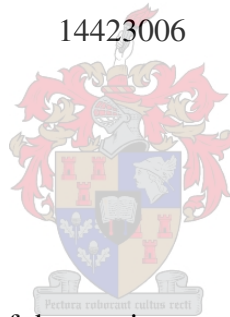


**Translocation and Female Subjectivities in Four Contemporary Narratives: Kingston's  
*The Woman Warrior*, Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* and  
Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*.**

by

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Stellenbosch

Department of English Studies

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December 2009

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Signature: E. Joss

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## Abstract

Drawing on theories of gender and subjectivity, this thesis explores the way in which constructions of modernity as well as tradition are mapped onto geographical localities and thus expressed through gender acts. The female protagonists in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*, as well as Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* undergo either transnational translocation or imagined translocation where they straddle multiple cultural contexts concurrently. The role of globalism and modernity amplifies the female's ambiguous position and therefore challenges her gender identity as she takes on additional gender characteristics. This challenge, a result of translocation, causes both the individual and collective nature of the subject to be emphasised and placed in multiple cultures concurrently. The female's subjectivity is under much tension as the cultures she immerses herself in interlace but also clash. As a result of this, her sense of self is constantly in flux as she attempts to achieve stability and coherence. This sense of a gendered, stable and located self will, I argue, both dissipate and transmutate upon undergoing physical or imagined translocation.

In addition, this thesis examines the manner in which globalism allows for the dissolving of boundaries and explores the extent to which the ambiguous position these female protagonists occupy enables them to reformulate and refashion their gender identity as well as write themselves away from the marginalised positions they inhabit. I will further explore how female subjects are compelled to take on additional feminine or masculine attributes upon translocation, seeming to become androgynous in the reformulation of their gender identity for a certain period of time. I will argue that protagonists supplement their gender in order to obtain a sense of belonging in a specific cultural context which requires this alteration of gender, and argue that this is also a means by which they liberate themselves from the marginal positions they occupy in their ethnic culture where sexism and prejudice are prevalent. However, I will demonstrate that modernity does not only provide them with liberation and autonomy, but that simultaneously it is also restrictive on the subject's gender identity. Finally, this thesis explores whether the female protagonists are able to use their ambiguous positioning strategically in order to generate

coherence of the self yet, concurrently, maintain fluidity between multiple cultural boundaries of the self.

**Keywords:**

Female subjectivities

Transnational translocation

Imagined translocation

Refashioning

Homely space

Androgyny

Modernity

Tradition

Kingston

Magona

Hoffman

## Opsomming

Hierdie verhandeling gebruik geslags- en subjektiwiteitsteorieë om ondersoek in te stel na die maniere waarop konstruksies van moderniteit en tradisie uiting vind in geslagshandeling. Dieselfde teorieë word gebruik om ondersoek in te stel na die invloed van geografiese plasing op geslagshandeling. Die vroulike protagoniste in Maxine Hong Kingston se *The Woman Warrior*, Sindiwe Magona se *To My Children's Children* en *Forced to Grow*, sowel as Eva Hoffman se *Lost in Translation*, ervaar elkeen óf transnasionale translokasie, óf verbeelde translokasie, waardeur hulle vele kulturele kontekste tegelykertyd in die dwarste beset. Die rol van globalisering en moderniteit versterk sonder twyfel die vroulike protagonis se dubbelsinnige posisie, en haar geslagsidentiteit word in twyfel getrek soos sy addisionele geslagseienskappe aanneem. Hierdie vertwyfeling – die gevolg van translokasie – veroorsaak dat beide die kollektiewe sowel as die individuele aard van die subjek benadruk word, en gelyktydig in meervoudige kulture geplaas word. Die protagonis se subjektiwiteit verkeer onder baie spanning omdat die kulture waarin sy haarself verdiep onderling vervleg is, maar tog ook bots. Derhalwe is haar beskouing van haarself voortdurend vloeibaar en veranderend terwyl sy probeer om samehörigheid en stabiliteit te bewerkstellig. Ek is van mening dat hierdie sin van 'n “geslaghebbende”, stabiele, gelokaliseerde self verdwyn en/of transmuteer wanneer dit fisiese of verbeelde translokasie ondergaan.

Gevolglik ondersoek hierdie verhandeling dus ook die manier waarop globalisme die ontbinding van grense tot gevolg het, sowel as die mate waartoe die dubbelsinnigheid van die vroulike protagoniste se posisie hulle toelaat om hul geslagsidentiteit te herformuleer en te herontwerp, en hulself weg, of uit, die gemarginaliseerde posisies wat hulle beset te skryf. Ek wil ook kyk na die maniere waarop die vroulike subjek genoop is om, as gevolg van translokasie, addisionele vroulike of manlike karaktertrekke aan te neem, met dié dat dit blyk dat die protagoniste vir 'n ruk lank androgene eienskappe in hul geslagsidentiteit toon. Ek argumenteer dat die protagoniste hul geslag aanvul, nie net sodat hul aanklank binne 'n spesifieke kulturele konteks kan vind nie, maar ook as 'n manier waarop hul hulself kan bevry van die marginale posisies waarin hulle hul in 'n etniese kultuur, waar seksisme en vooroordeel gedy, bevind. Nietemin wil ek ook aantoon dat moderniteit nie bloot net bevryding en selfstandigheid aan die vroulike protagoniste bied nie,

maar dat dit ook tegelykertyd beperkings op die subjek se geslagsidentiteit plaas. Die uitkoms van hierdie tesis is om te bepaal of die vroulike protagoniste in staat is tot die strategiese gebruik van hul dubbelsinnige posisionering, wat koherensie van die self sal meebring, en tog terselfdertyd vloeibaarheid tussen verskillende kulture sal behou.

### **Sleutelwoorde**

Vroulike subjektiwiteit

Transnasionale translokasie

Verbeelde translokasie

Herontwerp

Tuistelike plek

Androginie

Moderniteit

Tradisie

Kingston

Magona

Hoffman

## **Acknowledgements**

I am eternally grateful to Dr Shaun Viljoen, my mentor who has inspired me to succeed academically and who has encouraged and supported me throughout the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank Marlene Desiré Joss and Joan Edna O'Connor, my mother and grandmother, who have sacrificed so much and who have always been there for me. Without these two wonderful women I would never be the person I am today. I wish to thank Christian Rode for rousing in me the ambition to succeed and for supporting me throughout the writing of this thesis. To Hazel and Keith Maneveld and Jean Conradie for being the most wonderful family I could ever ask for. I am grateful to Marina Blazic, Chrisma Kok, Matthew Josephson, Thildi van der Merwe, Liesl van der Merwe, Carin Rossouw and Jeanette Lochner for their genuine friendship and support. Sincere thanks to Annel Pieterse for her translation of the abstract into Afrikaans. Finally, I wish to thank the National Research Foundation for its generous financial contribution to my studies; Stellenbosch University and the Department of English Studies for providing me with the Victoria League Bursary as well as the Post Graduate Merit Bursary and lastly, the Golden Key International Honour Society for granting me a bursary towards my studies.

## Addendum

*Yuefu Songs with Regular Five-Syllable Lines: A Choice Selection of Ancient Poems*<sup>1</sup> contains the Chinese version of the “Ballad of Mulan” as well as a translation of this into English. This anthology of poems has been sourced with the help of Mr Lei Feng, Mandarin lecturer in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages at Stellenbosch University. The ballad is employed and altered by Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* and will be further discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. “Yuefu Songs” is written entirely in Mandarin with the exception of English translations of the ballads and is therefore particularly difficult to reference. I have provided the reader with a copy of the English version of the Ballad in the Addendum of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> “Ballad of Mulan”. *Yuefu Songs with Regular Five-Syllable Lines: A Choice Selection of Ancient Poems (Chinese-English)*. Ed. Xi, Li. Foreign Languages Press, 2001.



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## Chapter One: An Introduction to Translocation and Female Subjectivities

The title of this thesis, “Translocation and Female Subjectivities in Four Contemporary Narratives”, alludes to the effect of translocation on female protagonists in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Magona’s *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow*<sup>2</sup>, as well as Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, and this thesis aims to explore the nature of the alteration in subjectivity that the female protagonists undergo upon translocation and how such changes constitute a crucial *gendered* alteration of the subject.

Regenia Gagnier defines the subject as that which constitutes an embodied self, a self which is affected by an “other” which develops in opposition to others; a self which is also a subject of knowledge in terms of the social institutions which circumscribe its being. The subject is a body that is separate from other bodies as well as dependent on its physical locality. Finally the individual is subject to language in that, through language, the self is both presented as well as subjected to linguistic devices (qtd. in Wolfreys 232). The term “subjectivity” attempts to capture a more extensive meaning of being as opposed to the term “identity”, which appears to be more limiting as it refers mainly to one’s personality or character. Thus, one’s subjectivity includes a wide range of facets, which comprise the self. Aspects such as language, personality, positionality, race and in particular gender, which will be the focus of this thesis, form the makeup of the subject. However, what is particularly interesting about the idea of the subject is that the term “subjectivity” calls for a duality<sup>3</sup> as the subject is perceived as being a construct of both individual and collective realities. Tension may thus arise within the individual, and is comprehended as interplay between the subject as individual and as collective. This is because the dualistic nature of the self is challenged, as the individual is placed both inside and outside multiple cultures or localities concurrently as a result of translocation. It is this tension, regarding the subject’s gender in particular, that informs my critique of female subjectivities, since it is

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study, I refer to three protagonists although there are four texts with which I grapple. This is because in both Magona’s texts the protagonist remains the same person as both books follow on each other.

<sup>3</sup> My intention in employing dualistic notions of subjectivity is to demonstrate the tensions felt by female protagonists. Although such dualistic notions are limiting in themselves, I use them to emphasise the crucial displacement and division the protagonists undergo as they are separated from their collective social and cultural environments.

through transnational translocation, a result of globalism<sup>4</sup>, that individuals are able to adopt a greater number of selves or multiple subjectivities than they were previously able to. Transnational translocation refers to the female subject's physical<sup>5</sup> migration from her home country to a new continent and a new culture and language which causes her to re-evaluate her gendered positioning, for this new cultural locale brings about new expectations of females to which she must adhere. Translocation thus causes the dual nature of the subject to be emphasised, and the amplification in the number of selves being formed challenges the female subject's primary or received notions of gender.

We find that the female protagonists, from each of the texts which form the basis of this thesis, concurrently straddle cultures and from this very significant position the self is certainly not whole at any particular moment in time. Although we may find that at times protagonists do indeed strive towards a complete sense of self, this integrity, these autobiographies seem to aver, is ultimately unattainable. Instead, we find the self to be fractured and fragmented and, in times of translocation, increasingly distorted and unclear. Judith Oster, in "See(k)ing the Self: Mirrors and Mirroring in Bicultural Texts", argues that in texts which employ biographical writing "[...] characters confront their own fragmented subjectivities, and are only too well aware of the various, often conflicting, elements that are destabilizing, even as they are constructing, their identities" (61). Oster states that in texts such as these, the subject is seen to find a new beginning, a new life, or may come to see herself in a new way as a result of the straddling of

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<sup>4</sup> A distinction can be made between globalism and globalisation, where the former can be seen as an ideology concerning interconnections (whether they be philosophical, organizational or technological) to form a global culture. Globalisation, on the other hand, forms a part of globalism, and can be defined as the *growth* of "[...] economic integration of the world, as trade, investment and money increasingly cross international borders (which may or may not have political or cultural implications)" (Schifferers). Therefore, globalisation is particularly concerned with the increasing or growing nature of global connections and the dissemination of ideas and culture to form a single society, whereas globalism is the ideology concerning these interconnections. Seyla Benhabib makes reference to Fredric Jameson, a social and cultural critic, who deems globalisation a phrase of the nineties (Benhabib 336).

<sup>5</sup> This physical migration is seen in Sindiwe Magona's *Forced to Grow* as well as in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*. In Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* we are presented with a different set of circumstances for the protagonist does not physically leave China to live in America and hence does not undergo transnational translocation; she has been born and brought up in America as a first generation Asian American. Her parents, who remain set in traditional Chinese ways, encourage her to conform to tradition, although in her Western context, these ways do not make sense. Similarly to the protagonists from Magona and Hoffman's narratives, Kingston's protagonist, although first-generation Asian American, also experiences an alteration in terms of her gender identity as a result of her parents' translocation.

cultures (59). She argues that the view the female subject has of herself is constantly disrupted since anything new that she encounters, be it an emotion, a new cultural environment, a language or any other contingency, causes her previous notion of her self to be disrupted. Thus complete coherence of the self is in fact never possible (61). Ultimately, this postmodern idea of the self as a being made up of multiple selves does not allow for continuity or for an absolute stability of the self and, instead, the disjointed nature of the subject is emphasised (Benhabib 355).

As Rey Chow notes, postmodernism foregrounds the interconnected nature of knowledge, customs and ideas which emphasise the ambivalent position of the subject. This is because the self is not closed off by geographical or social and cultural boundaries since boundaries in the postmodern are seen to dissolve (Chow, "Postmodern Automats" 102). Instead, the self transcends these boundaries to a certain extent, making it more fluid, dynamic and open and, hence, open to embrace its very own inherent multiple selves. Chow also notes that in postmodern thought, it "[...] is no longer possible to assume a transparent and universal frame of reality" ("Postmodern Automats" 104) which is the notion often implied by globalism, which cites Western liberal thought as a universal and dominant culture<sup>6</sup>. Instead, postmodernism foregrounds the numerous, multiple frames of reality that subjects engage, and demonstrates that the Western culture is "[...] no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world" since boundaries dissolve as cultures overlap and interlink (Young qtd. in Gunew 31). Although this fluid, fractured way of viewing the female subject offers her a way out of the structures of society which restrict her being and her gender, this postmodernist notion of the self as fragmented and dispersed ignores demands for stability which, as I will argue, all three narrators ultimately desire and strive towards in these autobiographical fictions.

The affliction the female subject undergoes is due to the impact of globalism and transnational translocation on her being which, I argue, challenges any previous notions of the protagonist's self. Such tension that the female subject experiences is seen in the four texts which will form the basis of this discussion, and it becomes evident that the process of telling the story by the fictive narrator herself serves as a means by which she is able to raise these tensions and

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term "Western" pertaining to cultural and ideological notions fostered by societies in the west and "western" as directional, referring to the geographic locality of the west.

deal with them sufficiently in order to preserve a sense of self. The female protagonist undergoes a reformulation of being as she questions the impact of translocation upon her gender identity<sup>7</sup>. Clem Robyns, in “Translation and Discursive Identity”, argues that in culture, the self strives towards self-preservation by means of discourse and that discourse serves as a means in which to preserve a sense of collective identity. She states that

[...] within a culture or discursive practice, there is an awareness of a common identity [which] implies that there has also been a striving toward preservation of this identity, toward self-preservation by the discourse. If identity is constructed in opposition to the alien, interferences imply loss of autonomy and thereby loss of identity. (406)

From Robyns’s statement, it is evident that one’s individual identity is closely bound to a common or shared identity within a particular culture. This further aligns with Gagnier’s definition of subjectivity, which as mentioned, comprises of both individual and collective selves. In addition, Robyns observes that if identity is constructed in opposition to a shared identity (possible in translocation), interferences and disruptions to the self cause a loss of identity and autonomy within the subject. Although Robyns identifies these tensions which may be felt by the subject who straddles multiple cultures, what she does not account for here is the fluid nature of subjectivity. Instead, I argue that the female protagonist’s previous notions of self are not simply “lost” upon translocation but are instead displaced, for the protagonist feels that Western culture has the potential to become increasingly dominant and override her own ethnic culture<sup>8</sup>. Because of this, the protagonists at times feel that their identity is in the process of dissolution in this new cultural locale, for their identity (founded at a previous cultural location), has become partially irrelevant in their new cultural environment. The protagonists therefore experience much tension in terms of their gender identity, as they make sense of what it means to

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the course of this thesis I refer to the term “gender identity” as an element of one’s subjectivity. By employing this term I by no means wish to imply that one’s gender is a distinct and separate segment of one’s subjectivity. I simply wish to draw attention to the part of one’s subjectivity where gender is culturally constituted. As an aim of this study, my examination of the female subject in terms of her translocation will therefore bring about a greater understanding of the formation of gender.

<sup>8</sup> The extent to which this is true differs between protagonists and, as I will further demonstrate, the degree to which the protagonist allows Western culture to become the dominant and overriding culture is dependent on the structure of the subject’s ethnic or home culture and the extent to which it fosters collective identity as opposed to individualism.

be female in a new cultural context as opposed to what it means to be a female in their ethnic culture<sup>9</sup>.

In contrast to Robyns' statement that identity and autonomy become "lost" due to interferences in the self, I argue that female subjects instead undergo a shift or alteration which challenges the very notion of the subject both as a collective being located in specific cultural space, and also as an individual able to assert, adapt or defy the imperatives of an enculturated space. Tension thus arises within the female subject as a result of this modification to the individual and collective self. As a result, female subjects do not simply "lose" their identity, as Robyns claims, for they are instead able to re-formulate, renew and re-fashion themselves as they combine their subjectivity at a previous cultural locale with a new sense of self<sup>10</sup>. An example of this re-fashioning of the self is seen when Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe, questions the nature of her self after her translocations to conferences and universities overseas in the autobiography *Forced to Grow*. When back at home in South Africa she is seen standing at the mirror and says:

I reluctantly looked at myself in the mirror and what I saw frightened me even more. Where was I? Who was I? For the mirror showed me someone I was not, someone I remembered as from a past long ago. (163)

This quotation is illustrative of the tension felt by the protagonist as she attempts to reconsider herself as a black South African female during the Apartheid era. However, she is able to increasingly re-fashion and reformulate herself upon undergoing translocations, for translocation enables her to obtain a critical distance from the cultural, social and political world she is situated in back home. The act of examining oneself in a mirror has been investigated by many psychoanalysts including Jacques Lacan, who postulated the mirror stage, a stage whereby a child from the age of six months becomes interested in his or her mirror reflection. He or she

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall argues that the term "ethnicity" "[...] acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (qtd. in Gunew 44). I use the term "ethnicity", taking Hall's definition into consideration, yet I use it to refer to the protagonists' culture of origin, their place of birth (as in the case of Magona and Hoffman's protagonists) or their ancestral origin (as in the case of Kingston's protagonist who is of Chinese cultural origin yet is born in the United States).

<sup>10</sup> In Kingston's narrative, the unnamed protagonist weighs up the multiple cultures she is born into, for her reformulation, as mentioned, is not one consequential on transnational translocation but is rather symbolic of an imagined translocation.

begins to discover a crucial part of identity when beginning to familiarise his or herself with the mirror – he or she is able to distinguish “[...] that which is without from his own within [and] sees himself as another among others; he is situated in social space, at the heart of which he will become capable of reshaping his own reality” (Gusdorf 32). Georges Gusdorf further argues that autobiography itself also functions as a mirror “[...] in which the individual reflects his own image [...]” (33). The mirror is thus used in literature as a trope for understanding oneself and gives way to a necessary self-examination. In Magona’s quotation, Sindiwe examines herself in the mirror, and her idea of herself and what is reflected in the mirror do not match. She states that the face she sees in the mirror is a representation from many years ago and not the self she now imagines. It can be argued, that this projection of her self in the mirror is perhaps a desire for the past, nostalgia for the way in which her life was before her marriage failed. She has now become someone different to what she had hoped.

It is evident that all three protagonists obtain this kind of critical distance upon translocation or imagined translocation as they are able to critically observe the cultural locale they attempt to situate themselves in. As a result, these female protagonists are somewhat displaced and this further intensifies their desire to preserve a past identity. The narrative itself is a way for the fictive self to achieve this. Translocation may indeed intensify the disruption of the individual’s gendered subjectivity, rendering her into an ambivalent space – a space in which the fragmentary nature of her self is accentuated. Tamsin Lorraine explains this ambivalent position of the subject and employs the term “nomadic subjectivity”, a term originally coined by Gilles Deleuze. Lorraine argues that “nomadic subjectivity” is that which can be defined as a position occupied by the subject which emphasises its fragmentary and fluid nature. She further emphasises the subject’s interconnectedness and explains that the subject

[...] cannot be reduced to any one linear chain of cause and effect. Instead, this subject is a multiplicity among multiplicities, the various lines of which actualize movements of becoming [...] evokes an image of collaboration of an embodied subject and world, a singular location and coming together of multiple lines in which the specific location and shape of the subject is impossible to pin down to any one point. (qtd. in Wolfrey 238)

The effects of translocation on female subjectivity are closely linked to Lorraine's definition of nomadic subjectivity since the female protagonists in these four texts straddle multiple cultures and find themselves constantly in ambivalent positions in which they relentlessly question the outcome of translocation on their being<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, Lorraine emphasises the interconnectedness of the subject to the outside world and demonstrates that the subject is not a singular and closed system, but is in fact an open self which simultaneously influences and is influenced by the world around it. Lorraine's quote above illustrates that because of this interconnected nature of the self to its environs, the exact location and shape of the subject is particularly difficult to specify for it is an interconnected and interdependent ontological system. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Habitus aligns itself similarly to Lorraine's way of thinking, for he states that "[...] the construction of social reality is not only an individual enterprise but may also become a collective enterprise" (18). Bourdieu develops this argument and states that his theory of Habitus implies a "sense of one's place" and also a "sense of the place of others" (19). It is therefore apt to suggest that the subject engages the role of a "nomad", as she is not culturally situated in a singular locale but instead operates both inside, outside and between different cultural spaces and traverses between these.

The subject is closely tied to social geography and to positionality, since the individual subject is closely bound to the collective. According to Julian Wolfreys, the term "subjectivity" is "[...] a location constituted by the state and [is employed] through ideological state apparatuses involving domination, coercion, identification and regulation" (235). What is particularly crucial in Wolfreys' argument is that he defines subjectivity as a location which is culturally determined. One can then further question how translocation changes or alters the make-up or mould of the subject, especially since the subject straddles multiple cultures simultaneously. Yet what Wolfreys' argument also implies is that the individual is not only presented to the readership through language but is also subjected to language and thus subjected

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<sup>11</sup> Although I will demonstrate that Magona's protagonist is seen to be more "nomadic" in a physical sense in comparison to Kingston and Hoffman's protagonists, this does not mean these latter protagonists cannot undergo a significant alteration as Magona's does. In fact, Rosi Braidotti in "Nomadic Subjects" argues that "[n]ot all nomads are world travellers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling" (5).



to a particular culture or to a contestation of cultures<sup>12</sup>. The three protagonists I examine occupy a rather ambivalent position - they are somewhat marginalised in their “culture of origin”<sup>13</sup>, and then, in adapting to a new location with prevailing Western thought, they are once *again* marginalised as they inhabit the margins of the hegemonic culture. Sneja Gunew argues that the purpose of the “[...] minority discourse is thus not simply an oppositional or counter-discourse [...] it also undoes the power of dominant discourses [enabling individuals to be represented] as universal” (Gunew 42). Female subjects are not simply marginalised or on the periphery of Western culture as they attempt not only to unify their selves after the dislocation of translocation but also simultaneously (re)present themselves as no longer part of a marginal cultural position, but instead as claimants to aspects of the dominant modernity<sup>14</sup>. They attempt to regain the autonomy they feel they may have lost upon translocation and are able to partially rewrite themselves out of the marginalised positions they occupy.

The three protagonists are marginalised in several ways - Kingston’s unnamed protagonist is marginalised as a female in the traditional Chinese way of life which is premised on sexist notions of the position of the female. She is, however, also marginalised as a Chinese woman and partial outsider within American society she inhabits. Similarly, Magona’s protagonist, Sindiwe, experiences sexism which is prevalent in her traditional Xhosa society. In addition, Sindiwe is dehumanised by the South African Apartheid government which demeans

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<sup>12</sup> In all four texts, the protagonists find themselves learning English as a foreign language and along with this newly acquired English they are simultaneously introduced to a Eurocentric and Western modernity. These female protagonists’ modernity is symbolic of opportunity yet they are consciously aware of the ambiguous position they occupy as modern female subjects, particularly with regard to the many effects of modernity on their ethnic culture.

<sup>13</sup> This phrase is of course slippery for it implies that the protagonists addressed in this thesis have a distinct and separate cultural identity before translocation. Female subjects, in fact, do not have one particular cultural origin when they reside in their home country, as they experience modernity and Western culture to a certain extent. Instead, the protagonists have a primary culture which is their “culture of origin” or their “ethnic” culture into which they are born; yet upon translocation to the West, this culture shifts to that of Western culture which has the potential to obliterate their primary culture. In the case of Kingston’s narrative, we find the protagonist to be a Chinese female born into a dominant American culture and hence her “culture of origin” is increasingly problematic to define for she is born into multiple cultures. Kingston’s protagonist recreates herself not in terms of a translocational move but, instead, in terms of a generational and imagined move away from tradition towards modernity and hence Western culture. She thus experiences an imagined shift in terms of gender formulation – imagined but with very real consequences.

<sup>14</sup> Chow argues that terminology such as “modernity” and “modernization”, refer to “the increasing technologization of culture” (“Postmodern Automaton” 101) and I have made use of these terms as such.

her as a black woman who is viewed as inferior. Hoffman's protagonist, Eva, is marginalised for she is a Jewish girl in a Polish society which fosters anti-Semitism. Later, upon her translocation to Canada, she is again marginalised as an outsider who struggles to adapt to English as a language as well as Western culture which itself is seen to objectify women. Although, as I will attempt to show, certain female protagonists desire to "assimilate" themselves into the hegemonic culture<sup>15</sup>, they nevertheless recognise the importance of remaining critical of the dominant values of the prevailing culture in their new locale, for at times they are able to see that Western ways are not necessarily more advanced or superior than those of their culture of origin. At times they realise that their ambiguous cultural position is advantageous. This is because it fosters the merging, intermingling and clashing of multiple traditions and expectations of gender, which although initially seem to be hindrances, cause them to re-evaluate their identity as females, and obtain a critical stance on culture restrictions. They are also able to see the importance of preserving their culture of origin in collaboration with their newly acquired culture<sup>16</sup>. The female subjects do at times realise that being marginalised, as Gunew argues, cannot be reduced to a binary position or

[...] a struggle between oppressor and oppressed in which the latter remains utterly passive. In their special conceived representation of exclusionary gestures, margins have always been ambiguous signs which have served to frame the centre in terms of indictment as well as approbation. (27)

Consequently one can challenge the protagonists' usage of the terms "assimilate" and "translation", which implicate this dualistic position of oppressor and oppressed. Although the female subjects attempt to immerse themselves in the dominant culture, their usage of these terms nonetheless hinders their adjustment to a certain extent, for both terms imply that something is lost during the process of modification to a new cultural environment. After the

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<sup>15</sup> Kingston and Hoffman's protagonists in particular desire to "translate" themselves and therefore desire to partly "assimilate" themselves to the hegemonic culture. Magona's protagonist is somewhat different in that she is instead increasingly nostalgic for her home country upon translocation and fosters the necessity of remembering her birthplace, for she realises the importance of this in her identity formation. Although she does embrace modernity for the opportunities it creates, by the end of the narratives she still remains grounded in her ethnic culture unlike the other protagonists. Hoffman's and Kingston's protagonists, I argue, are somewhat more compliant with Western culture than Magona's protagonist.

<sup>16</sup> Only certain protagonists are in fact able to come to this realisation in full by the end of the narratives, for their attempt to achieve stability regarding their selves is mostly hindered by their desire to "assimilate" themselves into a new culture.

process of translocation aspects of culture may indeed become misplaced or gained but it is not necessarily true that one's culture becomes replaced by another more dominant culture, which is what these autobiographical fictions at times can be read to suggest. Such assimilation is ultimately inaccessible, since protagonists problematise the idea of assimilation as, on the one hand, they strive to obtain a whole and unified gendered self yet, on the other hand, need to embrace their pasts, their lives at a previous cultural locality, in order for them to obtain a sense of belonging. As Gunew illustrates, being marginalised is not simply tension between oppressor and oppressed. Instead this struggle is much more complex than the three protagonists at times realise and such a struggle does not conform to binary or dual notions, for "culture" continually proves to be unstable and in flux. I will thus argue that what the protagonists desire to achieve is in fact not a complete assimilation to western hegemony but rather a desire for a homely space in the foreign. I will demonstrate that the protagonists in fact create an amalgamation of the numerous cultures they occupy in line with the postmodern idea of the fragmentary self which does not allow for a total assimilation to a particular culture. I will argue that translocation is complex and complicated and cannot simply be reduced to the term "assimilation" or "translation" since a self is not a self on its own but instead operates in relation to certain interlocutors<sup>17</sup> which have an effect on the makeup of the self. The gendered shifts the protagonists undergo are rather evident of a process of re-modelling, re-conceptualising and re-fashioning of the self where the protagonists consciously question the effect of translocation on their gender.

In particular, Hoffman employs the term "translation" in her autobiography's title, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. This further demonstrates her protagonist's necessity to "translate" and thus "assimilate" herself. The subtitle, *A Life in a New Language*, equally illustrates the protagonist's desire to create a new life separate from her life in a previous locality; to fully assimilate herself and hence translate herself from a Polish young girl into a westernised woman. Throughout the text, Hoffman's protagonist Eva frequently employs

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<sup>17</sup> I use the word 'interlocutor' to illustrate the various factors which impact on the self and cause a process of continual refashioning. The phrase "webs of interlocution" is employed by Charles Taylor in "Sources of the Self", in which he argues that a self is only a self "[...] in relation to certain interlocutors" (qtd. in Benhabib 344). Benhabib shares the same dialogic narrative view with Taylor and states that "the answer to the question of who I am always involves *reference* to "where" I am speaking from and to whom or with whom" (my emphasis) (Benhabib 344).

terminology such as “assimilate” and “translate” which, as mentioned, hinder the subject’s productive adjustment to a foreign locale. Similarly, Kingston’s autobiography *The Woman Warrior* employs the term “translation” but in a more literal sense in the final lines of the autobiography thus further demonstrating how both Hoffman and Kingston’s protagonists grapple not only culturally and socially but also linguistically in this new cultural environment:

After twelve years among the Southern Hsiung-nu, Ts’ai Yen was ransomed and married to Tung Ssu so that her father would have Han descendants. She brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is ‘Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe’, a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well. (186)

However, Magona’s texts *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow* are unlike Kingston and Hoffman’s in that the protagonist, Sindiwe, does not label the tensions resulting from her transnational translocations as “translation” or “assimilation”. Instead, we find Sindiwe asserting her own cultural norms as a black South African woman in her encounters with the people she meets overseas. For example, in a scene when she attempts to hold her friend Erlin’s hand, she states that she would like to teach Erlin the warmth of friendship and that women who hold hands are not necessarily lesbians. This indicates Sindiwe’s preservation of her traditional mores which she feels are still very much a part of her identity, even in this foreign locale. This is not to say that Hoffman and Kingston’s protagonists do not experience a desire to hold on to their culture of origin – they in fact do have this desire, although in Magona’s autobiographies, this desire the protagonist has is evidently stronger. Perhaps this can be attributed to her strong and rooted sense of community, which is valued by Xhosa society and also because she continually returns to her geographical “home”<sup>18</sup> unlike Hoffman’s narrator who returns home to Poland on only one occasion and Kingston’s narrator who has never visited China, her place of ethnic origin. Sindiwe’s continual visits to South Africa re-energise her sense of her traditional Xhosa culture, which both Kingston’s and Hoffman’s protagonists do not experience, for they do not frequently rejuvenate their sense of “traditional” culture by frequently returning “home” and

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<sup>18</sup> I use the word “home” here to refer to Sindiwe’s place of birth and upbringing, yet the word “home” is precarious, for the three female protagonists attempt to create a sense of belonging and home in a cultural locale dissimilar from their ethnic culture or place of birth.

their sense of dislocation is additionally intense for they are more deeply rooted in Western thought than Magona's protagonist.

Because of these physical or imagined translocations, it is evident that gender is inextricably linked to self and is by no means stable and unitary, for the self constantly changes as it relates to its physical locality. It is then apt to suggest that gender is not a stable or unitary conception but that it is rather in flux and partially unstable. Throughout the course of this study I will employ a number of theorists examining the constitution of gender in order to elucidate the alteration of the subject's gender upon translocation. Judith Butler, one of these theorists, argues that gender cannot be seen as a "stable identity" from which diverse acts occur. Instead, she suggests that gender is "[...] an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (emphasis in original) ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 519), and these acts demonstrate what constitutes gender. Butler further argues that

[...] the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are *renewed, revised, and consolidated* through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic. (my emphasis) ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 523)

It is these renewed, revised and consolidated acts which I wish to explore during the course of this thesis since the protagonists from each of the texts are shown to constantly renew and reformulate their gender identities as they question what it means to be a woman in numerous cultural settings. As they constitute these gendered performances, they play out the expectations of what this new cultural locale demands of them. Gender is therefore not a fixed and stable notion for we find it to instead be a socially constructed concept. According to the Collins Gem English Dictionary, the concept of gender can be further defined as "[...] the state of being male or female"<sup>19</sup>. The word "state" implies a current condition or circumstance of gender and by no means implies biological facticity. Likewise, Butler argues that gender is a cultural conception and she quotes Simone de Beauvoir accordingly, stating that woman "[...] and by extension, any gender, is an historical situation rather than a natural fact" ("Performative Acts and Gender

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<sup>19</sup> "Gender." Def. 14b. *The Collins Gem English Dictionary*. New ed. 1998.

Constitution” 520). Although Butler agrees, to a certain extent, that gender is a historical situation and cultural conception tenuously constituted in time, she instead emphasises the interplay between sex as a biological facticity and gender as cultural facticity, which according to her, de Beauvoir seems to underestimate (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 522). Butler further states that according to de Beauvoir’s definition, to be a female is

a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 522)

Butler therefore opposes de Beauvoir for she argues that to be a female *does* in fact have meaning for one’s femaleness which pertains to one’s biological and sexual inclination, is ultimately closely related to one’s gender, a socially constructed concept. Butler, unlike de Beauvoir, stresses the importance of the interconnectedness between biology and culture in articulating “femaleness”. She further argues against de Beauvoir’s claim that the body suffers a certain *cultural construction*, which implies that culture is imposed onto the body. Butler feels de Beauvoir’s historical determinist notion hinders the self’s ability to spontaneously construct and renew gender and rather argues that there is “[...] neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 522). According to Butler, gender is thus not inherent in one’s biological makeup but is instead constantly generated and regenerated through confirming gendered acts.

In light of Butler’s claims, the protagonists in the four autobiographies are indeed seen to renew, regenerate and consolidate their gender identity as females in an environment which is both foreign and familiar to them. For a certain period of time their formulation of gender is, I argue, particularly androgynous because of translocation. The protagonists take on additional masculine or feminine attributes in order to survive in white western society as opposed to their ethnic culture. They become androgynous in their formulation of their selves since the expectations of gender change from location to location and they find their gender challenged by

physical or imagined translocation. In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the protagonist is initially seen to be silenced in her position as a Chinese girl in an American locale as she feels that traditional Chinese culture fosters the notion of women as subservient and pleasing. She states that "[t]here is a Chinese word for the female *I* – which is 'slave'" (49). Kingston's protagonist, through the course of the narrative, reformulates her sense of self and her gendered identity and ascertains what it means to be an Asian American woman. She is later seen to obtain agency and a voice, as she stands up to her mother, who nevertheless conforms to traditional Chinese mores. She argues:

[d]o you know what the Teacher Ghosts say about me? They tell me I'm smart, and I can win scholarships. I can get into colleges. I've already applied. I'm smart. I can do all kinds of things. I know how to get A's, and they say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself.  
(Kingston 179)

Contrary to her mother's expectations, the protagonist is able to become a woman who is looked up to, who is intelligent and who can stand on her own two feet without support from a husband and in doing so must reconsider her gender identity and her role and worth as a female. It is necessary partly to abandon her Chinese femininity and instead embrace masculine elements of gender as we see her becoming determined and ambitious, traits associated with masculinity in western culture, aspects of culture not fostered in females in Chinese culture. Similarly, Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe, in the autobiographies, *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*, is able to renew and revise her gender identity. A crucial instance where this occurs is at a beach, when she lets go of her wedding ring in the water for she feels that it no longer symbolises a united love now that her husband has neglected her. She states:

I had embarked on the long journey that was to be the rest of my life, travelling light, sans husband. The act of letting go was deliberate, but it was prompted, suggested if you will, by the workings of the waves.  
(*Forced to Grow* 13)

From this moment, Sindiwe is able to reformulate herself as the "head" of the household and the breadwinner, for she "[...] feared the absence of a male head of the family would thwart [her] well-laid plans" for her family (*Forced to Grow* 162). Sindiwe feels that she must take on

additional masculine attributes in order to occupy this position of the breadwinner, a position for which males only are seen as suitable in traditional Xhosa culture. Sindiwe states: “I can assure you, my children never had a mother. I was too busy being their father” (*Forced to Grow* 100 - 101). Hoffman’s protagonist, Eva, in *Lost in Translation*, has to alter her gender identity similarly, for upon her translocation from Poland to Canada, she is confronted with new expectations of females which she weighs up against the previous expectations of females in Polish society. We find Eva undergoing a transformation in terms of her gender in order to conform to western expectations of women which she feels objectify females since Western culture cultivates a general superficiality. We are told that in Poland she was considered a pretty young girl but now, in this new locality, she has “[...] emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable” and must take on additional feminine characteristics expected of females in Canada (Hoffman 109). However, she questions this cultural expectation and states: “[...] surely, it’s enough to be a woman, isn’t it?” (Hoffman 178).

In these above instances, protagonists reconsider, reformulate and renew their gender identity. They are also at times seen to play out the expectations of females in a new cultural environment as they consolidate their gendered self. Paul John Eakin argues that the autobiographical act is “[...] a re-enactment of earlier modes of identity formation” (*Fictions in Autobiography* 227). Similarly, Butler quotes anthropologist Victor Turner who suggests that “[...] social action requires a performance which is *repeated* [and this] repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 526). Gender can as a result be seen to be a re-enactment of already established gender norms within the self and these are played out through the medium of autobiography.

In contrast to the theories postulated by Butler and Eakin, Benhabib suggests a narrative model of subjectivity and identity construction in place of Butler’s performative model, which accounts for the spontaneity and creativity Benhabib feels is lost in Butler’s hypothesis – for Butler’s model of performativity focuses on the act of gender as a reproduction of an already acquired gendered self and according to Benhabib, this hinders the spontaneity, naturalness and the dynamism of the self. In addition, Benhabib feels that Butler’s theory offers “[...] no explication



of how regimes of discourse/power or normative regimes of language and sexuality both circumscribe *and* enable the subject” (my emphasis) (340). She thus demonstrates that the dominant culture is able to simultaneously confine and permit the freedom of the gendered subject (Benhabib 340). Benhabib’s theory further illustrates that the psychodynamic capacity of the self urges the fictional narrator to retell, re-member, and reconfigure in order to recreate herself in a new locality. She feels that “[...] the telling of the story of the self reinforces or undermines a particular understanding of the self” (341). Benhabib’s narrative model is particularly useful in understanding the fluid nature of the subject and her ability to continuously renew and recreate itself through her own narrative story telling process. Benhabib takes Butler’s theory of performativity to the next level for she argues that the narrative is not simply an articulation of a previously constituted gendered self. She maintains that the narrative is a means by which the self is able to display a previous conception of itself and to further recreate and refashion itself. This further substantiates the protagonists’ abilities to combine parts of their ethnic customs with that of their Western custom and not merely assimilate their selves to a hegemonic culture.

In a seminar discussion with author of *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow*, Dr Sindiwe Magona, she stated that “storytelling is useful to help people understand their situation better”<sup>20</sup>. It is for this reason that the fictive narrators revise past memories in order to obtain a greater understanding of themselves in the present as well as of the ambiguous position they occupy as marginalised females straddling multiple cultures. These narratives are thus crucial as a means by which the self can obtain a greater understanding of its gender. Furthermore, Eakin, in his work in the field of autobiography, quotes Spiegelberg who similarly argues that the act of composition requires the reaching back into the past in order to “[...] recapture but also to repeat the psychological rhythms of identity formation” (qtd. in Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 226). Spiegelberg further argues that this act also helps one reach

[...] forward into the future to fix the structure of this identity in a permanent self-made existence as literary text. This is to understand the writing of autobiography not merely as the passive, transparent

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<sup>20</sup> This seminar was titled “Literary Representations Implicating the Self” and was hosted by Stellenbosch University’s Department of English Studies. During the seminar Dr Sindiwe Magona answered various questions regarding the role of literature and storytelling in contemporary South Africa (23 October 2008).

record of an already completed self but rather as an integral and often decisive phase of the drama of self-definition. (qtd. in Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* 226)

As Spiegelberg argues, the act of composition is not a record of an already complete self; it is rather a continuous process of self-creation since the act of writing can never represent the subject fully, as not everything can be uttered or written down. Autobiography is not a passive mode, for in articulating these memories, the protagonists in the four autobiographies seem very much aware of their gender identities in relation to their environment. They concurrently enact as well as construct their identities throughout the narrative. The narrative mode thus allows all three protagonists to recapture their gender identity of the past on the one hand, but also simultaneously to use it to adapt to new gender expectations on the other and hence reformulate their gender.

These four narratives have often been explicitly classified as “autobiography” and all three protagonists employ a storytelling mode as they themselves describe events in the first person. I thus refer to these works as ‘fictional autobiographies’ on account of their autobiographical elements *but* also their elements of storytelling and fiction since the term ‘autobiography’ itself is problematic<sup>21</sup>. Discussions surrounding autobiography draw on many fields of study including philosophy, psychology, literary as well as humanistic concerns and this is perhaps why many questions regarding what comprises of autobiography are render the term problematic and indeed complex (Olney, “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment” 9). Michael Sprinker argues that the etymology of the word *autobiography* itself poses problems for the author (325). He furthers this argument and quotes Nietzsche who states that “ ‘[...] [t]he ‘subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is’ ” (Nietzsche qtd. in Sprinker 333). Nietzsche further provides us with a warning as autobiography may be seen as an inquiry of the history of an individual, the danger then can be that the individual may “[...] interpret oneself falsely” (Nietzsche qtd. in Sprinker 334). It therefore seems more appropriate to refer to these texts as ‘fictional autobiographies’ since they

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<sup>21</sup> Throughout this thesis I use the terms ‘fictional autobiography’ and ‘autobiography’ interchangeably. I also use the term ‘narrative’ to describe the events of the text, for these articulations are written fictional *and* non-fictional accounts of the self articulated in the form of a story.

comprise of memories of the self, which are to a large extent constructed in a storytelling mode according to how the individual sees herself.

Furthermore, James Olney argues that it is indeed very difficult to define ‘autobiography’ and that the term comprises of three elements – *auto*, referring to the individual and the meaning of the self; *bio*, what we mean by our biological existence; and *graphy*, the significance and extent to which we can recreate the events of our lives on paper (“Autobiography and the Cultural Moment” 6). Hence, these texts are hence difficult to position within a particular genre of writing for they contain elements across different genres. For example, in all three fictional autobiographies, protagonists employ the narrative technique of dialogue recreation, as they recall conversations from the past. Although unable to remember precisely what was said, authors successfully capture their protagonists’ emotions experienced at the time. The extent of this technique which is seen in all four narratives differs from text to text. In both Magona and Hoffman’s narratives, use of dialogue recreation is minimal for protagonists instead mainly employ descriptive language in which to recreate scenes from the past. The extent to which the author has employed dialogue recreation is perhaps attributed to the degree to which the text is more fictional than fact, for it recounts events from the past in the form of direct conversation. This is impossible to recall exactly and the narrative is thus more fictional in nature as a result of this. In Kingston’s narrative, the unnamed protagonist is seen to increasingly use dialogue recreation, yet what is most interesting in this regard, is that Kingston as an author is seen to be the most criticised. As I will show in the subsequent chapter, critics have ridiculed her representation of Asian Americans (which critics deem “fictional”) and her simultaneous labelling of her text as a “memoir” for they see it rather as a work of fiction.

These four ‘fictional autobiographies’ conform to what Doyle and Winkiel describe as bearing “[...] a self-consciousness about positionality [...]” where positionality entails a sense of both a *stable and situated* as well as a *dislocated* social presence (3). All three female protagonists indeed encompass a self-conscious awareness regarding their positionality and are attentive to the geographies in which they situate themselves. At the same time, the protagonists occupy a certain homely space as they feel they are part of a certain cultural group. However, they concurrently inhabit a foreign culture where they are outsiders to some extent, and they

occupy both a situated but also a disrupted position. Because of this disruption, these three female protagonists appear to reformulate a new sense of a gendered self, which is affected by this positionality.

Consequently, both imagined and physical translocation situates the subject in a position in which she is able to examine critically both her culture of origin and Western mores. Western culture provides her with an entrance into an alternative, global culture, something which is much needed especially since she is on the outskirts or margins of multiple cultures. Gunew argues that the question of a common cultural literacy for the Anglophone world is debated in the United Kingdom, Canada and America. Gunew argues that “English has become the language not only of those who comprise but also of those who aspire to be part of the advanced capitalist world” (28). This Western hegemony is thus not entirely different and new for these protagonists since they have in fact been introduced to Western culture through the reach of globalism while residing in their country of origin. The protagonist in Kingston’s narrative has been born into both Western and Chinese customs as she is a Chinese female born in the United States and thus initially has a greater access to Western culture than the other two protagonists. In Magona’s two narratives, Sindiwe grows up in South Africa and has partial access to a global and Western culture, by means of her education as well as her travels overseas. She has also grown up in a country which was colonised by the British and hence a greater importance is placed on English language acquisition as opposed to the many African languages spoke in South Africa. Similarly, Eva, in Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, also has access to a Western way of life through books and magazines her mother possesses while living in Poland. However, upon both Eva as well as Sindiwe’s translocations, both protagonists are granted greater access into this culture. Entry into the West which is experienced by protagonists is not just entry into the foreign but also entry into a worldwide culture that is already in part experienced by the protagonists, for globalism allows a world-wide reach of Western thought and hence is already partially considered as a familiar culture and partly as “home”. It could be argued that as a result of this, the disruption of translocation is not as intensely felt by the subject for her access to Western culture within her ethnic cultural frame is already substantially in place. As I will demonstrate, this is case-specific for the disruption the protagonists experience differs from narrative to narrative.

The entry into the Western hegemony that each of the protagonists undergoes is facilitated initially through acquiring English as a foreign language because for each of the protagonists, English is not their home language although they may have some knowledge of it as a result of modernity. It is most interesting to note how language may in fact reveal a subject's "social embeddedness" and whether conflict surrounding the gendered self is eventually resolved, by means of acute immersion into the English language and the English literary canon (Wolfreys 238). Each subject describes this ambiguous position they occupy in terms of adaptation to the English literary canon and it is crucial to note that all three female protagonists immerse themselves in the field of English literature and that of storytelling as a way in which to recreate their selves through language after the disorientation of fragmentation, the result of translocation on their subjectivity. Certain protagonists even immerse themselves into the literature of the West in order to acquire cultural norms and expectations required of females for the gender norms of their cultural origin do not make sense after translocation.

The autobiographies pose vital questions with regard to female subjectivities in a world of globalisation where cultures increasingly intermingle and clash. As I will argue, it is as a result of translocation, or in the case of Kingston's protagonist, an imagined translocation evident of a shift from tradition towards modernity, that protagonists experience and deal with tensions concerning their subjectivity. In particular, the alteration of the subject's gender identity as a result of translocation will be closely examined during the subsequent chapters of this thesis and I will argue that the subject's gender identity is challenged, for this new locality or imagined space may threaten the female protagonist's previous conception of gender accruing to a particular custom which she was initially immersed in. In addition, this thesis aims to demonstrate that although at times protagonists problematise their indistinct positionality, for they desire to "translate" or "assimilate" themselves to the ways of the West, they are unable to do so for they cannot completely "assimilate" themselves and neglect their previous cultural identity since it has a largely profound impact on the re-formulation of their present identity and gender. What the protagonists in fact desire is not "assimilation" or "translation" to the hegemony. Instead, I will demonstrate that female subjects strive for a stable sense of self and a homely space in the foreign environment after the disruption of the self through translocation. These protagonists attempt not only to unify their selves after the dislocation of translocation but

also simultaneously (re)present themselves as no longer part of a marginal cultural position and instead become critical claimants to cultural elements of the dominant modernity. Female subjects thus attempt to regain the autonomy they feel they may have lost upon translocation and are able to rewrite themselves out of the marginalised positions they occupy. At times they realise that their ambiguous cultural position is in fact advantageous for it fosters the merging and intermingling of multiple cultures and multiple expectations of gender. I will illustrate that the protagonists at times come to the realisation that they are able to *interlace* Western culture and their culture of origin or ethnicity and are nonetheless able to re-create themselves by employing bits and pieces of various customs. They are able to embrace what they feel are the finest features of each culture, upholding these, yet in addition rejecting those features which they feel are restrictive on their gender identity as females.

Ultimately Kingston, Hoffman and Magona's protagonists all ask the same question about their selves. They question who they are now in the present in relation to who they were in the past or who they are required to become as a result of what is imposed by familial or cultural regulation. Emphasis will be placed on the very ambiguous nature of the gendered position they seem to occupy as they question, reformulate, refashion and rewrite themselves as a way in which to grapple with the physical or imagined translocations they undergo and in doing so, redefine themselves both in terms of the old and the new cultural spaces they occupy.

As do the female protagonists in these autobiographically inflected fictions, so Benhabib questions the position of the self in the period of globalisation:

[t]he challenge in the new constellation is the following: Can there be coherent accounts of individual and collective identity that do not fall into xenophobia, intolerance, paranoia, and aggression towards others? Can the search for coherence be made compatible with the maintenance of fluid ego boundaries? Can the attempt to generate meaning be accompanied by an appreciation of the meaningless, the absurd, and the limits of discursivity? And finally, can we establish justice and solidarity at home without turning in on ourselves, without closing our borders to the needs and cries of others? What will democratic collective identities look like in the century of globalisation? (355)

In my exploration of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* as well as Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, I attempt to address a number of

Benhabib's above concerns in terms of what she names, "the new constellation". In particular, I aim to address her concern for establishing solidarity at home without closing our borders to others and to address a greater understanding of the in-flux and dynamic position of women in the twenty-first century, especially in terms of globalisation and emergent forms of travel which cause the female subjects in these autobiographies to re-evaluate their gender identities and negotiate a new sense of self. Consequently, I aim to address Benhabib's concern for attempts to generate coherence of the self as well as the maintenance of fluid ego boundaries. This is especially crucial in the era of globalisation where boundaries are dissolving and where individuals are able to immerse themselves in and engage in multiple cultural contexts concurrently. It is therefore crucial for the individual to obtain a greater understanding of the many cultural contexts she occupies, to use them advantageously, but also more importantly to not let her ethnic traditions and customs dissipate as a result of porous boundaries between geographic and cultural milieus. As I will demonstrate, to achieve this is fundamental to the formulation of one's identity both in terms of the individual and collective self.

## Chapter Two: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is an enchanting and eloquent account of a young Chinese girl who grows up in the United States as a first-generation Chinese-American - the protagonist's parents relocate to the United States from China. The protagonist, although never having lived in China herself, must endure the consequences of straddling two different ways of life concurrently and thus notices discrepancies between the cultures within which she is brought up<sup>22</sup>. She notices the subordinate position that women often occupy (especially in old Chinese traditions) and initially accepts this position due to her youthful naivety. As requested by her parents, she does not inform anyone about her aunt who killed herself in China because of her pregnancy out of wedlock. The female protagonist thus feels her family wants her to participate in her aunt's punishment by not mentioning her death and she has up until now maintained this silence (Kingston 22). The opening chapter, entitled "No Name Woman", evinces the voiceless locality the protagonist as well as her aunt initially occupy and we find that the memoir is an attempt to give voice to her aunt's ghost as well as other metaphorical "ghosts" she herself faces, which are suggestive of her state of limbo between two cultures. It is evident that the protagonist endures an alteration of her own subjectivity, and in particular, a transformation in terms of her gender identity as she makes sense of the expectations required of a female in Chinese tradition as well as in white American culture. She questions notions of "femaleness" as she transgresses the boundaries laid out for her as a Chinese female in a locality which is both foreign and familiar<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> I have made use of the terms "Chinese culture" and "white American culture" throughout this thesis as a means in which to understand the contrasting expectations of females that the protagonist faces. However, such terminology is limiting in itself since it categorizes these cultures in a restricting way as both have many facets or subcultures. I aim to avoid such a duality and oversimplification but, for the purpose of this study I have selected these terms to further emphasize the weight of the tensions dealt with by the protagonist. It is also interesting to note that the protagonist herself in fact essentialises the notion of East versus West, since she refers to "American culture" and "Chinese culture", each as a single and definite culture when both are in fact very diverse in their lived realities.

<sup>23</sup> I argue that the protagonist grows up in a Western environment but she is still not essentially part of white American culture as she is of Chinese ethnicity and thus remains both physically located inside the white American hegemony yet culturally outside. To her, the environment is simultaneously familiar but also foreign.



In the initial chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, we are told the “talk story” of the protagonist’s aunt, which is recalled to her by her mother as a cautionary tale upon her first menstruation in order to warn her of the dangers of falling pregnant. The story is set in “old China” and we learn that her aunt’s life is not her own there, since she is ostracised by the villagers for falling pregnant out of wedlock, even though her conception was the result of rape. Her aunt does not object to the attack imposed by the villagers - she is passive, subservient and decides not to accuse her attacker “[...] that he be punished with her” (Kingston 18). In order to conceal her assailant’s name she gives birth silently in the pigsty; she subsequently takes her life into her own hands and drowns herself as well as her new born baby in the family’s well. The protagonist explains the reasoning behind this tragedy as due to the fact that, in Chinese tradition, males had more worth than females. She states that “[a] family must be whole, faithfully keeping the descent line by having *sons* to feed the old [...] and] who in turn look after the family” (my emphasis) (Kingston 19). Her aunt’s baby was most probably a girl, for she asserts that there is some hope of forgiveness for boys (Kingston 19). From this harsh opening scene we are introduced to the expectations of women in old China - the protagonist’s aunt is never questioned as to how she fell pregnant and the villagers certainly show no sympathy for her even though she is sexually assaulted. They do not consider her part of Chinese society; she is marginalized, and her ultimate decision to end her life seems to be the only right she has been given. The narrator’s words are explicit and piercing in this regard, stating that

[t]o be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder if he masked himself when he joined the raid on her family. (Kingston 14)

The protagonist’s aunt is thus placed into a position where she is considered powerless and suppressed. Her memory is denied by the family though only recalled at times as a warning to young girls. In addition, the protagonist’s mother demands her not to tell anyone that her aunt ever existed and she never learns the name of her aunt and claims that the real punishment was not the raid imposed on her aunt by the villagers, but rather the family’s intentional forgetting of her. Although the protagonist’s mother is the one who initially informs her of the tragedy of her aunt, it is the protagonist herself who recreates the story of her aunt, surmising the events leading

up to her aunt's death. She has partial agency in her articulation of this prohibited story, yet, on the other hand, the reader never learn the female protagonist's own name and this further highlights her indeterminate and submissive position for it seems she is never able to achieve a secure, stable self and instead fluctuates both between, as well as outside, disparate cultures (Cheung 6). In not mentioning her own name, the protagonist directly connects her own position to that of her submissive aunt, articulating her grievances and thus attempting to embody her in order to render her into reality and give her a voice.

It is this opening description of the protagonist's suppressed aunt which defies her parents' wishes for her to remain silent. She seems tolerant of the haunting memory of her aunt for she knows that in order to give voice to her aunt's ghost she must expose the wound, and thus divulge her aunt's story. To this end, the protagonist embraces that which embodies the powerful, liberated figure of the Chinese Woman Warrior, Fa Mu Lan<sup>24</sup>, a mythological figure ironically described to her by her mother, much in contrast to this initial warning she receives about her submissive aunt<sup>25</sup>. In recalling these memories of both her aunt as well as the figure of

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<sup>24</sup> According to Chinese mythology, the story of "Fa Mu Lan" appears as the "Song of Mulan" (see Addendum A). This alteration of the myth's name in Kingston's narrative illustrates both the female protagonist as well as her mother's agency to recreate Chinese culture in this Western locale. Certain male Asian American critics (in particular, Frank Chin who has an ongoing feud with Kingston) have opposed Kingston's work for they argue that Kingston misrepresents Chinese culture for many of the mythological stories she employs are falsities. In discussing Asian American writing, Chin argues that "[f]ake work breeds fake work" for he says that many Asian American authors, including Kingston, falsify Chinese culture (qtd. in Abe 3). He claims that Kingston has altered the "Ballad [Song] of Mulan" and turns it into a lie for he claims that it is untrue that the Chinese would brutally tattoo messages on the backs of women (qtd. in Abe 4). I however tend to agree with theorist King-Kok Cheung, who argues against Chin's concern for cultural purity, and says that Chin ignores one of the most defining characteristics of Asian American literature and ethnic literature generally – that of hybridity, where Asian and Western classics merge in Kingston's works (19). The English translation of the "Ballad of Mulan" in Addendum A of this thesis in fact bears many resemblances to the fictive story of Fa Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior*. The final words of the ballad affirm the position of the woman in society and hence further link to *The Woman Warrior* in that the unnamed protagonist confirms her value as a woman and that she can withstand prevalent sexism in Chinese culture by the end of the narrative. Even though Kingston labels her narrative a memoir, it is important for the reader to carefully consider the fictive element as Kingston is able to infuse new meaning into traditional tales (Cheung 159). This debate will not be touched on during the course of this thesis. Instead, I aim to rather explicate the protagonist's gender as she undergoes a reformulation of her self and thus I will treat the protagonist as if she were significantly distinct from Kingston herself.

<sup>25</sup> The Woman Warrior initially seems to be a figure of liberation for the protagonist. However, we later learn that this figure is in fact a figure contrastingly symbolic of liberation but also of subjugation in that the Woman Warrior is not able to become a fully liberated and autonomous being, but instead, at the end of the talk-story, reverts back to a traditional Chinese role of the woman and mother as her purpose is to bear sons for her husband's family. Further on in the narrative, the reader may draw parallels between the figure of the Woman Warrior and the protagonist's aunt – both are ultimately constrained by the limits of their femaleness within traditionalist contexts. Nonetheless,

the Woman Warrior, the protagonist is able to notice differences in the cultural expectations required of a female in the United States, as opposed to China. In recreating these Chinese memories and myths, the protagonist is able to find a way out of the gendered expectations placed upon her in both contexts because in recalling both the story of Fa Mu Lan and her aunt's memory, a memory considered a social taboo within her Chinese family, she is able to rewrite herself as well as her aunt away from and beyond the boundaries of traditional Chinese tradition. In doing so, she is able to uphold certain elements of traditional Chinese culture and neglect others, which she feels restrict her as a woman. In this attempt, she gives her aunt a known history, as opposed to an invisible, ghostly one, one that is considered unspeakable and which takes the form of a phantom - essentially symbolic of the cultural restrictions and forced silence placed upon her aunt's memory. Memory, and the recollection and modification thereof, is a crucial facet of autobiographies. Olney argues that there are

[...] subtle, and shifting interrelationships between the life imitated or recounted in an autobiography and the faculty of memory (or non-memory) that captures or recaptures, constitutes or reconstitutes that life [...]. ("The Ontology of Autobiography" 237)

Furthermore, Barrett Mandel describes the memory of the past that each individual recalls, and says that " 'the past ... never really existed: it has always been an illusion created by the symbolizing activity of the mind' " (qtd. in Olney, "The Ontology of Autobiography" 237). This quotation by Mandel thus argues that what the subject recalls from the past, is a creation of the mind and thus how the protagonists from the four narratives see themselves and their gender identity in both past and present is also an illusion for they fashion themselves in different ways and continuously recreate who they are.

The question of gender is pertinent to the memoir, since the protagonist reformulates her conception of what it means to be a female as a first generation Chinese-American. She strives to transform herself into a unified being by means of her negotiation of Western thought and her endeavours to write herself out of the expectations of women which restrict her in both cultural localities.

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this semi-emancipatory notion of the Woman Warrior still enables the protagonist to transgress many of the boundaries she faces.

Butler argues that “[...] construction of stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability” and thus it remains necessary for the subject to locate sites of “corporeal permeability” to transcend and deconstruct the impermeable (*Gender Trouble* 132). Such sites refer to the degree to which the subject is able to transgress the boundaries constructed by the hegemony in order to move from the limitations of the outskirts of white American culture towards a more dynamic and in flux position in which she is able to be both inside and outside multiple cultures simultaneously. The female subject is never fully able to situate herself inside the “core” of white American culture solely since her imagined translocation has enabled her to be physically located inside the dominant culture but also simultaneously on its periphery. Butler argues that on the margins of a culture, the subject is inscribed in a region of “[...] *cultural* unruliness and disorder [...]” and it is through this depiction of disorder that subject is able to attempt a unification of the self (*Gender Trouble* 131). The margins are symbolic of the state of limbo the subject occupies, for she is constantly in a position of *transition* between the inside and outside of culture; a position that is not a fixed locality but instead symbolic of flux and fluidity. In accordance with Butler’s point of view, Homi Bhabha argues that “[...] the problem of culture emerges only at the signifiatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are (mis)read or signs misappropriated” (206). Bhabha like Butler, emphasises the problematic accrued on the outskirts of a society as subjects form only a part of a particular culture as they straddle boundaries. Bhabha deems this position the “Third Space”, a space which he argues is both enabling and disabling. This will be examined in more detail further on in this section. Nonetheless, this space is a precarious and ambiguous positioning, since the individual is never fully part of the “core” culture. The degree to which as well as the manner in which the female subject can in fact obtain order and unification by redefining the boundaries of her gender within multiple cultural environments will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

As we have seen above, these restrictions dealt with by the protagonist place her at the margins of both her inherited Chinese custom and also her adoptive American way of life, and thus throughout the narrative we find her straddling very different margins in order to make

herself malleable and to a certain degree occupy both cultures<sup>26</sup>. On the one hand she is marginalised in white American culture where she is seen as a “gook” or a “chink” (Kingston 53), derogatory words used to describe those of Asian descent. She is also marginalized by being a female since the objectification of women in the USA is evident in the narrative and we see that in order to assimilate herself into the white hegemony, she feels that she needs to take on the role of the all-American sorority girl or cheerleader and also turn herself into what she calls “American-pretty” so that the five or six Chinese boys in the class may fall in love with her (Kingston 19). The protagonist feels that in order for these Chinese boys to take notice of her, she needs to comply, both physically as well as intellectually, with what they consider attractive according to American standards. Yet the irony is that these boys are also Chinese and most probably, have equal difficulty immersing themselves into the dominant culture. In addition, the protagonist is marginalised as a female in traditional Chinese culture, since women were considered unworthy and subordinate to men. We see this in the way her patriarchal uncle treats her and her sisters when he offers to take only his grandsons out for shopping. “No girls!” he would shout when they requested to be taken along (Kingston 48). It is thus evident that the protagonist straddles multiple margins as she finds herself restricted as a female in both a white American culture and also as a female in Chinese customs. Butler, referring to Mary Douglas, argues that “[...] social systems are vulnerable at their margins [...]” and that

all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. (emphasis in original) (*Gender Trouble* 132)

These margins which the protagonist occupies are, on the one hand, restrictive, for they place her on the outside of the white hegemonic power, but on the other hand this marginalised position is ironically crucial for the reformulation of her gender identity. Butler’s quote above which describes the vulnerability of individuals, who are at the margins of culture, can be likened to the three protagonists who are vulnerable when positioned at the margins of a social system for they

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<sup>26</sup> The ambiguous position occupied by Kingston’s protagonist can also be seen in Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation* as the female protagonist concurrently straddles Polish and Western culture upon her translocation from Poland to Canada. Similarly, in Magona’s narratives, *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow*, we find the protagonist straddling multiple cultural environments as she grows up in South Africa and translocates to America for study and work. This ambiguous position occupied by the protagonists further intensifies the sense of belonging they strive for.

are not part of the hegemony completely. Although being situated at the margins, this bordered position does help the protagonists re-situate themselves *away* from the margins and *outside* of the cultural restrictions placed upon them. At the margins, the position of the three protagonists examined by this thesis can then be considered unstable and perhaps somewhat dangerous for they threaten to challenge conventional notions of gender of both their traditional culture as well as Western culture. Kingston's protagonist is in a position to challenge and question for she is neither "completely" a Chinese female nor an American female for she is of Chinese ethnicity yet has been born in the USA. She can never completely be either since she is partly both at the same time. This "site of pollution and endangerment" that Butler speaks of also pertains to the ostracised position of the female subject who may be seen by the dominant culture as a threat to its restrictive and regulatory cultural identity. The protagonist's embodiment of the androgynous figure of the Woman Warrior, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is hence a bodily permeability "[...] unsanctioned by the hegemonic order" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 132) in that this figure roams the forests away from the constraints of society. This figure is both sanctioned and unsanctioned by traditional Chinese culture since it fosters the notion of a somewhat liberated female who assassinates patriarchal and abusive men, yet is ironically part of Chinese myth as the story is conveyed to the protagonist by her mother as a traditional and hence partly acceptable figure in Chinese mythology (despite the fact that the figure's name has been slightly changed by the protagonist – see footnote 3). In addition, Fa Mu Lan's myth is not entirely part of white Western culture either, but could only be part of *Asian American* culture (evident of a merging of cultures) and is further unsanctioned and peripheral to the hegemony. However, we do find that the protagonist is able to embody the liberatory<sup>27</sup> elements possessed by Fa Mu Lan, and in doing so is able to permeate (to a certain extent) what the protagonist feels is a liberated and free America as opposed to a restrictive and sexist China, a binary which the protagonist problematises, and does so in order to express the austere nature of these tensions. Therefore, the

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<sup>27</sup> In Hoffman and Magona's narratives we find the protagonists similarly stress the importance of preserving aspects of their "home" culture which liberates them. However, protagonists are equally seen to neglect certain aspects of their culture of origin which they feel restrict them as females. In Hoffman's narrative we find Eva holding on to her valued and worthy sense of femaleness fostered by Polish culture as opposed to the superficiality and objectification expected of females in America. Yet she embraces Western culture for the many opportunities it offers in terms of her career. In Magona's narratives, Sindiwe is seen to continually cultivate a traditional Xhosa sense of friendship in her new locale even though this is seen to be irrelevant in Western culture. Yet on the other hand, Sindiwe is seen to be thankful for her new autonomy and privacy fostered by Western customs, something which she does not have access to in South Africa and certainly does not yearn for while residing in America.

Woman Warrior, a female in a male's disguise, does not embrace a gender specification of either male or female separately but rather *simultaneously* embodies both genders and it is this very notion by which Kingston as an author subverts gender expectations. It is at the margins of which Butler and Bhabha speak of that gender is destabilized and that conventional binary notions of female and male are disrupted.

Similarly, Bourdieu argues against the use of binaries and problematises them in "Social Space and Symbolic Power" for he states that the "[...] world does not present itself as totally structured either, or as capable of imposing upon every perceiving subject the principles of its own construction" (19). Bourdieu thus problematises the binaries of East versus West, inner culture versus outer, male versus female, which Kingston's protagonist employs, and from this statement it is apparent that he sheds light upon the very complex nature of the situation that the protagonist finds herself in, one which cannot simply be reduced to a binary. This is evidently so, since Kingston's protagonist requires tradition and hence her mother's talk-stories to formulate a sense of self, yet on the other hand she uses these stories to free herself from the constraining gender expectations of Chinese women and hence the make up of her identity cannot be founded on a binary but rather on an amalgamation of cultures. Bourdieu further argues that social agents do nonetheless still hold power over other weaker agents but binaries are nevertheless oversimplifications of these structures of power. For Bourdieu, social systems are interconnected and in flux and cannot subscribe to essentialist notions of a complete and whole culture and subjects cannot subscribe to a complete and whole gender, since gender is seen to be a cultural construct. This theory, which he terms "habitus", also acknowledges the need of those at the margins to

transcend the artificial opposition that is created between structures and representations,... [to] break with the mode of thinking which Cassirer (1923) calls substantialist and which inclines one to recognize no reality other than those that are available to direct intuition in ordinary experience. (15)

Moreover, we indeed find the protagonist using the figure of the Woman Warrior in order to grapple with her gender identity and hence transgress what Bourdieu describes as the "artificial opposition" which is socially constructed between cultural structures. The protagonist's yearning for stability or coherence in her gender identity is seen throughout the narrative as the

protagonist contests the expectations of both cultures but nonetheless attempts to translate herself into the white American society and thus conform to its gender expectations. Butler argues that this attempt for stability of the self is seen in literary discourses. She states that

*coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification [...] Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (my emphasis) (Gender Trouble 136)*

As Butler asserts, stability of gender and of the self is desired by the individual and we find that in *The Woman Warrior* this assertion and attempt for stability is played out through identification with the fantastical figure of the Woman Warrior which also becomes a way in which the protagonist can internalise cultural norms. This re-enactment of the mythological figure, an imaginative conception by the protagonist's mother, is thus symbolic of the desire of the protagonist as well as her mother to free themselves from certain cultural restrictions placed on females. The protagonist is challenged by conflicting expectations of both Chinese and American culture and the meaning and necessity of her gender consequently become displaced due to these "cultural orders" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 134). Thus, in order for the female subject to move from the margins of the dominant culture *not* towards the inside of this culture, but instead towards a new cultural and gendered space in order to obtain what she feels is a stable, unified self, she must indeed internalise the cultural norms and expectations of a white American female and simultaneously a Chinese female and must come to reformulate a new gendered identity. We find that the "inner" and "outer" spaces of the white hegemony (those who are occupy the inner culture and those who do not), make sense only with reference to "[...] a mediating boundary that strives for stability" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 134). In other words, the margins between the inside and outside of the dominant culture are pertinent only if the subject strives towards the core, symbolic of a unified and whole way of life. This quest for wholeness is problematic since unification and completeness of the self can never be fully achieved. This is perhaps the reason why the protagonist problematises her position in terms of her marginal location in relation to the hegemony, for it is a way in which she can challenge and hopefully transgress these boundaries but also as a way in which she can create her very own "core". In this process, the protagonist does not simply let go of her Chinese heritage and embrace



American culture as a single cultural order. Instead I aim to show that the protagonist in fact holds on to certain elements of each culture which liberate her rather than restrict her.

The gender of the protagonist is seen to be displaced throughout the memoir as we find her making sense of what it means to be a female according to Chinese customs and what it means to be a female according to white American customs simultaneously. She initially attempts “[...] to turn [herself into] American-feminine” (Kingston 18) and move away from all that is considered “Chinese-feminine”, as a way in which to liberate herself from what she feels are the constraints of traditional Chinese culture. She thus feels that she can only fit<sup>28</sup> into an American culture if she internalises those cultural norms which are associated with the mainstream culture, and thus she begins to alter her behaviour accordingly. Her conception of this duality of both American culture and Chinese culture hence problematises her adaptation since both ways of life are diverse and in flux in their cultural orientations. However, we do find the protagonist attempting to assimilate herself into white American culture, as opposed to an Asian American minority culture and this assimilation is further enforced by the educational system she is placed into – one where women, as mentioned, are expected to become all-American sorority girls. We later learn of the narrator’s bullying of a young Chinese girl whom she threatens and forces to speak. She shouts angrily at her, “Don’t you ever want to be a cheerleader? Or a pompom girl?” to which the Chinese girl remains silent - a clear resistance to this process of assimilation (Kingston 180). This scene conveys the very contradictions prevalent in the narrator’s position since she in fact projects her own resistance to assimilate onto this young Chinese girl for we see her anger and fury when she convinces the young girl to conform to the expectations of females in the West. Yet during this incident, the narrator on the other hand displays an apparent will to assimilate herself, which she feels is a necessity for survival in this cultural locale. She notices that she does in fact have to alter her self in order to conform. The narrator thus contradictorily desires to take on the role of a cheerleader, symbolic of the all-American girl. In addition, she also despises another young Chinese girl whom she hates “[...] for her China doll hair cut” (Kingston 156). The intensity of her dislike of this young Chinese

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<sup>28</sup> This notion of “fitting” further implicates the protagonist’s desire to “assimilate” herself to the Western environment and thus conform to the gender expectations of females. I argue that the protagonist does not simply neglect her Chinese culture but is rather seen to negotiate the ambiguous space she occupies as evident of a intermingling (yet also a clashing) of cultures. The protagonist later dawns upon the realisation that this ambivalent position does not allow her to “assimilate” herself fully.

girl is due to the narrator's objection to the young girl's Chinese femininity which she feels is symbolic of the expectations of Chinese females, against which the narrator objects.

This scene can be likened to Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* where Eva must similarly alter herself and her gender in order to conform to Western culture, even though she equally opposes this alteration. We find Eva's appearance being modified and negotiated by Western women<sup>29</sup> in the community. Eva notes that she has to alter her physical appearance in order to become more desirable in the customs of the West. She is careful not to open her lips too widely for this may smudge her lipstick and we learn of her instability when wearing high-heeled shoes someone gave her. With every transformation, Eva finds herself feeling "[...] less agile and self-confident" (Hoffman 109). As in Kingston's text, we similarly see the ambiguous position occupied by Eva when she states that she is an off-centered person "[...] who wants both to be taken in and to fend off the threatening others" (Hoffman 110).

In contrast to Kingston's protagonist questioning her identity as a female in a white American environment, we find her questioning her aunt's practice of altering her appearance in order to make her husband happy many years ago in old China. Her aunt is described to the reader as standing "[a]t the mirror combing individuality into her bob" (Kingston 16). As though restricting herself in order to please, in order to be subservient and to do so, she thus has to deny aspects of her self. Her aunt even digs out a freckle on her chin with a hot needle, as the almanac said this mark on her face predestined her for unhappiness. One can question whether the protagonist, like her aunt, will undergo similar drastic changes to her appearance in order to be accepted, not into a patriarchal Chinese way of life but into white Western way of life. The protagonist does soon notice that in order for her negotiation of Western culture to be successful, she too, like the Fa Mu Lan, needs to partly step away from her family and from old Chinese traditions but also to conform in part to the expectations of the American hegemony.

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<sup>29</sup> It is peculiar to note that this is instigated by females and not males who impose gender expectations onto all three protagonists - Eva, Sindiwe and Kingston's protagonist. Because of this, protagonists are able to note the expectations of females only from the perspective of other females for the role of men in all four narratives is minimal. This makes one question the importance of the role of females in passing down cultural norms and gender expectations for the males (particularly in Kingston and Magona's texts) are seen to be working and do not bear much interest in the fostering of culture in females. Perhaps this is due to the prevalent sexism evident in Sindiwe's traditional Xhosa culture and in Kingston's protagonist's traditional Chinese culture, as males are seen to significantly underestimate the importance of the female.

Throughout the chapter entitled “White Tigers”, we find numerous descriptions of the Woman Warrior as recalled through Chinese “talk-story”, or fairytale, by the protagonist’s mother. She informs her daughter of the figure of the Woman Warrior who once fought off soldiers in the forests of China, and for whom leaving her family and the village was the only means of survival during wartime. These talk-stories pertain to old China and her mother uses them as a way in which to reminisce about the past when she lived in Asia years ago. They are also a way in which the protagonist herself can engage with the traditional elements<sup>30</sup> of her Chinese culture - the only way she may indeed be able to experience these elements since, unlike her mother, she has grown up in the United States. The narrative is thus seen to be postmodern in that it contrasts scenes of Chinese talk-stories with scenes from the protagonist’s real life as a young Chinese girl in a western context. Kingston’s text is illustrative of two parallel narratives which operate concurrently. On the one hand, we find tales of the past, talk-stories told to the protagonist by her mother, who is symbolic of oral Chinese tradition which then transmits cultural history to her daughter. Here we find tales of the supernatural, of ghosts and of the mythological figure of Fa Mu Lan all relating to traditional Chinese culture. These talk-stories utilize elements of magic realism, a genre which often articulates the perspectives of marginalized subjects. In addition, the magic realism mode uses a

mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre [together with] skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. (Cuddon 522)

On the other hand, the narrative utilises a realist narrative mode which, in contrast to the magic realism of the talk-stories, is symbolic of the protagonist’s own contemporary life in America as a young girl. Kingston thus consciously formulates a generic binary within her narrative since we find the talk-stories to be symbolic of the exotic, the illogical, the fantastical, that which is traditional in terms of culture and hence stereotypically “Eastern” and feminine. In contrast to

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<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in Magona’s narratives, Sindiwe employs traditional Xhosa songs and stories in the narrative in order to preserve her culture of origin for she resides in a locale situated away from her “home” in South Africa, yet she simultaneously combines these elements with her experience of modernity and the West thereby creating a mingling and merging of multiple cultures.

this we find the protagonist's own life as a young girl to be evident of modernity and the "West", that which is stereotypically symbolic of the rational<sup>31</sup>, the logical, the contemporary and the masculine. Bhabha states that "[t]he enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address" (207). Bhabha notes the problems that attach to processes of cultural representation, which he argues is furthered in the articulation of difference. Bhabha argues against binaries, which emphasise difference and proclaims that "[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other" (207) and this makes one question the deployment of dualities in Kingston's text. In the light of Bhabha's claims, Kingston problematises cultural difference but more importantly, gender, by employing binaries in her narrative. Yet, although the protagonist in Kingston's text problematises these binaries, she does so as a strategy by means of which to dramatise and foreground tensions felt as a result of her straddling of multiple cultures. In using binaries she conveys the tensions felt by the narrator but at the same time uses them to show how the narrator is required to negotiate her own notion of gender in order to enter into white American society. In employing such dualities and blurring the boundaries between them, the protagonist is able to traverse the tensions between realism and fantasy, between traditional Chinese culture and Western culture and hence reformulate her sense of self. Such a duality is evident when the protagonist experiences much tension for she is compelled to remember her tradition and uphold it but also, in order to remain accepted by the white American hegemony, needs to push her Chinese culture towards the margins:

To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are Chinese, the language of impossible stories.  
(Kingston 82)

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note how Kingston subverts the notion of the West as rational since the protagonist and her family's lives are seen to be irrational at times due to the tension of the indeterminate position they occupy as Chinese Americans. This tension can be evidently seen when Moon Orchid troubles Western rationality as she moves to America from China and is unversed in American ways. When her sister, Brave Orchid (the protagonist's mother), suggests that she confront her husband who left her years ago and who moved to America, Moon Orchid is unable to do so. To Brave Orchid, confronting Moon Orchid's husband would have been the only right thing to do, to demand that she be his wife again and confront him even though he is remarried to another woman. Yet for Moon Orchid, confronting him would be unnecessary and irrational and would go against her Chinese ways as a subservient and pleasing wife. Here we find Western notions of rationality to be challenged by Moon Orchid who goes on to become an institutionalised woman for she is unable to adjust and alter her subjectivity to Western customs (Kingston 119).

It is interesting to note that the parallel narratives, which subsequently further emphasize the binary of East versus West, operate in a mirrored way, since the talk-stories told to the protagonist by her mother reflect the realist narrative in which the protagonist describes her life in the USA. The reader notices a number of mirroring and overlapping techniques which Kingston employs as a way in which to show the interconnectedness of the worlds she describes and their impact on her. They are also simultaneously used to demonstrate the blurring of boundaries between the real and the fantastical, a technique employed in postmodernist and magical realist narratives. For instance, characters in her mother's talk-stories appear in the narrative but concurrently appear in a different form in the realist narrative, inviting the reader to draw parallels between the narratives. The protagonist's grandfather, who is misogynistic and denies the presence of his granddaughters, takes the form of the patriarchal baron who appears in the protagonist's mother's talk-story. The baron, like her grandfather, is cruel towards women as he states that "Girls are maggots in the rice" and that it "[...] is more profitable to raise geese than daughters" (Kingston 45). In addition, he locks women away in a dark room and they become weak and frail "[...] like pheasants that have been raised in the dark for soft meat" (Kingston 46). Here we see an indirect link to that of the protagonist's grandfather who denies the very existence of his granddaughters. Such links are numerous in the memoir and, as Rey Chow notes, are a feature of postmodern texts serving to invite interchangeability for "[...] that which is active and that which is passive, and so forth, become interchangeable positions" as boundaries are seen to dissolve ("Postmodern Automatons" 102).

By using this narrative style Kingston is also able to further emphasize the tensions the protagonist undergoes as she straddles different worlds but also as a way in which to show both at the same time, the interconnectedness as well as the disparities between these cultures. It is through these parallel narrative modes that the protagonist is able to embody her aunt's memory in order to draw parallels with her very own life, and thus partially give her aunt a voice. Gusdorf argues that the purpose of autobiography is to reconstruct "[...] the unity of a life across time" (37). He goes on to state that events influence us, determine who we are but also always limit us (37). Furthermore, Gusdorf beautifully states that

[t]oday's comprehensive psychology has taught us that man, far from being subject to ready-made, completed situations given from outside and without him, is the essential agent in bringing about the

situations in which he finds himself placed. It is his intervention that structures the terrain where his life is truly lived and gives it its ultimate shape, so that the landscape is truly, in Amiel's phrase, "a state of the soul." (37)

Thus, the narrative is a means in which the author is able to reconstruct the events of her life through use of the protagonist and other characters which may be fictional or non-fictional to a certain extent. In Kingston's narrative, the Woman Warrior can be seen as a fictitious character, a kind of alter-ego for the protagonist, who embodies some of her noble characteristics. Ultimately, the protagonist upholds and admires the courage and strength of the Woman Warrior who features in her mother's most significant talk-story as a way in which to surpass the restrictions placed on her aunt. She considers the figure of the Woman Warrior as one with whom she can identify. Yet it is only towards the very end of the memoir that she partly embodies the characteristics of this figure. We see the protagonist marvelling at the position of the swordswomen who, according to the talk-story, once raged across China and who would retaliate should anybody hurt their families and she then wonders whether women were once dangerous that they had to have their feet bound (Kingston 25). The protagonist disrupts age-old patriarchal notions that assume Chinese females would have their feet bound in order to conform to perceptions of beauty as petite and to please their husbands. She thus reverses these notions in favour of Chinese females, whom she feels might have been so powerful, perhaps more powerful than men, that they needed to be constrained in this drastic way. The idea of the bound feet represents those who do not have the freedom to roam as the Woman Warrior does. Hence, the protagonist is able to partly free herself from the constraints of traditional Chinese culture. Like the Woman Warrior, she is partly able to bypass cultural impositions, which like the bound feet, are restricting on one's gender. She is able to partly break away from such restrictions in order to formulate a new cultural space for herself.

The protagonist then goes on to recall the actions of the Woman Warrior who, from her own perspective, roams the forests, as though she herself were indeed the Woman Warrior. It is here that we judge the distinction between the protagonist and the Woman Warrior to become somewhat blurred as we find her taking on these characteristics in order to empower herself in this predominantly white cultural context. It is ironic that her mother, the one who we find wants to locate her daughter in a conventional, subservient position due to cultural dictates, is the one who gives her the imagination to recreate this powerful figure in her mind, and who gives her the

tools for her survival<sup>32</sup>. Her mother claims that her daughter “[...] would grow up a wife and slave,” yet the protagonist notices the irony of this when she says “[...] but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan [and thus] I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (Kingston 26). She thus notices that her mother, who constrains her to be subservient (as the conditions of old Chinese culture requires of Chinese females), in fact gives her the imagination to free herself to a certain extent from the subordinate role to which Chinese females were consigned.

In addition, the protagonist observes linguistic discrepancies between the two ways of life. She observes linguistic differences which further sexist notions of traditional Chinese culture for she claims that “[t]here is a Chinese word for the female *I* – which is ‘slave’ ” (Kingston 49). The protagonist hence attempts to rebel against this position by refusing to cook and, upon washing dishes as a child, she purposely breaks one or two in rebellion. When adults ask her what she wants to be when she grows up, she replies that she wants to be a lumberjack in Oregon (Kingston 49). This further highlights her adoption of a masculine guise necessary for her survival as a Chinese female in a white American context, a reformulation of her marginal position which is very much necessary for her to recreate and reimagine the boundaries posed by both cultures. Even though she is situated in the United States she feels that “[e]ven now China wraps double binds around [her] feet” (Kingston 49). Old Chinese tradition and subordination of females still permeates this foreign landscape and such subordination is also evident in American customs as she finds herself conforming to Western expectations of females. It is essential for her as a Chinese American to embrace certain attributes of the Woman Warrior which she finds desirable for her liberation. This fantastical reinvention of herself is reminiscent of what Butler notes about gendered assertions of the self. Butler argues that the

redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence

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<sup>32</sup> In Hoffman’s narrative, the role of the mother is significantly different from Kingston’s for she is not seen to transfer gender restrictions (of orthodox Jewish females) onto her children (Hoffman 9). Instead, she attempts to liberate her children and educate them for she herself was never allowed to be educated as a Jewish woman. Unlike Kingston’s protagonist’s mother, Eva’s mother is protective of her children in their foreign locale yet simultaneously both desires for them to adjust to Western culture but also maintain their Polish culture. Kingston’s protagonist’s mother instead attempts to partly constrain her daughter and enforce onto her traditional Chinese culture, instead of allowing her attempts at intermingling the different cultures she occupies.

and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. (*Gender Trouble* 135)

Butler's notion of gender as performative is useful here since we find the female protagonist using this figure of Fa Mu Lan, a figure of fantasy, as a way in which to enact but also transcend the expectations of gender placed upon her. Upon hearing a sexist remark by an emigrant villager to her mother, the protagonist screams: “ ‘I'm not a bad girl' [...] I might as well have said, 'I'm not a girl.' ” (Kingston 48). On the one hand the protagonist desires to be freed of the sexism prevalent in traditional Chinese culture; she does so in a resentfully sarcastic way, in what appears as a negation of her role as a female. Conversely, she is able to recreate herself *not* through the denial of her femininity but instead through the *embodiment* of the figure of the Woman Warrior who appears to bear both masculine and feminine qualities and not simply one or the other. It can then be argued that by enacting this androgynous figure of the Woman Warrior, evident of a unique composite of both genders, the protagonist is able to surpass the cultural restrictions on females in old Chinese culture *and* of those associated with masculine privileged cultural practices within the USA. As Butler notes in the quotation above, the construction of the gender of the subject is constituted through “[...] a series of denials and exclusions which signify absences” (*Gender Trouble* 135). The gendered identity of the female is thus dependent on denials or exclusions, through which she is able to construct her gender. Because the protagonist is in part rejected or denied by both Chinese and American customs as an Asian American woman, she is indeed able to reconstruct her gender by means of her exclusion in a traditional Chinese culture and a Western culture. Thus, we find the protagonist embracing the role of the androgynous Woman-Warrior-in-America, as a means in which to disrupt binaries of masculine and feminine in order to destabilize conventional notions of gender.

Like the protagonist, Fa Mu Lan is restricted as a woman in traditional Chinese culture, and thus she feels that it may be necessary to in fact disguise herself in order to be accepted in both cultures. Similarly, the protagonist needs to conceal her femininity in Chinese culture in order to resist the patriarchal displacement of the female. On the other hand, the protagonist must conform to the gender expectations of the dominant culture and again in a way “disguise” herself as an all-American female, thereby supplementing her external feminine appearance in order to be accepted by the authoritative culture. Fa Mu Lan's gender, similarly to the protagonist's, is



somewhat androgynous in conception. This is evident when Fa Mu Lan and her husband make a sling for her baby boy inside all her armour. The sling

was made of red satin and purple silk; the four paisley straps that tied across my breasts and around my waist ended in housewife's pockets lined with a coin, a seed, a nut, and a juniper leaf [...] I walked bowed, and the baby warmed himself against me, his breathing in rhythm with mine, his heart beating like mine. (Kingston 43)

From this segment it is evident that the Woman Warrior must cleverly disguise herself as a man and, underneath all her armour, the baby is strapped to her body and we find that even her uniform is lined with housewife's pockets. This image shows the very contradictions inherent in Fa Mu Lan's disguise as a warrior and thus her simultaneous masculine and feminine appearance is evident of a co-existence of both genders in a single body. Butler argues that in order to "[...] redeploy the categories of identity, an articulation of a *convergence* of multiple sexual discourses at the site of 'identity' is necessary in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic" (my emphasis) (*Gender Trouble* 128). The multiple sexual discourses which Kingston employs in her narrative thereby fashion the position of the female subject as problematic, for this ultimately disrupts heterosexual notions of gender and sexuality. Butler further argues that the heterosexual construction of gender as governed by mores in itself allows for the "[...] deregulation of such exchanges [which] accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all" (*Gender Trouble* 133). Both Fa Mu Lan and the protagonist question their gender and their physical gendered appearance and disrupt the boundaries of gender in their androgynous reformulation of their selves. As in Butler's argument, this deregulation of the heterosexual construction of gender causes the boundaries of gender to be disrupted but also causes the subject to question what it means to be a gendered body. Butler's argument asserts gender as a cultural construct, for the protagonist's negotiation of a Western *environment* is thus paradoxically dependent on her acceptance of the *Chinese* Woman Warrior as a figure of liberation and freedom, but also as an androgynous figure.

The first thing we learn about the androgynous Warrior is that an older man and woman intend to look after her and train her to become a warrior but she must indeed leave her family and live in the forest with them in order to learn the skills of a warrior. It is interesting to note

that the very first thing she learns which will enable her to become a warrior is how to be quiet so that the deer will not run away (Kingston 28). The Woman Warrior thus uses this silence as a tool with which to hunt and with which to fight. She carefully observes her surroundings and from this careful consideration she is able to skilfully take advantage of any battle situation. This hushed behaviour she learns as a warrior can be likened to the female protagonist's own subdued and often mute behaviour as a young child. The protagonist states that

[w]hen I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent. A dumbness – a shame – still cracks my voice in two [...] It spoils my day with self-disgust when I hear my broken voice come skittering out into the open. It makes people wince to hear it. (149)

The protagonist notes that in school other Chinese girls did not talk either and so she realises that the silence has to do with being a Chinese girl in a western context and not in only being a Chinese female for we are told that unlike her own subdued behaviour, “[n]ormal Chinese women’s voices are strong and bossy” (Kingston 155). Yet the protagonist is by no means a “normal” Chinese girl, for she has been brought up to straddle multiple cultures and not simply Chinese culture. This silence the protagonist experiences is thus a silence that can be associated with lack of self esteem and inferiority for she does not have the tools with which to understand her environment as she is unable to speak English. In addition to this, Cheung argues that the protagonist’s silence and “[...] confusion stems from *differences* in cultural evaluations of silence” which the protagonist has to negotiate (emphasis in original) (82). On the one hand, we are told by the protagonist that: “We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans” (Kingston 155). This whispering is evident of the protagonist’s determination and necessity to adjust to the Western hegemony. Yet her subdued behaviour can be simultaneously likened to that of the subdued behaviour of Fa Mu Lan. Unlike the Warrior, though, the protagonist’s silence is seen as a sign of weakness and submission whereas the silence employed by the Warrior is an instrument of power and domination. The protagonist’s silence is not always seen as a sign of weakness and insecurity, for this is seen to change dramatically during the course of the narrative. The chapter titles are evident of this transition the protagonist undergoes, for the initial chapter is entitled “No Name Woman” and the final chapter “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”. What begins as a tale of a silenced woman turns into a song, and hence, an articulation and praise of another Chinese

mythological figure, Ta'ai Yen, who unlike Fa Mu Lan (who remains partly subordinate in her position towards the end of the talk-story), is able to fully liberate herself from cultural restrictions. According to Cheung, Ta'ai Yen is able to achieve "[...] immortal fame by singing about her exile" (Kingston 95). Even though there is a disjunction between the evaluations of silence in the protagonist's Chinese culture and in her American culture, she is able to use these different cultural expectations to her advantage for she is able to recreate both herself but also tradition from the tensions which arise from disjunctions between multiple cultural environments. We are told in the final pages of the memoir – "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I am also a story-talker. The beginning is hers, the ending mine" (Kingston 184). The protagonist is initially silenced in her everyday environment as a result of this continual, fluid state of translation, amalgamation and entangled position. Yet one notes the definite transition the female protagonist undergoes during the narrative, as her silence progressed to an articulate voice, one in which stories are combined, altered and renewed. Bhabha theorises silence as potentially enabling and disabling. He argues that cultural performance is dramatised in the "[...] common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition (énoncé) and the subject of enunciation" (207). Bhabha argues that the production of meaning requires these two places to be "[...] mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (208). Bhabha further argues:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. (208)

As Bhabha argues above, it is evident that discourse and culture are closely linked and that the silence experienced by Kingston's protagonist is a result of her ambiguous cultural positioning in what Bhabha calls the Third Space, since her home language is somewhat suppressed due to the imposition of English as a language in the United States. In this Third Space the protagonist cannot sufficiently articulate herself and therefore becomes silent as a way in which to negotiate western culture.

The inarticulateness of the protagonist is seen as a recurring theme in the memoir, it is only towards the end of the narrative that the reader learns more about the source of the protagonist's silence. We learn that her fraenum was cut off directly after her birth by her own mother - an act which restricted her ability to speak. The protagonist sees this act imposed on her in different ways. On the one hand, she feels proud that her mother committed such a powerful act upon her, which shows her mother's courage and power over her daughter to influence her along the lines of tradition (Kingston 148). Although, at other times, she is terrified for she cannot conceive how her mother could perform such a destructive act upon first seeing her own daughter. The protagonist inquires and asks her mother why such an act was performed on her and her mother claims that she did it so that she would not be tongue-tied and would be able to speak many different languages and pronounce different accents. Her mother also claims that since her "[...] fraenum looked too tight to do those things, she [had to] cut it" (Kingston 148). Her mother thus cuts the fraenum as a way in which to liberate her daughter from societal constraints and as a way in which to expose her to other customs and languages. Whether the protagonist herself views this act in the same light is debatable and she states that the Chinese perceive "[...] a ready tongue [to be] an evil" (Kingston 148), thus questioning the act as a way in which to place the protagonist in a submissive and silenced position.

This act of violence, of severing the protagonist's fraenum, can be likened to the manner in which the parents of the Woman Warrior inflict violence on her body when she returns home to visit them. They impose this pain onto her by carving their names and addresses with sharp blades on Fa Mu Lan's back. Her father states that "[w]e are going to carve revenge on your back, [...so that wherever] you go, whatever happens to you, people will know our sacrifice" (Kingston 38). This statement highlights an explicit, physical and metaphorical fusion of tradition on the body of the Woman Warrior. Although Fa Mu Lan's position is illustrative of a liberated being who roams the forests away from social constraints, we also find her position still to be very much entrenched in the old Chinese society for she is left with physical scars on her, bearing the identities of her family. We also later see the Warrior returning to a more traditional role as a Chinese female when she returns home to her husband's family in order to conform to tradition and bear them sons. However, the pain inflicted on the Warrior is done as a physical reminder of her parents' sacrifice and as a means in which Fa Mu Lan will always remember her

true origin but also her true identity as a Chinese female, unlike the pain inflicted on the protagonist. Like the Warrior's parents, the protagonist's mother feels that this act of violence is a necessity. The protagonist's mother (and not her father),<sup>33</sup> severs the fraenum as she feels this is a liberatory act to unshackle her from the limits of her culture. This is a particularly interesting observation since both characters, one way or the other, remain somewhat tied to their customs. It is also significant that in the talk-story, both parents inflict pain on the Warrior, yet in the contemporary story, when the protagonist's fraenum is cut it is only her mother who inflicts this pain and not her father. This makes the reader question the role of the protagonist's father in continuing tradition as we mainly find that her mother is the one through whom cultural conventions are orally (through means of the talk-stories) as well as physically conveyed to the protagonist. Butler argues that "[...] cultural meanings are inscribed on the body" and she states:

the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related[.] Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. (emphasis in original) (*Gender Trouble* 8)

It is the body as a passive medium to which I wish to draw attention here. The protagonist initially displays passive qualities in order to observe hegemonic cultural expectations required of a female but also sees silence as something pertinent to Chinese girls in an Anglicised environment. As Butler argues, it is clear that the body is a medium which possesses a set of cultural meanings and that before these meanings are acquired by the individual who becomes a gendered subject, the body does not have a signified existence. This idea can be likened to Kingston's protagonist who, in order to acquire a signified, cultural existence in American culture, seems to become a partially passive instrument on which cultural and gender meanings are to be inscribed. This harsh act of cutting the protagonist's fraenum can be considered one of the many marks of gender imposed on her, which she herself feels, is conducted in order to render her voiceless.

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<sup>33</sup> As mentioned, the absence of the father figure in this contemporary story is evident and in general, the role of males is minimal in the narrative. The father figure seems to be an inarticulate being, positioned away from his daughter and his family in the narrative as he bears the burden of running a Laundromat. He is not seen to convey sexist notions of females as traditional Chinese culture requires of him. Instead, the protagonist's grandfather is seen to convey these sexist notions onto his granddaughters. Perhaps this can be due to the fact that the protagonist's grandfather has not immersed himself into the cultural ways of the West, where females are increasingly liberated. The father most probably conforms more with Western customs for he is able to negotiate the Western terrain much easier than others as he underwent translocation long before his wife and family moved to America.

This silence that the protagonist utilizes can also be seen in a different manner and pertains to the expectations of the mainstream culture which requires of her to be increasingly passive and unresponsive in her speech as opposed to Chinese communication which is perceived as loud (Kingston 18). Here the reader may question whether in fact the gendered alteration that the protagonist undergoes as a result of her parents transnational translocation is in fact emancipatory to her, since it seems that once again she is silenced into a subordinate position as a female in western society. She begins to increasingly comply with American expectations of females and we even find the protagonist recalling an image of her mother “[w]alking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese-feminine)” (Kingston 18). The protagonist thus notices that in order to conform, she too, like her mother, must turn herself into American-feminine. This process demonstrates the definite *cultural* construct in terms of which the protagonist becomes a gendered self, a process which is indeed continuous, fraught and never final.

The Woman Warrior not only uses silence to her advantage in order to connect with her natural surroundings as opposed to succumbing to familial roles, we too find her use of silent mimicry of the behaviour of owls and bats be equated to the process of adaptation to a new cultural space where Kingston’s protagonist finds herself silenced as she makes sense of the tensions between two cultures. The mimicry of both American gender and behavioural norms the protagonist adopts is a way in which she can affiliate herself with other Americans and hence transform herself into what she feels is an American female. However, a complete transformation into an American female is not possible for the protagonist since her previously acquired gendered identity cannot simply be ushered away, for this past identity plays a large role in the formation of the present identity. As Butler notes, “[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (emphasis in original) (*Gender Trouble* 140). It is this stylized repetition and mimicry of the animals through which the Warrior comes to formulate a temporary and increasingly shifting gender identity and not a stable, absolute locus.

Upon returning to the forest, Fa Mu Lan prepares herself for battle and here we see the Woman Warrior taking on additional masculine and feminine characteristics in order to negotiate her environment. In doing so, she reinscribes conventional gender roles required by Chinese culture. She states that “I put on men’s clothes and armour and tied my hair in a man’s fashion” and the villagers comment on how beautiful *she* looks (Kingston 39). The villagers comment on the aesthetic nature of the Warrior’s masculine attire or “drag” and praise her for this co-existence of both genders. However, Fa Mu Lan does place herself in grave danger by dressing like a soldier for we find that the “Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or [even] students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations” (Kingston 42). In order to survive, Fa Mu Lan has to adopt exterior masculine characteristics in addition to her female attributes while underneath maintaining her femininity.

We are told that the Warrior has a husband who was her childhood friend and was chosen by her parents to marry her. In this way, she is fortunate that she could be married off to someone she knew and loved. She also falls pregnant and “[...] hid from battle only once, when [she] gave birth to [their] baby” (Kingston 42). This reflects Fa Mu Lan’s prominent masculine qualities to endure battles right up until the birth of her baby as well as after its birth while performing the quintessential female reproductive function. Even later, when the baby starts to grow, she tells her husband to take the baby to his family so they can look after it before he is old enough to recognise her (Kingston 43). She does this in contrast to the protagonist’s tragic aunt who does not feel that there is a way out of her situation and as mentioned drowns herself and the baby in the well. In this regard, Fa Mu Lan shows characteristics of strength and determination to engage with dehumanising, misogynistic forces. In contrast to the protagonist’s aunt, Fa Mu Lan’s baby is born a boy which makes the reader question the possible outcome, had her baby also been a girl. It is peculiar to note that at the end of this talk-story told to the protagonist by her mother, the Woman Warrior returns to her parents-in-law and says that she will stay with them, doing farm work and housework and provide them with more sons (Kingston 47), hence complying with the traditional Chinese expectations of femininity. This ending of her mother’s talk-story problematises the figure of the Woman Warrior for the protagonist, since the ending does not in fact emancipate Fa Mu Lan, as she feels she must continue to serve dutifully as a subjugated Chinese woman and not as a liberated figure. The

protagonist on the other hand does in fact transgress<sup>34</sup> her mother's talk-story of the Woman Warrior since she herself obtains a more fluid position than Fa Mu Lan, who at the end of the talk-story, is confined by the restrictions placed on women (this will be discussed more fully below). It is important to note that without this story, the protagonist may have never been able to transgress such boundaries and, therefore, the story eventually gives her access to emancipation.

The links between the protagonist and the Woman Warrior are crucial since the protagonist's identification with the Warrior articulates her desire to possess strength as an autonomous figure. She states that

[t]he swordswoman and I are not dissimilar [...] What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families'. The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words – 'chink' words and 'gook' words too – that they do not fit on my skin. (emphasis in original) (Kingston 53)

Consequently, the protagonist consciously draws attention to the similarities between herself and the swordswoman. They both bear words carved at their backs – the Warrior bears physical scars from the sharp blades on her back which bear the names and identities of her family, whom she is asked never to forget. The protagonist, on the other hand, bears imaginary words on her back – carved into her self as a metaphorical burden of Chinese cultural expectations which are not entirely appropriate in the Western locale. These imaginary words inscribed onto the protagonist could also refer to the derogatory phrases such as "chink" and "gook" used by individuals in the USA to refer to people of Asian decent, in particular, referring to the protagonist who appears to be an outsider. By claiming that the "[...] reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (Kingston 53), she claims that her telling of the story is a way in which she can expose the ghosts of the past. The recreation of the talk-stories is thus of vital importance in order for her to recreate her self as a Chinese-American female. She claims that her telling of both her aunt's as well as her own story is a way in which she can make sense of her Chinese ancestral past but also of her Western present and she does this by retelling her mother's talk-

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<sup>34</sup> I will show later on in my argument exactly how she transgresses the boundaries and will also show, using Bhabha's essay "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences" that she creates a new space for herself, a Third Space, as a Chinese-American female.



stories, re-creating and altering them in parallel to her American life. The vengeance, she finds, is her reporting which allows her to enter into white American thought, not through assimilation but by the re-creation of the two worlds she concurrently straddles.

As I have shown, the protagonist's identification with the Woman Warrior as well as her imitation of androgyny signifies a co-existence of both genders as a way in which she can surpass the restrictive conventional notions of gender. This co-existence of genders is also a necessary act in order for the protagonist as well as her mother to negotiate American culture in terms of Chinese culture and we even find the protagonist's mother noting the effects of this transnational translocation on her own gender identity. She states that

[...] '[t]his is terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away,' she said. 'Even the ghosts work, no time for acrobatics. I have not stopped working since the day the ship landed. I was on my feet the moment the babies were out. In China I never even had to hang up my own clothes. I shouldn't have left, but your father couldn't have supported you without me. I'm the one with the big muscles.' [...] 'I didn't need muscles in China. I was small in China.' (Kingston 97)

In the USA we find Brave Orchid helping her husband run the family laundry, a position which she feels she would never have had, had she still lived in China where she would not have had to work at all. She also disregards her masculine qualities, which she has had to adopt in this foreign locality. Her "big muscles" are evident of the hard labour she endures in the USA whereas in China, being small is seen as being beautiful and feminine. It is as though her mother has to take on increased masculine qualities, in conjunction with her feminine qualities, in order for her negotiation of an American way of life to be successful.

This co-existence of genders the protagonist and her mother adopt are similar to the guise the Warrior adopts and such a guise is theorized by Butler who claims that in imitating gender, the adoptive drag reveals the structure of gender as a cultural conception. Butler furthers this argument by stating that

there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis

[...] and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (*Gender Trouble* 137 – 138)

The Warrior thus performs androgyny which, as Butler notes, in fact reveals the imitative structure of gender itself and it is for this reason that we can come to the realization that gender is in fact a performed, social construction. The androgynous nature of the Warrior is, consequently, not an essence which is expressed or internalised; rather, gender is a continuous construction and not an objective ideal to which the protagonist or her mother aspire.

Brave Orchid’s position in the USA as opposed to China is evident in many scenes in the narrative which demonstrate a shift from a traditional Chinese way of life to an increasingly modern lifestyle. Such a translocation makes the characters question their femininity and what it means to be a woman. We also see this questioning in how Brave Orchid reacts to her sister, Moon Orchid<sup>35</sup>, who moves to the USA with her children. Brave Orchid finds Moon Orchid to be submissive and obedient since she does not want to harass her husband who left her years ago to work in the USA and who has never contacted her since. As suggested by her sister, Moon Orchid does not want to make him feel bad about leaving his mother and father. She does not want to scare him or throw out the second wife’s belongings. Moon Orchid proclaims, “Oh, no, I can’t do that. I can’t do that at all. That’s terrible.” Brave Orchid then replies: “Of course you can. I’ll teach you” (Kingston 116). We later find Moon Orchid unable to adapt to the United States as a middle aged, submissive Chinese female - she is rendered voiceless, becomes paranoid and eventually ends up in a mental asylum. We find that Moon Orchid is completely displaced and her spirit is “[...] scattered all over the world” (Kingston 141). Through the character of Brave Orchid, Kingston, as author, questions the ability of the Chinese female to transgress the boundaries of both customs upon undergoing such a transnational translocation. One can perhaps argue that Moon Orchid is unable to adjust due to her late translocation to the West as opposed to Brave Orchid and her family who were relatively youthful when they underwent translocation. This suggests that Brave Orchid and her family are not as set in Chinese ways as Moon Orchid is since the latter has spend a greater period of her life in China.

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<sup>35</sup> Although the sisters are seen to disagree on certain issues, their closeness is evident in the autobiography and this is further echoed in the similarity of their names. The name Brave Orchid symbolises her courage which is seemingly lacking in her sister, Moon Orchid. The name Moon Orchid symbolises her strong link to tradition and what is natural and normal to her and hence her reluctance towards Brave Orchid’s Western values.

Perhaps it is indeed the protagonist's creation of a new space which enables her to transgress the restrictions placed upon her. We find her embodying characteristics of the Woman Warrior when she opposes her mother's idea that she is unintelligent and useless. She states:

Not everybody thinks I'm nothing. I am not going to be a slave or a wife. Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won't let you turn me into a slave or a wife. I'm getting out of here. I can't stand living here any more. It's your fault I talk weird [...]. And I'm not going to Chinese school anymore. I'm going to run for office at American school and I'm going to join clubs [...]. And I can't stand Chinese school anyway; the kids are rowdy and mean, fighting all night. And I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories [...]. I can't tell what's real and what you make up. (Kingston 180)

This quotation makes it evident that certain Chinese ways become insignificant in the USA now, for her mother's stories bear no logic to her. We also find the protagonist's urge to be released from the cultural constraints of a Chinese female as well as her desire to achieve liberation associated with the West. The protagonist finds she "[...] had to leave home in order to see the world logically" similar to the Warrior who leaves her family in order to become a liberated and partially autonomous being. It is at this point that we find the protagonist partly adjusting to the dominant culture for she states:

[c]oncrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodic tables, TV dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (Kingston 182)

Her adjustment is not assimilation as she does not abandon her Chinese culture. In fact we find her using Chinese traditions in order to reconfigure her femaleness. In the closing scene of the memoir she states: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I am also a story-talker. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine" (Kingston 184). This can be contrasted to the opening words of the narrative where her mother tells her, "You must not tell anyone" (Kingston 11) about the story of her aunt who killed herself in China. This comparison is evidence of a modification and shift in the female's subjectivity and we find the closing lines of the narrative to be an indication of the narrator's own ability to finally translate

and recreate herself as an individual stemming from two contrasting cultures. Bhabha argues that there is no such thing as a true national culture and that subjects are able to create a Third Space as a way in which to enter into a dominant global culture but also as a way in which to retain one's ethnic culture. Bhabha argues that the Third Space is a way of

conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of cultures *hybridity*. (emphasis in original) (209)

In other words, Bhabha describes the Third Space as a space in which the *hybridity* of cultures is cultivated and articulated and not a space in which *diversity* is fostered. Bhabha places importance on lexicography in stressing the difference between the two terms - he articulates 'hybridity' as a term which captures the fluid, ever-changing nature of self and of culture as well as the possible clashing or intermingling of cultures in this Third Space. On the other hand, 'diversity' seems to inherently stress the difference between cultures and therefore further differentiate or separate them.

Ultimately, Kingston's fictional memoir is a symbolic re-embodiment of the protagonist's aunt's ghost as she is able to write herself away from and beyond the margins of sexist Chinese traditions but also as a means in which she is able to carefully reconsider the western locale she is physically situated in. The storytelling mode she adopts enables her to find an amalgamated voice, one which is made up of fragments of cultures. In doing so, the narrator is able to transform herself into a Woman Warrior like the one her mother mentions. She undergoes a change in character and becomes her own person since she realises the power of her own voice. She is only able to transform herself into a Woman Warrior because she has been presented with and rises above sexist notions of old Chinese culture to which her family expect her to conform. Furthermore, we find that the Woman Warrior is not simply a ghost of the past since the protagonist at present indeed embodies the Woman Warrior's liberatory attributes. However, it is only towards the end of the narrative that we find that she repositions herself and her situation not in terms of a Chinese or an Asian American woman but in terms of a liberated and free human being with autonomy to do and say as she pleases and thus neglects aspects of traditional Chinese culture which restrict her gender. It is ironic that the protagonist's aunt remains unnamed as does the protagonist, but in contrast to this we are told that Woman

Warrior's name is Fa Mu Lan. This further illustrates that this androgynous figure is given some agency. Like the Woman Warrior, old Chinese tradition has contradictorily placed the protagonist in a position of liberation but simultaneously in a position of subordination since old traditions still permeate this foreign landscape. It is, therefore, essential for the Chinese-American protagonist to supplement her gender with masculine traits as Fa Mu Lan does, in order to survive in the West.

The narrative simultaneously highlights the plight of the protagonist's aunt and implicates the entrenched, gendered traditions that disfavour women. As Butler argues, the narrative is a means in which the female subject is able to "[...] effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines" (*Gender Trouble* 132). By the end of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston is able to guide the reader to reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines since she allows the reader to delve into a different reality, one that is a contact zone between cultures, rather than an essentialist, restrictive one. The very last sentence of the narrative: "It translated well" (Kingston 186), is thus the narrator's own and she has realised the importance and power of her own voice but also of the talk-story as a way in which to reimagine both culture and gender. Consequently, while occupying this ambivalent position, the protagonist is able to reconceptualize her culture and thus her gender as a combination of facets, a combination of parts of cultures. Her gendered self is never final. In the words of Trinh Minh-ha:

Two powerful woman storytellers meet at the end of the book, both working at strengthening the ties among women while commemorating and transmitting the powers of our foremothers. At once a grandmother, a poetess, a storyteller, and a woman warrior. (135)

### Chapter Three: Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*

Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and her subsequent book, *Forced to Grow*, are autobiographical in the sense that Magona retells her life from childhood, her young adulthood and motherhood (as depicted in *To My Children's Children*) and her later adulthood and transnational translocations (as depicted in *Forced to Grow*). Both books are honest, searching and sincere in their depictions of the life and the trials and tribulations Magona underwent as a young, black South African woman. Events are recalled in the first person by Sindiwe<sup>36</sup>, the protagonist, who lives during the Apartheid era, when people of colour were regarded as second class citizens and were ostracised and segregated from whites. This mammoth burden placed upon non-whites was carried out by means of the strict laws placed upon their basic freedoms. Both *To My Children's Children* as well as *Forced to Grow* are evidence of this trying time but Sindiwe recalls these events with the hope that she will one day surpass this imposition. Unlike Kingston's metaphorical and descriptive narrative, *The Woman Warrior*, both Magona's narratives are raw<sup>37</sup> and straightforward in their conception. Yet in both the protagonists deal with what is inevitably a vital alteration in terms of their gender identity and hence their subjectivity. In Kingston's narrative, this alteration is a consequence of transnational translocation, for the parents of the protagonist move from China to the USA as they leave their home country in search of opportunity. This causes the protagonist, who remains unnamed, to straddle dual worlds and experience much tension between her Cantonese culture and that of white American culture. However, in Magona's narratives, this process is somewhat different for we find Sindiwe constantly undergoing an alternation in terms of her gender identity, and not only as a result of her transnational translocations between South Africa and the United States (as well as other countries). Unlike Kingston's protagonist, Sindiwe herself experiences

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<sup>36</sup> I have distinguished between the protagonist Sindiwe, and the author Magona, even though such a distinction is not encouraged by the narratives since both the author and narrator bear the same name. I do so purely for analytical reasons, although there are sections in both narratives where such a distinction is difficult such as the preface of *To My Children's Children* where it is clear that Magona is the one who directs the story and hence such a distinction becomes blurred.

<sup>37</sup> By employing the word "raw" I by no means imply that Magona's narratives are uncrafted or unskilled. Instead I refer to Magona's straightforward and honest style, since Magona "calls a spade a spade", and does not use elaborate or complicated language. In comparison to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the language Magona employs in her narratives is certainly not as metaphorically descriptive and hence more literal in its conception. Yet, similarly to Kingston's narrative, Magona's texts are thoughtful, intriguing and sincere and deal with issues close to the hearts of many females.

translocations as she ventures overseas on various scholarships and conferences. I will argue that Sindiwe's alteration of her gender identity is attributed to many factors such as the political condition of the country which challenged the identity of Sindiwe as a black South African female. Another factor which contributes to her gendered alteration is the societal expectation of a female within her Xhosa community. Sindiwe's failed marriage also later contributes to this alteration since her husband leaves her and her children, thereby forcing her to take on the role of the breadwinner in her family, a role for which her Xhosa culture deems only the male fit. These very pertinent changes in her life cause her to re-evaluate her situation and create opportunities for herself where opportunities could never have possibly existed in a locality where restrictions on non-whites were copious. Although Sindiwe undergoes a very significant alternation in her subjectivity as a result of her travels, it is her gendered transmutation that precedes these travels that I find most interesting and that will be the focus of this chapter. In addition, I will discuss the gendered alteration of her transnational translocation, which occurs towards the end of *Forced to Grow* and which similarly has a large impact on her subjectivity.

*To My Children's Children* begins with an address to Magona's great-granddaughter. Magona feels the need to pass down the stories of her youth so that her great-grandchildren will know who they are and where they come from. In this preface, the roles of Magona as the author, and the narrator, Sindiwe, are blurred for we find them to be the same person. It is here that we find Magona drawing attention to her femaleness, to her young womanhood, her wifehood, and her motherhood with the intention of conveying to her great-granddaughter the vital roles that she, Magona/Sindiwe, has played in her family. In doing so, she does not exclude her future great-grandsons from her story but simply emphasises the essential role she has played as a matriarch in the family, a role which she feels she *had* to adopt for the survival of herself and her children. From the preface it is thus evident that Magona's culture is a storytelling one and that she feels compelled to pass down her story to her descendants. We are told by the protagonist, Sindiwe, that "[...] both men and woman tell folktales to children. These stories are handed down, by word of mouth, from generation to generation" (*To My Children's Children* 6).

According to Mary Soliday, ethnographic research demonstrates "[...] that telling stories at home is a rich and complex social practice" (513). Soliday further argues that storytelling is a

means through which “[...] family members establish their identities as language users in culturally specific ways” (513). In *To My Children’s Children*, Sindiwe states that both men and women play crucial roles in the passing down of these cultural norms, yet it is interesting to note that Magona as the author seems to alter tradition slightly in that she passes down these stories of her youth in a written mode and not, as her culture requires, by oral tradition. However, it is interesting to note that postcolonial writing is in fact occupied with the recording of oral literature and as a result, cultures which were marginalised during colonialism have become a part of the dominant culture. Gusdorf argues that the act of autobiography is by no means universal. He states:

The concern, which seems so natural to us, to turn back on one’s own past, to recollect one’s life in order to narrate it, is not at all universal. It asserts itself only in recent centuries and only on a small part of the map of the world. [...] The conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilization. Throughout most of human history, the individual does not oppose himself to all others; he does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community. (emphasis in original) (29)

Magona’s narratives are autobiographical for they portray Magona’s own life, as recalled by the protagonist, Sindiwe (who bears the same name as the author), yet they are also fictional as they contain extracts from traditional Xhosa songs and stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Both the autobiographical and the fictional intertwine and conflate in Magona’s texts and as a result, Magona has produced a unique combination of both<sup>38</sup>. Not only do Magona’s narratives contain autobiographical as well as fictional elements, they also contain two sets of “narrative conventions” (Daymond 331). Margaret Daymond argues that these two sets of narrative conventions are Xhosa orature and Western writing. Daymond argues that as a result of this amalgamation the narratives are dialogic in nature. She furthers this argument and states that

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<sup>38</sup> It is for this reason that I choose to refer to Magona’s texts as “fictional autobiographies” for they cannot be singularly labelled as either autobiography or fiction and are instead a unique combination of both forms.



In drawing on the oral tale-teller's repertoire, Magona's story-telling is not a harking back to ancestral voices but a demonstration that ancient modes and motifs can, in certain circumstances and within certain constraints, be used to represent the modern world. (346)

In telling these stories, Magona is able to turn an oral tradition into a written one; she is able to carefully reconstruct her situation to demonstrate that traditional modes of storytelling can be used to represent the modern world. This intertwining of genres can evidently be seen when Sindiwe describes a song she would sing as a child while playing and skipping:

'Nquaphela, ndikhule!	'Be stunted, that I grow!
'Nquaphela, ndikhule!	'Be stunted, that I grow!
'Nquaphela, ndikhule!	'Be stunted, that I grow!' (Magona, <i>To My Children's Children</i> 8)

From the above extract we find a definite conflation of genres but we are also presented with elements of culture in a format that represents modernity for we are presented with a traditional Xhosa song in a written format. This cultural shift is evident of a shift towards modernity<sup>39</sup> experienced by the protagonist who recalls these events in a *written* format and not an oral one, so that despite what life brings to her descendants, they will always know that they are not alone and that their ancestors are always with them (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 183). In doing so, the protagonist nonetheless alters tradition on the one hand, but on the other hand also preserves tradition simply in a new and modified format. This contradictory position is theorised by Benhabib, who argues that "[...] regimes of discourse/power or normative regimes of language and sexuality both circumscribe *and* enable the subject" (my emphasis) (340). Hence, Sindiwe's dominant and overriding culture<sup>40</sup> is able to simultaneously confine and permit her freedom. Sindiwe's traditional culture is preserved but is also limiting in that it cannot provide

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<sup>39</sup> Sindiwe does not completely abandon her traditional Xhosa roots during her translocations overseas, for she is very much dependent on her family and community as they foster her identity as a woman. This is especially so since even Magona as the author returned to South Africa in 2003 when she retired from the United Nations and her work in America. However, we are told that her links to the West remain stable for she established an organization in New York called South Africa 2033 USA, Inc. in order to cultivate social transformation (Koyana xii). Magona, like her character Sindiwe, is seemingly reliant on both Western culture and traditional Xhosa culture which simultaneously foster her identity.

<sup>40</sup> As I will further demonstrate, Sindiwe's dominant cultural frame is particularly difficult to define for although upon her translocations she is confronted with the dominant culture of the West, she is still evidently rooted in her home culture. In this particular instance, I do, however refer to Sindiwe's dominant and overriding culture as her traditional culture, for its role in the formulation of Sindiwe's subjectivity remains extensive.

her with opportunities to further her career and better her lifestyle – opportunities which modernity affords her. Similarly, Sindiwe's Western culture to a certain extent restricts her as a female for it does not foster in her a collective identity but at the same time gives her access to wider and universalised cultural capital.

The stories and songs Sindiwe recalls represent a shift towards modernity and partial deviation from certain traditional elements. This is seen more explicitly when the protagonist claims that long ago her parents attempted to keep in contact with relatives by writing, but this did not work, for Xhosa people “[...] are not a writing people, culturally” and she states that this cultural practice is indeed strong in her family (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 156). Furthermore, according to David Attwell, modernity is a loose concept that refuses a narrow definition but questions what it means to be a subject of history. Attwell states that modernity

refers not only to technology and the emergence of an administered and industrialised society, but also to that fluid but powerful system of ideas that we inherit from the bourgeois revolutions of Europe in the late eighteenth century – ideas such as autonomy, personhood, rights, and citizenship. These concepts, or their equivalents, could be found in many cultures, of both the past and the present, where they exist independently of the Western paradigm. (*Rewriting Modernity* 4)

As Attwell argues, modernity exists in many cultures even though they are separate from the West and this is seen as Sindiwe, a South African woman, is positioned away from the West and recalls memories from her past as well as traditional songs and stories in a *written* format and not orally. In embracing this aspect of modernity, the protagonist is able to recreate herself as a young, black South African woman in a period of political uncertainty and instability for non-whites yet also as a woman who gains greater access to opportunities brought about by modernity. As a result of this, Sindiwe is able to recall and recreate her memories, whether positive or negative, and in doing so, she is able to rise above the subordinate position she occupies as a woman - a position which both her country as well as her culture force her to occupy.

Sindiwe's transnational translocations are equally vital for this process of recollection and remembering of a time when she was subordinate. Evidence of Sindiwe's inferior position is

apparent in the imposition of strict laws during the Apartheid era which restricted non-whites and separated them physically from whites. We find Sindiwe experiencing the emotional, social and physical consequences of such laws on her community as well as on herself. There are many instances in *To My Children's Children* where Sindiwe is confronted with racist remarks and the tension between races is all too evident. An example of this is when a man on a bicycle shouts “kaffir” at her, a derogatory word used to describe black people (37). Similarly, we can also note the mental and corporeal effects of the Apartheid era on the imagined as well as the geographical space occupied by non-whites. Sindiwe states that progress was being made on one side of the banks of Boundary Road yet on the other side, deliberate and designed retardation was evident. On the one side poor-white people and far-from-poor coloured people lived; on the other underdeveloped side lived black people (*To My Children's Children* 38). Physical division of races is evident as well as the general neglect of non-whites by the government and yet, in spite of this, we still find Sindiwe determined to acquire a healthy sense of self and occupy a sense of a homely space – not necessarily a physical space but rather an imagined space (Koyana 19). Sindiwe states that:

As far back as I can remember, there has always been a place to which I belonged with a certainty that nothing has been able to take away from me. When I say place, that means less a geographical locality and more a group of people with whom I am connected and to whom I belong. This is a given, a constant in my life. (*To My Children's Children* 1)

Although Sindiwe, similarly to Eva in Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, is not able to acquire a sense of patriotism due to political circumstances, she still has a sense of belonging to her birth place. Gunew citing Said on nationalism, argues that nationalism is “[...] an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by doing so, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (qtd. in Gunew 36 - 37). Both Sindiwe and Eva are not able to establish a strong sense of nationalism within themselves because of the state of affairs in their countries of origin. It is vital that they establish a sense of belonging, not accruing to a particular locality, but instead accruing to an imagined space which they themselves foster. Said notices that because of modernity, the question of origin is much more difficult to define for notions of migranhood take precedence (qtd. in Gunew 36 - 37). It may then be argued that Sindiwe's “home” is cultivated in her

constant state of translocation for it is in both her geographical and her political and social dislocatedness that she in fact finds her sense of belonging.

Throughout Magona's two fictional autobiographies, Sindiwe emphasizes the importance of social and cultural networks created in the township where she grows up and she asserts the nature of customs and their preservation. To her, home is not a physical location; home is community and not a locality which is fixed. Home is something which directly links to that of Xhosa people and she states that no one (not even the government) can take this away from her. Even though, at the time, the government placed physical restrictions on where people were allowed to go and what they were allowed to do, her connection with her family and her community initially remains untouched as she relies on them for support in her everyday life. It is only later in *Forced to Grow* that we find Sindiwe leaving her home country to seek opportunities elsewhere. Her strong connections with her family later become threatened while abroad as she struggles to adapt to a foreign locality when she lives alone in the United States and her family remain in South Africa. Her struggle overseas is initially attributed to her strong cultural belief in a collective Xhosa identity which does not make sense in the West (this will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter).

Olney argues accordingly that the purpose of communal rituals throughout Africa is to merge individual identity with group identity. This is done so that the part represents the whole and the whole is embodied and personified in the part (qtd. in Eakin *Fictions in Autobiography* 200). Olney further argues that an autobiography is a [...] story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within [and] offers a privileged access to an experience (the American experience, the black experience, the female experience, the African experience) that no other variety of writing can offer" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 13). From Olney's reasoning, one can see the exceptionally strong link prevalent in many African cultures which unifies people. Sindiwe's continual renewal of her Xhosa culture through her constant visits home is evident of the strong sense of group identity prevalent in her culture. This is also evidenced by her mother's taking on of a new role - that of a traditional healer - through which Sindiwe is able to further affirm her linkages to her Xhosa heritage.

Bourdieu's theory of habitus is valuable in examining the imagined space that Sindiwe occupies as a young, black female in a politically tense country. It is evident that Sindiwe emphasizes the importance of her social environment as opposed to her physical environment. Bourdieu argues that the construction of a social reality is not only an individual enterprise but may also become a collective enterprise. Habitus, he argues, implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the place of others" (19) and it is through telling her story that Sindiwe is able to discover her own sense of self and the social space she individually occupies within her community. Also, she is able to discover her place in the collective and the importance of not severing these ties with her community for they have a large impact on her identity and who she is. In an interview with the author Magona herself, Siphokazi Koyana asks Magona whether she considers herself to have an "exilic consciousness". In response, Magona states that she has "[...] no idea what an exilic consciousness would be" and instead says that what she does have is a longing for home while she is living in New York, especially since the political situation at home has changed and that her mother has turned eighty. Magona states, "I would like to revisit my childhood haunts" (Koyana 148). From this statement, one can note Magona's own nostalgia about her childhood, which took place in South Africa and which influences her narratives. Magona's sense of belonging, like Sindiwe's, is closely linked to her upbringing and life in the Xhosa community in South Africa.

Benhabib hypothesises a narrative view of identity as she argues that individual and collective identities "[...] are woven out of tales and fragments belonging both to oneself and to others" (351). Benhabib underlines the juxtaposition between her model of narrativity and other authoritarian movements. She states that "[w]hile narrativity stresses otherness and the fluidity of the boundaries between the self and others, authoritarian and repressive movements respond to the search for certainty, for rigid definitions, for boundaries and markers" (Benhabib 351). She emphasises the need to consider the fluidity of boundaries between the individual and the collective for this will enable the subject to forge a greater understanding of herself and of others. However, fluidity between borders may pose a problem for the female's identity may be grounded in a particular cultural locale and in order to maintain a stable cultural reference, she may need to stay partly grounded within a particular culture and should steer clear of assimilating herself to the other (Benhabib 352). The subject should rather acknowledge and

understand the difference between her self and the culture she has been born into as well as the other cultures which she is confronted with. Out of the four narratives which constitute this study, Magona's is the only protagonist who is able to successfully and fully achieve this for she remains stable in her cultural frame of reference yet simultaneously engages in customs different to hers, and hence is partly nomadic in her subjectivity. Sindiwe, unlike Hoffman's Eva and Kingston's unnamed protagonist, is able to occupy a rather ambiguous position for she is able to remain successfully grounded, but concurrently she is able to generate meaning over time and is able to hold past, present, and future together as Benhabib's narrative mode of self-fashioning suggests (Benhabib 353).

Moreover, Sindiwe is able to hold on to those elements of Xhosa culture which provide her with a firm understanding of relationships and love; yet she nevertheless embraces some elements of non-traditional culture over those offered by Xhosa culture. In particular, Sindiwe favours the liberation that Western thought offers her as a means of eluding the sexist element of Xhosa culture. Bourdieu argues that "[i]n order to transcend the artificial opposition that is thus created between structures and representations" of one's culture, one must recognise that there is no one reality and instead multiple realities (15). Bourdieu further argues that these multiple realities offer freedom and partial exit from restrictive cultural structures in place (15). Sindiwe is able to transgress the limitations of Xhosa traditionalism by embarking on a journey of self-exploration, brought about by physical translocation but also through an imagined translocation in order to release herself from imposed strictures. She must embrace her self as a symbol of hope in order to find opportunities of exit. I argue however that these opportunities of exit which give her access to a liberated and freer world, in fact simultaneously limit her from the familial support inherent in her home culture. These opportunities give her an exit into another culture - a culture which is freer, but this is indeed ironic, for she has to leave her home country in order to embrace these opportunities and thus leave her support, her community and reformulate her imagined social space.

Likewise, in Hoffman's narrative, Eva has the ability to interweave cultures in order to create an imagined sense of home although this is hindered by her attempts to assimilate herself into mainstream Canadian culture; Sindiwe, however, attempts no such assimilation. In

Kingston's narrative the protagonist similarly attempts to move away from traditional Chinese culture, towards a more dynamic and fluid position which enables both Chinese culture and American culture to interlace, permitting her to resituate herself in terms of a combination of customs. Sindiwe, similarly to Kingston's unnamed protagonist, feels the necessity to straddle what she considers to be multiple cultures simultaneously, for both protagonists hold a large desire to preserve aspects of both the cultural environments they inhabit. While all three protagonists do occupy an ambivalent position, it provides them with the opportunity to release themselves from the gendered (and political) restrictions placed upon them by their ethnic culture.

Throughout both of Magona's narratives, we find Sindiwe's life, both as a girl and as an adult, to be scattered with restrictions placed upon her and her subjectivity as a child - initially she aspires to be white, a mindset resulting from Apartheid government propaganda, yet she is able to question this and reformulate a different sense of self. Initially, as a child, Sindiwe questions the roles that whites play in relation to blacks. She says that in other lands children played at being kings and queens but in South Africa "[...] we just played at being White. What I heard and what I saw were what I heard and what I saw. I was a child and saw with the eyes of a child" (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 40). For her, this game of desire to be white is ultimately a reflection of the harsh nature of the society within which she is brought up. Her desire to be white is not the desire to have a white skin colour but instead a desire to obtain the liberation and freedom held by whites in the South African context, something she achieves through transnational translocation. Sindiwe later learns through her translocations about the many tribulations all women suffer, regardless of race, religion or geographical location and extinguishes the idea that all whites are superior and without tribulations.

Sindiwe's membership of the Church Women Concerned group marks an important turning point in her life as a young woman, for in this group she meets women of different racial and religious categories and learns to see these government classifications in order to consider them first and foremost as women. She states that she discovered human beings in *women* who were white and not *white* women, women whom she previously perceived as domineering and awkward (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 122). This is perhaps a major alteration in Sindiwe's life since such

thought was revolutionary and rare at a time when segregation was rife and races were separated. A new realisation dawns upon her, “[...] a realization of our ability to love someone belonging to another group, someone of a different skin colour, took place” (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 133). From this compassionate realisation, Sindiwe takes up opportunities for conferences and study overseas. She is invited to the International Women’s Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, held in Brussels, although she finds it extremely difficult to board the aeroplane due to the many restrictions on black people. Anne, a woman who is classified white and who is the other delegate being sent to Brussels for this conference, helps her in this process and this further demonstrates to Sindiwe that her generalisation about white women may be incorrect (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 137). At this conference Sindiwe learns the many problems that women all over the world face every day and she realises that she is not the only one and that women of other races also bear their own burdens.

Abroad Sindiwe is initially seen to struggle in her new, strange locality. In Brussels she finds herself feeling small and illiterate for she does not understand the language she hears around her. She states:

[w]ho said travel broadens? In Belgium I shrunk. I was fine as long as I stayed within the conference. Outside that environment with its simultaneous translation facilities, its sympathetic crowd of feminists and other women, my brain narrowed to a grain of sand as I experienced the absolute horror of total illiteracy. Numbing. (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 141 - 142)

This moment is particularly crucial for Sindiwe, since we find her longing for home and the familiar environment of family and community. When encountering a foreign culture, Sindiwe cannot initially translate the faces she sees into her own cultural framework and thus feels an inability to make sense of this alienating environment around her. This is heightened in Brussels for no one speaks English, a language which she understands. However, while studying in New York she similarly experiences tension even though she understands the language. Sindiwe’s experiences abroad are thus a result of her acute sense of displacement and alienation. However, the continuous renewing of her understanding of the multiple value systems is linked to the multiple cultures she inhabits, for these continuously impact upon her subjectivity. Therefore the displacement brought about by globalism involves the invention of new forms of subjectivity, of



pleasures, of intensities and of relationships evident in Magona's narratives. From Sindiwe's experience of the bustling city of New York and the underground trains, she argues that the "[...] mole mode of living is definitely not for me" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 204). Although she initially experiences a dislocation from her home country, she is seen to undergo a definite shift in subjectivity when she later embraces certain aspects of New York and its culture which provide her with opportunities her home country could never provide. Sindiwe states:

[b]ut New York City is a very busy place; it fosters a spirit of daring. 'Do,' it says, showing you the rewards of those who have done. 'Dare!' it shouts from the rooftops of its skyscrapers. (*Forced to Grow* 215)

Evidently, Sindiwe uses her indistinct position strategically, affirming the view of Gunew who argues that "[...] positionality [...] is central to the construction of knowledge" in the postmodern era. Gunew further argues that positionality can be defined as "[...] where you stand in relation to what you say [and it is thus] more difficult to talk about literature in terms of universal propositions, or about texts without reference to their contexts" (1). *Who* one is and *where* one is from are essential to understanding one's position. Gunew states that this development has also been "[...] anti-nationalist in some respects by not being limited to the local in any parochial sense" (1). As a result of this liminal position, Sindiwe can be seen as a partially nomadic figure. Rosi Braidotti postulates that the nomadic life style is about "[...] transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands" (*Nomadic Subjects* 25). Although Sindiwe's translocations are preplanned, it is her constant movement which makes her nomadic. Braidotti further theorises the nomadic figure and argues that the nomadic way of life is also a form of resisting assimilation and homologation, something which Sindiwe is shown to do. Caren Kaplan similarly theorises the nomadic figure and states that the nomad is a figure who experiences a "[...] philosophical/literary trek across the imagined desert[.] [A figure] who can track a path through a seemingly illogical space without succumbing to nation-state and/or bourgeois organization and mastery" (66). Kaplan argues that the nomadic figure and the desert she investigates are symbolic of the site of individual liberation in "Euro-American modernity" (66). Both Kaplan and Braidotti's theories are most pertinent to Sindiwe's situation for she is able to experience a number of translocations without assimilating or succumbing to the hegemony and instead affirms her home culture upon translocation.

As a partially nomadic figure, Sindiwe experiences much confusion abroad as she struggles to find direction and formulate a sense of a homely space. Sindiwe's perplexed position can be compared to Kingston's protagonist's position since the latter similarly becomes silent upon her imagined translocation for she does not have the tools with which to understand her environment as she is unable to speak English as a Chinese girl (Kingston 149). Hoffman's protagonist also experiences this tension upon translocation and states that a verbal blur covers people's faces and gestures with a fog which she cannot clear up (Hoffman 108). In *Forced to Grow* Sindiwe's translocation to the USA not only rouses in her confusion with regard to geographical and communicational differences, but she is confronted with gender expectations which differ significantly from Xhosa tradition. This is evident in the scene where she attempts to hold the hand of her friend, Erlin, while walking down a street. Erlin asks her to stop this behaviour for people will get the wrong impression. Sindiwe states that

[a]t home, there was absolutely nothing sexual about women holding hands. I grew up doing that. And even now, when I am home, in the city or away in the village, I do it and feel no awkwardness whatsoever. Erlin's enlightenment threw me to the ground: 'People will think we are lesbians.' (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 205)

Sindiwe quickly learns the social norms and gender expectations of females in the USA yet this by no means conveys that she accepts these norms completely. She instead affirms that the kind and friendly gesture of holding hands with another female, to her, does not signify anything sexual. Instead this gesture is gesture of friendship and love she feels towards her fellow companion, which is not appreciated or understood in a western context. Butler suggests that gender identity is a performed accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo and that gendered "acts" are a "[...] shared experience and a 'collective action'" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 525). The act of females holding hands is seen as taboo between heterosexual females in western culture yet is very much accepted in Xhosa society as a gesture of camaraderie in a setting which fosters community spirit. However, what significantly distinguishes Magona's narrator from Hoffman's and Kingston's is that she does not wish to conform fully to Western ways. After learning this cultural taboo about holding hands, Sindiwe proclaims:

I'd put it down to reticence to her English upbringing, for although she is Ugandan, Erlin grew up in England. I, wholly African, was going to teach her the unbridled warmth of friendship – woman to woman. [...] However, until I left Columbia University and the City of New York, I still found that on occasion I'd forget myself and take another woman's hand in mine. Old habits die hard. (*Forced to Grow* 205 - 206)

From the above extract we find Sindiwe interrogating certain gender norms which she grapples with as a foreigner. Gunew argues that “[t]he development of post-colonialism has enabled those who are not part of the dominant and universalising culture to occupy a space from which to interrogate that very concept” (39). Thus Sindiwe occupies such a space as she views certain Western cultural practices in a critical manner. Another norm Sindiwe initially struggles with is the over-friendliness and artificiality of the people in International House where she stays, as opposed to the genuine and empathetic people she knows from the township who support her. She also notes the focus on individualism in western society when she later lives alone in a studio apartment. This is contrasted to her life in a township in South Africa, in which community plays a vital role. She states: “Always I'd had someone with me – child or children, younger siblings, lover, friend.” In contrast, while living alone she argues, “I was nobody. I counted for nothing. No one knew when I was having a bad night. And no one cared. I had not realised that part of my identity was those others” (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 207). Here Sindiwe understands the great importance of her family and community in her life, and its effect on her identity, and she is dependent on them for this. Overcome with a “sense of dislocation” in the USA, she struggles to maintain this side of her subjectivity for here the cultural norms are very different and hence clash.

As I have confirmed, the tension Sindiwe encounters in terms of culture appears in the form of Western modernity versus traditional Xhosa culture. However, this tension felt is further emphasised since Sindiwe's culture is a culture of community and support as opposed to the culture of the West which, in contrast, can rather be seen as a culture of individualism. Sindiwe learns from an early age the importance of this community and her place in it. As custom demands, Sindiwe, the eldest of five girls, goes to live with her maternal grandparents in Gungululu which also separates her from her mother and other siblings. She in no way sees this as a restraint but rather as an advantage, for she feels that she has two homes. This way of

viewing her position as a child with two homes is mirrored later in her life as an adult as Sindiwe must once again negotiate multiple cultural environments which offer her several notions of home. In her acceptance of these two homes as a child, Sindiwe learns the great importance of community early on in her life and the important role that family members occupy in her African way of life. Sindiwe's world is a "[...] people-world, filled with a real, immediate, and tangible sense of belongingness" (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 3). Even though we learn of the harsh restrictions placed on non-whites in South Africa, Sindiwe still maintains a very strong sense of belonging and this is cultivated in her by the community and by her family.

Sindiwe's role as a young girl is thus particularly crucial to the understanding of the alteration of her gender role and also to the motivation behind her translocations. Although family ties remain strong in her family, Sindiwe does encounter the prevalent sexism against girls in Xhosa culture. We are told that Sindiwe's father states his unhappiness when finding out that his wife had a girl – and not just a girl, but an unattractive one too. When she is born Sindiwe states that her father "[...] took one look at me and fled to cry behind the hut [...]. That is how ugly I had been" (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 85). Upon doing so, Sindiwe's grandmother, Nophuthekezi, who appears much wiser than Sindiwe's own father, convinces him of how lucky and grateful he should be upon receiving such a blessing, at which he walks back into the hut, picks up Sindiwe and embraces her warmly in his arms. When Sindiwe's father comes to this realisation after her grandmother had convinced him of her worth, he does not, however, stop believing that females should occupy a subordinate role to males. As a girl, we find Sindiwe limited to certain things simply because she is a female. Her brother "Jongi could go, one Saturday per month, to see a film *if* all his chores were done *and* his school work didn't suffer, *and* he went to church the next morning". Yet, Sindiwe states, she is not "[...] even allowed to join the Girl Guides. And all because I was a girl" (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 74). Her father thus appears rather controlling towards Sindiwe for she is restricted as a female by him as well. We learn that her "[...] father believed a woman, and to him that was any girl above the age of ten, should dress to cover not only the knee, but a good five to ten centimetres below it" and thus her gym dress for school was of an unfeminine length (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 71). Her father's belief leads to a conspiracy between herself and her mother for her mother places two sets of buttons on the shoulder flaps of the dress so that she

could have two lengths – one for when her father was in the vicinity and another for the rest of the time she wore this dress. Sindiwe states that because of this, she earned the “teen-aged respectability”, which her father ultimately denied her (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 72).

This rank sexism can also be seen in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, where sexism towards the unnamed protagonist as a girl child is evident when the protagonist's mother's friend, who is also an Asian American woman, makes a sexist remark at which the protagonist screams, “I'm not a bad girl” and then states that she might as well have said, “I'm not a girl” (Kingston 48). The unnamed protagonist's grandfather is equally misogynistic towards her and denies the presence of his granddaughters. In Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, although Eva herself is not confronted with sexism, we see that her mother was affected by this for as a girl she was denied education due to her staunch Jewish upbringing. Eva is instead marginalised as a Jew in Poland but also as a female *after* translocation – for translocation ironically places her in an amplified marginalised position in terms of her gender, for Western culture brings with it a prevalent objectification of women which initially leaves Eva disillusioned. Sexism and the marginalisation of females is prevalent all four fictional autobiographies.

In Magona's narratives we are mainly shown Sindiwe's father's sexist side, yet what we do not see in these narratives is Sindiwe's affirmation of the tribulations her father endured under Apartheid, for her narratives focus more on the role and importance of the women who are undervalued in Xhosa society. It is only upon reading Magona's short story entitled, “Home” in the short story anthology *A City Imagined* that we discover Magona's<sup>41</sup> utter concern for her own father who she says was completely degraded and helpless during this period (114). In this story Magona states that she is “[...] grateful for fathers and big brothers who kept me safe and taught me respect for self and mothers” (111). Here she also qualifies the position and role of the father figure - something which she leaves out of *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*. In “Home”, Magona states:

[m]y father, dead these thirty years and more. What was it like to be him? What was it like to be so emasculated by the apartheid regime? What was it like to be a man who had absolutely no say in the way

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<sup>41</sup> Although I have treated Sindiwe as the narrator and Magona as the author as two distinct individuals, here a closer look at Magona's own life is necessary for the understanding of her works.

his own life would be lived? Not even choosing the house where his family would live? To have no say in where that house would be? *Tata!* What wrenched wounding you suffered! How helpless – utterly helpless – you felt! How humiliating! (114)

Although Sindiwe as narrator does not refer to her father's positive or enduring attributes as a breadwinner in the narratives, she does focus on how the community treats him for educating his daughter. He is scorned and ridiculed by the community for they do not find it necessary to educate a female since a female cannot be seen as the breadwinner in a Xhosa way of life and the male is the only possible candidate for education since he would need to work and support his family, whereas the role of the female is to stay in the home and bring up the children. In *Forced to Grow*, Sindiwe herself experiences ridicule because of this cultural convention, for the male teachers working with her at the time are critical of her position as a single mother. Sindiwe states that “[...] to these men, some of whom were yet to marry (never mind have children), I did not qualify as a breadwinner” (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 68). Educating a female child was thus unheard of. In falling pregnant, Sindiwe feels much guilt for her parents have sacrificed plenty for her to become educated and now she feels that she has become a disappointment to them. This is further heightened by the fact that after the birth of her three children, no one from her family is present to collect her and take her safely home from the hospital. This neglect of Sindiwe further adds to the guilt she feels for bearing children during this period of dehumanisation and also explicitly demonstrates the vital importance of the community and family in Sindiwe's life.

In Magona's texts, Sindiwe focuses on the prevalent sexism towards her as a child but also as an adult. Yet this sexism is seen in a Western cultural frame of reference, due to the influence of modernity on Sindiwe (through means of her education and translocations), and not within a Xhosa frame of reference. Sexism is thus linked to the politics of place and customs. Butler fittingly argues that “[...] because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities [...] it becomes impossible to separate “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 3). In Butler's view, gender and

sexism are therefore inextricably linked political and cultural environments which, in turn, shape the subject's gender.

It is sexism as well as political conditions in South Africa which places Sindiwe in a subordinate position, for as a mother Sindiwe feels she must adopt masculine attributes in order to affirm her position as a valued and worthy woman. However, sexism towards Sindiwe is not only encouraged by her community but is equally enforced by the white Apartheid government. We are told that as a woman she was not allowed to rent a council house in Langa, Nyanga or Guguletu. Sindiwe states: "And I, a woman, could never hope for that basic right. This because, in the eyes of the law, I was a minor" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 2). As a woman in Xhosa culture she is placed in a subordinate position *and*, because she is classified as black she is further marginalised by the law in place at the time. In addition, this marginal role Sindiwe occupies seems to affect her sense of self as well as her self-confidence for she states that she did not believe she "[...] had the brains to pass matric" because, at the time, she thought that all men were more intelligent than women (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 14). Similarly, Kingston's protagonist questions her sense of self worth, and lacks the confidence to speak and because of this her teachers give her a zero on her Intelligence Quotient test. Eva in *Lost in Translation* also undergoes a similar experience in that upon translocation she finds herself sitting on the outskirts of Canadian culture and is an active observer of customs, not a participant, for she finds herself initially insecure in this unfamiliar territory. Yet all three protagonists in fact overcome their initial insecurity and lack of confidence as they negotiate a new sense of self. We find that Kingston's protagonist obtains a voice in her articulation of her story and the stories of Fa Mu Lan as well as her ostracised aunt; Hoffman's protagonist goes on to study English literature, which grants her greater access to this culture and with this, greater self-confidence in communication; and Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe, later proves herself wrong, passes matric and even goes on to obtain numerous tertiary qualifications despite her initial self-doubt.

Sindiwe's femaleness is in addition emphasised as she attempts to make sense of what it means to be a marginalised, black South African girl and later, wife and mother. Koyana argues that Magona's use of the maternal trope in her narratives "[...] increases our understanding of motherhood as defined by existing patriarchal discourses" (19). We find Sindiwe's culture

conveyed through social circumstances by her family, chiefly through the females in her life and their roles as mothers and as breadwinners. This idea of a female as a breadwinner challenges patriarchal notions of the role of women. The role of men in the homestead was limited as they had to act as breadwinners for their families and were often separated from their families during Apartheid as they worked in mines and other industries away from the “homelands” where their families resided. These men often neglected their families during this time. Even Sindiwe’s father worked in Cape Town and only sees his family once in a while. We also learn that most of the households in her township are run by females because of this. The role of male figures in Sindiwe’s life is thus diminished. Sindiwe states that

[f]ather’s visits were brief, too brief for me to get to know him. Not that I recall any such desire, on my part. We didn’t even call him ‘*tata*’ (father). He was called ‘*Bhuti waseKapa*’ (older brother from Cape Town) by mother’s siblings, too young to use the customary ‘*Sibali*’ (brother-in-law). We, his three children, addressed him similarly, imitating them. (Magona, *To My Children’s Children* 2 - 3)

Furthermore, in *To My Children’s Children*, we are told that before Sindiwe is sent to live with her parents upon the death of her grandmother, she states that “[I]ike most of my playmates, I was growing up fatherless. I had seen father two or three times, I think” (Magona, *To My Children’s Children* 16). Sindiwe’s father thus plays a minimal role in her life for he is never there for her to get to know. This phenomenon of fatherless children is a general trend during this time period. Sindiwe does not seem to show a desire to get to know him and by calling him *Bhuti waseKapa*, shows the very distant relationship that she had with him. Even her paternal grandfather does not play as prominent a role as her maternal grandmother or any other of her relatives do. It is evident that these men in Sindiwe’s life, especially her father, bear the burden of work and have to sacrifice being away from home for the survival of their children. We learn that Sindiwe’s father has a “[...] stern, unsmiling [...]” nature and “[...] deliberate gait – as serious as a funeral [...]” which explicitly depicts his anguish and the tribulations he most likely had to suffer in order to support his family. Even Sindiwe’s grandfather, like her father, occupies a shadowy presence in her life (Magona, *To My Children’s Children* 2). Similar to Kingston’s unnamed protagonist, Sindiwe’s recollections of herself as a little girl mainly revolve around the females in her life and thus her upbringing is dependent on these females who had to occupy multiple roles of wife, mother and even father. In Kingston’s narrative, the protagonist’s father is



hardly ever mentioned, and we only learn that he owns and runs a laundry which is a family business. In Kingston's narrative we are able to further deduce that it is the protagonist's mother who is the bearer of tradition and not her father (whose position is never exemplified) for we find her mother to be the one to sever her fraenum in order to render her voiceless and thus subservient (Kingston 148). The role of males in Kingston's narrative is thus equally minimal and similar in this regard to Magona's narratives, for the males who do appear in the latter texts are sexist and disreputable characters<sup>42</sup>. In contrast to Kingston and Magona's narratives, Hoffman's narrative is the only one of the four in which males play a slightly more substantial role as the bearers of culture.

The role of the mother in Magona's narratives is a crucial one for the mother is seen to be the carrier of customs and traditions. This is especially so since the males in Sindiwe's life bear the burden of work and are seen not to have sufficient time to cultivate a sense of culture in their children. The mother is seen as necessary to her children's socialisation and identity formulation and as Koyana argues, "Magona portrays the difficulties of single motherhood, and yet shows that, despite prevailing myths, the father is unnecessary in the consolidation of identity or sexuality" (29). From Koyana's statement, we note that gender is most definitely a cultural construction which Sindiwe as a mother is able to resolve after the loss of her husband since we find her embodying certain masculine traits in order to make up for this loss both she and her children suffer. Sindiwe states that when she got involved with her studies, she began "[...] coping with the triple bind: single parenthood, work demands and ambition, even the mild ambition of wanting to complete high school" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 46). As Koyana argues, we find the role of the father to be unnecessary in the gender formation of Sindiwe as a young girl and also in the gender formations of her children who are similarly fatherless. This is because Sindiwe adopts additional roles to her role as both a woman and mother. She has to be a father also to her children. She drastically, almost desperately, rethinks her role in the family when she states "I can assure you, my children never had a mother. I was too busy being their father" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 100 - 101). Sindiwe goes so far as to disregard her role as a mother and further states that:

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<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that only males in the protagonist's life are misogynistic for many of the females are equally sexist towards other females (in the case of the protagonist's mother) and many place themselves in positions of subordination, for this is what traditional Chinese culture requires of them.

I was so busy being the breadwinner that I now know my children never had a mother. I was the head of the family. Their well-being depended on me. I worked. I dished out discipline. I created a place where they would grow up well mannered, purposeful. I was father to my children. I shunned those things mothers do, cooing over their children, providing them with the gentler side of parenting; I deliberately suppressed things like these. They petrified me no end. I believed if I showed the children tenderness they would get spoiled as there was no father to counteract with stern discipline. I was bent on raising children who would defy the stereotype of children raising by *idikazi*, a woman alone, a woman considered by consequence of that fact alone as morally bankrupt. No, my children never had a mother. In me they had a father. (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 48)

At this moment in *Forced to Grow* we learn of Sindiwe's utter will power and determination to bring her children up as subjects whose gendered identities are whole and intact, people who comply with one of the binary notions of gender as either masculine or feminine as societal expectations demand. It is ironic, that in embracing her masculine qualities, Sindiwe does so purely so that her children will grow up as "normal". Her emphasis on the father role here is done so as to better equip her children with the masculine traits she feels they lack because their father has gone. In doing so, Sindiwe is afraid of showing her children her feminine side, for she is compelled to rather show her stern and strict side, and thus her masculine attributes. Such attributes cannot be found in the role of her husband, for he is no longer present in the family structure. Sindiwe embraces her masculine attributes in order to supplement the lack thereof in the family structure and in doing so becomes the "head" of the household.

Butler notes the distinction between gender and sex, and states that sex pertains to a biological notion and gender, rather, a construction of culture. She states that "[...] gender becomes a freeing artifice, with the consequences that *man* and *masculine* might as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (*Gender Trouble* 6). This interesting observation made by Butler emphasises the cultural aspect of gender and its formation as opposed to the idea of gender as a purely biological or corporeal embodiment. We find gender to be that which is in flux and certainly not stable and whole, even though Sindiwe essentially strives towards a gendered identity which is stable and unified, thereby interweaving masculine and feminine roles in order to construct her children's "balanced" gendered identities in a sufficient manner. Moreover, throughout both

autobiographies, we find Sindiwe's gender to be constantly in a state of transformation as we find her transgressing certain gendered expectations of a black female.

This coexistence of genders is evident in Sindiwe's awareness of the adventurous behaviour of her young son, Sandile. Sindiwe's motherly and protective instinct is at play since on the one hand, she wants to protect her son from certain environmental dangers. On the other hand, we are told that upon wanting to shout at him and protect him in this way, the words "Stop, Sandile!" stuck in her throat for she feared feminising him. She states that this fear of hers

seemed highly probable to me since he had no father to counterbalance my influence. Daily, therefore, I was tested bitterly as I swallowed my wise injunctions. (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 94)

Sindiwe has to occupy certain masculine traits in order to bring up her children in what she feels is a whole and unified manner. Tension in terms of Sindiwe's gender accordingly becomes evident, for she must juggle certain gender expectations in order to attempt the amalgamation of both roles of masculine and feminine. Thus Sindiwe feels that she must let Sandile act in this adventurous manner, despite her worries for him, so that as a result he would not become a "[...] sissy, ridiculed mercilessly by men and shunned by women, scorned by the old, and ragged by the young", what the rest of the community would expect from a son brought up by *idikazi*, a fallen woman (emphasis in original) (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 100).

As Butler suggests, there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires and this makes it possible for Sindiwe to supplement her gender with masculine elements because gender is not a fact. As Butler illustrates, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Butler contends:

Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable [...] Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 528)

Butler's statement above is particularly crucial to Sindiwe's position, for as Sindiwe realises, performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments as determined by society. As a woman, and especially as a mother, Sindiwe's role is thus challenged by the community because of this position she occupies as a single mother but, also as a breadwinner, which is considered a male role. Although Sindiwe discovers that it is not just single mothers who are detested by society, she also notices that "[m]arried, divorced, widowed and single mothers were [all] lumped together. Mothers, it was clear in the minds of the vast majority, had no business being anything else" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 79). This statement emphasises the subordinate position that women and mothers in Sindiwe's society occupy. As an educated woman, she is further ostracised by the community, as other women question why she is carrying books and asks her whether she has children, thus implying that she should not concern herself with her education and rather focus on bringing up her children. The role of the mother in traditional Xhosa culture is thus a role which restricts the mother to bearing and looking after her children. This lack of approval other women demonstrate towards her does in fact make her feel guilty but she soon realises that she must follow her dreams for they will help make her a better mother to her children. She states, that "[g]radually, I started branching out and growing, despite my need for other people's approval" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 80). Sindiwe continuously challenges the received positions she is thrust into and states: "But I had dreams yet" (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 79).

Sindiwe is particularly conscious of her gender and in her recollections of childhood memories one even notes the inherent supplementary masculinity fostered in her by the females who bring her up. She is swift in embracing her strength as a woman and thus embraces her masculine attributes for we find that these attributes give her the power she needs to rise above societal constraints. We learn that she "[...] was the only girl who had boys as friends, respectful friends and nothing but." She states that because of this, "[...] very stern stuff [...]" is in her makeup (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 47). Here, we find Sindiwe conscious of her gendered self and we see her determination and strength for she identifies, not with the other young girls, but instead with the young boys. In them, she sees the requirements necessary for survival. Further along in the narrative, Sindiwe again describes herself as embracing these

masculine attributes. She describes the medicine that she had to take as a baby and says that she “[...] wisely heeded father’s advice and ‘took it like a man’” (Magona, *To My Children’s Children* 57). This further illustrates Sindiwe’s embracing of her masculine characteristics in a custom which, in addition, gave preference to males above females, which in the political sphere, gave preference to whites above non-whites and in which survival in a poverty stricken locality was the chief achievement. Her adoption of these masculine characteristics is necessary for her endurance to maintain a secure, stable and healthy sense of self. Butler argues that “[t]he reproduction of the category of gender is enacted at a political level, when women first enter a profession or gain certain rights, or are reconceived in legal or political discourse in significantly new ways” (“Performance Acts and Gender Constitution” 524). Sindiwe experiences this political enactment of gender which is culturally and socially determined and her gender identity does not seem to take place in “[...] the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence” (Butler, “Performance Acts and Gender Constitution” 524). Because of this, Sindiwe is able to situate herself both inside and outside the Xhosa system of representation and does not remain deeply entrenched but rather partially grounded, stable and constantly under review. In accordance with Butler, Hall similarly argues for a “[...] new concept of identity as process rather than fact” (qtd. in Gunew 45). He argues that although systems of representation are unavoidable, it is indeed possible to use these systems in a strategic manner (qtd. in Gunew 45).

This ambivalent positioning allows Sindiwe to place herself both inside and outside Xhosa culture. Yet the most defining moment in “Forced to Grow” in which her realisation of her strategic place and its opportunities takes place, is the scene which takes place on Muizenberg beach while swimming. In this scene Sindiwe comes to the realisation that she no longer needs her wedding ring, the symbol of the love between husband and wife, for she realises that this love is no longer true. She states that with her “[...] fingers relaxed, at ease, the ring swam away” and this act brings her much satisfaction and relief (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 12). This defining moment in Sindiwe’s life compels her to be “born anew” (Magona, *Forced to Grow* 13). Yet what is particularly interesting about this incident is that this is not a result of a physical translocation but rather a symbolic or imagined translocation. What Sindiwe comes to realise is that despite what Xhosa culture compels her to believe, she is able to free herself from

her marriage (only symbolically for we are told that she could not divorce her husband because of the difficulties involved) and take on the role of the breadwinner in her family, a daunting task which she performs successfully. Sindiwe argues:

It is strange that it should have been the loss of Luthando, the husband I no longer loved, the one person in my life who meant the least to me, that contributed the most to my growth. (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 182)

This significant moment in Sindiwe's life leads to one of the many alterations in subjectivity and gender she experiences. Koyana argues that because of this limited role of males in the homestead, females had to re-evaluate motherhood as well as their children's upbringing (19). Sindiwe now has to take on multiple roles for she states that now she had to do what father did, and work; she had to do what mother did, and work in the household and besides all of that, she had to do what her brother Jongi did, and she studied to better herself. She states that "I became them" (Magona, *To My Children's Children* 182). From this statement we again note her important link with her family for in embodying these different roles played out by her family members, she is able to rectify her troubled situation and balance her life. We also note the gendered alteration which accompanies this adoption of multiple roles for she is no longer simply a wife and mother - she is both a mother and a father and additionally, a student. She does not exclusively embrace the role of motherhood or even feel that she may be able to juggle both roles of mother and father. Instead we find her adoption of the masculine role to be more prominent and thus the usual maternal and paternal roles are somewhat disrupted and unclear. Again, we learn the ironies Sindiwe notes as on the one hand she is marginalized by her culture but on the other hand she needs it in order for her identity formation and she ultimately needs her extended family to instil some hope in her and urge her to be successful.

Magona's latest book, *Beauty's Gift*, is further evidence of the changing nature of the role of women in South African society. In short, *Beauty's Gift* deals with a woman whose husband has an affair and infects her with HIV. Her gift is to impart this knowledge to her close female friends before her death, to help them to realise their worth as females and to not give in to their husbands who may be promiscuous and may in turn infect them with the virus. In this book, Magona illustrates to women the importance of placing oneself first and foremost, contrary to the

more traditional role of the woman which aimed to “mother” and please and thus place others before herself. The opening words of the narrative read: “God knew the African woman was going to have a very, very hard life. That is why He gave her skin as tough as Mother Earth herself” (9). Magona’s words are illustrative of the difficult position occupied by women. The narrative, similarly to *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow*, opposes tradition and modernity and challenges a woman to use elements of each tactically, to her own advantage, and to use modernity as a way in which to liberate herself from the parts of her traditional culture, which may restrict her gender identity but to still nonetheless retain a connection to her roots.

Overall, Magona’s autobiographies, *To My Children’s Children* and *Forced to Grow*, which I have examined in this chapter, are illustrative of the very dire circumstances Sindiwe as the protagonist faces as a young South African woman who has a black skin. Both fictional autobiographies have been written to pass on the story of Sindiwe to her descendents and are moving in that they depict Sindiwe’s courage and strength to better herself. As I have demonstrated, Sindiwe faces a number of alterations in terms of her gender identity and we find her constantly re-evaluating her role as a woman and as a mother. Magona uses what Koyana calls the maternal trope to navigate the tensions between two maternal discourses – one Western and the other, African (Koyana 19) and it is evident that being a female in the South African context within Xhosa tradition is very different to being a female in a western, American context. These redefinitions of self are partly attributed to Sindiwe’s transnational translocations but are also more importantly related to an alteration of her imagined space which occurs while at home in South Africa due to political and social circumstances. As I have argued, she is able to re-evaluate and refashion her gender identity and as a marginalised female she comes to reformulate a new sense of self and self-worth. Through her translocations, she learns of the many opportunities available to her overseas but also simultaneously learns that she is very much dependent on the community back home in the township who foster her identity as collective. She notices that her education and her embracing of modern ways are necessary to relieve herself of certain cultural constraints she finds within Xhosa culture and from the restrictive white government. Western liberal thought provides her with a new set of challenges and new ways of relating to others which she cannot comprehend and which do not make sense according to her Xhosa frame of reference. Yet Sindiwe formulates her imagined space in terms of the multiple

customs she occupies which allow her to place herself simultaneously inside and outside cultures.

However, in doing so, Sindiwe does not strive to assimilate herself as Hoffman's and Kingston's protagonists do. She is instead able to stay partly grounded in the values Xhosa tradition assigns to her even though she is simultaneously able to combine elements of these cultural environments (though she at times experiences a clashing of cultures). Through that she is able to embrace those aspects of modernity that partially allow her access to a more liberated way of life since she is provided with an exit away from the elements of Xhosa culture which restrict her as a female. In the final lines of *Forced to Grow*, Sindiwe requests that her grandchildren forget that she is sitting on a four-legged chair retelling or reading her story (232). She asks them to reimagine her situation and visualize her sitting on a goatskin or grass mat, telling the story in a traditional, oral manner and not in a written format which is significant of modernity. This ending is particularly crucial to the understanding of Sindiwe's partial embeddedness in Xhosa culture, but also crucial to the understanding of modernity and the opportunity it provides Sindiwe. Although this position between two customs is particularly ambiguous and presents numerous difficulties, Sindiwe is always able to use it strategically, and her link to Xhosa society will always remain strong. In the words of Magona:

Something deeper, primeval even, pulled and tugged at my heartstrings. *'Inkaba yakho iyakulilela! Your umbilical cord cries out for you!'* amaXhosa say to explain the urge that is not to be denied – the homing instinct. The umbilical cord, buried deep in the ground after the birth of a child, marks 'home'. And the belief is that this place has a pull on one. ("Home" 116)



## Chapter Four: Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*

Eva Hoffman's delightfully written memoir, *Lost in Translation*, deals with the female protagonist, a young Jewish girl named Eva, who undergoes an alteration in subjectivity on her emigration from Poland to Canada in the years subsequent to Hitler's rule. The protagonist initially experiences emigration as loss and upon arriving at her new home, she struggles, as a young Polish girl, to integrate herself into white western society. As a result of this, she is a complete outsider who strives to formulate a new sense of self as well as aspects of language, ways of thinking, and interaction with others in order to "assimilate"<sup>43</sup> into Canadian culture. Eva is physically displaced and we see a definite change in her subjectivity due to transnational translocation. This alteration in subjectivity mirrors the structure of the narrative which is seen to comprise three sections: "Paradise", "Exile" and "The New World", and attempts to depict both the progress and struggle of the character as a result of transplantation. From the initial page of the first section entitled "Paradise", one notes this fundamental transition in Eva's life as she moves away from her home country. We are initially given minor insight to the problematic faced by this young girl, and we find this notion of being "Lost in Translation", a depiction of a much larger societal concern regarding the Diaspora of Jews after World War Two. Although we are propelled into considering this immeasurable concern from the beginning of the book, it is only in the second and third sections, entitled "Exile" and "The New World", that the protagonist fully grapples with the consequences this translocation brings about. The problematic this young girl faces as a result of this and which will be the focus of this chapter, has to do with her reformulation of gender and her discovery of what it means to be a female in a western context rather than in her Polish context.

Eva's translocation causes her to re-evaluate her subjectivity and this re-evaluation is conveyed by means of her nostalgic thoughts in the initial chapter where we see Eva delving into memories of her childhood in Poland. Eva is initially seen to be distraught as she feels that her Polish life is ending upon emigration as a thirteen year old girl (Hoffman 3). However, it is certainly not her physical life that is ending for she comes to realise that it is instead her Polish

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<sup>43</sup> Eva feels that in order to adapt to this new cultural space, she has to assimilate herself into the dominant culture. I will argue that the term "assimilate" Eva herself employs is indeed problematic since it implies a complete dissolution of her Polish culture, when in fact some elements of her Polish identity are retained and reasserted.

cultural life and certain aspects of her Polish identity which are receding, for one's subjectivity is closely tied to one's locality, and the disruption of translocation causes the self to question its very existence. The realisation that in Canada she now has to "[...] invent a place and an identity for [herself] *without* the traditional supports" thus dawns upon Eva (my emphasis) (Hoffman 197). She emphasises that her traditional Polish cultural and social support system is partly dissipating because of her family's translocation and hence feels compelled to recreate a support and cultural system for herself. However, throughout the course of this chapter I will argue that Eva's identity is not dissolving as she believes it to be, but that it is instead altering and changing. I will demonstrate that Eva's Polish identity is not simply lost upon translocation for her formulation of her self consists of using *both* her newly acquired Western culture but also more importantly drawing on her traditional Polish culture.

This combination of cultures comprising Eva's subjectivity causes her to re-negotiate her sense of self in a new territory and thus to respond to contingencies brought about by Western hegemonic culture. According to John Phillips, narratives in which travel is fundamental test the self through contingencies to which it must respond. Phillips states that

[t]he travel narrative can thus represent through the motif of the person in trouble the whole dialectic of identity, in which the stable self tested by unpredictable contingencies must respond in consistent and enlightened ways, often achieving considerable personal enrichment on the way. The subject of the travel narrative must integrate new experiences and radical geographical and cultural differences within a stable cultural frame. (64)

Phillips captures the tension felt by the subject upon translocation but also highlights the vital importance of this tension as it allows the subject to recreate herself and integrate these new experiences into a stable cultural frame. Yet the question of what exactly comprises this stable cultural frame is indistinct in Eva's case since her translocation to the West is permanent and thus her cultural frame of reference shifts immeasurably, unlike subjects of travel narratives who generally return home after the proposed travel away from their cultural environment and hence retain a stable cultural frame of reference. Instead, in Eva's case, or, as Phillips argues, in the case of the diasporic or exilic subject, the unstable subject does not belong to a single dialectic. Instead her origin is displaced from the beginning, from the very first moment of translocation

and her cultural frame of reference cannot be fixed or stable (65). This is especially so, since we do not find Eva constantly returning to Poland to renew and revitalise her sense of her self as Polish, as does Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe. Unlike Eva, Sindiwe feels compelled to venture back and forth, between home and the foreign in order to retain her sense of self as fostered by Xhosa culture yet she is also very much dependent on modernity brought to her through her travels to first-world countries. Sindiwe is thus able to retain more of a partially stable frame of reference in relation to Xhosa traditions, unlike Eva's cultural frame of reference which is not as singular and is instead initially in flux, for it oscillates between different cultural contexts, combining, adding or rejecting cultural elements. Eva is seen to return home once throughout the course of the narrative and when she does so, she realises that she no longer fits into the Polish way of life. Upon telling her Polish friend Krysia that she is about to divorce her husband, Krysia is highly disappointed, as if she "[...] had told her about a painful incident" (Hoffman 235). Eva notices that in Poland such a thing would be looked down upon and divorce would not be considered a way out of an unhappy marriage or a way in which to free and liberate oneself, yet she feels that "[...] it's the right decision [...]" in her new locale (235). From this statement it is evident that Eva's new culture has a dominant and overriding effect on her culture at a previous locale for this new environment is where her cultural frame of reference now lies.

The degree to which a cultural frame of reference is stable is thus dependent on the collective nature of the subject's traditional culture as well as the patriotism felt by the subject. For example, Sindiwe's Xhosa culture focuses on collective and group identity, more so than Eva's Polish culture, which is in fact characterised by division for the Polish-Jewish culture she is born in (synonymous with anti-Semitism) yet also bears elements of individualism which further diminishes Eva's patriotism. This individualism is a fundamental dimension of Western liberal thought and thus of the Canadian milieu in which Eva immerses herself. It can then be argued that Eva is more malleable to Western ways than Sindiwe, for her Polish-Jewish identity could not be fostered by the collective Jewish mores or by her parents who veer away from traditional Jewish customs. Towards the end of *Lost in Translation* Eva states:

I've become [...] more "English," as my mother told me years ago. I don't allow myself to be blown about this way and that helplessly; I've learnt how to use the mechanisms of my will, how to look for symptom and root cause before sadness or happiness overwhelm me. I've gained some control, and control is

something I need more than my mother did. I have a more public life, in which it's important to appear strong. I live in an individualistic society, in which people blend less easily with each other, in which "That's your problem" is a phrase of daily combat and self defense. (Hoffman 269)

Correspondingly, Eva's position is seen to be similar to Sindiwe's in that Sindiwe also experiences much tension in terms of her Xhosa way of life, for people look down on her as an *idikazi*, or 'fallen' woman. However, unlike Eva, Sindiwe's family praise and maintain Sindiwe's familial environment even though the political environment and larger cultural context surrounding her deny her existence<sup>44</sup>. We are told that Sindiwe's mother even returns to traditional ways and becomes a traditional healer, thereby further affirming the family's role and influencing them with traditional customs. Although this does not initially impress Sindiwe, for she partly conforms to modernity, she does come to realise the importance of connecting to one's ethnic culture. It can then be argued that Sindiwe holds a much stronger and more stable cultural frame of reference than Eva, for Sindiwe's culture fosters a collective identity more so than the individualism fostered by Eva's Polish-Jewish culture as well as Eva's Western way of life. This is pertinent since the position of Jews in society has always been particularly precarious and Jews have been seen throughout history as a displaced people due to anti-Semitism. Subsequently, Eva's frame of reference (which was once partly stable during her childhood in Poland) is dramatically altered through translocation and it is through this that she attempts to obtain a unified and stable cultural frame in a new cultural environment whereas Sindiwe's frame of reference remains more stable and grounded in the Xhosa way of life.

In Kingston's narrative we see a correspondence to Magona's autobiographies in that Kingston's protagonist is able equally to achieve an amalgamation of both cultures, more so than Hoffman's protagonist. Despite the many elements of Chinese and Western culture which collide, Kingston's protagonist is cleverly combines elements of both cultures which liberate her and disregard restrictive elements which are sexist towards her as a female. In the final chapter of Kingston's narrative, the protagonist provides us with a story her mother told her. She states that the beginning of the story is her mother's but the ending is her own. This further highlights the autonomy of Kingston's protagonist in that she is able to reformulate her sense of self, not only

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<sup>44</sup> Whereas Eva's family are keen to embrace elements of Western culture and thus, to a certain extent, let their Polish roots dissolve.

in terms of a single culture, but in terms of both cultural environments. However, I have shown in Chapter Two that Kingston's protagonist does in fact hinder her ability to interlace cultures by employing essentialist terminology thereby circumscribing the process of her alteration in subjectivity and deeming it a process of "translation".

Each of the three female protagonists in this study experiences an oscillation of culture: in other words, they experience changing multiple cultural contexts which they have to negotiate. As I have argued, this oscillation differs from subject to subject for each protagonist stems from a different background and makes sense of her gender identity in a new cultural locale and in a different way. As this study will further show, one's cultural and gender identity by no means comes to an end upon translocation. Instead one's cultural and gender identity alters, modifies and transforms since translocation brings about a new cultural environment, with a set of challenges which the female protagonists must negotiate. In *Lost in Translation*, it is not only Eva's Canadian context that brings with it a new set of challenges, for back home in Poland Eva's sense of self is also equally challenged as a young girl who notes the prevalent anti-Semitism within Polish society. The caretaker of the building where her family reside remarks: "The little Jew, she thinks she's somebody" when she walks past (Hoffman 11). From this statement, one observes that Jews were indeed marginalised during this period, since their very identity and religion were challenged. Eva also sees the very explicit consequences of violence instilled by the war as she sees men with missing limbs on the tramway and as a child, concludes that life must be very difficult and that to be an adult "[...] is close to death" (Hoffman 7). Eva strives to retain this childhood innocence for she realises that to be an adult is certainly not unproblematic and throughout the narrative we see her nostalgia for earlier moments of her life and, in particular, moments of her childhood which shape her identity as an adult and later as an American<sup>45</sup> woman. This interplay of cultures on Eva's subjectivity is distinctive for despite the political and social turmoil brought on by the war, the Polish locale is nonetheless Eva's paradise and her home where her sense of belonging is essentially cultivated. It is for this reason that Eva finds herself being pried out of her childhood, her pleasures and her safety upon translocation

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<sup>45</sup> Although Eva translocates from Poland to Canada, as a young adult she later moves to America in order to attend university there and her experiences of these localities shape her identity. I refer to Eva as an "American woman", a "Canadian woman" but also a "Polish woman" as her subjectivity encompasses all three and she is neither one without the other since these multiple cultures and their localities have affected her subjectivity.

(Hoffman 4). Yet she slowly recreates her sense of self in the West. Bourdieu's theory of Habitus sheds light on Eva's position for he argues that in culture there are "[...] system[s] of schemes of production of practices and systems of perception and appreciation of practices in place" (Bourdieu 19). He further states that

[...] habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning. (19)

Bourdieu stresses the significance of cultural schemes and their codes which are necessary to understand social meaning. It is for this reason that Eva undergoes much tension regarding her subjectivity upon translocation for she has to acquire additional social codes and obtain an understanding of the cultural schemes as well as gender expectations in place in order to make sense of her new western cultural environment. Eva's sense of a geographical and cultural home is thus displaced for her Polish-acquired cultural schemes and their codes are less relevant in her foreign environment<sup>46</sup>.

Although Eva considers her culture of origin as an Eden from which she is wrenched, this Polish cultural locality Eva occupies is one which is indeed marginal for as a Jew she is not considered part of the Polish mainstream. Her family's geographical location in Cracow, Poland, echoes their marginal social and cultural position and we are told that like the very apartment in which they live, her family are "[...] located somewhere on the tenuous margins of middle-class society, in an amphibian, betwixt and between position" (Hoffman 13). From this quotation, it is evident that because of political circumstances, Eva's family occupies an ever-changing, obscure position, in which they fear the government's anti-Semitic motives and must to a certain extent conceal their Jewishness. In a similar way, during the war, Eva's parents must hide from the government in a friend's house, for fear of being found by the Gestapo. Although Eva's family occupy an ambivalent position in Poland, their position is certainly not one of poverty or destitution. In fact, her family is well-to-do and because her father becomes involved in illegal

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<sup>46</sup> Eva's family as well as other Polish emigrants now living in the West, are the only ones who still have access to Polish customs and norms although it does seem that they partly reject these in favour of Western culture which takes precedence. Eva therefore has significantly reduced contact with Poland and its customs in Canada.

business trading in order to make ends meet, they are even able to indulge in pleasures such as travel and having a live-in domestic worker. We are also told that Eva's mother comes from a family of merchants (Hoffman 22). Despite this, Eva's family's social and political situation is far from ideal for they are detested and looked down upon by non-Jews and her parents realise that translocation is necessary for their safety and their identity as a Jewish family.

This ambivalent position Eva's family occupy as Jews is one which may be classified as partially 'nomadic'. This is especially true since people of Jewish descent have been considered as those who do not have a fixed geographic place of belonging owing to years of war over land ownership in the Middle East between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It can then be argued that in history Jews have never had a situated sense of "home" due to years of prejudice and diaspora. In furthering this argument, Braidotti, in "Nomadic Subjects" argues that the polyglot or multilingual individual is a nomad whose identity is founded on translocation. She argues as follows:

[t]he polyglot as a nomad in between languages banks on the affective level as his/her resting point; s/he knows how to trust traces and to resist settling into one, sovereign vision of identity. The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant *cognito* supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for movable diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces. (*Nomadic Subjects* 14)

Although Eva is by no means completely "nomadic", as Braidotti theorises above, she does bear elements of the nomadic figure as Braidotti's theory suggests, for her subjectivity is founded on her different cultures and languages, her "inventory of traces". Eva's marginal position in Poland causes her family to relocate and become partially nomadic for their lives are filled with a sense of political danger and tension in Poland. However, Eva differs from the nomadic figure since her family's translocation is not a spontaneous move – it is a planned and mapped out permanent migration for her parents decide to relocate for they want "something better" for her and do not want her to be restricted by societal and political prejudices (Hoffman 15).

The nomad way of life is thus particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century, for we live in a time when increasing numbers of people are becoming dislocated from national,

regional, and ethnic locations or identities (Kaplan 101). Leaving home and changing one's location have become fundamental experiences in the modern world and as Caren Kaplan argues, "[...] the difference between the ways we travel, the reasons for our movements, and the terms of our participation in this dynamic must be historically and politically accounted for" (101). In Magona's *To My Children's Children* as well as *Forced to Grow*, Sindiwe is more of a nomadic subject than Eva in *Lost in Translation*. This is because Sindiwe constantly moves between different cultural spaces and moves from one point to another. Sindiwe has "absolute movement" for she is constantly on the move between different cultural locales. On the other hand, Eva is more of a migrant for as demonstrated she is seen to move in more "[...] determined and located ways" (Kaplan 89). It is also particularly interesting to note that Kingston's unnamed protagonist in *The Woman Warrior*, the one protagonist in this study who does not undergo a physical translocation, is one who can be considered particularly "nomadic" in the imaginative sense, for she is able continually move between multiple cultural contexts of the mind although physically situated in a single locale.

Although in *Lost in Translation*, Eva is seen to bear elements of the nomadic subject; she still has a strong connection to her Polish roots despite the prevalent anti-Semitism that exists there. Eva states:

[n]o, 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. It lives within me despite my knowledge of our marginality, and its primitive, unpretty emotions. Is it blind and self-deceptive of me to hold onto its memory? I think it would be blind and self-deceptive not to. All it has given me is the world, but that is enough. It has fed me language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind. (Hoffman 74)

Because of the ambiguous position of Jews in Poland during the time of Eva's youth, their sense of identity as a people was disrupted for they were not seen as being part of a collective Polish identity. As Eva states above, she was never permitted to be a patriot in Poland yet despite this, her childhood still forms a significant part of her being. This marginal position Eva's family occupy does not cease when they undergo a translocation to Canada since they again occupy a marginal position in the western world, yet in a new form. Upon arrival, Eva and her family inhabit an ambivalent position since they find themselves initially outside of the Canadian



culture as immigrants but are nevertheless, concurrently, physically located inside this cultural space. Later they are able to partly transgress this boundary as they slowly become members of this newly acquired cultural environment. Eva states that “New York, Warsaw, Tehran, Tokyo, Kabul – they all make claims on our imaginations, all remind us that in a decentered world we are always simultaneously in the center and on the periphery, that every competing center makes us marginal” (Hoffman 275). This postmodern way of thinking which Eva employs makes it evident that multiple cultural centers exist and that as a person whose cultural center becomes displaced because of translocation, Eva is able to occupy a particularly indistinct position of being, simultaneously in the center of the hegemonic culture but also on its periphery, for as an immigrant, it is difficult for her to fully ascribe to Canadian culture.

Eva experiences much tension when she arrives in Canada for the first time and this tension is conveyed through nostalgic memories of Poland. Eva views her nostalgia as a “[...] melancholia, which used to be thought of as an illness [...]” and as she walks the streets in Vancouver she finds herself “[...] pregnant with the images of Poland, pregnant and sick” (Hoffman 115). Eva not only experiences nostalgia for home but also an inability to read and internalise Western customs. She cannot make sense of the communication between individuals. Eva’s inability to communicate can be likened to Kingston’s protagonist who experiences similar problems of articulation and comprehension when she first goes to kindergarten and cannot speak English. We are told that she becomes silent and she states that even today: “A dumbness – a shame – still cracks my voice in two” (149). Equally, in *Forced to Grow*, Sindiwe also experiences incomprehensibility upon her translocation to Brussels. She states: “[...] my brain narrowed to a grain of sand as I experienced the absolute horror of total illiteracy. Numbing.” (142).

In Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation*, Eva’s experience of a new and incomprehensible cultural locale must be dealt with by partly letting go of these memories which make her metaphorically pregnant and physically unwell for she longs for her familiar Polish culture, a culture which she feels she needs to partly expel from her being in order to adapt to the authoritative culture. In addition, she needs to create new memories in this new locality in order to overcome this melancholia of translocation and thus translation. Eva notes that even though

she knows that there is “[...] no returning to the point of origin, no regaining of childhood unity”, her adjustment to this new environment requires of her to combine her past childhood experiences in Poland with her present Canadian cultural and linguistic experiences. Eva states that

[t]he wholeness of childhood truths is intermingled with the divisiveness of adult doubt. When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. (Hoffman 273)

Here we find Eva realising the true nature of her process of adjustment, which she hinders by using the term “translation”, that implies that during her process of adaptation, something will be lost (that of her Polish culture). Eva’s process of alteration is much more complex than she herself illustrates as she tends to oversimplify this process through use of such terminology. As the above quotation illustrates, Eva’s process of adjustment to this new cultural locale is determined by an intermingling, a fusion of both languages, English and Polish and hence an amalgamation. But in addition to this process of amalgamation, there is also a simultaneous process of conflict between the old and the new. English as a language, along with this Canadian culture to which she adjusts, does become the dominant culture for her, because in this new locality, her Polish culture is somewhat irrelevant, yet it is still somewhat necessary for the reformulation of her self as a Canadian woman. This is true since we are told that in Canada Eva “[...] no longer triangulate[s] to Polish as an authentic criterion, [and] no longer refer[s] back to it as to a point of origin.” We are also told that “[o]ccasionally, Polish words emerge unbidden from the buzz” (Hoffman 272). It is apparent that Eva undergoes not only a cultural shift but also a linguistic as her Polish language and culture decrease in use and purpose. Eva’s linguistic and cultural transformation in this geographical move in turn affects her gender identity and she too undergoes an alteration in terms of her gender for this new locality brings about new gender norms expected of young females.

Eva initially notices cultural as well as gendered differences between her generation and that of her parents while in Poland. We are told that her mother’s family was much more orthodox than her father’s, and even though her mother was a successful pupil:

[...] she was not allowed to go to the university which she ardently wanted to do, or to study the violin when one of her teachers offered to give her free lessons because he thought she was “musical.” She was not allowed to bare her arms or her legs, or to talk to boys on her own. (Hoffman 9)

These religious and gender restrictions placed on her mother as a woman are not transferred onto Eva and her sister, Alinka, for their mother feels that these restrictions on orthodox Jewish women are unnecessary and she attempts to encourage both children to become learned citizens. Their mother also does not instil in them a desire to dedicate themselves to ostensibly feminine pursuits such as cooking or sewing and instead encourages them to spend time on more interesting things such as books and educating themselves (Hoffman 9). The role of Eva’s mother is dissimilar to the protagonist’s mother in Kingston’s narrative who is seen to restrict the unnamed narrator’s role as a female through the imposition of sexist Chinese culture; ironically, the stories told by the Chinese mother foment the liberation of the young woman from restrictive norms.

In *Lost in Translation* we are told that Eva’s mother lends Hanka, a friend, a book that fascinates Eva. This book is called *For Women* and has images of what Eva and her mother consider liberated and desirable women in high-heels, exhaling cigarette smoke with lipsticked mouths. Eva states that the “[...] book’s purpose is to give advice on how to be glamorous, sexy, and constantly seductive [...]. its tone – so arch, so suggestive – irresistible” (Hoffman 54). This desire to become these glamorous and seductive women cannot be achieved in Poland where women like this were looked down on as a result of political, cultural and even religious circumstances. Yet, these glamorous women in the book are Westernised conceptions illustrative of modernity and western fashion – with which Eva and her sister Alinka later experiment. Yet, upon Eva’s arrival in Canada for the first time, she notices a young girl of about thirteen at the train station “[...] in high-heeled shoes and lipstick!” (Hoffman 54). Eva feels that this young girl looks so vulgar since she is not used to seeing this new aesthetic ideal to which she is now expected to conform in the West. She also finds that the culture and femininity to which she is expected to conform do not appeal to her for she finds that the boys and girls look sharp and aggressive, especially the girls with their “[...] bright lipstick on, their hair stick[ing] up and out like witches’ fury, and their skirts [...] held up and out by stiff, wiry crinolines” (Hoffman 105). From this description of the external appearance of these young girls, one can

argue that gender is indeed partly a kind of performance. Butler argues that the body “[...] often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (*Gender Trouble* 129). It is evident that Eva’s description of these young Canadian girls is unfathomable to her as a Polish girl, and her description of them is an external depiction of gender as internal cultural construction being played out. Butler further argues that “[...] acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organising gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (*Gender Trouble* 136). What Butler emphasises by this is that gender as performed externally is an illusion of the subject’s interior gender core which strives to be maintained and regulated according to cultural boundaries of heterosexuality yet as Butler has shown, gender can never be whole or fact and hence the refashioning of gender is a continuous process.

In *Lost in Translation*, what begins as a criticism of the cultural norms as well as gender norms expected of a female, slowly becomes an acceptance of these norms for we later find Eva wearing a red miniskirt that she is very pleased with, because after years of limiting herself to grey and navy blue and black she begins to dress in colours, which the fashion at the time requires. Upon wearing this skirt she jokes that “[...] it’s a sort of test for men. If they don’t see you are a sex object in this, then you know they’re really advanced” (Hoffman 55). In addition, Eva states that she knows this is the sort of joke her mother enjoys. We thus find Eva taking on additional feminine characteristics in order to understand Western culture but also to become a part of it. Yet it is clear that both her and her mother value intellectuality over looks, which they deem ultimately superficial, and that Polish culture fosters such intellectualism rather than the superficiality which tends to be associated with the ways of the West. As Eva observes, the culture of the West is a culture of objectification of women and hence Eva’s position has enabled her to be a part of that culture but also to have a critical viewpoint in order to see its shortcomings.

In “Nomadic Subjects” Braidotti argues that although modernity has brought about increased technology and breakthroughs, this technologization of culture is also fostering an increasing objectification of women. Braidotti states:

[t]he naked eye may have been replaced by the electronic lens, but the objectification and commercialization of what it beholds have grown bigger than ever. It is those factors that I would locate the pornographic mode, as a form of discursive and material domination [...]. I think that reflection on technology from the perspective of the humanities allows for powerful new insights on how to criticize scientific practice from within, so as to enhance its liberatory potential. (72)

As Braidotti points out above, a shortcoming of Western culture is that the increasing use of technology is prevalent and that this technology gives the viewer many different versions of reality which are essentially superficial in nature. Braidotti argues that a consequence of technology is that it leads to commercialisation and objectification in western society. Similarly, Eva notes the inadequacy of Western culture and this superficiality fostered by it and her experimentation with her external appearance is a result of her desire to achieve a stable gendered self and more broadly, a stable cultural frame of reference within an objectifying culture - an overwhelming task. This stylisation of the self is seen as Eva experiments with the fashion of the West, yet she does maintain her sharp intelligence and her criticism of the cultural locale she occupies. She is concurrently able to be both an insider and an outsider for she is on the one hand able to enter into Canadian culture by altering her physical appearance with supplementary feminine attributes, yet, on the other hand, able to retain much of her autoethnographic distance as a foreigner and an immigrant. Eva notices that the West values consumerism, money and success as she states that “[...] everyone also knows that America is the place where all the better things in life – cars, dollars, chewing gum, ballpoint pens – are endlessly available” (Hoffman 60). Yet she notes that this consumerist environment is also in fact quite dangerous for everything is seen as a commodity and monetary gain “[...] is a force so extreme as to become a religious force, a confusing deity, which demands either idolatry or a spiritual education” (Hoffman 139). Eva questions what one can love in this setting for one is bombarded with advertisements and endless varieties of products for sale and thus her subjectivity is inextricably challenged. Furthermore, the superficiality of the mainstream culture and the objectification of females that Eva and her mother attempt to initially protect Alinka from, makes Eva herself disorientated. This is clear in Eva’s experience with her mother and sister when they go shopping for dresses and accessories even though they cannot afford them. Here we find the hegemony to be a consumer-driven culture, and Eva states that she opposes

such consumerist notions for she finds material things to be of minor importance to her self, for these objects are simply that – objects which are essentially meaningless. Upon window shopping she says that “[...] the things threaten to crush me with their thinghood, with their inorganic proliferation, with their meaninglessness. I get headaches at Hudson’s Bay; I come out pale and depleted” (Hoffman 136). Chow argues that objectification, superficiality as well as the shift towards the visual fostered by the West is a kind of dominant discourse of modernity and in fact reveals epistemological problems that are inherent in social relations and their reproduction. “Such problems”, Chow argues, “inform the very ways social difference – be it in terms of class, gender, or race – is constructed” (“Postmodern Automaton” 101). This stylisation of Eva’s self must therefore be understood in terms of the greater Western hegemony which impacts on every aspect of Eva’s life as a young girl. As Butler argues:

[...] gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 519)

Eva’s gendered alteration is hence an experimentation and reproduction of the dominant culture for she feels that she must supplement her gender with feminine attributes which are praised in the prevailing notions of beauty. Although Eva is indeed critical of this compulsory act, she says she does not know “[...] what one can take into oneself as home [...]” for these material goods have no meaning to her and have no sense of significance - they are just objects and hence she questions how she can make this locale her new home. Because of her utter questioning of values in this locality, Eva is envious of those who, despite living in this consumerist and artificial world, still have a sense of belonging. She states: “I am most jealous of those who, in America, have had a sense of place” (Hoffman 159); yet we are shown that because of modernity, those that have a sense of place are few and far beyond.

Eva’s experience of modernity by no means occurs only after translocation and as I have shown, she comes into contact with aspects of modernity through her mother’s magazines and books. We are also told that while in Poland as a young girl and before her family’s translocation to the West, Eva’s acquaintances also see the West as being illustrative of progress and of a better way of life than what Poland can offer them. When Eva’s family receive a parcel

of gifts from friends who live in the USA, Eva and her sister Alinka receive pretty dresses as part of this present. For a while both sisters “[...] are the envy of the entire neighborhood” and they prance around as if they were from America themselves (Hoffman 61). It is evident that this translocation the family undergoes is justified for they feel that in moving across continents, they will undergo “[...] one enormous leap across the abyss, into modernity” and all the hopes and opportunities which come along with this (Hoffman 16). Eva is quick to notice that modernity is certainly not merely advantageous, for the dominant culture bears many elements of superficiality but also more importantly, the objectification of women is widely prevalent. This superficiality is evident when Eva visits friends who are trying on silk slips and putting on makeup to make themselves look more attractive for boys. Eva states that unlike the other girls, she does not have a silk slip which her friends find sexually alluring and does not like to put on make up and says that she finds “[...] these elaborate preparations [...] somehow disturbing”. She notices that these girls remodel themselves into something they are not, an almost unfamiliar species and hence place intelligence at a significantly lower scale of importance<sup>47</sup>. These young girls, who, as their customs require, objectify themselves, since, as Eva states, after this dress-up session the boys are

[...] supposed to come and get us, of course, but only after we have made ourselves into these appetizing and slightly garish bonbons. In the conspiratorial giggles in the room, there is the murmur of an unspoken agreement: we’re not going to show them who we are, we’re going to show them what they want. (Hoffman 129)

As an outsider, Eva is able to observe and criticize this objectification and this artificiality of Western culture. However, we see her succumbing to these very gender transformations she criticises and disputes. In Poland she was once considered attractive and pretty “[...] because [her] features have more of that irregularity – pouty lip, oblique cheekbone, slightly slanty eyes – which the Poles value as an ideal of feminine beauty” (Hoffman 42). However, now in Canada, Mrs Lieberman, a friend of the family who is also of Polish origin but who has resided in Canada

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<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that although Eva observes these gender differences, she includes herself in these elaborate preparations as she states that the girls remodel themselves “so that *we* can appeal to that other, alien species, boys” (my emphasis) (Hoffman 129). Eva’s use of “we” further illustrates her ability as an outsider to be both within the hegemonic culture but also on its periphery, for she is critical of these gendered acts she and her friends perform but also must participate in these to be accepted by the group.

for years and thus “[...] consider[s] [herself] well versed in native ways” (109), believes Eva deficient in her femaleness. The protagonist has once been a “[...] pretty young girl [in Poland, but now she] requires a basic revision of [her] self-image” (109) since this is what the dominant culture (and elsewhere) requires of her in order to assimilate herself. Eva states that

after the passage across the Atlantic, I’ve emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable. In fact, I can see in these women’s eyes that I’m a somewhat pitiful specimen – pale, with thick eyebrows, and without any bounce in my hair, dressed in clothes that have nothing to do with the current fashion. And so they energetically set out to rectify these flaws. One of them spends a day with me, plucking my eyebrows and trying various shades of lipstick on my face. (Hoffman 109)

These Westernised women also tell Eva that she has a perfectly good figure but must just accentuate it<sup>48</sup>. They even go so far as to examine her breasts and suggest to her mother that she start wearing a bra and her “mother obeys” (Hoffman 109). Eva’s mother is initially keen for her family to adjust to the ways of the hegemonic culture and agrees with the insight she feels these women have. Eva herself is not as appreciative of these alterations made to her appearance for she states that she “[...] feel[s] less agile and self-confident with every transformation”. She does not know how to walk in high-heels or to wear lipstick properly for she fears that it will smudge (Hoffman 109). It is this new appearance that gives her “[...] mannerisms of a marginal, off-centered person who wants both to be taken in and to fend off the threatening others” (Hoffman 110). Eva notices the duality of this situation she finds herself in – she wants to be accepted by the dominant culture but also finds this transformation of her gender identity threatening to her Polish gender identity already in place. Thus, her previously acquired gender identity is challenged by this cultural locality and thus her new sense of self. Butler argues that although gender is a “[...] public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 526). Gender is a societal conception which is

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<sup>48</sup> The role of men in Eva’s gender transformation is limited for we are not given much insight into their expectations of her as a young woman (with the exception of her father and lover who play minor roles in the narrative in comparison to the many females who influence her). Instead, we merely view this transformation in terms of the females she encounters and their expectations and knowledge of what it means to be a female. It is thus interesting to note that this objectification of the women in Canada comes from these women’s own gendered expectations and is not imposed onto them from males but is rather both self-imposed but also imposed by other older Westernised females.



enacted in various ways by individuals with agency. What Butler does not address here and what Benhabib expands on, is that as the self is enacted or as it plays out gender expectations which restrict the self, the self is also able to reformulate a new sense of gender. Benhabib argues that gender both confines and enables the subject. As stated earlier, Benhabib qualifies Butler's theory in that she stresses the need to acknowledge the spontaneity and creativity of the self for its acts are not simply a reproduction of a previously established gender identity.

Eva notices the many contradictions and clashing of cultures evident in her life. She notes that in Poland women who made themselves up with eye make up and lipstick and shaved their legs were seen as being "loose" and hence promiscuous; women who are evidently more masculine in their fashioning of themselves are praised. Even Eva's sister Alinka who is eleven has started performing these Western acts and is transforming her appearance which Eva and her mother later oppose for they do not want their loved one to be seen in a disgraceful manner. We are told that, "[...] altogether Alinka seems to be striving for a normal American adolescence. The only trouble is that none of us knows what that's supposed to be, and my sister pains us with her capacity for change, with becoming so different from what she was" (Hoffman 143 - 144). Butler discusses Victor Turner's work in the field of performativity and suggests that

[...] social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. When this conception of social performance is applied to gender, it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is immediately public as well. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 526)

Butler's understanding of the production of gender is particularly useful here for Alinka's experimentation with makeup and dress is completely "normal" for every young girl in Canada and she is required to act out these expectations in order to strive towards a normal Canadian childhood. Yet, Eva and her mother are ambivalent about these changes, for Polish ways are still ingrained in them. Eva begins

to feel maternal worry and lecture [Alinka] on how she should be careful: within our family divisions, I'm allowed the adventurousness of a son; but Alinka, the little one, the girl, must be protected. It's clear, though, that my sister is readier than I to defy family rules and plunge fullheartedly into whatever she finds here. (Hoffman 185)

Eva, as the eldest child, is allowed more independence than her sister whom she feels needs to be more protected. Even Eva's father "[...] in his excess of happiness, mistakes his firstborn for a son" and tends to treat Eva like a little boy who he prefers seeing in sports outfits such as long pants or shorts with her short and boyish hairstyle (Hoffman 9). Eva is thus allowed more freedom to roam this unfamiliar cultural locale in comparison to her sister who the family feel needs to be more sheltered, which is why Alinka's transformation comes as a shock to them. Eva must take the role of a protective older sister, who is more knowledgeable but also more hesitant and critical in the ways of the paramount culture. Yet this influence and control her parents have over both their children soon dissolves for Eva states that here in Canada, her parents no longer exercise much influence anymore, because Eva's mother does not know how to bring her children up in this new cultural location. Eva's mother's power has dissipated here for

[...] she has lost her sureness, her authority. She doesn't know how to scold Alinka when she comes home at late hours; she can only worry over her daughter's vague evening activities. She has always been gentle with us, and she doesn't want, doesn't know how, to tighten the reins. But familial bonds seem so dangerously loose here! (Hoffman 145)

Robyns argues that if "[...] identity is formulated in conflict to the alien then contingencies confer a loss of identity" (406). However, I argue that this is not in fact a loss but rather a dissipation of identity for its bond to culture is strong and upon translocation this geographical link is partly severed. Yet Robyns' statement below does in fact depict the tensions felt by the protagonist. She states:

the very fact that, within a culture or discursive practice, there is an awareness of a common identity implies that there has also been a striving toward preservation of this identity, toward self-preservation by the discourse. If identity is constructed in opposition to the alien, interferences imply loss of autonomy and thereby loss of identity. (406)

This dissipation of autonomy and identity is seen when Eva's mother questions her own position as a Polish woman in a Canadian culture whose familial relations seem less important and less secure and supportive than Poland's. Eva's entire family experiences dislocation upon their translocation for they feel their Polish culture is lost. Kaplan argues that in "[...] modernity, it is often a notion of the "past" that is believed to be lost, as well as notions of territorial blankness and ownership" (70). Kaplan argues that these notions of the past seem to be "lost" for modernity presents itself with many cultures which collide and interlace and so it may appear that one's past experience of a previously experienced culture or locality dissipates.

On the whole, in Canada, Eva is thus simultaneous part of the culture but also outside of the culture, and she is able to gain a distant and critical perspective of the gender norms expected of females. Eva learns that in order to be accepted by the teenage boys, a girl should embrace her femininity and should not be too masculine like a girl she knows called Rachel, who we are told, does not get any dates with boys because of this fact. Eva reads *Seventeen Magazine*, a teenage magazine for girls from which she learns of the expectations and highly complex nature of what is expected on a date with a boy. She states that a date to her, in Canadian terms, seems in fact quite scary as she "[...] never thought that talking to a boy was an enterprise hedged with special difficulty, or requiring special preparation". She questions the structured nature of this occasion and how, because of this, one cannot enjoy "[...] the fresh wind of camaraderie or freedom" that talking to a boy should allow (Hoffman 149 - 150). To Eva, a date is something unknown and whose "[...] semiotics are highly standardized and in which every step has a highly determinate meaning and has to be carefully calibrated" (Hoffman 149). This structured cultural occasion can be contrasted with the way in which Eva spontaneously reacts around her childhood love, Marek, whom she adored back in Poland. Together, Marek and Eva can be themselves, as young Polish children. We can see this spontaneity when Marek boyishly plays pranks on her and when he "[...] he drops an enormous tome on [her] head" when she walks past his window while they still live in Cracow (Hoffman 18). Eva challenges the superficiality of the mainstream culture and the restrictive spaces females occupy. She states: "I never thought you had to do anything special to be feminine – surely, it's enough to be a woman, isn't it?" (Hoffman 178). Here Eva questions these cultural norms which she feels cultivate a sense of objectification for in being a woman, one should not have to dress up to become someone else, make oneself look more attractive to

men or follow certain gender rules or expectations - instead one should be accepted for who one is and not what one looks like.

This objectification of women is further seen during Christmas time when Eva humorously describes all the women in the area who look as “[...] though they have had the services of a taxidermist: meticulously made up, sheathed in stiff dresses and totally matching accessories, smiling carefully. The men are wearing suits and ties and are talking, as always, business” (Hoffman 140). This distinction between men and women is deplorably questionable for it seems that Western culture requires of women to be objects of desire, with little intellect and men, on the other hand, to be serious, determined and intellectual beings. We are also told that while the men go to their businesses during the day, most of the women have little connection with the world outside their homes and none ever consider taking a job or pursuing a career. Their husbands’ ambitions are seen to be more important than their own (Hoffman 141, 142). We are also told that these women do not stand up for themselves or defend themselves if their husbands abuse them, nor do they seek support from the greater community and from friends because such support is not fostered by the dominant culture<sup>49</sup>. This is because of the individualism fostered by North American culture in contrast to Polish culture, which to a greater extent cultivates a sense of community. We are told that these women live “[...] too far apart from each other” and do not become part of each others’ lives and support each other (Hoffman 142). It is evident that Canadian customs do not foster community spirit and social bonds but rather personal pursuits are favoured without a connection to the greater community. Eva thus shows much insight into the gendered norms prevalent in Canadian social order and questions these norms accordingly as an outsider who is used to the love and support of fellow neighbours and friends.

When Eva later meets Rosa Steiner, a wealthy woman in Canada, she admires her for she is a vivacious, energetic woman in her forties who has beautiful high-cheekbones, a sign of Eastern European femininity. Eva admires her “[...] great certainty of her own opinions, judgments, and preferences” and states that Rosa reminds her of “[...] the authoritative women

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<sup>49</sup> The way in which Eva views Canadian women in comparison to the women back at home in Poland is a generalisation. However, her translocation to North America has enabled her to dislocate herself away from Polish culture and because she is not an ‘insider’ to Western culture, she is able to feel her way around her Western culture, draw comparisons between that and Polish culture and become more critical and attune to the differences between the cultures.

she knew in Poland”, whom she feels are certainly not as relentlessly feminine and superficial as the women in Canada (Hoffman 111). Eva looks up to Rosa’s determined and opinionated qualities which she feels are a sign of intelligence and sophistication, something she finds the Canadian women to lack for they seem too obsessed with appearance and pleasing their husbands.

In contrasting these two very different cultural descriptions of women, Eva questions and weighs up the expectations of females in both cultural contexts, in order to decide which she should aspire to. From these experiences of women, she notices that she would much rather aspire to be like Rosa, who, in her eyes, is a sophisticated and knowledgeable woman who is firm yet graceful in stature. Eva does not completely reject her Polish culture for she needs the morals and values it represents, in order to re-evaluate her situation in Canada and the West, where she feels her morals could possibly dissolve because of this shallow environment. Eva feels that the gender expectations of females in Canada are discriminatory to her, for she has been brought up with the knowledge of Polish gender expectations – which are now challenged in this region. These discriminatory gender norms can further be illustrated when Eva attends a party and dances with a boy even though she does not know how to talk to him and he does not say anything either. We find her stating:

I want so much to throw myself into sex, into pleasure. But instead, I feel that small movement of prim disapproval. This is “unnatural,” I decide – a new word of opprobrium in my vocabulary, and one that I find myself applying to any number of situations I encounter [...] “He held you very close,” one of the girls informs me when the dance is over and I’m returned to my own gender. (Hoffman 130)

At this point we again find Eva questioning her femininity in this new cultural locale. In Canada, dancing with a boy at this party and playing spin the bottle seems unnatural behaviour to her but she nevertheless partakes in these events. When the dance is over, her statement, namely that she is returned to her own gender, is particularly crucial for we find her adapting to these cultural norms by participating in them, but then also simultaneously stepping back as an observer for she feels these norms do not fit her previously acquired Polish norms for the dance, as well as the spin the bottle game which seem structured, artificial and unnatural. Eva thus fluctuates back and forth between her Polish culture of origin and her new Western culture. The structured and

unnatural event of this party can again be seen in contrast to Eva's loving and passionate relationship with her friend Marek in Poland. Eva finds this new locality to be "[...] a sad comedown from Marek and the pack of boys and girls" she used to interact with in Cracow for this new location is a highly structured one which she in fact does not find as spontaneous and enticing to cultivate romances. Eva states that this is "[...] certainly a comedown from my fantasies of an adventurous feminine destiny, which usually involved lush romances followed by a 'civilized' marriage – meaning one in which it would be understood that both I and my husband could have lovers" (Hoffman 131). For Eva, these games are childish and naïve, for she would much rather indulge in passionate and spontaneous love affairs as she had imagined. Because of these cultural observations Eva makes, she finds herself taking on the role of an anthropologist in what she claims is a non-participant and detached way – to observe these customs purely as an outsider.

As Eva becomes older, she again undergoes translocation, this time from Canada to the USA to study at university and this move brings about new cultural norms regarding her gender identity for she falls in love with a fair-haired Texan who is tall and has blue eyes. She is later told that the parents of this Texan man are not happy about his involvement with a Jewish woman (Hoffman 188). Eva thus constantly questions her femininity and asks:

[h]ow am I to become a woman in an American vein, how am I to fit the contours of my Texan's soul? The allegory of gender is different here, and it unfolds around different typologies and different themes. I can't become a "Pani" of any sort: not like the authoritative Pani Orlovska, or the vampy, practical Pani Dombarska, or the flirty, romantic woman writer I once met. None of these modes of femininity makes sense here, none of them would find corresponding counterparts in the men I know. (Hoffman 189)

Eva upholds the images in her mind which she has of the Pani's, or sophisticated ladies in Poland, as she notices these modes of femininity do not make sense in the USA and she cannot aspire to become women like them. Furthermore, there are no such figures in the USA to which she can aspire to except for Rosa Steiner, who to her mind represents a Polish and not a Western way of life. Eva's relationship with her Texan man is more complex and intricate for she does not comprehend the meaning of her role as an American woman. When her Texan man tells her that he loves her, she hears "[...] an oddly disembodied phrase [...]" (Hoffman 190) which is

essentially a result of her sense of dislocation for she feels that her connection to him should be deeper and that there should not be a metaphorical space between them. This metaphorical space between them later changes, for Eva is slowly able to reinscribe meaning from her Polish language into English words. She states that the language has entered her body and her being and so now when she says words like “darling” or “my dear” to her lover, these words

are filled and brimming with the motions of my desire; they curve themselves within my mouth to the complex music of tenderness. (Hoffman 245)

Here we find Eva’s sense of adaptation to be constantly in a state of flux and alteration, for in contrast to her previous feeling of dislocation at the words she and her lover exchange, she is now able to ascribe meaning to these words and to express that meaning through English, a language no longer foreign to her. Eva is able to employ English as a tool in which to attempt to understand her world, yet this tool in fact enables her to be critical about her locality as well – a duality which she comes fully to understand. Benhabib argues that the self exists only within “webs of interlocution” for the self is always determined by where one is situated and how one’s relationships are fostered in that space (Benhabib 344). According to Benhabib’s postulation, Eva is reliant on her understanding and acceptance of English in order to understand Western culture and her own relationship with her lover as a Western relationship and not as a Polish one. Eva’s relationship with her lover who is a Native American is very much dependent on her physical locality, a locality which she has not yet come to fully understand for she has only just learnt the language, a tool necessary for her to decode this complex locality. Eva is anxious about her environment and feels a partial sense of dislocation but comes to realise that she is not alone. Her sense of dislocation is also felt by the Native Americans who, because of what life brings about - “[...] [m]arriage, divorce, career indecisions, moving from city to city, ambivalences about love and work and every fundamental fact of human activity” – are also seen to struggle to find meaning in their lives. Eva further states:

It could be said that the generation I belong to has been characterized by its prolonged refusal to assimilate – and it is in my very uprootedness that I’m its member. It could indeed be said that exile is the archetypal condition of contemporary lives. (Hoffman 197)

In contrast to her initial anxieties, we find Eva connecting with the western setting for the most part as she is able to see the ironies of her situation in that it is in her uprootedness and her foreignness that she is in fact accepted, for we are told that exile is a condition of contemporary lives, thus, illustrative of the mainstream culture and hence modernity. It is evident that Western culture brings about a search for self and deeper meaning for in the midst of a consumerist and superficial culture people are beginning to re-evaluate their lives and find meaning through exile. Eva does learn an important lesson because of her uprootedness and her constant state of insider and outsider duality - she needs to first love the world around her Texan lover, this new locality she occupies, before she can indeed love her Texan (Hoffman 245, 246).

Eva notes that the many challenges she undergoes in terms of her gender identity are ultimately a consequence of her translocation which causes her to re-evaluate her situation, as a young Polish and Jewish<sup>50</sup> girl, but also as a young Canadian woman. On the one hand she has a measure of contempt for this environment she is so familiar with and critical of, for she states that

[t]his goddamn place is my home now, and sometimes I'm taken aback by how comfortable I feel in its tart, overheated, unsecure, well-meaning, expansive atmosphere. I know all the issues and all the codes here. I'm as alert as a bar to all the subliminal signals sent by word, look, gesture. (Hoffman 169)

Eva has learnt all the cultural codes and specifics here and she is alert to these behavioural codes, more so than the natives. Eva also notices that her situation could indeed have turned out very differently if her family had not moved from Poland to Canada. She states, “[...] people could behave in a different manner; I could look different, flirt different; I could be having entirely different conversations” (Hoffman 170). Here we find Eva to hold some remorse but also speculative nostalgia for the unknown because, if she had remained in Poland, her cultural identity as well as her gender identity would have been significantly different. The problematic of self-translation is thus pertinent throughout the narrative for Eva feels she must translate herself linguistically, socially and culturally into a white western culture. As we have seen, she initially struggles to do so, because “[...] the problem is that the signifier has become severed

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<sup>50</sup> It is strange to note that Eva never in fact discusses the consequences of translocation on her religious identity and rather focuses on the gender, cultural and linguistic modifications.



from the signified” and the words she learns in Canada do not stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in her native tongue (Hoffman 106). Eva refers to “[t]he verbal blur [that] covers [...] people’s faces, their gestures with a sort of fog” and we find that she “[...] can’t translate them into [her] mind’s eye” (108). Here we find the protagonist initially in a state of numbness, almost an empty vessel or blank slate; she cannot cope in this new world and thus she describes herself as a being that ceases to exist. Similar to Magona’s Sindiwe, Eva experiences a verbal blur as a result of translocation. Her culture and all that she stood for mean very little in this new cultural locale and this is why Eva faces such an immense challenge in order to recreate cultural systems in a new manner. Yet, she too finally learns to adjust to this position for she later states that “I fit, and my surroundings fit me” (Hoffman 170).

Therefore an immense alteration is seen in Eva’s subjectivity, for initially at the beginning of the narrative Eva felt that she had been dislocated from her own center of her Polish world and that Poland has been shifted away from her center (Hoffman 132). Now she realises that being an immigrant “[...] is considered a sort of location in itself” (Hoffman 133):

Perhaps it is my intolerance of those, my cherishing of uncertainty as the only truth that is, after all, the best measure of my assimilation; perhaps it is in my misfittings that I fit. Perhaps a successful immigrant is an exaggerated version of the native. From now on, I’ll be made, like a mosaic, of fragments – and my consciousness of them. It is only in that observing consciousness that I remain, after all, an immigrant. (Hoffman 164)

Eva feels that she needs to “assimilate” herself to a Western culture and as the word “assimilate” implies, she would thus need to abandon her Polish roots completely. Yet Eva contradicts herself in this statement for at the same time she says that she is made of fragments like a mosaic, which implies that her subjectivity is in fact made up of many different elements, both Polish and Canadian and not simply one or the other. This is further illustrated when she states, “[...] one of the ways in which I continue to know that I’m not completely assimilated is through my residual nostalgia” (Hoffman 197). Again we find Eva’s subjectivity to be made up of many different cultural elements and not to be singularly Polish or Canadian. She can never be completely assimilated for her situation does not allow for this.

Eva's desire to "assimilate" to the hegemony can be further understood when we see her attending university in the USA and receiving numerous scholarships and fellowships for her outstanding work. In educating herself on such a high level and through immersing herself in literature, Eva can partially enter into the culture for through literature she is able to obtain cultural and gender notions and expectations. We read that the hundreds of voices Eva has read eventually enter her and that by assuming them she gradually makes them her own (Hoffman 220). This is illustrative of the embodiment of cultural and gender norms as Eva absorbs cultural expectations in order to make sense of her world. Thus Eva's high level of education has helped her become a young American woman for when receiving her degree she states:

I receive the certificate of full Americanization [...] Everything comes together, everything I love, as in the fantasies of my childhood; I am the sum of my parts. It's all turned out right; a wave of gratitude sweeps over me. I've been the recipient of so much generosity. Harvard has been accepting of me, the American educational system as hospitable and democratic as advertised. (Hoffman 226)

At the same time, she can use English as a tool in which to be critical of her locale, to analyse it and note the inherent challenges and issues which it presents. Eva's American adaptation to her unfamiliar terrain is importantly linked to her love for education and for literature, since both are a huge determinant in her ability to integrate herself successfully as a young woman into the culture of the West. In addition, from an early age, we are told that Eva declares that she wants to be a writer but we learn that she is in fact articulating a different desire, a desire that she cannot yet understand for what she really wants is to be transferred into a space in which everything is as distinct, complete, and intelligible as in the stories she reads (Hoffman 28). Eva thus holds a large desire to encapsulate her knowledge and her experience into a whole and consistent format and similarly we see her striving towards a whole and unified being, for what she desires in her new locality is to achieve a complete sense of self – and as I have shown, something which she cannot fully achieve because the dual customs she straddles do not allow for this.

Nevertheless, words give Eva the ability to re-create her environment so that she can understand it but these words also give her the tools in which to re-create herself. Because her childhood was made up of Polish words and not English words, we are told that she wants to recreate herself from "[...] the discrete particles of words, that wholeness of a childhood

language that had no words” (Hoffman 217). Another element that is disrupted by this translocation is Eva’s speech and we are told that her “[...] voice is still a highly unreliable instrument” and at the strangest moments, it betrays her and refuses to go on for she literally cannot find it (Hoffman 218). Because Eva herself lacks a voice of her own and the English language, “[...] the voices of others invade [...]” her as if she were a silent ventriloquist. These voices echo inside her for these voices are the tool in which culture is passed on to her. Eva states that

I do not yet possess them; they possess me. But some of them satisfy a need; some of them stick to my ribs [...] Eventually the voices enter me; by assuming them, I gradually make them mine. I am being remade, fragment by fragment, like a patchwork quilt; there are more colours in the world that I ever knew. (Hoffman 220).

Language interlinks every aspect of Eva’s life for when she falls in love, she finds herself “seduced by language” and even when she gets married we see this. Later, her husband’s confident English voice when he recites Walt Whitman’s poetry gives her the confidence as well as the link she needs to embed herself into Western culture. She states that her husband’s voice can “[...] carry me right into the heart of America” (Hoffman 219).

Yet by the end of the fictionalised autobiography, Eva herself does believe that by means of literature and education she has achieved a state of wholeness, for she states that “For now, there are no Platonic azaleas, no Polish hyacinths against which these are compared [...] How could there be any other place?” (Hoffman 280). Eva’s center and homely space has shifted from Poland and is now set in the West, where she finally acquires a sense of belonging. Instead of her belief that she has become a whole, complete and “fully realized being” in the process she has in fact rather achieved a sense of belonging which her use of terminology such as “assimilation” and “translation” seem to complicate (Hoffman 137). Her closing words, “The language of this is sufficient. I am here now”, clearly demonstrate this finally acquired sense of belonging. Eva states that she most probably had “[...] to gather enough knowledge of [her] new world [in order] to trust it” (280). Yet, her notions of what it means to be a young Western woman will always be in a state of flux, as culture and thus gender are never stagnant and stable elements.

Understanding Eva's translocation is crucial to understanding her alteration in subjectivity, for the two are inextricably linked. As demonstrated, Eva desires to create a sense of a homely space in the foreign, and she achieves this not through assimilation to the West but rather through an interconnection of the multiple cultures she occupies. Rey Chow argues that a challenge of modernity is to question not "[...] whether we can return the native to her authentic origin, but what our fascination with the native means in terms of irreversibility of modernity" (*Writing Diaspora* 36).

## Chapter Five: Concluding Thoughts on Translocation and Female Subjectivities

As this study has shown, transnational translocation or an imagined translocation causes the female self to renegotiate her sense of being and in particular her gender. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* and Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* all bear similarities with regard to the variations in gender that the female protagonists undergo during translocation. As a result of this, subjectivity and gender are constantly in flux in relation to certain contingencies brought about by the straddling of multiple cultural contexts. I have demonstrated that because of this, gender is thus a cultural conception which is constantly renewed, revised and refashioned over time in response to changing cultural contexts. In accordance with Butler I have argued that the body acquires its gender through a series of acts which over time are transforming and consolidating in nature. Butler is accurate when arguing that the gendered body should be "[...] reconceived as a constitution of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 523). It is for this reason that gender is performative and that it is real only to the extent to which it is performed ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 527).

Yet, Butler's theory of performativity is perhaps limiting for, as Benhabib points out, Butler does not account for the spontaneity and dynamism of the subject's gender for her argument insists that gender is constantly performed and hence, to a certain extent, intended. Benhabib qualifies Butler's theory and argues for a narrative model of subjectivity which accounts for the socio-cultural nature of the subject's gender and also illustrates the constant refashioning of gender in response to unforeseen changes the subject faces. In Benhabib's postulation of the narrative model, she presents the idea that in writing and articulating the self, language and sexuality both circumscribe and enable the subject. This is to say that language and gender are a means in which the self both displays its structure but also demonstrates its restriction in terms of the boundaries and norms necessitated by culture. In saying so, Benhabib accounts for the conflict experienced by the female subject as she supplements her gender with masculine or feminine characteristics as a result of her attempt to achieve stability and coherence of the self – aspects of the self which seem to dissipate upon undergoing transnational translocation or an imagined

translocation. As a result of this supplementation, the formation of the protagonists' gender is seen to be androgynous for a certain period of time. Protagonists are thus seen to disrupt the fixed categories of gender which are restrictive upon their subjectivity. Accordingly, Teresa de Lauretis argues for the "[...] destabilisation of the normativity of dominant forms of sexed identity and urges individuals to find new definitions for female subjects for the social and cultural categories of 'male', 'female', 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' [which are indeed limiting in that these are] culturally defined and subject to taboo" (Lauretis qtd. in Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 274). This is particularly true in all three cases. In the case of Sindiwe who takes on additional masculine attributes, this is looked down upon by Xhosa culture. Her supplementation of these characteristics is necessary for survival is yet not culturally approved. The gendered transformations of Eva and her sister are not understood by her mother who remains partly set in Polish ways. Likewise, in Kingston's narrative, we find the protagonist searching for new forms of femininity which are not understood by Chinese culture.

The emergence of modernity and globalism amplifies the female subjects' alteration of gender, as translocation challenges the individual and collective nature of the subject because the subject is placed in multiple cultures at the same time. The global redistribution of labour has increased this tension, for as Braidotti argues, "[...] a decline of traditional sociosymbolic systems based on the state, the family, and masculine authority is underway" (*Nomadic Subjects* 2). This has a large impact on the formulation of the female's gender for, as postmodern thought illustrates, boundaries dissolve and multiple frames of reference bring about novel challenges in the new constellation. Furthermore, Chow notes that postmodernism foregrounds the interconnected nature of knowledge, customs and ideas which emphasises the ambivalent position of the subject, for the self is not closed off by geographical or social and cultural boundaries. Instead, the self transcends these boundaries to a certain extent, making it more fluid and dynamic. Chow also notes that in postmodern thought, it "[...] is no longer possible to assume a transparent and universal frame of reality" ("Postmodern Automaton" 104) and as I have argued, this way of thinking ultimately ignores demands for stability which all three protagonists strive towards.

It is for this reason that the protagonists search for a sense of belonging and autonomy. This search is ultimately founded on a desire for identity and stable positionality in terms of gender and subjectivity and is thus an immeasurable and widespread desire within Western culture in the twenty-first century. Consequently, identity and nationalism are two crucial concepts which are constantly at the foreground of the four narratives. These two concepts are particularly ambivalent in the twenty-first century due to emergent globalism and modern technologies which allow the female subject to venture into unexplored territory, cultures, languages and ways of being, but which also simultaneously expose her to new forms of marginality.

As I have demonstrated throughout the course of this thesis, each protagonist strives towards a sense of identity and belonging which they all do obtain, but only to a certain extent. Yet Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe, is the only protagonist able to use this ambiguous straddling of cultures to her full advantage for she is able to achieve a stable cultural frame of reference and formulate an imagined social space in which both Xhosa tradition *and* modernity have a place. Kingston and Hoffman's protagonists are able to achieve this to a much lesser extent, due to their greater immersion into Western customs and their desire to assimilate and translate themselves. Both Hoffman and Kingston's protagonists do not undergo frequent transnational translocations in order to revitalise their sense of home as Sindiwe does. In contrast to Sindiwe, Eva undergoes a permanent translocation from Poland to Canada and only returns home once; similarly Kingston's unnamed protagonist is an Asian American who does not visit China once during the course of the narrative. However, these two protagonists do revisit their traditional culture by means of storytelling and memory recollection yet I argue that this is not sufficient for them to refresh their sense of belonging within their ethnic culture for Western culture's impact on their selves is immense and overriding. In addition to this, I argue that physical translocations are not singlehandedly necessary for the subject to experience an alteration in terms of her subjectivity and her gender. Similar to Kingston's protagonist, Magona's protagonist in *To My Children's Children* equally experiences an imagined shift towards a new cultural space and not a transnational translocation. However, both physical as well as imagined translocations to one's ethnic culture are vital for the refreshing and renewing of one's self as Western culture becomes a potentially overriding culture.

*Forced to Grow* is particularly significant in that Sindiwe is able to achieve something that the other two protagonists do not. She is able to refashion, reformulate and renew herself by means of translocation yet she still achieves a stable cultural reference to her home culture through her constant visits home and through recollection of past events. Although Sindiwe and the other two protagonists are not able to achieve a single cultural frame of reference because of modernity's influence on their culture of origin, Sindiwe's desire to hold onto her culture is strongest and most stable and she therefore remains rooted in traditional ways. Sindiwe is therefore most "nomadic" in that she is a world traveller, not just of the geographical terrain but also of the imagined terrain. This is not to say that Eva and Kingston's protagonists do not experience an equal alteration in subjectivity. They in fact do, yet their alterations are significantly different in that they refashion themselves in terms of both their Western culture and culture of origin but hinder their amalgamation and clashing of cultures with essentialist terminology for they attempt to "translate" and "assimilate" themselves to a Western way of life, something Sindiwe does not attempt to do. Sindiwe instead uses her ambiguous positioning more strategically than Eva and Kingston's protagonist. As a mostly nomadic figure she is able to recreate her home elsewhere even though she still has a longing for South Africa when abroad. In the final lines of *Forced to Grow*, Sindiwe says to her grandchildren: "[...] forget that I am sitting on a four-legged chair instead of a goatskin or grass mat. Forget that we meet through your eyes instead of your ears. Listen, for my spirit, if not my flesh, is there with you" (232). In fostering her Xhosa culture, Sindiwe urges her grandchildren to reimagine her own life, to reimagine her physical translocation but to ensure her bond with her roots even though she is no longer physically located in South Africa. Braidotti argues that nomadism does not entail being homeless, instead, it entails being capable of recreating your home everywhere. The nomad, Braidotti argues, is an individual who is able to carry her essential belongings wherever she goes to create a home base anywhere (*Nomadic Subjects* 16).

In order to recreate a sense of belonging and autonomy, the protagonists, who are all marginalised as females in their ethnic culture due to political or social limitations, undergo



much tension upon translocation<sup>51</sup>. Yet, contrary to what they believe, upon translocation they are not necessarily seen to experience the liberation and freedom they desire, for modernity and the West present them with an entirely new set of limitations and restrictions which further challenge their gender. In order to sufficiently deal with these challenges they must create a new and imagined space for themselves, a space which allows them to (re)present themselves away from and beyond the boundaries of the multiple cultures they inhabit. In recreating a new space for themselves, female protagonists are able to destabilise boundaries as well as restrictive notions of gender as required by their cultures for they are able to take on additional masculine or feminine characteristics. A juxtaposed and contradictory outcome is raised by this study, for in the case of Kingston and Magona's narratives, supplementary masculine attributes are taken on by the protagonists in order to demonstrate their value as females as well as their equality to men for their home environments foster sexism. The Western hegemony offers them a way out of cultural restrictions through their employment of masculine attributes. Contrastingly, in Hoffman's narrative, Eva's adoption of additional female characteristics is due to her translocation as the cultural expectations required of women by the hegemony force her to alter her appearance in order for her acceptance. Eva needs to adopt feminine attributes in order to become a claimant to modernity yet in contrast to Kingston and Magona's supplementations, these attributes are objectifying and superficial.

Western culture, therefore, takes a contradictory stance in the case of the three protagonists for it is on the one hand enabling and on the other hand confining or restricting the gender of these protagonists. These incidents the protagonists experience in their new locale bring about gender tension, but such changes are nevertheless crucial to the female subject's negotiation of a new cultural space. This space pertains to Bhabha's Third Space, which he argues is a place between and amongst cultures where cultural signs to which value and meaning are attached, "[...] can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (208). This is particularly so, for the three protagonists this study has investigated occupy an ambivalent position much like the space Bhabha describes, as they inhabit multiple cultures concurrently and are able to obtain a critical distance by which they are able to negotiate themselves both in *and* away from their different

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<sup>51</sup> In the case of in *Lost in Translation*, Eva is marginalised in her home country, not as a female but as a Jew, although as mentioned, Eva's mother is marginalised as a female for she stems from an orthodox Jewish background where women are considered subordinate.

cultures. In doing so, the female subjects must refashion themselves away from their minority positions. Abdul JanMohammed and Dan Lloyd argue that “[...] minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically” which is why they are “[...] excluded automatically from claiming universality” (Gunew 33). This observation is particularly pertinent, for in the four narratives reviewed, protagonists attempt to claim aspects of the dominant modernity which allows them a portion of universality yet at the same time they are still able to acknowledge their roots.

Thus, all three protagonists have a desire to position themselves both inside and outside certain systems of representation. This ambiguous positioning denies the female subject’s identity singularity and fixity, for she oscillates between multiple ways of life and cultures. These systems are essentially inescapable yet, as Hall argues, it is possible to use these positions strategically. Even though one may not have a permanent positioning this does not mean that there can be no meaning because of this impermanence. Instead, Hall argues “[...] positioning is always temporary, meanings are always provisional” (qtd. in Gunew 45). This temporary position can be further linked to the destabilisation of conceptual boundaries in postmodern thought and as Chow argues, this becomes a “[...] sign of danger that directly threatens the subject’s commitment to an agenda of social progress based on the self and reason” (“Postmodern Automats” 103). From this statement, Chow indicates her concern for the tension brought about by the destabilisation of boundaries for in doing so, a dissipation of one’s cultural frame of reference may be experienced, as in the case of Kingston and Hoffman’s protagonists. This dissipation, however, is by no means negative, for they are able to reformulate themselves in terms of certain aspects of each cultural context. Similarly to Sindiwe, they are able to hold onto those elements of their ethnic culture which they need in order to thrive but they also reject and let go of those aspects which are restrictive on their gender. Chow further argues that the problem of modernity is not simply an “amalgamating” of “disparate experience” but rather the confrontation between what are now called the “first” and “third” worlds and the untranslatability of “third world” experiences into the “first world experiences” (*Writing Diaspora* 38). This confrontation is evidently seen in the narratives where upon translocation, aspects of culture become incomprehensible, complex and questioned by the protagonists who

attempt to make sense of them. It is, therefore, essential for the protagonist to recreate an imagined space, evident of both their third world and first world experiences.

Storytelling and narration are means through which the fictional narrators are able to refashion themselves and further the understanding of their positionality. Gusdorf eloquently articulates this refashioning of the self in autobiography and argues that

[...] autobiography is condemned to substitute endlessly the completely formed for that which is in the process of being formed. With its burden of insecurity, the lived present finds itself caught in that necessary movement that, along the thread of the narrative, binds the past to the future. (41)

Furthermore, Gusdorf argues that the medium of autobiography serves as a “[...] passage from immediate experience to consciousness in memory [and] also serves to modify its significance” (38). It is therefore apt to suggest that the protagonists attempt to represent their position - who they are today as well as who they were yesterday or in the past. The protagonists undergo a process of self-translation but at the same time attempt to represent difference, in terms of how they themselves have changed but also in terms of how the cultures they experience differ. Soliday argues that stories of self-translation often involve “[...] representing difference [and this representation] is at the core of today’s struggle in the humanities over competing versions of multiculturalism” (512). Understanding and respecting cultural difference is crucial to the understanding of one’s subjectivity in the global era. Spiegelberg emphasises the importance of storytelling and, similarly to Gusdorf, he argues that the purpose of composition is not simply to go back into the past and try to recapture or repeat it. Instead he argues that the aim of biographical writing is also to reach forward into the future in order to further re-create one’s identity and thus interplay of past, present and future is necessary for this process of storytelling. Spiegelberg argues that the process of telling the story is, therefore, not merely passive evidence of an already whole self but rather “[...] an integral and often decisive phase of the drama of self-definition” (qtd. in Eakin *Fictions in Autobiography* 226).

The process of storytelling is crucial for the protagonists to realise that their ambiguous cultural position is in fact advantageous for it fosters the merging, intermingling and clashing of multiple cultures and multiple expectations of gender (which although initially seen to be

hindering, causes them to re-evaluate their identity as females). They are also able to see the importance of preserving one's cultural origin in collaboration with their newly acquired culture<sup>52</sup>. Hence, the protagonists attempt not only to unify their selves after the dislocation of translocation but also simultaneously to (re)present themselves as no longer part of a marginal cultural position, and instead as claimants to aspects of the dominant modernity. As Benhabib appropriately argues, the challenge in the 'new constellation' is to establish "[...] coherent accounts of both individual and collective identity"; this is especially crucial in the postmodern era where boundaries dissolve (Benhabib 355). Furthermore, Benhabib quotes Jessica Benjamin who argues that in addition, the new constellation presents us with the challenge of keeping a stable frame of reference. Benjamin states that "[t]he question whether a subject can relate to the other without assimilating the other to the self through identification" is an essential one with which we need to grapple (352). Questions of identity are pertinent in the four autobiographies for upon translocation the meanings of identity and gender are able to be read anew, for the clashing and amalgamating cultures allow for this strategic positioning of the subject away from marginality. Through such explorations, the female subject is seen to question her existence, her very gender and more generally, her subjectivity. She is able to negotiate a new space for herself combining both traditional and modern cultural contexts, yet the extent to which protagonists are able to do so, differs between the texts. Kingston's unnamed protagonist is seen to combine elements of her multiple cultures more so than Eva in *Lost in Translation* who attempts to assimilate herself into Western culture. In *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* Sindiwe obtains a more stable frame of reference to the culture of her birth than the other two protagonists maintain to their respective cultures of origin. This is because of her strong collective identity fostered in her by Xhosa traditions.

However, reaching back to the idea of themselves in the past enables the female protagonists to recreate and fashion who they are in the present. Olney argues that

[l]ife [...] does not stretch back across time but extends down to the roots of the individual being; it is atemporal, committed to a vertical thrust from consciousness down into the unconscious rather than to a horizontal thrust from the present into the past. ("The Ontology of Autobiography" 239)

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<sup>52</sup> Only certain protagonists are in fact able to come to this realisation in full by the end of the texts for their attempt to achieve stability regarding their selves is in fact hindered by their desire to assimilate.

The narrative is thus a means in which the protagonists can attempt this recreation but also express their desire to obtain a stable cultural frame of reference. What the three protagonists desire is not assimilation to Western culture, nor is it a translation of their previous selves at their locality of origin. What they desire to achieve is a sense of belonging in what is for them a simultaneously foreign yet also partly familiar environment, as they experience modernity in part already before translocation. The narrative is thus a means through which female subjects articulate this desire for belonging; it is also a means in which they strive towards the creation of a coherent subjectivity, and thus simultaneously write themselves away from and beyond the marginal positions they occupy. Benhabib aptly states:

[...] our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves. (Benhabib 344)

<p>木兰诗</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Song of Mulan</b></p> <p>One sigh after another, Mulan sat opposite the door weaving; But no sound of the shuttle was heard, Except the sighs of the girl.</p> <p>When asked what she was pondering over, When asked what she had called to mind, Nothing special the girl was pondering over, Nothing special the girl had called to mind.</p> <p>“Last night I saw the draft dispatch, The khan is mustering a mighty army; The roster consists of many muster rolls, And every roll has father's name on it.</p> <p>Father has no grown son, Nor Mulan an elder brother; I want to buy a saddle and a horse, And from now on fight in place of my father.”</p> <p>In the eastern market she bought a fine steed, In the western market a saddle and a pad,</p>	<p>木兰诗</p> <p style="text-align: right;">第二一〇页</p>
<p>古诗苑汉英译丛</p>	<p>乐府</p>

<p>雄兔走路步轻捷， 雌兔张望眼迷离； 一双娇兔并肩走， 你怎知木兰原来是女的？</p>	<p>木兰诗</p> <p style="text-align: right;">第二一一页</p>
<p>古诗苑汉英译丛</p>	<p>乐府</p>

In the southern market a bridle,  
In the northern market a long whip.

At daybreak she bid farewell to her parents,  
At sunsét she bivouacked by the Yellow River;  
What met her ear was no longer her parents' calling,  
But the gurgles and splashes of the rushing waters.

At daybreak she left the Yellow River,  
At sunset she bivouacked by the Yellow River;  
What met her ear was no longer her parents' calling,  
But the gurgles and splashes of the rushing waters.

At daybreak she left the Yellow River,  
At sunset she arrived at the top of the Black Hill;  
What met her ear was no longer her parents' calling,  
But the Hun horses neighing in the Yanshan Mountains.

On the expedition of thousands of miles to the war,  
She dashed across mountains and passes as if in flight;  
In the chilly northern air night watches changed,  
In the frosty moonlight mailed coats glistened.  
Generals laid down their lives in a hundred battles,  
And valiant soldiers returned after ten years in the service.

When she returned to an audience with the Son of Heaven,  
The Son of Heaven sat in the Hall of Brightness.  
A promotion of many ranks was granted to her for her merits,

With a reward that amounted to thousands of strings of cash.  
The khan asked Mulan what she desired to do,  
"I don't need any high official position,  
Please lend me a sturdy camel that is fleet of foot,  
And send me back to my hometown."

When her parents heard their daughter was coming,  
They walked out of the town, each helping the other;  
When her elder sister heard the younger sister was coming,  
She decked herself out in her best by the door;

When her younger brother heard his elder sister was coming,  
He whetted a knife and aimed it at a pig and a sheep.

"I opened the door of my east chamber,  
And then sat down on the bed in my west chamber;  
Taking off the mailed coat worn in wartime,

I attired myself in my apparel of former times;  
By the window I combed and coiffed my cloudy hair,  
Before the mirror I adorned my forehead with a yellow pat-  
tern."

When she came out to meet her battle companions,  
They were all astounded and thrown into bewilderment.  
Together they had been in the army for a dozen years or so,  
Yet none had ever known that Mulan was actually a girl.

\* It was the fashion among women at the time to decorate their forehead with a yellow pattern in the shape of star, moon, flower or bird.



The male rabbit kicks its fluffy feet as it scampers,  
 The eyes of the female rabbit are blurred by fluffy tufts of  
 hair;  
 But when they run side by side in the field,  
 You can hardly tell the doe from the buck!

木兰诗

古诗苑汉英译丛



第二一四页

乐府

译后记

接受以当代规范语言翻译 24 首乐府诗的约稿之后，  
 诚惶诚恐，只怕自己力不从心，难能信达、雅地传达出原  
 诗的风采；但自己又心里痒得难忍，总以为好不容易有了  
 这样一个小试身手的好机会，过了这个村，就没有这个店  
 了，谁还想到请一个写小说、过去也写过几首诗的作家，  
 做这种本来属于是学者们做的事情呢？于是自不量力，  
 也就不知天高地厚地答应下来了，反正我是想好好地把这  
 件事做好，至于学识所限，不能传神地译出乐府诗的内  
 在美丽，那就只能给读者留下遗憾了。好在无论什么事  
 情都不求一律，全方位的文学创作格局，也就允许多种风  
 格的尝试，请作家翻译古诗，未必不是一个办法，作家习  
 惯于形象思维，也许比那些学富五车的教授、专家翻译得  
 更有神采。何况作家们胆子也大，没有那么多多的讲究，随  
 心所欲，只要不是存心糟蹋古典精华，读者就会接受他的  
 解读。不拘一格降人才么，怎么就不能不拘一格译古诗  
 呢？

其实作家的译古诗，也并不仅仅是一种文学普及，就  
 是学者、专家，也未必就不能从今天作家的译作里得到些  
 许新的艺术感受。譬如由古典文学名著改编的戏曲，舞  
 台上的许多“发展”，观众都接受了，而被老学问家看见，

译后记



第二一五页

古诗苑汉英译丛

乐府



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