

Transnationalism in Theory and Fiction:
*Fluid Identity and Magical Realism in Contemporary Migrant
Fiction from the US*

Emma Brouwer 3468313
Master Thesis
Research MA Comparative Literary Studies
Utrecht University
August 2015
Supervisor: Dr. B. M. Kaiser
Second Assessor: Dr. R. Dhondt

Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1 Modern Borders: Transnationalism, Fluidity, and Identity	13
Transnationalism	19
1. <i>Rethinking the Nation</i>	19
2. <i>Beyond Categorization</i>	22
3. <i>Rhizomed</i>	24
Fluidity	26
Chapter 2 Magical Realism	34
Genealogy	35
1. <i>German Romanticism</i>	36
2. <i>Latin American</i>	39
3. <i>Postcolonialism</i>	41
Contemporary Magical Realism	45
Chapter 3 The Dynamic of Distance in Rebecca Goldstein's <i>Mazel</i>	48
Magical Realism in <i>Mazel</i>	51
Crossing the Distance	61
Identifying and Belonging	65
Chapter 4 Writing as Reconciliation: How Different Worlds Meet in Junot Diaz's <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i>	69
Connecting Generations through Fukú	71
Belicia's Dominicanness	74
Writing to Reconcile	78
<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> and the Magical Mongoose	82
Some Final Thoughts	91
Bibliography	96

Introduction

The self is itself a multiplicity, a superposition of beings, becomings, here and there's, now and then's. Superpositions, not oppositions. (Barad 11)

Identities, or selves, are in constant movement and are never completed or finished. They develop and change in relation to other selves, and according to Karen Barad, this relation is not based on negation but rather on a constant repositioning, that somewhat resembles a palimpsest. There is a multitude of people, places, and times that can influence the process of identity, and because of this endless possibility of change, it remains always undetermined. Identity, it could be claimed, is fluid.

Imagining identity as fluid is especially helpful when thinking about the identities of those who do not have one specific place or culture to identify with; those who do not have a 'stable' background or a strong root that ties them to one heritage in particular. Until recently, identity was primarily thought of as being informed by your nationality, and for migrants this way of identifying can be problematic. The nation-state served as the main category of identification, and its borders kept the national identity encapsulated. Consequently, moving across those national borders as a migrant would mean losing one's identity and having to acquire a new one upon arrival in the nation-state of their destination.

An interpretation of identity that goes beyond those national borders, that is fluid, allows for identification with several nations and cultures and is therefore more useful when thinking about migrant experiences. One of the fields of study where fluidity and borders come together is called transnationalism. Together with phenomena such as globalization and cosmopolitanism, the study of transnationalism shows a raised awareness of the permeability of national borders.

One of its main arguments is that rather than being bound and defined by state- and national borders, we are connected across such borders.

For example, in *Crossing Boundaries*, Brian Behnken and Simon Wendt emphasize that until the transnational turn that has taken place over the course of the last three decades, it has often been ignored by scholars that “ideologies, movements, people, or goods rarely stop at national borders. Instead,” they argue, “they transcend these borders and influence every country or region that is involved in the process of their dissemination and diffusion” (5). Indeed, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih explain that “the transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents” and that it “can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur” (5).

Transnationalism thus disputes the idea that national borders define and delimit people’s identification, and emphasizes how we relate across, and beyond borders to other people, places, and cultures. This idea in itself is not necessarily newly introduced by transnational scholars, because theoretical frameworks such as cosmopolitanism and universalism have similar beliefs, and the ever-increasing worldwide economy is proof of global proliferation. However, the reason that transnationalism specifically is interesting for this research project is because it does not suggest a dismissal of national borders, but rather tries to find ways to approach them differently and incorporate them in a theory and approach of relation. Whereas cosmopolitanism, for example, is often conceived of as an ideological project that tries to eliminate borders entirely, it could be argued that transnationalism is a less radical movement that also tries to work on a global scale but simultaneously acknowledges borders and cultural difference.

From this transnational perspective that approaches difference as a fundamental part of cross-border relations, and that simultaneously incorporates borders in the process of

identification, I will specifically consider the representation of the migrant experience. As I mentioned above, the consequences of strictly delimited national identities can be especially demanding for migrants. Immigration policies such as assimilation and creating a ‘melting pot’ propagate the ideal to have one homogenous culture in one nation, and consequently to seek after one cultural identity. Were this ideology possible to realize, an immigrant would have to shed his or her old identity, cut the ties with the old country, and take on an entirely new identity by indulging in the new country’s culture.

Such an ideology of essentialist nationalism as the primary form of identification raises the questions of *why* such measures would be necessary; *why* a newcomer would have to put in frenetic efforts to forget and relearn; *why* it has to be either/or when it comes to identity and culture. A possible answer to those questions is that it is impossible to combine several cultures within one individual because certain cultural differences may be irreconcilable. Although this is certainly a valid point that has to be considered carefully, it also brings us back to the transnational encouragement not to shy away from differences.

By approaching migrants’ cultural and national multiplicity as a *benefit* for them and their environment, instead of as a restriction, we might be able to transcend the limitations of borders. By doing so, we can allow ourselves to focus more on the way in which the inhabitation of several nations and cultures can be discussed and presented as a possible enrichment of an individual. Therefore, the larger framework of investigation in this thesis will be how living in, and identifying with different worlds can be represented as an enhancement of migrant experiences.

A medium through which such a transcendence of borders and change of perception can be explored and experimented with is literary fiction. In this research, several theories that use

fluidity as their starting point will be compared to, and combined with a number of fictional representations of immigrant-experiences. The aim is not to give a political statement or discussion that provides a certain general outcome or position about immigration policy. Neither is this project meant to investigate actual sociological phenomena on a large scale. Instead, in order to turn away from more abstract data and researches on the topics of identification and migration, I will investigate how those issues are being conveyed in fiction. Through encountering the fictionalization of certain experiences, people can gain valuable insights into other people's lives and into both their outer and their inner worlds. Reading a work of fiction resembles an approximation to knowing an other. It is therefore that a study of *fictional* immigrant identities can hopefully lead to a greater understanding of how identity is not a stable category or entity that is formed in or through one dominant culture or nation.

Two novels in which migrant experiences are being depicted are Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel* (1995) and Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Although they both depict stories of migration, they are not very similar in their basic features. *Mazel* traces the journey of a Jewish woman who flees her home country Poland during WWII, to end up in the US where she settles and raises a family. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, we encounter a boy whose mother was raised in the Dominican Republic during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo and left for the US, where she raises her two children.

The novels thus have very different cultural settings, but both tell the story of a family's migration and its consequences for the protagonists. They portray the lives of different generations of a family, and the transnational relations between those generations, their different homes, cultures, and languages, and their journeys, play an important role in the representation of the several identities in both the novels. They will be analyzed and serve as examples of

different ways in which migrant identities are being portrayed as fluid. These analyses will serve as counterparts to more traditional representations of identity as informed by static interpretations of culture and the nation, both in theory and fiction, and how such a conceptualization of identity can be quite limited and restricted. As an alternative, these novels offer a transnational perspective, which suggests that people relate to each other beyond national and cultural borders. Not only migrants cross geographic and imagined borders, but everyone relates and connects across those borders, which suggests that fluidity is indeed not only a useful approach to migrant identities, but to identity in general.

The transnational approach does not only frame this research because it supports fluidity and cross-border relation, it also justifies my choice to discuss two US-based authors. The US is a unique case when it comes to discussions of nationality – and more important, discussions about transgressing the nation – because while it is not a nation in the traditional sense, it does seek after a united identity and culture. Indeed, its composition of being an assembly of different states and holding a great variety of cultures gives the US the potential to be a leading example of transnational interaction.

Simultaneously, however, the existence of cultural and national minorities still offers great problems in the unification of the country, even despite the shift in the political agenda from melting pot to multiculturalism, if we believe the historian David A. Hollinger. He claims that in the US, “[multiculturalism] drew energies from a multitude of constituencies and was invoked to answer an increasingly wide range of questions. But its unifying principles have proved too vague to enable its adherents to sort out their own agreements and disagreements” (2). Thus, the US serves as an interesting basis for transnational research because it hosts a variety of people who incorporate several cultures at once.

These two novels are not only being highlighted because both their authors represent migrant identities, but also because their authors use the same literary mode to do so. In both cases, magical realism is used as a literary device throughout the novel, and this is especially interesting in relation to identity-representation and border-crossing. Magical realism has been claimed to be a literary mode that is pre-eminently fit to express issues of identity¹ and it has also often been employed to express issues of hybridity and migration. Moreover, its oxymoronic name already suggests an inherent paradoxality, and is therefore especially useful when representing situations of uprootedness and hyphenation that migrants find themselves in.

Magical realism has often been found to be used in fiction where issues of migration, hybridity, and minority are being portrayed. Stephen M. Hart remarks in the introduction to *A Companion to Magical Realism* (2005) that authors often use magical realism “to offer a vehicle for the expression of the tensions within different societal frameworks” (6) and in “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction,” Wendy B. Faris argues that “The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions” (172).

Indeed, the realistic and the magical are used almost interchangeably in most magical realist fiction and this combining of seemingly incompatible worlds closely resembles the issues of identity-formation, migration, and fluidity that have been mentioned previously. Moreover, because it often features in fiction that specifically incorporates issues of migration and identity, magical realist fiction serves as a very compelling addition to the set of research tools combined thus far.

¹ See for example Christopher Warnes’s book *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* in which he links magical realism to “questions about identity and difference” (20).

Magical realism is traditionally considered to be a Latin American genre that primarily thrived during the 1960s and 1970s. Lately, however, scholarship is emphasizing that it not merely features in Latin American fiction but in a much larger area. For example, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris claim in the introduction to their collection of essays on magical realism from 1995 that “Readers know that magical realism is not a Latin American monopoly [...] and [it] is now achieving a compensatory extension of its market worldwide” (2) and they therefore approach it as “an international commodity.” Moreover, Christopher Warnes treats magical realism as “a global phenomenon” (6), and book titles such as *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*², *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain*³, and *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*⁴ confirm that magical realism is no longer a merely Latin American affair.

As has been emphasized, the process of migration can greatly disturb the sense of self when this self is thought of as being rooted in one place, or home. When talking about migrants we are simultaneously talking about uprootedness and about imagining to be living in several places at once. The merging of these different worlds that often seem incompatible, while still acknowledging their differences is one of the challenges of migration. My suggestion is that because magical realism is a literary mode that depicts different worlds next to each other and intertwined with each other, it is very useful for authors who want to portray migrant experiences. It can be used to depict the need to cross borders between nations and cultures, while these borders stay intact, just like transnationalism aims to investigate cross-border relations that still acknowledge those borders.

² Brenda Cooper

³ Anne C. Hegerfeldt

⁴ Gerald Gaylard.

Both Goldstein and Diaz use magical realism at certain points in their novels, and combined with transnational theories about fluid identity, this research will try to answer the following questions: How do Rebecca Goldstein and Junot Diaz use magical realism in their work to portray the formation of their characters' identities as living in several worlds? Does the magical realist mode bridge the distance between the several worlds their characters live in or does it rather emphasize that distance?

It will be investigated how magical realism can simultaneously be used as a technique to *bridge* the distance between different worlds, and *emphasize* the difference between cultures and the – seeming – impossibility of reconciling or merging those cultures. My suggestion is that authors use the mode for different 'goals' – as a technique to reconcile, or distance further, or both – but that they are in every way useful to portray how identity is not a stable category or entity that is necessarily formed in or through one dominant culture or nation.

In this research, I hope to highlight how literary fiction can imagine an approach to identity as flowing and ever-changing, and how literature not only asks us to embody differences, but also presents us with a picture of how differences are felt and expressed from positions of dispersal. Considering identity-formation in people who inhabit several nations and several cultures, representations of fluidity can shed a different light on the way people relate to their multiple backgrounds, and a transnational perspective allows for such representations. Identity as fluid and in constant motion means a rethinking of how cultural identity is being developed, which includes a different approach to the nation-state and its traditional idea of an essentialist and homogenous national identity. Because transnational theory reconsiders borders between nations and cultures to be permeable instead of solid and impenetrable, the resulting

concept of a world where cross-border relation constitutes the most important connection supports the idea of fluid identity.

In order to discuss all this, a significant part of the research will be theoretical explorations of all the issues at stake. The first chapter will illustrate the development of transnationalism, and specifically how the concept of the nation-state has changed within that development. The work on American exceptionalism from the transnational scholar Thomas Bender serves as a starting point for this discussion of the nation, and moving along Lionnet & Shih's work on minor transnationalism, eventually Edouard Glissant's conceptualization of the 'rhizome' will serve as a theoretical model for fluid identity. The chapter will also explore theories of identity and adaptations of transnationalism by literary scholars such as Ramazani and Azade Seyhan.

The second chapter will then give a succinct representation of the history and development of magical realism. It has different origins and I will explain how the concept was first mentioned in 18th-century German philosophy and how it then came back at the beginning of the 20th century in art history. Of course, the revival of magical realism in the 1960s in Latin American fiction, for which it is most famously known, will also be touched upon. The fact that its origins are disseminated over time and place already suggests that magical realism can be very useful when writing about migration and hybridity, and this is why it has been taken up by postcolonial writers from all over the world in the last few decades. This most recent development and adaptation is the most important one for this thesis and it will be discussed how it is often used in an attempt to bring together seemingly incompatible worlds.

The last two chapters will be the analyses of respectively *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and they will consist mainly of close-readings of certain passages from both

novels. Chapter three looks at the distance that Goldstein creates and emphasizes between Poland and the US in *Mazel*, and will then show how this distance is simultaneously being bridged by the use of the magical realist mode. Chapter four discusses the convoluted relation Oscar has with his Dominican heritage and his life in the US, and the constant renegotiating of culture that takes place in the novel. Important to mention as a last remark is that the use of these literary example is not meant to make a claim about identity-representation in general, or to describe an overall trend. Instead, I use them to serve as case-studies that can illustrate and clarify the theoretical issues and questions at stake.

Chapter 1

Modern Borders: Transnationalism, Fluidity, and Identity

So, our age is supposed to be an age of unparalleled mobility, migration and border crossing. Reading the literature of globalisation, the whole world appears to be on the move. It is the grand spectacle of a virtual surge of people flowing across the surface of the globe: refugees, exiles, expatriates, international vagrants, guest workers, immigrants, globetrotting travellers and package tourists, wanderers of all kinds crisscrossing the planet and all its national, ethnic, cultural, social and linguistic borders. It seems that we are witnessing a massive international and transnational defeat of gravity, an immense uprooting of origin and belonging, an immense displacement of borders, with all the clashes, meetings, fusions and intermixings it entails, reshaping the cultural landscapes of the world's countries and cities. (Moslund 1-2)

This passage from Sten Pultz Moslund's book *Migration Literature and Hybridity* from 2010 sums up the wide variety of topics and issues that are inevitably related to the topic of this research-project. It describes how movement is inherent to the modern world and that those who move come in all forms and sorts, and with all kinds of motivation to do so. For tourists, for example, the crossing of borders has often become a normalcy in which border-control is a nuisance and where the places that are being visited soon turn into pleasurable memories. For them, borders are formalities that can be ignored easily and that do not have to stand in the way of contact between cultures, people, languages, and economies.

Those same borders, however, can take the form of impenetrable walls and bureaucratic straightjackets for those whose moving has a more permanent effect. Immigrants, exiles, and refugees do not only encounter geographic borders with more difficulty than their leisure-seeking

counterparts, but they also often experience cultural and linguistic boundaries as impossible to cross. Finding themselves caught between⁵ nations, cultures, and languages that are neatly demarcated, those who are supposedly on the move can actually become stagnated. The effects of such border-crossing problematics are often felt in the formation of an identity, where belonging to different ‘categories’ can simultaneously be enriching and confusing.

When talking about ‘categories’, I especially mean those boxes that have to be ticked for official identification such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, and language. With one or two pen strokes one has to choose where to be included, and consequently where to be excluded, while such categorization is a complicated or even impossible task for many. Even if it is not on an official form but in a more informal setting, standardized categories of identity can obstruct the process of identifying as an *individual*, instead of as another product within the category we are forced to choose to define who we are.

Homi K. Bhabha argues in the introduction to his book *The Location of Culture* that especially “identities of difference” are often presented in binaries such as black/white, upper/lower, self/other (5). Using such categorizations when it comes to the representation of identity can easily result in conceptions of fixed and essentialized identities. Such a simplification does not only do no justice to the complex and multi-faceted process that identity is, it can also lead to a continuation of the hierarchical stereotyping and categorization of humans and cultures that postcolonial activists have been trying to shed. When Bhabha emphasizes that “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or

⁵ Leslie Adelson argues against the thinking of migrants as standing on a bridge *between* two nations because it “relies too schematically and too rigidly on territorial concepts of ‘home’ (*Heimat*)” (247). I agree with her that the notions of absolute and cultural borders are not necessarily useful, whereas thinking of “thresholds” and “*transitional* space” (247) can be. However, we cannot avoid talking about ‘between’ or ‘in-between’ in every discussion about migrants because they are often literally stuck between countries at customs and border control.

cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition” (3), he contests essentialist theories of identity that can easily feed lines of thought and argumentations that are grounded in inequality.

From this discussion of identity, two sides of the same coin arise: on the one hand there is the process of *individual* identification, and on the other hand there is the *representation* of identity in scholarly discussions of the topic. Both processes have, and need, certain tools to describe identity, but these tools can often lack a certain flexibility that would allow people to talk and think about identity as a fluid continuum rather than in strict categories. The felt need for that flexibility is at the core of this research and motivates the project: I think that when categories of identity are less thought of as stable and more as fluid, it might become easier to live in our current time of mobility and uprooting that Moslund describes.

I want to show how people from different backgrounds seem to feel the same urge to represent identity as a way of *relating* to other people, cultures, and traditions, instead of as a static goal that is strictly defined by nationality religion, or culture. This is not meant to imply that thus far, identity has merely been represented, lived, and discussed in such a way, but rather as an investigation into alternative ways of identity-representation. I hope to do so by investigating how identity is being represented in fiction because that is where we can experiment with new approaches and imagine new ways of doing so. In order to discuss such alternative ways of rethinking identity, we first need to look at some of the concepts that have been used for that purpose in the past, and that do not cohere with the fluid approach to identity that will be investigated in this project.

One of those major traditional categories of identity is the nation-state, which is known to promote a strong sense of cultural homogeneity. As an ideological project, the nation-state defines itself as being different from other nations, as having unique cultural features that are

represented in its citizens and that show the essence of the nation. The historian Thomas Bender writes in his article “No Borders: Beyond the Nation-State” that “To sustain the idea of a national citizen, the national space was to be firmly bounded, and population and culture were presumed to be homogeneous. In return, the modern nation-state promised to protect its citizens at home and abroad” (2). The territorial borders of the nation thus physically encapsulate the national citizen, while psychological borders simultaneously limit cultural association with other nations. While it offers protection to those who conform to the expectations of the national image, it shuts out those who come from other places and do not match the description of the nation’s ideal citizen.

When defined so narrowly, a national identity is thus highly exclusive, and Bhabha warns his readers that “the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (7). The violent picture he paints is also hidden in Bender’s more neutral depiction of the national citizen, where national protection is offered as a favor to the faithful citizen. The implicit message that a lack of commitment to the national character results in the abandonment of said citizen by the state echoes with Orwellian balefulness.

Thankfully, Bender and Bhabha both mention this extreme form of national identification to signal a change in mindset that they both notice and support in and across their respective disciplines. The nation-state as the sole means of identification and as a way of contrasting cultural differences is no longer unquestioningly accepted as a logical truth. Indeed, “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of

historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities – *as the ground of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition” (7), claims Bhabha.

Thus, the realization that an archaic model of the nation-state is no longer desirable is growing⁶ and one field of study that highlights this awareness, and adds to its development, is transnationalism. Recently, scholars from different disciplines have taken up a transnational approach to social relations between people. They argue that rather than being bound and defined by national borders we are connected *across* such borders. Whereas ‘globalization’ is often associated with the economic market, the study of transnationalism focusses especially on *cultural* and social cross-border practices and contributes to the redefinition of cultural identity beyond national borders.

It is from the perspective of transnational studies that I will discuss the issues of identity and migration. The field of transnationalism and the scholars that work in it offer a variety of tools and theories that support an approach to identity as *fluid* rather than fixed. Moreover, it does not just abandon the nation-state or borders altogether but rather suggests different approaches to them, which allows the transnational approach to be not so much an idealized utopia, but instead a more feasible and realistic project.

Transnationalism is so important to this project because it is an approach that promotes relations between people. The relation that is created between people by an essentialist ideal of the nation is one that is based on an often artificially created bond that connects people based on their supposed similarities. Transnational relations, on the other hand, are ideally fluid and connect people without the interference of a government or other institute of power. They are in

⁶ As Bridget Anderson, professor of Migration in Oxford, says in an interview with Luke de Noronha, “Not so long ago to propose open borders or no borders was unthinkable. People didn’t even talk about it. Now it is out there – it is at least possible to begin to imagine it” (Anderson n.p.)

constant motion and show how we can identify with traditions, practices, and people all over the world, and simultaneously maintain a wish to belong to another place without having to choose between any of them. I am inclined to think that this is how people live and identify with each other and it is in fiction that we can primarily find such representations of relational identification at the moment. Lately it is starting to make its way into scholarly research as well, most prominently in transnational studies, which will be shown in the next section. I will highlight three scholarly projects that promote a relational approach to respectively the nation, minority studies, and identity, with which the framework in which the two literary examples that will be discussed is created.

First of all, Bender hopes to turn away from American exceptionalism because the idea of being a superior nation can strongly influence the way people identify with their own nation but also with other nations. Therefore, in order to think about identity as not being solely defined by the nation-state while it plays such a prominent role, it is thus necessary to see how the nation can be incorporated positively into a transnational mindset and Bender is one of the scholars who attempts such an approach. Seen as *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are both partly set in North-America, it is especially interesting to look at Bender's specific case-study of *American* exceptionalism.

Secondly, Françoise Lionett and Shu-Mei Shih show how the conceptual issue of the 'local' and the 'global' has led to a dichotomization of the two whereas in reality they are closely related and interwoven. Lastly, Édouard Glissant argues that rhizomatic relation is what is most important in the process of identification. Taken together, these three transnational projects give an impression of a currently imagined world where relation crosses borders. In later sections, I will show how the field of literary studies is also adapting transnationalism – for example Jahan

Ramazani and Azade Seyhan – and how contemporary identity-politics are closely interwoven into this.

Transnationalism

1. Rethinking the Nation

Transnationalism believes in a relation between humans that exists beyond the nation-state and that highlights cross-border connections. It goes against the rather outdated model of national identity as competitive and essentialist, and instead suggests a way of cultural identification that simultaneously promotes equality and emphasizes difference⁷. However, it should be emphasized again that a transnational approach does not necessarily mean an abandonment of the nation-state altogether. Indeed, it suggests alternative ways of relation that do not mix well with certain models of the nation, but the nation-state plays such a fundamental role in modern society that it is currently simply unrealistic to try to dissolve that model entirely.

Especially the initial postcolonial promotion of the nation that took place in the second half of the 20th century as a result of decolonization, has enhanced the position of the contemporary nation-state. Indeed, although the process of decolonization would ideally lead to a world in which the definition of the geographic borders within which we live is not automatically a definition of who we are, the rearrangements of territory and ‘ownership’ that resulted from

⁷ As such, transnationalism differs from a traditionally cosmopolitan worldview. Cosmopolitanism also criticizes the nation-state, but does so because it believes in universal values and bonds between people. Therewith, it focusses more on universal homogeneity than that it acknowledges and incorporates difference. See for example the third chapter of *The Limits of Cosmopolitanism* for Kathleen Glenister Roberts’s claim that cosmopolitanism denies the subaltern, or Jamil Khader’s “Cosmopolitanism and the Infidelity to Internationalism: Repeating Postcoloniality and the World Revolution”.

Another more recent scholarly movement that turns against the nation-state is postnationalism, which wants to abandon the nation entirely. For a representation of the development of postnationalism see *Paths to Post-Nationalism: A Critical Ethnography of Language and Identity* by Monica Heller. For an example of a postnational project in the social sciences see Katherine Tonkiss’s *Migration and Identity in a Post-National World* in which she suggests a model of ‘constitutional patriotism’ as a replacement for national identification.

decolonization are often still based on old models of the nation. Gayatri Spivak notes in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* that “the political claims that are most urgent in decolonized space are tacitly recognized as coded within the legacy of imperialism: nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, socialism, even culturalism” (48). The nation still exists very prominently and is highly influential when it comes to policy-making about, amongst others, the hosting of migrants. Moreover, models of nationalism are also still in use in many academic disciplines.

Bender realizes this and argues that despite the fact that “nation-states have done terrible damage to the human community ... they are also the only enforcer available to protect human and citizen rights” (4). His aim is primarily to turn away from the idea of American exceptionalism that was reinforced by many American historians after World War II and instead to regard the development of America as a nation in a way that “better serves us as citizens of the nation and the world” (4).

He criticizes the way in which modern educational history is often based on the nation-state and national identity, arguing that other historical markers of identification that are more universal such as gender, class, and ethnicity are “radically subordinated to national identity” (2). It is thus highlighted how the educational system – Bender specifically discusses the American system but this claim could be applied to European education as well – sustains the idea of a national identity, which shows how embedded this form of identification still is in contemporary society. By teaching American history as a story of exceptionalism, an image of the nation as unique and superior can easily manifest itself in those who are being taught.

Bender therefore suggests a teaching of history in such a way that America is no longer depicted for its uniqueness set off against other nations, but rather for its inherently interwoven

history with other states and nations. In terms of experiencing equality and practicing hospitality, much has changed since decolonization started, but the translation of all this from theory to worldwide practice is still being made and is not finished yet. That is mainly why it is so important to consider different angles and approaches to the relations between cultures and nations. For example, many migrants still find themselves to be considered a nuisance and political administration and general opinion often still treats them to be so – one only has to think of European regulations about which country has to take in how many migrants or some of the American responses to the “immigration crisis” of 2014⁸ – which shows that there is still much work to be done when it comes to thinking and practicing equality, hospitality, and relation.

As will be shown in the chapter about *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Diaz seems to have a similar critique of the representation of American history as Bender gives. He uses footnotes throughout the novel in which he gives an account of 20th-century history from the perspective of the Dominican Republic. His ironic tone suggests that any reader of his who is not from the Caribbean has been taught a selective history of America that indeed emphasizes its exceptionalism. This focus has left out the darker chapters of its history where essentialist thinking has led to actions motivated by superiority.

Like Bender, Diaz thus signals that American history is often misrepresented. For Diaz this misrepresentation lies primarily in the fact that the spotlight is focused too narrowly on a small selection of actors and events, and for Bender it lies in the way it is depicted in comparison to other nations.

We take away from Bender’s critique the intention to turn away from the subordination of markers of difference, to acknowledge and appreciate difference within the nation-state, and

⁸ See for example foxnews.com for the article “Protests Turn back Buses Carrying Illegal Immigrant” from 2 July 2014.

to see the connectedness across national borders. Especially when considering the diversity of people living in the US and the never-ending flow of migrants from all over the world who settle on the continent, a relational image of the nation's composition highlights the connectivity between all those identities. Moreover, taking Diaz's ironic commentary to a larger scale, there still exists a large discrepancy between the representations of the center and the margin. Lionnet and Shih address this issue by looking at how the local minority is represented in comparison to the global majority in theoretical studies.

2. *Beyond Categorization*

If the transnational approach Bender suggests can be established, we come close to what Lionnet and Shih describe as “a space of exchange and participation ... where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center” (5). This is how they describe the transnational in their book *Minor Transnationalism* and it is formulated as such in opposition to globalization. Globalization, for them, is “centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture to be tested by its norm. It produces a hierarchy of subjects between the so-called universal and particular, with all the attendant problems of Eurocentric universalism” (5).⁹

Striking is that where Bender tackles American exceptionalism, Lionnet and Shih also actively argue for a break with a tradition that has affected and supported the existence of the Western hegemony, namely European universalism. The issue they focus on specifically is the

⁹ Their description of globalization thus closely resembles the cosmopolitan worldview mentioned above. There is no scholarly consensus about detailed definitions of globalization, cosmopolitanism, universalism, or transnationalism.

dichotomy between local and global which is an often-used theme in contemporary scholarship¹⁰. They argue that “local/global studies tend to romanticize the local as not necessarily pure but stubbornly the site of resistance” (6) while the local and the global do not necessarily stand in stark contrast to each other:

All too often the emphasis on the major-resistant mode of cultural practices denies the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples, and hides their micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires.

Common conceptions of resistance to the major reify the boundaries of communities [...] when in reality the minor and the major participate in one shared transnational moment and space structured by uneven power relations [...] Minority cultures are part of our transnational moment, not a reified or segregated pocket of cultures and mores waiting to be selectively incorporated into what qualifies as global or transnational. (7)

Focusing on the minor in transnational studies but doing so without classifying him or her as the dominance-defying ‘underdog’ or the powerless victim, Lionnet and Shih try to give a representation of the positions the major and the minor hold in transnational studies.

This is important to emphasize because the fictional characters that will be discussed in more depth later all inhabit spaces of the minor and the major. They encounter the global in the US and maintain a connection to the local while trying to incorporate that in their position of

¹⁰ They acknowledge the importance of the work done by people like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari for the study of ethnic minorities, but they think the tools offered by those pivotal French philosophers are too depoliticized. They argue that Derrida’s deconstruction of the center is still focused on the center and thereby defeats its purpose of transgressing to a recognition and equalizing of the margins: “The deconstructive dyad center/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it” (3). Moreover, they argue that Deleuze and Guattari “[fall] back into a recentered model of ‘minor literature’” in their discussion of the ‘rhizome’ because their argument is based on the author’s function as a minority in the binary political model of minor/major (2).

being a migrant. It will be shown that it is not through being the “stubborn” local who resists incorporation into the global world of the West that these characters’ identities develop. Rather, it is transnational moments of relation between the local and the global that help them to identify with their position as migrants, and with their position as individuals in American society.

Indeed, the theoretical divides between the local and the global, the minor and the major, have never been purposefully created but are nevertheless maintained in discussions about how to solve such limitations. *Minor Transnationalism* tries to show that, and suggests “new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries” (8). It “points toward and makes visible the multiple relations between the national and the transnational. It recognizes the difficulty that minority subjects without a statist parameter of citizenship face when the nation-state remains the chief mechanism for dispersing and regulating power, status, and material resources” (8). The most important thing to take away from *Minor Transnationalism* for this project is the fact that they acknowledge the problems of the stateless’ subject position in a world where the nation-state is still a strong indicator of identity, but simultaneously focus on the relations between the national and the transnational.

3. *Rhizomed*

When talking about relation and identity it is then impossible to leave out Glissant’s philosophical/poetical book *Poetics of Relation*. In this book, he argues that “When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened” (143). Instead, we should think about the identity of an emigrant as being rhizomed rather than rooted. Taking this concept of the rhizome from Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari¹¹, who in their turn took it from its use in plant biology, Glissant explains how people can feel connected to several places without feeling the pressure to choose one place as their true root or heritage. Indeed, when considering an individual to be rhizomed, his or her development can be seen as the development of an independent individual rather than as the development of a subject from a certain nation or culture.

In trying to establish his “poetics of relation,” Glissant argues that Deleuze and Guattari do not entirely dismiss the *idea* of rootedness, but “challenges that of a totalitarian root” (11). They want to dismiss the aggression of one root that determines all derivation but Glissant acknowledges that we cannot entirely dispose of a sense of wanting to belong. The rhizome, therefore, still contains a certain sense of belonging, or rootedness, but is first and foremost a place where everything is relation: “every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11).

An example that illustrates this idea is the formation of postcolonial nations. According to Glissant, “Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power—the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root—rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other” (14). Thus echoing Spivak’s warning but also Bender’s

¹¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari use the rhizome as a figure to explain their critique on the classical image of the tree and the root as “noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority” (1456). They argue that the root is part of the modern Western tradition to think and operate in binary or “biunivocal” relations; to split the subject and the object; to retain dualisms rather than striving for “multiplicity” without a beginning or end. They claim that the concept of the rhizome can indeed help us towards a theory of multiplicity. A rhizome does not have “binary relations between ... points and biunivocal relationships between ... positions” but is made of “lines of segmentarity and stratification” (1458). Dismissing structures, hierarchies, and genealogy, they argue that “the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states” (1459). Books should be read and written accordingly, considering a circular system of multiplicity where there is no beginning or ending, and where the middle is one of the possible points of departure.

Although Lionnet & Shih criticized Deleuze & Guattari’s work, they merely criticize their argument about minority writers (see previous footnote) but acknowledge the importance of “lateral and nonhierarchical network structures” like the rhizome (2). Moreover, they actually use Glissant’s theory of relation that is based on the rhizome as a point of departure for their own work (8).

rethinking of the nation, Glissant claims that a nation should be able to form its own identity, to have a sense of rootedness. This always happens in relation to other nations, but they are traditionally relations of negation, whereas Glissant hopes to promote relations that are based on acceptance and in which the different actors are part of a network, or rhizome. This approach to the formation of a nation's identity can then be extended to apply to the process of individual identification as well and such an approach corresponds to the idea of identity as fluid.

Discussing the protagonists of the novels as examples of Glissant's relational philosophy of the rhizome will hopefully ensure a depiction of them as individual cases rather than as stereotypes that are taken to represent "the Jewish-American" or "the Indian-American" migrant experience. For example, it does much more justice to Sasha, the protagonist of *Mazel*, to discuss her as being rhizomed across Europe and the US than to show how she embodies the typical Eastern European woman, or is an example of a self-made American citizen. Although we initially encounter her as a woman who thinks of herself as a true New Yorker, it will become clear throughout the novel that she is simultaneously still strongly connected to her Jewish-European background. Claiming she is rooted in either the US or Poland, where she grew up, would take away from the complexity of her character and her struggles, and would not give a fair impression of the process of migrating and associating with several cultures and countries. The image of the rhizome gives a much more accurate account of how those struggles can lead to an intricate network of relation that constitutes identity.

Fluidity

The transnational idea that connections between cultures and nations would be more beneficial when based on relations that acknowledge differences and similarities as equally important

enhances the idea that the people living in those cultures and nations connect to each other across their borders. When adhering to this idea, it is no longer possible to claim that a person belongs solely to one culture, or that the features of a culture or nation can be clearly defined and translated into an identification-guideline for the ideal citizen. Having discussed Glissant's theory of identity and relation, it is interesting to look at the concept that is closely related and that has been mentioned a few times now, namely 'fluid identity'. By describing this concept next to Glissant's relational theory I want to display another rethinking of identity, showing that the idea of identity as rooted and solid is being challenged by more scholars, and that it is therefore important for academia to continue this discussion.

The key features of fluid identity are the belief that identity is a constant process and that there is consequently no such thing as a 'fixed' or 'completed' identity. Especially in the case of migrants, itinerants, and nomads, those groups of people that make up such a large part of contemporary society, the static idea of identity as belonging to one culture is highly problematic and calls for a different theorization and conceptualization of identity. Glissant's theory of the rhizome has been shown to be one of those rethinkings and Stuart Hall's introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity* from 1996, edited by Hall and Paul du Gay, gives a succinct statement of why they promote a different approach to cultural identity specifically. Hall affirms that the Cartesian idea of a "self-sustaining subject" and "the notion of an integral, originary, and unified identity" (1) are no longer sufficient when talking about identity and the self. Their project is important, he argues, because at the time of their writing, those archaic notions of identity had become outdated and were no longer sufficient, but the process of deconstruction that had eliminated them had not yet offered new tools and concepts to work with instead.

Hall therefore discusses the process of *identification* as an important tool. Because identification is a never-ending process, it is helpful to use when thinking about a new notion of identity as not fixed or stable. He argues that “Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a saturation ... There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (3). It is thus important to realize that identification is not a teleological process in which the objective is to achieve an identity. Instead, it is a perpetual flow, a constant changing and adapting and reevaluating of uprootedness, belonging, and (un)homeliness. Indeed, it urges Hall to think about the formation of identity as a development where questions such as ‘what might we become?’ are more relevant than questions about ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ (4).¹²

What connects Glissant’s theory of relation to Hall’s focus on identification is that both their proposals revolve around movement. Indeed, the word ‘relation’ suggests interaction, a moving between different actors, and ‘identification’ is a process.¹³ The development of this focus on movement can be found in Zygmunt Bauman’s book *Liquid Modernity*. Bauman shows how attention has shifted from solidity to liquidity, resulting in what he refers to as ‘liquid modernity’.

Already in 1848 did Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels call for a “melting of the solids” in *The Communist Manifesto*. These solids, primarily referring to ‘the sacred’, ‘the past’, and

¹² Hall is not the only one to focus on the process of identity rather than on its unified and archaic concept. Other examples of scholars from different disciplines who take a similar standpoint are the historian David Hollinger who prefers to talk about “affiliation” because it “suggests a greater measure of flexibility consistent with a postethnic eagerness to promote communities of consent” (*Postethnic America*, 7). Then coming from feminist studies and American studies, Sylvia Schultersmandl and Sebnem Toplu describe identity as “a continuous cultural dialogue between self and other” (*A Fluid Sense of Self*, 16). Moreover, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman emphasizes “the contrived necessity of identity building and rebuilding” (87) in his book *Liquid Modernity*.

¹³ Schultersmandl & Toplu’s previously mentioned book *A Fluid Sense of Self* also focusses on movement and identity. Exploring fluid identity, they use motion and (be)longing as axes to look at imagined transnational identity in contemporary literature from Canada, the US, and Great Britain, and they claim that many of these literatures use the idea of a fluid sense of self as the only way of belonging in the current world of “hyper-mobility” (13).

‘tradition’, were old and pre-modern categories that needed changing because they were collapsing and deteriorating. The process of liquefaction that followed their call, unfortunately did not result in a replacement of the solids by more liquid concepts, but instead they were replaced by new solid categories that were supposed to be ever-lasting. However, because “The ‘melting of solids’, [is] the permanent feature of modernity” (6), according to Bauman, those supposedly ‘stronger’ solids are now actually being liquefied themselves, which ideally should lead to a fluid state of being.

One of the signs of this process of liquefaction is the shift of attention from space to time. In pre-modern times, having and expanding territory was the best way to exert power and to assure stability. When the liquefaction of those pre-modern concepts then started, stability was consequently no longer a desirable state of being. Indeed, Bauman explains that “liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape. Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions” (2). With a shift from solid to liquid we also change from stability to perpetual inconstancy, which has both hopeful and frightening potential. Frightening because it means that there is no fundament to fall back on – for example, Bauman points out that wars are no longer primarily fought on ground – think of the Gulf War – and that physical property is no longer the most profitable possession (14) – but also hopeful because it allows for a fluid approach to categories that were until then often thought of as stable.

This shift from solid to liquid explains the focus on movement that Hall and Glissant both incorporate in their work. Important to keep in mind is that liquidity or fluidity is not necessarily an entirely positive development. There is indeed more flexibility and the possibility for new ways of considering the world, but breaking down the solid categories we used to build upon also means taking down the fundamentals of our belief-systems and our stability.

Translating this directly to transnationalism, this paradox can be found when discussing migrant identities in the light of transnationalism, where there are two main processes that can be observed from a distance. On the one hand, as has been discussed, the world is becoming more and more globalized, creating cross-border communities, cultures, and identities that can no longer be simplified into neat national categories, and creating the possibility for people to identify across borders. On the other hand, however, migrants still feel the need to belong but often find themselves caught between cultures and governments with strong national identity-politics.

Because of this paradoxical situation, opinions on, solutions for, and rethinkings of the issue undeniably vary between different scholars¹⁴ and it is probably not possible to reach consensus or find one conclusive parameter that solves the issue at stake. However, there is one medium through which a wide variety of scholars is approaching the issue and that is indeed literature. Not only is the study of literature highly valuable in this research-area because it shows a multitude of representations of identity and can therefore underscore many different interpretations of the very complex issues at hand, it also offers a platform for the merging of theory and practice and actually furthers the evolvement of the concepts and theories it depicts. Returning to Moslund, for example, he claims that “migration novels are commonly assumed to be capable of generating [radical changes of worldviews]” (6), thus ascribing considerable power to the reading and studying of literature in this specific area.

¹⁴ For example, for Leslie Adelson, the abandonment of absolute national and cultural borders would be a start of the solution, because it takes the migrant off of the metaphorical bridge that is ever-suspended between nations, and focusses more on thresholds, ‘transitional space’, and the combining of differences (“Against Between” 247). Bhabha, however, argues that it is exactly in the ‘in-between’ of cultures that those differences are being merged, and where “the impossibility of culture’s containedness, and the boundary between” them simultaneously exist (“Culture’s In-Between” 54).

Just like the paradox of the contemporary migrant identity works on different levels and in two opposing directions, the study of transnational and migrant literature also operates in several ways. One approach to transnational literature is what Jahan Ramazani calls “a transnational poetics” in his homonymous book from 2009. In the preface, he explains how finding himself struggling to label certain writers with a national or regional tag, he started to realize that poetic practice and influence are not necessarily restricted to national or cultural borders. Indeed, anthologizing and canonizing literature, however necessary and valuable, can lead to a restriction of genres and authors that prevents the study and discovery of often unexpected relations between works of fiction. He therefore “proposes various ways of vivifying circuits of poetic connection and dialogue across political and geographic borders and even hemispheres, of examining cross-cultural and cross-national exchanges, influences, and confluences in poetry” (x-xi).

In his approach, Ramazani focuses on the transnational relations in Anglophone poetry from different times, places, and traditions. His project focusses on *influences* between works of fiction and this is a different study of transnationalism than the specific thematic study I carry out here. However, the general philosophy that supports his claims, namely that there are relations between literary traditions from cultures that are seemingly very far removed from each other, definitely adheres to the transnational line of thought of this research project.

A more thematic reading of transnational literature is Azade Seyhan’s book *Writing Outside the Nation* from 2001. Seyhan’s initial transnational interest lies more at the level of “narratives that originate at border crossings,” hoping to show how those individual narratives “enter novel forms of inter/transcultural dialogue” (4). She asserts that fiction and imagination are often needed to bring theory to life and to provide us with critical reflections on

contemporary conceptualization: “Literary expressions of contemporary sociopolitical formations offer critical insights into the manifold meanings of history and take us to galaxies of experience where no theory has gone before” (5). Literature is thus taken to be representative of transnational movement both physically and imaginary, and serves as a medium to explain transnational issues and as a platform at which transnationalism is actually established and rethought.

In this research, I take a transnational approach primarily by looking at transnational relations within the novels, but also by combining two authors from different backgrounds and cultures. Bringing together novels that have been written by two authors whose heritages lie in Poland and the Dominican Republic, and showing how they relate on several levels without necessarily influencing or referencing each other directly, shows how literary styles and topics indeed do not stop at national or cultural borders. I can discuss these novels in the same research because they use the same literary technique, namely magical realism, to describe the process of identification with multiple cultures and nations. This research shows how a literary technique that is traditionally associated with one specific cultural tradition, namely Latin American fiction, is also being used and adapted by authors from other cultures and nations and how poetic relation is thus often manifested transnationally.

Moreover, on the thematic level, *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are both partly set in the US but their protagonists are immigrants from different parts of the world and their cultural heritage therefore widely differs. They are examples that show how a certain experience, in this case the migrant-experience, can give people from all over the world a similar impulse to express themselves and to try and translate that individual experience for a larger

audience through fiction. They take place on “border crossings” and involve themselves with transcultural experiences and the sociopolitical issue of migration.

The relations between the protagonists’ different homes and cultures – both the relations that are being established and those that are actually missing – will show to be essential for the portrayal of their identities. We will see that although *Mazel’s* Sasha initially wants to abandon her Polish background, she eventually nourishes the ties between her native country and her newly acquired home in the US and transmits parts of this relation to her offspring. Diaz’s Oscar also has mixed feelings about his mother’s homeland the Dominican Republic, and the complicated relations between himself, his Dominican heritage, and his life in the US are exemplary of his continuous struggles to lead a happy life. The plot in both novels depends on the crossing of imagined, geographic, and cultural borders for the development of the identities of their protagonists.

The novels thus illustrate how fictional narration can experiment with situations of border crossing, transnationalism, and identification through cultural encounters. Fiction is a great example of a mechanism that operates on a transnational level and addresses issues such as identity, migration, and the nation in a unique way. In certain ways, fiction can go beyond philosophical and sociological theory and I hope that the analyses of *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* can shed some more light on the theoretical issues discussed in this chapter. The close-readings of the novels will serve to investigate whether the specific writing-mode of magical realism helps the exposure of identity as fluid. The next chapter will explore magical realism and explain why it relates so well to the issues discussed above.

Chapter 2

Magical Realism

Having established the theoretical issues that are at stake in this research in the previous chapter, it is important as a final theoretical exploration to discuss the state of the art of magical realism. As has been explained, I want to investigate transnational relations and how, and if they influence the process of identification for people who inhabit multiple cultures and nations. To do so, I have selected two novels from different cultural backgrounds which will serve as case-studies to highlight those issues of migration and fluid identity. What connects these novels is not only that they both tell a story of migration to the US, but also, more importantly, that they both use magical realist devices to experiment with ways to represent those issues of cross-border identification. My surmise is therefore that this mode of writing has an inherent quality that makes it especially useful for those who want to express the process of identification across borders and cultures, and this will be supported primarily by explaining how and why many postcolonial writers use it¹⁵.

However, before embarking on the postcolonial adaptation of magical realism, I will first depict the several origins it has. One of the features that makes it so interesting for projects in which permeable borders, transnationalism, and fluid identities feature, is that magical realism itself is fluid, transnational, and permeable. I will show how it simultaneously originates in 18th-century Germany, the beginning of the 19th century in Europe, and the 1950s and '60s in Latin America. All these places and times contribute to the 21st-century magical realism in all its forms and adaptations, and having such a varied background makes it fit in with the issues that have been discussed in the previous chapter; one could say that magical realism is itself a rhizome.

¹⁵ As Spivak says, in much contemporary scholarship there is “the idea that Magical Realism is the paradigmatic style of the third world” (13).

This chapter thus gives an account of those issues and angles linked to magical realism that are most valuable for this research-project. All works of theory that discuss magical realism seem to agree that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define the meaning of the term or to formulate one conclusive set of features. I will try and use the large diversity of definitions and descriptions that have been offered by several scholars to come up with an overview that can be used in the analyses of the works of fiction in later chapters.

Genealogy

The origins of some art-genres or movements can be traced back rather easily to a specific artist, geographical location, or manifesto. For some people this traceability is just as easy when it comes to magical realism. Many scholars agree that its real commencement as a literary phenomenon lies in Latin American novels from the late 1960s. Authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Alejo Carpentier are usually denoted as the founding fathers of Magical Realism, and especially Marquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967) is often mentioned as the pinnacle of magical realist fiction. Alejo Carpentier's preface to his novel *El Reino de este Mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*, 1949) is the first place where a theory about what he called *lo real maravilloso Americano* ("the marvelous American reality") is formulated as a typical Latin American literary style. This preface has been reworked into a larger essay and was published in a collection of Carpentier's essays in 1967 as "On the Marvelous Real in America," which now serves as an important source for many scholars.

In his essay, Carpentier reacts to the German art historian Franz Roh who is said to have coined the term 'magical realism' in 1925. Roh wrote about a trend in painting in the 1920s that

showed a return to Realism after the flourishing days of Expressionism, in which painters use a new form of Realism that is inspired by that Expressionism. Whereas Carpentier described magical realism as specifically Latin American, Roh's theory has its foundation in Western Europe. Moreover, whereas Roh gives a more general impression of how magical realism plays a role in the visual arts, Carpentier applies it not merely to the visual arts, but more specifically to literature. Carpentier and Roh are now often mentioned together as the two people who first described magical realism, but Carpentier is the first to give an extensive argument about the *literary* aspects of magical realism.

Apart from these two quite differing originators of the theoretical aspect of magical realism, there is also a small selection of scholars who go back in time much further and who refer to the German 18th-century philosopher Novalis as the actual origin of the term. Indeed, in her article in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Irene Guenther points out that "The concept of "*magischer Idealismus*" (magical idealism) in German philosophy is an old one. Novalis, at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote of a 'magical idealist' and a 'magical realist' in the realm of philosophy" (34). As said, this source is mentioned by only a few scholars and if they do, it is often to argue that magical realism has its roots in German Romanticism. Thus, we can basically find two schools of thought when it comes to tracing the roots of magical realism: either they lie deeply in European tradition, or they are typically Latin American.

1. German Romanticism

One of the scholars who expands on Novalis and Romanticism as a large part of contemporary magical realism is Michal Valdez Moses in his article "Magical Realism at World's End".

Moses's most important claim is that magical realism is a modern version of Friedrich Schiller's

category of “sentimental poetry”. He argues that although certain authors and scholars approach it as an *alternative* to global modernity, “magical realism is [nevertheless] both an effect of and a vehicle for globalization” (105). The magical aspect is a nostalgic look back to a past, pre-modern world that can never be reentered, and the realistic strand stems from the narrative tradition of the European realistic novel. Indeed, “the fact that these exotic narrative strands within the magical realist text typically appear to even sophisticated readers as native or indigenous elements merely underlines the modern historical horizon within which the magical realist novel is both written and read” (111). Some of these claims are rather controversial and express an opinion that goes against some existing scholarship on magical realism. His argument especially goes against those scholars and authors who see it as a possible literary answer to the dominance of the Western hegemony, because it has been used as a tool of expression by many postcolonial writers.

The core of Moses’s critique is very valuable but some of his statements are so broadly applied that they can be interpreted as generalizations too easily, and this partly undermines the message he is trying to get across. He is definitely right in his warning that scholars should be careful not to lapse into one-sided interpretations of works of magical realism, and that we need to be “critically astute” when discussing magical realist authors (119). Not every work of magical realism is an act of resistance from a marginalized cultural group standing up against the privileged hegemony that controls their discourse of power; and not every work of magical realism is a tool to empower those living in the margins.¹⁶

¹⁶ With this critique he makes remark that is similar to Lionnet’s and Shih’s claim about minority studies, where they show how well-intended statements about, and research of minorities and marginalized groups or individuals can lead to generalizations that once again put those groups in a category of stereotypes: the attempt to pull ‘the local’ out of his/her position of not being acknowledged and helping him/her gain more independence, often led to stereotyping of ‘the local’ as the resisting underdog, which inflicts yet another pattern of expectation upon them. Similarly, by showing how postcolonial writers use magical realism to speak about the process of decolonization, it can become a stereotype for stories of empowering and gaining independence. Not only are those who used to live,

Moses thus wants to convince critics and readers that although magical realism has its magical aspect rooted in many different cultures and is therefore easily conceived of as the advocate of cultural minorities, it is still a literary form that has its backbone in European Romanticism and therefore offers more Western realism than non-Western magic. However, the cultural diversity that can be found among the novels that are being discussed here already shows that the truth always lies in the middle. We can find magical realism's European roots when reading *Mazel*, and the Latin American tradition in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. However, both novels also incorporate parts of each other's tradition in their adaptation of magical realism, which emphasizes magical realism's potential for hybridity and cross-border influence: Goldstein uses literary techniques that are typical of Marquez's Latin-American style, and Diaz simultaneously uses and mocks the Latin-American tradition but also incorporates a different element of 'magic' namely the fantastical stories of the European writer J.R.R. Tolkien. Because elements of all the different origins of magical realism feature in the novels it is thus important to discuss all of them here.

Another scholar who also spends significant time exploring Novalis as a source for magical realism, but does so while simultaneously considering those other scholars, time-periods, and geographical origins is the previously mentioned Christopher Warnes. In the second chapter of his book, he examines Novalis's work and argues that even despite a lack of a fully developed theory of magical realism¹⁷, his theories nevertheless include elements that closely resemble the 20th and 21st century theories of magical realism that we now know. The most important similarity that Warnes finds is that "Novalis shows himself to be preoccupied with

or who still live in the margins much more than just that, magical realism is much more than a tool to empower the 'underdog's' voice.

¹⁷ Much of Novalis's concepts have never been completed due to his young death at age 29.

resolving the tension between two realms usually thought of as mutually exclusive: in his case real and ideal. In the case of literary magical realism a similar reconciliation will be sought between congruent concepts: natural and supernatural, realist and fantastic” (23). After establishing this link, he then continues by discussing Roh, Carpentier, and other early theorists of magical realism and thus provides us with an extensive impression of its history.

By doing this, Warnes creates a more balanced image of magical realism’s originators than Moses does. Whereas Moses places different sources *against* each other and makes a case for one of them to be the ‘true’ originator, Warnes shows how different people have directly or indirectly influenced each other and how all that combined has led to his current conception of magical realism. He concludes himself that his historical overview “confirms that there are in principle no geographical constraints on where magical realism might be found, just as there are no limits to the purposes for which it might be deployed” (41). This take on magical realism shows an attitude that resembles the approach to identity that has been established in the previous chapter. When considering magical realism to have no strict boundaries, it becomes clearer why authors would use it to paint a picture of fluid identity and transnationalism, where borders are also considered to be permeable.

2. Latin American

However true all this may be, even the scholars who focus on Novalis and Roh as the progenitors of magical realism cannot ignore the enormous role that Latin American writers play, and have played in the development of magical realism over time. Carpentier’s essay has already been mentioned briefly but some elaboration on the content will be given here, especially because it is such an interesting counterpart to Moses’s arguments. The first half of Carpentier’s famous

article on “lo real maravilloso americano” is an exposition of cultures, artists, art-forms, landscapes, and cities that are intertwined through his own travels. He describes all the places he has visited in a stream-of-consciousness style where associations between places and impressions are easily made. The second half of the article then continues in a similar style but explains how these travels have formed his idea about what the marvelous real is.

The article was published in 1949 and partly reacts to the art-movement of Surrealism which mainly thrived in Europe in the 1930s and early 1940s. Carpentier detects a certain forcedness in the way European art tries to manufacture the marvelous, or the magic within Surrealism, whereas in South America he experiences that marvelous reality in daily life. He argues that European artists had almost created a format for how to express the fantastic, which consequently led to a loss of combining inspiration and imagination in the process of creating art that expresses the magic of reality. Carpentier argues that Latin American artists were needed to show the magic and creativity of nature itself in their artwork, and he believed that faith is essential for encountering and reproducing the marvelous.

Carpentier can thus be seen to be making the same claim as Moses, only about a different location. Whereas Moses is convinced magical realism has its roots in European art and philosophy, and that even the Latin American novels of magical realism eventually stem from the European tradition, Carpentier is convinced that magical realism is uniquely Latin American and can only be created by those who encounter the magical in everyday life. Despite this strong belief, Carpentier is still quoted as an important source for magical realism much more often than Novalis or Roh, even by those scholars who write about it decades after his publication and who discuss works of magical realism that are not Latin American at all.¹⁸

¹⁸Giving just a small selection: people who acknowledge Carpentier’s importance are Schroeder in *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (2004), Stephen M. Hart & Wen-chin Ouyang as editors of *A Companion to*

The reason that Carpentier is mentioned more often than Novalis when talking about the roots of magical realism not only lies in the fact that Carpentier is a 20th-century writer and that magical realism indeed only really developed halfway into the 20th century as a popular literary mode. It could also partly be because although he holds such a strong stance on magical realism being Latin American, he still paints a picture of cultural cross-fertilization. Indeed, another consequence of his travels through other parts of the world – not only Europe but also Russia, China, and Persia feature in his descriptions – is that he “[sees] the possibility of establishing certain synchronisms, American, recurrent, timeless, relating this to that, yesterday to today. I saw the possibility of bringing to our own latitudes certain European truths” (84). Although Carpentier focusses on the differences between Latin America and Europe, he simultaneously notices possible ties and correlations between the different realms; the one can help and influence the other, and vice versa.

3. *Postcolonialism*

After the flourishing of Latin American magical realists in the late 1960s and 1970s, more and more writers from other parts in the world started to adapt the style. Especially authors from countries that had formerly been colonized who were starting to try and regain their cultural identity found a great tool in magical realism. Elleke Boehmer aptly argues:

[T]he proliferation of postcolonial migrant writing in English has become so closely linked to the continuing success of magic realist approaches that the two developments appear almost inextricable. The reasons for the borrowing are easy to see. Postcolonial writers in English share with their South American counterparts like Alejo Carpentier,

Magical Realism (2005), and Lyn Di Iorio Sandín & Richard Perez as editors of *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* (2013).

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Isabel Allende a view from the fringe of dominant European cultures, an interest in the syncretism produced by colonization, and access to local resources of fantasy and story-telling. Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural clash and displacement. (228-29)

Boehmer explains here how the inherent quality of magical realism to describe different, seemingly incompatible realms within one framework, is especially useful for postcolonial writers. Some of the most famous Anglophone postcolonial writers who employ the mode are for example Ben Okri, Salman Rushdie, and Toni Morrison.

Indeed, in contemporary scholarship on magical realism it is often mentioned as a typically postcolonial style. It can simultaneously depict the Western and the non-Western world, and portray the struggle of minorities encountering the majority, and therefore serves as a helpful tool for the postcolonial writer who struggles finding a literary voice of representation. In his introduction to *A Companion to Magical Realism*, Hart argues that the most pressing need of postcolonial writers in the 1980s and 1990s was mainly to find a literary style that could help them express the inequality they experienced, and to describe and explore the routes from colonialism to postcolonialism, so to speak. It is because magical realism's roots lie in the "riven" Latin Americas (7) and had therefore developed an "intrinsic heterogeneity" (11), that it was so adaptable for other postcolonial cultural areas.

It was thus initially a representation of the relation between the dominant and the marginalized world that needed a voice, and that voice was found in magical realism because it encapsulates an inherent struggle between worlds, namely the real and the fantastic. The two axes 'magic' and 'realism' indeed have a unique relation with each other and one of the points of

contestation is how exactly they relate to each other: is one of them the main-spectrum within which the other plays a guest-role, or do they interact equally? In his introduction, Hart gives a re-interpretation of Marquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* from which it seems to follow that eventually, realism has the upper hand. First, Hart does proclaim that in the novel, realism and magic are basically interchangeable, or at least work on the same level:

[M]agical realism is born, the novel suggests, in the gap between the belief systems of two very different groups of people. What for the inhabitant of the 'First World' is magical [...] is real and unremarkable for the inhabitant of the 'Third World'. To keep the *symmetry*, what for the inhabitant of the 'Third World' is magical [...] is real and unremarkable for the inhabitant of the 'First World'. (3-4; emphasis added)

His choice of the word "symmetry" suggests that the 'First World' is depicted on the same level as the 'Third World' and that there is no obvious hierarchy between the two. When interpreting this with an ideological mindset, it could mean that Marquez wants to depict a world in which the 'First World' and the 'Third World' stand on equal footing, where the West does not dominate the non-West.

However, Marquez does not provide his readers with a utopian depiction of what life could look like when two realms are equally incorporated, but a representation, and arguably a critique of the political situation in Marquez's life while writing *Cien Años de Soledad*, where the 'First World' and the 'Third World' do not function in a horizontal relation but rather in a hierarchized, vertical one. Hart concludes that the novel is "revolutionary" and that it is "predicated on a vision of the world as deeply fissured [...] characterized by a deep divide between the realm of the powerful and the world of the powerless" (4). Marquez's hierarchizing of reality – which is thus often associated with the Western world – over magic – associated with

the Third World – displays the power-relations that many postcolonial writers struggled with. Interpretations of magical realism as a constant battle between opposing systems can therefore be very helpful when considering postcolonial issues.

Hart does not focus on merely the postcolonial use of magical realism, but together with Ouyang he shows different types of analyses and applications that are being offered. In fact, what is particularly insightful about their book is that its introductory part portrays two of the main types of scholarship that can be found about magical realism: a more technical discussion of its style and features – written by Hart – and a more ideologically and sociologically inspired commentary – written by Ouyang. It is this last ideological type of scholarship that for a large part covers postcolonial readings of magical realism, and shows how the choice of non-Latin American writers to incorporate the mode in their fiction both initiated a renewed use of, and interest in the mode, but has also led to some issues of too restricted interpretations.

As Ouyang shows, writers and scholars working within the two main theoretical frameworks of the late 20th and early 21st century, postmodernism and postcolonialism, have shown great interest in magical realism and have adapted it to discuss reality. “Whether this reality is the postmodern of the so-called ‘First World’ or the postcolonial of the ‘Third World’,” argues Ouyang, “politics and aesthetics intersect in such a way that the text comes to be a map of conflicting ideologies and desires” (16). It is not only the postcolonial writer who uses magical realism in his/her work, it is also the postcolonial scholar who finds it an interesting lens through which to discuss our contemporary world.

Contemporary Magical Realism

Magical realism is thus no longer considered to be purely Latin American but has shown to be useful to postcolonial authors who write outside that geographic area as well. Moreover, it is not merely authors from areas that have experienced the process of colonization, but also from cultures that have experienced similar repression, such as the Jewish people, who use the mode. It seems to be used mostly by writers who want to express the experience of belonging to, and identifying with different cultures and nations.

As has been said in relation to Warnes's discussion of the genre, and has been pointed out by Hart and Ouyang as well, we should be careful not to automatically label an author of contemporary magical realist fiction as a postcolonial writer who wants to display the position of 'the underdog'. As has been explained in this chapter, there are many different forms of magical realism that borrow from each other across nations, cultures, and other borders, and that are being used to describe a wide range of issues.

In fact, the next two chapters will analyze two very different examples of contemporary fiction in which magical realism is employed to depict the lives of characters who indeed inhabit several cultures and nations. Because *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* come from two very different cultural backgrounds – respectively European Jewish Orthodoxy and the Dominican Republic – they are great examples to illustrate the diversity of magical realism that has already been explained by its theoretical framework in this chapter. The other way around, it will also be shown how the use of magical realism in these novels helps Goldstein and Diaz create characters and situations in which cultural diversity is not only highlighted, but also used to experiment with cross-border identification.

Important to note is that neither *Mazel* nor *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are full-blown magical realist novels. Both authors use literary techniques that are typical for magical realism, but the novels are not magical realist from beginning to ending. It is therefore fairer to claim that Goldstein and Diaz employ a magical realist mode, instead of saying that they have written magical realist novels. As I will show, by using the mode only in specific sections of their novels, the authors actually enhance its effect.

In Goldstein's case this means that she only uses the magical realist mode in the sections in which she describes her protagonist's 'old' life in a Polish shtetl, which emphasizes the distance between this shtetl-life and the life the protagonist later leads in the US. Some of the literary devices that are being employed most often in magical realist fiction are writing stories within stories, employing the doubling or duplicating of characters, and giving metaphorical images lives of their own, regardless of referential reality (Faris 164). Moreover, Geoff Hancock mentions "Levels of language, layers of formal and informal diction, doubles, transformations" (qtd. in Schroeder, 14). Goldstein especially uses the doubling of characters, but also tells many different stories within the larger story of the novel, and how this enhances her depiction fluid characters and transnational relations will be explored in the next chapter.

As for Diaz, his selective use of magical realist techniques is not only a counterpart to his incorporation of elements of popular American culture, but is also a reflection on the tradition of magical realism in Latin American fiction. Writing from the Dominican diaspora in the US, Diaz directly references Marquez in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and he also mentions a group of contemporary Latin American writers who argued for a break with magical realism because it would stereotype South America too much. While he uses the mode to establish

transnational relations between the Dominican Republic and the US, he simultaneously contributes to the theoretical discussions of what magical realism is and what it stands for.

Chapter 3

The Dynamic of Distance in Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel*

Remembering and longing and grieving and imagining. One soul's language never fully renderable to another, untranslatability always imposing itself between us, enclosing the vastness of untraversable distances. What can we do but try and imagine, and in the imagining, the *felt need* for imagining, acknowledge the impossibility of ever fully knowing? (Goldstein "An Afterword" 368)

In the 2001-afterword to her novel *Mazel*, Goldstein discusses some of her reasons to write the book, and to write fiction in general. The quote above sums up her foremost motivations, namely the power of imagination in the never-ending process of getting to know oneself and another. Her belief in the resourcefulness of imagination is especially meaningful because Goldstein is not only a writer of fiction but also thinks and writes on a more scientific level as a professor of philosophy and publisher of non-fiction works in the field of philosophy. She thus has several platforms and means through which she can express her thoughts on those connections between people she mentions in the quote above, and she sees imagination as a *necessity* when doing so.

Not only does imagination play an important role in her fiction, many of her characters, settings, and story-lines are also based on, or inspired by her own experiences¹⁹, as she explains in her afterword. Moreover, her scientific background in philosophy and mathematics is also incorporated in her creative writing and it is this mixture of personal experience, thorough philosophical knowledge, and imagination that makes up *Mazel*.

Goldstein was born and raised in the US and is therefore not a migrant herself.

¹⁹ In "An Interview with Rebecca Goldstein" in Ezra Capell's book *American Talmud*, Goldstein shortly talks about her family history, and the resemblances of the places and people she mentions to some of the places and characters in *Mazel* are undeniable.

However, being the daughter of a Polish father and a Hungarian mother who migrated as Jews to the US before World War II, she grew up as a second-generation immigrant and consequently experienced many of the struggles of her parents. This migration from pre-WW II Europe to the US is the same journey as the main character in *Mazel* makes, which is one of the reasons why it can be described as migrant-fiction.

Indeed, *Mazel* depicts the journey from the European continent to the US that many Jewish immigrants made in the first half of the 20th century. The reader encounters both the ‘Old World’ and the ‘New World’ in *Mazel*, in which three generations of women are being depicted. The actual journey is made by the oldest female character Sasha, who is the main protagonist of the novel, and her daughter Chloe and granddaughter Phoebe grow up in and around New York City. We only read about Phoebe and Chloe in the opening- and closing-parts of *Mazel*, which are also the only parts set in modern-day New York. The middle sections describe Sasha’s childhood in the Polish shtetl where she grew up, their family’s move to Warsaw where she joins a theatre company, the company’s travels through Lithuania, and Sasha’s final journey to the US.

Not only are the parts set in the US, and those set in Europe far-removed from each other because they take place in different time-frames, there is also a division between them because in the European sections we encounter magical realism, whereas we do not find any magical realist techniques in the New York chapters. Especially those chapters that take place in the shtetl Schluftehev employ magical realism as a literary technique that blurs the lines between natural and supernatural occurrences, and this only enhances the image Chloe has of Shluftehev as “that *mythological* place where her mother had begun her own life” (336; emphasis added). Although the novel does not fit into one of the ‘typical’ magical realist categories of Latin-American or

postcolonial fiction, it very clearly uses the mode in several sections of the novel and I will highlight some of those passages.

Looking back at the previous chapter, it is important to remember how it was established that magical realism is often used to represent two different, often seemingly incompatible worlds at the same time. Indeed, Carpentier is convinced magical realism can bring certain European truths to Latin American culture, and Hart explains how postcolonial writers use the mode to describe the relation between the ‘first’ and the ‘third’ world. I set out in this thesis to discover whether Goldstein and Diaz use the mode to emphasize the distance between those worlds, or rather to bridge it, and in any case, it can be argued that in *Mazel*, the traditions of the old European Jewry are being contrasted with the fast-paced contemporary life-style in the US.

I want to show how Goldstein simultaneously emphasizes this contrast by only using magical realist techniques in the middle sections of the novel, and bridges the distance that is consequently created by letting Phoebe identify with her grandmother’s heritage. Phoebe establishes connections that do not comply with the geographical and cultural borders that lie between her life in the US and Sasha’s youth in Poland.

In the first part of this chapter, I will give a close-reading of two passages in which the magical realist mode is being used primarily by blurring the lines between ‘natural’ and ‘magical’ events, and by incorporating Jewish myths into the daily life of the characters. It will be explained how this fits in with Joost Krijnen’s theory of the ‘dynamic of distance’ that many contemporary Jewish authors use. In the second part, I will show how Goldstein nevertheless bridges the distance that is being created between the different worlds by letting some of the magical elements return in Sasha’s offspring’s characters. This part also focusses more on the identification-process between migrating family members, showing how Sasha’s cultural and

religious upbringing returns in the born-and-raised American Phoebe. Although Sasha has tried to abandon her Jewish-Polish past and upbringing and professes she is a true New Yorker, her granddaughter Phoebe seems to be able to identify with Sasha's past *and* her contemporary American life, and both those worlds are incorporated in her character and therewith Goldstein establishes relations across the geographical and temporal borders that separate Phoebe from her grandmother's heritage.

Magical Realism in *Mazel*

As has been explained, *Mazel* is divided into different parts. In total, there are five parts that all start with a page with a place-name on it – 'Lipton, New Jersey'; 'Shluftchev, Galicia'; 'Warsaw, Poland' etcetera. Every different part also has one page on which part of a Yiddish folktale about Mazel (Yiddish for 'luck') and Saychel (Yiddish for 'brains') is told, and this folktale can be seen as a sort of overarching framework of the story, considering the title of the novel. The role mazel plays will be touched upon later in this chapter. The passage that will be analyzed here is from the second part of the novel which is set in Shluftchev, Galicia and describes part of Sorel's (later Sasha) childhood. We have learned in the first part that the aged Sasha has fervently tried to abandon her Jewish Orthodox past and that she has made a life for herself in the US: "Sasha's not what you would call a tradition-bound woman. Raised as a child in an atmosphere made unbreathable by piety and ritual, she had taken no small pleasure in breaking the tiresome taboos with as much noise and commotion as she could muster" (19). She herself has been part of an esteemed avant-garde theatre-group, has given birth to her daughter Chloe, who is a professor of classic languages at Columbia University, and now her granddaughter Phoebe, who is a professor of mathematics at Princeton University, is expecting a child herself.

In the second part of the novel, we then go back in time to the 1920s where Sasha's childhood in Poland is depicted. Stories about her parents and grandparents are interwoven with the stories about her own growing up in a *shtetl*, and the paragraphs that will be looked at describe a scene of the life of Sasha's father Nachum and his mother and stepmother. As a young boy, Nachum is very bright and loves to study the Torah. His mother, Fraydel Sonnenberg, dies when Nachum is still very young, and his father soon marries his second wife, whose name is also Fraydel. When the second Fraydel starts worrying about Nachum's future, the following happens:

And there, deep in prayer beneath the canopy, stood her own stepson Nachum, dressed in the simple shroudlike robe in which Jewish boys are married, in order both to remind them of the day of their earthly end and to trick the Angel of Death into staying away from the joy he's always anxious to spoil. At Nachum's side, on a beautifully carved throne of silver, rested the holy scroll of the Law, arrayed like a bride in gleaming white satin embroidered in gold, and engulfed in a bride's own aura of radiance.

So it was that the first Fraydel Sonnenberg had made known to the second Fraydel Sonnenberg her will concerning Nachum.

When the rest of the shtetl learned of what had happened in the night to Fraydel Sonnenberg, they all decided to contribute a certain amount yearly so that Nachum Sonnenberg might be able to go off and continue his studies. The first Fraydel Sonnenberg, having spoken her will concerning her son from beyond the grave, was never seen again, but slept in peace. (92)

The three succeeding paragraphs are all set in a different place and time, or have a different atmosphere to them, but the transition from one world to another is never clearly distinguished.

In the first paragraph, a third-person narrator describes the appearances of objects and people in detail: a young boy, Nachum, stands under a wedding-canopy and is ready to be married to a Torah. All this is reported matter-of-factly, but the scene is not unrealistic or dreamlike and mystical, while it is highly unrealistic that a boy marries a Torah. Thus, although the slightly unrealistic content does not match up with the realistic style of narration, nothing hints at this discrepancy, and the paragraphs that follow maintain this style.

The next sentence, which is a paragraph in itself, is a straightforward statement that seems to conclude the wedding-passage. It appears that the wedding is something that “the first Fraydel Sonnenberg” has used to convey her plans for Nachum to “the second Fraydel Sonnenberg.” Without the context of the story, it is difficult to imagine how someone can use a wedding to show her plans for her son, but a page earlier we have read that “only moments after Fraydel [the second] sank exhausted into her bed and closed her eyes, a woman [the first Fraydel] appeared before her” (91). The wedding thus seems to be a dream of the second Fraydel Sonnenberg, in which case the strange events of the union of a boy and a book, and the instructions of a dead woman to a living one would make more sense.

However, it is never explicitly mentioned that the second Fraydel is indeed asleep or that the first Fraydel comes to her in a dream. Instead, the actions of the two women are described as if the second Fraydel indeed physically gets up from her bed and walks with the first Fraydel, and even their manner of walking is described in detail: “soundless,” “silently,” “quickly,” “hurriedly” (91). Moreover, there is no clear formal or thematic transition between the two realities of sleeping and being awake in the two paragraphs discussed. Indeed, the third-person narrator continues his/her chronological, descriptive account of events as if all has taken place in the same dimension.

This continuous third-person narration can be seen as a technique that enhances the blurring of boundaries between reality and magic in *Mazel*. In her work on magical realism, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady introduces the concept of ‘authorial reticence’ which is the “deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world” (16). She argues that the most powerful reticence is when an author or narrator intentionally leaves out an explanation about anything magic or fantastical, and stoically continues his or her story. The narrator in *Mazel* indeed never emphasizes the strangeness of the events he/she narrates and this makes it easier for the reader to accept the magical as realistic.

By maintaining the third-person narrator throughout the narrative, Goldstein tricks the reader into acceding a dreamlike story to be just as “true” as the actions of people from an Eastern-European *shtetl* that supposedly took place about a century ago. Indeed, in the third paragraph of the excerpt, we encounter the rest of the inhabitants of Fraydel’s and Nachum’s *shtetl* who hold the first Fraydel’s instructions “from beyond the grave” to be so true as to act upon them by collectively supporting Nachum financially in his studies. The account of one woman’s nightly and unrealistic experience is enough to convince a whole village of the necessity to give money. The financial support enables Nachum to go study with a famous rabbi whose daughter, Leiba, he then eventually marries. From this marriage comes a baby called Sorel whose life we then follow throughout most of the book.

Tracing it back this far, Sasha’s existence thus actually relies on the passage that has just been described: if the village had not supported Nachum financially he probably had not ended up meeting Leiba, and Sasha would not have been born. Her origins thus lie in this story that sounds like one of those popular stories that are being retold from generation to generation in rural villages, but Goldstein chooses to represent and tell this mythical story as if it was factual

and part of 'real' history. Even more so, because of the detailed place-names and dates in each part of the novel, we are first led to believe that this might be a historical novel, and that its content somehow holds some historic 'truth'. However, the folktale that starts each of the five sections simultaneously disturbs this expectation: "Mazel, which is luck in Yiddish, encountered Saychel, or brains, on the road one day, and the two fell into a conversation" (1). Goldstein constantly puts her readers on a different track about the realism of her fiction, and this can be seen as one of the traits of magical realist fiction.

Another instance of the blurring of magic and realism appears earlier in the novel when we read about Leiba's father Rav Dovid, who was a highly esteemed scholar and studied the mysteries of Cabala. The third-person narrator tells us how Rav Dovid came to learn that Cabala can only be studied by a mature mind: A young student once lost his mind after studying the Cabala too early in his life, leaving him to think a chamber pot was his lost skullcap. Next, we read the following passage:

One night, sitting before his study table, he [Rav Dovid] had heard a sharp rap at the window just behind him.

It was an hour deep in the night, in the bitter-cold month of Shvat.

Rav Dovid turned around and saw staring at him the face of a man he himself had buried some years before.

Rav Dovid bent to pick up from the floor the holy volume he had dropped and softly kissed it. Only then did he go to the front door. (59)

In this passage, yet another dead person appears before a living character, and yet again the narration continues in the same casualness as in the previous passage. In no way is it acknowledged that the appearance of a buried man is unrealistic, or is any different from sitting

at a table or walking towards a door. We even learn such realistic details as in which month, and at what time of the night the instance takes place.

When Rav Dovid opens the door, the dead man asks to be reburied because his grave is in unholy ground and now his soul can find no rest. The Rav asks him to speak quietly because otherwise he might wake up his wife, which again attests to the fact that the dead man is being considered as just as real as the living and not just a figment of Rav's imagination. The next day, Rav Dovid is seen returning to the village with a shovel early in the morning, implying that he took the dead man's wish to heart and reburied him. Just as in the previous passage, the visit of a dead person spurs living people to action but nothing in the narration or description points to the unnaturalness of this.

Moreover, by using the mysterious learning of Cabala in this passage, Cabala being a Jewish tradition that is permeated with magic and supernaturalism, Goldstein fits in with Carolin Rody's claim that "We can locate the roots of contemporary Jewish magical realism [...] in a magical play of moral forces indigenous to traditional Jewish culture" (42). The author merges Jewish supernatural traditions with realistic descriptions and a stoic narrator, which is disorienting for the reader because there is no longer one certain truth to follow or to believe. At the same time however, this obscuring of the confines of reality also makes the transition from one reality to another easier for the reader.

Whereas the older Sasha is determined to break away from her traditional, Jewish heritage, her younger self Sorel is still embedded in the *shtetl*-life. Throughout the second section of the novel, when she is still a child, this embeddedness can be found in short comments on Sorel's character and her beliefs. For example, Sorel thinks that "The night outside was a black ocean, alive with roaming demons" (54), she is convinced that "Her mother's voice has powers

of keeping the uninvited from venturing across the threshold” (54), and she believes her sister’s stories about “forms of darkness who roam the night” (117). It is only after her beloved sister Fraydel, whose “heart was in love only with what was marvelous and strange” (128), commits suicide that Sorel decides to “step out of that unlit place where she had tried to cling to her sister” and instead to “choose life” (165). This “unlit place” of myth and magic can be considered to refer to the actual *shtetl* and its traditions. Sorel decides to leave behind that world where people cling to the dead, as we have seen in the two excerpts analyzed above, and to start choosing life. She will keep this extreme attitude against her old life throughout the rest of the novel, but as we will see, some aspects of that life stay with her for the better and even return in Phoebe’s character.

These examples all show how Goldstein depicts the magic traditions of the *shtetl*-life without explaining or mentioning transgressions from one reality to another. The description of Sasha’s growing up in Eastern Europe in the 1920s is one of the most important sections of the novel because it gives an impression of the European *shtetl*-life as infused with myth and magic, and it describes how and why she decides to leave that place. The difference between this world and the world she eventually ends up in, modern-day US, is definitely extensive and it is this distance, both geographically and culturally, that Goldstein enhances with the magical realist techniques.

By doing so, she partly fits into a trend that the Dutch scholar Joost Krijnen notices in the works of authors such as Jonathan Safran Foer, Michael Chabon, Nicole Krauss, and Nathan Englander. In his dissertation about contemporary Jewish American fiction, Krijnen finds that all these writers are rather controversial in their fictional representations of the Holocaust, which are often humoristic and fantastical narratives that do not concur with the common view of the

Holocaust as ‘unrepresentable’²⁰. Rather than adhering to the tradition of ‘Holocaust piety’, a term that Gillian Rose coined in 1996 to refer to the rhetoric of ineffability that surrounds the Holocaust-discourse, these authors prefer an *impious* approach to the Holocaust in their literature.

Krijnen argues that

a dismissal of these works of Holocaust impiety as perverse exploitations of memory would fail to do justice to the very complexity and significance of these cultural expressions: it is precisely by means of their incongruous and often irreverent engagements with the Holocaust that these works offer and provoke reflections on such matters as the nature of memory, its relation to identity, as well as the problematics and possibilities of representation. (13)

Throughout his dissertation, he investigates several works of literature by the four above-mentioned authors to support his claims and develops a theory about what he calls “the dynamic of distance” (110). In his analysis he shows that many contemporary Jewish American authors try to “make sense of the Holocaust” (110) by highlighting the *distance* between the American 21st century and the Holocaust, rather than by trying to evoke a realistic, historically annotated image of the Holocaust’s time and space. In order to do so, many of them make use of (Yiddish) folktales and traditions of story-telling. Often multiple storylines that are set in different times and spaces are interwoven, and distinctions between fiction and reality are often highlighted and exaggerated.

²⁰ See for example Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* for a discussion of the ‘unspeakability’ and ‘unrepresentability’ of trauma.

These are features that cannot only be found in contemporary Holocaust-fiction, but also more generally in contemporary Jewish American writing.²¹ In the previous analysis we have seen that Goldstein indeed uses myth and story-telling to depict European Jewish life around the time of the Holocaust and in the next section we will see how modern-day US is contrasted to this life. There is a clear gap between the two worlds in *Mazel* and Goldstein thus adheres to Krijnen's 'dynamic of distance' by highlighting that gap.

However, one of Krijnen's main arguments, namely the *impious* ways in which the Holocaust is being represented in those novels he discusses, does not adhere to Goldstein's novel at all. Although the Holocaust is eventually the main reason for Sasha's migration to the US, it only features implicitly in *Mazel*. It is never mentioned specifically and Goldstein says in an interview with Jessica Lang that she "won't write about the Holocaust directly" because "There should be more taboos around this subject" (4). She notices the same trend of Holocaust-representation that Krijnen notices, but feels that it "borders on the offensive" and that "It becomes an excuse for all sorts of fantasy" (4). With that statement Goldstein thus places herself in stark contrast to the writers Krijnen writes about, who create in their fiction "irreverent engagements with the Holocaust".

Goldstein does emphasize the distance between modern-day US and wartime Europe for Jews, thus employing Krijnen's 'dynamic of distance', but its effect is not an attempt to 'make sense' of the Holocaust. As we will see later on, that distance is actually also subtly closed throughout the novel, thus merging the past with the present. By not focusing on the traumatic event that has forced Sasha to migrate but rather on the individual process of leaving behind an

²¹ NB: Krijnen rightly points out that a work of literature does not have to mention the Holocaust specifically or let it play a major part to be considered Holocaust-literature. Indeed, it is often the presence of the Holocaust lingering in the background of a novel that emphasizes the dynamic of distance.

old place and encountering a new one, the novel arguably tries more to help 'make sense' of the more universally lived process of migration than the specific event of the Holocaust.

There is definitely a 'side-track' that refers to the cultural trauma, but the individual trauma plays a more important role, and especially the imagining of how that trauma can be resolved or 'worked through'. I will not incorporate an in-depth discussion of cultural memory and trauma but it is important to point out that indeed both in *Mazel* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a large traumatic event or period is at the core of the action, and is in both cases the ultimate motivation for migration. Although Diaz is very explicit in his description of the dictatorship that ruled the Dominican Republic and Goldstein is his opposite by hardly referring to the Holocaust, both their characters have violence as the driving force behind their migration.

For Sasha it is not just a forced migration, because as has been shown, she actively decides she wants to leave her shtetl. Her family initially moves to Warsaw where she finds the opportunity to develop her passion for theatre. This move away is then extended to the extreme when Sasha is actually forced to leave Poland entirely because of the threat of the German army. She initially flees to Palestine but after a short stay she moves to New York.

Thus the push-factor of her migration is indeed violence but there is also a drive inside her that makes her receptive of change and makes her want to move to the country that is the symbol of opportunity and change. In the next section it will be shown how that clear gap between the magic of the old world Europe and the new world in the US is bridged. While Sasha hopes to break with the ties that connect her to her 'old' country, we will see that some elements of that cultural heritage are still embedded within her and connect her Polish shtetl-life to her life in New York. This transnational connection is reinforced by Phoebe's interest in Jewish

Orthodoxy and her identification with her grandmother's cultural heritage ensures a fluidity in her character that connects her across the borders that Sasha has tried to permanently cross.

Crossing the Distance

As has been shown in the previous section, in the middle-parts of her novel, Goldstein depicts an image of a world that in many ways stands in contrast to contemporary US-life. She uses the typically magical realist literary devices of blurring boundaries and representing the magical as realistic, and by combining magic and realism in such a way that they appear to be similar realities she makes it easier for the reader to engage with this part of the story and to relate to the characters and events, however distant they may be from their own reality. Thus, it could be argued that in the chapters that are set in the past, or in the 'Old World', Goldstein uses magical realist techniques to represent Jewish traditions of myths and story-telling of rural shtetl-life in Poland.

However, the magical realist mode as a helpful tool is disturbed when comparing the sections in which it is used to the opening and closing sections of the novel. The opening and closing sections of the novel are set in Lipton, New Jersey, in what I assume is the 1990s²², and it shows the older Sasha with her daughter Chloe and her granddaughter Phoebe. We learn that Phoebe has been married for a year now and is expecting her first child. Everything is told by a third-person narrator with Sasha as the focalizer, and although the entire section only describes one afternoon, there are many flashbacks and flash forwards in which we learn much about the three generations of women and their lives in New York. The closing section of the novel is set a

²² Chloe tells Phoebe how she chose to become a single mother in 1964. At the time of narrating, Phoebe is a tenured professor at Princeton and expecting a child so we can assume she is at least halfway through, or in the end of her twenties. This means that it is thus approximately 25 to 30 years later, making it safe to say that the setting of the story is the 1990s.

year back in time compared to the opening section, namely just before, and on Phoebe's wedding-day. Just as in the opening section, the narration goes backward and forward, informing the reader about Chloe's childhood, Sasha's late husband, and Sasha's first years in New York.

In both sections, no magical events or objects are to be found directly, which clearly distinguishes them from the middle sections. Indeed, the opening section and the closing section are more realist fiction than magical realist because they give a much more straightforward image of the three women's lives in the US without the interference of supernatural beings and events. However, Goldstein subtly cross-references the two worlds, and by doing so she establishes ties between the two worlds that transcend the borders between them. It is with small references to the magical occurrences in the middle sections that Goldstein continues to implicitly incorporate the supernatural aspects in the opening and closing sections, thereby crossing the space and time that divides Polish shtetl-life from contemporary US-life.

She does so, firstly, by circulating some specific characteristics through the generations of Sasha's family. As has been highlighted previously, Sasha has radically tried to break with the traditions from her Jewish Orthodox background, and professes that she has hardly ever felt like an immigrant but "that somehow or other she was a born New Yorker" (7). Chloe is described as being very similar to her mother: both love to travel but will never want to live anywhere but in Manhattan. Maurice, Sasha's husband and Chloe's father, also comes from a Jewish family in Poland, but Chloe does not identify with their Jewish background, and only has an

elusive sense of herself as Jewish. Her mother and father had lived through extraordinary events, largely because they had been born into a Europe in which being Jewish was no incidental feature in a person's biography. The world from which [their] stories had derived had always seemed so remote to Chloe, existing almost at the level of mythology.

And this was true even though Chloe, of course, had been conceived right in the middle of all that inconceivable history, just as the old world had come crashing down around her father and mother. (335)

This passage describes how distant Chloe feels from her parents' background and how Jewishness used to be "incidental," whereas nowadays, it apparently is much more significant when someone identifies as Jewish. It is therefore, and also because Sasha and Chloe both do not practice any kind of Judaism, that it surprises them so much that Phoebe decides to convert to Orthodoxy.

Phoebe is described throughout the book as being different from the rest of her family, both in outer appearance, and inner life. Indeed, "Chloe was [...] highly accustomed to being somewhat mystified by her daughter. Phoebe, even as a child, had combined an almost aggressive streak of logic [...] with something almost impossibly tender. The logic didn't exhaust what there was to Phoebe. There always had been some unplumbable realm in Phoebe" (337). She is thus described as combining two extreme characteristics and this already hints at the fluidity of her character. When Sasha finds out that Phoebe has decided to keep kosher, the first radical step she makes towards Orthodoxy, Sasha is baffled: "'I can't *understand* you!' Sasha had greeted her. 'You're an educated woman! A *professor*! Why would you want to start up all over again with those *old ways*?''" (338). For Sasha, the Jewish traditions from her childhood that she has so fervently tried to escape are irreconcilable with a modern, educated mind. As a response, Phoebe tells Sasha that she has always identified with the dead man from the story about Rav Dovid, who said that "even the dead need the comfort of their own kind" (338), showing how she identifies with Sasha's old Jewish community and feels like she belongs there.

It could be argued that Phoebe is an example of Marcus Lee Hansen's theory about third-generation immigrants that "the grandson wishes to remember what the son preferred to forget" (Appel 3). In the 1930s, Hansen described the pattern of behavior of third-generation immigrants who show a revived interest in their ancestor's past, and with her conversion to Orthodox Judaism, Phoebe can indeed be seen to answer to this theory. Whereas Sasha desperately wanted to break free from the restrictions of her Orthodox background in Shluftchev, her granddaughter chooses to marry into an Orthodox family and moves to Lipton, which merely "is Shluftchev with a designer label" according to Sasha (333). She thus returns to a modern version of her grandmother's origins and traditions, reestablishing relations that cross the borders of time and space.

As has been mentioned previously, one of the literary techniques that is often used in magical realist fiction is doubling or duplicating characters. The use of this device is another way in which Goldstein creates ties between the European continent and the US. For example, Sasha's sister Fraydel can also be found in America quite literally because Phoebe often reminds Sasha of Fraydel. Sitting in the backyard of Phoebe's house in Lipton, Sasha reminisces that "There had been times when a certain look on Pheobe's [*sic*] face—or something she'd said, at odds with the world – would make Sasha fleetingly think that the child really *was* Fraydel" (17). Fraydel, the character who is strongly associated with the supernatural, indeed whose "heart was in love only with what was marvelous and strange" (128), is doubled in Phoebe. By doubling certain characteristics of two different characters, Goldstein leaves traces of magic and the supernatural attached to Phoebe without putting her directly in magical situations and events.

The last major red thread that follows Sasha and her family throughout the story is *mazel*. There are a few instances in the novel where Sasha experiences a loss of language and has to

resort to a “bone-crushing hug.” In two of those instances, the shortcomings of language that Sasha experiences are initiated by a reference to *mazel*, which is of course also the title of the novel. *Mazel* is found throughout the entire novel and it is an important theme for Sasha. Although she has deliberately left the Old World behind, her belief in *mazel* remains with her for the rest of her life in the New World.

It is difficult to categorize *mazel* as either realism or magic because it is indeed based on beliefs and imagination. I will not try to categorize it as either one, but it can be easily connected to the Jewish life of the ‘old world’. Not only is *mazel* the protagonist of the Yiddish folktale that connects the five parts of the novel to each other, it also seems as if for Sasha, it functions as a counterpart to the rationalized Western world: “*Mazel*, as Sasha expounds it, is the great confounder of closed systems and their pretenders. *Mazel* is the imp of metaphysics” (5). Although she lives a comfortable life in the US, Sasha is still connected to both worlds until her old days: on the one hand, when she came to New York she decided that she was made for this city, being thrilled by its vibrant life and theatrical opportunities, but on the other hand she cannot get rid of some of the beliefs and traditions that her European shtetl have left her with, whether she wants it or not.

Identifying and Belonging

As we have seen in the previous chapter in Hart’s exploration of magical realism, and also in Boehmer’s analysis, at the core of many magical realist works is the constant struggle of having two worlds that seem to be very far-removed from each other, simultaneously pulling at a character. As a similar theme, Rody claims that contemporary Jewish American writers try “to cross the enormous gap that separates them from the world they would seek to reclaim” (56) and

I think Goldstein's *Mazel* certainly is one of those attempts. *Mazel* cannot be called a fully-fledged magical realist novel, considering the differences between the sections that are set in the New World and those set in the Old World, and the lack of direct magical appearances in the opening and closing section of *Mazel*. However, Goldstein does use magical realist techniques that help her emphasize the difference between the two worlds her characters inhabit, and simultaneously to bridge that distance by establishing cross-border relations in the fluid character of Phoebe.

By using the magical realist mode, Goldstein tries to bridge the gap between Sasha's past and present, her physical and non-physical worlds, her geographic and temporal distances, her different places of belonging. Simultaneously, she emphasizes this distance by contrasting the Old World and the New World with each other in chapter-limitations and in style and mode of writing. This paradoxical process is exemplary of the dynamics of migrating and trying to identify with sometimes clashing cultural and individual values and ways of living. Although Goldstein recreates this experience through all the different techniques that have been discussed, she does not directly confront her protagonist with the actual struggles that can occur after moving to a different country. Her description of Sasha's life in the US is devoid of any actual hardship while we do encounter struggles in the passages set in Poland.

Goldstein's portrait of the individual Sasha shows how ties to an initial 'home' can loosen but will stay with you nevertheless, and her portrait of Phoebe shows how old ties and relations can be recreated and become new again. Sasha's situation is especially interesting because in her case it is not necessarily her ties with Poland or with a specific Polish national culture that are being stretched. Instead, it are the ties to Jewish Orthodoxy and the way it was lived in pre-war Europe that she brings with her during her journey. In an article on homemaking

in *Mazel*, Helene Meyers argues that Goldstein “structurally refuses to sentimentalize Eastern Europe as a monolithic, prefabricated Jewish homeland” (135), and by staying away from reinforcing stereotypes like that, Goldstein creates the space to experiment with fluidity and transnational relations. Neither her fictional places, nor her characters can be typecast as prototypes for what constitutes Jewishness, sentimental longing for the homeland from the diaspora, or professors of mathematics. She goes beyond categorizations and depicts how different sentiments and heritages can ensure an identification that is established despite borders.

Indeed, *Mazel* paints the life of an individual who feels connected to the different faces of her country of origin – Sasha thrives in the more modern and cultural city-life of Warsaw, but also still represents certain beliefs of her rural *shtetl*-life – and simultaneously to the different countries she inhabits. She depicts characters who do not have an aggressive and “totalitarian” root that keeps pulling them back and obstructs them from identifying with other places and cultures, but instead they may have a network of flexible roots, or a rhizome.

When considering the downside of migration and integration, it could be argued that the novel may lack a certain ‘hard’ reality in that sense that Goldstein avoids addressing the Holocaust in detail and does not focus on the struggle of integrating into an essentially different cultural system directly. This decision to leave out certain things or to enhance others, is however one of the exact reasons that literature can actually go beyond theoretical and political experiments. It can conceptualize models of how to live with certain situations and how to find a voice of expression for certain experiences, without necessarily emphasizing those situations and experiences. Although not directly addressing the Holocaust and Sasha’s forced migration, Goldstein still conveys the struggles and hardships her characters have had to go through and offers a fictional model to try and make sense of those experiences.

Mazel serves as a non-theoretical illustration to the theoretical proposals and discussion of fluid identity and relational transnationalism. In the next chapter I will analyze how Diaz illustrates these issues in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and also take the way he deals with the traumatic experiences of his characters into consideration.

Chapter 4

Writing as Reconciliation: How Different Worlds Meet in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Junot Diaz moved from the Dominican Republic to the US when he was 7 years old, so his position as a US-author is inevitably informed by his Dominican background, and he can thus be said to already write from a transnational position. His choice to, amongst other things, reproduce a part of Dominican history in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, while also setting significant parts of the novel in the US, only emphasizes his cross-border transnational perspective. The novel simultaneously paints the picture of the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the first half of the 20th century, and the personal story of a first-generation Dominican-American boy and his family's history of migration. Living and writing from the US diaspora, Diaz holds a position towards his native country the Dominican Republic that is refracted via border-crossing, and his novel partly reflects on the negotiation between different cultures one experiences when belonging to several places and culture.

Diaz portrays the shifting between cultures in *Oscar Wao*, and a central theme of the novel is the constant rethinking of identity that takes place as a consequence of this shifting. He embodies the constant renegotiation of cultural identification not only by using Spanish and English alternately, but also by referencing literary traditions from the two main cultures his characters identify with: he incorporates elements from the traditional Latin American magical realism we have encountered in chapter two, and simultaneously brings in popular American culture by quoting works of sci-fi and referring to the fictional worlds of superheroes.

As will be shown in this chapter, Diaz shows the complexity of migrant experiences by depicting several generations not as a harmonious entity, but instead as conflicting characters

with colliding dreams and aspirations. We will see how he creates the stubborn Belicia, who is forced to leave the Dominican Republic due to impending violence and who frenetically tries to maintain her “Dominicanness” while raising her children Oscar and Lola in a ghetto in New York. Her children, as the first generation of Dominican-Americans in the novel, however, are not as devoted to keeping with the image of Dominican life as their mother is. Especially Lola starts rebelling against her mother, whom she refers to as her “Old World Dominican mother ... which meant it was her duty to keep me crushed under her heel” (55). Indeed, Lola feels that being “the perfect Dominican daughter” was actually “just a nice way of saying a perfect Dominican slave” (56) and goes head to head with Belicia any given opportunity.

Caught between his strict mother Belicia and his rebellious sister Lola, we then find Oscar who struggles with fitting in. Not only is he a fat nerdy boy who does not fit in at his high school, he is also not “one of those Dominican cats everybody’s always going on about” (11), mainly meaning that he is not very successful with women. His love for fantasy genres and his lack of success with girls ensure that he is not considered as “your typical Dominican male” (19), and that he even “Couldn’t have passed for Normal if he’d wanted to” (21). He struggles to develop and to identify as a young man in American society while simultaneously being influenced by his Dominican heritage, and he constantly has to renegotiate between American and Dominican culture. His main way of escaping the dismal reality of growing up as “the fat lonely nerdy kid he was,” (19) is by reading fantasy genres, and by writing fiction himself. In fact, his aspiration to become the “Dominican J.R.R. Tolkien” shows his inherent longing for the merging of the different frameworks of reference he has. Although his story ends sadly, Diaz still depicts Oscar as striving for a fluid way of identifying that includes both his Dominican background and his contemporary American life.

In the previous chapter I have tried to describe how Goldstein depicts a migrant-experience that spreads its influence of cross-border, rhizomed identification through several generations. In this chapter I will focus on the ways in which Diaz also establishes a relation across the geographical and cultural borders between Belicia and Oscar, even despite the fact that the ending of this novel is not as rose-colored as *Mazel's*²³.

First, I will give a short account of the framework and setting of the novel. I will then describe Belicia's journey from the backlands of the Dominican Republic to the ghettos of New York, and show how she tries to enforce her rather strict Dominican values on her children. This will be followed by a section in which I will highlight how writing and language function as a way of relating across borders. Not only are Oscar's literary projects a way of reconciling his family's history, also Diaz's use of language throughout the novel serves as a mechanism to make the reader aware of cross-cultural and cross-border relations. In the last section, the role of fantasy genres and magical realism in the novel will be discussed, amongst others by close-reading the section that leads up to Belicia's leaving the Dominican Republic. I will then also explain in more detail how the use of these magical realist elements positions Diaz both within and against a group of Latin American writers that calls themselves the McOndo-group and who criticize the use of traditional Latin American magical realism.

Connecting Generations through Fukú

As has been shown, *Mazel* can be used as an example of how magical realism is subtly used to depict a rhizomed migrant-identity. Whereas Goldstein decides not to explicitly mention the

²³ Whereas we are left with an image of Sasha, Chloe, and Phoebe seemingly living happily ever after, Oscar and Belicia are both no longer alive at the end of Diaz's novel; Oscar has been killed and Belicia has died of cancer. Only Lola and Yuniór continue their lives beyond the ending of the novel, but even they barely see each other anymore, although Lola is "still the ciguapa of [Yuniór's] dreams" (327).

violent events that initiate Sasha's migration, Junot Diaz does almost the opposite in *Oscar Wao*: the story that is being told contains much explicit and implicit violence that influences the lives of all its characters, and its effects are felt not only by those experiencing it but runs through the entire family-line. Like *Mazel*, *Oscar Wao* is also the story of three generations of one family. Of the oldest generation we mainly hear the story of Oscar's grandfather Abelard and Abelard's sister La Inca; we also get a detailed account of the childhood of Abelard's daughter Belicia, who was raised by La Inca and is the family-member who migrates to the US; and Oscar and Lola are her children who grow up in Paterson, New York and whose teenage and college years are the time-frame of the main story.

Not only do both novels have a storyline that follows three generations, the structure of *Oscar Wao* is also similar to *Mazel*. It is divided into three parts which contain a total of eight chapters that are either set in New York or in the Dominican Republic. The chapters that take place in the US are all set in the last three decades of the 20th century, describing Oscar's and Lola's lives in the US. The chapters set in the Dominican Republic are mostly flashbacks to the lives of their family-members, dating back as early as 1944, but also describe the periods in which Oscar and Lola visit the Dominican Republic in their teens and twenties. Thus, in both novels, the family's history that is set in its country of origin is framed by the story of the lives of the family-members in the US.

Oscar Wao has several narrators, some of which are Lola and La Inca, but most of the story is told by Yunior. Yunior is Oscar's college roommate and Lola's ex-boyfriend, and although the novel and its events are centered around Oscar, he is not necessarily the main character. Instead of having one main character, it could be argued that Diaz makes the family in

its entirety the protagonist of the novel. Yuniór as a narrator then is the outsider who gives us his account of the family's history.

In a sort of prologue, the narrator²⁴ motivates his choice to tell the story of the family de León. He explains that he will be writing a story about "fukú," which is a strong curse that can haunt a family for generations. According to the narrator, fukú is not "a ghost story from the past with no power to scare" (2) but is still believed in by many, emphasizing how the belief in myths and folktales strongly exists among the Dominican population. Even if you are not one of those believers in fukú, "it's perfect. Because no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you" (5). What is implied is thus that there is no way to escape from it. He describes the Trujillo as the "high priest" of fukú (2) and explains how Dominicans believed that plotting against Trujillo "would incur a fukú most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond" (3).

It is believed that the fukú of the family de León started when Oscar's wealthy grandfather Abelard Luis Cabral defied Trujillo by not bringing his beautiful daughter to a party, despite the explicit invitation to do so²⁵. We learn that Abelard is being imprisoned and dies in the prison years later, while his wife and two oldest daughters all die in suspicious accidents. The only person remaining from his family is his daughter Belicia, who had only just been born when her father was imprisoned and who somehow got lost in the period of shock and uncertainty that followed Abelard's imprisonment. The fukú that started with Abelard's refusal to cooperate with Trujillo's wishes continues to find its way through the generations, especially haunting Belicia and Oscar throughout their lives. Fukú is thus the framework from which the story is told; in the

²⁴ It is unclear whether the narrator of the prologue is Yuniór, or it is Díaz himself speaking, or it is yet another unknown narrator.

²⁵ As the narrator keeps emphasizing very explicitly, Trujillo was known for his escapades with the most beautiful young girls of the island: "Dude had hundreds of spies whose entire job was to scour the provinces for his next piece of ass [...] In this climate, hoarding your women was tantamount to treason; offenders who didn't cough up the muchachas could easily find themselves enjoying the invigorating charm of an eight-shark bath" (217-18).

section about magical realist elements in *Oscar Wao*, I will further elaborate on the function of fukú.

Belicia's Dominicaness

After the death of her family, baby Belicia is being sold to farmers by some distant relatives and the first nine years of her life are spent in Azua, the poorest area of the Dominican Republic, as a child-slave. Fortunately, she is rescued by Abelard's sister La Inca, who provides her with care, education, and a home. After this rescue, Belicia grows up as a very stubborn and resistant teenager who, despite being a descendant of a wealthy, upper-class family, does not fit in at the expensive private school on the island. It is because of her skin-color that she is not accepted by the other students: "Putting her darkskinned media-campesina ass in a tony school where the majority of the pupils were the whiteskinned children of the regime's top ladronazos turned out to be a better idea in theory than in practice. Brilliant doctor father or not, Beli stood out in El Redentor [the school]" (82-83). This discrimination based on skin-color that Trujillo himself also acted out profoundly²⁶, is being addressed throughout the novel and shows the extreme forms of racism that could be found in daily life in the Dominican Republic.²⁷ Belicia cannot identify with her peers and is thus already an outsider while growing up in the Dominican Republic, which only enhances her outsider-position as an immigrant later on in life.

²⁶ The first footnote of the novel describes Trujillo as "A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulato who bleached his skin" (2), already emphasizing his focus on skin-color.

²⁷ Trujillo is infamous for the Parsley Massacre in 1937 where Haitians and "Dominicans who looked dark enough to be Haitian" (Abby Phillip n.p.) were persecuted and murdered.

Moreover, the discrimination illustrates how strongly the idea of a ‘pure’ nation was embedded in Dominican society during Trujillo’s reign. Another footnote about Trujillo²⁸ describes how he went about isolating the Dominican Republic:

Almost as soon as he grabbed the presidency, the Failed Cattle Thief [nickname for Trujillo] sealed the country away from the rest of the world—a forced isolation that we’ll call the Plátano Curtain. As for the country’s historically fluid border with Haiti—which was more baká than border—the Failed Cattle Thief [...] aspired to become an architect of history, and through a horrifying ritual of silence and blood, machete and perejil, darkness and denial, inflicted a true border on the countries, a border that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of a people [...] Most people argue that El Jefe [nickname for Trujillo] was trying to keep the world out; some, however, point out that he seemed equally intent on keeping something in. (224-25)

Under Trujillo’s rule, both the fluid geographical border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and the imaginary border between them and the rest of the world, are physically being enforced through violence.

This passage reminds of Bender’s explanation of old-fashioned national identity which was quoted in chapter one: “To sustain the idea of a national citizen, the national space was to be firmly bounded, and population and culture were presumed to be homogeneous” (2); and also of Bhabha’s warning that “the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history,

²⁸ As has been mentioned in the first chapter, Diaz uses extensive footnotes throughout the novel in which he provides the reader with accounts of the history and historical figures of the Dominican Republic. The fact that footnotes are traditionally used in informative non-fiction to provide background-information, suggests that it is Diaz who is addressing the reader directly instead of the narrator. However, the tone of most of the footnotes is not academic and instead continues with the mixture of slang and irony that the narrator Yuniors uses.

and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (7). Trujillo’s apparent wish to “become an architect of history” rings with Bhabha’s prediction that such an interference inherently means the end of fluid cultural borders. Belicia grows up in a country where those ideas that Bender and Bhabha mention are violently being imprinted on its citizens and they scar her for life.

Feeling like an outsider, Belicia decides to stop going to school and she starts working in a restaurant and going to clubs. One night, she meets Dionisio, referred to by the narrator as “the Gangster,” and falls in love with this criminal who works for Trujillo. She starts seeing him but eventually comes close to being assassinated by some of Trujillo’s hitmen. As it turns out, the Gangster is married to Trujillo’s sister, and when Belicia starts announcing publicly that she is pregnant with the Gangster’s baby, two officers from the Secret Police pick her up and bring her to the canefields outside the city, beating her up and leaving her there to die.

Belicia barely survives the beating but with the help of La Inca she recovers physically, although emotionally “She was in the grips of the Darkness, passed through her days like a shade passes through life” (160). Unfortunately, Trujillo’s men do not leave her to be and they keep coming back to the house, making threats to finish the job they started. This pending danger makes La Inca decide that Belicia will have to leave the country in order to survive, and she plans for Belicia to move to New York. Unlike Belicia’s idealized idea of the US²⁹, La Inca only thinks of it as “nothing more and nothing less than a país overrun by gangsters, putas, and no-

²⁹ When she was still happily together with the Gangster, he made her empty promises to buy her houses in Havana and in Miami, which she innocently believed. With the illusion of having a secured future now, Belicia started looking down on the people around her and fantasizing about her life in the US: “Dismissing her barrio as an “infierno” and her neighbors as “brutos” and “cochinos,” she bragged about how she would be living in Miami soon, wouldn’t have to put up with this un-country much longer” (128).

accounts. Its cities swarmed with machines and industry [...] a cuco shod in iron, exhaling fumes,” (158) but she nevertheless arranges the move.

Despite Belicia’s utopian dreams of life in the US and her growing dislike of Santo Domingo in the last months of her stay there, Belicia’s integration into American society seems to be a struggle, and her relation to her host-country stays troubled throughout the novel. Right before she departs for the US, the narrator warns her about the difficulty of migrating: “oh, Beli; not so rashly, not so rashly: What did you know about states or diasporas? What did you know about Nueva Yol or unheated ‘old law’ tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about *immigration*? Don’t laugh, mi negrita, for your world is about to be changed” (160). This is not merely a warning for Belicia, but also a concealed flash-forward that informs the reader about Belicia’s struggle to build a new life for herself in the US. We never get a detailed account of what happened during the first years of her migration and integration, but the combination of this sinister warning of the narrator, and the bitter woman that is depicted as Oscar’s and Lola’s mother suggests that the experience was not a turn for the better for Belicia.

Trying to enforce her idea of Dominicanness on her children, Belicia drives her daughter away from her – remember Lola’s depiction of her mother as an Old World Dominican slave driver – and makes it very difficult for Lola to identify with her mother’s birth-country. Oscar, too, who does not answer to the image of the stereotypical Dominican male, seems unable to fulfill Belicia’s wishes for him. When Oscar as a young boy is crying over a girl, she scoffs and yells at him: “She hauled Oscar to his feet by his ear [...] She threw him to the floor. Dale un galletazo, she panted, then see if the little puta respects you” (14), which roughly translates into “slap her around, then see if the little bitch respects you”. Scarred by her traumatizing

experiences in the canefields and the alienating experience of leaving her country all on her own, Belicia seems to grab onto her identification as a Dominican woman as a sort of safety-net. She is somehow unable to cope with her relocation to the US and tries to maintain her stable interpretation of Dominican cultural identity. This somehow prevents her from identifying across the cultural borders in the same way as she crossed the geographical border. She is rooted in the Dominican Republic and cannot change that rootedness to a relational network that would allow her not only to let her children live more freely, but also possibly to leave behind some of the pain inflicted on her in her home-country.

Writing to Reconcile

As the first generation Dominican-Americans, Oscar and Lola both have to identify with their mother's version of Dominican culture while being detached from the actual context of life in the Dominican Republic, and while also being influenced by daily input from American culture. For example, at fourteen years old, Lola becomes a "punk chick," a subculture that can be considered as a typically white, American movement, and she confirms to the reader that she wanted "The life that existed beyond Paterson, beyond [her] family, beyond Spanish" (55). Oscar is also influenced by popular American culture and immerses himself in comic books, TV shows about villains and super heroes, and role-playing games.³⁰

As has been said before, Oscar is not a prototypical Dominican man, unlike the narrator Yuniór, who is a self-proclaimed "playboy". Whereas until the age of approximately ten Oscar was "a 'normal' Dominican boy raised in a 'typical' Dominican family," meaning he was "one

³⁰ The popularity and influence of comics and fantasy are not just restricted to a reading audience but is extended beyond the books themselves, which can be seen in highly popular events such as Comic Con and the rising popularity of LARP (Live Action Role-Playing games). It is thus not 'merely' a trend in fiction, and because it is incorporated into daily life as well it can be considered to be a life-style.

of those pre-school loverboys who was always trying to kiss the girls” (11), he starts to get fatter and shyer during his young adolescence and then starts to become known as “a loser with a capital L” (17). It is not clear whether he starts to immerse himself in sci-fi and comic books because he is out by his peers, or that they shun him because he is doing so. In a footnote, the narrator also wonders where Oscar’s passion comes from and blames it on his inhabiting of two worlds:

Where his outsized love of genre jumped off from no one quite seems to know. It might have been a consequence of being Antillean (what more sci-fi than us?) or of living in the DR [*sic*] from the first couple of years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey—a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Third to First) but centuries (from almost no TV and electricity to plenty of both. (21-22)

In any case, Oscar does not answer to the physical image of the stereotypical Dominican male as a macho and a player, and his love for sci-fi and comic books only enhances his status as a nerd.

Indeed, his interest in these genres is not just acted out in the private sphere of his home but manifests itself in his entire life. Oscar “Could write in Elvish, could speak Chakobsa, could differentiate between a Slan, a Dorsai, and a Lensman in acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than Stan Lee, and was a role-playing game fanatic [...] Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore his light saber or a Lensman her lens” (21). He is so immersed in this culture that he starts writing himself and wants to become the “Dominican Tolkien” (192).

Especially after traumatic experiences he seems to find comfort in writing and reading³¹ and this idea of writing, or story-telling as a way of healing and reconciliation is what is being

³¹ Recovering after a failed suicide attempt, Oscar starts writing a lot, claiming that he was “regenerated” (192), and it is reading *Lord of the Rings* “for [...] the millionth time” (307) that comforts him most when he cannot be with Ybón, the love of his life.

emphasized in the final episodes of the novel. In these sections, Oscar goes to the Dominican Republic for a holiday and he falls in love with Ybón, La Inca's neighbor who works as a prostitute. Unfortunately, Ybón is also dating a Dominican policeman, and he and a colleague assault Oscar and beat him almost to death in the same canefields that Belicia had been beaten up in a few decades earlier. Initially Oscar flies back home to the US, but he changes his mind and decides to fly back to declare Ybón his love as a large, radical, romantic gesture. During the time that he tries to persuade her to leave the policeman and run away with him "he did two things: he researched-wrote and he chased her" (317).

Parts of what he writes during these final days of his life are eventually sent as a package to Belicia's home in Paterson, eight months after Oscar's death. One part of this package is "more chapters of his never-to-be-completed opus, a four-book E. E. 'Doc' Smith-esque space opera called *Starsong*, and the other was a long letter to Lola" (333). In this letter he tells Lola that another package is on its way in which another book is enclosed that "contains everything I've written on this journey. Everything I think you will need. You'll understand when you read my conclusions. (*It's the cure to what ails us*, he scribbled in the margins. *The Cosmo DNA*.)" (333; emphasis added). Thus, next to continuing to write fantasy-fiction, he also writes a final work to "cure" his family, to get rid of the fukú. The second package never arrives so the content of his solution remains an unknown, but his belief that his writing can relieve his family of their curse is what is most important. Not only has he found a way to combine his love for fiction and his family's Dominican history, but his reference to DNA also implies that this book somehow embodies who he is, and who his family is. It is not necessarily an identification in the sense of cultural identity, but it is nevertheless a way of establishing who he is, and this self is partly contained in the manuscript that is intended to physically cross the borders between Santo

Domingo and Paterson via mail. Oscar establishes a transnational relation between the two cultural frameworks he lives in through his writing, and on a higher level, Diaz does a similar thing in his novel.

Diaz does not only construct transnational perspectives in *Oscar Wao* by simultaneously referencing popular American genres and typically Latin American literature, of which I will say more in the next section, but also crosses national and cultural borders in his use of language. As may already have become evident through the quotes from *Oscar Wao* that have been used until now, Diaz does not write exclusively in English. It is undeniably an Anglophone novel because the main language in which it is written is English, but Diaz conflates this with Spanish words, idioms, and even entire sentences. Both his English and Spanish are often very colloquial, especially when we hear Yunior's voice, and this makes it even more of a challenge for his readers to fully comprehend everything that is said. Indeed, for the reader who does not speak Spanish there is no explanatory list of terms or translations, and for the reader who does speak Spanish there is still the often very specific Dominican slang which cannot always be found in your regular Spanish dictionary.

Diaz thus forces his readers to go through the uncomfortable experience of not fully understanding the language that is used to address him or her. They are faced with the borders between languages because Diaz decides to play with these borders and to constantly reposition them. He makes linguistic borders fluid by seemingly mindlessly switching between Spanish and English mid-sentence, and the possible uncertainty of a fluid state of being is enhanced by his use of slang in both his Spanish and his English. The switching in language exemplifies the switching between cultures that migrants have to go through, but the way he mixes the languages also embodies that you do not necessarily have to choose between either one of them. Indeed, his

novel is an example of cross-border influences and his language-use demands an active role of the reader that makes him or her part of the negotiation between cultures that the characters in the novel also go through.

Moreover, the novel paints a picture of American society that is made up of different cultures and therewith defies the idea of national homogeneity that Bender also challenges. As a US-author who writes from a transnational perspective, Diaz depicts a diasporic community in the US and shows how such types of communities are inherent parts of the nation. The characters he depicts are already transnational and multicultural because of their position of living in the diaspora, just as Diaz himself is. They are connected across different languages, cultures, and nations, and despite their struggles and differences, the different generations still relate to each other. The next and final section will show how Diaz emphasizes the bond between Belicia and Oscar and how this connects him as a transnational author from the US to his Latin American literary forefathers.

The Lord of the Rings and the Magical Mongoose

The role of fantasy genres in *Oscar Wao* is not just confined to Oscar reading them as an escape from reality. Throughout the novel, many characters and events are compared to those works of fiction that Oscar is such a fan of. Probably the most-referenced one is Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which is also Oscar's favorite book as we have already seen. I will quote a few passages in which Diaz incorporates Tolkien in his narration, to show how it is interwoven in the story:

“The Gangster's devotion did not go unrewarded. By the mid-forties the Gangster was no longer simply a well-paid operator; he was becoming an alguien ... and while none exists of him and El Jefe, that they broke bread and talked shit cannot be doubted. For it was *the Great Eye* himself

who granted the Gangster authority” (121); “Even a woman as potent as La Inca, who with the *elvish ring* of her will had forged within Baní her own personal *Lothlórien*, knew that she could not protect the girl against a direct assault from *the Eye*” (156); “it would be hard to exaggerate the power Trujillo exerted over the Dominican people and the shadow of fear he cast throughout the region. Homeboy dominated Santo Domingo like it was his very own private *Mordor*” (224); “Oscar was lucky ... because he was a homely slob, because he really looked like un maldito parigüayo who had never had no luck in his life, the capitán took *Gollum-pity* on him and only punched him a couple of times” (296). The italicized words in these passages are all direct references to *The Lord of the Rings* and they show how incorporated in the text these allusions are.³²

Next to incorporating these elements of popular American culture into *Oscar Wao*, Diaz also uses elements of magical realism in a few passages. This blending of literary culture enhances the transnational and border-crossing experiment he conducts in his novel. One of the most obvious allusions to the existence of something supernatural is of course the theme of fukú that runs through the novel. In the prologue in which fukú is being explained, the narrator also briefly mentions that the only way to ward off a fukú is by saying the word “zafa”. The use of this word “used to be more popular in the old days, bigger, so to speak, in Macondo than in McOndo” (7), but the narrator is wondering whether his story-telling is maybe a zafa in itself. Not only is this the first reference to the importance of story-telling, which the narrator continues to bring up throughout the novel, it is also an explicit reference to the use of magical realism and

³² Interesting to note is that most of these references are made to emphasize actions and situations of violence and evil. There is no time here to analyze these and the many more references to fantasy genres in more depth but in an interview with Edwidge Danticat, Diaz argues that “If you’re looking for language that will help you approach our nigh-unbearable historical experiences you can reach for narratives of the impossible: sci-fi, horror, fantasy, which might not really want to talk about people of color at all but that takes what we’ve experienced (without knowing it) very seriously indeed” (n.p.).

to a more recent literary movement from the Latin American region. It clearly quotes magical realism because it mentions the fictional village Macondo, which is the place where Marquez's *Cien Años de Soledad* takes place, and "McOndo" refers to the McOndo group of the late 1990s which reacted to the perseverance of traditional magical realism in Latin American fiction.

As Ignacio López-Calvo explains in an article on magical realism in *Oscar Wao*, the traditional magical realism of the 1960s in Latin American was partly characterized by the description of the underdeveloped countryside as a stereotypically 'Third World' image that also displayed an exotic and foreign atmosphere (83). As with many features of the original Latin American magical realism, Marquez's work offers the prime example, and his creation of the rural village Macondo in *Cien Años de Soledad* is indeed typical for those exotic rural images. The authors Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez noticed that this stereotypical image of Latin America was still maintained, and was also expected from writers from that area³³, and they decided they want to break with it. They argued that the image of an exotic rural landscape is no longer representative of the postmodern Latin American world, which has shifted from the national to "transterritorial" (Robbins 25). They call their 'counter-fiction' *McOndo*, a compound of 'Macondo' and 'McDonalds', which is an example of a success story of Westernization and economic globalization, with its branches spread all over the world.

With this rejection of magical realism in the late 1990s, Fuguet and Gómez did not only argue for a different style of writing, but also for a focus on issues that are related to more recent developments in South America. Robbins explains that "The process that Fuguet describes" in

³³ Emilse Beatriz Hidalgo summarizes the now well-known incident that largely motivated Fuguet's claims: in 1994, "Fuguet submitted a short-story to the *Iowa Review*. The short-story was rejected by the editor on the grounds that 'it was not Latin-American enough;' that is to say, it did not contain any fantastical or magical elements that made it publishable in the United States and so, as the editor later remarked, 'the story could easily have taken place right there, in [North] America'" (1).

the introduction to his and Gómez's book *McOndo*, "is not so much a transition from national to individual, public to private narratives, but rather a transition away from narratives that attempt to understand the national experience to ones that describe the conjoint processes of postmodernism and globalization" (27). Thus, the authors argue, both topic and style of the new generation of Latin American authors should be a reflection of contemporary Latin America rather than maintaining the outdated image of magical realism from the 1960s.

This attempted transition could be seen as motivated by a transnational perspective, especially in its turn away from narratives that focus on the national experience. I do not want to argue that the McOndo-movement is an inherently transnational project, but there certainly are similarities between their arguments and the transnationalism that has been described in the first chapter. Indeed, the way in which the McOndo-authors approach magical realism suggests that it is a tradition that too much emphasizes an outdated image of national character or culture, and that consequently obliterates the influence of contemporary processes of border- and culture-crossing on Latin America. This idea closely corresponds to the turn away from the nation-state as the most powerful source of identification and culture, and as being a strictly delimited entity that cannot and should not be 'contaminated' by influences from outside those national borders.

The McOndo group is of interest when discussing *Oscar Wao* because, as López-Calvo argues, "Like Fuguet, Diaz's transnational upbringing inspired a different vision of his own environment" (83). He then continues to explore how Diaz is influenced by the McOndo group but also how he is still indebted to the magical realism of the 1960s. Because Diaz is not a Latin American writer but a diasporic writer from the US, it is this combination of awareness of the globalization the McOndo group talks about, and the nod to the literary masters of his cultural heritage, that is so significant in the context of transnationalism. His position in both the Latin

American world and the US world is refracted through his migration, and he acknowledges and portrays this refraction by establishing relations across those different cultural positions.

Returning to the actual magical realist content of novel, next to the fukú that runs through the different generations, there is one other significant element of the supernatural that connects Oscar and Belicia, namely a mongoose that appears before them when they are in danger. It is in the passage that describes how Belicia survives her beating that the mongoose appears in the text for the first time, and after its first mentioning it reappears a few times. Because Belicia's beating was intended to kill her, it is extremely unlikely for her to survive it, even more so because "As some of you know, canefields are no fucking joke, and even the cleverest adults can get mazed in their endlessness" (149). Nevertheless, she finds her way out of the fields because a talking mongoose with "golden lion eyes" and a black pelt convinces her to stand up despite her injuries and leads her out of the fields:

[The mongoose] placed its intelligent little paws on her chest and stared down at her

You have to rise.

My baby, Beli wept. Mi hijo precioso.

Hypatía, your baby is dead.

No, no, no, no, no.

It pulled at her unbroken arm. *You have to rise now or you'll never have the son or the daughter.*

What son? she wailed. What daughter?

The ones who await.

It was dark and her legs trembled beneath her like smoke.

You have to follow.

It rivered into the cane, and Beli, blinking tears, realized she had no idea which way was out [...] But before Beli lost hope she heard the creature's voice. She (for it had a woman's lilt) was singing! In an accent she could not place: maybe Venezuelan, maybe Colombian. *Sueño, sueño, sueño, como tú te llamas*. She clung unsteadily to the cane, like an anciano clinging to a hammock, and, panting, took her first step, a long dizzy spell, beating back a blackout, and then her next. Precarious progress, because if she fell she knew she would never stand again. Sometimes she saw the creature's chabine eyes flashing through the stalks. (149-150)

In the passage we read a conversation between Belicia and the animal, learn that the animal is a female with a specific accent, and see how she leads Belicia out of the fields. Although the mongoose is personified by giving it a human voice, it is still continually referred to as "the creature." This reminds the reader that it is a non-human entity that can see into the future – hence the prediction of Belicia's to-be-born children – that saves her from the violence inflicted upon her by humans, and emphasizes the unnaturalness of the event. The narrator cannot tell us whether it "was a figment of Beli's wracked imagination or something else altogether [...] But no matter what the truth, remember: Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena" (149). The scene is thus specifically depicted as being an extraordinary event, and it is also specifically linked to the way Dominicans are wired. Because Diaz emphasizes it as a strange event – "And now we arrive at the strangest part of our tale" (149) – he cannot be said to use a magical realist technique,³⁴ but having a talking animal rescue one of the protagonists, who moreover is emphasized to be Latin American, cannot be

³⁴ As has been explained in the chapter on magical realism, one of its main features is that it generally does not explain or emphasize the strangeness of the magical occurrences in the text.

interpreted otherwise than as a clear reference to the exotic, supernatural magical realism of the 1960s.³⁵

Later in the novel, when Oscar tries to commit suicide by jumping off a train bridge, all of a sudden he finds something standing by his side that “he would call [...] the Golden Mongoose, but even he knew that wasn’t what it was” (190). After that, he is described a few times as dreaming about the mongoose, and when he is driven into the canefields right before he is being shot by Ybón’s boyfriend, he “imagined he saw his whole family getting on a guagua [bus], even his poor dead abuelo [grandfather] and his poor dead abuela [grandmother], and who is driving the bus but the Mongoose” (320). This animal, or at least its mythical powers, enhances the family-lines and saves both Belicia and Oscar from untimely deaths.

The interference of supernatural beings and powers is often a part of magical realist fiction, and its function is closely related to Boehmer’s previously mentioned discussion of magical realism in the postcolonial context. As was described in chapter two, Boehmer mentions that the mode offers “access to local resources of fantasy and story-telling” which allows authors “to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural clash and displacement.” Both the mongoose and the belief in fukú and zafa can be considered elements of local, non-western myths, and the tradition of story-telling that Boehmer mentions is also present in the novel, as we have already established, through Oscar’s authorship. In fact, Belicia’s scene in the canefields is especially significant in the light of story-telling because it shows how not only she, but also the people who tell and retell her story resort to narratives of myth and magic

³⁵ Especially so because in many texts of magical realism animals play an extensive role. See for an exploration of the topic on animals in magical realist fiction Tanja Schwalm’s PhD-thesis “Animal Writing: Magical Realism and the Posthuman Other” (2009). Moreover, if we are to believe the footnotes of the author, the mongoose is believed to have some magical powers and has “Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to the other India, a.k.a. the Caribbean [...] Believed to be an ally of Man. Many Watchers suspect that the Mongoose arrived to our world from another, but to date no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed” (151).

in trying to cope with violence. When Belicia's stepmother La Inca learns that Belicia has been taken away by the secret police,

she did what many women of her background would have done. Posted herself beside the portrait of La Virgen de Altagracia and prayed. We postmodern plátanos tend to dismiss the Catholic devotion of our Viejas as atavistic, an embarrassing throwback to the olden days, but it's exactly at these moments, when all hope has vanished, when the end draws near, that prayer has dominion. (144)

She, for her part, believes that her intense prayer has spurred God to save Belicia in the canefields, whereas others, "on and off the Island" believe it was a sign that the family was indeed cursed, and yet other people say the opposite, namely that Belicia was blessed. From yet another angle, the down-to-earth commentary from the perspective of the American-born narrator Yunior is that "The world is full of tragedies enough without niggers having to resort to curses for explanations" (152).

Yunior's "postmodern" dismissal of supernatural powers emphasizes once again how Diaz approaches contemporary Latin American culture from a position that is refracted via his migration to the US³⁶, and how his novel refuses to be an advocate of one cultural belief-system. As Michiko Kakutani says in her review of *Oscar Wao* for The New York Times, Diaz "conjures with seemingly effortless aplomb the two worlds his characters inhabit: the Dominican Republic, the ghost-haunted motherland that shapes their nightmares and their dreams; and America (a.k.a. New Jersey), the land of freedom and hope and not-so-shiny possibilities that they've fled to as part of the great Dominican diaspora" (n.p.). Indeed, different worlds meet in *Oscar Wao*, be it

³⁶ Yunior is also the narrator of most of the short stories of Diaz's book *This is How You Lose Her*, and partly because of this recurrence of this character, many readers of Diaz's work consider Yunior to be the author's alter ego.

magical realist elements and references to fantasy genres, Spanish and English colloquialisms, the Dominican Republic and the US, a traumatized mother and her struggling children, or 'Old World' superstitions and postmodern 'plátanos'. All these elements collide in the novel and all Diaz's characters have to keep negotiating between them. They play important roles in the identification-processes he describes, but eventually they seem to relate across the cultural, geographical, spatial, and temporal borders that run between them, creating multiple images of transnational relations throughout the novel.

Some Final Thoughts

Relation relinks (relays), relates. Domination and resistance, osmosis and withdrawal, the consent to dominating language (*langage*) and defense of dominated languages (*langues*). They do not add up to anything clearcut or easily perceptible with any certainty. The relinked (relayed), the related, cannot be combined conclusively. Their mixing in nonappearance (or depth) shows nothing revealing on the surface. This revealer is set astir when the poetics of Relation calls upon the imagination. What best emerges from Relation is what one senses. (Glissant 173-74)

Throughout this thesis, the most important guiding principle has been the idea that everything and everyone relates and connects. The transnational relations that can simultaneously transcend and acknowledge borders and differences are what give rise to the possibility of fluid identification. They allow the migrant, who inhabits several worlds at once, to identify with his or her old world and new world at the same time and to pass on his or her diverse heritage to descendants.

In the quote above, Glissant depicts how competing actions and entities relate to each other and stay ever-undetermined. The different cultures, nations, and people that migrants encounter are often conceived of as competing entities as well, and their competition can lead to feelings of uprootedness and longing, and result in situations of violence and trauma. When calling upon the imagination like Glissant does, however, the undetermined relations between these competing elements can also be imagined as possibilities for enrichment. Indeed, imagining that their diversity can actually transcend the borders that divide these conflicting categories can lead to an image of the migrant as fluid and transnational.

Taken together, the different parts of this thesis have attempted to establish several points of convergence between fluidity, identity, and migration. Not only do they meet in theory, but especially so in literature, where imagination can relate their connections to the reader even more directly than in theoretical explorations. The fictional representations of migrant experiences that have been discussed illustrate how fictional narration can experiment with situations of border crossing and identification through cultural encounters. The migration of their characters has been shown to influence the way these characters relate to their old country and how they identify with the concurrence of cultures and sympathies that happened after they settled in a new country. The expectation was that if the meeting-point of two worlds was regarded as transcending national and cultural borders, this could help the migrant identify fluidly and without having to make an either/or choice.

Interestingly, both in *Mazel* and in *Oscar Wao*, we have indeed encountered fluid identities that relate across borders, but in both cases it is not the family member who makes the actual move who identifies across the borders of her worlds. *Mazel*'s Sasha attempts to shed her old life in the Polish shtetl where she grew up and claims to feel at home completely in her new life in Manhattan, New York. The other way around, *Oscar Wao*'s Belicia moves to the US but fervently tries to stick with her Dominican roots and seems to stay stuck in her old world. It is eventually their children and grandchildren who actually establish relations across the borders that run between them and their family's past.

Maybe it is this distance to his mother's old world that allows Oscar to establish a connection with both his American life and his Dominican heritage; and maybe it is the distance to her grandmother's world that gives Phoebe the space to reestablish the ties between her American life and the Jewish Orthodox world her grandmother left behind. Coming back to the

initial question of this thesis then, distance undeniably plays a significant role in the depiction of migrant experiences. In the introduction, I asked whether the magical realist mode bridges the distance between the several worlds the fictional characters live in or if it rather emphasizes that distance. The direct answer to that will have to be: both.

As has been shown in chapter three, Goldstein emphasizes the distance between pre-war Europe and modern-day US by only using magical realist events and occurrences happen in the passages set in the old world. This puts her on par with other contemporary Jewish writers who depict the Holocaust by emphasizing its distance from their contemporary worlds, although Goldstein is very outspoken about not discussing the Holocaust explicitly in her fiction. Simultaneously, she bridges this gap by letting traits of Sasha's old world return in Phoebe, which results in a character that is fluid and established through transnational relations.

The distance between Belicia and her children has been described as well, but it has resulted in more troubling situations and events than was the case in *Mazel*. Her daughter Lola rebels against her mother's strict interpretation of what constitutes Dominicanness, and her son Oscar is eventually killed in the exact same place in the Dominican Republic where Belicia barely survived a beating herself. Again, however, magical realism is used to bridge the distance between the generations and the different worlds they inhabit. Not only does Diaz establish relations by linking the traditional Latin American version of magical realism to more contemporary forms of it, he also connects Belicia and Oscar to each other by incorporating the same supernatural elements in both their individual stories. Moreover, Diaz conveys the constant cultural renegotiation that takes place when migrating to a new place by mixing English and Spanish and referencing elements of popular American culture next to magical realist elements.

Drawing attention to the struggles of the actual migrating characters once more, one of the questions that arise as a result of these analyses is whether the theory of fluid identity is actually a good framework from which to look at the representation of migrant identities. From what has been concluded, it can be argued that although their offspring may establish transnational connections that allow for fluid identification, the actual migrating characters seem unable to merge the several worlds they inhabit. I do not know if this necessarily means that fluidity is the wrong approach to migrant-identification, but it would be interesting for future research to look further into how the differences between generations of migrants are being depicted in fiction.

I think that bringing in theories that are more specifically focused on cultural and individual trauma can help develop more in-depth discussions of this question. Another issue that arises beyond the scope of this thesis is, for example, the cultural setting of the novels that have been discussed. The transnational approach implies that these points of discussion can be found across any border, but this thesis has limited itself to Anglophone literature from authors based in the US. A necessary addition that would allow for more general claims about fluid identity, migration, and border-crossing relations would thus be an extension of this research that incorporates fiction from many other regions and written in many other languages.

Does all this mean that the novels that have been discussed are bad examples of transnationalism and fluid identification, or perfect ones? I think neither, especially because there is no such thing as a perfect example when it comes to these issues. The novels contribute to the growing body of work that is being written on alternative ways of looking at issues such as migration and cross-border relations in our contemporary globalized world. They imagine ways in which common conceptions about identity, the nation-state, and cultures can be countered, and

how a belief in relation can further that development. They are not perfect examples but that does not take away from their significance. To quote Glissant one final time:

The accumulation of examples is reassuring to us but is outside any claim to system. Relation cannot be 'proved,' because its totality is not approachable. But it can be imagined, conceivable in transport of thought. The accumulation of examples aims at perfecting a never complete description of the processes of relation, not circumscribing them or giving legitimacy to some impossible global truth. (174)

Bibliography

- Adelson, Leslie A. "Against Between: A Manifesto." Ed. Salah M. Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi. *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading*. Rotterdam: NAI, 2001. 244-55. Print.
- Anderson, Bridget. "Bridget Anderson on Europe's 'violent Humanitarianism' in the Mediterranean." Interview by Luke De Noronha. *Ceasefiremagazin*. N.p., 27 May 2015. Web. 3 July 2015. <<https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/interview-bridget-anderson/>>.
- Appel, John J. "Hansen's Third-Generation 'Law' and the Origins of the American Jewish Historical Society." *Jewish Social Studies* 23.1 (1961): 3-20. Web.
- Barad, Karen. "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart." *Parallax* 20.3 (2014): 168-87. Web. 29 July 2015.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000. Print.
- Behnken, Brian D., and Simon Wendt. *Crossing Boundaries: Ethnicity, Race, and National Belonging in a Transnational World*. N.p.: Lexington, n.d. *EBL Patron*. 27 June 2013. Web. 29 July 2015.
- Bender, Thomas. "No Borders: Beyond the Nation-State." N.p., 2006. Web. 27 May 2015.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 1994. *EBL Patron*. Taylor & Francis, 12 Oct. 2012. Web. 27 May 2015.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.
- Cappell, Ezra. "An Interview with Rebecca Goldstein." *American Talmud: The Cultural Work of Jewish American Fiction*. Albany: State U of New York, 2007. N. pag. Print.

- Carpentier, Alejo. "On the Marvelous Real in America." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. 75-88. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy*. New York: Garland, 1985. Print.
- Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Danticat, Edwidge. "Junot Díaz." *BOMB* No. 101 (2007): n. pag. *JSTOR*. Web. 07 July 2015.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. "From A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia: Introduction: Rhizome." Trans. Brian Massumi, 1980. *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch and Al. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. 1454-62. Print.
- Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead, 2007. Print.
- Faris, Wendy B. "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham & London: Duke UP, 1995. 163-90. Print.
- Gaylard, Gerald. *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*. Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2005. Print.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1997. Print.
- Goldstein, Rebecca. *Mazel*. New York: Viking, 1995. Print.

- Guenther, Irene. "Magic Realism: New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. 33-74. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "Who Needs Identity?" Introduction. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay. London: Sage, 1996. 1-17. Print.
- Hart, Stephen M., and Wen-chin Ouyang. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2005. Print.
- Hart, Stephen M. "Globalization of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics. Magical Realism: Style and Substance." Introduction. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2005. 1-12. Print.
- Hegerfeldt, Anne C. *Lies That Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. Print.
- Heller, Monica. *Paths to Post-nationalism: A Critical Ethnography of Language and Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.
- Hidalgo, Emilse Beatriz. "National/transnational Negotiations: The Renewal of the Cultural Languages in Latin America and Rodrigo Fresán's *Argentine History, the Speed of Things and Kensington Gardens*." *LLJournal* 2.1 (2007): N. Pag. *Lljournal*. Web. 4 July 2015.
- Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic, 1995. Print.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Travails of an Outcast." Rev. of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. *New York Times* [New York] 4 Sept. 2007, Arts sec.: n. pag. *Nytimes*. 4 Sept. 2007. Web. 4 July 2015.

- Khader, Jamil. "Cosmopolitanism and the Infidelity to Internationalism: Repeating Postcoloniality and the World Revolution." *Critique of Cosmopolitan Reason: Timing and Spacing the Concept of World Citizenship*. Ed. Rebecka Letteval and Kritian Petrov. Bern: Peter Lang, 2014. 267-292. *EBL Patron*. 7 July 2014. Web. 21 June 2015.
- Krijnen, Joost. *Impious Renewal: The Holocaust and Jewish American Fiction after Postmodernism*. Diss. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2014. Print.
- Lang, Jessica. "An Interview with Rebecca Goldstein." *Contemporary Literature* 49.1 (2008): 1-23. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 June 2015.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-mei Shi. *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- López-Calvo, Ignacio. "A Postmodern Plátano's Trujillo: Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, More Macondo than McOndo." *Antipodas* 20 (2009): 75-90. *Academia.edu*. Web. 4 July 2015.
- Meyers, Helene. "On Homelands and Home-making Rebecca Goldstein's Mazel." *Journal of Modern Literature* 33.3 (2010): 131-41. *Project MUSE*. Web. 1 June 2015.
- Moses, Michael Valdez. "Magical Realism at World's End." *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics* 3.1 (2001): 105-33. *Oxfordjournals*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Moslund, Sten Pultz. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Ouyang, Wen-chin. "Globalization of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics. Magical Realism and Beyond: Ideology of Fantasy." Introduction. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2005. 13-19. Print.

- Phillip, Abby. "The Bloody Origins of the Dominican Republic's Ethnic 'cleansing' of Haitians." *Washington Post*. N.p., 17 June 2015. Web. 4 July 2015.
- "Protests Turn Back Buses Carrying Illegal Immigrant Children." *Www.foxnews.com*. FoxNews.com, 2 July 2014. Web. 16 Aug. 2015.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *A Transnational Poetics*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2009. Print.
- Robbins, Timothy R., and José Eduardo González. *New Trends in Contemporary Latin American Narrative: Post-national Literatures and the Canon*. N.p.: N.p., N.d. *EBL Patron*. Palgrave Macmillan, 20 Aug. 2014. Web. 4 July 2015.
- Roberts, Kathleen Glenister. "Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Bias." *The Limits of Cosmopolis: Ethics and Provinciality in the Dialogue of Cultures*. New York: Peter Lang, 2014. 53-74. *EBL Patron*. 15 July 2015. Web. 21 June 2015.
- Rody, Carolin. "Jewish Post-Holocaust Fiction and the Magical Realist Turn." *Moments of Magical Realism in U.S. Ethnic Literatures*. Ed. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 39-64. Print.
- Roh, Franz. "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism (1925)." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. 15-32. Print.
- Rose, Gillian. "Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation." *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 41-62. Print.
- Sandín, Lyn Di Iorio, and Richard Perez. "Tracing Magical Irruptions in US Ethnic Literatures." Introduction. *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 1-18. Print.

- Schroeder, Shannin. *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004. Print.
- Schultermandl, Silvia, and Sebnem Toplu. *A Fluid Sense of Self: The Politics of Transnational Identity*. Wien: Lit Verlag, 2010. Print.
- Schwalm, Tanja. *Animal Writing: Magical Realism and the Posthuman Other: A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Canterbury*. Thesis. University of Canterbury, 2009. N.p.: U of Canterbury, 2009. Web. 4 July 2015.
- Seyhan, Azade. *Writing outside the Nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Tonkiss, Katherine. *Migration and Identity in a Post-national World*. N.p.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Warnes, Christopher. *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris. "Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s." Introduction. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. 1-14. Print.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. Print.