American Girls Living the American Dream: A Study of The American Dream and Immigrant Identity

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the American dream and identity are closely linked in a dialectical relationship and how this relationship influences young immigrant women's identities in fiction. In order to shed light on this topic, relevant identity creation theories, from multiple fields, such as ingroups and outgroups, performance, hybrid identities, and self-fashioning are chosen. These theories frame the analysis, which is conducted on two novels chosen because they adhere to the young adult fiction genre and the Coming-of-Age genre. The novels are compared and discussed in order to get a deeper understanding of the values they portray on the American dream. The analysis shows that mothers have a great influence on the immigrant daughters' choices in life. The mothers' expectations and their role as the authority shape the girls' identities. However, not every girl meets her mother's expectations, which influences their identity formation. The discussion finds a correlation between the values of the American dream, and which values the mothers, i.e., the authorities, subscribe to. The paper concludes that the American dream shapes the mothers' expectations, and, in turn, these expectations shape their daughters' identities. The girls' identities can either be uniform or diverse according to how they regard their mothers' expectations.

Keywords: The American dream, identity, Coming-of-Age, ingroups, performance, self-fashioning.

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1. Introduction

The Statue of Liberty has been a welcome sight for millions of immigrants since it was finished in 1886 ("The Statue of Liberty"). It symbolizes freedom, inspiration, hope, and that anything is possible in the Land of Opportunity. The most significant population movement recorded at that time in history happened between 1881 and 1920 when over 23 million people immigrated to the United States (Jenkins "Cities and Industry" 163). As she clutches onto the American Declaration of Independence, one feels that freedom, inspiration, and hope are a given when one enters the United States.

The narrative of why so many immigrated to the United States at this time is well-known: people wanted a better life for themselves. In 1931 the notion of the American dream was put into words for the first time: "In his 1931 *The Epic of America*, James Truslow Adams became the first to name and define the one desire that has united and characterized the American people since our beginning. He called it the "American Dream" and defined it as the "hope of a better and richer life for all the masses of humble and ordinary folk"" (Packer-Kinlaw 3). The American dream can be traced back to the beginning of the United States, and Adams defines it as the "greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world" (3).

The notion of the American dream is perhaps the best marketing strategy ever employed by any nation – though it is subconsciously imployed. It has benefitted immigrants, as they have come to a nation where they have the opportunity to better their livelihood, but also the United States economy has improved as "American industrial expansion was made possible by the ready availability of cheap labor" (Jenkins "Cities and Industry" 163). One would almost think that to immigrate to the United States, one had to subscribe to the notion of the American dream. Considering most immigrants fled from a life of poverty, they most likely did subscribe to it even before entering the United States. In such a situation, hope was the only thing they had to hold on to, and the United States was overflowing with it, thus making it an obvious destination.

The American dream has defined the American people for years and has become an integrated part of national culture and identity – even well into the twenty-first century. Still today, immigrants come to North America in pursuit of a better life, and even long-time citizens in the United States have not yet given up on the dream. It would be almost un-American to do so. The American dream being so closely integrated into American culture and identity means it leaves its mark on everything: the people, the literature, the art, and even the economy.

It is thus evident that the American dream is an integrated part of American national identity and culture. Therefore the relationship between the two is one of mutual give and take. However, the American dream also takes on a much more personal shape: it fits into everyone's lives and complies with individual wishes. It is, therefore, also an integrated part of individual identities. The American dream and identity formation engage in a dialectical relationship, where they do not omit or exclude one another but need and presuppose one another. This paper seeks to investigate how the dialectical relationship between the American dream and identity formation influences young immigrant women's identities in *Brown Girls* by Daphne Palasi Andreades (2022) and *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi (2017).

2. The American Dream

The American dream plays an essential role in this paper; therefore, it will first be defined. Secondly, its evolution through literature will be outlined, and thirdly, its significance to immigrants will be specified. This section will provide an in-depth understanding of the American dream's importance.

Usually, equal opportunity for all comes to mind when thinking about the American dream. Equal opportunity is both secured by law in the 14th Amendment and in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence ("14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution").[1] In his preface to the edited book *Critical Insights: The American Dream*, Professor of English Keith Newlin, quotes the preamble to the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (vii). The right to pursue happiness is another fundamental idea embedded in the American dream. Ever since The United States gained its independence, millions of people have immigrated to the country to find happiness. From poor Irish farmers during the great famine of 1845-1849 (Mokyr) to modern-day immigrants fleeing war and terror regimes. The Washington-based Pew Research Center revealed that the U.S. foreign-born population reached a record 44,8 million in 2018 (Budiman).

[1] The 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868 and it extended the Declaration of Independence to formerly enslaved people. Even 100 years later the 14th Amendment was not completely enforced as its lack of enforcement was one of the primary reasons behind the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Many still argue that is has not yet been enforced.

The American dream consists roughly of four components: “upward mobility; equality for everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, or class; homeownership; and “effortless attainment” of great wealth and luxurious leisure” (Kornasky 19). These components are also focal points in historian Jim Cullen’s book titled *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, 2004.

Keith Newlin adds to these components and argues that the American dream consists of three central values:

1. A passionate belief in the value of work, the right to profit from one’s labor, and that one must earn what one gets. Moreover, if one works hard, anyone can achieve what one may desire.
2. A belief that education is the primary means of making a better life for ourselves; that with increased knowledge and professional or vocational training, we will better position ourselves to achieve the success that comes from hard work.[2]
3. At the core of the dream is a sense of hope and possibility integrally connected to the land itself (Newlin vii-viii).

In essence, the three values function as a guide to achieving the American dream: hard work and a good education will provide one with everything one needs to become happy. The third value might require further explanation: when Newlin writes that the land itself has a sense of hope, it is because he thinks of the pilgrims. When they first arrived, they saw wide open plains where no other man had settled and saw endless possibilities (viii). Today we know it was not unsettled land; it most likely belonged to Native Americans. Newlin writes that the discrimination against the Native Americans later led to another critical component of the American Dream: “that it applied chiefly to the dominant (Anglo) culture” (viii), and in the twentieth century, a movement of criticism towards the American dream sprang up in literature, drama, and other cultural texts in the U.S. (viii).

Cara Erdheim has explored this critical movement in her article “Why Speak of American Stories as Dreams?”. Erdheim accounts for three waves that scholars of American dream literature moved through. She argues that research done in the 1950s-1960s was concerned with literature portraying the U.S. as the “new Eden” (Erdheim 54). This also reflects how Americans, and the rest of the world, viewed the United States in the years after the second world war. Literature analyzing texts about the American dream became critical in tone in the

[2] A trend of anti-intellectualism has sprung up in recent years. However, this trend is predominant among wealthy, privileged white people and not among those who strive to achieve the American dream.

1970s-1980s. It was mostly concerned with it being the white man's American dream which was most often portrayed (60). Again, corresponding with what the nation was most occupied with during this time. The 1990s saw no criticism of American dream literature as the country experienced a financial boom (61). However, after 9/11 "[…] Scholarship became apocalyptic in tone; indeed, critics engage more with the nightmare than with the dream" (61). Erdheim's article clearly shows the correlation between national identity and the American dream.

2.1 The Ever-Changing American Dream

In her article titled "The Rise and Fall of the American Dream: From The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin to *Death of a Salesman*," English Professor Donna Packer-Kinlaw provides her readers with an overview of how much the American dream has changed. She takes her point of departure by briefly accounting for the American dream in the seventeenth century: "[…] Americans dreamed about obtaining a better life through faith, hard work, and perseverance" (3). It is evident in this statement that the pilgrims still influenced America.

She accounts for the American dream through literature from various times throughout American history and begins with one of the founding father's autobiographies, namely that of Benjamin Franklin, published in 1791. Packer-Kinlaw writes that in the eighteenth century, the dream was still anchored in religion and morality, and one's moral code was a marker of how much one could achieve in life. Material wealth was also crucial, as was one's position in the community and the contributions one made to it (3). Franklin's reflections in his autobiography defined how Americans could become successful many years after the book was published. Franklin advocates for "[…] moral perfection [and] earning the respect of one's fellow citizens and becoming financially independent" (5). Packer-Kinlaw writes, "[…] he emphasizes work, rather than faith, as the key to realizing the dream" (6). Valuing work higher than faith goes against the seventeenth-century notion of the American dream, where faith was the most critical measure one could take in order to achieve one's dreams.

The values of the American dream changed again as the nineteenth century began. Americans of the nineteenth century were more interested in accumulating wealth than moral piety (7). Packer-Kinlaw writes: "[…] work now served as a pathway to building individual fortunes. The goal, or dream, was to make more money than the competition, to see who could increase their capital the most" (7). A real-life example of someone who undoubtedly achieved this dream is John D. Rockefeller, who built his fortune in the oil industry (9). Packer-Kinlaw explains the American dream in the nineteenth century through the 1868 novel *Ragged Dick*

by Horatio Alger, Jr. The novel tells the story of Richard Hunter, who polishes boots but climbs his way up the ladder to the American middle-class through hard work, perseverance, and a solid moral code (7). Alger's novel was viewed as a guidebook for young boys who tried to find their way through life (9). However, business moguls like Rockefeller were said to employ "questionable tactics" to achieve such high levels of wealth as they did, and a gap between morality and business occurred in the late nineteenth century (9). The American dream in literature no longer reflected the American dream in reality.

In the twentieth century, Americans "[…] longed to display their wealth" (10), something best illustrated in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Packer-Kinlaw offers a historical explanation for this longing: after World War I, American citizens looked at themselves differently and began to question morality, convention, religion, and tradition (10). This different self-image is also evident in Fitzgerald's novel: "They seek a world where no one actually engages in meaningful work, but where money is inherited, [or] made through questionable or illicit dealings" (11). However, not all the characters live off inheritance: it is evident that Gatsby himself is a "rags to riches" type of man. His schedule is described to the reader, and it focuses on bettering oneself and becoming more educated (11-12).

To finish the overview of how the American dream has changed through literature, Packer-Kinlaw looks at the play *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, written in 1949. In *Death of a Salesman*, the American dream is no longer material opulence but societal standing. Willy Loman, the main character in *Death of a Salesman*, dreams of becoming important and respectable. He already possesses the things "ordinary" Americans dreamed about, and now he feels he needs to establish himself. After World War II, the notion of equal opportunity for equal work is put into focus by the American government. Fundamental things such as establishing a minimum wage and the National Housing Act of 1949 helped form a new and larger middle-class. This new middle-class dreamed of "[…] upward mobility, homeownership, and cars and appliances that would make Americans' lives more comfortable" (13). Just like Professor of English Linda Kornasky describes above.

Packer-Kinlaw finishes her article by providing her readers with a twenty-first century definition of the American dream: "no matter who you are or where you're from, if you work hard and play by the rules, you'll have the freedom and opportunity to pursue your own dreams and leave your kids a country where they can chase theirs" (16). Bill Clinton gives this definition in his book *Back to Work* from 2011.

The American dream has thus changed over the years because of changes in national identity. Business ethics changed in the nineteenth century, and the two world wars in the

twentieth century also shifted Americans' self-understanding and, thus, their identity. These changes ultimately led to changes in the American dream. The American dream is still part of American national identity, culture, and the literary canon. Despite the changes just described, there is a striking similarity between what Franklin viewed as the central values of the American dream, and what Clinton views as the central values of the American dream. The fundamental idea is the same, even though the two books are published with a 220-year gap.

2.2 Immigrants, Youths, and the American Dream

Before an account of immigrants and the American dream can be conducted properly, a clear distinction between "immigrant" and "migrant" must be made, as the two terms are often used interchangeably and consequently incorrectly. The Cambridge Dictionary defines an immigrant as the following: "a person who has come to a different country in order to live there permanently" (Cambridge Dictionary, immigrant), while it defines a migrant as being: "a person that travels to a different country or place, often in order to find work" (Cambridge Dictionary, migrant). It is important to underline that migrants do not have to cross national borders but can also move from place to place within one country. This is evident in what has been termed 'The Great Migration,' where about 6 million African Americans left their homes in the South due to inadequate financial opportunities and the Jim Crow Laws to find work in the North. It happened between 1910-1970 (*History.com*). The difference between the two definitions is that the immigrant plans to stay in the country permanently, while a migrant only plans to find work.

Many immigrate to the U.S. to obtain something as simple (viewed from a Westerner's point of view) as freedom. One of the most alluring factors of the U.S. is the Bill of Rights which provides freedom from political and religious prosecution (Clark 2). In his book *Immigrants and the American Dream: Remaking the Middle Class* (2003), Professor of Geography William V. A. Clark states that even though the Bill of Rights is important to many immigrants, it is not the only alluring thing about the U.S.: "The individual immigrant has always focused on material well-being and prospects for a better future" (3). In other words, the American dream draws immigrants to the U.S.; the wish to better one's future and the future of one's children. The endless search for improvement is at the heart of the American dream.

According to Clark, the odds of the American dream becoming a reality are quite high. Many immigrants view the U.S. as a land of opportunity, and with opportunity, the American dream might become a reality. Clark gives his explanation for why North America is a top

choice for immigrants: "[…] it is the very fact that at least some dreams are being realized which is driving so much of the immigration" (5). A combination of personal freedoms and material opportunities is at the core of the American dream for immigrants. Moreover, American culture has been termed "a vast amorphous propaganda machine" which captures the imagination of people all around the world (10), and this "propaganda machine" also draws them in.

According to Clark, the American dream is multifaceted for immigrants. There is a fundamental wish for a higher income, preferably one that can support one's family and still allow one to purchase more luxurious items such as a dishwasher, a car, or a personal computer. However, the overarching luxurious purchase at the top of every immigrant's wish list is a house (8). Homeownership is a central dimension of the American dream; "[…] it provides security and implies putting down roots and community commitment" (8). It provides a safe base to return to at the end of a long day and gives a feeling of freedom, as one is the master of one's house. Clark also emphasizes that "a fairly substantial literature notes that homeownership is linked to prestige and symbolizes "making it" in the United States" (8).

Once the immigrants have come to a new country, they are most likely to get care-oriented work. In their comprehensive introduction to feminist theory *Feminist Thought*, Rosemarie Tong and Tina Fernandes Botts write: "Women from developing countries do a significant percentage of the elder-care, childcare, and domestic work in Western countries" (Tong and Botts "World Stage" 140). They also paraphrase Arlie Hochschild, who calls it a "[…] global heart transplant" when care-oriented jobs are exported from poor developing countries to wealthy developed countries (140).

Obviously, many complications can be connected with coming to a new country, especially for young people. These sons and daughters grow up too quickly and take on responsibilities that should not be theirs, such as paying bills, translating in doctor's offices, and other stereotypically adult undertakings. They are often given the burden of being the family's authoritative voice to the outside world, as the parents often do not speak or understand the language. In her article ""The America Dream" for Undocumented Immigrants: The Yearning for a Lost Sense of Family, Identity, and Belonging," Sonia Barrios Tinoco lists the consequences of increased early responsibilities: "This forced early responsibility could either give a sense of empowerment to the children, as they feel they are helping their family, or it could lead to them losing respect for their elders, as they must play the adult role themselves" (299-300). The reversal of roles is often a burden for the children, who might not

be fluent in English themselves or unable to translate culture as they have no lived experiences of it (300). Tinoco argues that this shakes the family structure and makes it unstable (300).

Having mentioned immigrants and the pursuit of the American dream, one must also mention undocumented immigrants and their pursuit of the same. undocumented immigrants are often Latin Americans, as they can cross the southern border and avoid airport immigration controls. Their motifs for coming to North America are the same as the legal immigrants' motifs: spiritual and material improvement. It must also be assumed that undocumented immigrants are more desperate than legal immigrants: when one leaves one's home country and risks death on the journey to a new country, it is an act of desperation. There are examples in the literature of undocumented immigrants who leave their families behind to pursue a better future for the family,[3] but it often has a devastating effect. A tight-knit family is often the be-all and end-all for Latin Americans, and splitting the family up ultimately breaks it apart (295).

Needless to say, young people who are undocumented in the United States also face many complications. Tinoco provides an example in her article of two young girls who are undocumented immigrants. They are not allowed to leave the house: "We can't because our parents are worried that we will be taken by *la migra* (immigration officers) […] people who have papers get to work, but the ones who don't have papers have to work in the fields" (300-301). These children have a difficult time assimilating to the new culture, as they are not allowed to experience it because of their parents' valid fears.

Tinoco argues that individual American dreams are more important than the cultural and stereotypical American dream. Most – if not all – immigrants share the wish of material opulence and economic stability, but individually they have their own dreams as well: Enrique from *Enrique's Journey* dreamt of seeing his mother while still coming to the United States to work (303); for undocumented immigrant children the dream consists of being legal, going to the movies and being afforded the same freedom as other young children in North America. For immigrants, the American dream also consists of feeling like a family in a new country, creating a new hybrid identity (especially true for immigrant children), and having a sense of belonging – often in the form of homeownership (303). To achieve the immigrant American dream, one has to create a bridge between one's home culture and the new American culture, and being a documented immigrant helps one tremendously in achieving one's dreams.

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[3] *When Parrots Breast-Feed* by Daniel Venegas (2000) and *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario (2006) are examples of immigrants leaving their families to find a better future elsewhere. Both examples are described and analyzed by Sonia Barrios Tinoco in her article ""The America Dream" for Undocumented Immigrants: The Yearning for a Lost Sense of Family, Identity, and Belonging" (2018).

3. Theory

With the American dream being defined above as one of the most integrated notions of American identity, it is relevant to take a closer look at what identity is. Theories from multiple fields will be used to provide a comprehensive understanding of identity formation and its implications for immigrants. The theories presented here will later be used to analyze the primary literature in order to provide an answer to the thesis statement.

3.1 What is Identity?

In their work *Introducing Cultural Studies* from 2017, Brian Longhurst et al. define identity as it is used in cultural studies: "In cultural studies' identity' is used to describe the consciousness of self found in the modern individual" ("Politics" 235). In other words, identity is how humans define who they are. The authors also explain that "'identity' and 'the self' mean 'the same as'" (235). The expression "to identify with" provides an example of this.

Longhurst et al. write that a modern identity is considered a performance: "Identity is understood as performative, not based on any essential characteristics; rather it is a performance based on cultural expectations" (235). Building on this notion, Longhurst et al. call identities "cultural constructions" rather than pre-fixed installments, which never change. When the performance is said to be based on cultural expectations, it can be concluded that "[…] identities are produced through ongoing and active relationships to other people and places (Longhurst et al. "Topographies" 221).

The cultural expectations an individual's performances are based upon, occur in ingroups and outgroups. Professor of Psychology, Michael J. Bernstein, explains what ingroups and outgroups are:

> The groups to which we identify are called ingroups; ingroups can include ones' family, school, sports team, political party, or even country. Some groups are more important to us than others (e.g. being a part of your familial group may be more important than being part of your political party). In contrast, outgroups are groups to which individuals do not consider themselves a part. (Bernstein 1)

Bernstein claims that research suggests that individuals may look at their fellow ingroup members and determine how to act, i.e., perform (1). Longhurst et al. claim the same thing: "It can be said that people make choices of how to 'perform' their identities depending on where they are and whom they are with. In part, people are in control of those performances, and actively construct their identities through those performances…" (Longhurst et al.

"Topographies" 221-222). Longhurst et al. argue that, to some extent, it is a conscious choice when individuals perform their identities. One explanation of why one performs in an ingroup could be to achieve a sense of belonging and being part of something: being an "us" rather than a "them."

Longhurst et al. claim that identity performance can be shaped consciously or subconsciously by other people's expectations, particularly those in one's ingroup. One has to change or – more fittingly – perform one's identity according to one's group, setting, and surrounding expectations. The expectations can have two characteristics: Individual or cultural and social. Individual expectations deal with the fact that people are expected to maintain some continuity of personality, i.e., one cannot suddenly change one's personality without warning. Socio-cultural expectations manifest in roles one is expected to take on, e.g., daughter, friend, wife, expert, etc. The expectations can also vary according to class, race, and geographical setting: "the expectations are different at home or at work, in church or in the sports arena" (222). This point, of course, underlines the statement that identities are not fixed: "They *are* what people *do*. Identities are made in action" (Italics in original. 222). Queer theory was among the first to drive home the notion of identities not being fixed (Longhurst et al. "Politics" 241).

American scholar Judith Butler is the best-known theorist of performativity. Butler is inspired by Foucault when she explains how one performs an identity: "Drawing on Foucault's idea of discourse, Butler argues that identities are made by the constant reiteration of discourses of gender and sexuality" (Longhurst et al. "Topographies" 222). Longhurst et al. also try to explain it another way: "[…] she argues that the 'doing' of discourse cites already established formations of knowledge and it is this citation which produces social subjects" (222). When an individual acts out a structure of meaning familiar to them, that individual is merely repeating – and confirming to themselves – what they already know. Butler argues that this constant repeat is what creates identities. Butler also argues that identities need to be "[…] constantly performed in order to continue to exist" (223). Yet again, it takes an ongoing performance to maintain one's identity.

3.2 The Identity Queue & Sectional Issues

Now that it has been established that identities are ever-changing and performed, it is time to look at another phenomenon within identity studies: the identity queue. English Professor Paul H. Fry published a book titled *Theory of Literature* containing his twenty-six lectures given at

an open Yale University course called "Lit 300". In chapter 21 he takes up the theory of African American Criticism and in connection to this he mentions "[…] the identity queue" (Fry 274). Fry gives an example of what the identity queue could look like:

> I am a working-class black lesbian feminist whose nation is Palestine. That gives me a lot of identity options to choose from, but the trouble is that I have to figure out which of them has priority. Which of those identities has the underlying determinate force that motivates and shapes the way I inhabit my other identities? Once I have chosen my *ur*identity, the others need accordingly to be placed farther back in the queue. (274)[4]

Fry calls for a selection of an identity with the most "priority" to be held at the forefront, while the others take up the positions after and become less apparent. Building on the notions put forward by Longhurst et al., this paper argues that one does not have to choose an *ur*identity and consequently create a hierarchy of identities; one can choose an identity – or more than one – according to the setting or group one is in. Depending on which group one interacts with, one can choose the most prevalent and relevant identity in that group or setting. The identity chosen might change throughout the interaction, but one does not need to choose one over the others. Here is an example: If a black woman picks up her child from daycare, her identity as a black woman might not be the most important in that moment, but her identity as a mother is more relevant. Something might happen during pick-up that makes her identity as a black woman relevant; it might be a racially charged comment, and she can shift from predominantly being a mother to also being a black woman. Her other identities, whatever they might be, are never gone; they are always available to her. Identities are – as described above – always in flux and under development, and it seems that changing between them according to one's needs is an important feature.

Fry's example of the identity queue sounds strikingly similar to the third-wave feminist term intersectionality. From the beginning, third-wave feminism has explicitly focused on all women's experiences and moved away from the second-wave's tunnel vision of white women's experiences (Tong and Botts "Women of Color" 108). As time passed, the idea that oppression was expressed and felt in many different axes or forms came to the forefront of third-wave feminism. Oppression regarding race, gender, sexuality, ability status, etc., often overlaps and fuses together in the lives of the oppressed, and this phenomenon needed a name. In the fourth chapter of their feminist introduction, Tong and Botts write: "Then, in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' to highlight the ways in which existing

[4] *Ur*identity is a form of essentialist thinking – that there can be only one identity which is the most prominent. A paradox occurs here: Fry calls for a selection of an *ur*identity – an essentialist act – while he later classifies essentialist thinking as a problem (Fry 274). Essentialism will be examined further on pages 12-13.

institutional structures fail to address the unique needs of women of color" (108). Crenshaw's point was to highlight how governmental institutions acknowledge discrimination against white women. However, at the same time, these same institutions cannot comprehend the multi-faceted discrimination experienced by women of color. Crenshaw explains that institutions in America are not aware of how "[…] racial and gender discrimination intersect in [women of color's] lived experiences" (108).

Intersectionality is an important aspect to consider when concerned with identity, especially the identity of people of color. In her attempt to spread the term, Crenshaw used the powerful example of the case *DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors*. In this case, African American women sued General Motors on the grounds of racism and gender discrimination because they only hired white women, white men, and black men (115). However, the Supreme Court found General Motors not guilty because they hired black men, and thus, they were not racist. They also hired white women, and on those grounds, they were not sexist (115). This example perfectly showcases why intersectionality is essential: the intersecting forms of oppression experienced by black women were not considered and therefore were not validated.

Intersectionality also stands to remind the world that "[…] personal identity cannot be described in terms of neat, monolinear, timeless categories" (Tong and Botts "Third Wave" 262). Instead, identities change and become relevant at different times in people's lives, and to be able to maneuver freely[5] between one's identities is a critical aspect of being human.

3.3 Essentializing Minorities' Identities

Paul H. Fry also describes essentialism as a problem experienced by African Americans concerning their identity. Essentialism is a "[…] more widely acknowledged problem" (Fry 274), according to Fry. Essentialism is the act of ascribing essential characteristics to any race or group of people – also called stereotyping. Fry states: "Stereotyping for positive and negative traits alike does nobody very much good because what is lacking is always implied in what is singled out as a distinctive trait" (274). According to various twentieth-century scholars, essentialism is an outdated and oppressing way of viewing identity.

English Scholar, Donald E. Hall, has written a book in the New Critical Idiom series published by Routledge titled *Subjectivity*. In it, he accounts for two scholars who believe

[5] The word "freely" should always be regarded with some skepticism as not many things can be conducted freely. It is an idealistic way of thinking if one imagines that one can perform freely with no regards to the contexts one performs within. It also goes against what has previously been established in the paper. The point is: even free performances have their limits as one is always bound by the context one performs within.

essentializing to be outdated and harmful: Audre Lorde and bell hooks. Lorde, being a black lesbian feminist, found a problem in trying to hide one of her identities when socializing with different groups of people:

> As a black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity […] I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of my self. But this is a destructive and fragmented way to live (Hall 111).

"Plucking out" pieces of one's identity is similar to what Fry describes above as the identity queue, as both imply foregrounding one piece of one's identity. Lorde describes that essentialism is destructive and prohibits her from living a full life. Lorde believes that responsible agency stems from being comfortable with one's identities and from being able to act out all aspects of one's identity (111). In other words, individuals can only truly be who they are when they are allowed to showcase who they are.

bell hooks is inspired by Lorde and states that "Employing a critique of essentialism […] allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience. It also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinform and sustain white supremacy" (111). hooks believes that essentialism lessens the value of black identities because essentialism strengthens colonialist views of racialized people. These views demean and belittle black identities and lived experiences.

Another well-known scholar who takes issues with essentialism is postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. Bhabha calls for an awareness of "[…] a range of subjectivities within artificially homogenized groups of oppressed peoples" (115). Bhabha calls attention to multiple identities in colonialized groups and thereby declares his objection to essentialism. Furthermore, Bhabha finds it problematic when colonized people put on masks to fit into the colonizer's culture as he believes this instance of performative agency "[…] unsettles, effects changes, and ironizes all notions of *real* identity" (Italics in original. 115). In the end, essentialism wipes out the colonized people's real identity, according to Bhabha.

Longhurst et al. provide their readers with an example that may help to further exemplify the problems connected with essentialism: "In the American imagination, Mexicans are allowed to occupy two different strangely complimentary spaces: we are either unnecessarily violent, hypersexual, cannibalistic, and highly infectious; or innocent, "natural," ritualistic, and shamanic. Both stereotypes are equally colonizing" (Longhurst et al. "Topographies" 223-224). The example is initially given by artist Guillermo Gómez Peña who has experienced both harmful stereotypes. When it is assumed that Mexicans are one way or the other, they are not

allowed a chance at changing the harmful stereotypes and are thus trapped in them. Being trapped in other people's views is common for those who are victims of essentialist thinking.

3.4 Hybrid Identities

Critics of essentialism hammer home the point of there being multiple identities, especially Audre Lorde's example of being a black lesbian feminist portrays this point perfectly. The concept of hybrid identities does the same thing. In their contribution to The New Critical Idioms series, called *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba, and John Drakakis write that a hybrid identity is a term which has become central to postcolonial theory (Loomba and Drakakis 127). Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha thinks that the failure of colonial powers to produce stable identities in their colonized nations led to a "[…]' hybridity' of identities" (112) in the native people. Some colonial regimes did not create a sufficient split between "us" and "them," and a hybrid identity was created where parts of colonizer and colonized identities merged. Part of this merge happens when colonized people mimic the colonizer to attain certain desirable identity traits – also called mimicry. Hybridity deals with the "in-betweenness" of identities that can – or is likely to occur – when people are colonized.

Loomba and Drakakis argue that "Hybridity […] is more self-consciously invoked as an anti-colonial strategy by some Caribbean or Latin American activists" (172). When a nation's population is culturally mixed – some are Creole, some are not – it can be important for those who are Creole to hold onto what the colonizers left behind. Many of the tools applied in their everyday lives stem from the colonizers and are used to create monetary or spiritual value. If someone is Creole, it means they are of mixed colonizer and colonized descent and often speak a combination of the two languages, also called a Creole language. Fabiola Toussaint, the main character in the novel *American Street*, is an example of someone who speaks Creole. Being from Haiti, an old French colony, she speaks Haitian Creole but is repeatedly told by her aunt not to do so when she comes to the U.S. An example of Fabiola speaking Haitian Creole is when she calls her mother "*Manman*" (Zoboi 1) and her aunt "*Matant*" (17). "*Oui*" is also spelled "*Wi*" (17), and so the difference is clear, especially in writing. Haitian Creole is spoken by the entire population in Haiti – which is over nine million people – and just under one million speak it in the U.S. (Spears 19).

Turning, again, to Audre Lorde, she continues to argue against essentialism and, in turn, for hybridity: "Responsible agency […] comes from an awareness of the unique combinations of identities lived and experienced by the individual, whose power to respond to oppression

thus originates in a critical consciousness of being athwart several, even numerous, social categories" (Hall 111). This is all to say that one acts as one should when one is aware of the different and unique identities that belong to oneself. When one is aware of these identities, one is better equipped to stand against oppression. Awareness of one's identities is fundamental to hybrid and Creole identities as oppression is part of their lived experiences, and resisting oppression is vital.

When identities become hybrid, it is implied that some aspects of both identities are lost, which can significantly impact the colonized. When something is lost, the most natural thing to do is to search for it, and Loomba and Drakakis write that cultural theorist Stuart Hall identifies this as a search for "[…] 'a sort of collective "one true self" …which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common'" (Loomba and Drakakis 178). The search for a "collective one true self" is described as essential to postcolonial identities. However, Hall also describes that turning to find this "collective one true self" does not provide one with an ultimate identity. Loomba and Drakakis explain Hall's point: "[…] colonized peoples cannot simply turn back to the idea of a collective pre-colonial culture, and a past 'which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity'" (178). A Creole identity can never become native again, as something will be missing from it. Finding a "collective one true self" will not provide one with all the answers of one's history because an element of Creole history is to be colonized.

3.5 The Other

According to Loomba and Drakakis, the notion of the Other is essential to the formation of Creole and hybrid identities (179). *Otherness* is a postcolonial term that is used to put a distance between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha describes the colonizer extending an "[…] invitation to identity: 'you're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're *different*, you're one of us'" (Italics in original. 174). Through this invitation, the Other is created. Difference is what constitutes the Other. Bhabha defines the distance between the colonialist self and the colonized Other as the figure of colonial otherness (175). Literary critic Edward Said argues that through hierarchies, "[…] the West creates an identity for itself in opposition to the essentialized characteristics of the Oriental 'other'" (Longhurst et al. "Topographies" 210). In other words, by looking at cultural differences, the West creates an identity by positioning the East as the Other.

The Other occurs in multiple scholarships, e.g., feminism – more accurately in existentialist feminism and women of color feminism(s). Simone de Beauvoir was preoccupied with the woman as the Other/object and the man as the Self/subject. De Beauvoir described puberty as the time when women began to notice their otherness: "With puberty, with the swelling of their breasts, and with the beginning of their menstrual flow, girls accept and internalize as shameful and inferior in their otherness" (Tong and Botts "Existentialist" 237).

According to de Beauvoir, the otherness from puberty is cemented in the institutions of marriage and motherhood (237). De Beauvoir believes marriage and motherhood rob women of their potential to do great things. The title of "wife" might provide security and tranquility, but it also limits women's freedom, and motherhood does so even more (238). De Beauvoir writes that woman "'obtains in her child what man seeks in a woman: an Other, combining nature and mind, who is to be both prey and *double*'" (238). At first, the child liberates the mother from her object status, but as time passes, the child becomes more demanding and eventually robs the mother of her freedom.

For women to obtain freedom, one should think that focusing on a career is the most sensible choice, according to de Beauvoir, but that is not the case. What traps wives and mothers in the role of the Other is femininity, and the same is true for working women (238-239). "Indeed, in some ways, the career woman is in a worse situation than the stay-at-home wife and mother because she is at all times and places expected to be and act like a woman" (239). On top of her professional duties, the career woman is expected to act feminine and have a pleasing appearance to meet society's expectations. It is evident in de Beauvoir's argumentation that she argues from her point of view – a French, white, bourgeois woman. For example, she does not mention the role of the single mother providing for her children and whether she is positioned as the Other or not.

As mentioned above, the concept of the Other also occurs in women of color feminism(s). However, the umbrella term *women of color* must be addressed before delving into that. The term *of color* can be very ambiguous: "For some, it simply means 'nonwhite.' For others, it has important sociological, historical, and political implications" (Tong and Botts "Women of color" 105). It provides people assigned with a nonwhite race with a shared experience, even though they come from different cultural backgrounds and have different lived experiences. Critics of the term view it as an essentialist term. Tong and Botts provide their readers with a non-exhausted list of experiences racialized people share:

> (1) Having one's non-Western culture devalued, (2) having what W. E. B. DuBois called "double consciousness," (3) being pressured to assimilate to the dominant (white) culture, (4) being denied access to "white privilege," and (5) being expected to be more competent than non-racialized persons (105).

Being racialized as nonwhite can "[…] operate as a barrier to the liberal ideal of the autonomous self" (105). Tong and Botts explain that women of color are "[…] persons who have had the female experience within this group of persons, an experience understood as consisting of oppression both as a woman and as a person of color" (105). In other words, they navigate an existence in which oppression intersects.

Keeping this in mind, women of color experience otherness both concerning their gender, but also concerning their race. Looking again to Audre Lorde, she emphasized that "African American women should regard their otherness from white women as a strength, not a weakness" (111). One of Lorde's most famous quotes seems fitting in this context:

> 'Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference … know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular, and sometime reviled. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (111).

With this quote, she reaches back to the time of slavery and calls upon the decedents of enslaved African American women to take charge and not expect help from anyone but themselves. According to Lorde, African American women need to take charge to liberate themselves and survive in a culture that devalues their cultural and historical experiences. The skill to survive can only be found in oneself.

Latin American feminist Maria Lugones also describes women of color as being the Other to white women: "Lugones' work highlights the agency of Latin American women, pointing out that although Western society views the Latin American woman as a woman of color, in her own home, among her family and friends, she perceives herself as herself instead of an-*other*" (121). When living in a society dominated by Western history and culture, everything not fitting into that narrative is seen as the Other. Women are not the dominant sex, and so they become the Other, but women of color are neither the dominant sex nor the dominant race, and so a double otherness occurs. In this double otherness, it can be difficult for women of color to navigate unless they learn to take their differences from the dominant culture and turn them into strengths, as Lorde prescribes.

3.6 Fashioning an Identity

Now that an extensive introduction to identity has been made, it is natural to explain how identity can be created. Ingroup and outgroup socialization and performativity are suggestions that have already been put forward, but there is another way that has to do more with literary criticism. As alluded to in the first paragraph about identity, "identity" and "the self" can be used interchangeably. So when literary critic Stephen Greenblatt writes about self-fashioning, he writes about identity creation. In his influential work titled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* from 1980, Greenblatt interprets renaissance texts and tries to provide his readers with an overview of how renaissance authors created their character's identities. However, the theory of self-fashioning is not exclusively used on renaissance texts; it can be applied to any text from any time and age. Thus, self-fashioning is highly relevant to this paper.

Greenblatt starts his seminal work by proclaiming: "[…] there are always selves […] and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (Greenblatt 1), thus laying down the *raison d'etre* for the book. From this quote, it can also be concluded that Greenblatt believes identities to be deliberately shaped and fashioned. Longhurst et al. previously argued that identities could be shaped consciously or subconsciously, showing agreement between the critics. Greenblatt, however, does not consider ingroups or outgroups; instead, he defines "[…] the point of encounter between an authority and an alien" (9) as the moment of self-fashioning.[6] How a self is fashioned may require some explanation, and the author of the article "The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare," Jan R. Veenstra, provides one. Veenstra writes: "A self is formed, first, in submission to an "absolute power" or authority (such as the Church, the State, or the Family) and, second, in relation to the Other, the stranger, a category other than authority branded by the latter as demonic, heretical, subversive, marginal, and so forth" (Veenstra 181). A self must be in submission to the authority and in relation to the other, in order to be fashioned. According to Greenblatt, it is at the point of encounter between an authority and an Other one's identity is created (Greenblatt 9). Greenblatt's relation between authority and Other is somewhat parallel to relations between ingroups and outgroups. The authority is often part of what one identifies with – nations, religions, etc. – and therefore, it is seen as part of oneself, i.e., one's ingroup (however, this is

[6] Greenblatt uses the word "fashioning" because it may suggest "[…] the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving or behaving" (Greenblatt 2). In other words, "fashioning" denotes an achievement of something related to one's identity.

not always the case). While the self is fashioned, it sways between uniformity and diversity. These opposites also regulate one's identity, ensuring one is not too uniform or diverse. (Veenstra 182).

The Other, which has been accounted for above as a postcolonial and feminist phenomenon, is not the exact same as the Other mentioned by Greenblatt. To Greenblatt, the Other is defined by the authority: If the authority is a woman, she can view a man as the Other as long as she views him as demonic or heretical. Ultimately, the authority decides what constitutes the Other in Greenblatt's theory; it is an individual decision. To postcolonial and feminist studies, the Other is determined by society, culture, and history. What constitutes the Other is collectively agreed on, and the alienation of the Other is a socio-cultural process, i.e., not something one person has decided for everyone else.

Greenblatt has set out ten rules for self-fashioning, but not all will be examined here. Firstly, it is important to remember that a self is fashioned in submission to various authorities and in relation to various Others: "There is always more than one authority and more than one alien in existence at a given time" (Greenblatt 9). The self is thus fashioned in submission to and in relation to different influences. Secondly, if one authority or Other is destroyed, another will take its place so that self-fashioning can continue (9). Thirdly, self-fashioning always involves some experience of loss of self. One last thing of relevance is that "Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (9).

It is curious why Greenblatt uses "language" and not "discourse" here. He is heavily inspired by Foucault and believes that the authority is in possession of power attained through Foucauldian discourse. Veenstra rewrites this rule and uses "discourse" instead of "language": "Humans fashion, are fashioned, and are aware of being fashioned, by discourse" (Veenstra 182). The inconsistency in the use of language and discourse poses a problem, as the two terms are not interchangeable from a Foucauldian point of view. Foucault's understanding of discourse is defined by Longhurst et al.: "For Foucault a 'discourse' is what we might call 'a system that defines the possibilities for knowledge' or 'a framework for understanding the world' or 'a field of knowledge'" (Longhurst et al. "Culture" 27). Discourse does not have something to do with directly speaking to other individuals. Instead, it has to do with knowledge and how we use and organize it. Language, on the other hand, might be compared to Ferdinand de Saussure's *parole*: "[…] the individual act of speech" (Jameson 22), i.e., merely speaking words. There is a stark contrast between the two terms, and using them interchangeably is thus a mistake.

However, it must be assumed that Greenblatt did in fact mean discourse in the Foucauldian sense, and not language: he uses the concept of power to define the authority and must thus be aware of how power is constructed. According to Foucault, discourse, as a body of knowledge, is power. It makes little to no sense for Greenblatt to argue that self-fashioning is a linguistic act. Rather, it makes sense that self-fashioning happens through discourse, i.e., bodies of knowledge and that these bodies of knowledge provide one with power.

Furthermore, Greenblatt argues that literature that deals with and expresses self-fashioning must be defined in three interlocking ways: "as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself an expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (Greenblatt 4). When Greenblatt argues that these literary functions are interlocking, he means that they cannot stand alone: a text which expresses self-fashioning cannot only be "a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author" (4), it has to have elements of all three. If the texts only function as a manifestation of the authors' behavior, the text would be too autobiographical and thus not be a text that expresses self-fashioning.

Previously, Longhurst et al. argued that creating an identity is a continuing process; one's identity is not performed once and never again; it changes depending on which group one interacts with (Longhurst et al. "Topographies" 221). The same goes for Judith Butler, as she has previously argued that identities need to be "[…] constantly performed in order to continue to exist" (223). To modern scholars, identity needs to be kept alive and renewed by constant reiteration. Greenblatt, however, never mentions anything similar to this. In his theory on self-fashioning, nothing is mentioned of identities having to be fashioned continuously. Self-fashioning is described as something that can only happen at the point of encounter between an authority and an Other. As mentioned above, there are multiple authorities and multiple Others at any given time, so one can fashion a self multiple times. However, Greenblatt never states whether it can be fashioned continuously or needs to be.

Multiple ways of creating – or fashioning – an identity have been presented in this theory section: Longhurst et al. recognize socialization within ingroups and outgroups; Judith Butler advocates that performativity and "the 'doing' of discourse" aids one in creating an identity; and finally, Greenblatt talks about fashioning a self in submission to an authority and in relation to an Other. Various other factors influencing one's identity have also been presented, such as intersectionality, essentialism, hybridity, and being perceived as the Other.

Longhurst et al. and Greenblatt agree that a self is formed in relation or submission to other individuals who might be similar to oneself or entirely dissimilar. Both types of socialization have the desired effect. Butler, on the other hand, does not explicitly mention other people's role in identity creation; she focuses on established sites of knowledge one can reiterate to create an identity. All the critics agree that one can have more than one identity, and thus, they discard the destructive idea of essentialism. Longhurst et al. and Butler also agree that a constant performance and maintenance of one's identity is necessary, but Greenblatt never argues anything similar.

When the three critics describe how to create an identity, they do not mention intersectionality or other implications connected with having more than one identity – even though they all point out that one can have multiple identities. Feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kimberly Crenshaw point these things out: de Beauvoir was one of the first, but Crenshaw coined the term and put it into a racial context to further exemplify the issues connected with intersectionality and essentialism. Postcolonial theory has also provided a deeper understanding of identity by explaining hybrid identities as the "in-betweenness" of two different cultures, the concept of the Other, and its significance in identity formation.

By joining forces between identity theory and feminist theory, with some inspiration from postcolonial theory, an extensive understanding of identity creation and its implications have been presented, and an analysis of the primary literature, *Brown Girls* by Daphne Palasi Andreades and *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi, can commence after a short introduction of the two novels.

4. Literary Review

The primary literature chosen for this Master's Thesis belongs to the young adult fiction genre, popularly referred to as YA fiction. YA fiction is literature written primarily for preteens and teens between the age of 12 to 18 years (Sparks). YA fiction was chosen as a criterion for the novels in this paper because it often portrays teenagers coming to terms with whom they are; in other words, identity formation is a common theme in the genre. Besides being YA fiction, the novels also fall within the Coming-of-Age genre. The two genres are related, and many themes within the genres recur. The Coming-of-Age genre generally focuses on the protagonist's growth ("Coming of Age"). The primary literature fits this description as will be shown in the summaries below.

American Street does not entirely comply with the conventions of the YA fiction and Coming-of-Age genres because it pictures the mother as the main role model. Novels of these genres often deal with separation from adults and parents, but Fabiola idolizes her mother and does not wish to separate from her. The novel is still relevant to the study as it complies with every other convention within the genre. *Brown Girls*, on the other hand, does comply with this convention: the mothers are sometimes a hindrance for the girls in reaching their American dream, and they thus wish for a complete or partial separation from them.

4.1 *Brown Girls* by Daphne Palasi Andreades

The primary literature is relatively new, and an introduction is thus needed. *Brown Girls* by Daphne Palasi Andreades was published in January 2022. *Brown Girls* is Andreades' debut novel, and on her website, it is described that "[…] her fiction often explores diasporas, immigration, family and hybrid identities" ("About"). *Brown Girls* has a collective narrator and is a Coming-of-Age story about young girls, growing into women, in "the dregs of Queens" (Andreades 3). The author does not center her story around one character. Rather, many different names are mentioned throughout the novel, and this gives the feeling that it is a story about every brown girl who grew up – and grows up – in what the author calls the dregs of Queens. The most specific description of the girls given in the novel is about their skin color:

> If you really want to know, we are the color of 7-Eleven root beer. The color of sand at Rockaway Beach when it blisters the bottoms of our feet. Color of soil. Color of the charcoal pencils our sisters use to rim their eyes. Color of grilled hamburger patties. Color of our mother's darkest thread, which she loops through the needle. Color of peanut butter. Of the odd gene that makes us fair and white as snow, like whatshername, is it Snow White? But don't get it twisted – we're still brown. Dark as 7 P.M. dusk, when our mothers switch on lights in empty rooms. Exclaim, *Oh! There you are* (Italics in original. 5).

This quote establishes that the novel is about every brown girl living in the dregs of Queens and that there is a myriad of ways brown girls can look.

The novel is divided into eight parts, and the chapters are relatively short, which makes it a fast-paced book – this is necessary when the author tells numerous stories spanning a lifetime in just 203 pages. *Brown Girls* tells the story of both big and small events in the girls' lives: how they sing karaoke in their friends' basements as children; which high school they choose and what comes of their choices; their parents' expectations; and the girls' relationship to their parents' home country – which many of them have never visited. The novel deals with life decisions like boyfriends, careers, old friendships, divorce, and family, and the reader is on

the sideline through everything. The novel also deals with themes such as race, gender, and lifelong dreams, not just the girls' dreams but also the parents' dreams for the girls. When the novel ends, the Corona pandemic has broken out, and the girls are now women. The collective narrator tells the story of how the pandemic affected millions of lives, and naturally, it leads the novel onto the topic of death. At the very end of the novel, Andreades kills off her characters one by one: "We die, we die, we die. But take heart: We also live on" (203). The last paragraph is about death, and when it comes, it is welcome.

Seeing as the novel was published in 2022, only a small amount of literature has been written about it, but some media have reviewed it. A journalist from The New York Times, Dwight Garner, writes: "Andreades' writing has economy and freshness. *Brown Girls* reads as much like poetry as it does like a novel, which is another way of saying: Don't arrive here expecting a good deal of plot" (Garner). Journalist at The Guardian, Sana Goyal, agrees with Garner as she writes: "[…] *Brown Girls* reads like a rap song, like an anthem" (Goyal). The novel has a certain lyrical quality to it. Goyal also mentions the collective narrator as a distinct characteristic, and she calls the narrator "[…] the eponymous brown girls" (Goyal). Even though the novel does not center around one character, it does not make the scope too broad, as the girls face more or less the same problems in their daily lives. Goyal writes: "But it's the particular microaggressions the girls face, and the collective bonds they forge as a consequence, that set them apart" (Goyal). The microaggressions – which will be explored further in the analysis – provide a sense of collective identity between the girls and unite them against the outside world.

The University of Southern California has a student newspaper called the Daily Trojan, and contributor to the newspaper Tina Ter-Akopyan has written a review borne by the conventions of literary criticism. The headline alone gives away its relevance to this paper: "*Brown Girls* reflects the complexities of American identity" (Ter-Akopyan). In her review, Ter-Akopyan focuses on "the American experience" and calls the novel "the brown girl experience," consequently juxtaposing the two. Ter-Akopyan points out flaws of the universal focus: "[…] the "universal" fails to live up to its name, as it does not encapsulate everyone's experience, especially minorities" (Ter-Akopyan). Andreades' tries to rectify this with her novel, which is a step in the right direction. However, Ter-Akopyan also feels something is lost in the universal focus: "Andreades' use of the collective narrator […] calls into question whether Andreades challenges or upholds society's horizon of expectation for marginalized artists" (Ter-Akopyan). According to Ter-Akopyan, Andreades does not fully explore the challenges of being a "brown girl" in North America.

Brown Girls follows girls from one of the outermost boroughs of New York from their childhood and even into the afterlife. The genre of Coming-of-Age and young adult fiction makes this novel interesting to analyze when it comes to identity, and especially when it comes to the American dream, and how it influences their life choices and thus the formation of young immigrant decedents' identities in the United States.

4.2 *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi

Ibi Zoboi is a Haitian-born author living in the United States. She and her mother moved to Bushwick, New York when Zoboi was four years old (Goddu). *American Street* is Zoboi's first novel in the young adult fiction genre, and it is said to reflect the harsh environment she grew up in, in Bushwick in the 1980s (Goddu). *American Street* was first published in February 2017 and is set in contemporary Detroit. The novel follows the teenage Haitian immigrant Fabiola Toussaint as she comes to North America to chase the American dream. Fabiola comes to the U.S. with her mother, but her mother is detained by Immigration Control and not allowed to enter the country. The mother previously overstayed her visa because she wanted to give birth to Fabiola while in the United States, as this would make her an American citizen. Everything Fabiola does in the novel, she does to get her mother to join her on the side of freedom in the Land of Opportunity.

Fabiola's American family lives in a house on American Street in Detroit. Owning a house is the nucleus of the American dream, and this house is even located on the corner of American Street and Joy Road. This is why Fabiola's uncle, Jean-Phillip François, bought the house: he wanted to be "[…] American and to have some Joy" (Zoboi 219). However, he does not get much of it, as he is killed by a bullet to the back of his head (219). His wife, Matant Jo, and three daughters, Chantal, Princess, and Primadonna (called Pri and Donna), live in the house after his death, and this is when Matant Jo becomes a loan shark.[7] By being a loan shark, she provides for her daughters, Fabiola, and Fabiola's mother in Haiti.

Feeling abandoned and afraid in a new country without her mother, Fabiola turns to traditional Haitian Vodou to feel a sense of home. Haitian *lwas*, or spirit guides, help Fabiola navigate her new reality, and they play a central role in the novel. Her cousins are renowned in Detroit for being "The Three Bees" (52), i.e., a three-person gang no one wants to get on the

[7] It is worth mentioning the reason behind her cousin's special names: "*Ma named us Primadonna and Princess 'cause she thought being born in America to a father with a good-paying job at a car factory and a house and a bright future meant that we would be royalty*" (Italics in original. Zoboi 44). The American dream even has an influence when choosing baby names.

wrong side of, and eventually, Fabiola joins them. When Fabiola arrives in Detroit, she learns that an overdose killed a white girl, and an undercover detective, Detective Stevens, contacts Fabiola. She promises that she will get her mother released from the detention center if Fabiola provides information about Donna's boyfriend, Dray, who sells drugs. Fabiola accepts the deal, and her work begins. Along the way, she meets Dray's best friend, Kasim, and they fall in love. Fabiola also discovers that her cousins sell drugs and that the white girl was killed by an overdose from the drugs they sold to her. This means she has to betray her cousins to get her mother back, but she finds a way around it. Fabiola tricks Dray into selling drugs at an upcoming party where Detective Stevens will be, but what Fabiola does not know is that Dray has ordered Kasim to sell at the party. Tragically, a police officer kills him by accident. Dray comes to their house on American Street and threatens to shoot Fabiola. Instead, he shoots himself in the middle of their living room. Eventually, Fabiola's mother is released. The novel ends with them moving out of the house on American Street and leaving to pick up Fabiola's mother from the detention center.

Many critics and book reviewers have examined Zoboi's novel. Enobi Njoku, a reviewer from the Horn Book Magazine, writes: "Zoboi's young adult debut is equal parts gritty and transcendent" (Njoku). While the American book review magazine Kirkus writes: "Fabiola's perceptive, sensitive narration gives readers a keen, well executed look into how the American dream can be a nightmare for so many" ("American Street"). The novel exudes tragedy and hope, the ideal recipe for literature about the American dream.

Contrary to *Brown Girls*, some literature has been published about *American Street*, namely the article "Decolonial Migration, *Crimmigration*, and the American Dream Nightmare in Ibi Zoboi's Spirit Worlds" by Marsha Jean-Charles. She argues that Zoboi's novel critiques the American justice and legal system, especially the immigration system. She writes: "The novel *American Street* is structured to clarify the U.S. justice system as a divisive, violent, and problematic force in Black and immigrant communities" (Jean-Charles 43). Jean-Charles argues that the immigration system is designed to target girls and women like Fabiola and her mother and hinder them from entering North America; Fabiola is only let in because she was born in the country (44). Jean-Charles also describes intersectional oppression as impeding one's attempts at achieving the American dream (44). According to Jean-Charles, the American dream, which turns into a nightmare for Fabiola, only underlines the structural problems in the American criminal justice system: Fabiola is hindered in achieving the American dream from the moment she enters the country as her mother is part of her American dream, but she is not available to her.

The American dream is the driving force when Fabiola comes to North America, and many decisions and events circle back to this overarching theme. Throughout *American Street*, Fabiola must learn to live in a mixture of two cultures, and ultimately it brings the question of identity to the front of the novel. This novel is thus another excellent example of American young adult fiction and Coming-of-Age fiction, and it can be used to investigate how the dialectical relationship between the American dream and identity formation influences young immigrant women's identities.

5. Analysis

Throughout the analyses of the primary literature, the theory presented above will be used to provide an answer to the thesis statement. The analysis will specifically be concerned with how the girls' identities are formed. It is also worth noting that whenever italics are used in a quote, it signifies that someone else speaks. The italics in the quotes have not been added; they are original from the novels. This is true for both novels.

5.1 *Brown Girls* by Daphne Palasi Andreades

As mentioned above, reviewers agree that the novel reads like poetry or a rap song. This is partly due to Andreades' style of writing and her use of repetition. One of the most frequently used repetitions is "Brown girls brown girls brown girls," which is used more than fifteen times throughout the novel. This repetition is used to sum up the actions of every brown girl in the dregs of Queens. It almost has a condescending ring to it as it is always followed by something the brown girls do that is not something well-behaved girls would do. An example: "Brown girls brown girls brown girls who sneak out basement doors and into cars that wait for them, engines idling, at the corner" (Andreades 44). It is as if the narrator is scolding the girls for their behavior.

Brown Girls has a collective narrator making it seem like the stories in the novel are about every brown girl to ever come out of the dregs of Queens. This makes it a 1st person plural narrator, placing the narrator in a group of brown girls. Andreades makes the narrator's affiliation to the group clear by naming several names whenever the narrator exemplifies something: "Some of us (including, but not limited to: Zainab, Nadine, Eva, Danielle, Odalis, Ellen, Sophie, and Aiza) travel from our homes […] to make our first classes at 08.05 A.M." (41). These names are rarely repeated, making the group bigger and more diverse each time

names are mentioned. Goyal's phrase "the eponymous brown girls" is thus fitting for the narrator.

Seeing as the narrator is collective and plural, it never becomes personal or specific, but Andreades is very specific in her description of the setting. The dregs of Queens is a place far away from the glamour of Manhattan, and the novel begins with this description:

> We live in the dregs of Queens, New York, where airplanes fly so low that we are certain they will crush us. On our block, a lonely tree grows. Its branches tangle in power lines. Its roots upend sidewalks where we ride our bikes before they are stolen. Roots that render the concrete slabs uneven, like a row of crooked teeth. In front yards, not to be confused with actual lawns, grandmothers string laundry lines, hang bedsheets, our brother's shorts, and our sneakers scrubbed to look brand new (3).

The precise and realistic descriptions of the setting make the reader feel submerged in the environment the girls grew up in. A few pages later, the main boulevard is described, called the "Boulevard of Death" (6). The Boulevard of Death is flanked by nail salons, auto repair shops, laundromats, Pizzerias, and "[…] forgotten discount electronic stores now selling mattresses" (7). The girls' houses are also described as "[…] neat brick rectangles. Hidden, peripheral" (7). The reader feels that the name "the dregs of Queens" is no exaggeration: it is a forgotten place in New York populated by the hidden and peripheral.

When they get older, some girls choose to go to local public high schools, and here, the setting is also described: "We sit in high school classrooms, the kinds of New York City public schools where metal detectors line entrances and American flags wave proudly above" (37). This is where children of immigrants, who have come to The Promised Land, go to school. The author uses the juxtaposition evident in the quote to comment on the current laws in the U.S.: Americans tell themselves they live in the land of the free and home of the brave, but the need for metal detectors in public schools dismantles this story entirely. Installing metal detectors is a clear sign of fear, and monitoring children to ensure they do not bring guns to school is not the definition of freedom; it is the opposite. The use of the adjective "proudly" to describe the way the American flag waves denotes that politicians and other officials are aware that metal detectors are installed in schools, but it is O.K. as long as people have the right to bear firearms. The fear caused by this law is irrelevant as long as everyone's rights are still preserved.

Some of the girls also choose public high schools in Manhattan, and these are situated between "[…] the graceful stone buildings of the New York City Ballet, the Philharmonic, the Met Opera, and Julliard" (41). Here, there is no need for metal detectors, or at least they are not mentioned, turning this into a matter of essentialism. In the renowned public high schools

of Manhattan, weapons are seemingly not a problem, but they are in the outer borough of Queens. It sends a message to the high school students in Queens that they are dangerous because they are monitored every day and it is presumed they will do something that can harm or even kill others. While the high school students in Manhattan enjoy more "freedom."

Towards the end of the novel, when the girls have become women, they revisit their old neighborhoods and recall this part of Queens as consisting of abandoned factory sites. However, they are surprised by: "[…] half a dozen sleek glass condos under construction, a giant glass spaceship of a tech store whose logo, portentously, is a bitten fruit denoting mankind's fall from grace, and a multinational supermarket catering exclusively to the first world's oh-so-delicate digestive tracts […]" (183). This part of Queens has undergone renovation and is now unrecognizable. The narrator dubs this "the future tense Queens" (184). However, the narrator is not surprised by the gentrification: "We've witnessed the same changes – the bulldozing, the condos under construction […] We've noted these *up and coming!* neighborhoods, the inevitable accompanying influxes of whiteness also occurring in Bed Stuy, Bushwick, Harlem" (184-185). Old and worn parts of the boroughs are renovated to accommodate the housing crisis of New York. As a consequence, neighborhoods containing history and generations of families are being bulldozed and rebuilt. This makes rent and the cost of living even more expensive and forces these families to leave their homes.

When working with identities, the setting is essential because it can help determine how one performs one's identity. As Longhurst et al. argue, "[…] people make choices of how to perform their identities depending on where they are or who they are with" ("Topographies" 221-222). Being in a setting, e.g., a high school where one is monitored via metal detectors, undoubtedly creates a different identity than being among graceful stone buildings where one is not monitored via metal detectors. Growing up among shining glass condos and modern tech stores also creates a different identity than growing up in "the dregs of Queens" among neat brick rectangles next to the Boulevard of Death. The different impressions the girls are influenced by in their childhood neighborhood influence them when they grow older. Their surprise to find the borough under renovation bears witness to their prejudices against Queens and that they have a hard time imagining it as anything other than the dregs of Queens.

5.1.1 Performativity, Ingroups, and Outgroups

Being an immigrant's daughter comes with some expectations. The brown girls' parents expect them to be good girls who care for their younger siblings and do well in school. The chapter

"Duties" outlines how the girls of ten years of age already know what their parents expect of them, and they know exactly how to live up to these expectations:

> But we brown girls are ten and already know how to be good. How to cross the Boulevard of Death, hand in hand with younger siblings […] how to mouth SHHH! when our fathers have fallen asleep on couches after long shifts, and how to vacuum homes, carpets dotted with hair and cookie crumbs […] We know never to talk back (Andreades 8).

This quote is an example of socio-cultural expectations which have been described above by Longhurst et al. The girls perform their roles as big sisters and good daughters, and it is precisely what the parents expect of them. They even do more than what might be expected of girls their age, something which is unique to children of immigrants: "We know how to cram into our parents' beds when loved ones from distant lands and warm climates immigrate to the States with their suitcases and dreams and empty wallets. Stay for months, years" (8). Needless to say, their families are part of their ingroups, and the young girls perform according to their expectations. Returning briefly to what Tinoco mentioned above; this forced early responsibility among immigrant children also has an effect on their identity creation because it can either lead to the children losing respect for their parents or feeling empowered. (Tinoco 299-300). Both are critical when constructing an identity.

The parents expect much from their daughters, not only to help around the house but also to chase the American dream, or more accurately, chase the parents' American dream for them. Especially their mothers are very adamant about how they want their daughter's futures to turn out: "*Grow up. Go to school. Get married. Have kids. Work, work, and work some more until you die. That's it – what else is there?*" (Andreades 64). The girls dream bigger than their mothers did; their mothers are first-generation immigrants willing to "settle," but the girls know the American way of life and dream of much more. Their mothers share the values of the American dream as they were put forward in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography: "[…] he emphasizes work […] as the key to realizing the dream" (Packer-Kinlaw 6). Many people shared this view at the time the autobiography was published, and as has been specified, many still share this view today, e.g., Bill Clinton. The mothers also seem to agree with the three values put forward by Keith Newlin on page (3) in this paper: Hard work and a good education in the United States will provide one with everything one could wish for in life.

The girls disagree with their mothers: "We long for more, but keep our dreams to ourselves" (Andreades 70). The girls do not dream of working their lives away; some of them do not even dream of getting married and starting a family. Some girls are accepted into high

schools in Manhattan, where there are no metal detectors, and one would think that this is everything their families ever dreamed of, but no. When the girls come home with report cards that list straight A's, they are met with "*What – you think you're better?*" (69). A juxtaposition occurs between what their family tells them to do and what they expect them to do: "We are admonished to *Study hard!* yet have also been told *Don't go far, stay close, stay near, aren't we good enough for you?*" (69-70). The girls do not know whether to adhere to their families' expectations or their words, and it affects identity construction and ingroups. The girls' ingroups might suffer, and if they break from their parents' expectations enough times or too much, they might be ostracized from this ingroup.

Outgroups also play a vital role in identity formation. One chapter tells the story of the girls being invited to dinner with their white boyfriends' parents, and this is a clear example of what might constitute an outgroup. In these homes, they are the Other; they are not the dominant race nor the dominant sex. The narrator describes that "In their homes, we smile and nod and mask ourselves behind laughs that we believe are elegant, until we hear them stream from our lips, grate against our ears" (55). The girls do everything they can to impress the white families, and this results in them leaving their ingroup identities behind. The girls must perform the most relevant identity according to the setting, but seeing as this setting is not usual, their identities become forced and compliant. The narrator describes: "Brown girls brown girls brown girls who morph into marionettes on a stage – *Charming, so charming!* – spotlights hot and blinding" (56). This quote underlines that they are putting on a performance – they are mimicking the colonizers, and their identities become hybrids. To be described as marionettes leave the girls with no agency. Being a marionette with no agency is the same as applying a mask to fit in: they become different versions of themselves to fit into this group, resulting in a feeling of isolation: "We have never felt more alone" (59). Betraying one's real identity is harmful and can reinform white supremacy, as bell hooks argues (Hall 111).

A great deal of performance is required when trying to fit into an outgroup, which is demonstrated in the same chapter about meeting the white boyfriends' parents. During these dinners, the girls suddenly become "[…] Ambassadors for Third World Nations" (Andreades 56). They are hailed down with questions that make them betray their undocumented immigrant family members at home in Queens. A choice needs to be made about which identity is most relevant in that setting, and that group, as this resembles what Fry calls the identity queue. They are expected to act a certain way; therefore, all their qualities are not allowed to come forward, and it is not beneficial to the girls.

The girls having to defend third-world nations and answer on their behalf is an example of essentialism: "*As examples of Your Race, you must surely speak for all!*" (110). The white boyfriend's parents say: "*I don't understand why it's frowned upon these days to build a wall at the border of Mexico – I mean, there ARE legal ways of coming to this country.* They say*, aren't your parents frustrated by those illegals getting a free pass, breaking the law?*" (57). The girls feel cornered by the questions which will determine whether or not they are fit for the group, and some find themselves "vehemently" nodding in agreement. The mask the girls put on during dinner – and the marionettes they have become – is harmful to their real identities. Homi Bhabha previously pointed out that it "[…] unsettles, effects changes, and ironizes all notions of *real* identity" (Hall 115). They hide who they truly are, and this does not provide a correct representation of their culture and values to the white parents. At worst, this performance enforces their essentialist thoughts and views and upholds an oppressive system.

Shifting between identities is becoming a natural thing for many of the brown girls. Those who go to Ivy League colleges are confronted with the different worlds they now participate in: "We arrive in parts of the country, or a neighborhood in our own city, the Big Apple, that we have no previous knowledge of […] Looking around, we are certain there has been a mistake, a mix up in admissions. We know we do not belong here" (Andreades 78). In an attempt to get to know their classmates better, they ask: "But why did you have to go to boarding school?" (79), and their classmates laugh. "Still, we laugh along with them, knowing our families have cleaned their apartments, picked up their dogs' shit, raised them and all their siblings" (79). The girls laugh along because they want to fit into this group, they are adjusting themselves to the setting they are in, and yet again, this is harmful to their real identities. They are very aware of their status as the Other. This status is given to them perhaps because of their skin color but definitely because of their economic background, upbringing, and native culture.

When they eventually receive their degrees, they learn to navigate a world where they did not grow up – they still wear masks to fit in: "We touch the masks we've learned to wear, gaze into mirrors at our "better" selves" (107). They are yet again the Other, and this quote is another example of how identity is based on performativity as the girls comply with the socio-cultural expectation that their education and careers entail. Their "better" selves are only better because they comply with the Eurocentric idea of "better." These girls are the "[…] *paragons of the American Dream*" (108). However, it is not like they had imagined it: "Nobody asks about the work itself. We are so visible that we have become invisible. Odd that in this moment we dreamt of, we are faceless" (108). They almost feel as if the American dream has been shoved down their throats and become an all-encompassing goal they were ordered to chase.

At the same time, the girls are not allowed to break from the identity they have created as professional working women. This is also an example of why putting on a mask and hiding one's real identity can be harmful: these girls, now women, do not get to perform their real identities anymore because people think the identity they perform on stage is their real identity. The audience is unaware that the on-stage identity has been taken on to fulfill socio-cultural expectations and that the girls have lost a sense of self.

5.1.2 Hybridity

It has previously been established that a hybrid identity is a postcolonial term; however, it is still relevant to this paper. The girls have never experienced colonization, but they grew up in a culture that has traces of it – perhaps some of their parents or grandparents encountered colonizers – and the foreign culture has undoubtedly affected their identity formation. Thus, their identities are just as much a product of colonialism as their parents' identities.

It is described that some of the girls travel to their parents' home countries to visit family and see the country they come from but have never visited. During these visits, they become aware of the multiple ways they are similar to these people whom they have never met, but also how dissimilar they are to these people who are also family – an awareness of otherness occurs, both their own and their family member's otherness. The girls grew up in the U.S., and consequently, they have different values. However, because they were raised by their parents who were raised in another country, they also hold values from this country. The girls realize: "Brown girls brown girls brown girls who, in their bones, are beginning to understand that they are the sum of many identities, many histories, at once" (132). This quote exemplifies the definition of hybrid identities: the girls possess values from both cultures. The girls eventually conclude: "The colonized, the colonizer. Where do we fall? Realize: Whether we like it or not, we lay claim to both" (133). They possess traits from both the colonizer and the colonized without ever having experienced colonialization. This is because the girls have hybrid identities.

An entire chapter is dedicated to their visit to the motherland, which is like a pilgrimage to many of the girls. They want to connect with that side of themselves, perhaps even search for a collective one true self. This search is natural when one feels like something has been lost or is missing. However, as Stuart Hall describes, this search does not provide one with a collective one true self (Loomba and Drakakis 178). This is also what the girls eventually realize: they are a product of both the colonized and the colonizer. Their travels confirm one

thing: "Why did we ever believe home could only be one place? When existing in these bodies means holding many worlds within us. At last, we see" (Andreades 137). Their travels are the beginning of their understanding who they are.

5.1.3 Essentialist Thinking

The novel also has examples of essentializing the girls' identities. Some have already been examined, but the most obvious examples will be analyzed below.

In the chapter titled "Musical Chairs," the girls are called upon by their teachers in middle school, but they never get their names right:

> Our teachers tell Michaela to *Come to the board and answer number three and make sure you show your work, please*, even though they hand the whiteboard marker to Naz. We stand when our names are called, and our teachers halt, confused. *Oh, I'm sorry, I – No, not you, I didn't mean you, I –* Across the classroom, we catch each other's gazes (15).

The teachers cannot tell the girls apart even though Nadira is Pakistani and wears a headscarf, Anjali is Guyanese, Michaela is Haitian, and Naz is from the Ivory Coast (15). This act simplifies the girls' identities and puts them into one box, which is just what essentialism is. The girls know they are different but are constantly told they are the same: "Think: her body is not mine is not mine is not mine. And yet" (16). Their bodies might not be the same, but in school, they experience the same things and are indirectly told that they are the same. The girls think they are completely different because they grew up in different cultures, are formed by different cultures, and their parents are from different countries, but their teachers view them as the same.

Another example of essentialist thinking is when the girls go shopping. They bring multiple items of clothes into the fitting room and try on the clothes together. They laugh and squeal and encourage each other when they try on something that makes them look glamorous. However, they cannot afford any of the items, as they only brought: "[…] one carefully folded twenty-dollar bill – our hard-earned babysitting cash" (23). When suddenly, the manager hammers on the door: "*What are you girls doing in there?* The doorknob jangles. *You better not be stealing anything!* She shouts. *I know what girls like you do!* (Girls like us?)" (23). The shop manager's prejudices against the brown girls are clear: she thinks they will steal the clothes they are trying on when they are just having fun. The microaggression "girls like you" is especially harmful as it, again, strips the girls of their individual identities and essentializes them into a collective identity built on shop manager's own prejudices. As bell hooks states

that this devalues the brown girls' identities as essentialism strengthens colonialist and harmful views.

When the girls are in a dressing room trying on clothes they cannot afford, they experience oppression on multiple and intersecting levels. They are girls, they are non-white, and they are children who are not from the most affluent area of New York. All four groups have historically been ignored, and especially the two former groups have also experienced oppression. Here, oppression regarding race and gender fuse together and form a new site of oppression. This is the definition of intersectionality.

5.1.4 Self-fashioning – Authority and the Other

As described above, self-fashioning is an important feature when concerned with identity formation in fiction. To refresh the reader's memory: self-fashioning happens in submission to an authority and in relation to the Other, which is defined by the authority (Veenstra 181). Multiple authorities and Others can exist simultaneously, as this allows for more selves to be fashioned (Greenblatt 9).

Greenblatt has defined three interlocking ways in which literature must function in order to represent self-fashioning. So before an analysis of self-fashioning in *Brown Girls* can begin, it is essential to address these interlocking definitions. The novel must be a manifestation of the concrete behavior of the author, and the novel is such a manifestation as the author herself grew up in Queens, New York ("About"). The novel should also be an expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and, finally, the novel should be a reflection upon those codes. This is also true, as the analysis above has proven. Now that it has been established that the novel expresses self-fashioning, the analysis can begin.

Brown Girls is a Coming-of-Age novel; thus, various authorities and Others are presented to the reader. The most prominent authority is the girls' families, particularly their mothers. A chapter titled "Our Mothers' Commandments" presents 5 commandments the girls have been given by their mothers, and the mothers expect the girls to follow them. They are no longer good and obedient daughters if they do not follow them. The 5 commandments are: "Commandment #1 You shall not be a troublesome girl […] Commandment #2 You shall not be an ugly girl […] Commandment #3 You shall not be a loud girl, with many opinions […] Do not argue. Submit […] Commandment #4 You shall not be a wayward girl, with many lovers […] Commandment #5 You shall not be a rebellious girl" (Andreades 66-67). During these 5

commandments, the mothers refer to themselves as "The Lord, your Mother," the reference to God hammers home the point of their mothers being the ultimate authority in the girls' lives.

The authority establishes the Other, and the Other is everything the mothers told the girls not to be in their commandments: troublesome, ugly, loud, wayward, and rebellious. A mixture of all of these things amount to a stereotypical American girl.[8] An American girl influenced and formed by American culture, thus making American culture the Other as defined by the authority. An important question comes to mind: How can American culture be the Other when the American dream is so deeply embedded in American culture?

It must first be established that the mothers believe in the American dream; it is why they came to America. They want their girls to be successful and receive a good education so they can become happy and live stable lives. However, they want to avoid paying the price that follows when their children do chase and achieve the American dream. The girls have always been told to "*stay close, stay near*," so they have never been allowed to chase their American dream. Some of the girls have bigger dreams for themselves than their mothers have for them, and these girls do eventually achieve the American dream, but they are also the ones who leave Queens and become strangers to their own culture. The girls who follow their mother's advice stay in Queens, hold mediocre jobs, and earn meager wages while still trying to support their families. The mothers have nothing against the American dream, it inspires their children to become more than they ever had the opportunity to be, but when the American dream starts to pull their children away from them and their native culture, they have a problem with it. On page 8 in this paper, Sonia Barrios Tinoco's states that the immigrant American dream consists of feeling like a family in a new country (Tinoco 303), and if the daughters move too far away, that feeling disappears.

In some way, the American dream also constitutes the Other – not the American dream as a whole, but the girls' individual American dream. The girls dream bigger than their parents, and it is the girls' American dreams which become the Other. The American dream can be an individual concept, and the girls' dreams are so far from the mothers' that they start working against the mothers' dreams. They did not move to America to split their families apart. However, that is what the American dream does to their families.

Now that it has been established who the authority is and what is defined as the Other by the authority, it is time to look at how the girls' identities are fashioned. All of the girls are in

[8] It is important to note that what the mother defines as ugly is "[…] lipstick with its too bright shade" (Andreades 66).

submission to their mothers. If they do not have mothers, they are in submission to their families as there are certain socio-cultural expectations they need to fulfill in their roles as immigrant daughters. An example of the girls being in submission to their mothers is when they leave for high schools outside of Queens. Some girls are called "*Know it all. Arrogant*" (32) by their mothers. These arguments have two different outcomes:

> In response to their words, we'd bitten our tongues, knowing it would be no use to take the bait. These arguments teach us that it is better to withdraw and keep our thoughts to ourselves. The hotheads of us, however, shouted back, I DON'T WANT TO BE STUCK HERE FOREVER! And gestured to the greasy kitchen stoves, the faded couches, the fake, dusty plants, and the china plates only used on special occasions (i.e. never). Houses – hidden, peripheral – our parents worked so hard to obtain (32).

The girls who bite their tongues in order not to respond to their mothers' harmful comments are clearly in submission to their mothers. However, the girls who respond with just as harmful comments are also in submission to their mothers. This is because they do not achieve anything from these comments: the mothers do not change their minds, and the girls are only given a slap across the face for talking back, as Commandment #3 reads, "[…] You shall not be a loud girl, with many opinions […] Do not argue. Submit" (67). Once the girls go against their mothers – the authority – she shuts down the conversation, and the girls are not allowed to express themselves; ergo, they also submit to the authority. Both the girls who stay quiet and the girls who speak up have an experience of their selves being modeled by forces they cannot control.

The girls' identities are also fashioned in relation to the Other. They are surrounded by American culture every day, perhaps even more than their parents' native culture. Through American culture, they are also taught to dream: again, the American dream is an integrated part of American culture. In fact, the girls are encouraged to dream: The United States is the Land of Opportunity, and as American citizens, they have every right to pursue the American dream. All that influences the girls on a daily basis, once again, results in a feeling of their selves being modeled by outside forces beyond their control – though perhaps not felt as strongly as the effect their mothers' authority has on them.

Greenblatt describes that "[…] self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien" (Greenblatt 9). The quote above exemplifies this: during the conversation about education, the girls either choose to be quiet or speak up, and it is this choice which will define them for years to come. Self-fashioning also entails a threat of loss of self (9). This is also true for *Brown Girls*, as the girls are almost robbed of their dreams because

they do not comply with their mothers' dreams. Some of the girls are, in fact, robbed of these dreams and "settle" for what their mothers think is best.

It has been explained that multiple authorities and Others can exist simultaneously; this is also true in *Brown Girls*. Another authority in the girls' lives – albeit short-lived – is their white boyfriends' parents. In the novel, the white parents represent the entire white middle- and upper-class in the United States. An authority is defined by the power it possesses; this power is attained through Foucauldian discourse, and, among the white middle- and upper-class, the white boyfriends' parents possess all the power and knowledge. The white middle- and upper-class is thus the second authority in the girls' lives.

To this authority, the Other is represented by illegal immigrants coming to North America and becoming a burden on the system. However, "[…] these white people deem us and our families *the good immigrants,* the *hard-working ones – not like the lazy people in this country who are a burden on the system*" (Andreades 57). The girls and their families are "[…] the *grateful brown people*. Thank you for colonizing our ancestor's countries, for the wars and dictators!" (57-58). They could never become the Other because they are perceived to carry their share of the load and have successfully mimicked the colonizer. In other words, they have accepted the idea of the American dream and the following ascension in society. However, the girls also live their lives in relation to immigrants who are deemed "lazy" by the white middle- and upper-class; these are their undocumented family members in Queens.

The girls are so eager to fit in that they forget their undocumented family members in Queens, and their selves are thus fashioned in submission to the white middle- and upper-class authority. It is also fashioned in relation to the Other, their family members who have been deemed lazy by the authority. The undocumented family members are of the same culture as the girls and thus hold many of the same values; however, the girls are not undocumented; they have rights in North America, and therefore, their selves are only fashioned in relation to the Other.

Brown Girls is a novel packed with identity-defining moments. The analysis shows the myriad ways the young immigrant girls' identities are created, both in relation to ingroups and outgroups, in submission to authorities, and in relation to the Other, and how their native cultures influence their identity formation in the United States.

One of the most prominent factors in identity creation is the families, especially the mothers. The mothers hold such a sway over the girls' choices that it sometimes ends up being the mothers who make the choices for them. Their mothers are part of their ingroup and an

authority in the girls' lives. Some girls change their dreams to accommodate their mothers' desires, while other girls do not; they stay silent until they decide to break away from their families and that ingroup.

The American dream is crucial to the girls' identity formation. The mothers' expectations are also formed by their views on the American dream, and the girls' identities are formed according to the mothers' expectations. They have been told from childhood that they should strive to achieve the American dream, but when they embark on the journey to achieve it, they are told to "[…] *stay close, stay near*" (69-70). They are even made to feel guilty because they want to achieve it "[…] *aren't we good enough for you?*" (70). Some girls value their families as ingroups more than the American dream, and their identities become more uniform, as Veenstra describes it (Veenstra 182). While for others, the American dream receives their full attention, and these girls' identities become more diverse (182). The battle between the authority and the Other is a life-altering event, and as Stephen Greenblatt prescribes, identities are formed in the meeting of these two.

5.2 *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi

The second primary novel is *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi. Fabiola Toussaint is the protagonist, and the story is told from her point of view; it is an autodiegetic narrator with a 1st person singular point of view. The reader is, therefore, only allowed access to Fabiola's thoughts and reasonings. The novel starts immediately after Fabiola and her mother are separated at the airport, so the reader is never properly introduced to the mother, although she plays a significant role. In fact, the mother only participates in dialogue during one phone call between her and Fabiola. However, through Fabiola's descriptions of the mother, the reader becomes familiar with her.

The transition from Haiti to Detroit is difficult for Fabiola, especially without her mother's support. Haiti is an old French colony, and Fabiola and her family are descendants of former enslaved people. Above, it is described that Fabiola speaks Haitian Creole. However, as she arrives in her family's home in Detroit, she is forbidden from speaking her native language: "'English please.' She stops and stares at me 'I hope your mother really sent you to that English speaking school I paid all that money for'" (Zoboi 17). Even before coming to North America, Fabiola's American education begins. She could only afford to go to an English-speaking school because her aunt sent her money (165). Fabiola's aunt tells her to speak English; she also grew up in Haiti, as Fabiola did. Matant Jo believes that letting go of

Fabiola's Haitian heritage will make more room for American culture, which eventually will help her achieve the American dream.

The Haiti Fabiola grew up in is an impoverished country; there were no in-house toilets, only latrines: "'You mean to tell me y'all still have latrines?'" (22). Moreover, they did all their laundry by hand: "Manman had just taught me how to boil water in the big aluminum pot over hot coal to pour into a bucket of dirty clothes, then drop in a bar of indigo soap, and, once the water cooled off, crouch down around the bucket to scrub the clothes between my hands" (309). Both of these experiences are miles away from what one would expect to happen in North America. After the earthquake in 2010, Haiti was made even poorer, and Fabiola describes it in the novel:

> […] everything around me moved. And then there was a rolling sound. I swayed and dipped, and in an instant, the walls around me started coming down. The columns that held the second floor of our house split in half, and the roof surrendered. A long crack eased up on the side of the other house. And soon, the concrete, the stones, the marble tiles, the dancing rebar all fell down around me (310).

The description of their house in Haiti sounds like they were among the more affluent citizens, and they were, but only because Matant Jo sent them money. Matant Jo was willing to pay for Fabiola's education because she believes that anything free is "[…] bullshit [and] you don't want a bullshit education" (50). Especially not when reaching for the American dream. This is an example of another mother agreeing with the three central values put forward by Newlin.

Matant Jo had to work hard to provide for her family. However, it is not honest work as she is breaking the law, and this does not align with the values of the American dream as it was portrayed in Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography. In Franklin's autobiography, hard work and a solid moral code would provide one with everything one needs to achieve the American dream (Packer-Kinlaw 3). However, Matant Jo's moral code is not solid when her way of earning money breaks the law. Thus, she does not embody the eighteenth century's way of viewing the American dream. Nor does she comply with the twenty-first century's notion of how one should achieve the American dream. Bill Clinton's autobiography was previously quoted in this paper: "No matter who you are or where you're from, if you work hard and play by the rules, you'll have the freedom and opportunity to pursue your own dream and leave your kids a country where they can chase theirs" (Packer-Kinlaw 16). Matant Jo does not play by the rules, and until they leave the house on American Street and Matant Jo stops her illegal

business – and her daughters stop theirs – neither she nor her daughters can achieve the American dream if one is to believe Franklin and Clinton.

Haiti is one of two crucial settings in the novel; the other is Detroit. The city was once booming and known as Motown because multiple car factories were located there. Even Henry Ford's first factory was founded in Detroit with its favorable wages and hours (Jenkins "Cities and Industry" 131). This meant that large numbers of people moved to Detroit in search of a job – especially during The Great Migration. Jean-Phillip François, Fabiola's uncle, came to Detroit from Haiti in 2000 because he had heard there were jobs available: "*So in 2000, Jean-Phillip François, the Haitian immigrant* […] *paid the city three thousand dollars in cash for that little house on American Street*" (Zoboi 219). However, when Jean-Phillip bought the house on American Street, Detroit was no longer booming; it was a city falling to its knees. In 2013: "[…] the city of Detroit, former capital of the US auto industry, filed the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history, with debts of some $20 billion" (Jenkins "Contemporary America" 244). Detroit was in money trouble, just like Haiti had been after the earthquake. [9]

Contrary to what Fabiola initially believed, Haiti and Detroit are similar. Various examples are given throughout the novel, usually referring to the residents or the culture. For example, Matant Jo tells Fabiola: "'In some ways,' she says, 'This country is like Haiti. They talk out of two sides of their mouth. You can never know what these people are going to say'" (Zoboi 55). Talking out of two sides of one's mouth refers to people lying and not being truthful – there is a lack of trust in both settings. Fabiola first realizes the similarities when she witnesses Dray, Donna's boyfriend, beating up the old man called Bad Leg just outside their house on American Street: "I want to tell Manman what I just saw and tell her we have to go back. This corner where Matant Jo lives is no different from some of the streets in Delmas" (29). Delmas is the area of Port au Prince where Fabiola and her mother lived in Haiti.

In terms of identity formation, the setting is essential. Some things are similar between Haiti and Detroit, but some things are different, too: schools, restaurants, shopping opportunities, and access to money. Almost all of the money that Matant Jo sent to Haiti was to be spent on Fabiola's education, but when she is in Detroit, Matant Jo gives Fabiola $400 to spend on whatever she wishes. She has never had that much money to spend on herself, and it gives her confidence: "It makes me walk taller and speak with more confidence. This unearned

[9] The earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and Detroit's bankruptcy in 2013 are not two events that can be easily compared as roughly 220.000 people lost their lives during the earthquake ("UN marks anniversary of devastating 2010 Haiti earthquake"), but Haiti's following financial situation is comparable with Detroit's bankruptcy.

cash makes me feel a little bit more American. This is the beginning of the good life, I think" (59). Fabiola does not realize at this point in the novel that the money was made illegally.

5.2.1 Performativity, Ingroups, and Outgroups

Fabiola is engaged in a difficult balancing act, and it influences her identity formation. She has to live up to multiple people's expectations, which do not always align. Mostly, she is concerned with her mother's expectations and what her mother would think of her actions now that she is not present to guide her. At the same time, Fabiola wants to fit in to gain Dray's trust and get him arrested, and her mother released.

Fabiola's mother and her family in Detroit are both in Fabiola's ingroup. However, they are not in the same ingroup because her mother is more important to her, especially in the beginning. Fabiola does not even feel like she is part of the cousins and aunt's ingroup when she first arrives in Detroit: "How could my aunt just leave me here in the kitchen – is this how you treat family in America? There is no celebration for my arrival, no meal is cooked, no neighbors are invited to welcome me, not even a glass of cool water is on the table for me to drink after such a long trip" (20). This feeling quickly changes, and she begins to view them as part of her close ingroup.

When Fabiola moves to Detroit, her cousins – especially Pri – expect her to behave a certain way:"'And make sure you look 'em dead in the eye, 'cause you repping' the west side now. Don't show weakness, a'ight, cuzz?'" (21). In Detroit, there are specific ways one needs to behave in order to be taken seriously. Fabiola is even told that she represents the West side of town. So she has to live up to the socio-cultural expectations her cousins have, but also the socio-cultural expectations the members of the West side have. Her other cousin, Chantal, is older and only expects Fabiola to be herself: "'You don't have to be like everybody else'" (48). Within the same group, people expect different things from Fabiola. Both of these expectations are based on the culture the cousins grew up in: Chantal was four when she and her mother moved to Detroit, and she has been influenced more by her father as he was alive during most of her childhood. Pri and Donna grew up without a father, and after their father died, their mother was more focused on earning money than bringing up her daughters with Haitian values. Thus, Chantal has a stronger connection to Haitian culture than her sisters.

Fabniola's mother's expectations are not directly pronounced by her mother, but Fabiola always has her approval in mind when she does something. The mother's expectations are built around the American dream; she wants her daughter to succeed in North America and get a

good education so she can build a good life for herself. This is evident in their time of arrival to the U.S.: "Manman had insisted that we arrive on a weekend so that I could start school the following Monday. She didn't want me to miss a day of this real American education" (34). Again, one of Newlin's three central values is complied with.

Bernstein argues that some ingroups are more important than others (Bernstein 1). In the beginning, the ingroup with her mother is more important than the ingroup with her family in Detroit, and she will do anything to get her mother back. However, as time passes, the ingroup with her family in Detroit becomes just as important as that with her mother. This is evident because Fabiola is not willing to tell Detective Stevens that her cousins sold the drug to the white girl who died of an overdose. Instead, she tries to place Dray at the party where the drugs were sold.

As Fabiola spends more time with her cousins and more time away from her mother, she gets more familiar with American culture. Fabiola's third cousin, Donna, insists that Fabiola should wear a wig and have a face full of makeup when she goes on her first date with Kasim: "'Come on, Fab! Step up your hair game. You gotta actually look *fabulous* for people to start calling you Fabulous'" (Zoboi 135). Initially, Fabiola is willing to change her looks to fit in, but her mother's approval constantly worries her: "I've been thinking about my mother all day. Would she approve? Would she like Kasim? Would she like what I was wearing? I don't even know if she would like me wearing wigs, or weaves, as Donna calls them, because I never so much as had braid extensions" (135-136). When Fabiola does wear the wig, she does not feel like herself and does not want to wear it. Instead, Chantal helps her do a natural hairstyle: "When we're done, my hair looks so good I could eat it" (137). Fabiola is still not wholly convinced that the American look is for her, so she does not meet Donna's expectations. However, she does live up to Chantal's and her mother's expectations, ultimately complying with Haitian cultural expectations.

As the novel progresses, Fabiola becomes more compliant with American cultural expectations. This is because she wants to gain Dray's trust. To do this, Fabiola puts on a performance. Donna takes Fabiola to a salon where they sew in weaves and make false nails and eyelashes. Fabiola, Chantal, and Pri are against the transformation, but Donna insists: "[…] you are definitely not rolling with us looking like that. Let's go" (175). Fabiola gives in because she thinks it will help her on her mission to get her mother to the side of freedom: "I have to be like Papa Legba now – a trickster. So I will wear the costume, say the rights things, and play the game to get what I need" (176). The word "costume" reveals that Fabiola is putting on a performance in a literal sense – she is mimicking an American girl. Papa Legba plays a vital

role in the novel: he is the Haitian *lwa* – spirit guide – of crossroads and is embodied by the older man outside their house called Bag Leg. He guides Fabiola through the tough choices she needs to make on her mission to get her mother back. *Lwas* are an important part of Haitian Vodou, which, in turn, is an important part of Haitian national identity and culture. Haitian Sociologist Laënnec Hurbon writes that Haitian Vodou took shape during the centuries of slavery:

> Once the religion of the royal family of Dahomey, in West Africa, it was then transformed by the slaves of the island of Haiti as a way of restoring a sense of identity and as a force of liberation. This explains the highly significant role played by Vodou in the largest ever successful slave revolt in history and in the creation of an independent Haiti (Hurbon 1).

It is evident why the *lwas* are so important to Fabiola; they are part of her identity and Haitian heritage. Fabiola describes performativity as a natural part of Haitian Vodou: "Manman says that in order for the *lwas* to help us, we sometimes have to embody them, let them mount us so they take over our thoughts" (Zoboi 264). Putting on her costume as an American girl and embodying a Haitian *lwa* is thus a dual performance: she unites an American girl and a *lwa* in one and becomes her new self. The word "embody" also signifies the Haitian *lwa's* important role; it is as if Fabiola reincarnates and becomes the Haitian *lwa*, which is a more powerful act than putting on a costume. It must also be pointed out that to embody a Haitian *lwa* and for them to take over one's thoughts, one loses agency. Fabiola is completely at the *lwas* mercy and has no control. This is comparable to the brown girls acting like marionettes at dinner parties, marionettes who are also without agency.

Being related to The Three Bees, the three-person gang made up of her cousins, Fabiola automatically gains some rivals; these rivals are in Fabiola's outgroup. As explained by Bernstein, "[…] outgroups are groups to which individuals do not consider themselves a part" (Bernstein 1). Fabiola does not consider herself a part of a group who are rivals to her cousins. She gets into a fight with these girls, and in doing so, she meets Pri's expectations as she fights back: "'I think you've just been initiated. This just proves that you could hold your own. We've all been suspended for one reason or another. Welcome to the club, cuzz'" (Zoboi 257). Confronting their common outgroup gave Fabiola a pass to become the fourth Bee and an even more incorporated member of their ingroup.

5.2.2 Hybridity

Naturally, the dual performance Fabiola engages in between an American girl and Haitian *lwa*, mentioned above, leads one to think of hybrid identities. Having grown up in Haiti under different cultural expectations, Fabiola has formed her identity to fit in there. Now that she has come to a new country, she has to merge her Haitian identity with an American identity which is being formed every day she spends there. As mentioned, Fabiola went to an English-speaking school in Haiti, and this has given her a taste of what American culture would be like. However, the full immersive experience is much more powerful.

Fabiola is fully aware that she performs as an American girl, and consequently, her identity becomes a hybrid, and according to Audre Lorde, this is very powerful. Above, it is described that awareness of one's different identities makes one better equipped to stand against oppression. Holding on to her Haitian heritage in Detroit is also important for her identity formation: Haitian Vodou especially plays a vital role. By holding on to this, she reminds her family in Detroit of their Haitian heritage, and they come to realize that they have neglected it and try to regain some of their Haitian heritage using Fabiola as their guide. Chantal is especially grateful to Fabiola for making her remember where she comes from: "Creole and Haiti stick to my insides like glue – it's like my bones and muscles. But America is my skin, my eyes, and my breath […] you force me to remember the home I left behind. You make me remember my bones" (116-117). This is also a clear example of Chantal possessing a hybrid identity, and strength lies in it, too. The cousins were raised by parents who immigrated from Haiti, and like in *Brown Girls*, they also have hybrid identities because their parents' culture has influenced their identity formation.

Fabiola's hybrid identity shines through during Thanksgiving, perhaps the most American holiday where food, family, and gratitude are central. The plan is for Fabiola and Matant Jo to cook for everyone, but Matant Jo feels unwell, and Fabiola has to cook the Thanksgiving dinner alone, but she is very excited. Fabiola shows her love for people through cooking, and she makes her own untraditional Thanksgiving dinner composed of cut-up turkey in a spicy tomato sauce, rice and beans, cassava fritters, fried plantains, and *joumou* – a traditional Haitian soup made of pumpkin, celery, carrots, and potatoes (232-233). Needless to say, her American family is up in arms over the Haitian Thanksgiving dinner. Nevertheless, they eat all of it and talk about Haiti and Haitian food and culture. The Haitian Thanksgiving meal brings them closer together and is a clear example of hybridity not only in identity but in cultures too.

5.2.3 Essentialist Thinking

There are some examples of essentialist thinking in *American Street*, and they are grounded in Haitian culture. In school, Fabiola makes a friend who is not from Haiti, her name is Imani, and she helps Fabiola with her English papers. Even before she introduces herself, Imani knows who Fabiola is because her cousins have spread the word about her arrival. Being The Three Bees' cousin, no one wants to cross her, and The Three Bees have a reputation in Detroit for one specific reason: "'[…] 'cause they're Haitian, everybody thinks they do that voodoo shit. Is it true? Do they put hexes on people? I hear their mother is a voodoo queen who goes by Aunt Jo'" (53). Imani thinks that because they are from Haiti, they perform Vodou and curse people to their advantage; this is why no one dares to cross them. This type of essentialist thinking strengthens harmful colonialist views. Imani also thinks performing Vodou is a bad thing when in fact, it helps uphold their Haitian identity and heritage. The *lwas* of Haitian Vodou even guide Fabiola through one of the toughest times of her life, and they are thus crucial to her.

Pri tells a story of when they were children and their mother gave them "[…] dookie braids with rainbow barrettes and bows" (45), and people used to make fun of them. Some even thought they did not shower because they were Haitian and wore mismatched colors. The most ostracizing idea was that they performed Vodou, so they had to turn their otherness into their advantage, as Lorde argues. Thinking that anyone from Haiti is essentially a witch is extremely harmful thinking. It hinders people from Haiti from assimilating into American culture properly, and it also tells them that their native culture is bad and evil, forcing them to stop practicing it. In some way, it is comparable to colonialism when colonizers told natives how to act and how not to act: Americans told the girls from Haiti that they were acting against their expectations of how girls should act. Essentialism wipes out any traces of the colonized people's real identity.

Branding Vodou as harmful and heretical also positions Fabiola as the Other. She practices Vodou more than anyone; she even has an altar in her room where she prays for her mother's safe return. In Detroit, it is as if her Haitian identity plays an even more central role in her attempt to save her mother. At the end of the novel, when they move out of the house, Pri asks if it is Fabiola's "Vodou stuff" in that box, and Fabiola replies: "'Pri, you have to treat it with a little more respect. It is not my 'voodoo stuff.' It is my life'" (321). Fabiola is aware that without the help from Haitian *lwas*, she would not have her mother back, and she is eternally grateful to them.

Fabiola is also a victim of intersectionality. She is from Haiti, and even though she speaks English, she has a Haitian accent. She has brown skin, believes in a different religion than the majority, and is a girl. Her characteristics are something she is mindful of when she interacts with strangers, especially her accent: "I quickly apologize with my very best English accent and step away. Any hint of an accent could be an invitation for judgment – that I'm stupid and I don't belong here" (60). The invitation for judgment can quickly spread and start to include her skin and hair, and if someone knows her, her culture and religion. It is mentioned above that intersectionality reminds us that personal identities are not monolinear (Tong and Botts "Third Wave" 262), and Fabiola's is certainly not.

5.2.4 Self-fashioning – Authority and the Other

Self-fashioning plays a vital role in *American Street*. However, before an analysis of self-fashioning in the novel can take place, it is yet again important to establish that the novel does, in fact, portray self-fashioning. The novel must include all three of the literary functions put forward by Greenblatt: be a manifestation of the author's behavior, express the codes which shape behavior, and finally reflect these codes. The author's life is shortly accounted for in the literary review: Ibi Zoboi grew up in Haiti and moved to Bushwick in New York with her mother when she was four years old (Goddu). This is similar to Fabiola's story; the only difference is where they move to and at what age. It can be argued that, despite the age gap, they have encountered some of the same challenges connected with identity formation in young immigrant girls. The novel is also an expression of the codes which shape behavior, not just young American behavior, e.g., in the form of advice, which Pri gives Fabiola, but also Haitian immigrant behavior; one does not simply throw away one's Haitian culture and religion only because one has moved to the United States. The novel naturally reflects those codes, and with that established, an analysis of self-fashioning can begin.

All her life, it has only been Fabiola and her mother, but when her mother is detained, Fabiola is left alone in a new country with family, she has only ever spoken to on the phone. Needless to say, Fabiola feels alone and abandoned while she tries to navigate this new culture and new family. Fabiola's mother is a *mambo* (Zoboi 248), a priestess of Haitian Vodou, and she facilitated various rituals in Haiti and was a respected member of their local community, and so Fabiola values Haitian Vodou very highly and uses it every day to guide her. So when she is with her family in Detroit, who do not practice Haitian Vodou and who seem to have forgotten about Haitian culture, she feels more alone than ever. Because of this, Haitian culture

and Haitian Vodou take up a more prominent place in her life than before. This paper argues that one authority in Fabiola's life is Haitian culture and Haitian Vodou. Both Greenblatt and Veenstra agree that an authority becomes an authority because it is in possession of power which is attained through Foucauldian discourse (Greenblatt 9 & Veenstra 182). Moreover, as specified, Foucauldian discourse can be understood as a framework for understanding the world (Longhurst et al. "Culture" 27). Haitian culture and Vodou have a specific way of understanding the world. As Fabiola agrees with the particular ways of understanding the world, the culture and religion are afforded power and can thus be regarded as an authority to her.

According to Greenblatt, an authority must always be accompanied by an alien Other, which the authority defines. In the case of Haitian culture and Vodou, the Other is its opposite: American culture. Fabiola's mother can be viewed as an ambassador for Haitian culture and religion as she has lived all her life in Haiti and is an integrated part of society, and so her mother's opinions determine whether or not something is the Other. The first time Fabiola dresses up for a party exemplifies American culture as the Other. Fabiola wears makeup, a tight dress, and high heels, and Donna is taking pictures of her: "I want to tell Donna not to put them on the internet, but maybe this new self will reach my mother and she will come to smack the makeup from off my face and rip the tight dress from my body" (64). Clearly, her mother brands American culture as the Other. Like in the novel *Brown Girls*, the reader is presented with things that Fabiola should avoid, according to her mother. Fabiola's voice presents these things to the reader whenever she does something new and stereotypically American.

Yet again, the question of how American culture can be the Other, when the American dream – the catalyst for their immigration – is such an integrated part of American culture, comes to mind. The cornerstone of the American dream is hope, as Newlin writes in his third and last central value: "At the core of the American dream is a sense of hope and possibility connected to the land itself" (Newlin viii). Moving to North America thus means automatically accepting the premises of the American dream and sharing the desire to achieve it with millions of others. These millions of others are likely also immigrants or decedents of immigrants, which means that the American dream is not exclusively made for people who have lived in the country for generations. Originally, the American dream was made for immigrants. The American dream is thus a part of American culture that is accessible to all, no matter how much time one has spent in the country and how well-integrated one has become.

The authority and the Other have now been established, and it is time to investigate how Fabiola's self is fashioned. It must be fashioned in submission to the authority, and even though

Fabiola is no longer in Haiti, she still lives in submission to Haitian culture. This is particularly evident through her use of Haitian Vodou: whatever the *lwas* tell her, she obeys. One *lwa*, Papa Legba, is, as mentioned, embodied by an older man, Bad Leg, outside their house on American Street. Papa Legba sings every night, and Fabiola listens to these songs and treats them as if they are foretelling the future:

> *Pull up a chair, let's have a meal,*
> *Shuffle them cards, let's make a deal.*
> *I'll give you the key and set you free,*
> *Be right here waiting for just a small fee.*
> *Beware the lady dressed in brown.*
> *Don't even know her way downtown.* (82-83).

Shortly after, Fabiola realizes that "*the lady dressed in brown*" refers to Detective Stevens, and she does want "a small fee" for setting her mother free, i.e., information on Dray. After this, Fabiola begins to listen to Papa Legba's songs and regard them as true predictions of the future. Letting Papa Legba's songs control her actions is a sign that she lives in submission to the authority.

As has been established, Fabiola must also live in relation to the Other, i.e., American culture. Fabiola does this with Donna: "I borrow more of Donna's clothes now. This is how we have become closer. I give in to all the things I've always liked: jeans that show off my curves, light makeup […] and beautiful hairstyles that highlight my eyes and cheekbones as Donna says" (221). This is an example of Fabiola living in relation to American culture, as it is not something forced on her. She wants to experiment with clothes and makeup, and she has a say in how much makeup she puts on. Thus, Fabiola lives in relation to the Other.

In the beginning, Haitian culture as the authority is much more prominent and important to Fabiola. However, as time passes the authority/Other dualism between Haitian culture and American culture gets put on the back burner, and a reversed dualism with American culture as the authority and Haitian culture as the Other becomes more relevant than before. This is because a switch in the authority/Other dualism can help Fabiola's mother to the side of freedom. The reversed dualism is necessary if she wants to gain Dray's trust and get her mother back. She is therefore willing to recognize American culture as the authority and brand Haitian culture as the Other. Fabiola is careful with making American culture the authority as she still considers her mother's approval, but she does not do the things she thinks her mother would approve of. An example is when Fabiola gets into a fight at school: "Never in my life have I been suspended. And never in my life have I fought in or near school. My mother would beat

me herself, then would have the mother of whoever I fought beat me, too" (256). Fabiola gets involved in a fight at school because she follows Pri's very first advice to her: "Don't show weakness, 'aight, cuzz?" (21). Thus, Fabiola ignored her mother's advice and met Pri's expectations. This episode is both an example of Fabiola living in submission to American culture – because she gets in a fight by following Pri's advice – and in relation to Haitian culture – because she ignores her mother's advice while still having it in mind.

It can be argued that putting American culture as the authority and Haitian culture as the Other is a performance, i.e., something she is just pretending. This is because Fabiola knows that she needs to gain Dray's trust in order to get information on him that she can pass on to Detective Stevens. As mentioned, she will do anything to get her mother to the side of freedom in America. The self she forms under this dualism is an act, as there is no room for her to fashion an authentic self in Detroit without her mother. Greenblatt also states that self-fashioning entails a loss of self (Greenblatt 9). This is true for Fabiola, as her authentic identity is not fashioned with American culture as the authority. Fabiola states that she is losing her authentic identity in Detroit, but she refuses to give up on it, as she has not got her mother with her.

> The whole house seems to want to squeeze me in, force a deep wail from out of my body because it's only been one day and I am losing myself to this new place. This is the opposite of the earthquake, where things were falling apart and the ground was shifting beneath my small feet. Here, the walls, the air, the buildings, the people all seem to have already fallen. And there is nothing else left to do but to shrink and squeeze until everything has turned to dust and disappeared. But not yet. Not without my mother (54).

Fabiola's balancing act between Haitian and American culture is reflected in self-fashioning and the authority/Other dualism. After her conversation with Detective Stevens, Fabiola realizes that she will have to perform and act like an American girl to get her mother back. As the novel progresses and Fabiola becomes more familiar with American culture, this becomes the authority. What was branded the Other before is now the authority, which is possible because Fabiola's mission is paramount to her.

Further proof that American culture as the authority is a performance lies in the examples of ingroup expectations on pages 42-43 of this paper. It is described that Donna wants Fabiola to wear a wig on her date with Kasim, but she refuses (135-136). In the meeting between the authority and the Other, the self is formed; this instance is one example. Later, when Donna, Dray, Kasim, and Fabiola go out together, Fabiola allows Donna to take her to a salon where her looks are transformed (175-176). She only allows this because she knows she must be a

trickster like Papa Legba. American culture is only the authority because a Haitian *lwa* has commanded it to be so. To Fabiola, Haitian culture is still the authority, and American culture is the Other. However, if she acts like Haitian culture is the authority, she does not comply with her new ingroup's expectations, and as a result, she will risk being ostracized. This would be devastating as she would have no means of helping her mother to the other side, to freedom in the United States.

Haiti and Detroit are the two settings that influence Fabiola the most, and within these two settings are the people who influence her the most too. Haiti and North America constitute two recurring dualities Fabiola has to choose between whenever she does something. The balancing act between the two cultures defines Fabiola and how she forms her identity.

The two most significant ingroups in Fabiola's life are also divided between Haiti and the U.S.: her mother constitutes the Haitian ingroup, while her family in Detroit constitutes the American ingroup. As the novel progresses, the two ingroups come to share the most important spot in Fabiola's life, and she listens to both ingroups equally, despite their different expectations of her. Even though the two ingroups are equally important to her, the cultures are not. This is evident because Fabiola performs as an American girl, and she refers to her new hair and eyelashes as a costume (176). She puts on her American girl costume while embodying a Haitian *lwa*, and a hybrid identity is constructed.

The two cultures influence her greatly, and it shows in how she fashions a self. Haitian culture and religion are the authority, and American culture is the Other in the first half of the novel. This changes when she realizes what she must do to get her mother to join her in North America. However, when American culture is the authority and Haitian culture the Other, the self that is fashioned is not authentic. As mentioned, Fabiola puts on a costume when she is an American girl with sewn-in hair and false eyelashes, and costumes can never reflect an authentic self. It is all a performance.

Fabiola's most important goal is to get her mother back, which is the first step to achieving her American dream. She cannot be happy without her mother, and happiness is an integrated part of the American dream – which is clearly stated in the preamble of the American Declaration of Independence. Fabiola succeeds in achieving the first step of the American dream by listening to Haitian *lwas*, and they play an even more important role in her life afterward. Even though it is the American dream, it can still be achieved by the use of means which are not remotely American. Chasing the American dream makes Fabiola realize her Haitian heritage's significant role in her life.

6. The American Dream & Identity

Thus far, the history and evolution of the American dream have been accounted for, and the theory pertaining to identity formation has also been examined. While the analysis has mostly been concerned with how the girls' identities are formed in the two novels, this section will investigate how the dialectical relationship between the American dream and identity formation has influenced the young immigrant protagonists' identities. Firstly, the analyses of the novels will briefly be compared.

The analysis has shown the importance of ingroup relations in young immigrant girls' lives. In *Brown Girls*, the girls grow apart as they attend different schools, and those leaving the borough feel as though something of themselves has been lost. In *American Street*, Fabiola is lost without her mother but finds her way back with the help of another ingroup: her cousins. Performance is also an important aspect: in both analyses, a loss of agency has been described as significant. The brown girls are marionettes while Fabiola performs as a *lwa*. This loss of agency aids the girls in the formation of their identities, and performance is what enables a loss of agency. Hybridity is another important aspect in both novels: even though the girls might not have experienced colonization, there are still traces of it in their native cultures, and it aids in the creation of a hybrid identity. Particularly, Fabiola has difficulty engaging in the balancing act between Haitian and American cultures. Essentialism is one of the more harmful elements in both novels; it removes any trace of authentic identity and places all the characters in one box. The chapter "Musical Chairs" in *Brown Girls* is a striking example. Fabiola's close relation to Haitian Vodou also ostracizes her, and her friend Imani represents another example of essentialist thinking. Self-fashioning, one of the most significant identity formation tactics in both novels, sheds light on power relations. In both novels, the most prominent authority is the mothers and their native culture. Even though they are in the United States, the girls engage mostly in a culture that is not American, i.e., their native cultures. The Other is also the same: American culture. The mothers want their daughters to hold their native cultures' values instead of American values, and they consequently brand American culture as the Other. However, the American dream inspires many of the girls and their mothers, but in *Brown Girls*, mothers' and daughters' dreams do not align. In *American Street*, the American dream is shared by mother and daughter. *Brown Girls* and *American Street* deal with many of the same themes; some of the most central themes are immigration, identity, and the American dream. Common to both novels is the importance of their native cultures.

A means to reach the American dream is education, which is a significant driving force in both novels: Fabiola arrives in Detroit on the weekend, so she can start school on a Monday (Zoboi 34), and some of the brown girls attend Ivy League colleges against their parent's wishes (Andreades 78). Fabiola's mother wants her to attend the best schools, as does her aunt. They view education as a sure way to succeed in life. To them, success is defined by buying a house and having a well-paying job: "[…] *she thought being born in America to a father with a good-paying job at a car factory and a house and a bright future meant that we would be royalty*" (Zoboi 44). A bright future is secure as long as the cousins' father has a well-paying job, and being born on American soil means they have constitutional rights as is secured by the 14th Amendment.[10] The brown girls' mothers are of the same conviction and also want their daughters to have a good education, preferably in healthcare: "*A career in healthcare is the best you could have*, our mothers, medical professionals themselves for twenty-five, thirty years, assures us. *Plus, I'm not paying for any other degree*" (Andreades 86-87). To the mothers, healthcare is the right way to go. If their daughters do not receive scholarships, they are left with no other choice than a degree in healthcare as dictated by their mothers. One cannot help but think of Tong and Botts, who previously paraphrased Arlie Hochschild when describing the transfer of care-oriented jobs from poor developing countries to wealthy developed countries; calling it a "global heart transplant" (Tong and Botts "World Stage" 140).

The girls in *Brown Girls* are second-generation immigrants, while Fabiola is a first-generation immigrant. This is important because Fabiola moves to North America with one goal in mind: to achieve the American dream, just as the brown girls' parents did when they moved to the United States. Fabiola has an easier time living up to her mother's expectations because they share expectations of what they want to achieve with their new American life. The brown girls, on the other hand, who grew up in Queens, have formed their own expectations, which do not necessarily align with their mothers'. These girls have also been influenced by American culture far more than their mothers, which is perhaps why they dare to dream bigger than their mothers do.

In *Brown Girls*, the American dream becomes a point of dispute between the mothers and the daughters. Some of the girls submit completely to their mothers' opinions and expectations on how they should live their lives, while others are more outspoken and stand up

[10] The 14th Amendment is perhaps the most important amendment in the United States' constitution. The first line of the 14th Amendment states: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside" ("14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution").

for themselves (32). They do not want to work their entire lives in healthcare, and they do everything they can to obtain scholarships to good schools to pursue their own dreams. Greenblatt defines two ways identities can turn out: uniform and diverse. On page 19 in this paper, it has been described that while the self is fashioned, it sways between uniformity and diversity, i.e., between fitting in with the authority's expectations or not. The girls who submit to their mothers and stay quiet form uniform identities, while the outspoken girls from diverse identities because they deviate from their mothers' expectations.

In *American Street*, Fabiola has the same dream as her mother, and the American dream is not a point of dispute like it is in *Brown Girls*. However, Fabiola's American dream is out of reach until her mother is with her. As Fabiola values her mother's opinions very highly, it must be assumed that she, too, will form a uniform identity.[11]

6.1 Values and the American Dream

The mothers' values align with the literature about the American dream, analyzed by Professor Donna Packer-Kinlaw. The mothers in *Brown Girls* subscribe to the notions shared by Benjamin Franklin and Bill Clinton: hard work and playing by the rules, i.e., a solid moral code (Packer-Kinlaw 3 & 16). Their daughters do the same: it is hard work to go to school in Manhattan when one lives in the dregs of Queens; the commute takes hours every day. To be accepted into these high schools, they have "[…] interviewed and auditioned, have lugged our instruments and portfolios to parts of the five boroughs we've never been. We have been evaluated, scored, judged. We do all this at the age of thirteen, already training ourselves in the competitive ways of the City That Never Sleeps" (Andreades 29). They work incredibly hard to get into the best schools as their parents tell them "[…] *education is the only way to succeed*" (29). This value corresponds with one portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby comes from nothing, presumably the only one in upper-class society, and through education and bettering himself, he reaches the pinnacle of society. The brown girls strive for the same thing. They obey their parents' mantra about education and success, and by complying, their identities are on track to become uniform. However, the girls who are accepted into high schools in Manhattan are also told not to go too far away and stay close by. However, they still choose to go, which sets them on the track to form diverse identities.

[11] *Brown Girls* follows its protagonists all through their lives, and it is thus easier to say something definitive about their identity formation, but *American Street* only follows Fabiola for about 6 months, and it is thus difficult to say something definitive about her identity. The 6 months the reader follows Fabiola are crucial in her life and can thus be used as an indication of what might happen to her later in life.

It has already been established that Matant Jo and her daughters do not play by the rules, as Franklin and Clinton prescribe. Therefore, they do not abide by these values of the American dream. Matant Jo is more concerned with accumulating wealth than moral piety, and she thus denotes the same values prevalent in the nineteenth century and embodied by John D. Rockefeller. However, Matant Jo also believes in the necessity of a good education; all three of her girls attend a private catholic high school, and Fabiola attends the same school when she comes to Detroit (Zoboi 61). Once again, the family subscribes to the "rags to riches" narrative from *The Great Gatsby*: Education is everything. Anything else is set aside as unimportant, e.g., Matant Jo earning money in a way that does not abide by the law. She will do anything to ensure her children and niece are set up for success in North America.

Fabiola's mother also subscribes to the notion of education being an all-important measure for her daughter to achieve the good life in North America. It must also be assumed that Fabiola's mother subscribes to the notions put forward by Franklin and Clinton in their autobiographies. Playing by the rules is what any good person would do, and it must be assumed that Fabiola and her mother have done so while in Haiti; otherwise, they would not be permitted to enter the United States. As opposed to her sister, Fabiola's mother does not subscribe to the values exemplified by John D. Rockefeller. She believes hard work and education are the key ingredients.

The values portrayed in *Death of a Salesman* are not subscribed to by any of the mothers in the two primary novels, but some of the daughters in *Brown Girls* hold the same values. Willy Lowman has achieved upward mobility, homeownership, and comfortable necessities, so he wants more: he strives for societal standing (Packer-Kinlaw 13). The girls who receive a good education and a promising carrier – those who become "[…] *the paragons of the American dream*" (Andreades 108) – initially strive for societal standing. However, they do not wish for it when they lose themselves in this world and realize there is no room for their authentic selves.

Matant Jo does not comply with Franklin and Clinton's values on achieving the American dream, but this does not mean she does not subscribe to their values. However, it must be assumed that Fabiola's mother subscribes to Franklin and Clinton's values about hard work and a solid moral code. The brown girls' mothers do the same. They also subscribe to the value of education from *The Great Gatsby*, as Matant Jo and Fabiola's mother do. The two novels conflict when it comes to moral code. In *Brown Girls*, the girls' lives are built up around playing by the rules and hard work as they believe this will get them the furthest, while the characters in *American Street* are aided by their illegal business to earn money and go to the

best schools. Fabiola can only achieve her American dream when her mother is released, and her mother is only released because Dray kills himself. Detective Stevens believes that the person who sold the drugs that killed the white girl is off the streets, and she owes Fabiola a favor. Fabiola never tells Detective Stevens the truth, and so Fabiola reaches the first step of her American dream by immoral means.

The mothers and which values of the American dream they subscribe to are important, as their "commands," expectations, and who or what they choose to alienate also determine how their daughters' identities are shaped. This is because the daughters' identities are formed by the mothers' expectations and in submission to their authority. The daughters' individual American dream is also shaped by their identities. This goes to prove that there is a dialectical relationship between the American dream and identity formation. Even though some girls in *Brown Girls* are outspoken and warp their mothers, they still view them as the authority, as has been proven on page 36 in the analysis. Therefore, whichever view the mothers subscribe to, will influence their daughters' identities.

7. Conclusion

The notion of the American dream has existed for centuries; even the pilgrims in the seventeenth century were aware of the possibilities the land in North America afforded. Benjamin Franklin, Horatio Alger, Jr., F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Arthur Miller are known for their texts about the American dream, and these texts also reflect the American people's changing attitudes towards the American dream. As the national identity changes, so does the American dream. Although the American dream changes throughout the years, it fundamentally stays the same; there is always a wish to better one's life. There are great similarities between Franklin's vision of the American dream and Clinton's vision of the same. Hard work and playing by the rules have always been the cornerstones of the American dream. Sonia Barrios Tinoco points out that for many immigrants, a family that stays together and homeownership are markers of a successful life in North America.

In an attempt at trying to define how one constructs an identity, multiple theories have been accounted for: ingroups and outgroups, performativity, intersectionality, essentialism, hybrid identities, otherness, and self-fashioning are the most prominent. Theories from various fields have been selected to provide the reader with the most comprehensive understanding of identity construction.

The analysis of *Brown Girls* has revealed that its collective narrator portrays the myriad ways identities can be created in the dregs of Queens. Among the most prominent identity formation tactics are ingroup expectations, performance, and self-fashioning. There is one figure guiding the girls through it all: their mothers. This authority figure either tries to hinder the girls from achieving their dream or pushes them to achieve a dream they have planned for them in healthcare.

The analysis of *American Street* has revealed that even if one does not play by the rules, as Franklin and Clinton prescribe, one can still achieve the American dream. However, it is rather an immoral way of achieving it, as another person takes the fall for one's happiness. In this novel, the mother is the embodiment of the authority. However, the mother is removed from all action as she is in a detention center, but her opinion is still of great importance. Religion takes up the place of authority along with her mother, and the *lwas* command Fabiola what to do. Fabiola listens to her mother and the Haitian *lwas* when creating her identity. Fabiola also uses ingroup expectations, performance, and self-fashioning as her identity formation tactics.

This study concludes that the girls' identities are formed and based on their mothers' expectations. The girls' identities are created through ingroup expectations, performance, and self-fashioning, and the mothers' expectations are fundamental to all three identity formation tactics. The brown girls' mothers' expectations and Fabiola's mother's expectations are inspired by the four main components of the American dream: "Upward mobility; equality for everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race; homeownership; and "effortless attainment" of great wealth and luxurious leisure" (Kornasky 19). These components are reflected in American dream literature analyzed by Professor Donna Packer-Kinlaw. The mothers' expectations will lead the girls to achieve the American dream. It is then clear that the American dream has shaped the mothers' expectations and, in turn, their daughters' identities.

The expectations which shape the girls' identities are deeply connected to the mothers' American dream. The mothers' American dream corresponds with one that has existed for centuries. This proves that a dialectical relationship between identity formation and the American dream exists. However, to provide a clear answer to how this dialectical relationship influences young immigrant women's identities, Greenblatt's terms, which describe identities as either uniform or diverse, are important. The girls whose dreams align with their mothers, such as Fabiola's, grow up to have uniform identities to the authority. In contrast, the girls who speak their opinion and do the opposite of what the authority expects of them grow up to form diverse identities from the authority.

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