under what conditions personhood is articulable at all. As scholars in an age of terror, it is imperative that we critically examine how autobiographical narratives and practices function, particularly to consolidate or expand the truth-telling discourses of citizenship, rights, and humanity.

\(^{7}\) Nichols defines these as "nonfictional systems" (3)—legal, familial, pedagogical, economical, political, and national—that participate in "the actual construction of social reality" (10).
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