Chapter Four: “The Distance between California and Kentucky”: Migrating Region and Gender in *The Patron Saint of Liars and The Bean Trees*

“[Sissy] tried to figure out how the distance between California and Kentucky came into all of this.”

--*The Patron Saint of Liars*

“[Missy] intended to drive out of Pittman County [Kentucky] one day and never look back...”

--*The Bean Trees*

Discussions of migration and populations are important as ever in the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by recent debates about Arizona’s ban on ethnic studies in education and U.S.-Mexico border enforcement.[[1]](#endnote-1) Current events such as these remind us of Gloria Anzaldúa’s passionate and still pertinent call to honor mestiza identities. Her theories of the borderlands, which refer to what is now known as the U.S. Southwest, posit that cultural integrations are often the result of relocation and concomitant re-conceptualizations of places people inhabit. Out of such integrations arise dynamic and fluid identities and communities that are profoundly intertwined with movement and place.

Studying motivations for moving provides information about population demographics, which sheds light on individual and community characteristics. Official reports of U.S. regional relocation gauge patterns of migrants’ and residents’ ages, educations, genders, races, incomes, housing, and occupations, among others.[[2]](#endnote-2) Such statistical data help us understand why people move where they do, but here I turn to qualitative questions of how identities and communities shift and take shape during and after relocations. To explore these large questions, this chapter analyzes contemporary narratives of women whose regionally gendered performativity migrates between the Southwest and Appalachia.

As noted in Chapter Three, Southwestern and Appalachian environments are frequently juxtaposed by writers; the authors featured in this chapter—Ann Patchett and Barbara Kingsolver—make such comparisons in their non-fiction and fiction. In an essay about returning to Kentucky, Kingsolver compares creek banks and canyons: “The high bank across from us is a steep mud cliff carved with round holes and elongated hollows; it looks like a miniature version of the windswept sandstone canyons I’ve come to know in the West” (2003, 178). Patchett stresses the fecundity of Tennessee: “So ripe is this state for the explosive growth of plant life that the species have become extremely competitive. ‘Think of those plants growing in the California deserts,’ a botanist friend said to me, and I picture the succulents and flowering cactus that thinly dot the vast stretches of sand. ‘Those are the plants that can’t compete’” (2008, 431). In Patchett’s *The Patron Saint of Liars*[[3]](#endnote-3) and Kingsolver’s *The Bean Trees*[[4]](#endnote-4) women protagonists contemplate “how the distance between California and Kentucky” plays a prominent role in identity formation and community membership, especially in regard to how each region’s topography figures into these processes (Patchett 1992, 321).

In *Patron*, Rose migrates from Marina del Rey, California, to Habit, Kentucky; conversely, in *Bean*, Taylor migrates from rural Pittman County, Kentucky, to Tucson, Arizona. Migrating individuals negotiate their region of origin with the region of relocation, and, in doing so, often support or collapse distinctions between the two regions and among concepts of race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, Paula Gunn Allen asserts that “[t]he majority of Anglo-Americans who relocate to the borderlands take on Southwest customs, costumes, and outlook to one degree or another” (1997, 345). *Patron* and *Bean* ask: “How essentially are we changed by movement among regions?” (Inness and Royer 1997, 6). In response, this chapter contextualizes my earlier examinations of Appalachia (Chapter Two) and the Southwest (Chapter Three) by investigating how characters negotiate identity and community when they move between the two regions.

While considering the distance between regions is crucial, an analysis of these regions as definitively dissociated would misconstrue the regional relationship as one solely of difference at best and antagonism at worst. Instead of thinking in terms of opposition, then, Doreen Massey’s focus on regional interactions serves as a basis for intersectional analyses. Massey claims that places

 are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations. It

 implies that their “identities” are constructed through the specificity of their

 interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them. It reinforces

 the idea, moreover, that those identities will be multiple (since the various social

 groups in a place will be differently located in relation to the overall complexity

 of social relations and since their reading of those relations and what they make of

 them will also be distinct). And this in turn implies that what is to be the

 dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over

 time. (1994, 121)

Like human identities, the identity of a place is fluid, formed by intersecting social relations both within and outside of a particular locale, and is not contained to a singular physical location. *Patron* and *Bean* exemplify Eudora Welty’s assertion that “[s]ometimes two places…are brought to bear on each other…and the heart of the novel is heard beating most plainly, most passionately, most personally when two places are at meeting point” (1990, 130-31). Literary analyses of place help us imagine these overlapping areas and the ways in which seemingly disparate entities constitute each other.

Place is shaped, in part, by narratives, and narratives are shaped, in part, by place. Rudolfo Anaya stresses the importance of recognizing that “[s]ense of place does not merely mean that a writer uses the landscape of the place as background. It means that the spirit of the place affects and influences the characters by shaping their consciousness” (1995, x). Ambiguous terms such as “spirit” and “consciousness” account for possible transformations between and among people, place, spirituality, and land: “This is what the most profound meaning of sense of place describes: our relationship to the spirit of the earth” (Anaya 1995, xiii). Anaya’s articulations are helpful in understanding that although place—as physical landscape—cannot literally be transferred (i.e., we cannot move the Appalachian Mountains to New Mexico), the spirit of a place can be and often is carried with people when they move or travel.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Similarly, communities take shape as a result of human interactions and relationships not necessarily tied to one physical location. Mary Louise Pratt coins the term “contact zones” to describe “attempt[s] to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (1992, 7). Focusing on the geographic part of Pratt’s definition, this chapter explores how women in these texts shape gendered identities as part of the process of venturing into new regional communities. Of course identity and community formation are fraught with issues of power. Accurate analyses of contact zones, according to Pratt, should “treat 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” (1992, 7). I modify Pratt’s thesis by focusing on how regional contact zones are created and inhabited by women and how gendered relations of power work in such spaces.[[6]](#endnote-6)

A brief discussion of gender and travel introduces some of the configurations of power dynamics analyzed in this chapter. “Travelers” and “travelees” refer to those who journey and to the residents (of the destination) who are observed by and subject to the journeyers, respectively. Well-documented are implications of systemic inequalities of race, class, and gender on the decision and ability to travel.[[7]](#endnote-7) Eric Leed asserts that “travel is ‘genderized’” in that “historically, men have traveled and women have not, or have traveled only under the aegis of men” (1991, 113). Focusing on theoretical and narrative accounts of traveling, Janet Wolff argues that metaphors commonly used to describe women travelers “produce androcentric tendencies in theory” (1993, 224), and she urges readers of travel accounts in the Victorian age, for example, “to consider how this travel was construed and constructed, both by the travellers [sic] themselves and by the cultures they left and returned to” (1993, 232). This chapter examines how travel shapes women’s regional identities.

Women’s journeys in *Patron* and *Bean* speak to important questions such as: “How does regional identity (southerner, easterner, midwesterner, westerner) influence how one reacts to people from other regions?” (Inness and Royer 1997, 2). *Patron* and *Bean* provide a spectrum of women’s situations in new regional communities, ranging from feeling like a foreigner to feeling a sense of belonging. These considerations are analyzed in light of one of Butler’s main questions in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: What provokes the feeling of lack of fit? I also address what provokes the feeling of fit.

I read one of Butler’s responses to this issue of belonging as disrupting the split between essentialist and constructed identity as recognized in and by community: “Although I have argued that no one can recognize another simply by virtue of special psychological or critical skills and that norms condition the possibility of recognition, it still matters that we feel more properly recognized by some people than we do by others. And this difference cannot be explained solely through recourse to the notion that the norm operates variably” (2005, 33). Recognition via “social relations…and representation” (Leed 1991, 217) affects how gender and region are portrayed and understood as categories of identity. Bant and Lace ultimately believe the people of Prater consider them as members of the community; in Medallion Sula is rejected. The women in *So Far* experience various kinds of recognition by residents throughout their lives in Tome. Maria never feels recognized by her community (and perhaps she does not want to be), with the possible exception of BZ. All of these are examples that occur within a region of origin. This chapter examines consequences of regional relocation on recognition. Interesting angles to consider are why some individuals develop an identity attached to a non-native place and community, as is the case with Taylor in *Bean*, and why some do not, as we will see with Rose in *Patron*.

Butler emphasizes that intelligibility—when the self is known by others— is a doomed project because the more intelligible one is, the more she is limited by social and discursive practices. In order to avoid the likely outcome of violence, Butler calls for processes of representation and identification to become relational instead of juridical. Whether or not intelligibility is possible, Butler is correct that the process most often requires an acknowledgement of the limits of one’s knowing, forgiveness, subversion, and resistance:

To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven. (Butler 2005, 136)

The phrases “to be moved,” “to address myself elsewhere,” and “try to give an account from this place” outline three aims in my analysis of regional migration, which is to better understand why a woman decides to move to a new region, how she shapes and presents her regionally gendered identities in this new place, and how these identities are understood by others. I suggest that intelligibility can occur as a result of relocation, and I explore this idea further in the discussion of *Bean*.

Thus far this study has examined how Appalachian and Southwestern spaces shape identity and community formation in literatures of each region. This final chapter analyzes how narratives of women’s migration between the two regions demonstrate how identities and communities are developed when negotiated outside the region of origin. In *Patron* and *Bean*, Rose and Taylor deploy regionally gendered performativity to challenge binary conceptualizations of identity as either essentialist or socially constructed. How these challenges are received by those in each region of relocation directly affect the women’s experiences with community coalition.

***The Patron Saint of Liars***

*Patron* opens with a flashback to 1906 when a hot spring breaks through the ground of George Clatterbuck’s land in Habit, Kentucky. Miraculously, the spring water not only cures ailments plaguing George’s horses but also saves his daughter from a fatal illness. In 1920 Lewis Nelson erects an extravagant hotel, named Hotel Louisa in honor of his wife, to house visitors who flock to the healing spring from outside Kentucky. However, “[n]o one from Habit ever went inside after the opening day. It made them feel like they weren’t quite good enough. Even the Clatterbucks, who were supposed to be partners in everything, kept to the other side of the woods. You couldn’t see their house, not even from the third-floor rooms. The guests never knew they had ever been there at all” (Patchett 1992, 4-5). Thus from the beginning distinctions form between those from Habit and those not. When the hot spring dries up, Habit loses its main tourist attraction, and the Nelsons gift the hotel to the Catholic Church. The Church converts the hotel into a home for pregnant girls managed by nuns and renames it Saint Elizabeth’s.

Cut to a few decades later (in the 1950s), on the other side of the country, and the reader is introduced to Rose, a young girl living with her mother in Marina del Rey, California. Unsure of what she wants out of life, at the age of nineteen she meets Thomas Clinton, a kind math teacher infatuated with her, and unenthusiastically marries him that same summer. Discovering that she is pregnant forces her to admit she does not love her husband and motivates her to leave him and her unfulfilling domestic life. Rose never tells Thomas she is pregnant. After a consultation with her priest, Rose, now twenty-three, begins a road trip across the country that leads her to Saint Elizabeth’s and away from Thomas, her mother, and California.

Divided into three sections, the novel is narrated retrospectively by Rose, her husband Son, and her daughter Cecilia (nicknamed Sissy). In an interview Patchett explains the reason for multiple first-person narrators: “[T]hese characters didn’t communicate with one another. The only way I could structure it was to have three first-person narrations, because they’re all feeling things they can’t say to the other one” (Johnson 2004, 173). Rose especially struggles to communicate with Son and Sissy, but she forms close friendships with Sister Evangeline, a psychic elderly nun, and fellow Saint Elizabeth’s resident Angie. Although Sister Evangeline, Angie, Son, and Sissy form Rose’s nuclear community, Rose mostly isolates herself in the kitchen, where she is in charge, and remains reserved. Tensions caused by Rose’s competing Appalachian and Southwestern identities are highlighted through her relationships with Son and Sissy.

Migration narratives in American literature often describe an escape from home or reality to the promised land of the West.[[8]](#endnote-8) By abandoning her home in California for Kentucky, Rose reverses the typical trajectory; she “was somewhere outside of Ludlow, California, headed due east toward Kentucky….headed into the desert alone, windows down, radio up” (Patchett 1992, 11). Before considering the implications of this reversal and the gendered significance of the journey, I highlight Rose’s reflections on how her identity has been shaped by southern California.

While living in Marina del Rey, Rose does not realize how she is affected by her surroundings. With hindsight and a change in geographic perspective, however, she does. Of her first date with Thomas she recalls:

It was a night that at nineteen, in southern California in May, was like every other night you had seen so far, but a night that when you remember it years later in a place without an ocean, is like a powerful dream. Everywhere you went you heard the water, the same way you had always heard your own breathing, and would later hear the highway, or trains, or women’s voices. But the sound was so much a part of everything that you couldn’t hear it at all then. This is what I took for granted: The sound of the water. (Patchett 1992, 18)

For Rose the sound of the Pacific Ocean conjures the rhythm of breath, the throb and excitement of transportation, and the cadence of women’s speech. Being, moving, and speaking are gendered via the symbol of water in the specific place of southern California. Allen reminds us that “[a] region’s particular identity is established by its characteristic sounds, smells, colors, textures, and flavors” (1997, 345). Rose does not recognize these interconnections, however, until she is geographically and temporally removed from the site of their convergence. This memory encapsulates her nascent understanding of how region and gender interconnect and how such processes and their effects can be conceptualized differently depending on the location from which they are considered.

The “resulting dividedness of self” that can occur when “one takes leave of a localized identity” (Leed 1991, 44) is prompted for Rose by the recollection of California topography and her adolescence. A region’s identity is also established by its correlation to other regions, and Rose experiences California differently in Kentucky. She feels split—estranged from her California upbringing and skeptical of a Kentucky present. The above passage from *Patron* introduces comparisons between Rose’s regions of origin and relocation and signifies transportation as a crucial turning point in analyses of region and gender.

Like Maria in *Play*, Rose defies gender roles by taking control of the wheel. Historically women have not had equal access to the freedom of the road. Wolff points out that “the ideological gendering of travel (as male) both impedes female travel and renders problematic the self-definition of (and response to) women who *do* travel” (1993, 234). Rose does not let gender obstacles stop her; she “love[s] to drive, the way people love forbidden things” (Patchett 1992, 25). She drives southern California freeways in order to clear her head and find purpose. Wolff points out that “[w]hen women do travel, their *mode* of negotiating the road is crucial” (1993, 233). In *Patron* this mode of negotiating involves both the ability and inability to drive. Rose describes the pleasure of pursuit: “People think you have to be going someplace, when, in fact, the ride is plenty…I was never interested in where I might go, only the contours of the roads, the kind of lines they made, their shape and width, the views I imagined they would afford me. This is what I was looking for” (Patchett 1992, 27). The physical act of driving provides satisfaction Rose does not feel otherwise.[[9]](#endnote-9) Her nagging discontent, she says, only “seemed to go away…when I was driving. The world moved because of the directions of my hands. I rushed it past my windows as fast as I wanted” (Patchett 1992, 27). On the freeways Rose obtains power via navigation, speed, and risk.

However, when Rose leaves the doctor’s office after finding out she is pregnant, she forgets how to drive and has to pull over to the side of the freeway. Her sudden inability to do something so familiar and meaningful makes Rose realize that the conventional domestic life with husband and child is not what she wants: “I had married a man I did not love….I would have to have something else because this could not possibly be my life” (Patchett 1992, 29). She quickly recovers the ability to drive and with it the determination to change direction. She believes that in order to escape stultifying gender norms—especially strict in the mid twentieth-century setting of this narrative—she must drive herself out of her region of origin.

Rose reverses popular passageways by leaving the west for the east, and she takes control over the direction of her life by deciding when to leave, on what terms, and where to go. In the desert a gas station attendant named Dwight informs Rose that “[w]oman [sic] shouldn’t be traveling alone” (Patchett 1992, 34). Defying this articulation of a sexist norm, Rose continues to drive alone until she picks up a hitchhiker in Oklahoma named Billy, whose destination is Arkansas. Billy asks where she is headed, and she replies, “East” (Patchett 1992, 38). He says, “East isn’t a place,” and she responds: “Well, I’m going east” (Patchett 1992, 38). For Rose “east” *is* a place, both imagined and actual, which symbolizes freedom. “East” is *not* the west, not California, not Marina del Rey. Her migration narrative destabilizes what Wolff sees as the “*intrinsic* relationship between masculinity and travel” (1993, 230). Wolff is careful to stress that “[b]y ‘intrinsic’” she does “*not* mean ‘essential’; rather [her] interest is in the centrality of travel/mobility to *constructed* masculine identity” (1993, 230). Conversely, Rose’s migration destabilizes constructed female identity. Especially during the time period of Rose’s narrative, driving challenges gender roles. When she leaves California she believes she is leaving behind her marriage and traditional notions of family and motherhood. For her driving reflects a regionally gendered performativity that propels her to leave social mandates she views as attached to southern California for the freedom she hopes to find in Appalachia.

Freedom is often correlated with the idea of the “frontier,” especially in connection with the western U.S. To Rose, however, Appalachia symbolizes freedom. As many do in conceptualizing the West, Rose exoticizes Kentucky. When Father O’Donnell tells her about Saint Elizabeth’s she is “interested in the location more than the description” of the home (Patchett 1992, 30). One of the first differences Rose notices between the west and east are the trees: “I had never seen such thick banks of trees, such softness growing from every surface of a field. Kentucky was another country, and in that country, Saint Elizabeth’s was a country unto itself…” (Patchett 1992, 52). She feels doubly displaced geographically because she must negotiate living in a new region and, within that, the sequestered community of Saint Elizabeth’s. She knows no one in Kentucky and wants to start a new life there—the kind that only anonymity can provide—but the mirage of Appalachia as frontier and freedom is quickly dispelled.

Rose realizes that she has not left stereotypical assumptions and restrictions behind in the Southwest. Her regionally gendered performativity challenges gender roles associated with women from California. One evening Rose asks Angie how the concept of home is altered by staying at Saint Elizabeth’s, because Rose thinks that if a girl has “to come to a place like this” then most likely she “wouldn’t have a home to go back to” (Patchett 1992, 56). Annoyed by this question, Angie briefly describes lies the girls and their families tell (i.e., they are caring for a sick aunt or traveling through Europe). Angie’s impatient reply gives Rose the impression that “she was tired of girls from California being so stupid” (Patchett 1992, 56). On the contrary, Rose is smart and clever, and she is definitely not a stranger to lying (whether outright or by omission). After getting to know Rose, Angie’s stereotypical assumptions about “girls from California” are disproved. Despite or perhaps because of such challenges to stereotypes of California women, Rose often feels like a foreigner in Habit.

Residents of both Habit and Saint Elizabeth’s consider Rose to be displaced and unusual. In this way, her conception of Kentucky as foreign is transposed onto her. Unlike the majority of women at Saint Elizabeth’s, Rose is self-assured, as shown in a conversation about Sister Evangeline’s well-being. Out of concern for the elderly nun, Son says to Rose: “’But you seem like a smart girl, and Sister Evangeline, she sings your praises, so you’ll watch out for her’” (Patchett 1992, 64). Son’s veiled supplication assumes that Rose needs to be asked or directed to take care of Sister Evangeline. His use of the future tense “will watch” suggests that Rose will start doing so after he asks her. In addition, his statement that Rose “seem[s] like a smart girl” is patronizing; Rose knows she is a smart woman. She curtly replies: “’I watch out for her’” (Patchett 1992, 64). The sharp tone and present tense of the verb “watch” convey that Rose does not need to be told or asked by Son to take care of Sister Evangeline. By ignoring his comment on her intellect she shows that his opinion is of little significance to her, and without directly addressing the condescension implied by the term “girl,” she shows she is a mature adult.

Immediately following Rose’s reply Son identifies her as an outlander: “You’re not from around here” (Patchett 1992, 65). She answers, “No, I’m from out west, California” (Patchett 1992, 65). She thinks to herself: “How many times had I said that already? Kentucky wasn’t a place you could just be in, you had to be from there, or everything about you was strange” (Patchett 1992, 65). He says: “I could tell from the way you talk” (Patchett 1992, 65). By “talk” Son refers to the content and delivery of Rose’s speech. Assuming an Appalachian woman will be demure, when he discovers that Rose is not, he explains the discrepancy in geographical terms.

Although Son does not refer to dialect in this instance, Marjorie Pryse’s point about the “extensive use of mountain dialect” in Mary Noialles Murfree’s fiction is pertinent. Pryse notes that the dialect “draws our attention to the way language functions as its own site of encounter” (2000, 206-7). Murfree’s use of dialect creates a contrast within language (thereby erecting an insider/outsider binary) but in doing so enables readers unaccustomed to the dialect the opportunity to become familiar with it and see it as a medium through which to approach differing perspectives (Pryse 2000, 207). Similarly, Rose’s delivery and content constructs insider/outsider positioning by creating a contrast (in Son’s view) between her and other Kentucky women. However, what Rose says simultaneously disassembles this construction by providing a means through which to acknowledge and ideally embrace difference.

At this point Son still approaches Rose’s positionality from a bifurcated perspective: he does not recognize her as a woman who could live in Appalachia. After a moment’s hesitation he continues: “Well, it’s not just the way you talk, it’s the way you move around too, look people right in the eyes, hold your head up. You don’t see too much of that around here” (Patchett 1992, 65). Son identifies Rose as a non-Appalachian based on her confidence and assertive mannerisms. Because regional boundaries can be “both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded” (McDowell 1999, 4), Son deploys social norms to create spatial boundaries.

Pryse’s discussion of dialect can also be used to analyze essentialism and social construction. Rose challenges Son’s essentialist expectations of the deportment of women in Kentucky (i.e., to Son her actions do not correspond with place), and she challenges social construction because she does not assimilate to the regionally gendered behavior that Son expects. He first identifies Rose as an outsider, but through this position of difference the foundations on which he builds such binaries are ultimately fractured because he comes to understand Rose as a Kentucky woman from a more nuanced perspective. Along the lines of José Muñoz’s call to destabilize binaries of essentialism and social construction, Rose’s regionally gendered performativity demonstrates that identity processes can be both/and instead of either/or.

Rose’s in-between position distinguishes her from Son and the others but also bridges difference by transforming others’ suspicion into appreciation. Son describes how the Saint Elizabeth’s community depends on her: “You’re not like the other girls, Rose….You’re half running this place now. Everybody’s come to count on you, they’re getting attached to you” (Patchett 1992, 106). When Angie goes into labor and Rose and Son drive her to the hospital against Saint Elizabeth’s protocol, Angie corroborates Son’s point:

“I can’t believe the way they listen to you now…It’s like you’re one of the sisters.”

“That’s an awful thought,” Rose said.

“No, no, I mean, you’ve got that kind of power. The way you stared them down and said, ‘No, Son and I will take her to the hospital.’” Angie laughed. “Like, la-di-da, I’m running this show now. Well, I think it’s something, is all. You stay on, they’re gonna be calling that place Saint Rose the Divine.” (Patchett 1992, 130-31)

While Angie and Son are both in awe of Rose’s command, Son in particular is fascinated by her: “Rose was a strong girl. She’s the only woman I ever knew who felt as big as me” (Patchett 1992, 128). Described as “a giant man, maybe six foot six” Son’s size is difficult to match (Patchett 1992, 52), but Rose’s personality, strength, confidence, and self-sufficiency rival his physical largeness. Son concludes that “Rose could hold her own against anybody” (Patchett 1992, 129). To community members Rose’s presence in Kentucky as a woman from California is extraordinary, and in time they come to understand her in a positive light. Although her regionally gendered performativity can be considered unintelligible in Butlerian terms—those in Habit continuously remark on how she is unlike them—nonetheless she is accepted into the community because of an appreciation of difference. (A similar kind of acceptance happens for Loca; it does not happen for Sula.) While Rose’s position within the community of Saint Elizabeth’s stabilizes over time, if she ever sees herself as an actual member of that community and of Habit is dubious.

The narrative that describes how Rose decides to keep her baby, marry Son, and raise Sissy demonstrates the regionally gendered performativity that Rose deploys in Habit but eventually abandons. In a new region, Rose realizes she must contend with new *and* familiar gendered expectations. In Marina del Rey Rose would have been expected to keep her baby; at Saint Elizabeth’s all girls are expected to place their babies with adoptive families. Rose is unsure what she wants to do, but “walking through the woods alone in northern Kentucky, wearing a man’s overcoat that someone had donated to Saint Elizabeth’s, [she] felt strangely better off” (Patchett 1992, 92). Rose has considered all the places she could go where she could keep the baby—back to Thomas or her mother or to Billy’s in Arkansas—but the only place she believes is appropriate is rural Kentucky. Janice Monk argues that “landscapes can…empower people to creativity and action, to develop cultural alternatives” (1992, 136). While the landscape of Kentucky did not prompt Rose to leave California, once there it provides her with a sense of possibility and autonomy. She thinks: “I was through with giving things up. I wanted something of my own” (Patchett 1992, 112). The distance between Habit and Marina del Rey—whether real or imagined or both—plays a significant role in Rose’s decision and ability to raise her baby.

Now determined to be a mother, Rose is unsure how to break the Saint Elizabeth’s adoption protocol. Son suggests they marry and raise the baby together, which will allow Rose to keep her and to stay at the home in Habit. Like Taylor, Rose is accustomed to an all-woman family and does not even consider the possibility of a father in her baby’s life until she realizes the possible benefits of Son’s offer. However, her acceptance is bittersweet because she feels she is replicating the same scenario that caused her to leave Marina del Rey. She wonders: “Maybe this was the way it was supposed to be for me. God telling me He was right after all. I was supposed to be married, live a small life with a man I didn’t love” (Patchett 1992, 115). These feelings of defeat and despondency cause Rose to doubt her decision to move to a different region, and they negatively affect her developing identity as an independent woman. On the other hand, Rose and Son’s agreement helps her develop cultural alternatives by raising her baby at Saint Elizabeth’s. Regional relocation presents her with new and familiar sets of gendered expectations; while she is able to manipulate some to her benefit (i.e., marrying Son), she still fears that she has only transferred her circumstance in California to Kentucky.

Son assuages these anxieties by assuring her that he does not need to know about her past, and largely because of Son’s respect for her privacy, Rose is able for a time to assume a new identity as a mother living in Kentucky. However, Son does not keep his promise, and his inquiries regarding California intensify Rose’s need to forget her experiences there. Son thinks Rose is working too much in the kitchen and suggests “she should take some time for herself” (Patchett 1992, 218), but when he suggests that she return to California, Rose “turn[s] away from [him]” and remains silent (Patchett 1992, 218). Like Maria in *Play*, Rose does not want to remember; to break with the past Rose must forget place. For Rose forgetting involves not only repressing the memory of Marina del Rey but also living only in the immediate present in an attempt to preclude the establishment of a past or future associated with Habit and Saint Elizabeth’s.

Although the community in general accepts her, Rose’s attempts to avoid temporal roots distance her, especially from Sissy. One of the biggest problems between mother and daughter is the almost complete lack of communication. Rose does not share stories of her life or history with Sissy, and Sissy feels that Rose takes her “do-it-yourself” creed to the extreme, resulting in little to no affection or intimacy between them.[[10]](#endnote-10) Since shared stories and histories “provide a deep sense of continuity within a psychospace” (Allen 1997, 348), this lack causes Sissy to feel discontinuity. Rose resists temporal bonds tied to place in order to maintain distance from the community in which she is otherwise immersed.

Communities often constitute themselves by telling stories of place, but Rose even avoids talking with Sissy about where she is from originally—another example of the extent to which Rose disassociates with California in order to be able to live in Kentucky.[[11]](#endnote-11) Sissy was in eighth grade “before [she] ever knew [her] mother wasn’t from Kentucky” (Patchett 1992, 252). Sissy’s assumption that Rose is from Kentucky contrasts with Son’s immediate ability to point her out as a foreigner. Their differences in ability cannot be attributed to Rose’s assimilation into the Habit community or to her self-identification as a Kentucky woman because neither occurs. What Sissy’s incorrect assumption does suggest is Rose’s ability to pass as a woman from Kentucky. Interconnections between gender and region are especially emphasized via this concept. Using terms that usually apply to gender, perhaps Rose can “region-switch” or “region-bend.” If so, her ability to assume a regional identity that is recognized by some and not others reminds us of Butler’s argument that “no one can recognize another simply by virtue of special psychological or critical skills and that norms condition the possibility of recognition” (2005, 33). Her determination to forget place motivates her reticence and contributes to her strained relationship with her daughter.

Rose struggles to negotiate a space in between being a California woman and a Kentucky woman. Although the Kentucky community accepts her as both, Rose does not claim an identity as either, both, or neither. For her, California has “long since ceased to provide straight-forward support to [her] identity. Yet, though the ‘homes’ which ground and house identities can be denied people physically by enforced exile or lost through chosen migration, they still continue to resonate throughout the imagination of displaced communities” (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, vii). Instead of condemning Rose’s failure to become a full-fledged community member, one could claim that she, like Maria, establishes a positionality in her new regional community that enables her to survive and temporarily stay—whether this is selfish or desirable is debatable.

When Rose is faced with a visit that would force her to remember and confront Marina del Rey in Habit, she decides she can participate in neither her regional community of origin nor of relocation. After receiving a mysterious letter in the mail, Rose secretly flees Habit. The mystery is solved when Sissy’s biological father arrives at Saint Elizabeth’s to bring Rose the news that her mother has died.[[12]](#endnote-12) Sissy is intrigued by this man from her mother’s past and wonders “how the distance between California and Kentucky came into all of this” (Patchett 1992, 321). She suspects that in that distance lie answers to questions she has about her mother, but she also realizes that it is partly that very distance which hides the answers.

 Rose wants this distance to provide a barrier between her past and current identities as a woman. When the worlds of southern California and Appalachia collapse (or collide), she extricates herself from both the actual and imagined communities associated with each region. In order to escape her past, Rose twice abandons place and family. Sissy explains Rose’s decision to leave Habit: “If people do have more than one life in a lifetime, they should be careful to make sure the different versions of the past never overlap. My mother had tried to do that, and when she knew she couldn’t hold the two worlds apart anymore, she left” (Patchett 1992, 328). Patchett does not depict Rose as a simple coward or selfish shrew. Instead, she portrays her as a complex character whose anxieties about what it means to be a woman, mother, and wife in two different regions prove to be overwhelming. She cannot live in the Southwest constricted by the roles of wife and mother, and she manages to live only temporarily in Appalachia in these roles.

Overall, Rose’s regionally gendered performativity is unintelligible to her and others, and leaves the reader wondering, much like Sissy, what actually happened in the distance between California and Kentucky. In Appalachia Rose forms temporary bonds that do not withstand the stress of Thomas’—her southern California past’s—impending appearance. Kentucky is not her “terminal arrival.” Leed describes the connection between terminal arrival, home, and identity: “In terminal arrivals—the arrival home, or anywhere that creates the ties between person and place we call ‘home’—the traveler forms what are in some sense permanent bonds, which presumably redefine the social and even the biological self and make the traveler a ‘native’” (1991, 111). Rose redefines a regional social self in terms of how the community re-considers gendered norms of deportment. However, she never sees herself as a “native”; she does not identify as a Kentucky woman *or* a California woman, and the in-between space proves inhospitable for her.

Left to surmise what would have had to happen for Rose to remain in Kentucky, the reader can only guess where Rose’s non-traditional migration narrative takes her next. Like Rose, Taylor in *Bean* is independent, determined, and sassy. As will be discussed in the following section, they experience regional relocation similarly and differently. A significant similarity is that by traveling Rose and Taylor subvert the idea “that an individual has one, real, consistent persona and character” (Leed 1991, 276), especially in regard to regionally gendered performativity. In addition, they both narrate in hindsight. This narrative style works because it offers characterizations of the women at the present time and then backtracks to show how their migration experiences affect regionally gendered identities. The most clearly marked difference is that Taylor’s narrative features a “terminal arrival.”

***The Bean Trees***

*Bean* tells the story of Missy (who eventually changes her name to Taylor), a girl who spends her childhood with her mother in rural Appalachia but is determined to leave Pittman County, Kentucky, in order to avoid what she sees as the “barefoot and pregnant” fate of all women who stay (Kingsolver 1992, 3). On her solo trek west Taylor, who is in her early twenties, is asked unexpectedly to care for an “Indian child” by an anonymous woman she sees in a bar in Oklahoma (Kingsolver 1992, 18). She takes the child with her to Tucson, Arizona, where she finds work with a woman named Mattie and makes a home with another single mother named Lou Ann. Both women become her friends and family, and both play significant roles in helping Taylor destabilize boundaries of essentialist and constructed identities. As a result, Taylor, unlike Rose, finds a “terminal arrival” in Tucson and establishes a permanent position in the community there.

Taylor’s emerging individual and communal identities are tied to local places—both Pittman County and Tucson—but bring into question regional stereotypes of women. Because of her willingness to question her own conceptions about both regions, Taylor creates an imagined regional community for herself in Tucson through which she challenges stereotypical distinctions between the Southwest and Appalachia. She enacts regionally gendered performativity in ways that are in large part recognized by those around her in Tucson, which helps her establish a secure position in the community. She eventually considers her region of relocation to be “home.”

Missy defies regional and gender expectations in order to create her new identity as Taylor. She is “desperate to escape the pressures to conform to the woman’s role in Pittman County, Kentucky” (Himmelwright 2007, 124). These roles, as Missy sees them, are to be married and pregnant, and she believes the possibility for any other kind of life in Pittman is slim. Living in Kentucky “threatens her vision of personal identity,” and therefore “[f]light is essential” (Himmelwright 2007, 125). A teacher helps Missy secure employment at the local hospital, and after almost six years she saves enough money to buy a car, in which she “intend[s] to drive out of Pittman County one day and never look back, except maybe for Mama” (Kingsolver 1992, 10).[[13]](#endnote-13) Both Missy and Rose begin their journeys alone, driving toward unfamiliar territory, and both defy gendered expectations of women and mobility by demonstrating the audacity to drive alone, away from their families and homes and into new places and experiences. Missy sees her Volkswagen as a literal and figurative “vehicle out of a dead-end situation as well as a means to escape conventional domesticity” (Smyth 1999, 116-17). Chapter One of *Bean* is entitled “The One to Get Away”[[14]](#endnote-14) because Missy believes she is escaping an undesirable and confining place—Appalachia in general and Kentucky in particular.

When Missy crosses the Pittman County line she changes her name to Taylor because she believes it is “time to make a clean break” (Kingsolver 1992, 11) from her past.[[15]](#endnote-15) Since Taylor has never been outside of Kentucky, she “ha[s] no way of knowing why or how any particular place might be preferable to any other” (Kingsolver 1992, 12). Her migration to the West begins as a journey to a promised land, destination unknown but—she hopes—better than where she was. Before she arrives at her destination, however, she is confronted with the very situation she wants most to avoid—motherhood.

During a pit-stop in Oklahoma, a woman places a child in Taylor’s car and asks Taylor to take care of her.[[16]](#endnote-16) After a brief conversation in which Taylor conveys her doubts and disinclination, the woman leaves Taylor alone with the toddler (whom Taylor later names Turtle). This unexpected scenario particularly jars Taylor because she left Kentucky in large part to avoid having a child. She says: “’If I wanted a baby I would have stayed in Kentucky…I could have had babies coming out my ears by now’” (Kingsolver 1992, 18). While pressure to become a mother in Pittman might be stronger than in other places, she realizes that leaving Appalachia does not ensure an escape from motherhood.

Taylor continues westward with Turtle in tow. She is heading into a hyper-masculinized region as a single woman, now a single mother, and the fact that Turtle is Indian plays a central role in the narrative: Taylor is confronted with immediate issues of region, gender, and race. Himmelwright argues that Kingsolver “evok[es] a nonwhite mythology which will allow for the participation of the female” in traditionally male-centered narratives of the West (2007, 122). She contends that “Kingsolver is able to explore a world which gives voice to the female through the Native American experience. Gaining access to a world and mythology which pre-exists the white male construction of adventure, she is able to navigate a space in which the female story has not yet been defined by the masculine voice” (Himmelwright 2007, 122). Taylor certainly has to negotiate her position as a woman in the West, but Himmelwright’s claim that Taylor’s narrative must be formed on the back of Native American culture is problematic.

Himmelwright’s analysis pits against each other a reductive idea of Native American culture in general and a particular instance of Anglo-American male sexism in order to deploy “the Native American experience” as an antidote to Anglo-American sexism. Moreover, although Taylor and her mother claim to have enough blood to qualify as Cherokee (Kingsolver 1992, 13), Taylor does not identify as Native, and the power dynamics involved with a white woman’s gaining agency by raising an Indian girl should not be overlooked. The insinuation that a Native child would have a better life with a random white woman—who does not even choose the position voluntarily—perpetuates the stereotypical assumption that Native Americans cannot take care of their own children and that any white woman can substitute. Contrary to Himmelwright’s position, Kristin Jacobson’s concern about “the role fictional locales generally play in further whitewashing narratives” is valid (2010, 185).[[17]](#endnote-17) In these ways *Bean* perpetuates racist stereotypes, but it also challenges norms of how families are created and sustained. Taylor cares for Turtle like her own mother did for her, which is a good example of intergenerational love passed on through unconventional mother-daughter family formations. Taylor provides Turtle with a comfortable and safe woman-centered home (similar to Saint Elizabeth’s, with the exception of Son) at Lou Ann’s house.

Prior to Taylor’s account of arriving in Tucson, we are introduced to Lou Ann Ruiz, whose regionally gendered performativity can be read in contrast to Taylor’s. Unlike Rose and Taylor, Lou Ann identifies with her region of origin. She “lived in Tucson, but thought of herself as just an ordinary Kentuckian a long way from home” (Kingsolver 1992, 24). After at least five years of living in Tucson, “it still surprised [Lou Ann] sometimes to open that window and not see Kentucky” (Kingsolver 1992, 62). She resists identification with her region of relocation and maintains that she is essentially Kentuckian, no matter where she lives. Sherry Booth addresses the complexity of essentialist and social constructionist identity formations by positing that “[w]e know intellectually that identity is a concept, fluid and multiple. It is not a tangible thing, something we can depend on to be there in the morning like the view from our window as we sip our first cup of coffee. But we also believe that we possess an identity, a core of who we are” (2010, 337). Some inherent difference does seem to set Lou Ann apart from those in her Southwest community. Bobby Bingo says to her: “You’re not from here? I didn’t think so” (Kingsolver 1992, 61). Appalachian topography is an imagined constant for her, and Appalachian self-identification is a bedrock.

Lou Ann *feels* Kentuckian. In feminist theoretical terms, her identity would negatively be labeled “essentialist,” in that it rests on her belief that she naturally possesses an essence of Kentucky. However, some women’s experiences of migration cause them to identify more with their region of origin because only after leaving the area do they recognize their strong attachment to it. These circumstances can be affected by gender because it may be more difficult for women to develop their own sense of self while still embroiled in gendered expectations dominant in their home and early family life. Perhaps only after they leave the region of origin do they obtain the distance necessary to decide whether or not they identify with that region. For example, bell hooks claims she became “more consciously Kentuckian” after moving from Kentucky to California, and she contends that “[t]his is what the experience of exile can do, change your mind, utterly transform one’s perception of the world of home. The differences geographical location imprinted on my psyche and habits of being became more evident away from home” (2009, 13). Hooks’ observation parallels Rose’s experience of understanding, only after she is in Kentucky, how California topography shaped her identity. And like hooks, Lou Ann’s affiliation with her region of origin is strengthened after migration because only after leaving Appalachia does she realize that she identifies as an Appalachian woman.

Unlike Lou Ann, shortly after moving to Tucson Taylor begins to enact a regionally gendered performativity that draws from her identifications with both regions and her complex feelings of belonging (or not) in the Southwest. Taylor decides to end her journey in Arizona because she is entertained by “a kind of forest” through which she drives where, instead of trees, “puffy-looking rocks shaped like roundish animals and roundish people” sat stacked on each other and “turned pink” in the sun (Kingsolver 1992, 35). The desert’s surreal landscape is the opposite of what Taylor knows from Kentucky, and its novelty is reason enough for her to stay. Although Taylor remarks that here she feels like a visitor from another planet (Kingsolver 1992, 37), she finds independence and anonymity she did not have in Pittman: “In Tucson, it was clear that there was nobody overlooking us all. We would just have to find our own way” (Kingsolver 1992, 47). For Taylor, finding her own way includes the distance she needs from Kentucky in order to shape her own identity.

Being outside of her comfort zone excites her, and she feels that migration has relocated her geographically *and* temporally: “[L]iving in the hustle-bustle of downtown Tucson was like moving to a foreign country I’d never heard of. Or a foreign decade. When I’d crossed into Rocky Mountain Time, I had set my watch back two hours and got thrown into the future” (Kingsolver 1992, 46-7). Like Rose, Taylor describes her region of relocation as being like a foreign country, but Taylor adds a temporal dimension: “It’s hard to explain how this felt. I went to high school in the seventies, but you have to understand that in Pittman County it may as well have been the fifties. Pittman was twenty years behind the nation in practically every way you can think of, except the rate of teenage pregnancies” (Kingsolver 1992, 47).[[18]](#endnote-18) While in this project my main interest is to explore how gendered subject positions intersect regionally, Taylor’s commentary on temporal intersection is intriguing. By using the notion of successive decades, she insinuates that Tucson is more sophisticated and advanced than Pittman. She expects a narrative of progressive linearity in which “progress” equals “good,” and good is symbolized by a lack of teenage pregnancies. Her remarks suggest that temporality and space affect one’s enactment of gender and regional identity.

But her assumptions of progress are challenged during a conversation with a young server named Sandi. Upon finding out Taylor is from Kentucky, Sandi tells Taylor how lucky she is to have owned a horse. Taylor informs her that no one in Pittman could afford to own a horse. Incorrectly assuming that Taylor knows how to fry chicken, Sandi is confident that the restaurant would hire Taylor. But when Taylor finds out Sandi has a young child, the roles are reversed, and Taylor’s stereotypes of women from and in non-Appalachia are challenged: “I had thought Pittman was the only place on earth where people started having babies before they learned their multiplication tables” (Kingsolver 1992, 51). Making Sandi’s acquaintance debunks one of Taylor’s regionally gendered expectations, as she begins to think about how her affiliations with both the Southwest and Appalachia intersect with her identity as a woman.

Soon after serving tables with Sandi, Taylor lands a job that shows her how gendered identity can be directly affected by geographic location. Like the continuous curves and budding leaves of McDowell’s nodes, identity is constantly in flux and in transit; yet transformations may be temporarily halted in a particular place and time. Chapter One of *Bean* begins with information that becomes significant after Taylor finds a job with Mattie. Missy confesses that she has “been afraid of putting air in a tire ever since [she] saw a tractor tire blow up and throw Newt Hardbine’s father over the top of the Standard Oil sign” (Kingsolver 1992, 1). She views the incident with Hardbine’s father as the exact moment when she decides her future will not be like Newt’s or his father’s: “But the day I saw his daddy up there like some old overalls slung over a fence, I had this feeling about what Newt’s whole life was going to amount to, and I felt sorry for him. Before that exact moment I don’t believe I had given much thought to the future” (Kingsolver 1992, 1). At this point, Missy is unsure of what she will do in life, but these ominous events in Pittman do not bode well for her possibilities in Kentucky.

After meeting Mattie in Tucson because she needs a new tire, Taylor is impressed with Mattie’s position as owner of Jesus Is Lord Used Tires (JILUT): “I had never seen a woman with this kind of know-how. It made me feel proud, somehow. In Pittman if a woman had tried to have her own tire store she would have been run out of business. That, or the talk would have made your ears curl up like those dried apricot things” (Kingsolver 1992, 43-4). Instead of seeing Hardbine on the sign, when she is at JILUT she “look[s] up to see if there was anything tall overhead to get thrown up onto. There was nothing but clear blue sky” (Kingsolver 1992, 40). Because the clear blue sky frames her introduction to Mattie and her business, this scenario of possibility (unlike the one in Pittman) “allows Taylor a greater realization of just what women can accomplish” (Clarke 2007, 127-28). Taylor is astounded by Mattie’s capability and confidence as a woman in the automotive repair industry. Mattie “is an inspiration to Taylor because…she does a job that would be done only by men in Taylor’s home town” (O’Rourke 2003, 262-63). Taylor’s awe is grounded in the specific place of Tucson during the time period of her recent arrival.

But also important is that this disbelief arises out of Taylor’s comparison to her past experiences in Pittman. Both locations converge at the point in her life when she first meets Mattie, and this scenario exemplifies the *OED*’s first definition of node that details a point of intersection. Himmelwright notes that, “[a]lthough Taylor’s mother is also depicted as a strong woman, community is not described as a source of support in Kentucky. In Tucson, Taylor finds a world where women aid and help those around them” (2007, 132). Mattie serves as a mother figure to Taylor in the Southwest. Taylor flourishes under Mattie’s mentorship and as a member of the JILUT crew, and the job enables her to be financially independent. What Taylor believed to be limitations on gender seem to be relegated to her experience as an Appalachian woman, for in Tucson her employment and involvement in community positively affect her identity as a woman. Taylor’s position vis-à-vis Tucson, Mattie, and women’s work can be understood concurrently as a point on a continuous curve of her life and as a distinct point from which Taylor matures and develops as a woman.[[19]](#endnote-19)

An individual may perceive and therefore enact gender differently in a certain geographical location, and an individual may perceive and enact regional identity based on gender. In Tucson, Taylor works for Mattie as a capable tire-repair specialist, recognizing performativity of gender through her work because she is convinced she could not carry out this type of employment in Pittman. As affiliation with the region of origin can be strengthened once one leaves that area (Lou Ann), a parallel question would be how—or if—one could identify more as a woman once she leaves the confines of a regional set of gendered expectations (i.e., Taylor finds employment she believes would be denied to her in Pittman because of her gender). If so, Taylor would identify more as a woman when she becomes a tire-repair specialist, which runs contrary to gender norms that separate the gendered identity of a woman with that of a worker in the automotive repair industry. At JILUT Taylor is a Southwestern woman working on tires; in Pittman she was an Appalachian woman afraid of them. However, Taylor does not experience these identities as distinctly divided. Instead, she begins to identify with both regions, and this dual regional identity offers her more possibilities for autonomy.

The second definition of node, which stresses its life-giving or cultivating activity, is applicable here. Taylor’s regionally gendered performativity influences Lou Ann in developing hers as an Appalachian woman in the Southwest. Using the metaphor of the budding leaf we can think of these characters’ senses of themselves and their relations to and within communities as outgrowths of their physical environments, and as extensions of their encounters with new experiences, acquaintances, and places. When Lou Ann and Taylor meet, they recognize each other as Appalachian women and bond over their similar positions as single mothers and migrants from Kentucky to Arizona.[[20]](#endnote-20) After befriending and living with Taylor in Tucson, Lou Ann’s identity transforms but still remains rooted in Appalachia.

For most of her life Lou Ann has lacked self-esteem, but she learns to become assertive and confident because of Taylor’s influence. For instance, Lou Ann emphasizes how much the door handle at Fanny Heaven (“a combination nightclub and pornography shop” [Kingsolver 1992, 30]) offends her, and Taylor encourages her to “talk back to it” so that she exerts agency and does not let animosity consume her (Kingsolver 1992, 150). Lou Ann asks Taylor where she learned to be assertive, and Taylor replies: “Nutter school” (Kingsolver 1992, 150).[[21]](#endnote-21) Taylor “may change her name and place, but she retains a strong sense of who she is and where she comes from. Indeed, her journey into the future encompasses a great deal of symbolic attachment to the past” (Clarke 2007, 127). She hones her resourcefulness and determination in Pittman, where she learns to fend for herself as a young girl with no money to buy clothes. Lou Ann did not learn these lessons in Appalachia or the Southwest until she meets Taylor, who carries them with her to Tucson and incorporates a dual identification as Appalachian and Southwestern into her regionally gendered performativity. In a prime example of social construction of identity and behavior, Lou Ann enacts Taylor’s teachings. She persuades Taylor to fight when Taylor feels defeated by Turtle’s custody battle, and when she starts dating someone new, she says to Taylor: “I’ve gotten so brave hanging around you” (Kingsolver 1992, 230). Lou Ann identifies as an Appalachian woman and is more open to expanding her identity alongside someone from a similar positionality.

Therefore, Taylor’s regionally gendered performativity influences Lou Ann because of their shared regional affiliation with Appalachia. Taylor’s identity process shows that one can identify with both communities and cultures of regions of origin and relocation. While these processes run concurrently for Taylor, they seem to operate separately for Lou Ann. Taylor learns from both Mattie and Lou Ann because she identifies with both regions and is open to expanding her identity along those lines. In general Kingsolver “complicates the notion of community…by challenging the power that the community insider has over the outsider and providing an avenue for the outsider to become integrated into the community” (Magee 2008, 19). At stake for Taylor is her ability to deploy regionally gendered performativity in terms of her region of origin *and* relocation because she wants to become a member of her new community.

Taylor negotiates boundaries of insider/outsider in terms of region and race. In light of the third definition of nodes, which highlights how moments of intersectional experience profoundly affect individuals and their communities, issues of nationality and race/ethnicity are foregrounded in scenes featuring Turtle and her Guatemalan friends Estevan and Esperanza. In a heated conversation with Estevan, Taylor compares her relocation experience with his Guatemala-to-U.S. journey. Like Rose, she describes how she feels like a foreigner in her own country:

You think you’re the foreigner here, and I’m the American….Sometimes I feel like I’m a foreigner too. I come from a place that’s so different from here you would think you’d stepped right off the map into some other country where they use dirt for decoration and the national pastime is having babies. People don’t look the same, talk the same, nothing. Half the time I have no idea what’s going on around me here. (Kingsolver 1992, 135)

Allen’s claim that for “[t]he majority of Anglo-Americans” (1997, 345) who move to the Southwest, “residing in the area is in many ways similar to entering a new country, one much like and yet palpably distinct from the one left behind” (1997, 346) corroborates Taylor’s explanation. While Taylor’s (and perhaps Allen’s) statements could be dismissed as a perpetuation of stereotypes, the reader should consider that Taylor’s observations, as a native Appalachian, reflect the way she sees Pittman. (As we have seen, some of her perspectives on Pittman are changed by living in Tucson.) Yet, Taylor and Estevan’s motivations for leaving their region and country of origin are drastically different: Taylor excitedly leaves by choice to pursue a better life, while Estevan and his wife leave in order to stay alive. Taylor’s response to Estevan’s narrative of political exile is an example of the near-sightedness often complicit in collapsing analyses of intersectionality. Taylor equates her migration with his, but as a white woman remaining in the U.S., she does not experience issues of race and nationality like Estevan does and she soon sees these differences.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Befriending the Guatemalan couple challenges Taylor’s ideas about race, nationality, and region. Taylor, Turtle, Estevan, and Esperanza drive to Oklahoma so Taylor can officially adopt Turtle by deceiving state officials.[[23]](#endnote-23) Taylor can tell physical differences in Estevan and Esperanza when they drive into “the heart of the Cherokee Nation” and there are “fewer and fewer white people” (Kingsolver 1992, 204). She notices that “the relief showed in their bodies. I believe they actually grew taller. And Turtle fit right in too; this was her original home. I was the odd woman out” (Kingsolver 1992, 204). In this group, Taylor feels she is both an insider (i.e., she is from the U.S. and is with friends and family) and an outsider (i.e., she is white). Leed suggests that “[t]ravel transforms collective as well as individual identities” (1991, 271), and Taylor’s experience as a white woman here exemplifies how location can change conceptualizations of who is in the racial “majority” or “minority” and highlights how arbitrary and relative these concepts are. Taylor’s individual identity is transformed when she considers it in relation to the local collective in Oklahoma. As a white woman from a predominantly white community in Appalachia, Taylor is unfamiliar with feeling like “the odd woman out,” but this experience shows her how conceptualizations of race vary depending on region.

Another example of interconnections between race and region arises in Lou Ann’s frustration with her family’s stereotypical attitudes toward Mexicans. When her mother and grandmother visit Tucson, she tries to explain how “there were so many Mexicans that people didn’t think of them as a foreign race. They were doctors, bank clerks, TV personalities, and even owned hotels” (Kingsolver 1992, 27). Her mother and grandmother are reluctant to believe what they consider a drastic difference in population demographics: “[Lou Ann’s mother], who lived in eastern Kentucky and had never seen a Mexican, thought Lou Ann was making this up” (Kingsolver 1992, 28). Having moved to Tucson, Lou Ann perceives race differently than her family. Their conversation illustrates how regional location can shape and manipulate concepts of race and deployments of racism.

Identifications with and understandings of region, gender, and race can shift or solidify during and after migration. Overall Taylor’s regionally gendered performativity is influenced by both Appalachia and the Southwest. In the dialectic relationship of challenging others’ regionally gendered stereotypes and having her own challenged, Taylor’s conception of the Southwest as a place completely different from Appalachia is de-romanticized. Therefore, she is able to consider both regions from practical perspectives and does not reject affiliation with her region of origin based on faulty preconceptions. She feels innately Appalachian in some regards, but she is also open to learning customs and cultures of the Southwest. Taylor’s identity processes blur boundaries between essentialism and social construction by showing how she identifies with both regions of origin and relocation. Taylor, like Rose, becomes “a new social body within the niche of a particular locale” in the region of relocation, but unlike Rose she “establish[es] fixed psychosomatic bonds to land, soil, and topography” (Leed 1991, 112). Taylor feels that she is, in part, a woman attached to the physical geographic location of the Southwest. Lou Ann’s identity process leans more toward what would be labeled essentialism in that she thinks of herself as inherently Appalachian, regardless of the fact that she has lived in the Southwest for a considerable amount of time. In short, consequences of migration can assist in shaping a dual regional identity (Taylor), or they can reinforce an affiliation with the region of origin (Lou Ann).

Taylor’s regionally gendered performativity is intelligible to those in her region of relocation, which is her “terminal arrival” and becomes her “home.”[[24]](#endnote-24) She establishes permanent bonds of community and forms a non-traditional family, both of which assist her in shaping a new regionally gendered identity. Her narrative of identity formation differs from “stories of western male adventure. Rather than relying on the power of the individual and the individual’s ability to conquer challenges on his own, Kingsolver creates a female character who is empowered and able to transform herself and others through the act of creation through community” (Himmelwright 2007, 134).

Taylor’s community of relocation encourages her to grow as an Appalachian-Southwestern woman by recognizing her regionally gendered performativity. The communities of Habit and Saint Elizabeth’s never lose their sense of Rose as extraordinary, but they accept her from a perspective of difference as one of their own. Rose’s feelings of ambiguity and awkwardness contrast with Taylor’s sense that she is “at home” in Arizona. Although their journeys end very differently, Rose and Taylor challenge expectations of women’s roles and behavior via migration narratives in which they develop and deploy various enactments of regionally gendered performativity influenced by Appalachia and the Southwest.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this project I ask variations of the question: “How important is our sense of place to our conception of self?” (Inness and Royer 1997, 6). Investigations into how region and gender function in/between places expand our knowledge of formations of identity and community that blur boundaries between essentialism and constructionism. This dissertation analyzes contemporary narratives in which Appalachia and the Southwest are juxtaposed as sites of origin and relocation in order to trace transformations of women’s identities and community allegiances in each region. “Engendering Regions” argues that women's narratives portray emerging individual and communal identities that are tied to local places yet resist traditional gender stereotypes. These narratives demystify, and ideally encourage readers to reconsider and redress, systems of privilege and oppression.

Along the lines of Massey’s idea of “a progressive sense of place” (1994, 156), places are not constituted in and of themselves, but exist always in relation to other places and locations outside of themselves. “Region” is difficult to define, since it is a concept rooted in both the actual and imaginary,[[25]](#endnote-25) and because the areas demarcated as regional are “generated by constantly evolving systems of government, economy, migration, event, and culture” (Ayers and Onuf 1996, 4). This project centers on the regional areas of Appalachia and the Southwest while acknowledging that these regions are not contained in isolation from places and social relations not perceived to be within their borders. Patterns of juxtapositions between Appalachia and the Southwest in contemporary women’s novels call for this kind of comparative study that highlights region and gender.

The analyses in this study portray how region and gender are performed by women within their regions and communities of origin and how this performativity functions when they migrate. Such enactments depict what I term “regionally gendered performativity.” Regionally gendered performativity pinpoints ways in which women protagonists form identities and community allegiances that are both rooted in and resistant to local norms of behavior. By embodying *and* defying such norms, these women protagonists problematize Butlerian theories of performativity and the ubiquitous essentialist/social constructionist dichotomy.

“Engendering Regions” also examines ways in which regionally gendered performativity affects community. At a basic level regional formation is similar to community formation in that “constructing regions centrally involves culturally charged, socially based acts of inclusion and exclusion” (Ryden 2011, 18). I have shown in this project how women’s regionally gendered performativity facilitates or impedes community membership. All of the protagonists in this study negotiate issues of individualism and coalition; and “[g]iven the political impetus of feminism, which gave rise to the adage that ‘sisterhood is powerful,’ it should not be surprising that many feminist writers privilege the collective in their work at the same time that they insist on the right of each individual to her (or his) own quest” (Phillips 1998, 124). Feminist literary readings of contemporary portrayals of region, gender, and spatiality contribute to our knowledge of how intersections of identity and community operate on a daily basis.

Fictional spaces opened by these novels encourage readers to imagine and ideally implement alternatives to current systems of privilege and oppression. Literature reflects the actual world as we know it *and* enables us to experience realities other than our own. Individuals’ negotiations of personal and communal identities can reflect larger-scale issues of nationality; Morrison reminds us that “cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation’s literature” (1992, 39). Because regional literature is part of this national body of work, its influence can extend beyond the boundaries of the given region to other regions, the nation as a whole, and beyond national boundaries.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Tracking how literature reflects regional changes can help us understand new formations of identity and community that are continually emerging. Interconnections of region and gender vary across times, places, and individuals, and the configurations they take are numerous, possibly infinite. Investigations into how gendered and geographic subject positions intersect yield insight into how people and place coexist. Such investigations suggest ways that these interrelationships, on which we depend for survival, may flourish. I hope that my discussions pique interest in and shed light on the importance of understanding how regional space—particularly topography and climate—are integral to women’s identity and community formation.

1. In April 2010 Arizona Governor Jan Brewer “signed the nation’s toughest bill on immigration into law” (Archibold 2010). Sparking debate and protest, the law “make[s] the failure to carry immigration documents a crime and give[s] the police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally. Opponents have called it an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status” (Archibold 2010). Shortly thereafter, in May 2010, Gov. Brewer signed into law “a bill that aims to ban ethnic studies in Arizona schools” (Santa Cruz 2010). Controversially, “HB 2281 bans schools from teaching classes that are designed for students of a particular ethnic group, promote resentment or advocate ethnic solidarity over treating pupils as individuals….The bill was written to target the Chicano, or Mexican American, studies program in the Tucson school system, said state Supt. of Public Instruction Tom Horne” (Santa Cruz 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In a 2003 U.S. Census Bureau publication Franklin reports: “The highest levels of both in- and outmigration [sic] of all four census regions occurred in the South. Just over 5 million people moved from the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West to the South between 1995 and 2000. During the same period, 3.2 million individuals left the South for one of the other regions. The resulting net immigration rate was 20.2, meaning that the South gained 20.2 people through migration for every 1,000 individuals living there in 1995” (2003, 2). In comparison Franklin writes: “Although the second-highest level of immigration was in the West, at 2.7 million people, this figure was balanced by an almost equivalent number of outmigrants, creating a net immigration rate for the West of just 0.2” (2003, 2). No “Appalachian” region is designated in this report, but “the South” includes the majority of “Appalachian” states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Franklin 2003, 2). It is surprising to see Delaware in this list. “The West” includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming (Franklin 2003, 2). Variation among regional demarcations noted in this dissertation reflects the difficulty in precisely defining region. For additional information see Lichter et al. (2005), Pippert (2006), and Travis (2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hereafter referred to as *Patron*. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hereafter referred to as *Bean*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The spirit of place and one’s attachments to it can disrupt traditional notions of temporal, historical, and psychic distance. Dyer describes this phenomenon in regard to his experiences traveling: “If successive phases of history can be imagined as sharing a common space, then perhaps, by analogy, chronologically distinct experiences of place—Rome, Detroit, Leptis Magna, Amsterdam, New Orleans—also occur in some ways simultaneously. If the successive can be experienced simultaneously, then perhaps distance can be experienced as immanence. They might be tied to specific locations, but in ‘the sphere of the mind,’ some experiences—separated, originally, by years as well as miles—end up sharing a single location and a single instant” (2003, 248). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Pryse (2000) discusses how standpoints deployed during interactions between Appalachians and non-Appalachians in Murfree’s work exemplify Pratt’s ideas of “contact zones.” [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See MacCannell (1976), Russell (1986), Birkett (1989), Leed (1991), and Roberson (1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Two notable exceptions occur in Dorothy Allison’s *Cavedweller*, where Delia leaves Los Angeles to return home to Cayro, Georgia, and also in *The Fool’s Progress*, in which Henry leaves Arizona to return home to Stump Creek, West Virginia. Unlike Rose, Delia and Henry are “going home” to Appalachia. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Leed notes that “[t]here is not yet a psychology of travel, but if there were it would have to focus upon the pleasures inherent, for some, in motion: its autotelic characteristics, the manner in which passage through space shapes the experience of time and perception in general” (1991, 129). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. One of the only intimate experiences they share is when Rose teaches Sissy how to drive, telling her daughter that “[d]riving is the most important thing you can learn….It’s the secret of the universe” (Patchett 1992, 286). While Sissy enjoys these rare occasions, overall she harbors resentment and anger toward Rose. In one episode Sissy fantasizes: “I’d go right up to her and tell her she could go to hell for all I cared. She’d done a rotten job. She had never for a minute put me first. Jesus, look around you, I’d say to her. Saint Elizabeth’s is full of girls who can’t raise their children. At least they’re kind enough to give them away” (Patchett 1992, 274). Fleeting moments of intimacy, based on Rose’s teaching her how to escape, do not provide a mother-daughter bond for Sissy. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Palencia describes how hearing stories of leaving and staying in Appalachia influence how one learns to live in the place: “While I learned from my father all that was good about subsistence farming and life in an isolated Appalachian community, his sister, my late aunt Glenith, told a different tale—and told it with determination. The stories of those who leave are different from the stories of those who stay. And Aunt Glenith left, as fast as she could. My father and my aunt taught me two opposing but inseparable ways of being from Appalachia” (1998, 202). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Neither Thomas nor Sissy suspects that they are biological father and daughter. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. When Rose leaves Marina del Rey she feels she has to cut ties with her mother completely: “If I gave up the thing I loved most in the world, then maybe God would respect my decision” (Patchett 1992, 32). Missy leaves under very different circumstances: she talks with her mother about moving, she is not pregnant, and she does not feel ashamed. She does feel some guilt, however, because she loves her mother. Rose’s mother does not know about Rose’s imminent departure, but Missy’s mother is supportive of Missy’s desire for a different life and wishes her the best on the trip out West. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Rose also says she “wanted to get away” (Patchett 1992, 50). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. She takes the name of the town where she first runs out of gas; she shortens Taylorville to Taylor. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Taylor guesses the child’s age as “[s]omewhere between a baby and a person” (Kingsolver 1992, 17). A doctor in Tucson decides she is about three years old (Kingsolver 1992, 123). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. But Jacobson does not dismiss Kingsolver’s body of work: “While racist errors in her early fiction undermine her progressive political goals, these novels still accomplish important political work” (2010, 185). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Although outside the scope of this chapter, an analysis of why rural Kentucky is portrayed in both *Bean* and *Patron* as being a location in which an inordinate number of pregnant girls and women live could shed light on associations between women’s (pregnant) bodies and rural space. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The sphere of the workplace may be one through which people are introduced to a new region. Gender, of course, plays a prominent role in who works and how this facilitates or impedes their settlement in the new region. In a study of Appalachia-to-northeast Ohio migrants, Feather notes: “The male migrant became assimilated into the new culture rather quickly by virtue of the workplace….For the migrant’s wife, however, assimilation was a slower process” (1998, 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Their “hometowns in Kentucky were separated by only two counties” (Kingsolver 1992, 72). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Taylor explains that “nutters” is the nickname given to “the kids that lived in the country” in Kentucky who “would pick walnuts to earn money for school clothes” (Kingsolver 1992, 139). They were outcasts. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. From seeing the hardships Estevan and Esperanza endure, Taylor realizes that im/migration is not always desirable or positive. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Jacobson argues that Kingsolver “consciously uses white privilege against the system to obtain the illegal adoption [of Turtle], and yet the novel still fails to consider fully the implications of Taylor’s guardianship of the Native American child” (2010, 186-87). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Taylor frequently refers to Tucson, Arizona, and the Southwest as “home” (for example, see pages 217, 225, 229, and 232). Welty acknowledges that “home” can be a location other than that of one’s birth: “It is through place that we put out roots, wherever birth, chance, or fate or our traveling selves set us down” (1990, 132-33). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Limerick asserts that “[r]egion is a mental act and region is real, at one and the same time” (1996, 103). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Pryse suggests Murfree’s fiction provides a global perspective by helping us “to question…ways in which the contrast between America and Appalachia becomes a metaphor for the larger contrast between the United States and our own ‘cultural imperialism’ beyond our borders” (2000, 211). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)