Finding Home

Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Our Lives

Ball State University | The Digital Literature Review | Issue 12, 2025

The Digital Literature Review

Finding Home: Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Our Lives

The Digital Literature Review is a journal showcasing undergraduate student work in literature and cultural studies. The journal is produced by undergraduate students at Ball State University who are involved in *The Digital Literature Review* immersive learning project. Our goal is to provide a forum where undergraduate students can showcase their research projects and disseminate their valuable contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

The Digital Literature Review is published annually in the spring. The deadline for submissions is in early January. We welcome original articles relating to each year's theme. Articles should range from 2500–5000 words; every article is reviewed by undergraduate students on the journal's editorial team. Notification of initial decision is in February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions

Further information regarding *The Digital Literature Review* is available at https://openjournals.bsu.edu/dlr and https://bsudlr.wordpress.com/.

NOTICE: The views expressed herein are those of their respective authors and do not represent those of Ball State University.

Cover art by Michael Fiedler from stock.adobe.com.

DLR Staff

Design

Team Lead: Emily King

Blog Editor: Jack Vaught

Natalie Presse

Cole Southerland

Editorial

Lead Editor: Theo Edwards

Managing Editor: Emma Carlson

Natalie Byers

Victoria Mayeaux

Publicity

Team Lead: Morgan Zacek

Anna Grile

Kaira Carter

Teaching Assistant

Mia Godleski

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Sreyoshi Sarkar

Table of Contents

"Finding Home: Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Our Lives" Introduction

Natalie Byers, Emma Carlson, Theo Edwards, Victoria Mayeaux — The 2025 Digital Literature Review Editorial Team

Migration studies is a complex field that seeks to understand the emotional and social effects on individuals and communities as well as the broader economic, political, and cultural impacts of migration and exile. It studies migrants, countries that the individuals migrate to, and the countries and cultures they come from, creating an incredibly complicated and ever-evolving field. According to Peter Scholten et al., "It is an inherently pluralistic field, bringing often fundamentally different theoretical perspectives on key topics" (4). The methods they use range from "ethnographic fieldwork with specific migrant communities to large-n quantitative analyses of the relation between economics and migration" (4). These different—and often contradictory—perspectives create a field of study that is very diverse and complicated. It has been extensively developed in a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to: sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, and law and economics.

Migration studies developed throughout the 20th century, which is relatively recent in human history, given that human beings have always migrated. There are some reasons for this, though. According to Asya Pisarevskaya, "Various scholars have argued that the growth of migration studies has kept pace not only with the growing prominence of migration itself but also with the growing attention of nation-states in particular towards controlling migration" (456). Before the introduction of centralized governments, people were more free to move and migrate, and these movements were seen as normal—or, at least, were controlled less strictly. But with the increasing emphasis on creating an organized bureaucratic state during the Industrial Revolution, migration came to

be seen in a different light. As wage labor became the dominant form of economic transaction during this time laborers (and, consequently, migrants) became subject to the ebbs and flows of the economy, and their wages largely depended on the surplus of individuals within the available labor pool. Nations, and the people living within them, now saw migration as a threat to their hegemony and, therefore, they felt they needed to control it. Additionally, discrimination and racism play a key role in how migrants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Because we have only ever experienced a post-industrial world, it can be difficult to recognize that our perception of migration did not develop in isolation but rather emerged from a combination of factors shaping the world we live in today. Such complex labor histories and cultural encounters established migration studies as an important field of study that even today continues to persist and expand.

In this year's journal, our essayists delve into the field of migration studies by analyzing works of literature, song, and film. Readers gain insight into how our world is cultivated through film, how literature breaks down barriers and creates understanding, and how music is a uniting force that can strengthen and empower marginalized voices. Migration studies can contain a variety of academic subjects, and to reflect that, our essayists examine the impact of exile, multiple identities, counterstories, and the impacts of alienation and racism. Our essays cover a wide variety of topics, but all of them have one common goal: to raise awareness of a subject within this field that the writers are deeply passionate about.

Creating a narrative that stays true to the migrant perspective has been something that has been co-opted and often whitewashed to make these stories palatable for a Western audience. Authenticity, and how to achieve that within these narratives, is something that is expanded upon by Jack Vaught in their essay "Counterstories in Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*." They analyze *Minor Feelings* with multiple different

essays along with other critical works to create an incredibly thought provoking and effective deconstruction of how to create this authenticity in migrant narratives with counterstories. Counterstories are a reclamation of perspectives by migrants themselves, giving them the agency to tell their narratives in a way that feels authentic to their own experiences and cultures.

Acts of reclamation are particularly frequent in films that contain elements of exile and the rediscovery of lost identities. These themes, however, are difficult to acknowledge when written into movies that are primarily intended for younger audiences. Natalie Byers discusses this in her essay about identity reclamation titled "Birds of a Feather: A Comparative Analysis of *Rio* (2011) and the Migrant Experience," which dives into *Rio* and its protagonist, Blu, on his journey of understanding who he wants to be and who he is. After being taken from his homeland, Blu struggles to combine his two cultures and learns to be confident in his evolving identity.

Similarly, Kaira Carter's essay "Post-Migration and Embracing Identity Multiplicity" also engages with themes of identity. In this case, though, Carter analyzes Ibi Zaboi's novel *American Street* and how the main character, Fabiola, reconciles both her identity as a Haitian migrant and her newfound American identity. It engages with *American Street* by utilizing it as an example of how identity multiplicity can be a complicated but beautiful thing, where one individual is able to foster a welcoming community that accepts them for who they are. Identity is something that is difficult for everyone to navigate, but when someone migrates to another nation, identity can become a lifelong struggle, and this essay illustrates how *American Street* engages with this idea.

In the United States, nativism is an ideology that has sprung up countless times throughout its history. Nativist ideologies "see the relations between nations and nation-states as a zero-sum game. They privilege erecting borders, both territorial and symbolic,

against minorities, migrants or refugees, other nation-states and supranational political formations" (Anna Triandafyllidou 207). Nativism is almost always combined with racism and other forms of xenophobia, and these ideas create a culture of conformity, where anything outside of total assimilation is outside the norm. While it has always had deadly consequences for those it affects, its impact has rarely been as far-reaching as it is today under the current administration, where mass deportations are dislocating families, instilling fear, and fueling hatred.

Continuing from this theme, some of our essayists seek to fight back against the hatred and xenophobia we see espoused, including Anna Grile's "The Power of Language: Strengthening Chicano Voices Through Song." This essay discusses a famous band known as Chicano Batman and their role in creating a welcoming community through spreading messages that can be loved and appreciated by all. The band also seeks to raise awareness of key issues faced by Mexican Americans, such as in their cover of "This land is your land" (2017) where they seek to question and undermine the nativist ideology espoused by many politicians in our world today.

Alienation and othering are two concepts that are heavily misunderstood and nearly impossible to fathom for those that have never experienced it. In order to best understand the effects and impacts of othering, reading firsthand accounts of people that experience it can provide an invaluable perspective. Victoria Mayeaux does exactly that in her essay "The Enduring Alienation of Black Bodies and Migrants: A Comparative Analysis of James Baldwin's 'Stranger in the Village' and Teju Cole's 'Black Body'." This essay compares the writings and experiences of James Baldwin and Teju Cole in a Swiss village decades apart to highlight how racism is a deadly reality, especially for migrants. This essay brings in contemporary examples and analyzes media portrayals of migration to show how these things are still present in our culture and in our institutions.

The representation of exile in film is also discussed by Emily King in "Stitch: The Creation, The Model Citizen, and The Reality Discovered Through Exile." This essay highlights how we can look at the character Stitch and see parallels of our own world. While not trying to conflate the experiences of a fictional character with real people and real emotions, King argues that the struggles Stitch experiences in trying to fit in can be seen all throughout our world. She argues that this struggle to fit in can persist for a long time—and, in many cases, last forever. She also claims that most adults react to Stitch with fear, awe, and confusion except for the main character, a young girl who has not yet been influenced by the older generation's harmful beliefs. This interesting analysis shows that prejudice is something that is perpetuated by the old and passed on through generations.

The Digital Literature Review is an undergraduate student-run journal which means that the process of selecting essays, designing the journal, and promoting it is done independently by the student teams in the course. As such, all seven essays published here were selected, reviewed, and edited by the Editorial team, the illustrations and formatting were done by the Design team, and all promotions on social media and otherwise were created and distributed by the Publicity team. This caters to Ball State's investment in high impact practices by supporting undergraduate research and professional experience as part of the senior seminar course.

Migration will always be an important reality within our world, and the struggle of grappling with one's identity will persist. Hatred and prejudice remain a thriving problem within our society, but by continuing to participate in conversations regarding the migrant experience—through open dialogue as well as literature—ideally those sentiments will fade away. Our hope is that the essays featured in this year's edition of *The Digital Literature Review* contribute to this on-going conversation, and that you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Works Cited

Pisarevskaya, Asya, et al. "Mapping migration studies: An empirical analysis of the coming of age of a research field." *Migration Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 3, September 2020, Pages 455–481.

Scholten, Peter et al. "An Introduction to Migration Studies: The Rise and Coming of Age of a Research Field." *Introduction to Migration Studies*, Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022.

Counterstories in Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*

Jack Vaught

ABSTRACT

Although the "model minority myth" seems promising in benefiting Asian Americans, its greatest hoax is that it has never guaranteed safety from anti-Asian hate. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 uncovered the long-existing, historical tensions of anti-Asian hate in America, as hate crime rates had spiked to unprecedented levels. They have historically been shaped by discrimination, forced assimilation, and the struggle to belong in a society that has continuously treated them as diseased or alien enemies. Asian Americans have been subjected to the simplification of what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie defines as the "single story." To break from this continued discrimination of autonomy and identity, it is crucial to look at stories that push back against dominant narratives imposed by mainstream society.

In recent years, a surge of marginalized narratives has countered pre-existing barriers formed by single stories, including Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. Her semi-autobiography includes various essays that work toward describing the Asian American consciousness through Hong's lived experiences and research. Authentic stories that counter the single stories imposed by mainstream society re-story the canon of what it means to be Asian

American. In this paper, I will explore how Asian Americans reclaim identity through "counterstories," turning what Hong calls "minor feelings" into visualized struggles. By analyzing the critique of single stories, narrative voice, and the experience of purgatorial spaces, I will demonstrate how Minor Feelings works as a counterstory to reclaim Asian American identity.

Since their initial wave of immigration to the United States, the Asian American identity has been historically shaped by discrimination, forced assimilation, and the persistent struggle to belong in a society that continuously treats them as perpetual foreigners. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's concept of the "single story"—noted as the reductive, inaccurate representation of a group of people—provides a powerful lens to comprehend this struggle of identity: Asian Americans frequently have stereotypical images and singular narratives forced onto them that erase their complex and diverse lived experiences, rendering them invisible. Korean American poet Cathy Park Hong hopes for a change in American literature to counter the single story imposed on Asian Americans: "Overhaul the tired ethnic narratives that have automated our identities; that have made our lives palatable to a white audience but removed them from our own lived realities—and stop spelling ourselves out in the alphabet given to us" (47-48). Authors' counterstories—an act of what Chinua Achebe refers to as "re-storying"—are crucial when deconstructing single stories. In this essay, I will explore how Asian Americans reclaim identity through counterstories, turning minor feelings into visualized struggles. Using Adichie's definition of the single story and elements of Espiritu et al.'s critical refugee studies (CRS) in *Departures*, I will explore the enduring impact of racism and displacement within the home. Through analyzing the critique of single stories, lived experiences of purgatorial space, and narrative voice, I will demonstrate how Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* works as a counterstory with Hong's acknowledgment of the power to heal, reconstruct, and reclaim Asian American

narratives.

Cathy Park Hong was born and raised by Korean parents in Los Angeles, California. Hong is a poet by trade, her work primarily focusing on the fusion of language and unique expressions of human honesty. Her semi-autobiography *Minor Feelings* is divided into seven critical essays that attempt to locate Asian American experiences within the racial discourse of the United States, each struggling with questions of internalized and societal racism. Hong begins her novel with the essay "United," in which she asks, "Who is us? What is us?" (28). Her essays detail the complexities of the Asian American identity from defining the single story and cross-racial relationships in "Stand Up," political shame in "The End of White Innocence," and concluding with the burdens of silence and gratitude in "The Indebted." Each chapter deals with spaces of discomfort with the "intersections of racism and capitalism, specifically but not solely as they relate to Asian Americans, to more deeply understand where we are and how we might move forward" (Beyer). The title of the novel *Minor Feelings* is positioned as a framework to identify why Asian Americans are dismissed as racialized minorities. Using Sianne Ngai's "ugly feelings," Hong contends that minor feelings arise from a spectrum of racialized experiences that have been internalized to avoid giving them significant value. This can result in emotional suppression, self-doubt, and a complicated relationship with one's cultural background or "home." *Minor Feelings* breaks from the mainstream to make the lived experiences of Asian Americans visible. As an Asian American herself, Hong acknowledges her access to this knowledge and practices Trinh T. Minh-ha's "speaking nearby" when discussing the Asian American condition, maintaining proximity to the subject while refraining from speaking on their behalf (Hong 102-103). Like CRS, which Espiritu et al. define as the contextualization of refugee narratives, Hong recenters the story of Asian American experiences to enable transformation from simplified objects of study to complex narratives, emphasizing they are fellow humans deserving of justice. In this essence,

Hong's *Minor Feelings* evokes elements of Richard Delgado's "counter-storytelling" or "counterstories": critical stories used to challenge dominant narratives, such as single stories (Delgado 2414). Hong retells the story on her own terms, bringing an intimate, raw honesty that allows readers to bear witness to the impacts of systemic racism.

When discussing the Asian American body, it is important to recognize the complexities of the diaspora. The label Asian American is a recent term coined by historical civil rights activist Yuji Ichioka in the late 1960s to unify Asian ethnic groups in solidarity to increase their power, rejecting terms such as "Oriental" imposed by the Western world and demanding much-needed resources (Shih et al. 412). Despite the rich diversity of Asian Americans, the label has been used as an umbrella term to homogenize the diversity of Asian subgroups' myriad differences; they are generally understood to be those of the East Asian diaspora (i.e., Korean, Japanese, and Chinese). Yang et al. acknowledge in the introduction of their article that "Grouping such diversity into one category blurs the uniqueness and humanity of different heritages, making it all too easy to marginalize and stereotype," describing one of the main dangers of the Asian American monolith in its erasure of individual groups' realities.

In discussing the Asian American condition, Hong questions how to use the collective statement "we," mentioning in *Minor Feelings* her conflicted feelings in its usage. She uses it cautiously throughout her novel, describing the struggle of defining what the label Asian American is: "The paint of the Asian American label has not dried. The term is unwieldy, cumbersome, perched awkwardly upon my being" (29). Her cautious use of the word reflects the challenges Asian Americans face when uniting a vast community under a single label while simultaneously honoring the diversity of individual experiences. By acknowledging the fluidity of Asian American identities, more inclusive narratives that counter the homogeny of the label itself are brought to attention. This recognition of the richness of Asian American experiences is essential to dismantle the reductive frameworks

that erase them.

According to Bell and Delgado, counterstories refer to the narratives of those marginalized by white-dominated spaces. Counterstories humanize marginalized groups' realities by articulating their lived experiences while simultaneously challenging dominant frameworks (qtd. in Rodríguez 160). Delgado emphasizes their power, noting that counterstories engage the conscience and stir imagination in ways conventional discourse cannot (2415). Hong draws audiences' attention using her tools as a poet to illustrate lived realities, describing how poetry is used to authentically describe immigrant experiences: "The lyric as ruin is an optimal form to explore the racial condition, because our unspeakable losses can be captured through the silences built into the lyric fragment" (196-197). Turning to prose gives Hong more agency to examine and analyze her internalized feelings on racial identity. Her narrative in *Minor Feelings* presents her lived experiences not to elicit empathy, but to reclaim and resist the commodification of her pain. Hong critiques the expectations that writers of color must present their trauma in ways white audiences can maintain innocence:

> Of course, writers of color must tell their stories of racial trauma, but for too long our stories have been shaped by the white imagination. Publishers expect authors to privatize their trauma: an exceptional family or historic tragedy tests the character before they arrive at a revelation of self-affirmation… the outlying forces that cause their pain… are remote enough to allow everyone, including the reader, off the hook (49).

Hong's critique highlights how migrant and racialized literature has historically been framed to maintain the existing framework "shaped by the white imagination" that demands writers of color's voices be modified into preapproved, nonconfrontational templates to avoid addressing systemic racism. This simplification aligns with Carpio's critique in *Migrant Aesthetics* of how racialized literature—such as slave narratives

and contemporary immigrant fiction—relies on expressions of suffering and pain to gain empathy and allyship (12). Similarly, Hong observes the pressures on marginalized writers to always express gratitude, stating "Writers of color had to behave better in their poetry and in person; they had to always act gracious and grateful so that white people would be comfortable enough to sympathize with their racialized experiences (46). Asian American writers, Hong argues, are often pressured to adapt their stories to be consumable to a white audience. This process obscures their complexities and lived realities, forcing them to adhere to preapproved molds of the single story.

The single story is a concept that devalues and homogenizes marginalizes narratives. As Adichie defines in her TEDTalk, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (00:13:03-00:13:15). Single stories place labels onto groups of people, creating a distinct line between those with power and those without to otherize them. It is here that those in power standardize what they consider to be authentic stories. As Adichie further explains, "Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nklai: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power" (00:09:48-00:10:03). The perpetuation of the single story devalues lived experiences that do not conform to dominant standards, using certain available facts to obscure reality and justify the reinforcement of stereotypes (Delgado 2421-2412). As Hong identifies, this can be found in exceptional stories of struggle and triumph that let readers "off the hook" (49). Stories narrated by minorities lose their authenticity when forced to conform to molds prescribed by the dominating white framework. As Hong describes, these "respectability politics" adhere to the sterilization of grief in subaltern narratives. Rather than empowering marginalized voices, the single story ultimately serves the dominant group, reaffirming white innocence and complacent distance from systemic injustice.

Hong advocates for acknowledging the emergence of counterstories that reclaim the fullness of Asian American identity. These stories refuse to create remoteness that isolates pain from the collective histories and systems that shape it. In countering these stories through *Minor Feelings*, Hong applies what Chinua Achebe defines as re-storying: "the process of 'tak[ing] back the narrative' of 'peoples who had been knocked silent by all kinds of dispossession,' in the hope that re-storying will result in 'balance of stories among the world's people'" (qtd. in Espiritu et al. 22). Asian Americans are grossly underrepresented with the dominating presence of the single story. Throughout *Minor Feelings*, Hong works to contextualize Asian Americans' stories, examining figures such as Ocean Vuong and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha to emphasize the importance of authentic representation by countering the singular narratives imposed onto them as tragic diasporic subjects. Contextualizing such marginalized stories outside of the exceptional tale acknowledges the individual human stories that enrich a collective narrative.

Hong highlights the dynamic of commodified, exceptionalist stories in her essays, particularly in "Stand Up," where she describes how white audiences impose their frameworks onto stories of trauma. This framework is highlighted in Hong's short analysis of Ocean Vuong whose work is often simplified by audiences who fixate on his background as a Vietnamese refugee, ignoring the broader complexities of his layered identity; to audiences, his queer identity does not fit into the mold of tragic victimhood. In her critique of Vuong's single story, Hong underscores the limitations of the refugee narrative. She argues it objectifies pained experiences to evoke emotional responses driven by a sense of injustice such as empathy, pity, shame, and outrage: "He reassures the public that he has not only sung but lived through his libretto of hurt so that his poetry and biography have become welded into a single American myth of individual triumph" (Espiritu et al. 19; Hong 51). The importance of counterstories, Delgado notes, is that they shatter complacency to deepen and humanize the Othered subject: "It is through

this process that we can overcome ethnocentrism and the unthinking conviction that our way of seeing the world is the only one—that the way things are is inevitable, natural, just, and best—when it is, for some, full of pain, exclusion, and both petty and major tyranny" (2439). Diverse stories are a gateway to conversations that construct reality. Welding stories such as Vuong's to a solely tragic subject fosters audience complacency, dehumanizing the individual by erasing complex identities and flattening his lived experiences into a consumable narrative that elicits empathy, as Carpio describes.

The concept of empathy plays a significant role in the perpetuation of the single story. Carpio notes that empathy has been historically commodified in literature. By 1955, Susan Lanzoni notes, "*Reader's Digest* defined the term… as the 'ability to appreciate the other person's feelings without yourself becoming so emotionally involved that your judgment is affected'" (qtd. in Carpio 10). This detached empathy model of art, as Serpell calls "a gateway to white saviorism" with its implied occupation of marginalized stories, allows audiences to feel without thinking critically about systemic issues" (qtd. in Carpio 12). Instead of working toward genuine understanding, this approach enables readers to consume marginalized experiences while maintaining distance.

Another key aspect of the single story is the racial binary that excludes Asian Americans. Hong notes the difficulty of situating herself within the context of the dominant "black/white" racial framework. She understands the oppression of Black and African Americans but also finds herself allying with white people (53-54). These binaries create an exclusionary dynamic where, in the context of Asian American single stories, Asian Americans are neither fully accepted nor entirely rejected, reinforcing their status as perpetual foreigners. Despite being positioned as "honorary whites" under the model minority myth, Asian Americans remain racialized Others, expected to be diligent and compliant while remaining politically silent (Saiot, Tuan, Zhou & Tuan qtd. in Sabharwal et al. 543). Such limitations lead to a form of erasure where Asian Americans are

absorbed into a white supremacist framework where whiteness equates to acceptance and success, therefore denying their individuality and history. The positivity of American optimism coupled with seemingly positive stereotypes establishes a double bind of existence where Asian Americans occupy what Hong describes as a "vague purgatorial status:"

> In the popular imagination, Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status: not white enough nor black enough; distrusted by African Americans, ignored by whites, unless we're being used to keep the black man down… But while I may look impassive, I am frantically paddling my feet underwater, always overcompensating to hide my devouring feelings of inadequacy (9).

Although Asian Americans are given the faux privilege of being adjacent to white Americans, their status is easily reversed by their perceived foreignness in this country's long-existing anti-Asian hate rhetoric. The importance of counterstories becomes especially clear in such times of crisis. More recently in 2020, the United States was forced into lockdown with the Covid-19 pandemic. Many politicians—including Present Donald Trump—labeled Covid-19 as the "kung flu" or "Chinese virus," associating Asians with the disease. Those racist sentiments reinvoked hate and discrimination targeting Asian Americans, mirroring America's history of making Asians a racial scapegoat through disease. According to the Anti-Asian Hate Crime Report in 2021, reports of discrimination and violence against Asian Americans increased by 145%—unprecedented levels—in 2020 (qtd. in Han et al. 2516-1517). Racism in America has always been under the surface by systemic barriers. As Sabharwal et al. point out, "The rise in reporting hate crimes against Asian Americans is indicative of the xenophobia and the deep-seated stereotype of 'forever foreigner' that persist in the historical, political, and cultural underpinnings of the US" (543). Conditional citizenship, where Asians are caught in a double bind between praise and hate, highlight the limitations of the single story. Hong delves into the internal toll of this purgatorial status, describing the strenuous performance of

competency in terms of citizenship and economics. The purgatorial status in which Asian Americans are positioned exiles them with the inability to fully belong in the American framework, where they are viewed as perpetual foreigners.

The perpetual foreigner stereotype alienates Asian Americans, compelling them to feel as if they are not recognized as part of a larger community. As Asian Americans are not acknowledged as "real minorities," they overcompensate and contort their identities to fit into singular narratives constructed by the white imagination, as seen in Hong's critique on whiteness and success. This is not to say that all Asian Americans are to be perceived as generally conforming, but that the effects of the single story manipulate how the general public views them in terms of their conditional citizenship. As Asian Americans are positioned outside of society's barriers through the perpetual foreigner myth, their experiences arguably align with those of refugees under Espiritu et al.'s CRS, which critiques the commodification of stories of exceptionalism.

While it is recognized Hong is privileged compared to refugees as an American-born citizen, there are ways her depiction of systemic marginalization in the States aligns with CRS. Similar to previous movements in other emergent fields, CRS confronts conditions such as purgatorial spaces and systemic forces of erasure, challenging the status quo to amplify the voices of the "overlooked and underestimated" (Espiritu et al. 11-12). It focuses on elements of Achebe's re-storying, using Um's definition of it "as the process conceptualizing survivor-refugees as 'experiencing subjects,'" rewriting to humanize and legitimate these lived experiences (qtd. in Espiritu et al. 22-23). CRS emphasizes the importance of lived experiences being retold canonically by those who bear witness, resisting systemic marginalization and dominant narratives of the single story as counterstories do—themes that resonate with Hong's analysis of Asian American identity in *Minor Feelings*. CRS highlights how refugees are seen as outsiders who are shaped by tragic experiences of imperialism and war, which extends to how Hong contends

the multifacetedness of Asian Americans who are regarded as perpetual foreigners in a society that refuses to acknowledge their existence outside a liminal space.

The marginalization of Asian Americans through their purgatorial status mirrors CRS's examination of how refugees are denied agency and visibility. Hong's critique that Asian Americans "don't have enough presence" to be considered "real minorities" parallels the marginalization of refugee experiences in broader narratives (7). They are objectified into a framework of commodity under the guidelines of the single story, reducing them to figures who must constantly justify their existence and citizenship outside of portrayed victimhood. For Asian Americans, it is their dismissal as a model minority "used by whites to keep the black man down" (9). During the Cold War in 1965, Hong describes how Asian Americans went from "the degraded race" to the model minority:

> During this period the model minority myth was popularized to keep Communists—and black people—in check. Asian American success was circulated to promote capitalism and to undermine the credibility of black civil rights: we were the "good" ones since we were undemanding, diligent, and never asked for handouts from the government (22).

However, this status can easily change, as previously mentioned, when the white men in power use Asian Americans as racial scapegoats. This unstable identity is similar to that of the systemic erasure CRS critiques: refugees are often reduced to sanitized victims of imperialism and war to avoid existing systemic issues that suppress upward mobility. These reductive roles record how both Asian Americans' and refugees' exceptional stories are commodified in single stories. By reviewing Hong's work within the broader framework of CRS, she not only critiques the perpetual foreigner stereotype and racial binaries used to keep minorities in place but also challenges the structural inequities they perpetuate. Like CRS, Hong advocates re-storying to resist the singular narratives imposed by dominant groups to reclaim humanity and the complexities of identity.

By contextualizing herself as an Asian American woman while navigating these restrictive structures, Hong challenges the idea of the "tragic unknowable subaltern subject" (172). She acknowledges the silence embedded in Asian American narratives:

> The problem with silence is that it can't speak up and say why it's silent. And so silence collects, becomes amplified, takes on a life outside our intentions, in that silence can get misread as indifference, or avoidance, or even shame, and eventually this silence passes over into forgetting (165).

Here, Hong discusses Korean American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, whose notable novel *Dictee* is known for its manipulation of English as an act of resistance. She is also known by police as "an Oriental Jane Doe" (Hong, 164). Years after her death, critics and audiences quite literally made a performance out of it to grapple with the meanings of her many works. In this act of disregard for her humanity, Cha's own views on silence were hijacked by the dominant discourse that silenced her.

Unlike the previous case study of Ocean Vuong's narrative, Cha's was reduced simply to silence. Cha was brutally raped and murdered in 1982—a fact that is often omitted to avoid sensationalizing her story or retraumatizing her family (Hong, 164). Hong argues that this silence ultimately erases Cha, reducing her identity to "mystery and hushed hearsay," a common trope found in objectifying Asian women (165). Hong centers the chapter "Portrait of an Artist" on Cha to re-story how her life is remembered, appreciating her being in its entirety, including her end. She critiques how Asian American writers often struggle against their work being hijacked by their biographies, particularly when those stories disrupt dominant narratives. These counterstories can elicit discomfort, leading audiences to erase or reframe them in ways that align with the preapproved molds of the single story.

One of the main points echoed throughout *Minor Feelings* is the struggles Asian American writers face when their work is paired with their biographies, especially when

it comes to racial and sexual experiences. The confrontations of these experiences that do not adhere to the single stories of exceptionality and foreignness expose audiences to long-suppressed discomfort, which they then impulsively erase again with narratives that fit their ideals. When Hong recalls her conversation with Flitterman-Lewis—a friend of Cha's—she describes one of the dominating narratives that fetishized Cha's life as an object of study. One graduate student at a particular conference "made confusing, pretentious claims about Cha's passivity as rape victim being a kind of performance art" (170). Cha, as Flitterman-Lewis retorted, was not at all passive. Any form of biographical narrative that counters or re-stories dominant ones must be treated with care. They must appear noncoercive as counterstories to not turn potential allies away, nor should their aesthetics promote sensational viewing. When Hong reflects on her search for who Cha was, she writes, "Maybe I am just tired of Cha's ghostliness. If she's known at all, she's known as this tragic unknowable subaltern subject" (172). Hong is in a privileged position where she can speak near these "unknowable" subjects. The confrontation disrupts the commodified silence that typically follows the narratives of Asian women.

Language has long been used as an act of silence. Throughout history, the English language has served as a tool of assimilation. However, writers such as Achebe and Cha see language as a medium of resistance. Hong notes Cha manipulated English to create an unpleasurable experience, presenting the discomfort Asian Americans feel when their sense of belonging is determined by linguistics: "English could never be a true reflection of her consciousness, that it was as much an imposition on her consciousness as it was a form of expression" (155). Hong examines how the concept of standardized American English reinforces the perpetual foreigner stereotype while simultaneously offering a means to reclaim identity. In her chapter "Bad English," Hong reflects on her relationship with English by celebrating the realities of accented, nonstandard, mixed dialects she proudly refers to as her heritage:

> It was once a source of shame, but now I say it proudly: bad English is my heritage. I share a literary lineage with writers who make the mastering of English their rallying cry… To *other* English is to make audible the imperial power sewn into the language, to slit English open so its dark histories slide out (97).

Hong describes bad English as a powerful linguistic tool that projects an authentic, unapologetic voice that challenges the authority of standard English. As she recounts her history of "outside" English, Hong explores "what it means to borrow words and stories from other groups. The resulting vernacular pokes holes in the idea of fluency" (Kim 27). Hong embraces her bad English as a form of reclamation of the Asian American identity, defying the dominating white framework of America that expects the people to speak in unaccented, standard American English. For Hong, bad English represents a form of defiant survival in a society that situates a binary based on linguistic performance.

Hong highlights how language choice intersects with identity. She briefly touches on Awkwafina's backlash for her "blackface" accent in the film *Crazy Rich Asians*, realizing the accent Awkwafina had used was similar to the K-town girls' accents: "It never occurred to me that those K-town girls were doing blackface. I thought they were just talking the way other teens around them talked" (101). Here, Hong shows linguistic choices emerge from lived experiences and are not necessarily cultural appropriation. However, when individuals such as Awkwafina adopt linguistic markers from other marginalized communities in an attempt to assert belonging, they face scrutiny that reinforces their liminality. Hong critiques this response, noting that like the single story, "stay in your lane" politics simplify the lived realities of racial identities: "Such a politics not only assumes racial identity is pure—while ignoring the messy lived realities in which racial groups overlap—but reduces racial identity to intellectual property" (102). Once again, Hong illustrates the objectification of Asians as objects of study.

Hong's commentary on the transformation of English amongst minority groups

reflects other postcolonial theories writers, such as Achebe with "English and the African Writer." Hong describes English as "our ever-expanding lingua franca, the consumer language of brand recognition and outsourced labor," highlighting the power dynamics within the language (96). By reshaping English, Hong asserts how marginalized communities reclaim the language as a tool to reflect their own lived experiences rather than conformity. This reflects the sentiments of both Cha and Achebe, the latter stating a writer "should aim at fashioning an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experiences. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different, to say" (347). Hong's reclamation of bad English challenges the authority of existing, standardized norms of the language, which are rooted in maintaining systemic hierarchies. English is typically thought to be the white man's language, one that involves the colonization of other languages in acts of assimilation. This can be seen today with "stay in your lane" politics imposed onto minorities by white supremacist frameworks, keeping them in low positions of power and Other them in society. As Hong demonstrates, nonstandard forms of English—or as she describes, bad English—serve as a reclamation of voice. Achebe states, "The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (347). When the English language is reclaimed, it must adapt to suit the needs of the minority who uses it to their best judgment; it must remain in contact with English and the primary language to avoid erasure, yet altered enough to suit its new usage.

To explore "Bad English" with its linguistic reclamation, I spoke with Dr. Mary Lou Vercelotti, an applied linguistics professor at Ball State University. Although she disagreed with Hong's use of the term "bad English," she acknowledged how Hong inverts linguistic discrimination to challenge standardized English. As Hong states, "To *other* English is to make audible the imperial power sewn into the language, to slit English open so its dark histories slide out" (97). Her aggressive language—describing how she must "eat English

before it eats me"—reflects the violent nature of linguistic policing (98). Dr. Vercelotti noted that "cannibalizing" English allows Hong to reclaim the power of language historically used to oppress minorities. This transformation of English to a tool of survival underscores how linguistic hierarchies maintain social inequalities. As Dr. Vercelotti stated, "Who gets to define her English? Is it the white people, or is it her? She's saying, 'I get to decide.'" By embracing bad English, Hong asserts her agency and disrupts power structures of exclusion.

Hong's *Minor Feelings* dismantles the single story in resisting commodification, amplifying uncomfortable truths, and reclaiming Asian Americans' narrative agency. She critiques the racialized constraints imposed onto marginalized writers by white supremacist frameworks, recognizing that to write truthfully about race she must "write against the narrative" to break free from the "infernal circle" that reduces people of color to their racial identities (64). Through counterstories and their elements of re-storying, Hong challenges these sympathetic approaches that distort migrant experiences into simplified, commodified single stories designed for white audiences. She calls for literature that directly confronts racism, imperialism, and historical erasure while also paying respect to the lived experiences of Asian Americans, ensuring their voices are not flattened into monolithic representations. By embracing linguistic diversity, Hong asserts her right to define her own voice and identity rather than conforming to the limiting framework.

Hong is direct in her language, demonstrating the importance of not negating her intentions with *Minor Feelings*: To present her story not as one of exceptionalism, but as one of many stories that make up an authentic counterstory. Hong goes against the status quo to establish the authentic counterstory. She recognizes her privileged position as a published and educated American-born writer, using it to amplify other authors' voices in her critical essays. *Minor Feelings* does not finish with a solidified conclusion of

what is Asian America, instead ending with the declarative statement, “We were always here” (203). The Asian American face has never truly been solidified, constantly being reshaped to fit standards of marketability, rendering multitudes of stories invisible. When it comes to defining what the Asian American story is, there is no answer. Hong’s semi-autobiography proves its power to heal, reconstruct, and reclaim narratives as a counterstory by saying “We were never invisible; it was just a refusal to see us.” Ultimately, *Minor Feelings* is a powerful act of re-storying, reclaiming Asian American narratives from the constraints of the single story.

Works Cited

Colby, Sandra L., and Jennifer M. Ortman. *Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060*. U.S. Census Bureau, 2015.

Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. One World, 2020.

Kim, Jisu. "Marginalia." Women's Review of Books, vol. 37, no. 2, Mar. 2020, pp. 26–27. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lkh&AN=142053769&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Park, Josephine. "Alien enemies in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1, Mar. 2013, pp. 135–155, https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2013.0013.

Rodríguez, Noreen Naseem. "'This is why nobody knows who you are:' (counter)stories of Southeast Asian Americans in the Midwest." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, 14 Mar. 2020, pp. 157–174, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2020.1757377.

Sun, Michelle. "Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning." *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 63, no. 3, Mar. 2024, pp. 381–383, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2023.12.006.

"About the Topic of Race." *Census.Gov,* 1 Mar. 2022, www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html.

Carpio, Glenda. *Migrant Aesthetics: Contemporary Fiction, Global Migration, and the Limits of Empathy*. Columbia University Press, 2023.

Espiritu, Yen Le, et al. Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies. University of California Press, 2022.

US Census Bureau, et al. "Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060. Population Estimates and Projections. Current Population Reports. P25-1143." *US Census Bureau*, Mar. 2015. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED578934&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Yang, Shuling, et al. "Understanding culturally sustaining practices through the lens of Chinese immigrant families in the United States." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 2023, pp. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2282697.

Shih, Kristy Y., et al. "Impacts of the model minority myth on Asian American individuals and families: Social Justice and critical race feminist perspectives." *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, 12 Aug. 2019, pp. 412–428, https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12342.

"Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Story | TED." *Youtube*, uploaded by TED, 7 Oct. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg.

Vercellotti, Mary Lou. Personal interview. 14 Nov. 2024.

Hong, Cathy Park. Interview by Mina Kim. "Poet Cathy Park Hong on 'Minor Feelings' and Anti-Asian Racism in the Age of COVID," *KQED*, 29 July 2020.

Achebe, Chinua. "English and the African Writer." *Transition*, no. 75/76, 1997, pp. 342–349, https://doi.org/10.2307/2935429.

Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative."

Michigan Law Review, vol. 87, no. 8, Aug. 1989, pp. 2411–2441, https://doi.org/10.2307/1289308.

Fassler, Joe. "What Stories About Racial Trauma Leave Out." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 26 Feb. 2020, www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/02/cathy-park-hong-susan-sontag/607081/.

Goh, Jin X., et al. "Positioning Asian Americans in social cognition." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 17, no. 6, 20 Apr. 2023, https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12760.

Han, Sungil, et al. "Anti-Asian American Hate Crimes Spike During the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 38, no. 3–4, 3 June 2022, pp. 3513–3533, https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221107056.

Sabharwal, Meghna, et al. "From the Chinese Exclusion Act to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Historical Analysis of 'Otherness' Experienced by Asian Americans in the United States." *Public Integrity*, vol. 24, no. 6, 2 Nov. 2022, pp. 535–549, https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2022.2120292.

Birds of a Feather: A Comparative Analysis of *Rio* (2011) and The Migrant Experience

Natalie Byers

ABSTRACT

When people migrate somewhere new, they experience a schism in their identity; there is the person they were in their homeland and the person they become in their new home. In order to make their identity whole again, migrants must decide what parts of their past selves to rediscover or reclaim, as well as what new discoveries they wish to incorporate into their new sense of self. This essay explores Carlos Saldahna's film *Rio* through the lens of migrant studies, examining how the film captures the complexity of migrant identity through the development of its characters. More specifically, this essay includes in-depth character analysis for the protagonist, Blu, a rare Macaw originally from Brazil but raised in the United States, who finds his way back to Rio de Janeiro. He must grapple with both of his conflicting identities and redefine who he is and what's important to him. Based on the film itself, *Rio* reviews, and theoretical essays on both migrant studies and the portrayal of Brazil in media, this essay reveals how migrant-oriented narratives offered in an easily comprehensible format like film provide opportunities for migrants and other audience members to understand and mend their own identities through the journey of a character on a screen.

Scientists, historians, psychologists, and other researchers have spent an enormous amount of time and effort trying to understand how immigration affects a person and their identity. The field of migration studies is solely focused on the journey migrants take: why they migrate, how the migration takes place, and the consequences migration might have in a broader sense, for themselves and societies involved. And one film encapsulates this journey perfectly: The 2011 film *Rio*.

Directed by Carlos Saldahna, *Rio* tells the tale of a macaw named Blu, who is believed to be the last male of his kind. Captured by smugglers when he is just a hatchling, Blu finds himself in Minnesota where he is raised and domesticated by his caretaker Linda. One day, a Brazilian ornithologist named Tùlio informs Linda and Blu that there is a female macaw like Blu in Rio de Janeiro, and asks them to go there so that they can save Blu's kind from extinction. Linda and Blu reluctantly make the journey, but just as Blu meets the female, Jewel, the two of them are captured by smugglers and chained together; they manage to escape, but now they have to figure out a way to remove their chains so that Blu can reunite with Linda and Jewel can live freely in the rainforest. They meet some other bird friends (along with a drooly bulldog) on their journey and learn to work together, slowly falling in love in the process. They have a falling out, but once Blu is forced to rescue Jewel from the smugglers again, he learns to accept his love and his identity and finally learns how to fly.

At first glance, *Rio* has no connections to migrant identity, but a closer look at the main protagonist Blu reveals that is far from the case. Blu is a rare macaw taken from his homeland Brazil before he can even fly, raised in Minnesota by a human he bases his life around. When he is suddenly forced to travel to Rio against his will to mate with another macaw he doesn't even know, he is scared, confused, and feels extremely alone. His American caretaker Linda cannot understand how his Brazilian heritage could foster in him, and his new Brazilian bird friends cannot understand how his American background

has domesticated him into a bird they can barely recognize as one of their kind. It takes the entirety of the movie for someone to accept him for who he is—his planned mate, Jewel—and when she does, he finally learns how to accept who he is: both Brazilian and American. It is only then that he is able to fly. No one has looked at *Rio* through the lens of immigration before, but *Rio* offers a perfect parallel to the struggles of immigrants through the character journey of Blu. Delving deeper into Blu's character—his strengths, his struggles, his relationships, and his development—opens a larger dialogue between the character of the immigrant and the audience.

The Creation of Rio (2011) and the Creation of "Brazil"

When Carlos Saldahna was developing what would eventually become the film *Rio*, his goal was to create a love letter to the city he grew up in, and a city that was quickly on the rise in global recognition. After a period of economic decline, Brazil had found itself in an upsurging economy and profile; in the late 2000s, Brazil had just been selected to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, and they were becoming much larger players in the geopolitical scene. And Rio de Janeiro was becoming Brazil's crown jewel: all thirty-three Olympic venues were there, and the FIFA World Cup Final took place in one of its many soccer stadiums. All that was needed was the reconstruction of its international "branded identity"—an identity that depicted Brazil more positively to appeal to tourists and its own people. Saldahna did not single-handedly pioneer this restructuring, but his film did emphasize the sense of vibrance and happiness his hometown could bring to its citizens (and the prospect tourists watching the film). His purpose for creating *Rio* serves as a double-edged sword; the movie "recreates a very positive urban imaginary for Rio, with a great potential for boosting mass tourism via blockbusters, however, at the same time, it reaffirms anachronic North-South hierarchies and recasts Brazil in the periphery of global capitalism" (Vieira, 2). From 0:12:59–0:13:34 in the film, *Rio* is presented on only the day before Carnaval, arguably the largest party

in the world, and dozens of people are shown scantily dressed in shimmery one-pieces dancing through the streets. At that moment, Rio de Janeiro becomes a spectacle of an experience tourists would flock to instead of the home of a spectacular and historic celebration. Instead of exalting Brazil for its brilliant history, culture, and nature, aggrandizing Brazil for its prospective economy and tourism exalts it for its capitalist identity only. Instead of becoming an independent power of its own, Brazil also becomes a brand for other global powers to exploit.

While the branding of a country for geopolitical gain is rather commonplace and not always problematic, one must consider Brazil's goals for their brand when viewing and discussing *Rio*. Brazil wanted to portray itself as a place full of grand sports in beautiful places, somewhere with much to see and do, a tropical paradise that was also safe to visit, and Rio executes these portrayals of its setting to a tee. When Blu first sees Rio (0:12:15–0:12:58 of the film), it is a beautiful, sunny, tropical paradise with gorgeous skylines, colorful parrots flying everywhere, and hundreds of people lounging on the beach. Aside from the film's setting, what about its characters? The characters of *Rio* are pronouncedly animated, and their identities are usually simple and dichotomous; "In other words, identities are mostly constructed following a basic semiotic equation that one's identity can be defined by difference from an other" (Marsh, 74). Thus, any characters can only be understood in relation to other foil characters, as personalities, character traits, and identities are fairly cut-and-dry in the movie.

This type of stereotyping, which establishes an "us" versus "them" divide in a set of characters, is also a tactic used to create negative views on other-groups, such as migrants in a country. Otherization in populist media is a new trend in Brazil ever since the election of President Jair Bolsonaro, who promoted a nationalistic perspective at the cost of demonizing Brazil's immigrants (Gonçalves and David). When immigrants are misrepresented and marginalized, it becomes extremely difficult for them to both be

accepted by their country and by themselves, which is why stereotyping can become such a slippery slope in media. *Rio* likely utilized popular Brazilian stereotyping to create a simpler, more marketable movie, but analyzing its characters requires critics to recognize the stereotypes present in order to look past them to discover deeper meanings. Now, with this in mind, let's delve deeper into *Rio's* protagonist, Blu, and how his character includes far more than meets the eye.

The Character Blu

Almost all of *Rio's* themes revolve around the main protagonist, Blu, and his struggles with his identity through his experiences and relationships with the other characters. When the audience first meets Blu, he is a small hatchling in a nest by himself, woken up by the singing and dancing of the other colorful birds in *Rio's* rainforest as they celebrate the arrival of Carnaval. He instinctually begins to dance to their samba, and when he spots other hatchlings jumping from their nests and learning to fly with the music, he braces himself to do the same, but bird smugglers interrupt their fun and Blu falls from his tree, getting trapped in a cage. This awful experience coupled with his terrifying journey from Brazil to a crate thrown off a truck into the snow (0:4:05) traumatizes Blu. The only comfort he finds is in his new caretaker, Linda, who finds him and gives him an extremely structured life that ensures his well-being. Blu never learns to fly, and Linda accommodates so that he doesn't have to. He bases his life off what Linda does, so he subsequently becomes highly introverted, book smart, and a homebody; he also makes every decision based off logical facts and his safety. When Blu is trying to teach himself to fly, he reads a bunch of books about flight, makes a checklist for himself, and even constructs a runway for himself to run down, though all of it fails dramatically (0:10:37–0:11:34). Every other bird that sees him mocks him by calling him a "pet," but Blu is happy with his life—since he doesn't know any different, how could he not be? It

is only when he and Linda are all but forced to make the trip to Rio de Janeiro to save Blu's species that Blu is first met with another culture of birds like him and begins to question his identity, specifically the reemergence of the Brazilian culture he had largely forgotten.

When Blu meets the only other blue macaw, Jewel, he is determined to woo her quickly so he can return home as quickly as possible, so he tries to impress her with his mind, not his heart, showing her how he can communicate with other animals and make daring ground escapes (0:32:31–0:33:53). Jewel, on the other hand, has no desire for a mate and only wishes to escape their enclosure to freedom in the rainforest. Right away, the macaws are set up as foils for each other: Blu, the nerdy American who acts more human than bird, and Jewel, the free-spirited Brazilian who refuses to trust humans. They are on completely opposite pages until they are kidnapped and chained together by one leg each, forcing them to work together so they can escape the chain and go their separate ways. As they learn to cooperate, the largest obstacle in the way of their freedom is Blu's inability to fly, which is depicted as his lack of freedom from humans. Jewel tells Blu that flying is freedom—it is not having to rely on anyone else (IvyPanda, "*Rio* and the Issue of Freedom")—and she asks him why he wouldn't want that, to which he replies that a life like that sounds lonely. Here, Blu's dependence on others and rejection of independence contradicts with Jewel's stubborn independence and rejection of depending on anyone but herself; as their journey progresses, they must both learn to be more independent and dependent respectively, and this is eventually how they connect with each other and fall in love.The last character of significant note to Blu is the toucan Rafael, who serves as Blu's primary mentor in successfully wooing Jewel and accepting his Brazilian identity. Like Blu, Rafael used to do things that satisfied his brain's desires, but after meeting his mate and settling down with her, everything he does now comes from his heart—and this is where Rafael tells

Blu flying comes from. He says, “Blu must connect his heart to his mind, and only then will he truly soar and discover the hero inside” (“Carlos Saldahna Rio Interview”). This juxtaposition of heart versus mind is central to Blu’s character journey as he grows to accept more of himself through his love for Jewel.

Throughout the movie, Blu’s largest conflict is his internal struggle accepting both his identities, both as an American pet and a Brazilian bird, as valid while it seems everyone around him cannot. As he unlocks more memories of his past—once through a flashback to the beginning of the movie as Blu dances with Jewel at 0:54:20—and grows to love the little tastes of freedom he gains through his wild adventures with Jewel and his friends, he still values the knowledge and carefulness from his American upbringing. Because of his upbringing, Blu is an expert at using human tools around him to solve problems in sticky situations—such as when he used a skateboard at 1:21:27 to catch up to a trapped Jewel. However, at this point in the film, Blu has not accepted both his American and Brazilian identities to make up his whole immigrant identity.

The only one that seems to like both sides of Blu equally is Jewel, which opens the door in his mind towards reclaiming his cultural heritage, but when the chain is finally removed from them and Jewel immediately flies away from him, his insecurity skyrockets. From 1:07:08–1:09:38 in the film, Blu is watching his friends and his love interest, Jewel, happily soaring above him, the music soaring with them. While the flying birds are illuminated by the moonlight, Blu is lit by streetlights on the ground with the bulldog Luiz, his face dejected. Luiz tries to comfort him by saying, “Yep, I know just how you feel. Watching them up there makes you want to chase them and grab them in their mouth and bite their heads off, huh?” and then laughs it off, but eventually he realizes he is not helping and leaves. The camera focuses on Jewel and the other birds flying in circles with Blu out of focus, until he eventually walks out of frame. It seems even the camera has decided he is not important compared to his friends flying above

him. Once Jewel realizes he is leaving and goes to ask him what's wrong, they are much more separated than they were when they were chained together, and they are never both shown in focus in the same shot. This is to signify their disconnect; now that Blu believes Jewel could never accept all of him, he tells her, "I can't spend the rest of my life following you wherever you go," and Jewel retorts that it isn't her fault he can't fly—which really means it isn't her fault he refuses to conquer his insecurities and live with her. As the music intensifies with the heat of their confrontation, Blu then completely separates himself from his Brazilian roots, claiming he doesn't belong here and also hates samba, implying nothing had changed in him and there was no possibility of a relationship with Jewel. Jewel, realizing Blu has rejected any Brazilian part of himself he'd grown to love and has thus rejected his love for her, also rejects the American part of him she'd grown to love, calls him a "pet" once more, and flies away from everyone. Blu's character has echoes of James Baldwin's essay "Stranger in the Village." Like Baldwin, an African-American staying in an isolated Swiss village, he is seen as a "living wonder" to every bird he meets in Brazil, and while they do not intentionally treat him unkindly, they do not view him as a real bird without the ability to fly (2). The people in the Swiss village only view Baldwin as otherworldly because they had never seen anyone like him before, which is similar to how the Brazilian birds react whenever they observe Blu's American mannerisms. All of Blu's friends try and use different methods to teach him how to fly, but in the end, Blu takes flight only after both his identities are accepted, first by Jewel and then by himself. Once he can see the value of his American pet resourcefulness and the value of the wonders of his freedom in Rio de Janeiro as equal, his identity is finally whole. He is American, but he is also Brazilian—he is a pet, but he is also a bird—and when Jewel accepts that too, there are no fears or insecurities that could stop him from soaring with her by his side.

Blu as the Role of the Migrant

It may seem incredulous to think the character arc of an animated macaw in a children's movie might have any parallels to the experience of immigrants, but there is much to learn about the migrant experience when viewed through the narrative of Blu's journey in *Rio*. Immigrants often struggle with trying to balance their two identities: Who they are in the culture of the country they call home, and who they are in the culture of the country they used to call home. They might feel at home in their new country but unwelcome based on what self-reflective critics of migration studies call "ethnic lensing," which conceptualizes ethnicity as separate from other sectionalities of one's identity. Peter Scholten et al. argue, "focusing only one ethnicity risks defying social complexity and the importance of intersectionalities between ethnicity and, for instance, class, citizenship, education, location, cultural, or political disposition" (18). Even though Blu was born in Brazil, he was raised in America and had no memories of his original home before he returned, and upon returning, both his identities were immediately challenged by the other's existence. As it turns out, Blu's journey is closely related to the journey many immigrants find themselves on to find self-acceptance of their multiple identities, because he is an immigrant.

On the journey to accepting his Brazilian heritage, music is the strongest way Blu is able to connect with his roots. Unlike something like language, music is a simple common ground for people from different cultures to connect to, so it is an incredibly useful tool for immigrants to use when trying to connect to their ancestral cultures. Sandra Sanchez Adorno conducted a research study that showed music allowed four second-generation immigrant children to explore the values and traditions of social groups and also served as a source for "understanding, maintaining, and expressing their ethnic, gender, and youth identities" (1). The movie *Rio* starts with birds singing and dancing to Brazilian music, and there is almost always samba playing when the cast is in Rio de Janeiro. As

a baby, Blu is shown dancing to the music, and when he and Jewel dance together at a party, the same flashback plays while Blu does a very similar dance instinctively.And it is no coincidence that when Blu rejects his Brazilian identity, he ends by saying he hates samba—a move that shocks all his friends and even brings some to tears. Carlos Saldahna's choice to make *Rio* a diet movie musical makes sense since he was writing a love letter to his culture, and music plays such a huge part in sharing any culture with an audience. By making music a pinnacle part of Blu's cultural rediscovery as well, he creates a portrait of discovering one's identity that is easy for others to relate to—particularly to immigrants.

One of Blu's toughest decisions in *Rio* is deciding what constitutes a home for him. Is a home based on where you live, where you're from, what you're doing, or who you're with? He thinks Minnesota is his home because it's where he grew up, but once he travels to Rio de Janeiro and gains new friends, love interests, and desires, he loses sense of where his home truly resides. This experience is one many immigrants go through, too. When examining the 2006 film The Namesake, Natalie Friedman explains that the American-raised children of Indian parents Ashoke and Ashima, who both immigrated to the United States when they got married, "do not see India as their country of origin or as a putative homeland, and they can only define home as the place where their two cultures merge" (115). For some, that home is their family's house, with their extended family's memories and their own memories with each other. For Blu, that home eventually becomes Rio de Janeiro, in a new blue macaw sanctuary run by his caretaker Linda, deep in the rainforest where he lives with his friends, Jewel, and his and Jewel's three children. Although he does not still live in Minnesota, Linda, the most important part of his Minnesota life, is still with him; Blu's home is anywhere with all his loved ones, and in true migrant fashion, both of his cultures are accounted for.

Conclusion

Narratives are how people discover new parts of themselves: their personalities, their quirks, and most importantly, their identities. It is vital to the betterment of society that a trove of diverse narratives is spread to everyone in it—that way, humans continue to foster identities that fit themselves and continue to shape the world to be a better place for all. Carlos Saldahna may have created *Rio* for the Brazilians in his homeland, but the narrative he tells speaks to more than just them. If an immigrant watches *Rio* and feels seen by the awkward, insecure, but brave Blu, they will find it easier to accept themselves for every piece of their identity that doesn't seem to quite fit together, and humanity will feel more whole as a result. And isn't that the greatest outcome society can achieve? After all, regardless of where we come from, what we love to do, what we believe in, and who we love, we are all birds of a feather.

Adorno, Sandra Sanchez. "Navigating Identities: The Musical Lives of Four Second-Generation Immigrant Children." *Journal of Research in Music Education*, July 2024, p. 1. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294241256929.

Baldwin, James, "Stranger in the Village," Harper's Magazine, (1953).

Carlos Saldanha Rio Interview. https://www.girl.com.au/carlos-saldanha-rio.htm. Accessed 29 Jan. 2025.

Friedman, Natalie. "From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake." *Critique*, vol. 50, no. 1, Fall 2008, pp. 111–28. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.50.1.111-128.

Gonçalves, Isabella, and Yossi David. "A Systematic Literature Review of the Representations of Migration in Brazil and the United Kingdom." *Comunicar*, vol. 30, no. 71, Apr. 2022, pp. 47–58. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.3916/C71-2022-04.

Marsh, Leslie L. "Another Good Neighbor?: Hollywood's (Re)Embracing of Brazil in 'Rio' (2011) and 'Fast Five' (2011)." *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2012, pp. 67–85. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24388781. Accessed 5 Nov. 2024.

"Rio (2011) and the Issue of Freedom." *IvyPanda*, 14 Jan. 2022, ivypanda.com/essays/movie-review-rio-2011/.

Rio. Directed by Carlos Saldanha, 20th Century Fox, 2011.

Scholten, Peter, et al. *Introduction to Migration Studies: An Interactive Guide to the*

Works Cited

Literatures on Migration and Diversity. 1st ed, Springer International Publishing AG, 2022.

Vieira, Else R. P. "Carlos Saldanha's Cinematic Reinvention of Rio as an Aspiring Global City." *The International Journal of New Media, Technology and the Arts*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2020, pp. 29–50. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.18848/2326-9987/CGP/v15i02/29-50.

Post-Migration and Embracing Identity Multiplicity

Kaira Carter

ABSTRACT

Migration is a phenomenon that requires individuals to shift their identity to incorporate new cultures, creating a split between the individual's ethnic identity and national identity. Acculturation to a new environment requires migrants to solidify a new identity, often adopting a combination of their past lives and their new lives. In the context of Social Identity theory by Henri Tajfel, each migrant has the ability to choose how they categorize themselves and create groups. The book American Street by Ibi Zoboi contextualizes the migrant experience to America as a struggle to find their place and acceptance in a community. Using Social Identity Theory, this paper aims to prove that the protagonist, Fabiola Toussaint, is able to find peace as a Haitian American citizen, incorporating both of her homes into her identity. By embracing her multiple identities, Fabiola unites her family from both worlds and learns to accept herself.

In each culture, there are unique traits and traditions that set it apart from other cultures across the world. Within these social constructs, each individual develops an identity to reflect the culture they live in. This representation allows individuals to feel a sense of belonging and harmony, creating meaning and community worth cherishing (Deaux 280). However, for those who permanently migrate to new countries, their ethnic identities no longer reflect social expectations, driving them to adopt a new national persona. This new national identity often differs from their ethnic identity, requiring migrants to rapidly adapt to their new situation. Between ethnic identity and national identity, each migrant has to decide how to incorporate their old selves into their new selves and find acceptance as a mixture of both. Without the ability to adhere to each part of their identities, they will feel incomplete or inauthentic as an individual. Migrants finding belonging in their new home depends on their ability to blend their social identities and categorize themselves as bicultural individuals who derive support from their cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and family bonds.

In 2017, Haitian-born author Ibi Zoboi wrote her debut novel *American Street* about immigrants in the United States having to grapple with several social identities while adapting to new surroundings. As one of the finalists for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, this novel follows the US-born Haitian protagonist, Fabiola Toussaint, raised in Haiti with her Haitian-born mother. Wanting to leave Haiti to live with their American family, Fabiola tries to enter America with her undocumented mother, who is arrested at the airport and put into a detainment center. Fabiola is forced to immigrate alone. Struggling to leave behind her mother and country to assimilate into Detroit's isolated, fast-paced society, Fabiola turns to her American-born cousins to help her acculturate while also remembering to preserve her Haitian heritage to find a sense of happiness. While immigrants to the United States can identify as Americans, they can't escape their past cultural identities. Throughout the novel, Fabiola connects her

spiritual beliefs to the people in her life, finding guidance and comfort from her origins. Her cousins and Aunt Jo take care of her and teach her how to survive in downtown Detroit, even introducing her to their family businesses: Loan sharking and drug dealing. Because of their Haitian backgrounds and because they have a single mother who cannot work an official job due to medical issues, the Toussaint family has to support each other by any means necessary. Fabiola finds strength and offers support by praying for her family, cooking nutritious Haitian cuisine, and inviting her family into her religious practices. Even though Fabiola must adopt new behaviors as an American citizen, such as attending a public school and prioritizing money, she does not abandon her ethnic identity as a Haitian. Instead, she recontextualizes her ethnic identity in a way that sustains her national identity. By engaging with both of her identities, Fabiola finds peace and acceptance with her choices throughout the novel and feels connected with her Haitian mother, the person she dedicates herself to rescuing from confinement. The novel culminates in an impossible choice between two families: Her American family or her Haitian mother. Accepting both worlds as a crucial part of herself, Fabiola finds a solution that allows her to unite both, even at the expense of financial security.

The author of *American Street*, Ibi Zoboi, is a Haitian immigrant to the United States who writes about migrant experiences, striving to bring awareness to her audiences about violence and oppression in America. *American Street* is her break-out novel and National Book Award finalist, and it was the first step toward accomplishing her goal. In an interview with PBS Books, Zoboi explained she was born in Port-Au-Prince, like Fabiola, and immigrated to America with her mother at the age of four to Bushwick, New York. The area she grew up in was prone to violence and drug use, causing her mother to restrict her from going outside. As a result, Zoboi grew up in front of the television, consuming as much media as she could (PBS Books). She explains her reason for placing the setting of *American Street* in West Side Detroit was because it reflected the Bushwick

she had to grow up with. The event that motivated her to publish *American Street* was "the murder of a black boy and the media haranguing of his Haitian-Dominican-American friend" (Jean-Charles 45). As someone who grew up in the crosshairs of violence, Zoboi decided to represent migrants and marginalized groups who face persecution because of racial judgment and their inability to escape their ethnic identities. After *American Street's* success, she published several more books such as Nigeria Jones, Pride, (S)kin,Punching the Air, and many more. *American Street* helps provide a migrant perspective about the difficulties of categorizing oneself in a new environment and finding an accepting community to rely on.

Zoboi's novel received extensive review and praise for making migration studies and an assimilation text accessible for young adult readers, who often struggle to relate to migrants. In Laurel Niedospial's review on Popsugar, they state, "While a different writer might have fallen into the trap of making America be the ideal, Zoboi manages to describe the difficulty of living in the US while still making authentic and dynamic characters who have grown up there." As a Haitian immigrant to the United States herself, Zoboi understands first-hand the hardships involved in leaving one's country behind for one that is supposedly better. Zoboi depicts the American Dream as an unrealistic standard and presents the struggles migrants face as they adapt to a new culture. Another review from Tiffany Rhoades on Girl Museum also takes notice of Fabiola's multiple identities and her dedication to integrating into Detroit's harsh environment. They emphasize that the book creates an emotional attachment between Fabiola and the reader, creating a personal experience. Rhoades states, "I was proud as she learned how to write a proper research paper and received her first 'A' in an American school … I also became enamored with her traditional practices as she prayed to the ilwas, made a Haitian-influenced Thanksgiving dinner, and told her cousins about life in Haiti." These reviews show that even if the American Dream is not accessible

to everyone, immigrants in the United States can find success. Fabiola's journey is not just one of hardship; she learns to be courageous and take steps toward the life she wants most. Her dedication to her family and her bicultural identity gives her a sense of purpose in her new life that the American Dream never offered her.

Before determining whether multiculturalism is an approachable method for integration, it is imperative to understand how human beings define themselves and what creates effective social groups. Social Identity Theory, originally established by Henri Tajfel and his colleague John Turner in the early 1970s, is a method used to define and categorize an individual. This theory utilizes social categorization and social identity to explain why and how social groups are created (Tajfel 254). Social categorization is when like-minded individuals with similar qualities or goals come together. These qualities and goals help the group identify and compare themselves to other groups. Tajfel explains that "Social identity will be understood as that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups)" (254-255). Social identity is how someone defines themselves in relation to others, thus creating communities of people.

As established in the definition, individuals can be parts of several groups and determine for themselves what represents them. This can incorporate multiple cultures and beliefs should the individual choose to accept culturally diverse practices into their everyday lives. What determines whether a social group is successful is equally important to identify. In a later article published in 1985, Tajfel teamed up with John Turner to research the factors determining if a group fulfills its purpose and gets along with other groups. A social group naturally determines its success by comparing itself to alternate groups, also known as out-groups. If conditions are better in their group, members will have higher self-esteem and a sense of belonging. When conditions are worse in their group, members will have worse self-esteem and will likely leave the group or start

conflicts with an opposing group (Tajfel, Turner 16). The difference in social status between groups is what creates issues with out-groups, leading to disputes over social identity and how to properly categorize oneself.

Social identity theory applies to all ethnic groups because ethnicity is a categorization used for identification and relatability. Because identity is malleable and can be changed to conform to a new social standard, assimilationist and multiculturalist texts are often about how to shift from one identity to another, or how to bridge the gaps between the two cultures (Carpio 16–17). However, conflict often plagues migrant groups, preventing them from finding self-esteem and acceptance in their host country. Large immigrant groups with common traits and beliefs tend to be viewed as threats to a host country's culture, preventing the two ethnic groups from forming peaceful relations (Schwartz 344). In many cases, immigrants who try to integrate into a host society have to accept new ethnic labels that place them into a stigmatized social group, such as when an Afro-Caribbean native is labeled as "Black" in American society (Deaux 276). Zoboi focuses on conflicts between different nationalities and ethnicities in her book, emphasizing the Haitian struggle to immigrate to America and assimilate into their society. In trying to compete with a powerful, opposing culture, the Haitian American community is plagued with low self-esteem and feels as though they have to fight to belong. Fabiola's oldercousins and Aunt Jo represent this struggle, and they feel alienated as a result, unable to find support from locals or financial opportunities. Because they could not find a stable source of income, the family resorts to becoming loan sharks and drug dealers to survive. While a part of their social group and struggle, Fabiola also represents the combination of American and Haitian culture. Instead of feeling resentful toward anyone in particular, she attempts to create bridges to cross the gaps between their ethnic and national cultures. Creating these bridges and finding similarities in her social groups are what allow her to integrate into society as a bicultural

individual and allow her family to follow in her footsteps.

One of the first ways Fabiola bridges the gap between her ethnic and national identities is through spiritual association: Drawing connections between the people in her life and the spiritual lwas that guide her. These lwas play a significant role in the Haitian religion known as Vodou. Laënnec Hurbon, a Haitian professor who studies Haitian religion and culture, explains Vodou as a social hierarchy of spirits (lwas) with God serving as the leader of all spirits. He states, "They represent a transformation of ethnic groups into families of divinities and constitute a genuine pantheon. God is recognized as the 'great master' who leaves to the lwa, the secondary divinities, the task of dealing with earthly matters" (6). To interact with the guardian spirits, there are manbo, or priestesses, and Vodou practitioners who conduct ceremonies to communicate with the lwas (7). Each family usually inherits one or two lwas who guide and represent them. In *American Street*, Papa Legba, also known as the leader of the lwas and the "master of crossroads," is Fabiola's lwa who helps show her what choices she has in front of her. (6–7). Once Fabiola realizes that Papa Legba is guiding her, she realizes that her life is surrounded by spiritual guardians who take the form of the people in her life, offering their advice.

In Chapter 21, after interacting with several outside characters and spiritual guides, she finally puts everything together, connecting her two worlds through spiritualism. For instance, the book states:

> "If the old man at the corner called Bad Leg is Papa Legba in the flesh, if Dray with his eye patch and gold cross is Baron Samedi, if Donna with her makeup and pretty things is Ezili and, with her scars, Ezili-Danto, then Chantal and Pri can be my spirit guides, too, as Ogu, the warrior, and one-half of Les Marassa Jumeaux, the divine twins who stand for truth, balance, and justice. Maybe even Kasim represents a lwa if I look hard enough. They are all here to help" (Zoboi 214).

By identifying recurring archetypes in her life, she feels better prepared to confront challenges and take action to appease the lwas. These associations also help fill in what is no longer present for Fabiola: Her mother. On the page before, Fabiola wonders to herself what her mother wouldsay to her if she were there. After discovering her cousins are the drug dealers responsible for killing a minor at a block party, Fabiola hides away in her mother's nightgown, breathing in the scent of home. The confusion caused by the discovery brings her to a crossroads and a monumental decision. Should she turn in her cousins in exchange for her mother's freedom or ally with criminals and become the manifestation of a falsified American Dream? When tasked with an impossible scenario, recontextualizing her life to that point through spiritual guidance is what allows her to preserve both. Her morally gray decision becomes black and white: sacrifice Dray, Donna's abusive boyfriend, to the police. As the manifestation of death itself and having a hand in local drug dealing, Dray becomes the key Fabiola needs to liberate her home, her cousin Donna, and her mother from entrapment. Though the results of her decision would later become a devastating trade-off, Fabiola's spiritual upbringing allows her to find resolution in her new circumstances and determine where her loyalties lie: With her family.

The second instance where she blends her ethnic and national identities to find solace in her new home is in Chapter 23 when she helps her family prepare a Haitian American-style Thanksgiving dinner. In this section, Fabiola sees her aunt "holding her head as if about to pass out" (229). Having suffered from a stroke in the past, Fabiola's aunt is unable to maintain the level of power and control she had in the past, making her feel incapable of holding together the family, even for holiday events like Thanksgiving. Fabiola, recognizing this pain, takes it upon herself to bring the family together, despite her unfamiliarity with the holiday and the foods commonly prepared. Rather than letting the task daunt her, her passion spurs her forward. The kitchen connects Fabiola with

her mother and the ingredients bring her comfort. She says, "I'm at peace here in this kitchen—seasoning, chopping, and stirring pots. I pour every prayer and blessing into the dishes" (230). By comparing cuisine to religion, she is also incorporating her protective Vodou practices, meant to fend off misfortune and create harmony in the household. The tension caused by the drug deals and Dray in the past chapters fade into the background as Fabiola blesses her household in a moment that is "like a hug from God." Once the meal is prepared and the family is together, they each take turns commenting on how Fabiola's presence helped heal the sense of helpless separation their family created. The unified moment is thanks to the warmth she feels for her family, and the Thanksgiving meal helps her to express her dedication. In her "thunderstorm" of emotions, Fabiola finds strength in the familiar and the new as her cousins and aunt embrace her (231). The scene concludes with the cousins realizing that Fabiola stewed the turkey, a common tradition in Haitian cuisine, rather than cooking it whole. They accept the shift in tradition and Fabiola as a new, experimental individual who brings warm memories. Her American family comes together to comfort her and support her for who she is, accepting her traditions even when they deviate from what they are used to. Her country's food brings them all together and helps contextualize Fabiola's unique talents and blessings.

Haitian food, like what was served during the Thanksgiving dinner, has a vibrant history of cultural identities forging together into a melting pot of internal and external cultural influences. For instance, according to an article about the history of Haitian cuisine, the indigenous tribe known as the Taino set the spicy foundation for Haiti's food culture, inventing barbecue and open-air cooking practices. Once the European settlers colonized Haiti and introduced African slave workers, they introduced their unique cuisine, introducing ingredients like coffee, sugar, cacao, okra, and gumbo (Louis-Jean 1). With Spanish and Arab migration to Haiti, more cooking styles permeated in the Haitian culinary world. Fabiola's history and bloodlines, derived from countless global sources,

prove that she has experienced identity multiplicity and integration since she was born, having incorporating European, African, American, and indigenous influences.

The final chapter of the book brings Fabiola's family together one final time to mourn the loss of their collective American Dream. Fabiola, taking up her mother's role as a mambo, a priestess, conducts restorative ceremonies to help her family move on from their losses and misfortune:

> "We are all in white. Even Pri has shed her dark clothes and now wears a white turtleneck and pants. I had wrapped my cousins and aunt in white sheets after making a healing bath of herbs and Florida water for each one, and let them curl into themselves and cry and cry. This is what Manman had done for our neighbors who survived the big earthquake. The bath is like a baptism, and if black is the color of mourning, then white is the color of rebirth and new beginnings. Our brown skins glow against our sweaters, pants, and head scarves. We are made new again" (Zoboi 321).

The ritual helps Fabiola and her family remember that not all is lost and that they still have their lives before them. Even after losing their home to crime and violence and watching their companions perish because of impossible choices, they still have each other and are allowed to heal each other. Pri's decision to cast away her masculine persona demonstrates her desire to be present, ready to be vulnerable with her family as a way to offer support. However, she still wears pants rather than a skirt or dress, recognizing who she is and staying true to herself. Fabiola's recollection of her mother after the 2015 earthquake that devastated her previous home in Port-au-Prince shows that she has witnessed first-hand what it is like to see an entire existence crumble before her into something that can never be restored. Rather than giving into despair, she leans into her upbringing and her mother's comforting role to bring hope. In this baptism scene, the whole family recognizes that what they desire in their lives is not a new

nationality or the American Dream; rather, they seek solace in each other and peace from the world that offers them nothing but hardship. Despite the chaos surrounding them, Fabiola knows how to pave the way for a new future: Open-minded understanding and a strong community. Because of her continuing connection to her past life, Fabiola can find resolution not only for herself but her entire family as they each choose to move forward to the future.

Vodou, as a healing and connecting religion for Haitian individuals, offers comfort and connections to Haitian migrants in their new homes. By cultivating a community and practicing their religious beliefs, they embrace their ethnic identities alongside their national identities, similar to how Fabiola embraces Vodou and invites her family to participate in her rituals to purify them. This can be seen in a 2009 scientific study of Haitian communities coming together to practice Vodou in Montreal and inviting locals to join them. In Hadrien Munier's article about this study, they state, "As the migrant defines himself or herself within this socio-cultural construction of belonging, two dimensions are important to this process. The first establishes Haiti as a reference point for identity that is constructed and shared in the diasporic community. Secondly, adherents develop a 'dividual' self through the practice of Vodou" (27). What they mean is that Haitian migrants use Vodou as a way to comfortably and successfully integrate into their host culture, allowing themselves to become part of a like-minded social group and retaining their ethnic background in a safe environment. Their practice educates the local inhabitants, encouraging cultural exchange and open-mindedness. For instance, one participant named Carline grew up in Montreal and was experiencing financial troubles. Her family encouraged her to consult a Vodou practitioner. After taking their advice, she overcame her troubles and found a community of caring individuals, leading her to become a convert (Munier 30-34). Vodou is a therapeutic practice for adherents, offering stability in an unfamiliar situation and leading to the reinvention of the self. The

baptism scene in *American Street* is an example of this reinvention, and it solidifies the family's collective desire for a better life—not an American or Haitian one, but something in between. In becoming individuals, a unified family with shared ethnic backgrounds and shared goals, Fabiola finds the community she needs to feel accepted as a Haitian American.

American Street's significance comes from its ability to confront racial conflicts migrant groups face in America and how material gain never trumps family and culture. The ending reflects this idea and leaves only one thing certain for the readers: Fabiola has her family, and they are going to continue the fight to belong. In a critical essay about *American Street* by Betsy Nies, she states, "The family drives down Joy Road, symbolizing a decision to abandon the American dream … Zoboi leaves unanswered how the family will survive …, she does indicate the importance of moving away from material gain as a value and toward spiritual and familial connections" (153). The American Dream—the concept that everyone has the freedom to pursue wealth and achieve their wildest dreams—proves to only be a dream for Fabiola and her family. Instead of ending with a struggle for wealth or turning against American ideals after Dray and Kasim's deaths, Zoboi chooses to leave the ending open to interpretation. Ultimately, the audience needs to decide if their struggles throughout the novel were worth the outcome. What matters most in the end is Fabiola's conviction to stand up for herself and her culture, showing the world what it means to be a proud Haitian American. Fabiola, "fortified by Vodou, love, and visions of community …, helps readers think of worlds in which her trials and tribulations … cease to exist" (Jean-Charles 47). Fabiola alone cannot improve American society and create acceptance; the people around her are the ones who decide if she has a place. Zoboi's voice for girls like Fabiola is meant to push her audience to consider a world where migrant groups are not seen as invaders or threats—they are people.

Ibi Zoboi and their first breakout novel *American Street* show that no one has to give up their history or their home to acculturate to a new place; their past lives and experiences are what give them strength. Fabiola's journey to the United States teaches her that the skills she adopted from her mother in Haiti make her powerful and resourceful. She creates an entire Thanksgiving feast, asks the lwas for guidance to save her sisters from deadly drug dealers, and uses her knowledge of sacred rituals to guide them in mourning and restoration. By relying on her Haitian background as she developed as an American citizen, Fabiola found friends and a family to look out for, even rescuing her mother from detainment in prison. Home is not something that needs to be abandoned; rather, it should be incorporated into every new home, offering strength, esteem, and familiarity to those who face a vast new world.

Works Cited

Carpio, Glenda R. "Categorizing Migrant Literature." *Migrant Aesthetics: Contemporary Fiction, Global Migrations, and Limits of Empathy,* Columbia University Press, New York City, New York, 2023, pp. 15–25.

Deaux, Kay. "Immigration and identity theory: What can they gain from each other?" *Identity and Symbolic Interaction*, 23 Apr. 2020, pp. 273–291, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41231-9_10.

Hurbon, Laënnec. "Haitian Vodou." *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 4 May 2022, https://doi.org/10.29164/22haitianvodou.

"Ibi Zoboi on 'American Street' at the 2017 Miami Book Fair." *YouTube*, PBS Books, 17 Nov. 2017, youtu.be/w4wvwsMp3ml?si=yYADuvbOUaF6892R.

Jean-Charles, Marsha. "Decolonial migration, crimmigration, and the American Dream Nightmare in Ibi Zoboi's spirit worlds." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 51, no. 2, 3 Apr. 2021, pp. 40–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2021.1888683.

Louis-Jean, James, et al. "Valorization of pikliz: A spicy meal garnishment in Haitian cuisine." *Journal of Ethnic Foods,* vol. 8, no. 1, 9 Apr. 2021, https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-021-00077-5.

Munier, Hadrien. "Self, lwa and Haitianness: The adherence process and reinvention of the self by Haitian Vodou in Montreal." *Student Anthropologist*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1 Dec. 2020, pp. 27–40, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.sda2.20130304.0003.

Niedospial, Laurel. "American Street Shows the Shifting Perspective of the American Dream." *Popsugar*, Vox Media, 9 Oct. 2017, www.popsugar.com/entertainment/

american-street-review-44123125.

Nies, Betsy. "Vodou Illuminations, Diaspora Literacy, and Racial Violence in Ibi Zoboi's Young Adult Novel American Street." *Caribbean Children's Literature*., vol. 2, 18 May 2023, pp. 133–157. *Critical Approaches*, https://doi.org/10.14325/mississippi/9781496844583.001.0001.

Rhoades, Tiffany. "Book Review: 'American Street' Is the next Great American Novel." *Girl Museum*, 11 June 2020, www.girlmuseum.org/book-review-american-street-is-the-next-great-american-novel/.

Schwartz, Seth J., et al. "Identity Development in Immigrant Youth: A Multilevel Contextual Perspective." *European Psychologist*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2018, pp. 336–49. EBSCOhost, https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000335.

Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Nelson-Hall Inc., Chicago, Illinois, 1986, pp. 7–24.

Tajfel, Henri. "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison." *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology,* Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 254–267.

Zoboi, Ibi Aanu. *American Street*. Balzer + Bray, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2018.

The Power of Language: Strengthening Chicano Voices Through Song

Anna Grile

ABSTRACT

In a country as full of diversity as The United States, there are numerous groups of people, especially racial/ethnic minorities, that are systemically marginalized. Because of this, representation through music that is created by those who are individuals within these groups can act as empowerment. The Chicano Batman cover of the song "This Land is Your Land" by Woody Guthrie establishes an attitude of resistance towards prejudiced norms and inspires a sense of belonging for Latino/Chicano people through the Spanish lyrics that are embedded into the classic American song. In this essay, I will use *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán* by Chon Noriega to highlight and demonstrate the significance of Chicano culture and history within the United States. I will dissect the Spanish lyrics included within the Chicano Batman cover of the song and elaborate on the importance of their inclusion in relation to both current and past Chicano history.

© Grile, *The Digital Literature Review*, 12 (4), 58–69.

doi: 10.33043/6adcr468.

Music is a force that has been uniting people for thousands of years, and the new personal connections that become possible through song and music can change people's lives. Individuals and groups across the globe have all created different music that shares their perspectives on humanity and the world, and this representation has allowed for the sharing of unique points of view. Lyrics and musical composition have the power to unify and educate people about key topics. Musicians revisiting well-respected songs from the past and creating new covers can create spaces for entirely new audiences within the genre and music, and this type of change is notable, especially regarding universal topics such as immigration. This can allow for new experiences with music and new meaning making as well. A prime example of this is the cover of "This Land is Your Land" done by the Latino band called Chicano Batman. The Chicano Batman cover of Woody Guthrie's song "This Land is Your Land" is both important and empowering, as it reclaims a sense of belonging for multigenerational Chicano people and immigrants through the modernized way they rewrite the original 1940 song. This cover allows for Chicano and Latino communities to make meaningful connections and feel a sense of empowerment in the United States through the inclusive Spanish lyrics that it includes. This specific choice of alteration, among others in their cover of the song, is already making lasting impressions within Latino communities.

The Chicano Batman cover of "This Land is Your Land" was released in January 2017, and most listeners noted this significant timing, as it was released just days before Donald Trump came into office for his first term as president. This cover of the iconic original song by Woody Guthrie captivated audiences across the nation, as it transformed an already pro-freedom anthem into a new one: one that amplifies the voices of Latino and Chicano-identifying people in the United States. The last stanza of lyrics in their cover contains three lines from the original version in English, and one final line in Spanish. This concluding Spanish line reads, "Esta tierra es para ti y para mi." By

blending the two languages together in the ending of the song, they are connecting the two central cultures that make up the Chicano identity. By making the choice to end the song with one last line in Spanish, they are also intentionally reemphasizing a sense of Latino triumph and pride. Their bilingual cover acts as a more inclusive version of the original song. Chicano Batman allows for Latino audiences to establish more meaningful interactions through their cover of the already well-known anthem. This version does so with the stanza of Spanish lyrics that the band implemented into the song. With its synth, Bardo Martinez's powerful vocals, and accompanying background vocals, the Chicano Batman cover contains a more upbeat tempo and groovy melody in comparison to the original. This restyling of the song adds to the already empowering tone that it creates, as well as creating a more twenty-first century and bilingual take. These changes may also appeal more to modern audiences, as they turn the original song into one that sounds similar to pop or indie music that may play on the radio.

Chicano Batman is an indie Latino rock band that was formed in 2008 in Los Angeles, California and is made up of members Eduardo Arenas, Carlos Arévalo, Bardo Martinez, and Gabriel Villa. They are known for their soulful and bold music and the culturally relevant themes they discuss and present within their songs and albums. They tackle serious and important topics such as immigration, identity, police brutality, and freedom while blending them into their smooth style of music. Their album "Freedom is Free" takes a stance on these topics in both straightforward and inexplicit ways. For example, their song titled "La Jura," a Spanish word colloquially used to identify police, tells the story of an instance of police brutality head-on and is inspired by tragic events that happened to Arenas' old neighbor/companion (Bryan). Their song sharing the title of "Freedom is Free" contains lyrics that promote freedom as an individualistic idea of belonging and liberation. This song contains lyrics such as: "Freedom is Free, and you can't take that away from me" and "that's the way it's always gonna be." In their

album and song titled “Invisible People,” Chicano Batman explains what it is like to be a minority in the United States, stating that “Invisible people, the truth is we're all the same, the concept of race was implanted inside your brain.” In this song, they do not stray away from the idea that minorities are treated differently than dominant groups, and bring attention to this idea with their groovy/funky cover.

The unique name Chicano Batman does not simply come out of nowhere either, and lead singer Bardo Martinez is the one who originally came up with the concept/band name. In a PBS SoCal article, Martinez shared that “The whole point was that both Chicano and Batman are very iconic names so when you combine these two iconic names it creates a whole different thing. The whole point is combining a pop-cultural symbol and a cultural-political symbol” (Anguiano). The word Chicano is a term that Mexican Americans in the United States have identified with and used to label or describe their culture or family heritage (“Latino/a/x, Hispanic, Chicano”). The name Chicano Batman exists and works to create a newer positive reception and reputation of the word Chicano, as it has previously held a negative connotation in the United States. The name does so by blending this term with the previously established pop culture of the United States to add balance. By creating, releasing, and performing their music under the band name Chicano Batman, they are decreasing the negative stigmas surrounding the word and becoming a visible and well-known positive representation of it. The name acts as an immediate attention grabber for multiple audiences, and this is only the beginning of how Chicano Batman is spreading visibility for Chicano people as a band. Their Chicano representation directly acts as a powerful influence that can inspire and empower Chicano people of all ages and reduces previous negative stereotypes.

It is no surprise that a band that creates music in order to promote freedom and diverse voices would end up working on a modernized cover of Woody Guthrie’s classic song “This Land is Your Land.” In an interview for Billboard, the members of Chicano

Batman discussed their beliefs and experiences as a band and what the music they create and play means to them. When asked about the creation of their cover of "This Land is Your Land," they shared that the idea of them covering the song came from a pitch in hopes of them recording the song in collaboration with Johnnie Walker Whiskey. This collaboration ended with a video advertisement in which all members of the band were in the spotlight for. This ad itself acted as a source of Chicano/Latino representation in media and became a source of attention and discussion because of this. Carlos Arevalo, the guitarist of the band, shared about the initial hesitation they had about the song because it was "cheesy" and something that they all had to sing in school when they were younger. Eduardo Arenas, the bassist of the band, also shared they believed "that song ["This Land is Your Land"] has been misappropriated into this all-American, almost pro-war type of chant," and how after beginning to recontextualize the lyrics of the original song, they began to understand the importance of it and what their cover of it could mean for people (Norris).

In this interview, Arenas shares about a meaningful interaction he had with someone who had listened to their cover. He recounts this moment, stating, "I ran into someone after a show who said he was working on a midterm, one of his college papers, about the song and what it means for Latinos to be singing that song today, in America" (Norris). This interaction alone is a prime example of how their cover of "This Land is Your Land" has created environments for people to connect with it and resonate with the messages that it shares to promote and inspire community and belonging for multigenerational immigrants in the United States. Their cover promotes the idea of Latino and Chicano people using their voices in order to represent themselves and claim their rightful belonging within the United States. Conversations like the one Arenas had with a fan may seem as though they are a smaller interaction, but there is a deep significance behind these discussions. When people within the Latino/Chicano communities are able to see

the inclusion of Spanish within a classic American anthem, they are able to establish a sense of relation and belonging that is specific to them and their culture.

In his essay titled “Unraveling America’s Hispanic Past Internal Stratification and Class Boundaries,” historian Ramón A. Gutiérrez notes that there are “several possible origins for the word” (Gutiérrez 257). Guiterrez shares a few of the most plausible beginnings for the word, stating that it may derive from the following: the switching of letters in the Spanish word "chinaco," meaning "tramp;" the shortening of names used with children learning to speak; the passing down of the name of an Aztec tribe called Meshicas; or that it stems from the Spanish word "chico," meaning "small" (Gutierrez 258). Despite which of these origins the word accurately came from, in the past it has been used as a derogatory word towards Mexican people that live in the United States, especially aimed at, but not limited to, low-income Mexican families. Since then, newer generations have especially begun to reclaim and identify with the word Chicano/a in the mid-to-late 20th century. Adaljiza Sosa Riddell shares this sentiment in her essay titled “Chicanas and El Movimiento,” expressing that the Chicano movement is “the all-encompassing effort to, on the one hand, articulate and intensify the Chicano existence, and on the other hand, to articulate and alleviate the suffering that has accrued to Chicanos precisely because of that existence” (Riddell 245). The reclamation of the Chicano label has allowed for Chicano people to restore a sense of power for themselves within the word and use it as a word that empowers them, rather than belittle or discriminate against them. This provides a stronger sense of agency within these communities and unites Chicano voices together.

Since World War I and World War II, Chicano-identifying people and Mexican people have endured several cases of mass deportations and acts of racism in the U.S. These types of experiences are unfortunately nothing new for Mexican people in the United States to face, and there is a relevant history and multiple examples of this occurring.

In her essay about Chicano movements, Rosaura Sánchez shares some of this history, summarizing that this discrimination presented itself as "the repatriation of Mexican immigrants in 1930–1931 and continuing with media reports promoting violence against the 'zoot suiters' of the 1940s, the deportation of 'wetbacks' in the 1950s, and the raids and border violence against 'Mexican illegals' throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s" (Sánchez 352). These acts of violence and prejudice have reinforced immense feelings of exclusion towards Mexican people, as well as created and upheld these attitudes and structures in which they have the potential to be harmed.

For decades, the United States allowed the maintenance of these harmful beliefs and judgements towards Mexican Americans and Mexican individuals, and this is something that still occurs today. Current immigration policies in the United States have also allowed for these negative mental and physical consequences to continue. According to the American Immigration Council, The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has contributed to the deportation of 231,000 Mexican individuals from 2013-2018 that had at least one child that was a U.S. citizen. Similarly, in 2019, 27,980 Mexican people were deported that had U.S. born children (American Immigration Council). This demonstrates one of the many ways in which Mexican and Chicano-identifying people are treated and the cultural shame they have endured in the U.S. because of their identity. Modern bands like Chicano Batman are working to reclaim the word Chicano in both a positive and powerful sense in relation to identity within the United States. They are shedding light on the importance of the Chicano identity and history and becoming additional representation for those within this community.

Since the creation of the United States, many artists have used creative means to express their beliefs about the country, including both appreciation for it and what could be changed for the better. "This Land is Your Land" is a song known by many due to its peak in popularity in the 1940s that has lasted to this day, and this Woody Guthrie song

has been well-received and chanted by many throughout the country as a patriotic song. Although this song includes patriotic themes, Guthrie also worked to ensure that the song included elements that brought attention to the economic disparities in the country. In fact, Guthrie is believed to have written this song as a unique response to the song "God Bless America" by Irving Berlin ("This Land is Your Land"). According to the Library of Congress, Guthrie's observations "accurately reflected the fact that, even in the depths of the Depression, nearly 20 percent of the nation's wealth rested with one percent of its population" ("This Land is Your Land"). Guthrie wrote this nationally acclaimed song as a means to acknowledge both the beauty and injustice of the country. He also included lines of a similar sentiment in the song that were later removed from recorded versions. Two of these lines read: "Nobody living can make me turn back / this land was made for you and me" ("This Land is Your Land"). These lines reflect more of an objection in relation to the unequal distribution of property, wealth, and land in the United States.

While the Woody Gurhrie version of "This Land is Your Land" was advanced for its time in promoting a more inclusive United States, the Spanish lines added to the Chicano Batman cover of the song are what makes it so unique and sets it apart from the original version from several decades ago. The Spanish stanza of lines from their cover state:

No existe nadie que pueda pararme
Por el camino de libertad
No existe nadie que pueda hacerme volver
Esta tierra es para ti, para mí.

In English, this stanza translates to read: "There is no one who can stop me / On the path of freedom / There is no one who can make me return / This land is for you, for me." It is noteworthy to mention that the Spanish lines from the song have been partially translated through a combination of translations from both *SpanishDict* and myself. The line "Esta tierra es para ti y para mí" is repeated again as the last line of the song, and

this repetition highlights the specific importance of presenting that the U.S does not solely exist for one group of people/people that were born there. While these Spanish lines only make up a smaller section of the entire song, the significance of this stanza is immense because of the ways in which it speaks for immigrants and envisions a new pro-immigrant version. The specific line "No existe nadie que pueda hacerme volver" or "There is no one who can make me return" especially display this belief because of the ways that they express Mexican immigrants/Chicanos should not be–and will not be–forced to leave the United States to live in Mexico.

While the original version of the song does express views that the U.S. should be shared between everyone with the consistent line of "This land was made for you and me," it does not include lines that are specifically aimed toward the inclusion of all immigrants and Latino/Chicano immigrants in the same modern way the Chicano Batman version does. They put emphasis on the fact that these are their rights as human beings, and their uplifting lyrics within the song begin to work as a sense of activism in itself. These Chicano Batman lyrics discourage sentiments of alienation towards people who are immigrants in the United States and instead promote ideals sharing the belief that these people belong in the U.S. and should share the same freedoms as every individual who lives in the country.

As a band, Chicano Batman has already achieved success when it comes to sharing the messages of Latino voices through their music. Their influence has been noted by many, and people in the Chicano and Latino community have been able to make strong personal connections with their songs and musical performances. In a review of "Are We Not Foreigners Here? Indigenous Nationalism in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands" by Jeffrey Schulze, Gregorio Gonzales recounts a time in which he was able to see Chicano Batman perform their cover of "This Land is Your Land" live in New Mexico and how powerful this experience was for him. He shared that after the Spanish lines in the song were

first sung, "Chicano nationalism and Native nationhood soaked the sea of brown bodies grooving to the psychedelic soul rhythm pulsing through the veins of this transnational Indigenous, urban border town of Indian country" and "a crescendo of voices then emerged from the crowd to yell protest anthems in Lakota" (Gonzales). Gonzales' experience in this crowd of people demonstrates a first-hand account of how Chicano Batman's cover of "This Land is Your Land" has directly positively impacted the Chicano community in the United States. Gonzales was able to see the Latino and Indigenous communities that were brought together through Chicano Batman's cover, and this goes to show just how impactful the Spanish lines were for Chicano and Latino voices.

Music and songs are powerful tools which artists are able to use to craft entirely new meanings and connections for themselves, as well as their audiences, to experience. The exposure and influence that Chicano Batman has had as a band through their cover of "This Land is Your Land" has instilled further growth, pride, and belonging within the Chicano label and Chicano/Latino community in the United States. It has allowed for Chicano/Latino people to claim the sense of belonging and that they deserve to live and exist as human beings wherever they are in this country–without the dismissive and prejudiced views of others interfering. This cover of "This Land is Your Land" has promoted ideas of inclusivity and empowerment, and Chicano Batman as a band itself continues to provide Latino representation for audiences of Latino/Chicano and their communities.

Works Cited

Anguiano, Jose. "Chicano Batman: Not Another Band from East L.A." *PBS SoCal*, PBS SoCal, 7 Feb. 2022, www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/chicano-batman-the-east-la-band-offering-nostalgia-and-comfort#:~:text=The%20name%20originally%20served%20as,and%20a%20cultural%2Dpolitical%20symbol.

Bryan, Beverly. "Chicano Batman's New Album Is Their Funkiest Political Statement Yet." *Remezcla*, Remezcla, 29 Apr. 2019, remezcla.com/features/music/chicano-batman-freedom-is-free-interview/.

Gonzales, G. (2018). Are We Not Foreigners Here? Indigenous Nationalism in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands. By Jeffrey M. Schulze. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* , 42(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.17953/0161-6463-42.1.135 Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9v1203kh

Gutiérrez, Ramón A. "Unraveling America's Hispanic past." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1986, pp. 257–258, https://doi.org/10.1525/azt.1986.17.1.79.

"Latino/a/X, Hispanic, Chicano." *Editorial Style Guide*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, editorial-styleguide.strategiccommunication.wisc.edu/term/latino-a-x-hispanic-chicano-2/#:~:text=Latino%2C%20Latina%2C%20or%20Latinx%20are,use%20to%20describe%20their%20heritage.

Noriega, Chon A., et al. *The Chicano Studies Reader: An Anthology of Aztlán*, 1970-2019. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2021.

Norris, John. "Chicano Batman Talk Inspiring Resistance in Trump Era & How Their Acclaimed Johnnie Walker Ad Came About." *Billboard*, Billboard, 7 Apr. 2017.

Riddell, Adaljiza Sosa. "Chicanas and El Movimiento." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1–2, 1974, p. 245, https://doi.org/10.1525/azt.1974.5.1-2.155.

Sánchez, Rosaura. "Mapping the Spanish language along a multiethnic and multilingual border." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1–2, 1 Oct. 1996, p. 352, https://doi.org/10.1525/azt.1996.21.1-2.49.

"This Land Is Your Land." *The Library of Congress*, www.loc.gov/collections/patriotic-melodies/articles-and-essays/this-land-is-your-land/.

"U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement." *American Immigration Council*, American Immigration Council, 8 Oct. 2024, www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement.

The Enduring Alienation of Black Bodies and Migrants: A Comparative Analysis of James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" and Teju Cole's "Black Body"

Victoria Mayeaux

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the persistent sense of alienation experienced by Black individuals and migrants, comparing James Baldwin's Stranger in the Village and Teju Cole's Black Body. Both writers highlight how racial and cultural othering continue despite societal progress, showing how Black people and migrants are scrutinized, stereotyped, and pushed to the margins. Baldwin's account of being treated as an exotic outsider in a Swiss village parallels Cole's reflections on the racialized gaze in modern America, revealing how Blackness is still seen as foreign. The essay also examines how the media reinforces these reductive portrayals, the lasting psychological toll of historical trauma, and the pressures of forced assimilation. Additionally, it critiques cultural appropriation, where dominant groups profit from Black and immigrant cultures while disregarding the people behind them. Drawing from scholarly and literary sources, this analysis emphasizes the importance of awareness and solidarity in challenging systemic racism and fostering a more inclusive society. Ultimately, it calls for a shift in how we tell these stories—one that moves beyond stereotypes and truly acknowledges the humanity and belonging of Black individuals and migrants, both in America and abroad.

doi: 10.33043/4z9c28b8.

Introduction: Literature as a Reflection of Racial and Migrant Alienation

In 1951, civil rights activist and American writer James Baldwin visited a remote village in Switzerland as the sole Black man. A few years later, in 1953, he published an essay titled "Stranger in the Village" where he reflected on those years he lived in Leukerbad. His essay established the effects of American racism on the Black body as it compares to outside countries. Decades later, Nigerian American writer Teju Cole visited the same village and later published his own 2014 essay, "Black Body." By writing about the parallels between Baldwin's experiences and his own in both Switzerland and America, Cole highlights the enduring legacy of racial othering, despite advances in societal progress. The conversation between both writers illustrates how literature has long served as a mirror reflecting the social realities of its time, offering powerful insights into issues of identity, belonging, and exclusion. Particularly, Teju Cole's literary exploration reveals how societal perceptions of race render Black bodies as foreign—within and outside of their own countries—underscoring the challenges of identity and belonging faced by migrants, which will only continue without the proper implementation of change. However, it is important to note that the comparison between these two essays is not an attempt to conflate the experiences of Black individuals with those of other migrants, but rather to illustrate the resonance between their experiences.

The Alienation of Black Bodies and the Politics of Visibility

The alienation experienced by Black individuals, both as migrants and within their homelands, is intensified by societal perceptions and stereotypes. In "Black Body," Teju Cole observes, "To be a stranger is to be looked at, but to be Black is to be looked at especially" (Cole, 13), illustrating how race magnifies the scrutiny and othering of Black Americans. This assertion emphasizes that while all migrants may experience the feeling of being viewed as outsiders, Black individuals face an additional layer of scrutiny tied

to their race. Their very existence and presence in a space are often politicized, viewed not as individuals but as symbols of difference. The constant gaze is dehumanizing, and the inability to escape the racialized identity imposed upon them fosters alienation. Similarly, Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" recounts his dehumanizing experience in a Swiss village, where he was treated as a "living wonder" rather than a fully realized human being. This perception reduces Baldwin to an exotic spectacle, robbing him of his individuality and complexity. He is seen not as a person with his own experiences and history but rather as an object of fascination, a symbol of difference that reinforces societal boundaries.

This reducing of identity to racial difference does not only affect Black people but also extends to immigrants from many ethnic backgrounds. The process of othering frequently targets migrants, focusing intently on their cultural, linguistic, or religious distinctions; all become points of scrutiny in American society. Baldwin's own reflections on being perceived as an object of fascination in Leukerbad—an almost entirely White village—resonate with contemporary accounts of migrant experiences in America. He was othered because he was racially, culturally, and linguistically different.

The Role of Media and Stereotypes in Perpetuating Alienation

Media outlets, for example, perpetuate this sense of alienation for migrants through their frequent representation of refugees from the Middle East and Africa, labeling them as "waves" or "crises" due primarily to the colors of their skin, cultures, and religions. This reductive language indicates "that the media is still manufacturing consent with regards to immigration coverage" (Okoye) in a way that supports biased, racist perspectives and agendas. In doing so, the media itself removes migrants' individuality and diminishes them to a single, dehumanized group, and it is a phenomenon that points out many shared challenges of identity and belonging that affect a large number of Black

Americans and migrants. In an interview with Francois Bondy, Baldwin speaks on the harm of spreading similar reductive narratives about non-White Americans through media outlets and textbooks, commenting:

> If we could tell the truth about what happened to Indians, what happened to the Black man in America, and get rid of all those terrifying myths which are all over TV, and books and textbooks, if we could tell the truth about what our real relationship was to the Mexicans, for example, then we would begin to use a tremendous potential, and it might begin to save the world. (Baldwin and Bondy, 18)

As Baldwin suggests, reductive narratives alienate and reinforce social hierarchies and "terrifying myths" that privilege the White Americans in power who cannot let go of their hatred for those who are not like them. It's evident that these insights on the media's role in shaping racialized perceptions of marginalized groups remain relevant today, as the same reductive narratives used to justify slavery and segregation in the past are now wielded against contemporary immigrant communities, such as the non-White immigrants who cannot escape their connection to labels like "waves" and "crises."

The Psychological Toll and Historical Trauma of Alienation

A similar sense of reduction to one's race or foreignness is echoed by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," where she recalls a personal encounter with microaggressions. Adichie describes how, after moving to the U.S. for college, her roommate was astonished that she spoke fluent English and didn't listen to tribal music, reflecting how stereotypes based on incomplete knowledge lead to misperceptions. Adichie explains, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete" (Adichie, 13:11). These stereotypes limit how people see others and prevent them from

understanding the complexity of their identities, reducing them to narrow, often harmful narratives.

This idea that stereotypes are incomplete captures how Black individuals as well as migrants are often judged based on the limited understanding others have of their backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Together, these insights reveal how societal labeling and reductive narratives not only alienate Black individuals but also migrants from all backgrounds. These narratives reinforce the "otherness" of such groups, making it difficult for them to integrate fully into society. This alienation and the challenges that come with navigating a world shaped by stereotypes highlight the deep complexities of belonging and identity. American immigrants, just like Adichie, must constantly negotiate their sense of self within a society that frequently fails to see them for who they truly are.

Furthermore, such enduring racial stereotypes are linked to historical trauma, leading to the psychological toll of displacement for Black individuals. Baldwin reflects on this in "Stranger in the Village" when he writes that the children who shout slurs at him "have no way of knowing the echoes this sound raises in [him]" (Baldwin). These moments of casual racism carry a deep and cutting weight, tying Baldwin's personal experience to the broader historical trauma experienced by Black Americans under systemic prejudice. Such instances aren't just individual affronts—they are reminders of centuries of racial subjugation, with each insult or prejudice echoing the pain of history and time. The constant exposure to this dehumanization accumulates over time, leaving a profound psychological impact, particularly in terms of alienation. In "Black Body," Teju Cole builds on this idea, observing that "the Black body comes pre-judged, and as a result, it is placed in needless jeopardy" (Cole, 13). This insight underscores how Black Americans face heightened vulnerability due to the stereotypes attached to their bodies. Because of this, Black individuals are often seen as threats or dangers, regardless

of their personal characters or intentions. This, in turn, can expose them to further discrimination and violence.

Similarly, migrants of all backgrounds—especially those who are non-White—face challenges rooted in racial and national stereotypes. These stereotypes, often leading to alienation and violence, shape the migrant experience in ways that parallel the racialization of Black bodies. A striking example of this is "the rapid escalation of racial violence that followed 9/11 [that] normalized an atmosphere of racial terror" (Rana), fueling a nation-wide growth of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia. Innocent immigrants who merely shared the faith of the terrorists were vilified, subjected to hate crimes, and labeled as threats to a country they had no role in attacking. Despite this being just one extreme instance in a long history of racial stereotyping, it does not stand alone as an isolated incident; in fact, it is simply one more tragedy added to the many others in American history which has led to the exclusion and persecution of migrants. It is clear that racial bias, historical trauma, and exclusionary practices create a shared vulnerability between Black Americans and immigrant communities. These experiences reveal the significant toll that systemic racism and prejudice exact on marginalized groups, preventing them from being seen as fully human. As a result, both Black Americans and migrants are frequently treated as outsiders where their sense of belonging is consistently questioned.

In Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village," he reflects on the loss of cultural and ancestral roots for Black Americans, stating, "I am told that there are Haitians able to trace their ancestry back to African kings … the signature on the bill of sale" (Baldwin). Meanwhile, many Black Americans cannot say the same; that history was lost to time and stolen by terrors of the past, bleeding into the present. This difference highlights the disconnect that Black Americans feel from their heritage due to the traumatic history of slavery, which forcibly severed their ties to their African roots. Slavery erased much of

their history, rendering it difficult for them to trace their cultural lineage.

Likewise, immigrants from various ethnicities and nationalities experience a similar sense of dislocation when they migrate. Forced to leave behind their cultural traditions and identities in search of a new life, many immigrants face pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture of their new home. For example, many Mexican immigrants and their children face pressure to abandon Spanish in favor of English, often being discouraged from speaking their native language in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. This pressure stems from a broader societal expectation that assimilation into American culture requires the rejection of one's native language, as it creates discomfort for the mostly White, prejudiced Americans who dislike when someone of a different race and nationality engages in a language and culture that they do not. Non-conformity terrifies them. To those with this particularly poisonous ideology, what cannot be understood becomes *other*, and what becomes *other* soon becomes a threat. Thus, Mexican-Americans—like many other immigrants—are often given two choices: assimilate or face the consequences of their non-conformity.

Whether for Mexican Americans or for immigrants hailing from other countries, the process of forced assimilation often creates a feeling of displacement, as their roots are either erased or made invisible. As the scholar Nandini Sahu notes, "One of the most significant traits of the immigrant existence is the striking balance between the two worlds—the homeland and the adopted one" (Sahu, 145). This struggle is not simply a matter of learning a new language or adjusting to different customs; rather, it is a continuous negotiation of identity, where immigrants must navigate the tension between preserving their cultural heritage and integrating into a society that often demands conformity. For many, the homeland represents deep-rooted traditions, values, and a sense of belonging, while the adopted country offers new opportunities but often at the cost of cultural loss. This balancing act can lead to a fractured sense

of self, as immigrants attempt to retain their original identity while also trying to avoid marginalization in their new environment. The expectation to assimilate can be especially challenging when dominant cultural narratives portray foreign traditions as inferior or outdated, further alienating immigrant communities and reinforcing the erasure of their heritage. Or, sometimes, their roots and customs are stolen from them and appropriated to fit another's standards, and an entirely new loss of culture occurs.

Cultural Appropriation and the Erasure of Identity

Teju Cole's "Black Body" addresses this particular aspect of such alienation against Black communities when he writes, "Throughout the culture, there are imitations of the gait, bearing, and dress of the Black body, a vampiric 'everything but the burden' co-option of Black life" (Cole, 14). This highlights a frustrating truth: those who steal the culture of Black identity—in this instance, the majority points to White Americans—do so without bearing the burden of actually being a Black body. The appeal of it is embraced wholeheartedly, yet there remains a distance from the daily struggles of living in a society that marginalizes them. While Cole's statement directly critiques the exploitation of Black culture, the sentiment extends to the experiences of immigrants from all backgrounds.

Aspects of American immigrant culture—whether food, fashion, music, or art—are often celebrated or commodified, but the individuals behind these cultural elements remain marginalized and excluded. The culture is seen as desirable, something to be appropriated, yet the people who produce it are still treated as outsiders. This phenomenon is also reflected in Stuart Hall's "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" where he discusses the existence of ethnic hierarchies in America. Hall explains, "America has always had a series of ethnicities, and consequently, the construction of ethnic hierarchies has always defined its cultural politics" (105). This

statement highlights how both Black Americans and immigrants are positioned as outsiders in American society, even though their cultural contributions have shaped and enriched the nation.

One such instance of this presents itself in the rising popularity of East Asian American entertainment in Western culture. Despite things like K-pop and anime becoming more prevalent in American households, many Asian American artists still struggle to receive recognition or to break into the mainstream U.S. entertainment industry. This is due in part to Hollywood's decades-long streak of whitewashing Asian roles in movies and television, going so far as to cast White actors as Asian characters. Scarlett Johansson in the movie Ghost in the Shell is a prime example of this, as she was a White actress cast for the role of a Japanese woman. As it stands, this is not a singular occurrence; the upsetting truth is that it happens all the time with people of color in American media, and it remains yet another obstacle for non-White Americans and American immigrants alike.

Time and again we see that the contributions of immigrants are overlooked in American society. Even more so, those who are non-White are further dismissed in favor of a dominant narrative that consistently frames both Black and immigrant Americans as "other." This leads to American culture—and America itself—being enriched by that of migrants and Black individuals, yet that enrichment goes overshadowed and thankless. Unfortunately, sweeping it under the rug and claiming that it was always there is easier than admitting the truth of its origins.

These simplified, often inaccurate representations reinforce both communities' struggles with exclusion, marginalization, and misrepresentation. When their stories are told by others—when their food, art, music, style, and speech are stolen and appropriated—these individuals lose agency over how they are perceived and are left

with narratives that are incomplete at best and harmful at worst. Thus, their own narratives are now controlled by the dominant beliefs of American society. This process of reduction contributes to the erasure of both their personal identities and their cultural contributions. The result is a society that limits understanding and perpetuates harmful stereotypes, which further alienates marginalized groups. In this way, both Black Americans and migrants face similar challenges when it comes to maintaining their cultural identities while navigating systems that marginalize them. Their cultural richness is often commodified or misunderstood, leaving them in a constant state of tension between preserving their roots and assimilating into a dominant culture that does not fully accept them.

Unmasking Systemic Racism and the Power of Solidarity

It must be said, however, that in order to address systemic racism and the challenges faced by marginalized groups, it is also essential to understand the deeper, often hidden forces that perpetuate exclusion and discrimination. James Baldwin addresses this, arguing that Black Americans cannot be set free "unless one is prepared to set the White people in America free … Free from their terrors, free from their ignorance, free from their prejudices and free, really, from the right to do wrong" (Baldwin and Bondy, 14). Baldwin's assertion shows how systemic ignorance and prejudice don't just hurt Black people—they hold back all of society. To really create change, these issues need to be addressed on a broader scale. Similarly, Teju Cole also discusses how racism has been able to cling onto life—or thrive, really—in America. He describes American racism as having "many moving parts, and has had enough centuries in which to evolve an impressive camouflage" (Cole, 15). This highlights the horrifying truth that racism isn't always obvious; it can be hidden in everyday actions or policies, and that makes it even more difficult to fight.

Even still, in a later interview of his own, Cole claims that “the fact is that if you have a voice, you try to find ways to be responsible to your voice” (Hodapp, 249). This is a reminder that everyone has a role to play, especially migrants, allies, and activists who can challenge harmful narratives and speak out for change. Despite it being an uphill battle, it must still, in the end, be a battle we are all willing to fight. Given this, it is essential to recognize the importance of “the development of critical consciousness [and] the restoration of connective solidarities and healing relationships” (Lang, 182) in repairing the fractured American system. Building connections and understanding between different groups is an effective tool to fight against alienation and create a stronger sense of belonging for Black Americans and migrants alike.

Conclusion: The Path Forward in Addressing Systemic Racism

Ultimately, the purpose of this essay is to highlight the ongoing challenges faced by both Black Americans and American immigrants, exploring how their experiences mirror one another, the reasons these challenges persist, and the ways society can address and correct the negative perceptions and attitudes directed toward them. In this vein, Adichie’s declaration on and against stereotypes, once again, finds a place here. When she asserts that “the single story creates stereotypes [and] emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (Adichie, 13:11), she highlights how stereotypes reduce people to a single, oversimplified narrative that ignores their full humanity. Both the Black experience and the migrant experience are often shaped by these stereotypes, where people are seen as "others" rather than as individuals with rich histories and complexities. Baldwin himself addresses this dehumanization once more, arguing that “the Black man insists … the White man cease to regard him as an exotic rarity and recognize him as a human being.” This need for recognition that Baldwin pleads for is something that applies to migrants just the same, especially those who are of a different

race. No matter where they come from, immigrants often face the challenge of being seen as outsiders or even threats—threats to American safety, the economy, and social status—with their identities shaped by the dominant culture's view of them as different or lesser.

It is evident that "despite the passage of time, shades of political progress, and the greater spatial and cultural mobility that Cole enjoys, the underlying racial fear and hatred that Baldwin interrogated still persists" (Gehlawat et. al., 59). Just as it was before, Teju Cole's claim that "if you have a voice, you try to find ways to be responsible to your voice," becomes imperative to implement when considering the path to activism and speaking out against prejudice. It serves as a reminder for people to take action, challenge stereotypes, and speak up against the discrimination faced by Black Americans and migrants. It underscores the critical importance of continually revisiting the conversation about race relations, as these issues still persist today—decades after "Stranger in the Village" was written and centuries after the founding of America. Moreover, it illustrates the importance of using literature as a tool through which we can carry on this dialogue. This essay itself seeks to do the same, adding to the conversation between Baldwin and Cole and many other scholars within migration and race studies. By engaging in this ongoing dialogue, both verbally and through literature, we can use our voices—responsibly, as Cole encourages—to advocate for a more inclusive society so that we may finally foster the change that is long overdue.

Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED Talk*, 7 Oct. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son, "Stranger in the Village."* London, Penguin Books, 1955.

Baldwin, James, and Bondy, Francois. "James Baldwin, as Interviewed by Francois Bondy."*Transition*, no. 12, Jan. 1964, pp. 12–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2934484. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Cole, Teju. *Known and Strange Things, "Black Body."* London Faber Et Faber, 2017.

Gehlawat, Monika. "Strangers in the Village: James Baldwin, Teju Cole, and Glenn Ligon." *James Baldwin Review*, vol. Vol. 5, 2019, pp. 48–72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48665178. Accessed 1 Nov. 2024.

Hall, Stuart. "What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice*, vol. 20, no. 1/2, 1993, pp. 104–114. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/29766735. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

Hodapp, James M. "Lumpy Sympathies: An Interview in Beirut with Teju Cole." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2017, pp. 243–249, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafrilite.48.4.16, https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.48.4.16. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Lang, Peter. "CONCLUSION: Transcending Racism, Transcending Trauma." *Counterpoints*, vol. 244, 2004, pp. 181–193, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42979565. Accessed 1 Nov. 2024.

Okoye, John-Bell S. "Mediated Representation of Middle Eastern and African Migrants in UK and US Press in the Wake of Brexit and Trumpism." *Journalism*, vol. 23, no. 10, 30 Dec. 2020. *Sage Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920984693. Accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Rana, Junaid. *Terrifying Muslims*. Duke University Press, 1 June 2011, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12101n2. Accessed 7 Feb. 2025.

Sahu, Padmini. "From Alienation to Assimilation: Exploring Jhumpa Lahiri's the Namesake." *The Creative Launcher*, vol. 6, no. 4, 30 Oct. 2021, pp. 141–147, https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2021.6.4.23. Accessed 24 Dec. 2021.

Stitch: The Creation, The Model Citizen, and The Reality Discovered Through Exile

Emily King

ABSTRACT

Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* explores a multi-faceted migration story in which Stitch is exiled because of his creation and perceived behavior, yet rather than the migrant only being against a greater power—which Glenda Carpio attempts to refute in her book Migrant Aesthetics—Stitch is shown to struggle with beratement from the dominant culture, his place in his new home, and with his internal perception of himself. Stitch, an alien creation by a mad alien scientist, is an outcast both in space and on the Hawaiian island he crashes into. He immediately recognizes the need to blend in with similar creatures, leading him to minimize his alien features. However, because he is unfamiliar with Hawaiian culture and other normalities on Earth, his unexpected and unusual actions cause his newfound O'hana (the cultural value in which family is never left behind or forgotten) to face public scrutiny and other difficulties. The expectations set forth by the community are loosely verbalized to him when the social worker states Stitch's need to become a "model citizen:" He is expected to assimilate to life on Earth. When Stitch fails to meet the social expectations, Stitch begins questioning who he really is and where he needs to be. Eventually, he reveals his alienness and receives pushback from his found family; yet, they come to realize that Stitch displaying his differences doesn't change who he is. In the end, the audience is

shown the culture swapping the family participates in, as well as Stitch's assimilation to his new community. Throughout the essay, I argue that the film reflects Carpio's previous claim that the depiction of migration must move beyond the "problem of two opposed entities," instead displaying how migration "is produced by the actions of institutions that permeate every level of society" (8). Thus, Stitch's story depicts the battle between the expectations from one's community, assumptions from outsiders, and real identity, displaying the complexity of migration and exile in a fictional tale.

Much like other aspects of life, different forms of art and entertainment are directly influenced by positive and negative life experiences, including migration and exile. Simultaneously, important topics and ideas — such as migration and exile — are shaped by the representation and language used when such stories are told (Caprio). An example of entertainment depicting a migration story is Disney's animated movie *Lilo & Stitch*. In the movie, Experiment 626 (Stitch) is deemed a monstrosity, doomed to wreak havoc on cities, steal "left shoes," and generally have "no place among [the alien society]" he was born into (1:24–2:53). Yet, after escaping his harsh, seemingly unjust imprisonment, he migrates to Earth only to face further condemnation. His appearance and lifestyle are called into question by most; however, Lilo, a six-year-old girl native to the area, accepts Stitch for who he is, allowing him into her family without question. As a result, the audience witnesses Stitch questioning who he is meant to be and where he belongs. Stitch, from Disney's *Lilo & Stitch*, is pulled between three aspects of himself: who he was made to be, who he is believed to be, and who he actually is. These aspects are explored through his exile from his homeland, forced assimilation into a new culture, and eventual acceptance into a found family.

Lilo & Stitch provides a complex yet comprehensible introduction to migration stories, targeting a younger audience but reaching far broader demographics. In this

essay, I argue that the movie responds to Glenda Carpio's book *Migrant Aesthetics* in which the author sets a foundation of understanding by attempting to "[challenge] the view of migration as a problem of two opposed entities: the migrants, who must beg admission to sites of power, and the powerful, who must figure out how to protect their borders" (8). Carpio argues that "migration needs to be understood as a global phenomenon, one that, much like global warming, is produced by the actions of institutions that permeate every level of society" (8). In other words, migrants are depicted as being forced to fight for any chance at equality and acceptance in lands dominated by those in power or the accepted majority. Yet, migration is not that simple: it has a variety of causes — far beyond just those of two vastly different groups — including the widespread patterns of discrimination present in society. Because of these complexities, introducing complex topics to a younger audience in a simple yet hope-inducing manner becomes vital in changing the perception of migration over time. *Lilo & Stitch* provides a multi-faceted migration story in which Stitch is exiled because of his creation and perceived behavior, yet rather than the migrant only being against a greater power, Stitch is shown to struggle with beratement from the dominant culture, his place in his new home, and with his internal perception of himself.

All that said, I would like to note that I don't feel comfortable comparing Stitch to real-life immigrant experiences. I recognize and seek to acknowledge the harm that can be caused by comparing fictional, alien creatures to real people who have been discriminated against because of their cultural, physical, etc. attributes. However, I cannot neglect the connections between Stitch's story and immigrants' stories, including his exile and forced assimilation into an unfamiliar society.

The Creation

Stitch is a new, never-before-seen alien species, making him a distinct outcast no

matter where he is located. In the opening scene, self-proclaimed mad scientist Dr. Jumba Jookiba is charged by his alien government body known as the United Galactic Federation (UGF) with "illegal genetic experimentation." The resulting creation is Experiment 626 whom he claims is a new alien species with immense power and, despite his small stature, city-destroying desires (0:1:27–0:1:53). Jumba's description of the creature later known as Stitch casts the both of them in distinctly negative lights and results in the surrounding crowd visibly and audibly gasping. Crysta Rollison's article "We Are Not Alone: Finding Family Across a Universe of Differences in *Lilo and Stitch*" explores how Jumba's description is an example of science fiction's use of "extraterrestrial Others" to cast out specific individuals because of their differences (1–2). In her article, Rollison refers to David Seed's book *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*, in which she summarizes his depiction of the term "alien," explaining how it "did not originally refer to extraterrestrial beings, but rather to other human beings" (2). In this opening scene, the Grand Councilwoman of the UGF refers to Stitch in a similar manner explained by Seed; however, instead of using the term "alien," she labels him an "abomination" that "is a fiord project of a deranged mind" with "no place among [the UGF]" (0:2:43). The opening scene establishes this aspect, alluding to how Stitch will be rejected, "not just by humans, but also from the very alien society that he was created into" (Rollison 1–2). As a result, Stitch is imprisoned and informed of his exile to a "deserted asteroid" (0:3:35 – 0:3:57). It is not clear whether or not Stitch understands why he is being imprisoned; however, he understands that he is imprisoned and will be subjugated to immensely restrictive conditions if he doesn't escape. Thus, he plans and executes his escape, eventually activating his stolen spaceship's hyperspeed and blasting off to a foreign land (0:4:26–0:7:10). Luckily for Stitch, instead of finding himself landing on an uninhabitable planet or stranded somewhere in space, he lands on Earth on an island in Hawaii.

His outcast label is further bolstered immediately after landing on Earth by the exaggerated, fearful reactions he receives in the animal shelter. After his crash landing, Stitch is believed to be a dog after getting run over by a semi-truck, so he is brought to the animal shelter. While at the animal shelter, Lilo and her sister Nani arrive to adopt a pet though Lilo initially struggles to find any pets. She calls out, "Hello? Hello! Are there any animals in here?", and the frame pans upward, revealing scared, shaking animals clinging to the rafters and tops of the kennels (0:25:46 – 0:25:54). Beyond the animals, Nani and the animal shelter worker show obvious shock and fear at the supposed dog before them, most notably when the animal shelter worker states, "Oh, yes, all our dogs are adoptable... Except that one!" (0:26:23). During the pause in her exclamation, she physically jumps back in her chair before running forward to pull Stitch away from Lilo's side, claiming "it was dead this morning" (0:26:31). Stitch then begins to pull the animal shelter worker toward an excited Lilo being held by a scared Nani. Despite her fear, Nani allows Lilo to adopt Stitch. This scene shows the fear caused by the unnatural aspects of the once-dead "dog" and the fear sparked by the Other. As stated in Iris-Aya Laemmerhirt's "From Outer Space to Paradise? Remapping Hawai'i in *Lilo and Stitch*," "the idea that these creatures from outer space, which exist beyond the borders of the known, are being used as metaphors of binary oppositions, because 'difference and otherness are the essence of aliens' and according to most science-fiction narratives, the only way to prevent chaos and to restore social order is to relentlessly eliminate these aliens"(88). In the context of the scene, the otherness of Stitch evoked fear and discomfort in those who recognized the differences. Lilo, though, is young and malleable. She does not yet recognize the "binary oppositions" brought forth as a result of the alien creature she has willingly chosen to be a part of her family. Since the target audience of the movie is younger individuals who are meant to be able to identify with Lilo, the scene allows the audience members to adopt the same beliefs as her, meaning they are more willing to go against the cultural norms and accept the Other with greater ease. However,

Stitch's perception is not only hindered by his blue alien appearance and aggressive personality; his lack of understanding of the surrounding culture also interferes.

Stitch's unfamiliarity with Hawaiian culture and normalities on Earth cause a variety of individuals to react negatively, including restaurant patrons. However, because Nani and Lilo hold the cultural value in which family is never left behind or forgotten (known as O'hana), Stitch is allowed to stay with the pair. During the Luau-themed restaurant scene, the audience is shown Stitch, who is currently considered a dog, and Lilo sitting at a table eating dinner while Nani works as a waitress (31:58-35:28). Nani walks up to the table and scolds Lilo for allowing Stitch to eat while sitting at the table in which Lilo simply responds, "Stitch is troubled. He needs desserts!" (32:36). Reluctantly, Nani agrees and brings both of them a slice of cake, and Stitch attempts to eat both slices in one bite. Lilo shows her clear disappointment with a simple drawn-out "hey," causing Stitch to spit out the cake slices and offer them both back to Lilo who audibly displays her disgust (33:00). This scene displays the clear disconnect between Stitch and the surrounding culture: While Nani and Lilo seem to understand the restraints surrounding "dogs" in restaurants in their community, Lilo doesn't seem to care, Nani is too resigned to force Stitch to the ground, and Stitch doesn't know the expectations placed upon him in the moment. Moments later, Stitch is lured to Jumba and UGF agent Pleakley's table who are dressed in tourist-style disguises. Stitch begins gnawing on Pleakley's head when they try to detain him and take him back to the United Galactic Federation for his sentence in exile. Stitch's outlash is not without justification, though. Because of his inability to communicate the situation to Lilo, Nani, and the owner of the restaurant, Nani is fired from her job, and the group is asked to leave the premises. After returning home that evening, Nani and Lilo have a small argument regarding Stitch's place in the family because of his seemingly unwarranted, feral behavior:

Nani: Hey! Look at him, Lilo. He's obviously mutated from something else. We have

to take him back.

Lilo: He was an orphan and we adopted him! What about O'hana?

Nani: He hasn't been here that long.

Lilo: Neither have I. Dad said O'hana means family. Huh? O'hana means family. Family means…

Nani: …nobody gets left behind.

Lilo: Or…?

Nani: Or forgotten. I know. I know. (Lilo & Stitch 35:14-36:37)

In these scenes, the audience is shown a clear miscommunication between Stitch and his newfound family unit, leading to rising tension and Nani's attempt to convince Lilo to bring Stitch back to the animal shelter. However, because of Lilo's reference to their cultural belief O'hana, Nani realizes she would be violating the expectations and the trust built between herself and Lilo if she went against their values. Thus, despite the numerous cultural transgressions impacting the family that are performed by Stitch, he is allowed to stay with the duo because of his new label: O'hana. The movie is attempting to display how families "can be formed under the most strained and difficult situations and can unite even angry, desperate, and otherwise abandoned people (and creatures)" (Minow). In other words, Stitch is able to overcome the "prejudices and social fears" enacted by his label of "alien" and "Other," making room for the creation of family ties in an unlikely scenario (Laemmerhirt 92). He is still struggling within the greater community; however, with Lilo's help, he has begun to make headway within his family unit.

The Model Citizen

After being on Earth for a few days, wreaking havoc both on the island and in Nani and Lilo's home, the undefined expectations posed by those on the island are verbalized by social worker Cobra Bubbles: He is expected to become a model citizen and assimilate

to life on Earth. To become a model citizen, Lilo proposes Elvis Presley as an individual whom Stitch should mirror his behavior after. The audience, then, begins to hear Elvis's "You're the Devil in Disguise" playing in the background while a montage in which Stitch attempts to meet the pillars set forth by Lilo, arbitrarily including dancing, playing guitar, and romance. Simultaneously, the audience sees Nani attempting to get a job at a variety of different businesses around the island. Stitch is shown learning how to hula dance, play the ukulele (noticeably not a guitar), and romance women. Nearing the end of each of his lessons, Stitch makes vital mistakes in which he knocks a watermelon onto an elderly woman's head, shatters windows at a coffee shop, and kisses a woman in the lobby of a hotel (0:41:42–0:44:08). Unfortunately for Nani, because of Stitch's missteps, she doesn't receive any job offers, and as a last resort, she goes to the beach in an attempt to become a lifeguard. The camera pans the area and shows a variety of individuals of varying demographics relaxing and enjoying the beach when Stitch, dressed in a white, sparkly Elvis-style outfit and hairstyle, walks to the middle of the beach and begins to play alongside the Elvis track. In doing so, he draws the attention of the beachgoers who then begin to surround Stitch and take an overwhelming amount of flash photography, causing Stitch to overreact, shred all his clothes, and cause the crowd to flee the beach, knocking over the lifeguard during their rapid departure (0:44:13–0:45:37). When Stitch begins to make mistakes, the lyrics of "You're the Devil in Disguise" shift from the sweet opening lyrics, "You look like an angel (look like an angel) / Walk like an angel (walk like an angel) / Talk like an angel," to the chorus, "You're the devil in disguise / Oh, yes, you are, devil in disguise," displaying how his appearance looks sweet but something about him is off-putting and inherently negative to the general public. The mayhem he causes in this scene displays an idea described by Carpio in which she claims people "have a hard time experiencing empathy for those we can only imagine abstractly" (10). In other words, people who are different from the majority of the population, whether physically or psychologically, are difficult for others to empathize with as their differences

become hard to comprehend. In this instance, the individuals who flee from Stitch fail to empathize with him because of his physique, attire, and actions. They saw him as a spectacle and became fearful after he reacted to the lack of empathy from the crowd. Despite Stitch's valiant attempts to become a "model citizen" as ordered by Cobra Bubbles, he ultimately fails and remains labeled an outcast.

When Stitch fails to meet the social expectations, Stitch begins questioning who he really is and where he needs to be. The evening after the beach debacle, Stitch begins to recall what Lilo described to him early in the movie regarding the children's book *The Ugly Duckling* in which she states, "That's the Ugly Duckling. See? He's sad because he's all alone and nobody wants him. But on this page, his family hears him crying, and they find him. Then the Ugly Duckling is happy because he knows where he belongs" (0:40:26–0:41:04). Stitch then leaves through Lilo's window and is shown reading *The Ugly Duckling* in a dark, vegetation-dense forest in a lone patch of dirt and beam of moonlight. His distressed facial expressions indicate his remorse regarding the pain and suffering he has caused Lilo, Nani, and the others he has harmed. The camera zooms in on a page where the duckling cries, "I'm lost!" While reading, the audience sees Stitch stroke a page in which the duckling finds its family. Simultaneously, his ears lay flat down his back with his eyebrows pitched upward in a concerned manner. He then starts clasping his hands together repeatedly, indicating his anxiety and despondency. Furthermore, the film utilizes a crane shot in which Stitch looks at the sky and copies the duckling, stating "I'm lost" (0:54:43–0:55:45). The film's choice in using a crane shot indicates to the audience that "there has been a dramatic change of perspective," and this idea is further indicated by the difference in his demeanor and body language compared to earlier in the movie (Corrigan 73). Additionally, his choice to repeat the book's phrase "I'm lost" verbalizes how Stitch isn't sure of where he belongs: He understands that he has caused harm to his O'hana, but he doesn't know what he is meant to do next or who he can

turn to. Stitch is immensely vulnerable in this position, and his confused, melancholy demeanor helps the audience, who has spent the entirety of the film up to this point connecting to Stitch, "to think, as themselves, from the position of another person and thus to call into question their own preconceptions and actions" as called for by Carpio (8).

The Reality

Upon revealing his alienness, Stitch does receive a lot of pushback from Lilo; however, after being put into a dangerous situation, she recognizes that Stitch displaying his differences doesn't change who he is. After Stitch's reflective moment in the woods, a battle with other aliens, and the destruction of Lilo and Nani's house, Lilo runs away when Bubbles attempts to take her to foster care. For context, throughout the movie, Bubbles, the family's social worker, has been monitoring the care of Lilo and informed them that Lilo could be removed from the home if her care is insufficient. In this scene, Lilo just fled from Bubbles and is now walking away from the remains of her house. She is shown with pinched eyebrows, her mouth ajar, and slightly squinted eyes, indicating to the audience that she is in emotional distress after her whole life is uprooted by Jumba and Pleakley, the aliens actively hunting Stitch. When suddenly running into Stitch, her first words are, "You ruined everything," shortly followed by "You're one of them?" and a swift shove and order for him to leave (1:03:54–1:04:06). Lilo, the first and only person to accept Stitch unconditionally, has turned on him as a result of the detrimental situation caused by the other aliens. Before Stitch is able to address Lilo's feelings, the duo is captured by Captain Gantu of the UGF. Stitch, however, is able to escape because of his alien attributes and works with Nani, Jumba, and Pleakley to successfully rescue Lilo from her capture. During the rescue, when it seems as if it may not be possible for Lilo to be rescued, she yells to Stitch "Don't leave me, ok?," indicating that she does trust him despite being a part of the demographic who destroyed her home and kidnapped her

(1:11:35). Lilo's initial reaction to his alien reveal was fueled by her emotions: She knows he is good. Her emotional outburst is not surprising as Stitch's migration to Earth has had major negative consequences for Lilo, including her lack of stability and removal from her guardian. She couldn't have known he was actively being persecuted and hunted by the same group of people. Despite her age, though, Lilo recognizes that while he is an alien, he is not the cause of the disruption they are faced with. These scenes introduce the audience to the idea that even though an individual is a part of or shares attributes with a certain group of people, they can't assume the person fits within the stereotype they associate with that group. Labels are not one-size-fits-all situations: There is variation, especially in people.

The next major scene in the movie highlights the bureaucratic migration conflict between two larger entities while also showing how the institutions created problems for migrants in the first place: The scene reflects Carpio's previously stated claim in which the depiction of migration must move beyond the "problem of two opposed entities" instead displaying how migration "is produced by the actions of institutions that permeate every level of society" (8). After the chase and Lilo's rescue, the Grand Councilwoman and multiple UGF cronies cuff Stitch and inform him of their intentions to bring him back to space for his criminal sentence to be served. However, questions from Pleakley, Lilo showing Stitch's adoption papers, and Bubbles arguing how "aliens are all about rules" convince the Grand Councilwoman to agree to change his exile location to Earth rather than the deserted planet previously mentioned (1:14:05–1:16:57). In this instance, instead of the two governmental bodies (the UGF and the United States Government) arguing over who has claim over Stitch; Pleakley, Lilo, and Bubbles argue for why Stitch should be allowed to stay, meaning a UGF member, a former CIA agent-turned-social worker, and a member of the general public all pitched in to fight for Stitch's migration to Earth. The migration struggles permeated throughout multiple levels

of society because of the actions of the UGF: they caused "dire consequences for those who are misread and/or are unseen by that law," with Stitch, Lilo, and Nani being among those who are "misread" and unseen" by the law and the consequences being depicted throughout the entirety of the movie (Espiritu 26). The scene reinforces the idea that the actions of UGF are what caused his migration and eventual consequences.

Before the movie officially ends, Stitch is shown to have assimilated within the family and on the island, even displaying signs that Nani and Lilo are willing to take on aspects of Stitch's alien culture and vice versa. After being formally exiled to Earth, the audience is shown a short sequence of video clips and photos displaying his assimilation to life on Earth and his acceptance into Lilo and Nani's family, and while there are fewer, the audience is also shown scenes of Stitch, Jumba, and Pleakley sharing aspects of their space culture as well. This sequence begins with Stitch playing the ukulele while Jumba, Pleakley, Nani, and others are shown rebuilding the family's destroyed home, though instead of building the house exactly as before, the group adds a room that looks like a red planet or a small ship with white detailing, accenting the nontraditional addition (1:17:35). Stitch learns to bake, partakes in holiday festivities, travel to a variety of locations outside of Hawaii, and perform group hula dances with Lilo (1:17:35-1:20:20). The audience also gets to see Stitch helping Lilo carve a pumpkin with a laser gun, teach her classmates about space, and see Jumba give Lilo and Stitch child-sized flying ships for Christmas. They partake in a variety of culture-blending and assimilating activities while they are together. This ending of the movie wraps up Stitch's migrant story quite nicely in which he understands who he really is, where he is meant to be, and how he can connect with those in the dominant culture. It is important to note, however, that real migration stories are complex and don't typically end in such a finite manner. Finding one's place in the world is a complex process, especially after migrating to unknown lands, whether forcefully or not. At the same time, for the primarily child-based audience, the ending

reassures the audience that "hope is never lost," that "things *will* get better," even if it doesn't feel that way (Parker).

Conclusion

According to a New York Times article by A.O. Scott, *Lilo & Stitch* is "an example of quiet, confident craftsmanship that tells a sweet, charming tale of intergalactic friendship;" however, the movie is far more complex than the simplicity posed by Scott. The film manages to respond in a positive manner to Carpio's migrant aesthetic perspective which frames "migration solely in terms of the nation-state, belonging, acculturation, and individual and collective identity formation, [limiting] our apprehension of a global phenomenon that constitutes our whole world to the great suffering of many and the benefit of a few" (14). Instead of expanding perspectives to a global level, *Lilo & Stitch* takes theories of migration aesthetics and broadens it to a universal level with the inclusion of actual aliens, providing a way for the story to represent a wide range of individuals and their migrant stories. Stitch's sudden departure from his home paired with the internal questioning and eventual community acceptance emphasizes Caprio's claim on page 13 in which she states, "Migration shapes and is shaped by language and narrative, specifically how we write and read fiction, and how the language of migration in turn influences real-life phenomena." Thus, Stitch's story depicts the battle between the expectations from one's community, assumptions from outsiders, and real identity, displaying the complexity of migration and exile in a fictional tale.

Carpio, Glenda. "Introduction: Migration Aesthetics." *Migrant Aesthetics: Contemporary Fiction, Global Migration, and the Limits of Empathy*, E-book, Columbia University Press, 2023, pp. 1-32.

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, Tenth Edition, Waveland Press Inc., 2024.

Denbroeder, Lena. "Fragile Families in Lilo and Stitch." *Sociological Images*, 28 Oct. 2019, https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2019/10/28/fragile-families-in-lilo-and-stitch/. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Espiritu, Yen Le, et al. "Introduction: Departures." *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies*, vol. 3, University of California Press, 2022, pp. 11-29.

Laemmerhirt, Iris-Aya. "From Outer Space to Paradise? Remapping Hawai'i in Lilo and Stitch." 2013: World Designs of the Fantastic: *Narrating - Writing - Playing*, 1 Jan. 2013, Komparatistik Online, https://www.komparatistik-online.de/index.php/komparatistik_online/article/view/101/66. Accessed 6 Jan 2025.

Lilo & Stitch. Directed by Chris Sanders and Dean Dublois, Walt Disney Feature Animation, 2002.

Luibhéid, Eithne. "Immigration." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Third Edition, NYU Press, 2007, https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/immigration/.

Minow, Neil. "Parents' Guide to Lilo and Stitch." *Common Sense Media*, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/lilo-and-stitch. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Works Cited

"Movie: Lilo and Stitch," *Content Kids*, https://content-kids.com/review-for-movie/lilo-and-stitch/. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Ness, Mari. "Aliens and Family Values: Lilo and Stitch." *Rector*, 27 Oct. 2016, https://reactormag.com/lilo-and-stitch/. Accessed 15 Jan 2025.

Parker, Lacie. "Why I Still Love Animated Kids Movies as a (Grownup) Highly Sensitive Person." *Sensitive Refuge*, 23 Dec. 2021, https://highlysensitiverefuge.com/why-i-still-love-animated-kids-movies-as-a-grownup-highly-sensitive-person/. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Rollison, Crysta A. "We Are Not Alone: Finding Family Across a Universe of Differences in Lilo and Stitch." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Student Research and Scholarship*, vol. 4, no. 1, University of Washington Tacoma, 2020, https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/access/vol4/iss1/7?utm_source=digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu%2Faccess%2Fvol4%2Fiss1%2F7&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages. Accessed 6 Jan. 2025.

Scott, A. O. "Film Review; Escaping Deep-Space Exile and Making Friends in Hawaii." *New York Times*, 21 June 2002, https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/21/movies/film-review-escaping-deep-space-exile-and-making-friends-in-hawaii.html. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

Sharpson, Neil. "Disney Reviews #42: Lilo and Stitch." *Unshavedmouse*, 12 Dec. 2025, https://unshavedmouse.com/2013/12/12/disney-reviews-42-lilo-stitch/. Accessed 20 Feb 2025.

Contributor's Biographies

Natalie Byers is a junior Professional Writing major and Creative Writing minor at Ball State University. She is a member of the Editorial team for *The Digital Literature Review* and has loved getting to work on the journal this year. In the future, Natalie plans on becoming a professional copyeditor, and her experience editing this year's publication has only further cemented this dream! She'd like to thank the other members of the editorial team for their dedication to each other and *the DLR*.

Emma Carlson is an second-year English Studies Major with a minor in Creative Writing. She is the Managing Editor of the Editorial team in *The Digital Literature Review*. Emma has always loved reading and hopes to one day help authors bring their books to life. With the knowledge Emma has gained from *The Digital Literature Review* and what she is learning from her classes she wishes to become a book editor for a publishing house in New York City.

Kaira Carter is a senior Ball State student majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in Professional Writing. She is a member of the Publicity Team for *The Digital Literature Review*. Outside of the academic journal, she is a published content writer for the on-campus student magazine *Ball Bearings*. She hopes to become a professional copywriter after graduation.

Theo Edwards is a third-year English major with a minor in history. He is the Lead Editor of the twelfth edition of *The DLR*. Theo is an avid reader, writer, and is an active participant of the BSU debate club. He is currently studying for and will soon apply for law school, aiming to pursue a career in environmental law specifically. In his free time, he enjoys rock climbing, video games, and eating amazing food.

Anna Grile is a junior at Ball State majoring in Secondary English Education. She wants to be a middle school or high school ELA teacher in the future after graduation. She is a member of the publicity team for the 12th edition of *The Digital Literature Review*.

Emily King is a senior Professional Writing major, Sociology minor, and member of the Honors College. She is the Design Team Lead, and is grateful for the experience *The Digital Literature Review*. After graduation, she plans to get a copyediting job and eventually pursue a master's degree with the goal of starting a nonprofit.

Victoria Mayeaux is an English Literature major in her senior year, with a minor in creative writing. She is part of the DLR's 2025 editorial team. In the future, she wants to use her experience editing for *The Digital Literature Review* and *The Broken Plate* to edit for a professional literary magazine. Most especially, though, she aspires to author a best-selling novel but will, in the meantime, settle with writing them alone in her room.

Natalie Presse is a senior English Creative Writing Major and History Minor at Ball State University. She is a Design team member for *The Digital Literature Review* and is very happy to have worked with the journal this year. Natalie has been working on her own fantasy book series and is very grateful for all the experience that working with *The DLR* has provided her with this year. She'd like to thank her team for all their amazing work this year.

Cole Southerland is a senior at Ball State University. He is majoring in English with a focus on Creative Writing, and he is a member of the Design team of *The Digital Literature Review*. He is also a member of the Prose team for *The Broken Plate*. He wishes to write fiction stories for people all around the world. You can find him writing his stories and playing video games in his free time.

Jack Vaught is a third-year student at Ball State University majoring in English Language Arts Secondary Education. They currently serve as the blog editor of Ball State's 2024-2025 *Digital Literature Review (DLR*). Additionally, Jack is the secretary and incoming president of the English Education Club at Ball State. In the future, Jack plans to pursue research in amplifying marginalized voices and shaping inclusive learning environments, committing to fostering equity and representation in education.

Morgan Zacek is a senior with a major in General Studies (concentration in English) and two minors, Sociology and Women and Gender Studies. She is the Publicity Lead for *The Digital Literature Review*. She plans to attend law school in the fall with the long-term goal of being an attorney.

The Digital Literature Review

Finding Home: Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Our Lives