

IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: A DISTINCT SUB-GENRE OF AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Asst. Prof. Dr. E. Lâle DEMİRTÜRK*

Immigrant women's autobiographies deserve a closer study, for immigrant women's encounters with America have been even more multi-faceted than those of men. Both men and women moving to the New World faced poverty, hunger, loneliness, discrimination, and often a fierce struggle to overcome the language barrier. But even more than for men, the act of immigration altered the immigrant women's relationships to their old cultures, especially to prevalent notions of gender that affected family relationships. They faced a double educational handicap: They were not only foreign-born but female. The daughters of immigrant parents, especially, had to go through a series of conflicts with their parents, regardless of whether or not they were born in the United States. Some fathers were simply afraid that higher education would somehow "unsex" a woman, eventually ruining her future chances for marriage and motherhood. This childhood of marginality that the children of immigrant parents went through was intensified by their struggles between the Old World definitions of roles and duties of a woman, and the New World possibilities of becoming more independent women.

Many daughters of immigrants felt the need to recapitulate the immigration experiences of their parents, and autobiography as a genre was one way to do that. Through the act of recounting the process of their gradual independence by blending fact and fiction, they tried to resolve the contradictions between their common ethnic heritage and their personal commitment to "feminism" by modelling themselves after the strong women of their immigrant past. Many such autobiographies express the need to reclaim their ethnic background and integrate it into their contemporary American life-styles.

* Hacettepe University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Translation and Interpretation.

Among women's autobiographies which deserve special scrutiny, are those by immigrant women. Immigrant women's autobiographies display, and hence prove, a deeper consciousness of female identity even more so than American women's autobiographies. Unlike American women's autobiographies, immigrant women's autobiographies do not only talk about the process of growing up female but also discuss or dramatize the tensions of the two cultures they have been brought up in or between. The dream of America as a land of hopes displaces thoughts and associations of their old country. But their immigrant lives in the United States cannot possibly wipe out the past of their homeland.

Consequently, these women often present themselves as split psyches in their autobiographies written in their second language. The clash between the old culture and the newly "adopted" one shapes their identities. The "American" woman, who now made it in the New World, has literally transformed herself into an assertive woman, one who claims to have gained the ability to raise her voice. The American voice is the one recounting the process of growth as an immigrant female self.

The traditional roles that these women's former cultures imposed on them are in conflict with perceptions of what their new lives are going to be. They live in a culture-within-culture, repeating the old country's patterns of thought which define women as inferior beings to be married off to an unknown husband in whose hands they will be pieces of property. Yet they also confront a culture outside their traditional domestic circle, which is an extension of their old culture, that develops, and therefore challenges, them into questioning the ways in which they were brought up as women. This double perspective on the female identity makes them feel homeless as they stand on the crossing boundaries between two different cultures with no real sense of belonging to either one.

Immigrant women's autobiographies in the New World, in this respect, reveal an idiosyncratic thematic structure, the record of a distinctive mental odyssey out of which women have sought to become whole persons with bi-cultural identities. This double-culture heritage establishes an American dilemma in female identity and vocation. Within the framework of selectivity and specificity, a limited number of autobiographies have been chosen to represent a particular group of immigrants: middle-class educated women who in the New World came to enjoy an unexpected fame which derived in considerable measure from their writing autobiographies.

As it will be seen immigrant women autobiographers share a common impulse not simply to dissociate themselves from patriarchal images of

women but to present themselves as "males" and professional intellectual women. Eventually these writers identify themselves with American **men** as a strategy to redefine Old World identities and affirm themselves as liberated intellectual **women**.

The chief autobiographical device for this verbal act of self-liberation is metaphor. Metaphors are used in these stories to transpose self-conceptions from the psychic to the social domain. For as Jitka Linden states:

Metaphor (and language in general), since it evokes the earliest experiential feelings of inside and outside, is considered to be a transitional phenomenon... mediating and providing links in both directions between the inner and outer worlds.¹

Immigrant women use metaphors to represent their origins from the viewpoint of liberated intellectual "American" women of the present. Images and tropes, that is, are appropriate to the communication of the female aspects of cross-cultural experience. This complex cross-cultural and cross-gender perspective of immigrant women's autobiographies, as will be argued in this article, provides a special sub-category of American life history.

During the research on the literature written about this topic, no books but only a few articles have been found on immigrant women's autobiographies per se. In his article "The Brave New World of Immigrant Autobiography," for example, William Q. Boelhower bases his argument mostly on immigrant men's autobiographies without making any distinctions between the different narrative strategies that the immigrant men and women use. He discusses the common thematic pattern of "the peculiar transcultural dilemma of the immigrant protagonist."² Like Boelhower, James Craig Holte makes no distinctions between the narrative styles in immigrant men's and women's autobiographies, but sees both of them pursuing the single theme of "giving-up and taking-on of languages, traditions, and beliefs."³

1. Jitka Linden, "Insight Through Metaphor in Psychotherapy and Creativity," **Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought: A Quarterly of Integrative and Interdisciplinary Studies**, 8 (1985), p. 389.
2. William Q. Boelhower, "The Brave New World of Immigrant Autobiography," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 9 (Summer 1982), p. 9.
3. James Craig Holte, "The Representative Voice: Autobiography and the Ethnic Experience," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 9 (Summer 1982), p. 45.

There are, in addition, articles on certain ethnic groups of autobiographers, such as Jewish- and Chinese-American, relevant to this subject. Alvin H. Rosenfeld's "Inventing the Jew: Notes on Jewish Autobiography," refers to Jewish woman autobiographers as significant contributors to the Jewish-American autobiography. In that tradition he notes, (with disapproval since his is an orthodox, religious, and patriarchal outlook) "a coalescence within Judaism of secularization and feminization, the twin components of romantic adoration."⁴ But for Rosenfeld, secularization is more significant than feminization. Hence he pays little attention to Jewish women's life-stories as such.

In contrast to the criticism on the Jewish-American autobiography, which analyzes a wide group of the Jewish-American woman autobiographers, the ones on the Chinese-American autobiography focus on specific works. Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer F. Paulson's "The Divided Voice of Chinese-American Narration: Jade Snow Wong's **Fifth Chinese Daughter**" studies Jade Snow Wong's **Fifth Chinese Daughter** as "an extraordinary literary form, one which effectively renders the divided consciousness of dual-heritage."⁵ Patricia Lin Blinde's "The Icicle in the Desert: Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers" contrasts Wong's process of self-effacement in **Fifth Chinese Daughter** to Kingston's "continuous pursuit of identity [that] takes place through the mazes of conflicting truth and value-creating systems."⁶ Linda Ching Sledge's "Maxine Kingston's **China Men**: The Family Historian as Epic Poet," presents **China Men**, which is Kingston's second work and a kind of sequel to **The Woman Warrior**, as an epic in which Kingston "is able to encapsulate the data of history, the deep dreams of myth, and the archetypal drama of one American family."⁷ Carol E. Neubauer's "Developing Ties to the Past: Photography and Other Sources of Information in

4. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Inventing the Jew: Notes on Jewish Autobiography," in **The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays**, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 155.
5. Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer F. Paulson, "The Divided Voice of Chinese-American Narration: Jade Snow Wong's **Fifth Chinese Daughter**," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 9 (Spring 1982), p. 59.
6. Patricia Lin Blinde, "The Icicle in the Desert: Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 6 (Fall 1979), p. 69.
7. Linda Ching Sledge, "Maxine Kingston's **China Men**: The Family Historian as Epic Poet," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 7 (Winter 1980), p. 19.

Maxine Hong Kingston's **China Men**" criticizes **China Men** as an autobiography that "underscores the similarity between [Kingston's] family's struggle to adjust fully to life in America and the immigrant problems faced by many Chinese Americans."⁸ Chen Lok Chua's "Two Chinese Versions of the American Dream: The Golden Mountain in Lin Yutang and Maxine Hong Kingston," looks at **China Men** and **The Woman Warrior** as Kingston's way of "[mapping] out her paradigm of female identity."⁹

Cecyle S. Neidle's article entitled "The Foreign-Born View America: A Study of Autobiographies Written by Immigrants to the United States" is the only work that devotes attention to immigrant women's autobiographies as a distinct genre. But Neidle discusses both immigrant men's and women's autobiographies primarily as sources of historical data, as she concentrates on the hardships the immigrants faced. By contrast it is intended hereby to treat autobiography as not only a historical source but an idiosyncratic document.

All the works cited above overlook the immigrant women's autobiographies, because none of them refers to immigrant women's autobiographies as an appropriate way of studying the female bi-cultural identity. All of them depend upon relatively traditional autobiographical theories which prove to be partial in perspective, because they never take immigrant women's autobiography into account as a distinct sub-genre containing different themes from those of white and black American women's and men's autobiographies in general, and from immigrant men's life-stories as well. However, in order to understand the idiosyncratic patterns in immigrant women's autobiographies, it is necessary to glance at white and black American women's autobiographies and immigrant men's in order to create a generic or formal spectrum on which immigrant women's autobiographies can be located.

American women's autobiographies published between the late 1850s and 1980s reveal a self-consciousness and an emotional/intellectual need, on the part of these women writers, to sift through their lives for explanation/exploration and understanding of their "own" selves. Memories of their past lives are reorganized narratively to assert a concept of the female self conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with certain ties and responsibilities to the other members. All of these issues center around or move toward the revelation of anger against being excluded from the mainstream, that is male culture. Female anger, in this case, becomes a generative force that inspires creativity.

8. Carol E. Neubauer, "Developing Ties to the Past: Photography and Other Sources of Information in Maxine Hong Kingston's **China Men**," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 10 (Winter 1983), p. 34.
9. Chen Lok Chua, "Two Chinese Versions of the American Dream: The Golden Mountain in Lin Yutang and Maxine Hong Kingston," **Melus: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States**, 8 (Winter 1981), p. 65.

Black women's autobiographies touch subtle problems as they focus on the double jeopardy of being both black and woman. Harriet E. Wilson's **Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black** (New York: Random House, 1983) shows her transformation from a woman-as-object to a woman-as-subject. Linda Brent's **Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl** (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) explores the racial and sexual abuse which black women, especially mulattoes, have been subject to. The theme of the double-binding slavery recurs in a modern work, **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings** (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), in which Maya Angelou celebrates her femininity but concludes by locating her sixteen-year-old self in the role of an unmarried mother. She also recreates matrilineal patterns in the persons of Momma and Vivian Baxter, whom she sees as both model and anti-model mother and grandmother figures for herself. Audre Lorde's **Zami: A New Spelling of My Name** (Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1982) builds a female myth, unlike the other black writers mentioned, though she is not only black but also immigrant, based on a lesbian as well as matrilinear consciousness. Breaking with her mother, the original role-model, she restores her matrilinear ties within the framework of a sexual sisterhood.

Among white American women's autobiographies, Margaret Mead's **Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) and Lillian Hellman's **An Unfinished Woman: A Memoir** (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), and **Pentimento: A Book of Portraits** (New York: New American Library, 1973) are other well-known works which express a matrilinear consciousness. All these three autobiographies repattern these women's lives in relation to mother and grandmother, in Mead's case, or spinster aunts, in Hellman's. These family members become the role-models to turn to. H.D.'s **Tribute To Freud** (New York: New Directions, 1956), **End To Torment** (New York: New Directions, 1958) and **The Gift** (New York: New Directions, 1982) on the other hand, are mythic quests into ancient civilizations to recreate a mother figure for herself. These three autobiographies, reveal a poet's matrilinear ties with a "surrogate" mother whose name is ironically identical with her own mother. Identifying herself with Helen of Troy becomes a way in which H.D. can open up a space for her new female self to grow in the roots of civilization.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, Gertrude Stein, Mary McCarthy, Adrienne Rich and Sylvia Plath, other autobiographical examples of anger are seen as the active source of a woman's energy and creativity. Gilman's **The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman** (New

York: Appleton-Century, 1935) explores the seeds in her unhappy childhood of her anger as a feminist reformer. Addams' **Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes** (New York: New American Library, 1960) shows how she utilized resentment about woman's place in her rebellion against social injustices. Stein turns her antagonisms and anxieties onto particular men like Hemingway and her brother Leo in **The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas** (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). McCarthy's **Memories of a Catholic Girlhood** (New York: Berkley Publications, 1963) questions socially accepted and assigned roles, unlike Rich's **Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution** (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976) and **On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978** (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979) which angrily trace gender conventions to their roots in patriarchy. None of these writers, however, lifts her anger to the level of pretentious affirmation of the traditionally and socially assigned roles in the form of a deep suicidal rejection as Plath does in her **Letters Home: Correspondence, 1950-1963** (London: Faber and Faber, 1976).

Along the same lines, other white women like Tillie Olsen and Judy Chicago create an insight into the female psyche. In her autobiography **Silences** (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978) Tillie Olsen penetrates the unnatural psychic silences and secrets created and kept by many women writers. In the case of Judy Chicago's **Through the Flower: My Struggles as a Woman Artist** (New York: Anchor Press, 1982) the notion that the life of the imagination, even more so than in others, creates the female identity pervading Chicago's recreation of her womanhood.

Although women's autobiographies like these mentioned range widely in their social focus, a central theme and dilemma pervades them--the complex theme of the female self in two cultures: their homeland's and the American. Though they redefine the female self based on particular experiences, there are also common grounds they share with each other in the way they tell them. Gilman, Addams, Stein, Doolittle, Hellman, and Chicago either implicitly or explicitly talk about matrilineal ties with their mothers or mothers' relatives. They define the female self within the framework of a matrilineal consciousness.

For instance, Gilman presents her childish desire to be loved by her mother, who only kissed her at nights when she was asleep. She compensates for her mother's "absence" by creating a cult of sisterhood with the women she works with. Addams, who also wants to recreate ties with her dead mother, institutionalizes this need on a different level by crea-

ting a sisterhood with other women in the social institution of Hull-House. Stein's yearning for a mother may be seen in her close camaraderie with Alice B. Toklas. In H.D.'s **Tribute To Freud**, Freud interprets H.D.'s dreams about Moses and Bethlehem as revelations of her desire to identify with religious archetypes, Moses and Mary. Her strong urge to become a man and a hero seem to drive her more to Ezra Pound in **End To Torment** and to seek a father figure in him. The shattering impact of the Second World War on H.D.'s psyche drives her to turn more and more to Helen of Troy and thus to locate herself in history. Hellman's mother's two spinster sisters in **Pentimento** are independent women who are able to defy patriarchal Southern notions of a married/traditional woman. Aunt Bethe prefers free love to marriage. Years later when Hellman repatterns her life according to Bethe's life-style and lives with Dashiell Hammett, she reveals her subconscious drive to restore her matrilinear ties. Similarly Chicago projects her need to redefine her matrilinear consciousness in her art. The images of the flowers in her paintings become symbolical of women whose selves are in a continuous process of flowering and renewal. All these women writers in fact redefine the female identity in relation to their mothers, grandmothers or other mother figures, and attempt to locate themselves in the female side of their family history.

Why do women like these feel so strongly the need to reconceive the self more than men do? Does this impulse suggest a different concept of the self with which certain autobiographers can feel more at ease? Or do certain writers covertly continue their submissiveness trying to achieve or create "male" roles and goals, as Margaret Mead appears to do?

All these questions in fact point to another one, that is the problem of the relationship between the past and the present self--"How do I, as a woman, see myself?" Perhaps these autobiographies represent women's attempts to talk about their side of a dialogue, not heard until the present century. They seek widely to create a personal form to connect with the culture by also criticizing its norms and institutions. Women, by all the suffering they experience through their marginal roles as a gender, are in a special position from which to criticize institutional and intellectual weaknesses in general, by exposing and opposing the stereotypical images imposed on them by men. In doing so, they attempt to destroy a major cultural mode of false consciousness. They re-vision their own selves, while they re-create their own voices in entering a dialogue with the culture to re-focus our perceptions of autobiographies through a female lens.

Immigrant men's and women's autobiographies, on the other hand, enter this dialogue with two different cultures in their pasts and presents, while both genders re-create their identities as bi-cultural. The Russian-Jewish novelist John Cournos, for instance, turns his **Autobiography** into a justification of his masculinity: "But perhaps I am boasting, trying to make something of a hero of myself."¹⁰ He never really talks about his wife, but mentions his lover almost as a piece of property: "...She was mine unconditionally and unequivocally."¹¹ He never defines his identity as an Orthodox Jew, but states that

[The] problem for men of my generation born in one epoch and forced to live in another, was to bridge the gap between the two worlds. To bridge this gap one had to reject the old world and accept the new.... To know both worlds and to accept and reject something in each is to be on the horns of a dilemma.¹²

He solves the problem by ignoring his past culture and defining himself not as a Jew but as a human being: "I am a human being; neither creeds nor politics interest me, but human feelings."¹³

Similarly, the Italian-American Leonard Covello, who wrote the first textbook for teaching Italian in the United States, presents himself as an idealistic educator in **The Heart Is The Teacher**. He mentions his marriage relationships with two wives only in a matter-of-fact way. He also reflects his cross-cultural conflicts over getting used to a woman teacher: "Was it possible? A woman teacher!"¹⁴ He remembers nostalgically that "'In Avigliano we were taught by men.'¹⁵ Coming from a patriarchal culture his attitude toward the female gender as weak does not change: "I could earn money and stand on my own two feet and help keep the family together, as I had been taught practically from the time I was born was my responsibility."¹⁶ He teaches at a boys' high-school and therefore emphasizes boys' education, ignoring that of girls. "I came to realize how the heart and mind not only of the individual boy but of his whole community are involved in the educational process."¹⁷

10. John Cournos, **Autobiography** (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), p. 93.

11. Cournos, p. 246.

12. Cournos, p. 332.

13. Cournos, p. 343.

14. Leonard Covello with Guido D'Agostino, **The Heart Is The Teacher** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), p. 23.

15. Covello, p. 23.

16. Covello, p. 38.

17. Covello, p. 269.

The pride in ethnicity and maleness is seen with a different note in some Jewish men's autobiographies in which the connection between the natural genius and America as primordial nurturer of the individual talent is emphasized. Yehudi Menuhin's **Unfinished Journey** presents the typical male story of a genius who has made it in the New World, as every Jewish male is expected to: "I am happy to know that mine is a well-trodden path, but I suspect that personal history has pushed me somewhat further along it than most of my contemporaries."¹⁸ His emphasis on his wife's sartorial elegance and physical beauty "Diana herself is supremely an aesthetic achievement"¹⁹ can be compared to Philip Cowen's attitude in his **Memories of an American Jew**. In this memoir the author refers to his wife only as "Mrs. Cowen,"²⁰ implying an identity as her husband's possession. He locates himself firmly in his patriarchal Jewish ancestry by turning his autobiography into a testament of pride over his contributions to the Jews in the New World by publishing **American Hebrew**: "...my partner, who was a Christian, lacked the courage to go into the scheme, so I bought out his interest and myself embarked on my great adventure..."²¹

Pride in the fulfillment of the American Dream, which means going beyond traditional gender-roles for the immigrant woman autobiographers, usually takes the form, for immigrant man autobiographers, of contributing to the development of American society. The Philippine poet Carlos Bulosan's **America Is in the Heart: A Personal History** testifies to the patriarchal satisfaction he feels in achieving the American Dream:

I felt it spreading through my being, warming me with its glowing reality. It came to me that no man [sic]... could destroy my faith in America again.... It was something that grew out of our desire to know America, and to become a part of her great tradition, and to contribute something toward her final fulfillment.²²

Accomplishing individual goals as professional or intellectual men, these immigrant autobiographers stress their gender more than they emphasize the fact of their being immigrants.

18. Yehudi Menuhin, **Unfinished Journey** (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 334.

19. Menuhin, p. 208.

20. Philip Cowen, **Memories of an American Jew**, *The Modern Jewish Experience*, eds. Moses Rischin, Arthur A. Goren, and Irving Howe (1932; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 351.

21. Cowen, p. 39.

22. Carlos Bulosan, **America is in the Heart: A Personal History** (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), p. 327.

The Jewish-American novelist Morris Raphael Cohen's **A Dreamer's Journey: The Autobiography of Morris Raphael Cohen** presents his self-image as a perfectly assimilated man: "As a solution to American problems the ideal of political Zionism has appealed to me as little as the ideal of assimilationism."²³ He turns his autobiography into an appeal to all human beings regardless of their ethnic origins: "The promise of America is the promise of freedom for the development of human energy, liberated by free education and the abolition of hereditary class distinctions."²⁴ The sense of assimilation that demands the continuity of their patriarchal attitudes creates a didactic and authoritative tone in these autobiographies, as opposed to that of women's.

The theme of being born as a natural genius continues in other immigrant men's autobiographies. Isaac Asimov presents himself as a secular Russian Jew who devotes **In Memory Yet Green: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov 1920-1954** to talking about his fame as a writer and his books. "These were already recognized as classics,"²⁵ he remarks with pride. In the introduction of his second volume, **In Joy Still Felt: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov 1954-1978**, his synopsis of the first volume re-creates his self-image as an innate genius:

I flourished in the new environment, taught myself to read at the age of five, entered the first grade before I was six, and was quickly pushed ahead by teachers who discovered I was unusually bright.²⁶

The notion of being a natural genius is created also in the Yugoslavian-American Louis Adamic's **Laughing in the Jungle: The Autobiography of an Immigrant in America**, as he celebrates his hunger for experience:

Rather, I had come to experience America, to explore the great jungle, to adventure in understanding--and here I was. I had found the adventure exciting and worth while; and there was more to come. I was not yet thirty.²⁷

23. Morris Raphael Cohen, **A Dreamer's Journey: The Autobiography of Morris Raphael Cohen** (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), p. 226.

24. Cohen, p. 227.

25. Isaac Asimov, **In Memory Yet Green: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov 1920-1954** (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979), p. 707.

26. Isaac Asimov, **In Joy Still Felt: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov 1954-1978** (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. vii.

27. Louis Adamic, **Laughing in the Jungle: The Autobiography of an Immigrant in America** (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 325.

His hunger for knowledge and wider experience becomes his way to fulfill the American Dream: "I had a hungry mind, and there was plenty in America to feed on."²⁸

In contrast to these exemplary versions of overtly patriarchal immigrant men's autobiographies, immigrant women's autobiographies reveal the complexities of defining the immigrant female self. Emma Goldman, as an immigrant woman and anarchist ideologue, directs her anger against established capitalist institutions in **Living My Life**. She believes that "economic exploitation rather than political oppression is the real enemy of the people."²⁹ In **A Romantic Education**, the third-generation Czech-American poet Patricia Hampl tries to locate herself in the horrors of European history such as World War I, World War II and the Holocaust:

The horrors and the sadness, the endless mourning, is floating there, careening in the imagination, looking for a place. Looking for some way to be transformed. Looking, in a word, for culture. As I am.³⁰

Her search for her own identity as a creative woman requires immersing herself in Czech culture and identifying herself also with her grandmother. In this way she dissolves the barriers between past and present and asserts the historicity of her female self.

It would be impossible to look into the past, even a happy one...were it not for the impersonality that dwells in the most intimate fragments...that bind even obscure lives to history and, eventually, history to fiction, to myth.³¹

In **Blood Ties: A Woman's History**, Anica Vesel Mander, a Yugoslavian-American, tells her life-story through her own eyes and juxtaposes it against that of her maternal grandmother Sarika. "Her story is my story and so I integrate it with mine."³² As she goes back to Yugoslavia for a visit, she recreates her female identity only in relation to the female members of her family: "In the middle of my life I look back and I seek my roots. In the middle of my life I look back and I seek my female lineage."³³

28. Adamic, p. 326.

29. Emma Goldman, **Living My Life** (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 324.

30. Patricia Hampl, **A Romantic Education** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), p. 253.

31. Hampl, p. 9.

32. Anica Vesel Mander with Sarika Finci Hofbauer, **Blood Ties: A Woman's History** (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 1.

33. Mander, p. 1.

All these immigrant women's autobiographies establish the cross-cultural dilemma of the female identity. One unusual variant of this pattern is provided by Pearl Buck. Unlike all the other immigrant women, who have migrated to the United States, she spent long years in a foreign country first, before she eventually returned to her own. Born of American missionary parents, the 1938 Nobel prize winner spent her life in China, and came to the United States many years later. She verbalizes some of the same issues in **My Several Worlds: A Personal Record** that have been seen in these other life-histories. Feeling like a Chinese among Americans, she recreates herself as a bi-lingual and artistic interpreter of two cultures, expressing repeatedly the hope that there will be better understanding between the East and the West. "I grew up in China, in one world and not of it, and belonging to another world and yet not of it."³⁴

This lack of a solid sense of cultural belonging **as women** characterizes the thematic patterns in immigrant women's autobiographies. They focus on the theme of growing up female in two different cultures. Anger and resentment, emotions that form their authors' binary vision of the female identity, become a source of creativity in these personal narratives.

Despite distinctions between the metaphoric patterns these immigrant women autobiographers use to represent their reconstructed identities, they define themselves as women who are able to combine conventional male and female gender-roles in the New World. All concentrate on female aspects of the immigrant life and culture in a new country as the central thematic pattern in their autobiographies. The American Dream represents for each an available cultural myth of individual freedom for women, one that does not exist in their homeland. Their attempts to revise or reject the patriarchal precepts and concepts of female identity force them to turn inward and become matriarchal authorial selves who can use autobiographical contexts as ways of imposing order on the disjunctive experience of growing up female in two different cultures. This particular issue of discovering and retaining their identities as women demands a special attention to the autobiographies of immigrant women as opposed to those of men. One common response is to take on untraditional roles and become intellectual, liberated "American" women. This turns their autobiographies into distinctly different narratives from those of immigrant men, who reveal their pride in a culturally sanctioned patriarchal superiority, and present their professional achievements in autobiographies which stress their careers and the public realm.

34. Pearl S. Buck, **My Several Worlds: A Personal Record** (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), p. 51.

In her diary-memoir, **Notes from the Other Side of Night**, the Romanian-Jewish American woman dancer and poet Juliana Geran Pilon, who lost all relatives except her parents in the Holocaust, reveals herself as a Jewish woman with no sense of belonging. When she re-visits her native country as a "tourist," she remarks "Both a stranger and a native, I wander along the streets looking for a friend, or hoping my old self will wake up to me and tell me who I was."³⁵ This concern over losing one's ethnic identity recurs in **Fabric of My Life: The Autobiography of Hannah G. Solomon**, where the author merges herself with all Jewish women in her identification with the National Council of Jewish women, of which she becomes the President. " ... I am profoundly impressed by the Council's size as well as its comprehensive activities."³⁶ Helene Deutsch, in **Confrontations with Myself: An Epilogue**, acts as the psychoanalyst of her own past self. Herself a Polish Jew, she sees herself a woman more than a Jew, while expressing deep pride in herself as a professional woman: "My scientific and ideological identity remains with Freud and with most of my old friendships that still remain."³⁷

The perceptions of America as a redemptive force and environment in which to carry out and even exhaust the possibilities of patriarchy in men's autobiographies become for the immigrant women autobiographers the way to a safe distancing from the burden of the past. In **Ghost Waltz: A Memoir**, the Austrian-American woman Ingeborg Day, herself a Nazi's daughter, reveals her unresolvable conflicts with her own past: "If I think Six Million, my parents become monstrous in my brain and more monstrous and then so monstrous that I fight for breath and they become abstract."³⁸ This avoidance by abstraction of her parents' shameful ideology dramatizes her inability to face her past directly: "It was simple. If I detested anti-Semitism with my brain and soul, I had to distance myself from my parents to a degree unbearable for me. So I detested anti-Semitism with my brain alone."³⁹ Yet inevitably she confronts the reality of a little domestic holocaust in seeing her mother as a victim of her father's patriarchy, for she was forced to obey her husband's ideological stance: "I detested and adored my father while he was alive and I still do.... I miss and only miss my mother."⁴⁰

35. Juliana Geran Pilon, **Notes from the Other Side of Night** (South Bend, Indiana: Regnery/Gateway, 1979), p. 24.

36. Hannah G. Solomon, **Fabric of My Life : The Autobiography of Hannah G. Solomon** (1946; rpt. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1974), p. 258.

37. Helene Deutsch, **Confrontations with Myself: An Epilogue** (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 216.

38. Ingeborg Day, **Ghost Waltz: A Memoir** (New York: Viking Press, 1980), p. 9.

39. Day, p. 210.

40. Day, p. 222.

Similarly, in her diary **Only One Year**, Svetlana Alliluyeva presents her father Josef Stalin as a predominantly cruel man. She changes her last name to her mother's, for she cannot "tolerate the name of Stalin."⁴¹ Her anger at her father enables her to call him "this new Czar!"⁴² She also presents her father as an oppressive tyrant in **Twenty Letters to a Friend**, where the return to the past and the memory of her father is almost a descent into Hell: "The past descended on me from all sides all over again and I thought I'd never have the strength to talk to these shadows, these ghosts that came crowding round me."⁴³ The cruelty of her father's chauvinism is also juxtaposed with the image of her mother as a nurturing source of love and affection. She becomes a role-model, one who radiates hope for the future. Svetlana ends her diary with her reborn hope for the everlasting glory of life as a woman: "Everything on our tormented earth that is alive and breathes, that blossoms and bears fruit, lives only by virtue of and in the name of Truth and Good."⁴⁴

These European accounts of New World possibilities of becoming liberated women and reevaluating patriarchal norms, that constitute a common thematic pattern in the immigrant women's autobiographies can also be seen in Chinese immigrants' autobiographies. In **My Life in the United States**, Cynthia L. Chou sees the New World as "the paradise of women,"⁴⁵ a place where she can enjoy an independent life even as a married woman. As a Chinese woman with a lost identity back in her homeland, her life in the United States resurrects a strikingly different vision of herself. She, therefore, like other autobiographers presents a utopian vision of American culture as a place of academic and individual freedom, that does not exclude women, unlike the situation in China. Margaret Yang Briggs, in **Daughter of the Khans**, also presents herself as an intellectual woman. But unlike Chou she is extremely conscious of her ethnic identity, and feels "proud of her Mongol blood."⁴⁶ Yet when she refuses to submit to her father, she leaves home determined to marry a foreigner, as she eventually does an American, so that she will never have to become a traditional Chinese wife.

41. Svetlana Alliluyeva, **Only One Year**, trans. Paul Chavchavadze (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 166.

42. Alliluyeva, **Only One Year**, p. 175.

43. Svetlana Alliluyeva, **Twenty Letters to a Friend**, trans. Priscilla Johnson McMillan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 234.

44. Alliluyeva, **Twenty Letters to a Friend**, p. 235.

45. Cynthia L. Chou, **My Life in the United States** (North Quincy, Massachusetts: The Christopher Publishing House, 1970), p. 57.

46. Margaret Yang Briggs, **Daughter of the Khans** (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1955), p. 223.

Jade Snow Wong's **Fifth Chinese Daughter** and Maxine Hong Kingston's **The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts** articulate the "silence" that the traditional roles have pushed women into, while they integrate themselves into the mainstream American culture. Although Wong succumbs to Chinese traditions without displaying anger or resentment toward her gender-role during her girlhood, she later defines herself as an artist, starting her own pottery business. Her autobiography presents the solid vision of a Chinese-American woman, who can transcend the stereotypical images of herself as a body, a piece of property: "She could stop searching for that niche that would be hers alone. She had found herself and struck her speed."⁴⁷ Kingston, on the other hand, vents her anger toward the Chinese attitude towards women as unquestionably inferior. As she becomes a liberated woman leaving her family home, she presents herself as an American woman for whom the Chinese heritage must exist only in re-worked cultural myths and legends of China so that she will not have to confront them elsewhere in the American present.

To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear.⁴⁸

The attempts to become accomplished male versions of the Old or Middle Kingdom self in order to achieve the pride in maleness, that defines a Chinese man's autobiography like Yung Wing's **My Life in China and America** (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909) dominates the writings of these immigrant women. Unfortunately, we have such a limited number of Chinese women's and men's autobiographies, as opposed to Jewish men's and women's, that these assertions and contrasts must remain merely tentative.

These differences in the authors' visions of their cross or bi-cultural identities which are revealed in this representative survey of men's and women's autobiographies certainly pertain to different ways of looking at patriarchal preconceptions, in several cultures, of conventional female identity. Immigrant men's autobiographies in general do not re-

47. Jade Snow Wong, **Fifth Chinese Daughter** (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), p. 246.

48. Maxine Hong Kingston, **The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts** (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 102.

veal as many or as serious conflicts of growing up male in two different cultures as they do about their authors' mature identities as unusually successful males. For the patriarchal norms in their original traditional cultures which they carry as cultural baggage to the New World, continue making them feel the "strong gender." American culture, too, in most cases does not appear to disabuse them of this belief. Immigrant women's autobiographies, on the other hand, concentrate much more closely, critically and emotionally on cross-cultural conflicts between their parents and themselves. The ways in which some exemplary historians of the self re-define their gender-identities have been traced. The result revises male autobiographers' record, which may have been unduly prominent in histories and other analyses of the immigrant experience.

Unlike their male counterparts, immigrant woman autobiographers attempt to erase or fundamentally revise the patriarchal definition of the female identity. In this context, then, the cultural historian should, and can, construct a distinct female immigrant autobiographical macrotext. Unlike William Q. Boelhower, who does not recognize distinct thematic patterns in the immigrant women's autobiographies, this article has propounded that there is an idiosyncratic and deliberate "deconstructive process"⁴⁹ of traditional gender-roles and gender-identities going on in these autobiographies. In contrast to Boelhower's view that "there is always a new birth, but it is a doubling, not an erasing process,"⁵⁰ the analysis of immigrant women's autobiographies reveals not simply a doubling of gender-roles as this special group of intellectual women transform themselves. Their autobiographies also illustrate the often life-long process of erasing patriarchal impositions on their personal growth.

This analysis of immigrant women's autobiographies, during the course of which there has also been references to immigrant men's and American women's, both white and black, life-stories, demonstrates anew the value of studying autobiography as a distinct sub-genre of American autobiography in which history, psychology and literature converge. To do so, turns personal narratives into cultural narratives. Autobiography combines literature and history in order to present and preserve a slice of cultural experience that envelops--and enveloped--the autobiographer's life. The immigrant women's stories are necessary "documents," for they present their first-hand accounts of immigrants in the New World, their uprootedness and transplantation. They give

49. Boelhower, p. 19.

50. Boelhower, p. 18.

their side of the cross-cultural dialogue as they refocus one's view of American past from the female immigrants' perspective. In doing so, their stories of becoming professional and intellectual women help one see the composite American identity in terms of a thicker description. For the genre of autobiography makes possible many ways to reveal individual and group struggles of becoming "Americans." The literature of autobiography offers us a different account of the immigrant experience than do the conventional histories. In this respect, providing an autobiographical view of the American past redefines and complicates American cultural identity. What emerges is a collection of "multi-cultural identities" that converge in the distinctive yet shared ways certain "minority" women have recreated themselves within American society, history, and literature. The generalizations offered in this article may extend to black women and to other immigrant groups like the Hispanic and the Vietnamese, and some others, which have not been analyzed. The immigrant women's liberated voices are literally heard in their autobiographies, while their feminist concerns and struggles reflect a multi-layered vision of the feminine immigrant identity as they strive to resurrect voices long silenced by the patriarchal impositions of their native cultures.