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"Tales" of Text and Culture: Tropes of Imperialism, Women's Roles, Technologies of Representation, and Collaborative Meaning-making in Rita Golden Gelman's *Tales of a Female Nomad, Female Nomad and Friends*, and Personal Website

Michelle Lynne Van Wert Kosalka
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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“TALES” OF TEXT AND CULTURE: TROPES OF IMPERIALISM, WOMEN’S
ROLES, TECHNOLOGIES OF REPRESENTATION, AND COLLABORATIVE
MEANING-MAKING IN RITA GOLDEN GELMAN’S
TALES OF A FEMALE NOMAD, FEMALE NOMAD AND FRIENDS,
AND PERSONAL WEBSITE

by

Michelle Van Wert Kosalka

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ABSTRACT

“TALES” OF TEXT AND CULTURE: TROPES OF IMPERIALISM, WOMEN’S ROLES, TECHNOLOGIES OF REPRESENTATION, AND COLLABORATIVE MEANING-MAKING AT WORK IN RITA GOLDEN GELMAN’S *TALES OF A FEMALE NOMAD*, *FEMALE NOMAD AND FRIENDS*, AND PERSONAL WEBSITE

by

Michelle Van Wert Kosalka

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014
Under the Supervision of Professor Peter Sands

This dissertation examines contemporary travel writing specifically created for a popular reading culture, Rita Golden Gelman’s *Tales of a Female Nomad*, *Female Nomad and Friends*, and personal website. The project is concerned with how culture is continuously represented and shaped through the dialogic interaction between writer and reader, and the subsequent liminal spaces which emerge in moments of meaning-making. Chapter 1 is a close reading of how Gelman’s works reinforce and, in some cases, resist, tropes of imperialism. Chapter 2 examines patriarchal gender roles in Gelman’s works and the ways in which recent advances in feminist psychiatry and psychology can radically change our understanding of women’s identity formation based on an updated collaborative identity model. Chapter 3 explores the active nature of meaning-making between text, reader, and popular culture utilizing the theoretical framework of reader-response criticism for a reception history of Gelman’s texts. In my analysis of the

relationship between Gelman as author and her popular readership via print text and web reception, I seek to provide historical context as well as a situated, specific, and tangible exploration of meaning-making for artifacts of popular culture.

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*For my parents, who taught me to love learning.
For David, who taught me the meaning of true partnership.
And for Kate, who continues to teach me what life is about—joy.*

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Introduction

This project examines contemporary travel writing specifically created for a popular reading culture using a set of poststructural theoretical lenses (postcolonial and feminist, with reader-response tenets woven in throughout). Rita Golden Gelman's *Tales of a Female Nomad (Tales)* contains moments where my academic reader's training causes me to feel uncomfortable with the way Gelman portrays the people and cultures she encounters. These moments of tension piqued my interest and ultimately brought me to this dissertation, an examination of how one woman's contemporary travel writing is simultaneously challenging, changing, and in some cases confirming existing tropes of travel and gender roles as well as gendered genre expectations. In this project, I read Gelman's *Tales*, as well as her secondary work in the travel genre, a collaborative recipe and story anthology called *Female Nomad and Friends*, published in 2010 (*Friends*). I also explore how she uses her website, ritagoldengelman.com, to reach out to a community of readers who respond to her "female nomad" lifestyle.

Chapter 1, "The Rhetoric of Empire in 21st Century Travel: Tropes of Imperialism and the Tensions of Cultural Relativism in *Tales of a Female Nomad* and *Female Nomad and Friends*," begins the project with an in-depth study of specific tropes, or stereotypes reproduced and reinforced over time, which writers employ to describe people and places that are different than their own culture of origin. Key terms and ideas from Graham Huggan and Mary-Louise Pratt related to the "surmise" of travel writing, which operates in a space between fiction and reality that stretches and shapes meaning-making in unique and sometimes unpredictable ways, frame my argument. This in-between, liminal, interstitial space is a theme that runs through each chapter. I move beyond

binaries and either/or restrictions in order to plumb the depths of the grey areas involved in moments of cultural relativism. Poststructuralist literary theory focuses on discourse and language as one way to become trapped in a circular web of representation. David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* provides a solid scaffolding from which to explore Gelman's work from the perspective of discursive repetition. As a journalist, Spurr began mapping the language of "othering" he found in journalism and colonial documents produced about "other" cultures by American, British, and other Western writers for the popular media and government administrations. Spurr identifies twelve tropes which are consistently reinforced throughout the official administrative documents of colonialism he studied as well as in popular, mass-market texts. These tropes are surveillance, appropriation, aestheticization, classification, debasement, negation, affirmation, idealization, insubstantialization, naturalization, eroticization, and resistance. In my own analysis of Gelman's *Tales* and *Friends*, I focus on eight of these tropes. I explore how Gelman's gaze becomes one of surveillance during moments of interpersonal tension in *Tales*. I also clarify moments of classification Gelman creates when she begins to compare other cultures to her own (both wittingly and unwittingly). In addition to these two tropes, I look at moments in *Tales* and *Friends* where there are overlapping moments of tropic tension related to aestheticization, insubstantialization, affirmation, and the civilizing mission. Often these moments are difficult to read, both with and against the grain; several involve passages where the writer witnesses and recreates for readers extremely intense experiences including physical violence, psychological tension, and spiritual awakening. The heightened emotion and intensity of these passages, "tales" of their own, make them all the more important to examine from a

discursive, tropic point of inquiry, for it is here that we can find both insidious and insightful clues about how travel writing also “writes” culture, continuously shaping and reshaping how we perceive ourselves and our own cultural contexts in relationship to others.

Chapter 2, “(Re)Presentations of Patriarchal Expectation and Exception: A Feminist Poststructuralist Reading of Women’s Roles in Gelman’s Work,” pushes beyond an analysis of trope to delve into how Gelman’s work as a travel writer reinforces and resists traditional patriarchal gender roles. In this chapter I am not only exploring Gelman’s writing and several of the stories contributed by other writers to the *Tales* anthology, but also how gender roles are determined in western culture. I read passages in *Tales* and stories submitted to the anthology *Friends* in order to tease out connections between reinforcement of and resistance to socially constructed gender roles. Often, many paragraphs in these passages, read through various lenses or ways of seeing, create tension because they simultaneously reinforce and resist socially constructed gender roles. Recent and substantial advances in feminist psychology and psychiatry are radically changing the way scientists view psychological and psychosocial development for girls and women. These changes in the perception of women’s roles in relationship to identity development are important to link to writing by women about travel and interpersonal relationships, especially in relation to themes of community, connection, and belonging. What may initially seem to be simplistic and essentialist moments of reliance on the “global community of women” or “shared humanity” can be read instead as moments of a form of strategic essentialism, particularly when we take into consideration how women construct identity not through the socially-acceptable,

“normal” (male) model of rugged individualism and competition (individual-autonomous model) but rather through a (female) model of self-in-connection-with-others (community-based relational model). Read both with and against the grain, such moments can both reinforce essentialism and make strategic use of it at the same time. While I identify and examine how Gelman’s work in *Tales* can at times resort to essentialism and reinforce traditional gender roles (or show us explicitly how they operate on the body and in the psyche of a contemporary female traveler), I also contend that the ways in which Gelman evokes a bond with women through shared humanity or “women’s work” is strategic and serves a larger purpose for coalition-building than a cursory reading would allow.

The third and final chapter in my dissertation, entitled “Collaborative Meaning-Making: The Interplay of Reader, Writer, and Technologies of Representation in *Tales*, *Friends*, and Gelman’s Website,” weaves aspects of cultural studies, reader-response theory and cyberfeminism into a reading of how Gelman’s writing work and her website have impacted readers and helped to shape the relatively new figure of the solo female traveler in the travel writing genre. While aspects of reader-response theory are already implied in most theoretical analysis by feminist and postcolonial scholars, concrete and grounded analysis of the strong connection between readers and writers is often overlooked. I focus on this connection between writer and reader in Chapter 3 chiefly because the readership for Gelman’s travel work is not academic, but popular. I remain fascinated by the ways Gelman helped and helps to transform what a “female nomad” is and can be, and even how the term itself has taken on new meaning in the years since *Tales* was published. I look closely at Appadurai’s conceptual –scapes related to

meaning-making, including technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes and relate them to Gelman's work in *Tales*, *Friends*, and her website. I identify the implied reader and the interpretive community for Gelman's work and website using key reader-response concepts from Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser. Further, I present a reception history of Gelman's writing via reviews, online blogs, and interviews. I also explore popular and as scholarly pieces which mention Gelman's work specifically, or which focus on similar themes in the travel writing genre. Cyberfeminism informs my reading of how Gelman's use of the web to reach out and form a coalitional space for women with similar traveling penchants is historically relevant and important. I also explore the use of the term "nomad" in the travel writing genre, from early references to pastoral and aboriginal nomadic peoples to contemporary use of the term as a "global wanderer." In my analysis of the relationship between Gelman as author and her popular readership via print text and web reception, I seek to provide historical context as well as a situated, specific, and tangible exploration of meaning-making for artifacts of popular culture.

The whole of the project, then, situates itself as a body of work concerned with how culture is continuously represented and shaped through the dialogic interaction between writer and reader and the subsequent liminal spaces which emerge in moments of meaning-making. Using Gelman's two texts and website as the case studies for inquiry allows a manageable, targeted, and close reading chosen particularly because of my interest in how gender informs ideas of travel and the travel writing genre. Across disciplines as diverse as literary studies, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, linguistics, psychology, psychiatry, and women's studies, scholars are sounding

the call for more discussion in popular culture about women's roles, women's writing, and women's contributions to both local and global society, many of which have been erased, eroded, or simply left out of recorded history. This dissertation is an effort to respond to that call and contribute a detailed analysis of Gelman's impact on both the travel writing genre and popular culture.

**The Rhetoric of Empire in 21st Century Travel:
Tropes of Imperialism and the Tensions of Cultural Relativism
in *Tales of a Female Nomad* and *Female Nomad and Friends***

“Representations are authorized to speak in the name of the ‘real’ only if they are successful in obliterating any memory of the conditions under which they were produced.”

--Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*

In this chapter, I contend that a contemporary twenty-first century travelogue by Rita Golden Gelman, *Tales of a Female Nomad (Tales)*, and the follow-up to that publication edited by Gelman, a collaborative text with many contributors entitled *Female Nomad and Friends (Friends)*, are contemporary travel texts which are both discursively neo-colonial *and* rich in liminal, in-between spaces that offer moments of fruitful cultural relativism. Both *Tales* and *Friends* are texts published for and within the popular culture of the United States in the early 21st century. The texts are at once symbolic of the cultural context in which they were created and resonate as a shaping component of that very cultural context. While *Tales* was touted to the public as a groundbreaking text on the basis of gender and lifestyle choice (Gelman became a “nomad” and renounced her high-class L.A. life), *Friends* is presented as text born of collaborative vision, containing stories and recipes from around the world submitted and compiled by different authors. *Tales* situated Gelman as a single woman making her way in the world in a way that other women could follow; *Friends* is a celebration of both Gelman’s choice and of other women who have also taken up the call to live differently and who would like to share that with the world.

Moments exist in these texts where Gelman negotiates her own place in juxtaposition to the cultures she visits, and these moments often result in the use of

imperialist tropes as she writes her experiences. However, I am wary of limiting my analysis to these areas, for as Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan note in their work on travel writing at the millennium, “it would be as foolish to claim of travel writing that it is uniformly imperialistic as it would be to defend travel writers as being harmless entertainers” (Holland and Huggan ix). Travel texts are representative of interactions, collaborations, cominglings, confrontations. In this vein, while many examples I will provide show that Gelman does indeed perpetuate imperialist tropes and ways of seeing in *Tales* and *Friends*, moments also exist where Gelman and other contributors are self-aware of their positions and how that impacts their views of the world around them, including members of cultures different than their own.¹ Therefore, in this chapter I seek to explore both the liminal, in-between moments of tension that offer spaces of growth and change in these two texts, as well as the moments where negative representational tropes of othering are perpetuated in popular culture.² Such an ideologically conflicted state makes these texts fascinating historical and cultural markers to examine.

Many works in the last twenty years of writing about travel have focused on historical readings of early modern and colonial-era travel journals, travelogues, and novels or memoirs about travel. Very few are concerned with travel writing produced in the past decade, in our current cultural and global context, just after the turn of a new century which has seen technological and globalized capital expansion across the earth at breakneck speed. Even fewer are concerned with contemporary 20th- and 21st-century travel writing penned by women,³ though much work has been done on early-modern and Victorian women travel writers and women’s travel in the American frontier era.⁴ It is in this context of a lacuna or gap in scholarship that my work in chapters one and two of this

dissertation offers insight—by exploring the multifaceted and overlapping layers of (often) interdisciplinary critical theory on a specific set of very contemporary travel texts written by women in close reading.

Methodological Approach

The shaping methodological approach to this chapter stems from key concepts and themes identified by three travel writing and colonial discourse scholars: David Spurr, Graham Huggan, Mary-Louise Pratt. The main thread woven through this chapter will be tropes identified by David Spurr, to which I will return in great detail in the next section of this chapter. The tropes Spurr identifies in *The Rhetoric of Empire* offer a way into investigating how texts continue discourses of othering well-established in colonial writing but less explored in mass-market travel writing today. Several of the tropes Spurr identifies continue in *Tales* and *Friends*. What does this mean, especially when close reading also uncovers equally rich spaces for growth and cultural relativism? The texts themselves are part of a larger, meta-level system of representation and mechanism of capital and commodification, indicative of a “brand” and type, creating market appeal and influencing perceptions of women and travel right now, on the web, on tour throughout the world, and in bookstores today.

As secondary touchpoints for analysis and discussion, I will use the ideas of “travel/writing” from Graham Huggan and the “contact zone” identified by Mary-Louise Pratt. In *Tourists with Typewriters*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan describe all travel writing as a “surmise” between fiction and reality, which corroborates and complicates the in-between space of negotiation in travel. Holland and Huggan comment on the liminal space of the veracity of travel writing in reference to travel writer Paul

Theroux's *The Happy Isles of Oceana*. They write, "travel narratives can generate a space for themselves between fact and myth. This in-between space is not simply fantasy, but a kind of illusionary *surmise*" (94). My work will build on exploring and investigating this interstitial space of "surmise." In Huggan's more recent work, *Extreme Pursuits*, he contends there is "no meaningful distinction between the tourist and the traveler" (*Extreme* 5). Huggan wishes to keep the definition of travel more open rather than narrowed, because he believes too-narrow definitions, such as travel writing as autobiografiction, or simply as an alternate form of memoir, limit the functionality of the larger lens. I am in agreement with the broader strokes of Huggan's latest attempt to wrestle with the boundaries of all that travel and writing about travel entails. Huggan notes that the frame of "travel/writing" helps critics to see how travel, as a practice he argues is always interwoven with tourism, "*engages* with, not *escapes* from, the unstable conditions of global modernity" (5). *Tales* and *Friends*, as examples of travel/writing texts in our contemporary American culture after the turn of the 21st century, are situated as apropos case studies for application of Huggan's more "global" frame of analysis, for both function as specimens of writing and as culturally-reflective texts on modern travel discourse as it is presented to the contemporary mass market.

While Huggan's survey in *Extreme Pursuits* goes further afield than my own will (he engages eco-tourism narratives, extreme risk-taking tourist attractions, tourism of war zones, and post-9/11 impacts on the travel/writing genre), the idea of the term "travel/writing," with the slash indicating both similarity and difference, categorical autonomy and interdependence, serves as a power signifier of the in-between, liminal depths of the genre I seek to plumb in my own close readings of *Tales* and *Friends*. It is

in this light that I will enrich readings in this chapter using Huggan's helpful term "travel/writing" as a framing guide as well as a point of departure.

Also important to my methodological approach is Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," which gives primacy to the idea of a meaningful, interactive space of negotiation in moments of travel. As she argues in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, the term "contact zone" is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (7). Pratt is careful to point out that her term should be used not to create categories of difference, but rather in a more liminal, in-between sense of "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (7). For Pratt, the "contact zone" is a rich space of mutual discovery, an idea which runs against the grain of deconstructive readings of written colonial encounters which focus only on categories of difference. Pratt is not dismissive of tropes and imperial discourses of power; she instead argues that there is negotiable space in interaction that may even serve as positive space for growth and discovery for both parties involved. I believe that it is crucial to tease out these moments in order to complicate a close reading of what, at first glance, seems only to reinforce colonialist discourse.

Both Huggan and Pratt put a new emphasis on the in-between as a space of presence and sentience, rich for exploration. Pratt's work in 1991, and Huggan's in 2009, bookend a rich period of critical inquiry around travel and neo-colonialism, gender inequality, racism, sexuality and sexual exploitation, and flows of capital in a globalized economic system.⁵

Spurr's Framing Tropes in *The Rhetoric of Empire*

Journalist David Spurr's work *The Rhetoric of Empire*, published in 1993, almost simultaneously in the scholarly world with Pratt's, gained solid reviews when published.⁶ Based on post-structuralist and post-colonialist reading strategies calling into question the legacy of empire through writing, popular representations of non-Western cultures in mass journalism and literary travel texts had emerged as important objects of study for scholars to trace the evolution and perpetuation of the discourse of colonial power relations.⁷ As Purnima Bose notes in a review of *The Rhetoric of Empire*, Spurr covers public discourse "that has actual consequences for real peoples with little control over how they are represented to more powerful cultures and nations," especially in the context of media sources like print journalism. John McClure finds Spurr's work important in his review of *The Rhetoric of Empire*, but does note that Spurr is quick to focus only on rhetorical analysis and does not push further into political analysis in terms of postmodern criticism and postcolonial theory, a natural segue to future work incorporating Spurr's identified tropes. McClure also includes a caveat for Spurr and future scholars looking at the tropes Spurr utilizes that is critical for my own work using them. He argues that we cannot "write off anti-colonial discourses simply because they rehearse elements of the colonial discourses they challenge" (325). As I look at the interstitial space in Gelman's writing, I intend to heed McClure's call to not be so concerned with identifying markers of colonial discourse that I do not also overlook moments where Gelman recognizes, confronts and possibly even resists neo-colonial discourse in *Tales* and *Friends*.

The Rhetoric of Empire has since been cited by some of the foremost scholars in contemporary work on travel writing and imperialism, including Ella Shohat, Graham Huggan, and Debbie Lisle.⁸ The work is also cited as important to an understanding of colonial and post-colonial discourse, as indicated by Mishra and Hodge in “What Was Postcolonialism?,” Desai and Nair’s *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, and Raka Shome in “Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An ‘Other’ View.”

A concrete definition of the term trope is critical to my analysis. Spurr first defines his use of trope as a rhetorical mode, a way of seeing and representing the world in the discourse of power. Another key scholar writing in a similar vein at the time was Mary Louise Pratt, who spoke of “conventions of representation . . . different strands, ways of reading and focuses for rhetorical analysis,” including “the study of tropes” in *Imperial Eyes* (Pratt 11). Categorical ways of seeing, ways of framing, then, tropes function as themes and modes of representation we can pinpoint and analyze as components of the discourse of power relations.

In order to further narrow the definition of the tropes he uses in his study, Spurr draws from classical rhetorical modes identified by Northrop Frye,⁹ which were in turn modified, expanded, and made more abstract later by Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida.¹⁰ Building on these thinkers’ modifications, Spurr works to create a loose interpretation which moves away from rhetoric and becomes “more than merely literary or philosophical” (3). For Spurr, the twelve rhetorical modes he identifies function as “ways of writing about non-Western peoples” and “a kind of repertoire for colonial discourse, a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations available for purposes of

representation” (3). Spurr argues that the rhetorical modes he identifies as tropes “are the tropes that come into play with the establishment and maintenance of colonial authority . . . there is nothing especially conscious or intentional in their use; they are part of the landscape in which relations of power manifest themselves” (3). It is in the spirit of Spurr’s larger context of the discourse of power that I will use the word “trope” in my analysis of *Tales of a Female Nomad* and *Female Nomad and Friends*. I utilize Spurr’s framing tropes for two critical reasons—firstly, because I want to show that his groundbreaking work can still be utilized effectively to analyze contemporary works even in the first decade of the 21st century; and secondly, because the tropes he identifies can be used on contemporary travel texts meant to appeal to a mass market of readers, rather than to a specifically literary audience.

Spurr asks readers and scholars to examine how the language of “othering” is systematically applied, perhaps even unwittingly, by contemporary writers. In the early 1990s, as a journalist, Spurr began to rhetorically map the way imperialism was written, across cultures and across continents, through colonial administrative documents, popular print journalism contemporary to the 19th and 20th centuries, and travel writing contemporary to colonization. He continued his study to include more contemporary 20th century popular journalism (much of it American) about formerly-colonized and currently-colonized areas. Spurr identifies twelve tropes common to the rhetoric of the British, French, and American writing he studied. He posits that the following twelve tropes were reinforced in continuous loops of re-signification through official administrative documents of colonialism and popular, mass-market texts of the times alike: surveillance, appropriation, aestheticization, classification, debasement, negation,

affirmation, idealization, insubstantialization, naturalization, eroticization, and resistance.¹¹

As I read *Tales* and *Friends* utilizing Spurr's tropes as a frame of analysis, I find that many of these twelve tropes are woven throughout the fabric of the texts and become integral to their function as travelogues. Gelman's observation of the cultures she visits in *Tales* sometimes slips into a clear representation of Spurr's surveillance trope. Describing cultures in relationship to her own in *Tales*, readers witness how the writer uses the trope of classification. Both her use of surveillance and aestheticization in *Tales* contribute to Gelman's attempts to classify what she sees in the sense of Spurr's trope of the rhetorical classification of empire. Moments of tension in the texts, because *Tales* and *Friends* are positioned as narratives about an inner journey of freedom that takes place in the physical world through travel, function to show how the texts participate in the tropes of aestheticization and insubstantialization, making the experiences portrayed in the text function always-already in collusion with her identity transformation.¹² The use of multiple, overlapping tropes including those listed above as well as the trope of affirmation and the civilizing mission¹³ make *Friends* an especially challenging sequel to *Tales*.

Surveillance

In one of the early chapters of *Tales*, Gelman describes her decision to insert herself inside a Zapotec community for a month in Mexico near Oaxaca. Her writing about this month-long encounter fits well into Spurr's trope of surveillance. Gelman's writing about the village in terms of landscape, bodies, interiors, and her own cultural

gaze shows how the text marks the ongoing discourse of colonizing language in relationship to indigenous, non-Westernized peoples. Gelman is complicit in this language of colonialism even as she writes as one who is trying to acknowledge her role in observing and describing what is happening around her.¹⁴ She wants to fit in, wants to be welcomed. She needs to feel welcomed in order to feel part of the community, a community to which she does not belong but imagines herself being included in within the space of a month. She begins right away with writing through the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” lens as she describes the landscape, village setup, and people she encounters.¹⁵ Always her writing is connected to her perception of how the villagers are responding to her presence, her body, her symbol of difference from the “other.” Her inner monologue, which she writes into her narrative, is telling—it reinforces how the frame of colonialism and assumptions about the culture she is supposedly working to learn more about are clear from the beginning. Spurr urges us to consider that “Even where the Western writer declares sympathy with the colonized, the conditions which make the writer’s work possible require a commanding, controlling gaze. The sympathetic humanitarian eye is no less a product of deeply held colonialist values, and no less authoritative in the mastery of its object, than the surveying and policing eye” (20). Nowhere in *Tales* does an example of this type of surveillance and conflict in perspective appear more sharply than in the following passage. Gelman has been staying with a family in the remote village, where she has been offered a small backyard shed for accommodations. One evening after a village celebration, Gelman witnesses her hostess, Margarita, being beaten by her husband, Jose:

I'm jolted awake by a woman's scream . . . I hear a slap, then more, and screams, and a man swearing. It is happening just outside my room . . . Jose is beating Margarita, slapping her, punching her. She is crying. He doesn't stop. I am watching and shaking. I continue to watch from my blind, knowing that I will interfere if I think she is in danger. After four years of anthropological training, which teaches that we must not project our own values onto another culture, that professionally we must remain in the nonjudgmental role of "participant-observer," I realize that, in this situation at least, I am more an individual than I am a professional. If I have to, I will step in. Fortunately, he stops before she is in serious trouble. I'm sure this isn't the first time he has beaten her and I'm just as sure it isn't the last. I also suspect that in this small village, wife beating is common. And no one else's business but the husband's. (26-27)

Here we can clearly see the "sympathetic humanitarian eye" Gelman uses to frame her experience; we can also witness the power of the "commanding, controlling gaze." The writing itself unfolds in this dual context—the written frame of experience through description and the contextual frame of the Western writer's perspective through Gelman's words. Gelman is at once expressing empathy and hegemonic power through her language, through her ability to write Margarita's beating into existence for readers. A close reading of the passage lends a unique perspective of the conflicting forces at work in Gelman's experience and her writing of it.

To begin, Gelman's position of visual advantage is made clear in the passage: she is "watching and shaking . . . from [her] blind" (21). Gelman's gaze in this passage is

directed down onto the violent scene erupting below: we see that she “climbs up” to get her view, as she looks from above, watching from her “blind,” “without being seen.” She is rendered invisible, yet has the all-seeing eye, while Margarita and Jose are the spectacle, the object of her authoritative gaze. Gelman’s blind consists of her apartment shed, where “the only openings in the room are the door and a two-foot by one-foot barred window above the door” (22). For Gelman to be “watching and shaking,” she must necessarily be peering down at what’s happening from the barred window opening above the door.

The landscape is one of violence, a repeating pattern in which Margarita is trapped. Symbolically we can see this in her two black eyes—her view of the world is darkened by the violence she witnesses and suffers, and she is unable to see any realistic means of escape. Gelman’s gaze is not only directed down onto the scene unfolding before her, but her perspective is also always-already influenced by her cultural values, despite her willingness to try to shed this subjectivity by taking on the mantle of the anthropological professional using the “nonjudgmental role of ‘participant-observer’” (27).¹⁶ The small window and its bars, which frame her view in this example, are symbolic of the distance and barriers between her written and perceptual perspective, as well as her body, and those of both Margarita and Jose. Gelman witnesses the beating through a window of visual and cultural perception that puts both Margarita and Jose in a prison of their culture, behind bars, witnessed from the “outside,” from “higher ground.” We see the fight through Gelman’s frame of reference. The interior includes a battle between her professional persona as a trained anthropologist, and her personal inclination to help someone in need. Her self is interspersed with her professional persona,

struggling to find a choice that fits both parts of her being. Convincing herself that “in this situation . . . I am more of an individual than I am a professional,” Gelman finally feels comfortable asserting “If I have to, I will step in” (27). In just a few sentences, where readers see the battle between professional training and personal feelings, Gelman realizes her own subjectivity and her willingness to step in.

However, Gelman’s assumption about the status of domestic violence in Oaxacan society perpetuates cultural misconceptions and belies the complexity of actual Oaxacan life. Margarita’s beating is starkly portrayed on the page and overridden by Gelman’s frame of reference. Implicit in her written presentation is the idea that domestic violence is considered commonplace in Oaxacan society, that women have no or limited means to speak about violence perpetuated against them, and that gender roles are rigid and patriarchal in the area. These assumptions are countered by ethnographic studies related to Oaxacan culture by Douglas Fry, Lynn Stephen and Analisa Taylor.

In the early 1990s, researcher Douglas Fry reported marked differences among closely neighboring villages in terms of perception of learned aggression and violent reaction between men and among husbands in reference to wives or women with whom they were sexually involved or related.¹⁷ Wife-beating was prevalent in some areas, but not others. Restriction of women’s movement and sexual practices varied widely between smaller villages in Fry’s study and a study of sexuality and gender in Zapotec Oaxaca conducted by Lynn Stephen more recently in 2002. Stephen notes the influence of Spanish colonization and categories of sexual difference in the perception of gender roles in Oaxaca, where the Spanish binary system of male/female does not adequately accommodate indigenous representations of sexuality, including the third gender role of

the *muxe*, a biologically sexed male who exhibits particular female characteristics as well as male characteristics. The important concept in Stephen's work for my analysis is the inclusion of the legacy of Spanish colonialism, which instituted a hierarchical "dual gender system, in which masculinity dominated femininity" (51). Analisa Taylor, in addition to analyzing "nationalist myths that equate femininity and indigeneity with the resigned acceptance of imperialist domination over home and body," recently wrote about areas in Oaxaca where women are valorized "in their different roles as breadwinners, family members, and transmitters of culture," demonstrating that perceptions of women and their roles are not static but rather fluid and changing depending on location and understanding of local gender roles passed through generations of modeled and learned behaviors (817).

In all fairness, Gelman is clear to point out that she is referring to "this small village," contextualizing her experience to Margarita and Jose and their interaction. However, the statement that the beating is Jose's personal business precludes other types of agency Margarita may find in the village community. Field workers have written about the communal networks of women in Oaxacan villages "strongly segregated by gender" who come together during community and social fiestas to discuss sexuality among women and men in Oaxaca (Stephen 45). While there may or may not be such a community structure in Margarita and Jose's village, Gelman's perception that the beating she witnessed is "no one's business but the husband's" serves to reinforce the impression of *machismo* in Mexican culture and a more rigid, systematic control of women's bodies than is recognized in anthropological literature about the region. This is not to say that Margarita's situation may not have been one in which Jose had powerful

control of her body and actions—the beating clearly shows a system of domination and subordination between them, which Gelman witnessed.

What is imperative is a recognition that in telling the story in the way it was presented, with the last two sentences framing the representation of events, Gelman allows the filter of surveillance, of her assumptions about the larger influence of her perception of Mexican and Oaxacan/Zapotec culture—from reading and studying, a perceived rather than lived experience—to color her view of the interaction between Margarita and Jose. Gelman’s assumptions are based on uniformity of experience, while the studies show diversity of experience from village to village—there is a spectrum of potential experiences which Gelman’s written assumptions do not acknowledge. The frame of the event, from invoking anthropological training at the beginning to limiting the scope of understanding of the event and its life in the culture of the village to Jose’s gaze and control, sends a powerful message to readers that goes well beyond the simple recollection of a personally traumatic event for the writer.

This reading is complicated, however, by weaving in the concepts of “contact zone” and “travel/writing” coined by Mary Louise Pratt and Graham Huggan, respectively. In the tension-filled moments of Margarita’s beating, Gelman is thrust into a space and place completely foreign to her, which showcases her immersion in a situation that clearly involves intersecting trajectories and “radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 7). Read in the light of a moment of discovery, Gelman is forced to address both the physical and psychological impact of what she is witnessing before her eyes. She must recognize and try to move beyond her anthropological training if she is going to choose to follow her compassionate urge to intercede. The conflict

between training and inclination, played out on the page, can be read as a moment of close bonding with Margarita, despite Gelman's ultimate decision to remain behind the closed door, watching from afar. Is the working-through of her background and desires on the page, in the telling of the tale, a way for Gelman to take a stand she was not able to with physical intercession? While the reading I provided using Spurr's tropes is clear, so too is the interstitial space of negotiation in the telling of the tale to readers.

In a similar way, using Huggan's "travel/writing" allows for a richer counterpoint to a reading focused solely on neo-colonial tropes. If we take Gelman's infiltration into the Zapotec village, even into the shanty where she is staying in Margarita and Jose's back yard, as an act of tourism, then the encounter with Margarita's beating would indeed engage with "the unstable conditions of global modernity" (*Extreme* 5). Face to face with an act of violence deeply impacted by social, cultural, and economic factors unfamiliar to her, Gelman is left to try to put together the pieces of what she witnesses. Her natural inclination is to categorize, fit, compartmentalize, qualify—using the frame of reference that comes most easily to her from her own cultural background and understanding. The perspective of the tale, from Gelman's own body and mindful recollection, is transformed in the telling, as all writing based on memory and experience ultimately is, into the makeshift "surmise" between fact and myth Holland and Huggan identify in *Tourists with Typewriters*. Is the fitting of the tale into continuously circling tropes of colonial encounter simply a way to ease the tension of this in-between space, to find a way to make sense of senseless violence?

The stark reality of this perceptual conundrum comes to a head in the next few sentences Gelman uses to describe her experience:

I am unable to sleep. All night my mind replays the beating, and I cry.

The next morning Margarita brings my breakfast. Her eyes, both of them, are black. Margarita knows I have seen her shame. She tells me she is afraid of her husband, but she cannot leave. ‘Where would I go? How would I feed the children?’ she asks. I give her a hug, but I say nothing.

This village, this marriage, this life are her destiny. (27)

The juxtaposition of conflicting representation is most puzzling in these few sentences. It is clear that Gelman is bothered by the violence she has witnessed—she empathizes with Margarita’s situation. It makes her cry and leaves her unable to rest. Yet, she does not act on her willingness in the moments of the beating, even though Margarita is quite injured (two black eyes) from the beating. Further, while Gelman writes herself compassionately here, in the last sentence describing the beating, she symbolically trivializes Margarita’s experience as ordinary (positioning herself above or beyond this treatment): “this village, this marriage, this life are her *destiny*” (27, emphasis my own).¹⁸

The “morning after,” then, Gelman sees visual evidence as a reminder of the violence she watched unfold before her the night before, yet by framing the bruises on Margarita using the words “her shame,” she slides back into the role of Western observer with what Spurr dubs the “surveying and policing eye.” “Shame” invokes all sorts of connotations, placing Margarita not only in the space of victim, but also in the space of carrying some sense of blame or accountability for the incident. Through her choice of words, Gelman represents herself as free of this blame, even though she witnessed the event and did not step in to assist Margarita. Gelman is free to move, and just as she

moved up and over to a position of visual advantage to survey the scene below her the night before, here she views and processes Margarita's body and wounds, what is happening to her body, her black eyes. And while we are given Margarita's frame of reference through the words she speaks to Gelman about how she feels she cannot leave the village or her husband, we are quickly shifted back to Gelman's own frame when Gelman slides back into surveillance. Empathy may remain, but the power of the Western perceptual advantage over those marginalized by Western culture shows its power: Gelman hugs Margarita, presses her body against her own, but does not speak. She can no longer participate in that frame of reference; instead, she must pull back, distance herself from Margarita. She must make a grand framing statement through her writing, in retrospect, distanced by time and space and memory from the moment itself—Gelman cannot be like Margarita, cannot represent herself in the same light, for she has choices, abilities, opportunities that are unavailable to Margarita—choices provided to her because of her position of power culturally and economically. Margarita, however, as Gelman presents her to readers, has only a “destiny,” one preordained by her “village,” her “marriage,” her “life” in the “other” culture she inhabits. The last two sentences, then, are revealing. The women hug, and their symbolic bodies represent dual choices, opposite “others.” Their bodies are symbolically the ultimate means of comparison, passing judgment even when expressing empathy or sympathy.

In the end, then, this passage stands as a clear representation of Spurr's observation that the gaze becomes “the active instrument of construction, order, and arrangement. What one might call the ideology of the gaze takes on one of its clearest forms in the convention of the commanding view . . . it conveys a sense of mastery over

the unknown and over what is often perceived by the Western writer as strange and bizarre” (15). Gelman’s surveilling gaze constitutes the means she uses to classify and structure her environment, her interaction with others. To master the unknown, Margarita’s frame of reference and experience, the strange and bizarre beating, Gelman utilizes surveillance and the trope of the commanding view both literally and figuratively in the way she represents Margarita’s beating in *Tales*.

A final complicating aspect of the passage including Margarita’s beating cannot be overlooked—the question of how Gelman, through her representational lens, is both writing what Margarita said and Margarita herself in words and therefore enacting what Gayatri Spivak might call “epistemic violence” through the story itself. Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” broke ground in contemplating the violence colonial and gendered language and representations of difference can enact on history, ways of seeing, and frameworks of reference. In light of Spivak’s call for an investigation of how the subaltern (in this case, Margarita) is represented, we must look not only at what is said, but what is not said—the spaces, pauses, gaps, and silences. “She tells me she is afraid of her husband, but she cannot leave,” writes Gelman. Here, Margarita is written, spoken for, through the frame of Gelman’s gaze—she is subaltern and silent. Gelman is reproducing her message, but Margarita is presented without agency, being spoken for. The next sentence allows Margarita some voice—“Where would I go? How would I feed the children?” This is the closest Margarita gets to agency in the passage. Other than this set of two questions, Margarita is eclipsed by Gelman’s own frame of reference. Indeed, in the next two sentences, while Gelman writes that in the moment, she hugs Margarita and says “nothing,” in the writing of the passage for the text of *Tales*, she says it all, in a

way that shuts down any agency or ability for change or resistance from Margarita, rendering her forever in the space of the subaltern, where her village, marriage, and life are predetermined in the realm of “her destiny” (27).

Classification

A second trope used to continue imperialist ideology and the survival of colonialist discourse is, Spurr claims, rhetorical classification. Spurr notes three key features characteristic of western writing about the Third World: a “condescending tone;” a standard of measure for political and economic organization “to which all nations must aspire,” with “no sense that different cultures may require different institutions of social order,” and a subsequent classification “according to the relative failure or success of a nation in meeting this standard” (62). Perceptions are essential to decode as they appear in writing about non-Westernized or “other” culture, as “Western writing generates an ideologically charged meaning from its perceptions of non-Western cultures” (Spurr 62).¹⁹ One of the most disconcerting appearances of the classification trope in *Tales* occurs in the same chapter as the beating of Gelman’s host, Margarita, when Gelman first inserts herself into a Zapotec village in Mexico. The example spans Gelman’s perceptions concerning the Zapotec culture’s ability to stabilize itself economically and to provide for its community needs.

In her writing about the inability of the village members to create crafts for sale in the neighboring communities and in the city center, Gelman shifts from an observation about a culture to a character judgment, and it is in this dangerous moment that we see the power of the condescending tone and the survival of the classification mode of

colonial discourse. Gelman writes, “Oaxaca, a little more than an hour away, is a city filled with tourists who have cash in their pockets. My entrepreneurial soul can think of all sorts of items the village people could make and sell: carved wooden things, corn husk dolls, weavings, beaded jewelry. But neither the men nor the women have developed any skills. How easy it would be to create a village industry. What a waste” (27). All three of the characteristics Spurr identifies are plainly evident here. First, there is a condescending tone. Gelman presents herself as having an “entrepreneurial soul,” so by default, the villagers do not. She is writing from a position of authority, and from that position can declare that the lack of a village industry is a “waste.” Further, the social and economic systems by which the Zapotec villagers are judged are unmistakably industry-based and capitalist. For Gelman, it’s all about buying and selling “things.” People without the necessary skill sets to create and sell items at markets nearby are not valuable to the community, a “waste” with their “undeveloped” potential to earn kept unrealized. Gelman’s condescending writing about the Zapotec culture here operates similarly to Charles Darwin’s writing on classifying cultures in the mid-1800s: it supports “the notion of inherent ethical differences . . . differences in character” according to a classification system that spaces peoples “according to their degree of advancement along the same path” (Spurr 65). This classification system presents the Zapotec villagers as lacking, needing improvement, essentially inferior. It also sets up the villagers in a “hierarchy of societies,” where Gelman shows us that economically developed, capitalist societies clearly rank higher than others (Spurr 65).

In a system of hierarchy that positions action over passivity, Gelman’s written perceptions can be read as a road map of value—her “entrepreneurial soul” with its active

strategy to create and maintain wealth based on a cultural assumption that this is the best, most advanced, most valuable way to be a contributory citizen in a society, is presented in stark comparison with her representation of the “unskilled” villagers, who, through improvement, could become skilled and producing crafts (more valuable) and then selling the crafts for money to support the village (even more valuable). The “lack” of skills for labor and capital gain, then, becomes a “lack” of ambition, a *character flaw*. In addition to becoming a commentary about a hierarchy of nations, this example also becomes a commentary on personal worth to society, on “lack” of complexity, activity, skills, *value*. This passage, a small part of a larger whole, even becomes a mini-tableau of Gelman functioning as part of the civilizing mission. Her knowledge, her societal and cultural structure, can supposedly help stabilize and “save” the Zapotec villagers—we know this because of the tone and the verbal strike of the small phrase “what a waste” (27).

In addition to the comparison of cultures based on conformity to western social and economic norms, Spurr notes that the idea of modernization also influences the evolutionary continuum (70). If the Zapotec villagers were to create handicrafts for sale at market, they would necessarily need to create a system to deal with production, transportation, sale, and possibly worker pay. While Gelman is quick to present her entrepreneurial ideas as having merit, she leaves out an understanding of the implications of this new way of life on the villagers and their current social norms. Her assumption is that selling crafts would undoubtedly serve the well-being of the community economically, through an influx of capital. The ideology she presents equates inaction on the selling of crafts with passivity or inferiority, with a lack of *capitalization* on a possibility. Spurr argues that classification systems used by Western writers, including

the press, are simplistic: “they tend to equate social complexity with modernization, to ignore the human costs of such modernization, and to exclude the possibility of any standard that could find positive value in a non-western model” (73). When Gelman argues that the unskilled Zapotec villagers are a “waste” of potential in terms of earnings for their community, she connects with this oversimplification of the impact of modernization on any society. The condescending tone and value judgment readers are left with after Gelman’s “what a waste” statement continues colonial ideology--to exclude the possibility that the Zapotec villagers could value the way of life they are currently living and not find it lacking in the way that she does. Finally, it presents not only the products the villagers would create, but also the villagers themselves, as commodities.

In this example, readers witness Gelman’s assumption about the objects she imagines the villagers creating—small items for purchase by tourists. Gelman does not envision a village industry that would benefit the members of the society internally, like a dairy, an agricultural venture such as a community garden, or an investment in livestock. Instead, she envisions the villagers’ artistic value to those who come to Mexico on holiday, aligning herself in the economy of travel as a tourist, thinking of ways the Zapotec villagers could become part of that system. The “wooden things,” dolls, beaded jewelry, and weavings for purchase become mini-aestheticizations of the Zapotec culture totemized in objects to bring back home, to essentialize the breadth and depth of Zapotec culture into a single artistic rendering. Here, the artistic object becomes a stand-in for an oversimplification of the culture of the Zapotec villagers as primitive, exotic, and

backward in the hierarchy of modernized, first-world cultures that drives cultural assumptions in this passage.

Read more generously in the context of Pratt's "contact zone" of reconciling difference and Huggan's "travel/writing," where the space between travel and writing offers a glimpse into how systems of power operate and are translated through experience and writing, Gelman may be simply trying to reconcile the economically depressed conditions she witnesses in the Zapotec village with her perception of a way to recover from or ameliorate these conditions. Such a reading would focus on the compassionate aspects of the writer's ideas, rather than on the mode of presentation. The stark contrast in economic conditions between the city of Oaxaca and the village Gelman is living in bring her face to face with confronting radically different systems of power on multiple levels—in comparison to the two areas in Mexico as well as with her own American economic frame of reference. There is a strong tradition of Oaxacan crafts being sold to American buyers, who then sell the wares mainly in the southwestern United States.²⁰ Wanting a more stable economic system for those she is living with is not problematic in and of itself. It is in the framing of the system she envisions within the hierarchy of western economic flows of capital where the idea becomes problematic—in the transformation from idea to template. This is not meant to discount the clear aspects of the classification trope in operation in the passage, but rather to complicate and expand it. In this way, the writer's struggle with the economic conditions and her proposal of an entrepreneurial solution can be viewed as a rich space of negotiation in addition to being read as a passage that clearly represents a trope of colonial discourse.

Aestheticization

One of the most prevalent and damaging tropes of imperialism is *aestheticization*, which functions not so much “to falsify as it takes hold of and commodifies reality, securing it for the observer’s sensibility” (Spurr 59). Spurr details several examples in *The Rhetoric of Empire* where members of the press and other writers aestheticize aspects of the cultures or individual members of the cultures they visit, likening them to a piece of fine art like a painting, a sculpture, a work of classical western literature, and so on. In this way, the “unknown” becomes simply a reflection of the known, the accepted, the norm. In the case of *Tales*, however, Gelman rarely utilizes the aestheticization trope when she speaks of individuals or cultures she visits (though there are moments where she likens the people of Mexico to a bouquet of exotic spices, and the passage quoted above, for example). Interestingly, the entire text, from cover to cover, becomes an aestheticization, a commodified “reality” from Gelman’s perspective, delivered to readers “back home.”²¹ And though the text consists of non-fiction, the chapters are arranged in a narrative arc, some not even chronologically, in order to create an adventure story for readers.

The popular mass-market appeal of *Tales* in its paperback edition is striking. One needs only to look at the front cover to get a sense of how the text was presented for readers to choose, carefully crafted to entice a particular audience. The cover contains a bright conglomeration of rich earthy tones; warm golds and greens blend with hints of amber and sienna to create an enticingly colorful mix. On the top third of the cover, the title appears in white letters in a jumble of fonts with a sepia-tone map of the Earth behind. Bright green lines traverse this warm representation of the globe, starting from the United States and trailing long arcs across the map to sites in Europe, Southeast Asia,

South America, Mexico, Central America, New Zealand, and Canada. As readers will soon learn, these are all sites Gelman has visited in her “nomadic” journeys.

The bottom two-thirds of the front cover show prospective readers a blurred image of a woman in motion, a woman wearing no shoes, clad in a gorgeously-detailed long gold and green brocade skirt. The bright green harlequin pattern of the skirt mirrors the arcs on the map above, as if the places visited on the map of the earth are similar to the woman and clothing seen on the cover—the similarity is so striking that the spaces on the map and the rich, exotic print on the skirt’s fabric seem interchangeable—and all function as markings of *difference*.

The text’s subtitle, “Living at Large in the World,” is positioned to the left of the woman’s skirt, as if she were walking away from the title to show her choice to live “at large,” with nothing to keep her stationary. The feet in motion indicate that this woman is moving, active, exploring. Shadows fall behind her legs, which show that she is moving toward the sun. Finally, the author’s name is presented at the bottom of the cover page in bold capital letters spanning the entire width of the text—a dominant stamp of authorial ownership, located beneath the feet of a woman in motion. In addition to the images and words presented on the front cover of the text, the back of the book provides crucial information about the author and text (and how she conceptualizes herself) for readers. What does “nomadism” mean to Gelman? If we flip the book over to its back cover, several indications of the author’s interpretation of nomadism become apparent.

The color scheme is repeated on the back cover—a warm map on the top third of the cover, with repeated pictures of the woman in motion on the left and right margins on the bottom third—while a creamy inset box with a thin yellow border houses a quotation

from Gelman's work, her author biography and picture, as well as review excerpts of the text.

Gelman's credentials are listed off in short order next to her photo, which is a one-inch square head-and-shoulder shot presented, oddly enough, in black and white. The color of the page, the rich and warm palette, does not extend itself into the only image we have of Gelman herself. If the travel she undertakes is to translate for readers as important enough to color the world as richly and warmly as the cover indicates, why is the visual representation of the woman who undertakes this travel presented to us in a monochromatic, flat photo? This is an interesting, conflicting barrier thrown into the overall cohesive unity of the book cover as a whole. We learn that Gelman writes children's books, and that several of hers have done very well. "*More Spaghetti, I Say!*" is specially mentioned as "a staple in every first-grade classroom." Then, once again, the chosen label of "nomad" is applied—"Rita has no permanent address. Her most recent encampments have been in Mexico and New York City." For a text about global travel, it is fascinating to see that Gelman's most recent travels have not taken her too far afield; Mexico is just south of the U.S. border, and of course New York City is situated within Gelman's country of origin itself.

The final review passage located at the bottom of the back cover comes from *Booklist*. Here we are told that "Gelman doesn't just observe the cultures she visits, she participates in them, becoming emotionally involved in the people's lives. This is an amazing travelogue." Again we have a connection to the psychological importance of the text in that both Gelman and, implicitly, readers, will become "emotionally involved" in "people's lives" via the text. The reinforcement of this emotional connection to peoples

in other cultures brings the back cover full-circle, incorporating the competing themes of exoticism, women's rebirth, psychological struggle, and growth, and the idea of "nomadic" world travel.

Indeed, even the prefatory material and the reader reviews and comments shape the appeal and the symbolic import of this text in its cultural context. Gelman writes the following to potential readers in a passage from her preface: "I move throughout the world without a plan, guided by instinct, connecting through trust, and constantly watching for serendipitous opportunities." The image she invokes here is an enticing one, one of a woman in control of her destiny, yet still influenced by chance. Note that she does not say "I *wander* throughout the world without a plan," but rather chooses the word "move." The word "move" gives the phrase a more guided sense of purpose than "wander," and still implies a final destination—one "moves" from one place to the next. To "move" is not to be in a constant state of motion, but rather to shift from one known space to another. Gelman's inclusion of "instinct" and "trust" are equally as telling for potential readers—first, they indicate that there will be an underlying psychological component to the text, one that centers on human interaction and "connecting through trust," which the reader can infer means "trust" is a universal human attribute, one that can be found throughout a variety of cultures across the globe. "Instinct" is a key inclusion, for it positions Gelman as having an innate sense of authority over what is valuable and what is not worthy of note. It also indicates her underlying assumption that "instinct" is indeed a human attribute, one that can be documented and quantified. At the end of this passage, readers are left to wonder what (on earth?) constitutes a "serendipitous opportunit[y]" for Gelman. Would those "opportunities" be opportunities

to travel to distant locales, or opportunities to become involved with the inner workings of a culture foreign to her? The passage, in effect, teases the reader's imagination, and leaves one wondering exactly what Gelman means by her last turn of phrase.

The review excerpts that are situated below the prefatory passage are also telling. A reviewer from *The Los Angeles Times* is quoted in the first review passage: "Whenever I open an atlas . . . part of me wants to pack up and hit the road for a year or two. But I doubt I'll ever do it, because I'm too practical. Rita Golden Gelman . . . didn't let practicalities stop her." Now Gelman is presented to readers as an innovative traveler, one who left the trappings of "practicality" behind and forged ahead on an ingenious new path. But the passage also points to a cultural proclivity toward the "travel bug" mentality—other readers may connect with the reviewer, who opens an atlas and "wants to pack up and hit the road for a year or two." The review text, then, reinforces the desire to travel as innate to human nature, and it also presents Gelman to us as an "out-of-the-box" thinker who breaks free to "hit the road" on her own. The text itself becomes a go-to manual, an artistic rendering that contains a way of seeing cultures as aesthetic "snapshots" through the writer's view.

With evocative images of nomadism, tribal life, and fairytale palaces, the text speaks to potential readers who may glance at it while scanning the shelves at a local bookstore. The text, as we know, is writing that has been packaged for consumption, and it is vital to look closely at how this packaging works—what exactly is being sold? The colors, the map, the font, the photos, the quotations—all are carefully and artfully combined to sell us the vision of a story, to pique our interest as readers. In chapter two of this work, I will focus in detail on the creation of the female travel writer and even the

category of nomad as a brand in contemporary travel writing marketing strategies. In this way, the text as well as the writer are packaged for consumption and become imbricated in a much larger system of representation.

Rita Golden Gelman's "extraordinary existence" is due in no small part to her position of privilege across a variety of categories that carry cultural capital across the globe. As a wealthy (not only in terms of American culture, but obviously by global standards of wealth), highly educated, upper-class, white woman with the ability and means to travel as well as a complex network of friends and services that allow her to do just that, Gelman is not an "average" traveler. We learn from the earliest pages in the text that it will center on Gelman's divorce and the psychological struggle she encountered afterwards. The dissolution of Gelman's marriage, and her *choice* to leave an "elegant life in L.A." to follow her "dream," position the text as one of rebirth and growth, and also situate the text firmly within the boundaries of the "female" identity struggle. Readers can assume that the text will not only focus on Gelman's global travels, but also on her inner map of feeling and emotion, which may find expression in her body and her chosen actions with it. As I will show, this inner journey, expressed through outward travel, becomes problematic, for it reinforces the trope identified by Spurr as insubstantialization (141-155).

Insubstantialization and the Specter of the Cannibal

The trope of insubstantialization moves the focal point of the traveler's experience from the places traveled to the writer's inner, personal journey in two ways: first, by comparison between external experience and inner feeling, and second, by making the cultures and experiences of travel a backdrop to the writer's own internal

transformation. In this way, as Spurr details, writing about the non-Western world then serves to “render that world as insubstantial, as the backdrop of a baseless fabric against which is played the drama of the writer’s self” (142). The places where the writer travels, the novel experiences in those spaces, become secondary to the inner journey, an inward-looking eye that ultimately trumps the physical experience of travel. Further, experiences for the traveler where boundaries are crossed, cultural and physical borders traversed, become rendered as moments of an inner conquest over self or psyche.

In much the same way that the entire text of *Tales* stands as an aestheticization, so too does it insubstantiate the cultures and countries Gelman visits in her travels. From the cover of the book to the prefatory materials through her rendering of her travel experiences, Gelman’s inner journey of self-exploration and inner change are woven into the fabric of the narrative. As she begins the first chapter of her travel memoir, she recounts the trip to the Galapagos islands she booked without her husband for the first time, after meeting a woman on a plane who caused her to begin crying as she spoke of her dreamy job, which involved booking sailing excursions for sailors around the world. Gelman writes,

I . . . touched the magic of otherness. I was never the same again. When I returned from the Galapagos, that long-dormant fire of adventure had been rekindled and the glamour of my life turned gray. The gourmet dinners, the exclusive press screenings, the concerts, the parties, and the evenings at the theater suddenly felt like empty substitutes for discovery, for learning, for penetrating the unknown. (4)

Using words like “otherness,” “adventure,” “discovery,” and phrases like “penetrating the unknown,” Gelman sets the stage to make her travel an exoticizing exercise; she also uses these words to juxtapose against what she feels has become a mundane, “empty” life with her husband.

From the very beginning of the text, then, Gelman’s travels are set as reflections of leaving her former life behind and moving forward. Her inner journey will be realized through her outward movement through countries and cultures. This makes the travel a secondary backdrop, a tableau in which to situate her more important, more liberating sense of independence from her own cultural boundaries. Indeed, Gelman further utilizes the trope of insubstantialization in an intriguing way as she writes about her particularly-situated role in her own culture and the culture she is visiting in terms of the role she inhabits willingly, even thankfully:

I’m not running away. I’m running toward . . . toward adventure, toward discovery, toward adversity. And while I was in Mexico, I discovered something intriguing: once I leave the US, I am not bound by the rules of my culture. And when I am a foreigner in another country, I am exempt from the local rules. This extraordinary situation means that there are no rules in my life. I am free to live by the standards and ideals and rules I create for myself. (40)

“This extraordinary situation,” then, means that Gelman feels she does not have to truly participate in any culture she visits—she believes can always occupy the in-between space of being “exempt from the local rules” while simultaneously being unbound by the “rules of [her]culture.” It is hard to believe such a space truly exists—laws must be

obeyed in a culture whether one is a visitor or a citizen of that culture. Yet inhabiting this in-between space becomes a sort of escape, an idyllic gap between cultures where anything is possible for Gelman.

The second aspect of the trope of insubstantialization lies in the naming and supposed confrontation of taboo social and cultural boundaries by the traveler in non-Western space. In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, Spurr gives examples of several traditional travel writers who all use the scene of the “disorienting Orient” to destabilize boundaries, to offer a space for the “surrender of the self to the powers of the Other in what is represented as a dangerous transgression of boundaries” (144). A strong example of this type of disorientation appears in *Tales* when Gelman is in Borneo and is invited to attend a sacred ceremony with a government group traveling in the area. The trip requires travel deep into the heart of the Borneo forests by a long boat journey upriver, and culminates in a ceremony where Gelman confronts the “disorienting Orient” and invokes the specter of cannibalism, the consumption of human flesh. As readers learn, Gelman has been sipping a native drink called *tuak*, a liquor made from palm trees, as part of the sacred ceremony that is beginning to pick up pace as the sun sets and the forest darkens. She writes,

The drinking never stops. *Tuak* is drunk from glasses, from cups, from bamboo, from animal horns, small and large. And finally, in the middle of the night, when everyone is dancing and laughing and passing a bull’s horn, the chief of the village brings out the skull of the last human to have been sacrificed for this ceremony. It was a long time ago, they say, but no one gets specific about when.

The skull, looking exactly like what it is, will bring power and spirituality to each of us. It is filed with *tuak* and passed around the dance floor.

All day I have been sipping *tuak* from communal cups, sharing saliva and tipsy smiles and moving my body to the beat of the drums. But now, as I take the skull in my two hands, I am shaking. It is as though I am drinking the brains of a human being, sipping his spirit, gaining his power. I am nearly in a trance, moving, sipping, feeling my lips on the smooth bone, dipping my tongue into this other person's fluids, absorbing his soul.

I am trembling with the taste of cannibalism. (125)

In her need to conform, to be part of a community, Gelman has crossed cultural boundaries she did not intend. Lost in the power of the communal ceremony, the sharing and dancing and drumming and drinking, Gelman writes her experience utilizing the trope of insubstantialization. She “shares saliva,” “moves her body to the beat of the drums” with people she does not know. She holds a human skull supposedly belonging to a former victim of human sacrifice. She begins to shake, and the transformation of the trope begins—she now envisions herself as taking in the sacrifice victim's essence, his very soul. She enters a trance, leaves her own sense of consciousness. It is here, lost in disorientation, clearly positioned outside the realm of her rational self, that Gelman can dip her tongue “into this other person's fluids, absorbing his soul,” and leave herself “trembling with the taste of cannibalism” (*Tales* 125). Connections between the trope of insubstantialization and the othering trope of cannibalism are useful here in unraveling further layers of complexity in this example.

Anthropological and archaeological research on cannibalism, as well as literary criticism concerning the trope of cannibalism, is widespread. Critics confirm that invocation of the term cannibalism in literature is itself a trope of colonial discourse (Sewlall 160). Peter Hulme notes that “cannibalism is now primarily a linguistic phenomenon, a trope of exceptional power” (4). Gananath Obeyesekere argues that cannibalism is bound up with discourses of Othering, whereby the savage and civilization are positioned in opposition to each other (18). This positioning gives linguistic and ideological privilege to the Western, civilized traveler, and by extension, to the writer sharing the story to “civilized” readers “back home.” William Arens points out the connections between the term anthropophagy (the consumption of human flesh) and what became the study of anthropology, the very system of observation and investigation that Gelman invokes as her field of study and framework of influence as she works to write what it is she encounters.²² Peter Hulme traces the term “cannibal” etymologically, providing a reading against the grain of the accepted timeline and definition of the term “cannibal” in the Oxford English Dictionary in order to expose the path of creating the cannibal Other in the modern discourse of colonialism. Harry Sewlall argues that critic Ania Loomba adds to the scholarship on the discourse of cannibalism by showing how the term cannibalism “became a signifier that designated whatever lay outside Europe” (Sewlall 162). Further, Sewlall details how Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin contribute the key point that moving from the term “anthropophagy” to “cannibal” indicated a shift from a descriptive term (the eating of human flesh) to an ontological category (one who eats human flesh), bringing the focus from action to a component of fundamental being (Sewlall 169).

In the example of the insubstantialization trope I included above, Gelman participates in a sacred ceremony which itself equals form of symbolic substitution through supposed human sacrifice—the sacrificed human being, who ostensibly gave his life for the ritual, is symbolized in the bowl made from his human skull, which is passed around the group filled with the symbolic *tuak*, a powerful mind-altering substance. The *tuak* and the skull together become a symbol of the internalizing of another human being, the “taste of cannibalism” Gelman trembles to behold. By taking in the symbolic “flesh,” Gelman situates herself outside of the civilized and inside the realm of the savage; she becomes what Obeyesekere deems “a being apart, not fully human” (12). The chapter on Borneo ends this way, abruptly, Gelman’s own travels having been subsumed under this cultural transgression that cannot be followed with rational words or explanation in the frame of (neo)colonial discourse. It is as if in taking part in this ceremony, in “losing herself” to the communal experience, Gelman has passed a point of no return.

The two-fold disavowal and desire surrounding cannibalism as it is expressed in *Tales* reinforces a component trope of one of the earliest forms of othering extant in the travel writing genre.²³ Ted Motohashi notes that “fantasy about man-eating is probably as old and widespread as human history and community. When encountering an alien people whose appearances and customs are distinctively different from one’s own, both fascination towards and repugnance against man-eating are released as a practice and discourse” (85). If we take this statement by Ted Motohashi into consideration when assessing the vignette Gelman provides about her encounter with the sacred ceremony in the Borneo jungle, we see an important connection between difference and desire. Gelman presents the ceremony in a way that insubstantializes, brings the frame of

reference to her own using a common trope identified by Spurr, as I have shown, but she also writes the tension of the tale into the meshing of her body with the skull, fluids, and soul of the man from whose head she is drinking. The tale is structured as a fantasy-desire piece, culminated in the moment of no return, when Gelman sips the *tuak* from the skull and “trembles with the taste of cannibalism.” She engages in a paradox: at once entering the space of the other and allowing the other to symbolically enter her, which ends in a statement of both repugnance and desire, the “complete and utter loss of difference” (Kilgour 240).

The silence after the last statement is just as important as the statement itself—both in terms of insubstantialization and the fascination and repugnance Gelman perpetuates in her written reenactment. In the last statement, she invites the other into her inner journey, just as she passes a point where she begins to tremble, lose her authority, and can no longer be considered the detached Western observer. By ending the chapter with invoking the threat of cannibalism, Gelman takes part in a tradition that Spurr notes when he writes “the Western writer, literary or journalistic, is after all a kind of Prospero who transforms the non-Western world into a series of enchanting or disturbing visions, as easily dissolved as they are conjured up” (155). Because the entire experience is insubstantialized, presented as an example of blurred boundaries between reality and illusion, the civilized and the savage, the chapter can end without further explanation—it needs none, as a symbol of the power of Othering discourse.

A final turn in the discourse on cannibalism in travel writing and as a part of colonial discourse lends an interesting perspective on the sacred ceremony chapter as a form of consumption by readers. Crystal Bartolovich focuses on cannibalism,

consumerism, and identity in contemporary cultural imagination and discourse.

Bartolovich shows that historical writing and stories about cannibalism set the stage for the establishment of the conditions necessary for capitalism. Now, Bartolovich argues that “contemporary capital configures different problems in the cannibal, placing an emphasis on mass commodity consumption . . . a crisis in appetite conjures up cannibals” (211). If we lend this reading to Gelman’s Borneo ceremony, a new layer of meaning adds a richness to the inclusion of the story. Readers “back home” are consuming the tale, piqued by the hint of desire and dare-not-imagine that encompasses the trope of cannibalism (let alone human sacrifice, a symbolic representation of cannibalism). As the ultimate form of othering, cannibalism’s inclusion in a contemporary piece that is itself commodified, typed, marketed, even branded (the “female nomad” category I will explore in depth in chapter two of this work) sets the story in a chain of strategies all complicit in maintaining the trope of cannibalism as a discursive and economic powerhouse of capital flow.

Maggie Kilgour argues that the cannibal stands in as a “projection of modern dreams and fears,” and becomes “a fitting double for the modern insular ego . . . which both depends on a clear sense of its separation and detachment from others, and yet, perhaps imperialistically, wants to set sail and expand its own boundaries,” including the “desire for autonomy and for transcendence of selfhood” (244). In many ways, *Tales* becomes a project of just this kind, and the human sacrifice/cannibalism passage in Borneo stands as a microcosm of the larger project as a whole. The Borneo narrative incorporates the insubstantialization trope to make the focus more on Gelman’s inner journey than on the others she encounters—in this way it becomes about separation and

detachment of her ego from others when we compare her image to the moment and threat of cannibalistic communion in the ceremony. Simultaneously, however, the whole project symbolizes Gelman's own "setting sail," away from gender-prescribed boundaries in her marriage, away from preconceptions of western productive citizenship. She never envisioned herself participating in a sacred native ceremony with indigenous peoples in Borneo—it was not normative behavior for the definition of her prior role in society. On the whole, Gelman presents herself entering a state of autonomy that also desires universalism in a "transcendence of selfhood" that stands not only in the symbol of cannibalism in the smaller frame of the Borneo example, but also in the universal humanity statements ("we are all the same despite our differences") included throughout the narrative of the text as a whole.

Insubstantialization and Perceived Risk,

Affirmation and the Civilizing Mission: Multiple Tropes

As an example of the importance of insubstantialization combined with perceived risk, I will briefly analyze the story "Million-Dollar Moment" from *Friends*, which was submitted by writer Bonnie Worthen, and which serves to reinforce the writer's belief in the innate knowledge and instinctual sense of her fiancé during an encounter with a tour guide on a trip to Peru. The concept of perceived risk is an important thread woven through the text of *Friends*. In the preface, Gelman shares with readers that through her website she formed after publishing *Tales*, she asked readers of *Tales* to send her stories: "I had a website that was getting a lot of hits. I could ask for submissions from all those readers who had told me they wanted to write about their travels. I threw out the challenge: Send me stories about *connecting* and *risk-taking* around the world" (*Friends*

5).²⁴ She collected stories from 2003-2006, when she began the project of editing for publication. Gelman especially sought stories from “people who had left their comfort zones and stepped into the unfamiliar. These writers had been willing to take risks, break rules, face the unknown.” (*Friends* 6).

It is the way that Gelman writes about perceived risk that is striking in the next few paragraphs of the preface. She writes:

Risks are not the same for everyone. For some, walking out the front door or talking to a stranger is a risk. For others, risk is about moving to a new place, saying yes to an invitation, reaching out to help a stranger, or traveling to a country where they don’t know the language.

For the most part, the risks in these stories are neither dangerous nor foolhardy but rather the kind of risks that spark the part of you that screams from within, *Hey, look at me! I can’t believe I’m doing this!* (*Friends* 6-7).

In a sense, Gelman creates her own definition here, and clearly shows readers that not all “risks” they encounter via the travelers’ written experiences in the text will be truly dangerous or groundbreaking. What is crucial, however, is that the focus is on the traveler, and not the encounter itself. The focus is on the perceived risk and what it means to the traveler: “*Hey, look at me!*”. The frame of reference shifts and it becomes about the ability to escape from the mainstream cultural rules and regulations: “*I can’t believe I’m doing this!*” The other participants in the moment become a backdrop to the traveler’s inner journey in a way that supports Spurr’s insubstantialization trope. The whole of this second text, then, and its multiple authors and contributors, becomes framed

once again by the idea of escape from a rigid set of cultural expectations and an inner awakening.

Bonnie Worthen begins her tale by framing the danger of the geographical space she and her husband will be entering: “many of our friends were concerned that we were going to such a dangerous country; there had been guerrilla warfare in the Peruvian jungles for many years. The train that we were planning to take between Cuzco and Machu Picchu had been robbed several times. Nonetheless, our excitement eclipsed any fears we had” (*Friends* 91). The writer details the couple’s “adventures” in Cuzco over the next two pages of text, writing about the “fabulous new sights” she and her fiancé encountered: sweaters that were “much more sumptuous and feathery to the touch than the finest cashmere from India,” “shoeshine boys,” llamas walking down “narrow, steep, cobbled lanes . . . heavy-lidded with extravagantly lashed eyes that gave them an air of enticing innocence” (*Friends* 92-93). Carlos, a local tour guide, wins the trust of Worthen’s fiancé and suggests several trips for which the couple pays in cash. Because of the success of these day trips, the couple decides to book a full trip to Machu Picchu through Carlos, and they intend to pay in cash. The perceived risk is described here, when Worthen’s fiancé pulls out a fake one-million-dollar bill. Worthen writes:

Carlos’s eyes opened wide. He mumbled that he had never seen one of those before. The room got very quiet. We had a very long and hairy-scary moment. During that moment Carlos’s Peruvian color vanished. We wonder even today if his eyeballs ever got back in place. I envisioned us with our throats cut and Carlos trying to book first-class passage to Paris. Then Michael laughed and told Carlos it was a fake and gave it to

him. I sometimes wonder just how close we came that night to real danger. (*Friends* 94)

We know the risk is perceived because of the final phrase, “real danger.” Carlos’s wide-open eyes, his mumbled affirmation of the amount of money he believed was in front of him, the quiet of the room, all serve to build the tension of the encounter. The long “hairy-scary moment” is the tension-filled pause, the climax of the reader’s apprehension and vicarious experience, the thrill of the perceived risk. Carlos’s draining color and the writer’s dramatic vision of death add to the appeal of the perceived risk. The laugh eases the tension, serves as the denouement, and brings readers back to safety. This affirmation is solidified by the writer’s use of the story to make a comment about the inner value of her now-husband, not the moral or ethical compass of Carlos, who never failed to follow through on their purchased tours. Carlos, as “other,” serves as a comparison point to the writer’s husband. While Carlos clearly has a high ethical standard and does not rip off the couple as they travel, the story’s real purpose is not to share that, but rather to share the reaffirmation for the writer of her husband’s values, especially in relationship to travel. She writes in the final paragraph of the story: “I saw the fire in that Peruvian man’s eyes as he gawked at that phony million-dollar bill. I have never doubted Michael’s intuition about tricky people and sticky situations. He is a perfect traveling companion, my Million-Dollar man” (*Friends* 94). Note that here Carlos has been replaced with “that Peruvian man;” he is represented as an object in comparison to “Michael,” Worthen’s named partner in travel. Further, “Michael’s intuition about tricky people and sticky situations” implies that Carlos was a tricky person and that the fake bill incident was one that contained real risk, though the author has already stated that there

was no real danger. Readers can see that the tale unravels when analyzed through the lens of perceived risk—Carlos may even stand in as a type of straw man, included to support the true message of the piece—that Michael, as a Western man well-acquainted with travel, can save his wife from risk and function as the “perfect traveling companion” (*Friends* 94).

Worthen’s tale stands as another fine example of a piece that can be complicated using the “travel/writing” terminology set forth by Graham Huggan. In this case, the story-within-a-story aspect of the tale functions to broaden the scope of meaning for readers. We see not only the moment of encounter with Carlos and the fake money, but also the framing of that story in recollection, with other components woven in that were not part of the experience at the time. The wiggle-room between the travel experience and the writing of that experience lends itself to a whole system of representation, the “surmise” between reality and myth-making, that brings the tale into the larger realm of the affirmation trope, where the story is no longer about Carlos and his interaction with the couple but rather about the husband.

The affirmation trope is a common one among stories in *Friends*, and a trope often presented in addition to others. “Peeing, Drugs, and a School,” by Maria Altobelli, begins the collection of writing in *Friends* after Gelman’s introduction, and it is a tale that reinforces the affirmation trope and also invokes the idea of the “civilizing mission.” In this story about the travels of a late-middle-aged couple back to the site of the husband’s Peace Corps assignment in Bolivia from the 1970s, readers gain a glimpse into the life of a couple revisiting parts of their life journey after decades have passed. The story begins with a dirty bus trip across Bolivia replete with assumed drug dealers hiding

packages beneath seats and a filthy lavatory which no one on the bus would attempt to use. Once the couple makes it to their destination, Ascension de Guarayos, the story becomes about the husband's work building a school, and how the school was ultimately named after him. Ending on a personal connection between a man the husband helped when his pregnant wife was in need of emergency care, the story at the surface level seems touching, presenting a moment of reconnection across the years between men and a memory. Readers cannot deny the possibility that the husband affected positive change in the community, of course. But illuminated by the tropes of empire, this story stands out as a savior narrative, where the young Western man navigates the harsh, backward Bolivian terrain, creates the village's first school, and networks to save a young woman's life all before flying home to Minnesota. The moment of connection presented at the end of the story serves to solidify the husband's liberatory presence in the village—he "saved" a woman's life and because of that, a family was sustained. The end of the story thus produces a "feel good moment" where readers can confirm, once again, that Western values and intervention not only changed lives (the school) but saved lives (the man's wife survived and went on to have three children). In this way, the story reifies the civilizing mission, an important component of the affirmation trope and a critical aspect of colonial ideology. Using the trope of the civilizing mission allowed colonial power-centers to justify colonization by claiming that it was the duty of "civilized" nations to bring civilization to those areas that were still "backward" or "savage." The trope is still in operation today in current neo-colonial, western configurations of "First World" and "Third World" or "developing" nations. It is also reinforced in American culture when those in power speak of spreading democracy around the globe. Further, the idea was

recently invoked with great success to sway public opinion at the outset of the bombing and subsequent American reconstruction of Iraq from 2003 onward.

Including the civilizing mission trope in a similar way, the next story in the book, entitled “A Pair of Shoes,” continues the trope of affirmation. In this short piece, author Janie Starr details her farewell lunch with Petrona, a woman she’s become friends with during a two-week stay in Guatemala. Petrona’s son Estuardo is ten years old and the family comedian. In a recent distribution of new shoes from the elementary school Estuardo attends, Estuardo was left out because Petrona had American friends, and the school officials believed those friends had paid Estuardo’s tuition, indicating that Petrona should have enough money of her own to pay for shoes for Estuardo: “She told them that she alone had paid his tuition. They must not have believed her because they never gave Estuardo his pair of shoes” (*Friends* 32). This prompts the author to leave her own shoes behind for Estuardo when she leaves the next day. It is the writer’s glimpse into her inner dialogue that becomes most significant. She writes, “I know my offer is as much about making *me* feel useful as it is about making any significant difference in a young boy’s life” (*Friends* 32). This is a moment of keen self-awareness for the author, one that deserves mention. The author realizes that her shoes are likely insignificant for young Estuardo’s future, and she is recognizing that the decision to give her shoes to Estuardo is a feel-good gesture taken in part to make herself feel like she is doing something to help the family’s dire situation. Yet Janie’s gesture can also be read as a reinforcement and continuation of colonial cultural norms, where the colonizing force believes in its own benevolence and perpetuates the desire to “save” someone in a non-Western culture from the supposed backward, pre-modern space of “otherness.” For Janie, in order to make

herself feel like she had any power, like she mattered, she made a choice that ultimately reinforced a whole set of colonial discourse, a long tradition of seeing those in non-Western space as needing, lacking. The final lines in the story serve as a marker of that long tradition: Estuardo “jumps down, jerks off his worn-out old-man’s cracked-leather shoes and pulls on the too-big sandals . . . Estuardo gives me one final grin, and then he takes off running. He disappears in a flash of red as he kicks up his heels and turns the corner toward the lake” (*Friends* 33). Estuardo has the shoes he needs, and Janie feels an intense feeling of self-satisfaction that she has made a difference on her trip to a very different culture than her own. The satisfaction of the civilizing mission affirms and perpetuates the neo-colonial norm of the benevolent Western savior.

Moments of Tension: Deep Exploration and Healthy Cultural Relativism

There are indeed examples in *Tales* and *Friends* which show moments of cultural relativism where the subjects attempt to make sense of cultural difference in a way that is respectful, even quite positive. These moments of tension can become fruitful liminal spaces of discovery and reflection. As I have noted, Pratt refers to liminal space as the space of the “contact zone,” one where the emphasis should be placed on interaction. She writes, “a contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees,’ not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7). It is in this frame that I will read and analyze moments of interactive cultural relativism where Gelman or other Western writers

attempt to grow and expand their understanding of the “other” cultures they visit and write about.

A story submitted by Kelly Hayes-Raitt appears in *Friends* and exemplifies the rewarding moments of self-reflection and cultural awareness that are sometimes woven into *Friends* and *Tales*. In “Tower of Babel,” Hayes-Raitt reflects on her visits to Babylon (present-day Iraq) before the 2003 bombing and occupation of Iraq by the United States. On a trip with a women’s delegation in 2003, the author meets a family and participates in a mock marriage ceremony (in fun) replete with peeling and sharing an apple, first fruit, with her new “husband.” During her stay with the family, she bonds deeply with the family matriarch, Amira, along with other women and members of her “new Babylonian family” (*Friends* 39). The tale serves as a comparison between American motives for the 2003 bombing and occupation and the reality of Iraqi life for families still reeling from the short-lived 1990s Gulf War. Both Hayes-Raitt and the family she is visiting realize that “war is imminent” (*Friends* 38). The author writes of her inner turmoil when the first bombs start dropping in the area during the 2003 bombardment:

When the bombs started falling, I wasn’t there . . . I listened live on National Public Radio from the safety of my car half a world away, clutching my steering wheel on Santa Monica Boulevard, while honking cars angrily passed me, going about their self-important day.

Later, I waited anxiously for news of my new Babylonian family. In Texas, Amira initially heard that everyone was okay—shaken, scared, edgy, angry, but alive. Over months we hear of the deaths.

First, Amira's elderly mother died when she couldn't get her medication.

Then I hear my "husband" has died. The strain of the constant gunfire, the never-ending fear, took its toll on his heart.

I eat an apple in his honor, hoping that in death, he finds our common dream: peace. (*Friends* 39-40)

In this carefully-crafted piece that revolves around a mock wedding ceremony and the impact of war, Hayes-Raitt explores the tension surrounding visiting and living among members of a culture that will be impacted by actions instituted by her own government. Her close, lived connection to the family members she meets in Babylon alter her perception of the war, make it much more personal, making the in-between space in Huggan's idea of "travel/writing" one of discovery and self-reflection, a true "contact zone" with real contemplation and recognition. She is able to write about the tug of those relationships on her way of seeing and on her fervent desire for peace. The story does not function at the level of poignancy or sentimental nostalgia, but rather at the level of an in-between space for both Hayes-Raitt and the family she visits. Despite the actions of either group's government, they were able to connect and change perceptions of cultural difference. While Gelman often writes about having had this type of connection, Hayes-Raitt is able to write it in a way that shows the tension and change lived by the family and by herself in a way that is profound for readers.

There are three strong examples in *Tales* that show a form of cultural relativism which is rich and productive, forcing Gelman to think differently in the "contact zones" of her travels and to self-reflect in a way that is meaningful to her understanding of

culture and background. In these examples, Gelman moves into the more liminal figure of the “travel/writer” which Huggan envisions, the traveler and writer in a self-reflexive communion of experience. One of the first such examples is found in the early pages of *Tales*, when she reflects on her adventures in Nicaragua and her predisposition to want to change the people around her according to her cultural standards. She writes,

As we sit on the ground, cars blowing exhaust in our faces, we eat, tossing the papers and wrappings into the street. It is hard for me to throw garbage into the street; I can feel the years of conditioning pulling on my arm as I toss. I think about picking up our trash and finding a garbage pail; but I think again. I am a friend, not a teacher. If I pick up after them, I am making a judgment that says I know better than they. Even if I walk with my own garbage to a pail, I am making a statement.

I am an invited guest. I do as they do. (*Tales* 53)

In this example, Gelman is faced with her social conditioning in a situation which causes her to question the relative value of her training. She wants to fit in; in order to do so she must set aside a part of her cultural training and refrain from taking an action that seems normal to her. She is clearly in a “contact zone,” where she must interact with others outside her frame of cultural reference for behavior. Here, readers can see the writer is self-aware of her position—she knows that not following the cultural norm she is witnessing in Guatemala will show that she is judging her new friends. In this short reflection, then, Gelman shares a moment of cultural relativism and her choice to “do as they do” despite the “years of conditioning pulling on [her] arm.” This decision speaks

of a rich and open space of negotiation where Gelman stretches and flexes her understanding of mores and social rules.

A later example from the text shows how Gelman has stretched her cultural self-awareness and understanding of the complexities of difference, especially in comparison to her earlier comments about crafts as a savior for the Mexican Zapotec villagers. While she is visiting the indigenous tree-top dwellers in Irian Jaya, Gelman must confront rampant childhood malnutrition. She reflects on her day in the village as she attempts to fall asleep:

All night I am haunted by the image of children with distended stomachs. I cannot get their shapes out of my mind. More than half of the young children in this village look as though they are pregnant. The condition, called kwashiorkor, is caused by a diet low in calories, high in starch, and seriously deficient in protein . . . The simple addition of powdered skim milk to the diet could reverse the disease. But who would buy and distribute the milk? And educate the people on how to use it? What about beans and rice? Or chickens and eggs? Or goats? Or cows? Who cares about these people of the clouds, high in the hills of Irian Jaya? Certainly not the Indonesian government. (*Tales* 200)

In this example, Gelman attempts to address some of the multiple complications of the situation the villagers face in terms of malnutrition and childhood disease. She can respect that the problem will not be fixed easily and that the solution may not be readily available despite her knowledge that something as simple as providing powdered milk would remedy the suffering of the children. She can also foresee the type of intricate

process that would need to be put in place in order for a sustainable change to occur.

This is a moment of growth for Gelman, a moment of wallowing in the deep complexities of life for remote indigenous peoples in Indonesia, where government response to the children's issues is nonexistent.

A final example from Gelman in *Tales* shows how her thinking has transformed from her first days exploring in Mexico to the time when she decides to leave the *puri* (palace complex) where she has been staying for four years in Bali. This four-year stay is the longest span of time Gelman remains in one fixed living space. She writes,

I have become too involved. It is not my place to change their lives. I am here to learn from them, not to alter their history.

I have adapted in many ways to the pace and style of living in Bali, but I will never be a Balinese woman, or a Mexican or a Nicaraguan. I can live in other cultures . . . but I must constantly remind myself that my background will always slant the way I see things. When I am tempted to change who they are or rush what they are becoming, it is time to move on. (*Tales* 220)

This expression of relativism is a complete shift from her earlier desire to change the Zapotec villagers by encouraging the start of a crafting village community. In that earlier example, Gelman went so far as to declare that the lack of village industry was a “waste.” Here, Gelman is able to reflect more complexly about her own background and how it influences the way she sees the people in cultures different from her own. She has begun reminding herself that her way of seeing impacts her actions. She is aware that sometimes she is tempted to interfere, even to “change who they are” or “what they are

becoming,” and she now has a mechanism in place to avoid this—she forces herself to move on and interact with a different community.

Although these examples do represent moments of growth, it is important to recognize they also simultaneously continue the rhetoric of empire by reinforcing problematic rhetorical tropes, signifying the ideological conflict at work in the text as a whole. When Gelman confronts childhood malnutrition in Irian Jaya, she does stretch herself further than at any point prior in the text in terms of realizing and acknowledging the complexity of the social and cultural influences contributing to the children’s condition. Yet, even as she pushes her self-awareness, she continues to employ words and phrases that perpetuate the “monarch of all I survey”/condescending tone and focus on comparison of education and progress that are part of the classification trope. When she writes that the “simple addition” of milk to the children’s diet and finding volunteers to “educate the people” would make a substantial difference, she places herself as an outsider looking in and effectively participates in “othering” the villagers and their children. “Simple” reinforces the condescending tone and makes the solution seem so easy that anyone could think of it. Asking the question of who would educate the people on how to use powdered milk suggests that the villagers would be able to figure this out on their own. Finally, when Gelman writes “Who cares about these people,” she excludes herself and the people in the village as potential answers. By making the question larger, she tries to bring home her point—the government is not responding to the need of the villagers. In addition, though, by making the question larger she implies that the villagers reside in a space and place that is less developed, less advanced on the path of Western progress by which all nations are judged using the classification trope.

In the last example, when Gelman reflects on her influence in the lives of those she encounters during her stay in Bali, she opens herself to acknowledging that her background impacts the way she sees the cultures and societies she visits. In the same instance, however, she continues to employ the surveillance and classification tropes. When she writes “I am here to learn from them, not to alter their history,” Gelman paints an unrealistic, minimalized picture of how her insertion into a culture and space different from her own might actually be altering that culture and space. The simple fact of her presence in the communities alters the communities’ histories. Furthermore, when Gelman writes “When I am tempted to change who they are or rush what they are becoming, it is time to move on,” once again readers can see the ease with which a statement of cultural relativism can shift to a statement of classification and insubstantialization. Gelman is the authority in this quotation, the one who has the power to change “them,” the unnamed “others.” She, as a Westerner, further along on the timeline of modern progress, might “rush” the “others” who are not yet in the same modern, progressive space she occupies. The specter of teleological progress continues to appear in the phrase “rush what they are becoming,” implying that interference may hinder progress along the magic road of “becoming” more civilized, modern, Western. Finally, by stating that when she feels this way, like she could or should interfere, she *leaves*, Gelman shows readers that the only option in situations like this is to remove oneself from the situation, in essence teaching readers back home that jumping from culture to culture is preferable to confronting the issue of how or why she feels she wants to interfere.

Conclusion

To come full circle, then, a close examination of *Tales* and *Friends* ultimately leads to a discussion of the story or text as a separate and even contested space of othering, as a consistent and complicated wrestling with representations of alterity. Michel de Certeau explores such a role for the text in the articles he includes in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Similar to Holland and Huggan's idea of the "surmise" of travel writing as a space in-between fact and myth, de Certeau argues that fiction (a qualification: all writing ultimately constitutes fiction for de Certeau) "plays on the stratification of meaning: it narrates one thing in order to tell something else" (202). We can see clearly that in both *Tales* and *Friends*, from the examples explored in depth in this chapter, that the telling of the travel narrative in these texts is predicated on rules, structures, ways of seeing which are rendered invisible in the telling without such a close, deliberate reading against the grain as I have attempted to provide. De Certeau recognizes that voices of narration "exercise an immense power" to "transform, reorient, and regulate the space of social relations" (206). Both *Tales* and *Friends* stand as texts of narration and representation—of experiences, moments, memories—transformed through their very telling, their inscription on a page that is meant to be read by an audience, into something other entirely, a "(t)exterior" (de Certeau 69). They can only impact inasmuch as they are able to elide the very means of their production, their packaging, their "sale," even their very "collection" into a narrative arc. The meta-narrative, invisible even as it operates on every page, revolves around the production of a structure for the (re)presentation of the writer's experience. The fan base Gelman recognizes on her website and her ability to collect and publish a variety of "fellow travelers" tales into a second book speaks to this immense power.

For de Certeau, in a way that is helpful for a connection to my project, there exists a continual loop between creation of the Other and creation of writing about the Other. As he argues, there is an intrinsic distance in writing about travel, for “a frame is necessary to ensure the strangeness of the picture . . . the discourse that sets off in search of the other with the impossible task of saying the truth returns from afar with the authority to speak in the name of the other and command belief” (69). For Gelman in *Tales*, this frame is her own personal journey, through which she narrates the encounters she has with others and relates them to her ever-changing internal physical and psychological perspectives. In *Friends*, the stories and recipes come together in a different kind of whole, a frame of togetherness-through-travel (though that travel is conditional—it primarily consists of women writing about a personal journey that impacted their views of the world). In this way, both texts create a space of their own—*Friends* predicated on inner journey, and *Tales* on journey-together. In creating the frame of viewing others in relation to oneself or the group, and creating the text(s) within that frame, the texts set conditions for how others can be represented.

Both kinds of spaces—those which reinforce the norms of colonial discourse and those which attempt, however briefly, to resist such discourse—operate in *Tales* and *Friends*. A text can clearly house moments where harmful stereotypes are perpetuated and resistance and rupture exist, even within the space of a few sentences. As scholars we must be willing to accept and uncover moments of tension, even when the overarching message of a text remains neo-colonial and reinforces hegemonic discourses of othering. It is only through this type of vigilance that a more nuanced understanding

of the complex, interwoven, and multivariate strands of both resistant tension and reifying tropes in contemporary travel writing can occur.

CH 1 NOTES

¹ In this way, my work aligns with one of the early standards in assessing work through a post-colonial theoretical lens, that of re-reading a text for thematic trends and tropes. While Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin mention this strategy as one that produces “powerfully subversive accounts of textuality and concepts of ‘literariness’ which open up new areas of concern” (194), they do so in reference to canonical works of literature. See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989. My reading will use the same strategy, but assess a contemporary piece of writing meant for a larger popular audience. For a recent example of this type of work, see Lisle, Debbie. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

² Similar to Said’s method of “contrapuntal” reading, where one must “take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it” in reading a text to “draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented” (66). See Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

³ For two notable recent exceptions, see Paes de Barros, Deborah. *Fast Cars and Bad Girls: Nomadic Subjects and Women’s Road Stories*. New York: Lang, 2004.; and Lisle, Debbie. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

⁴ See Siegel, Kristi, ed. *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women’s Travel Writing*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.; Kinsley, Zoe. *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008; Imbarrato, Susan Clair. *Traveling Women: Narrative Visions of Early America*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2006; Steadman, Jennifer Bernhardt. *Traveling Economies: American Women’s Travel Writing*. Columbus: Ohio UP, 2007; and Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1991

⁵ For a more comprehensive review of works related to this time period, see the Introduction to this dissertation.

⁶ See Bose, Purnima. "Rev. of *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, by David Spurr." *The International History Review* (Nov 1994): 790-792.; McClure, John. "Rev. of *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, by David Spurr." *Victorian Studies* (Winter 1995): 323-325.; Sekora, John. "Rev. of *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, by David Spurr." *The Journal of Developing Areas* (Jan 1994): 263-265.

⁷ More recent contemporary work still draws on these theoretical underpinnings. For instance, in *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*, Graham Huggan argues that the idea and representation of “travel as freedom” is outdated, especially in the age of continued forced migration, streams of refugees from war-torn areas, and coerced travel. Huggan instead posits the term “travel/writing,” symbolic of writing both inside and outside the travel writing genre, to more fluidly assert and examine the role travel plays in cultural identity. To that end, Huggan explores how “travel/writing relies increasingly on ‘miscegenated’ modes of cultural identity that are created under current conditions of globalization” (5). For Huggan, travel should be examined in popular texts, especially those that engage in tourism, because he claims “there is no meaningful distinction between the tourist and the traveler” (5). Huggan goes on to argue that travel/writing cannot be unraveled from tourism in any easy way, for it is “inextricably connected with the multiple ways in which tourism engages with, not escapes from, the unstable conditions of global modernity” (5). Finally, Huggan explores the distinction between passive consumption and active experience in travel/tourism (178). Huggan’s recent work has many parallels to my examination of Rita Golden Gelman’s *Tales of a Female Nomad* and *Female Nomad and Friends*, especially in my analysis of Gelman’s positioning of travel as “freedom” from her previous life in the United States, her imbrication in the processes of globalization at work in the places she chooses to live as a self-styled “nomad,” and her incorporation of tourism into her traveling lifestyle. See Huggan, Graham. *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization*. Ann Arbor: U of MI P, 2009.

⁸ See Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam, eds. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994.; Huggan, Graham. "Counter-Travel Writing and Post-Coloniality." Lisolette Glage, ed. *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. 37-59.; Lisle, Debbie. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

⁹ Frye introduces the concept of “tropical criticism” in his introduction to *Anatomy of Criticism*, identifying it as a rhetorical form of criticism based on comparative value and “complexity of meaning” (20-21). See Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957. Further, Hayden White explores tropical discourse in history and the human sciences, arguing that “tropics is the process by which all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively” (2). See White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

¹⁰ David Spurr argues in *The Rhetoric of Empire* that Derrida and de Man offer vehicles for entry into larger rhetorical analysis, but pushes beyond their approaches to create his own category. For example, Spurr agrees with Derrida’s concept of the “violence of the letter” through “difference” and “classification,” but he argues that it “extends beyond” Derrida’s study of anthropology “and beyond the initial confrontation of cultures” into “the entire system by which one culture comes to interpret, to represent, and finally to dominate” (Spurr 4). Similarly, Spurr recognizes deMan’s process-based approach to the “grammatization of rhetoric,” which focuses not only on identifying tropes, but also on a “larger narrative framework” that Spurr argues encompasses “literary journalism” (Spurr 8). In this way, Spurr argues for a more global approach to “aspects of this language

which survive beyond the classical colonial era and which continue to color perceptions of the non-Western world” (Spurr 8).

¹¹ Holland and Huggan build on Spurr’s work in this area in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*, where they note that “travel writing frequently provides an effective alibi for the perpetuation or reinstallation of ethnocentrically superior attitudes to “other” cultures, peoples, and places” (viii). See Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: U of MI P, 2000.

¹² In a way, *Tales* can be read as a celebratory model of universalism through globalization, a theme which I will explore in more depth in another chapter of this dissertation. I am reminded of a statement by Leela Gandhi, who wrote that “the West remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations . . . multicultural celebrations of ‘cultural diversity’ conveniently disguise rather more serious economic and political disparities” (136). My work in this chapter will touch on a close reading of some of these disparities; others will be addressed at length in other chapters in this dissertation. See Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

¹³ See Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992. 152-153.

¹⁴ Asha Varadharajan argues that Said articulates in *Orientalism* how surveillance and classification operate as an “‘increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control’ (36) implicit in the discourse of orientalism. The object, in this scenario, is immediately rendered vulnerable to scrutiny and reduced to thinglike status, to a fundamentally ontological and stable fact over which observers have authority because they know the fact ‘and it exists, in a sense, as [they] know it’ (32)” (qtd. in Varadharajan 125). See Varadharajan, Asha. *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak*. Minneapolis: U of MN P, 1995. Indeed, Said remarks in *Orientalism* that by making “others” into objects, into things, “to have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’” (*Orientalism* 32). In this sense, is Gelman’s writing of Margarita’s experience, despite its opening of the topic of domestic abuse cross-culturally, ultimately classifying that abuse, making Margarita an object rather than a subject with agency?

¹⁵ For more on the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” frame, see Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992. 201-223.

¹⁶ For further investigation to the legacies of colonialism as intertwined with early anthropological studies and historical writing, see Cooper, Frederick and Ann Laura Stoler, eds. “Between Metropole and Colony.” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: U of CA P, 1997. 6-8, 14. and Chatterjee, Partha and Anjan Ghosh, eds. *History and the Present*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002. For work related specifically to the intertwining of social science, anthropology, and history, see Iggers, Georg. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1997.

¹⁷ June Nash, in her discussion of the impact of maquiladoras and economic upheaval in Mexico, argues that there may be a link between domestic violence and limited household economy, where in stressed areas gendered roles become more stringent,

creating a kind of “fragmentation of society that erupts into mass psychosis . . . the sexist tradition allows misogynist practices such as violence against women in the home to be carried out with impunity” (155). See Nash, June. “Women in Between: Globalization and the New Enlightenment” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 31.1 (2005).

¹⁸ Homi Bhabha recognizes the power of the stereotype as colonial discourse’s representational “major discursive strategy,” for in the repetition of the stereotype there is a performative anxiety whereby the stereotype, as a form of classification, “vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must anxiously be repeated” (66). In this case, Gelman may refer back to her anthropological training and previously-learned stereotypes in order to attempt to classify, solidify, make more rigid her understanding of what is happening to Margarita. See Bhabha, Homi. “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism.” *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 66-84.

¹⁹ For Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, what Spurr details as the classification trope is a key element in the theme of the *anti-conquest*. Pratt shares the figure of the “seeing-man,” “he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” in a way similar to how Spurr describes one who uses the classification trope (Pratt 7). Pratt takes the concept of “anti-conquest” even further than Spurr, however. She argues that the “seeing-man” may articulate in a space of supposed innocence, using a “strategy of innocence” that is “constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest” (7). Using this strategy, writers represent themselves as innocent of conquest through careful classification and documentation of what they see, while still “assert[ing] hegemony” through the very description they create.

²⁰ See Wood, W. Warner. “Flexible Production, Households, and Fieldwork: Multisited Zapotec Weavers in the Era of Late Capitalism.” *Ethnology* 39.2 (Spring 2000): 133-148.

²¹ Holland and Huggan might classify Spurr’s aestheticization trope as a form of hypercommodification, which “involves the production of commodities that are commodifying in their turn—such as travel and the travel book” (197-198). See Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: U of MI P, 2000.

²² See Arens, William. *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

²³ See Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*. London: Methuen, 1986.; and Arens, William. *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

²⁴ Gelman’s website is located at <http://www.ritagoldengelman.com/> and will figure prominently in my Chapter 2 analysis in this dissertation.

**(Re)presentations of Patriarchal Expectation and Exception:
A Feminist Poststructuralist Reading of Women's Roles in Gelman's Work**

In this chapter I read Gelman's work from a feminist poststructuralist perspective to identify and examine key categories of essentialism and universalism related to gender and gender roles. Using close reading and concepts from both feminist post-colonial theory and feminist psychology, I explore how women are (re)presented in *Tales* and *Friends*. Areas of analysis include internalized patriarchal oppression and contemporary theories of women's identity formation, universalist categories (humanity, sisterhood, motherhood, woman), "excluded" women, victimhood, "empowered" women, and strategic or protective essentialism. Because my reading follows the poststructuralist tradition of searching for rupture and in-between space, I continue to explore contradictions in Gelman's work which offer relevant and fruitful spaces of inquiry.

Gelman's texts, as cultural objects, provide insight about gendered expectations in society and contextual clues about identity formation and gender role negotiation—they give us a point of analysis where pop culture meets theory. Her texts stand as cultural artifacts, productions, representations of specific contextual moments of cultural confrontation with difference. Concrete analysis and explication of examples from Gelman's popular, mass-market texts using a methodological framework of feminist poststructuralist theory allows us to see the interplay of prescribed roles, including the contradictions of those roles in particular, contextualized moments of cultural confrontation, as well as moments where the author lacks awareness of how those same roles may impact the text and its reception. Critics often examine local histories and

contexts in order to focus on what has been left out of mainstream narratives of history and cultural encounter. Here, I examine what these uncritical, popular texts written by a contemporary American author reveal about the workings of gender enculturation and the mechanics of power relations. I contend the arc of Gelman's work, from *Tales* to her website to the *Friends* anthology, engages in a form of feminist struggle and coalitional strategic essentialism that aligns with a collaborative identity model.

To begin my analysis, I would like to look at a powerful moment in *Tales*, when Gelman returns "home" to the US to attend her college reunion in Massachusetts. While there, she speaks about her new life as a nomad to friends, noting the differences in response between one couple, a man and a woman:

As I talk about my three years in Central America, and my idyllic stay in the Galapagos, I notice a tightening around David's mouth and a simultaneous widening of his wife's eyes.

"You're doing this alone?" she asks.

Their physical positions have altered. She is leaning toward me, animatedly asking questions, and he is a half step back. It happens three more times that night and many times over the next years. Usually it's the women who identify with me and ask the questions. It isn't the details of my travels that intrigue them; it's the fact that I am living a rich, fulfilling life. And I'm doing it without a man. For many women, my story awakens buried dreams or stimulates new ones. I can tell by reading eyes and body language when I've touched a sensitive nerve. (111-112)

This passage is both striking and very important because it speaks to the deep-rooted roles expected of women and the pull of Gelman's life outside of those expectations. Here Gelman shares how speaking of her life physically impacts her college friend of thirty years, David; the threat of the independent woman viscerally affects him. His mouth tightens and he actually steps back, away from her, as she continues speaking. In contrast, his wife becomes more animated and her body language shows interest; she leans in and asks questions, focusing specifically on the biggest of the thwarted expectations of gender Gelman provides: traveling solo, and even more importantly, without a man. "You're doing this alone?" is more than a question about solo travel—it's a loaded question implying "you're free from the expectation of a male partner?" and it shows, with pinpoint clarity, the type of struggle involved in breaking free from the stereotypical social roles expected of women in patriarchal American culture. A close reading even goes so far as to suggest that Gelman's new life is risqué, not because of sexual freedom (although maybe in part), but because she is actually living a life that *satisfies* her, and she is doing it alone. "I am living a rich, fulfilling life" without a male partner is a powerful, unorthodox message in a culture obsessed with messages of heterosexual "true love" and traditional gender roles. Yet this example is one of many in the trio of texts Gelman offers for exploration, and throughout all three there are varying degrees of adherence to and struggle against such engrained gender roles.

In *Transformations*, Sara Ahmed and other feminist scholars discuss the importance of connectivity with struggle and identity, arguing that women must "struggle" toward a solidarity forged through connection. For Ahmed, we must both make connections but also understand "the limits of connections," pushing ourselves to

critically examine the categories we find or create as a way to envision solidarity for women across the globe (117). The play of boundary and border-crossing as writers negotiate this solidarity-building creates rich liminal space, an in-between-ness that is a productive field for inquiry. The theme of individualism versus community is often repeated in contemporary feminist work related to travel. Struggle, to push beyond limiting culturally-determined roles and boundaries, becomes a political strategy as well as a common motif in women's writing. We need to recognize and examine the writing of women who express the need to connect with other women or a larger sense of human community in solidarity over being marginalized, or to feel part of a powerful group, because it points to a key difference between men and women's identity development.

Tanya Kennedy argues that individualism can in a sense fracture a woman's writing self, for she must participate in the very masculinist endeavor she is often working to subvert in other ways. According to Kennedy, "the traditions of Western individualism may affect a female author's ability to write the self out of the same master narrative that marginalizes her experience and rejects female embodiment, since both may question the coherent mastery of self that traditional forms of autobiography and citizenship require" (112). The master narrative of patriarchal culture excludes the experience of women and assumes these experiences are irrelevant. The travel writing genre itself is historically male-oriented, based on socially-accepted motifs of masculinity-based journeys like the coming-of-age trial or the hero cycle, which situate a man against a problem or ordeal involving travel or conquest and a return back home in victory as a hero or "true man." The master narrative of the travel writing genre presumes that women are unable to travel solo in the ways that it is socially acceptable

for men to travel (to remote, dangerous locations, without a companion). Women were historically left out of the genre for reasons related to their position as part of a marginalized group. In Europe, there was little to no opportunity for women's writing about travel to be published, if women were indeed allowed to be involved in foreign travel. While there are notable exceptions, like the early modern period publication of Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* after her death, in these cases the women were of the upper class, and were often traveling as companions with powerful men (in the case of Montagu, her husband was on a foreign diplomatic mission and she accompanied him). The reality of a woman traveling solo, without a companion, to locations culturally diverse and far from "home," has only recently become possible and is still only marginally culturally acceptable even for an economically and socially privileged white Western traveler.

Recent feminist psychological research by Kelly Zaytoun and Carol Gilligan, and work on women and identity by Crawford and Unger, Moya Hames-Garcia, Marchand and Runyan, and Holland, et. al shows a strong connection between women's developmental psychology and identity formation in a space of community and collaboration, decidedly different than the traditional, male-oriented model of rugged individualism and identity through individuation. If, as Kennedy suggests, a woman writing in a historically masculinist genre must, by default, split the self in order to successfully negotiate that genre, then we need to explore women's travel writing differently. As critics and scholars, we need to examine the ways in which women's travel writing attempts to broaden the genre, and we also need to embrace and engage with the contradictions and struggles of women writing in a rigidly-defined genre.

Writing in a space of fragmentation and constant struggle to find a sense of self would produce texts that contain multiple contradictions and problematic representations of women's roles and experiences (both those of the writer and those framed through the cultural lens of the writer in representation). Gelman's texts (and the pieces included in *Friends* by writers other than Gelman herself) provide rich examples of such contradiction and struggle as women negotiate their roles in complex social situations.

Feminist Psychology and Postcolonial Theory: Exploring Contradictions in Perceived Roles for Women

In the past decade, a feminist approach to psychology and psychiatry has radically changed the disciplines. Whereas both fields were previously the "domain of men" and male-based medical research methodology, both are now more open to female practitioners and female-based research projects than ever before. Feminist literary and cultural theory has profoundly influenced clinical and research practices in both psychology and psychiatry. Nancy Potter provides a comprehensive and accessible summary of the key influences of feminist theory and activism on the fields. She traces the United States' women's movement from its initial stages to its contemporary influences. According to Potter, *liberal feminists* began the first wave of American activism, using liberal political theory based on "gaining equality with men under the law by appealing to liberal arguments . . . within existing institutions in order to accommodate women on an equal basis" (62). *Radical feminism* is associated with the second wave of feminist activists from the 1950s through the 1980s; "it grew out of an impatience with liberal feminists' seeming attachment to goals of equality that ignored

the social and political consequences of fundamental gender differences” (62). Radical feminists do not believe that equality through the law will solve gender inequality— instead, they argue that “sex differences organize humans into dichotomized classes that are deeply entrenched into our conceptual and material frameworks” (62). In order to change such a system, radical feminists work to “celebrate the essential differences in women that have been degraded” rather than to “overcome” or “transcend gender differences” (62). *Neo-Marxist feminists* in the 1970s and 1980s focus foremost on the economic aspects of oppression, social class, and women’s labor through reproduction and other forms of domestic, “invisible” labor. *Socialist feminism* branches away from neo-Marxist feminism by refusing to position social class above other forms of oppression and signs of difference (the focus is, instead, on intersections of race, class, and gender). For socialist feminists, “the various axes of power must be contested simultaneously” (62). Potter also explores how key terms and concepts from postcolonial theory and poststructuralist feminist theory influence current practice in psychology and psychiatry, including feminist psychoanalytic theory. Hybridity, double consciousness, fragmented subjectivity, and the denial of both unity among humanity and the universal subject are some of the concepts now included in feminist psychology and psychiatry that were absent in the past. Specific contributions by feminist psychoanalytic theory, Potter claims, include “feminist-sensitive object-relations theory, the positing of the development of gendered psyches through patterns of domination and subordination in caregivers, and a feminist reading of the intersections between internal representations of things and the world of signs and meaning-making” (66). Examining the discursive practices of patriarchy in language and critiquing essentialism merges poststructuralist

literary theory, feminist theory, and feminist psychology/psychiatry in a unique and powerful way.

Psychologist Kelli Zaytoun, incorporates feminist “standpoint theory,” which integrates identity formation based on collective, social interaction as well as individual development of autonomy, in her theoretical understanding of how developmental psychology is changing (57).²⁵ Zaytoun uses “outsider within” and “borderland” epistemologies to help explore “links between the development of self-concept and social consciousness” in adult developmental psychology (53). “When social identity is considered in self-concept construction,” Zaytoun argues, “broader possibilities emerge for thinking about self and interconnectedness” (59).

McLeod, in “Postcolonialism and Feminism,” writes that “Western women’s relationship with the dual workings of [neo]colonialism and patriarchy is often particularly complicated as they can be placed in contradictory positions, empowered as members of the ‘civilized’ [neo]colonizing nation yet disempowered under a Western patriarchal rubric” (177). If we think back to the seduction passage at the beginning of the text, we can see how this functions in *Tales*. Gelman is obviously financially independent, and she mentions that her *gringo* appearance has already marked her body positively in terms of race hierarchy; these two signs empower her as “civilized” in McLeod’s frame. She is both empowered in the hierarchy of race and class, and disempowered by gender.

Gelman begins *Tales* with a discussion of her divorce, her choice to leave her life’s identity as partnered with a man. She does not pretend that her divorce is easy, and realistically renders her experience of self-realization in the text. However, Gelman

vacillates between traditional patriarchal and “exceptional” roles throughout the text and at times is not self-aware of doing so. Renowned psychologists of gender Crawford and Unger write about the socialization of helplessness in childhood, where girls and young women learn the expected roles for their gender. Studies show repeatedly that girls are seen by adults (both male and female) as needing help more often and are more likely to believe they need help and ask for it than boys of the same age, even though ability to solve the problem given to both boys and girls does not differ by gender. Over time, this belief crystallizes into internalized gender expectation: “by being taken care of more often, girls learn that they are needier than boys. Greater adult assistance confirms their belief in their own helplessness” (185). Such a self-fulfilling prophecy of negative self-efficacy creates a loop which reinforces the behavior of learned helplessness, so that “girls are more willing to present themselves as helpless and then have their beliefs confirmed by help from others” (185).

While somewhat far afield from learning roles in childhood, the moment when Gelman must seek out a place to eat alone in Mexico can be read as a moment where we can see the socialization of helplessness. To be seen alone as a woman is more problematic than to be seen as helpless (being seen as helpless is a confirmed gender role for women in patriarchal society). Here Gelman writes about her encounter with the fear and shame of eating alone in a restaurant at her evening meal. As she describes moving from hotel to hotel with the hopes of picking up someone to dine with, Gelman recounts the pervasive fear she has of being seen alone. At the last minute, just as she is ready to head back to her room one evening defeated, Gelman finds a pair of men who overhear the hotel clerk talking about a restaurant where a woman can eat alone. Thus, “chivalry

not dead,” Gelman is ecstatic when she gets her invitation: “An Englishman never lets a lady eat alone. I’m John and this is Lionel. We’d be delighted if you would join us for dinner” (10). As she slips into the role of female companion, readers experience the change in Gelman’s tone; she begins by praising the men’s choice of “a small restaurant in Zona Rosa, the elegant part of the city,” where they begin the meal with *ceviche* cocktails, where the “chicken *mole* is fabulous,” where the men buy her “a wilting rose from the old lady who is selling them from table to table” (11). At the same time that this adventure is allowing Gelman to embrace being independent, not tied to her husband, supposedly free, it also allows her to fall into a comfortable social role of dependence on men (and acceptance of “help” from them) because she is afraid of being alone, of being recognized as alone, on her own, free. She is operating under internalized oppression related to patriarchal gender norms. She fears most what she wants most to be, because it means that ultimately she is utterly *alone*. Being independent, alone, is taboo. To avoid the fear, she embraces old patterns of socially-acceptable (and socially-expected) female dependence.

Later that evening, Gelman is seduced by John and has a one-night tryst with him. The next morning, she awakens and asks herself “is it possible that leaving the country has turned me into someone else?” (11). It is here that Gelman realizes that alone, and “without attachments, she is a woman in limbo, whose identity has been buried in her roles” (11). While in other points of Gelman’s work she is unable to see how she is acted upon and informed by cultural expectations and roles, here Gelman understands she is feeling the tug and pull of gender roles and how they have fluctuated for her over time as a married woman and as a newly-single middle-aged traveler. After this point in the text,

Gelman works to redefine herself and her gender role(s), and spends the rest of her time in Mexico trying to “uncover the person inside [her] skin,” a person that will no longer allow herself to be defined through men.

This vacillation between “exception” and a woman who willingly chooses a patriarchal norm to avoid feeling (or being seen) alone shows the complicated and contradictory types of situations McLeod mentions. Here Gelman is both empowered by her newfound “freedom” as an American in Mexico, and disempowered as she chooses a socially acceptable patriarchal position over being seen alone. In one social situation, Gelman is *both* exception and patriarchal expectation, showing the fragmented nature of subjectivity. This being-both happens instantaneously, seamlessly, impossibly. The Western woman “in limbo,” caught in-between exception and expectation, is placed in a continuous position of struggle, one where she is either reinforcing neocolonial ways of seeing because of how she is marked with power, or reinforcing patriarchal, traditional gender roles when she chooses not to be an “exception,” a woman who is alone and unafraid of being seen alone.

This struggle, for Gelman, continues from this point on. She returns again and again to reflect on “her roles,” especially in relation to being alone. Often this type of reflection coincides with markers of social class hierarchies. There are other textual references to feeling alone and how that feeling impacts Gelman in her interactions with other cultures. The text allows such a reading in the way the narrative is constructed. She has a deep fear of *being seen alone* when she joins a government party touring the highlands of Indonesia, though in this case she is afraid of being ostracized by important women traveling with the governmental group: “I am feeling uncomfortable, rejected,

and very alone. I watch others climb into my boat and sit down, but the seat next to me remains empty. Like that first night in Mexico three years ago when I couldn't go out to dinner alone, it isn't being alone that's the problem. It's watching everyone else's reaction to my being alone. I sit, trying to smile but wanting to cry. I can see the unasked question that is in everyone's eyes: Why have you been isolated by those women?" (121). Gelman does try to brush away the fact that being alone is the central problem here, though it is not a very successful attempt. Her cultural context clearly indicates that she should not be seen alone, as that would make her appear vulnerable. In this case, her sense of loneliness is hinged on her acceptance or rejection of the other high-ranking women in the government party (one is a renowned primate scientist and the other is her assistant). And here her understanding of her roles is attached to the roles of others, whether male or female (in this case the higher importance of the women in the party may indicate the need to be connected to a role with some authority). At times, Gelman's definition of herself in contrast to others establishes problematic groupings of women without taking into consideration significant differences between her own life and the lives of the women she meets in her travels.

---Universal Humanity, Universal Sisterhood, Universal Woman, Universal Mother

There are several examples in *Tales* where Gelman relies on the idea of universal humanity or universal sisterhood as a strategy for building a connection (both in her travels and with readers). As I briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, theorists like Bhabha and Appadurai show how discourse on "others" often leads to a universalizing tendency—like the one in this short passage where Gelman describes meeting indigenous tribal people in Irian Jaya who still hunt with bows and arrows: "They are a picture, a

dream, a realization of my fantasies . . . being human and open is all it takes to connect. If I were not on a tour, I would ask to live amongst them . . . however long it might take for us to learn to trust each other. I'm sure they would have me" (213). This brief snapshot exemplifies the urge to focus on shared humanity as a binding connection across disparate cultures, moving from seeing the "other" culture as meeting the desire of exotic fantasy to being the same, no different, removing diversity entirely.

We can see this same tendency taken one step further where the focus becomes more narrowed from all of humanity to the gender-specific grouping together of women in a category of similitude. In other areas of the texts, Gelman uses identity markers like gender to focus on homogenizing traits. *Tales* reinforces this trend, for here Gelman uses the concept of sisterhood to craft a sort of space of safe harbor for the idea of women in community. She writes, reflecting on an afternoon spent with women in a Zapotec village, "the most touching and meaningful lesson of all was the intensity of *sisterhood* . . . I can feel the warmth and strength of those women as they danced around me and with me, the affinity I felt, the bonding that occurred, the strength they projected as they held hands to protect me from their men" (31). Here Gelman takes the common problem Appadurai identifies one step further—she is not universalizing about all of humanity, but rather the smaller subset based on gender, women alone.²⁶ Also telling is that the sisterhood shared here occurs in juxtaposition to a threat posed by the men in the village—the women are dancing together in a group in order to protect Gelman from the culturally-different men, whose values pose a threat to her sexually. At one point, Gelman reinforces some common patriarchal beliefs about women (that all women are nurturers, that all give life) when she writes about the "universal bonds" that "tie women

together” (*Tales* 125). She claims that “We [women] give birth, we nurture, we love. We are creators and not destroyers” (*Tales* 125). Appadurai speaks of the pull toward heterogenization or homogenization in terms of culture, while in this passage Gelman shows this pull in terms of the desire to create a category just for women, a universalizing trend that masks vast differences in socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, access to education and technology, and geographical mobility. Gelman goes so far as to claim that women commonly seek to connect in this universalizing way, writing “communication isn’t difficult because we all share the sensations of human emotions, the *need to affirm our sameness*, and the universal capacity to laugh” (*Tales* 303, emphasis my own). Blended together, the universalizing tendency meets gendered category to subsume all women into “sameness.”

As an example of how complicated and interwoven universalism and mother imagery can become, I would first like to focus on one passage in *Tales* where Gelman reflects on her time with a Guatemalan family, a time when she felt very connected with people from another culture. There are places in her texts where her connection to community and people is written in the likeness of a benevolent, nurturing mother. This imagery is significant because it can be read in two very different ways, one from a position of struggle with identity and a collaborative world view, and one from a position of power which reinforces neo-colonial discourse. Both are viable readings, though I argue that Gelman is using this most powerfully to show a moment of struggle because she recognizes the “messy” aspect of the encounter and she is clearly writing from a moment of self-reflection.

Gelman evokes this mother imagery:

As I sit there in the hot sun, sweating and dirty, surrounded by the adults, holding one of the babies in my arms, and feeling as close as I have ever felt to people from another culture, I realize that I have left no space between me and them, no room for anthropological distance. I feel as though they are family. Their pain is my pain; their joy, my joy. And it feels right.

It is clear that I am far more a mother than I am an anthropologist. This odd and messy weekend has helped me to define what I want to do in my travels: I want to know many cultures . . . from the inside. (54)

This “messy” example of Gelman trying to come to terms with her perceived role in a complex social situation in another culture shows us how the mother role can be used in juxtaposition to “anthropological distance.” When Gelman uses family imagery, she begins to see herself as the *same* as the Guatemalan family she is with—I have left no space between me and them” (54). If we read Gelman as the actor in that sentence, then she is admitting (“I realize”) she feels so deeply connected that she did not leave the appropriate amount of distance emotionally between the family and herself. If we read with the focus on “have left no space,” then the tension is not with Gelman’s own action, but that there is no space present for distance (less onus on Gelman as the actor). In both cases, what comes next clarifies: “I feel as though they are family” (54). Here the focus is on feelings, not thoughts, on emotions, not scientific objectivity. This passage can be read as a moment of self-discovery and authentic “struggle” for Gelman, because she is beginning to reflect on her anthropological training and how it influences her view of the cultures with which she interacts. There is a pull between her inner dialogue about

connection and her training in the discourse of scientific observation and perceived objectivity. This pull takes form in the image of herself as mother, as an integral part of family (the very imagery she uses in this passage to drive home her point of deep integration into a specific, local community). “I am far more a mother than I am an anthropologist” is a powerful statement—here the universalizing trait of woman-as-mother wins over the scientific, neo-colonial discourse of anthropology, yet both are reductive in their own way.

Read less generously, the passage indicates that Gelman puts on a mask here that allows her to use a new image of herself to her discursive advantage. By identifying as a woman, as a “mother,” she can bypass the murky waters of cultural context and write to *know* herself, other women, and ultimately “many cultures . . . from the inside” (54). If we see the use of “family” as a putting on of a discursive mask, then she is changing her mask to a more productive one for her self-definition and exploration of other cultures. She chooses two very important terms here for her readers back home when she reflects: “define” and “know.” Far from being experiential terms, these terms are concrete, based on categorizing, quantifying, taxonomizing (and indeed part of the scientific discourse of power). To *define*, to *know*, one must have a tangible concept, a concrete idea, a representation that gels with logic, a *knowable unknown*. Gelman’s push to become an insider, a part of the family, in any culture she visits, brings her closer to her vision of knowing. While the words of Gelman’s reflection show that she, in action and thought, is trying to make sense of the distinction between her feelings and her training, they also show that language as a form of representation indicates a discourse of

“knowing” that goes beyond her intent, right into the very heart of the words and language available for her to express her struggle.

These are examples of plausible readings of Gelman’s struggle for identity and use of universalism in *Tales*. Returning to a reading incorporating a feminist psychological framework as a way to analyze universalism allows us to complicate our understanding of Gelman’s work in helpful ways. Zaytoun and McLeod illustrate the ways in which women are placed in contradictory positions in relationship to power based on institutionalized patriarchal and/or neo-colonial social roles. Carol Gilligan and other scholars of feminist psychology point to an identity formation for women that is decidedly different than the traditional universally-accepted (male) developmental model put forth by psychologists like Erikson and Piaget.

Feminist scholars argue that the western developmental psychology model for identity, which focuses on childhood attachment to a parent figure and the subsequent separation from that parent as a means to gain independence and autonomy, is based on research conducted with male patients and presents a decidedly male model (Gilligan, Hartsock, Zaytoun, Chodorow). While Erikson, one of the preeminent researchers on identity development, noted differences between women and men in his research, he did not include these differences in the model he produced for human development. His observations showed that “for women, identity has as much to do with intimacy as with separation,” yet his developmental model focuses only on development of autonomy through independence and competition, rather than on collaborative forms of identity formation (Gilligan 98). In the United States, historical traditions and values of popular governance stress the importance of the independent, autonomous individual in

competition with others, reinforcing the model of a populace that operates in separation from others (Gilligan xiv).

Feminist psychology models point to what has been termed an “ethics of care” as the developmental model for women, while the developmental model for men is an ethics of respect for individual rights and a driving need for individual achievement. Gilligan argues that women’s development hinges on relationships and understanding the “psychological logic” of relationships and the “need of all persons for care” socialized in the norms and values of being a woman in western society. In contrast, men’s development emphasizes building an individualized “active responsibility” and ethical autonomy based on “consequences of choice” (Gilligan 100). Contemporary psychology research indicates that boys and young men are socialized to internalize the “role of separation as it defines and empowers the self,” while girls and young women are socialized to internalize the importance of the “ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community” (Gilligan 156). Girls and women are taught to make their own achievement secondary to their primary socialized role: the care of others.

In the 1970s, McClelland noted that in adult relationships, women are socialized to place their attention on *interdependence*, leading to an ethical core with a focus on not hurting others. This manifests in a cultural norm of power through nurturing for women, while men focus on *independence*, their power coming through culturally accepted norms of male “assertion and aggression” (qtd. in Gilligan 167). At mid-life, this emphasis on relationships continues to define women’s sense of self in connection to others, especially since “the reality of connection is experienced by women as a given rather than as freely contracted” and “the concept of identity expands to include the experience of

interconnection,” a factor previously left out of psychological models on identity (Gilligan 172). Researchers currently call for more targeted studies related to girls in early development, and especially to women at mid-life, which include the experiences and voices of women.

If we move the frame of inquiry for moments of universalism in *Tales* from the binary of self/other to a more collaborative model like those put forth by researchers currently studying women’s development as part of a continuum of relationships, then we open the text to a whole new set of meaning. If Gelman is working within an identity framework based on collaborative and coalitional ways of belonging, then her use of universal humanity, womanhood, and sisterhood become strategic ways of working to incorporate her sense of self into a larger whole, a global community of women in relationship to one another. Her approach is not a scholarly or academically careful one, but in the area of writing about gender roles, she does, more consistently than with race or social class, for instance, try to make sense of herself and her perspective in relationship to the other women with whom she lives and interacts. *Tales* functions as her self-narrative of identity, her movement into both a different stage of her life developmentally (late middle age) and a stage in life where her social and cultural roles related to her sense of herself as a woman had changed definitively (recently divorced, empty-nester). We see her work to define herself by wishing to “become one” with several different groups in *Tales*—the Zapotec village, the Guatemalan family, the sacred ceremonial groups in Bali, the women cooking Ho Mok in Thailand, the tribal families in Irian Jaya, the family observing Sabbath in Israel. I will return to these themes at the end of this chapter, where I examine the transformation of Gelman’s work with identity and

coalitional change from her earlier work in *Tales* to the collaborative project that is *Friends*.

---Excluded Women

“Women’s space,” space defined by patriarchal norms as reserved for daily work and activities that are a woman’s to perform according to social standards, appeals to Gelman as a place to search for community and connection as she continues her life of global “nomadism.” She seeks out communities of women tied to the space of the hearth or kitchen, where they work together on cooking meals for their families or communities. We see this at first when she writes about the women in the Zapotec village preparing the celebratory meal for a party, and it continues in her writing about women in Central America, Bali, and Thailand. While Gelman views participating in this “women’s work” as a way to build community and get to know the women she visits, we can also read this work as exclusionary, set apart from the socially-acceptable world of men. I’d like to move now to an exploration of spaces in *Tales* where Gelman recognizes moments of exclusion based on gender.

Some of the most powerful writing Gelman does in her travelogue involves moments when she feels excluded from something important because of her gender or when she is commenting on how gender is used as a mode of exclusion in the cultures she is visiting. These are among the most political moments in her writing as well; while she tries to understand, she clearly does not agree with the patriarchal roles enforced in different places around the world. While in Bali, Gelman focuses on the intersection of gender and class, noting that polygamy is allowed socially though not always supported legally. Marriage in Bali changes not only a woman’s social role in relationship to her

husband and her husband's family, but also reinforces her status as property. A woman can never inherit after a family death, even after her husband's—money is distributed only among men. She writes,

Women are second-class citizens . . . when a woman marries, she must move from her father's home to the home of her husband's family, where she is totally dependent on them . . . the place of women is obvious at celebrations, on the street, in the homes. On ceremonial occasions, they sit lower (pavilions have different heights) and are served their meals after the men. (152)

Here we see not just Gelman's struggle with women being treated as lesser beings than men, but also with the idea of dependency, perhaps ringing true for her because it is also something she disliked about her own relationship with her husband. Nowhere in *Tales*, *Friends*, or her website does Gelman state outright that she is a feminist, yet moments like these in the texts and her struggle with them ("It is difficult for me to accept this inequality . . . I too must learn now to see and not see") are evidence of her belief that men and women should be treated equally (*Tales* 152).

Interestingly, Gelman also notices that in their exclusion from the worlds men are allowed to inhabit, women form bonds of sisterhood together while involved in their "woman's work" tasks. She observes the Bali women in the royal *puri* and writes, "in spite of their second-class citizenship, women get strength and sisterhood from the bonding that takes place daily as they sit together weaving palm leaves and assembling offerings" (*Tales* 152). Seen as closer to nature in a form of primitive othering, the

women in the Balinese temple are assumed to have a more pure and special relationship to both family ancestors and the gods worshipped in Bali.

There is a lot going on in these examples to show the complexity and overlapping that occurs in social situations regarding the fluctuation of expectations related to gender roles. The idea of woman-as-property is disconcerting to Gelman, as is the higher station (literally) provided to men over women in social celebrations and even in daily interaction. She is forced to “unsee” the inequality in order to continue to function in the Balinese society she is living in. She struggles to find a way to show how women are, in some small way, able to overcome or resist these stringent roles based on gender alone. In doing so, she again mentions “sisterhood” and focuses on connection through “bonding,” though the bonding here is done precisely because the women are forced to act out patriarchal roles as they prepare offerings for ancestors (a task which takes many hours out of each day). The exclusion of the women in this society is the reason for their “sisterhood;” their connection exists because of the roles they perform according to regimented social expectations dictated by gender in a patriarchal society.

A second instance where Gelman writes about the treatment of women is unique because in it she is speaking of her own thoughts and feelings about being excluded because she is female; this example comes from her writing about a trip to Israel to uncover her cultural “roots.” Here she is describing a Sabbath ritual and ceremony to which she has been invited:

When I arrive, there are only women and children in the house.

The men are off praying. Teenage girls are helping the women in the kitchen then the outside door opens and suddenly the room is filled

with men . . . I am introduced only to the father, who wishes me a good Sabbath but is not permitted to touch my hand nor look into my eyes.

I do not like feeling second class. In this super-Orthodox world, women are dangerous; their very presence can distract the men from their pursuit of knowledge. Women are not permitted in the places where men study Torah; and in the synagogue, they must sit upstairs, away from the more devout and distractible males

And then, dinner is finished and one male voice begins. Soon, the others join him . . . I slowly and softly begin to add my voice to their chorus.

The woman sitting next to me puts her hand on my arm.

‘You cannot sing,’ she says.

‘What?’ I ask.

She repeats herself.

‘But why?’

‘The sound of a woman’s voice is thought to be a temptation for the men. We can sing when we are by ourselves, but not when the men are present.’

And suddenly, for me, the magic, the joy, the spirituality—and the bonding, is gone. (*Tales* 88-89)

She is thrilled to be invited to the ceremony, to get a glimpse into her own cultural heritage, one she has never experienced before. She is excited and positive, optimistic about the encounter. But immediately upon entering the house, Gelman is confronted by

the reality of exclusion. She notices that men are allowed to pray at temple, while the women remain at home preparing the Sabbath meal. Her introduction to only the father is significant enough to her that she makes note of it for readers—especially the lack of bodily contact, as if something were wrong with or tainted about it; as if all that her body (re)presented or could represent was sexual. She came to the experience expecting and craving connection, and the father in the family cannot even look her in the eyes for fear of being “tempted.”

Gelman sometimes conflates issues of sex or gender exclusion with class. Here “second class” is clearly “discriminated against based on sex or gender.” Key words to note are “dangerous,” “distract the men,” “not permitted,” and “must sit upstairs, away.” These markers of exclusion reduce women to some sort of embodied sexual essence, removing any connection to intellect, let alone agency. For Gelman, this is unexpected and palpably disconcerting, especially when she reaches a moment of emotional vulnerability. She deeply desires to join the group in a religious song, but is denied. Even her access to connection with her understanding of God is denied in that moment, solely because she is female. It is one powerful moment in *Tales* where she feels the depths such a form of discrimination can plumb. In many ways, Gelman occupies a position of power in relationship to global hierarchies—she is wealthy by world standards, born and raised in a Western and Northern first-world nation, highly educated, and white. While in Israel it is her female body that keeps her from experiences she wants to have. Because of this she struggles not only with understanding why these exclusions for women exist, but also questions the practice so deeply that it has a direct impact on her sense of spirituality and human connection in that moment—“suddenly, for

me, the magic, the joy, the spirituality—and the bonding, is gone” (*Tales* 89). Excluding women from social practices reserved only for men is one way gender hegemony is reinforced; consistently positioning women as physically or psychologically weak, as “victims,” is another. In contrast, the role of “empowered woman,” similar to the “exceptional woman,” exists as a category to explain women who succeed within patriarchal culture to create a new space for themselves by negotiating gender roles. The interplay of these two roles for women sets up a strong binary—either one is perpetually weak, a victim, or one is compelled to strive to be exceptional.

--Victim and Empowered Women Roles

Kelly Hayes-Raitt’s narrative “The Trip That Changed My Life” in *Friends* stands as an excellent example of the complexity of social norms about sex and the shifting roles and expectations of women and their bodies according to those social norms. Gelman’s travel experiences are shared across a global span of locations and a timeframe of over ten years. I include this particular reading of Hayes-Raitt’s blended narrative about a trip she chaperoned with teens in India, and her own rape in India after her responsibilities ended, because it offers a rich stand-alone text where conflicts about gender roles inform the writer’s perspective not only about herself, but about the country she visits.

The piece is aptly included in the “Mixed Messages” section of *Friends*. A close reading of passages from the narrative shows the unique nature of the piece in relationship to prescribed gender roles. The piece demonstrates the power of the traditional patriarchal “victim” role and the insidious effect of the “patriarchal woman,”

who has internalized patriarchal ideology, as well as the more subtle and subversive “empowered” woman role.

We know from the title of the piece that the writer feels profoundly impacted by her visit away from home—the trip “changed [her] life.” It seems a fitting inclusion in Gelman’s anthology, since life-changing adventure reflects her own choice to live as a “female nomad” and also plays into readers’ expectations of the types of stories in the anthology. The first lines of the narrative, however, hook the reader into the underlying theme of the piece, which is not the exoticism and adventure of the trip, as it might seem on the surface once the narrative gets going, but rather the haunting image of girls’ and women’s bodies as markers of sexual activity (and the very real possibility of life-altering pregnancy from violation). Hayes-Raitt writes, “I came home pregnant. Of course, I didn’t know it until the laundry was done and the jet lag had lapsed. India had shaken my soul; now it had invaded my uterus” (*Friends* 97). While in these first lines readers do not know that the pregnancy is unwanted, the writer foreshadows a negative connotation by connecting the pregnancy to the country she visited using forceful and violent imagery (India had “shaken” her soul, the foundation of her understanding of herself, and India had “invaded” her uterus, the foundation of her understanding of her sexuality). Carefully chosen, these words are discursive keys to unlocking the writer’s struggle with her rape and subsequent unwanted pregnancy.

While in India, Hayes-Raitt writes about her experience with culture shock and how she quickly began to experiment with ways to rebel, ever so slightly, just as the teens she was chaperoning tested the boundaries of social norms. Hayes-Raitt began smoking, and not the type of cigarettes expected for women—she began smoking unfiltered

“chunky, boyish Marlboros favored by the Indian men” (*Friends* 99). As a phallic symbol, the “smoldering” cigarette(s) in the narrative stand in for the writer’s own conflicted relationship with men, their bodies, violent sexual encounters, and her simultaneous desire for and repulsion from the phallus as both symbol and physical instrument of power and domination. We can see this conflict begin as the writer describes the moment she began to smoke during her trip, when she wanted to impact a man she was attracted to, “ a man whose attention I couldn’t quite capture. His cigarette smoldered seductively in the ashtray, and I just picked it up and inhaled” (*Friends* 99). Here we see the symbol of desire and difference connected with a failed attempt to exert sexual control or power in a situation; the phallic symbol “smolders seductively” as symbol, and the writer takes on the phallic symbol as substitute for the object of her desire, the chaperone. She “inhales” her desire and also takes on the psychological conundrum that ripples through as an undercurrent in her narrative reflection on the trip and its impact on her mind and her body.

We see the realization of and reflection on bodies as markers of sexual activity several times in the narrative. One poignant example comes as Hayes-Raitt rides home with socially-outcast low-caste children she has spent the day interacting with, and she witnesses the body language and will of a young girl:

“One of the orphans, a silent, alert five-year-old girl with a quick laugh, fell asleep in my lap during the bus ride back to the orphanage. As I gathered her sleepy dead weight, her arms draped around my neck, my forearm supporting her butt, I expected her to instinctively wrap her strong legs around my hips. Instead, the girl clung to my neck, her legs thrust out ramrod stiff and clenched tightly

together from the waist down, even in her sleep protecting the most vulnerable part of herself against the memory of a previous violation” (*Friends* 99).

The passage shows the stark contrast between the expectation of openness and connection through childhood innocence and the jarring reality of body language that speaks of past sexual trauma or the perceived danger of sexual advances. Instead of drifting into a happy sleep of exhaustion from playing at the pool with friends, the young girl from the orphanage twists her body into a position displaying her fear in a fierce pose of defiance against any who would try to violate the privacy of her body.

The message is quite clear: young girls should not have to ward off sexual violence, and the girl’s response should be both sad and shocking, to those readers who have not experienced a life where such sexual violence is commonplace, and even to those who have. The author’s expectation is confronted by the child’s “ramrod stiff,” “clenched,” defensive and automatic reaction, her reality. The privacy of one’s own body is at question, as is its protection from sexual exploitation. The author’s use of “memory of a previous violation” is interesting, considering the entire piece revolves around her own “memory of a previous violation” through her retelling of her trip to India, her own rape, and her unwanted pregnancy. The small moment of confrontation with the reality of sexual violence against female children on her trip forecasts and foreshadows her own experience of rape in the piece, where her own understanding of sexual norms and values is called into question. How much is she like the little girl she held in her arms? How much of herself does she see in her now, and write in her now, in reflection, after her own experience?

We may never know, but the links between the young girl's fear as expressed in her body and Hayes-Raitt's experience as expressed through her psychological turmoil are clear in the piece. Hayes-Raitt was raped while in India. She was forced into sexual activity without consent. Yet in the piece, she is naturally questioning what happened—and thus questioning herself, what she had done, how she had behaved, what she could have done differently, trying to come to terms with the violation. She cannot figure her role, cannot understand how the attack happened. She analyzes the rape from different angles, writing “I don't believe anyone ‘asks’ to be violated,” indicating a freedom from blame, but then also writes “I was determined to understand why I had made myself vulnerable” as if she was responsible somehow for being violated (100). Lois Tyson shares the idea of the “patriarchal woman,” a woman who is trapped in social programming designed so that women cannot see “the ways in which women are oppressed by traditional gender roles” (85). Hayes-Raitt exemplifies the “patriarchal woman” here, because patriarchal society demands that she search for a reason *in her own behavior* for the attack on her body. The conflicting language in the narrative concerning women's bodies and her own body as commodity implies that she is struggling with her sense of agency, the ability to do something about the attack, while also trying to acknowledge that somehow she found herself in a situation where she was both physically and psychologically violated. She wants to find an answer, some reason why the attack happened. In order to do that, she questions herself, her own actions.

In reality, the only way she made herself “vulnerable” was by opening the door, which she did in a haze of “travel-weary” sleep. She recognized the face of the manager of the resort hotel where she was staying, and opened the door to his continual knocking.

Then he “drunkenly forced his way into [her] room.” The manager had, earlier in the day, paid for her drink, upgraded her room, and bought her dinner. Hayes-Raitt writes, “now he’d come for his payment, and for a foggy moment I believed I owed him—a nanosecond he quickly exploited before I was too overpowered to effectively fight back” (*Friends* 100). Blurred lines between expectation and reality surface again in this passage, and here the stakes are even higher for the writer physically and psychologically. Where do women learn that they “owe” men anything, let alone access to their bodies sexually, for anything men offer them or pay for? And why would this be a thought she would allow herself, even for a moment, when analyzing the sexual violence she experienced?²⁷

This passage speaks directly to the internalization of social myths about gender, especially those concerning the body as commodity to be “bought” by men and a devalued sense of self-esteem related to one’s perception of one’s worth as “sexy.” Both of these internalized roles are evident here. Hayes-Raitt shows the pervasive nature of these expected roles—both she and readers know she did not deserve to be raped for any reason—yet she writes “for a foggy moment I believed I owed him,” as if there should be some kind of sexual exchange for the unrequested upgrades she received from the manager earlier in the day. She is caught in a double-bind. In order to be valued in a sexist society, she needs to feel valued as a sexual object (because that is what patriarchal social norms tell her she is, and must be, to be attractive to men). She writes a few lines later, “I didn’t believe I was worthy of a man’s attention,” indicating that she did not feel sexually appealing to men, which is one of the key roles for women in a patriarchal society. This value is constructed to provide a semblance of power, the power of sexual

allure, but it is a false sense of power, one which is only addressed or judged by men, and it is always-already a sense of power based on submission to traditional gender roles of passive femininity (women serve to please men physically and sexually). She “believed” she “owed him” because she had been programmed by social norms that allowed the belief her body was there for the taking.

In her mind, as she works through the “memory of a previous violation,” she places blame on her own choices as leading to the violation. However, she is questioning herself within a systemic pattern of roles for men and women that are already determined, already patriarchal, so she can come to no conclusion that feels satisfactory other than to blame herself somehow. As Crawford and Unger point out, social myths are “maintained because each person does not create his or her social reality anew, but must use cultural beliefs to understand and justify all the forms of inequality in which he or she is involved” (101). Here we see the social myth of women who are raped as “asking for it” by their mode of dress, provocative behavior, or sending some coded signal of sexual availability. As Hayes-Raitt searches for some underlying cause for the rape, she falls into the either-or thinking of a set of binaries about women, which are powerfully woven into the fabric of culture: “good girl/bad girl,” or “virgin/slut.” Society, and these roles, tell her that she must have done something to elicit the attack. Somehow, according to the thinking following these roles allows, she had been a “bad girl” by sending a message about her body being available to the manager.

Hayes-Raitt can’t get out of this bind. Because women in Western culture are trained to see their bodies and their sexual allure as integral to their sense of worth in

society, her self-confidence is deeply connected to her body as a constructed commodity and its value to men.

The science and simple fact of her pregnancy is somehow easier for her to handle than the rape: “it took me longer to deal with the fact that I’d been raped than that I’d been impregnated” (*Friends* 100). She could accept the scientific certainty of the pregnancy test, but she could not see any certainty in how the way she acted with the man who raped her caused him to expect sex from her. (There is of course no causal link, but the writer shares the very painful process of her struggle with believing she somehow caused the attack with us as readers, so we can glimpse how debilitating and psychologically disconcerting it is for her--the narrative itself functions to work through her struggle.) She writes, “I smoked Marlboros and dissected my encounter, mining every moment for the exact instant I had subconsciously chosen to allow my body *to be stolen*” (*Friends* 100, emphasis my own). The intriguing word choices of “allow” and “stolen” are crucial here. She did not really “allow” her body “to be stolen,” she was attacked and physically overpowered. “Stolen” again ties her body to value, in several ways. First, physically, her privacy and right to control what happens to her own body were violated, “stolen” from her. Psychologically, her autonomy was taken from her in the moment of the attack and through the later traumatic revisiting of the rape, where she is forced to question herself and her supposed “motives” through the lens of her cultural norms related to women’s roles. And, the chosen wording plays on the social myth of the “commodity” of her body in relationship to men. She is caught in her trauma, and the words she writes clearly indicate that she feels somehow responsible for the attack, blaming herself, as if she had any choice.²⁸

The end of the piece solidifies the importance of recognizing the ways in which women's bodies are treated as commodities. The literature on women's (and girls') bodies as sexual commodities is rich and varied. The social script of creating women as commodities revolves around questions of worth related to physical attractiveness, sexual availability, and weakness (both physical and mental). Women are taught that their value in society, and to men, is directly related to their physical appearance (norms of attractiveness determined by men, diminutive physical size) sexual virtue ("good girl") and availability ("bad girl"), submissive behavior, and ignored or overlooked intellectual potential.

The inclusion of this piece about rape in the anthology of *Friends* provides a rich opportunity, albeit an uncomfortable one, for readers to wrestle with the realities of socially constructed gender roles across cultures. Studies show that girls in Western cultures learn as young as the elementary school years to discipline their bodies according to gender expectations of body size, shape, and muscular definition in order to be "attractive" to men (Shilling, Kilbourne, Crawford and Unger 236-237). Psychological and psychiatric research and diagnoses point to rigid social norms pertaining to weight (anorexia nervosa, bulimia, compulsive overeating), body shape and size (body dysmorphic disorder), and internalization of these strict roles for women (depression, anxiety).²⁹ We see Gelman herself struggle with body image, weight, and anxieties about health in *Tales* (189-190, 256, 289).

Globalization, and the addition of American mores and values to those already in place in relationship to women in other areas of the world, spreads these unrealistic and harmful attitudes around the world so that they are becoming normalized at the

international level. The sexualization of young girls through the use of heavy makeup, provocative posing, and suggestive dress in the media, advertising world, and competitive beauty pageants can begin at preschool age. Little girls learn from these images and activities that one's external beauty and attractiveness to men is more important than internal markers of value such as intelligence, compassion, and creativity.

Easily accessible via the Internet and much of it violent and misogynistic, pornography contributes to shaping attitudes towards little girls' and women's bodies as commodities, both goods to be purchased and services to be offered for the taking (at the right price). The rise of the Internet brought exponential growth in the availability of easily accessible pornography, both illegal child pornography and legal hardcore pornography depicting violent sex with adult women. Live pay-for-view streaming sexual encounter websites are prolific, many involving children from developing countries who are victimized both by the foreign customers who pay to watch them sexually assaulted as well as by the cultural norms which allow the children to become commodities, forced or sold into service in the industry in the first place (poverty, black market trade in children, government incentives to grow the sex industry for tourism and economic gain).³⁰

While Gelman does not address the sex industry in *Tales* or *Friends*, and Hayes-Raitt only hints at the possibility of an unwanted sexual encounter for the young girl she held in her arms in her narrative about India in *Friends*, the reality for women across the globe is striking and deserves mention here in a chapter devoted to exploring women's gender roles. In developing countries, millions of women and children are forced into service as prostitutes each year. The international sex trade is a primary source of

economic growth for many developing nations (and supports a tourist industry based on exploitation). Statistically, ethnic minorities and indigenous/aboriginal girls and women make up the vast majority of those forced into or involved in the international sex trade. Women and children (most from poor areas in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa) are bought and sold by intermediary brokers to pimps who often move them internationally and keep them as sexual slaves, some forced to work to pay off the debt incurred by the pimp for buying them (Poulin 38-40). In these ways, women's and girls' bodies become economic "raw resources" exploited for both physical and material gain.

And even without the influence of pornography and the international sex trade, children and women are consistently viewed across many cultures as available for sexual "use" value—by these norms and values, privacy and bodily autonomy do not apply to children's and women's bodies. This is what we see in Hayes-Raitt's piece, where she confronts how hard it was for her to grapple with her own rape. Sexual victimization through rape and/or domestic violence is tolerated in the majority of global societies, even if lip service is given to preventing it or laws for legal repercussions exist. In America, rape statistics show that 1 in 5 women will be the victim of sexual assault in their lifetime,³¹ but studies in sociology and society determine that the significant underreporting of both stranger and acquaintance rape (because of fear of economic, physical, or psychological repercussions for women who report) gives a number skewed drastically lower than the reality of rape both in America and globally.³² Numbers are difficult to assess for children and women in developing nations, but based on a study of over 24,000 women outside the United States around the globe, the World Health

Organization (WHO) estimates that worldwide, between 15% and 71% of women are the victims of sexual violence or physical violence annually.

Hayes-Raitt recognizes several of the problematic role assignments related to women's bodies, and works to try to find a sense of resolution for them in the conclusion of her narrative. She writes,

“I sat in the dark wrapped in my fluffy bathrobe, my baby long since gone, rewinding the summer. I took an extra long drag when I thought of the little girl who instinctively avoided wrapping her legs around me and wondered at what blink of an instant we little girls learn our bodies are commodities to be taken or traded. Although I never consciously believed there is a quid pro quo between allowing a man to buy me dinner and sleeping with him, on a deeper level I didn't believe a man would have any other motive. It wasn't that I didn't know how to say no, I didn't know how to say yes. I didn't believe I was worthy of a man's attention.

Yes, India had invaded my uterus. And it had shaken my soul. I traveled halfway around the world to learn I would never again accept some man's price tag on my body.

I snuffed out my cigarette” (*Friends* 101).

Hayes-Raitt allows us to see how the norms and values surrounding the commodification of women act upon her own body and psyche. While she narrates to readers that her conscious, rational mind does not allow the idea that a man could or would use her sexually because he bought her dinner, she also shares that unconsciously

she has internalized a deeply entrenched cultural message about herself in relationship to men that is harmful and restrictive. This message is debilitating and very clear. It haunts her beneath the surface of her consciousness—as a woman, she is useful to men only as a sexual object—“I didn’t believe he would have any other motive” (*Friends* 101). The clenched legs of the young girl show in a physical pose the same message that Hayes-Raitt’s narrative allows us to see through her emotional and psychological struggle with the assault on her own body (and the assault of the patriarchal social norms conditioning her body and mind). Both the young Indian girl and the adult American woman have learned that women’s “bodies are commodities to be taken or traded” (*Friends* 101).

Further, Hayes-Raitt continues the narrative by exploring how she struggles subconsciously with her own worth and self-value in direct relationship to the rigid patriarchal norms she internalizes. We know she has internalized the norm that she is most valuable in patriarchal society as a sexual object for men, and that sex is the “motive” for any man to be attracted to her or to interact with her. She speaks both inside and outside the context of her sexual assault. “It wasn’t that I didn’t know how to say no” shows us she obviously recognizes sex without consent constitutes rape. “I didn’t know how to say yes” is indicative of something else entirely. At a much deeper level, Hayes-Raitt is wounded by the double-bind of the patriarchal norm. If she allows herself to consciously recognize the patriarchal norms operating on her, then saying “yes” to a man means saying “yes” to the norm of sexual availability and use, subjecting her to the rigid label of “bad girl.” But the issue goes even further, for she has, over time, psychologically conditioned herself to believe she is not “worthy of a man’s attention.” Here we can see evidence of the crippling expectations for women in regards to

perfection in physical appearance played out in honest self-reflection. The word “worthy” indicates the need to be recognized by a man to feel valued, an extrinsic sense of value rather than an internal one. “Attention” positions her as an object, someone to be viewed, and operates at the level of the male gaze.³³ Her entire sense of self-value is tied to how a man might or could judge her based on the spectrum of “appropriate” roles for women.

Readers may view Hayes-Raitt as a victim, and indeed she was a victim of sexual violence, one of the most common forms of violence against women and children. The gender-normed *role* of victim is an “appropriate” one for women in patriarchal society, which is not to say that victimization of women is acceptable, but rather that it is common in patriarchal societies for women to be labeled as weak and incapable of defending themselves from all forms of physical or psychological harm. Women are trained by patriarchal society to condition their bodies to be less muscular, to accept or welcome sexual advances (the patriarchal logic being that if they do not, they resist fulfillment in their lives because their worth is tied to being desired by men) and to be soft-spoken, submissive to men—fulfilling the essentialist fallacy that women are “naturally” weaker than men both physically and intellectually.³⁴ Therefore, they are cast in the victim role consistently.

Interestingly, the role of victim is so prevalent for women in patriarchal society that it has become a rallying cry for a particular sort of bonding, an imagined binding factor to create a homogenous group of women based on the perceived universal experience of sexual victimization from the varied and heterogeneous reality of women’s lives in global society. Sum argues that women are often placed into gendered categories

based on “similarities rooted in ‘victimhood’ and ‘familial’ concerns,” placing women in direct relationship to men in determining their place in society, either as weaker and more susceptible to domination through violence, or as always connected to their bodily reproductive function (as mothers) and the family domestic sphere where their labor is often invisible or dismissed as unimportant in comparison to men’s.³⁵ Reading against the grain, the inclusion of this piece in the whole of *Friends* reinforces the victim role for women because Hayes-Raitt is sexually assaulted—and unfortunately that places her in the category of “victim,” a category used by society to reinforce the idea that women are weak and constantly victims. Even though the authors and contributors work to share their very individual, local experiences with cultural difference and cultural relativism across the varied topics of the stories included in the anthology overall, and even though Hayes-Raitt pushes herself and her readers to think complexly and difficultly about the flawed nature of gender role construction, we are still stuck in the discursive constraints of prescribed gender roles when we realize Hayes-Raitt would always be described as a “victim” of sexual violence. The piece is one mentioned in the front material for *Friends*, showing how the category of rape or the power of sexual assault narratives might influence readers to consider purchasing the book, as a sort of “hook” to grab the reader’s attention.

Included in the anthology to touch on an unfortunately common experience for women in patriarchal culture, sexual assault, Hayes-Raitt’s story capitalizes on the “victim” role for women as a way to draw in readers to a larger discussion of how, when, and why women’s bodies are commodified in contemporary culture. Read at face value, the narrativization of her sexual assault reinforces the victim role imparted by patriarchy

on women. Yet the narrative goes beyond this level, and instead works through, by recognition and reflection, one woman's journey to self-understanding after rape. Hayes-Raitt challenges the stereotype of the submissive, quiet woman who is created a victim by patriarchal ideology and stays a victim after succumbing to the sexual violence allowed by that same patriarchal ideology. Ideologically conflicted as it may be in its tendency to conflate a country with a rapist and to subtly reinforce psychological messages about self-worth and cultural capital in relationship to one's physical attractiveness, the piece ultimately serves to reinforce the role of "empowered woman" more than it does woman as "victim."

By association with Gelman, whose own "female nomad" lifestyle is presented as an avant-garde, cutting edge, freedom-granting and liberatory one, Hayes-Raitt is subtly able to connect with a shifting of potential women's roles. More subversive than submissive, "The Trip That Changed My Life" works in subtle and stark ways to collectively redefine ways in which women can view themselves as empowered in a society that disenfranchises them. Hayes-Raitt does this by exposing the attack on her body and struggling through how she came to terms with it through a frank understanding of women's bodies as commodities. Hayes-Raitt recognizes, observes, and records, in at least some tangible way, how patriarchy operates on the minds and bodies of both young girls and women. In publishing an open narrative about sexual assault, Hayes-Raitt "reports" her rape to her readers. Her retelling and reflection is a brave way to come to terms with the attack on her body and her mind. Her writing lays bare the workings of patriarchal ideology for readers to see in the ways she questions her own self-worth, identity, and perceived responsibility in relationship to the sexual assault she

experienced. At the end of the piece, the writer comes full-circle, back to the cigarette-as-symbol of patriarchal power. Throughout the narrative, she has been smoking, reflecting on her choices and women's bodies as commodities. She picked up the habit again while in India and continued after she came back to the United States as she worked through the violence and sexual trauma of her experience. It is important that she ends her writing with the "snuffing out" of her cigarette, for it is a figurative "snuffing out" of the influence of patriarchal norms on her body as commodity. Her moment of epiphany occurs in the quiet reflective space "back home," when she is able to fully recognize the influence of and squelch the power of the patriarchal norm operating on her body and her mind. While she may not have been able to fight back physically during the attack, Hayes-Raitt ultimately makes her powerful recourse: she did not just "take it" like a patriarchal woman is expected to, but struggled through it by writing it, worked to overcome the memory of it, recognized the insidious effects of patriarchal norms on her body and psyche, and then shared it, making it part of a larger global collection of critical reflections on rape written by women living in a "rape culture."³⁶

---Spivak and Protective or Strategic Essentialism

The final section of this chapter explores women's roles in Gelman's texts through the lens of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's key ideas about representation of marginalized women as well as a strategic use of essentialism to create a space for coalition among women. Spivak emerged as a powerful figure in the intellectual study of post-colonialism when she wrote a pivotal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," which identified a previously masked subset of subject constitution, namely gender—she wanted to confront "the immense problem of the consciousness of the woman as

subaltern” (Spivak 296). The Subaltern Studies group, focused on examining imperialist discourse in Indian history, and emerging in part as a branch of the race-examining practices of the Cultural Studies movement in the 1980s-1990s, formed the nascent precursor to a deconstructive, historiographical, post-colonial theoretical approach. Subaltern Studies, as a collective of critics, was mainly concerned with giving voice to local, ignored historical moments and projects from the perspective of the subaltern³⁷ population, or those left out of the mainstream historical narrative because of low class status. What no critic in the diverse group had yet iterated, even while using a historiographical approach grounded in “bottom-up” analysis, was that gender functions as a viable component of human subjectivity; all the focus was on Marxist analysis of class (indeed a common critique of Marxism is its lack of recognition of gender). Spivak helped to redefine subaltern studies by claiming gender as a category of marginalization as powerful as class or race (which had been the focus points for the Subaltern Studies and Cultural Studies approaches). The 3rd world subaltern woman could be triply oppressed—by Southern or Eastern low caste or class, by non-white or less-white ethnicity, and by being female.

Spivak took her analysis one step further to assess how intellectuals, from their elite positions of power within academe (middle to upper class, highly educated, networked within systems of politics and cultural capital), could be silencing the voices of subaltern peoples, and in particular women. Just as the mainstream writing of history left out the voices of the subaltern or appropriated them into Western knowledge, so too could Western intellectuals, even the formerly-subaltern academics who immigrated to the US, position themselves as the “writers” of “subaltern history.” Spivak argues that

such a problematic position for the Western intellectual can silence subaltern voices (agency); Western intellectuals and intellectuals from formerly colonized areas now in Western academe must recognize their elite status and privilege, and “learn to unlearn” it, to “reconsider positions that once seemed self-evident or natural” (Moore-Gilbert 98). Intellectuals can be just as guilty of writing-to-know and writing-to-possess as the very imperialist discourse they are trying to deconstruct and argue against.

For Moore-Gilbert, this is an imperative point about Spivak’s recognition of the position of the intellectual. He writes, “the most enabling element in all of Spivak’s work is the emphasis on the importance of trying to recognize and hear the Other woman in *her* terms (even if this involves, quite literally, learning *her* language) and not simply assimilating her unproblematically into Western values, histories, and regimes of knowledge” (112). As I point out in Chapter 1, we can clearly see this problematic relationship with speaking for the “other” woman in the passage about Margarita’s beating in *Tales*. Gelman slips into a position where she does a bit of both—she does attempt to write the encounter from Margarita’s position, including her voice, words, and perspective about how leaving her home and husband feels impossible to her. But it is the judgment about Margarita’s “destiny” after the attempt at impartial representation that turns the tables and “assimilates” her into “Western values” which assume that a woman in Margarita’s position is destined to be in a powerless position of victim.

A final component of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” which figures into my discussion of Gelman’s work is the concept of “strategic essentialism.” Beginning in the 1980s with the second wave of feminism, feminist critics argued strongly against using broad, homogenizing categories to group women together for the purpose of solidarity or

similitude. Branded “identity politics,” these essentializing strategies had been used by first wave feminists as ways to create categories of female similarity across diverse geographical, linguistic, race, class, and sexual orientation boundaries. In “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?” Linda Martin Alcoff notes, “identity politics is blamed for a host of political ills and theoretical mistakes, from overly homogenized conceptions of groups to radical separatism to essentialist assumptions” (313). Because of these issues, which caused major rifts within the feminist community of activists and within feminist theorists in academe, as well as the approach through poststructuralist theory to avoid positing identity as an identifiable, realistic term,³⁸ the term “identity” became synonymous with a “soft” or “problematic” theoretical approach. Contemporary feminist work on identity moves from the more pessimist assumptions of Judith Butler’s analysis³⁹ (a fixed identity derived from oppression) and the issues with the subjectivity of identity as a term, to an active and reflexive process of meaning-making⁴⁰ and transcending difference (Alcoff 335).

Further, the essentialist categories used by earlier feminist activists were called into question at the same time that theorists began to wonder what *could* be used politically and conceptually as a way to bring women together across differences for the common cause of resisting patriarchal hegemony. This is when the idea of “strategic essentialism,” or knowingly using a universalizing category for the sake of creating similitude amongst women, and using it for a particular political purpose, began to gain popularity.⁴¹ Critiques include the recognition that even as they disavow essentialism, strategic essentialists continue to utilize essentialist categories, thus creating an inescapable reliance on the very categories they are trying to escape (Stone 22).

Contemporary feminist theorists have begun to reconceptualize and reinterpret the category of “women” based on biological sex and “femininity” based on culturally-inscribed gender. Intriguing work has been done by critics on creating a genealogy of women, where we recognize that “femininity is historically constructed in multiple, shifting, ways,” so that feminist politics is also being reframed as “coalitional rather than unified” (Stone 23).

Reflecting on her critical essay and its reception at the outset of her work in postcolonial and subaltern studies, Spivak recently revisited her earlier writing on “strategic essentialism” and the question of whether subaltern women (and men, for they are part of a marginalized class) could ever “speak” their truths without being filtered through the language of power.⁴² Revising an earlier idea, Spivak began to focus less on how essentialism is used and more on “learning to learn from below,” learning to embrace small, distinct, local-level approaches to making a difference for women in determined, specific ways. With this shift from global uses of essentialist categories (woman as more important than race or class, for instance) to the micro-level of specific, historically-situated resistance(s) by women on the margins, Spivak argues that we can enact a sort of *nachtraeglichkeit*, a retroactive revisioning of the past.

Struggles within the feminist movement concerning how to avoid essentialism in grouping women together by broad categories (such as “mother,” “victim,” “domestic laborer”) exemplify the difficulty in bridging the multivariate and different lived experiences of women across the globe. Using broad and sweeping categories as a way to bring women together in a group based on supposed similar experience is risky. In doing so, local and individual lived experience is elided for the opportunity to be part of a

larger “collective” of women at an international and global level. For many years, the mainstream Western feminist movement’s essentialism created a broad category of women as oppressed by patriarchy, but did not take into account how race, class, and sexual orientation clearly overlapped as identity markers within the identity category of “woman.”

Those who carefully employ strategic essentialism, as a key term and a specific methodological practice, recognize the potential pitfalls of assuming lived experience of patriarchy is the same for all women across the globe universally. In Chapter 1 and in sections of this chapter, I have worked to show how universal and essentialist categories in Gelman’s work sometimes reinforce colonialist ideology and patriarchal ideology institutionalized in a Western culture that is keen on knowing and defining the “other.” In some cases the “other’s” alterity is based on race, in some cases it is based on social class, and in some cases it is clearly based on gender. Combinations and overlapping aspects of all three create complex identities that defy easy categorization and show the interconnectivity between markers of identity. Strategic essentialism allows for the recognition of broad categories, but is also clear to point out how individual differences shape our understanding of identity and the cultures of which we are a part. Strategic essentialist writers try to unmask the “othering” involved in the mainstream use of categories too broad to allow for nuance, while at the same time making a conscious choice to utilize the same categories strategically, in order to affect some change or to build solidarity toward a common goal. While it is obvious not all women share the same experience, strategic essentialist approaches still find value in grouping women together based on a common cause (confronting victimization, for instance, or organizing

as a group around a central concern related to women, like the international sex trade and women in human trafficking). The essentialism used by strategic essentialists is self-reflexive. The writers are deliberate, careful, and clearly recognize that they are appropriating problematic categories with the hopes that the benefits outweigh the negative.

Most writers using strategic essentialism do so to recognize and combat major forces of oppression—racism, sexism, classism—using the sheer force of combined numbers of people around the world who experience the detrimental effects of such institutional and cultural oppression. Those who identify with this approach are cultural critics, literary theorists, intellectuals and scholars whose role includes the constant critique of how culture operates. Gelman is not an intellectual scholar writing within the discourse of the academy. She is writing for a popular audience in narrative form and, as I have shown, often that writing is problematic in the ways it reinforces essentialist attitudes about “others.” It is interesting to think of Spivak’s targeted strategic essentialism and her later revisioning of “learning to learn from below” in the context of Gelman’s work, especially considering how the widely popular *Tales*, which plays on stereotypes of 1st and 3rd world women, led to the collaborative, strategically-planned *Friends*, a communal and cross-global effort both to gather and disseminate stories and recipes, and to provide humanitarian relief for students who desired an education in an underserved population of tenement slums in New Delhi.

The contrast between *Tales* and *Friends* is interesting when viewed in the light of strategic essentialism. *Tales* is Gelman’s own narrative, and she struggles with writing the lives of others as well as her own without falling prey to neo-colonial or patriarchal

tropes. In *Tales* she uses essentialist categories of “sisterhood” and the “universal woman” in ways that are not targeted for a specific purpose, but rather as encompassing labels to group women together in a “we are all the same” form of universal humanity that elides difference and problematically erases the marked impact of gender, race, and social class on the lives of individual women.

This is not to say that her approach is motivated by a desire to create such problematic groupings, for a generous reading shows her own struggle with how to interpret moments of clear cultural difference without resorting to the driving hegemonic cultural discourse of how such moments should be “written” in the binary trap of self/other and 1st world/3rd world. In the midst of finding herself again, outside of her previously prescribed roles of wife, mother, and writer, she reaches out using the collaborative approach to seek identity for herself and in relationship to the other women she encounters. She does this openly and idealistically, as a way to redefine herself. In my reading both with and against the grain of Gelman’s work, I seek to uncover and examine the problematic moments of essentialist thinking from multiple perspectives (neo-colonial ideology in Chapter 1, patriarchal ideology in this chapter). However, I also recognize and highlight moments where Gelman shows readers the complexity of wrangling with the discourse of power—the near impossibility of writing cultural encounters without resorting to essentialist thinking. The essentialism we read in *Tales* is not a form of strategic essentialism, but rather a playing-out of the discourse of essentialism used to reinforce neo-colonial and patriarchal ideology.

If we know that identity formation and development of autonomy for women is now seen in a more collaborative and community-driven light than previously

determined, that the individualism and competition-driven model previously assumed for both male and female identity development may only be a cultural construction of how male identity is formed in the context of cultural norms, then we *can* read Gelman's project in producing *Friends* as a form of strategic essentialism.

While the idea for the project developed very quickly after *Tales* was published, it took Gelman over 5 years to compile and complete it for publication. Very different from *Tales*, which was a personal travel narrative, *Friends* was born out of a desire to connect with readers to form a collaborative anthology of interaction across cultural boundaries. Gelman invited any and all to submit their written narratives for inclusion in the anthology. The call went out on her website and her listserv, utilizing the Internet to cross boundaries of space and place. By uniting the book project with her desire to help children in New Delhi *jhuggies* have access to educational resources and scholarships for college, she created a community of like-minded writers committed to making a difference at a local level for a specific group of people. Gelman writes in the introduction to *Friends*, "way back when I was soliciting stories, I had told the potential authors that the profits from the book would go into a special fund that would send high school graduates from the slums in New Delhi to vocational schools. None of us would be making any money from this project" (8). Both Gelman and the group of writers involved in the project set aside monetary gain to fund the project. Gelman asks readers to purchase more books for friends and fellow readers specifically to help the *jhuggie* project. She writes, "There will be even more money if this book earns out its advance. All additional royalties will find their way to the Delhi Rotary and new students. So please pass along the word, encourage your friends to buy a copy, and they too will be

contributing dramatic life improvements to some very deserving young men and women” (11). In this way, we can read Gelman as subversively using the genre and the book, and its marketed play on exoticism (the “spicy” tales and the “tantalizing” recipes) to form a coalitional group in order to serve a targeted purpose. If the book sells because of its appeal to exoticism, it ultimately subverts that exoticism by channeling money directly to the *jhuggie* project.

Here, too, we can see the full arc of Gelman’s struggle with identity and a way to affect change when read through the model of women’s collaborative identity formation. *Tales* stands as a working-through of Gelman’s struggle with her own self-perception, her wrangling with a new sense of identity. From start to end in *Tales*, we see Gelman weave her way through the gauntlet of social expectations placed on her and on other women based on gender. At times she deftly maneuvers through the maze, and at others she stumbles and makes use of trope or overly simplistic ways of seeing that portray the world of “others” in a problematic “us/them” discursive binary. *Friends*, even in its conception, begins in a collaborative frame, pushing aside the “us/them” binary and embracing the “we” of humanity in a way that, for Gelman, is what she phrases as a “running towards” instead of a “running from.” The essentialism of common humanity used here is targeted, specific, and political. The struggle of self-identity from *Tales* is transformed into a coalitional project in *Friends* that involves writers, readers, and students in need. The universal humanity and universal woman categories become less important than continued outreach via the *jhuggie* and gap year projects Gelman (and by extension her participating reading community) engage in.

For women like Gelman, who are writing in Western popular culture, negotiating the tug and pull of socially-prescribed gender roles is clearly difficult. The genre of travel writing is patriarchal and traditionally male, and is shaped toward celebrating writers who, whether male or female, follow a particular arc of narrative which positions the self in comparison to others, not the self in connection to others. There are discursive landmines like essentialism, primitive othering, and speaking for the subaltern which result, in part, from a focus on individualism rather than community. Important recent scholarship in psychology points to a key difference in identity development between men and women which illuminates another way to look at essentialism in writing like Gelman's as a strategy to build identity through solidarity and connection. While a careful reading shows that essentialist moments in the texts are still discursively problematic and still reinforce hegemonic ideology, we can also see how some moments of essentialism indicate Gelman's struggle to find herself in others as opposed to in comparison to others. This distinction is crucial and one which bears further examination by scholars reading women's travel writing in future.

 CH 2 NOTES

²⁵ Potter defines feminist standpoint theory as one which argues women hold a special position as subordinated, one which may give them a “better perspective from which to ascertain truth” because they “must shift perspectives between the centers of power and ideology and their more marginalized experiences, thus having access both to the view from the ‘inside’ and to how practices work from the margins” (66). Standpoint theorists think that such a “double point of view” gives “a more complete picture of the world than one can glean from the center” (66).

²⁶ Potter writes that “sociological, anthropological, and economic studies suggest that conditions in women’s lives are fundamentally so different that it is inaccurate to say that women all share one common experience—that of being oppressed; ethnographic research suggests that not only gender, but biological sex, are socially constructed and that it makes no sense to talk of an essence of man or woman independent of the meanings we give to our embodied selves” (68).

²⁷ Crawford and Unger write about the cultural waffling that surrounds whether economic investment on the part of a man entitles him to sexual activity. They write that according to a variety of psychological studies related to perception of rape, “Some people are hesitant to label forced sex between acquaintances as rape, particularly if . . . the man initiated the date . . . or he spent a great deal of money” (453). Hayes-Raitt’s self-questioning concerning the money the man invested and her body as available or unavailable for sex based on that “system” of value indicates she has internalized a set of cultural values that accepts women’s bodies as available for sexual use based on a certain price-point or monetary investment.

²⁸ Some theorists also posit that self-blame after rape functions as a way to gain a sense of control after being violated—by putting the responsibility on one’s own self, the powerful reality of the complete loss of control can be transferred. It is sometimes easier to self-blame than it is to come to terms with the reality of total violation. (See Crawford and Unger, 458).

²⁹ See Crawford and Unger 236-237 for discussion of eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and the link between women who have internalized the need to find self-worth from their appearance as defined by patriarchal standards of beauty. For more information on specific diagnostic labels noted, see the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V). 5th ed. American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.

³⁰ See Sassen, Saskia. “Countergeographies of Globalization: The Feminization of Survival” for a discussion of institutionalized female labor and commodification in prostitution. Richard Poulin’s article is also enlightening in this regard, especially in terms of the “industrialization” of prostitution for women and children in global culture. See Poulin, Richard. “Globalization, Trafficking, and Commodification.” *Canadian Woman Studies* 22.3/4 2003. 38-47.

³¹ See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Sexual Violence: Facts at a Glance.” <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/SV-DataSheet-a.pdf>. Last access 6 May 2014.

³² Crawford and Unger write that there is a report rate for rape of only 14-15% worldwide, meaning 85% or more of rapes go unreported (453).

³³ For psychological ramifications of objectification, see Crawford and Unger 43-44. See also Mulvey 438-448, and Kilbourne for a discussion of how objectification and the male gaze permeate media including films and advertising.

³⁴ For more on biological essentialism and how it functions in patriarchal society, see Crawford and Unger 176, and Potter 68-69.

³⁵ In a fascinating deconstruction of contemporary uses of essentialism to connect women, Sum analyzes a political speech given by Hillary Clinton at a global women's summit for its discursive links to women as victims and as connected to domestic family roles. The essentialism used to forge a bond of "sisterhood" in Clinton's speech is similar to the one deployed by Gelman and several of the writers in *Friends*, including Hayes-Raitt in the piece "The Trip that Changed My Life." See Sum, Ngai-Ling. "From Politics of Identity to Politics of Complexity." *Transformations: Talking Through Feminism*. Ed Beverly Skeggs. Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition, 11 January 2013. Last access 16 January 2014.

³⁶ For an excellent overview of how American culture is a "rape culture," see Buchwald, Emilie, et. al. *Transforming a Rape Culture*. Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2005.

³⁷ Robert Young notes that the Subaltern Studies group did initially include gender in their definition of subalternity—Guha first defined the subalternity as "The general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (qtd. in Young 355). However, Spivak brought laser focus to the component of gender and thus transformed how the term was later used: "Spivak found it necessary to insist on the extension of subalternity to women's and gender issues; in postcolonial studies generally, the subaltern has become a synonym for any marginalized or disempowered minority group, particularly on the grounds of gender and ethnicity" (Young 355).

³⁸ For a detailed overview of how theorists in the humanities (and in particular feminist theorists) wrangle with the term "identity," see Alcoff, Linda Martin. "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Eds. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia. Berkeley: U of CA P, 2000. 312-344. and Hau, Caroline. "On Representing Others: Intellectuals, Pedagogy, and the Uses of Error." *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Eds. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia. Berkeley: U of CA P, 2000. 133-170.

³⁹ See Alcoff 323-324.

⁴⁰ Mohanty frames identity as a narrative, arguing that, "identity constructions provide narratives that explain the links between group historical memory and individual contemporary experience . . . they create unifying frames for rendering experience intelligible, and thus they help to map the social world" (Alcoff 324).

⁴¹ According to Stone, "confronted with the spectre of a dissolution of feminist politics, many feminist theorists in the 1980s and 1990s espoused 'strategic' essentialism, the position that some form of essentialism is necessary as a political strategy. Spivak, for example, argued that one acknowledges that essentialism is descriptively false (it denies the real diversity of women's lives), but, in limited contexts, one continues to act as if essentialism were true, so as to encourage a shared identification among women that enables them to engage in collective action" (20).

⁴² While I briefly touch on Spivak's work in analysis of this same passage in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, in that analysis I focused mainly on the tropes of representation for postcolonial analysis. Here I enter analysis from a specifically feminist methodological approach and add in Spivak's revision of earlier work on agency for subaltern women.

Collaborative Meaning-Making: The Interplay of Reader, Writer, Culture, and Technologies of Representation in *Tales, Friends*, and Gelman's Website

In this chapter I explore the continued interdisciplinary use of reader-response tenets, such as the implied reader and the interpretive community, and their importance for analysis of artifacts of popular culture. I take on a reception history of Gelman's travel writing work and her website, as well as a close reading of several interdisciplinary approaches to themes in Gelman's travel writing and website related to the interplay of reader, writer, and culture. While I weave in key cultural studies concepts like *-scapes* from Appadurai, I place special emphasis on reader-response particularly because of its accessibility as a popular interpretive modality and my commitment to providing readings from various perspectives that stand as both informative and political in both scholarly and popular contexts. To that end I also include a cyberfeminist reading of Gelman's work with her personal website, ritagoldengelman.com, and a historical overview of how Gelman's work fits in with the trajectory of women's political action using the Internet at the turn of the 21st century. Gelman's audience is a general reading public; reader-response theory functions in a way that engages readers across diverse backgrounds without requiring academic experience with rigorous theoretical discourse. Research shows from broad interdisciplinary use and various fields of inquiry that reader-response retains its merits as both an interpretive tool and a political tool for contemporary literary analysis. Therefore, through a combination of informative historical context and specific analysis from a detailed reception history of Gelman's

travel work, this chapter provides a situated, close reading of how *Tales*, *Friends*, and Gelman's website resonate with readers and contribute to cultural meaning-making.

Reader-Response Analysis

Reader-response theory became popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a mode of literary criticism. Its purpose was not to create a substantially new way of interpreting texts, but rather to call attention to the interplay between writer, reader, and meaning. The space between the text, the writer's authorial intent, and the reader became a liminal space of discovery for reader-response theorists, one where psychological or social interaction could be measured on a variety of levels based on close reading or interpretation. Reader-response criticism, while in some ways focused explicitly on communities of scholarly readers involved in reading works deemed "literature," also went beyond the role of reader and interpretation in solely academic terms. Schweickart and Flynn state that "reader-response criticism has actively sought to pluralize readers, to explore reading as a cultural practice in a variety of contexts, including the practices of ordinary people in the course of their personal, social, and cultural lives, no less than those of professors and students within the academy" (10). It is in this spirit that I include both scholarly and popular responses to Gelman's texts in a reception history in this chapter. Gelman's works are popular works, and most of the responses available to them are from popular readers.

This does not negate, however, a sense of an interpretive community or group of readers approaching the texts and actively working to make meaning. Stanley Fish's original concept of the *interpretive community* operates at the level of institutional ways

of seeing and interpreting literature as scholars and literary critics, and in the case of Gelman can inform a reading of how her work fits into and also challenges genre expectations for travel writing. Yet as we look closely at the reception history of Gelman's work, we also find a guiding way of seeing even at the level of popular readers' responses, those who may have had no training at all in the interpretation of literature. Fish reminds us that the "objectivity of the text is an illusion," that when we read we are involved in a form of "kinetic art" that forces us to realize the changing nature of the text and that we are "correspondingly changing" while reading—the text "does not lend itself to a static interpretation because it refuses to stay still and does not let you stay still either" (43). Reading is active and transformative, whether done from the perspective of a literary critic or a popular reader of a popular text. Readings of Gelman's work transform over time, with the addition of more material and a change in approach from *Tales* to *Friends* to her website's recent push for a "gap year" for students between high school and the first year of college. Fish asks us to consider an important question—what does a text "do?" in the sense that "something is always happening" (29). The text is doing, acting, and being acted upon, in a constant interplay between writer and reader no matter the institutional training of the reader. The term *interpretive community* is useful in this broader sense when examining Gelman's popular texts and the reception history of them.

Wolfgang Iser's contributions to reader-response criticism also call us to consider the text as a constant negotiation between the author and reader, the "coming together of text and imagination" (54). Iser asks us to look at the text as structuring a sort of scaffold for reading, where the stepping points are available in the text's structure but we climb

along on our own, moving and bringing our own choices and points of view to the overall reading. For Iser, the way a text is structured by the author toward her or his readers impacts readers and allows us to surmise what he calls an *implied reader*, a type of reader we can determine from what the author assumes about the reader (in terms of knowledge, cultural approaches to understanding, and so on).⁴³

In Chapter 1, I analyze the cover and prefatory material from *Tales* to explore how the text operates as a cultural package, how it is “sold” to potential readers using reductive and dangerous neo-colonial tropes. Here I include some of the same information to show how the prefatory material indicates the type of reader interested in a travelogue like Gelman’s—a component of the implied reader. The first reading concerns the text as cultural object, while this reading concerns the implied reader and the interpretive community, groups involved in the interactive process of meaning-making.

Let’s take a moment to investigate Iser’s concept of the implied reader for all three of the available “texts” Gelman offers us as readers: *Tales*, *Friends*, and her personal website, www.ritagoldengelman.com. *Tales* is situated at the beginning of the trajectory of the “nomad” trend for women in travel writing. It is an early example of a way of seeing women in travel that changed the genre in multiple ways, by offering a new niche space in a traditionally male genre as well as marketing opportunities for the publishing establishment to expand sales of travelogues written by women to women. The concept of the implied reader functions as an amalgam of expectation and forecasting. It shows us assumptions made about readers in important ways. It also reinforces the dual and dialogic nature of reading—the interaction between implied

readers and authorial text as well as intent—and how readers interpret (and internalize) that intent, whether tangible or imagined. It is through the process of meaning-making between text and reader that texts impact culture, take on staying power, and can potentially create change.

The implied reader of *Tales* wants to change, is interested in some sort of life transformation, or is curious about how life could be radically different. We see this as early as the way the preface and introduction by Gelman are crafted—as an announcement about how her life is profoundly different and she is deeply changed because of it. She writes, “I am a modern-day nomad . . . I’ve been living and loving my nomadic existence since the day in 1986 when, at the age forty-eight, on the verge of a divorce, I looked around and thought: There has to be more than one way to do life. There is” (*Tales* vii). Change, possibility, openness to difference, and idealism are all conveyed simply and easily in this short first opening section of the preface. In the first paragraphs of the first chapter of *Tales*, Gelman shares that she is uncomfortable with her former life and craving a change. She writes, “I am living in a designer world that has been designed for someone I no longer am” in reference to her jet-set lifestyle full of celebrities and glamour and her husband (*Tales* 3). She relates that as she spoke with a vibrant woman seated next to her on a plane ride about traveling, she unexpectedly found herself in tears and realized she felt a part of herself was missing: “I was crying for my lost spirit” (*Tales* 3). And once she leaves the life that kept her from her spontaneous dream of being a “nomad,” she realizes that she had finally “touched the magic of otherness” and “was never the same again” (*Tales* 4). In conjunction, these are very powerful textual indicators of where the text “fits” with a particular type of reader, one

who will connect with the life changes and desire for connection that Gelman so clearly writes in these early passages.

The implied reader of *Tales* is somewhat unconventional, comfortable with skirting traditional roles or at least open to countering those traditional roles prescribed by society. We can sense this in the cover quotes as well as in the way the writer focuses on these roles in the first chapters of her book (divorcing, choosing to travel alone, dining alone as a woman, first sexual encounter in a culture unknown to her). The reader is an independent thinker, likely college educated, and also apt to be middle to upper class (an implied level of affluence based on the way the author speaks about wealth, use of money for travel and expenses, and income while living in developing countries). Spontaneity and the desire to leave caution behind, to take on a new, slightly “wilder” role, is also implied. We see, in the prefatory material for *Tales*, a reader writing to tell Gelman that she appreciated her because she “didn’t follow a traditional path or do what others expected.” Another reader, a young woman of eighteen, gives us a clue about the implied reader’s desire to live an alternative lifestyle outside of the normal social roles: she thanks Gelman for giving her a vision of an “interesting, magical, spontaneous, unpredictable life” that “can actually come true.” The implied reader values human connection and desires that connection on an individual level, both interpersonally one-on-one and in the larger context of a group or global human connection. Readers whose notes to Gelman are included in the preface show this by claiming Gelman “renewed [their] faith in people” and they could sense again the “warmth of humanity,” which also implies a sense of optimism about human interaction that may have been clouded or

dampened somehow by day to day life (reading the book restores this belief/desire for this type of reader).

Curious about cross-cultural exchange, the implied reader enjoys exoticism and learning about other cultures from the writer. The cover art⁴⁴ for *Tales* and the way Gelman plays on exoticism in the preface are evidence of this aspect of style, especially when she writes “I have lived with people in thatched huts, slept in their gilded palaces, and worshipped with them at godly ceremonies and dens of black magic” (*Tales* vii). Outside of the norms of typical American daily life, “thatched huts,” “gilded palaces,” and “dens of black magic” conjure up images of difference and otherness and whet the reader’s appetite for more.

Emotionally, the implied reader of *Tales* wants a friend, and values a chatty or informal personal tone, in the style of a memoir or travelogue; the reader also enjoys learning secrets and discovering vulnerabilities in others. In the introduction to *Friends*, Gelman writes about the emotional connections readers feel from *Tales* by speaking of the responses she received in the first few days after the publication of *Tales*: “readers have shared and continue to share their dreams and fears, their adventures and longings, their joys and pain. They share their lives as I shared mine in the book” (*Friends* 2). The implied reader places value on friendship and connection, possibly to the point of idealism, and seeks both beauty and trust from these types of experiences. The fact that Gelman consistently draws on these themes and writes about them throughout *Tales* showcases this aspect of the implied readership of the text (see *Tales* 29, 35, 99, 302-303; *Friends* 3). Perhaps triggered by a similar personal upheaval or experience, the implied reader may be facing an emotional loss or a major life change, which allows a connection

to the text based on the similarities between their own life and Gelman's life changes.

Another example Gelman shares from responses to *Tales* shows this type of connection through shared emotional experience: "Lots of readers have written to tell me that I'm living their dreams, but they've never had the courage to act. And now they're thinking, *If she can do it, why can't I?*" (*Friends* 3).

While the world is vast and global, the implied reader of *Tales* wants it to be smaller, more intimate, and wishes for experiences to relate to this idea of a "small world." Interestingly, the reader also views the world as a playground to traverse, indicating again a certain background package of socioeconomic power through wealth and the ability to view the entire world as open for discovering through travel. Both the "small world" and the "vast playground" are reinforced throughout the text (see *Tales* 43, 73, 97, 218, for example). Finally, the implied reader of *Tales* sees people as intrinsically kind and good, worthy of trust and deserving of respect, for that is how Gelman portrays the people she meets and writes about (*Tales* 140, 201, 223).

In the later anthology of travel stories and recipes, the implied reader for *Friends* is somewhat different, though there are marked similarities to the implied reader for *Tales*. A travel enthusiast and likely a curious cook, the implied reader for *Friends* is looking for a spicy adventure into the exotic through both story and recipe. This implied reader wants to embrace the diversity of the global reach of humanity and to experience this diversity through the flavors of dishes created in the kitchen as well. Again most likely Western, middle to upper class, and college educated, the implied reader of *Friends* wants to change her or his life or at least "spice it up," and to cross borders both virtually and geographically as an individual (the *Friends* "Reading Group Guide," 333-335,

reinforces this idea with a series of questions). The back cover material of *Friends* shows this implication by the use of the words “global adventure,” “active traveler,” “wonders and joys of cross-cultural connecting,” and from the prefatory material, how the text will “bring out the inner nomad in all of us.” Yet, the connection to community coupled with exoticism is clearly implied as well, especially in the cover art for *Friends*, where readers see women standing closely side by side with arms around each other, draped in colorful and exotic silk gowns and gauze veils.

After the success of *Tales*, Gelman pondered several possible choices for connecting with readers in a way that would further stoke the passion for travel and cultural exchange. She realized she was too scattered and unorganized in her current travels to successfully complete a sequel travelogue of her own, especially since *Tales* took her over a decade to pull together and ultimately publish (*Friends* 4). She knew her best moments had pushed the boundaries of cultural difference, and that many had involved cooking together in a group with other women.

Gelman used her website to reach readers of *Tales* and wrote to those who had signed up for her listserv. She put a call out to her fans for stories related to cultural exchange paired with recipes. She collected stories and recipes from 2003 to the end of 2006. It was then she began to work with Marie Altobelli on testing recipes and selecting the final categories for stories as well as the final accepted stories themselves (*Friends* 2-7).

Just as *Tales* was packaged as a narrative of escape and freedom, so are the recipes, stories, and even writers included in the anthology of recipes and tales that make up *Friends*. The cover art includes a stunning array of colors and vibrant designs, with

women standing next to one another in a circle of embrace, each woman pictured with her arms around the back of the waist of the woman next to her on either side. The image is powerful and communal, invoking friendship and a warmth of collective purpose. The subtitle of the book, “Tales of Breaking Free and Breaking Bread Around the World,” is a play on the subtitle of *Tales*, which was “Living at Large in the World.” Immediately we can see the theme of escape or freedom envelops the text as a whole, from stories to recipes to larger purpose in performativity.

The way the text is packaged impacts the way the implied reader responds to its contents. Everything about the text is accessible, from the reader reviews to Gelman’s openness about the project and how it works in the front material “How *Female Nomad & Friends* Came to Be and What It’s All About” to the categories of recipes and stories (‘connecting,’ “mixed messages,” “language,” “passion,” and, of course, “food”). Even the diversity of voices and the idea of shared universal traits is covered in the forward: “we are forty-one authors in this anthology, with forty-one ways of expressing ourselves. The editors have tried to retain the voices, styles, slang, even the punctuation idiosyncrasies of the various authors. *Female Nomad & Friends* is a celebration of diversity and a tribute to our shared humanity. We hope you enjoy traveling with us.” This balance between an inclusive diversity and a more global universal humanity is something the text tries to impart, but in some ways falls far short of expectation.

When we as readers embark on the “travel” that *Friends* allows, we are invited along—“we hope you enjoy traveling with us.” We are not alone; we are reading through the lenses of forty-one authors, forty-one different cultural and contextual backgrounds. The text as a whole functions as a patching together of these spaces of cultural

connectivity, yet there is an implied reader for the text—a reader who is independent, middle class or higher, worldly, curious about cultural encounters, impressed by the escape or freedom travel would allow, perhaps even excited by the exoticism portrayed not only in the stories included in the anthology, but in the recipes and food tips shared as well. Readers would also wish to be part of a community of like-minded “travelers,” to the point of knowing that the purchase of the text itself would lead in some small way to providing a change in life circumstance for others (in this case, educational opportunities for children living in a New Delhi *jhuggie* slum). Implied readers here can also become part of the interpretive community, which speaks for how the text could (or should) be viewed as a performative piece. We can see the impact of the interpretive community for *Friends* by examining the very first three pages of the text, in the section titled “Praise for *Female Nomad and Friends*” and “Praise for *Tales of a Female Nomad*.” Carefully crafted, this section consists of a performative “window,” of sorts, where readers are guided into thinking a particular way about *Friends* alone as well as in conjunction with the earlier *Tales*. The implied reader would be influenced by such an arrangement, pulled into the freedom narrative of travel that the texts work together in tandem to reinforce. Phrases such as “Gelman’s book pulsates with life’s flavors,” “we are ushered through an exotic world of experiences,” and the book “speak[s] to the inner nomad in all of us” frame the text in specific and tangible ways (readers are led to seeking an exotic escape in the pages of the text).

More targeted and the most narrow in scope and type of style, Gelman’s website’s implied reader is different because she or he is curious enough to move on from the physical text of *Tales* or *Friends* to another virtual site or space of exploration. The

website's implied reader craves more connection with the narrator-as-friend, and actively seeks out that information via the website links to blog entries, humanitarian relief efforts, Gelman's current projects, and other provided supplementary materials. The website design is quite basic, especially by contemporary web graphic design standards, coded in simple HTML with links and inserted photos on a burgundy background. The site has not changed substantially in design since 2004; it consists of a series of linked pages with the titles of entries as hyperlinks. The implied reader of the website is clearly technology literate, and access to the technology required to participate in the site indicates a stable level of socioeconomic status and education (again, likely middle to upper class and college-educated) (see Eisenstein 11-12). While Gelman could easily gear the site toward both children/teens and adults, and she does include links to her children's books, her choice to focus on adult themes and her current travels indicates an adult readership. The implied reader of the website wishes to be in dialogue, in conversation with the author's thoughts and ideas, for that is the purpose of the site as indicated by the author. The implied reader also has a willingness to interact via the email, listserv, donation sites, and other click-through possibilities on the links Gelman provides. Here the scope and style of travel is very much narrowed to the point of honing in on Gelman's particular type of "nomadic" travel, so the target audience is a readership clearly more focused on living a "nomadic" lifestyle personally (or learning more about it). The implied reader enjoys being part of a virtual community and is engaged in social media; he or she also enjoys learning and is happy to be taught, educated, or enlightened by the website's author.

Finally, evident here more than in either of the physical texts, the implied reader may consider the author as a personal friend and may reach out, especially via the email listserv (which requires a request to join), to engage Gelman in personal dialogue. An anecdote from my interview with Gelman puts this in a nice frame for reference. Here Gelman is speaking about the impact of her virtual community on her life as she was living, alone, on a small and isolated island:

RG: It's really exciting and fun. I don't know if you saw the listserv letter I sent out when I was on the island, and I was feeling very lonely? I was living on a strip of houses that were really summer houses and it was a couple of months ago, it was winter, and there was hardly anybody around. And I sent out an email indicating this. I got so many responses...it was like my family and they all came back and they said "don't worry about it." I said in the email "you know, in the morning I turn on NPR and hear all the news of the world, and I look outside and there's this seagull talking to me through the window and nobody out there for me to talk to" and within an hour I get this woman's email and she says, "Rita, turn off NPR! Start singing at the top of your lungs, and walk around naked!" (laughing.) I'd never heard of her before, but there she was giving me advice. And I did turn off NPR, and I did stop talking to seagulls. And I was all ready to walk around naked the next morning, but there was somebody mowing the lawn, so that part didn't happen. (laughing.)

MK: So you were able to find that sense of connection even in isolation physically and geographically.

RG: Yes, exactly—they were all there for me. I must have gotten 45, 50 answers. It transformed quickly and I didn't feel lonely anymore. It was great. (Personal Interview)

Here we can see how Gelman connects with readers using her own loneliness and vulnerability as a platform for interaction—her own personal reaching-out leads to a stronger sense of community for herself *and* for the readers she interacts with.

These similarities and differences in readership show the multivariate landscape of how *Tales*, *Friends*, and Gelman's website can impact a wide variety of people and create a space of community, a combined effort in meaning-making forged not only by the words in the texts and website, but also by the interaction with the thoughts (and, in the case of the website and listserv, the very real written communication) of actual readers. The texts and website appeal to varied interests and have different emotional components which can draw readers in via the use of pathos and the interpersonal connection Gelman works so hard to invite.

The reception history that follows below provides context for the ideas about interpretive community and the implied reader I included in this section. The readings, interpretations, and scholarly work related to Gelman's texts (and, more broadly, women's travel writing that focuses on self-identity and personal narrative) show how the scaffolding content in Gelman's work impacts a community of readers. The themes and common points of discussion identified among readers provide clues to the ways in which expectations of the travel writing genre have shaped reception of Gelman's work

and the ways in which the genre is rapidly changing. For *Tales*, *Friends*, and the website, then, fitting within a particular genre niche helps solidify their place as works of literature within the field—for texts which represent nonconformity, their very existence within a frame of reference or literary category helps them conform to expectations which make an interpretive community possible. In order to perform as texts about breaking boundaries apart, they must first create a cohesive and interpretable “whole” body of meaning within the context of the travel writing genre.

Categorizing and understanding the motivations and backgrounds of the writer, reader, and even publishing industry as cultural institution matters, especially for solid feminist critique, because the inclusion of intention, personal choice, and self-reflection are core essentials to feminist theoretical practice. In determining implied readership and assumptions about genre and/or intention to fit into or subvert a cultural mode of representation (i.e. the interpretive community for the travelogue), we are doing important work in identifying multiple layers of performativity.

Reception History of Gelman’s Work

A large number of popular book reviews, blog entries, interviews and podcasts, textual references in books of travel writing, and web commentary on Gelman’s works exist, along with several scholarly pieces making mention of *Tales of a Female Nomad*. What drives the interpretive community? Gelman’s popular reception is most often connected directly to her role as a female, with references to her marriage or divorce, her solo travel (risk-taking), and intriguingly, her age as key components to readers’ connection with her writing. Often, Gelman is hailed as a “pioneer” or an “inspiration”

in reviews and popular web commentary. Interviewers touch on her age, her financial plan to continue traveling, and her lack of fear while traveling alone (read: as a woman alone in places deemed “dangerous”). Because *Friends* follows *Tales*, many reviewers and bloggers compare the two texts. They also often comment on how purchasing *Friends* can directly impact the future of a student in India. The body of extant scholarly criticism mentioning Gelman is in reference to *Tales*, and includes work positioning *Tales* in comparison to *Eat Pray, Love* or includes Gelman as a signifier of a changing trend in the genre of travel writing.

Popular Work on *Tales*

A common descriptive word used in reference to Gelman and *Tales* by popular reviewers and web writers is “inspiring” (*TWB*, Hearing, Guest, innocentnomad). Katie, a blogger writing recently in 2014 who invited Gelman to write a guest piece for her college advice blog, claims that Gelman is on a “mission to inspire” others to travel, and proudly cites Gelman as “the inspiration for some of the most foundational and joyful decisions of my life” (Guest). *The Empty Nest Expat* blog claims *Tales* “inspired a whole community of readers” with its “inspiring stories” and Gelman is an example of a woman with an “inspiring life well lived” (Hearing). The travel blog *Travel With Balls* crows about Gelman’s “inspiring” example (*TWB*). Often, the “inspiration” Gelman provides for readers is directly tied to her choice to leave her marriage and travel the world alone, defying traditional gender roles.

Many popular reviewers and bloggers comment on gender-related components to Gelman’s work, including her divorce, her children, and her solo travel without a man

(Hearing, Wordpress, *TWB*, Jaros, Carter). Since women's roles are so distinctly tied to what society dubs feminine behavior (passivity, acquiescence, enculturated diffidence) and domesticity (marriage, domestic chores and housework, childbearing and childrearing), Gelman is situated as an "outsider" and therefore a radical figure for many readers. Gelman's decision to leave her marriage behind receives much commentary from readers. Use of the word divorce and references to her divorce or role as wife are especially remarkable. *The Empty Nest Expat* blogger writes about how Gelman left behind her life as a "dutiful wife," which implies that in her new life she no longer feels tied to a sense of social duty to a man (Hearing). Another book reviewer writes about the process of "transformation from wife and mother to female nomad," where it discursively stands to reason that Gelman could retain neither of those roles if she wanted to consider herself a real "female nomad" (Carter). One writer goes so far as to say that Gelman "divorced herself from a normal life," using a play on her divorce from her husband and her choice to live a completely different life on her own to discursively link normalcy to traditional roles (Wordpress). Here normalcy can be read as complacency, but the linguistic cues still push Gelman to the outsider role—being a *female* nomad can never be seen as a "normal" choice.

This comparison to "normal" women's roles ties to the traditional female gender role of passivity and silence, which also plays a key role for readers. *The California Journal of Women Writers* review of *Tales* includes the statement that through her travels, Gelman experiences a *rebirth*, a word carefully chosen and linked to gendered conceptions of motherhood: "it was a much needed rebirth for herself and for womanhood" becomes a loaded comment about how truly distant Gelman's way of travel

is situated from social determinations of domesticity and women's place (Carter). Gelman becomes a paragon of change not only for herself but "for womanhood" as a global, universal category for this reviewer. Gelman is reborn outside the mainstream, able to navigate without tiptoeing within the confines of predetermined roles, and because she has done it she is leading the way through *Tales* as an example to teach other women how to do the same. The *TJCWW* review ends with another powerful statement in "the hidden spirit of Gelman, and of women all over the world, will not be bound to silence any longer" (Carter). Powerful women are not hidden, and they are not silent, and Gelman stands as an example of this newly reborn figure of a powerful woman for many readers.

Readers and writers in the popular sphere go even further to make Gelman a loud figure of difference. The comparison between the female nomad lifestyle and a life outside of socially-defined normalcy does not stop with connections to divorce, silence, and traditionally-defined female space in the domestic sphere. Sometimes, a woman who stands outside of the patriarchal norm in a "special" way can be invited into the fraternity of male anatomical comparison. Gelman is so outside the female sphere that she has been gifted her own "package" to join the boys' club. The *Travel With Balls* blog notes that "Obviously, you don't have to be a man to *Travel With Balls*. *TWB* has nothing to do with gender—it's about traveling with the spirit of adventure and a bit of daring" (*TWB*). I would argue that while the blogger claims otherwise, *TWB* has *everything* to do with gender. One may not need to be a man to travel with balls, but one must adhere to a structured set of predisposed ideas about what "travel with balls" means, and these predisposed ideas are tied to the traditional idea of a male traveler out for "adventure"

and “daring.” For a site which uses a gender-specific name, uses consistent references to male genitalia, and uses a traditional male-oriented approach to define travel to claim that it has nothing to do with gender is fascinating. Apparently, Gelman has earned her balls and she travels with them, due to her adventurous nature and her sense of daring (socially-constructed masculine traits); the blogger writes “I can’t conceive of not having a home base to return to from time to time . . . guess my *cojones* aren’t quite as big as Gelman’s!” (*TWB*). Here a supposedly non-gendered adventurous sense of travel is directly compared to male anatomy—the bigger the distance from (female) normalcy, the bigger the metaphorical *cojones* Gelman sports.

Readers and writers using popular media to reach their audience also expound on their personal connection with Gelman’s writing, and many speak not only to how Gelman’s work influenced them but how Gelman herself made a strong impression as well. One reviewer reminisces about *Tales*: “I first read this short travelogue on a plane on my way to London. I was almost 18, and I was moving across the globe. Golden Gelman inspired something in me that I haven’t been able to lose since. When I’m losing my wanderlust, or when I’m doubting the life I’ve been living for more than 10 years, I read this” (innocentnomad). For this reviewer, Gelman functions as a mentor, and *Tales* helps to ground the reviewer in her lifestyle full of wanderlust. Jessie Knuth praises Gelman’s “alternative lifestyle.” Readers’ inspiration comes from the way that Gelman leads her life and conducts her travel, according to this reading community. Blogger and reviewer Ginnie proclaims that Gelman rises above the “ugly American stereotype” of the traveler-as-tourist, while Daveda Russell shares her position that Gelman is a “renegade woman” dedicated to “radical exploration” (Goldendaze, Russell). Some

writers recognize Gelman as a “real woman, not a superhero” while others claim Gelman as their “personal hero” because of the “connection” they felt “with Rita and her story” (Hearing, Liberti). The key element in all of these connections between readers and Gelman is desire—the desire to live a life similar to Gelman’s. The connection to Gelman as a person is just as much a connection to the idea of Gelman’s life and travel.

This sense of connection and desire weaves into readers’ understanding of Gelman’s concept of global community as well. One reviewer writes that she is drawn to Gelman’s work because of a “need to find my place in this world by seeing how other people experience it.” Both reading Gelman’s *Tales* and embarking on her own journey of exploration leads the writer to a “willingness to look at and experience the world in a new way” (Jaros). Laini Liberti, who is a female nomad travelling the world with her son Miro, writes that she read *Tales* with “tears rolling down my cheeks” because she had found another women living in a similar way to herself—she was no longer alone and, with Rita’s text and website, had a connection to a community of other women (Liberti).

A final important component of the popular reception of *Tales* is related to comments about Gelman’s age. As a scholar exploring the reception of Gelman’s work, I find this fascinating because, anecdotally, I have not personally experienced reading a volume of popular commentary on men’s travel writing which focuses so closely on the age of the traveler. To be fair, Gelman does begin *Tales* with a mention of her age and her divorce; this could be one reason why so many in the popular audience point it out in their own discussion of Gelman’s work. Still, popular cultural conceptions of women’s roles do not allow young women to travel alone for fear of physical danger; these perceived limitations only get stronger as women grow older, for an aging woman is

viewed as even more dependent than a young one. With that in mind, Gelman's more "advanced" age stands as yet another identification point outside the norm—readers see it as something additionally special about the author. Russell claims that Gelman shows her readers how "travel is not just for the young" but suggests that "travel is the responsibility of the seasoned." A comment left on the *Wordpress* review of *Tales* reads, "this is the type of 'OLDER' woman I want to be!" One writer who attended a talk Gelman gave overseas shares, "at age 75, Rita is starting to feel her age for the first time" (Hearing). Ginnie, a fellow traveler and reviewer of Gelman's *Tales* who is beyond retirement age, writes "at her age, she is still going strong" (Goldendaze). And another comment ties age to those defined gender roles again: "She wasn't a 20-something backpacker. She was a middle aged woman who started out traveling short term during a separation from her husband. She had two grown kids in the US. Can you imagine? Her friends thought she had gone bonkers" (Crego). At the time of Gelman's travels, and even when her travelogue was first published in 2001, the woman-traveling-solo role had not yet become a phenomenon. We can see in these examples the cultural expectations she is thwarting by taking on her female nomad role. She leaves behind her husband and her children. She must project strength because she "was a middle aged woman" when she started and now that she is in her 70s, "at her age," when she can "feel her age for the first time," she is still traveling and speaking around the world. Though she has left her old life behind, readers still connect her to the domestic roles she once accepted, which held her at home to care for her husband and children.

Interviews in the popular press and on the web focus on Gelman's choice to give away her possessions and live a life of freedom as a female nomad. Some pinpoint

financial decisions, while others explore Gelman's approach to travel and connection with people around the globe. Several hone in on women's roles and how Gelman has transformed her own roles as a solo traveler. An interview by Jennifer Connor published in *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* presents Gelman's life-changing decisions in financial terms, asking questions like "did you have a financial plan when you began?" and "what do you do for health insurance?" so that like-minded potential nomads will have some investment and budgeting tips (88). Here we see the global nomad trend pared down to its financial bones for an audience reading about Gelman from a frugal monetary perspective—if they want to be adventurous, they need to ask "how can one travel on little to no money?"

Jeremy Foster, writing for TravelFreak, speaks to Gelman about her "creative, adventurous, welcoming, and engaging spirit," and includes this quote by Gelman about her prescription for happiness in her travels: "I think that anybody can do it but you've got to get yourself out of the 'I have to be a good girl' mentality." Here Gelman recognizes that in order to embrace her female nomad lifestyle, she is stepping out of the "good girl" role and into the realm of the "bad girl," where she finds joy but also "feel[s] naughty" (Foster). The theme of a woman alone as a threatening figure or a figure worthy of pity surfaces again in Foster's interview, where he asks Gelman how she feels travel has empowered her "as a woman." Gelman responds: "Just doing it. Most women are afraid to go out alone. When I'm alone and having a great time, there's not much that I wouldn't do."

A final interviewer, Lainie Liberti, speaks with Gelman from the perspective of a fellow female nomad. Liberti is traveling the world on her own while raising her young

son Miro to experience life through the cultures they encounter together. For Liberti, Gelman is a personal hero, so the tone and tenor of the interview are infused with her admiration for Gelman's work and lifestyle. While the other two interviews are in print, Liberti posts her interview with Gelman in the form of a podcast on her blog, *Raising Miro on the Road of Life: Experiencing Global Education Through World Travel*. Hearing both Liberti and Gelman's voices and the way they interact during the podcast adds a depth to the interview that allows listeners to sense Gelman's earnest enthusiasm about travel and the way she encourages others to connect through risk-taking and trust. It is clear she is passionate about her lifestyle and about teaching people to explore the world, especially younger people.

Each of the popular interviews I found through my research made a point to direct readers to Gelman's interactive website for more information about her nomadic lifestyle. All three interviews presented Gelman positively from their different perspectives: a financial lifestyle choice, an empowering lifestyle that challenges assumed roles for women and Western culture, and a mentoring lifestyle of leading others to a different way of life through cross-cultural connection.

Overall, popular response to Gelman's work is overwhelmingly positive. The few critical book reviews I found were web reviews; these tended to focus on her tone in passages where she described difficult interpersonal choices related to interfering in the cultures she was in, such as Margarita's beating, or the Guatemalan family throwing trash in the street (see Book Shark, for example). The vast majority of popular readers, critics, and interviewers herald Gelman as an inspirational pioneer, a unique forerunner to what

has now become the more commonplace literary figure of the solo female traveler in contemporary Western culture.

Scholarly Work on *Tales*

While scholarly and peer-reviewed work on Gelman's *Tales* and *Friends* is limited, reviews and scholarly references to her work can be found in fields as diverse as linguistics and TESOL, library science, anthropology, globalization studies, gender studies, philosophy, and literary studies. A reviewer in *TESOL: Essential Teacher* argues that Gelman's *Tales* is essential reading for language instructors, because her total "immersion in diverse cultures and her successful attempts to master the local languages" provides language teachers "valuable insights into a different culture" which will help any language teacher who teaches students "struggling with an unfamiliar language" (Alexander 54). *The Kirkus Review* book review of *Tales* notes Gelman's focus on community and connection, and critically suggests that she writes well about the people she encounters but often provides only "sketchy takes on local history," leading to a travelogue that is "primarily an exercise in personal growth." *Kirkus* dubs *Tales* an "idiosyncratic but exuberant homage to wanderlust." Linda Kaufmann's review of *Tales* in *Library Journal* takes a different approach, naming Gelman's *Tales* as an "odyssey" where Gelman's "enthusiasm for the people she meets and her ability to overcome the challenges faced by a woman traveling alone make for an engrossing and inspirational read."

In 2010, Kelly Tempest published an article in the *Shawangunk Review* titled "An Exploration: Questions of Morality, Motives, and Gender in Travel." Tempest blends a

detailed exploration of her own penchant for travel with philosophical, moral, and social issues that complicate a simplistic view of travel for pleasure. She connects Gelman's writing about travel with her own need and desire to travel, her inherent sense of wanderlust and restlessness, which compels her to leave home behind to experience the world with strangers. Tempest notes the connection between gendered travel for women and risk involved in traveling as a woman alone, tying historical references to previous women's travel (encouraged but planned, guided, on permanent routes long-established as safe) in comparison to contemporary women travelers like Gelman who travel without a plan and therefore put themselves at greater risk. By asking readers to consider whether it is moral to view a culture through travel, Tempest calls on Kant's categorical imperative and the focus on refusing to use others as a "means," or a "step toward achieving some other goal, even one as worthy as education" (76). Moving the discussion to one of relationships, Tempest comes back to her dialogue with Gelman's *Tales* and her own travels by way of exploring the meanings of community, both traditional home community and alternative kinds of communities "formed through travel" (77). Tempest's essay concludes with questions related to autonomy, especially autonomy for women when traveling, including the freedom from social constraints and rules travelers like Gelman often feel when they are in foreign countries—unbounded by the rules of home and outside the boundaries of the rules of the culture she visits, the woman traveling can experience a resounding freedom from restraint on her gendered body. Tempest importantly notes that while this sense of autonomy, which Gelman also writes about in *Tales*, is tangibly felt, it is nonetheless a theoretical autonomy, because there are, in reality, a "large number of social factors constraining women's options" at

any time during travel.⁴⁵ Here we see a writer using Gelman's travelogue to supplement her own questions about travel, weaving between her personal experiences and the ones Gelman writes about to find examples and socially-constructed issues to explore.

Other briefer references to Gelman's *Tales* cross disciplinary boundaries but continue to be related to representations of other cultures or cultural alternatives. Rupert Stasch writes about travelers' continuous stereotypical representations of West Papuan culture, including Gelman's representations of the peoples of Irian Jaya in her writing in *Tales*. Stasch argues that the representation "chronotype," similar to what I have noted and examined using David Spurr's "trope" terminology, is repetitive and problematically reductive. The propensity toward sameness in examples of primitive or exotic othering and the repetitive cycle of travel writers' accounts of these cultures reinforces the stereotype and limits the possibility of new ways of seeing or representing the culture in the future. And while Gelman's *Tales* is not concerned with gay or lesbian culture or relationships (beyond the same-sex couple Gelman befriends during her travel in *Tales* and who remain close friends, providing support and feedback on the cookbook anthology in *Friends*), Gelman was recently mentioned in a dissertation on lesbian women and the world of online dating (Yuhos). Gelman's writing about risk-taking and joy have been highly circulated around the web, and in the cited instance stood as an example of empowered female choice to embrace risk and become true to oneself and one's identity. Identity, and the process of forging and reforging one's identity in a continuous progression of self-exploration and transformation, tie Gelman's writing on travel to other writing about identity formation, especially in relationship to women and lifestyles that are labeled "outside" of mainstream Western culture.

Two final references to Gelman in scholarly work pair her travel writing in comparison to Elizabeth Gilbert's wildly popular travel 2006 text *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything in Italy, India, and Indonesia*. In her 2012 thesis titled "Global Citizen, Global Consumer: Study Abroad, Neoliberal Convergence, and the *Eat, Pray, Love* Phenomenon," Nancy Barbour includes Gelman in a grouping of women travel writers along with Gilbert; she claims many contemporary female travel writers create a "pattern of narcissism and 'othering' in their depictions of cross-cultural encounter." Barbour sees this trend coupled with an increasingly commodified idea of study abroad opportunities for American students which "reinforce corporate motives for travel and endorse the commodification of global environments, cultures, and people." Travel and commodification of global cultural differences become paired with women writing about "others" in Barbour's example, while in the next women's travel writing is increasingly paired with a sense of self-centered narcissism. Kate Cantrell, in her 2011 piece entitled "Eat, Pray, Loathe: Women's Travel Memoir as Moving Metaphysical Journey or Narcissistic New-Age Babble?" makes just a passing mention of Gelman's *Tales* in her work, noting that both Gelman's and Gilbert's travelogues begin at the end—the end of a marriage. However, the larger message of Cantrell's piece can be read in the context of Gelman's travel writing as well. Cantrell argues that a certain type of women's travel writing which focuses on a journey of self-discovery is increasingly being read as part of a "culture of narcissism," and the consistent focus on self is becoming culturally accepted as a particularly female discursive practice (45). The middle-aged woman's travel narrative, Cantrell suggests, is more about the self than the travel. The hero of this type of narrative is the "restless female who is writing at a mature

age and usually in the midst or aftermath of an existential crisis” (46). Gender-based questions then arise. Why is it culturally unacceptable for women to write about travel in a way that “focuses primarily on the self?” Why is society especially critical of what Cantrell calls “an absorbing feminist interest in questions of identity?” (45-46). Women who dare to focus on self-identity come under fire in a way that labels them self-absorbed or they are accused of using travel “as a metaphor for a spiritual journey,” creating a blurred blend between the travel writing and female self-help genres (Cantrell 46). The vast bulk of Cantrell’s article is related to the popularity and commodification of Gilbert’s world-wide bestseller and argues that as a culture, we need to investigate further why it is so difficult for us to accept a woman who writes primarily about herself while traveling and also writing about others.

While scholarly work on Gelman’s writing is currently limited in scope and number, the issues and questions noted by scholars in reference to her work are important and indicative of larger trends within Western culture and the travel writing genre. Reviewers point out how Gelman’s travelogue may be useful (to an educator looking for the perspective of someone immersed in a foreign culture and foreign language) as well as limited (lack of local historical context) and, even more importantly, a piece of writing that is centered on personal growth. Of particular note is the consistent attention on gender in relationship to travel and self. Academic readers are noting, as I do, that women’s writing about travel is coded differently, read differently, and treated differently as a body of writing than is male travel writing. Questions about risk and morality for women come along with attention to a female travel writer’s sense of autonomy in comparison to the other people she meets and cultures she experiences during travel.

Women's travel writing can be problematically reductive in its representation of "other" cultures. Simultaneously, changes are shaping the genre in new ways, especially as more female travel writers join the genre. The middle-aged female travelogue is being read as a hybrid between more traditional travel writing forms (the hero journey, gendered male) and the self-help genre, which is gendered female. Community, connection, and relationships are central key features of women's travel writing and continue to be areas investigated by scholars as they highlight gendered differences in the genre. While none of the pieces I found in my research made a connection between gendered identity development and women's focus on relationship and community when writing about others, it is fascinating to note the emerging arguments from scholars in diverse fields that explore how larger popular culture is "reading" women's travel. As the scholarship to date shows, when women place an emphasis on themselves in a genre that is supposed to explore diverse cultures, popular criticism tends to be harsh, and a focus on self is now being labeled a "narcissistic" problem of women's travel writing, particularly, in the larger cultural context.

Popular Work on *Friends*

The number of popular reviews and blogs which consider *Friends* is smaller compared to the number available for *Tales*, in part because of its more recent publication, but it is very clear that the strong motifs of connection and risk-taking with the hopes of serendipitous opportunities continue in a thematic arc from *Tales* to *Friends*. Reinforcing the concepts of global humanity and identity in relationship with others, *Friends* continues the strategic work Gelman undertook with *Tales* to present readers

with a model for living life through trust. Every piece related to *Friends* I found in my research used the words “connect” or “connection,” from “human connection” to “making connections” to “connecting and risk-taking” to “connect with people all over the globe” (Kirkus, Dixon, Paquet, Pinter, Lotusreads, Marsh). All related *Friends* back to Gelman’s earlier work in *Tales*, often remarking on the ways in which *Friends* gave readers another chance to connect with Gelman and experience the lifestyle of a female nomad even if it was through armchair travel. Several reviewers praise the readability of the stories in *Friends*, noting that the authors “write, talk, and feel like ordinary people” so there is no barrier to engaging with the various writers’ pieces in the anthology (Pinter). Others provide a more critical review, arguing that some of the authors try “too hard to be profound or uplifting,” or note that the tales are “mostly Eurocentric,” though most reviewers eventually come to the conclusion that the pieces are effective; even if based on “emotionalism” there is a “zest for life” that infuses each tale with a certain likeability (Paquet, Kirkus). Reviewers like Dixon and Pinter question whether they could live the way that Gelman lives, moving from place to place with no fixed address or home base. All of the reviewers made special note of Gelman’s project for children in the Delhi jhuggies, encouraging potential readers to buy a copy (or several) of *Friends* because doing so would help children in need.

As I review the reception history of Gelman’s work and my initial thoughts about the implied reader for her work, I find that the reception history substantiates several key aspects of the implied reader. We see evidence of an expectation (and appreciation) of Gelman’s conversational, relatable, friend-like narrative voice. Readers wanted and responded positively to passages which shared an intimate experience of a “small world,”

where the passages reinforced the idea of human connection trumping difference. There was also an expectation of exoticism and spice in the stories from *Tales* and the stories and recipes in *Friends*. This expectation tied into the desire readers expressed to live a life similar to Gelman's and positive determinations from many readers that Gelman's lifestyle is "inspirational." Readers were more popular than academic, for the most part, but clearly educated with access to technology and tech-savvy enough to self-publish blogs and reviews on the web without complications. Finally, readers noted and used gender as a component of their responses across the gamut of popular and scholarly responses.

Technologies of Representation: Reader, Writer, and Culture Intertwined

Interpretive communities, ways of understanding based on sets of culturally-determined assumptions and ways of seeing, and the use of technology as a form of power with which to disseminate "knowledge" across state, national, and cultural bounds are in great discussion among contemporary scholars in areas as diverse as economics, cyberfeminism, and poststructural literary theory analysis. Duncan and Gregory remind readers that "our access to the world is always made through particular technologies of representation . . . all geographies are imaginative geographies, fabrications in the literal sense of 'something made'" (5). Meaning, therefore, is a construct, engineered from the rich overlap of identity markers and over-determined subject positions. Moving beyond just reader and writer as the primary actors in meaning-making, contemporary theorists in cultural studies provide useful frameworks for the ways in which culture influences (and is influenced by) texts or artifacts of a particular time, place, and way of seeing the world.

Arjun Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, argues that there is a strong tension between the pull toward “cultural homogenization” and “cultural heterogenization” in all forms of cultural representation. Either we are pulled to show similarities and elide differences, or we are quick to showcase individual, specific cultural differences to prove that there is no overarching “we” of humanity. An example of this from both *Tales* and *Friends* is Gelman’s consistent call to praise diversity while appealing to the universalizing claim that “we are all the same.” We can see this clearly in the preface to *Friends*, where readers are confronted with this sentence, “*Female Nomad and Friends* is a celebration of diversity and a tribute to our shared humanity.” Gelman reflects on her travels as she writes the introduction to *Friends*, again providing evidence of the push toward homogenization: “I knew that travel would reinforce those shared traits that make us all members of one human family” (1-2). Also indicative of Appadurai’s observation is the way Gelman states her desire for difference, for accepting heterogeneity: “I opened my life to *otherness*” (*Friends 2*, emphasis my own). While the statement seems to show acceptance, even a willingness to embrace diversity, the word “otherness” showcases the dichotomy between self and other, between accepted cultural norm and difference, and actually exemplifies the trend toward giving primacy to cultural heterogeneity.⁴⁶

--Scapes at work in Gelman’s texts

Appadurai’s work on *-scapes*, “perspectival constructs inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors,” are helpful tools with which to analyze the structures of power at play in textual representation in Gelman’s

works. The key factor influencing the overlap and negotiation of *-scapes* is the individual—the individual’s sense of interaction with the *-scapes* shapes the *-scapes*, makes them the representation of culture they are. Appadurai argues “the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of [-scapes] landscapes . . . navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from *their own sense* of what these landscapes offer (33, emphasis my own). Meaning is made in negotiation here, in much the same way as we find in the other theorists I’ve mentioned thus far.

For Appadurai, there are several fractal *-scapes* that operate and inform meaning-making in any given representation of culture. Technoscapes highlight how information, through technology, moves “at high speeds across previously impervious boundaries” (34). Financescapes are multitudinal, as “the disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before” (34). Ideoscapes, often related more directly to state power and the political, operate as “images of the world created by media” (35). Mediascapes “tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality . . . out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives . . . of others living in other places” (35). As a set of texts imbued with the technology of representation, Gelman’s work functions as its own mediascape. Appadurai’s work operates at the meta/macro or global economic level of analysis, but we can make the case at the micro level at play in the reception of *Tales*, *Friends*, and Gelman’s website.

Tales, *Friends*, and Gelman’s website function as mediascapes, technoscapes, and in the sense of contributing to a way of seeing directly related to cultural experience and situatedness, ideoscapes. The books and website are mediascapes in that they are a collection of narrative images of culture filtered through the culturally-constituted norms

that help create the more political and macro-level ideoscape of travel and writing one's interaction with other cultures. The texts operate as a technoscape because of the reception that exists outside the reality of the text itself, on the Internet, in cyberspace.

In 2002, using a relatively new form of virtual communication, one which operated outside of traditional or conventional channels of communication between author and reader/artist and fan base, Gelman began to interact with readers of *Tales* on the Internet via the world wide web and via email. Instead of receiving mail via her publishing house or agent, Gelman decided to ask her readers to use their web savvy to respond to her instead. Reflecting on this moment in the first chapter of *Friends*, Gelman writes, "back then it was rare to see an e-mail address in a book . . . Twenty four hours after the book appeared in the stores, the e-mails began to arrive . . . I still 'meet' new readers every day, and I write back to all of them. There are thousands of letters in my computer . . . it is a special kind of e-connecting" (2). The ease of access and quickness of response—almost immediate—across borders and boundaries which do not exist as finite in the "cloud" of virtual space-without-place are examples of how powerful the technoscape can be. The span of time and the limitations of physical space are collapsed through the technoscape, and images, information, and communication can be shared in nanoseconds. This dissemination of ideas at lightning speed has a direct impact on meaning-making and cultural representation. In the example with Gelman, it changes the "experience" and the constitution of "larger formations" through interaction, through the merging of the writer's and readers' own "sense of what these landscapes offer" (Appadurai 33).

The idea for *Friends*, in part, came from interaction via the technoscape in the form of Gelman's website, www.ritagoldengelman.com. The website functions as a cultural space, a frame of reference for understanding the impact ideas from a text can have on a larger readership or even a more targeted readership. It simultaneously functions as a political space, especially when read as another text-in-tandem with *Tales* and *Friends*, designed to appeal to both men and women, but one which can be read as a space of community, for those with a similar "nomadic" lifestyle (and in particular for women). In this space, women from around the world, regardless of ethnicity or affiliation with a particular nation or state, can interact with each other and with Gelman.⁴⁷ The website enables dialogue, a simple connection across time and space which leads to new ways of seeing, new projects, new affiliations, and a new sense of empowerment (this happened especially as Gelman put together the framework for the anthology of stories and recipes for *Friends* and shared that with readers on the website, asking for submissions and ideas—the entire project was born of virtual space and interaction in the cloud). Aihwa Ong might claim the project was a *trans* project, transnational, operating not from a top-down space (see Ong's observation of Appadurai's model in *Flexible Citizenship*) but rather a horizontal space of sharing and lateral exchange via the fluid channel of the web's stream of information, bits, and bytes. Ong argues that "*Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (4). As a project constructed from experiences in travel and cultural relativism, the women and men who shared their stories through virtual space did so across all sorts of socially-constructed boundaries as well as in-between, or beyond, the reach of physical borders—all through the use of technology.

In much the same way that the speed of information and the exchange of that information transforms cultural context, so too does it inform the flow of global capital and the influence of that system in what Appadurai deems “finance-scapes” and Ong labels “transnationality,” “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space which has intensified under late capitalism” (Ong 4). *Tales*, *Friends*, and the website exist in the flow of global capital and, indeed, all three contribute to it in various ways. The royalties from *Tales* kept Gelman traveling to her more recent destinations and allowed her to take time to focus on creating *Friends* in collaboration with people she “met” virtually through her website in cyberspace. She acknowledges, too, her earlier work as a writer and how it directly influenced her ability to continue her travels: “I financed my travel addiction by writing children’s books” (*Friends* 2). Marketing powerhouses and publishers embedded Gelman within a package of “new women” whose alternative lifestyles could be “sold” in a new variety of travelogue, thus changing a longstanding norm of women operating on the margins in the travel writing genre. The recent proliferation of texts about solo women travelers speaks to the profound impact of this change on the market and on the genre in a relatively short period of time. (Think of Gelman’s *Tales* as the precursor, and the more popular text *Eat, Pray, Love*, built on the same view of woman-travels-alone but morphed into a more mass-market package which also spawned a major motion picture—money!) People are “buying” the change, purchasing the texts (and with them the cultural assumptions), supporting the movement and shift in thinking—and their money exchanges hands across space and time in the finance-scape, as well. The new roles for women “sell” a way of

thinking about the world, and they make money not only for travel authors in general but also for international publishing. This money talks and perpetuates the trend.

At the local level, *Friends* impacts the lives of impoverished children directly via the finance-scape. The forty authors of the text, including Gelman and her writing partner Maria Altobelli, receive no income from the book—both the advance and the royalties for the book are given to a local Rotary group in New Delhi, India, to share as tutoring scholarships children who want to finish secondary school.

The line between Appadurai's finance-scape and the ideo-scape is blurred when we think of Gelman and the political merging with the financial to create change largely driven by media. For Appadurai, the ideoscape functions as a set of "images of the world created by media" via advertisement, repetition, and targeted marketing. If again we think of *Tales* and *Friends* as packages carefully crafted to be conspicuously consumed by readers and to reinforce a particular way of thinking about the world—and women's travel in it—then we can see the more insidious nature of the ideoscape, one which operates at a meta-level so above the local and original text(s) that the author may not even be aware of participating in it. The smaller idea becomes part of a much larger political machine, which spreads the message in various ways, some even in complete juxtaposition or opposition to the author's original intent (the ideas are appropriated and come to mean something different—they are co-opted and then used to reify another limited way of seeing—again, *Eat, Pray, Love's* simplistic view of cultural relativism and women's roles in travel stands as a good example here).

A second aspect of the ideoscape at play in *Tales*, *Friends*, and the website is the perpetuation of the view of the world as accessible, available, open for discovery, open

for business, open for the taking. The implications here are myriad, and speak to the desire for the consumption of other cultures, of appropriation of native or indigenous knowledge, art, cultural practices—the age-old imperialist mission to taxonomize, classify, know, and ultimately *own*. And yes, these ideas and moments of discursive appropriation do occur in Gelman’s texts, especially in relation to art and cultural ceremonies not often open to “outsiders:” the tuak ceremony, the dens of black magic and female spirit possession, the potential to market and sell the work of the amazing indigenous woodcarving artist, even the inclusion of the ho-mok recipe from Thailand in *Friends*. These moments of representation via the ideoscape connect to the trope of the primitive or exotic other, and promote both exoticism and othering in the type of small bits of representation that function in what Appadurai dubs the mediascape.

Mediascapes work in conjunction with political aspects of “othering” at a smaller level of repetition and reinforcement. In order to analyze the mediascape operating from *Tales*, *Friends*, and Gelman’s website, we must remember that we are seeing only “strips of reality” in the words on the page, only partial context, and a partial context that is already once-filtered through Gelman’s own frame of cultural perspective (Appadurai 35). In this way, mediascapes relate to both Iser’s and Fish’s analysis of the interpretive community’s assumptions about what constitutes this genre of literature and the desires of the implied reader, so that we can see both the “imagined lives” and the “*scripts . . . of imagined lives*” produced by the author and reader in a relationship of meaning-making (Appadurai 35). If we think in terms of readership, in Appadurai’s “sense of interaction” the perception of interplay between reader, writer, and culture shapes the very interaction, and therefore also the –scapes themselves. In the case of Gelman’s reception, readers are

both actors in creating culture and informed by cultural context simultaneously. Readers in the public sphere perceive a new “type” in Gelman’s “female nomad” and attach to it as an exception in the genre. The publishing industry pushes more of similar typing because the new type sells. The genre opens to include this type and new expectations come with it—a certain style of narration, a break from a former “self,” a relinquishing of old roles to forge a newer, supposedly purer life. A script is created, a script of Gelman’s new life and of the possibility of escape or enlightenment for others who would follow the lifestyle they imagine her to lead after reading *Tales* or *Friends* or information from her website. The script goes beyond the texts. It is no longer simply about Gelman, but instead becomes part of a cultural narrative about how and what a woman can or should accomplish—freedom from traditional domestic roles, financial independence, the desire and ability to travel, and the capability to trust random strangers around the globe based on a sense of goodwill and human connection. The “female” travelogue becomes the venue for this cultural shift, and over time it becomes the template for a life transformation text for women that is different than the hero-cycle journeys often portrayed in traditional male travel writing. From this new template, women learn that their own lives are unfulfilling or lacking if they choose not to undertake such a lifestyle change of their own. Gelman does not tell them this, but the reception of her work offers compelling evidence of the trend of cultural expectation over time and the ways in which women internalize the value of mainstream, conventional (and patriarchal) cultural life. Readers compare themselves to Gelman’s perceived lifestyle using the information she provides for them in her texts and website—we see responses related to Gelman’s bravery, her confrontation of fear, readers’ admiration for her ability to leave the

mainstream world behind. These texts perform culture as one script of a woman's experience. Hundreds of thousands of readers (or more) read this script, incorporate it into their own understanding of culture through acceptance, comparison, or both, and slowly we see cultural expectations of women and travel begin to change. New texts emerging in the decade since *Tales* went to print confirm the social and cultural value now placed on a woman, alone, changing her life through travel (Barbour, Cantrell, Gilbert, Griswold, Neelis, Tempest). This complex interplay of being an actor in culture and being acted upon by culture allows for a deeper and richer look into how reception of Gelman's work includes not just writer and reader, but the machinations of an entire cultural context, from institutions to economic forces and structures, to the technologies used to disseminate information as knowledge/power. It is in this context that I move now to a historically-specific exploration of women and their uses of technology, particularly the Internet as it came into being and is used today to forge coalitional and "intimate" spaces for social change, along with an analysis of Gelman's website and its impact on the reception of her work.

Into the Global Community: Cyberfeminism, Technology, and Representation

In *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy*, cyberfeminist⁴⁸ Zillah Eisenstein also investigates the flow of cultural representation, though her focus is different than Appadurai's. Eisenstein explores what she deems the technoscape and women's roles in relationship to patriarchal and hegemonic systems of cyberpower. Just as Appadurai notes the complex fractals and overlaps of the different kinds of *-scapes* he identifies, so Eisenstein writes about the ways "the centers of power

are always shifting, which is different from saying that power has no specific location”

(2). The mobility of the different forms of power at play in the technologies of representation, then, is an essential component of understanding the power relations at work in viewing a set of texts, such as Gelman’s, in the frame of representative, performative pieces.

Similarly, Gillian Youngs, in “Globalization, Feminism, and Information Society,” argues that “the technological character of the information age offers decentralizing tendencies as well as centralizing ones, in ways that many consider to be entirely new . . . the Internet, and its contrasting public and private spaces of the web and email, is offering a concrete status to what has previously been a rather abstract and/or distant notion of globalization” (223-224). For Youngs, Internet technology functions as a mode to employ for solidarity-building, even if the medium itself is fraught with hegemonic systems of state and economic power.⁴⁹ Finally, Youngs argues that new technology can be used to forge “intimacy.” She writes, intimacy becomes “about building new networks that are disruptive of established structures or perspectives, offering mutual support, information, and understanding for community building (virtual or otherwise) and lobbying for change at a personal, collective, and societal levels” (233). In many ways, Gelman’s website functions as a “socio-spatial” area for community-building. With her website, which went live in the early 2000s, Gelman uses technology to create a figured world of -scapes, and utilizes web technology to further her humanitarian aims by creating a collective of similarly-minded women who work together to provide educational opportunities to underserved children in New Delhi *jhuggies*.

The literature on cyberfeminism, women's access to information technology, and use of the Internet as a social and political tool is substantial, encompassing not only the use of (and creation of) personal websites, but also the private sphere of personal email. Theorists like Gajjala and Mamidipudi, Youngs, and Eisenstein argue that we must examine who has access to what kind of technology, how they have access, and how they use that access (to what purpose, to what gain?).⁵⁰ In addition, cyberfeminists staunchly argue that we must acknowledge the systems of financial and social hierarchy which regulate and govern the use of "free" Internet technology and that we must continually interrogate these systems.⁵¹ The Internet as a political tool for a 1st world, Western woman like Gelman operates in a quite different reality than it does when used by Southern, non-Western women in developing countries.

Information technology has been co-opted by the teleological discourse of Enlightenment, where use of technology and science equal "progress" toward a more "civilized" society. In the context of Gelman's work and website, it is important to ask who has or gets access, and what does that access accomplish. The Internet is also changing the landscape of how we perceive space and movement in contemporary society. The ultimate paradox of the Internet is that its "free" space of ideas is anything but free—in fact it is tightly controlled and mediated by corporate interests and financial power players. However, there is still space for subversion and unexpected uses of information technology in opposition to this tight control, and even some in-between space for what Youngs calls cyberspatial "intimacy."

Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi describe cyberfeminism in basic terms, defining it as "women using Internet technology for something other than

shopping via the Internet or browsing the world wide web . . . cyberfeminism is feminism in relation to ‘cyberspace’” (8). According to Gajjala and Mamidipudi, we must be careful, however, not to fall into the trap of viewing the Internet as a tool to empowerment for women in a way that furthers the Enlightenment discourse of progress; Gajjala and Mamidipudi would argue that technology and science do not intrinsically lead to “progress” and “development,” both terms which hinge on the Enlightenment ideals of a never-ending march toward higher “civilization.” Thus access to the technology and speed of the world wide web does not necessarily equal the playing field for women and men, nor does it mean that women will be able to move outside of the many restrictive social labels and controls placed on them by gender, class, race, or sexual orientation. Cyberfeminists ask questions about contemporary use of information technology in relationship to the idea that the Internet will empower women, questions such as “who has the Internet empowered? How has this happened? And how relevant is this?” (9).⁵²

Read as a space where a woman shares her journey and approach to travel by and for women, Gelman’s website functions as a cyberfeminist space. Here readers can learn more about her nomadic choices and current travels, and they can participate in projects and other community-building options via the many interactive links and the collaborative listserv. The site is political even if Gelman does not intend it to be so. It is a snapshot of a culturally-constituted social position as well as an interactive space where people make meaning from both the content and the interaction with others that occurs within the space of the website. Using Gajjala and Mamidipudi’s approach, we can ask who has this site empowered, and how relevant is this to changing women’s roles or a

feminist outlook? We know that access to technology alone isn't enough to successfully navigate the technological sphere of discourse surrounding and included in the Internet. The site is structured on constructs of language and is visual in orientation. One must be well-versed in website operation to navigate the many strings of links and sub-trees included in the overall map of Gelman's site. English is the only language offered (we might even read this as English is the language assumed to be the language for all who would enter the site, so if someone access the site but has no English language skills, they would struggle to follow the threads to more information). Women familiar with Gelman's books, proficient in English and with mastery of basic web design functions, could find the site empowering in its reliance on a discourse of difference (outside-the-box thinking about nomadic lifestyle and multicultural "connection"). The implied readership, however, is relatively small and very clearly Western, well educated, already technologically literate in Internet navigation and website design, and from a middle to upper range of socioeconomic status. Those who do not fit this readership would struggle to find meaning or to find the political relevance of the site to their own experiences in the world. The familiar world of Gelman's discourse for the implied reader would be jarring and de-centering for someone "outside" the implied readership.

Youngs shares a historical perspective about the advent and development of information technology that speaks to the fusion of the industrialized world of travel and movement (forms of transportation including cars, rail, and air flight) with virtual icons (electronic devices which allow "movement without physical movement, social interaction without physical presence") (229). This historical change in movement is crucial to the way we have conceptualized cyberspace and the way we understand both

the speed and function of the “information superhighway” of the Internet. This is true for both our understanding of the Internet and the finance-scape that surrounds and informs it. Ideas and capital can now flow instantaneously through digital space without the need for physical movement.

Youngs claims the global economy now consists of a “hybrid of [new] digital and [familiar] material worlds” (224). Where once physical movement was needed, and indeed brought rapid change via industrialization and fast mass transit of goods and people, now physical movement is no longer necessary to shift mass quantities of financial capital across space and time in nanoseconds from the comfort of home or office. Youngs writes, “power in the virtual age is all about moving, connecting, and acting, while sitting still at the office desk or in the armchair at home. It is also about accessing multiple social spaces and people within them while on the move through mobile networked devices (computers, cell phones, and the like)” (229). Social spaces now exist where we can interact with others in widely disparate places around the globe simultaneously, without doing anything more than clicking an app on our phones or bringing up the web browser of our choice on our laptops or home computers.

A personal example highlights the power of this change. At the time of this writing, I am currently connected via Internet browser to a popular social networking site, where in the past twenty minutes I have been contacted by no fewer than seven friends and family members using the messaging function—these friends and family members are located in geographically remote areas across the globe, from the United States to Europe, North Africa, and Asia. To speak with them via video chat, voice message recording, or typed message, I need only to click a link or tool area in the provided

window and begin. Simultaneously, while I am connected to the social networking site via computer, my cellular phone is also currently online. It contains a different networking application; this app allows my partner to contact me via phone, without charge, from Germany, and leave me a text message in real time or a recorded voice or video message I can replay at any time. I can instantaneously receive and reply to messages from people who are close to me socially but not close to me physically---I am utilizing what Youngs would call a “socio-spatial” space, which is a radical shift from the “geo-spatial” terms we used to conceptualize global communication across physical borders in the past. Youngs defines “socio-spatial” virtual spaces as “technologically mediated spaces we can access, and in which we can work and play, build relationships and communities, pursue learning, and so on” (225). Such spaces were unavailable until the early 1990s and have deeply transformed our contemporary understanding of social interaction at the turn of the 21st century and into its first decade, allowing us to create communities unbounded by geographical and physical distance.

Yet while the potential and opportunity for new spaces for social interaction are now available via information technology, Youngs and other cyberfeminist critics, including Zillah Eisenstein, are quick to point out the insidious ways Internet technology is already shaped by corporate financial interests. This influence has always been built into the structure and function of the Internet, even as it is simultaneously (and carefully) presented to the masses as a space of “free” exchange, learning, and dialogue.⁵³ While the message shared globally highlights the web as “a tool for enhancing world wide democracy” and as a way to “help bridge gaps between social groups,” we must not forget that web technology was and still is defined, created, and financially controlled in

a patriarchal, hierarchical, hegemonic system initiated by Northern, Western, and 1st world economic, military, and political interests.

While the Internet boasts freedom and a fair exchange of ideas, Eisenstein identifies a key problem when thinking about the conceptually “free” arena of cyberspace and the hegemonic reality of financial and social global systems: “economic inequality blooms alongside cyber freedom. Technological empowerment has no trickle-down effect for the poor . . . it is ludicrous to speak of access to the information highway . . . in a world defined by economic and social inequality” (11-12). This point is brought into sharp relief as I think about Gelman’s website and how it functions. It exists as a point in the stream of information available on the web, but even access to it, let alone a complex cultural understanding of it, is already contingent on having enough capital, both financial and cultural, to even know it exists. The “free” life of the nomad celebrated on the site in a form of “cyberdiscourse” seems mindless when compared to the very real economic and social life conditions for many in what our global society continues to call “developing” spaces. Indeed, access to the site to learn more about this “free” life is a marker of socioeconomic status and education that many will never have the opportunity to attain.⁵⁴ The cyberdiscourse of the site, then, continues to mask over the very real inequalities that exist across the world economically.

As a particular form of discourse presented via the Internet, cyberdiscourse, according to Eisenstein, “presents an epistemological stance toward information and its relation to transnational capital that obfuscates the realities of exploitation and domination in the global economy. Cyberdiscourse operates as a democratic imaginary alongside that of a fantasmatic open globe” (70-71). We can see this clearly in the frame

Gelman's website creates for the world—as an open landscape ready to receive us, no matter where we go, through the conduit of human “connection.” The website creates and houses socio-spatial spaces where communities of like-minded people can interact and forge such a sense of connection.⁵⁵ The false ideal presented here is that *anyone* can achieve such a dream, when the reality is that very few have the means to do so, and this is especially true for women in relation to global standards for women's roles and freedoms. Information about this alternative nomadic lifestyle is readily available, enticing, and “free,” but at the same time it peddles a discourse of freedom that masks over radical inequalities.

One primary aspect of the “mask” over problems that technological media allows is that we can easily (and ubiquitously) view inequality without actually having to acknowledge it. Eisenstein writes that “print media, TV, and the Internet expose problems, but they also allow us to escape them. We watch, but often we do not really *see*” (29). If we think of this problem in the context of Gelman's website, and indeed even in the context of *Tales* and *Friends*, several examples come to mind to support Eisenstein's claim. A primary example from the website in tandem with *Friends* is the *jhuggie* education project; purchasing a copy of *Friends* immediately impacts the project because all profits go to help the *jhuggie* children, while a link exists on the website for visitors to click and donate to help the project as well. While simplistic, a reading as easy as “buy book, send money, save kids” is possible here. Readers or web visitors are very gently confronted with dire economic inequality, but they are essentially “saved” from viewing it because they are already “helping” (in the case of buying a copy of *Friends*) and can thus feel good about it, or they can conveniently choose to ignore both the

inequality and the link to contribute to the project on the website. In a similar way, while Gelman does confront inequality in some moments of cultural relativism in *Tales*—most notably in her writing about economic disparity in Guatemala and Mexico, and the limited roles for women in Bali, Indonesia, and Israel—the larger narrative of nomadic “freedom” is reinforced much more consistently. Moments of reflection on inequality get lost in the overall rush toward a universalizing narrative of “connection.” In addition, readers can easily move through the text riding on Gelman’s lens of perspective, without having to think deeply about the varying levels of economic disparity in depth because they are encouraged to travel across the landscape of her experiences at a surface level, as armchair travelers—the genre expectation of the travelogue itself reinforces a less-than-critical reading audience (the relativism of “her travels, her view” shields readers from critical self-reflection about inequality).

This is also true in relationship to many humanitarian projects presented as options to improve conditions for “others” in “developing” areas of the world. While the drive to help others is commendable, the presentation and reification of ways of seeing “others” is problematic, especially when coupled with the problem of masking over inequality mentioned above. Critics like Ann Russo argue that white privilege is continually overlooked on the web, especially in projects created to help people of color. “Helping each other,” (the universal “each other”) stands in for “rescuing” people from “primitive” cultures (thus continuing colonialist ideology, albeit with different catch phrases for the 21st century). Russo argues that in many cases, “working on the problem of racism becomes a matter of ‘helping’ these women out, as if the problem of racism were ‘their’ problem” without noticing that racism is also “a white problem and issue”

(299). While Gelman's *jhuggie* project is based more on changing socioeconomic status and class than on racism, the same type of thinking applies. Western readers who purchase the book or click on the web link to contribute to the project to help distant children half a world away with "their problem" of not having access to education, technology, or materials because of extreme poverty and crowded living conditions. In this way, even though the project was conceived from a space of goodhearted optimism, it still supports the colonialist trope of the civilizing mission.

Yet despite the tendency for the overarching narrative to support colonialist ideology, there are moments of rupture that deserve attention—and those moments of rupture are where cyberfeminists believe we can create a sense of "intimacy" that can subvert, in some small way, the metanarrative of imperialism. Eisenstein claims that "intimacy" in cyberspace is about "building new networks that are disruptive of established structures or perspectives, offering mutual support, information, and understanding for community building (virtual and otherwise) and lobbying for change at personal, collective, and societal levels" (233).⁵⁶ With a generous reading, we can view Gelman's site as somewhat subversive—in the early years after the publication of *Tales*, it was innovative to create and use a website in the way Gelman originally did. It established and maintained a community in the cloud with no physical or geographical borders or boundaries. It was a space where women could come together and discuss aspects of travel that had been previously left out of their sphere of reference because of the patriarchal nature of the travel writing genre (women traveling solo rarely published). And it allowed a new type of intimacy and camaraderie with Gelman as author, which up to that point was impossible.

Read now, in 2014, the site offers something different in terms of intimacy and subversion. We now know that the bulk of the women who access the site are similar in socioeconomic status and culture as Gelman herself, so the potential for disrupting the dialogue in that way isn't as high as it once was.⁵⁷ However, a new project that Gelman is working hard to promote, the "gap year project," is asking from within that dominant Western culture and socioeconomic status to affect change in the culture of the United States.

I asked Gelman to explain about her drive for the project and what it means to her in my personal interview with her. She stated, "I really am passionate about the gap year," and what influenced her most was her "experience in the world, [her] observation of the prejudice and intolerance in this country, of otherness, of immigrants" (Interview). She continued, "I think kids coming from high school are not ready for college. I know I wasn't. I think that they go and that first year is a waste" (Interview). When I asked why it was so important to her now, she claimed

I just think it will change the country. If kids in their senior year walked down the hall poking each other and saying "so where are you going next year?" [sic] I know it changes the kids. They don't come back the same. You just can't. Once we have a population of people who have been out of the country, the country will change, and the world will. I'm convinced. I'm willing to stop being a nomad, if my efforts for the next however many years I have to live could really pay off by me instituting a gap year movement here. This is the project that is fuelling my passion. (Personal Interview)

This type of approach is new for Gelman—she is trying to change her own culture from within, rather than trying to enact change on a culture she has visited briefly.

Opportunities exist for real collaboration with her fans as well as educators and others across the United States to bring the idea of travel (and maybe even of service) to American students in the year between high school and college. She is using the website to gather others who share her new passion together to form a new and rather unexpected new community of people willing to share the gap year project with children and parents in their local neighborhoods, schools, and community centers. Those who were first drawn to her website by the “female nomad” lifestyle and way of viewing the world can now change with her, and put their focus on transforming the way we think about travel and its importance to the American culture and worldview. This type of change is indicative of the “intimacy” and unpredictability possible in cyberspace used as a social and political tool. While the metanarrative of the site still reinforces old stereotypes and ways of representing “others,” at this one smaller level, Gelman is pushing for a change that is politically relevant and creating a new network of activists across the United States that cyberfeminists would view as important and positive.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the roles of writer, reader, and culture interacting to produce a reception history of a particular writer’s travel work in the context of the turn of the 21st century. A close reading of how Gelman’s work was perceived by the popular reading public and came to reinforce specific, tangible, and important changes to the travel writing genre niche of “solo women’s travel” contributes to our understanding

of how readers in popular culture influence expectations and are influenced by expectations of gender roles and genre rules. Broadening the analysis of Gelman's work to include Appadurai's *-scapes* allows for a more nuanced reading of the multivariate, overlapping aspects of culture that shape our world and our understanding of the world, from economic and financial influences to the ways in which media and the (re)presentation of information through media and technology inform, at all times, our cultural context. Finally, a historically-grounded investigation into how women have strategically used the Internet to form coalitional, "intimate" space for social change, woven into an analysis of Gelman's own website as such a space, reinforces the importance of contextual analysis with a longer horizon or vantage point—what seems mainstream and rather ordinary now takes on more meaning when situated within a larger pattern of adaptation to the changing scope of technology in our contemporary cultural landscape.

 CH 3 NOTES

⁴³ Tompkins notes that Iser recognizes “textual constraints” where a “reader’s activity is only a fulfillment of what is already implicit in the structure of the work” (xv). The focus on structure as an important component shaping the reader’s interpretation keeps the reader tied to the text and helps to determine the implied readership. (Tompkins xvii).

⁴⁴ For more on cover art and analysis in *Tales*, see Chapter 1 of this work, pp. 25 – 27.

⁴⁵ See Green, Eileen, and Carrie Singleton. “Risky Bodies at Leisure: Young Women Negotiating Space and Place.” *Sociology* 40.5 (2006): 853-71.

⁴⁶ Linguistic structure forecasts the possibilities and choices an author can make; language itself limits and shapes representation.

⁴⁷ Basic access to the technology needed to access the Internet and the skills necessary to navigate virtual space on the Internet are prerequisites to the gateway of knowledge and cultural artifacts available on what has been hailed the “information superhighway.” Access to technology is impacted and mitigated by socioeconomic status, race, and gender differently across the globe. The assumption that everyone on the planet has equal access to “free” information and technology is a dangerous one and patently untrue. For more on the false idea perpetuated that the Internet spreads democracy and opens a wide path to education and enlightenment, see Eisenstein.

⁴⁸ For a succinct definition of cyberfeminism, see Gajjala, Radhika and Annapurna Mamidipudi. “Cyberfeminism, technology, and international development.” *Gender and Technology*. Ed. Caroline Sweetman. Oxford: Oxfam, 1999. 8.

⁴⁹ Many theorists are quick to note that the term “community” has recently been co-opted as a mask for consumerism. Gustavson, for instance, writes that “while the Internet has frequently been invoked as a potential site of community idealism, “community” has now become a buzzword for commercial portals” (169). What once was a legitimate desire to connect has been appropriated by corporate interests to draw women into their consumer sites.

⁵⁰ Gustavson argues “women are a growing Internet population . . . discursively constructed on the Internet as community-seekers and as consumers, traditionally feminine roles” (169).

⁵¹ Youngs offers the following view on the importance of interrogation: “Feminists explore the information society paradigm as something that needs to be interrogated, rather than assumed in any single form, and view horizontal developments associated with the Internet as equally important as vertical ones. This is a recognition of communications processes which cut across traditional (vertical) [hierarchical] power lines, forming alternative (horizontal) networks and communities, which may often interact with and challenge centers of power, but may also just work in their own (alternative) terms” (231).

⁵² Of the many questions scholars and activists ask about the hierarchies of power at play even in the context of access to the Internet, these written by Gajjala and Mamidipudi are indicative of the scope and depth: “Will women all over the world be able (allowed) to use technologies under conditions that are defined by them, and therefore potentially empowering to them? Within which Internet-based contexts will women of lesser material and cultural privilege within ‘global’ power relations be able to develop

collaborative work, and coalitions, to transform social, cultural, and political structures” (see Gajjala, Radhika and Annapurna Mamidipudi. “Cyberfeminism, technology, and international development.” *Gender and Technology*. Ed. Caroline Sweetman. Oxford: Oxfam, 1999. 15.)

⁵³ For an excellent review of the myriad obstacles that can potentially stymie even basic access to technology in many developing areas, see Schreiner, Heather. “Rural Women, Development, and Telecommunications: A Pilot Programme in South Africa.” *Gender and Technology*. Ed. Caroline Sweetman. Oxford: Oxfam, 1999. 64-70.

⁵⁴ Marja Vehviläinen recognizes the illusion of universal access to web technology: “Global technologies have a tendency to erode the sense of place and local practices, detaching women from their localities and emphasizing sameness and equal access instead” (277).

⁵⁵ Women have used the web to connect with each other as a way to deny “more traditional ‘real’ spaces” dominated by patriarchal norms, as well as for “the chance to find a new sort of community or commonality that is missing from ‘real’ life” (Consalvo and Paasonen 10).

⁵⁶ Sadie Plant discusses a similar notion with her idea of “net culture” for women, a “continuum of the female practice of weaving and feminization as a process that erodes and subverts the culture of masculine dominance” (qtd. in Consalvo and Paasonen 3).

⁵⁷ Consalvo and Paasonen might see this as an example of “whitewashing,” arguing that “what and who counts as ‘female’ is by no means given, but based on a continuous process of inclusion and exclusion. Quite often this implies a process of ‘whitewashing,’ where white women are positioned as points of identification for the category of women in general” (16).

Conclusion

In this study of Rita Golden Gelman's travel work and influence on the travel writing genre, perception of women's roles in cultural context, and reception history, I moved from a very specific, targeted analysis of trope and stereotype to a close reading of the representation of women's roles in *Tales* and *Friends* to broader strokes of investigating how writer, readers, and culture intertwine in meaning-making. My intent was threefold. Firstly, I sought to provide a thorough, historically- and culturally-specific close reading of a single 21st century female travel writer's body of work on travel. From a first-person travelogue to an anthology collection of writers' stories and recipes dedicated to connecting through trust and food to a personal website reinforcing the role of the "female nomad," Gelman's travel work provided a rich yet manageable set of texts to explore.

I started my analysis with Spurr's framework on the rhetoric of empire because of my own complicated and problematic relationship with the ways in which Gelman represented people she encountered through "othering." I wanted to look closely at how essentialist, reductive ways of seeing can markedly influence our understanding of other cultures and our own sense of cultural context, especially when an author is unwittingly participating in a complex discourse of cultural and discursive imperialism. Still, I had a strong desire to mine Gelman's work for interstitial, in-between space, a productive grey area where an either-or analysis just wasn't sufficient to adequately show what the text was performing in terms of cultural expectation and expression. Along that trajectory, I was determined to incorporate a political, feminist reading of women's roles as they relate to travel as well as a closer look at how psychology and psychiatry are shifting our

cultural understanding of how women's identities are formed through collaboration, coalition, and connection with others rather than in the traditional (male) identity model of autonomy via individualism and competition. I pushed for a reading of Gelman's work as a whole which incorporated this new way of thinking about women's identity, and argued that the larger arc of purpose for Gelman's travel work functions as a form of strategic essentialism. While I showed in Chapter 1 that Gelman uses universalism and essentialism in her writing in ways which reinforce colonialist ideology, are reductive, and make her representations of cultural exchange problematic at times, in Chapter 2, I also showed how her use of essentialism could be a strategic perspective used to create coalitional, dialogic space with a community of readers and women who stand outside conventional gender roles and seek a virtual community with likeminded people. My third goal was to document how Gelman's work was received by readers and scholars through a detailed reception history using a reader-response theoretical approach. I chose reader-response because it is an approach being used interdisciplinarily across fields interested in how travel influences culture (sociology, anthropology, composition studies, literary criticism, linguistics) and because it is an accessible theoretical approach politically useful for scholarly as well as popular application. In this chapter I also built on my earlier work on gender roles to consider how the virtual space of Gelman's website offers a historically-situated glimpse of a strategic space for "intimacy" and coalition, formed just as the Internet became politically important for women in newly-formed virtual communities dedicated to resistance, subversion, and change.

Even as I look at the trajectory of my own work on Gelman, I think of many threads I was unable to fully cast that are worthy of further analysis by future scholars. I

focused on the “female” qualification in “female nomad” extensively, but there is much room for analysis of the term “nomad” itself and how it continues to be a powerful motif in the travel writing genre and is also taking on new meaning in an era of eco-travel, marketing for solo travel and tourism, and a renewed call for “clean” or “pure” living without attachment to possessions and the extra “baggage” of conspicuous consumption.

And while I looked closely at women’s roles in Gelman’s work and how they both performed culture as well as shaped reception by culture, there is ample space for a detailed analysis of how women’s physical bodies in Gelman’s texts, including her own, are markers of culture, always-already acted upon by the restrictive rule-sets of what is and is not acceptable for female bodies. The recent work by scholars showing the ways in which genre criticism is changing for women writing about their solo travel is a fascinating contemporary window to examine how cultural expectations of women versus men in travel are markedly different. Continuing to question why women who write about themselves and their physical, sexual, or spiritual journeys through travel are labeled “selfish,” “self-centered,” or “narcissistic” in popular culture backlash and criticism is important work—the double standard of the genre and patriarchal rule-sets are clearly still informing the way women’s contemporary travel writing is being read in the larger western cultural context.

Questions of class have long accompanied questions of travel, and I would be remiss not to realize that my work situated itself mainly around analysis and reception related to gender and neo-colonial/neo-imperial trope, but did not give full measure to the influence of socioeconomic status, social class, or social positioning in Gelman’s work or in the travel writing genre as a whole. Gelman’s own position of privilege undoubtedly

influences her ability to live the lifestyle she espouses as a “female nomad;” in order to follow her example, women would necessarily need to have a source of funding and cut ties to friends and family in a way that indicates a level of financial independence rare outside of contemporary western culture.

Finally, I recognize that as I took on a political reading of Gelman’s work from a feminist perspective, celebrating and examining the work of a contemporary female travel writer, I was still writing a project on an author from the center of the developed, western world who consistently wrote about her experiences with “others” in the margins of the developing world. What about writers from the margin who detail their encounters with the center? With more avenues available for publication via the Internet and small imprints devoted to broadening the background and number of voices we can read related to 21st-century travel, we are seeing, for the first time, a considerable influx of published and available writing about travel from margin to center, making this an important and fascinating avenue for future scholarly exploration.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Michelle Van Wert Kosalka

Place of birth: Marshalltown, IA

Education

B.A. , University of Northern Iowa, December 2007
Major: English

B.A., University of Northern Iowa, December 2007
Major: Psychology

M.A., University of Northern Iowa, August 2001
Major: English Language and Literature

Dissertation Title: “Tales” of Text and Culture: Tropes of Imperialism, Women’s Roles, Technologies of Representation, and Collaborative Meaning-Making in Rita Golden Gelman’s *Tales of a Female Nomad*, *Female Nomad and Friends*, and Personal Website

Professional and Teaching Experience

Undergraduate Program Chair, English and Communications
Herzing University Online, 2011-2014

Curriculum Management/Instructional Design Specialist
Herzing University Online, 2009-2010

Awards/Honors

National Educator of the Year, 2011
Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU)

Community/University Partnership Grant, 2008-2009
“Teen Speak—Confronting Oppression through Spoken Word Poetry”
Cultures and Communities Program, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
and Neighborhood House of Milwaukee