Part 1.

*Absence* describes the stereotypical emigrant, a person leaving their home in search of a better life, or at least a new life. Thus, it is with Wari. He is done with his life in Peru and ready to move on. More than just changing scenery, Wari is committed to changing his life, he willingly gives up painting before even attempting to paint in America, noting that he is “not a painter anymore” (26). Moving to America, Wari knows means adapting. and he is “willing to work… at anything” (24). His move is fraught on both ends. America is still recuperating from the 9/11 terrorist attacks that left behind “a wide and hollow nothing” (28). And a car bomb was left at the American Embassy in Peru to welcome the US President on his official visit (18). This culminates in a less than enthused welcome for Wari and (in conjunction with limited funds) a reduced visa. All of this summarizes the hard life of an emigrant. S/he leaves a home and career and enters a new country that is not likely to greet them with open arms and accept jobs that are, more likely than not, menial in the face of their past career. Additionally, they face the pain of “staying gone” (23). Leaving home is easy, people do it every day, but never returning is a different matter. This is a common predicament of emigrants as they move to a new country for a better life, but one that does not guarantee ever seeing their native lands again.

While having to leave home and stay away might be terrible, adjusting to life in a new country may be harder. The difficulty in this is in finding the fine line between adapting to a new country and way of life and losing your past. *Mother the Big* explores this idea through the opposing perspectives of Michael and Mother the Big. They move to America to avoid the turmoil and dangers of Tehran. Michael looks to the future and tries to adapt to his new life. While he does this in many ways, e.g., idealizing American values, coveting the blond and blue-eyed American woman, and expressing doubt in the wonderous Iran Mother the Big tells him about, perhaps the most telling is when he “got [his] name… *Michael Nouri”* (36). Michael’s insistence in moving forward often puts him at odds with Mother the Big to the point that she curses and screams at Michael when she discovers his American girlfriend, saying “*she wished she had actually died instead of witnessing*” the girlfriend (45). Despite this and the bullying incurred at school, Michael is adamant to adapt.

Mother the Big refuses to accept her new life and represents the antitheses of Michael. From the outset, she is against the move. Before they have even moved, she asks Michael “do you see why it’s better here?” (32). She understands the devastation around her better than Michael, but instead of desiring to leave she wishes to stay; Iran is her home. She left against her will. Michael tells his teachers that his parents “could not afford to leave their business behind” and his “grandmother, so old, could use the good doctors here, while I could use the good schools” (33-34). It is only because this is what is needed of her that she came. Whether she truly hates America or simply despises it since it was foisted upon her in conjunction with the loss of her home is up to debate. Either way she expresses her distrust and disdain for America as often as possible, from remarking that American women “bring you and your family more ad luck than you can imagine” to equating her time America to “hell” (38, 51). Emigrants face a horrible choice upon leaving their home country, ‘do I adapt to a new life or cling to my history?’. Khakpour highlights this struggle through Michael and Mother the Big.

Part 2.

*Otravida, Otravez* depicts the struggle of immigrant lives in America. We follow Yasmin as she struggles with accepting the present and the future and letting the past go. This is a common issue amongst immigrants and in Yasmin’s case we see her struggle portrayed in her difficulty in accepting that Ramon has moved on from Virta. Virta’s “eight years’ worth” of letters is a constant struggle for Yasmin throughout the story (101). She discovers the letters early her relationship with Ramon and finds that “after reading her letters [she] always feel[s] better” (102). Eventually the letters stop, and Yasmin can live contentedly without the reminders of the past. However, a new letter arrives while Yasmin is pregnant, and Yasmin contemplates destroying it (111). This is the time that Yasmin must let go of Ramon’s past relationship (and her own past) and accept and trust her relationship with Ramon (her new life as an immigrant). She talks with Ana Iris who has made a decision and will “either bring [her boys to America] or she will go” to them (112). Ana Iris’ acceptance of the present prompts Yasmin to do the same and accept her lot as an immigrant and give Ramon the letter.

We also see the struggle of what is left behind. Ana Iris struggles with being separated from her family. She told Yasmin that “we are not here for fun” when Yasmin first arrived (102). Ana Iris is in the US to support her family and “hasn’t seen her three boys in nearly seven years” (99). This mirrors the issues that many immigrants face when they immigrate. Though they are making better wages in the US and can better support their family, they have given up actually having a family. Eventually the toll is too high, and Ana Iris realizes her boys have “gotten so much older… it’s hard for me to recognize their voices” (112). Additionally, Ramon shows us the struggles a Latino man has in providing a stable life. He constantly talks to Yasmin. “about the house he wants to buy, how hard it is to find one when you’re Latino” (97). It takes him until the end of the story to finally purchase a house. This is what it takes for Ramon to prove to himself that he has made it, “we did it, he says quietly. Now we can begin. Then he puts his head down… and cries” (109). Even the house is “a half-ruin” this is the most important moment in Ramon’s time in America and the raw emotion he unveils, shows us just how hard this has been (109).

*Wal-Mart Has Plantains* depicts ‘being here’ as a compromise. The narrator and her family move to America to help her husband find a job in the medical field (118). Little did the narrator know, this meant that she “was not entitled to work” while her husband did (117). Furthermore, the narrator faces a compromise between adapting to America and holding on to Nigeria. While she likes and misses Nigerian cuisine, she refuses to seek it out, but when she “spot[s] a basket of ripe plantains” she cannot pass it by (121). This is representative of the narrator deciding to adapt to her new life but still allowing her Nigerian background to impact her.

 Part 3.

*Hot-Air Balloons* depicts the immigrant voices in a drastically different way from most of the other stories. Most of the stories are the histories of a first-generation immigrant. Clio, however, is second-generation Haitian. This story provides a much different perspective on being an immigrant. Perhaps the most drastic difference is there isn’t any message of discomfort about being in America. While Clio did have an “unstable adolescent life that left [her] longing for so much”, this is in relation to how her parents raised her and her inability to from strong relationships with children growing up (195). Her issues growing up were simply the issues of any adolescent and were not significantly altered by being the child of immigrants.

Instead, Clio struggles to relate to her family’s past and the country of her parents. She knows she has a good life in America and a part of her wants to take advantage of that and make a difference. But another part of her is frightened of going to Haiti and doesn’t want “to see it. [she] was afraid to know” the sad and dilapidate society her parents had fled from (200). Buoying this, is the realization that her parents had given “everything so that [she] would never have to see… [and] experience” Haiti (200). Clio’s story is essentially the opposite of most others, she struggles to accept not living in a country she has never known.