Moving Girlhoods
in Twenty-First-Century Life Writing

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Abstract

This thesis explores 21st century life writing by 'Third Culture' women and girls from diverse backgrounds that concerns the experience of growing up in at least three countries, cultures and languages – a phenomenon I term 'moving girlhoods'. It reframes existing 'Third Culture Literature' theories, which have so far only been applied to fiction by authors raised as 'expatriates', while also integrating critical debates in postcolonial, transcultural, and girlhood scholarship into the field of life writing for the first time, to analyse how moving girlhoods shape autobiographical texts. Specifically, I explore the aesthetic and generic elements employed to portray the concerns of these particular migrant girls. Each chapter focuses on a distinct category of mobility and genre of life writing. Despite the different reasons for migration, in their various ways the texts portray 'moving girlhoods' as always an unsettling experience, however privileged the context of mobility. I argue that the writers magnify contradictions in their life writing to articulate the experience of growing up in conflictual conditions. In turn, genres of life writing are used to disrupt dichotomies, to challenge misjudgements and ill-fitting classifications, and to speak out against marginalisation.

I analyse Elizabeth Liang's play *Alien Citizen: An Earth Odyssey* (2013); Abeer Hoque's *Olive Witch: A Memoir* (2016)*;* Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (2017); and Susan Abulhawa's essay 'Memories in an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna' (2013). I also examine modern-day forms of life writing by girls, such as TED talks. I conclude by contending that writers who grow up crossing borders and outside the mainstream create distinctive texts about bridging individual and collective differences. While describing multiple polarisations, life writing about moving girlhoods also empowers unique opportunities to explore and engage in the new perspectives and critical global conflicts of the twenty-first century.

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Abbreviations

ATCK   Adult Third Culture Kid

CCK   Cross-Cultural Kid

TC   Third Culture

TCA   Third Culture Author

TCK   Third Culture Kid

TCL   Third Culture Literature

Introduction

'One is not born a migrant', asserts Thomas Nail.[1] However, it cannot be ignored that there are currently many children throughout the world who grow up in three or more countries, an experience that can clearly influence how individuals view themselves and their place in the world. This thesis explores life writing produced in the twenty-first century by 'Third Culture' (TC) women and girls from diverse backgrounds, and which concerns the experience of growing up in at least three countries, cultures and languages – a phenomenon I term 'moving girlhoods'. It reframes existing 'Third Culture Literature' (TCL) theories, which have so far only been applied to fiction by authors raised as 'expatriates'; it also integrates critical debates in postcolonial, transcultural, and girlhood scholarship into the field of life writing for the first time, to analyse how moving girlhoods shape autobiographical texts. Specifically, I explore the aesthetic and generic elements employed to portray the concerns of these particular migrant girls. Each chapter focuses on a distinct category of mobility and genre of life writing.

The main assumption of this thesis is that the postmodern figures of the child, migrant and life writer in the twenty-first century all involve an instability of some sort, and at some stage these three figures are all, using Nail's expression, 'bound to move'.[2] While the selected texts portray frequent migration in childhood as an unsettling experience, however privileged the context of mobility, life writing about moving girlhoods also empowers unique opportunities to explore and engage in the new perspectives and critical global conflicts of the twenty-first century. The 'moving girlhoods in life writing' in the title of this thesis therefore refers to moving geographically, culturally and linguistically in childhood; to navigating conflicting and shifting identities in girlhood within a moving landscape; to moving across genres of life

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[1] Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 3.
[2] Nail, p. 2. Here, Nail uses this expression for migrants.

writing as an adult; and finally, to life writing as a movement of change for the selected life writers.

Girls on the Move in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

The life writing texts that I analyse in this thesis were all written in the twenty-first century. The authors examined in the final chapter were born in this century, whereas the others were born in the second half of the twentieth century and wrote their autobiographical pieces when they were around thirty years old, also in the present century. Their self-representations are primarily about growing up in the 1970s and 80s, a period chosen because serial migration was then becoming common but was not yet the norm.[3] For example, Elizabeth Liang, born in 1972 to an employee of the American company Xerox, moved internationally over seven times while growing up.

This new form of temporary, cyclical and international migration, which is observable in all the selected life writing texts, began to be more common in the second half of the twentieth century, when technology was shaping the future of aviation, and indeed global development in general. As flying was now easier and cheaper, many businesses began sending their staff (and their families) abroad more frequently. Sociologists, educators and psychologists use the term 'Third Culture Kids' to describe individuals who, like Liang, were raised in several countries because of their parents' career choices.

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[3] Sociologists Gabrielle Désilets and Susan Ossman use the term 'serial migrants' to refer to individuals who have lived in many countries, while Stefan Gössling et al. link the notion of highly mobile travellers to the concept of hypermobility. See in this respect, Gabrielle Désilets, 'Third Culture Kids' as Serial Migrants' Children: Understanding Some of the Impacts of a Highly Mobile Transnational Upbringing', in *Migration, Diversity and Education: Beyond Third Culture Kids*, ed. by Saija Benjamin and Fred Dervin (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 137–56; Susan Ossman, *Moving Matters: Paths of Serial Migration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Stefan Gössling and others, 'Hypermobile Travellers', in *Climate Change and Aviation: Issues, Challenges and Solutions*, ed. by Stefan Gössling and Paul Upham (London: Earthscan, 2009), pp. 131–50, p. 132.

As Pico Iyer points out, today's airports look 'more and more like transnational cities',[4] and 'in the age of movement and connection, space, as Marx had it in another context, has been annihilated by time; we feel as though we can make contact with almost anywhere at any moment'.[5] In the 1970s, 80s and early 90s, however, technology began to change the way many people moved, but it had not yet accelerated communication. The introduction of the 2010 edition of Salman Rushdie's collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands* begins by describing the global changes around the 1990s:

> Now that we're contemplating a transformed international scene, with its new possibilities, uncertainties, intransigences and dangers, it seems not inappropriate to pull together our thoughts on the rapidly receding decade in which, as Gramsci would have said, the old was dying, and yet the new could not be born. 'In this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms,' Gramsci suggested.[6]

Caught in an interim world that was moving quicker but not yet fast enough to connect people digitally, the life writers I examine in the first four chapters grew up in an interregnum. Although 'Third Culture Kid' scholar Ruth Van Reken argues that the Internet has not altered the experience of growing up internationally, a new and increasing

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[4] Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (New York: Vintage, 2001), p. 19. Iyer grew up 'jetlagging' between the United Kingdom and the United States (where his Indian parents lived).

[5] Pico Iyer, 'Why We Need to Slow down Our Lives', *Ideas.Ted.com*, 2014 <https://ideas.ted.com/why-we-need-a-secular-sabbath/> [accessed 17 January 2019].

[6] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 1; in his novels, life writing and interviews, Rushdie discusses the notion of growing up in many cultures (in his case the Indian, Muslim and British cultures), of hybridity, otherness and feeling out of place. Significantly for chapters one and two, Rushdie has written about covering up one's identity and adopting a mask, see for example, Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 44.

body of research about 'connected migrants' and 'digital diasporas' shows the importance of discussing the relation between migration and digital technologies.[7]

'Third Culture Kid' experiences of frequent farewells and dealing with the loss of friends and relatives will most certainly have to be rethought in our hyper-mediated world. Recently published life writing about moving girlhoods typically represents the childhood of life writers between the 1960s and 1990s, as reflected in most of the life writings I examine. It can of course be argued that many other writers, such as Judith Kerr (who was born in 1923 in Germany and lived in Germany, Switzerland, France and the United Kingdom in her childhood) and Vladimir Nabokov (who grew up between multiple cultures and languages and who migrated in adolescence and early adulthood) are 'Third Culture Kids'. This thesis, however, focuses on a new era of migration, which was gradually beginning in the 1950s due to the onset of decolonisation processes and technological innovations. In the Global North, since then, we have been contributing to a faster pace of change. Thus, literary studies should address the ever-changing reasons for and consequences of international migration in childhood, which often entail uneven power structures.

Writing about 'Third Culture Authors' (TCAs), Antje Rauwerda names many male novelists: these include Yann Martel, who is the son of Canadian diplomats and grew up in Spain, Costa Rica, France, Mexico and the United States; and Ian McEwan, who was raised in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Libya and Germany, due to his father's career in the British Armed Forces. Iyer exemplifies an author of non-fictional texts, about his childhood spent moving between the Indian, British and American

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[7] Ruth Van Reken in foreword of Tanya Crossman, *Misunderstood: The Impact of Growing up Overseas in the 21st Century* (Norwich: Summertime Publishing, 2016), p. xvii. For further discussion regarding 'connected migrants', see the work of Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Connecting Europe: Postcolonial Mediations' (presented at the University Inaugural Lecture: Utrecht University, 2016) <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/335976> [accessed 22 January 2019]; see also Laura Candidatu, Koen Loers, and Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Digital Diasporas: Beyond the Buzzword. Towards a Relational Understanding of Mobility and Connectivity', in *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media and Culture* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2019).

cultures. Other male authors who have written about their peripatetic upbringing include Gene Bell-Villada, Ilija Trojanow and Vladimir Vertlieb.

In contrast to Rauwerda's approach, the contemporary life writing texts I discovered about frequent migration in childhood were mostly composed by women. These texts generally comprise both traumatic events and examples of individual and collective marginalisation. As Judith Herman points out, as recently as the 1970s, thanks to the women's liberation movement, it was recognised in the Global North 'that the most common post-traumatic disorders are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life. The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life'; and thus for many years, women 'were silenced by fear and shame'.[8] In this respect, as Gillian Whitlock argues, autobiography has the power to 'personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard'.[9] I am specifically interested in addressing the uneven power structures that appear within the context of migration and the complexity of the intersecting forms of discrimination in the lives of unheard and unseen migrants. For this reason, I concentrate my literary examinations on life writing about moving girlhoods.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson contend that for women, autobiography can be a tool for 'coming of voice' and for writing 'themselves into history'.[10] This might explain why self-representations about moving childhoods are mostly written by girls and women, although it is also significant to remember that there are similarities between feminism and postcolonialism. Examining postcolonial life writing alongside women's life writing, Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that both of these subcategories are involved with

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[8] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 28.

[9] Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 3.

[10] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situation Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 3–52, p. 5.

marginalisation and struggles against dominations.[11] Although most of my selected life writers have settled down in the Global North, they predominantly grew up in countries that were once or continue to be colonies, and they have very diverse backgrounds (for example, Asian and Hispanic). Accordingly, their texts are both about and considerate of marginalised groups and individuals who have had their voices silenced for a number of reasons. In this respect, it is noteworthy to point out that when referring to 'postcolonialism' throughout this thesis, I do not adopt the term temporally, but I apply postcolonial notions to address, using John McLeod's terms, 'disparate forms of *representation*, *reading practices*, *attitudes* and *values*'.[12]

While it is crucial to consider both feminist and postcolonial approaches in this study of life writing, when exploring moving girlhoods it is also meaningful that individuals have multiple identities that can shape their experience of marginalisation. Marginalised individuals or groups, such as migrants, are often disadvantaged by intersectional forms of discrimination based simultaneously on their migration status, race, gender, class and age.[13] For Audre Lorde, there is 'no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives'.[14] Moreover, serial migrants can have multiple belongings, and my explorations focus on how life writers portray their complex multifaceted experiences, and thus also their rejection of single classifications – not only through the contents of their texts, but also through the hybrid genres of life writing that they have selected.

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[11] Bart J. Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp xiv-xxiv.

[12] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 6.

[13] The term 'intersectionality' was used for the first time in 1989 for a juridical context by Kimberlé Crenshaw, for further details see 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1, 1989, 139–67. Intersectionality will be discussed further in chapter five.

[14] Audre Lorde, 'Learning from the 60', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), p. 138.

Why 'Third Culture Literature' Matters

In the English-speaking realm, a sociological term frequently used to discuss individuals who spent a significant part of their developmental years outside their parents' passport countries is 'Third Culture Kids' (TCKs). Ruth Hill Useem, who coined this term to describe the offspring of missionaries, diplomats and the military, was one of the first sociologists to study the phenomenon of childhoods on the move, together with her husband, in the 1950s and 60s.[15] The authors of *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds*, David Pollock and Van Reken, explain the derivation of the term TC:

> the Useems defined the home culture from which the adults came as the first culture. They called the host culture where the family lived (in that case, India) the second culture. They then identified the shared lifestyle of the expatriate community as an *interstitial culture,* or "culture between cultures," and named it *third culture.*[16]

It is significant that above, Pollock and Van Reken use the term 'expatriate' to refer to educated (and predominantly wealthy) professionals working abroad, who are expected to return to their home countries after an assignment abroad for their employers (referred to in TCK jargon as 'sponsoring organisations'). Recognising that many families faced challenges in 'repatriating' and adjusting to their original 'home' countries, Hill Useem focused her research on American wives and their children living in the TC. The

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[15] Between 1952 and 1985, Dr Hill Useem taught in the United States at university level. Since 1985 she was Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Education at Michigan State University, see Ann Cottrell in this respect, who was one of her earliest graduate students, Ann Cottrell, 'TCK Research: Looking Back & Ahead.', *TCK Research Network Newsletter*, 2.2 (2009) <https://www.academia.edu/38256556/TCK_research_looking_back_and_ahead> [accessed 12 May 2019].

[16] David C Pollock and Ruth E Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1999), p. 20.

sociologist Ann Cottrell, who wrote the first articles about children living in the TC with Hill Useem, discusses the origins of the term TCK:

> As an early feminist scholar, Ruth took an interest in those whose lives were defined or changed by the fact that a spouse or parent "dragged" them abroad. Her interest in these wives and children, was unprecedented. She dubbed the children Third Culture Kids because their upbringing within the third cultures created by their parents gave them experiences, identities and world views which put them at odds with their non-mobile passport country peers.[17]

In 1984, Norma McCaig coined the term 'Global Nomad'[18] to refer to 'anyone of any nationality who has lived outside their parents' country of origin (or their "passport country") before adulthood, because of a parent's occupation'.[19] Both TCK and 'Global Nomad' notions appeared at a time when more and more individuals were being sent abroad by companies. Regarding this historical phase, Cottrell points out that 'This research grew out of an interest in understanding the new post colonial patterns of relationships as Americans, especially, were being sent abroad in an increasing variety of roles to work with host national counterparts in newly evolving relationships'.[20]

Hence, this research originally focused on the emergence of a global and nomadic 'American' society. Developments in former colonies' political and economic systems,

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[17] Cottrell, 'TCK Research'.

[18] For the original article in which this term appeared see Norma M. McCaig, 'Growing Up with a World View', *Foreign Service Journal*, September, 1994, pp. 32–41.

[19] *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids*, ed. by Gene H. Bell-Villada, and Nina Sichel (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. x.

[20] Ann Cottrell, 'TCKS: Privileged but Not Migrants' (presented at the European Association of Social Anthropologists, Tallinn, Estonia, 2014) <https://www.academia.edu/7924453/TCKS_PRIVILEGED_BUT_NOT_MIGRANTS> [accessed 27 October 2018]; in respect to new postcolonial patterns, TCL and continuity between colonial and postcolonial TCAs (for example in the novels of Rudyard Kipling), see Adam Geller, 'Third Culture Literature: What Can We Get out of Older TCK Literature? (Guest Post)', *Third Culture Literature*, 2016 <http://thirdcultureliterature.blogspot.com/2016/03/what-can-we-get-out-of-older-tck.html> [accessed 9 September 2021].

together with technological progress, allowed increasing numbers of American businesses and organisations to send families abroad. Accordingly, the professions of the parents of Hill Useem's TCKs and Norma McCaig's 'Global Nomads' predominantly 'had a representational character that influenced the whole family, including children', according to Agnieszka Trąbka.[21] These children represented the sponsoring organisations which sent the families of TCKs abroad, and as David Pollock, Van Reken and Michael Pollock illustrate, sociological work has shown that these organisations' subcultures play an important role in the life of these families:

> Whatever the rules are in any TCK's given subculture – be they matters of correct dress, correct faith, or correct political views – TCKs know that to be an accepted member (or child of a member) of that group, they must conform to those standards.[22]

The above-mentioned acting in accord with prevailing group practices is connected to the subculture of TCKs. However, this thesis will show that other groups of migrants' children feel they have to behave in a moderate and socially conforming way in order to avoid relational tensions. This reveals flaws in TCK terminology. Since 1999, the year in which Pollock and Van Reken developed the theories of Hill Useem and increased the popularity of this term,[23] many questions have been raised about 'who "qualifies" as a "real" TCK'.[24] For Pollock and Van Reken, a 'third culture kid is a person

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[21] Agnieszka Trąbka, 'Being Chameleon. The Influence of Multiple Migration in Childhood on Identity Construction', *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, 40.3 153 (2014), 87–106 (p. 89).

[22] David C. Pollock, Ruth E. Van Reken, and Michael V. Pollock, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017), p. 72. When discussing culture, Pollock and Van Reken use Paul Hiebert's notion of culture and they agree that 'culture is learned rather than instinctive – something caught from, as well as taught by, the surrounding environment and passed on from one generation to the next', p. 56.

[23] David C Pollock and Ruth E Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1999). I subsequently refer to the 2017 revised edition of this book by David Pollock, Ruth Van Reken and Michael Pollock.

[24] Cottrell, 'TCKS: Privileged but Not Migrants'.

who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture'.[25] Drawing upon Hill Useem's work, Pollock and Van Reken emphasise that these children 'are raised in a neither/nor world',[26] and that they build 'relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any'. Often, their sense of belonging is 'in relationship to others of similar background'.[27]

  Although the meaning of TCK has shifted over time, possibly the term's derivation from a relatively small group of 'sponsored' American families, explains why it is still unknown in many scholarly fields. As Trąbka indicates:

> The notion of "third culture" did not gain popularity in academia, which may come as a surprise taking into account its resemblance to Homi Bhabha's "third space" or cultural hybridity – both so prominent in contemporary sociology and anthropology. Although Ruth Hill Useem was a professor at Michigan University for a few decades, the concept of Third Culture Kids did not enter mainstream migration studies either. Instead, many governmental and non-governmental organizations were created promoting the notion and offering counseling, practical information, and facilitating networking for expatriates and TCKs.[28]

Homi Bhabha's liminal 'Third Space',[29] which, using the terms of Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner, 'is born out of the contact between two social groups with different cultural traditions', does appear to echo the 'third' interstitial culture examined by the Useems

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[25] See *TCK World*, for example, Ruth Useem Hill, 'Third Culture Kids: Focus of Major Study - "Mother" Pens History of Field', *ISS NewsLinks*, 12.1 (1993) <http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art1.html> [accessed 18 October 2018].
[26] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 4.
[27] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 15-16.
[28] Trąbka, p. 89.
[29] See in this regard, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

thirty years earlier.[30] Bhabha's notions, however, offer new spaces in which marginalised groups of people can create subjectivities. These hybrid third spaces typically constitute, using Robert Young's expression, 'the site for potential counter-authority' by adults,[31] whereas children who grow up in an interstitial space often do not yet have the skills to negotiate and make sense of conflicting value systems. Herein lies one of the differences between Bhabha's and Hill Useem's third and in-between zones. Another significant difference is that Bhabha's is a *space,* or a site of liberation, whereas Hill Useem argued that, as a result of their upbringing, the children of expatriates share characteristics and knowledge, and consequently have a distinct culture.[32] Until recently, as Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti argue, children have not been considered as 'active participants in and contributors across different levels of society, culture and politics',[33] so it is easy to see why TCK research has not become as popular as Bhabha's notions. Furthermore regarding the name itself, 'kid' is problematic in literary circles, and TC implies a variety of meanings.[34]

Useem's coinage still has very limited use in literary fields; not only due to the fact that it concentrates on the challenges and consequences of migration in childhood, but also because for many years it has focused on examining the experience of American children (as Rauwerda comments, 'it is unpopular to study the "over-dog" ').[35] In this respect, the sociologist Danau Tanu argues that in this sociological field, 'experiences of

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[30] Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner, *Communicating in the Third Space* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

[31] Robert J.C. Young, 'Postcolonial Remains', *New Literary History*, 43.1 (2012), 19–42, (p. 23).

[32] For further details, see also the work of Rachel Cason, who discusses Bhabha's 'Third Space', p. 286. Moreover, Cason links the TCK model to the notion of 'elite vagabonds', p. 10, Rachel Cason, 'Third Culture Kids: Migration Narratives on Belonging, Identity and Place.' (Keele University, 2015) <https://www.academia.edu/17089572/Third_Culture_Kids_migration_narratives_on_belonging_identity _and_place> [accessed 7 January 2019].

[33] Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti, *Life Narratives and Youth Culture: Representation, Agency and Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 7.

[34] In order to avoid confusion, in 1993 Hill Useem points out that the term 'Third Culture' is not synonymous with 'Third World' nor with C.P. Snow's 'Third Culture' but that all these terms are related to the mobility patterns that were occurring at the end of colonialism, see Useem Hill. I will discuss these differences in more detail in chapter two.

[35] Antje M. Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood: The Third Culture Literature of Kingsolver, McEwan and Others* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), p. 5.

American transnational youth are often projected onto all children growing up in the third culture, thus creating a concept that is prescriptive in its application'. [36] Related to this issue, literary scholar Carly McLaughlin explains that:

> the TCK model, ever since its first use in the 1950s and its reformulation in Pollock and Van Reken's study of 2001, has been criticized for being a model for a small, privileged group of children which bears little relevance for the world's children, who migrate under much more difficult, at times traumatic, circumstances.[37]

At one end of the migratory spectrum, then, there are the TCKs, and at the other, the children who migrate under more difficult situations. At this stage it is useful to consider the figure of the *child* migrant. Discussing the figure of the (adult) migrant, Nail argues that

> The gains of migration are always a risk, while the process itself is always some kind of loss. This is precisely the sense in which Zygmunt Bauman writes that "tourism and vagrancy are two faces of the same coin" of global migration.[38]

Describing the degree to which everyone is on the move in postmodern times, Bauman contends that 'tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds – because they have no

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[36] Danau Tanu, 'Toward an Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Diversity of "Third Culture Kids"', in *Migration, Diversity, and Education: Beyond Third Culture Kids* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 13–35, p. 26.

[37] Carly McLaughlin, 'Childhood, Migration, and Identity in Chris Cleave's The Other Hand', in *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Lena Zamorano Llena (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 47–67; in this respect see also Paniz Khosroshahy, 'Immigrant vs. Expatriate: On Being a Third Culture Kid', *Gal-Dem*, 2016 <http://gal-dem.com/third-culture-kid/> [accessed 18 October 2018]. Here, Khosroshahy argues that the TCK perspective is race-blind.

[38] Nail, p. 2.

other choice'.[39] The stance I take is that, within the context of migration, children are the vagabonds because they predominantly move involuntarily, in that, using Cottrell's expression, they are 'dragged' abroad by adults. Many factors contribute to the determination to migrate; however, it is generally the adults who make the choices, and children are rarely involved adequately in decision-making processes. Consequently, the parents of TCKs are undoubtedly 'tourists' (or the 'heroes of postmodernity' using Bauman's expression) due to their privileged migrant status, because their businesses or other sponsor agencies pay for, arrange and support their moves abroad.

In the selected primary texts it is predominantly the fathers who make the decisions. Discussing the notion of 'forced choice', Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré argue that 'the circumstances of women's mobility may also include the financial or legal circumstances of male members of the family, often regardless of or despite the resultant uprooting implied for female members'.[40] Lacking the necessary skills to tackle issues caused by displacement, children are even more impacted by 'forced choices'. Therefore, while the reasons for children's frequent relocation are clearly diverse, life writing of moving girlhoods is particularly characterised by complexities and conflicts. These concerns, as I argue, are portrayed through both aesthetic and generic elements.

To call all the children of migrants 'vagabonds' (or the 'victims of postmodernity' according to Bauman) is particularly provocative when considering the offspring of privileged 'expatriates', and I might seem to be disrupting important categories of mobility. By calling these children 'vagabond', I am using an image to dramatise the figure of the serial migrant child, in order to highlight a phenomenon that is underexamined in the literary field, and to address the issue of existing binary categories

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[39] Zygmunt Bauman, 'Tourists and Vagabonds: Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity', *Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna (IHS)*, Political Science Series, 30 (1996), 1–16 (p. 14).

[40] Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré, 'Introduction: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing', in *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing*, ed. by Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 1–14, p. 9.

of mobility, which need to be pluralised. Regardless of where children should be placed on the migratory spectrum, we must acknowledge that within literary studies the figure of the migrant has mainly been examined from the adult's perspective, and that migration entails disruption for a child, however comfortable the migratory situation is. Thus, the TCK approach, which discusses the challenges children face when they migrate, remains unprecedented within sociological studies because it, as McLaughlin argues, 'recognizes the fundamental gap between the experiences of parents and those of their children'.[41]

Rauwerda extends findings from TCK research to the literary field by examining over fifteen novels written by adult TCKs, to demonstrate that 'there is a field of literature that, most simply, shares characteristics reflecting the third culture context out of which it is produced'.[42] For Rauwerda, four themes are clearly recurrent in TCL by novelists such as Barbara Kingsolver, Yann Martel and Ian McEwan: (1) dislocation, (2) loss, (3) disenfranchisement, and (4) secret guilt.

Regarding her new label, Rauwerda extensively illustrates how TCL breaks away from existing classifications. The novels she analyses do, of course, contain features common to 'diasporic', '(third world) cosmopolitan' and 'postcolonial writing', but these existing classifications focus on the notion of one initial and central homeland, and therefore typically feature binary relationships. Similarly, McLaughlin summarises why the term 'hybridity' is also unsuitable for the TCK experience:

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[41] McLaughlin, p. 51.
[42] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* p. 23.

The transcultural reality in which many of the world's children grow up indicates the need to develop other paradigms of cultural identity which move beyond postcolonial frameworks of cultural belonging. [. . .] Even if hybridity is understood as the merging of more than two cultural forms, it still defines identity in relation to a crossing-over, a collapse of two or more fixed, prior cultural identities. It is thus perhaps no longer useful in today's increasingly mobile and culturally complex world in which children, and indeed many adults, inhabit multiple cultural spaces.[43]

By contrast, Rauwerda had neglected the term 'transcultural reality'. Crucially, the parallels and differences between TC and transcultural literature should not be ignored. In this respect, the background and works of Iyer are significant. Rauwerda refers to Iyer as a good example of a TCA because he was raised in the United Kingdom and the United States by Indian parents. She quotes from his book *Global Soul*, in which he explains:

A person like me can't really call himself an exile (who traditionally looked back to a home now lost), or an expatriate (who's generally posted abroad for a living); I'm not really a nomad (whose patterns are guided by seasons and tradition); and I've never been subject to the refugee's violent disruptions.[44]

Authors who do not have one specific and fixed homeland are also the focus of Arianna Dagnino's transcultural literary examinations. Adopting the notions of Rosi Braidotti, Mikhail Epstein, Fernando Ortiz and Wolfgang Welsch (to name just a few), Dagnino discusses the neo-nomadic lifestyles of many contemporary authors:

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[43] McLaughlin, p. 57.
[44] Iyer, *The Global Soul*, qtd. in Rauwerda, "Not Your Typical 'Diaspora,' " p. 23.

Constantly increasing migratory flows, together with the pressure of economic globalisation and the development of digital communication technologies, are inciting as well as enabling a whole new range of intercultural interactions, transnational patterns, and neo-nomadic lifestyles. The kind of transformations induced by the present socio-cultural scenario are being expressed in creative ways by those imaginative "transcultural writers" – such as Pico Iyer.[45]

When discussing the narratives of these transcultural writers such as Iyer, Dagnino identifies four common traits and elements, which are similar to those traced by Rauwerda (for example, that these writings are neither nationally nor culturally identifiable).[46] How, then, do Dagnino's transcultural writings differ from Rauwerda's TCL?

Generally, the term 'transcultural' is used to describe 'phenomena that transcend cultural boundaries', as Daniel König and Katja Rakow argue.[47] Transcultural individuals, as explained by Epstein, tend to embrace diversity and the notion of ever-changing identities. For Epstein, these individuals do not agree 'to be determined in terms of race, nation, gender, or class'.[48] This is a significant concept for this thesis, as it will be demonstrated that in adulthood the selected life writers challenge labels in terms of race, nation and genres. This, however, is a trait that is evident in adulthood. The selected life writings reveal that in childhood the girls strive to belong to their surrounding societies. A way of achieving this is to act like their peer groups. Thus, Epstein's remark that 'differences complement each other and create a new interpersonal transcultural

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[45] Arianna Dagnino, 'Global Mobility, Transcultural Literature, and Multiple Modes of Modernity', *Transcultural Studies*, 2, 2013, 130–60 (p. 131) <https://doi.org/10.11588/ts.2013.2.9940>.

[46] Arianna Dagnino, *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2015), pp. 183-89.

[47] Daniel König and Katja Rakow, 'The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework: An Introduction', *The Journal of Transcultural Studies*, 2, 2016, 89–100 (p. 93) <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.ts.2016.2.23642>.

[48] Mikhail Epstein, 'Transculture: A Broad Way Between Globalism and Multiculturalism', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 68.1 (2009), 327–51 (p. 341).

community to which we belong, not because we are similar, but because we are different',[49] is relevant to transcultural adults, but not necessarily to migrant children. Many of Dagnino's transcultural writers migrated in childhood; however, unlike Rauwerda, Dagnino rarely takes into consideration their childhood experiences, and focuses instead on the link between their creativity and their peripatetic adulthood. Again, only Rauwerda has so far demonstrated how the experience of a particular type of migration in childhood can result in a new subset of literature.

Tanu proposes the term 'transnational youth' when talking about migrant children (who predominantly attend international schools in her work).[50] I too am reluctant to use the term TCK, due to its existing tendency to exclude the children of migrants from the Global South. For the same reason, I refrain from applying Rauwerda's coinage TCL to the texts I examine, and from calling them, for example, 'TC life writing'. Nevertheless, I also feel that the term 'transnational' ignores aspects other than the 'national' when children repeatedly move internationally. Transnational scholars tend to explore the ties between (trans)migrants' countries of origin and the countries they settle in; they predominantly focus on adult migrants who, for many reasons, choose to maintain connections with their countries of origin, rather than considering whether migrant children also keep their transnational ties.[51]

Although Rauwerda was one of the few literary scholars to focus on the consequences of *childhood* migration in literature, we must be cautious when applying her ideas to life writing about moving girlhoods. While it is praiseworthy that Rauwerda aims to push literary scholars to accept and acknowledge the 'privileged expatriate

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[49] Epstein, pp. 348-9.
[50] Danau Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit: The Politics of Belonging at an International School* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), p. 24.
[51] In this respect see Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 'From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68.1 (1995), 48–63, here the focus is on transmigrant adults; see also, for example, *The Transnational in Literary Studies: Potential and Limitations of a Concept*, ed. by Kai Wiegandt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), in this recent collection of articles, the focus is on transnational adults too.

perspective' in texts by authors who share a TCK upbringing,[52] it is not clear why the novels she discusses in her book are all by white novelists (whose parents are mostly from the Global North), when an increasing number of non-white authors can be categorised as TCAs.[53] For example, Tahmima Anan grew up in Bangladesh, France, the United States and Thailand, where her parents were employed by the United Nations; and because Uzma Aslam Khan's father worked for Pakistan International Airlines, the writer grew up in Pakistan, the Philippines, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Additionally, might Rauwerda classify writers from Arab Muslim countries as TCAs? When disclosing that her 'roots were up in the air',[54] Elif Shafak, who grew up all over the world because her mother was a Turkish diplomat, undoubtedly reflects Rauwerda's notion that the TC is a space that floats above the terrestrial level, like a cumulus cloud.[55] However, despite her TCK background and characteristics, Shafak is not mentioned in Rauwerda's research.

By expanding Rauwerda's work and examining the experience of moving girlhoods in life writing, my aim is to explore how TCL might be rethought and broadened to consider and include more diverse types of movement in childhood. This thesis thus extends and interrogates Rauwerda's literary work in four ways. Firstly, whereas previous TCL studies have focused on novels, this project analyses a range of life writing that describes the experience of growing up on the move.[56] Concentrating on the

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[52] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood*, p. 8.

[53] Here, it is important to specify that Rauwerda does puzzles over the 'whiteness' of her 'Third Culture Authors' in her literary blog, albeit briefly, see, for example, Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: Does TCL Have a Distinctive "Fingerprint"?', *Third Culture Literature*, 2014 <http://thirdcultureliterature.blogspot.com/2014/07/does-tcl-have-distinctive-fingerprint.html> [accessed 13 May 2019].

[54] Elif Shafak, *The Happiness of Blond People: A Personal Meditation on the Dangers of Identity* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 15.

[55] See Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: We Are Cumulus: Third Culture as a Cloud', *Third Culture Literature*, 2015 <https://thirdcultureliterature.blogspot.com/2015/08/we-are-cumulus-third-culture-as-cloud.html> [accessed 7 November 2018].

[56] So far only Antje Rauwerda, Carly McLaughlin and Gene Bell-Villada have adopted the TCK lens to examine novels written by authors who experienced frequent migration in childhood; see Gene H. Bell-Villada, 'On Jean Rhys, Barbara Kingsolver, and Myself: Reflections on a Problem That Has No Set Name', in *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids*, ed. by Nina Sichel et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 411–25.

autobiographical representations of growing up in at least three countries, this thesis calls attention to stories of migration in girlhood that have not been discussed in depth within life writing studies.

Secondly, I also examine to what extent the genres of these life writing texts indicate that a childhood spent moving between multiple nations might prompt a crossing of literary borders. By exploring both the experiences of migration in childhood and the blending of literary genres, this project also expands the work of Douglas on 'life writing about childhood', and Rosalia Baena's research on hybrid genres of transcultural life writing.[57]

Thirdly, instead of solely considering Anglophone works, I repeatedly highlight texts about moving childhoods that were written in a variety of languages. Moreover, in every chapter, I point out how the life writers describe their experiences of language loss and acquisition. For TCL to be truly international in character, its approach must not only cross national and cultural borders, but also linguistic ones.

Finally and most significantly, my chosen texts reflect a wide range of migration experiences. In exploring how less privileged forms of migration are autobiographically represented, this project develops TCK discussions in the literary field by considering emerging theories from the wider umbrella group 'Cross-Cultural Kids' (CCKs), which includes subgroups such as the children of refugees.[58] I thus shift the understanding of the TCK concept, which Rauwerda uses to refer to Global North 'expatriates' moving predominantly to the Global South, to include the children of migrants from the Global South moving to the Global North.

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[57] Kate Douglas uses the term 'life writing about childhood', see *Telling Tales: Autobiographies of Childhood and Youth*, ed. by Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 26. In her research, Douglas does not focus on the specific experience of *migration* in childhood. Rosalia Baena's collection of essays focuses on hybrid forms of life writing about transcultural *adults*, see Rosalia Baena (ed.), *Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[58] Ruth E. Van Reken, 'Cross-Cultural Kids: The New Prototype', in *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids*, ed. by Gene H. Bell-Villada et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 25–44.

Shifting Categories of Girlhood, Movement and Life Writing

This thesis is guided by three specific research questions: (1) What do the most common literary symbols selected by the life writers tell us about moving girlhoods? (2) How do the life writers represent the concerns of girls on the move by means of genres of life writing? (3) In what ways do the selected life writers use their texts to create agency for migrant girls?

Regarding the first research question, it is important to briefly address the work of Donna Velliaris. Because the term TCK is not widely known, and many children and adults lack the words to express their experience of frequent migration, Velliaris has examined over fifty phrases that have been adopted to describe the experience of growing up internationally,[59] arguing that these 'metaphors' (such as 'cultural chameleon' and 'rubber-band nationality'), can help young transnational students 'to express feelings and situations with few words, but much "symbolism" '.[60] Similarly, because I mainly consider the perspective of the migrant child, who might lack the vocabulary to name the TCK experience, I concentrate on *literary* symbols that are used to reflect the concerns of girls on the move.

The second research question reflects the need to expand examinations of genres in the field of life writing. Arguing that the concerns of the migrant girl are mirrored, supported, and transformed into creativity and agency by means of genres, in each chapter I examine a distinct genre of life writing. Specifically, I will explore the ways in which

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[59] Donna M. Velliaris and Craig R. Willis, 'Metaphors for Transnational Students: A Moving Experience', in *Metaphors for, in and of Education Research* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 207–222; also see Cason who extensively reviews terms which are similar to the 'Third Culture Kid' classification.

[60] Donna M. Velliaris and Luis J. Frenzel, 'Descriptive Representations for Transnational Students', in *25th ISANA International Education Association Conference Proceedings* (presented at the 25th ISANA International Education Conference, Adelaide, Hobart: ISANA International Education Association Inc., 2014) , p. 1. <http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2014/paper_velliaris_metaphors.pdf> [accessed 7 November 2018].

life writers portray the phenomenon and consequences of frequent migration in girlhood by means of hybrid and unclassifiable genres.

In her literary studies, Rauwerda examines TCL only through a privileged expatriate lens. As Averis and Hollis-Touré argue, it is rare for a literary study to analyse 'the intersections and overlaps' between categories of mobility, such as expatriate, travel writing and migrant writing.[61] I too posit that literary scholars must acknowledge these intersections. In order to explain my reasoning and the importance of these overlaps in the context of children who move frequently, it is useful to briefly consider the recent work of Van Reken.

Acknowledging the criticism that TCK scholarship for many years has been American, elitist and static,[62] and wanting to expand the TCK model to include all the stories of children who are affected by multiple cultural contact, in 2002, Van Reken coined and devised the CCK model (see Figure 1 for the groups of children included). This term refers to individuals who are living or have 'lived in – or meaningfully interacted with – two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during the first eighteen years of life'; and the new model illustrates subcategories of CCKs, such as the children of bi-racial parents, the children of immigrants, and international adoptees.[63] Notwithstanding the term's yet again awkward and somewhat American phrasing, this model no longer only focuses on the challenges that white American children face when migrating.

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[61] Averis and Hollis-Touré, p. 9.
[62] See in this respect Cottrell, 'TCKS'.
[63] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, pp. 43-4; see also Ruth E. Van Reken, 'Third Culture Kids: Prototypes for Understanding Other Cross-Cultural Kids - Who Are Cross Cultural Kids?', *Cross Cultural Kids* <http://www.crossculturalkid.org/who-are-cross-cultural-kids/> [accessed 18 October 2018].
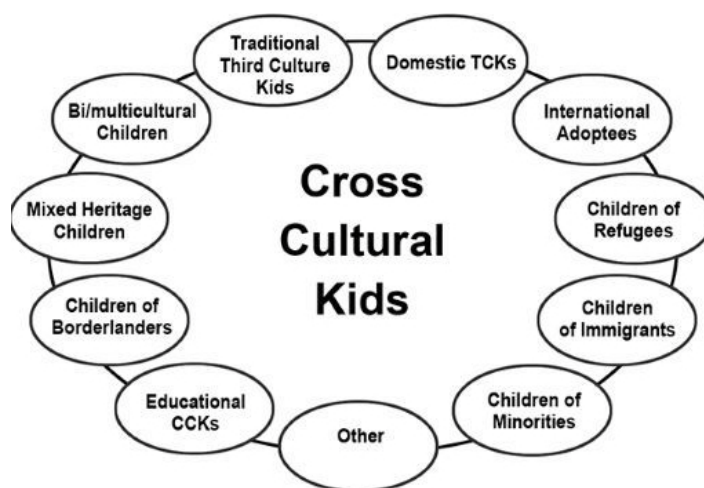
Figure 1. Groups of children included in Van Reken's Cross-Cultural Kid (CCK) model.

As McLaughlin points out, the updated model above inclusively 'takes into account the reality of the increasing number of individuals who grow up outside of a traditional monocultural environment'.[64] Van Reken aims to show that there are parallels between the frequent crossing of physical borders and of cultures in childhood, as well as to help children who belong to her CCK model to recognise that they should celebrate their multiple identities instead of, as she asserts, 'being forced to choose identity based on old standards'.[65] In many ways this idea is similar to transcultural perspectives, with the significant difference that Van Reken focuses on challenges that *children* face when continually moving between cultures. Clearly, further research should examine the 'Other' subgroup and the CCK model in general.[66] This CCK model is still very new, and so far only McLaughlin has discussed it in her literary analysis of Chris Cleave's novel *The Other Hand*, in which the main protagonist is a young Nigerian asylum-seeker.[67]

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[64] McLaughlin, p. 65.
[65] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 377.
[66] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, pp. 43-44; this other circle is left blank in *Third Culture Kids* but children of divorced parents who switch from one home to another are mentioned as examples of other groups of CCKs. Children whose parents have left them behind while they migrate for work are discussed by McLaughlin, whereas Van Reken explains that Oya Ataman argues that the children of deaf adults might also find themselves in several of the categories mentioned in the CCK model, thus expanding the model to children of parents with impairments; in this respect see also Oya Ataman, 'Third Culture Kids (English), *Coda +*, 2013 <https://signsandwords.com/new-page/identity/tck-english-i/> [accessed 17 March 2021].
[67] See McLaughlin. Chris Cleave grew up in Cameroon and the United Kingdom.

In this thesis, I employ this model as a starting point and draw upon Van Reken's work, because the CCK perspective reveals the diversity and nuance in how individuals interact daily with multiple cultures in childhood. Van Reken illustrates that many individuals embody several of the abovementioned CCK subcategories – such as Barack Obama, who belongs to 'at least six CCK circles – traditional TCK, bicultural, biracial heritage, domestic TCK, minority, educational CCK'.[68] In accordance with intersectional scholars, Van Reken thus demonstrates that however elitist the worlds they inhabit, children who are raised on the move often experience childhoods that involve complex entanglements.[69] Consequently, when considering categories of mobility, literary scholars must employ plural rather than singular or binary categories of analysis. For this reason, in my analyses, I predominantly adopt Leigh Gilmore's notion of 'autobiographics', which refers to self-representational acts by women that incorporate, using her terms, 'elements of multiple genres' and identities.[70]

Although each of this study's first four analytical chapters focuses on one main classification of mobility, it is significant that these categories of cross-cultural movement intersect, as Van Reken has made clear. In the introduction to a recent collection of essays on mobility in contemporary Francophone writing, Averis and Hollis-Touré also argue that the fact that mobility terms are often interchangeable

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[68] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 43. Barack Obama was born in Hawaii to an American mother and a Kenyan father and was raised in several States of the United States and in Indonesia – where his stepfather came from.

[69] The notion of 'intersection' has shifted over time and it is currently sometimes used to examine the interconnected nature of social categorisations, which create overlapping systems of inequality. Some of the newer social categorisations that are included in intersectional approaches are physical ability, age and migration status. While the term now ranges beyond black and female (and this is the way I use it when considering the overlapping identities of migrant girls, particularly in chapter five), it is crucial in this context to acknowledge that Crenshaw's research originally explored the race and gender dimensions of violence against Black women. As I discuss at the end of this thesis, although the majority of the selected life writers are not white, it must be recognised that the voices of writers of minority ethnicities are still underrepresented by publishing houses. In respect to the notion of intersectionality, see also Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

[70] Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood: Toward an Intersectional Tradition of Life Writing* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 9 and p. 42. I will discuss the notion of 'autobiograhics' further in the next chapters.

underscores the need to re-evaluate our use of terminology and designation, to recognise the limitations that such categories impose, and to consider the possibilities that become available to us with the recognition of their permeable and porous nature.[71]

Many of the authors discussed in the above-mentioned book are, like my selected life writers, 'category-shifters' who demonstrate, using Averis and Hollis-Touré's terms, 'the difficulty of separating and defining self-contained modes of displacement'.[72] Following the example of intersectional thinkers, and agreeing with Averis and Hollis-Touré that the application of categories can establish hierarchies, I am cautious about categorising each text according to one classification of mobility. Accordingly, I have chosen to explicitly refer to the labels that each life writer gives to their experience of mobility in childhood.

The primary texts have been chosen because they represent a variety of genres of life writing and reveal the diverse experiences of children who recurrently cross cultural, geographical and linguistic borders. Instead of ordering the chapters chronologically, I use categories of mobility, by taking both Bauman's tourist/vagabond spectrum and Van Reken's CCK model into consideration. Chapter one centres on the underexamined experience of growing up in serial migrancy as a non-white TCK, as presented in Elizabeth Liang's one-woman autobiographical performance *Alien Citizen: An Earth Odyssey*, which was premiered in 2013.[73] Chapter two focuses on the experience of sliding down the socioeconomic ladder as a consequence of migration. In contrast to Liang, who continuously grew up in an 'expatriate' environment, Abeer Hoque, the author of the 2016 memoir *Olive Witch: A Cross-Cultural Memoir*, was born in Nigeria

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[71] Averis and Hollis-Touré, p. 7.
[72] Averis and Hollis-Touré, p. 5.
[73] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey* (HapaLis Productions, 2017). Here, I refer to the film recording of the play.

to Bangladeshi 'expatriates' but then moved to the United States, where she and her family were initially underprivileged 'immigrants'.[74] In chapter three, I examine the genre of 'autographics' and moving due to war, in Thi Bui's illustrated memoir of 2017, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir*.[75] Chapter four focuses on the experience of migrating due to political conflict and international fostering in Susan Abulhawa's autobiographical essay of 2013, 'Memories in an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna'.[76]

A thorough exploration of genres of life writing would not be complete without considering new media, and a proper examination of the self-representation of frequent migration and cross-culturalism in girlhood must include life writing by children. Most child-focused life writing is composed in adulthood and is obviously influenced by the perspectives of the adult writer. Accordingly, in the last analytical chapter of this doctoral thesis, I explore modern-day forms of life writing by children, such as video blogs and TEDxYouth talks, in order to explore how digital technology is creating new forms of life writing and changing the ways in which girls negotiate their transient girlhoods.

In each chapter, I place the selected life writers alongside more prominent authors who grew up in the 'cross culture', such as Edward Said and Marjane Satrapi, in order to emphasise that the texts of these adult CCK individuals share commonalities. It is crucial to point out that in examining how categories of mobility intersect in each chapter, I am not proposing to merge existing classifications of movement. For this reason, in each chapter I focus on one main specific type of mobility. It is only in the concluding chapter that I draw comparisons among the various selected texts and types of mobility. This final chapter highlights my most prominent findings, in support of the thesis that we should

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[74] Abeer Y. Hoque, *Olive Witch: A Memoir* (Noida: Fourth Estate/HarperCollins Publishers India, 2016).
[75] Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2017).
[76] Susan Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', in *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, ed. by Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2013), pp. 4–15.

read the life writing of moving girlhoods contextually and generically, in order to see that although their reasons for migration are very diverse, the selected life writers exploit their texts to voice their views on multiple boundary crossings, and to emphasise the need to bring conflicting cultures together.

Crossing Borders:
The Figures of the Frequent Migrant, the Child and the Life Writer

Before proceeding to the central chapters, it is important to clarify my understanding of terms that recur throughout this thesis. TCK research, as we have seen, was originally about expatriate children. The word 'expatriate', however, originally derives from the Latin *expatriātus*, and literally (and broadly) means a person who has left their country of origin. The economist Sylwia Przytuła points out that

> the differentiation found in common usage of the word "expatriate" usually
> comes down to socio-economic status of workers as skilled professionals
> working in another country are described as "expatriates", whereas a manual
> labourer who has moved to another country to earn more money might be
> labelled an "immigrant".[77]

Due to the classist and racist connotations that the term 'expatriate' still carries in everyday use, in this thesis, when discussing individuals who move from one country to

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[77] Sylwia Przytuła, 'Migrants, Assigned Expatriates (AE) and Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIE) - Differentiation of Terms and Literature-Based Research Review', *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 7.2 (2015), 89–111 (p. 95) <https://doi.org/10.1515/joim-2015-0012>; see also Jacqueline Knörr, 'Childhood and Migration', in *When German Children Come 'Home.' Experiences of (Re-)Migration to Germany- and Some Remarks about the 'TCK'-Issue* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), pp. 51–76.

another, I use the broader term 'migrant', which the United Nations defines as any

individual who moves across

> an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of
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> residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the
>
> movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement
>
> are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.[78]

Throughout this thesis, a range of reasons for migration in childhood are examined, such

as international adoption or flight from the effects of war. I acknowledge that each type

of migration has its specific characteristics, which I name and discuss in each chapter. I

use the neutral umbrella terms 'migration' and 'migrant', however, to reflect the overall

notion of crossing international borders, because these terms encompass diverse situations

and thus allow me to explore various types of movement together more easily.

In a similar manner, I refer to the terms 'childhood' and 'girlhood' in a broad

sense, but I realise that no single term is appropriate for all phases and contexts. However,

these flexible terms allow me to examine several life stages together in the first four

chapters. Although, as Catherine Driscoll points out, 'girl' is a difficult term 'to pin

down',[79] here I use the term 'girl' to emphasise that my research moves away from a male

and adult-centred focus.[80] Childhood is a complex label because the notion of childhood

(and indeed age in general) is socially constructed. Furthermore, childhood is not a

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[78] United Nations, 'Migration', 2020 <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration> [accessed 8 March 2020]; see also *Glossary on Migration*, ed. by Richard Perruchoud and Jillyanne Redpath-Cross, International Migration Law, 2nd edition (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2011).

[79] Catherine Driscoll, 'Girls Today - Girls, Girl Culture and Girl Studies', *Girlhood Studies*, 1.1 (2008), 13–32 (p. 28) <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2008.010103>.

[80] In her article, Driscoll argues that when 'the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham rose to prominence with its analyses of youth culture in collections like *Resistance Through Rituals* (1975), it was overwhelmingly focused on boys'. Driscoll thus praises the canonical work of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber within the context of girl studies, Driscoll, p. 21; see in this respect, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, 'Girls and Subcultures', in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "Just Seventeen"* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 1991), pp. 1–15.

universally agreed concept because different societies in the world have diverse notions of childhood, and furthermore, children acquire skills at different ages and in various ways accordingly. While terms such as 'infants', 'toddlers' and 'adolescents' attempt to indicate a specific developmental stage, and I use them at times in my descriptions, throughout this thesis I use the terms 'childhood' and 'girlhood' to discuss a broad age range, as the United Nations does in its Convention on the Rights of the Child.[81]

Although for the United Nations 'childhood' is the span between birth and eighteen years of age, I agree with Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, who argue that 'girl culture is extending also at its upper end' and can thus also include young adulthood.[82] Therefore, I use the terms 'childhood' and 'girlhood' for the time between birth and the completion of compulsory secondary school education, when children are generally still living with their parents or legal guardians, and are thus still dependent on them in terms of financial support and decision-making.

Explaining her coinage 'autobiography of childhood', Douglas points out that she uses the term 'autobiography' interchangeably with 'memoir', 'life writing' and 'life narrative'.[83] I prefer the term 'life writing' because I examine both literary and media interviews, which are generally classified as biographical texts.[84] Life writing scholars predominantly understand life narrative to be the writing of one's own life, whereas life writing, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, is 'a general term for writing that takes

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[81] United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990 <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/50f941fe9/united-nations-convention-rights-child-crc.html> [accessed 3 June 2020]; see Douglas for a history of how childhood is represented and constructed in autobiographies Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 8-15; see also Sultana Ali Norozi and Torill Moen, 'Childhood as a Social Construction', *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 6.2 (2016), 75–80 <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n2p75>.

[82] Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, 'Introduction to Part 1', in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), I, xxiii–xxxii, p. xxvi.

[83] Douglas, p. 3.

[84] For further details on how interviews operate as forms of autobiography, see, for example, Jerome Boyd Maunsell, 'The Literary Interview as Autobiography', *European Journal of Life Writing*, 5 (2016), 23–42 <https://doi.org/10.5463/ejlw.5.194>.

a life, one's own, or another's, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical'.[85]

The term 'life writing', however, raises the question of whether it can only encompass written material on paper. This is a significant point for this thesis, as I examine a theatrical performance, an illustrated memoir, a YouTube video and TED talks. Similarly to Baena, I consistently refer to 'texts', which in this sense are broadly understood to mean both literary and cultural products that can be read, and can therefore include oral, written, visual and digital works.[86]

Digital technology is abundantly offering new ways to produce life writing texts that can reach wide audiences. As Paul Arthur argues, it is 'impacting on the field of biography by greatly expanding the range of forms that can be considered as genres of "life writing".[87] Arthur refers here to new 'genres' of life writing that are emerging as a consequence of digital technology. While 'form' and 'genre' are often used interchangeably by life writing scholars,[88] throughout this thesis – similarly to Smith and Watson, who have compiled a thorough list of sixty genres of life narrative[89] – I use 'genre' for various types of life writing that share common features, such as the bildungsroman, memoir, diary and digital life stories. In relation to genres, I explore how they are used by the selected life writers to regain a sense of agency and become the heroines of postmodernity.

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[85] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 4.

[86] See Rosalia Baena, 'Introduction', in *Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. viii.

[87] Paul L. Arthur, 'Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing', in *Save As... Digital Memories*, ed. by Johanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 44–59, p. 46.

[88] See for example Marlene Kadar and Helga Schwalm, who use the terms interchangeably in their articles; Marlene Kadar, review of *Review of Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing*, by Rosalia Baena, *Biography*, 31.2 (2008), 282–85; Helga Schwalm, 'Autobiography', *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (Hamburg: University of Hamburg, 2014) <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/129.html> [accessed 13 May 2019].

[89] The genres I explore in this thesis are discussed in Smith and Watson's 'Sixty Genres of Life Narrative' ('Appendix A' of *Reading Autobiography*); Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* pp. 253-286.

Chapter One
Performing the TCK Experience in Elizabeth Liang's
Autobiographical Show *Alien Citizen: An Earth Odyssey*

Introduction: International Jet-Setting in Childhood

Very often I think about it. What would have happened if I had been born in Belgium and lived in Belgium? Would I be a writer? I don't know. This is the billion-dollar question.[1]
— Amélie Nothomb

When I say that I'm privileged, it is because my parents were diplomats, I traveled all my life, I could adapt myself more easily. And then, I am one of the privileged people that out of suffering developed a new form of strength.[2]

— Isabel Allende

While high-level professionals who are sent abroad on work assignments often enjoy a privileged lifestyle, frequent international mobility can have profound and complex effects on children. As I have previously argued, using Bauman's terms, these professionals are the 'tourists' and their children become the 'vagabonds'.[3] Amélie Nothomb is the daughter of the figure of a 'tourist', as her father descended from Belgian aristocrats and was a diplomat. Due to her father's itinerant diplomatic career, Nothomb grew up in Japan, China, the United States, Burma, Bangladesh, Laos, and Belgium.[4] In her Francophone autofiction, Nothomb's describes living and being educated within designated spaces for privileged expatriates, such as isolated compounds and international schools.

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[1] Jasper Rees, 'A Writer's Life: Amélie Nothomb', *The Telegraph* (London, 23 July 2006), section Culture <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3654008/A-writers-life-Amelie-Nothomb.html>.

[2] Inés Dölz-Blackburn and others, 'Interview with Isabel Allende', *Confluencia*, 6.1 (1990), 93–103 (p. 98).

[3] Bauman.

[4] For Nothomb's biography see *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette Den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); see also for the debate related to her place of birth Benjamin Hiramatsu Ireland, 'Amélie Nothomb's Distorted Truths: Birth, Identity, and Stupeur et Tremblements', *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*, 33.1 (2012), 135–56.

Notwithstanding these 'safe' places, in *The Life of Hunger* Nothomb discloses that during her adolescence she was sexually abused by strangers on a beach in Bangladesh. She also reveals her family's refusal to talk about this event, both then when she was twelve (at the end of the 1970s) and in her adulthood (at the beginning of the millennium). Nothomb uses the imagery in this book to depict systems of privilege and disadvantage and the tension that arose when she reflects about having a marginalised childhood when she was actually living in affluence. In many Asian countries, the young Nothomb saw people around her who suffered from nutritional hunger. Though anorexic and self-starving herself, Nothomb's body was emotionally hungry too. From the text, it is clear that something is missing in the author's life, there is a void that needs to be filled.

Some contemporary authors who have written about their itinerant childhoods due to their parents' professions, for example, in the Foreign Service, the UN or international businesses, are Isabel Allende, Elif Shafak, Tahmima Anam, Hisham Matar, and Joseph O'Neill. Shafak, who experienced a TC girlhood due to her mother's profession in the Turkish Foreign Office, writes

> I've lived in different cities through all my life. Mobility and nomadic life is a part of my personality and writing. I'm nurtured by this. However, from time to time it can be wearisome. Nomadic life is good for art, but tough for the artist.[5]

Shafak's words are interesting because on the one hand they emphasise that a 'privileged' itinerant girlhood can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. On the other hand, we notice that Shafak refers to her 'nomadic' lifestyle and not to a TCK one.

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[5] Elif Shafak, *The Happiness of Blond People: A Personal Meditation on the Dangers of Identity* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 15.

While the experience of growing up in multiple countries during these globalised times is becoming a frequent phenomenon and has been captured in various life writing texts, these pieces seldom mention the sociological concept of TCK. Accordingly, in the critical field of life writing and TCL, texts that explicitly aim to promote this term are still insufficiently explored. This chapter addresses this gap by focusing on the literary representations of moving girlhoods in a life writing piece that revolves around the TCK phenomenon. In her autobiographical performance *Alien Citizen: An Earth Odyssey*, which premiered in 2013 (referred to hereafter as *Alien Citizen),*[6] which I will explore in this chapter, Elizabeth Liang depicts the experience of frequent movement in girlhood due to a parent's high-powered career in order to help others who may be in her same situation. Additionally, to date, race, gender, and genre imbalances have been overlooked in TCL scholarship. In an attempt to problematise TCL, I examine a text by a writer who calls herself a 'Guatemalan-American business brat of Chinese-Spanish-Irish-French-German-English descent'.[7] Considering Van Reken's CCK model, Liang belongs not only to the 'TCK' circle, but also to the 'mixed-heritage children' and 'children of minorities' subgroups.[8]

In TCL, a critical open question is how multiple factors shape the identities of TCKs (and not solely frequent migration). In the first section, I will examine the most recurring symbols that Liang uses to depict her entangled TCK upbringing. Although autobiographical performances are, as Sherrill Grace argues, 'popping up' more frequently and more scholars are examining the relation between performances and life writing,[9] to date, *Alien Citizen* has not yet been evaluated in academia. In the second

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[6] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey - the Play*, directed by Sophie Calderon, 2013.

[7] Elizabeth Liang, 'Elizabeth Liang', *Website of Elizabeth Liang*, 2019 <https://cargocollective.com/ElizabethLiangSoloShowandWriter/Elizabeth-Liang> [accessed 14 May 2019].

[8] Van Reken, 'Who Are Cross Cultural Kids?'

[9] Sherrill Grace, 'Theatre and the Autobiographical Pact: An Introduction', in *Theatre and AutoBiography: Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Sherrill Grace and Jerry Wasserman (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2006), pp. 13–29, p. 13.

section, I will examine how the aesthetic portrayals of Liang's moving girlhood are mirrored through the choice of her selected genre of life writing. I will argue that, after a muted TC girlhood, Liang uses acting under the spotlight to challenge fixed, single, and essentialised notions of the self. Moreover, considering that the author has created a play that relays her travel experiences around the world while aiming to help other 'aliens', I argue that an important part of the performance is to sensitively balance experiences of the TCK self and insights about the people in the host countries.

After premiering in 2013, Liang's *Alien Citizen* was subsequently filmed in 2015 at a theatre in Los Angeles, with the digital video recording of the performance being released in 2017 (which I will refer to in this chapter). Liang was born in 1972 in Guatemala to a Chinese-Spanish father and an American mother of mixed European descent. Her father worked for the American company Xerox and, due to various assignments he was given, Liang moved over seven times internationally while growing up. Her one-woman performance (or 'live travelogue', as Liang calls it in her autobiographical essay describing the initial drafting of her play) takes viewers through her journey around the world.[10]

The play begins at an unspecified time in an unspecified dark place with the actress wearing an alien mask with two vacillating feelers on top of it. A tenebrous offstage voice asks the masked person 'Who are you?' and 'Where do you come from?'.[11] This opening scene, like the title of the performance, suggests that the play will be about a quest to find one's bearings after being lost in the universe. The subsequent scenes are set in Guatemala, where the actress was born, before moving to Egypt. Liang then

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[10] Elizabeth Liang, 'Checked Baggage: Writing Unpacked', in *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 440–54; Liang's brother John also portrays his experience of growing up in the TC in this collection of essays, see John Liang, 'Finding Home', in *Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 80–91.

[11] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1 min.

predominantly stages her childhood experiences in chronological order, taking the viewer on a trip from her Guatemalan birth to Costa Rica, the United States, Panama, back to Guatemala, then the United States again, Morocco, Egypt and then, finally, back to the United States once more where she first attends Wellesley College in Massachusetts before finally settling in Hollywood, Los Angeles, due to her acting career.

Liang's mask at the beginning of the play is a very simple one, recalling those crafted by children with limited materials. It is worth noting that Liang must make use of uncomplicated theatrical devices, like an unsophisticated mask, as this is not a high-budget performance with famous performers but a one-woman performance by an early-career artist. Additionally, *Alien Citizen* is a play which aims to educate different kinds of audiences about the experiences of growing up in the TC, an underexplored notion that must be explained in simple terms. Many specialised books and online websites of TCKs often target multiple audiences, and, like most of those texts, Liang's performance has been shown to both children in international schools and to adults in theatres and companies around the world. Accordingly, the author has used simple but significant words, images and theatrical tools to engage both these types of audiences.

Images of the 'Third Culture' Girlhood: Silenced and Discriminatory Words

I am eleven and I don't have the words.[12]

– Elizabeth Liang

My music was similar to my upbringing […] Mars was an apt metaphor: I was a foreigner, an alien, in whatever environment I found myself in.[13]

– Sinkane

Children cover their eyes, ears, and mouth when demonstrating that they do not want to see, hear or say something. The child-like action of covering her mouth is the most recurring gesture that Liang performs during the play (see Figure 2), and in this section I will interpret the various meanings of this symbol and the overall significance of the images of words in Liang's work while tying it all in to relevant TCK theories.

Figure 2. Liang covering her mouth with her hands in *Alien Citizen*, HapaLis Productions.

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[12] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey*, 31 min.
[13] Matt Diehl, 'The Sudanese Soul Stylings of Sinkane', *T The New York Times Style Magazine*, 2014 <https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/18/sinkane-sudan-mean-love-song-premiere/>. Musician Sinkane (Ahmed Gallab) was raised in the United Kingdom, Sudan and the United States. Echoing the notion that TCKs feel like aliens, Sinkane chose the title *Mars* for his 2012 album.

In Figure 2, we see two hands that are covering not only the mouth of the actress but also a big part of her face, almost masking it completely. By wearing a black t-shirt in front of a black background, Liang's body (including her dark hair) has blended in with her surroundings so that when she covers her mouth it is only her eyes that can be seen, allowing her to fade into the background and rendering her unable to speak.

Blending into one's surroundings has been widely addressed by TCK scholars, who often refer to these children as 'chameleons' due to their adaptability skills, which Pollock et al. describe as 'a primary tool for surviving the frequent change of cultures'.[14] In *Alien Citizen*, the young Liang discloses how she tries 'not to stand out from the majority'.[15] Striving to quietly blend in, Liang acts in school and college like her peers in order to be perceived as 'normal'. The act of mixing in does not work for all TCKs; and, in the late 70s and early 80s while in the United States, Liang stood out among her peers due to her mixed racial background. Such episodes suggest that the TCK phenomenon is not a uniform one and that there are nuances in the ways in which individuals live through this experience. Due to her outward appearance and 'minority status' in the United States,[16] Liang tells us she was teased and excluded at school, and left 'basically friendless'.[17]

Liang's way of coping with this lack of proper communication and peer exchange in the United States was to fantasise about being one of the superheroes she watched on American television, particularly Superman, who comes, almost like her, from a different planet.[18] However, the play informs us that Superman and all the other television characters did not look like her and, accordingly, she felt that the character of Spock from *Star Trek* was the only one she could relate to.[19] This image once again confirms that the

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[14] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 153.
[15] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 29.00 min.
[16] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 21.40 min.
[17] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 21.43 min.
[18] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 21.50 min.
[19] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 22.00 min.

young girl felt like she was living in another dimension. In their respective productions, both Liang and Spock are on a journey to discover new worlds, and during their travels the two characters look extraordinary in the eyes of everyone else around them. To find comfort at this difficult stage in her life, the young Liang turned to literature. In order to stage this act of reading in girlhood by means of simple gestures, Liang puts her two hands up in front of her face to portray a person immersed in a book and this gesture, which the actress repeats throughout the play, once again presents the image of a girl who is both hiding and mute.

A further instance of Liang's lack of words is at the beginning of the play when performing an episode that takes place in Egypt. Explaining a situation in which the girl had to fill in a form at the American school in Cairo, the adult Liang reveals that she was asked to check one of the boxes describing her ethnicity. As a girl she felt uncomfortable and confused, not wanting to be forced to choose between her parents and their ethnicities, consequently she ticked the 'other' box.[20] The young Liang was not provided with the words or assistance to describe her feelings and situation fully. In an effort to manage the tension between the mixed ethnicities of her parents, their positions within the family and her own role as a child, during the play Liang emphasises the gesture of hastily ticking a box. Nina Sichel explains, that because they are children, many TCKs, do not 'know how to express what they are feeling', and therefore problems are often 'unspoken, unrecognized, shunted aside'.[21] Instead of trying to make sense of the feeling of being caught between different categories and trying to talk about this situation with her parents, Liang remains silent and important words remain unspoken.

Whereas we have previously seen the figure of a child who is misunderstood by her peers in the United States, there are also many instances in the play in which the young

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[20] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 6.33 min.
[21] Nina Sichel, 'The Trouble with Third Culture Kids', *CMHN - Morning Zen*, 2018 <https://www.cmhnetwork.org/news/the-trouble-with-third-culture-kids/> [accessed 19 July 2021].

Liang is silenced by her parents, who do communicate properly with her due to her age. For many years in childhood, due to her attachment to her grandparents and relatives who live in Guatemala, where the family go back to regularly when living in South and North America, Liang felt like Guatemala was 'home base-ish' for her.[22] Moreover, this is also the country she was born in. At the beginning of the play, Liang explains that as a young school girl she felt that she had a place to call home and therefore she told her peers that she was a true 'Guate'. However, when she found out by chance that there was a war in 'her' country and that this was the reason why her parents fled, she felt 'stupid and embarrassed'.[23] A true 'Guate', she thought, would have known about the war, and so in the play she asks herself 'Who I am to complain when people misidentify me ethnically and nationally, which they do all the time?'.[24] Instead of challenging her parents, who had never discussed the war with her, the young Liang blames herself for her childhood ignorance and suddenly loses her 'home' as a consequence of feeling that she knows so little of the place she was born in. It is perhaps at this stage, and due to the significant unspoken words to the child, that the character in the play starts losing her bearings and begins to get lost in space.

The two episodes above of not uttering words show the difficulty of communicating within Liang's family. Communication, or the lack of it, is also portrayed throughout the play by means of different hand gestures that the figures of her parents make. When performing the role of the father during her teenage years, the actress moves to a more prominent spot on the stage, becoming a new character in a more illustrious and stronger position. Additionally, whereas the young girl's voice is either a 'stupid', interrupted or silent one, the father's voice is dark, loud, and scowling. When scolding and instructing her, Liang's father brandishes a finger in the air. Typically, the father cuts

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[22] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 14 min.
[23] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey*, 14 min.
[24] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 12.46 min.

off further dialogue between the child and the adult as he is either tired or annoyed by having to converse with the girl.

Although the father's finger moves back and forth during the act of scolding, it always remains near the mouth, and this gesture of a single finger placed vertically in front of the lips is indicative of requesting silence from his daughter. This recurrent patriarchal gesture contrasts to that of the young girl, as the father waves one single finger in the air to stop any form of speech, whereas the young girl hides most of her face with two hands in a shadowy position when being silenced. During these father-and-daughter conflicts, shield-like hands alternately protect the face of the young girl while her father's powerful knife-like finger is shown repeatedly on stage. In this situation, the girl takes on the role of a young person who does not have the rights and strength to manifest her worries. The imaginary shield in front of her indicates that she prefers to be accommodating and to hide instead of facing conflicts with her parents in an already very tense situation, particularly in Morocco, where her father is depicted as a man who is agitated due to problems at work.

Another notable character gesture is that of the female adult, the figure of the mother of Liang. The mother either waves two fingers near her mouth while holding an imaginary cigarette in the air while talking or places these two fingers in front of her lips while smoking. As a child, the words and suggestions from her mother while holding two fingers in front of her face are predominantly ineffective and even harmful. For example, in the United States, Liang's peers at school ask the young girl 'what' she is, and they particularly want to know whether she is Chinese or Japanese. The audience is told that after school the young Liang rushes to the mirror at home to look at herself but does not 'see it'. Confused, she asks her mother what she should reply and is instructed to tell her peers that she is Chinese because 'the Chinese had great doctors before anyone else did; tell them that the Chinese invented gunpowder and fireworks'. However, when she tells

her peers that she is Chinese they tease her and sing 'chinky' and 'Chinese Japanese' in front of her.[25]

Another representation of the unemotional words of her mother can be observed in a scene that takes place with teenager Liang in Cairo. Not fitting in with her peers, the teenager resorts to food for comfort. The trope of a mouth blocking words is again observable at this stage because the teenager is silencing her mouth by filling it excessively with food. Instead of reading this as signals of an eating disorder and self-destructive behaviour that are used to self-medicate after traumatic events, the mother's only suggestion is to 'go back on Weight Watchers', which the actress recites while waving two fingers in the air. After this comment, the mother once again places her fingers to her mouth as if smoking, indicating that, for her at least, the conversation is over.[26]

At a first glance, it might seem that the figure of the mother is that of a strong person who silences her daughter throughout Liang's play. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that Hill Useem began her TCK research because she recognised that both children and women faced challenges when returning or 'repatriating' and adjusting to their original 'home' countries. When discussing the origins of the TCK concept, Cottrell specifies that Hill Useem was one of the first sociologists to acknowledge the notion that children and spouses can suffer as a consequence of being dragged abroad by men.[27] The man in Liang's play is portrayed waving a single menacing finger near his mouth, whereas his wife alternates between two hand movements, which indicates ambiguity.

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[25] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey*, 18.00-19.15 mins.

[26] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 52 min.; Liang speaks about her eating disorder in her teenage years in her play, for more details about the relationship between TCKs, eating disorders and trauma, see for example Elizabeth A. Melles and Lisa L. Frey, '"Here, Everybody Moves": Using Relational Cultural Therapy with Adult Third-Culture Kids', *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 36 (2014), 348–358 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-014-9211-6>.

[27] Cottrell, 'TCK Research'.

On the one hand, the two fingers in the air in the scenes with her daughter are suggestive of conquering. Holding an imaginary cigarette, using the index and middle finger seemingly forming a V sign, indicates that the matriarch has won the battle. On the other hand, it should be noted that, after holding the cigarette in her fingers near her lips, the hand of the mother then ultimately conceals her mouth. The image of an 'expatriate' woman who covers her own mouth serves to point out that, at the end of the twentieth century, many women were also expected to trail behind their husbands while their concerns were often silenced.

When examining the issues of children who are dragged around the world, it is also significant to consider the struggles that they face when having to learn a new language. According to Pollock et al., 'acquiring fluency in more than one language is potentially one of the most useful life skills a cross-cultural upbringing can give TCKs'.[28] However, Liang's image of a girl's mouth being silenced alludes to problems related to having to learn new languages in new countries, and more specifically to the loss of words. Within the play, upon returning to Guatemala during a school holiday after having lived in the United States, the young Liang recounts that she is frightened because she feels she cannot speak. She is learning English in the United States, but is simultaneously losing her grasp of Spanish. Consequently, upon being reunited with her Guatemalan relatives, she suddenly 'can't find the words in any language'.[29] Liang accordingly feels like she is 'falling into a big hole' and that she will be 'left behind'.[30] Rather than understanding that acquiring fluency in multiple languages can be a long and beneficial process, as a young girl she only sees limitations. Liang loses the image of her 'Guate' self through the inability to express herself in Spanish, losing her bearings and reverting back to the identity of a lonely alien. Furthermore, in her new school in Morocco, Liang

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[28] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 175.
[29] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 20.50 min.
[30] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 20.30 min.

is once again assaulted by the fear of not being able to speak.[31] In the new Spanish-speaking school, Liang is speechless upon hearing the multitude of new dialects, including Moroccan French and 'street Spaniard Spanish' as opposed to the 'fancy Castilian' that she speaks and expects to hear.[32] Considering that at this stage Liang fluently speaks English, Spanish, Castilian, French, and Arabic, the trope of muteness is all the more significant. Paradoxically, within the text a talented polyglot is barely capable of speaking.

So far, I have discussed the instances where Liang represents how words were taken away from her in girlhood. In stark contrast to this image, Liang also portrays episodes in which words were launched at her. Representing her life as a teenage girl in Casablanca and Cairo, expressions in white are often projected onto the black t-shirt of the actress in order to shed light upon moments of verbal abuse and discrimination that she experienced while walking alone in the streets in these countries (Figure 3). Some of the phrases that are used include 'Whore', 'Bitch', and 'How much?'. To portray these episodes, the actress recites the words in Arabic using a deep male voice while the translations in English are projected onto her body.

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[31] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 40.17 min.
[32] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 42.00 min.
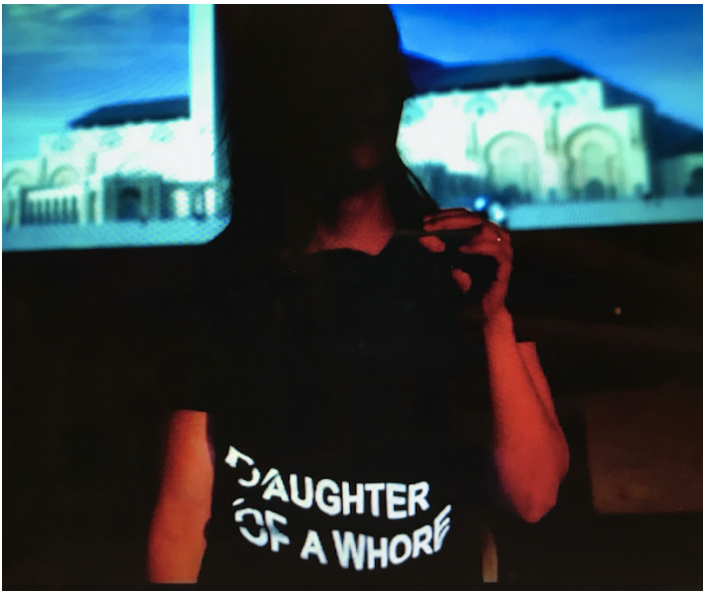
Figure 3. Discriminatory words are projected onto the body of the actress in *Alien Citizen*, HapaLis Productions.

In Figure 3, Liang is once again left in the shade. Her body has almost disappeared and the audience's focus is drawn to the white words on her body and the bright picture behind her of the Hassan II Mosque, an image strongly associated with Casablanca. At this stage, it is significant to briefly point out that Liang's performances were held in front of a predominantly Western audience. Linking a picture of a mosque to gender discrimination risks potentially portraying North African Muslims as threats to the West. In the following section I will discuss, using Said's terms, 'the Orient's special place in [the] European Western experience' in more detail.[33]

Considering that Liang often puts her hands in front of her mouth to prevent expressing herself, the image of strong words being launched at her is all the more significant. We have already seen how Liang lost her 'human' identity and felt like an alien due to the loss of a language, adjusting to new settings, fitting into boxes, and accommodating the needs of her parents. In Figure 3, it can be observed that, hidden in the dark, Liang has lost herself again. This time, she has lost her identity and has been

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[33] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 1.

ascribed a new one by means of labelling, naming, and false assumptions. On the streets of Casablanca and Cairo, the girl is discriminated because of her gender. If we are to consider that Liang was called 'Chinese Japanese' by some of her peers in the United States due to her physical appearance, and suffered from prejudice on the basis of her age when speaking to her parents, we can see that multiple forms of discrimination overlap in her TCK experiences.

The verbal abuse that Liang portrays during the Casablanca and Cairo segment shows how this traumatises the teenage girl, who must often go to school or other afternoon activities alone. When trying to discuss a solution to this problem with her mother, the concerns of the young girl are muted again because her mother tells her that she should behave like a proper guest in these countries, adding that, instead of complaining, she should acknowledge the beauty around her. Consequently, the writer stops expressing her feelings and shuts down, stating 'I don't have words for this, so I never talk about it'.[34] Here, the girl's worries are ridiculed again by her parents and all have contrasting opinions; while the mobile adults believe their children are in a privileged situation, the feelings of their offspring are in reality very different.

During her girlhood, Liang is not allowed to complain because her parents tell her frequently that she is a privileged child because she is being given the very best education in beautiful nations, cultures, and languages. The fictional protagonists of Rauwerda's TCL are often 'ashamed of their privilege' because they are typically children from the Global North living in the Global South, with their affluent situations being different to those of 'the locals outside'.[35] Liang's shutting down reflects what Rauwerda calls 'secretive self-condemnation' and a grievance that others 'fail to recognize as a loss at all because of the assumption that travel, especially for privileged expats, is a mind-

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[34] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 56.2-56.51 mins.
[35] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* pp. 45-6.

broadening, enrichening, *good thing*'.[36] In early adulthood, after having come across the TCK concept, Liang realised that she was 'one of countless kids whose highest priority was to let our parents think that we were fine'. This is 'because we were scared that they would send us away'.[37]

Being sent away in this case might refer to attending a boarding school. Cottrell explains that 'expatriate' parents 'who were located far from "appropriate" schools and/or who were especially mobile were faced with the decision of where to send the children for school', with the 'common solution' being boarding schools.[38] Attending boarding school would have meant coping with additional stress for Liang. She would have had to say goodbye to her parents and learn to adapt to a new culture alone. Scared of losing her family too, the only fixed point in her life, she puts on an act and avoids expressing her feelings of alienation.

Liang emphasises the significance of words in her text to represent a girlhood in which little expression was allowed. The actress plays the role of a girl who is at times allowed to be seen but rarely allowed to be heard. Hiding herself and her pain, Liang puts on masks during girlhood and creates shields in front of her body. Ultimately, these masks and shields are ineffective, as Liang reveals at the end of her play. In one of the final scenes, she symbolically removes all the shards that harmed her in girlhood by extracting each of them from various parts of her body, such as her cheek, stomach, throat, and each breast. While removing each shard, the actress grimaces in order to express pain. Simultaneously, the perforating sound of glass vibrating is heard from a loudspeaker. Additionally, each time Liang removes a piece of glass from her body she quotes a phrase (each time in a different language, such as Arabic, English and Spanish) that she should

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[36] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* p. 36.
[37] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1.19 min.
[38] Cottrell, 'The International Education of TCKs' (presented at the Phi Beta Delta Annual Conference, Cholula, Mexico: Tckresearcher.net, 1998), pp. 1–13 (p. 9) <http://tckresearcher.net/Internat%20%20education%20TCKs%20%2798.pdf> [accessed 31 July 2021].

have uttered while growing up. For example, in English she utters 'I see you, will you please see me? You keep hurting me and it keeps breaking my heart. I am doing the best I can'.[39] After she has removed each piece of glass from her body, Liang throws the shards onto the floor and the loudspeaker plays the sounds of them falling and breaking.

Upon considering this symbolically healing act of something being released from the body of the actress, an additional meaning to putting two hands in front of one's mouth emerges. Whereas I have so far considered this gesture as an attempt to prevent words from coming out of a mouth; however, a mouth, as Pasi Falk reports, 'is a body opening which intermediates flows in both directions; a *bidirectional* sensory opening'.[40] As I have previously discussed, Nothomb uses hunger and food in her life writing as symbols to represent her lonely, distressed and moving TC girlhood. Stuffing something into her mouth was an attempt to fill a void, and it became her primary emotional coping mechanism accordingly.

Repeatedly bringing her hands to her mouth, Liang is also miming the action of incessantly putting something into her being as opposed to restraining something from coming out of it. Symbolically, conflicts of the outside world are taken into the girl's body, where they are trapped and caused emotional imbalance. The shards – the unresolved emotions – must be removed at the end of the play as they were hidden inside of Liang, causing her pain and disguising her identity. Therefore, in *Alien Citizen*, both the symbols of putting something imaginary into a body and taking something away from it represent the difficulties of conveying emotions.

The images I have examined in this section indicate that the TC character presented is an individual who cannot express herself and speak out. Liang portrays how she has suffered because of words and the inability to express them during her unsettled

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[39] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1.19-1.27 mins.
[40] Pasi Falk, *The Consuming Body* (London: Sage, 1994), p. 15.

childhood. She learns at an early stage that at times it is best to be mute and to stay in the shadow to cope with multiple types of conflicts. Because of the repeated moves, the child had to continually adapt, so much so that she became invisible to herself. In continually acting a role and having to modify her identity to please others or to avoid clashes, the almost natural consequence was for Liang to become an actress as an adult and to write an autobiographical story in order to help herself and others in her situation. By speaking out loud and stepping into the spotlight, Liang could finally come out of the shadows.

Multiple Genres and the Role of Speaking About the 'Third Culture Kid' Experience

I have learned, in writing my play, that a silenced voice can become very loud when it shakes off the muzzle. It is no wonder I became an actress.[41]

– Elizabeth Liang

It's always what the military needs, what the foreign service needs, what the missionaries need. So I guess that makes a lot of artists, because you want to express yourself.[42]

– Donna Musil

As I have previously explained, Liang calls herself a 'Guatemalan-American business brat of Chinese-Spanish-Irish-French-German-English descent', and it is clear that she rejects identifications according to single classifications.[43] Considering this description, it is understandable why it might be difficult for others to position her, and why she chooses to clarify past misrepresentations through her life writing and, using Gilmore's terms, to 'speak rather than to be spoken for'.[44] In this section, I will firstly discuss why Gilmore's autobiographic research is a useful reading practice in regards to examining

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[41] Elizabeth Liang, 'Checked Baggage: Writing Unpacked', p. 452.
[42] Shelley Jones, 'Does a Nomadic Childhood Lead to a More Creative Life?', *Huck Magazine* (UK, 22 July 2015) <https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/uprooted-kids/> [accessed 24 January 2019].
[43] Elizabeth Liang, 'Elizabeth Liang'.
[44] Gilmore, p. 40.

Alien Citizen and other life writing texts about moving girlhoods that resist, contradict, and interrupt notions of the 'stable *I* anchored within a relatively stable genre'.[45] Discussing the diverse applications of masks and the mixed genres in Liang's play, I will argue that the genre of the autobiographical performance is a tool for restoring a sense of agency after Liang's TC girlhood. I will then focus on Liang's efforts at creating a travelogue that displays cultural sensitivity. Here, I will consider the role of the TC writer who describes the Orient's geography, people, languages, and cultures to a dual audience.

In her book *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (1994), Gilmore examined a set of self-representational texts written by women, such as Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, which told the stories of women who were invisible and 'underrepresented to the point of unrecognizability'.[46] Gilmore examines these texts through her new lens and applies notions, which echo the concepts of Judith Butler.[47] For Gilmore, up until then there had been an 'absence of autobiographical categories' that 'mirror the complexity of human life'.[48] In her new practice of reading self-representational texts by women, she argues that autobiographics,

> allows us to recognize that the *I* is multiply coded in a range of
> discourses: it is the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of
> "identity," multiple figurations of agency. Thus, autobiographics avoids
> the terminal question of genre and close delimitation.[49]

Speaking of metaphors that have been used in the past to describe autobiographical acts (predominantly by men), Gilmore examines the theories of James Olney and Paul de Man

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[45] Gilmore, p. 185.
[46] Gilmore, p. 8.
[47] See in this respect Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519–31.
[48] Gilmore, p. 32.
[49] Gilmore, p. 42.

in great depth. The symbol of the mask and simulation has been an enduring symbol of life writing discourse since de Man argued in the 1970s that autobiography provides a tarnished view of the true self.[50] When discussing this notion of prosopopoeia, Gilmore deliberately uses the image of a zombie to 'dislodge the considerable horror that runs through de Man's anxiety about voice'.[51]

There are commonalities between Gilmore's notions of the self in women's self-representational writings and TCK identities, and this can be observed when comparing Gilmore's de-faced figure of a zombie and Liang's alien-like figure at the beginning of her autobiographical play. A voice coming offstage from a loudspeaker asks the almost ethereal being 'Who are you?' and 'Where do you come from?'.[52] Both selves of the woman who created the autobiographics and the individual who grew up in multiple nations and cultures are, using Gilmore's terms, 'multiple, heterogeneous, even conflicted'.[53] The question that is called out to an almost inanimate and absent figure remains unanswered because the masked figure cannot yet speak or perhaps does not yet have an answer to long lasting debates in the fields of life writing and TCK studies.

Gilmore argues that, in the past, a man's autobiography was typically 'the self-conscious search for individuality guided by the questions 'Who am I?', which 'assumes that the *I* is contained within a set of boundaries that distinguish it from everything else around it'.[54] In Liang's opening scene, it is the masked figure that is being asked 'Who are you?' instead of the protagonist asking herself 'Who am I?'. This question, as posed by a deep male and invisible voice, represents structures of wanting to define, label and assert power over other people that accompanied Liang throughout her girlhood. By the

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[50] Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', *MLN*, 94.5 (1979), 919–30 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2906560>.
[51] Gilmore, p. 72.
[52] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1 min.
[53] Gilmore, p. 85.
[54] Gilmore, p. 127.

end of her 'odyssey', Liang is able to answer questions regarding her identity and voice, allowing her true selves to be visible again.

Discussing masks since the earliest records of performance, David Roy states that such props are used pragmatically to indicate that a play is about to begin and allows actors to adopt a variety of roles. Masks, according to Roy, are also adopted abstractly as 'a modifier of conventional signs of identity', as seen through Bertolt Brecht's use of them 'as a deliberate act of alienation of the spectator'.[55] By wearing only a mask instead of a costume in this opening scene, the person is seen as a half-alien, half-human creature, indicating from the beginning that this will be a piece about alienation.

Masks can conceal and protect a face, but they can also reveal identity. Liang signals the changing of her roles and identities throughout her performance by donning different hairstyles, voices, accessories and positions, and she uses several images to convey her metaphorical lack of visibility in childhood. The opening scene of *Alien Citizen* is the only moment in which the actress *physically* wears a mask to cover up her face, but it evokes many meanings. As Gregory McCart asserts, in Greek theatre 'acting was masked acting' and Greek actors were 'born into a culture that celebrated the use of masks'.[56] Liang's choice of donning a mask to begin her play can be thus interpreted as a tribute to the origins of Western theatre by making use of a typical device of Athenian tragedy.

Masks, however, were and still are used by many societies in orature and for religious ceremonies and rituals. In this respect Paul Wingert points out, masks are used in cultures all over the world to conduct rituals of initiation, 'a time during which young

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[55] David Roy, 'Masks as a Method: Meyerhold to Mnouchkine', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 3.1 (2016), 1–11 (p. 4) <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2016.1236436>.

[56] Gregory McCart, 'Masks in Greek and Roman Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, ed. by Marianne McDonald and Michael Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 247–67, p. 247.

people are instructed in their future roles of adults'.[57] During these ceremonies, the young individuals wearing masks lose their previous identities and assume new ones. Therefore, the mask at the opening of the performance signifies the beginning of a passage from childhood to adulthood that is about to be represented on stage. Additionally, a simple handcrafted mask is an indication that Liang crosses the borders between children and adult's writing. For McCart, the enduring symbols of the theatre are 'the grieving mask of tragedy and the grinning mask of comedy'.[58] Liang's mask is neither a grieving mask nor a grinning mask, it is merely the absurd silent mask of a somewhat lost, small, and frightened alien-like being in a tragicomedy that must portray feelings of alienation and must appeal to dual audiences.

Pollock et al. argue that answering the question 'Where do you come from?' is not an easy task for children growing up in the TC.[59] Whereas Liang preferred to hide and avoid having to negotiate her disparate personas in girlhood instead of proudly manifesting her multiple identities, at the end of the play she can ultimately answer the question that was called out to her masked self at the beginning of the performance. At the end of her play, Liang reveals that she is one of the luckiest people on the planet and that, like many individuals who grow up on the move, she does not come from a place but from people, adding that her parents, her brother, her husband and her acting are her home.[60] Liang is no longer a disguised alien citizen child but an adult family citizen with multiple identities that belongs on stage.[61]

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[57] Paul Wingert, 'Mask - The Functions and Forms of Masks', *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago and London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019) <https://www.britannica.com/art/mask-face-covering/The-functions-and-forms-of-masks> [accessed 20 December 2019].

[58] McCart, p. 266.

[59] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, pp. 29-32.

[60] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1.14 min.

[61] After having been an 'Alien Citizen' in girlhood, at the end of the play, Liang states that she is one of the luckiest people on planet Earth due to all the beauty she has experienced while travelling, Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 86 min.

Examining autobiographical performances, Grace adapted Gilmore's concept of autobiographics and coined the term 'performative autobiographics' in 2006.[62] As she explains, this concept refers to 'the creation of identities that exist in performance, that challenge fixed notions of the self and of subjectivity, and that are new each time the story is performed'.[63] If we are to consider Liang's struggles due to her mixed background and TC upbringing, an autobiographical performance is an expressive form of movement for change in that it allows her to reclaim a sense of agency in adulthood. Rather than hiding and attempting to fit into one single box, acting and using masks allow the performer to play different characters and communicate many notions. In adulthood Liang can embrace multiple roles and speak about not being one single identity but a fusion of people, places, languages, cultures, ethnicities, experiences, and roles.

Significantly, acting gives Liang the chance to let her former silenced voice speak out loudly. In this respect, Deirdre Heddon points out that contemporary female life writers are particularly concerned with using their plays to respond:

> autobiographical performance was regarded by women as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalization and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency; performance, then, as a way to bring into being a self. Autobiographical performances provide a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise.[64]

As discussed in the previous section, Liang was not allowed to voice her worries for many years. In adulthood masks and acting give her the protection to behave in ways that were

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[62] Grace, 'Performative Autobiographics', in *Tracing the Autobiographical*, ed. by Marlene Kadar and others (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), pp. 76-77.

[63] Grace, 'Theatre and the Autobiographical Pact: An Introduction', p. 18.

[64] Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance: Performing Selves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3.

forbidden in childhood, allowing her to acquire a feeling of control over actions and their consequences.

Regarding her moving girlhood, in her personal essay that describes the drafting of the play, Liang explains that:

> I think I also became an actress because the lifestyle bears a resemblance to the TCK lifestyle, with added perks: the immediate family of casts and crews, the insulated world of the play or film, the inherent loss of one another at the end of a project.[65]

Here, we can observe that acting is not only a means to regain a sense of agency but also directly reflects and extends what Liang was accustomed to in girlhood. The TCK experience is a lifestyle choice made by adults that influences their offspring during their developmental years, and these decisions can endure throughout a lifespan. Liang has found in adulthood a career that gives her a sense of TCK belonging and allows her to carry on encountering new people, places, situations, and roles. With every new theatrical project, Liang can reinvent her identity and come together with other individuals who construct layered and complex personas. In the theatrical context, she can feel that she is in control of her unique life narrative. Acting also mirrors her girlhood experiences in that she can hide inside other characters when performing.

Regarding complex and unique genres, along the lines of Gilmore's thinking, Caren Kaplan argues that female migrant writers often create hybrid autobiographical genres because they reject to conform to the norms of traditional genres and scripts.[66] Since then, other life writing scholars have discussed the emergence and significance of

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[65] Elizabeth Liang, 'Checked Baggage: Writing Unpacked', p. 452.
[66] Caren Kaplan, 'Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects', in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 115–38.

both mixed-genres and women's life writing, which challenge past literary conventions. Anne Fleig, for example, illustrates that the 'merging of autobiography and drama/theatre in performance art and post-dramatic theatre clearly demonstrates that established genre conventions are the necessary prerequisite for deliberate transgressions against these very norms'.[67] Liang, as we have seen, suffered due to having been prescribed ill-fitting words and categories in girlhood, and her autobiographical performance, which incorporates mixed-genres, is a tool to challenge definitions by limiting characteristics, embracing the notion that identities and positions are multiple, overlapping, and variable.

In *Alien Citizen*, Liang blends the genre of life writing with drama while also incorporating elements such as the bildungsroman, the travel narrative, and 'scriptotherapy'.[68] The piece is also a trauma and a self-help narrative. One of Liang's objectives is to educate dual audiences about her girlhood experiences on the move, and at regular intervals, the actress puts her long black hair up in a ponytail and stands on a chair with a TCK anthology in her hands, playing the role of a scholar who is disseminating the TCK concept.

At the end of the play, Liang explains that, after reading the collection of personal essays by TC individuals that she is holding, in adulthood she finally found the words that helped her understand what her life had been until then (as she 'did not have the words when growing up').[69] The TCK term was indeed still very new during the playwright's early years. Tanu points out that it was a ultimately an online medium that 'triggered the exponential growth' of the usage of the term in 2007,[70] explaining that

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[67] Anne Fleig, '3.8 Autobiography and Drama/Theater', in *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction*, ed. by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 497–502, p. 498.

[68] Scriptotherapy and the other terms for genres of life writing that I discuss here are taken from Smith and Watson's 'Sixty Genres of Life Narrative' ('Appendix A' of *Reading Autobiography,* pp. 253-286). Scriptotherapy for them is autobiographical writing that 'functions as a mode of self-healing'. The imaginary removal of shards at the end of Liang's play is indicative of a process of self-healing; Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography,* p. 279.

[69] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey,* 1.20-1.22 mins.

[70] Danau Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit: The Politics of Belonging at an International School* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), p. 8.

Brice Royer, the son of an Ethiopian mother and a father of French-Vietnamese descent who worked as peacekeeper for the UN, established the *TCKid.com* online community at the beginning of the new century because 'he had become physically ill from the stress of repeated moves and not having a sense of belonging'.[71] Royer's encounter with the TCK concept prompted his recovery, and in establishing an online community for other individuals who grew up as he did, he aimed to 'reach out to others facing similar issues of belonging that result from serial temporary migration in childhood'.[72] For Pollock et al., the sense of belonging of TCKs is in 'relationship to others of similar background',[73] and when these individuals discover that their experiences are shared by others (through, for example, books, workshops or online communities) they feel less isolated. Royer in adulthood, like Liang, was stunned to see how, according to Tanu, a 'mere three-word-phrase' could have such deep impact on him and his life.[74] Donning the role of the TCK, Liang too informs her audience about the 'three-word-phrase' and how it influenced her girlhood. Her solo-show is thus a way to finally speak out for her child and adult selves as well as to help other individuals who may share her situation remove their own 'shards' and ultimately purify their emotions.

Whereas Aristotle uses catharsis as a metaphor to describe in dramatic art the effects of tragedy on the audience,[75] Liang's acting career and the representation of her TCK experiences on the stage can be seen as a means of purifying negative problems of both the performer and the spectators. Liang removes her shards at the end of the play, and in informing her spectators how not having a name for her TCK experience led to traumatic circumstances and in showing them a book that contains information about this subject, Liang's performance provides them with solutions, and using Stefan Meisiek's

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[71] Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit,* p. 8.
[72] Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit,* p. 8.
[73] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 13.
[74] Tanu, *Growing Up in Transit,* p. 8.
[75] See in this respect Anthony Kenny, 'Introduction', in *Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. vii–xcviii, p. xviii.

arguments about catharsis, 'provides the audience with the necessary action motivation to overcome such problems'.[76] We must not forget that Liang allows the audience to relive not only her problems related to frequent migration but also to those connected to multiple discrimination. Liang felt alienated while growing up and her play is not only the voicing of the TCK experience, but it is about finding and shaping appropriate aesthetic means to address important problems that many children face growing up in the twenty-first century in Van Reken's 'cross-culture' and to propose solutions to these issues. Van Reken created the CCK model because she was interested in exploring the ways in which individuals who grow up crossing borders may bond through their shared 'cross-cultural' experience and it is significant to point out that Liang is concerned with helping individuals who are in various groups of Van Reken's model. Liang has often donated proceeds from the sale of the DVD of *Alien Citizen* to refugee and racial justice organisations.[77]

Alien Citizen is not only a TCK self-help performance, but using Gilmore's terms, it is a 'site of multiple solicitations'.[78] Liang takes her audience on a journey across different sites, beginning with an alien in space, then changing to a girlhood spent in various countries before finally arriving at a present-day stage where audiences are reminded that our world, like theatrical performances and our identities, is composed of multiplicities, which are to be heard, seen, and respected at all times and in all places. Due to her portrayals of her journeys across the world, Liang calls her autobiographical play a 'travelogue', and she is also aware that she must be sensitive when it comes to representing other people, nations, and cultures.

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[76] Stefan Meisiek, 'Which Catharsis Do They Mean? Aristotle, Moreno, Boal and Organization Theatre', *Organization Studies*, 25.5 (2004), 797–816 (p. 797) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604042415>.

[77] See for example in this respect Liang's blog entry of August 2020. Here she informed that through December 2020, 20% of proceeds from streaming *Alien Citizen* would go to 'Color of Change', the largest online racial justice organisation of the United States; Elizabeth Liang, 'Making It Clear (or: How the Pandemic Helped Me Understand Something As a Solo Show Creator)', *Alien Citizen Solo Show Blog*, 2020 <https://aliencitizensoloshow.com/Blog> [accessed 7 August 2021].

[78] Gilmore, p. 42.

Examining travel writing, Claire Lindsay points out that this kind of autobiographical act is always a representation of the cultural 'other'.[79] In this respect, she discusses the theories of Said and his notion of 'Orientalism', which is crucial when reading *Alien Citizen*. Orientalism, according to Said, is 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.[80] Not wholly 'Occidental' herself, Liang in her play attempts to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of her childhood in both the Orient and Occident. In regards to this, in her autobiographical essay 'Checked Baggage' she states:

> My endless task as a TCK is to put such stories into context so the listener won't be offended by either the host country or my depiction of it, or my behavior or me. I have to figure out how to tell the biking-in-Cairo story with all the humor I can muster, but without commentary [...] so the audience will understand that I am *not* saying "Egypt was awful," when it was no such thing. This is a lot of work. [...] TCKs learn that there are social minefields when speaking to non-TCKs about the countries in which we have lived. The listeners may draw broad, incorrect conclusions about those countries.[81]

Although Liang's comments indicate she considered many problematic issues that a travel writer faces, it must not be forgotten that she performs her play predominantly in the Global North and, at times, in front of children, who might know very little about the places, cultures and people she describes. As she writes, her audience might draw false conclusions about the Global South based upon her representations. While on the one hand it is understandable that Liang wants to project images of the countries she is moving

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[79] Claire Lindsay, in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), pp. 25–34, p. 26.
[80] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 3.
[81] Elizabeth Liang, 'Checked Baggage: Writing Unpacked', p. 443.

to because she wants to signal that she is in a new country, on the other hand, these simple photographs of landmarks risk portraying the Orient in merely stereotypical and unimaginative ways.

Regarding the pictures of the countries she visited, it is important to explain that Liang makes use of images projected onto a large screen at the back of the stage to theatrically mark a move to a new country throughout her girlhood. Every time Liang represents a relocation, a photo of a small bridge in a woodland is projected onto the screen to indicate an upcoming passage. Through changing lights and sound effects, this bridge seems to be in the process of being moved by a roller mechanism before being replaced by a picture that represents Liang's new host country. This technique, which is frequently repeated throughout the performance, reflects xerography technology and therefore not only indicates the act of movement but also significantly displays the reason for the family's dislocation.

I have previously compared Liang's migration in childhood to Bauman's notion of vagabonds because I believe it to be predominantly involuntary. By repeating phrases like 'Xerox is moving us to Panama City', 'After four years, Xerox is moving us again, Fairfield County', and 'Xerox is moving the family to Casablanca, Morocco […] I'm going to be the new kid, again',[82] the young Liang naively emphasises that a multinational American company is to be condemned for the family's upheavals and problems. Like masks, which are identity modifiers and which Liang adopts at the very beginning of her play to indicate alienation, the xerographic images that the performer uses show copies that alter the original image. The colours of the pictures of places change from being colourful to black and white, then back to being projected in colour on the big screen.

The fact that these theatrical effects are used to emphasise how photocopies involve a process of modification and that Xerox has altered a girlhood demonstrates that

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[82] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey*, see, for example, 22.48 min.

Liang has considered the ethical responsibilities that she has as a life writer to her parents. Through this effect, she is attempting to show that her parents are not to be blamed entirely for affecting her girlhood. However, whereas she acts fairly as a daughter, the pictures Liang chooses cast doubts on whether she has acted ethically as a travel writer and TCK expert, who aims at promoting the *bridging* of cultures by means of her representations. It is important to remember that what makes her play stand out from other autobiographical texts about growing up in an 'expatriate' context is that Liang educates dual audiences on the challenges of this experience. As we have seen, she acts the role of a scholar who has specific expertise in cross-cultural contact and travelling to foreign countries. Additionally, *Alien Citizen* differs from many other TCK autobiographies because Liang also portrays the burden caused by various forms of discrimination due to her mixed ethnic ancestry.

However, the images Liang projects of the Sphinx to represent Cairo and of the Hassan II Mosque to represent the city of Casablanca, as well as the images of the men in these countries, oppose the notions that Liang is speaking as a TCK expert and an individual who experienced discrimination in girlhood on the grounds of her race, gender, and age. On the one hand, Liang's pictures can be read as theatrical effects that are used to mirror xerography technology, but on the other hand, they can be seen as processes of what Bhabha calls 'mimicry'.[83] In portraying stereotypical images of North African countries, Liang adopts the coloniser's assumptions in that she, like many tourists, associates these countries predominantly with landmarks such as the Giza pyramids and Sphinx. These images that are projected via xerography-like processes underscore Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's notion that the result of mimicry 'is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer

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[83] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, 28 (1984), 125–33 <https://doi.org/10.2307/778467>.

that can be quite threatening'.[84] The threatening result of Liang's act of mimicry here is that, by using these archaic and simplistic images, she presents Casablanca and Cairo as static places, thus depriving them of any change or authenticity. The picture Liang paints of North Africa fulfils the expectation of an audience of the Global North and allows for the reestablishment of the West vs. East dichotomy: the United States is linked to technology and frequent travel via its connections to the Xerox company, while Egypt and Morocco are connected to ancient monuments and Muslim architecture, thus being ultimately portrayed in the West as places of, using Said's terms, 'exotic beings and haunting memories'.[85]

If Liang, after a muted girlhood, is speaking at times with prejudice about and for North African people, it must also be pointed out that, at the end of her play, she challenges representations of North African women (quoting Said) as 'creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing'.[86] Whereas Liang has revealed that, as a 'Western' girl, she was treated by some North African men as a creature of fantasy, she portrays a very contrasting image of an Egyptian female. As a teenager looking out of a car window in Cairo, Liang sees local children playing football. Among a group of boys, a young girl of about four years is playing too. She often falls down and is urged by the boys to leave the playfield. Assisted by an older boy, who Liang assumed was her brother, the brave girl stands up time and time again and insists on carrying on playing football with the older boys.[87] As opposed to the passive, foreign and lonely TC girl who is observing the game and the world outside through a window, the girl playing football is actively acquiring social skills in a team and learning to bounce back from disappointment as an important

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[84] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 139.
[85] Said, *Orientalism,* p. 1.
[86] Said, *Orientalism,* p. 207.
[87] Elizabeth Liang, *ALIEN CITIZEN: An Earth Odyssey*, 1.14-1.16 mins.

part of becoming resilient. Here, Liang depicts a dynamic portrait of a young Egyptian girl who has a strong willpower and resists against being treated as inferior to boys. This is not only the vision of a young Egyptian girl but of girls in the twenty-first century in general that Liang's audience should take from *Alien Citizen*.

Conclusion

Allende, Liang, Nothomb and Shafak all grew up on the move due to their parents' high-powered positions. On the one hand, these four women indicate in their life writing that moving girlhoods can lead to silent and lonely childhoods. On the other hand, this upbringing has benefits and can successfully influence career choices. TCL, as Rauwerda points out, is written by authors who like Allende, Liang, Nothomb and Shafak come from 'relatively affluent backgrounds' and who experienced 'extreme global mobility' in childhood.[88] For her, TC authors portray four common features: internationalism, 'descriptions of the losses entailed in mobility', feelings of not belonging to one single place, and guilt (connected to being a 'privileged outsider' in the host country).[89] While we have seen that *Alien Citizen* includes these four features, I have argued that it problematises and extends Rauwerda's concept of TCL by introducing into its narrative multiple discrimination. My analysis has shown that within the context of migration one is rarely only a TCK in modern times. *Alien Citizen* therefore indicates that 'expatriation' should not be considered in isolation and that categories of 'cross-cultural' people often intersect. Multiple factors, such as racial discrimination, shape the identities of these

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[88] Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan" : Unexpectedly International Writing', *Wasafiri*, 25.3 (2010), 16–23 (p. 16).

[89] Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan" : Unexpectedly International Writing', p. 20.

individuals, and it is no longer timely nor reasonable to 'jam everything about their lives into one simple "TCK box"', as Van Reken argues.[90]

Whereas the image of covering one's mouth reflects feelings and concepts that are recurring in both TCK and TCL studies, such as alienation, guilt and the role of children and spouses of 'expatriate' men in the twentieth-century, this gesture also refers to losing one's mother tongue due to migration, in this case Spanish. This highlights just how important first language loss and language overall is in a field that so far has primarily concentrated on the significance of losses related to persons, places, pets, and possessions.[91] Moreover, the image of covering one's mouth mirrors the act of stuffing something into the body in order to fill a void. This signals that Liang suffered from psychological distress in her girlhood. Additionally, through words that are symbolically projected onto her body, Liang emphasises that the catalyst behind a lot of her trauma comes from not having a name for what she was and the life she was leading. When trying to discuss this with her parents, words were recurrently interrupted. Words and naming are particularly difficult for a girl who comes from many places, peoples, cultures, languages, and ethnicities. After moving recurrently, the girl had to take on new roles and put new masks on all the time and explain to the fluctuating people around her what she was. Words are also complicated for a TC life writer who wants to write about her girlhood without offending actors in her past and present-day audiences. *Alien Citizen* thus reveals the complex interrelationships between mobility, identity, age, gender, race, culture, and life writing.

The analysis of *Alien Citizen* has also highlighted the importance of genres in life writing about moving girlhoods and how they can be used both to emphasise and challenge the issues that were faced while growing up. After having been silenced, Liang

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[90] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 43.

[91] In respect of the losses that TCKs experience see, for example, Kathleen R. Gilbert, 'Loss and Grief between and Among Cultures: The Experience of Third Culture Kids', *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 16.2 (2008), 93–109 <https://doi.org/10.2190/IL.16.2.a>.

has regained a sense of agency in adulthood through acting and has chosen an autobiographical performance to 'speak back' in the spotlight. In *Alien Citizen* the actress expresses strong emotions that were previously blocked and therefore the performance facilitates Liang's own cathartic release of emotions. Through her performance, Liang also aims to help others who might share her feelings of alienation. However, Liang's role as a TCK survivor, expert and heroine means that she must be particularly sensitive to, what Bhabha calls, the 'question of the representation of difference'.[92] In discussing the concept of mimicry, he discusses 'discriminatory identities constructed across traditional cultural norms and classifications'.[93] Through the simplistic images that Liang adopts to portray the North African countries she lived in, Liang inadvertently risks reinstating misleading stereotypes about the Orient and consolidates damaging binaries.

At the end of her play, however, after representations of a passive, muted and invisible girlhood on the move, Liang creates a scene of female active resistance and empowerment by bringing a strong Egyptian girl to the forefront. In the face of disadvantages, an extremely young girl swiftly adapted to challenges – and through this experience, Liang conveys the message that, despite repeatedly falling over and getting dirty, one can learn to stand up and carry on fighting. *Alien Citizen* is about Liang's tragic and traumatic TCK girlhood and her unexpressed emotional distress that was painfully internalised; yet through this representation of a young girl playing football, Liang ultimately tries to create a lasting cathartic moment for her spectators, by offering ways to release emotional tension in the world outside theatres.

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[92] Bhabha, p. 130.
[93] Bhabha, p. 130.

Chapter Two:
Expatriate, Immigrant or TCK? Contradictions in Abeer Hoque's
Olive Witch: A Cross-Cultural Memoir

Introduction: Being Uprooted in Childhood

'This is your home,' my father said again. 'You have roots there.' Even though it was no longer clear which country he was talking about.[1]

– Abeer Hoque

A man does not have roots, he has feet.[2]

– Riad Sattouf

In a series of graphic memoirs, Riad Sattouf describes his childhood spent in France, Libya and Syria.[3] Sattouf was born in 1978 to a French mother and a Syrian father, and when asked about his nationality he once answered: 'When I was a teenager I decided to choose for myself another people. I refused France, and Syria. I chose cartoonists'.[4] In many interviews, as the epigraph above indicates, Sattouf often paraphrases Salman Rushdie, who writes that to 'explain why we become attached to our birthplaces, we pretend that we are trees and speak of "roots." Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles'.[5]

Observing the last page of his graphic memoir *The Arab of the Future* (Figure 4), one can see a very young Sattouf trailing behind his father, who is urging him to move

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[1] Abeer Y. Hoque, *Olive Witch: A Memoir* (Noida: Fourth Estate/HarperCollins Publishers India, 2016), p. 114.

[2] Adam Shatz, 'Drawing Blood: A French Graphic Novelist's Shocking Memoir of the Middle East.', *The New Yorker - Magazine*, 12 October 2015 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/drawing-blood> [accessed 23 January 2020]. Shatz writes in this interview: 'Sattouf loathes nationalism and is fond of the saying, paraphrased from Salman Rushdie, "A man does not have roots, he has feet." '

[3] Riad Sattouf, *The Arab of the Future (Volume 1): A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984: A Graphic Memoir*, trans. by Sam Taylor (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2015).

[4] Rachel Cooke, 'Riad Sattouf: Not French, Not Syrian… I'm a Cartoonist', *The Observer*, 27 March 2016, section Books <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/27/riad-sattouf-arab-of-the-future-interview> [accessed 27 March 2019]; see also the book's review by Hillary L. Chute, 'Comics of Violence and Nostalgia From War-Torn Syria', *The New York Times* (New York, 12 October 2018), section Book Review - Graphic content <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/12/books/review/arab-of-the-future-3-riad-sattouf.html> [accessed 17 March 2020].

[5] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984), p. 86.

faster towards an aeroplane they are about to board.[6] The anxious and powerless boy seems to be looking at readers with calculated misery, almost imploring them for help before it is too late as the plane he apparently does not want to board is about to take off, and the first volume is ending. In adulthood, Sattouf emphasises that he has feet in order to make the point that he does not belong to one single place and nationality; he has multiple attachments and he is now free to make his own decisions. Figure 4, however, shows that the young Sattouf does indeed have feet; but they are the small extremities of a young boy, who can be dragged away from his place of birth against his will due to decisions made by adults.

Figure 4. Departing from Paris on the last page of Riad Sattouf's *The Arab of the Future*, Metropolitan Books.

Sattouf's father accepted positions teaching at universities in Tripoli, Libya, and consequently in Damascus, Syria, where the young blond boy had to cope with feeling an outsider in these countries due to his physical appearance, accent and contrasting values.

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[6] Sattouf, p. 154.

To set him apart, his peers called him 'a Jew', although the young boy was raised as a Muslim in both Libya and Syria. When in 1990 his parents separated, Sattouf's mother returned to live in France with her two sons. For many years, she was unemployed and the family was forced to live in public housing on welfare. In France too, Sattouf felt out of place and was bullied by his schoolmates due to his looks and manners.[7] Mobility in Sattouf's case is linked with feelings of alienation and discrimination, similarly to the feelings Liang portrays in *Alien Citizen*. Yet, when moving, Liang was always with her family who belonged to the upper classes, and the young girl attended private international schools. When his mother and father divorced, Sattouf, on the other hand, was separated from his father. Suddenly placed in an unfamiliar environment, from being the son of a university professor, Sattouf became the child of a single mother on welfare. In this case, physical, cultural and linguistic movement intersected with social mobility too.

Whereas I have previously considered a type of mobility that is caused by adults' often high-powered job transfers, initiated by their employers, in this chapter I focus on the experience of physical relocation and suffering socioeconomic decline as a consequence of migration in girlhood – as depicted in Abeer Hoque's *Olive Witch: A Cross-Cultural Memoir* (hereon referred to as *Olive Witch*). Although it is generally assumed in TCK discourse that 'expatriates' maintain their socioeconomic status when relocating, this chapter adds to the critical field of life writing and existing TCK frameworks by focusing on the underexamined experience of growing up in both 'expatriate' and 'immigrant' environments as a 'brown' girl at the end of the twentieth

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[7] See in this respect, Aidan Flax-Clark, 'Former "Charlie Hebdo" Cartoonist Riad Sattouf Discusses His Graphic Memoir "The Arab of the Future"', *Vice - Entertainment*, 2015 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xd7mna/talking-with-french-syrian-cartoonist-riad-sattouf-about-his-best-selling-graphic-memoir-the-arab-of-the-future> [accessed 15 March 2020]. In this interview, Sattouf speaks about discrimination in childhood and says: 'But if I had been Jewish, or if I had been gay, it's incredible how life would have been for me. Each time someone said to me, "Hey gay, fuck you," if I really loved men, I would have gone crazy. So I became very sensitive to all those questions of people who are hated by a mass who don't know why. I have a lot of affection for the outsider, the excluded person'.

century.[8] In contrast to Liang, who predominantly grew up in an 'expatriate' environment, Hoque was born in 1973 to Bangladeshi parents in Nigeria, where she and her family were housed in the Nsukka University compound, but when they moved to the United States they were initially underprivileged 'immigrants' (the five of them 'live in a tiny two-bedroom apartment with rusty appliances and second-hand furniture').[9] In the United States, Hoque also suffered racial discrimination. Whereas TCK research has been criticised for focusing for many years mainly on the children of advantaged white 'expatriates', Hoque strikingly regards her experience as an immigrant in the United States as a TC one.

As I will argue in the first two analytical sections of this chapter, which apply TCK and postcolonial magic realism notions to examine the contrasting images that Hoque uses to represent her moving girlhood, *Olive Witch* raises important questions about migration, globalisation and categorisations, and thereby encourages us to reconsider terms used in TCK discourse. I then focus on genres of life writing and develop Gilmore's notion of autobiographics by considering the use of photography in Hoque's memoir. In this last analytical section, I will return to Sattouf's image in Figure 4. Whereas Sattouf chooses the 'cartoonist' role in adulthood, Hoque opts for other forms of creativity, such as photography. I will argue that as an adult, Hoque 'shoots back' in order to regain agency. Instead of being dragged onto planes by her parents, the adult Hoque is free to make her own choices, and actively navigates the world armed with a camera and a pen.

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[8] Throughout her memoir, Hoque describes herself and her family as being 'brown', see, for example, Hoque, p. 81.
[9] Hoque, p. 69.

Playing With Contradictions: Magic Realist Elements in *Olive Witch*

It would be more humiliating if their faces didn't look like masks, if their voices weren't muted. Or maybe she's the one with the mask. It papers the entire stretch of her skin.[10]
> – Abeer Hoque

I try then to find value for what is bad—since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the color of evil.[11]
> – Frantz Fanon

Until the age of twelve, Hoque leads a life that is similar to that of many traditional TCKs of the Global North. She attends a school in the Global South which is Western in nature ('Twenty years after Nigeria's independence from Great Britain, our little English-medium school is rooted in Anglocentrism'[12]), and when her family moves to the United States for the first time due to her father's sabbatical, they are aware that they will only be spending a year in that country and then returning to Nigeria. When the political circumstances dramatically change in Nigeria in 1985, they have the privilege to choose whether to leave the country during this difficult phase, unlike many of the local families. At this stage, Hoque is on the one hand the typical TCK that Rauwerda explores, in that TCKs are categorised as children whose 'passports, visas and parents' careers' (to use her terms) give them the freedom to easily drift away to a new region when 'the going gets tough'.[13] On the other hand, the family does not have a sponsoring company that will safely move them to a new area and assignment. Accordingly, at the time of the Nigerian coup d'état, the Hoques are self-initiated expatriates, in that they can, as Przytuła

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[10] Hoque, p. 121.
[11] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 153.
[12] Hoque, p. 21.
[13] Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: We Are Cumulus'.

describes this group of migrants, 'personally take responsibility of [*sic*] their careers without the direct support of an organization'.[14]

Whereas the Hoque family lead an expatriate lifestyle in Nigeria, in the United States they become immigrants; this shows that the status of being a TCK can shift. Hoping to offer their three children a safe and prosperous future, Hoque's parents decide to move to the United States, where the family's socio-economic status suddenly changes. Here, they initially have both financial and assimilation problems (their family 'is practically the only non-white one' in their suburban Pittsburgh township).[15] Similarly to Liang in the United States, Hoque faces multiple challenges in this new country, such as discrimination from her peers who call her a 'smelly African';[16] she therefore dons multiple 'masks' to fit in with her peers ('I forget both pidgin and the Queen's English in a heartbeat and all my efforts converge on escaping notice at all costs. The first and fastest casualty is my accent').[17] Additionally she suffers due to the pressure of her parents' expectations ('It's understood that we will end up with PhD's [*sic*] after our names'),[18] and she misses the landscape, friends and lifestyle she has left behind in Nigeria ('our sunlight-deprived house is in a neighbourhood that hasn't yet accepted us, nor have we accepted it. Four years and I've not been inside any other house on our street except our own').[19]

Following an attempted suicide in early adulthood, and after interrupting her PhD studies at the Wharton School and completing a Master of Fine Arts instead in San Francisco, Hoque decides to spend some time in Bangladesh with her relatives. This time Hoque moves voluntarily, and she is now the 'tourist'. In Bangladesh, Liang ultimately understands the sacrifices that were made by her own parents and by their parents before

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[14] Przytuła, p. 96.
[15] Hoque, p. 81.
[16] Hoque, p. 69.
[17] Hoque, p. 65.
[18] Hoque, p. 102.
[19] Hoque, p. 79.

them, in order to create better futures for their offspring; she then decides to return to the United States, where her parents live and where she settles down. *Olive Witch* is divided into three main parts, which describe the life writer's early girlhood in Nigeria, her adolescence in the United States, and her early adulthood in Bangladesh. Considering Hoque's relocations and the experiences above, the three sections of her memoir could also be neatly called 'play' (in early girlhood in Nigeria), 'hide' (masking and observing in her teenage years in the United States) and 'seek' (trying to find herself in early adulthood in Bangladesh).

The various reasons for Liang's relocations show the complex systems in which mobility can occur, and that Bauman's tourist/vagabondage dyad is not an opposition but marks two points on a shifting spectrum, where the writer repeatedly takes a new place. Hoque writes about her 'triple-cum-halfway life as a Nigerian-born Bangladeshi American'[20] in a multi-layered memoir, in which she uses images of nature as a tremendous motivating force to engage in a number of important discussions about choices, migration, multiple and shifting identities, catastrophic events, globalism and polarities.

Throughout the memoir, almost 'hidden' in the main text, there are nameless chapters with small grey boxes of different sizes. These interruptions of the story of Hoque's girlhood – which include medical reports, hospital instructions, poetry and personal comments – are linked to the writer's stay in a psychiatric ward. This style echoes that of Frantz Fanon, whose *Black Skin, White Masks*, as John Drabinski argues, displays elements of 'psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, and dialectics, as well as, most prominently, the early Négritude movement'.[21] Fanon merges personal stories and poetry with literary, philosophical and psychiatric criticism, to explore the

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[20] Hoque, p. 207.
[21] John Drabinski, 'Frantz Fanon', ed. by Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/frantz-fanon/> [accessed 22 August 2021].

psychological impact of the dialectical tension between Blacks and whites. In a similar vein, Hoque's juxtaposition of styles and third and first-person narrators highlights the struggles that she faced in managing many contradictory elements and masks, and in coming to terms with her 'splintered existence'.[22] Each chapter of Hoque's memoir, including the eruptions or interruptions, begins with the name of a climatic condition, a temperature in Fahrenheit, and subsequently a text written in verse. Whereas the predominantly chronological three-part structure of Hoque's narrative might suggest that hers is a straightforward coming-of-age memoir, the severe weather phenomena and the interruptions from a psychiatric ward indicate that her journey is not a teleological metaphor. Instead, Hoque's real-life migrations were continually interrupted and led to conflicting conditions in girlhood, which she must seek to resolve.

In the opening lines of each chapter, we notice the merging of two realms: one scientific (climatic conditions) and the other literary (poems). We also recognise that the climatic conditions both influence and comment on the events that are revealed in each chapter, and thus nature is a living being and a stronger force than the characters of the memoir are born with. Due to this interweaving of (super)natural and realist elements, I propose that Hoque's aesthetics are informed by discourses that include postcolonial magic realism and the dynamics of migration. In suggesting opposing meanings throughout *Olive Witch,* Hoque emphasises that hers is a multi-layered identity due to the fusion of the contradictory and moving worlds she was raised in.

Hoque uses climatic conditions to mirror the merging of contrasting elements. In a chapter that begins with 'coalescence', 84°F and a clapping game in Igbo, Hoque must take leave of a friend who is about to leave Nsukka. This is only the first in a long series of losses that will leave the girl bereft and confused. The last time that Hoque sees her Nigerian friend Chubuike, he tells Hoque in Igbo: 'I know a word of eight letters. If you

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[22] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 104.

divide it, half will make you happy. Half will make you cry'.[23] Spinning on a roundabout,

the boy then 'switches to English' and says to Hoque: 'I give you dis wod, dis name of

eight lettahs . . . Beatrice'.[24] After this, it begins to rain and the young girl spins 'ever

more slowly into the storm'.[25] If we consider the forecast at the beginning of this chapter,

we notice the significance of the condition 'coalescence' for the events that occur later.

Within warm clouds, rising and falling water droplets collide and over time they coalesce

to form larger droplets and rain.[26] Elements on the move can thus be transformed: 'rice'

(an important staple in Nigeria and thus the 'happy' part of the word) follows the harsher

word 'beat' to form the name 'Beatrice'. This climatic condition reflects that languages

collide and then join to form a new, powerful one: in this case, Nigerian pidgin.

Hoque's narrative suggests that cultures and nationalities join together but then

ultimately 'fall out' like the rain, in that the 'foreign' child has made contact with a West

African one and they must now leave each other. It can be noticed above that when two

contrasting and moving elements join, be it the two cultures of the Useems or the two

spaces of Homi Bhabha, there is always a conflict of some sort and things can begin to

'fall apart'. The sad part of the word Beatrice alludes to a battle, and the second part,

which should be happy according to Chubuike, in fact recalls the role of the West African

slaves in bringing rice to the Americas.[27] Are the two elements then truly contrasting, and

can they ultimately coalesce to create a third, productive and subversive whole?

The name Beatrice additionally evokes Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. On his

three-part autobiographical journey, the exiled Dante is on a quest to understand the

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[23] Hoque, p. 48.
[24] Hoque, p. 49.
[25] Hoque, p. 49.
[26] Regarding this type of rain, see Christina Talamo, 'The Formation of Rain Droplets Due to Collision and Coalescence Credit: COD Meteorology/Plymouth State Meteorology/ (Wallace & Hobbs, 2006)', *Global Weather & Climate Center*, 2019 <https://www.globalweatherclimatecenter.com/weather-education/the-formation-of-rain-droplets-due-to-collision-and-coalescence-credit-cod-meteorologyplymouth-state-meteorology-wallace-hobbs-2006> [accessed 3 August 2021].
[27] See in this respect, Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

nature of sin, and to seek healing. After witnessing the eternal punishments of sinners in hell, it is the angelic figure of Beatrice who will accompany him through heaven. If we rearrange the *Divine Comedy* to fit Hoque's three-part journey, Nigeria would be her paradise where she receives the gift of Beatrice, and the United States would be her hell. Bangladesh, in the third and last section, would be the life writer's purgatory or limbo. The heroine Hoque would ultimately and fittingly live across multiple spheres, on the borders. While in Dante's autobiographical wandering across worlds Beatrice takes the role of a blessed woman, who is subordinate to the male hero, Hoque's is a memoir originally published in India, about a Bangladeshi girl born in Nigeria.

Rather than only considering Western medieval classics, it is important to examine the structure and contents of contemporary West African texts, to clarify the allusions in the memoir. As in the example above, throughout *Olive Witch* words relate to other words, and texts exist alongside other texts – just like the cultures, languages, values and nationalities in Hoque's childhood. Similarly to climatic conditions, this plurality of voices and intertextuality reflect the dynamism in Hoque's girlhood and life. In her memoir, Hoque recurrently alludes to Chinua Achebe's Nigerian novel *Things Fall Apart*, and to the British classic *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, which Achebe writes back at. For example, the chapter that describes Hoque's first move to the United States due to her father's sabbatical begins with the climatic condition 'blizzard, 9°F' and the text '*it's dark and warm inside the room / it's almost safe, it's always doomed / look just once behind your heart / all the pieces come apart*'.[28] After she has spent ten years in Nsukka, things seem to start falling apart when the Nigerian-born girl encounters societies of the Global North for the first time. Like Achebe's novel, the first part of Hoque's memoir predominantly describes her family, its personal history and her Igbo life, while the

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[28] Hoque, p. 27.

second and third sections portray the influence of foreign (American and Bangladeshi) systems on her Nigerian existence.

Whereas in Nigeria and during her summer holidays in Bangladesh, the young girl had a unique relation with the natural world, this relationship is violently disrupted upon interaction with an industrialised nation. The only way for Hoque to bring this damage to an end is to commit suicide, like Okonkwo, the protagonist of Achebe's novel. However, rather than passing away, Hoque's 'incarnation' on the last page of the memoir indicates that the woman has found strength and resistance in creativity,[29] which she uses to engage with the many stories and complexities of the Global South. Considering this ending that portrays the ultimate empowerment of a Nigerian female protagonist, Hoque's memoir seems to be related to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus.* Echoing some of the themes in Hoque's memoir, Adichie's novel tells the story of a young girl who struggles with the expectations of a strict father and who tries to find her own voice surrounded by influential women, such as Aunty Ifeoma and her own mother, another Beatrice. It is in fact this Beatrice, a woman who is initially portrayed as quiet and passive, who ultimately can no longer cope with the violence of her husband, and therefore poisons him. Beatrice here has two sides too, and the parallels between Hoque and Adichie's works are striking.

Although Hoque's *Olive Witch* resembles Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* because it communicates important points about Nigeria, its history, colonisation, language and traditions through allusions to Achebe's novel, Hoque had already finished writing the manuscript of her memoir when Adichie's novel was first published in 2003. Hoque was thus not influenced by *Purple Hibiscus*. Nevertheless, the two writers have similar backgrounds. Like Hoque and her family, Adichie grew up on the Nsukka campus and attended schools there. In addition, *Olive Witch* and *Purple Hibiscus* do not solely allude

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[29] Hoque, p. 238.

to and celebrate Achebe's work. They also reread, reinterpret and rewrite his narrative, in order to undermine the dominance of a male-centred society and to reveal new solutions to the question of the power of language in African literature. Although Hoque and Adichie's works are written mainly in English, they use untranslated Igbo words in order to honour the complexities of Nigerian languages, and also to offer a dialogue between thinkers such as Achebe and Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who have different perspectives on the adoption of languages that can either reject or accept the speech of white colonialists.[30]

Whereas elements of oral culture (such as proverbs, tales and songs) in *Things Fall Apart* are predominantly transcribed by men, Adichie and Hoque use orature as a means of resistance. By portraying instances of female orature (through, for example the proverbs of Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*, the family tales of Hoque's mother, and the Igbo songs of children in *Olive Witch*), the female writers both celebrate indigenous oral cultures and challenge patriarchal dominion. Due to her heritage, Hoque takes counteraction a step further, and in the third section of her memoir she tries to understand her parents' decisions and movements by examining Bangladeshi history, women and cultures from a new perspective, rather than through the lens of a girl who has grown accustomed to the traditions of the Global North.

The very title of her memoir *Olive Witch*, like the name Beatrice, can be read as an exchange between multiple elements, and thus as an image with deeper and hidden meanings. Hoque's memoir and its title comprise different ways of illustrating Eastern and Western values, and the collisions that arise when all of these values coalesce in one

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[30] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, has written in his native language Gikuyu in order to dismiss the language of the coloniser. Achebe, on the other hand, believes that universal languages, such as English, can transmit to wider audiences the complex experiences of the colonised. Other than English and Igbo, the memoir *Olive Witch* comprises some words in Arabic (which Hoque learns in childhood during her Quran lessons) and Bangla. Like Adichie, Hoque writes mainly in English, yet she incorporates diverse languages in her text. Her text thus represents both the importance of English for spreading pressing global issues to Anglophone audiences, and the power of languages that were spoken long before contact with the languages of the colonisers.

person. Whereas the roots of the olive tree in the bible symbolise the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and the olive branch represents salvation and peace (similarly to Ancient Greek and Roman imagery),[31] witchcraft is deeply rooted in the belief systems of many African and Asian societies. In Western cultures, the figure of the witch may indeed still evoke negative imagery.

Depending on who interprets it, the name Olive Witch could then be composed of a negative and a positive part, like the name Beatrice. In an echo of this giving of an enigmatic name as a gift, many years later in the United States, Hoque is named Olive Witch by her 'first love' Glenn, whom her father rejects:[32]

> 'Are you dating this boy?' Abbu asks. [. . .] 'You know that we don't recognize dating in our culture,' Abbu says. You must stop at once'. [. . .] 'If you marry him, or someone not of our faith, let alone culture, understand this: you will no longer belong to this home'.[33]

Hoque will lose Glenn too; this time not due to migration, but because of generational, gender and cultural conflicts with her father. Glenn calls Hoque 'Olive Witch' while listening to a song by an American rock band: ' "All of which are American dreams . . ." Glenn is singing Rage Against the Machine. "Which American dreams?" I ask. "Olive Witch, *I* am your American dream" '.[34] This is not mentioned in the memoir, but the title of this song is 'Know your Enemy', and the song ends with the lyrics: 'Compromise / Conformity / Assimilation / Submission / Ignorance / Hypocrisy / Brutality / The Elite /

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[31] One of the first authors to write that peace is symbolized by the olive branch due to biblical references was Saint Augustine, who is also thought to be the writer of one of the first Western autobiographies, see for references to the olive branch and peace, *On Christian Teaching* that was written in the mid-390s, Saint Augustine (Bishop of Hippo), *La Dottrina Cristiana*, trans. by Luigi Alici (Milano: Paoline, 1989), p. 178.

[32] Hoque, p. 96.

[33] Hoque, p. 100.

[34] Hoque, p. 96.

All of which are American dreams!'.[35] Considering that this song attacks the elitism of the American dream, Glenn gives Hoque an ambivalent name, which paradoxically has little to do with a desire for peace, and comprises conflicting elements.

Discussing oppositions and magic realist texts, Stephen Slemon argues that in the latter, 'a battle between two oppositional systems takes place'.[36] Like the term 'magic realism' – which for him is 'an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy'[37] – the very name Olive Witch can be read as an oxymoron, in which the contemporary world-views of the West align with non-Western traditions. Western regions are represented in this name by the symbol of the olive, and Hoque portrays them throughout her memoir as individualistic and materialistic societies that value technology and rationality. By contrast, non-Western traditions are predominantly represented through symbols of nature and spirituality, and are portrayed as collectivist ones. Regarding representations of non-Western traditions, when we meet the child protagonist for the first time in Nsukka, the night before her first day of 'real school', Nigerian witches are introduced too:

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[35] 'Lyrics for Know Your Enemy by Rage Against the Machine', *Songfacts*, n.d. <https://www.songfacts.com/lyrics/rage-against-the-machine/know-your-enemy> [accessed 7 February 2020].

[36] Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse', *Special Issue of Canadian Literature*, Magic and Other Realisms, 116 (1988), 9–24 (p. 10) <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822397212-021>. Like Slemon, herein I will use the term 'magic realism', as opposed to the term 'magical realism' used by some other scholars. For further discussion upon these terms and the origins of the term that was first used by Franz Roh in 1925 to describe art, see Maggie Ann Bowers, who I quote below.

[37] Slemon, p. 10.

But I won't sleep yet. I'm waiting for the drums. [. . .] Sometimes, the drums come into town, carried in by the juju men, the witch people. They go from compound to compound and they sing and they dance, wearing huge painted masks. I don't know if they have real faces underneath. We give them money because if we don't, it's bad luck. [. . .] The drums are so faint at first I don't even hear them. And then, just before I fall asleep, from somewhere inside the jungle, they come.[38]

The reader is presented here with an image of masked magic people who can bring harm by transmitting a curse if they are not acknowledged properly. These masked 'witches' seem to haunt at night, trying to enter and disturb the safe rooms and dreams of naïve children. Hoque thus presents Nigeria as a place of danger and disruption for the 'innocent' girl, who is about to enter the British school system.

Although Hoque seems to employ magic realist elements to portray dialectical struggles and interrogate power structures of the West, in her memoir's very first pages the life writer reinstates stereotypical images of a Western African country that are characteristic of early colonial life and travel writing. In the following chapter, the reader comes across another non-Western witch, this time a Russian one: 'My favourite book though isn't a Ladybird book. It's bigger, and has folktales from different countries. I like the Russian story best, about a little girl called Vasilissa and her magic doll and the witch, Baba Yaga'.[39] The plot of this nineteenth-century Russian fairy tale by Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev is only revealed in the very last chapter of the memoir, when the third-person narrator in the psychiatric ward writes: 'In the story, a poor child, Vasilissa, is plagued by an evil witch to perform impossible tasks. If she doesn't finish them by

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[38] Hoque, p. 8. Interestingly, the term 'witch people' is not gendered in Hoque's translation of 'juju men'.
[39] Hoque, p. 10.

morning, the witch will eat her'.[40] Similarly to the first Nigerian episode, a harmful witch

is disrupting the nights of an innocent girl. The Nigerian witches come from a jungle and

the Russian one from a forest, both dark and mysterious places according to the

perspective of a young girl, and in the darkness of her bedroom the young girl is deprived

of sleep for fear of what will happen to her in the future. This initial episode in Nigeria

and the reference to the Russian fairy tale are the first of many accounts of disturbing

nights, in which the life writer lies awake thinking of dangers that might come from the

dark and which can be prevented by addictive sleeping pills. It is the Russian book and

not the Ladybird one (which Hoque has many of and which in many ways represents

British media and values) that contains the tale of the witch, which haunts the girl. In

these initial pages, the message portrayed by an Anglophone writer, who resides in the

United States, is that the child's enemy dwells in Nigeria and Russia.

Regarding the notion of masks worn by troublesome creatures and the opposition

between hiding and revealing one's identity, it is significant that the first page of the

memoir is a diary entry of the writer in a psychiatric ward: 'I swallowed and melted into

the tar-patched roof. A rusted, uneasy oblivion. I didn't hide, as I said I would. Some hand

of god or primal instinct made me leave the roof, ask for help'.[41] Because the protagonist

did not hide but sought help, the act of revealing herself brought her salvation (which

might have come from the spiritual world). When the narrator awakes in a hospital and

looks at herself in the mirror she is confused: 'Her left eye is black, unswollen, as if face

paint has been smeared around her eye. Her lips are also black and her hair wild. She

doesn't recognize herself'.[42] In fact, the charcoal smeared on the patient's face was given

to her to make her throw up the thirty-two 'blue killjoys' in her stomach.[43] This alarming

face-painting then has helped to rid the body of evil substances and restore well-being.

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[40] Hoque, p. 230.
[41] Hoque, p. 1.
[42] Hoque, p. 2.
[43] Hoque, p. 1.

Having been saved because she chose not to hide, Hoque is paradoxically once again disguised behind an unrecognisable face.

Hoque's contradictions and merging of elements indicate that she questions whether literary distinctions between literary genres, and categorisations in general, are useful at all. For Maggie Ann Bowers, the characteristics of trauma narratives and magic realist texts often match, as they both 'disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality and history' in order to 'create a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed'.[44] At the beginning of the book, Hoque immediately signals to the reader that she has a corrupt gaze, and that she is thus in many ways an unreliable narrator of this autobiographical story. In a chapter titled 'Red and Orange', which refers to the colour of the two dresses that Hoque's uncle brings from Turkey for her and her sister (Simi), the life writer says that she was sure that she was given the orange dress:

> We go on like this until I bully Simi into agreeing with me. This is nothing new. As the oldest, I have been getting my way for seven years now. My 'evil eye' is legendary in my family. But this time I'm right. I can see my reflection in the mirror wearing the orange dress.[45]

Months later, however, Hoque finds a family photograph of when her uncle came to visit: 'My sister is standing to Jamie Mama's left, smiling her brilliant smile. She's wearing the orange dress. In that moment, I realize memory is a treacherous thing'.[46] Here, once again Hoque's narrative is fraught with contradictions that serve to challenge the notion of polarisations and single classifications. In never mentioning the real name of the main protagonist, Hoque implicitly plays with Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact

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[44] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004), p. 77.
[45] Hoque, p. 11.
[46] Hoque, p. 12.

between readers and writers, which is authenticated by the use of the life writer's name for both protagonist and narrator.[47] Hoque consequently blurs the distinction between genres. Moreover, above Hoque creates a portrait of her child self that is 'half devil' (the Nigerian witch with an evil eye and an unreliable memory) and 'half child' (the figure of the innocent girl at the beginning of the memory, attempting to fall asleep on the night before her first day in a British school).

On the one hand, this contrasting image of the child at the beginning of the memoir can be read as a strategy of postcolonial magic realist writers, who combine, using Elleke Boehmer's terms, the 'supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath'.[48] This child figure indeed mirrors Rudyard Kipling's images of the non-Western 'half devil, half child'.[49] On the other hand, by emphasising that she has an 'evil eye' and is an unreliable narrator at the very beginning of the memoir, readers may feel that she has a corrupted 'I/eye', which prevents her from telling her childhood story truthfully.

While Shannin Schroeder has observed that magic realism can be used in postcolonial or trauma narratives by marginalised peoples to define their multiple identities and 'to reestablish marginalized histories as a site of "truth" in literature',[50] Hoque's initial unreliable narrator is strikingly similar to the 'madman' described by William Riggan in *Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-person*

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[47] See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[48] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 229.

[49] Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', *Modern History Sourcebook* (New York: Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, 1899) <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/Kipling.asp> [accessed 7 February 2020].

[50] Shannin Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), p. 126.

Narrator.[51] As Maria Rovito explains when examining Riggan's theories, the unreliable madman 'suffers from a severe mental illness, and this impairment hinders the narrator's ability to tell their story correctly'.[52] In the context of an autobiographical text, by juxtaposing the identities of the brown Nigerian girl with an evil eye and the madwoman with a seemingly black face in a psychiatric ward, Hoque 'others' girls of colour and women with mental health disorders by highlighting that stories of these marginal people should not be believed because they are unreliable.

Moreover, the evil-eyed and unreliable Nigerian girl above is often starkly contrasted with her smiling sister, who is portrayed throughout the memoir as pretty and clever. Her brother Maher, who was born in the United States, is also depicted positively, as the happy and flexible sibling. We must remember that her siblings are called by their real names throughout the memoir, whereas Hoque remains almost a fictional and illusionary character, who is occasionally referred to only as Olive Witch (with the exception of the name of the author on the cover of the book). Notwithstanding her deep love for Nigeria and her attempt to create a text that challenges readers to question the accepted reality in order to make social and political critiques, Hoque represents the Western African child as the one with flaws, and thus reinstates colonial stereotypes at the onset of her memoir. Concealing one's true self might serve as a survival strategy for a migrant girl, and a literary one for a postcolonial magic realist author born in the Global South; but in recurrently hiding behind contradictions, a life writer who is touching on themes such as trauma and racial discrimination risks failing to speak out strongly for minority groups.

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[51] William Riggan, *Picaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

[52] Maria Rovito, 'When "Disability Demands a Story": Problems With the "Unreliable" Narrator', *MUsings: The Graduate Journal*, Spring 2009 (2019) <https://blogs.millersville.edu/musings/when-disability-demands-a-story-problems-with-the-unreliable-narrator/> [accessed 12 February 2020].

Hidden Behind the Climate Metaphor: Categories of Migration

My nationality, my accent, changes with the landscape, with the very weather.[53]

– Abeer Hoque

Sometimes we need labels just to be able to describe the thing we are talking about. But labels confirm the limitations of language and, when they are overused, they become limiting. I find myself referred to as an African author less often.[54]

– Aminatta Forna

Whereas Rauwerda represents the unattached TC as floating like a cumulus cloud above the first culture (the parents' cultures) and the second culture (the host cultures),[55] Hoque is interested in the physics of clouds, and nature in general – both as a figure of speech in literature, and predominantly as a force that is all around us and is embodied in historical, social, economic and cultural movements and events. In one of the first chapters of the memoir, when Hoque's mother tells her three young children the story of her migration from East Pakistan to North Africa, outside their house 'the trade winds are hazing the heavy air with dust'.[56] Inside their house, accompanied by music and dancing, the children happily listen to tales about moving from one part of the world (that has long been influenced by British rule) to other former British colonies in Africa (Libya and Nigeria); while outside, nature is clouding this picturesque narrative by stirring up memories of the migration of slaves and goods, made possible by trade winds from Africa to the Americas.

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[53] Hoque, p. 180.
[54] Aminatta Forna, 'Aminatta Forna: Don't Judge a Book by Its Author', *The Guardian*, 13 February 2015, section Books <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/13/aminatta-forna-dont-judge-book-by-cover> [accessed 7 November 2018].
[55] Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: We Are Cumulus'.
[56] Hoque, pp. 17-8.

Climatic conditions and the literary device of pathetic fallacy are used in *Olive Witch* both to express moods and to critique social and political events. In the chapter discussed above, the young Hoque does not comment on the violent legacies of the British Empire, nor later upon the Nigerian wars. This lack of commentary is indicative of the childlike indifference and innocence of the young protagonist. Nonetheless, history and politics are not ignored, because the climatic entries at the beginning of each chapter are used as narrative strategies, as we have seen in the previous section. It is Mother Nature, a covert narrator, who is most familiar with past, present and future events, and accordingly comments upon them. In the case above, the weather conditions suggest that these migrants can never be free of their attachments, histories and global conflicts; and that a change is approaching that will take the protagonists from West Africa to the United States.

Hoque's memoir underscores that migrants are a heterogeneous group and that people migrate for many different reasons. Hoque's ancestors and her parents have migrated due to economic and political circumstances, and the third part of the memoir is dedicated to social migration, in that Hoque moves to be close to her Bangladeshi family. Additionally, the climatic conditions at the beginning of each chapter draw attention to catastrophic events caused by the forces of nature, thus warning that migration can be a consequence of environmental causes too. These four reasons for migration (economic, social, political and environmental) can overlap or change during a lifetime, and the decision to move to a new country can be a permanent or temporary one. Rather than being part of the natural world, migrants are human beings who must face similar challenges, such as adjusting to new places, cultures, languages and people. We have seen that through weather conditions, Hoque remarks that sometimes when migrants attempt to coalesce with locals, there can be collisions and storms.

Both Rauwerda's notion of the peaceful cumulus TC cloud (which contains 'expatriates' and global souls) and that of global nomads, cannot be entirely applied to Hoque. The life writer does not float freely without attachments; on the contrary, her images imply that her cloud is not allowed to choose its direction. Hoque is seemingly controlled by a mobilising force that determines her next steps and thus makes decisions for her.[57] Sophia McClennen argues that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the contemporary deterritorialised nomad is 'an example of Orientalism'.[58] For her, nomads do not wander stateless spaces but move according to seasons and the climate. As she argues regarding the nomad, 'While the boundaries of the spaces they traverse are elastic, they are still very clearly defined, and are largely controlled by the weather – hardly the basis for a decentered and free-floating identity'.[59] Considering how climate change is impacting nomadic peoples nowadays – for example, in areas such as Mongolia and the Sahel region in Niger – this critique of the metaphor of the postmodern nomad is even more relevant. In respect to the forces of nature, Hoque's concern that nature can determine and govern humans' conditions is also an indication that climate change might lead to increased migration. If there are unpredictable forces that cannot be controlled and which may suddenly cause many of us to adjust to new places, it might be ultimately meaningless to categorise migrants by focusing on their differences.

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[57] Another writer who uses symbols of the natural world and pathetic fallacy to portray her experience of her itinerant girlhood is Ilma Rakusa. In a personal essay, Rakusa explains that she was born to a Hungarian mother and a Slovenian father in Slovakia. She grew up in Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy (where Rakusa lived in the British-American part of Trieste). Her family finally settled in Zurich, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Rakusa studied languages in Switzerland, France and Russia and has translated many Russian novels into German. She has lived in many border regions, in 'trans' areas and she does not consider the notion of belonging and identity in term of nations, but in term of languages. See in this respect, Ilma Rakusa, 'Transit. Transfinit. Oder: Who am I?', in *Zur Sprache gehen: Dresdner Chamisso-Poetikvorlesungen* (Dresden: Thelem, 2006), pp. 7–42; most significantly for this chapter and Rauwerda's notion of the TC cloud, Rakusa often uses the symbol of strong winds to depict the notion that she was not allowed to choose her own paths in girlhood; in this respect, see for example Ilma Rakusa, *Mehr Meer: Erinnerungspassagen* (Graz: Droschl, 2009), p. 107.

[58] Sophia A. McClennen, *Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2004), p. 48; see also in respect of the critique of the notion of the modern nomad, Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 54.

[59] McClennen, p. 48.

The term TCK, coined by the Useems, has changed considerably over time; this underlines the problems related to fixing dynamic migratory and social processes into rigid categories. Original TCK research focused on families from the Global North that sponsoring agencies had sent to the Global South, recognising that these families faced new sets of challenges as opposed to other immigrants to the Global North; whereas the term TCK is now used to describe very different situations. In the twenty-first century, this term is broadly used to refer to any individual who has spent a significant part of their childhood outside their parents' culture, and can therefore include children who have not necessarily moved at all in childhood. The author Andrea Levy, for example, who was born and grew up in the United Kingdom, might be considered a TCK because she was raised outside her parents' Jamaican culture. But if we consider the original meaning of the term TC, which denotes families who are sent abroad by companies, then Levy is not a traditional TCK.

Hoque's interpretation of the TCK concept shows that it now holds multiple and varied meanings. While Hoque did in many ways live in the Useem's original idea of the TC in Nigeria due to her family's privileged and secluded lifestyle, she revealed in an interview that she uses this moniker to 'refer to a person who was born/raised in a place different than their parents' country, and now living in a third country altogether'.[60] In Hoque's sense, the number three is not related to the shared 'expatriate' culture that one belongs to, as originally proposed by the Useems; rather, it quantifies the countries where one has lived. Moreover, in the acknowledgements of her memoir, Hoque writes: 'To my brother Maher, third culture kid, who somehow fits in everywhere'.[61] It was Maher Hoque who first introduced the TCK phenomenon to his sister, and this dedication suggests once

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[60] See for this interview, Jessica Sanfilippo-Schulz, 'My Accent Changes with the Landscape: An Interview with Third Culture Kid Author, Abeer Hoque', *READ*, 2018 <https://readdurhamenglish.wordpress.com/2018/02/23/my-accent-changes-with-the-landscape-an-interview-with-third-culture-kid-author-abeer-hoque/> [accessed 25 January 2019].
[61] Hoque, Acknowledgements.

again that for Hoque, being a TCK implies fitting in everywhere, and it has little to do with cultures that collide and coalesce to form a new one. In line with TCK scholars, however, Hoque does believe that in contrast to immigrants like her father, who experience loss when returning to their home country, TCKs feel 'a kind of ubiquitous unbelonging', as she reveals in an interview.[62] Whereas her brother is represented as feeling happy everywhere, and as being almost weightless and all around like clouds, Hoque herself is more restless and does not belong anywhere.

Fitting in everywhere and not belonging anywhere is discussed by Aminatta Forna in her recent collection of personal essays, *The Window Seat: Notes from a Life in Motion*.[63] When comparing the frequent moves of her mother to Barack Obama's mother, and her father's to those of Barack Obama, Forna refers to David Goodhart's notion of the 'anywheres' and the 'somewheres':[64] those who have light attachments and 'whose sense of self is not rooted in one single place', as opposed to those who conversely belong to one place.[65] Forna, who was born in Scotland in 1964 and who grew up in Sierra Leone, England, Iran and Thailand (due to political upheaval, and to her father and her step-father's careers), does not reveal whether she is an 'anywhere'. This indicates that she is wary of simple binaries. Hers, like that of Hoque, is a complex identity, and for such writers it seems more appropriate to conceive a continuum between types of mobility.

Both Hoque's description of the term TCK, which exemplifies how meanings shift over time, and Forna's caution regarding pinning down the various feelings surrounding migration processes, indicate that it is preferable to talk more broadly of CCKs when examining the experiences of children who have grown up outside their parents' culture. As I have explained in the previous chapters, this new model no longer solely comprises

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[62] See Sanfilippo-Schulz.
[63] Aminatta Forna, *The Window Seat: Notes from a Life in Motion* (New York: Grove Press, 2021).
[64] See in this respect David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst & Co, 2017).
[65] Forna, p. 43.

the offspring of privileged white families, but includes, for example, the children of refugees or of bi-racial parents. This expanded perspective leaves more room to examine the challenges that diverse groups of children face when moving to new environments, and it acknowledges that categories of movement can overlap and progressively shift.

The CCK model broadens perspectives in the context of migration in childhood. Van Reken's new concept acknowledges the nuanced and complex experiences of children who frequently cross borders in childhood. Referring back to the original concept, it attempts to find broader commonalities that may contribute to new and general understandings of lives spent in between multiple cultures. Regarding this broader concept that can be used to examine a wider range of experiences, it is interesting that in 2017 Hoque's memoir was reprinted by Harper360 for the American market. This edition used the same cover photograph, but with the subtitle 'cross-cultural memoir', rather than 'a memoir', which appeared in the Indian Fourth Estate edition of 2016. Hoque points out that although she had preferred the subtitle a 'Third Culture Kid memoir', the American publishers thought this term too obscure and believed their subtitle would help to clarify the contents of the book.[66] It is striking here to observe two issues. Firstly, that the author preferred the subtitle TCK, which for many years has been criticised for ignoring the experiences of children belonging to minority groups. Secondly, that the term 'cross-cultural' was chosen by the American publishers as a marketing tool to provide the context in which to embed this memoir, instead of adopting other similar subtitles, such as 'transcultural'.[67]

The view of Hoque's publishers confirms that there is scepticism about the unfamiliar and problematic label 'TCK'. In this respect, it is noteworthy that in 1993, to avoid confusion, Hill Useem highlighted that the term TC is not synonymous with 'Third

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[66] As per personal communication with the author on 14th November 2018. For the 2017 American edition of *Olive Witch*, see Abeer Hoque, *Olive Witch*, Harper360.

[67] See, for example, the subtitle of the memoir by Padma Hejmadi, *Room to Fly: A Transcultural Memoir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

World', nor with Charles Snow's 'Third Culture', but that her coinage was related to the mobility patterns that were occurring at the end of colonialism.[68] As John Brockmann mentions, Snow wrote in the 1960s that the two contrasting cultures of scientists and literary intellectuals would emerge one day to create a 'Third Culture' that would close 'the communications gap' between these two groups.[69] If we think about the entries at the beginning of each chapter, we can see that in combining the scientific (climatic conditions) with the literary (poems), Hoque affirms Snow's concept of the 'Third Culture' in her TCK memoir. Additionally, in blurring the lines between the scientific and the literary, she seems to indicate that weather forecasting is not always an exact science based on reading facts. Mother Nature's element of unpredictability means that she is capable of surprising us, like fiction.

The reference to cross-culturalism on the cover of Hoque's memoir, as we have seen, can be used as a tool to attract wide audiences. Regarding the significance of internationally mobile writers such as Forna and Hoque, who have moved in childhood for very different reasons, such as wars and the high-powered careers of their parents, we see that they are perceived as having authentic and authoritative voices. As writers, they embody multiple social and migratory positions along the continuum, and are thus qualified to help readers of diverse cultures know and understand each other in a world that is more connected due to globalisation.

While on the one hand Hoque's images of climatic conditions suggest that subject to the superior force of Mother Nature all human beings are similar, it is crucial to remember that on the other hand, Hoque portrays that a brown girl faced a distinct experience of migration because she suffered from harmful racism while growing up in the United States. *Olive Witch,* as a TC and 'cross-cultural' memoir, thereby underscores

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[68] Useem Hill.

[69] John Brockman, *The Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster Ltd, 1995), pp. 17-8; see also in this respect Charles Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

that there are indeed issues that affect most migrants, but migration almost always takes a disproportionate toll on ethnic minority groups.

Seeking the Bigger Picture: The Absence of Photographs in a Cross-Genre

A photograph isn't necessarily a moment of truth, but what the photographer wants you to see.[70]

      – Abeer Hoque

I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.[71]

      – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The absence of photography in a memoir that crosses genres and forms may be as significant as its presence. While Hoque's website reveals that she is a 'writer, photographer, and editor', and her previous works all contain photographs,[72] Hoque chooses not to present photographs in *Olive Witch*. In this section, I read the absence of photographs in the memoir of a photographer as a form of interruption and resistance, and thus as a fundamental characteristic of Gilmore's autobiographics.

Very often the textual and the visual are inseparably bound together in life writing, and many contemporary memoirs include photography. Hoque's *The Lovers and the Leavers* is a collection of twelve interwoven stories that includes poems and

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[70] Abeer Y. Hoque, 'The Version We Remember: On the Truth and Fiction of Photography', *Catapult*, 2018 <https://catapult.co/stories/the-version-we-remember-on-the-truth-and-fiction-of-photography> [accessed 23 December 2018].
[71] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'The Danger of a Single Story', in *TED Conference* (presented at the TEDGlobal, Oxford, 2009) <https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript> [accessed 6 February 2020].
[72] Abeer Y. Hoque, 'About', *Olive Witch*, 2015 <http://olivewitch.com/wordpress/about/> [accessed 18 February 2020].

photographs,[73] whereas her *The Long Way Home* is a book of poems and photographs that were written and taken while travelling all over the world between 2005 and 2013.[74] Furthermore, in her stories and essays that have been published in magazines and literary journals, Hoque usually includes photographs that she has taken. In an essay, for example, she examines the significance of 'the truth and fiction of photography' in life stories, and publishes a series of her own creative photographs and of family photos taken in childhood.[75] However, rather than adding photographs to her memoir (with the exception of the cover photograph), Hoque instead prefers to describe them – similarly to Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* and Isabel Allende in *Paula*, who only refer to their family photographs in their life writing about the frequent crossing of borders in girlhood.[76]

Paradoxically, as a child, Hoque dislikes taking photographs, but in adulthood this will become one of her professions. When Hoque signals to readers at the onset of her life writing that the memories of her childhood are flawed, she refers to a photograph that she finds in a family album. About her child self in this photograph, Hoque writes: 'The ground beneath us is red and dusty, and I'm looking sullen because I hate taking pictures'.[77] Here Hoque plays with the idiom 'to take a photograph'. Discussing this phrase, Linda Haverty Rugg explains that 'Photographers are said to "take" an image of a person precisely because we naturally assume at some level that images of us belong *to* us'.[78] Hoque suffered racial discrimination in the United States, and in adding a photograph of her past self in her memoir, she would be visible to others and would thus be vulnerable again. Readers might judge Hoque according to her physical characteristics

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[73] Abeer Y. Hoque, *The Lovers and the Leavers* (Noida: Fourth Estate/HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015).

[74] Abeer Y. Hoque, *The Long Way Home* (Dhaka: Ogro Publishing, 2013).

[75] Hoque, 'The Version We Remember'.

[76] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Isabel Allende, *Paula* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1994).

[77] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 12.

[78] Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 3.

once more: 'My entire adult life, I have been defined and described by my hair, braided or loose, dyed or black. It has become more powerful than me'.[79] Hence, in only describing parts of a photograph that was taken by someone else, Hoque can portray the notion that photographs of herself belong only to her, and she can actively choose which ones to add or omit.

The description of a static image of the memoirist standing next to her sister in Nigeria indicates that the siblings were asked to pose for this photograph. This is yet another situation in which Hoque had to act a role. By pointing out that she looks sullen in the picture, Hoque indicates that photos can be misleading if one has to pose for them, as in family photographs. About such photographs for special events, Timothy Dow Adams argues that 'posed photographs are fictional'.[80] However, photographs in autobiographies are considered as having a referential power, and they are therefore often used in life writing, as Nancy Pedri argues, to lay claim to a 'truthful representation of self'.[81] By not providing a visual image of herself and her family, and by referring to a posed photograph, Hoque seems to be emphasising that the referential pact of life writers entails a series of problems. Photographs, and especially posed ones, can also tell a static and untruthful story. In her photography in adulthood, Hoque takes creative (as opposed to journalistic) and 'candid' photos, which means that she prefers to capture moments naturalistically.

Hoque's descriptions of the landscape she cherishes in Nsukka also exemplify Haverty Rugg's notion of the phrase 'to take a photograph'. At the very end of the memoir, when Hoque is an adult and has a camera, she stands in front of her former Nigerian house and recalls the year her family left West Africa permanently to live in the

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[79] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 150.
[80] Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: The University of North Carolina Press Books, 2000), p. 3.
[81] Nancy Pedri, 'Rewriting Texts Remaking Images: Interdisciplinary Perspectives', ed. by Leslie Boldt, Corrado Federici, and Ernesto Virgulti, Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 261–68, p. 263.

United States. She remembers standing 'at the very southwest corner' of the compound and turning 'to the setting sun'.[82] Then the young girl did not have a camera, and sensing 'a terrible impending loss', she would observe and memorise the landscape in front of her for many months before the family's departure. The adult Hoque does this again as an adult on the very last page of the memoir. Here too, she simply observes the landscape before she drives away and leaves 'Nsukka in its golden hour'.[83] Hoque ends her memoir with a photographical term for the period either shortly after sunrise or before sunset, when photographs can benefit from the sun's soft light. Hoque could have photographed the view at this special time, and added it to the memoir to show readers how unique the landscape was. Instead she prefers to focus her 'mental' camera on the scene, thus holding and establishing it in her consciousness, as she did in childhood:

> I was thirteen when we were about to leave Nigeria and I could sense a terrible impending loss. So I stood in that corner every evening for a year before we left and I memorized the crawling hills, the coiling jungle, the violent sky.[84]

With reverberant language invoking energy and movement, Hoque makes readers feel that her surroundings have the ability to perform like human beings. Nature is acting out and playing powerful roles. The environment is not something simply colourful but can be as diverse as people and the child protagonist is deeply fond of it. Above Hoque the sky is strong, in the distance the landscape moves by wriggling and in a corner the girl is fixed. She takes a mental snapshot of her natural Nigerian friends to take with her and remember them by when they are faraway. The teenage girl takes with her from Nigeria to the United States memories of an ever-changing landscape. Subsequently, at the end

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[82] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 238.
[83] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 238.
[84] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 238.

of the memoir, Hoque seems to communicate that although this is her view, in her country, at her time of the day, it belongs to the Nigerian landscape; and by not taking a photograph, it can remain there as untouched as possible. Thus, by sharing this moment with readers through language, Hoque can claim possession of Nsukka and of her childhood landscape for herself alone by not incorporating a photograph of the view.

Depending on how they are interpreted, photographs in life writing can also have negative consequences by giving people a name or identity. As Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir argues, photography

> can affirm or reinstate our presence in the world, while at the same time it makes us into types, whether it be for medical purposes, or to establish some kind of deviance, or conformity, as in the more mundane instance of the passport photograph.[85]

A passport photograph is connected to the concept of having a nationality, of belonging to a certain nation, and thus also of categorising people. Similarly, maps on borders create nationalities, and Hoque, unlike her father, condemns borders: 'I don't like or understand borders, nor do I have any sense of nationalism. I am even more wary of religion. It seems they are such divisive and deadly lines in the sand'.[86] Hoque's father was a geologist who relied on maps, compasses and earth, and whose entire career, as she explains, 'has been devoted to knowing where he is, what is under his own two feet'.[87] He had plans 'mapped out' for the family, and it was he who kept neat family albums.[88] By contrast, borders and

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[85] Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir, *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), p. 253.
[86] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 194.
[87] Hoque, 'The Version We Remember'.
[88] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 134.

identities keep shifting in Hoque's life, and by refusing to add photographs in her memoir, she challenges notions of fixed borders and representations.

The absence of photography in the memoir also denotes loss. When describing her family's move to the United States when she was a teenager, Hoque writes again about memory gaps. This time she does not seem to want to remind readers about the fine line between fact and fiction, or to imply that the narrator is unreliable. The memory loss this time seems to be linked to a purposeful blocking out of stressful and traumatic situations during challenging times in the United States: 'It's not that blurred together sort of blankness, but more like cauterized memories in which the new and the different are so horrifying and difficult that I can't or won't retain the details'.[89] Hoque does, however, recall her young adult self in the United States: 'I've been practising disguises for more years than not. I can put on any face with its matching mood and modulation. It's become so that I can't tell if I exist anymore, if who they're watching is even real'.[90] The lack of photography here indicates that Hoque has lost her identity and that she, like many TCKs has become a chameleon, which the outside 'eye' can hardly focus on and perceive anymore.[91]

The Hoque family's socioeconomic status upon relocating permanently to the United States is also responsible for the absence of photographs. At the end of the teenager's abovementioned difficult school year, photographs were exchanged between peers before the summer holidays. Hoque recalls that she could not buy any photographs due to her family's economic hardship. Additionally, she had no photographs because she had made no friends that year. Photographs in this narrative are connected to economic

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[89] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 65.
[90] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 144.
[91] Regarding the term 'chameleon' that is often used to describe TCKs, it is interesting to point out here that Hoque calls a chapter in the second section of her memoir 'Chameleon Girl'. The climatic condition of this chapter is 'virga 51°F'and the verse that opens it is '*not all of us can gather in/our insides and spill out/the same same/every time/you could call it/being a chameleon/but I'm not/it was the way I learn to survive in America'.* In meteorology the term virga refers to rain that falls out of a cloud and that evaporates before it reaches the earth's surface. These streaks of water suddenly disappear, just like a chameleon does, when it blends into its surroundings, see Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 74.

well-being and having friends, and the absence of photographs signals the very opposite: poverty and isolation. A classmate does indeed ask Hoque for a photograph, but not out of courtesy:

> He says, 'Can I have your picture to smell and remember you by?' With this too, it doesn't occur to me to do anything than accept what comes my way. I laugh with everyone else. It's all to be endured and, with effort, understood. I don't speak much that year. It's enough watching my strange new world whirl by.[92]

After being teased throughout the school year and being called a 'smelly African' by classmates, this request for a photograph is the manifestation of harmful misrepresentations. Hoque attempts to put on a brave face yet again in front of her classmates in this strange new world. It is significant that this episode is narrated in the second section of the memoir, called 'The Home of the Brave', in which Hoque describes having to be brave in a new world. If we consider this as an allusion to Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel (and not only to a line of the national anthem of the United States), it can be observed that unlike her home country of Nigeria – which she acutely misses, and which was portrayed as having unique natural landscapes – this new country, in which technology (photography) is linked to discrimination, is a futurist and meaningless one. Refusing to provide readers with a photograph here also, Hoque can regain agency by not accepting what comes her way. Instead, by deliberately choosing not to disclose a photograph of her past self, she can find new ways to speak out for her teenage self. The passage above emphasises once again the notion that photography can only provide a single image. Hoque's photography obviously cannot convey a scent, and by listing most

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[92] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* pp. 72-3.

of the senses – sight (picture, watching), hearing (laughter and speaking), smell, and touch (whirling by) – the writer suggests that a captured moment contains more than meets the eye/I.

While Hoque attempts to hide her Bangladeshi traits in Nsukka by standing in the sun all day in order to look more Nigerian, in the United States she tries to mask both her Nigerian and Bangladeshi characteristics in order to appear American. Hoque rejects her Bangladeshi origins in an act of rebellion, as her parents expect her to behave like a proper Bangladeshi daughter. When Hoque tries to speak with her mother about her problems in the United States, such as requesting some pocket money to buy some deodorant, Hoque's mother replies: ' "We can always send you to Bangladesh. You can do college there and it will be far less expensive. And then you can marry a nice Bangladeshi boy." There's nothing to say to that.'[93] Bangladesh is here almost a punishment for the teenage girl, and it is thus understandable that for many years she tries to 'avoid brown people' in the United States.[94] In the third part of the memoir, in Bangladesh, Hoque learns to accept and celebrate both her Bangladeshi and American-Nigerian identities; she realises that she is an individual with many selves, languages, cultures and nationalities, and that all of her identities are constantly shifting ('Everything moves. Everything is in a constant state of change').[95] From being a seven-year-old girl with an evil eye, Hoque has become a woman with multiple *I*s. This indicates that photographs of the past are not included in the memoir *Olive Witch* because Hoque has come to understand that the self is not documentable, and that a static image is not the most truthful way to represent ever-changing identities.

Taking photographs, instead of being photographed, allows Hoque to turn her feelings of passivity into a sense of agency. In an essay about photography, Hoque writes:

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[93] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 86.
[94] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 103.
[95] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 228.

'I can just be and see and shoot. It feels natural, emotional, true'.[96] After a childhood spent hiding behind a mask and observing others, Hoque can finally be herself and observe as an act of pleasure. Instead of being passive, she can shoot; and her photography is thus a tool for change. Hoque uses her attention to detail to select which subjects to shoot, when to press the shutter, and how to exhibit her work. Personal experience has taught her 'that language is elemental – describing who we are, yet telling only part of the story'.[97] Hoque therefore prefers photography because 'It doesn't matter where you're from, only where you are and how you see it. It lives beyond language, maybe even beyond place'.[98] However, Hoque chooses the genre of a memoir (and thus language) in order to reveal her past experiences. This genre gives the life writer more space for experimentation because she can play with different typographical styles, voices, masks, frames, forms, contradictions, and indeed languages too – possibilities that photography cannot always offer.

If Hoque perceives photography as a language that is more universal than words, the absence of this universal element in a cross-cultural memoir is striking. Hoque however has been viewed, ordered and classified by others, very much like photographs placed in albums. The styles that Hoque chooses in *Olive Witch* show that she rejects classifications, neat structures, and being judged according to the way she looks. Photographs would have challenged her views in this memoir, and Hoque prefers to expose her pictures in other types of works, rather than in a book exclusively dedicated to the life writing of a cross-cultural woman 'of colour'.[99] Consequently, through the lack of photographs, Hoque highlights that the gaze of the other upon the 'I' can be dangerous; it can indeed become an evil eye.

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[96] Hoque, 'The Version We Remember'.
[97] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 207.
[98] Hoque, *The Long Way Home,* p. 9.
[99] In several essays and interviews Hoque often refers to herself as a person of colour, see for example, Abeer Y. Hoque, 'The Canon of Now', *Wildness by Platypus Press*, 2019 <https://readwildness.com/19/hoque-canon> [accessed 4 August 2021].

Causing tension between the visual and the textual, photographs could have been used as a supplementary technique to create disruption and multiple meanings in *Olive Witch*. Autobiographics, according to Gilmore, as a 'description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation'.[100] In frequently describing photographs instead of revealing her own artwork, Hoque causes 'interruption' by hindering the gaze of the readers, and she deliberately chooses to play with their expectations about the memoir of a photographer. The fact that a photographer does not incorporate photographs in her memoir can be considered as a stark contradiction, another fundamental characteristic of Gilmore's autobiographics. Typical of autobiographics is also the refusal to accept an autobiographical name, and this, as Gilmore argues, 'marks the site of resistance'.[101] Hoque acknowledges at the end of her memoir that 'everyone contains multitudes', and the absence of both her name and her photographs in her memoir indicates that she too challenges harmful labelling, as well as single categories and stories.

Portraying stories from only one point of view can create stereotypes and, as Adichie argues, can rob 'people of dignity'.[102] The single story, as she writes, 'makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar'.[103] While she acknowledges that Africa is a 'continent full of catastrophes', Adichie points out that 'there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them'.[104] Hoque's works also show multiple stories and emotions that go beyond pity and catastrophe. For example, while describing Bangladeshi issues that readers of the Global North might associate with patriarchal oppression,

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[100] Gilmore, *Autobiographics,* p. 42.
[101] Gilmore, *Autobiographics,* p. 20.
[102] Adichie.
[103] Adichie.
[104] Adichie.

such as arranged marriages and girls wearing a burqa,[105] she also depicts the power of many brave women whom she meets in the country, such as local voluntary workers.[106]

Considering that I have concentrated on the significance of the lack of photography in Hoque's cross-cultural and cross-genre memoir, it is somewhat paradoxical to end this section by displaying one of her photographs. However, I include a photograph here because it exemplifies Hoque's attempt to portray the 'dignity' of people, and it contrasts with Figure 4, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Figure 5. Hoque's picture 'Green Green Is the Ground' – Barahipur Village, Bangladesh, *The Long Way Home*, Ogro Publishing.

Similarly to Sattouf's drawing in Figure 4, in Figure 5 we can see a row of people walking away from the viewer.[107] However, in opposition to the portrayal of a young Sattouf in France, who looks at viewers pathetically while being dragged away to Syria by his parents, Hoque's photograph does not show us children of the Global South who are to be pitied.[108] Gazes, as *Olive Witch* shows, are often a lens of dangerous power, and in

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[105] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 214.
[106] Hoque, *Olive Witch,* p. 226.
[107] Hoque, *The Long Way Home,* p. 65.
[108] In respect to representations of the Global South in Sattouf's works, it is significant to point out that after having lived in Syria and Libya, Sattouf has now settled down in France and has worked for French publishers such as for the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo.* His *The Arab of the Future* series in French has been criticised by some scholars for reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes about people who come

adulthood Hoque uses her photography to resist them. In portraying active children who are not posing for the photographer and who seem to be moving of their own free will, Hoque is 'shooting' back.

Conclusion

At the end of *Olive Witch*, Hoque decides to turn back on her past and future, and to concentrate instead on living in the present. This might seem somewhat paradoxical coming from a memoirist, who uses recurrent images of climatic conditions, and from a photographer, due to the fact that through memoirs, photographs and weather forecasts, circumstances and images are recorded for the future. This chapter has shown that *Olive Witch* is characterised by stark juxtapositions. This is a meaningful finding for understanding which literary strategies are adopted to portray the experience of physical and socio-economic movement in girlhood. In an attempt to nuance the notion of TCKs, which has predominantly been described as a universal (white) experience of privileged expatriatism in childhood, I chose to explore a memoir by a 'brown' migrant girl, whose family in the United States both belong to a minority group and struggle to make ends meet. Significantly, Hoque wished to give her memoir the subtitle 'a TCK memoir' – another paradox, considering that the term has been criticised for its ethnocentric and elitist connotations. In order to avoid confusion and unfair discrimination, a solution to

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from Syria and Libya. It can be argued that Sattouf at times tells one single Western story, for example when portraying the outrage of his French mother when she sees Syrian children kicking a dog, see for more details regarding this episode and the critique of literary scholars, Laurent Bonnefoy, '« L'Arabe Du Futur » Ou La Force Des Préjugés', *OrientXII*, 2015 <https://orientxxi.info/lu-vu-entendu/l-arabe-du-futur-ou-la-force-des-prejuges,0784> [accessed 19 February 2020]; Chris Reyns-Chikuma and Houssem Ben Lazreg, 'Marjane Satrapi and the Graphic Novels from and about the Middle East', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 39.1 (2017), 758–75 <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.39.1.0758>; Sattouf, pp. 138-142.

this, as the American publishers of *Olive Witch* have recognised, is to adopt the more inclusive term 'cross-culturalism'.

Children who grow up crossing cultures on a daily basis tend to be observant, rather than participating in activities, because they feel that they do not fit in with their peers. Hoque observed her surroundings in girlhood, and at the same time she was scrutinised by her peers. Her girlhood was deeply affected by perspectives, by viewing, ordering and classifications. In contrast to this, in adulthood Hoque decides to do her own viewing, shooting and ordering by means of photography. If we consider the visual elements used in Liang's autobiographical performance to portray her girlhood experiences, and the meanings Hoque depicts through photographs, we can notice that the strategic significance of the visual in TCK life 'writing' is striking, especially when contrasted with the TCKs' tendency both to 'hide' and to 'seek' – meaning to conceal a self, but also to construct a self as an observer of others.

Although Hoque turns to photography in adulthood, her memoir lacks visual records, and while this is yet another manifestation of contradictions, it also symbolises a form of resistance. Whereas Gilmore concentrates on language and consequently does not consider the presence and absence of photography in life writing by women, I have applied her notion of autobiographics to *Olive Witch* in order to explore how she achieves agency by means of her creativity in adulthood. The contradictions and multiple perspectives, styles, genres, languages and typographies that Hoque merges in her memoir exemplify the concept of autobiographics, and that the life writer resists single stories and categorisations. Although the rejection of an autobiographical name is a typical characteristic of autobiographics, by hiding behind figures with either nameless or contradictory names in her memoir, Hoque runs the risk of failing to speak out openly for minority groups and individuals who have faced traumatic experiences in girlhood.

When speaking out about their experiences of recurrently crossing cultural borders in girlhood, life writers may help to raise awareness of contemporary critical global problems, such as climate change and racism. Considering that their writings may also change the thinking patterns of individuals in similar situations, it is crucial that they offer abundant examples of real-life situations in which the young protagonist can claim agency and power for herself. For instance, although her parents did not approve of her decision and although her peers had ridiculed her bodily traits, Hoque joined her school's swimming club in the United States. The teenager bravely exposed her almost naked body to her peers and became a successful swimmer in her team. Through this physical activity, Hoque enacted resistance, in a similar way to the young Egyptian girl playing football, portrayed at the end of Liang's life writing. Swimming helped Hoque to reappropriate her body and create a sense of both pride and power.

Moving her body through water, Hoque noticed that she no longer felt so out of place in an industrialised society that was moving swiftly around her. Similarly to Sattouf and Rushdie, Hoque finds she has limbs instead of roots, because she does not belong to one single nation, culture or language. Hoque's resistance by means of swimming, however, shows that young migrant girls may have much more than just feet. Despite many challenges, no matter what happens they can achieve a sense of agency and carry on swimming against the current. Hoque's image of an energetic girl who exposes her body, although she has been racialised, and who actively swims, challenges Rauwerda's notion of TCKs who move 'freely' and 'unattached', like cumulus clouds. Hoque does not swim unhindered in the United States, but must face struggles in migration that take a disproportionate toll on ethnic minorities. Hoque's memoir ultimately portrays the notion that in the context of migration, certain people have the least ability to adapt. Hence, categories of mobility that highlight these differences are needed, although their names are often debatable.

Chapter Three:
Passages, Borders and Gaps in Girlhood in Thi Bui's
The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir

Introduction: Reading and Viewing the Movement of the Migrant Child

There were all the bad Vietnam War movies that I'd grown up with, and then even looking further into scholarship about the Vietnam War, what I was finding a lot of was just very American-centric perspectives. And then even the ones that tried to not be American-centric did a very naive thing, which was to then go talk to the enemy, and then that was what people thought of as the Vietnamese experience.[1]

– Thi Bui

With words always already functioning as images and images asking to be read as much as seen, comics are biocular texts par excellence.[2]

– Marianne Hirsch

By focusing on an actress and a photographer, the two previous chapters of this thesis have suggested that there is a relationship between life writing about moving girlhoods and visuality. A silenced observer in childhood, Liang uses her autobiographical one-woman performance in adulthood to speak out to mixed audiences about the challenges of being raised on the move, and to be seen. Hoque exploits her creativity to explore various forms of seeing and subjectivity. Both the child 'I' and the adult artistic eye are central to her works, in which she explores how gazes can be empowering and disempowering. Their life writing indicates that Liang and Hoque were influenced while growing up during the 1980s and 1990s by the phenomenal development of new forms of visual electronic media. Television had the capacity to both transport the girls to

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[1] Sam Inshassi, 'Interview with 2018 NBCC Autobiography Finalist Thi Bui', *Creative Writing at The New School*, 2018 <https://newschoolwriting.org/interview-with-2018-nbcc-autobiography-finalist-thi-bui/> [accessed 24 November 2020].
[2] Marianne Hirsch, 'Editor's Column: Collateral Damage', *PMLA*, 119.5 (2004), 1209–15 (p. 1213); born in Romania, Hirsch migrated to the United States as a teenager with her parents before fleeing to Austria and Israel; for further details of her 'statelessness' during her transient girlhood see Marianne Hirsch, 'Stateless Memory', *Critical Times: Interventions in Global Critical Theory*, 2.3 (2019), 416–34 <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-7862541>.

imaginary worlds and to teach them about Western customs that they were not fully familiar with while growing up, due to their transient and cross-cultural upbringing.[3]

Not only are children all over the world increasingly affected by visual images in our digital age, but the figure of the child is instrumentally used more and more in visual media to emotionally move global audiences. The 2015 photograph of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian toddler, lying face-down on a beach in Turkey, and street artist Banksy's recent mural in Venice of a shipwrecked migrant child wearing a lifejacket and holding a pink warning light over his head, are only two examples of many contemporary visual images of the figure of the migrant child that have been politicised and used to stir up public concern for global crises.[4] Swiftly spread around the world by means of digital media, 'moving' images of the desperate child on the move were exploited here to raise international awareness of the extreme risks refugees take to seek a safe haven.

Having previously analysed life writing by the offspring of adults who chose to migrate voluntarily for work reasons, in this chapter I focus my attention upon the experience of growing up as the child of refugees who are forced to flee from a war-torn country. In her 2017 graphic memoir *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (referred to hereafter as *The Best We Could Do*), Thi Bui illustrates the journey of her family, who fled Việt Nam after the war.[5] I have selected a graphic autobiography for this

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[3] In her performance, Liang explains that she was fascinated by watching Superman on television, and Hoque writes that she was influenced by 'bubblegum TV' in the United States; see Abeer Y. Hoque, *Olive Witch*, p. 66.

[4] For further details on how Nilüfer Demir's photograph of 2015 travelled from Turkey to 20 million screens across the globe, primarily via Twitter, see the report edited by Farida Vis and Olga Goriunova, *The Iconic Image on Social Media: A Rapid Research Response to the Death of Aylan Kurdi*, Picturing the Social Project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Sheffield and Manchester: Visual Social Media Lab, University of Sheffield and Manchester Metropolitan University, December 2015) <http://visualsocialmedialab.org/projects/the-iconic-image-on-social-media> [accessed 8 October 2020]. Banksy's 'Pest Control Team' confirmed that the mural in Venice is Banksy's creation in September 2019; for further details, see, for example, Desirée Maida, 'L'intervento Di Banksy a Venezia Durante La Biennale', *Arttribune.Com* (Rome, Italy, 22 May 2019), section Contemporary Art <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2019/05/banksy-allestisce-una-bancarella-abusiva-a-venezia-il-video-pubblicato-dallo-street-artist/> [accessed 7 October 2020].

[5] Bui's illustrated memoir was originally published in hardcover in 2017 by Abrams: Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2017); in this chapter I refer to the paperback edition published in 2018: Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (New York:

chapter because, as Marianne Hirsch points out, 'there is a great deal yet to say about words and images and their expressivity in specific cultural and historical contexts'.[6] In a similar vein, I would contend that there remains a great deal to write about visual images of the migrant child in life writing about moving girlhoods.

In this chapter, I will position Bui's life writing alongside the work of Marjane Satrapi and Art Spiegelman, two cartoonists who were raised in the 'cross-culture'.[7] Bui, who was inspired by the autographics of Satrapi and Spielgelman,[8] was born in Sài Gòn (later renamed Ho Chi Minh City), Việt Nam, in 1975. Together with her parents and siblings, she fled Việt Nam by fishing boat in 1978. After a perilous journey across the South China Sea, during which her father fell from the boat, the passengers reached Pulau Besar, a refugee camp on the coast of Malaysia. Here, Bui's mother gave birth to a son. Soon after his birth, Bui's mother and her children were flown to the United States, where they had relatives. Bui's father joined them soon after.

Whereas Satrapi's and Spiegelman's black-and-white minimalist illustrations portray collective and personal disruption, Bui uses simple black-and-red watercolour paintings to depict the survival story of a family that flees across water and is recurrently beset by instability. Gathering material for his *Maus* project, Spiegelman interviewed his father Vladek about his Holocaust experiences. After being denied conversations about the war during her childhood, in adulthood Bui also attempted to find out more about her family's traumatic past from her parents. In interviewing her parents and tracing her

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Abrams ComicArts, 2018). Throughout this chapter, I use the spelling 'Việt Nam', as Thi Bui does. Hereinafter, Thi Bui's book will be abbreviated to *The Best We Could Do.*

[6] Hirsch, 'Editor's Column: Collateral Damage', p. 1210.

[7] Satrapi grew up in Iran, where she attended a French school, and in Austria; whereas Spiegelman was born in Sweden to Polish Jews and moved with his family to the United States as a child.

[8] Bui was influenced by Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Spiegelman's *Maus*; Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (New York: Pantheon, 2004); Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon, 1986). Hereinafter, I will refer to Satrapi's autographics as *Persepolis* and Spiegelman's autographics as the *Maus* project.

family's 'journey in reverse', she hoped to close the gap between herself and her parents by sketching a story across time and seas that 'will set everything right' for the future.[9]

Throughout this chapter, I use Whitlock's term 'autographics', which, as she explains, describes life narratives 'fabricated in and through drawing and design using various technologies, modes, and materials'.[10] Gilmore's notion of autobiographics, which I have employed when analysing the hybrid genres of Liang's and Hoque's life writing, is the starting point for Whitlock's explorations of autographics too. Whitlock clarifies: 'The intertext of "autobiographics" lends to my thinking about "autographics" the insistence on the shifting jurisdictions and limits of autobiography that is a consistent feature of Gilmore's attention to the production and consumption of life story'.[11] Autobiographics are often characterised by ruptures and fragmentations, which reflect the fragmented subjectivity of the female life writer, and Whitlock is thus specifically interested in the fractured 'subject positions that narrators negotiate in and through comics'.[12] In autographics, the subject is additionally fragmented across both words and images, and across panels.

Expanding Hillary Chute's and Whitlock's notions of autographics to include the visual representation of frequent border crossing in girlhood, in this chapter I will firstly examine how Bui uses the form of autographics – which is loaded with borders, boxes of movement, and gaps – to retrospectively depict her instability in childhood. I will suggest that autographics, which blends genres, crosses audiences and compels viewers to constantly engage in movement and hybridity, aptly mirrors and enhances the experiences of moving girlhoods. Secondly, I will explore Bui's use of symbols of fluidity to depict journeying and lines of connection. Focusing on images of swimming, I will argue that

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[9] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* pp. 40–41.
[10] Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti, 'Self-Regarding Art', *Biography*, 31.1 (2008), v–xxiii (p. v) <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.0.0004>.
[11] Gillian Whitlock, 'Autographics: The Seeing "I" of the Comics', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 52.4 (2006), 965–79 (p. 966).
[12] Whitlock, p. 966.

Bui's recurring representation of floating bodies is suggestive of the preoccupations of a life writer of autographics – as well of those of a migrant; of a daughter of refugees; and of a mother who aims to preserve a story of water passages and to fill in gaps of the past, in order to draw a stable future without borders.

Hybrid Forms: Passages, Borders and Gaps

By the time I got to grad school, I was really interested in recording them [family stories] as an oral history. [. . .] I was really inspired by some graphic novels I was reading at the time, like "Maus" by Art Spiegelman and "Persepolis" by Marjane Satrapi.[13]
                                        – Thi Bui

I cannot take the idea of a man cut into pieces and just write it. [. . .] It would not be anything but cynical. That's why I drew it.[14]

                                        – Marjane Satrapi

Personal accounts of their childhoods, and stories of suffering during and after the Việt Nam war, are recounted to Bui by her parents orally. The life writer then narrates a story about family movement by means of visual and verbal forms. Because autographics convey meaning by combining words and illustrations, scholars of life writing argue that this is a hybrid genre. Whereas in chapters one and two I have ended my literary examinations by exploring how the conflicts of the migrant girl are mirrored, supported, and transformed into creativity and agency by means of hybrid genres, in this chapter I begin by exploring how autographics powerfully reflects the experiences of moving

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[13] Carly Lanning, '"The Best We Could Do": Thi Bui Honors Family's Immigration Story in Debut Graphic Novel', *Nbc News*, 2017 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/best-we-could-do-thi-bui-honors-family-s-immigration-n726626> [accessed 9 October 2020].
[14] Tara Bahrampour, 'Tempering Rage by Drawing Comics: A Memoir Sketches an Iranian Childhood of Repression and Rebellion', *The New York Times, Nytimes.Com* (New York, 21 May 2003), section Books <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/21/books/tempering-rage-drawing-comics-memoir-sketches-iranian-childhood-repression.html> [accessed 7 October 2020].

girlhoods because, as many scholars of life writing argue, it is a hybrid genre *par excellence*. For example, Shane Denson, Cristina Meyer, and Daniel Stein explore this 'hybrid medium' and examine the 'hybridities that result from the intersection of visual and verbal forms and that define narration itself as a series of transgressions'.[15] Chute develops Gilmore's concept of the female subject in autobiographics, and argues that the 'double narration' of hybrid visual-verbal forms is apt for giving voice to women, who have been invisible in the past. Through this hybrid medium, women can choose how to depict and embody their everyday life experiences.[16] When explaining the duality of the visual and the textual in comics, Scott McCloud argues that 'In comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading'.[17] Although McCloud claims that a competition between the dancers can 'subvert the overall goals' in comics,[18] life writers of autographics can purposely and ingeniously play with this duality. When words and pictures compete against each other on a page, conflictual autobiographical stories can be suitably depicted.

In this section, I develop the arguments of Chute and McCloud by suggesting that the mingling of the figures of the migrant, the girl, and the life writer in the hybrid visual-verbal form of autographics complicates and dramatises the balance of the 'dance moves' to a greater extent due to multiple conflicting differences. These are stories of frequent border crossings: for example, across time, places, developmental stages, audiences. Viewers of hybrid autographics about moving girlhoods must themselves experience travelling by navigating between borders, words, images, gutters, liminal spaces, and frames across pages, in order to create meanings and new knowledge about movement,

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[15] Shane Denson, Cristina Meyer, and Daniel Stein, 'Introducing Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives', in *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics At The Crossroads* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 1–14, pp. 5–6.
[16] Hillary L. Chute, 'Introduction', ed. by Hillary L. Chute (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 1–27, p. 5.
[17] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1994), p. 156.
[18] McCloud, p. 156.

and at times about inaction too. These terms and notions used by scholars of graphic literature will be explained further, with reference to Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. An example of bleeding and the figure of a new migrant in the United States in Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do,* Abrams ComicArts.

Figure 6 is a page that depicts one of Bui's earliest memories in the United States.[19] To experience more independence and milder temperatures, her family has just moved away from Indiana and their relatives there, and the Buis now live alone in California. A panel is a single frame or box where action is illustrated, and in the page above, the action is

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[19] Bui, *The Best We Could Do*, p. 67.

drawn in nine panels. Panels can be enclosed by a border, and here it can be seen that the first five panels have strong black rectangular borders. Significantly, the page begins with visual images in a box, in which the young Bui is alone and consuming American culture and language by means of visual images in two very similar-looking 'boxes': the television and the cereal box. Outside of the box, Bui seems to be telling viewers that authentic American ways, as opposed to televised and marketed ones, can be alarming; and the page ends with a fractured box that she creates by means of irregular borders.

The young Bui learns about American culture, language, and patriotism from her older siblings too, who attend an American school – and it is a group of school-age children who attack Bui's father on a street in California. In Việt Nam, Bui's family was exposed to multiple languages, such as Vietnamese, French, and the English of the American soldiers. By means of Bui's manipulation of textual images in Figure 6, readers can observe the significance of new types of wordings in the United States: the language of comics and offensive language. In the sixth panel, Bui's capitalisation of the word 'gook', which is used in a derogatory way for individuals of Asian descent, highlights the force of the term in this episode. This is the last time on this page that an utterance is displayed in a speech balloon; and it is important here to read sound effects, gaps, and the absence of textual elements as techniques of meaning construction in autographics.

In comics and autographics, viewers must fill in the action omitted by gutters. Panels are separated by gutters, which are the empty spaces or gaps between the panels, and closure requires readers' prior knowledge to fill in these gaps. Authors of autographics can only draw a static picture, and must therefore rely on these gutters and readers to create the portrayal and recognition of movement. For Chute, 'absence' is created by these gaps, which will be filled by readers' imagination and interpretation;[20]

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[20] Hillary L. Chute, 'Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative', *PMLA*, 123.2 (2008), 452–65 (p. 452).

and in a similar manner, McCloud claims that 'in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea'.[21] It is therefore the viewer who, engaging with pluralities of words and images, must generate new meanings in the liminal space of the gutter. In a similar way, viewers must also fill in information and provide the closure of textual sound. The text is onomatopoeic in the sixth panel, and with the aid of visual elements, viewers can understand that it represents the sound of spitting. Additionally, by means of the colouring and size of the textual image, viewers can imagine the overwhelming power and volume of this spitting sound.

Sound effects are one of the main elements of traditional comics, particularly those featuring superheroes. In comics, visual onomatopoeias are mostly used to depict violent sound effects, such as heavy blows ('wham!') and gunshots ('bang!').[22] In the figure above, it can be noticed that in imitating the sound effects of comic drawings, Bui not only exploits the possibilities of visual onomatopoeias to highlight the violence of the situation. In addition – and antithetically to the story of comic hero Superman – she also illustrates the flaws of the American assimilation processes at the end of the twentieth century.

Created by the offspring of Jewish migrants, Superman, an embodiment of American culture, is indeed one of the most famous migrant children in the world of comics.[23] Born on the planet Krypton, as a baby, Superman was rocketed to planet Earth, where he was raised in Kansas by the Kents. Recognising at an early age that he is an outsider and different from other individuals around him, the migrant from Krypton must,

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[21] McCloud, p. 66.

[22] For further details on the importance of acoustics in comics and the experimental possibilities of this device, see Robert S. Petersen, 'The Acoustics of Manga', in *A Comics Studies Reader* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), pp. 163–172.

[23] Superman's creators, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, were children of Jewish immigrants, who emigrated to New York in the 1930s, fleeing the European anti-Jewish riots. Siegel's father was Lithuanian, and Shuster's family were from Kiev in Ukraine. Shuster and Siegel thus recognised the conflicts facing migrants in the United States. For further details, see Julian Voloj and Thomas Campi, *The Joe Shuster Story: The Artist Behind Superman* (New York: Super Genius Books, 2018).

like Rushdie's migrants, 'find new ways of being human'.[24] Clark Kent is figuratively successful in exemplifying or 'describing himself' as a human.[25] In fact, he integrates himself so triumphantly into the surrounding American (human) culture that he uses the skills from his home planet to protect the United States – the host country that gave him refuge. Yet, as seen above, Bui's father is not an acclaimed superhero migrant; on the contrary, Bui's embodiment of this refugee illustrates the stark and violent divisions within the American society.

While the first panels portray how the notion of American patriotism is instilled in children by adult teachers in schools, and by television and advertising industries dominated by adults, the middle and final panels illustrate the two faces of nationalism. In the seventh panel, we notice that the spit that the boy has branded onto the cheek of Bui's father resembles both a bloodstain and a map and this indicates that a school-age child has fiercely marked his racist feelings onto the body of a migrant adult. Additionally, if viewers take a closer look at the eighth and ninth panels, in which the migrant adult is walking away, they will notice that the bottom border of these panels are deliberately faded. This illustrates the fine line between patriotism and xenophobia.

In these panels, Bui seems to illustrate how nations are figuratively remapped and formed by the harsh realities faced by refugees, in both the countries that they are forced to leave due to violent conflicts, and in the new countries that host them. Bui's family has had to leave Việt Nam due to a bloody war, and hoped to find safety in the United States. These panels thus powerfully echo Chute's notion that comics can play 'with and against visual stereotypes'.[26] By illustrating a stain of red blood on the face of a refugee from Việt Nam, newly arrived in the United States, Bui depicts that there is affliction in the man's new host country too. Consequently, in observing the stained and humiliated face

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[24] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Vintage, 2010), 277.
[25] Rushdie, p. 277.
[26] Hillary L. Chute, 'Introduction', p. 12.

of a refugee in the United States, viewers of Bui's autographics can witness and perceive instances of degrading discrimination.

Due to the perception of physical differences, acceptance in the 'land of the free' cannot be enjoyed by all, and it can indeed be denied by some. In fact, the young boy in this page is illustrated as having fair hair, as opposed to the dark hair of Bui's father. On the outside, the migrant's physical traits are thus different from those of the young American boy. Yet, by using red for the American boy's spit on the face of the Asian migrant, Bui forcibly reminds viewers that despite outward appearances, the liquids (such as blood and saliva) that flow inside the two characters are the same colour. On the one hand, these panels underline Chute's notion that autographics can powerfully engage in 'what it means to picture' trauma and abuse;[27] and on the other hand, they show how the genre is useful in tackling what Whitlock calls the 'politics of visibility of refugees'.[28] Although, as Whitlock writes, some people hardly want to look at asylum seekers, panels in autographics that feature refugees can force viewers to fix their gaze for a while on the experience of individual refugees.[29]

Paying attention to the figure of the adult refugee, viewers might thus notice that whereas the American boy's act of spitting is portrayed by Bui's visual sound effect as an aggressive one, the refugee's reaction is illustrated as a silent one by means of the lack of textual images. Through this gap or sound void, the depiction of divisions is exaggerated, and viewers can envisage that for some migrants, freedom of speech is hard to achieve in the United States. It is understandable that the newly arrived migrant might not possess the necessary language and cultural skills to fight back in this situation; yet subsequent pages show that Bui's father cannot generally talk about traumatic situations,

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[27] Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016), p. 5.
[28] Gillian Whitlock, 'Joe Sacco's Australian Story', *Life Writing*, 14.3 (2017), 283–95 (p. 291) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2017.1328732>.
[29] Whitlock, 'Joe Sacco's Australian Story', pp. 291–3.

and this hopelessness creates a further gap in the family. Silence is thus a recurring condition in Bui's childhood, and the form of autographics lends itself well to the portrayal of gaps of speech.

Silence in the seventh and eight panels, for example, is used as a method of highlighting a particularly important first moment faced by the migrant man and his daughter in the United States. In omitting textual elements from these panels, Bui forces her viewers to pay extra attention to the visual ones, because they contain all the information that is required to construct meaning. The image of a migrant who has been attacked is thus given special regard by not just Bui, the artist, but by her audience too. Viewers must examine these two wordless panels longer and more deeply in order to perceive how the man feels and acts during and after the attack. 'Hunched bodies' in comics, as Jane Tolmie argues, 'force the viewer to "see" an often-invisible culture of shaming and silencing', and this notion is clear in the seventh panel. Here, this first moment of silence in the United States, alongside the picture of Bui's father hunching in the United States, serve to underline the disadvantaged position of a refugee.[30]

Comics, as Tolmie points out, 'do a particularly good job of addressing invisibility and silence'.[31] Expanding this argument to autographics, it can be observed that Bui's work reveals that other textual examples of life writing cannot portray silence as effectively as autographics, because the former are constructed primarily of words. In her one-woman performance, Liang forcibly represents silenced and moving experiences in girlhood by recurrently putting her hands to her mouth, and thus interrupting sentences. Consequently, it can be observed that not only autographics, but also genres of life writing that generally rely on visuality, can efficiently address acts of silencing. Elsewhere in her autographics, Bui inks additional moments of unspoken and thus confusing trauma by

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[30] Jane Tolmie, 'Introduction', in *Drawing from Life: Memory and Subjectivity in Comic Art*, ed. by Jane Tolmie (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), pp. vii–xxiii, p. xi.
[31] Tolmie, p. xi.

omitting textual elements, and viewers are forced to examine and perceive moments of sinister silence in Bui's childhood.

Furthermore, in this seventh panel, it can be noticed that the migrant man has closed his eyes in order to protect himself during the attack. In portraying a man with his eyes shut and only revealing the blemished side of his face, Bui emphasises once again the violence and the loss of face in this situation. As Chute argues, comics are a 'haptic form' that requires 'a physical intimacy with the reader in the acts of cognition and visual scrutiny'.[32] Bui's father is illustrated here as a person who does not want to be seen in such a distressing situation by his young daughter – the life writer – and consequently by viewers. Bui, the adult illustrator, is thus ironically here exposing a man who seems to be resisting reductive scrutiny by an empathetic gaze. At the same time, however, the seventh panel functions as an indicator, and admonishes viewers to be attentive rather than to look away from destructive processes of marginalisation.

Finally, in the last four panels of the page shown in Figure 6, the bottom borders are irregular. Occasionally, in Bui's autographics some panels are not surrounded by borders, and some images extend beyond the edge of a page. This technique is called 'bleed', and Bui adopts it sporadically in order to emphasise dramatic moments. Considering the figures of the migrant, of the child and of the life writer, I suggest that the signification of the bleed in this final panel is threefold. The tree that is cut in half in the final panel attracts the viewer's gaze; the contour of the tree seems to be forcibly breaking into the panel from the previous one. Here the focus is therefore more on the tree, and less on the man and the child. The lines of the tree here signal both the migrant's disruptive crossing of borders and the impossibility of putting down roots (due to the obstructed form of the tree).

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[32] Hillary L. Chute, 'Comics Form and Narrating Lives', *Profession*, 2011, 107–17 (p. 112).

The figure of the child holds her father's hand and is walking back home in between the bleed and a building. She seems caught between a plurality of discourses and conflicts, such as the notion of home, shifting boundaries, and roots. After learning about American culture from boxes in the first panel, in this final panel, Bui illustrates a child who seemingly cannot belong to one single and fitting box. This page suggests that the child has witnessed and struggled with traumatic events that will shape her creativity in adulthood. The girl in the picture will have to form new meanings, and must access and uncover cross-generational traumatic pasts by thinking outside of separate and bordered boxes. The life writer can relive this past situation and, like Liang and Hoque who respectively speak and shoot back, 'draw back', by allowing the viewer to act as witness and take part in her migrant family's trauma.

While for Whitlock the 'labor of reading and looking for closure is at the heart of the opening that autographics might make in shaping affective engagements and recognition across cultures now',[33] here it is a bleed, with an opening of a border, that represents the disturbed passages of the adult migrant, the split within the migrant child, and the motion of the life writer. Bui seemingly invites the reader into the action of the page's frames, and to fight against discrimination across cultures. For Chute, viewers of autographics about trauma can reject 'the opposition of viewing and acting'.[34] After this first episode of violence in the United States, in purposely leaving a gap in the lower border of the ninth and final panel of this page, Bui appears to be opening up a passageway for her viewers through which they can follow the adult and child migrant. It is, however, a delicate border, and the life writer seems to let viewers choose whether and how they wish to stand behind the refugees.

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[33] Whitlock, p. 978.

[34] Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn,* p. 31.

Whereas in Figure 6 a bleed closes an episode in which a young migrant witnesses a disturbing attack on the body of an adult, in the following image Bui inks trauma by carving a sanguine void into the body of a child.
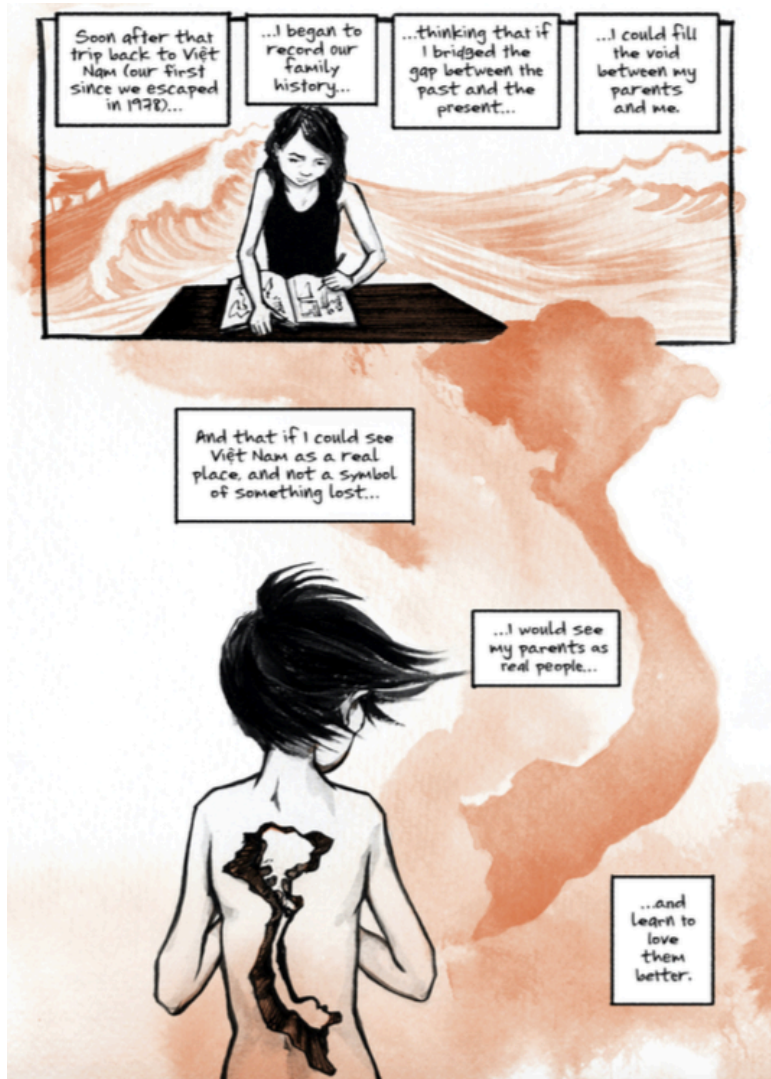
Figure 7. The figures of the migrant child and the adult life writer: Mental and physical gaps in Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do,* Abrams ComicArts.

For Carolyn Kyler, graphic memoirs 'map along multiple dimensions', and many 'graphic memoirists go beyond the map of the page and provide actual maps within the pages, helping the reader to visualize the places, times, and transformations of the

narrative'.[35] Bui could be added to Kyler's list of memoirists who exploit topographical depictions, as she frequently illustrates maps in her autographics too.[36] The map of Việt Nam, which lacerates the body of the child, is used in Figure 7 above to represent the nation's bloody attempts at liberation from France, Japan, and the United States, and to depict traumatic conflicts that affected both an entire society and individual lives.[37] In his *Maus* project, Spiegelman illustrates the history of his survivor-father, explores the inheritance of traumatic memory by second-generation Holocaust survivors, and addresses how past and present memory can be recorded. Although he was absent from his father's founding trauma, Spiegelman feels that he is obliged to illustrate his family's story. His is also an attempt to bridge the psychological gap between himself and family members.[38] Figure 7 shows that in a similar way to Spiegelman's *Maus*, Bui's autographics is also concerned with the obligations and memory of the second generation of war survivors.

Elsewhere, Bui illustrates that although her parents took the family 'far away from the site of their grief … certain shadows stretched far, casting a gray stillness over' their offspring's childhood, 'hinting at a darkness' they could not understand 'but always FEEL'.[39] Bui's parents are portrayed as two lonely figures 'in between two sets of expectations'.[40] Bui and her siblings are 'the lame second generation',[41] and Bui feels

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[35] Carolyn Kyler 'Mapping a Life: Reading and Looking at Contemporary Graphic Memoir', *CEA Critic*, 72.3, A Special Issue: The Graphic Novel (Spring-Summer 2010), 2–20 (p. 11) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44378421>.

[36] Sally McWilliams explores the use of maps in Bui's autographics: for further discussion, see Sally McWilliams, 'Precarious Memories and Affective Relationships in Thi Bui's The Best We Could Do', *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 22.3 (2019), 315–48 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2019.0039>.

[37] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 36; regarding this image, see also Layli Maria Miron, 'No Reclaimed Homeland: Thi Bui's Postcolonial Historiography in The Best We Could Do', *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, 4.1, Spring (2020), 44–65 (p. 52) <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/ink.2020.0008>.

[38] For further discussion on the passing on of trauma in Spiegelman's *Maus*, see Victoria A. Elmwood, '"Happy, Happy Ever after": The Transformation of Trauma between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's Maus: A Survivor's Tale', *Biography*, 27.4 Fall (2004), 691–720.

[39] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* pp. 59–60. This text is placed in four different captions in Bui's autographics, and is divided by three dots.

[40] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 33. Here, Bui refers to the two sets of American and Vietnamese traditions of her parents.

[41] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 29.

guilty because she is aware that her parents escaped their country of origin so that their 'children could grow up in freedom'.[42] These feelings of shame and inadequacy of the young second-generation migrant are additionally portrayed above by the flawed, frail, and displaced body of a daughter.

Throughout her autographics, Bui's multiple passages and important moments of transience, such as those from daughterhood to motherhood and moving away from New York to California with her husband and child, are repeatedly illustrated next to the dangerous past passages of her parents. This is done by means of the juxtaposition of panels that depict the life writer in the United States and those that portray her family's past in Việt Nam; and once again, it can be seen that autographics lends itself well to portraying multi-layered passages and experiences. The graphic juxtaposition in Figure 7 highlights the notion that the past of Bui's parents is reflected in Bui's present. The mirror image of the map of Việt Nam above is yet another illustration that forcibly imprints the reproduction and consequences of her family's movement on Bui's body. However, the map carved into the body of the girl is an inverse one, which signals to viewers that Bui's map is at odds with the original one of her parents' country – thus highlighting conflicts between the perspectives of the girl and those of her mother and father.

This inverted map also forcibly engages with Hirsch's notion of postmemory, and more precisely of growing up 'with overwhelming inherited memories' and being dominated 'by narratives that precede one's birth or one's consciousness'.[43] Although Bui was born in Việt Nam, she was a very young when her family escaped to Malaysia and then to the United States; and therefore, the Việt Nam war indeed preceded Bui's consciousness. For Hirsch, 'Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation',[44] and in

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[42] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 30.

[43] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5.

[44] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory,* p. 5.

Figure 7 it can be observed that Bui's postmemorial connection to the Việt Nam conflicts is projected onto her childhood body by means of a distorted and lacerating map.[45]

Furthermore, growing up with her parents' traumatic memories of war, Bui's body as a child is, according to Hirsch's notions, visually carved 'indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension'.[46] As a girl, Bui was rarely allowed to unearth her parents' past, and the trauma of her parents was mostly unspoken. Consequently, the child's incongruous map also delineates who is allowed to enter into her family's past, and their painful memories of a country that is marked by bloody lines, which colonial administrators have drawn on maps. The map's three-dimensional form that carves a hole through the girl's upper body, creating a void at its core, also marks gaps of knowledge. The second generation, as Hirsch explains, are at times 'unable to fill in the gaps and absences'.[47] The migrant girl is not allowed to fully embody her parents' passages across space and time, and the map that lacerates the girl's torso exemplifies how autographics can powerfully portray these challenges of the postmemory of the second generation that Hirsch discusses.

However, the girl does not agree to remain a passive observer and an uninformed second-generation victim of war. In illustrating a glimpse of the girl's hands through the map/gap, and a head that is turned towards the true boundaries of Việt Nam, Bui indicates that her suffering can facilitate change. The margins of the map seem to be a red cloud that has left the girl's wound and is flowing up to the adult life writer; and here the genre of autographics successfully depicts how the suffering migrant girl and the figure of the life writer are linked by bloodlines and borders. Inspired by Spiegelman's *Maus*, in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Hirsch examines how

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[45] While Hirsch discusses the notion of postmemorial trauma, Douglas Robinson examines intergenerational trauma, in this respect see Douglas Robinson, *Displacement and the Somatics of Postcolonial Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2013) pp. 175-212.

[46] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory,* p. 5.

[47] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 244.

family photographs 'link private memory to collective history'.[48] Here Hirsch applauds

the 'anchors of agency and responsibility' in postmemorial acts of recalling of the

Holocaust.[49] In Figure 7, it can be seen that by being figuratively empowered in adulthood

by a pencil, it is now the role of the life writer to 'draw back' with her artistic skills and

preserve a nation's and a family's story of conflict and loss. War crimes in Việt Nam, and

the wounds they left on the bodies of a family, should not be forgotten; and the second-

generation war survivor draws in order to portray her perspective on the conflict, and to

warn that history should not repeat itself.

Only the fragmented back of the child's body can be seen by viewers. This

perspective might be a technique to illustrate – and even protect from objectifying gazes

– the many children who are pulled into the vortex of war. How can a life writer attract

the attention of a wide international audience and justly illustrate the horrors that children

experience as a consequence of conflict? Once again, we can see that autographics lends

itself well to the representation of moving experiences of, and for, youth. For both Satrapi

and Spiegelman, the comic style is a suitable medium to depict the horrors of war and its

traumatic consequences; this is because illustrations, as Rocío Davis explains, 'draw the

indescribable, so to speak'.[50] The ostensible simplification of comics, as Davis points out

when analysing *Persepolis*, 'is actually a complex strategy for the representation of events

and perspectives that may be difficult to communicate only through words'.[51]

Additionally, according to Michael Boatright, who also examines Satrapi's *Persepolis,*

graphic memoirs offer valuable representations of racist and xenophobic acts, because

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[48] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* rear book cover.
[49] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* p. 264.
[50] Rocío G. Davis, 'A Graphic Self: Comics as Autobiography in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism,* 27.3 (2005), 264–79 (p. 268) <https://doi.org/10.1080/014403500223834>.
[51] Davis, p. 268.

illustrations can powerfully portray differences in appearance to both young and adult readers.[52]

Chute examines how trauma can be 'expressed ethically' in autographics,[53] and in her analysis of Satrapi's work, she argues that the illustrations reproduce the traditional use of the Persian miniature technique.[54] Rather than oversimplifying illustrations of violent conflict to the point of banality, Satrapi's minimalist illustrations in black and white highlight the enormity of war. Bui's drawings are influenced by visual traditions of her place of birth too, and her illustrations replicate Vietnamese traditional silk painting styles that use simple water-based ink and brush painting techniques. Figure 7 illustrates how Bui uses her paintbrush and single-colour washes to allow different shades of the red ink to soak into the page, to create the effect of water and blood in both the top panel and around the map of Việt Nam. In Figure 7, Bui does not expose the afflicted face of a young girl, and throughout her autographics she does not draw blood gushes squirting out of the bodies of war victims. Instead, by illustrating a gap in a body, Bui sends invisible and tactful signs to her viewers, who must ultimately draw conclusions about the effects of war.

Both her void and the image of the adult and the child linked by blurred borders lead to multiple interpretations, discussions and opportunities. It is this type of natural and minimalist painting, which Bui exploits to depict traumatic experiences, that renders her autographics accessible to a mixed-aged readership. Following in Satrapi's and Spiegelman's footsteps, Bui has produced an autographics that is used in high school and college classrooms in the United States as a teaching tool.[55] This indicates that Bui's work

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[52] Michael D. Boatright, 'Graphic Journeys: Graphic Novels' Representations of Immigrant Experiences', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53.6 (2010), 468–76 (pp. 469–470) <https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.53.6.3>.

[53] Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, p. 3.

[54] Hillary L. Chute, 'The Texture of Retracing in Marjane Satrapi's "Persepolis" ', p. 98.

[55] For further details regarding the use of Bui's text in classrooms, see Mariel Waloff, 'Students at Oakland International High School Describe Their Immigration Experiences with Graphic Art', *Oakland North – UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism* (UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, 27 October 2011) <https://oaklandnorth.net/2011/10/27/immigrant-students-at-this-oakland-school-describe-their-

addresses adolescents and young adults, and that her portrayals of the Việt Nam conflicts are a pedagogical resource. In terms of explorations into the genre of autographics, the juxtaposition of the adult and the young girl in Figure 7 also suggests the notion that in crossing over age barriers, autographics can blur the borderlines between the bodies of literature intended for children and for adults. In Figure 7, Bui's comic self is drawing simple lines in a sketchbook, and her desk in this un-bordered frame appears to be connected to the figure of the girl by means of an ink-brush drawing of a map. However, this image of the adult life writer drawing at her desk in Figure 7 also exemplifies additional advantages of the genre of autographics in depicting Bui's autobiographical story about national, social and familial movement and disruption.

Through this genre that allows the juxtapositions of powerful visual and sharp verbal elements, the life writer can effectively portray the intersection of multiple storylines. There is only one panel on this page: within it, the life writer portrays herself at the forefront, drawing her lines at a table. The life writer is the creator here, and is thus apparently the highest in rank. Yet, behind the 'I' there are higher, more fluid and dangerous forces; and by means of watercolour lines that reproduce motion, the viewer's eyes are led to observe moving waves in the background. The ocean is constantly in motion, and serves on this page as an analogy for movements of time, of places, of groups of people, of individuals, of national borders, of perspectives, and also for emotional movement within families.

Rejecting chronological narration, in her autographics Bui navigates between three countries (the United States, Việt Nam and Malaysia), leaping frequently back and forth in time (the action takes place in between the years 1945 and 2005). Figure 7 illustrates how fluidly and effectively temporal and geographical passages can be

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experiences-with-graphic-art/> [accessed 21 October 2020]; see also *Thi Bui's 'The Best We Could Do': A Teaching Guide* (Eugene, Oregon: The UO Common Reading Program, organized by the Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2019), pp. 1–31 <https://fyp.uoregon.edu/sites/fyp2.uoregon.edu/files/tbwcd-curriculum-guide-2018-19_reduced.pdf> [accessed 21 October 2020].

portrayed through visual images. The border of the panel in which the life writer has placed her childhood self has a small opening that permits Việt Nam to figuratively enter into the United States, where the life writer is sitting. This open border also allows viewers to imaginatively drift up and down time, because the past bleeds into the present and vice versa, by means of a map that serves as a slide or bridge across time.

To the right of the life writer, a small boat is travelling on big red waves and is touching the border of the panel. Whereas this visual image symbolises the perilous border-crossing of millions of Vietnamese boat people fleeing a country afflicted by 30 years of war,[56] the verbal elements call attention to the effects of war trauma on individual refugees and their families. As opposed to the soft watercolour painting behind her, the figure of the life writer is a solid one, drawn with thick and bold black lines. Her desk, too, is massive, and resembles a stable pier that is ready to provide access and support for passengers of a small boat caught in a breaking wave. Bui's creativity and mapping of past trauma, as the text in the panel spells out, thus function as a tool to repair broken ties, and as a source of support for the future.

However, if Bui's artistic intention in leaving signs in a book is to create a stable future after a disruptive past, images of rolling waves behind her graphic 'I' indicate everlasting motion and the hazards of a life writer when sinking into the past. The juxtaposition of the adult and child 'I' on this page exemplifies Watson's notion that due to the duality of words in drawing, 'the splitting of self into observer and observed' of life writers is 'redoubled in autographics'.[57] In visualising herself drawing in this page, and indeed frequently throughout her autobiographics, from an external viewpoint, Bui reflects a significant TCK notion that we have observed previously in the life writing of

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[56] For figures regarding this conflict, see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *State of the World's Refugees: The Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 79.

[57] Julia Watson, 'Autographic Disclosures and Genealogies of Desire in Alison Bechdel's Fun Home', *Biography*, 31.1 Winter (2008), 27–58 (p. 28) <https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/bio.0.0006>.

Liang and Hoque: the paradox of 'hiding' oneself to avoid being observed while actively 'seeking' to observe others. Loss is also central to TCL and after examining the novels of TC authors, Rauwerda reveals that she was surprised to discover that in these (textual) works, 'the proliferation of devastating loss appeared consistently and ubiquitously'.[58]

Whereas scholars of autographics, such as Chute and Whitlock, have focused on how the interconnection of visual and verbal modes offers life writers enhanced creative opportunities to portray images of fragmented subjectivities, of trauma, and the mapping of lives and bodies, particularly of women, the readings in this section have specifically addressed the value of autographics in representing the lived experience of frequent border-crossing in girlhood. My analysis of the confluence of the three figures of the girl, the serial migrant, and the life writer in Bui's *The Best We Could Do* has indicated that through the multiple creative elements at her disposal in the hybrid genre of autographics, Bui can give her viewers a detailed impression of feelings of loss, and the notion that migration might leave gaping voids that can influence individuals, families, societies, and nations. In the following section, I will examine how images in Bui's autographics serve to clarify and bridge these emotional, familial, geographical, temporal, and cultural gaps.

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[58] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* p. 4.

Fluid Images of Lines of Connection: Passages in Water

FAMILY is something I have now created - - and not just something I was born into.[59]
– Thi Bui

As we emerge from amniotic fluid, from the liquid universe of the womb, we, too, discover that we can breathe; we, too, leave behind a kind of waterworld to become denizens of earth and air.[60]
– Salman Rushdie

Bui begins her autographics with illustrations of her own body in a New York hospital in 2005. The woman is in labour and the 'pain comes in twenty-foot waves'.[61] Fluid lines are formed by creases and spectral shadows on the woman's hospital gown, and viewers can additionally observe two differently shaped wavy lines at the bottom of the opening panel, which seem to be the plastic tubes of an intravenous drip. By means of fluid visual lines in red and textual water metaphors, on the first page of the book Bui links her painful process of labour to her family's traumatic migration across three countries and over eight decades, in order to begin something new. Here, the life writer echoes Rushdie's notion that because humans originally leave a woman's body through passageways, we have all at some stage moved, and thus we are all in some way 'frontier-crossing beings'.[62] Throughout her autographics, Bui uses images of liquidity to depict passages and continual fluctuation. These wavy lines resemble permanent lines of connection. When the umbilical cord is cut, is one truly free from past ties, passages, and debts? Can one ever break lines that connect to figures of nations, migrations, and families? These questions that Bui figuratively poses at the beginning of her autographics will only be answered after the hybrid journey back to her origins, which will take her across places,

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[59] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 21.
[60] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*, Modern Library edition (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 350.
[61] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 1.
[62] Rushdie, *Step Across This Line,* p. 76.

families, and times. In this section I will examine the implication of these fluid images of lines of connection.

In a caption on the very first page of the book, viewers can read that Bui's mother has disappeared from the hospital room where Bui is experiencing agony. Bui's mother had lost babies of her own and cannot alleviate her daughter's pain while giving birth in hospital. Yet, this loss also refers to the overall restrained relationship of these two women, and also to the current new relationship between Bui and her baby. In fact, throughout her autographics, Bui depicts her feelings of inadequacy and indebtedness, equally as a daughter, a mother, and a second-generation migrant.

Whereas Bui's mother succeeds in swiftly finding a job in the United States, her father stays at home and remains an apathic and frightening figure while Bui is growing up. Spectral lines connect the young Bui to her father in these frames. He is often portrayed smoking, and the clouds of vapour that Bui draws form dark eerie shadows that linger over and link the two troubled figures. Bui frequently juxtaposes pictures of her father as a young boy in Việt Nam with her own child self. Connected by fluid dark lines, both the child figures experience feelings of loss and anxiety: her father as a boy, due to colonialism and conflicts in his country and with his own father; and the girl in the United States while growing up, due to her family's trauma and shadows of the past. Additionally, in the United States her father becomes over-anxious, almost paranoid. In a caption, Bui writes about her father: 'Afraid of my father, craving safety and comfort. I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own'.[63] Bui fantasises of being free from these shadows and frightful lines of her father, and on a whole page the young girl in her dream is illustrated floating, almost swimming, above her family's apartment and her small world. [64]

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[63] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 129.
[64] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 89.

In relation to Bui's autographics and her metaphors of water, it is significant to point out that in comic jargon a panel that takes up a whole page is called a 'splash page'. Bui seems to use splash pages to enhance the aquatic register. This splash of a dreaming and frightened girl also echoes Hirsch's comment regarding postmemory, and her own anxiety as a child that was passed down to her by her relatives who had experienced the Holocaust. Hirsch in fact writes: 'These moments from their past were the stuff of dreams and nighttime fears for, as a child, it was at night, particularly, that I imagined myself into the lives they were passing down to me, no doubt without realizing it.'[65] In adulthood, Bui longs to understand the origins of her father's suffering, which in turn caused feelings of disruption in her own childhood. By diving into the past and figuratively following old dark cloudy lines, Bui thus hopes to be able to draw new and lighter lines of connection with her father.

Through words and drawings, which for Chute are the reason for the 'unresolvable interplay of elements of absence and presence' in autographics,[66] Bui can effectively portray a great emotional distance between herself and her parents, although they are physically close to each other.[67] Bui aims to bridge this gap by means of her illustrations.[68] She wishes for independence from a nation she barely knows, from a colonial trauma that she experienced second-hand, and from parents she is tied to by bloodlines and grey shadows of the past. Can Bui erase these lines of inheritance so that her son can be free of the haunting presence of the family's past?

The last pages of the autographics show that Bui's figurative journey was a successful one. Regarding her role as a daughter, she understands that she will never be

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[65] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory,* p. 4.
[66] Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn,* p. 17.
[67] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 31. About her relationship with her parents, here Bui writes: 'proximity and closeness are not the same thing'.
[68] In the foreword of her book, Bui explains that she taught herself how to draw, in order to illustrate the story of her family: see Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. i; in this respect, see also Momo Chang, 'Best Graphic Novelist Fighting for the Underdog: Thi Bui 2018', *East Bay Express – The People Issue*, 2018 <https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/best-graphic-novelist-fighting-for-the-underdog/BestOf?oid=19153829> [accessed 4 November 2020].

able to reward her parents for their migratory journey towards humanity and safety. She is now a mother herself, and realises that life is simply 'a gift that is too great' to repay.[69] Regarding the figure of a migrant, Bui acknowledges that she no longer feels 'the need to reclaim a HOMELAND'.[70] Bui is now an adult with plural and fluid attachments. Concerning her role as a mother, Bui realises that she might not necessarily have passed 'some gene for sorrow' on to her son.[71] As opposed to the first images of the mother holding her baby, in the last image of the woman breastfeeding her baby towards the end of the book, the lines of the drip have disappeared, thus indicating that fluids are no longer blatantly flowing into and connecting the bodies of these two figures. In the very last double-page spread of the book, however, Bui's son is still seemingly connected to water and fluid lines. On this last page, viewers can share the mother's perspective and observe a young boy playing in waves, and who then finally swims away from them underwater. These visual images are accompanied by the textual elements: 'But when I look at my son, now ten years old, I don't see war and loss or even Travis and me. I see a new life, bound with mine quite by coincidence, and I think maybe he can be free'.[72] Whereas the text suggests that the young boy who is swimming away represents freedom and that everything has been set right after Bui's search for an origin story, the image of her son in water, as I will discuss in more detail below, emphasises the boy's similarities and connectedness to his Vietnamese grandparents and heritage. This in turn challenges the textual reference related to being connected by chance and raises the question of whether we can ever float fully free of the relations and circumstances that delivered us? While Bui's drawings of lines stress broken and incomplete attachments, her images of water suggest that there is always an inheritance, albeit an incomplete and fleeting one at times.

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[69] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 325.
[70] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 326.
[71] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 327.
[72] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* pp. 328–9. Travis is Bui's husband.

Both the illustrations, at the beginning and at the end of Bui's autographics, show mobile stages in which a child breaks away from his mother, and the parallelism of motion and flight is clear. Human beings seemingly either refuse or are not allowed to stay in place, and are thus always migrating. As she reveals in an interview, in her autographics that she created while teaching in a school for immigrants that she helped to establish in Oakland, Bui 'thought she'd be drawing parallels between the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and that which brought her family to the States'.[73] On the one hand, floating away underneath black watery lines, Bui's son is pictured as being 'free'. Rather than increasing visibility and awareness about new waves of refugees, this final image of Bui's son, in a genre that compels viewers to constantly engage in movement and hybridity, risks masking the specific reality of millions of people all over the world who are currently trying to move towards 'freedom'.[74] On the other hand, the final splash of a passive, invisible and speechless boy underwater can reawaken the images of refugees' bodies drowning in water and floating across the ocean, and thus encourage viewers' participation.

To understand the ambivalent meanings of the important final image of Bui's autographics, in which her son is on the one hand invisible under water but on the other hand partly visible to the book's viewers, it is useful to compare images of swimming bodies in this work. Below in Figure 8, images of Bui's father, mother, and son in water can be seen. The picture of Bui's son, is significantly the very last image in Bui's autographics; it deserves special attention because it is a splash, and thus occupies the full

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[73] For this interview, see Fiona Zublin, 'From Refugee to Graphic Novelist – A Story Four Decades in the Making', *OZY – A Modern Media Company*, 2017 <https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/from-refugee-to-graphic-novelist-a-story-four-decades-in-the-making/80719/> [accessed 4 November 2020].

[74] According to a 2020 report by the UNHCR, at the end of 2019 there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced in the world, as a consequence 'of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order'. Statistics and Demographics Section Global Data Service UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency – The UN Refugee Agency, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*, Global Trends (Copenhagen: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 18 June 2020), pp. 1–84 <https://www.unhcr.org/dach/de/ueber-uns/zahlen-im-ueberblick> [accessed 11 October 2020].

last page of the book. The pictures below are not the original proportions of the images, and I am illustrating them in this way here for comparative purposes.

Bui reproduces the oral memories of her parents separately. She begins with her father's past and then moves on to that of her mother. Interestingly, in both these sections, Bui chooses to depict the moments in which her parents teach themselves how to swim as children. Bui's father learns to swim at the age of eleven in a pond in Hải Phòng, in northern Việt Nam, whereas Bui's mother is seven when she begins to swim on her own in Nha Trang, a coastal city in the country's south. In the pond in Hải Phòng, nobody else is in sight, and the young boy ingeniously teaches himself to swim by firstly holding on to a washtub and then by paddling with a plank of wood.[75] Bui's mother goes to a beach in Nha Trang with her older sister, who spends the time having deep conversations with a friend; thus, left alone in the water, Bui's mother learns to swim by playing by herself for hours in the waves.[76]

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[75] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 97.
[76] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* p. 139.

Figure 8. Images of children swimming in Thi Bui's *The Best We Could Do,* Abrams ComicArts.

In Figure 8 it can be observed that in the panels that illustrate the important moves in the lives of the children in Việt Nam, the faces of the boy and girl are above water, and they seem to be looking and swimming towards the viewer.[77] As nobody else in the images is actively observing the two children, the viewers of Bui's autographics appear to be the only first-hand witnesses of these two transitory and agentic processes. Viewers can clearly see the simplified form of the two cartoon faces of the children as expressing McCloud's notion that acts of character identification are an integral part of the process of comic-reading because of their high degree of 'viewer involvement';[78] thus, Bui allows the empathetic identification of viewers to be stimulated in these two episodes. In observing this moment and seeing the faces of the swimmers, viewers imaginatively share the children's struggles in the murky waters of Việt Nam, and their ultimate joy and pride.

In contrast to these moments of triumph in which the viewers are figuratively alone with the children, in the final image, viewers share Bui's perspective. The mother

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[77] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* pp. 97, 139 and 329. Please note that these are not the original proportions of the images.
[78] McCloud, p. 204.

is watching her son in the water, and both the face and body of the ten-year-old boy are turned away from her. Whereas the children in Việt Nam were free to swim on their own, and viewers could participate in their success because their faces were illustrated, in the very last image of this autographics, viewers passively observe a boy who is attempting to float away in what resembles a pool of blood, and the image leaves little space for active viewer involvement. Yet, the stark contrast of these moments in water is suggestive of swimming being an act of survival in Việt Nam, as opposed to floating as a child's play in the United States.

During their perilous journey across the South China Sea in a small boat, Bui's father falls overboard, and viewers can observe the three sharp blades of a motorboat's propeller moving dangerously and swiftly towards the vulnerable man in the water. Struggling to push himself away from the boat, Bui's father thinks back to when he first learnt to swim as a boy in the Hải Phòng pond near his home, with a wooden plank. Bui can forcibly illustrate this recollection by means of juxtaposing images of the past and the present on the same page. In fact, alongside the man almost drowning in water, Bui reproduces the previous panel of her father as a child in the Hải Phòng pond.[79] The act of swimming of an innocent child, which viewers previously witnessed with pride, is now presented next to the act of swimming of an adult Vietnamese boat man who moves in water in order to survive. Recalling his own image as a boy in a pond, Bui's father regains the strength to swim alone to the Malaysian shore.

Whereas viewers are allowed to share the contented facial expressions of Bui's mother and father as children while they are learning how to swim, and then the panic of her father as an adult refugee in the extreme close-up panels when he is on the brink of drowning, in the final splash, it could be argued that in hiding her son's face from the viewer, Bui is preventing collective viewer involvement. McCloud claims that the cartoon

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[79] Bui, *The Best We Could Do,* pp. 97 and 255–6.

is a form of 'amplification through simplification', and it is due to the 'universality of cartoon imagery' that comic art speaks to a wide audience.[80] For him, the simplified form of cartoon faces invites viewers to participate in an indirect sign-reading passage that is unique to comics. McCloud calls this experience 'masking'. If we are to think of the lack of detail that the illustrators apply to the animals in *Maus*, or to the black and white faces in *Persepolis*, masking means that due to these sparse details, viewers empathise with the suffering of the figures more than they would with more specific visual elements. The simple cartoon character can serve as a mask that is like an 'empty shell' because, according to McCloud, it is a 'vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled'.[81] Consequently, by extending their own identities into this mask, viewers 'become' the cartoon.[82] Considering Bui's final image, one might pose the question: In hiding her son's face, is the life writer interfering with McCloud's notion of masking, and thus impeding the ability of viewers of all ages to 'travel to another realm'[83] and to engage in global refugee crises?

Although the image of Alan Kurdi that went viral in 2015 is clearly not a cartoon drawing and should not be reduced to one, it does, however, suggest that some of McCloud's theories of 1993 are outdated in the twenty-first century, at a time when more and more scholars are addressing the meaning of visual materials. In lying face-down on a beach, the expression of the Syrian toddler could not be observed by viewers; yet this absence did not prevent many of them from being pulled into the empty shell of the picture, from filling in the blanks and wondering why the young boy was dead and alone on Turkish sands, far away from Syria and his family and friends.

When considering the ability that pictures might have for conveying abstract and complex meanings, it is important to point out that Bui completed two master's

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[80] McCloud, p. 30.
[81] McCloud, p. 36.
[82] McCloud, p. 36.
[83] McCloud, p. 36.

programmes, one in fine art and one in education. While compiling her family's story of migration for one of her master's theses, as she reveals in an interview, she aimed to illustrate experiences 'in a way that had lots of photographs and visuals', yet the outcome was 'still pretty academic'.[84] Subsequently, influenced by her own experience of motherhood, Bui decided to study comics on her own, in order to forcibly *show* her parents as human beings rather than simply as a mother and father, or within the context of migration as 'others'.[85] Although the final image of her son in her autographics is 'masked', in that it does not reveal his face, its aim is still to portray humanity in a simple and effective way.

Admittedly, Bui allows viewers to project themselves into the Vietnamese characters while they are swimming in Asian waters; whereas in the final image, viewers are not allowed to examine the facial expression of her son. As a mother, Bui's aim is to protect her own son, so that he is not turned into a figure of enquiry. Instead, Bui directs the flow of viewers' attention back to liquidity: to water and blood, which are fundamental to the story of her parents and the passages of Vietnamese refugees. In illustrating a body silently drifting in an excess of water and blood, Bui also ultimately conjures images of ongoing tragic voyages across waters in search of freedom.

Bui uses watery passages as a prominent image throughout her autographics, in order to illustrate the preoccupations of boat people, of the daughter of refugees, and of a mother and a life writer who wishes to fill in gaps of the past as a means of drawing a safer future. Bui's ultimate aim is for her son to float away from her and the viewer, in order to find a way to be independent from them and the 'guardianship' of a traumatic personal and generational past.[86] Whereas for Bui's parents swimming was ultimately a way to escape conflict and survive in adulthood, the final image also reproduces important

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[84] For this interview, see Lanning.
[85] Lanning.
[86] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory,* p. 1. Here, Hirsch uses Eva Hoffman's notion of the 'guardianship of the Holocaust'.

stages of their childhood and is therefore also a way of relating to them. It emphasises that swimming can create a sense of both agency and kinship. Similarly to the birth of Bui's son on the first page of the book, his steps, or strokes, towards autonomy on this last page take place in liquids. Furthermore, this figurative act of being born again occurs simultaneously with the creation of Bui's 'second child': the autographics itself. Instead of being tied down by the trauma of his ancestors and by the weight of having to fill in gaps, Bui's son now has a book that can help him clearly see some of the lines that connect him with Việt Nam.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how Bui uses images and genre to depict the experience of moving in girlhood with her family, due to forced migration. Before moving on in the following chapter to examine the life writing of Susan Abulhawa, who relocated recurrently alone in childhood, it is interesting to observe that in Bui's life writing, like those of Liang and Hoque, the migration of her parents and ancestors entwines with her own feelings of dislocation and instability. Amidst the prevailing silence and confusion surrounding family migration, Bui must also attempt to make the contrasting worlds she inhabits cohere. Through the genre of autographics, Bui can effectively illustrate how the postmemory of a child born to parents escaping Việt Nam, the experience of being a girl migrant in the United States, and that of becoming a mother with heavy family ties, all create waves of trauma, confusion, pain, and conflict.

Conflicts and a multi-layered girlhood are shown productively in Hoque's textual life writing by means of multiple perspectives, styles, forms, languages, typographies, and by figures of contradiction, such as oxymora. Instead, Liang's masking in her

autobiographical performance is suggestive of multifariousness, but also of alienation and searching for protection. The visual aspect in Liang's life writing inevitably plays a significant role for the portrayal of cultural, linguistic, migratory, racial, and parental conflicts in girlhood. However, Bui's life writing shows how the genre of autographics lends itself particularly well to the portrayal of hybrid, multi-layered experiences, of recurrent passages, and – most significantly for the child of the forced migrant and war survivor – the representation of gaps, silencing, and absences.

Engaging with pluralities and juxtapositions of words and images, in autographics the eyes of viewers must constantly wander across panels, and in the liminal space of the gaps between panels they must create new meanings. This results in a hybrid genre, in which viewers must translate passages and gaps into new spaces of meaning. In drawing her childhood experiences, Bui can decide what should be looked at and interpreted. The analysis of Figure 6 has shown that Bui, like Liang and Hoque, was affected in the United States by ways of looking, and classifications. Common to the CCK experience is that of profoundly observing one's surroundings in childhood, and at the same time being scrutinised intensely by peers due to one's atypical ways and appearance. In adulthood, however, Bui can 'draw back' and superintend the viewing of her childhood experiences by selecting a genre of life writing that strongly relies on visual forms.

As Chute and Marianne DeKoven affirm in their introduction to the 2006 *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on the graphic narrative, 'one might say, in the present moment, images have never been more important, or more under siege'.[87] As a self-taught graphic artist, Bui uses paints and her brush to draw images of bodies in watery lines to exemplify a Vietnamese family's story of migration, loss, trauma and resilience. Although her book's final image, of her son floating in blood-like waters under

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[87] Hillary L. Chute and Marianne DeKoven, 'Introduction: Graphic Narrative', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 52.4 Winter (2006), 767–82 (p. 771) <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2007.0002>.

surveillance, risks representing passivity, vulnerability, and disempowerment in childhood, nevertheless the last page of her autographics ultimately conjures images of current voyages across waters in search of safety. Thus, Bui too, at the end of her life writing, uses the visual image of a child to remind viewers of the Global North to pay attention to individual refugee stories.

Chapter Four:
Witnessing Conflict in Childhood in Susan Abulhawa's
'Memories in an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna'

Introduction: 'Third Culture Authors' and Writing for Justice

I was always writing, but had not thought about myself as a writer. It was a very private thing. During the second intifada, I was so angry with the reporting being done in mainstream media in the United States. It was just so, so wrong.[1]

– Susan Abulhawa

Much of my work as a writer and lecturer was concerned with refuting the misrepresentations and dehuminizations of our history, trying at the same time to give the Palestinian narrative – so effectively blotted out by the media and legions of antagonistic polemicists – a presence and a human shape. [. . .] With the exception of one or two novelists and poets, no one has ever rendered this terrible state of affairs better than Joe Sacco.[2]

– Edward Wadie Said

The three previous chapters began with epigraphs by contemporary authors who were raised in the TC, such as Amélie Nothomb and Riad Sattouf. In childhood, Edward Said also moved recurrently across geographical, cultural and linguistic borders. Born in 1935, Said spent his childhood in Jerusalem during the British Mandate in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and the United States.[3] Consequently, Said could be considered a prominent 'Third Culture Author' (TCA), as Rauwerda calls writers who grew up outside their passport nations, 'in a series of host countries'.[4] Yet, Rauwerda does not refer to Said in her book about TCL. Similarly, in her more recent online list of these writers, who are divided into groups such as 'TCA memoirs' and 'Colonial-Era TCAs', there is no mention

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[1] Shreya Ila Anasuya, '"Not Even One Mainstream Newspaper Touched It": Susan Abulhawa on Writing Palestine', *Scroll.In* (USA and India, 20 March 2016) <https://scroll.in/article/805369/not-even-one-mainstream-newspaper-touched-it-susan-abulhawa-on-writing-palestine> [accessed 7 April 2020].

[2] Edward W. Said, 'Introduction – Homage to Joe Sacco', in *Palestine Collection*, by Joe Sacco (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2014), pp. i–v, pp. i and iii.

[3] Edward W. Said, 'No Reconciliation Allowed', in *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*, ed. by André Aciman (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 87–114, p. 97. Here, Said writes about summers spent in Dhour el Shweir in Lebanon.

[4] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* p. 7.

of Said and his life writing about his transient childhood.[5] This omission might seem to be an act of 'blotting out' Palestinian stories in the United States (where Rauwerda is based), such as both Said and the writer Susan Abulhawa denounce in the above epigraphs. However, considering Said's writings about the experiences of exiles and his political activism, it is more likely that Rauwerda regards him as more than simply the offspring of 'expatriates'. In fact, Rauwerda focuses her literary examinations primarily on novels written by authors who in childhood frequently relocated 'under the auspices of organizations like the military'; and according to her, this kind of fiction differs significantly from postcolonial, diasporic and exile writings.[6]

Exiles, as Said argues, are banished individuals who live 'anomalous and miserable', lonely and spiritual lives in host countries, 'with the stigma of being an outsider'.[7] 'Expatriates', on the other hand, as both Rauwerda and Said point out, move more freely and 'voluntarily live in an alien country'.[8] Whereas exiles tend to blend aesthetic and political concerns in their works, for Rauwerda, 'the hallmarks of the literature of third culture authors like Martel is the omission of "dissatisfaction" with politics'.[9] According to her, this is true of the writings of Ian McEwan too, who grew up as a 'military brat' in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Libya and Germany. However, McEwan's dissatisfaction with Brexit politics is unmistakeable in his recent novella *The Cockroach*.[10] Valeria Luiselli is another example of a TCA, who is deeply concerned

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[5] Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: Third Culture Kids Who Write: A Growing List of Third Culture Authors', *Third Culture Literature*, 2017 <http://thirdcultureliterature.blogspot.com/2014/07/an-ever-growing-list-of-third-culture.html> [accessed 18 January 2021].

[6] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood,* p. 7.

[7] Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 144.

[8] Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays,* p. 144.

[9] Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan": Unexpectedly International Writing', *Wasafiri*, 25.3 (2010), 16–23 (p. 19). Here, Rauwerda gives the example of the works of Yann Martel, who grew up in Spain, Portugal, Canada, Costa Rica and Mexico due to the assignments of his parents, who worked for the Canadian foreign service.

[10] Ian McEwan, *The Cockroach* (London: Vintage, 2019); although Rauwerda contends that McEwan's novels are apolitical, other literary scholars, such as Pascal Nicklas, have argued that many of McEwan's novels, such as *Amsterdam,* contain political and social critique too. In this respect, see Pascal Nicklas, *Ian McEwan: Art and Politics* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009).

about the current political situation in the United States in her writings.[11] Moreover, the 'comics journalism' of Joe Sacco testifies that individuals who move in childhood due to the career choices of their parents can also be concerned with blending the artistic and the political in their works in adulthood.[12]

Born in 1960 in Kirkop, Malta, to Maltese parents, Sacco grew up in Malta, Australia and the United States, due to his parents' career and ideological choices. In recent interviews Sacco has disclosed that he felt that the American media that he grew up with in the 1970 and 1980s misrepresented the situation between Israelis and Palestinians. In 1991, he therefore travelled to the Middle East and eventually produced nine comics about the daily lives of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. The single-volume edition in 2001 of his complete *Palestine* series begins with an introduction by Said.[13] Said's willingness to write an introduction to this volume indicates Sacco's ability to create graphic portraits of Palestinian individuals that are not overshadowed by stereotypical assumptions of the Western observer, and which are concerned with global political affairs. Hence, the writings of Sacco, Said, Luiselli and the most recent novel of McEwan pose the question of whether TCL really does neglect important political issues, and of which writers can be classified as TCAs.

In this chapter, I will challenge the notion that TCKs lack affiliation with their parents' home countries, and that TCL varies significantly from postcolonial and exilic writings, by exploring the symbols and genres of life writing used by Susan Abulhawa in her autobiographical essay 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna'.[14] I

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[11] Valeria Luiselli's father worked as a diplomat for the Mexican foreign office, and she grew up in Mexico, the United States, Costa Rica, South Korea and South Africa. In her works, she examines, for example, the plight of refugee children in the United States; see Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2017).

[12] Gillian Whitlock refers to Sacco's cartoon reportages as 'comics journalism', see Gillian Whitlock, 'Joe Sacco's Australian Story', in *The Limits of Life Writing*, ed. by David McCooey and Maria Takolander (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 7–20; for further discussion on the works of Joe Sacco, see also Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016).

[13] Joe Sacco, *Palestine Collection* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, reprint of 2014).

[14] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna'.

will argue that this text demonstrates that children who are forced to migrate due to political disruptions do indeed have strong national ties to an original home country. By placing Abulhawa in a context of canonical political writing alongside authors such as Said, an expanded perspective is gained, and consequently a more heterogeneous picture of TCAs can be delineated.

Moreover, in the previous chapters, I considered a type of mobility in childhood that is caused by adults deciding to move voluntarily to a new country. I have chosen to examine Abulhawa's 'Memories in an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna' because in the past, TCL has neglected the stories of children who move *alone* frequently, because they grow up in foster care.[15] Additionally, as mentioned in the previous chapters, TCK discourse has focused predominantly on the offspring of 'expatriates' who attend private international schools and who generally live in secluded compounds. Paradoxically, as a child, Abulhawa also spent many years in an exclusive and exceptional school in a segregated area. However, hers was a school in an orphanage that was founded for the offspring of Palestinians who had died during the 1948 Palestine war, and is located in East Jerusalem. This chapter thus contributes to the critical fields of life writing, transcultural adoption, and existing TCK and CCK frameworks, as it focuses on the underexamined experience of growing up internationally in both refugee and foster care environments at the end of the twentieth century.

Abulhawa's 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna' is the first text in a collection of personal reflections of 2013, called *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*.[16] Although some of Abulhawa's fiction includes

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[15] For further life writing about growing up in multiple countries and about transcultural adoption, see Hannah Pool, *My Fathers' Daughter: A Story of Family and Belonging* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005). Hannah Pool was born in Eritrea and grew up in Sudan, Norway and the United Kingdom; additionally, for life writing about growing up on the move and alternative family forms, see Jane Alison, *The Sisters Antipodes: A Memoir* (New York: Mariner Books, 2010).

[16] *Seeking Palestine: New Palestinian Writing on Exile and Home*, ed. by Penny Johnson and Raja Shehadeh (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2013).

autobiographical details, in this text, the writer fully recounts her mobile childhood for the first time. Born in 1970 to refugees of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Abulhawa grew up in Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan and the United States. In this non-linear narrative, Abulhawa uses the first-person voice to disclose information about the transient lives of her ancestors, as well as her own. Readers are informed that Abulhawa's mother also spent many years in the Dar al-Tifl orphanage, where Abulhawa was later to live. Here at the orphanage, her mother received a scholarship and went to Germany to study nursing. When she finished her studies in 1967, her mother was unable to return to Palestine as it had just been occupied by Israel; Abulhawa's mother therefore went to Kuwait, 'where Palestinian refugees flocked as cheap labor'.[17] Abulhawa was thus born in Kuwait, to two Palestinian refugees. After their divorce, as an infant, Abulhawa was 'abandoned' by her mother in the United States, where she lived with her aunt and uncle until the age of five.[18] The young girl then moved back to Kuwait to live with her mother. Abulhawa's mother had remarried 'an important person in Kuwait with a lot of stars on his army uniform'.[19] About this man, Abulhawa reveals that he

> molested me when I was seven years old, long before she married him. It would be at least twenty-five years before I would admit to anyone that at the age of eight, when my mother married my molester, I became my stepfather's mistress. Until I burned down their home.[20]

After this incident, at the age of nine, Abulhawa is sent to live in Jordan with a relative; she is subsequently passed 'from one relative to another' for a year,[21] until in 1980, her

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[17] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 8.
[18] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 8.
[19] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 9.
[20] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 9.
[21] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 10.

maternal grandmother arrives from Kuwait and shows her how to 'sneak into the West Bank through the Allenby bridge'.[22] Once in Jerusalem, Abulhawa is left at the orphanage by her grandmother; she lives here until the age of thirteen, when she is sent to live with her father in North Carolina, in the United States. Here she is abused by her violent biological father; then, after having lived in several foster homes, she is moved by the North Carolina social services to a children's home in Thomasville, where she stays until the age of seventeen. About this period, Abulhawa writes: 'Before the age of sixteen, I had lived in twenty-one different homes, only two of which were with either of my parents. The rest were with relatives, in foster care or at institutions'.[23]

Owing to the complicated Israeli-Palestinian struggle and the 'Question of Palestine',[24] it is important to specify at this early stage that throughout this chapter I am presenting Abulhawa's own points of view regarding this conflict; and when I critique her text, it is in relation to her representations of the figure of the moving child, and not because of her political opinions regarding the 'Question of Palestine'. I ended the previous chapter by quoting Adichie, who argues that there is never one single story. This is very similar to the notions of Said, Sacco and Abulhawa, who wish to present readers in the West with a new story of the Palestinians. However, I acknowledge that for some, their representations might seem to reflect only one side of a story that is composed of multiple voices. Along Adichie's line of postcolonial and intersectional thinking that encourages the thorough consideration of relationships of privilege and oppression, if one seeks a diverse perspective from which the historical Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been perceived by contemporary authors who have grown up in many countries and cultures

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[22] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 11. Allenby bridge crosses the Jordan River and connects Jordan with the West Bank.

[23] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 14.

[24] For further details regarding the 'Question of Palestine', see United Nations, 'History of the Question of Palestine', *The Question of Palestine* <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/> [accessed 20 April 2020]; see also Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, Reissue (New York: Vintage, 1992).

and who have strong ties to Israel, one could, for example, consider the life writing of

Miriam Libicki and Vladimir Vertlib.[25]

Images of Childhood and Theft: Traumatised and Out of Place in a 'Family'

In the US, I lived in the foster care system. My childhood was quite unstable and unrooted, owing mostly to family circumstances. I have mostly felt my way through life.[26]

– Susan Abulhawa

Unaccompanied minors aren't waved into the country. They are questioned, doubted. […] They are cold, hungry. They don't savour freedom; they crave their families.[27]

– Dina Nayeri

In his life writing *Out of Place: A Memoir*, Said begins the portrayal of his childhood by

stating that there was a mistake regarding how he was 'invented' by his family and how

he was meant to fit in with his parents and siblings.[28] Said was the misfit, who often felt

out of place. Abulhawa too begins her short piece of life writing 'Memories of an Un-

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[25] Miriam Libicki is an American Jewish cartoonist who has written a graphic memoir about enlisting in the Israeli Army. For a recent interview and her biography, see Noah Berlatsky, 'Author Miriam Libicki Thinks Jewish Identity Is Complicated', *Medium*, 12 September 2016 <https://medium.com/the-establishment/author-miriam-libicki-thinks-jewish-identity-is-complicated-4f3290aa3728> [accessed 24 April 2020]. Vladimir Vertlib grew up in Russia, Israel, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States. Vertlib describes his childhood on the move in German in *Zwischenstationen: Roman* (*In between stations*, my translation); see Vladimir Vertlib, *Zwischenstationen: Roman* (München: dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005).

[26] Olivia Snaije, 'The Many Lives and Languages of a Palestinian Novel', *Publishing Perspectives* (New York, 21 March 2012) <http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/03/the-many-lives-and-languages-of-a-palestinian-novel/> [accessed 14 April 2020].

[27] Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2019), p. 363. Significantly for TCK, CCK and TCL notions, in this life writing Nayeri discusses being a chameleon, shedding skins and telling stories ('Each time we uprooted we had the option of crafting ourselves anew. I've always taken it', p. 350). Nayeri grew up in Iran, The Emirate of Dubai, Italy and the United States.

[28] Said, *Out of Place,* p. 3. Here, Said writes: 'All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters'.

Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna' with an image of deviance, and more specifically, by exclaiming 'I was a thief'.[29] Here, the life writer is recollecting an episode that occurred in the mid-1980s, when the young girl allegedly stole a tin of tuna. The protagonist was then thirteen years old and living in an orphanage in Jerusalem. In a parallel manner to Said's opening, Abulhawa immediately challenges the depiction of offspring in normative 'happy' families and disavows an image of the child that underscores romantic innocence. A girl in an orphanage, thus not in a stereotypical family, has violated established norms. Figuratively then, at the beginning of the story, she is similar to the can of tuna – she is a fish out of water. Consequently, throughout her life writing, Abulhawa too represents her young self as a marginalised individual, and as a person who is deeply engaged in understanding her place both within a family and a world that denies the rights of the Palestinians.

In the following analytical sections, I will explore Abulhawa's image of theft, and I will argue that the author uses forms of deviance to reflect the young girl's family situation. Although in childhood Abulhawa aspires to live with her biological mother and father, she is deprived of an idealised concept of families and must consequently search elsewhere for alternative forms of kinship. Images of transgression are maintained by Abulhawa throughout her text; I will therefore also analyse the writer's use of legal rhetoric. I will contend that Abulhawa sets her life writing within a legal framework in order to reflect personal, social and political situations. Throughout the analytical sections on Abulhawa's text, I will continue to position her life writing and activism alongside those of Said, in order to emphasise the similarities between these authors, who both grew up experiencing feelings of alienation in the TC.

Although Abulhawa begins her text by exclaiming that she has committed a crime, the young girl might in fact not have stolen the can of tuna. Recollecting an evening when

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[29] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 4.

Abulhawa was summoned by Sitt Hind, the head of the orphanage, the life writer remembers having felt dirty due to the liquid from the tuna can on her hands. Earlier on that day, recognising that she was hungry, Um Hasan, the cook of the orphanage, might have secretly given the young Abulhawa a can of tuna, as she had done in the past:

> There wasn't enough food for Um Hasan to do that for every girl, so she singled out a few of us for clandestine snacks. She picked the runts, the ones who likely couldn't fend for themselves, or those of us who were clearly hungry and undernourished and, importantly, those of us who wouldn't tattle and make her lose her job.[30]

Thus the can of tuna might not have been stolen, but might have been given to a young girl who was hungry. Why then does Abulhawa immediately introduce herself as someone who has committed a crime? Is Abulhawa a perpetrator or a victim?

Additionally to this theft crime, a few sentences later, readers are informed that the offender has also committed a criminal trespass, as she is in a classroom after school hours – an act which is not allowed under the orphanage's regulations. Moreover, it is also disclosed to readers that the young girl has committed arson too. In introducing a young girl who is admitting her past guilt, the writer sharply awakens the reader's attention, and immediately creates a sense of legal atmosphere. The young Abulhawa in fact seems to be testifying under oath in a court. She is the defendant, who is apparently pleading guilty to several crimes she has committed in the past. Considering that this is a text about family, social and political wrongdoing, it is a shrewd narrative strategy to begin the life writing in a judicial style.

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[30] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 5.

Legally, in order to be found guilty of a crime such as theft, as lawyers explain, one must have had 'a guilty "state of mind" at the time of the offence', and 'doing something accidently is generally not enough to support a guilty plea for most offences'.[31] In recalling that the orphanage's cook, Um Hasan, occasionally gave the young girl 'clandestine snacks',[32] Abulhawa is seemingly asking to be acquitted, as she did not purposely steal a can of tuna fish. Moreover, as Krista McCormack states, in court cases, pathos, ethos and logos can be introduced 'to affect trial outcomes'.[33] In her 'almost legalist act of truth-telling', as Gilmore defines autobiographical 'limit-cases',[34] the life writer effectively argues her position (of innocence) by utilising Aristotle's three modes of proof. Readers are informed that Um Hasan realised that the young girl was often hungry, and was forced to pick up and eat 'discarded crusts' of sandwiches.[35] The emotions of the readers (the fictive judges) are thus stirred. Here the life writer utilises pathos (emotional appeal); and consequently the readers' ability to make a decision might be influenced by understanding the feelings of the starved young girl. Abulhawa attempts to affect the readers by subsequently listing her virtues: for example, that she was obedient and had good grades. The life writer explicitly states that the 'matter of stealing tuna [. . .] should not count against' her.[36]

In listing the benevolent traits of the young protagonist, Abulhawa is presenting herself as a credible and good person, and is thus using 'ethos' (ethical appeal) to persuade her audience to overlook her crimes. Immediately after this episode of alleged theft, the girl is told by the head of the orphanage that she can go and live with her father in the United States. Later on in the story, the reader is informed that her father has abused her

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[31] 'What Does Being Guilty of an Offence Mean?', *Lawfacts.Ca* <http://lawfacts.ca/node/97> [accessed 21 April 2020].

[32] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 5.

[33] Krista McCormack, 'Ethos, Pathos, and Logos: The Benefits of Aristotelian Rhetoric in the Courtroom', *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, 7.1 (2014), 131–55 (p. 140).

[34] Leigh Gilmore, 'Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity', *Biography*, 24.1 (2001), 128–39 (p. 129).

[35] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 5.

[36] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 5.

and that he has been 'convicted of misdemeanor child abuse'.[37] Abulhawa uses flashbacks throughout her story, but if the reader is to consider both the above theft episode and other important facts in a linear order, it would seem that the audience is being convinced by use of logic ('logos') that the narrator was punished enough after this crime. In the case of the girl's crimes, Abulhawa's audience is therefore not required to decide on a further sanction.

Whereas at the beginning of the story, Abulhawa initially claims that she is guilty and subsequently proves her innocence to her readers as a legal and narrative strategy, when recounting the next crime, the life writer adopts the opposite strategy. Firstly, Abulhawa reveals that she was sexually molested by her stepfather, and then she discloses the reasons why she burned down his house. In a similar way to the opening of the story, when Abulhawa confesses this further crime, the revelation stands alone in one short sentence in order to emphasise her wrongdoing ('Until I burned down their home').[38] Instead of being given a can of tuna in a furtive way, in this case the young girl damages someone else's property ('their home'). Although she previously called herself a thief, here Abulhawa does not use the term 'arsonist', and she does not need to subsequently persuade the audience that she was innocent. Using chronology as narration in this case, Abulhawa's audience can easily reach the conclusion that the girl was traumatised after repeated rape, and that she did not possess a guilty state of mind at the time of this crime either.

Both of these admissions of guilt could be interpreted as forms of confession or conversion within the framework of life writing, in which, according to Smith and Watson, the narrator records 'some kind of error transformed'.[39] At the core of Abulhawa's story is, however, the traumatic experience of being exploited and harmed in

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[37] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 13.
[38] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 9.
[39] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 265-6.

childhood. Hers is thus an act of witnessing, which, as Smith and Watson explain, 'is indicative of how subjects respond to trauma'.[40] In her book *Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Gilmore argues that traumatic memoirs of abused girls challenge the limits of autobiography because their narrators do not tell their stories in a conventional way. In these 'limit-cases', as she calls them, several forms are combined, and in 'their movement from an overtly testimonial form to one that draws on legal as well as literary knowledge, such texts produce an alternative means of confronting kinship, violence, and self-representation'.[41] According to her, without 'recourse to locations outside the law, these stories could not be told'[42] – for example, because their statutory deadline has passed, and it is therefore no longer possible to file a claim related to a past incident. This is the first piece of life writing in which Abulhawa writes about her violent teenage years spent in the United States with her father; and, as she discloses in this story, it took her twenty-five years to talk about the sexual abuse by her stepfather, which began when she was seven years old. Assuming that Abulhawa could not file charges against her stepfather for legal and personal reasons, it is through her life writing – or, using Gilmore's terms, in this production of 'alternative jurisprudence'[43] – that the author can finally reveal an unspeakable and confusing childhood trauma.

When discussing notions of 'truth' in autobiographies of traumatic childhood, in her book *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory*, Douglas argues that 'those experiencing trauma commonly experience difficulties in remembering'.[44] This poses the question of whether Abulhawa at the beginning of the story inaccurately presents herself as a thief, and thus as a dubious adult narrator who has forgotten parts of the past after many years, or whether the life writer has deliberately forgotten and omitted

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[40] Smith and Watson, p. 285.
[41] See book cover of Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
[42] Gilmore, 'Limit-Cases', p. 134.
[43] Gilmore, 'Limit-Cases', p. 134.
[44] Douglas, p. 109.

unwanted memories. How can the reader then judge who are the victims and perpetrators of the events in this text, if the stories are not recounted truthfully? What are the rights of the child in this case, if she is a thief? As Douglas writes, 'some of the cultural debates associated with representing child abuse' are 'the reliability of memory – trauma and "forgetting," socio-economic and gender issues associated with trauma and its perpetration, and trauma and the rights of the child'.[45] The image of theft at the beginning of Abulhawa's life writing can also be read as reflecting debates associated with child abuse, trauma and its perpetration, and forgetting.

For Douglas, autobiographies about abuse in childhood 'are a means via which the previously disempowered person (in this instance, the child) can "write back" (as an adult) after the fact, to offer a revised version of events'.[46] In publicly revealing in this autobiographical text that she was raped by her stepfather, Abulhawa does indeed revise situations. An ironic transformation of events is achieved by portraying the young girl (the real victim) as a criminal at the beginning of the life writing; roles are consequently reversed. After the 'arson crime', the young girl is sent away to live with relatives. About this episode, Abulhawa writes:

> Like the times before, I do not recall the details of this abandonment. My memory moves from the grip of my stepfather's stare after the fire, to being in Jordan with a relative, too embarrassed to let anyone know that I had only one pair of panties that I wore and washed at the sink every so often, under the cover of night when the world was sleeping.[47]

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[45] Douglas, p. 111.
[46] Douglas, p. 107.
[47] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 10.

This excerpt demonstrates three important points regarding autobiographies about child abuse: the trauma, unspeakability and shame of rape. Abulhawa's memory, just like the narration of her story, is fragmented. Gilmore points out that one response to trauma can be 'failures in memory'.[48] Similarly to her conversation with Sitt Hind, Abulhawa only remembers parts of the events after she destroyed her molester's house, and there are gaps in her memory. Yet she recalls his monopolising gaze after the incident, which obviously frightened her, and was perhaps one of the reasons why she chose to keep her real motive for the arson a secret for over twenty years. In Kuwait, her stepfather held an important position, and the frightening and violent look he gave the young girl might have been a reminder of this. Under his scrutiny, the girl felt particularly small. Moreover, the fact that the girl was embarrassed to speak to relatives in Jordan about her scant personal possessions indicates that she might have felt guilty and shameful about the crime, and preferred to keep a low profile.

Life writing about abuse in childhood reveals that for many years, these victims often feel guilty or ashamed of what has happened.[49] While attempting to break open the can of tuna fish with a fork and a rock, the young Abulhawa is summoned by another girl from the orphanage, Epsi, to go to the head's home. The 'smelly tuna water leaked and squirted out all over' the protagonist's hands and clothes.[50] Thus, the girl enters the office reeking of tuna fish and she feels dirty, shameful and guilty: 'Now I couldn't even shake Sitt Hind's hand, much less accept her hug when she came towards me with open arms. I just backed away. I was so ashamed of smelling so bad'.[51] The girl is ashamed of her body and feels guilty due to a crime that she thinks she has committed. Yet, before entering Sitt Hind's home, the young girl must shove 'aside the as yet unopened, badly

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[48] Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 31.
[49] Douglas, and Gilmore and Marshall examine the addressing of shame by victims in life writing; see, for example, Douglas, p. 122; and for victims who blame themselves, see Gilmore and Marshall, p. 23.
[50] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 5.
[51] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 7.

battered can of tuna' in a room that is then locked by Epsi.[52] Readers can assume that Abulhawa never managed to open and eat the tuna she had allegedly stolen, and the image of theft is all the more ironical. The battered, punctured, smelly and now useless can of tuna is thus thrown away in a locked room.

The can of fish is small, yet in its image, the life writer has packed an abundance of references to child sexual abuse. Most obviously, a standard-sized tin is petite, like an average seven-year-old girl. After the tin is mishandled, liquid gushes from it and dirties the body of the small girl. It is this smelly watery substance that has squirted onto the girl's clothes and hands that makes her feel dirty and guilty, in front of an almost spotless orphanage director. Due to feelings related to her dirty body, the young girl avoids any type of further physical contact. A filthy act has occurred, after which the can has been thrown on the floor. The type of tuna in this story is not fresh, nor is it preserved in olive oil: it is of the cheap kind, canned in water. Ultimately, the cheap, battered can of tuna fish lies worthlessly in a locked room. This image forcibly reflects the unspeakable feelings of fault that Douglas mentions when describing the experiences of many victims of child sexual abuse, who keep their stories canned and locked up for many years.

In the context of autobiographies of sexual abuse, and in the context of life writing in general, the image of processed fish is an interesting one. When writing about childhood events as an adult, memories are no longer fresh. As in the case of Abulhawa's image of a long-lasting can of tuna fish, former experiences are filtered, altered and packed into small sections of our brain for many years.[53] In the case of distressing memories of the past, as Gilmore explains, there might be failures and gaps, and a perforated and diluted can of processed tuna fish aptly evokes this notion.

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[52] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 6.

[53] For further details about how memories are stored in our brains, see, for example, Benjamin J. Griffiths and Simon Hanslmayr, 'How Memories Are Formed and Retrieved by the Brain Revealed in a New Study', *The Conversation* (UK, 22 October 2019), section Science and Technology <https://theconversation.com/how-memories-are-formed-and-retrieved-by-the-brain-revealed-in-a-new-study-125361> [accessed 28 May 2020].

Additionally, in the context of traumatic incidents, the figure of a girl trying to open a container mirrors the mythical story of Pandora and her 'box'. Pandora was given a jar, yet she was not allowed to open it. While Pandora was ordered not to open the container by the Gods, Abulhawa cannot open her can simply because she does not possess the right tool. Keen to know what is in the jar, Pandora opens it, just as Abulhawa attempts to open her container in order to satiate her hunger. When opening their containers, both girls are aware that they are breaking rules. What seems valuable to the girls is in reality a curse, and both girls are punished for their misconduct. While Pandora releases evil into the world and keeps hope locked inside the box, Abulhawa's futile puncturing of the can is also the start of a slowly escalating situation that will affect her negatively in many countries. In fact, shortly after attempting to open the can, Abulhawa is told that she will go and live with her father, who will then abuse her; and subsequently, the young girl will be passed on to one foster family and institution to the next in the United States, far from Palestine. Although the hungry girl does not manage to eat the tuna fish, she is indeed successful in figuratively opening a can of worms. On the one hand, the expression 'to open a can of worms', which is often used interchangeably with the term 'to open Pandora's box', means instigating something that will cause a series of problems. On the other hand, unpacking worms echoes Douglas' argument that autobiographies about abuse in childhood are a way to revise versions of events, and thus regain agency in adulthood. Douglas in fact considers the act of disclosing trauma in autobiographies as a 'means of shifting the shame from the victim to the perpetrator'.[54] In revealing the truth about her father and stepfather for the first time in this text, Abulhawa is ultimately unpacking the story of filthy 'worms', and through her legal and literary images, the life writer conveys the viewpoint that she was not the thief. On the

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[54] Douglas, p. 116.

contrary, through her narrative, one of the points that Abulhawa conveys to her readers is that she was robbed of her girlhood, and the perpetrators were her own family.

Images of Childhood and Theft: Placing-Out and Alternative Forms of Kinship

Though we had so little and often went without food, my memories of those years are ultimately happy ones, rich in spirit and substance.[55]

– Susan Abulhawa

In the previous section, my reading of Abulhawa's text both as a limit-case and as an autobiography of childhood has established that the life writer's use of images illustrates that her girlhood was a traumatic one, due to the experience of repeated violence by family members. Douglas argues that

> contemporary autobiographies of childhood have commonly placed the family under intense scrutiny. When child abuse occurs, the most common site is the family – whether biological, adoptive, or foster care – or agents of the family such as babysitters, family friends, or trusted family connections such as clergy.[56]

In the above passage, Douglas does not consider the staff of orphanages as family. This is possibly because many childhood experts believe that these institutions are unsafe places for children and are not a substitute for families of any kind. Rebecca Smith of the

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[55] Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin,* p. 152.
[56] Douglas, p. 5.

organisation Save the Children, for example, claims that 'children living in orphanages simply don't get the secure care they need to survive and thrive'.[57] By the same token, a UNICEF report makes known that because 'numerous studies prove that children brought up in institutions often have physical, emotional, social, and cognitive impairment', it is in children's best interests 'to avoid placing a child in an orphanage institution'.[58] In this section, I will examine how the image of the theft of a can of tuna reflects Abulhawa's family environment. I will argue that although in childhood Abulhawa fishes determinedly for her ideal biological family, the life writer's literary depictions of her affiliation to her orphanage in Jerusalem ultimately challenge the notion that it is not viable to create a family environment in an orphanage.[59]

In the first chapter of this thesis, I described the image of hunger that the author Nothomb uses in her novel *The Life of Hunger*. Although she is the daughter of a privileged Belgian diplomat and aristocrat, in this autofiction Nothomb reveals that she feels that something is always lacking and at fault while she is growing up; this is due to her feelings of alienation because she recurrently moves internationally (and thus, like Abulhawa, has to frequently say farewell to people and places that she has familiarised herself with). As opposed to Nothomb's metaphor of hunger to indicate a void in the life of a typical TCK, Abulhawa truly suffered from hunger in childhood at the Jerusalem orphanage. Yet, in her childhood imagination Abulhawa was a thief because 'In that

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[57] Rebecca Smith, 'Why We Don't Support Orphanage Volunteering', *Savethechildren.Org.Uk*, 2016 <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2016/why-we-dont-support-orphanage-volunteering> [accessed 1 September 2020].

[58] Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) and Committee on the Rights of Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Transforming an Orphanage into a Family Support Facility: A Procedural Guide* (Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan: UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2008), pp. 1–159 <https://www.unicef.org/kazakhstan/media/2396/file/Публикация%20на%20англ.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2020].

[59] For the perspective of an orphanage worker who believes that orphanages cannot replace families, see Jeff Ernst, 'I Worked in Orphanages for Years. I Now Know There's No Substitute for Family', *The Guardian* (London, 8 February 2007), section Working in development <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/feb/08/i-worked-in-orphanages-for-years-but-now-know-there-is-no-substitute-for-family> [accessed 1 September 2020]. Here, Ernst writes: 'A family cannot be scaled-up, and except for the most extreme of situations, there is no moral, financial, or scientific justification for the proliferation and perpetuation of orphanages'.

corner of memory', the cook did not give her the tuna; otherwise 'she'd have also given me something to open it with'.[60] Moreover, the young girl strongly believed that she was at fault and was lacking a happy and 'normal' family, unlike some of her schoolmates. Immediately after looking back at the episode of theft, Abulhawa recalls these luckier girls in her school:

> They had families waiting for them at the end of classes. I imagined a loving mother, anxious for her daughter's return, who would embrace her child and proceed to do mother-daughter things that were suffused with laughter, cuddles, books, cooking and unimaginable joy. The father I imagined, equally magnificent, would look at his daughter with complete adoration and pride.[61]

Whereas as a child Abulhawa believes in the myth of the traditionally constructed family, in adulthood, she realises that all families are imagined. At the end of her narrative, Abulhawa declares: 'The thing about being an adult is that you eventually stop needing things to match up and you manage, somehow, when your birth-right or your dreams don't coincide with your destiny'.[62] Seemingly, then, Abulhawa spends her childhood dreaming of a family she has lost or was never granted. Her romantic family has been stolen from her, and as a girl, she will go to great lengths to achieve the dream of having a functional biological family. Writing later about this episode of theft in childhood, Abulhawa's memory is once again fragmented. She can no longer recall why Sitt Hind had wanted to talk to her that evening after the 'theft':

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[60] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 4.
[61] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 4.
[62] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.

perhaps Sitt Hind had summoned me that evening so many years ago to ask
if I wanted to go and live with my father, because she was prepared to keep
me if I didn't. I wish I could remember our brief conversation. Maybe she did
ask me. I might have been agreeable to going, not believing it possible that I
would ever leave the orphanage otherwise.[63]

The life writer is confused regarding this conversation with the head of the orphanage.
By contrast, she clearly remembers

Those early years in the US ensured that I would speak English with a
southern American accent, which would, many years later, help me pull off
an Oscar-worthy act that got me into the country at the age of thirteen, alone,
without a passport or a green card. I got into the US on the strength of that
perfect accent, the kind hearts of two immigration officers, the winning smile
of a child, and the cunning of a survivor.[64]

The episode above indicates that the life writer still recalls that as a young girl she was
determined to reach the United States, where her biological father was waiting for her.
Driven by the romantic ideal of filial ties, the young girl is willing to overcome obstacles
to achieve the feeling of having a 'perfect' family. This determination to be reunited with
her biological family can be observed once again in the story. Abulhawa clearly recollects
wanting to leave the United States four years later, in order to go and live with her mother
and her mother's children, instead of graduating from high school:

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[63] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', pp. 12-3.
[64] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', pp. 8-9.

As a ward of the court, I couldn't leave US jurisdition [*sic*] before the age of eighteen. But I used my resourcefulness and cunning to leap for the great carrot. I found a way to leave at the age of seventeen […]. For a week's visit with my birth mother, I gave up the financial security of being a ward of the court, which would have provided for me and paid for my education until I graduated.[65]

The two passages above show a girl in two different stages of her childhood, who industriously perseveres in order to be rewarded with precious time with members of her biological family. The image of the theft of a can of tuna fish is thus not only linked to physical starvation, but to an emotional one too. Figuratively, the young girl is hungry to live with a member of her biological family and thus uses her 'cunning to leap for the great carrot'. Yet, this is a dangling carrot that the young girl chases to no avail, because it will ultimately not satiate her hunger. In a parallel manner, the can of tuna cannot nourish the girl because she does not have a can opener.

On the one hand, it is understandable that a young and clever girl who has been, as she specifies at the end of the story, 'denied the right' to grow up with her family and her home, would try very hard to achieve the dream of living with her family.[66] On the other hand, there are some perils in alluding to this kind of childhood aspiration, and in depicting a girl who repeatedly wishes to return to her biological family. Exploring the literary representations of adoption, McLeod discusses this critical topic. When examining Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Black Album*, McLeod addresses 'the harms that emerge when transcultural adoptees attempt to fix the compass-points of their personhood in terms of the predominant bearings of self: race, nation, birth-place, "birth culture",

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[65] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 13.
[66] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.

consanguinity, biogenetics, heritage, resemblance, distinctive sameness'.[67] Yet, in a Palestinian setting it is perhaps difficult to ignore thinking about one's heritage; and I will return to this point later on in this section. At this stage, it is important to consider Abulhawa's representations of biocentric filiation. McLeod argues in this respect that:

> For adoptees, growing up in a realm where consanguineous relations are the guarantors of racial and cultural identity and stabilizers of self has compelled many to think of themselves as incomplete, because they lack knowledge of their 'natural' beginnings and heritage from which they have been damagingly sundered.[68]

In portraying her child-self immediately as a criminal, in an autobiographical text that describes being raised in an orphanage and in foster care, Abulhawa indeed runs the risk of depicting the young orphan as a deficient person. When analysing the literary representation of orphans in the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, Beverly Crockett points out that in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, 'unsupervised children and orphans' were often portrayed in fiction 'as dangerous, alien, even monstrous creatures'.[69] In signposting at the beginning of her story that she has committed a crime in an orphanage, Abulhawa could seem to be reinstating past misleading stereotypes about adoptees. Crockett also describes that these types of children were frequently divided into two groups, the 'redeemable' and the 'corrupt'; and that the system of 'placing out' was enacted in the above-mentioned period in the United Kingdom, which means that children were sent away from urban and thus corrupt areas

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[67] McLeod, p. 180.
[68] McLeod, p. 17.
[69] Beverly Crockett, 'Outlaws, Outcasts, and Orphans: The Historical Imagination and Anne of Green Gables', in *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marianne Novy (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 57–82, p. 57.

in order to be saved.[70] Due to the inadequate laws of those times, according to Crockett, a child who was placed out in North America 'had few guarantees'.[71] While Abulhawa was 'placed out' to her father and then foster care, Said was 'placed' in an American boarding school in order to be 'redeemed' after having been expelled from Victoria College, Alexandria. Semantically, the application of 'out of place' to express their feelings of alienation is compelling in this context if one is to consider Crockett's descriptions and both the biographies of Abulhawa and Said, who were 'placed out' in North America as teenagers.

In more recent times, however, perspectives regarding international adoption in the United States have changed. In fact, as McLeod argues:

Many popular and prevailing representations of transcultural adoption generally want to tell a pious story of the global North as involved in humanitarian acts to rescue, saving anguished children from a future of impoverishment overseas; or for facilitating transcultural families that offer a palatable, saccharine vision of post-racial human relations.[72]

Whereas the beginning of Abulhawa's narrative of a Palestinian child thief in an orphanage who is sent to live in the United States might evoke notions of dangerous unsupervised children who can be redeemed in the Global North by pious families, the rest of the life writing testifies to another perspective. In her book *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama,* Marianne Novy contends that 'twenty-first-century culture desperately needs some belief in bonds that cross "bloodlines" '.[73] In the

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[70] Crockett, pp. 60-1.
[71] Crockett, p. 61.
[72] McLeod, p. 4.
[73] Marianne Novy, *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 23.

United States, it is neither a biological nor an adoptive family that 'saves' the young Palestinian girl. It is Abulhawa's own determination and 'wisdom' to 'get an education' that transforms the girl into a strong woman and considering this important argument, the earlier references to 'cunning' take on added resonance.

After narrating the traumatic experiences with her biological father and with her biological mother's new husband, the life writer seems to perceive that the loving mothers and magnificent fathers that she was hungry for as a child do not necessarily exist outside her imagination. The biological family that she has found is a dysfunctional one; and at the end of the story, Abulhawa triumphantly declares that she had 'the great fortune to claim' her inheritance of Sitt Hind's 'wisdom and generosity; and of Um Hasan's gentle heart'.[74] Most fittingly then, these two kind Palestinian women in an hospitable Palestinian orphanage, who are at the centre of the can of tuna fish episode, are ultimately the sustenance which can stuff Abulhawa's hunger for a family, a 'birth' culture and a national selfhood.

Above, I use the verb 'to stuff' because after listing the qualities of Sitt Hind and Um Hasan, Abulhawa concludes her text by writing: 'These have been the stuff of my Palestinian identity. My stories are the stuff of my intifada'.[75] Abulhawa uses the noun 'stuff' twice here to indicate the essence of her Palestinian selfhood; however, the term is also linked to food consumption and appetite. This is particularly important when considering the main image and title of Abulhawa's autobiographical text.

In the Palestinian context, the term 'intifada', which is derived from Arabic and means 'to shake off', refers to getting rid of the Israeli occupation. However, in the context of writing transcultural adoption, Abulhawa's intifada refers to shaking off past stories and myths of invented consanguineous families, and to embracing new types of

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[74] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.
[75] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.

narratives that embody innovative forms of affiliations. In an interview, summarising the most autobiographical chapter of her novel *Mornings in Jenin* (which is called 'The Orphanage'), Abulhawa reveals that notwithstanding poverty and challenging conditions, she has very fond memories of her years spent in the Palestinian orphanage in the 1980s.[76]

Although Abulhawa did indeed dream of the domestic as a child while being moved repeatedly from one place to the next across the globe, the autobiographical text she writes in adulthood invites her readers to associate images of hope with the Palestinian staff of her former orphanage. Ultimately, the head and the cook of an orphanage in Jerusalem satiated Abulhawa's appetite for a family. In showing us this, Abulhawa portrays that alternatives to biological families do exist, and through her life writing about her travels across the globe, she leads us back to where these fresh forms of kinship can be found.

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[76] Abdullah Khan, 'Mornings in Jenin – Interview', *The Star*, 20 August 2010, 9. 34 edition, section Weekly magazine <https://archive.thedailystar.net/magazine/2010/08/03/interview.htm> [accessed 3 April 2020]. In this interview, Abulhawa discloses that the chapter 'The Orphanage' is an autobiographical one, and that it chronicles her life 'in a Jerusalem orphanage for girls' where she lived for almost three years of her 'life in the early 1980s'.

Short Forms of Activism Writing: A Palestinian Child Testimonial Essay

I was without papers, without a passport. I didn't belong anywhere but to a political discussion called "The Question of Palestine." I was an abstraction. I was nothing.[77]

– Susan Abulhawa

I was working in an almost entirely negative element, the non-existence, the non-history which I had somehow to make visible despite occlusions, misrepresentations, and denials.[78]

– Edward Wadie Said

As Gilmore and Marshall argue when examining autobiographics about traumatic girlhoods, 'Narratives of childhood offer a gateway for new relations to emerge between authors and audiences through which previously silenced histories of personal and collective trauma might be revealed and addressed'.[79] Abulhawa's life writing begins with the act of theft of a tin of tuna fish in an orphanage, but as it is told by means of flashbacks, frame stories and the recollection of journeys to and from Palestine, one must frequently wonder what is really at the centre of this narrative. From beginning the story in childhood, with memories of being an orphan and the thief of a small unopened and uneaten can of tuna fish, the narration ends in Palestine with depictions of the life writer's intifada in adulthood; a notion that has obvious political connotations. The image of personal theft and the revelation of traumatic occurrences at the beginning of the story thus also significantly refer to the collective trauma of the Palestinians due to the exploitation of their territories.

Considering Abulhawa's strong political ties, in this section I read the notion of theft, and the juridical framework in which she sets her story, as a reflection of the life

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[77] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 10.
[78] Said, 'No Reconciliation Allowed', p. 105.
[79] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 11.

writer's political ideologies. Subsequently, in continuing to argue that the autobiographical genres chosen by the selected life writers I examine are predominantly hybrid genres that reflect and emphasise the 'moving' content of the texts, I argue that Abulhawa's example of life writing is, what I call, a Palestinian child testimony essay. Finally, after having established that this hybrid genre of life writing uses the figure of the child witness to seek political justice, and invites readers to participate in acts of bearing witness, I challenge Rauwerda's notion that TCAs are apolitical.

Said asserts that Golda Meir's statement in 1969 – that 'There is no Palestinian people'[80] – set Said, and 'many others, the slightly preposterous challenge of disproving her'.[81] It is in this setting of controversy that Abulhawa was born, in June 1970. Many years later, the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians over territories still continues; in 2004 the International Court of Justice had to be called upon to judge whether Israel's West Bank barrier was breaching international law. Although the Court of Justice ruled that it was against international law to erect this barrier, building works went ahead, and walls and fencing are still under construction. This building of barriers demonstrates that in Israel, politicians are still failing to recognise the rights of the Palestinians.

Abulhawa's reference to an 'un-Palestinian story' in the title of her life writing echoes Said's notion of negative elements and denials in the context of Palestinian rights. Abulhawa too grew up in a negative element, as she discloses throughout her autobiographical text. Particularly at the end of her narrative, she lists some of these negative elements alongside her transformations; for example: 'the ability to hold your head high, even when someone has their boot on your neck; the wisdom to do whatever it takes to get an education, even when you're denied a school', and 'the marvel of a body

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[80] In 1969 the former Prime Minister of Israel supposedly stated in an interview published in the *Sunday Times* on 15 June 1969 that there are no Palestinians. In 1976 she talked about her 1969 interview in *The New York Times*. For this clarification see Golda Meir, 'Golda Meir, on the Palestinians', *Aish.Com* (Jerusalem, 14 January 1976), originally printed in *The New York Times*, reprinted on 13 January 2018 <https://www.aish.com/jw/me/Golda-Meir-on-the-Palestinians.html> [accessed 20 April 2020].
[81] Said, 'No Reconciliation Allowed', p. 105.

that heals itself from the intentional harm of others and rises to rebuild'.[82] From the young figure of a lonely, hungry orphan and a thief, the life writer has grown up into a strong woman who has found resilience in the face of adversity, and who can now imagine and form a (national) community, and thus create an alternative form of biogenetic kinship, with other Palestinians.

At the end of the story, in fact, Abulhawa lists three people who have been important throughout her life. All three are Palestinians; and hers, as she concludes, is ultimately a Palestinian identity. Regarding narratives about transcultural adoption, one of McLeod's concerns is the stories of adoptees who wish to trace their biogenetic families and retrieve their 'birth culture'.[83] In the Palestinian context, reclaiming one's birth culture is an especially challenging quest: it is difficult to return to an original birth nation when this country has not been officially recognised as a state by all members of the United Nations. For Abulhawa, the basic truth of being Palestinian means to be 'dispossessed, disinherited and exiled'.[84] In using the image of an innocent girl who feels guilty but has not committed a crime of theft at the beginning of her story, Abulhawa is invoking the wider impression of the Palestinian peoples as traumatically robbed of their land. Moreover, this image suggests to readers that those residing in occupied territories, under constant monitoring by the Israeli army and the police, are almost living as criminals.

In an essay of 2013, writing about the struggles of Fanon and Said, Abulhawa considers oppression and victimhood in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and argues that the Palestinians

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[82] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.
[83] McLeod, p. 17.
[84] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.

don't recognize the origin of the solidarity shown to us. We are so immersed

in our own pain and suffering – however understandably so – that we regard

our victimhood to the exclusion of other suffering, much as (although not

quite with the same worship) our oppressors have done.[85]

Abulhawa also argues that the histories, experiences and representations of African and indigenous peoples are very similar to those of the Palestinians around the world, and that consequently 'the Palestinian struggle is a black struggle'.[86] Considering these notions of Abulhawa, it is then compelling to return to the image of a young girl in a Palestinian orphanage, who claims that she has stolen something, although this might not have been the case. For African slaves in the United States, running away was illegal. Frederick Douglass is a notorious example of a fugitive slave, who, to use the phrasing of Ishmael Reed, 'stole his own property'.[87] In childhood, Abulhawa neither possesses a passport nor belongs to a biological family. One can see here clear parallels between being robbed of a family and a nation, and having to fight actively and legally for a new sense of community. Moreover, although adoptees are often imagined to be 'free' or 'freely given', it is courts that decide whether a child is 'legally' adoptable.[88]

Considering the problematic rights and laws for both adoptees and Palestinians, it is thus not surprising that Abulhawa depicts her childhood in this life writing within a compact juridical framework, as illustrated in the previous section. In a court setting, Abulhawa can unmask a political and moral crime. A can of tuna has futilely and

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[85] Susan Abulhawa, 'The Palestinian Struggle Is a Black Struggle', *The Electronic Intifada*, 2013 <https://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-struggle-black-struggle/12530> [accessed 29 April 2020].

[86] Abulhawa, 'The Palestinian Struggle Is a Black Struggle'.

[87] Ruth Abbott and Ira Simons, 'An Interview with Ishmael Reed', in *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, ed. by Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), pp. 74–95, p. 81.

[88] In this respect, see, for example, Barbara Yngvesson, 'Placing the "Gift Child" in Transnational Adoption', *Law & Society Review*, 36.2 (2002), 227–56 (p. 230) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1512176>.

allegedly been stolen, and this image also neatly reflects images of unjust capture and of the condition of many Palestinian children and adults.

A compact can of tuna, like the small territory of Palestine, has to be opened and freed in a challenging way in Abulhawa's life writing. For Abulhawa, Palestinians have been oppressed and placed in a captivity from which they need to be freed in complicated ways, like the stolen can of tuna in the hands of a small and hungry girl. In adulthood, Abulhawa seeks to fight in order to free occupied Palestinian territory and children by means of an alternative jurisprudence. In almost legalistic ways, she writes an autobiographical text to speak of the crimes that have been committed against the Palestinians; and as an activist she promotes the international rights of children. In 2001, Abulhawa founded *Playgrounds for Palestine*, an organisation that helps to build playgrounds in refugee camps in Palestine and Lebanon.[89] Each of her foundation's playgrounds represents for children, as its website states, 'an affirmation of their right to childhood'.[90] Rather than playing in childhood, Abulhawa could mostly only focus on education as a means to achieve transformation and a better future. In adulthood she strives to help children in difficult situations, because for her this 'is a minimal recognition of their humanity'.[91] Both by writing about the complex experiences of Palestinian children and by building small yet playful and agentic experiences for them,

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[89] For further details, see Pervine El-Refaei, 'Memory, Identity and Resistance in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*: Writing Back at the Zionist Discourse', in *Recontextualizing Resistance*, ed. by Loubna Youssef and Emily Golson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), pp. 79–110, p. 80; and 'Playgrounds for Palestine – An Act of Love.', *Https://Playgroundsforpalestine.Org* <https://playgroundsforpalestine.org/> [accessed 23 April 2020].

[90] 'Playgrounds for Palestine – An Act of Love.'

[91] As the website of 'Playgrounds for Palestine' states, the foundation was established by Abulhawa 'as a measure to uphold the Right to Play, enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', 'Playgrounds for Palestine – An Act of Love'. In this respect, see Giulia Rhodes, 'Building Playgrounds in Palestine: "This Is Their Special Place and Refuge"', *The Guardian* (London, 6 June 2015), section Family <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/jun/06/building-playgrounds-in-palestine-this-is-their-special-place-and-refuge> [accessed 3 June 2020]. In this interview, Abulhawa states that 'Play is such an important part of child development – physical, cognitive, mental, social, psychological', and Rhodes reminds that 'play and leisure time are enshrined as basic human rights, for all children, in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child'; for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child see United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1990 <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/50f941fe9/united-nations-convention-rights-child-crc.html> [accessed 3 June 2020].

Abulhawa seems to be trying to build their confidence to resist unfair power relationships, and to give visibility to these marginalised individuals.

Said's aim, also, is to give more visibility to the Palestinians; for this reason he collaborated with the photographer Jean Mohr, soon before the first intifada in 1987. In 1986, Said and Mohr published *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*.[92] 'No clear and simple narrative is adequate to the complexity of our experience', argues Said in the introduction of this publication.[93] Said chooses the interplay of text and photos to convey the everyday reality of Palestinians because he believes that 'essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent' the Palestinian community.[94] My stance is that Abulhawa too draws upon a miscellany of life writing genres in her text, in order to convey the complexity of both her background and the situation of her peoples. By mixing genres in this piece of life writing, Abulhawa creates what I call a Palestinian child testimonial essay to write back and challenge previous representations of Palestinians, or rather, 'build back' a fairer Palestinian community if we are to consider her organisation that constructs playgrounds.

In life writing studies, acts of testifying or bearing witness are referred to as 'testimonio', a term that in Spanish means 'testimony'. This Spanish term is often used in life writing because the genre developed during Latin American 'guerrilla' movements, where it was especially adopted by women who aimed to challenge various types of oppression. Regarding the origins of this genre, Kathryn Blackmer Reyes and Julia Curry Rodriguez illustrate: 'During the 1980s and 1990s, as cultural studies and postmodern methodologies began to frame critical scholarship as subjective and political, Chicanas in particular drew on the reflexive form of testimonio, using such concepts as agency,

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[92] Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, revised edition of 1999).

[93] Edward W. Said, 'Introduction', in *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 1–7, p. 5.

[94] Said, 'Introduction', p. 6.

subaltern, and native'.[95] Ylce Irizarry explains that in Latin America, as 'a narrative form, testimonio is often delivered orally and in the first person, but it always depicts communal experience';[96] whereas Smith and Watson point out that in the contemporary 'testimonio', the life writer 'intends to communicate the situation of a group's oppression, struggle, or imprisonment, to claim some agency in the act of narrating, and to call on readers to respond actively in judging the crisis'.[97]

In writing about her childhood in English and by sharing it with an international readership, Abulhawa is transforming her audiences in a similar vein.[98] At the end of her story, Abulhawa writes: 'My stories are the stuff of my intifada. And every reader is part of my triumph'.[99] Strategically, each of her readers is now both a judge and a witness. Instead of preserving impartiality, the text now becomes part of the conflict, because the listener has been obligated to make a pact with the speaker. Patricia DeRocher writes about testimonios:

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[95] Kathryn Blackmer Reyes and Julia E. Curry Rodriguez, 'Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources', in *Chicana/Latina Testimonios as Pedagogical, Methodological, and Activist Approaches to Social Justice*, ed. by Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga, and Judith Flores Carmona (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 162–76, p. 163. 'Chicana' means an American girl or woman of Mexican descent.

[96] Ylce Irizarry, 'The Ethics of Writing the Caribbean: Latina Narrative as Testimonio', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 16.3 (2005), 263–84 (p. 265) <https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920500184116>.

[97] Smith and Watson, p. 282; for further discussion on the parallels between Western testimonio and Holocaust survivor literature see Laura Webb, 'Testimonio, the Assumption of Hybridity and the Issue of Genre', *Studies in Testimony*, 2.1 (2019), 3–23; and for further discussion on the genre of testimonio see John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[98] Notwithstanding her strong Palestinian ties, Abulhawa does not write fiction in Arabic because, as she discloses in several interviews, she believes that she is not sophisticated enough in this language. See, for example, Ila Anasuya. In this interview, Abulhawa also explains why the novel that was originally published in 2006 as *The Scar of David*, was then released again a few years later in 2010 as *Mornings in Jenin*.

[99] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 15.

The very nature of the testifier-witness dialectic suggests a reciprocal social
pact, an ethical engagement of two consensual parties, to "bear witness" to a
social truth. While the testifier might gain closure through the telling of the
narrative, responsibility is in turn shifted onto the witness to form a just
response to this social information. [100]

Abulhawa's ending shows how responsibility has been shifted to be shared with her
readers. After this instrumental transformation, it seems that it is now the turn of the
readership to stand tall against Israel's 'colonial oppression' of Palestine.[101] If the readers
are witnesses, and indeed also judges, of Abulhawa's innocence regarding the crimes of
theft, trespassing and arson, they are additionally called upon to judge the Israeli
government guilty of stealing Palestinian land. Readers can naturally resist this political
call; yet Abulhawa's rhetorics and her use of the figure of the child make it difficult for
her audiences to ignore this final appeal. In her story, the life writer gradually shifts the
attention of her readers from the image of the traumatised girl to representations of
Israel's dominion over Palestine. Through the figure of an innocent, homeless and
traumatised child,[102] Abulhawa ingeniously reflects her views about the condition of
many Palestinians, and incites readers to stand behind both her child and adult selves.

Abulhawa thus uses her narrative to turn the occlusions, misrepresentations and
denials, which Said refers to in his works, into new forms of resistance and freedom for
herself and her people. The life writer utilises twists in her story to challenge and disprove
the claim that Palestinians do not exist. In childhood the protagonist felt like a 'nothing',

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[100] Patricia DeRocher, *Transnational Testimonios: The Politics of Collective Knowledge Production* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018), p. 26.

[101] In several interviews, Abulhawa refers to the current situation in Palestine as a form of colonisation, and sees similarities between Israel/Palestine and apartheid South Africa; see, for example, Ahmad Qabaha, '"Owning One's Story Is as Important as the Ownership of Physical Space": An Interview with Susan Abulhawa', *Bethlehem University Journal*, 36 (2019), 133–39.

[102] For Douglas, in many literary representations, children are supposed to be seen as innocent; see Douglas, p. 6.

but in adulthood she illustrates her strong feeling of Palestinian identity.[103] Palestinians

do indeed exist; they live dispersed all over the world, Abulhawa seems to be telling her

readers at the end of her story. In becoming a witness of this Palestinian child

'testimonio', the reader must acknowledge this too. In this respect, it is significant to turn

to the relationship between the authors and readers of autobiographies. Strikingly, for

Lejeune this relationship is of a contractual nature, because, as previously illustrated, life

writers enter into an 'autobiographical pact' with readers by agreeing that there is an

'identity of name' between the author, narrator, and the character who is the subject of

the autobiographical story.[104] A 'testimonio' has legal connotations too; and because the

speakers of these stories stand as representatives of larger social groups by revealing their

personal experiences, Mary Louise Pratt alludes to 'testimonial contracts'.[105] Readers of

Abulhawa's 'testimonio' obviously do not have a binding contract with the writer. Yet,

by means of the literary strategies that I have discussed above, involving the childhood

experiences of the writer, the reader is steered to form a bond with Abulhawa and the

Palestinians at the end of her text.

Non-fiction testimonial narratives are generally book-length narratives, yet

Abulhawa chooses the genre of a shorter piece of writing for her act of witnessing and

resistance.[106] Rather than calling Abulhawa's a short story, the legal narrative thread that

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[103] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 10.

[104] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 3-30. This 'identity of name' means that the author, narrator and characters are identical as per the seal (name) on the cover of the autobiographical text.

[105] Mary Louise Pratt, 'I, Rigoberta Menchú and the "Culture Wars"', in *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, ed. by Arturo Arias and David Stoll (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 29–48, p. 42. In this book chapter, Pratt examines Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio about ethnic conflicts in Guatemala and subsequent controversies over 'truths' in her book. In recognition of her testimonio and her work which advocated respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. David Stoll, however, contended that Menchú's key points might not have been true in this Guatemalan's testimonio; and although Menchú was branded a liar by many scholars as a consequence of Stroll's allegations, the Nobel Prize committee did not revoke Menchú's prize. For Menchú's testimonio see Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London and New York: Verso, 1984); see also David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

[106] Examples of contemporary book-length 'testimonios' are Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo, *Biography of a Runaway Slave (Revised Edition)*, trans. by W. Nick Hill (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press,

runs throughout her text suggests that the writer combines the genre of the 'testimonio' with the essay. The term 'essay' derives from the French *essai*, which means 'an attempt', 'a trial' or 'a test'. Cases are 'tried' in a court of law, and when writing an essay, authors are trying to understand and are attempting to give meanings. In life writing studies, as Smith and Watson explain, 'since its development by Montaigne as a form of self-exploration engaging received wisdom, the personal essay has been a site of self-creation'.[107] For Karin Westerwelle, these types of essays are not 'limited to mere introspection. They constantly reflect on the world'.[108] Thus, the autobiographical essay is a genre that, in line with 'testimonios', attempts to express both private and collective thoughts and experiences.[109]

Additionally, Abulhawa chooses to mix the 'testimonio' with the genre of an essay because an essay, as Westerwelle specifies, is its own aesthetic genre and can be easily remembered.[110] Abulhawa's attempt at opening the can of tuna fish is a problematic and messy moment; and in a parallel manner, narrating certain instances of her past also represents such an experience. A small can of tuna is very similar to a short essay and its functions. The can of tuna is compact, it has a long shelf life, and can thus be opened (or revealed) after many years. Consequently, it can effectively fill a void or purpose – for example, satisfy hunger, when the right time has come. A can of tuna contains one central nourishing ingredient, and Abulhawa's testimonial essay concentrates on one important

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1994); Primo Levi, *Survival In Auschwitz* (Revised Edition), trans. by Stuart Woolf (New York: Touchstone, 1995); Menchú.

[107] Smith and Watson, p. 276; for further discussion on the essay in life writing studies, see Lydia Fakundiny, 'Autobiography and the Essay', in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly (Chicago and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 79–81.

[108] Karin Westerwelle, 'Essay', in *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction*, ed. by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), I, 585–94, p. 585.

[109] For further details regarding autobiographical essays as literary forms, see Graham Good, 'Identity and Form in the Modern Autobiographical Essay', *Prose Studies*, 15.1 (1992), 99–117.

[110] Westerwelle, p.585; for the aesthetics of personal essays, it is helpful to look at studies on the works of Virginia Woolf, who, inspired by Montaigne's compact forms of digressions, wrote hundreds of essays, in which she, for example, attempted to fight against male critical assumptions; see in this respect, for example, Vera Nünning, '"A Theory of the Art of Writing": Virginia Woolf's Aesthetics from the Point of View of Her Critical Essays', *English Studies*, 98.8 (2017), 978–94.

experience. Most significantly, in an autobiographical essay, like the can of fish being opened slowly and problematically, even violently, without a tin opener, Abulhawa in adulthood can gradually release traumatic and stained memories of the past. At the end of her story, Abulhawa writes that she was never a typical Palestinian girl, 'surrounded and protected by large families'.[111] Hers are thus 'memories of an un-Palestinian story, in a can of tuna'; or rather, personal and political witnessing that is carefully packed and preserved in a small and fabricated genre.

Having established that Abulhawa's text is a political one, it is now necessary to finally turn to Rauwerda's statement that, unlike exiled, postcolonial or immigrant groups of people, 'Third Culture individuals have no specific *national* culture', and their values and ideals 'tend to be malleable'.[112] In childhood, Abulhawa grew up in many countries, yet she clearly portrays having a Palestinian and exiled identity in adulthood. Additionally, in depicting the Palestinians as peoples who have been oppressed by the State of Israel, her life writing encompasses postcolonial notions too.

Rauwerda's TC individuals are people who were raised in privileged environments due to their parents' predominantly high-powered careers. However, as previously discussed, the term TCK is now generally used to refer to individuals who were raised outside their parents' passport countries; it also includes many immigrants and exiled people. When Rauwerda states that 'third culture writers generally do not have a homeland',[113] it is clear that more attentiveness is required, because there are indeed many people spread around the globe who truly do not have a home; and some, like Abulhawa, do not have a nation. A new vocabulary and more refined approaches are therefore required in order to examine the literature of writers who grew up on the move.

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[111] Abulhawa, 'Memories of an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna', p. 14.
[112] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood*, p. 22.
[113] Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan" ', p. 17.

As an adult, Said was concerned with challenging misrepresentations of Palestinian history. His life writing about his childhood, however, shows that as a young boy he had other preoccupations. At the age of sixteen, after being expelled from Victoria College in Alexandria, Said was sent to a school in Massachusetts, in the United States, by his parents. About moving to a new school in a new country, Said recollects:

> The day in early September 1951 when my mother and father deposited me at the gates of that school and then immediately left for the Middle East was probably the most miserable of my life. Not only was the atmosphere of the school rigid and explicitly moralistic, but I seemed to be the only boy there who was not a native-born American, who did not speak with the required accent, and who had not grown up with baseball, basketball, and football.[114]

Said feels like a misfit because he does not speak like his peers and he does not share their interests. Said therefore immediately goes to Ned, a family friend of Egyptian origin, in order to find a piece of 'home' while he is alone abroad. I give this example here in order to emphasise that in adulthood one might be interested in the political misrepresentations of one's homeland. However, the portrayal of his childhood shows that as a child, Said is more interested in overcoming feelings of loneliness and in being accepted by peer groups, than in the politics of Palestine.

Rather than arguing, as Rauwerda does, that TCKs show no political dissatisfaction, it is thus more fitting to specify that *children* who frequently move from one country to another might not be particularly or immediately interested in political affairs. The writings of adult TCKs, however, show that frequent movement between cultural worlds in childhood can be a spur to fervent activism in adulthood. To emphasise

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[114] Said, 'No Reconciliation Allowed', p. 98.

my point that there is a link between cross-cultural childhoods and subsequent artistic adulthoods, in which the writers are particularly respectful of differences and concerned with finding creative ways to reflect and meditate upon the experiences of the marginalised, I therefore return to the journalist Sacco, whom I quoted at the very beginning of this chapter.

In his comics about Bosnia and Palestine, Sacco gives a voice to people through speech balloons, and supplies illustrations of small everyday happenings that have been ignored by more conventional reporters in the past.[115] In an interview of 2012, Sacco reveals about his childhood spent on the move that: 'You make some friends but there's a certain alienation. You realise you're different – suddenly you're in a new place with problems you're unfamiliar with'.[116] Sacco's declaration here echoes the portrayals of Said, Hoque and Liang in respect to their relocations to the United States as children. Due to their feelings of alienation in childhood as a consequence of frequent mobility, in adulthood these writers seem to take an active interest in the biographies of individuals who are marginalised due to their minority status, and who exist in states of conflict.

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[115] See in this respect, Sonia Smith, 'Joe Sacco's Wars End Reviewed in Georgetown Voice', *Drawn & Quarterly*, 25 August 2005 <https://www.drawnandquarterly.com/press/2005/08/joe-saccos-wars-end-reviewed-georgetown-voice> [accessed 15 April 2020].

[116] Alex Burrows, 'The Myth Of Objective Journalism – Joe Sacco Interviewed', *The Quietus*, 9 December 2012 <https://thequietus.com/articles/10916-joe-sacco-journalism-interview> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine Abulhawa's representations of growing up internationally in both refugee and foster care environments at the end of the twentieth century. Because Abulhawa moved recurrently and spent a part of her childhood, like many TCKs, in a segregated school, I also considered TCL theories when approaching Abulhawa's life writing in terms of its literary images and hybrid forms.

Abulhawa's 'Memories in an Un-Palestinian Story, in a Can of Tuna' is stuffed with images of the homeless child, jurisdiction and politics. The analysis of the image of the theft of a tin of tuna fish has shown that the central theme of Abulhawa's Palestinian child testimonio essay is hunger not only for food, but for family ties, education, justice and a Palestinian identity. Food and shelter are two of the rights that the United Nations lists in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Play is also included in this Convention, and in adulthood Abulhawa's foundation *Playgrounds for Children* helps children to shake off their worries for a short time in areas of conflict by building spaces for them in which they can play and strive. Abulhawa moved frequently internationally in childhood and both the central themes in her text, and her activism in adulthood indicate that TCAs are indeed engaged in social and political change.

Rauwerda claims that works created by authors who experienced TCK movement in childhood demonstrate that these writers do not have strong national ties. A closer look at the genres that Abulhawa uses in her text also challenges this notion of Rauwerda. Whereas Hoque weaves oral literature into her hybrid life writing in order to emphasise the Nigerian components of her mixed TC identity, Abulhawa employs the genre of personal witnessing in childhood in order to comment on the political situation in her 'homeland'. Strategically, the figure of the child witness is used by Abulhawa for political

propaganda. In many ways, like the image of Palestinians and orphans, the child is a paradoxical figure that is caught up in legal and political ambiguities.

Before beginning to examine life writing by girls in the following chapter, regarding Rauwerda's notions, it is important at this stage to consider that Liang, Hoque, Bui and Abulhawa wrote about their moving girlhoods retrospectively. As Bui's life writing suggests, the lines that connect to maternal and paternal ancestors and to their places of birth can fade in childhood, but they can be redrawn in adulthood. We have seen that all life writers in childhood are more interested in being accepted by peer groups, than in politics. This therefore indicates that there is a difference between TCKs and adult TCKs (ATCK) and it is crucial to specify that transient children might not be particularly or immediately interested in political affairs. Abulhawa's life writing and her representations of her Palestine identity serve to illustrate her fervent activism in adulthood.

It may well be that this tendency to develop an interest in the story of one's ancestors' nations in adulthood proves Rauwerda's point that the floating TCK cloud can drift, occasionally 'more over Home, sometimes more over another place or places'.[117] Liang, Hoque, Bui and Abulhawa's attachments to the home countries of their parents, however, raise the question of whether the image of an unattached floating cloud can suitably represent the TC. While on the one hand a cloud that floats over the home country (first culture) and host countries (second culture) aptly indicates that the TC does not have a specific geographic location, on the other hand, Rauwerda's image neglects three aspects. Firstly, as Hoque's images have shown us, clouds do not move 'freely' but are moved by winds. Higher forces, or decisions taken by adults that can affect children, might destroy a TC cloud. Secondly, the image of an unattached cloud rejects the notion of strong lines of connection to a place. Thirdly, in their life writing, Liang, Hoque, Bui

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[117] Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: We Are Cumulus'.

and Abulhawa portray that they have multiple attachments that connect them across various places, cultures, persons and languages. It must be acknowledged that TCKs rarely move between only two spheres, but that they navigate between many different references, managing multiplicity.

Ultimately, the TC goes beyond familial and national ties. The TC connects individuals together and establishes a relationship among them. In a similar vein, in revealing how an alternative form of biogenetic kinship can be created in an orphanage, Abulhawa emphasises that if people have similarities between them, they can then have a meaningful bond of kinship.

Chapter Five:
Bridging Cultures in Digital Forms of Life Writing

Introduction: Girl-Authored Digital Life Writing in the Twenty-First century

We can't be another failed generation of "what could've, should've, would've". We are strong people. We can do this. Only if we try.[1]

> - Feroza Aziz

I really love fighting.[2]

> - Perwin

In November 2019, Feroza Aziz, a seventeen-year-old high school student from New Jersey, United States, posted a video on TikTok condemning China's detention of Uighur Muslims, while she was pretending to give a make-up tutorial. TikTok is a social media application popular among teenagers, which allows users to create and share short personal videos. Soon after this criticism of the Chinese government's treatment of the minority group, Chinese-owned TikTok banned Aziz's user account. On the one hand, this incident indicates that teenagers want to speak out and that they are using social media to raise awareness of their concerns and global injustices. On the other hand, it poses a series of questions regarding power relations between big technology companies and their consumers. Users can both tell their individual stories and demand action globally, in some cases long before politicians intervene in these concerns;[3] however, their voices can

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[1] Feroza Aziz, 'I Made a Video about the Situation in China', *Instagram @officialferozaaziz*, 2019 <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5Tho5TAXZd/?utm_source=ig_embed> [accessed 22 February 2021]; see also in this respect, Leo Kelion, 'Teen's TikTok Video about China's Muslim Camps Goes Viral', *BBC News* (London, 26 November 2019), section Technology <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50559656> [accessed 22 February 2021].

[2] Markus Auge and Jasha Hannover, 'Ein Weiter Weg Wohin? (Further, But Where?) - Refugees in Their Own Worlds', *Gesichter Der Flucht: Vom Gehen Und Ankommen* (Baden Baden: Arte and SWR, 2020) <https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/089482-007-A/gesichter-der-flucht-7-ein-weiter-weg-wohin/> [accessed 15 January 2021].

[3] In January 2021, over a year after Aziz's TikTok video, politicians in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada announced a ban on imports of products from the Xinjiang region, where the Uighur camps are located, due to human rights violations. In this respect see, for example, Ana Swanson, 'U.S. Bans All Cotton and Tomatoes From Xinjiang Region of China', *The New York Times* (New York, 19 January 2021), section Economy <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/business/economy/xinjiang-cotton-tomato-ban.html> [accessed 29 March 2021].

also easily be controlled and silenced by the powerful technology corporations that enable online communication processes in the first place.

Silencing and masking have been significant motifs in the previous four chapters dedicated to life writing by adults. This final chapter of my doctoral thesis focuses on modern-day forms of girl-authored life writing, such as YouTube video blogs and TEDxYouth talks, in order to explore whether twenty-first-century digital platforms are changing the ways in which girls represent and mediate their transient girlhoods. As Paul Eakin argues, 'it is timely to ask whether the advent of the Internet and the social media enabled by it have in fact produced new forms of self-expression'.[4] Thus, a thorough exploration of genres of life writing would not be complete without considering new media. Additionally, a proper examination of the self-representation of frequent migration and cross-culturalism in girlhood must include life writing by youth. Most child-focused life writing is composed in adulthood and is obviously influenced by the perspectives of the adult writer, as has been seen in the previous four chapters that explored adult-authored narratives.

Adopting a framework of automediality, Emma Maguire suggests that in 'an acknowledgment that media technologies shape the kinds of selves that can be represented', scholars must 'move beyond the literary in considering how people narrate their lives'.[5] In this chapter, I explore videos that circulate online, and which are potentially accessible at any time by anyone, anywhere; I will also think critically about mediation, and how girls mediate the experience of their lives in migration. My reading of these videos is also guided by Douglas and Poletti's argument that digital media is an 'effective means for young people to claim their rights as citizens and agents rather than

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[4] Paul Eakin, 'Self and Self-Representation Online and Off', *Frame*, 28.1 May (2015), 11–29 (p. 12) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367439118-13>.

[5] Emma Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', *Biography*, 38.1 (2015), 72–86 (p. 74) <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2015.0006>.

subjects of adult-led politics'.[6] This chapter suggests that digital life writing is a significant way of bringing to public awareness the experiences of migration that are being lived in the present moment by girls, and a means of giving voice to female youth. These experiences would otherwise be presented according to the adult's point of view, and thereby altered. Nevertheless, one must be attentive to the dilemma of understanding the voices of these international girls when they are divulged within predominantly American adult-led and male-dominated spaces.

In order to explore whether digitally mediated youth-authored life writing can offer girls an autonomous space in which they can speak and spread awareness about some of the issues related to migration, I firstly consider the problem of limited access to texts that are both produced exclusively by girls and which focus on the experience of migration. I will then examine two interviews with girls who frequently move across national boundaries. Drawing on Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall's work on the 'representational politics of girls in crisis',[7] I will argue that these biographical texts, produced and edited by adults, predominantly invite viewers to identify with girls as vulnerable figures.

Secondly, I will examine one YouTube video and three recordings of TED talks, in order to explore how girls are employing new media and genres of life writing to creatively portray their experiences of mobility that they are still very much living. Although the impact of new digital technologies, such as Instagram and video blogs, on how girls portray themselves has recently been explored by scholars such as Mary Kearney, and Poletti and Maguire,[8] very little attention has been given to TED events by

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[6] Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti, *Life Narratives and Youth Culture: Representation, Agency and Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 121.

[7] Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall, 'Girls in Crisis: Rescue and Transnational Feminist Autobiographical Resistance', *Feminist Studies*, 36.3 (2010), 667–90 (p. 667).

[8] Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Emma Maguire, *Girls, Autobiography, Media: Gender and Self-Mediation in Digital Economies*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Douglas and Poletti.

scholars in the literary field. Whereas Ana Belén Martínez García and Julia Ludewig have recently argued that TED talks can be considered as literary genres, specific TED events for and by youth have so far been neglected in scholarly studies.[9] In arguing that these talks, which often contain particular information about a young person's life, can be distinguished as practices of life writing which are circulated through the use of digital media, this section thus contributes to the critical field of life writing by focusing on underexamined TEDxYouth talks. If these texts are to provide scholars with new spaces for close textual analysis of life writing by children, one must be attentive to the difficulty of hearing the speech of groups of minorities, such as children, in the existing context of powerful Silicon Valley media networks, and the unequal power relations that shape and influence current modes of communication and of spreading personal stories. My aim in the second section is thus to examine, using Spivakian logic, whether the platforms that the girls choose for their personal narratives are spaces in which the minority voices of migrant girls are allowed to be heard.

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[9] Ana Belén Martínez García, 'TED Talks as Life Writing: Online and Offline Activism', *Life Writing*, 15.4 (2018), 487–503 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2017.1405317>; *New Forms of Self-Narration: Young Women, Life Writing and Human Rights*, ed. by Ana Belén Martínez García (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2020); Julia Ludewig, 'TED Talks as an Emergent Genre', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 19.1 (2017), 1–9 <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2946>.

Crossing the Borders: Girl-Focused Life Writing Produced by Adults

Crossing the border for us, depending on how much of a line there is, it's chaotic sometimes. People who stare at you, like what if they want to kidnap you or something. It's scary.[10]
      – Ana Fernanda Bernal and Ana Luisa Bernal

Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.[11]
      – Gloria Anzaldúa

Regarding the interviews I explore, it is significant at this stage to point out that although I examine videos, throughout this chapter I refer to them as life writing texts. Texts in this sense are broadly understood to mean cultural products, and can include works which are oral, written, visual and digital.[12] Additionally, because this chapter focuses on life writing by girls, it is important here to reiterate my understanding of the term 'girlhood'. In the introduction of this thesis I pointed out that childhood and girlhood (and indeed age in general) are complex labels because these notions are socially and culturally constructed. I agree with Douglas and Poletti, and Maguire, who all argue that childhood and youth are not universal because different societies in the world have varying notions of childhood, and furthermore, children acquire skills at different ages. So far, drawing on their discussions, I have used the term girlhood in the broadest sense to describe the span between birth and the completion of compulsory secondary school education. In this span, generally girls are still living with their parents or legal guardians, and are thus still dependent on them in terms of financial support and decision-making. In this chapter,

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[10] Eléonore Hamelin, 'Crossing the Border to Go to School in the US', *BBC's Crossing Divides Season* (Latin America & Caribbean: BBC News, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-51505183> [accessed 15 January 2021], 1.10-1.27 mins.

[11] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), p. 103.

[12] See Rosalia Baena, 'Introduction', in *Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. viii.

however, the writings I explore are about and by female teenagers; thus, I generally use the term girlhood in a narrower sense to refer to young women. Regardless of the time span, it was challenging to access texts that are both produced exclusively by girls and which focus on the experience of migration.

As Henry Jenkins points out, the vast majority of stories about children are in fact 'written by adults, illustrated by adults, edited by adults, marketed by adults, purchased by adults and often read by adults'.[13] In an attempt to highlight texts by girls in the study of life writing, I tried to find girl-authored and print-based texts for this chapter. I only happened upon a handful of such memoirs, which were always co-authored by an adult – the most prominent example being Malala Yousafzai's life writing, which was published in 2013 when the girl was sixteen.[14] Consequently, I shifted my search and focused on digital forms of life writing, because these forms, as Douglas and Poletti argue in relation to blogs by youth, can help to gain 'an experiential perspective that might be otherwise missing from public discourse'.[15] The texts I discovered were thus largely about and by youth growing up in this century. For this reason, in this chapter, I focus on digital life writing about moving in the 2010s, in contrast to the four texts that I have previously explored, which concerned migrating in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Online, I predominantly came across a plethora of interviews with migrant children that were obviously not only edited and thus altered by adults, but which were also portraying these children as vulnerable figures. Before dedicating my analyses to life writing which has been authored by girls, in this section I will examine two interviews,

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[13] Henry Jenkins, 'Introduction: Childhood Innocence and Other Myths', in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. by Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 1–38, p. 23; Douglas and Poletti also quote this phrase from Jenkins when discussing the urgency to examine youth-authored texts, see Douglas and Poletti, p. 7.

[14] Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

[15] Douglas and Poletti, p. 67.

in order to illustrate the argument that life writing texts that are made and edited by adults are often produced in ways that invite viewers to identify with girls as vulnerable figures.

'Crossing the Border to Go to School in the US' is a four-minute documentary that was produced by Eléonore Hamelin for the BBC's *Crossing Divides* season of 2020.[16] As the editor of this series states, 'we are exploring the power and possibilities of encountering people with conflicting opinions, across divisions of race, class, faith, politics and generation'.[17] 'Ein Weiter Weg Wohin?' (Further, But Where?) is also part of a 2020 series; it was produced by the European public service channel Arte.[18] Arte's website states that its series *Your Exit: The Stories of Migrants and Refugees* tells the migratory experiences of eight people from 1945 onwards, in order to show viewers that migration has always belonged to the history of mankind.[19] This series addresses debates following the refugee migration to Europe – particularly to Germany, during the years 2010 to 2015, when hate and violence against asylum seekers and discrimination in general were on the rise. The BBC series was also produced at a time when racism and xenophobia were increasing in the United Kingdom after the Brexit referendum. It thus seems that the aims of these two series were to raise awareness of the issues affecting migrants globally, and to let their voices be heard by means of their personal stories; as well as to generally promote the understanding of varying perspectives, in an attempt to bring about unity through diversity. For the purpose of this chapter, it is also important to specify that both these series were mainly targeted at an adult audience.

BBC's short online documentary film 'Crossing the Border to Go to School in the US' portrays a typical school day of the sixteen-year-old twins Ana Fernanda Bernal and

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[16] Hamelin.

[17] Emma Kasriel, 'Insight: Crossing Divides', *Public Media Alliance*, n.d. <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/insight-crossing-divides/> [accessed 15 January 2021].

[18] Auge and Hannover. Throughout this section, all citations from this source in English are taken from Arte's subtitles in English.

[19] Arte.tv, 'Your Exit - Politics and Society | ARTE in English', *Arte.Tv*, 2020 <https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/RC-019671/your-exit/> [accessed 19 January 2021].

Ana Luisa Bernal, who live with their mother in Mexicali, Mexico. Mexicali is a city located across the border from Calexico, California, and the girls cross this border to the United States and back every day in order to attend school.[20] At the time of the film, the twins are juniors in the Calexico Mission School, which is a private, Christian school. Ana Fernanda and Ana Luisa Bernal are only two among thousands of transborder students living in Mexico, who cross the border every day.[21]

The documentary begins with an image of the two girls showing their American passports to an officer of the US Customs and Border protection. Ana Fernanda Bernal states: 'Every single day, since I was four years old, I've crossed an international border'.[22] It is clear here that the opening's setting is suggestive of the international border-crossing experiences of the two girls. However, images of American police and kindergarten children also highlight border-crossing processes, and most specifically the notion of power relations, control, enforcement decisions and submission. As Idalia Nuñez and Luis Urrieta argue, transborder students must learn border literacies, such as reading 'the world of surveillance', anticipating intrusive questions and practicing obedience and compliance.[23]

Child compliance and power relations between adults and children are in fact significant in this short film too, and the international barriers at the beginning of the documentary also figuratively echo the barriers that the twins must overcome every day when they respect decisions taken by their mother. Soon after the opening image, the setting of the film moves back in time and place: in Mexicali, viewers can see the girls' house from outside in the dark. Viewers are then admitted into the house; a textual

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[20] Mexicali and Calexico are portmanteaus of the words 'Mexico' and 'California'.

[21] See for statistics Charlotte West, 'Transborder Students Cross the Southern Border Every Day to Go to College', *The Hechinger Report*, 2019 <https://hechingerreport.org/thousands-of-students-cross-the-southern-border-every-day-to-go-to-college/> [accessed 20 January 2021].

[22] Hamelin, 0.00-0.23 mins.

[23] Idalia Nuñez and Luis Urrieta Jr., 'Transfronterizo Children's Literacies of Surveillance and the Cultural Production of Border Crossing Identities on the U.S.–Mexico Border', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 51.4 (2020), 1–21 (p. 21) <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12360> [accessed 20 January 2021].

explanation states that it is 4 a.m., and a piercing alarm clock sound can be heard. One of the girls is portrayed soundly asleep under her bedsheets, and then a girl is shown ironing a school uniform skirt very early in the morning. Repeatedly, the time of the day is indicated, by means of bells and textual elements: At 5.30 a.m. the girls are shown resting, wearing earphones in the back of their mother's car; at 6.30 a.m. the girls are standing in a long queue at the Mexicali–Calexico port of entry; at 8.00 a.m. the school bell rings; at 10.30 a.m. the students have a break; at 4.15 p.m. the girls run hastily towards border control; and at 5.30 p.m. it is dark again, and the girls return to their house. Finally, at 9 p.m. the camera shot shows a girl who has fallen asleep on the sofa next to her school books. The frequent reference to time suggests that the lives of the girls are controlled by the clock, which heavily dictates their daily actions.

Driving her twins to the border control in the dark at five in the morning, the girls' mother explains in Spanish that: 'As a single mum, it's very hard. But it's worth it. Education is the inheritance I'm leaving them'.[24] The tight and tiring schedule of the girls, which is emphasised in the film by means of recurrent time references, is also an indication that the twins must work towards their mother's aspirations: they must strive towards a successful future, and there is little time for rest in the present day. At the beginning of the film, the girls state: 'We're US citizens, because we were born in the United States'.[25] Exploring borderland parentocracy, Darcy Tessman and Jill Koyama argue that:

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[24] Hamelin, 1.08 min. Here, I use the BBC translations from Spanish into English.
[25] Hamelin, 1.08 min.

Some Mexican parents use US citizenship for their children as a strategy for

expanding prospective opportunities for education, employment, and future

well-being. Low-paying jobs, insufficient housing, water, and sewage

infrastructure in MX make the Arizona side of the border appear as the best,

if not the only, option for their children's potential upward mobility.[26]

During the short interview in the car, the twins' mother does not mention whether

conditions might be hard for the girls too. Such a comment might have been cut by the

editors; however, in the context of borderland parentocracy and the relationship between

adults and children, it is notable that through this short interview, the mother is indeed

portrayed as one of Tessman and Koyama's parents, who are predominantly interested in

strategically optimising their offspring's life opportunities, and the viewer knows very

little about the aspirations of the two girls.

However, towards the end of the film, images of the gates and fences that protect

the school and the Calexico border control are shown, while Ana Fernanda Bernal's voice

says: 'People that jump the border want to get a better life, opportunity. I can relate to

them, just because life hits them hard too'.[27] On the one hand, this remark confirms Ana

Fernanda Bernal's agreement that sacrifices have to be made in order for the twins to be

successful in their futures. Considering the images of confinement that accompany her

voice, on the other hand, Ana Fernanda Bernal and the producers of the documentary are

suggesting that the life of the American student, like that of illegal Mexican migrants, is

a complicated and restricted one.

Although this is a film about a day in the life of the Bernal twins and their border

crossings, most of the perspectives that viewers hear are those of adults. For example, the

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[26] Darcy Tessman and Jill Koyama, 'Borderland Parentocracy: Mexican Parents and Their Transfronterizo Children', *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18.4 (2019), 328–39 (p. 329) <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1394857>.
[27] Hamelin, 3.05 min.

school principal, Oscar Olivarra, proudly lists the merits of his school on the border, and asserts: 'Being bilingual while being at the border, it's almost like a superpower. You're that glue. You're able to bring two worlds together'.[28] With the emphasis on the educational viewpoints of adults in this documentary, children's education seems to be dependent on the intentions and merits of adults, rather than on the students' strengths and aspirations. Gilmore and Marshall warn about 'the ongoing dangers of a politics based on a universal girlhood in need of rescue',[29] and the adults portrayed in the documentary do indeed seem to adopt the roles of rescuer, decision-maker and law enforcer, who all know what is best for the girls.

As opposed to harmful representations of the figure of the 'static vulnerable girl', Gilmore and Marshall focus on finding 'alternative, more effective resistance strategies'.[30] Whereas the girls are mostly represented in this short film as being compliant with adult requests and directives at home, at school and while crossing borders, there is a short moment in which the girls' agency is portrayed. Soon after the principal describes the benefits of a bilingual education, the twins are shown during a break, talking to their friends in Spanish about the video-sharing application TikTok. Ana Fernanda Bernal's voice is heard saying: 'I know it's for our benefit to speak English and they try to enforce it, but in our free time, we always speak Spanish'.[31] Here it is important to observe that Ana Fernanda Bernal uses the verb 'to enforce', which has authoritative connotations (somebody is forced to obey a law or rule). In speaking in Spanish about the digital platform TikTok, on which mostly young people upload short videos of themselves, these girls are challenging their adult-dominated society. The use of Spanish, which is linked to the migrants' Mexican identity and not to their official American

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[28] Hamelin, 2.10 min.
[29] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 669.
[30] Gilmore and Marshall, pp. 680 and 669.
[31] Hamelin, 2.30 min.

citizenship, is thus a strategy to resist decisions that have been 'enforced' upon the girls by adults.

Significantly for the following section, there is a stark contrast between the two genres of life writing that are provided in this sequence. The adult-edited BBC documentary, as an established genre of life writing in which the story of the girls is reproduced, predominantly represents the girls as vulnerable figures, who are controlled by adults and their decisions. In this adult-produced life writing, the girls talk (in their 'forbidden' language) about TikTok, a very modern digital and underexamined form of life writing. Considering Douglas and Poletti's notion that digital forms of life narrative are 'effective means for young people to claim their rights as citizens and agents rather than subjects of adult-led politics',[32] TikTok might in the future enable transborder girls to create a video which displays their own perspectives on crossing international borders every day,[33] and which gives more insight into the 'new mestiza' girl of the twenty-first century. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the complexities of growing up on the Mexico-Texas border. In this seminal intersectional feminist text of 1987, Anzaldúa clarifies that her Chicana/Mexicana and Anglo-American adult identities cannot be categorised as oppositional, and after rejecting binaries and dualities in adulthood, she thus develops the concept of the new mestiza.[34] Anzaldúa's aim is to generate change by thinking in pluralities, and to build bridges that will connect her with manifold groups of peoples. The producers of the BBC film make it clear that the mother of the Bernal sisters wishes to create new possibilities for her daughters by sending them to a school in California, thus requiring them to experience a girlhood in borderlands. Due to limited dialogue with the girls, however, it is unclear whether girls

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[32] Douglas and Poletti, p. 121.
[33] Famous young TikTok users such as bela_boi (371.6K followers), kIdscp_, and weronka_krupetta are already using their TikTok videos to speak about their TCK and migrant experiences. They use hashtags such as #TCK and #migrantlife to promote these videos.
[34] Anzaldúa, p. 101.

who cross borders every day and who have plural identities – and not just women, as Anzaldúa proposed – strive to build bridges and generate change with recourse to the terms promoted by adults.

In contrast to the above BBC documentary, which dedicates little space to the personal accounts of the two girls, the entire seven minutes of the short film 'Ein Weiter Weg Wohin?' (Further, But Where?) are devoted to Perwin, her descriptions of her flight from Syria, and her current experiences in Germany. Perwin is a refugee girl who moved from Syria to Turkey with her father in 2012 in order to join her mother, who had already fled there. After four years, as a teenager, Perwin moved to Germany with her parents; she now attends a high school in Baden Baden. This documentary was produced in 2019 by Markus Auge and Jascha Hannover for the European public service channel Arte; it was broadcast in 2020 as part of a series that focused on the migratory experiences of eight people from 1945 onwards, all of whom now live in Germany.[35] These eight people recount their stories in German, but because Arte is a European network, English subtitles are provided.

This film is longer than the BBC one, and focuses solely on the personal accounts of Perwin, and thus not on the narratives of adults (for example, in her family or school). Therefore, the producers of this documentary allow viewers to observe how Perwin could make her own decisions and exercise her agency in the countries she has lived in. In fact, the short film begins with the smiling girl in what might be a film studio, asserting: 'I love fighting. I want to show that I can defend myself'.[36] By strategically choosing images of battle at the beginning of the video to attract the attention of viewers, it could be argued that the producers are immediately attempting to provoke what Gilmore and Marshall call a 'rescue sensibility', and to acknowledge 'ongoing danger' in the life of the girl.[37] Yet,

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[35] In all of the eight short films, the interviewees are called by their first names and no surnames are provided. For this reason, in this chapter I too must simply use the name Perwin.

[36] Auge and Hannover, 0.00-0.20 mins.

[37] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 671.

by subsequently portraying Perwin in a sports centre, bowing to the camera in her martial arts attire, the producers redirect the viewers to reflect that at the centre of Perwin's story of migration is not the urgency to fight for survival at an early age in Syria, but the determination to become a champion by practising karate. Thus, here the producers resist positioning Perwin as a girl victim or dependent on the decisions of adults, unlike the depictions of the Bernal sisters above. Throughout the film, many shots are devoted to the girl practising sports as a way of being independent, and Perwin recurrently speaks about karate. For example: 'I enjoy karate a lot, I love fighting. I really love fighting. Even when I was at school in Syria, I used to beat up the boys! [. . .] I want to help myself. I don't want to depend on anyone'. She also says: 'I want to show people that I can defend myself. It makes me more confident'.[38] These remarks all contribute to demonstrating that Perwin is not, using the terms of Gilmore and Marshall, a 'target of rescue'.[39]

At this stage it is important to remember that this video, like the BBC one, is a biographical documentary that was shot and edited by adults, and it is unclear whether the final film was approved by Perwin. The ending, however, points out that the adult producers show particular awareness regarding representations of both migrants and girls. A final caption states that 'Perwin lives in Baden-Baden with her parents. She is training for her orange belt. Her brothers are both deaf and dumb and still live in Turkey. They're not allowed to come to Germany'.[40] The producers could have chosen to provide this information at the beginning of the video and exploited the rhetorical technique of pathos to manipulate viewers' emotions, encouraging them to engage swiftly with Perwin. Gilmore and Marshall argue that images of girls in crisis that circulate in the West often 'appeal in a way that constitutes the "West" as a site of sympathy for "distant suffering"'.

[38] Auge and Hannover, 3.40-4.20 mins.
[39] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 677.
[40] Auge and Hannover, 5.55 min.

The images and narratives may elicit pity and sympathy for girls by 'fostering feelings of benevolence in Western spectators'.[41] By informing viewers at the end of the documentary that Perwin's brothers are not allowed to migrate and that they are both disabled, the producers do indeed elicit pity and sympathy for the migrant girl and her family; but this is done when the viewers have already formed their opinions about Perwin, regardless of her dramatic family situation.

Having called attention to the producers' sensitivity in the above representations of Perwin, nonetheless, it must also be acknowledged that this film invites viewers to misinterpret the girl's story of migration, particularly through the use of despairing and reductive cartoons. Throughout Arte's series about eight migrants, the producers employ cartoons to illustrate the migrants' personal accounts. Whereas it is understandable that this technique is used to attract the attention of viewers, to ease tension and to simplify their comprehension of particular stories, in the case of Perwin's video, the refugee girl is represented as a disempowered young girl in the cartoons. They are used three times in this short film to illustrate the experience that Perwin is narrating, while viewers can hear the voice of Perwin explaining her feelings. The first cartoon portrays Perwin in Istanbul, Turkey. After positively recounting that she liked the nature and scenery in Turkey very much, Perwin states that she suffered during the four years there, due to her political status:

> In the morning, when I saw the students making their way to school, I just cried. They had really nice uniforms with a shirt and skirt. I didn't want to see it. It really hurt me in a way. Why did they have the chance to go to school and I didn't?[42]

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[41] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 684.
[42] Auge and Hannover, 1.08 - 1.20 mins.

While Perwin tells this story, a cartoon image shows a girl looking sadly out of a window at happy children in uniform; this illustration is suggestive of a passive life lived in isolation. Alternating images of Perwin in a film studio and in a sports centre are shown, and the producers choose to employ cartoons to hold the audience's interest. Showing a cartoon here to capture attention means that viewers can scrutinise the images with particular interest. Consequently, audiences might be led to believe that in Turkey, Perwin is (using Gilmore and Marshall's terms again) a 'static vulnerable girl' from the Global South, who is imprisoned and 'in need of saving'.[43]

The following two cartoons illustrate moments when Perwin is already in Germany. She explains that she is older than all of the other students in her class, and viewers can deduce that this is because of the years of schooling that she missed while living in Turkey. Here Perwin reveals: 'I find it a bit difficult to communicate with the others. Some of them are a lot younger than me'; and she often feels that her peers look at her 'strangely' due to her age.[44] In the cartoon, young children in a classroom are shown staring at Perwin, who is drawn as a weak old woman. In portraying Perwin with white hair, the producers employ humour as a rhetorical device. The major purpose here is to include a brief moment of amusement, to alleviate the rising tension during Perwin's story. However, both humour and cartoon figures serve also to sharpen the attention of viewers. Here, the great gap between the German children and the odd-looking Syrian female are emphasised. From being a girl in captivity in Turkey in the previous cartoon, Perwin is now an old lady in a classroom amidst young children, and is thus once again a vulnerable and dependent subject.

In the third and last of the cartoon representations of Perwin's experiences, the girl talks about missing her hometown:

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[43] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 680.
[44] Auge and Hannover, 3.08-3.20 mins.

To be honest, I still don't feel completely at home here. I miss Damascus a

lot at the moment. On my way to school, I always used to smell coffee and

jasmine flowers. The smell was so strong in the mornings and evenings! I had

a dream not long ago, that I was in Syria after the war and everything looked

wonderful, and very special, but the city was empty. I couldn't find anyone.[45]

After cartoon illustrations in colour of a happy girl inhaling the scents in a market, a

dreary and empty Damascus is portrayed in black and white. Perwin is here illustrated in

colour in the middle of the market, in order to create a stark contrast. If Perwin does not

feel at home in Germany, and Damascus is portrayed in this cartoon as a place void of

meaning, then viewers might conclude that Perwin is a 'homeless' person, and thus once

again a vulnerable girl.

Gilmore and Marshall argue that stories of girls in crisis often present a girl 'in

need of a particular form of rescue, namely, education and empowerment'.[46] Although I

have previously argued that the final information given to viewers demonstrates, to some

extent, a sensitivity to representations of migrants and girls, the final words of Perwin

suggest that the producers are attempting to elicit pity. Due to the war in Syria and her

stay in Turkey, Perwin has missed a great deal of schooling. She must still attend school

for many years, and then university; hence, she speaks of 'a long way ahead of me'. This

is the last of her speeches; in fact, it is also the German title of the short film.

Consequently, the final representation of Perwin is that of a girl who, using terms from

Gilmore and Marshall's notion of girls in crises, still has to 'rise from wretched

circumstances' caused by the politics of the Global South in Syria and Turkey, by means

of education of the Global North in Germany.[47]

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[45] Auge and Hannover, 4.36-5.05 mins.
[46] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 685.
[47] Gilmore and Marshall, p. 684.

Before exploring life writing texts that have not been framed by adults, it can be concluded that at least two readings of Arte's film about Perwin are possible, because only the girl's story is presented. Perwin's determination is portrayed, albeit through the adult perspective and editing of the producers. The BBC film about Ana Fernanda and Ana Louisa Bernal, on the other hand, encompasses the narratives of many adults, and the sisters are rarely portrayed as girls who are allowed to take control of their own stories. Both short films indicate that one must be wary when 'rescue' is used in the context of 'best interests' of children.

Bridging Cultures: Life Writing Produced by Girls

Being young is a great advantage […] we are not afraid to make radical changes.[48]

– Greta Thunberg

Instead of thinking that we can't fit in anywhere, we can embrace both cultures that belong to us. We can make people think that we belong to both societies and that we are citizens of everywhere. Let's start using the term 'Bridging Kids': An inclusive term that accepts children that were born in more than one culture.[49]

– Yui Mikuriya

The recent actions of Greta Thunberg have shown that far from being vulnerable and passive figures, girls all over the world have a lot to say and they want to be heard. Thunberg's global movement, which demands urgent action from governments to fight climate change, was circulated and enhanced through the Internet. In fact, Thunberg

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[48] Greta Thunberg and Ali Smith, 'Greta Thunberg: "They See Us as a Threat Because We'Re Having an Impact"', *The Guardian* (London, 21 July 2019), section Culture <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jul/21/great-thunberg-you-ask-the-questions-see-us-as-a-threat> [accessed 6 April 2021].

[49] Yui Mikuriya, 'Third Culture Kid? No, No, No! Bridging Kids!' (K. International School Tokyo, 2019) <https://www.ted.com/talks/yui_mikuriya_third_culture_kids_no_no_no_bridging_kids> [accessed 14 January 2021], 10.16-10.32 mins.

posted her first school strike photo at the age of fifteen in 2017, on both Twitter and Instagram. With almost 11 million followers on her Instagram account and almost 5 million followers on Twitter in 2021, Thunberg has managed to reach out to the world in a very short period. By means of hashtags and links, these two social media platforms allow users of all ages to disseminate copies of textual and graphic content swiftly and easily. The circulation of Thunberg's messages, which are predominantly in English, also significantly shows that in digital spaces, English has become the dominant language. On the one hand, social media platforms appear ready ways to amplify a voice, expedite global connections and generate change in the twenty-first century. On the other hand, the biggest social media platforms are structured by unequal power relations that influence the spreading of personal stories. For example, Thunberg comes from Sweden and her 'posting' in English raises questions about the politics of language online and how language might affect the online creation of a 'voice'.

Regarding online voices, in this section, I explore whether digital media can offer migrant girls new spaces in which they can take control of their own stories and voices while documenting their lived experiences of frequent mobility. I have chosen the texts below because they encompass varied types of international migration, and because they all reveal that these life writers are in favour of deploying digital media to spread awareness regarding the intersection of their experiences. The first text I analyse is a YouTube video blog entry, in which a girl talks about her TCK experience and unmasks assumptions about her nationality and place of residence to her viewers for the first time (hereinafter I shorten 'video blog' to 'vlog'). The other texts that I compare and contrast are TED talks, in which migrant girls exploit this format to speak about challenges based on their disability, religion and race respectively. Most TCL examinations focus on white adult authors who were born to parents from the Global North; thus, they often lack explorations of the nuanced experiences of growing up on the move. This section

therefore additionally expands existing TCL research by examining narratives that address the complexities that often accompany frequent migration in girlhood.

In a 2018 vlog entry titled 'Where Do I live: Growing up as a Third Culture Kid', the then fifteen-year-old Hannah Hermann used this video to reveal her background.[50] Hermann began posting videos on the social media platform YouTube in 2015 when she was twelve years old; and at the beginning of January 2020 she had over 300,000 subscribers. Although her channel name is 'MissHannahBeauty', the videos Hermann uploads on the platform are not only about beauty, but also about fashion, food, travel, and the girl's lifestyle in general. It is also significant at this stage to point out that although Hermann's digital user name 'MissHannahBeauty' might predominantly appeal to viewers interested in beauty-related channels, this 2018 vlog entry related to her TCK background is one of Hermann's most successful videos, with almost a million viewings on YouTube. Hermann now uploads videos and photographs on additional social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok. I agree with Maguire, who argues that Instagram does not necessarily produce 'shallow patterns of life narration, but shallow patterns of reading'.[51] Rather than reading Hermann's vlog entry as a trivial reproduction of conventional online acts, I propose that this carefully crafted nine-minute video, in which Hermann chooses to defy her American persona, reveals current trends at play in social media.

Examining new genres of life writing, Smith and Watson use the notion of automediality to approach 'life storytelling in diverse visual and digital media'.[52] Exploring this concept, Ümit Kennedy and Maguire explain that the 'framework of

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[50] Hannah Hermann, 'Where Do I Live? Growing up as a Third Culture Kid', *MissHannahBeauty* (Singapore: YouTube, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjaJlrPwOSM&feature=youtu.be> [accessed 6 December 2018].

[51] Emma Maguire, 'Constructing the "Instagirl," Deconstructing the Self-Brand: Amalia Ulman's Instagram Hoax', *European Journal of Life Writing*, 8 (2019), 12–32 (p. 14) <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.8.35546>.

[52] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 168.

automediality moves away from a conception of texts as able to capture and transmit preexisting selves, lives and identities, and towards an understanding of selves, lives and identities as constructed by and through textual and media practices'.[53] If, as Maguire argues, 'automedial texts are shaped by the networks of production and consumption in which they circulate',[54] then it is crucial at this stage to briefly consider the structure of the social media platform YouTube.

YouTube was founded in 2005 in California by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, who had all previously worked together for the American payment system company PayPal.[55] YouTube was bought from them only a year later by the American technology company Google LLC for $1.65 billion; it is currently the largest video-sharing social media site in the world. Evidently, large amounts of money are at stake in this business, and YouTubers can earn from advertisements and selling products, for example. According to Madeline Berg and Abram Brown of *Forbes* business magazine, the highest-paid YouTuber, ten-year old Ryan Kaji, earned an estimated $29.5 million from 1 June 2019 to 1 June 2020.[56] For the purpose of my analysis of Hermann's video, it is significant to point out that according to this *Forbes* report, all of the three highest-paid YouTubers during the above time span (Kaji, Mr. Beast and Dude Perfect) are young males who reside in the United States.[57]

Crucially then, it is in this still mostly American context that automedial self-representations are created; as Maguire argues, they 'circulate as commodities in an

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[53] Ümit Kennedy and Emma Maguire, 'The Texts and Subjects of Automediality', *M/C Journal*, 21.2 (2018) <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1395>.

[54] Emma Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', *Biography*, 38.1 (2015), 72–86 (p. 74) <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2015.0006>.

[55] See in this respect, William L. Hosch, 'YouTube | History, Founders, & Facts', *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago and London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/YouTube> [accessed 26 January 2021].

[56] Madeline Berg and Abram Brown, 'The Highest-Paid YouTube Stars Of 2020', *Forbes*, 2020 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2020/12/18/the-highest-paid-youtube-stars-of-2020/> [accessed 26 January 2021].

[57] Dude Perfect is a group that consists of five American men, Cory Cotton, Coby Cotton, Garrett Hilbert, Cody Jones and Tyler Toney. Ryan Kaji was born in the United States. His mother is the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants and his father is Japanese.

online media economy where survival is measured in video views, subscriber tallies, likes, and shares'.[58] Considering that on YouTube, as Maguire asserts, 'the creator's drive is to produce content that is "like"-able and shareable, and which will be watched lots of times by lots of people' in order to earn more money,[59] it thus follows that YouTubers feel the pressure to upload videos regularly. This is significantly reflected in the opening of Hermann's video:

> Hello guys, it's Hannah, welcome back to another video on this channel. If you can't tell by my voice already I am currently a little bit sick, it was even worse last week, hence why my video didn't go up, sorry about that.[60]

Before apologising for having missed a video, Hermann uses a greeting that is commonly adopted by American English-speaking YouTubers. Together with the American English accent, which, as she explains, she has acquired at international schools, and her ordinary Western furniture in the background, it is understandable that since her first 2015 vlog entry, many viewers have assumed that Hermann is a 'normal' American teenage girl living in the United States. After revealing where she was born and the countries she has lived in, which I will consider in detail later, Hermann asserts:

> I don't know why I haven't really talked about where I live or anything like that. But I just thought that it would make me more relatable. I guess I know the biggest audience for YouTube videos and stuff like that is in America so I thought if I talked about things like Target and stuff they only have in America that would make me more attractive to subscribers.[61]

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[58] Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', p. 77.
[59] Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', p. 77.
[60] Hermann, 0.00-0.20 mins.
[61] Hermann, 4.09-4.18 mins.

After the personal disclosure regarding her background and current place of residence, Hermann's autobiographical vlog entry involves a new type of confessional mode of speech. In her above-quoted admission, Hermann hopes to correct her misleading error. For Maguire, the appeal of many girls on social media, such as the 'Instagirl', 'is that she is potentially just an ordinary girl',[62] and a way to understand the digital self-representations of these girls is 'to see them as part of the broader cultural practice of self-branding'.[63] Up until this video, Hermann had been self-branding and commoditising her YouTube-self as an ordinary American girl in order to appeal to her viewers, supporting Maguire's claim that 'autobiographical subjects that emerge in the YouTube landscape are not incidental – they are shaped by the medium's "affordances" and conventions'.[64] The conventions in this case are the American ones, because as we have seen above, the most affluent YouTubers on this platform are American citizens.

In a world that, as Winfried Fluck argues when examining popular media, 'constantly Americanizes itself',[65] Hermann thus recognises that she has cultivated an Americanised image of herself in order to market her channel. Her act of performativity, which has been based on YouTube conventions, has masked Hermann's subjectivity, and in recording the process of transformation from her fabricated American-self to an international migrant, this vlog entry is also a 'coming out' video. For Sander De Ridder and Frederik Dhaenens, this new form of online life writing is rapidly gaining popularity 'in contemporary media culture'.[66] In these videos, it is predominantly young adults who publicly reveal that they have found their true identities. Hermann has indeed hoaxed her

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[62] Emma Maguire, 'Constructing the "Instagirl," Deconstructing the Self-Brand: Amalia Ulman's Instagram Hoax', *European Journal of Life Writing*, 8 (2019), 12–32 (p. 24) <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.8.35546>.

[63] Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', p. 78.

[64] Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', p. 75.

[65] Winfried Fluck, 'The Americanization of Modern Culture: A Cultural History of the Popular Media', in *Romance with America?: Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies*, ed. by Johannes Voelz and Laura Bieger (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), pp. 239–67, p. 263.

[66] Sander De Ridder and Frederik Dhaenens, 'Coming Out as Popular Media Practice: The Politics of Queer Youth Coming Out on YouTube', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 6.2 (2019), 43–60 (p. 43).

viewers for many years; but in pulling her new multinational-self out of the closet, she is paradoxically keeping up with online trends, while simultaneously exposing the flaws of YouTube tropes, thereby disrupting its conventions.

This vlog entry additionally shows that after three years of vlogging, Hermann is a skilled rhetorician. Her video begins with a short introduction, a main part that intermittently includes all three modes of persuasion, a final question and answer section, and a brief conclusion. At the beginning of this vlog entry, Hermann outlines the contents of the video and explains: 'I'm gonna be explaining where I live, where I was born, where I'm from, all of like my history in that sense because I have never really addressed it'.[67] In deciding to address her nationalities and experiences of migration after three years of American self-branding, this vlog entry signals the beginning of a new and more multifarious promotion of Hermann's personal brand.

After this short introduction, Hermann emphasises that she is not American: 'Alrighty, first thing I want to say is I have absolutely no connection to America whatsoever'.[68] Using the slang variation of 'alright', Hermann catches the attention of her viewers by signalling that she is about to begin a new topic, and by means of hyperbole, she then overemphasises that she is not American. Hermann then continues: 'I was not born there, I've never lived there, my parents aren't from there, none of my family lives there, nothing like that. I'm just, I don't know'.[69] Although Hermann initially seems to be creating a powerful situation by presenting a list of what separates her from the United States, in order to then forcibly announce where she does belong, the final sentence produces an unintentional effect of anticlimax. It seems that Hermann is not yet ready to confess to her viewers why she has pushed them into believing that she was American. On the other hand, Hermann is perhaps trying to create suspense in not yet revealing her

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[67] Hermann, 0.20-040 mins.
[68] Hermann, 1.05 min.
[69] Hermann, 1.10 min.

nationality; and, using aposiopesis, her sudden breaking off of this sentence, as if at a loss for words, could also be intended to stir pathos.

Instead of revealing her nationality, Hermann at this stage only asserts: 'I just sound American to a lot of people and that's why a lot of people think I live there, but I don't'.[70] Based on this assumption Hermann is diverting blame away from herself. Hermann then finally reveals where she was born and where she has previously lived:

> My mom's from Finland and my dad's from Germany and they met when my mom moved there for a job so I was born in Germany and I lived there until I was eight. When I was eight years old my family moved to Shanghai, China, kind of random I know but I lived there for about four and a half years. When I moved there I did not know any English, I did not speak any Chinese obviously so I was kind of completely lost.[71]

Continuing to present facts, Hermann initially uses logos above to help her viewers understand her background, before revealing where she currently lives. In then claiming that she was lost in China, Hermann uses pathos to touch her viewers. Additionally, she coughs during her talk, to point out that she is still sick. Another instance of pathos can be observed when Hermann wraps up her video: 'I don't think I ever really went fully out of my way to keep it a huge secret and I definitely mentioned small things in videos but I'm glad to finally uh film a video and just talk about everything fully'.[72] In the above conclusion that resembles a plea in front of a jury, it is significant to point out that Hermann has downsized her wrongdoing. The girl had indeed already given hints about her migrant status and place of residence in past vlog entries, and can thus ultimately

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[70] Hermann, 1.21 mins.
[71] Hermann, 1.20-145 mins.
[72] Hermann, 9.09 min.

plead 'not guilty'.

After previously assuming that typical YouTube viewers know all about American products and shops, Hermann now takes it for granted that her followers know the meaning of the TCK term. In fact, she does not refer to this label in her video, and it is only found in its title. However, it must be pointed out that here Hermann answers questions that were sent to her previously via her Instagram account, and she might thus have illustrated this term to her followers beforehand.[73] Additionally, the comments that can be found below Hermann's vlog entry suggest that many of her viewers know the meaning of the TCK label. For example, user Shanaya Ssvor writes: 'Oml i live in Singapore too and I go to an international school here! I am a 3rd culture kid too!!!'; whereas user Ifeta comments:

> i just clicked on this video because it was in my recommended and im shook because we're literally the same person lmao. I'm also a junior doing IB in my third country I've lived in??? theres so little third culture kids I know online so this is pretty cool yuh.[74]

It is also Ifeta who explains to another user the meaning of TCKs:

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[73] Posts in Instagram announcing 'Question and Answer' sessions and other temporary activities are often deleted soon after the events. Additionally, Instagram 'Stories' can be viewed by subscribers only for 24 hours. Should Hermann have described the term TCKs in a 'story', this might be why I was not able to find the post on Hermann's account.

[74] See user comments, Hermann. Regarding the user comments I quote in this chapter, please note that not wanting to risk changing their meanings, I decided to leave the quotes as they are and I have therefore not corrected the spelling and grammar of these comments.

third culture basically means you're someone who grew up in different countries/cultures than where you're originally from for a big chunk of your developmental years (aka your childhood). So you don't completely fit into any culture since you kind of adapt to many different cultures/people. [75]

As the comments underneath Hermann's video indicate, many users either self-identify as TCKs or have friends who share the girl's international lifestyle. If social media users, as Smith and Watson argue, 'often read sites with a skeptical eye',[76] then Hermann must from now on prove to her audience that she is an authentic TCK, as opposed to her past 'fake' American self-representation. Using ethos to prove to her viewers that she can be trusted, and to show that she has lived in many countries, Hermann gives a taste of all the languages that she speaks, and introduces herself in German, Swedish and Mandarin.[77] Additionally, by means of visual images she provides her viewers with basic information about Singapore.

In this vlog entry, from being originally an ordinary American girl, Hermann has transformed herself into a girl who has lived in three countries, who is multilingual, who has many national attachments and friends from all over the world. In asserting this heritage at the end of her video: 'It makes me realise that it makes me a little bit unique and different from other YouTubers that are on this platform',[78] Hermann changes the focus of her self-branding. Considering Maguire's argument that in social media, girls 'are using self-representation to compete in the highly competitive YouTube landscape',[79] the question must then be raised as to whether Hermann is embracing a new

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[75] See user comments, Hermann.

[76] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation', in *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, ed. by Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), pp. 70–95, p. 76.

[77] Hermann speaks here in Swedish rather than in Finnish because, as she explains, her mother comes from the Swedish-speaking area of Finland and this is thus the language that she speaks with her mother and her Finnish relatives.

[78] Hermann, 9.08 min.

[79] Maguire, 'Self-Branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in the Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles', p. 79.

TCK identity in order to receive more views, fans, subscribers, likes, and ultimately financial gain. Amidst a plethora of 'ordinary' YouTubers who replicate American ways in their videos, it can be argued that Hermann has found a niche that can help to make her channel more unique, and particularly, more profitable. Read this way, the sudden repudiation of American attachments in this video is solely for commercial reasons, and Hermann exploits her differences as a marketing weapon.

It is, however, important to remember how some other life writers whom I have previously analysed experienced their girlhoods on the move. Liang informs her audiences that she felt confused while growing up in many countries because she did not know where she belonged. Finding out about the TCK concept finally gave Liang a sense of belonging in adulthood. No longer wanting to perform a role imposed by others and refusing to be unfairly placed in one single mould, in adulthood Hoque rejects limiting classifications and finally embraces her multi-layered existences. In exclaiming 'but recently I've realised that me living abroad makes me more unique, hence why I'm explaining everything to you guys now',[80] Hermann shows that an appreciation of one's mixed heritage and migrant background can indeed be achieved in girlhood too, albeit for marketing purposes.

Crucially, the marketing and financial reasons behind Hermann's self-representation seem to be the focus of the girl's interests. Yet, Hermann also proves to be a skilled communicator, who uses this commercial digital mode of self-representation to distance herself from her American persona and to claim multiple nationalities and languages, together with frequent migration, as her new online identity. This vlog entry thus also draws attention to social media systems that Americanise young users. It suggests in fact that at this stage of her girlhood, Hermann is beginning to reject living a

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[80] Hermann, 4.24 min.

life driven by the expectations of others and by social media conventions. After viewing Hermann's video, user Mona Majzoubvor comments:

> Wait hold up! You're not American okay i'm sooooo shook! I'm also not American but a lot of ppl think i'm american. Not being american rlly made me not want to start a youtube channel bcz i can't relate to everyone else since most of the ppl are american.[81]

Hermann's video highlights what this user reiterates: YouTube is believed to be a platform that is dominated and shaped by American discourses. This comment also indicates that Hermann's video offers empowerment strategies, in that it can encourage viewers to be self-empowered digital users who can resist, improve and transform current YouTube norms. Hermann's video thus might encourage not only migrant viewers, but indeed also young viewers who feel they do not belong to the dominant culture surrounding them, to come out and celebrate their differences, instead of attempting to cover them up. Additionally, Hermann's vlog entry significantly publicises an overlooked topic. In fact, though hers has been of the privileged type, Hermann gives prominence to the experience of migration in childhood.

Whereas Hermann's YouTube channel, as we have seen, is a personal self-branding and commoditising project, for their autobiographical talks, the girls described below have chosen a more didactic platform. Yui Mikuriya, Nujeen Mustafa and Maria Omer recently spoke at live TED events, and the video-recordings of these talks were subsequently uploaded online by the event organisers. As the official homepage of TED illustrates: 'TED was born in 1984 out of Richard Saul Wurman's observation of a powerful

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[81] See user comments, Hermann.

convergence among three fields: technology, entertainment and design'.[82] As Ludewig informs, when TED launched its website in 2006 and began divulging video recordings of selected talks, 'TED entered a new phase of distribution'.[83] Consequently, according to Ludewig:

> the talks have at least two distinct and overlapping audiences. There is a primary audience at the conferences, and a secondary audience for video recordings of conferences as they are published online on TED's own website, its YouTube channel, a private website or blog. It is important to note, however, that not all conference talks appear on the website, which means that the web presents a curated selection.[84]

The three talks I examine are all TEDx talks. Whereas TED conferences are managed by the non-profit TED organisation and attendance is by application and invitation only, a TEDx event, as the TED homepage explains, 'is a local gathering where live TED-like talks and performance are shared with the community. TEDx events are fully planned and coordinated independently, on a community-by-community basis'.[85] Nonetheless, TEDx talks must also follow TED rules, such as avoiding any political, religious or commercial agenda.

Additionally, two of the talks I analyse are TEDxYouth talks. Unlike adult TED talks, which must not exceed eighteen minutes, these talks are generally under ten minutes, and TEDxYouth events are oriented towards young audiences. Whereas increasing numbers of scholars from the literary field are beginning to explore TED and

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[82] 'History of TED', *Ted.Com*. <https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization/history-of-ted> [accessed 1 February 2021].
[83] Ludewig, p. 2.
[84] Ludewig, p. 2.
[85] 'What Is a TEDx Event?', *Ted.Com* <https://www.ted.com/participate/organize-a-local-tedx-event/before-you-start/what-is-a-tedx-event> [accessed 2 February 2021].

TEDx talks, analyses of TEDxYouth talks are still underexamined. For example, García reads TED talks 'as an understudied form of life writing, one of multiple ways of rendering self-presentation more visible that have emerged thanks to the digital paradigm'.[86] García, however, does not examine the format of TEDxYouth conferences. At the time of the selected talks, Yui Mikuriya was eighteen, and Nujeen Mustafa and Maria Omer were both sixteen years old. However, TEDxYouth presenters can also be much younger. Tommaso Tricamo, for example, was eleven years old when he gave a seven-minute presentation about growing up as a TCK, and Luke Bakic was nine when he talked in English about the importance of reading, in front of an audience in Poland.[87]

Yui Mikuriya's TEDxYouth talk, titled 'Third Culture Kid? No, No, No! Bridging Kids!', was delivered in 2019 at the Tokyo international school KIS.[88] At the time of this talk, Mikuriya was a high school student; her twelve-minute talk expanded upon the TCK concept, after explaining her experience of growing up in France and Japan. In her eleven-minute TEDx talk of 2018, titled 'My Journey from Syria to Germany in a Wheelchair',[89] Syrian Kurdish refugee Nujeen Mustafa spoke to an audience in Nishtiman, Iraq, about her journey from Syria to Europe in a wheelchair. Finally, Maria Omer's 2017 talk, 'Has War Made Peace?',[90] explained the girl's experience of living all over the world, and how the current refugee crises should be tackled. At the time of this six-minute TEDxYouth talk, Omer was a student at the Birmingham Academy, and her presentation was given at Passmores Academy, Harlow, United Kingdom. Mikuriya's talk was chosen because she

[86] García, 'TED Talks as Life Writing', p. 488.

[87] Tommaso Tricamo, TCKs (TEDxYouth presented at the TEDxYouth@WSO, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmWs_waCk6A> [accessed 2 February 2021]; Luke Bakic, 'The Power and Importance of...READING!' (TEDxYouth presented at the TEDxYouth@TBSWarsaw, Warsaw, Poland, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rW2r5uStgG0> [accessed 2 February 2021].

[88] Mikuriya, 'Third Culture Kid?'

[89] Nujeen Mustafa, 'My Journey from Syria to Germany in a Wheelchair', *TEDx* (Nishtiman, Iraq, 2018) <https://www.ted.com/talks/nujeen_mustafa_my_journey_from_syrian_to_germany_in_a_wheelchair> [accessed 17 January 2021].

[90] Maria Omer, 'Has War Made Peace?' (TEDxYouth@Harlow, Harlow, 2017) <https://www.ted.com/talks/maria_omer_has_war_made_peace> [accessed 14 January 2021].

self-identifies as a TCK, and she explained that she felt discriminated against in France based on her race. Mustafa spoke about being different to other people around her because she is both a Syrian Kurdish refugee and a disabled girl with cerebral palsy. In her talk, Omer spoke about both frequent migration and the challenges she faces as an Arab Muslim girl.

These three talks thus significantly expand our understanding of how migrant girls are representing themselves and their migratory and intersectional experiences by means of new genres of life writing. However, once again, one must not forget that the TED talks platform – like YouTube, as Tobias Denskus and Daniel Esser argue – reflects 'a communicative culture rooted in Silicon Valley entrepreneurism; TED embraces the latter's business model while asserting its social non-profit aims'.[91] Therefore, it is important to consider how these self-representations are mediated, and more specifically, how they are created for the TED platform.

Ludewig asserts that early TED talks had much in common with a sales pitch: 'first, they are presented inspirationally and with the goal of convincing listeners of the assumptions as well as the trustworthiness and ingenuity of the presenter. Secondly, they pitch products, often technological innovations'.[92] Yet, according to Ludewig, unlike traditional sales pitches, 'the "products" advertised are just as often ideational as material, which is much in line with TED's slogan "Ideas Worth Spreading" '.[93] Ideas and solutions are therefore often put forward and advertised after recounting challenges, and Ludewig points out that the talks then end on an 'upbeat note'.[94] This narrative pattern can also be observed in the talks of Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer.

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[91] Tobias Denskus and Daniel E. Esser, 'TED Talks on International Development: Science Communication, Digital Solutionismm and Social Change', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2014, 1–34 (p. 18) <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2467192>.
[92] Ludewig, p. 4.
[93] Ludewig, p. 4.
[94] Ludewig, p. 5.

All three girls in fact begin by explaining the challenges they faced while migrating, and in looking and being different from their dominant culture peers. In the talks, the girls then illustrate how they tackled this situation and, finally, they offer advice to their audiences on how to embrace cultural differences. Mustafa begins by informing her audience that she is a Kurdish disabled girl from Kobanî: 'As you see, I'm a wheelchair-bound and so there are two things that set me apart and make me different from everyone else'.[95] She then briefly describes her journey in a wheelchair from Syria to Germany. Mustafa recounts that she was grateful for this opportunity, because:

> For a girl like me who's always been confined to a small space a journey like
>
> that was like a dream and I approached it with a six-year-old's curiosity. I
>
> was excited to cross borders meet people and be in new countries. There were
>
> a lot of firsts on this journey.[96]

Yet, this adventurous journey was 'not all fun and games',[97] as Mustafa explains. For example, she and her sister were denied entry to Hungary, and her enemies told her repeatedly that Kurdistan does not exist. Therefore, she ends her talk by asking her audience, and indeed all the world, to be more understanding:

> What I want to say to the whole world, to the Christians, to the Muslims, to
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> the Kurds, to the Turks, all of them, is that no good comes from the attempt
>
> to eliminate people. The only way we could survive together is to accept each
>
> other.[98]

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[95] Mustafa, 01:02-01:15 mins.
[96] Mustafa, 04.05-04.29 mins.
[97] Mustafa, 06.09 min.
[98] Mustafa 11.09-11.30 mins.

This ending can be considered as what Ludewig calls a 'micro-to-macro augmentation',[99] in that the speaker attempts to make her portrayals of her individual fate – as a migrant Syrian Kurdish disabled girl – become part of a bigger global picture. Moreover, it also chimes with Mustafa's comments about living in a 'small' space yet traversing an international domain. In this last sentence, Mustafa employs the first-person plural pronoun to establish a feeling of intimacy and togetherness with her listeners, before asking them to collaborate with her in accepting diverse cultures.

Mikuriya also ends her TEDxYouth talk by asking her peers to unite with her in order to bridge cultural gaps:

> We 'Bridging Kids' are the key to making bridges between cultures in this world and work as cultural ambassadors. It doesn't matter if you don't fit into the label that we used to know as 'TCK' because you can still be a 'Bridging Kid' by your actions. Join me and let's bridge this world together.[100]

Once again, the speaker tries to create an ultimate sense of togetherness and urges future collaborative performance by employing the personal pronoun 'we'. Previously, Mikuriya has informed her audience that she spent parts of her childhood in France, where she initially felt and 'looked different to most other children'.[101] To highlight this stark difference, here Mikuriya employs visual aids and shows her audience a school class photograph, in which it is easy to find the Asian girl amidst other European children. Mikuriya states that in France she was often called 'Chinoise' ('Chinese') on streets. This term is used indiscriminately in French-speaking countries against people who have an Asian appearance. Mikuriya says that she never became used to people identifying her as

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[99] Ludewig, p. 6.
[100] Mikuriya, 11.01-11.30 mins.
[101] Mikuriya, 2.11 min.

Chinese or Asian, because they were casting her out of the French culture that she thought she belonged to.[102] Upon returning to her country of birth, she realised that she 'was an outsider in Japan too'.[103] Common to many individuals who grow up in the TC, Mikuriya asserts that 'being different was what was shaping my identity'.[104]

Having illustrated these challenges linked to her migration, the speaker then explains how she found the strength to find solutions to her problems; this is when the narrative of success begins in the talk. Mikuriya states: 'I wanted to say goodbye to my identity crisis and make actions' that arose from my 'multicultural backgrounds'.[105] The high school girl analyses possible actions that could contribute to bridging the two countries she is attached to: Japan and France. Significantly, Mikuriya's awareness mirrors Anzaldúa's concept of the new mestiza that I commented upon in the previous section. Indeed, early on in her life, Mikuriya 'learns to juggle cultures', and like the new mestiza of Anzaldúa, 'Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else'.[106] Ultimately, Mikuriya's cultural, national and linguistic ambivalence compelled the management of the Sumida Hokusai Museum in Tokyo to create labels and information for visitors in French. Previously, Mikuriya had been surprised to observe that despite the fact that French visitors formed the majority of foreign museum-goers, no information about the Japanese artist Hokusai and Ukiyo-e art were provided in French.[107] Mikuriya helped to translate into French the information that can now be found in the museum.

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[102] Mikuriya, 3.25 min.

[103] Mikuriya, 5.45 min.

[104] Mikuriya, 2.13 min.

[105] Mikuriya, 6.15-6.20 mins.

[106] Anzaldúa, p. 101.

[107] 'Ukiyo-e' is a style of Japanese woodblock print and painting from the Edo period (from the 17th to the 19th centuries); for further information about Mikuriya's Hokusai ambassador work at the Sumida museum, see her blog posts, Yui Mikuriya, 'Hokusai Ambassador Project', *Yuimik*, 2018 <https://yuimik.wordpress.com/2018/08/20/hokusai-ambassador-project-overview/> [accessed 18 February 2021].

This process shows that the girl had the strength and imagination to transform feelings of confusion and alienation caused by her TC, or ambivalent upbringing, into positive action for others and for herself. At the end of her talk, in coining the term 'Bridging Kids' and in rejecting the label TCKs, Mikuriya encourages peers of all backgrounds to bridge cultures with her. After examining selected TED talks, Denskus and Esser conclude:

> Many of the TED talks in our sample evoke individualism despite explicit emphasis on collectivism. Rather than actually engaging the audience collectively in critical thinking via a political-economic analysis of structural problems, stories of success and resilience shape the narrative which then, in turn, frame "solutions" but not broader actionable projects, let alone any kind of "movement".[108]

The two scholars may have a point when they assert above that adult TED talks often emphasise collectivism and are shaped by stories of success and resilience. However, when considering the changes that both Mikuriya and Mustafa have brought about, the arguments of Denskus and Esser are unconvincing. Mikuriya, as we have seen above, has improved the experience of French-speaking groups in an important museum in the capital of Japan, and in illustrating the 'Hokusai Ambassador Project', she encourages other peers in the audience to take part in similar actions, such as the 'High School Student Ambassadors of Nippon Culture'. Mustafa gained global attention after her book was published in 2016, which describes her journey in a wheelchair with her sister from Syria to Germany.[109] Mustafa today uses her fame to campaign for the rights of refugee youth

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[108] Denskus and Esser, p. 15.
[109] For this memoir, see Nujeen Mustafa and Christina Lamb, *The Girl From Aleppo: Nujeen's Escape from War to Freedom* (London: Harper Collins, 2017).

and youth with disabilities. In April 2019, she became the first woman with a disability to brief the UN Security Council, where she admonished her audience that more must be done to include people with disabilities in all aspects of the work of the UN Security Council. It is due to advocates like Mustafa that the UN issued new guidelines in February 2021, which 'reflect the diversity of young people, recognizing that different groups are affected differently in crises'.[110]

In this discussion, it must not be forgotten that although she is disabled, Mustafa now speaks from a more privileged status, in that she has gained global fame and respect. This status enables her to speak to and be heard by worldwide audiences. Mikuriya also enjoys a privileged status. She speaks at the international school that she attends, and she was able to be heard by the museum managers; accordingly, she could promote change due to her position, and the French and English skills that she had acquired during her unique TC education. It is thus Omer's talk that can shed more light on how TEDxYouth talks, as a new genre of life writing, might be useful in giving an unaltered voice to youth in marginal or minority positions.

After contesting stereotypes of Arab Muslims in Western societies (for example, that 'every Arab woman is an oppressed failed exotic belly dancer'),[111] Omer lists some of the Arab Muslim inventions that shaped the modern world, such as algebra and coffee. Before ending her talk with an Arabic quote (a fact that shows that Omer is also a multilingual girl), she describes some of the challenges of Arab Muslims in Europe and illustrates why she decided to talk in front of her audience. Like Mikuriya and Mustafa, Omer asks her audience to unite with her in fighting discrimination:

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[110] 'New Guidelines Put Youth at the Forefront of Humanitarian Response', *UN News*, 2021 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1084832> [accessed 18 February 2021].
[111] Omer, 2.39 min.

In fact I had doubts about today's presentation and feared on how you might view me after. But then I realised that I have a voice. I have a voice and I should be standing up for the unheard and I have every right to be standing up for my country and my culture. So us, as the new generation, we have a lot of power and we could be standing up against xenophobia, racism and stereotypes. So I ask all of us to stand in unity.[112]

It is significant to observe that in the passage above, Omer insistently repeats that she has a voice. She is standing on a TEDxYouth stage to speak out for herself and for unheard Arab Muslims, who have been judged unfairly based on Western preconceptions. In speaking to her generation, she hopes to encourage youth in her area and global TED audiences to think about harmful stereotypes. Can Omer's TED talk about her personal experiences then be considered as a way of giving voice to unheard minority groups?

In one of the key theoretical texts in the field of postcolonial studies, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that 'there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak'.[113] In this essay, Spivak emphasises that the voices of people from the Global South (the subalterns) are merely representations, created and framed by a Global North perspective. The subalterns cannot speak because, as Graham Riach explains when analysing Spivak's notions, 'they are always spoken *for* by those in positions of power, and are never able to represent themselves. Further, if they do speak, they are not heard'.[114] Riach adds 'that more powerful people–academics, religious leaders, or people who are otherwise privileged in society–always speak for

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[112] Omer, 05.08-05.38 mins.

[113] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313, p. 307.

[114] Graham Riach, *An Analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak?* (London: Macat International, 2017), p. 12.

them. When they do this, the elite rob subalterns of their own voice'.[115] While acknowledging the richness and complexity of Spivak's essay (which I can only gesture to here), I wish to borrow some of its main terms and ideas about the most marginalised in colonial societies, who do not have platforms to voice their demands and make their own decision, when thinking about Omer's talk.

Expanding Spivak's concepts to Omer's talk, it can be argued that the girl portrays Arab Muslim individuals in Europe as subalterns, who are subordinated by the dominant Western world-view, and who are denied a position from which to speak. Spivak gives the example of the work of the Subaltern Studies group, to demonstrate how spaces can be cleared in which the subaltern is allowed to speak, rather than permitting others to speak for them.[116] It could thus be understood that the TED platform, like the objectives of the Subaltern Studies group, allows subaltern subjects' voices to be made intelligible, although we need to recognise, as I argue, that such spaces are never entirely outside the dominant mode.

In this context it must not be forgotten that Spivak has forcefully argued that subaltern women must speak for themselves using appropriate arenas. She gives the example of the Subaltern Studies group because it was originally founded by a group of Indian scholars who aimed to reclaim Indian history, which until then had been written by intellectuals and elites, and upheld the colonial legacy. This group sought to reject imperial and dominant modes of representation. Omer is, however, standing on a TEDxYouth stage; and for her act of speaking out for herself and other Arab Muslim girls in Europe, she employs a platform that is both linked to and imitates TED events. TED's

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[115] Riach, p. 11.

[116] See in this respect, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 241.

global stages, as Carsten Schwemmer and Sebastian Jungkunz illustrate, have been criticised for being elite ones that remain 'a privilege of white people'.[117]

Considering the TED platform as a tool that can, according to Schwemmer and Jungkunz, 'enforce cultural reproduction of dominant ideologies',[118] and so play a significant role in shaping perceptions of the world, TEDxYouth speakers are at risk of supporting dominant modes of knowledge production, rather than challenging them. Omer is indeed attempting to speak out and to be heard; yet, in accepting the TED rules and reproducing their standard (adult-led and elite) story structures, it must be asked: on whose terms is she truly speaking? In line with a Spivakian reading, then, Omer's act of speaking out on a TED platform about incidents of discrimination against Arab Muslims in Europe is not enough, because in participating in dominant modes of discourse and in speaking in front of an elite audience, she cannot be successful in winning justice for girls in her position.

In fact, the platforms that Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer have chosen for their self-representations seem to shape the autobiographical selves of the girls. Influenced by the business strategies of YouTube and TED, theirs are carefully crafted stories of personality formation that follow specific presentation structures. In terms of life writing by girls, the talks reveal that although they have not been edited and altered by adults, they can nevertheless be considered as texts that have been influenced and developed according to dominant modes of representation.

In the previous chapters, I have examined how the selected texts could be read as autobiographics. Gilmore considers women's self-representations that within the dominant mode produce 'an alternative autobiographicality',[119] and her reading practices

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[117] Carsten Schwemmer and Sebastian Jungkunz, 'Whose Ideas Are Worth Spreading? The Representation of Women and Ethnic Groups in TED Talks', *Political Research Exchange*, 1.1 (2019), 1–23 (pp. 17-18) <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2019.1646102>.

[118] Schwemmer and Jungkunz, p. 4.

[119] Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p. 22.

are 'concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation'.[120] For the very reason that Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer reproduce dominant modes of representation, I am wary to read their self-representations in this chapter as modern-day forms of autobiographics. Yet, signs of eruptions and resistance do emerge in their talks.

Far from being vulnerable figures, these girls feel the need to be seen and speak up for more diversity. In the four previously examined texts, a recurrent theme is shame and confusion, often linked to guilt-tripping parents and stepparents. While feeling alienated abroad, the girls are told by adults that they should count themselves lucky for what the parents are doing for their offspring, and feel privileged for what they are experiencing abroad. The girls then feel guilty and are even more confused; thus misunderstood, they remain silent instead of speaking out (both Liang and Hoque mute and mask their contradictory emotions; Abulhawa does not reveal the abuse she suffered by her father and stepfather; and affected by postmemory, Bui's girlhood is veiled in silence and complexity). For Rauwerda, guilt is a common characteristic in TCL, but it is a sense of guilt that is revealed retrospectively.[121]

As opposed to these retrospective feelings of shame in girlhood, the texts of Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer show that the girls do not appear to feel guilty. On the contrary, they are blaming others for the obstacles they have had to tackle. If one thinks of Thunberg's speech of September 2019, in front of world leaders at the United Nations – in which she asks her adult audience, 'How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood'[122] – together with the talks of Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa

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[120] Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p. 42.

[121] See in this respect, Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan" : Unexpectedly International Writing', *Wasafiri*, 25.3 (2010), 16–23, (p. 20); see also Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Third Culture Literature: Shame: The Next Frontier in Third Culture Studies', *Third Culture Literature*, 2021 <https://thirdcultureliterature.blogspot.com/2021/02/shame-next-frontier-in-third-culture.html> [accessed 20 February 2021].

[122] Greta Thunberg, 'Greta Thunberg's Full Speech at the United Nations Climate Action Summit' (presented at the The United Nations Climate Change Conference, New York, 2019)

and Omer, one can observe a trend of speeches by girls that take a condemnatory tone towards adults. Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer are blaming others for biased behaviour: Omer criticises 'media's perspective about Arabs';[123] Mustafa denounces people who assert that 'Kurdistan does not exist';[124] Mikuriya finds fault with prejudicial action in both France and Japan; and at the end of her video, Hermann denies taking the blame for misleading her viewers concerning her place of residence ('I definitely mentioned small things in videos').[125]

Significantly, these girls are not blaming their parents for their feelings of alienation and for their migratory experiences. On the contrary, the analysis of their talks has shown that feelings of pride, rather than shame, for their cross-cultural experiences are presented in the videos. Their stories of migration in the twenty-first century are about transforming challenges into opportunities. Instead of celebrating their differences in adulthood (as seen in the previous chapters), these migrant girls crucially embrace a transcultural acceptance in girlhood. Rather than muting their voices in migration, these girls want to speak up and act as ambassadors, or 'Bridging Kids' for change, by means of powerful platforms. These digital platforms are both empowering, in that they promote divergent voices, and exploitative, because the voices of their global users and speakers of all ages mostly circulate as commodities on Silicon Valley-based platforms.

Briefly returning to the main four life writing texts that have previously been analysed, it can be noticed that with the exception of Hoque's memoir that was originally published in India, all these English texts were first published in the United States; albeit in some cases by independent publishing houses and entertainment companies, such as Interlink books and HapaLis Prods. Regarding the production and consumption of texts

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/read-greta-thunberg-s-full-speech-united-nations-climate-action-n1057861> [accessed 21 February 2021].

[123] Omer, 02.06 min.

[124] Mustafa, 10.12 min.

[125] Hermann, 9.09 min.

in English, parallels can thus be drawn between twenty-first-century digital life writing by girls and more traditional forms of life writing by adults. Although most of the adult life writers now live in the Global North, they predominantly grew up in countries that were once or continue to be colonial possessions of another nation, and therefore their texts are both about and considerate of marginalised groups and individuals who have had their voices silenced. It is in these often postcolonial contexts, as Graham Huggan argues, that 'Contradictions inevitably emerge: writers wish to strike back against the center, yet they also write and are marketed for it; they wish to speak from the margins, yet they are assimilated into the mainstream'.[126] Huggan thus writes about 'continuing asymmetries of power relations that are attendant on the production and consumption of world literature in English'.[127] These concepts of the 1990s, related to postcolonial fiction and to literary markets in English, can be expanded to digital life writing by girls in the twenty-first century, in that the girls in the selected videos also strive to 'talk back' in English by bringing to public awareness their stories about migration, and by clearing spaces for multiple voices. In order to achieve these goals they strategically comply with the opportunities fashioned by big information technology companies.

Conclusion

The first analysis in this chapter, of two short documentaries about migrant girls, has shown that when videos are produced and edited by adults, girls are not always allowed to take control of their own stories. As opposed to these adult-produced videos, in the second section, talks by girls that have not been altered by adults were considered, in

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[126] Graham Huggan, 'The Postcolonial Exotic', *Transition*, 64, 1994, 22–29 (p. 24) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935304>.
[127] Graham Huggan, 'Prizing "Otherness": A Short History of the Booker', *Studies in the Novel*, 29.3 (1997), 412–33 (p. 414).

order to examine whether platforms such as YouTube and TED can offer girls autonomous spaces in which their voices and stories about migration can be heard. In this section, it was observed that digital life writing cannot be understood solely on literary terms, and that it is crucial to consider how self-representations by girls are mediated and shaped by the norms of powerful technology companies. In this respect, it was argued that the digital turn in life writing has produced a paradox for these young girls, who want to spread awareness and demand action concerning migration and discrimination. On the one hand, platforms such as YouTube and TED allow migrant girls spaces in which they can speak out; but on the other hand, these are spaces controlled by big American technology corporations that have the power to influence markets and the practices of their users.

Given my discussion, I conclude that while the videos I have analysed in both sections indicate that migrant girls want to speak out and exercise agency, all the formats are controlling ones, in which the girls speak out in the shadow of adults, and of social, cultural and linguistic norms influenced by internet trends. Therefore, these platforms do not offer girls spaces in which they can speak with uncorrupted autonomy. Nevertheless, many traditional book markets and corporations that offer life writers spaces to narrate their stories of migration are profit-making businesses too, and parallels can be drawn between the processes of these companies and the more modern ones that dominate expressions of culture and the dissemination of information in English, the online lingua franca.

Silencing and masking in girlhood, as opposed to the act of speaking out in adulthood by means of life writing, have been recurring themes in the previous four chapters dedicated to life writing by adults. This chapter has shown that the selected migrant girls of the twenty-first century Perwin, Ana Fernanda and Ana Luisa Bernal, Hermann, Mikuriya, Mustafa and Omer, also speak out. In their talks, these girls affirm

that challenges caused by migration can be transformed into opportunities in girlhood. Another recurrent theme connected to masking has been visibility and perception. Considering the media's production of visibility, it can be observed that all the girls considered in this chapter are eager to be seen. Instead of hiding and feeling ashamed, these girls are not afraid of standing up on powerful platforms. Previous chapters have shown that the life writers growing up in the 1970s and 1980s often found comfort in watching the cartoons of superheroes on television. This chapter, on the other hand, has shown that in the twenty-first century, new forms of media and life writing allow roles to be shifted, and migrant girls can be postmodern superheroines who fight to bridge cultures on-screen.

Drawing upon the work of Bauman, at the beginning of this doctoral thesis I argued that within the context of migration, notwithstanding the sometimes privileged status of their parents, children are always the vagabonds – this is because they move involuntarily, in that decisions regarding their international mobility are made on their behalf by their parents or legal guardians. At the end of this final analytical chapter, I would like to emphasise that one must be cautious of claiming that digital platforms are opening new spaces in which migrant girls, and using Spivakian terms again, subaltern young women around the world can voice their opinions. In her book *New Forms of Self-Narration: Young Women, Life Writing and Human Rights*, García dedicates a whole chapter to Bana al-Abed, a girl who, in 2016 at the age of seven, began using Twitter and the hashtag 'Aleppo' to divulge information about the Syrian conflict in English.[128] Al-Abed's tweets were reposted by celebrities such as J. K. Rowling; the girl's swift fame led to her family's flight from Syria a few months after the first Tweet, and to gaining citizenship in Turkey. Al-Abed's is a story of successful digital life writing, but it is crucial to acknowledge at the end of this chapter, and indeed of this thesis, that there are

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[128] García, *New Forms of Self-Narration: Young Women, Life Writing and Human Rights,* pp. 77-92.

nuances in the concept of the vagabond, of subalternity, and indeed of moving girlhoods in general. There are many children and girls who, unlike al-Abed, do not have the privilege of having parents who speak English fluently, or access to mobile phones and internet services. All over the world, girls are forced to leave their homes and countries and to migrate internationally, due to human trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour.[129] Notwithstanding modern technology, these girls are not allowed spaces from which their voices can be heard. On the contrary, these migrant girls remain invisible and are not allowed to speak.

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[129] In this respect, see Ligia Kiss and others, *The Trafficking of Girls and Young Women: Evidence for Prevention and Assistance* (London: Plan International UK and International Organization for Migration – IOM, November 2019), pp. 1–106 <https://plan-uk.org/file/trafficking-of-girls-and-young-women/download?token=gXqs11ip>; and Naomi Grimley, 'I Was Trafficked from Romania', *BBC News*, 2016 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37622796> [accessed 8 April 2021].

Conclusion

When Kazuo Ishiguro won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017, literary critic Denis Scheck praised the Swedish Academy for providing a window on the world with their award. For Schenk, Ishiguro is an 'ideal bridge constructor', because he connects both cultures and genres.[1] Ishiguro moved from Japan to the United Kingdom at the age of five when his father was temporarily recruited by the British National Institute of Oceanography. A conversation between Ishiguro and the 1994 Nobel Prize in Literature winner Kenzaburo Oe reveals that Ishiguro's parents originally intended to stay in England only for a couple of years.[2] In view of imminent repatriations, the family's assimilation into British culture was therefore a complex process.

As a 'foreigner' in the United Kingdom, Ishiguro learnt at an early age that survival often depended on impersonation, as Iyer reveals in his book *The Global Soul*.[3] Here, Iyer describes Ishiguro as a 'translator of sorts',[4] because he was accustomed to converting values of one culture into another. This image mirrors Schenk's notion of the novelist's building of bridges. Although Ishiguro is a man, I refer to him here at the end of this thesis because the above texts about this prominent TC writer summarise many of the notions that have been detected in this thesis: alienated children adopt a disguise while crossing boundaries in a foreign setting, to mask their differences. Ultimately, they grow into creative figures who produce works that cross genres and bridge cultural differences.

Extending the recent observations by life writing critics such as Douglas and Poletti about autobiographies of childhood, my thesis has set out, through examinations of aesthetic and generic elements that are employed in life writing to portray moving

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[1] Theresa Münch, 'Literaturnobelpreis Für Kazuo Ishiguro', *Südkurier* (Konstanz, Germany, October 2017), section Culture <https://www.suedkurier.de/ueberregional/kultur/Literaturnobelpreis-fuer-Kazuo-Ishiguro;art10399,9440829> [accessed 12 May 2021]; (my translation of Denis Scheck's comment).
[2] Kazuo Ishiguro and Kenzaburo Oe, 'Wave Patterns: A Dialogue', *Grand Street*, 38, 1991, 75–91 (pp. 75-6) <https://doi.org/10.2307/25007458>.
[3] Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul*, p. 20.
[4] Iyer, p. 20.

girlhoods, to problematise and extend Rauwerda's notion of TCL. Rauwerda limits her TC readings to contemporary fiction written by predominantly white novelists with origins in the Global North, who experienced serial migration in childhood due to their parents' careers. So far, race, class, gender, age, language and genre imbalances have been overlooked in TCL scholarship. To address these gaps, this doctoral thesis has explored twenty-first-century life writing by women and girls from varying backgrounds, who moved (or are still moving) in childhood, for diverse reasons. As I have suggested, life writing texts about moving girlhoods are characterised by contradictory images; and in these texts, multiple genres of life writing are employed to challenge harmful classifications. It has emerged that the selected life writers blur the boundaries between the personal and the political, to draw attention to diversity and speak out against marginalisation.

The selected life writers all describe their connections with individuals who encounter barriers that prevent them from participating fully in society. This supports my original claim that migration in childhood is always an unsettling experience, no matter how privileged the context of mobility. Rauwerda focuses on the common themes of adult novelists who have experienced privileged expatriatism in childhood, and in this respect she refers to examinations of the 'over-dog'.[5] In order to emphasise the arguments that children live migration processes very differently from adults, that the migrant child cannot be viewed as the over-dog, and that literary scholars should thus pay more attention to the stories of international mobility in childhood in our times of migration, I examined the theories of Bauman and Nail in the introduction of this thesis. Considering Bauman's point that all migrants are situated somewhere between the contrary vagabond/tourist positionings, I argued that such children occupy a position closer to that

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[5] Rauwerda, *The Writer and the Overseas Childhood*, p. 5.

of the vagabond, because, using his terms, 'they have no other choice',[6] in that they predominantly move involuntarily, and they are rarely involved in decision-making processes. In order to summarise and reflect on my research, I will keep in mind Bauman's tourist/vagabond spectrum, alongside the previous notion of bridging two different places, people or groups.

Playing by the Rules: The Migrant Girl and Postcolonial Dualities

Throughout this thesis, the general term 'migrant' encompasses both vagabonds and tourists. Describing two different positions within global power structures, according to Bauman, these two figures reflect polarities of 'the postmodern society'.[7] In terms of the most common motifs used by the selected life writers to portray their moving girlhoods, the texts are characterised by images that reflect stark divisions. An example is Hoque's pairing of opposing weather conditions throughout her memoir, to contrast the natural world in Nigeria and Bangladesh with the industrialisation and pursuit of economic development in the United States. Such contradictory motifs employed by the life writers reveal the notion of growing up in 'difference' and in conditions of conflict. More specifically, the migrant girls have generally experienced the phenomenon of othering, and have struggled due to imbalances of power. Postcolonialism, as critics such as Benita Parry argue, is based on attending to divisions and 'binary structures of domination'.[8] Accordingly, this critical perspective has provided crucial frameworks for examining the selected texts, due to their recurrent depiction of the tension between dominating and dominated groups, and the conflict of feeling like an outsider. For example, in chapter

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[6] Bauman, p. 14.
[7] Bauman, p. 5.
[8] Benita Parry, 'The Postcolonial: Conceptual Category or Chimera?', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (1997), 3–21 (p. 17) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3509129>.

one, notions of orientalism and mimicry were applied to examine Liang's experiences as a teenager in North Africa. In chapter five, Spivak's notions of the silenced subaltern led to the discovery that the selected migrant girls born in the twenty-first century depend on platforms of dominant groups to express themselves.

My findings thus cast doubts on Dagnino's, Rauwerda's and McLaughlin's assumptions that transcultural, TC and 'Cross-Culture' texts respectively are generally characterised by multiple rather than binary relationships. However, it is significant that although the selected writers employ opposing motifs, they do not focus on one type of dichotomy and on 'only' two contrasting identities. Instead, their images serve to magnify multiple and interconnected polarisations, such as those of migrant, gender, racial and age binaries, in order challenge harmful divisions. Although Liang, as discussed in chapter one, is a migrant girl who attends private international schools, her allegedly privileged TCK upbringing is disrupted by various conflicts which lead to severe feelings of alienation and confusion. As an international migrant, Liang repeatedly experiences loss, and in the United States she suffers racial discrimination due to her physical Guatemalan/Asian traits. Additionally, she is silenced by her parents while growing up, and she is not allowed to take decisions because of her age. While living in North Africa, she also repeatedly experiences gendered insults.

This pattern of representations of multiple instances of othering and intersectional discrimination has emerged throughout this thesis. In sum, then, these are all unique stories of struggles, complex processes of minoritisation and discrimination, based on at least three factors in childhood (age, gender and migration status); or, to extend Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford's coinage, theirs is a triple colonisation.[9] This idea, and the images used in the selected texts, support my proposal that life writing about

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[9] Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1986).

moving girlhoods reveals that although ours are globalised times, we are nevertheless living in an increasingly polarised world.

Breaking Divisions: Genres and Classification Systems

Although I have used Bauman's images above to summarise life writing of moving girlhoods as characterised by contradictory motifs that reflect unbalanced relationships between two elements, it is crucial to specify that Bauman's vagabond/tourist dyad is not an opposition; rather, it exemplifies two positions on a shifting spectrum. Regarding the backgrounds of the selected writers and those of their parents, the majority of the migrant girls were either born in the Global South or have at least one parent from this geographical area (for example, Hoque was born in Nigeria to Bangladeshi parents, or Mustafa was born in Syria to Kurdish parents). By contrast, the examined texts were all created while the life writers were living in the Global North, and we can thus locate them on Bauman's shifting scale, rather than aiming to adopt fixed positions and simple distinctions.

In this respect, the examined genres of life writing suggest that the writers blend many genres in their texts, in order to reject fixed and ill-fitting categories after a girlhood spent trying to hide and fit in with the dominant culture, having fallen victim to its incorrect classifications. Hoque's memoir, for example, merges prose, poetry, weather forecasts, and medical reports from a psychiatric ward. Hoque recurrently interrupts the narrative by inserting notes in boxes at the beginning of short unnamed chapters; this indicates her experiences of living, using Fanon's terms, in a 'compartmentalized' society that classifies and excludes individuals.[10] Hoque's multi-layered life writing indeed

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[10] Fanon, p. 3.

shares similarities with that of Fanon's. As I pointed out in chapter two, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon merges personal stories and poetry with literary, philosophical and psychiatric criticism, to explore the psychological impact of the split between Blacks and whites. I ended the analysis of Hoque's memoir by showing one of the artist's photographs. Here, playing on words, I argued that in adulthood Hoque's weapon is her camera: in her works she 'shoots back' to challenge the gaze, after a disrupting childhood marked by discrimination based upon her looks, which differed from the surrounding dominating culture. This sense of employing genres as a response to misrepresentations and as a tool to 'write back' to dominating cultures, in order to abolish borders between centre and margin, has emerged throughout this thesis.[11]

Besides pointing out Hoque's act of 'shooting back', I argued that Liang chooses an autobiographical performance to 'speak back' on a stage after having been silenced in girlhood, in order to help children and adults who have shared her experiences. After a girlhood struggling with her parents' silence and the erasure of past memories, Bui 'draws back' lines of connection in the hybrid genre of autographics, for her parents, refugees like them, herself, and for the future of her son. In chapter four, I used the terms 'writing back' and 'building back' because Abulhawa blends genres to create a Palestinian child testimonio essay, which allows her to point out the parallels between her stolen and traumatic girlhood and the political situation in her 'homeland'. The notion of 'building back' is also a reference to the organisation that Abulhawa established, which builds playgrounds in Palestine and in UN refugee camps in Lebanon. Returning to platforms – specifically, digital platforms used by girls born in the twenty-first century – the last chapter revealed that teenage girls who grew up feeling alienated transform their feelings

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[11] Here, and in the following paragraphs, I refer to the term 'writing back' that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin adopted from Rushdie to define postcolonial writers who respond to colonial misrepresentations, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin.

of displacement into an asset; they use their life writing to speak up to encourage viewers to bridge cultural gaps.

I propose that life writing about moving girlhoods also shares parallels with the genre of testimonio, given that all the life writers are bearing witness to having been the outsider; to having been put in a box, using Abulhawa, Bui and Hoque's images; and to having been assigned labels and harmful judgements by dominant cultures. The life writers use their texts to 'speak back' to dominating powers and to convert their experiences into political action. These findings partly answer the research question that addressed the ways in which the selected life writers use their texts to create agency for migrant girls. On the one hand, as we have seen, these life writing texts express that the voices of minorities should not be silenced, and that one should take pride in one's complex cultural condition. Notwithstanding instability and false assumptions, girlhoods on the move are an accomplishment. On the other hand, the life writers have depicted how they developed a sense of agency and belonging; for example, through sports, reading, education, creativity, and more recently through social media.

My interpretation of the selected texts as a means of inspiring action and impelling change conflicts with Rauwerda's claim that a central characteristic of TCL is that it is predominantly apolitical.[12] The analysis of life writing about moving girlhoods has indicated that despite their diverse reasons for migration, the selected writers are all in some way engaged in helping others through their texts, which promote understanding of diversity and issues of marginalisation. These writers express how the shared experience of growing up as an alien, using Liang's terms – or of being raised 'out of place', as the title of Said's life writing suggests – can forge crucial individual and collective attachments. However, the authors not only seek dialogue in speaking about finding

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[12] Antje M. Rauwerda, 'Not Your Typical "Diaspora" or "Third World Cosmopolitan": Unexpectedly International Writing', *Wasafiri*, 25.3 (2010), 16–23 (p. 19).

similarities among differences. Most of the life writers are actively involved in helping members of minority groups who live in unstable situations. For example, Bui co-founded the first public high school in California for recent immigrants and English learners, and Mustafa has collaborated with the UN Security Council to help issue new guidelines; hence, they reflect the issues of minority groups, and recognize how diverse groups are affected differently in crises.

Few literary studies have focused on comparing the function of different genres of life writing, and one of my aims has been to fill this research gap. Accordingly, various genres of life writing were selected in order to examine how the phenomenon of moving girlhoods is represented through genres. My findings support Baena's idea that 'the choice and manipulation of form serve as signifying aspects' for transcultural experiences and subjectivities.[13] Although writers carefully choose genres according to various factors, such as audiences, and although the genres of life writing selected for telling their stories of moving girlhoods are very diverse, my exploration of the significance of genre suggests that the texts share some key features. As discussed, the selected genres of life writing about moving girlhoods tend to underline the main themes of the texts. Most significantly, each life writer depicts moments when they were passively affected by false representations in childhood. Additionally, they masked their identities to fit in with the surrounding dominant culture. In contrast, their chosen genres of life writing are tools to regain agency and to contest these representations.

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[13] Rosalia Baena, 'Introduction', in *Transculturing Auto/Biography: Forms of Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. vii–xiii, p. vii.

Postmodern Girls on the Move: New Perspectives and Shifts

Considering that the selected texts are tools to reveal the life writers' uniqueness after girlhoods spent behind masks, my readings suggest that life writing about moving girlhoods and transcultural theories are more closely connected than has previously been recognised. Although there is extensive literary research on transcultural adults, few studies focus on transcultural girls and their life writing. Whereas the examinations in the first four chapters show that women who grew up on the move in the 1960s, 70s and 80s proudly accept their unique cross-cultural upbringing after settling down in the Global North during their thirties and forties, chapter five has indicated that migrants girls born in the twenty-first century are bridging cultural gaps via digital platforms already before the age of eighteen, while still experiencing migration. These platforms help to spread awareness because they allow life writing of moving girlhoods to travel faster and wider.

Additionally, the first four chapters portrayed instances of trauma generated by unfavourable situations that were all caused by adults' decisions. Whereas, for example, Abulhawa's image of a can of tuna fish suggests a confined and powerless girlhood due to adults' decisions in the past, the texts in the final chapter demonstrate that twenty-first-century girls are quick to acknowledge and denounce being put into a box and scrutinised. These girls are proud of the multiple identities, linguistic competencies and intercultural skills that they have acquired on the move. It is thus not the coming of age in migration that is problematic for them, but their reductive categorisation due to the labels and judgements assigned by the dominant culture, and the influence of mainstream discourse. Consequently, these girls feel alienated from society and must attempt to make the opposing worlds they inhabit cohere.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the experiences of migrant girls are not universal: as we have seen, moving girlhoods are tackled in disparate ways. In the life writing of

Mustafa, a Syrian Kurdish girl with cerebral palsy faces greater problems on the move than non-disabled migrants. However, despite their different reasons for migration and the varied genres of life writing they employ in response to their border crossings, the selected life writers have created texts that share common elements. This in turn suggests that moving girlhoods is a distinctive subcategory of life writing, characterised by three essential features. First, juxtapositions of literary images reflect the dialectical tension experienced during moving girlhoods and raise questions about discrimination, masking and positioning. Second, in response to these themes, the authors select genres of life writing that underline these individual struggles, and thereby address diversity, visibility, agency and the notion of thinking outside boxes. Third, the life writers use their individual experiences of growing up out of place to emphasise that one's uniqueness can be used to tackle collective problems of our times.

Inspiring Girls: Telling Stories to Connect the World

After opening this concluding chapter of my thesis with the example of a male adult TCK who experienced a moving childhood in the world, it is fitting to end my discussions with an example of a girl – a 'Cross-Cultural' girl who has moved the world with her actions and through her life writing. I have already linked Thunberg to powerful digital platforms in chapter five. In 2018, when talking about falling into depression at the age of eleven, Thunberg revealed on a TED stage that she was then diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, selective mutism and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Thunberg stated that 'I think in many ways that we autistic are the normal ones, and the rest of the people are pretty strange'.[14] A year later she connected being on the spectrum with her 'outside-the-

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[14] Greta Thunberg, 'Greta Thunberg: The Disarming Case to Act Right Now on Climate Change' (TEDx, Stockholm, 2018)
<https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate_change?f

box thinking': 'I think that is something to really be proud of, that you are different'.[15] Voices of autistic individuals (and of young climate activists) have mostly been ignored in the past. Thunberg employs modern-day forms of life writing, such as TED talks and Instagram, to urge her audiences to see past stereotypes in order to create connections and drive change.

Thunberg's performances have shown that speaking when 'it's necessary' to bear witness to the experience of feeling different can be a powerful political act, and that the soft voice of a unique girl can travel far on digital platforms.[16] Her concept of difference is the opposite of a tool of segregation. She uses it as a weapon to publicly critique the multiple inequalities, including environmental crises, that are increasing due to technological innovation and globalisation. In seeking to reframe Rauwerda's notion of TCL by analysing and comparing life writing about the diverse experiences of children who recurrently cross cultural, geographical and linguistic borders (based on Van Reken's model), this doctoral thesis has also contributed to critiquing and expanding knowledge in the new CCK sphere. My examinations also reveal that girls who cross cultures on a daily basis, such as Thunberg, portray their transcultural sensitivity. Specifically, using Welsch's notions of transculturality, they readjust their inner compass 'to an attentiveness for [*sic*] what might be common and connective wherever we encounter things foreign'.[17] This suggests that rather than feeling that they are raised in a liminal state, or in a 'neither/nor world'[18] (as per Van Reken's previous TCK notions), contemporary girls recognise that they belong to different cultures and use their pluralities with a spirit of

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bclid=IwAR1XNtIibmx6dQcT9vr4ztE9xpiLd7Ue9pBYoXxboCuZX6-31dbto9dkYhU> [accessed 16 June 2021], 02.24-02.27 mins..

[15] Amy Goodman, 'Climate Activist Greta Thunberg on Why Being on the Spectrum Is Her "Superpower"', *Democracy Now!* (New York city: WBAI, 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpptVrll-bo> [accessed 20 June 2021].

[16] Thunberg, 1.22 min. Thunberg says here that she speaks when she thinks 'it's necessary' and the urgency of the climate crisis is the reason why she is speaking publicly at this stage in her life.

[17] Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today', in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World,* ed. by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 194–213, p. 198.

[18] Pollock, Reken, and Pollock, p. 4.

pride, inclusivity and resourcefulness, to speak to and attract the attention of wide audiences.

Van Reken proposes that more and more minors are growing up across multiple, and at times minor, cultures. She questions whether studies that compare the nuanced experiences of the individuals discussed in her CCK model might lead to new tools to understand children who frequently cross and live in between multiple borders. While asking why 'the specifics of the ways their stories happened were often so disparate?',[19] Van Reken's contemporary vision is to demonstrate the possibility of alliances through, across and within 'borderlands' in childhood. I refer to the term 'borderlands' here, because throughout this thesis, I have cited Anzaldúa's notions of the border woman. In bringing the theories of Van Reken and Anzaldúa's together, I have made the point that the differences experienced in lives spent crossing borders are 'connected and interdependent', as Anzaldúa asserts, and that these differences can offer useful tools for social change and 'bridging'.[20]

Regarding notions of shared experiences of exclusion, boundary crossing and minoritisation, Bhabha argues that writers such as Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer are 'interested in the experience of those who were excluded, either on the basis of their sexuality or their race'.[21] Expanding Bhabha's notions to the stories about childhoods spent crossing borders, my examinations suggest that life writers who frequently cross cultures and feel out of place as minors (as seen in the words and actions of Thunberg), grow up to be concerned with imprecise categorisations, and they are interested in finding appropriate ways to tell personal stories to challenge minoritisation and inequalities that

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[19] Ruth E. Van Reken, 'Peer Review: Ruth E. Van Reken', *Shades of Noir Journals*, Third Culture Kids (2021), p. 57 <https://shadesofnoir.org.uk/journals/content/peer-review-ruth-e-van-reken> [accessed 3 March 2021].

[20] Gloria Anzaldúa, 'Foreword to the Second Edition', in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), pp. iv–v, p. iv.

[21] Sheng Anfeng and Homi K. Bhabha, 'Minoritization as A Global Measure in the Age of Global Postcoloniality: An Interview with Homi K. Bhabha', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 40.1 (2009), 161–80 (p. 164).

affect the whole world. These individuals are not only interested in the voicing of 'experience', but they also seek to find and shape the best aesthetic means to convey confluent singularities, and to refashion the parameters of how we think rather than rely on the old polarities and 'boxes'. Accordingly, I conclude that the experiences of individuals who cross multiple borders in girlhood are told – and can be read, analysed and promoted – to address important themes of the twenty-first century.

Regarding the successful promotion of these stories, we have seen in chapter five that in Hermann's life writing, the girl uses her background to attract more YouTube followers. The fact that Hoque's publishers in the United States reprinted the memoir *Olive Witch* with the new subtitle 'cross-cultural memoir' also confirms that this term can be used as a tool to attract wide audiences, because there is the feeling that more and more people cannot be put in one single box, and, using Bui's images, reject staying between the lines.

As the scope of this thesis is inevitably characterised by its particular points of focus, it is worth pointing out some salient matters that require further development as the field evolves. First, returning briefly to the topic of publishers, my study has focused on texts that were predominantly produced and published in the Global North, where the life writers were living. Throughout this doctoral thesis I called attention to autobiographical texts that were written in a variety of languages, for example in French (Nothomb and Sattouf). However, life writing about moving girlhoods is generally written in English. As I pointed out in chapter five, this fact underlines the importance of addressing ongoing inequalities in the production of both print-based and digital life writing texts.

Second, my examinations have taken account of author diversity in order to achieve a detailed representation of girlhoods on the move. Accordingly, I examined, for example, the memoir of Hoque, who self-identifies as a Nigerian-born Bangladeshi-

American woman of colour. However, it must be acknowledged that the voices of writers of minority ethnicities are still underrepresented by publishing houses and on digital platforms.

Third, the selected life writers have migrated for diverse reasons, but the socio-economic and academic backgrounds of their parents in their countries of origin are more or less comparable; and they could all afford to migrate, or using Bauman's terms, to 'choose' their itineraries to a certain extent in the first place.[22] Additionally, the life writers were free to tell their stories in the Global North. My doctoral thesis has focused on the those who move and on those who can express their opinions, but it is just as important to consider the conditions of children who stay and of those who do not have the right to freedom of expression. Here too, it is crucial to acknowledge power asymmetries that affect both mobility and immobility. On our future individual and collective journeys, as is emphasised by life writers of moving girlhoods, we must actively be involved in leaving no one behind, and in bridging the gaps of global inequality.

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[22] Bauman, p. 14.

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