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IMMIGRANT LABOR AND INFORMAL AMERICAN ECONOMY:

REALITY AND REPRESENTATION

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Introduction

It is almost impossible not to think of immigrants when thinking about the USA. Immigration is the central aspect of its history and it is a major reason that the nation's total population grew to 303 million by 2008. "Believing in the American Dream, many tens of millions of people have come to live in the USA. They strengthened the nation's commitment to the dream and to its deal of being a refuge for the poor and oppressed, a nation of nations. Gradually, over the centuries of massive immigration and the struggles of newcomers and Americans to adjust to each other, the view that the nature of the nation was and should be a composite of man national backgrounds, races and cultures gained popular acceptance. This view continues to face the opposition of those who believe newcomers should leave their homeland cultures behind and the dilemma of deciding what is necessary to hold the country and its increasingly diverse population together." (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 54) My primary interest and the topic of this paper are illegal immigrants, but more particularly illegal immigrant women working in the USA. Primarily, I will focus on Zou Lei, a character in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) who is described as a half-Uighur half-Chinese illegal immigrant working and living in the USA.

Methodology

To explain my methodology I must first briefly summarize the nature of American Studies because this paper's topic falls under that field's discourse and the methodology I will be using positions in contrast to the American Studies' typical approach to topics, subjects and problems. The object of American Studies can be shortly summarized as "American problems." (Castronovo, Gillman, 2009: 2). American Studies are (at least in theory) an interdisciplinary field that studies everything from "bits of material culture as small as a cigarette stub or as large as war." (Castronovo, Gillman, 2009: 1) The most common critique of this field is that, although it boasts interdisciplinary approach to "American problems", its methods "too often operate according to principles that are merely additive, a sort of scholarly liberal pluralism that fails to address how interdisciplinary practice might actually throw into question the disciplinary assumptions of history, textual analysis, and cultural studies from which they draw." (Castronovo, Gillman, 2009: 3) In other words, what the field of American Studies lacks is another point of view because it too often concentrates on

abstract forms of the topics it researches and as the abstract forms they are forever unchanging and singular. As Du Bois, author of *The Study of Negro Problems* (1897) recognized, the scope of any problem changes over time and across space but American Studies often spoke of the “Negro problem as though it were one unchanged question, a singular problem and not a plexus of social problems.” (Castronovo, Gillman, 2009: 2) To describe this problem in philosophical terms, Donatella Izzo borrows the term “heterotopia” from Foucault. (Izzo, 2009: 588) Heterotopias are utopias in which the real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. American Studies therefore act as mirrors that simultaneously re-present the mirrored subject as “absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it” and de-realizes it by framing it in the utopian space where “it is not”. (Izzo, 2009: 588) Utopia in this sense is not a perfect place but an imaginary place, a category under which a subject is subsumed and in which it fits perfectly. Although American Studies are said to be interdisciplinary and cultural anthropology (ethnology) is one of the fields that can be incorporated into American Studies, the fact remains that although American Studies use the term “culture” that is associated with cultural anthropology and it is the main object of its study, it still interprets culture as something abstract and general. The example of this is the American Studies conference’s schedule in 2007. “The word “culture” appeared in twenty-nine session titles, and the predominance of its use was in the singular—not “cultures” but simply “culture”. In these titles, “culture” generally signified a category of humanistic production. And so there were session titles containing “print culture,” “literary culture,” “vernacular culture,” and “material culture,” each once; “public culture” in two session titles; “popular culture” in three session titles; and “visual culture” in six session titles.” (Evans, 2007: 431) “The formulation “literature and culture” or “history and culture” appeared as the dependent clause in three session titles, and in each instance the formulation complemented a specific community that was the session’s main focus. So one got “U.S. Latino/a Literature and Culture,” “African American History and Culture,” “Early Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture.” But the fact that these cultures were coupled with history or literature would seem to draw an equivalence between them. Culture was being used not to demarcate a population, but rather to indicate a category of humanistic production. Of the twenty-nine sessions, there were only five in which culture had an anthropological bearing. In three of these five, “culture” was pluralized but referred to a pattern of discourse, not to a group. The formulation of the title was the same in all three of these. They were set up as “cultures of x”—specifically, “cultures of militarization,” “cultures of the academy,” and “cultures of reenactment.” The point was to demarcate not

groups but a system of meaning, and it is not clear that pluralizing the word meant much more than the perpetuation of an academic trend.” (Evans, 2007: 431)

Therefore, I have chosen not to write about the “problem” of illegal immigrants in the same way the American Studies write and talk about “culture”, but have chosen to begin with the general and move to the particular in order to detach myself from any possible heterotopia. In that sense, the methodology I used while writing this paper can be compared to the ethnography of the particular. I chose to use that method because the most common problem of cultural anthropology and other social sciences today (and throughout history) is their study of social behavior and how it is influenced and produced by certain social systems and collective representation, in other words, they focus on generalizations. Such an approach is problematic because focusing on the general erases the particular and gives way to many heterotopias. That kind of approach sees the repeating patterns but disregards the differences. (Abu-Lughod, 1995:138)

According to the principles of ethnography of the particular, generalization should be avoided because it de-humanizes the subject or subjects of research (Abu-Lughod, 1995:150) which are, in this case, illegal immigrants. The other reason why cultural anthropologists (ethnologists) should be wary of generalization is that, as part of a professional discourse of “objectivity” and expertise, it is definitely a language of power. Because it seems detached, this way of studying and commenting on social life represents the viewpoint of those involved in “professional, managerial and administrative structures and because of that, it belongs to the the ruling apparatus of this society that constructs anthropological objects as simultaneously different and inferior.” (Abu-Lughod, 1995:150-151) The same warning should be applied to American Studies.

Cultural anthropology is not by any means immune to generalization and cultural anthropologists often generalize about communities by saying that they are characterized by certain institutions, rules, or ways of doing things. For example, they can say things like “Bongo-Bongo are polygynous” but what the ethnography of the particular does, and why it is important to incorporate it into American Studies, is it instead asks how a particular set of individuals, for example a man and his three wives in a Tanzanian Masai community in Africa, live the “institution” that is polygyny. (Abu-Lughod, 1995:153) Polygyny as an institution is a type or marriage in which a man is allowed to marry more than one woman, but “by focusing on the individuals and reconstructing their arguments about, and

interpretations of what they and others are doing would explain how social life proceeds.” It would show that although the definitions and terms of their discourses may be strictly set and configured, within these limits people contest interpretations of what is happening, they feel pain, strategize and live their lives. The ethnography of the particular seeks textual means of representing how something happens, it does not just make theoretical assertions that it does.” (Abu-Lughod, 1995:154)

That is why, instead of just collecting and analyzing data, I have decided to focus on Atticus Lish’s novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). Lish studied at Harvard University, but dropped out two years into his time as an undergraduate. He joined the Marines before taking a fiction workshop at the university.¹ According to the Harvard Magazine, “his writing career began far earlier: Don DeLillo, a friend of his father’s borrowed an extract from one of Lish’s fourth grade compositions to end his novel *The Names*.”² For his novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014), Lish was awarded the Faulkner award and his novel has been called “perhaps the finest and most unsentimental love story of the new decade³.” The novel is, of course, much more than a love story. It tells a story of Zou Lei, an illegal Chinese immigrant who came to America. After spending three months in detention, she is released without explanation after which she finds her way to Queens, New York. She wanders to Chinatown where she finds an apartment rented specifically to illegal immigrants. While taking a break from her work, she meets an Iraqi veteran Skinner who suffers from PTSD. Through their experience of New York, both as individuals and as a couple, the novel presents the ways people, primarily illegal immigrants, are forced to look for employment and it shows their struggles with the law, prejudice and poverty. Although the novel is the work of fiction, it was written by a real person and literature can sometimes teach us more about reality than some autobiographies. It is important to note that after he dropped out of Harvard, Lish spent a period of his life living in a series of basements in Queens, and with his wife he moved to China and lived there for some time before returning to New York for a job at a translation firm.⁴ Therefore, some or many experiences in the novel are probably his own experiences due to the amount of detail used in the descriptions and the knowledge that cannot be simply obtained by Googling a certain topic. Literature, whether it is fictional or not, always reflects

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/08/pen-faulkner-award-goes-to-atticus-lish-debut-preparation-for-the-next-life>

² <http://harvardmagazine.com/2015/04/lish-wins-pen-faulkner>

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/08/pen-faulkner-award-goes-to-atticus-lish-debut-preparation-for-the-next-life>

⁴ <http://observer.com/2014/11/the-son-also-writes-it-atticus-lishs-roundabout-path-to-literary-success/>

the author's background and his or hers worldview and it should not be disregarded as a source of valuable data. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze Lish's novel and I will not use it to describe "how illegal immigrant women live in the USA", instead I will focus on "how did Zou Lei, an illegal Chinese immigrant woman, live when she came to New York" But, before I analyze Zou Lei's story I have chosen a theoretical framework and topics which I will explain in the first part of this paper. I believe both the framework and topics I will explain are a necessary tool for understanding the novel's story and the lives of illegal immigrant women, specifically Zou Lei's life, in post 9/11 America of Atticus's novel.

Theoretical framework

In this chapter I have chosen certain terms and topics I believe must be explained in order to better understand the novel's story and examples from the novel that I will be focusing on.

History of Immigration to America

Lish's novel was published in 2014 which makes it one of the more recent novels dealing with the topic of illegal immigrants in America, New York. But in order to understand why the situation with immigrants in America is the way it is now, we must turn to history of immigration to America, the most important waves of immigration and the reasons behind them. The labor importing countries have always been quite selective in the recruitment of immigrants. When it comes to America, different political, ideological and economic needs dictated its waves of immigration. The first wave (1680-1776) of immigrants was welcomed by the founding fathers "only if they were willing to conform to Anglo-American culture and supply needed labor." (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 59) The second wave (1820-90) was the result of industrial revolution. Following changes in the Atlantic labor market, people moved to where the new job opportunities were. Steamships and trains made migration abroad safer, faster and cheaper and out of the 60 million people who left their countries between 1820 and 1930, two thirds settled in the USA. Land giveaways such as the Homestead Act of 1862 and the discovery of gold in California brought peaks in the rising immigration. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 61) The third wave of immigration (1890-1930) brought critical changes to American immigration policy. Immigration from north-western Europe declined sharply, arrivals from southern and eastern Europe rose and there was also a significant number of Syrians, Japanese and Fillipinos immigrants. To most Americans, the change mostly involved the feeling that "the typical immigrant became much less like them." The scale of new immigration and the altered job market resulted in larger urban immigrant quarters than

Americans have ever seen. The effect of the new immigration were high rates of crime, overcrowding, bad insanitary conditions and epidemics in immigrant ghettos. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 63) It caused a great calamity in the American society, some approved of the Zangwill's idea of a "melting pot" but some called it "the *mongrelization* of the white race." In 1921 Congress passed the first general limitation on migration, the Emergency Quota Act. It drastically reduced the annual number of European newcomers to 358,000 and it also introduced nationality quotas. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 64) The Second World War and the Cold War caused several contrasting shifts in the immigration policy. The government imported temporary labor from Mexico under the "bracero program" because America suffered labor shortages and lifted the ban on Chinese immigration because of foreign-policy considerations. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 66) In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act stated that race was no longer a reason for refusing someone an immigrant visa. It also started the "brain-drain" to the USA by reserving the first 50 percent of visas for each country for people with needed skills. The Act kept the national origins principle which gave many Third World countries only tiny quotas. The Immigration Act of 1965 replaced national origins quotas with hemispheric limits to annual immigration and to promote the idea of equal treatment, all nations in the eastern hemisphere had the same limit of 20 000 immigrants annually. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 66) This act started the fourth major wave of immigration, which was at its highest point in late 1990s and produced the highest immigration totals in American history by the beginning of the 21st century. Between 1960 and 2007 almost 39 million people settled as legal immigrants in America. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 67) Almost half of the immigrant population in 2007 consisted of Latino and Asian immigrants. The fourth wave includes a broad range of socio-economic groups and a very noticeable minor group are highly skilled workers and professionals. The large majority of both legal and illegal immigrants are similar to those who have arrived since the 1820s. They are above average educationally and economically at home, but below average in the USA and have migrated to the USA because commercialization and industrialization have disrupted their traditional economies. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 68) The poorest of this wave are groups or refugees from wars and other disasters. As a result of Vietnam was, in the 1960s and early 1970s huge groups of people fled south-east Asia to the USA. The poorest also include people who gain visas because they are near-relatives of more skilled immigrants who take jobs Americans do not want. The latter include Latino women recruited by agencies as domestic servants and nannies. (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 68) "Spreading the word about these jobs and moving into better-paid work once they have acquired more English, they bring their families and forge the links in "chain

migration” based on a network of female contacts.” (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 69) “The United States, Canada, and Australia have increased their intake of immigrants since the mid-1960s. Legal immigration to the United States increased to 460,000 entries a year in 1979, up from 265,000 in 1960. The 1970 U.S. Census recorded 9.6 million immigrants, representing 4.7 percent of the population. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) recorded an additional two million permanent residents between 1970 and 1976. These figures underestimate the impact of immigrant workers on concentrated, regional labor markets. They exclude undocumented immigrants, estimated to range from three to seven million, a large share of whom are probably employed.” (Sassen, 1981: 74) In North America, there has been a major shift to non-European immigrants since the 1960s and nowadays Asian and Caribbean countries provide half of all the immigrants to Canada (Hawkins, 1977 u Sassen 1981, 74). The history of immigration in America shows that because of various political, economic and social reasons, immigrant labor and types of immigrants are valued differently. It is also important to note some current trends in immigration that are the product both of past immigration waves and some new socioeconomic mechanism.

Globalization

The phenomenon of globalization is an unavoidable factor when thinking and rethinking Zou Lei’s story and her choice of coming to New York. If we imagine the world as an ocean, then globalization would be the current that brings everything closer to particular places on the coast and those places would be called “global cities”. Complex mechanisms operating within the process of globalization are what brought Zou Lei to New York. Although the phenomenon of globalization has a long history, the term itself has been in use for almost twenty years. It has been used to explain the changes in the economy, technology, society and culture and it can be defined as the fusion of economy, social, cultural and political related processes that lead to connectivity and dependence of different countries in the world and it expands beyond national boundaries. (Čolić, 2004: 185, translation Marija Vukšić) Some believe that it is necessary to differentiate between globalization as a political project of neoliberal capitalism that began at the end of the 20th century and globalization as a historical process. (Gray 2002; Wolf 1982 u Čolić, 2004: 185, translation Marija Vukšić) Globalization as a neoliberalist political project is a free market utopia whose goal is free economy without social and political control of nation-states. Global market assumes that economic modernization functions similarly in every part of the world and it sees the globalization of economy as the evolution of western type capitalism: American free market. (Čolić, 2004:

186, translation Marija Vukšić) Saskia Sassen in her article *The Global City: Introducing a Concept* sees the global city or cities as products of globalization. She notices that there have long existed cross-border economic processes such as exchanges of capital, labor, goods, materials, tourists etc, but they mostly took place “within the inner-state system, where the key articulators were national states. That has changed over the 1990s as a result of privatization, deregulation, specialized services, the opening up of national economies to foreign firms, ascendance of finance services and the growing participation of national economic actors in global markets” (Sassen, 2005: 27) “Because of that, there is the partial weakening of the national as a spatial unit and the emergence of global cities.” (Sassen, 2005: 27) “Global cities around the world are a terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms.” (Sassen, 2005: 40) “Those processes are the emergence of transnational corporations, outsourcing, global service and general strengthening of cross border city-to-city transactions and networks.” (Sassen, 2005: 28) “There is also very noticeable growth of global markets for finance and specialized services, transnational servicing networks, reduced role of government in the regulation of international economic activities.” (Sassen, 2005: 29) There is no longer a clear connection between business and such places in the city known as downtown or the central business district and there is obvious a development of “transterritorial centre or centers such as New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, Amsterdam, LA, Sydney, Hong Kong, Sao Paolo and Mexico City” (Sassen: 2005, 37) that are not geographically close but are strongly connected to each other through the mentioned processes.

New immigrant workforce

It is important to note the new immigrant workforce and the reasons behind emigration can no longer be so simply linked to wars or industrialization as it was the case in the past waves of immigration to America, rather they should be linked with globalization and its reinvention through the processes of neoliberal capitalism and creation of nation-states. “Global capital and the new immigrant workforce are two major instances of transnationalized actors that each have unifying properties around the world and find themselves in contestation with each other in global cities.” (Sassen, 2005: 39). “A state’s position on migration partly reflects its location in the world economy.” (Sassen, 1981: 69) With globalization came the strengthening of states and borders which only seemingly obstructs the needs of a consolidated world economy for massive international labor migrations but national borders do not act as barriers so much as “mechanisms reproducing the system through the

international division of labor.” (Sassen, 1981: 70) “The enforcement on national borders contributed to the peripheralization of a part of the world and the designation of its workers as a labor reserve. Border enforcement is a mechanism helping the extraction of surplus labor by assigning criminal status to a segment of the working class – the illegal immigrant. Foreign workers undermine a nation’s working class when the state renders foreigners socially and politically powerless. At the same time, border enforcement meets the demands of organized labor in the labor-receiving country insofar as it presumes to protect native workers. Yet selective enforcement of policies can circumvent general border policies and protect the interests of capital sectors relying on immigrant labor. This shows the contradictory role of the state in the accumulation process, especially evident in the consolidation of the liberal state.” (Petras, 1980; Weinstein, 1968 in Sassen: 1981:70). “The strengthening of the nation-state creates the conditions for immigrant labor as a distinct category of a nation’s labor supply. It has a distinct role characterized by the institutional differentiation of the processes of labor-force reproduction and powerlessness associated with formal of attributed foreign status.” (Sassen, 1981: 71) The growth of networked cross-border dynamics among global cities includes a broad range of domains: political, cultural, social and criminal. There are cross-border transactions among immigrant communities and communities of origin and greater intensity in the use of these networks once they become established, including economic activities (Sassen, 2005: 31) Immigrant labor offers several benefits for the country, for example, foreign workers ask for fewer services than national workers, they occupy empty workplaces and housing, their consumption and needs are below average and they can be repatriated when no longer needed. The problems arise when they have children in the country they are currently working in, can the children be also repatriated although they were not born in the same country as their parents and is it ethical to separate parents and children? (Sassen, 1981: 72) During the economic growth of the 1990s, because of the shortage of unskilled labor, most Americans willingly overlooked the problem of illegal immigration. “The Immigration Act of 1990 raised the annual total of immigrant visas and the limit for individual nations and the number of asylum seekers who could remain in the USA. It also removed restrictions on the entry of many groups, including homosexuals, communists, people from nations adversely affected by the 1965 law, and additional family members, including the spouses and children of illegals given amnesty.” (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 71) When the recession began, government implemented “the USA Patriot Act of 2002 that developed new biometric identity checks to regulate entry to the country, conducted intensified surveillance of the foreign-born, and called in immigrants, since 9/11 especially

Arab Americans, for questioning, detention or deportation.” (Mauk, Oakland, 2009: 72) “In the United States, the labor-supplying periphery has expanded to include a growing number of South American, Caribbean, and Asian countries. Two recent changes in immigration flows to the United States are significant. First, low-wage countries have replaced high-wage countries as the main source of immigrant labor. In 1950, 60 percent of legal immigrants were from Europe and less than one-seventh from Asia and Latin America (excluding Mexico). By 1970, these shares were reversed (INS 1981). Second, there has been a marked increase in immigration. Between 1961 and 1970, there were 1.2 million more immigrants admitted than between 1950 and 1960.” (Sassen 1981: 75) Because of globalization and the development of modern global economy, there is greater pressure in manufacturing industries, specifically in apparel industries, to lower labor costs because of heavy competition from low-wage Third world countries. Such industries pay very low wages to their workers and the workers work in substandard conditions. Most of the workers are immigrants because they are the most common source of cheap labor and many firms have chosen places like New York because of its status as a global city that has a large number of immigrants looking for work. (Sassen, 1994: 2300)

Informal economy

Informal economy is one of the most important terms when explaining illegal immigrants and the jobs they are able to do due to their “illegal” status. Zou Lei partakes in just such economy while living and working in New York and Lish’s novel reveals many more people earning their living in such manner. But, informal economy is not simply everything that is illegal and it should not be perceived in black and white terms, it is a gray area that needs to be further explained. In the book *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concept and Policies* (2006), Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, Ravi Kanbur and Elinor Ostrom argue that the terms “formal” and “informal” economy are debatable and problematic. They mention the early critics of informal economy like Lipton (1984) who questioned the usefulness of the concept of the informal sector but argued for “nuance in application.” (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, Ostrom, 2006: 2) Lipton believed that the concept of informal economy could be discredited on account of misplaced dualism, misplaced isolation and confusion. “Misplaced dualism because in practice there is no clear split between formal and informal, there is continuum since they depend on each other there for they are wrongly interpreted as a dichotomy. Misplaced isolation is the neglect of the fact that the relationships of the informal sector to the rest of the economy are not investigated, and the third critique, that of confusion,

is the idea that the characteristics of the informal sector are not well spelt out, nor are the entities that would fall into this sector.” (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, Ostrom, 2006, 2) Regardless of the problems, Lipton defined the term “informal economy” by three characteristics: “substantial overlap between providers of capital and providers of labor in each enterprise and prevalence of near-perfect competition. Thirdly, informal economy consists largely of unorganized unincorporated enterprises to which legal restrictions on employment (minimal wage, regulations of working conditions etc) do not apply.” (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, Ostrom, 2006: 3) Lipton was wrong when he characterized informal economy as unorganized enterprises because informal economy “may or may not have the same level of organization as formal economy. The association of the informal with unstructured has been a powerful catalyzer for interventions of the government that have often led to disaster.” (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, Ostrom, 2006, 5) It is also important to note that “informal” is not the same as “illegal. Therefore, informal economy is not, as the name suggest, the opposite of formal economy but rather “to informal economy belong those income-generating activities occurring outside the state’s regulatory framework and that have analogs within that framework. The scope and character of the informal economy are defined by the very regulatory framework it evades.” (Sassen, 1994: 2290) Examples of this are babysitting that does not require official paperwork or sweatshops that pay their workers regularly but make them work in substandard conditions. “Informalization must be seen in the context of the economic restructuring that has contributed to the decline of the manufacturing-dominated industrial complex of the postwar era and the rise of a new, service-dominated economic complex.” (Sassen, 1994: 2290) “The economic transformation began in the 1980s, the groups of service industries that were the driving economic force created greater earnings and occupational dispersion, weakened labor-unions and created more unsheltered jobs in the lower-paying sectors. The overall result of the transformation is a tendency toward increased economic polarization.” (Sassen, 1994: 2294) “The ascendance of finance and specialized services created a critical mass of firms with extremely high profit-making capabilities. Moderate profit-making firms often have to operate informally in order to survive. Alternatively, firms with limited profit-making capabilities may subcontract part of their work to informal operations. (Sassen, 1994: 2294) This alternative allows the contracting firm to operate formally and reduce its costs of operation.” (Sassen, 1994: 2295) “Increased inequality in earnings reshapes the consumption structure and affects the organization of work. There is a bigger number of services in the formal economy for high-income customers and bigger number of services in the informal economy for low-income

customers. For instance, registered cab drivers refuse to go to low-income neighborhoods so there are a lot of gypsy cabs servicing low-income neighborhoods. Increased inequality fuels the growth of informal economy.” (Sassen, 1994: 2297)

Capitalism and labor supply system

Zou Lei and her mother lived from the land until they begun to live “in a big western city”. (Lish, 2014: 26) At first it might seem as if they moved away but what the reader soon realizes is that the village they lived in got transformed into a city. “Things were being built or broken down(...) a highway went overhead and stopped in midair.” (Lish, 2014: 27) Unable to live from the land that was taken away from them, they are forced to become a source of cheap labor for factories in the more developed cities in China. What happened to them is what has happened and is still happening to many people that used to live of the land. The story of Zou Lei’s migration starts with her first migration to Shenzhen, a Chinese city where she worked in a fruit juice plant. (Lish, 2014: 27) She and her mother became a part of the modern age labor-supply system that is based on immigrant workforce. “Basic characteristic of the world economic system that must be included in any theory of migration is the general development of labor-supply system that has been an integral part of the broader process of incorporation into the world capitalist system. (Sassen, 1981: 65) Labor supply systems have historically incorporated a variety of mechanisms through which workers from foreign areas, both capitalist and non-capitalist, were drawn or forced into the capitalist world system.” (Sassen, 1981: 66) “Labor scarcity has historically been one of the main problems capital has had to solve to realize an area’s potential to generate surplus. The incorporation of most areas of the world into the capitalist system resulted in the disintegration or subordination of non-capitalist forms of subsistence. (Sassen, 1981: 67) For example, commodification of land left a mass of landless peasants with little alternative to becoming part of the urban labor reserve willing to be mobilized into the labor market.” (Sassen, 1981: 68). The strengthening of a world system through peripheralization of large parts of the world also brought about a change in the direction of labor. “There were (and still are) major international labor flows that originated in the periphery and went to satisfy the labor needs in the centre.” (Sassen, 1981: 68) “The major western European countries first drew labor from their immediate peripheries: Irish went to England; Poles to Germany; Italians and Belgians to France” (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Cinanni, 1968; Hechter, 1975

in Sassen, 1981: 68). Then this periphery was expanded to include all of eastern and southern Europe that were the main sources of labor for western Europe and gradually the USA as well. “As these reserves were exhausted or their flows interrupted due to wars, China, Mexico, and North Africa emerged as important labor suppliers. In the last two decades, the Caribbean and a growing number of countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have become major labor suppliers. An important new pattern of labor flows has been added to the continuing flow from periphery to center.” (Sassen, 1981: 68)

Women and survival circuits

Although Zou Lei had no family left in China, she often encountered women who came to America while their husbands, parents, children or other family members are still in the country they came from. The workers she met were often other women like herself and they all shared an apartment in which they slept. That implies that the women came to the country alone but it is highly unlikely that, like Zou Lei, they have nobody left in their country of origin to take care of. “When women today migrate to work as nannies, domestics or sex workers, they participate in two sets of dynamic configurations: global city and survival circuits, it is a response to the deepening misery of the ‘global south’.” (Sassen, 2009: 185) Global cities concentrate some of the global economy’s key functions and resources. Because of the previously mentioned growth of finance and service industries, there has been an increase in demand for highly paid professionals who in turn generate a demand for low-paid service workers. (Sassen, 2009: 185) “Global cities have become places where large numbers of low-paid women and immigrants get incorporated into strategic economic sectors. Some are incorporated directly as low-wage clerical and service workers, such as janitors and repairmen. For others, the process is less direct, operating instead through the consumption practices of high-income professionals, who employ maids and nannies and who patronize expensive restaurants and shops staffed by low-wage workers. This new pattern undermines workers’ empowerment, producing a class of workers who are isolated, dispersed and effectively invisible. (Sassen, 2009: 185) Through their work in global cities and survival circuits, women are crucial to building new economies and expanding existing ones. There are three processes of change that explain the growing need for immigrant women and immigrant workforce: moving of advanced services and corporate headquarters into the global cities, downgrading of the manufacturing sector as opposed to telecommunications, finance and other corporate services and informalization of economy (the rise of sweatshops). (Sassen, 2009: 186) Men have lost job opportunities and governments have cut back on social

services, it was important to find alternative ways of making a living which pressed additional responsibilities onto women. (Sassen 2009: 187) Remittances (a transfer of money by a foreign worker to an individual in his or her home country) as well as the organized export of workers have become increasingly popular ways for governments to bring in revenue. (Sassen, 2009: 188) Exporting workers is one means by which governments cope with unemployment and foreign debts. (Sassen, 2009: 190) There has come to a reemergence of a serving class in contemporary high-income households. Immigrant woman now serves the white middle-class professional woman, immigrant women take over tasks previously associated with housewives. (Sassen, 2009: 187) Women are by far the majority group in prostitution and trafficking for the sex industry and they are becoming a majority group in migration of labor. (Sassen, 2009: 188) Migrations are often organized by third parties (illegal traffickers or governments) and women often take part in countergeographies of globalization, meaning that they escape conventional surveillance and to some extent they belong to the shadow economy but they also make use of the regular economy's institutional infrastructure. (Sassen, 2009: 187)

Post 9/11 world: Immigration Politics and Practices

New York in Lish's novel is a post 9/11 New York and that is a fact highly emphasized throughout the novel. The event of 9/11 affects the characters in the novel in many different ways but it primarily constantly threatens Zou Lei. Even though it is no longer a current event, the memory of the attack on the Twins is still fresh in the minds of characters the reader encounters in the novel. The memory of the attack has changed many laws and regulations making it more difficult for illegal immigrants to come to America, stay there without being caught and find work outside the economic enclaves.

The Patriot Act

When Skinner found out that Zou Lei was Muslim, the first thing he asked her was if "the cops know" (Lish, 2014: 237). Zou Lei responded that they probably do not, "not too many people know what's Uighur people, I just think no matter any kind of people, to say in the U.S. it's not easy right now." (Lish, 2014: 237) What Zou Lei said can be understood in two different but still similar ways. She might have meant that to come as an illegal immigrant and not get caught and deported was more difficult in post 9/11 America than it was before, or she was commenting on the fact that any immigrant, legal or not, has a more difficult time

living in America than it was the case before 9/11. Neither interpretation is wrong. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, President George W. Bush and other political leaders around the world had “argued that the world had changed forever.”(Rizvi, 2004: 161) The world in fact, had stayed exactly as it was, but the media made it seem as if the Apocalypse was at our doors even if we were at the other side of the world from America. A Chinese character in the novel seems to share that opinion as he reflects on 9/11: “We have had 9/11. A nation as big as ours, we’ve had more than one 9/11, but you don’t hear about it.” (Lish, 2014: 145) Be that as it may, 9/11 has certainly changed some things in America that effected the rest of the world. The events of September 11 had widespread and severe consequences on the internal functioning of international financial markets. Some argued that a new and different security system would need to be developed to deal with many types of terrorism that acted across national borders and that were very mobile and flexible. “In the cultural field, a series of pro-and anti-Islamic sentiments appeared in the popular media around the world; and in the USA, the symbols of patriotism became commonplace, as most people wondered about the American response to the atrocities. Calls for tolerance and understanding coincided with calls to root out the evils of terrorism.” (Rizvi, 2004: 161) “The USA Patriot Act, enacted seven weeks after the September 11 attacks, granted the federal government new powers to expand surveillance, curtail financing, and deport aliens in connection with terrorism. The statute expanded the range of aliens who could be excluded or deported from the United States on terrorism-related grounds, while reducing the procedural protections available to them.” (Rizvi, 2004: 161)

Since 9/11, the smallest offense made you deportable, depending on what country you were from. According to the World Journal, there were different classifications of countries and immigrants. Zou Lei didn't know if she would be classified with immigrants from China, a trading partner of the United States, or with those from Jamaica, Guyana, Mexico, Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. (178)

Under the new law, immigrants "certified" as threats to national security must be held in government custody without bond pending deportation proceedings and removal from the country. (Sinnar, 2003: 1420) In immigration scholarship, law review articles have addressed the mass detention of noncitizens, the use of racial profiling in immigration enforcement, and expanded secrecy immigration proceedings.” (Sinnar, 2003: 1420-1421) “A noncitizen can be excluded or deported for national security reasons, including involvement in espionage, the attempted overthrow of the government by unlawful means, or terrorist activities.

Now, any alien whom the Attorney General believes is inadmissible or deportable under the terrorism-related grounds of U.S. law may be certified under the USA Patriot Act. Even if an alien is not deportable based on these grounds, he may be certified if the Attorney General has "reasonable grounds to believe" that he otherwise endangers national security. The statute does not require the Attorney General to limit certification to aliens who are believed to be dangerous or pose a high risk of flight, or to make any finding to that effect." (Sinnar, 2003: 1424) "In the Fourth Amendment context, "reasonable suspicion" amounts to a lower requirement than "probable cause"; when a law enforcement officer has "reasonable suspicion" of criminal activity, he can only "stop and frisk" an individual, not arrest him. If the INS interprets a "reasonable grounds to believe" standard to require less than probable cause, an alien could be subjected to lengthy mandatory detention based on a level of suspicion that would only permit a brief stop and frisk on the street." (Sinnar, 2003:1432) This also happened to Zou Lei, she got caught by undercover policemen when she was going out of bodega⁵ (7), they cuffed her and she ended up in prison.

There were no lawyers. She said she wanted to know if she was going to get to see a lawyer. No one had told her what she had been charged with or on what basis she was being held. (Lish, 2014: 11)

When Zou Lei finally got in touch with the immigration lawyer, he asked her if she knew what she was being charged with and told her that if she entered the country "under the radar, so to speak" she was not eligible for bail because of the Patriot Act. If it was like that, there was nothing he could do. (Lish, 2014: 10) "This was the answer Zou Lei finally received: No one knows what will happen to you." (Lish, 2014: 13)

It is obvious from this part of the novel's story that in the USA in particular, but elsewhere as well, there has emerged a powerful new narrative of security that appears to dwarf most other concerns about public policy and social welfare. This narrative has had major implications for the way issues of mobility of people across national-boundaries in particular are now considered. (Rizvi, 2004:162) 9/11 is often mentioned in the novel, the way it affected public opinion regarding the immigrants instills fear not only in Zou Lei but in other characters in a similar situation. A Guyanese Muslim whose job is delivering jasmine rice,

⁵ A hispanic/spanish/latin mini-mart, kind of like a 7-11, but usually smaller and more like a liquor store atmosphere. Commonly used term on the east coast, especially in the New York City region, where you will find many of these. The word came from the actual spanish word for "grocery store" - la bodega. Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bodega>

told Zou Lei that his aunt's husband was arrested and put in Passaic County jail although he had papers saying that he will soon get a green card. In jail, "the guards went after anyone who was Asian, Muslim, Trini, black, brown, whatever – anything like Arab." (Lish, 2014: 177) He warns her that the cops know how to recognize fake ID cards and that everyone has one of those, what she needed was a counterfeit green card. As she leaves, a police car slows as they pass them by and a policeman carefully watches them. (Lish, 2014: 178) Soon, Zou Lei discovered that counterfeit green cards are not good either and her fear of deportation grows. When he finds out that she is an illegal immigrant and also a Muslim, her boyfriend Skinner becomes terrified as well. He suggests that they marry so that she could stay in the country. Zou Lei then asked a lawyer if she could marry Skinner and stay in the country. The lawyer advised her to marry and then to apply for staying in the country but the love between her and her future husband should be real otherwise "she'll be in big trouble" (Lish, 2014: 293-294) implicating there were many marriages whose sole purpose was acquirement of a green card for one of the spouses and that such marriages were made illegal. A man in a bar warned Skinner that if he wished to marry Zou Lei "Homeland would make him jump through hoops, but it'll slow them down from getting rid of her." (Lish, 2014: 247)

E-Verify

Because Zou Lei's English when she first arrives in New York is very limited, her only option of work is working with people who can understand her and since she lives in Chinatown in Queens her employers are other Asians. She is further limited by her status of an illegal immigrant so she often looks for work through channels specifically designed for illegal immigrants, such as a special type of newspapers written in Mandarin or other illegal immigrants. She is aware that "American senators wanted identities to become electronic. To get a job, you would have to pass something called E-Verify." (Lish, 2014: 176) but it is not until she begins to work for her first "white American boss" that she learns what E-Verify actually and how it works. "E-Verify is an Internet-based system that compares information from an employee's Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, to data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Social Security Administration records to confirm employment eligibility."⁶ As the discussion over immigration reform receded from Congress in 2007, some states implemented the E-Verify system to reduce the hiring of undocumented workers. "By 2010, more than a dozen states required that public agencies

⁶ <http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify/what-e-verify>

or public contract recipients use E-Verify to determine employment eligibility for new hires, and four states enacted E-verify mandates for all employers. This trend has only continued, with five additional states enacting E-Verify mandates in 2011.” (Amuedo-Dorantes, Bansak, 2012: 543) Zou Lei encountered E-Verify when she moved out of New York’s Chinatown and moved to Phoenix, Arizona. There she also worked in a Chinese restaurant but the owner was a white American. She felt that he was “way too proud of himself for having detected her crime by means of E-Verify, his favorite new tool. But what nearly made her violent was when he threatened to call Homeland on her” (Lish, 2014: 414) She threatened back and told him she knew people from the Underground who would gladly take care of him. Afterwards, she found a job at a horse ranch where she met “a different kind of American, a cowboy from North Dakota. He wore a Stetson hat, a silver-tipped cowboy string tie, and a black silk kerchief at the throat of his denim shirt.” (Lish, 2014: 415) She told him of her troubles with E-Verify and he responded that “the government needn’t be involved in everything it was involved in”. (Lish, 2014: 415) He offered her a job at another ranch and a web address she should look up. Zou Lei’s illegal status and the implementation of E-Verify into many American states stop her, and many others in a similar situation, from exiting the world of informal economy.

New York: A Global City

Zou Lei came to New York for a reason: “she was never going to get arrested again, she was going to stay where everybody was illegal just like her.” (Lish, 2014: 49) I have previously established that New York is a global city because it holds some of the global economy’s key functions and resources (Sassen, 2009: 185) but what makes it truly global are not functions and resources but the people those functions and resources attract because the word “global” implies something worldwide but not only on an abstract but also a very real level. The way in which Zou Lei lives, or survives, when she first comes to New York is possible precisely because she came into a global city.

Enclave economy

“Between 1970 and 1990, New York City experienced a dramatic change in the ethnic composition of its neighborhoods. At the macro level the dominant trend was the declining size of the non-Hispanic white population, a process often referred to as "white flight." In 1970, white people represented 76 percent of the total population of the metropolitan region,

but by 1990 this had fallen to 62 percent, a decline in absolute terms from 13.1 to 10.6 million. As the white population fell, the city's Latino and nonwhite populations increased correspondingly, but in relative terms Asians were the fastest growing group during this period. By 1990, there were more than 850,000 Asians in New York City, which was 432 percent higher than in 1970.” (Smith, 1995: 63) “From 1970 to 1990 there was a noticeable growth of all-minority neighborhoods in New York City while the number of all-white neighborhoods declined dramatically. Neighborhoods that recorded significant increases in the proportion of Asians fall into two distinct categories. The first category includes a small number of Asians who moved into what used to be all-white suburban neighborhoods. This has traditionally been the settlement choice for middle and upper class Japanese, South Asian and Filipino households, as well as Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The second category to which Zou Lei belongs, is a much larger group and includes Asian immigrants that are unable to move into more exclusive suburban neighborhoods, and who prefer to live in already ethnically diverse neighborhood” (Smith, 1995: 64) which is, in Zou Lei’s case, Chinatown in Queens. Before she arrived there, she was put to work in a Chinese restaurant in Nanuet and she slept in a Motel 8 where she and other illegal immigrant women from China were kept.

America is a good country, an older woman said. We took a fishing boat across the ocean. The ocean police caught us and closed us up on an island near San Francisco. I almost died on the voyage and that was what saved me. That was lucky. The others were forced back home, thirty people, but not me. My cousin applied me for asylum. Some of these other sister have been deported once already. Now they come back, once becomes twice, twice becomes three times. They go to Yucatan Peninsula, cross the border in Arizona. Now that's hard of course. (6)

The next year she was in another state in another motel room with eight women and they had a woman who watched over them and made sure they did not leave their room. Although she should not have done it, Zou Lei let the maid into the room. The maid was from Honduras in Latin America, she was also an illegal and earned “poquito money.” (Lish, 2014: 7) Soon afterwards, Zou Lei ended up in prison. The book does not explain why or how she was released from the prison but after her release, she took the subway and exited near the Manhattan Bridge. There she entered a coffee shop and asked where she could find a job, they told her to get out and look elsewhere. Afterwards, she found herself on East Broadway where there was “a condemned building where you could stay for then dollars if you called

the number.” The next day she travelled to South Jamaica in Queens where she found Sing Tao, Chinese newspapers with job ads. After talking to the man who put the job ad in the newspaper, she received a phone number and called it, but nobody answered so she continued her journey. While she was walking down the 110th Street, a man called her on her cell phone and told her to come back to Queens. He picked her up on Roosevelt Avenue and brought her to “a standard illegal apartment divided into sheds to accommodate eight or more people.” (Lish, 2014: 47) The next morning, she exited the apartment and continued her search for a job:

She started moving with the crowd, looking above their heads and seeing that she was going into Chinatown, a thicket of vertical signs, the sails of sampans and junks, too many to read, a singsong clamor rising. No English. There were loudspeakers and dedications and banners for Year of the Dog. Voices all around her, calling and calling. Here, here, here, come and see! Someone spitting in the street. Crying out and running along next to her, pushing and pleading, grabbing the sleeve of her jacket. They put flyers in her hands and she dropped them. Missing, teeth, younger than they looked. Illegals from the widow villages. Body wash, foot rub, Thai-style shower, bus to Atlantic City. (Lish, 2014: 48)

Finally, she found a job on Main Street in “a basement food court hidden under a 99-cent store, hidden among nested Chinese signs.” (Lish, 2014: 51) The Chinese signs implicate that the store is a part of Chinatown described in the previous quote. In his article *Asian New York: The Geography and Politics of Diversity* (1995), Smith notices that many of the newly arrived⁷ Asians have entered the labor market as professionals or business owners, rather than choosing to work for others. It is also reasonable to assume, says Smith, that many of the new immigrants will reject the cramped residence and crowded streets that are typically associated with Asian enclaves. (Smith, 1995: 66). However, as the book points out: there is a big difference between legal and illegal immigrants’ jobs in America. The woman owning a basement food court is most likely also an illegal since the court is hidden and, as she claims, she does not make a lot of money. The food she sells is cheap and she does not use meat because it is a waste of money. Since she is very poor, she warns Zou Lei that “you don’t make nothing working here.” (Lish, 2014: 51) Zou Lei’s job was selling food, cleaning and moving packages. Other than that, she also collected bottles and cans and redeemed them at “the Beer Center, a recycler on Parsons and Boulevards across from a factory that made fan

⁷ The article was published in 1995

belts and timing belts.” (Lish, 2014: 120) She got a number out of Chinese paper and shortly after she started selling DVDs. (Lish, 2014: 120) “The man who gave her the DVDs took care to avoid arrest. He would not give her his name, so she couldn’t rat him out if she got caught. All she knew about him was that he was from Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province and people from Wenzhou knew how to survive.” (Lish, 2014: 120) On Cantonese radio, she heard an ad for a shopping center called the Flushing Mall, located on 38th Road behind the Sheraton LaGuardia. (Lish, 2014: 128) She went there hoping she could find a new job and earn more money. She went into a Chinese restaurant and the Asian boss initially told her she would be paid at least a minimum wage because “everyone has to obey the law in society” but after he found out she did not have her working papers he told her that she would be paid less than minimum wage. (Lish, 2014: 130) In her new job there were two kinds of people, illegal immigrants who were called “fleas or fence jumpers, boat people or saiwooks – cargo – a reference to how many of them died in trucks crossing the border” and legal immigrants who worked there and were a second generation immigrants whose parents had come in America legally. (Lish, 2014: 133) One of them was Sasoon, a register girl. She had a husband who went back to China and her brother had his own business installing windows with another man, a cousin. Other legal immigrants were Sasoon’s sister, Zou Lei’s boss and the cook. The boss and Sasoon’s brother and cousin are what Smith calls, immigrant business owners. “This was the first kind of people and they were in charge.” (Lish, 2014: 135) This part of the novel confirms Smith’s claim about Asian immigrants who became business owners or in general have better paying jobs, but it is also obvious that illegal Asian immigrants work much less paying jobs and are being taken advantage of by their bosses precisely because of their illegal status. It is perhaps ironic that their bosses belong to the same ethnic group yet they feel no remorse for their “illegal” co-workers. This kind of economy Smith refers to as “enclave economy”, enclave in this sense being “an area of a country or city where people have different religion, culture or nationality from those who live in the country or a city” (Oxford Dictionary, 2005: 480) and “enclave economy is a spatially clustered network of businesses owned by members of the same minority group.” (Galster, Metzger, Waite, 1999: 98) For Chinese immigrants the unique characteristics of the enclave economy have a significant effect on locational choices. Most immigrant Chinese, wherever they live in New York, are tied closely to the economic and cultural opportunities offered by the traditional enclave economy. This includes not only the dominant Chinatown in Lower Manhattan, but also others in Queens and Brooklyn. The enclaves provide jobs but, almost as important, they act as the repository for information about employment opportunities in other places. (Smith,

1995: 70) In Zou Lei's case there are a few reasons why she chose Chinatown. When she first came into the country, she did not know how to speak English well. "She knew how to say okay. When they pointed at the menu, she got it fine." (Lish, 2014: 3) In the motel, they kept the TV running to practice English. (Lish, 2014: 4) The second reason is the most obvious one, she is an illegal immigrant so she has better chances of finding a job with someone who is not an American and does not have E-Verify. And the third reason are her job qualifications. She is not educated, in China she lived with her mother in a village. "Her mother picked watermelon in the orchard by a ditch near a half-built section of roadway" while Zou Lei "played soccer on the clay behind the bus station. Her mother's people came down from the steppe, before they were collectivized by the Chinese, who came from the east." From this passage in the book, it is obvious Zou Lei and her mother are poor, uneducated and have a physically demanding lifestyle which left Zou Lei with "rural, purple-skinned hands" (Lish, 2014: 5) Zou Lei's second boss makes fun of the characters in her name because they are usually used in male names. "They want the son, I think. Or they do not recognize literacy. Many Chinese don't recognize literacy. Right?" (Lish, 2014: 130) Therefore, Zou Lei is aware that even by illegal immigrant standards, she is considered uneducated. She does jobs that do not require a lot of talking or writing, mostly physical jobs: "You are dishes, garbage, dumplings, mop." (Lish, 2014: 137) Eventually, Zou Lei was replaced by a 17 year old boy who "understood everything right away, he knew computer too" and he went to Cardozo. (Lish, 2014: 275) Zou Lei got replaced by a boy who had a higher level of education than hers. Another woman like Zou Lei who washed dishes said about her and her people: "We were dirt and we lived in the dirt and it gave us our lives. We used to have fields. Used to have food to eat without end. It was country there. Then they destroyed the fields and put buildings up everywhere. There are no fields to plant anymore. They put up factories and nothing grows." (Lish, 2014: 136) This woman is obviously what Sassen calls "urban labor reserve" (Lish, 2014: 68), people who worked in agriculture but are unable to do so because of industrialization so they accept any job in the city that they can do. Later, the woman referred to the Uighur people which is the people that Zou Lei belongs to and said that they were given "jobs in factories because they'll do it for nothing." (Lish, 2014: 68) Zou Lei's recollections reveal that her people were rural people therefore presumably they also lost land due to industrialization and were forced to work in factories for below minimal wage. Zou Lei's primary reason for going to America was to find better job prospects than what was offered to her in China, but ironically, she does not work for an American boss but keeps to other Asian people and their businesses where she works as an

illegal immigrant. Therefore, this example shows that the enclave economy can also be connected to informal economy or can, in some instances, be a form of informal economy.

Urban ethnicity

“The physical presence of large numbers of new immigrants in commercial and residential areas has altered the appearance of many North American cities but what truly transforms the city are the socioeconomic characteristics of the new inhabitants.” (Smith 1995:65–66) One of the major characteristics of global cities it is a terrain where, as Sassen says in her article *The Global City: Introducing a Concept*, “a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms.” (2005: 40) One of those forms are the economic forms I have elaborated previously, specifically in Zou Lei’s case, enclave economy. And although Sassen focuses mostly on the economic forms present in global cities, the novel also focuses on ways in which the immigrants shape, not only the economy, but the space surrounding them or in other words, how the space around them reflects their socioeconomic status. Zou Lei likes to jog around hers and some of the surrounding neighborhoods and when she jogs she sees “dirty white houses that are tucked in under other buildings red blessings on the doors, Chinese New Year’s just behind us. On the dashboards of their Caravans and Quests, there were Buddhas.” (Lish, 2014: 53) People always put their laundry out to dry. “They made projects. Plants of ascending sizes, little designs, a money cat, plastic bags woven together to make ropes, the tropes tied from beam to beam, a contraption, you never knew what for. You might smell joss in the tumbledown alley. You might see a stolen Corolla.” (Lish, 2014: 53) “The boards and barricades in the alley were gray-weathered, the piles of leafless brush were gray, husk-dry, piled under windows, woven into the rusted wire fences. The workmen coming home. They talked on cell phones, waited in pickups. Orange extension cords coiled in the back, a crew of five or six, drinking coffee, vapor coming up from the manifold, idling – bachelors, cousins, one last name.” (Lish, 2014: 53) “Along with the Chinese, there were Guatemalans and Honduras and other Central Americans, having left behind what they called the problems in their countries.” (Lish, 2014: 53) “There were people from India, the help desk people, the IT people. They had a string of businesses on the main artery: video, hair-style, Punjab grocery. Neon signs, second-story porches and satellite dishes. Pakistanis living above their stores on the other side of Cherry, next to the tattered awning of Little Kabul.” (Lish, 2014: 54) Improvised laundry ropes, stolen cars, battered houses, cramped apartments all indicate that the picture the novel paints is a picture of poverty in immigrant neighborhoods that reflects the economic status of its inhabitants. There are many different

theories that try to explain the socioeconomic status of particular groups of immigrants. The theories primarily divide into spatial and nonspatial, those that believe the success of certain groups of immigrants does not depend on the space surrounding them and those that believe the opposite or at least do not incorporate the former into their theoretical framework. The truth is, as always, somewhere in the middle. Human capital theory posits is one of nonspatial theories and it poses that immigrant's success is affected primarily by the amount of educational credentials, skills, and experience they offer to prospective employers. "There is typically an adjustment period during which immigrants acquire appropriate American human capital, such as English language proficiency school credentials, and social and job contacts. After that, their economic achievement rises rapidly." (Galster, Metzger, Waite, 1999:97) Zou Lei reflects on the importance of English language in improving her status: "When her English was better she would do something else." (Lish, 2014: 187) Unfortunately, as the story progresses so does Zou Lei's English, but the job opportunities are the same as at the beginning of her story: she was a waitress, a seller of illegal DVDs, she cleaned the stables at a ranch, washed dishes, collected bottles and worked in a food court. On the other hand, Polo, her boss on her second job, loved to demonstrate his knowledge of English to his staff. He would read the newspapers to his employees and then he would tell them that they would learn, "it takes time, ability comes slowly." (Lish, 2014: 135) This scene implicates one of the reasons he became a business owner is because he learned proper English, or at least that is how it seemed to his illegal employees. But, it must also be noted that since the implementation of E-Verify, even illegal immigrants speaking perfect English have a difficult time finding a job with an American boss, therefore Human capital theory may be only applicable to legal immigrants in post 9/11 America. Ethnic capital theory is a spatial theory that, simply put, says that immigrants coming to neighborhoods with a larger percentage of their ethnic minority will have a better chance of economic success. (Galster, Metzger, Waite, 1999:99) This theory is particularly problematic for Zou Lei since she belongs to the Uighur people which are described in the novel as a Muslim ethnic minority in China. Zou Lei looks different than a typical Chinese although only her mother belonged to Uighur people and her father was Chinese. "In the sun, you could see Zou Lei's hair was brown and not black. There was a waviness to it. She had a slightly hooked nose and Siberian eyes." (Lish, 2014: 4) When she first arrived, the Chinese women with whom she was in a motel with noticed that she was different, one of the women called her a "minority". (Lish, 2014: 4) Other women keep close together with women from their village or town and speak in their own dialects, only Zou Lei is always alone which indicates that her "ethnic capital" is slim to none. At one

point in the story she wandered off to the Muslim part of the neighborhood where she met an Uzbek tribesman from Afghanistan. (Lish, 2014: 317) She realized that she lived on the other side of the mountains from the Uzbek and it seemed like she found someone to bond with, since he was also Muslim and knew about the Uighur people. But, she soon realized that the mullah who held sermons for other Muslims in that area thought the way she dresses is inappropriate and that he would like her to “live properly and obey the law”. (Lish, 2014: 324) She never came back to the mullah or the Uzbek man because her mother was a Muslim and “she knew about God” but there were “too many rules for her to follow”. (Lish, 2014: 324) Therefore, Zou Lei does not fit neither with the Muslims nor with the Asians due to her ethnic background which explains why she fares so poorly when it comes to business opportunities. Ethnicity therefore shapes the city and in turn that new ethnically marked space in the city becomes a place of interest to the people from the same or similar ethnic group which go to that new space believing they will fare better there than in some other place in the city.

Conclusion

Zou Lei’s mother told her a story about a girl whose father was taken away by a witch and the only way to be reunited with him was to travel west. The girl had to walk through seven deserts to find him and her journey lasted seven years. When she thought she would die, a bird came and cast its shadow on her and under the bird’s shadow, she was able to continue the journey and find her father. (Lish, 2014: 21) After her mother died, Zou Lei also began her journey to the west, to America. There she met Skinner, a war veteran with PTSD and, besides their mutual passion for fitness, what they had in common was the feeling of not belonging and loneliness. Although Skinner was born in America, after he came back from the war it seemed to him like the America he knew was gone for good. For Zou Lei, America was a beacon of hope, a chance for better life, but instead from the beginning of the novel to the end, she struggles with poverty, racism, immigration policies and she lives from one work shift to another, sometimes doing two jobs at once. Bill Clinton once said that "the American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one - if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you." (Cohen-Marks, Stout, 2011: 824) Zou Lei’s life in New York is an ironic twist of that American dream. She works really hard, but is only able to save some money after Skinner kills himself and she takes his credit card. In one of her inner monologues she told Skinner:

“I’m piss poor, get paid like shit out here. You money’s keeping me in the steak for now. When it runs out, it’ll be rice and beans from then on.” (Lish, 2014: 416) It seems that the American dream does not apply to illegal immigrants or it was never actually all-inclusive in the first place. The former is probably closer to the truth. Zou Lei entered the country “under the radar” and that make her invisible but through her story the reader is given an insight into her reality in Queens, New York. Through her eyes the reader is able to see the effect of immigrants on the ghetto in which they live in and how their socioeconomic lifestyle and their culture altered not only the space surrounding them but the economy as well. To go into further interpretations would be equal to turning Zou Lei into a symbol, an abstract, and Lish’s novel into something other than an almost ethnographically detailed description of immigrant ghettos (because to keep calling them neighborhoods seems unfair) in Queens and the general mindset of post 9/11 America. The point of this paper was to move away from the general and closer to the particular which is a shift I have tried to emphasize throughout the chapters. I have focused away from immigrants to illegal immigrants and then to specifically women illegal immigrants and then to Zou Lei. Through the descriptions of many different underpaid jobs that she did, working in bad conditions for below minimum wage, her struggles with immigration policies, the Patriot Act and E-Verify I have tried to humanize the overly dehumanized topic of illegal immigrants in America, I have tried to give this topic a personal twist that seems to be lacking both in the media and in the American Studies, to theirs representations of the lives of illegal immigrants in the US I have tried to provide a reality, albeit a fictional one. Zou Lei continued her journey west to Arizona, where she was met with equal hostility as in New York, she learned to speak Spanish better than English which is an indication of a large population of Latin Americans among the immigrants she socializes with. The novel itself does not have a grand conclusion just an implication that Zou Lei’s life will remain that of a nomad, a travelling stranger, not in China but in America.

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Abstract

The subject of my master thesis is the life of illegal immigrants in America, specifically women illegal immigrants, in correlation with modern and current processes of globalization, neoliberal capitalism and industrialization of the "Global South" which have caused and are influencing the newest wave of immigration to America. Instead of focusing on general theories and statistics, I have chosen to analyze Atticus Lish's novel "Preparation for the Next Life" (2014) and the story of its main character, half-Chinese and half-Uighur illegal immigrant Zou Lei who is trying to survive in America. Through the story of her everyday struggle due to her "illegal" status to find and keep a job, I have singled out some phenomena connected to the labor production in global cities of today, such as informal

economy, enclave economy and E-Verify. The methodology I have chosen is the ethnography of the particular and its main purpose is to concentrate on the particularities of a certain social phenomenon through studying a particular person or persons and the way they interpret their reality thus moving away from the usual dehumanizing methods of writing about culture in abstract terms. I believe that such methodology could help improve the American Studies and change the usual approach to any research concerning their field of study as well as promoting interdisciplinarity that American Studies seem to be lacking. My modus operandi in this master thesis could be summarized as comparing and contrasting Zou Lei's story with current data available on illegal immigrants in America. Instead of just analyzing the subject of illegal immigrants in America, I believe I have succeeded in humanizing that topic as much as possible and offered a new perspective.

Key Words: Immigrant labor, illegal immigrants, Patriot Act, E-Verify, ethnography of the particular, American Studies, 9/11, globalization, global cities, informal economy