Duality and Diversity in the Lives of Immigrant Children: Rethinking the "Problem of the Second Generation" in Light of Immigrant Autobiographies*

NEDIM KARAKAYALI *Bilkent University*

À la lumière d'autobiographies d'immigrants écrites dans l'Amérique du Nord du XXe siècle, l'auteur de cet article étudie la thèse très répandue selon laquelle les enfants des immigrants sont pris entre leur communauté parentale et leur société hôte, et, par conséquent, qu'ils constituent un « groupe problème ». Les autobiographies fournissent une image plus complexe que ce que décrit ce modèle, indiquant non seulement une existence « ambivalente », mais également une vie imprégnée de rêves d'une nouvelle identité. S'inspirant des travaux de Deleuze et de Guattari sur la « littérature mineure », l'auteur suggère que la réalisation de ces rêves constitue un aspect central du soi-disant « problème de la deuxième génération ».

In light of immigrant autobiographies written in 20th-century North America, this paper examines the widespread thesis that children of immigrants are caught between their parental community and the host society, and therefore constitute a "problem group." Autobiographies provide a more complex picture than what this model portrays, indicating not just an "ambivalent" existence but also a life imbued with dreams of a new identity. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's work on "minor literature," the author suggests that the realization of these dreams is a central aspect of the so-called "problem of the second generation."

IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED AT THE DAWN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, the renowned social statistician Richmond Mayo-Smith (1894) identified three major groups among what he called "the whites" in America. First, *there were "the native-born of native parentage,"*[1] the "true Americans" who constituted "a homogeneous body, and to this body the others of more recent arrival tend to be assimilated." Then, there were "the whites of for-

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1. Mayo-Smith's depiction of early European immigrants as "natives" indicates a total exclusion of Native peoples of America from the discussion. This further hides the fact that what he calls "the native-born of native parentage" are themselves children of immigrants.

eign birth, the immigrants . . . the real element to be assimilated." Finally, there was the "the native-born of foreign parents . . . the second generation of immigrants, so to speak." Second-generation immigrants, Mayo-Smith wrote, "stand half-way . . . between the native and the foreign element . . . . They represent the process of assimilation in the act" (437–38).

Although few researchers today, if any, would proceed with such a simplistic scheme, Mayo-Smith's remarks are far from being obsolete. In fact, most social research on children of immigrants[2] in the 20th century has unfolded in the broader context of the integration of immigrant groups. More specifically, the idea that children of immigrants are caught between the "worlds" or "cultures" of their parents and the host society permeates the sociological literature. As I will try to show below, this idea is articulated in slightly different terms in different periods. Thus, in Thomas Jefferson's time, it was a matter of political loyalty and commitment to "democracy"; at the turn of the 20th century, it became a matter of social integration and order; and in Robert Park's work it turns into a matter of cultural integration. Ultimately, however, we can think of this as a single thesis that has been used in different forms. In this paper I chose to denote this idea as the "two-worlds thesis," partly because the term "world" is fairly broad (and therefore exposes the vagueness of the thesis better), and partly because it is used by Marcus Lee Hansen (1952) in his famous essay on "three generations."

This paper is a critical examination of the two-worlds thesis in light of autobiographies written by children of immigrants in 20th-century North America. Three major issues will be addressed. First, although the experience of duality is expressed in almost all the autobiographies, once we begin to zoom into the "worlds" of immigrant children, we *also* observe an immense diversity. Children of immigrants "live" in many—not just two—worlds. In this respect, my findings concur with recent ethnographic studies in multiethnic contexts in Western Europe (Back, 1995; Ålund, 1995; Qureshi and Moores, 1999; Soysal, 2001).

By focussing exclusively on the experience of duality, the two-worlds thesis depicts an existence shaped by uncertainty and ambivalence. It is this condition that constitutes "the problem of the second generation" (Hansen, 1952). Autobiographies, however, *also* reveal the presence of numerous dreams and a desire for a different kind of life. The second major argument of this paper is that the realization of these dreams is an equally important aspect of the "problem."

Finally, we need to tackle the question of how, despite the diversity revealed by ethnographic and autobiographical data, the image of "two worlds" has become so popular and is often accepted even by the children

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2. There is no standard terminology in this field (Widgren, 1986; Zhou, 1997). For stylistic reasons, I will use "children of immigrants," "immigrant children" and "second-generation migrants" interchangeably, keeping in mind that these terms are sometimes used to denote different subcategories. With these terms, I primarily refer to people who were born and/or grew up in a country other than the homeland of their parents.

themselves. The autobiographies provide a rather straightforward answer to this question: children of immigrants do not literally live in two worlds, but they live in a world where the belief that there are only two worlds is omnipresent. This "belief" constantly erupts in relations they enter at home, at school, on the street, or in the workplace. I will therefore suggest that the so-called "problem of the second generation" should be located in the tension between diversity and duality, rather than in being caught between two worlds.

Data Sources and Limitations of the Study

Autobiographies as a Data Source

Children of immigrants can neither be defined as a class, nor as an ethnic group, nor even as an age group. The classic proponents of the two-worlds thesis justify this categorization on the grounds that children of immigrants share *a common subjective experience* (Stonequist, 1937; Hansen, 1952). As the author of a recent study, who had herself grown up as the child of a relatively wealthy immigrant family in early 20th-century America, writes:

> I cannot claim to have endured the poverty that was the lot of so many immigrant children . . . . Nor did I live in a tenement . . . my neighbor-hood was not a ghetto . . . . In spite of all these departures from the typical immigrant pattern, in other respects I, too, suffered from the immigrant child syndrome (Berrol, 1995: ix).

For Berrol, this syndrome involves, "most of all, feelings of marginality." Given this emphasis on feelings and experiences, proponents of the two-worlds thesis often turn to autobiographical texts as one of their major data sources (Park, 1937; Stonequist, 1937). In this respect, autobiographies provide a good starting point for evaluating the two-worlds thesis.

That "immigrant autobiographies" can provide a key for understanding the "experience" of immigrants was first stressed in the pioneering work of Boelhower (1982). We should nevertheless note that not all immigrant autobiographies deal with the experience of migration, nor do they always focus on children. In fact, it might be quite misleading to treat them as a unified genre. We have no reason to assume that there is a unified "experience" associated with being a second-generation migrant. As Sollors (1997: xv) reminds us in his introduction to Mary Antin's work: "She may be speaking for thousands in one sense, but in another sense, her story does not even resemble that of her own sister."

Methodological Limitations

Since my main objective in the limited space of this study is to show in what ways the accounts given in the autobiographies diverge from the two-worlds

thesis, there is little emphasis on the ways in which the autobiographies differ from each other. I try to reveal the multiplicity of relationships and potentials that often remain invisible from the point of view of the two-worlds thesis. It is nevertheless important to note that these relationships and potentials are articulated in different ways by immigrant children, depending on race, ethnicity and gender.

There are, for example, crucial disparities between the works of male and female autobiographers, ranging from language use to attitudes towards sexism. Similarly, when we compare the autobiography of Piri Thomas (1967), who was born of Puerto Rican parents, and Michiel Horn (1997), the son of a Dutch immigrant family in Canada, we see that the former text indicates a much more *intense* experience of "duality" than the latter, as racial dualities reinforce the "immigrant-host" duality (more on this below). As Wong (1991) points out on the basis of her analysis of autobi-ographies written by Chinese immigrants,[3] many of the recurring themes in the autobiographies of European immigrants may not be found in the autobiographies of other immigrant groups.[4] Some scholars have even argued that "autobiography" is unique to Western culture (Gusdorf, 1980). However, although a *certain* way of writing autobiographies might be unique to Western culture, there are examples of autobiographical narra-tives in other cultures.

Native American Autobiographies

While a rigorous comparison of autobiographies written by Native peoples of North America and by immigrant groups is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting some of the significant differences between the two groups. To begin with, as Krupat (1985: 30) notes, most Native American autobiographies are *produced* in a different manner than immigrant auto-biographies: they are "collaborative efforts, jointly produced by some white who translates, transcribes, compiles, edits, interprets, polishes, and ulti-mately determines the form of the text in writing, and by an Indian who is its subject and whose life becomes the content of the 'autobiography' . . . ." In fact, one might say that not only the content, but the very form and style of the autobiography changes in response to the changes in the situation of Native peoples vis-à-vis Europeans. As Wong (1992: 199) puts it, "the devel-opment of Native American autobiography parallels the historical transitions of Native American cultures from the tribal tales of ritual to the life stories of history to the imaginative autobiographies of art." Thus, native autobi-

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3. For a detailed bibliography of Asian-American writers, see Huang (2001).
4. While some of the autobiographers cited in this study have non-European origins (Thomas, 1967; Bulosan, 1946; Santiago, 1998; Kingston, 1976), the majority of them are the children of—predomi-nantly Southern and Eastern—European immigrants. This is a significant limitation in many respects, but in the context of this study, it should be remembered that the two-worlds thesis was first developed in reference to this group.

ographies might reveal a very different type of "loss" and minoritization process than attested by immigrant autobiographies, indicating that we need to use the term "minority" with caution.

Data Sources and the Historical Period

In this study I have consulted some thirty autobiographical sources from North America (Canada and the United States), though only about half of them are cited/quoted here. Most of these sources are published autobiographies written almost exclusively by children of immigrants. The publication dates of the autobiographies analysed here range from 1925 to 1998, although the majority of them were published between 1930 and 1980. Given the "retrospective" and sometimes posthumous nature of autobiographical texts, however, the publication date is not a direct indicator of the period depicted in the work.

As a whole, the autobiographies I focus on depict the lives of immigrant children in the period between 1900 and 1970. This limitation is rather deliberate since both in Canada and the United States, this was the era of assimilationist policies, when the immigrant groups were expected to melt into the "host" society. Not surprisingly, this was also the very time period in which the two-worlds thesis became fully developed. Two crucial changes that took place after this era concern the move towards multiculturalist state policies (most explicitly in Canada) and a significant change in the ethnic and national background of immigrants. While the effect of these changes on the experience of immigrants is still an issue of debate, there seems to be some consensus that the perspective of immigrant authors since the 1970s has become more critical of assimilation and less North America-centred than before (Proefridt, 1991; Karpinski, 1996).

More importantly, during the 1970s, especially in official discourses, the notion of "diversity" begins to turn into a kind of *ideal*. Despite the growing popularity of this ideal, however, the duality thesis still persists in immigrant autobiographies and in academic works. Referring to the work of immigrant authors writing after the official acceptance of multicultural policies, Radi (1996: 23) argues that "the multicultural generation, too, is neither 'here nor there.' For the present, its members are trapped on the cusp of two worlds." A very recent publication on immigrant youth in Ontario, with the title *Managing Two Worlds* (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003), alludes to the same idea. This indicates that even though the shift from the ideal of assimilation to diversity at an official level is an important historical marker, this might not automatically put an end to the two-worlds thesis.

Canada and the United States

Finally, one might question the treatment without any distinction of autobiographies produced in Canada and the United States. Certainly, attitudes towards immigration, language and ethnicity in the two countries have often

been a subject of comparison. For example, the presence of a territorially based ethnic/linguistic minority and the relevance attributed to language skills in obtaining immigrant visas are among important characteristics that distinguish Canada from its southern neighbour (Chiswick, 1992). The literary traditions of the two countries have also been a subject of contrast, as in the work of Fogel (1984), who characterizes Canadian and American literature as being respectively "anorectic" and "cathetic." However, there are very few, if any, autobiographical texts that involve an explicit comparison of the two societies. One major exception here is Eva Hoffman who, in her oft-analysed autobiography, compares her experience in Canada and the United States, referring to the former as "the dullest country in the world," while appraising the latter as being "real" (Hoffman, 1989: 133). As a whole, the autobiographies analysed in this paper do not indicate any significant difference between Canada[5] and the United States, partly because the immigrant authors face a similar ethnic majority and a similar ideology with respect to immigration in both countries.

A Brief History of the Two-Worlds Thesis

> [Immigrants] will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave .... These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share legislation with us. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp or bias its direction, and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass (Jefferson, 1964: 152).

As Jefferson's remarks (first published in 1782) indicate, the concern with the "duality" or "divided allegiance" of immigrants and their children has a long history. It may seem that, in the early 20th century, social research on immigrant children focussed on rather "practical" issues, such as involvement in criminal activities (Taft, 1936; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958: 1753–830), occupational choices (Beynon, 1934), birth rates (Robinson, 1936), marriage patterns (Monahan, 1951), mental health (Sanua, 1959) and, of course, educational attainment.[6] However, the investigation of these particular issues—which are still very much alive today—has never been completely independent from the two-worlds thesis. The importance accorded to education, for example, is often justified on the basis of the idea that "[t]he immigrant child lived in two worlds . . . the immigrant enclave on one side, and on the other, the dominating ordinate world of the larger America; and for the immigrant child, the school precariously bridged both worlds" (Cordasco, 1976: 20). The dual life of the

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5. Another important limitation that is worth noting is that all the Canadian authors analysed here are from the English-speaking parts of the country.
6. The literature on the education of immigrant children is too vast to be cited here. For a full bibliography, see Cordasco (1976).

immigrant child was stressed in studies on crime and mental illness (Sanua, 1959; Srole and Fischer, 1978). It was even hypothesized that, because of their ambiguous position, immigrant children were "predisposed to fascism" (Stewart and Hoult, 1959).

The two-worlds thesis was given a more rigorous theoretical form—through the notions of "culture change" and socio-cultural integration—by scholars associated with Chicago School (Park, 1937; 1967; Stonequist, 1937; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958). While, in their ethnographic studies, Park and his colleagues underlined the complex nature of migrant communities (Lal, 1990), the idea that, as long as integration was incomplete, a sense of duality would persist among new generations of immigrants remained central to their work.

Perhaps the most concise formulation of the two-worlds thesis was developed by Marcus Lee Hansen (1952) in his essay on "three generations." Here, Hansen depicts children of immigrants in terms of a double transition: along a generational axis, they fall between the first and third generations, and, along a socio-cultural axis, between the worlds of their parents and of the host society. For Hansen, "how to inhabit two worlds at the same time [is] the problem of the second generation" (494).

Although many of the underlying assumptions of both Hansen's "three generations hypothesis" and Park and Stonequist's concept of the "marginal man" have been criticized (Golovensky, 1952; Glazer and Moynihan, 1963), the two-worlds thesis has found widespread acceptance in the subsequent literature. It permeates most studies on the topic regardless of context, ranging from Jews in North America (Bell, 1961) to Italians in Switzerland (Stricker, 1981). Since the early 1980s, most European scholars writing on immigrant children have explicitly or implicitly succumbed to the two-worlds thesis (Ekstrand, 1978; Müller, 1981; Mehrlander, 1982). As several researchers have pointed out, this trend also has been highly prevalent in the 1990s (Karakayali, 2003; Soysal, 2001; Ålund, 1995). The two-worlds thesis is still with us.[7]

A Framework for Analysis: "Immigrant Autobiographies" as Minor Literature

The first sociologist who pointed out that "strangers" are often perceived as "types," rather than as individuals, was Simmel (1950: 406). Certainly, when immigrants and their children write their autobiographies, they do not forget about the stereotypes in their society. The consciousness of being marked as a "type" is a central component of immigrant experience, rendering even the most ordinary activities in life problematic. "In class, I seldom

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7. Interestingly enough, the issue of duality no longer has the same central place in recent research on the "new second generation" by North American scholars (Perlman and Waldinger, 1997; Portes, 1996; Zhou, 1997). It is nevertheless worth noting that the experience of the "old second generation" constitutes an essential point of reference for these studies as well.

raised my hand," writes Esmeralda Santiago (1998: 17), the daughter of a Puerto Rican immigrant family, "because my accent sent snickers through the classroom the minute I opened my mouth." In a letter to his white girl-friend Dorothy, dated 2 May 1940, the twenty-nine-year-old Filipino immi-grant—poet, writer and political activist—Carlos Bulosan recounts his experience of walking down the Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles with her: "The night was horrible: the people were staring at us because we dared to walk down the street together. I walked home in a nightmare" (cited in Evangelista, 1985: 12–13).

However, autobiographies also reveal a deep concern with details and complexity. They are never just the stories of "the immigrant" but also of individuals. As Mary Antin writes about her family in her renowned auto-biography: "There were five of us newcomers, and we found five different ways of getting into the American machine of perpetual motion, and as many ways of getting out of it" (1997: 148).

In this context, Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) concept of "minor lit-erature" provides a powerful analytical tool for analysing immigrant autobiographies as individual life stories told against the background of stereotypes. Unlike "major authors," minority writers cannot pretend to produce purely personal life histories. Yet, however "typical" they might consider themselves, their stories are not impersonal accounts of a "transsubjective" experience either. While, to some extent, all autobiographic discourses involve a collective as well as a personal dimension (Marcus, 1995), the tension between the two becomes intensified in the minority literature. Thanks to this tension, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) point out, in "minor literature" the personal becomes inseparable from the political. As with other "genres" of minority literature, immigrant autobiographies are immediately subversive. At the very least, by presenting the immigrant as an active individual (a narrator as well as a protagonist) and by emphasizing the individual differences within the "ethnic community," they provide an immanent critique of the dominant stereotypes of "the immigrant." In fact, when some of the proponents of the two-worlds thesis use autobiographies to support their arguments, they remain completely insensitive to this individuating voice. Park's (1937) reading of Santayana's (1936) semi-autobiographical novel *The Last Puritan,* and Stonequist's (1937) selective quotes from Lewisohn's (1929) memoirs are typical exam-ples of this. I will, therefore, begin by focussing on this individuating voice in the autobiographies.

In How Many Worlds Do Children of Immigrants Live?

In autobiographies written by children of immigrants, individuation begins with the immediate family. For the immigrant child the relation *between* his/her mother and father is at least as important as how the two together

relate to the society at large. In certain cases, the mother and father, as two different personalities, complement each other (Antin, 1997: 155; Maynard, 1972). In others, they develop deep conflicts. Sometimes the lot of the immigrant child consists of a despotic father and a helpless mother who "did not count for much . . . except to take the beatings when things went wrong in the home" (Ruddy, 1975: 11). In other cases, one of the parents might be completely missing and the focus shifts to the relations between the single parent and his/her partners (Santiago, 1998). Parents also differ from each other in terms of their attitudes towards the host society. Horn (1997: 47) notes that, while his father considered the decision to immigrate to Canada from the Netherlands as the "greatest blunder of his life," his mother was comfortable in her position as an immigrant since, having been raised in Java, she was "less rooted in the Netherlands." Similar observations can be made about brothers, sisters and grandparents. Antin remembers, somewhat sadly, the day when she was "led to the schoolroom, with its sunshine and its singing and the teacher's cheery smile" and her sister "to the workshop, with its foul air, care-lined faces, and the foreman's stern command" (1997: 157): two immigrant children born of the same parents, two radically different lives.

Not only do autobiographies shatter the image of the "immigrant family" as an undifferentiated entity, but they also reveal that there is no uniform, "typical" relationship between the immigrant child and his/her family. "I don't know why, but my father never liked me, and our relationship was never a good one. Once he asked me to leave home and live elsewhere, I never talked with him," writes Polvi (1991: 9), the child of a Finnish immigrant family. He contrasts his father with his mother, who always treats him affectionately and with whom he shares many of his secrets. Antin talks about the difficulties involved in relating to an atheist father and a religious mother (1997: 192). Furthermore, the composition of the "immigrant family" changes over time and, especially for poor families, harsh living conditions often entail death and remarriage, and hence the need to form new relations—a typical theme in many autobiographies (Kohut, 1925; Adamic, 1969; Covello, 1970).

The larger circle of close relatives and other immigrants with the same ethnic origins display similar characteristics. Rather than implying a closely knit social environment, such circles are often experienced as fragile and highly tenuous groups. Fredelle Maynard, who was born of Jewish parents and grew up in Saskatchewan in the 1920s, writes:

> Our social roots went, not down into the foreign soil on which fate had deposited us, but outwards, in delicate, sensitive connections, to other Jewish families in other lonely prairie towns. Sundays, they congregated around our table, these strangers who were brothers; I saw that they too ate knishes and spoke with faintly foreign voices, but I could not feel for them or for their swarthy children the kinship I owed to all those who had been, like us, both chosen and abandoned (1972: 28–29).

"Ethnic communities" constituted by immigrants are not devoid of their "deviants" and multiplicity of lifestyles. Here an uncle, who persists in remaining single and dating "native girls" appears as a scandalous, yet fascinating, figure, subtly conveying the message that it is possible to violate the norms of the "community" (Mangione, 1983: 20); there, some immigrant women in the community break through the barriers of patriarchal beliefs and make their way to college "regardless of precedent" (Covello, 1970: 55), while others participate in radical feminist movements (Kohut, 1925; Marsh, 1978).

The effect of regional differences is also a very well-known theme. As D'Antonio, a "third-generation" immigrant, puts it: "Part of my growing up involved learning that there were Italians and Italians" (1975: 58). Similarly, there is much disagreement about religion and politics in migrant communities (Kohut, 1925; Adamic, 1969; Covello, 1970: 32). Ever since the pioneering studies of the Chicago School sociologists, the astonishing diversity of immigrant media and associations has been widely recognized (Park, 1922). In the case of Germany, Soysal (2001) reports some 180 "intercultural" associations, 45 of which draw their membership from immigrant youth.

Class divisions can also produce deep chasms among immigrants. In his semi-autobiographical novel John Marlyn (1990) gives a vivid example of how class can affect the nature of relationships between immigrants with the same ethnic background. The protagonist of Marlyn's novel is Sándor Hunyadi, the child of a Hungarian immigrant couple living in early 20th-century Canada. When Sándor arrives at the door of the Kostaunik family to join the birthday party of his beloved friend Mary, Mrs. Kostaunik glares "down at him with such hostility that his lips [begin] to tremble" (34–35). Sándor freezes at the door, bewildered: this is the same Mrs. Kostaunik, who was a very good neighbour of Sándor's family and who, he recalls, had looked after his mother for three weeks when she was ill. But now the Kostauniks have become rich and moved to a different neighbourhood. When, finally, Sándor is willy-nilly admitted into the house, he notices that the people at the party begin to draw away from him: "As he glanced at them, the boys dressed in dark shorts and clean fresh blouses with bright new shoes, he saw himself as they saw him, as something darkly alien in their midst and yet disturbingly familiar" (37). In the end, when the kids mock and harass Sándor and things get out of control, he is thrown out.

Immigrants with different origins often live in the same residential areas and even share a similar fate, but this does not turn them into a homogeneous group. The "slum life," Antin (1997) notes, cannot be characterized by a single set of relationships, as the inhabitants "quarrelled in the gray morning, and made up in the smoky evening; tormented each other, supported each other, saved each other, drove each other out of the house. But there was no common life . . . ." (213–14). D'Antonio recalls, somewhat humorously, that as Italian immigrants in America, they "had to

watch out for the Jews, stay away from the Poles and recognize that the Irish were in control of things" (1975: 58).[8] Finally, when immigrant children move beyond the "immigrant community"—to the school, the army, the workplace, or the prison—their relationships diversify even further: "Cranking the winch and attacking packing cases with my baling hook, traveling the elevated trains and eating in nickel joints, I found out that New York did not consist of Americans and Italians" (Covello, 1970: 56).

Finally, while the children might be highly conscious of the barriers between their ethnic community and host society, these two domains cannot be understood in terms of a simple opposition. Indeed, the desire to take part in the society at large is often induced by encounters in the ethnic community itself. It is her father's business partner, who speaks English fluently, that triggers the idea in young Mary Antin that she, too, can speak English and become an "American": "That anyone could talk so fast, and in English, was marvel enough, but that this prodigy should belong to *our* establishment was a fact to thrill me" (Antin, 1997: 154). Conversely, Rebekkah Kohut (1925: 65–66) recalls a time in her youth when she had begun to develop ambivalent feelings towards her ethnic community. Unable to share this secret with her family, she turns to a "native," her "American" teacher Mary Kincaid. In the end, it is her teacher who encourages Rebekkah not to stop participating in her community.

Becoming "Someone Else": Diversity, Desire and the Secret Life of Immigrant Children

Almost invariably, autobiographic sources indicate that an immigrant child, especially in his/her adolescent years, is likely to develop a myriad of relationships and participate in many different "lives":

> There was my life with my family and Aviglianese neighbors. My life on the streets of East Harlem. My life at the Home Garden with Miss Ruddy [a missionary]. Life at the local public school. Life at whatever job I happened to have (Covello, 1970: 44–45).

There is seldom a single group or "people" to which the autobiographers claim to belong: "I was living what seemed like fragmentary existences in different worlds . . . . There seemed to be no connection, one with the other; it was like turning different faucets on and off" (Covello, 1970: 44–45). The world of the immigrant child as portrayed in the autobiographies is fragmented and in flux, approaching what Adamic (1969) calls a

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8. These observations, of course, are not limited to autobiographies. There is enough evidence in the social scientific literature that indicates that "immigrants" differ along both racial and ethnic lines, and that even among immigrants with the same ethnic or racial background, regional, class and educational differences generate significant variations (Breton et al., 1990; Lowe, 1996).

"jungle." Children of immigrants are not migrants, and yet, throughout their lifetime, they migrate between numerous milieux.

The formula that Deleuze (1989: 215–224) has devised for "minor literature" can easily be applied to the autobiographies: "the people are missing." The individuating voice of the minority writer does not only subvert dominant stereotypes in society, but it also puts the writer at a distance from his/her "community"—however inseparable the destinies of the two might be. The minority writer, who often writes in the language of the majority, is not simply a spokesperson for the minority, whose members might be indifferent to literature and even illiterate.

The absence of a people has often been emphasized by the proponents of the two-worlds thesis as well. This absence is claimed to underlie the ambivalent identity of the "marginal man." The primary desire of marginal "personality types" like the children of immigrants, Stonequist (1937) suggests, is to be accepted into the majority. If they fail in their attempt, then they might adapt a reactionary attitude towards the majority, embracing their ethnic or racial community as their "people." There is certainly some truth in this argument. Many autobiographies reveal not only a desire to become a part of the "natives" but also endless disappointments involved in such attempts. One of the most striking examples here is Piri Thomas's (1967) autobiography, which revolves around his question: "*My God, why am I in the middle?*" (90). Born of Puerto Rican parents in the United States, Thomas's frustrating oscillation between the white majority and black minority finds an echo in his attitude towards his "white" mother and "black" father: "It was like hating Momma for the color she was and Poppa for the color he wasn't" (93).

What the two-worlds thesis misses here, however, is the presence of a "third" option, which is not oriented towards fitting into one of the established identities but towards becoming "someone else" (Santiago, 1998: 83), becoming part of a "people" that does not yet exist. At the root of this option lies a questioning of the limits and legitimacy of established identities: "Mami made it clear that although we lived in the United States, we were to remain 100 percent Puerto Rican. The problem was that it was hard to tell where Puerto Rican ended and Americanized began" (Santiago, 1998: 25). What is it that makes me an American, a Puerto Rican, a Jew, a Sicilian? Who could tell? These are questions that erupt in all autobiographies and pave the road for a more profound inquiry: the possibility of a new life in a new world, beyond the two worlds.

This inquiry is often carried out secretly, in the dark and behind closed doors, perhaps after everyone in the household has gone to sleep. "I had a secret life," exclaims Esmeralda Santiago (1998)—a life that she shared neither with her mother, nor with her classmates, nor even with her sister. This secret life, she writes, "was in my head, lived at night before I fell asleep, when I became someone else" (83). Similarly, Jerre Mangione (1983: 13) recalls that at an early age he developed an "awareness of being

doomed to lead a double life: the one I led among my drove of Sicilian rela-
tives, the other in the street and at school." But, beyond this double life,
"[t]here was also a third life, the one I lived with myself, which gradually
was to dictate the secret resolve to break away from my relatives" (13–14).
And in what should perhaps be considered one of the most elegant exam-
ples of its genre, Maxine Hong Kingston (1976) tells the story of a "woman
warrior" who has been training in a secret world to fight the hypocrisy and
injustice—particularly the oppression of women—that she has observed in
both her parental culture and American society.

That for Kingston, as for other female autobiographers, sexism con-
stitutes a major concern, while it is almost completely absent from the
works of male autobiographers, implies that the secret life of immigrant
children cannot be construed as being homogeneous across gender lines.
What is common to both male and female autobiographers, however, is that
their secret life is led in a dream-like world untainted by the "two worlds."
In Esmeraldo Santiago's (1998: 84) words:

> In my secret life I wasn't Puerto Rican. I wasn't American. I wasn't any-
> thing. I spoke every language in the world, so I was never confused about
> what people said and could be understood by everyone. My skin was no
> particular color, so I didn't stand out as black, white, or brown.

Here the "absence" of a people takes upon a new sense: it is not simply the
result of a failure to be accepted into a group, but rather the active rejection
of melting into one:

> In my dreams I had no family—no mother or father, no sisters or brothers,
> no grandmothers, no wrestling cousins, no drunk uncles . . . . I was alone,
> sprung from an unnameable darkness, with no attachments, no loyalties,
> no responsibilities (83).

What such passages imply is not a desire for "identity" but, on the contrary,
a desire to escape "identification." Above all, the "secret life" of the immi-
grant child is a life that fully embraces diversity:

> In my secret life I wasn't Esmeralda Santiago, not Negi, not a scared
> Puerto Rican girl, but a confident, powerful woman whose name changed
> as I tried to form the perfect me. Esme, I was once. Emmé, another time.
> Emeraude, my French class name. . . . I was Emma, Ralda, or just plain
> E. . . . I was the pilot of my own plane and flew around the world, and
> everywhere I went people were happy to see me and no one asked where
> I was from (Santiago, 1998: 83–84).

It is often the world of books and literature that provide the breeding
ground for the secret life of immigrant children. For this is a life, Mangione
(1983: 14) notes, that is "based on para-Mitty feats of the imagination." Its
source is neither the Sicilian community, nor American society, but the

"piles of books I brought home from the public library, most of which I read clandestinely in the bathroom or under the bed since my mother believed that too much reading could drive a person insane" (14). Similarly, beyond all the "lives" of his everyday world, Covello talks about his "life in the wonder-world of books." In fact, life itself often appears as a book: "As I turn the leaves of the past, I find myself growing . . . as though someone in a book, not myself, were the active participant" (Kohut, 1925: 285).

These observations are also supported by ethnographic studies in contemporary European societies. Soysal (2001) shows that children of Turkish immigrants in Germany form highly complex relationships and are involved in a whole range of different cultural "projects." Similarly, Ålund (1995: 320) concludes, on the basis of her fieldwork in multiethnic suburbs of Stockholm, that "[y]oung people mediate experiences anchored in several social and cultural worlds. Their stories are traversed by a multiplicity of histories, memories and dreams."

It is worth noting here that both researchers identify a *positive potential*—"projects" and "dreams"—emerging out of this complexity. In this sense the autobiographies of immigrant children can be seen as the stories of a new person—if not a new people—in the making. Autobiographies are not mere inventories of a myriad of encounters and disjointed worlds; in them these separate parts are woven into a narrative and become elements of a singular life. As Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17) insist, "marginality" does not have to be a completely crippling condition: "If the writer is in the margins or completely outside of his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility."

Autobiographies are not the only examples. As Les Back's (1995) analysis of the life and career of the musician Apache Indian and Ayhan Kaya's (2001) ethnographic research among Turkish hip-hop youth in Berlin show, other "subcultural" movements, often associated with various music genres, also provide a ground for collective affirmation of diversity. In fact, as Qureshi and Moores (1999) point out, the particular genre of music itself might operate as a symbol of this affirmation.

Why Do Children of Immigrants
Feel That They Live in Two Worlds?

Why, then, do children of immigrants themselves often feel that they are caught between two worlds? On the basis of the autobiographies analysed here, we can propose at least one straightforward answer. If the theme of two worlds is omnipresent in them, this is mainly because it is omnipresent in the everyday life of immigrant children. Almost from the day they are born, the distinction between a "homeland" and a "new land" permeates their lives, even seeping through the tales they hear. For Fredelle Maynard, whom we encountered earlier, for example, the "homeland" was symbolized

by her grandparents. In her imagination, her grandparents "were utterly unlike the benevolent, apple-cheeked characters who presided over happy families in [her] favourite stories" (Maynard, 1972: 28). Most of the clues about her "homeland" came from the Jewish stories she heard from her father—"sitting in his lap, my head against the blue shirt that smelled like sunshine and flatiron steam" (Maynard, 1972: 165). "I did not much enjoy Papa's Jewish stories," Maynard writes, "[t]he landscape was unfamiliar, a world peopled by rabbis, starving melameds (teachers), matchmakers, grandfathers with earlocks and long caftans . . . . The life pattern which alone could have made these tales comprehensible was mysterious to me" (164).

Jerre Mangione, who was born of Sicilian parents and grew up in Rochester, New York, in approximately the same period as Maynard, tells a strikingly similar story. One of his worlds was beyond the picket fence:

> Before my parents considered me old enough to go beyond the picket fence that separated me from other children on the street, I would peer through it for hours, longing to play with them and wondering what they could be saying to each other. Although I had been born in the same city as they, I spoke not their language (Mangione, 1983: 13).

His "homeland," Sicily, was much farther away: "From the way my relatives usually talked about it, Sicily sounded like a beautiful park, with farmland around that produced figs, oranges, pomegranates, and many other kinds of fruit that refused to grow in Rochester" (Mangione, 1983: 18).

This is not to posit a simple opposition between "real" and "imaginary" worlds. The crucial point is that the image of "two worlds" is not external to the inhabited world of immigrant children. Although he has never been to Sicily, Jerre notes that "the thought that *Siciliano* implied something sinister had become implanted in me by dozens of small incidents and casual remarks" (Mangione, 1983: 7). The "two worlds" were, so to speak, imposed upon Jerre's "lived" world:

> The world, my teacher insisted, was made up of all the colored spots on a globe. One of the purple spots was America, even though America wasn't purple when you looked at it. The orange spot was Italy. Never having been there, that wasn't so hard to believe . . . . He pointed to Italy on the globe . . . . Then he pointed to a tiny orange splash at the end of the Italian boot and called me a lousy *Siciliano* (Mangione, 1972: 1–3).

Some of the proponents of the two-worlds thesis come very close to observing the division that cut through the everyday life of immigrant children and how such divisions become a source of tension. "The sons and the daughters of immigrants," writes Hansen (1952: 494), "were subjected to the criticism and taunts of the native [sic] Americans and to the criticism and taunts of their elders as well. . . . The source of all their woes . . . lay in the strange dualism into which they had been born."

Concluding Remarks

The real problem with the two-worlds thesis is not its argument that immigrant children feel caught between two worlds, but its failure to note that this experience follows from the condition of living in a world where most people *believe* that there are only two worlds. By depicting this belief—this constructed reality—as the only reality of immigrant children, the two-worlds thesis unwittingly contributes to its reproduction. Moreover, to state, as Hansen does, that all the "woes" of immigrant children can be located in the "duality into which they were born" is to miss the point that there is also a desire to escape this duality—a desire for a new identity. The actualization of this desire is no less a "problem" than the experience of being caught up between two worlds.

In concluding this essay, it is worth raising the question of why, despite the diversity revealed by ethnographic and autobiographical sources, the two-worlds thesis has become so popular. Was it the still-persisting obsession with the integration of immigrant groups that led researchers to reduce immigrant children to a mere index of socio-cultural change? Or, could the labelling of immigrant children as "ambivalent" not only follow from, but also reinforce, the assumption that "established" identities and distinctions (e.g., "migrant" versus "native") are inherently stable and unambiguous? Could this assumption, which has been essential in the emergence of modern nation-states, effectively cripple new identity formations that might "compete" with existing ones? I believe Stonequist reaches to the heart of the issue when he raises the following question about "mixed bloods," whom he puts into the same general category, "the marginal man," with the children of immigrants: "Is it possible that the theories about the character of mixed bloods are merely 'rationalizations' of the existing practices and prejudices of the particular situation?" (1937: 49).

A full analysis of macrohistorical factors that shape this "particular situation"—ranging from nation-state formations to international migration—is beyond the scope of this paper. What I have attempted to develop here is rather a microsociological proposition, namely, that the "problem of the second generation" should be defined as how to realize the potentials engendered by a heterogeneous life, despite the obstacle of a social environment where the existence of such potentials goes unnoticed. Redefining the problem does not eliminate the broader factors that contribute to the emergence of the two-worlds thesis. It might, however, give us a leverage point to work against the "existing practices and prejudices of the particular situation."

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