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Introduction:

Against the (Main)stream: New Perspectives on Asian American and British Asian Identity Politics

Silvia Schultermandl

In her 1993 essay “Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature,” Shirley Geok-lin Lim postulates that the term “Asian American” is “already collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions” (162). Lim thereby raises issues about the viability of Asian American criticism and the inherent multiplicity such a term might occult. Lim’s statement questions the applicability of a single umbrella term to adequately define a field that is so diverse. More importantly, Lim’s speculation is part of a general skepticism in multiethnic studies. Therefore, what Lim posits here as a problem pertaining to Asian American culture at the height of US multiculturalism might also hold true for other fields of multiethnic studies including British Asian studies. As recent scholarship evidences, both Asian American and British Asian studies are characterized by an enormous inherent contradiction and by constant renegotiations of (the importance of) identity politics.

This contradiction and renegotiation is what I wish to evoke by characterizing Asian American and British Asian studies as being positioned against the (main)stream – meaning that the two fields both operate with counter-discourses to the mainstream in the US and in Britain while at the same time dealing with distinctions between center and margin within the fields themselves. Thus, the multiple positionings of Asian American and British Asian cultural productions challenge ongoing discussions of multiculturalism in the modern world. This is where Asian American and British Asian studies lend themselves to a particularly complex but insightful investigation of multi-ethnic literatures in both a local and global context.

The attempt to investigate Asian American and British Asian studies side by side is however a rather complex endeavor. There are rather pronounced differences in the discourses on Asian American and British Asian studies in relation to lived experiences, immigration history and the maintained relationship between the ‘home’ and the ‘host’ countries. It is therefore difficult enough to envision definitions of Asian American and British Asian studies that encompass the plurality and multiplicity of the cultural productions in these fields, especially in light of the complex interconnectedness of ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, age, national origin and religious affiliation. Moreover, to discuss Asian American and British Asian Studies side by side is particularly challenging. At the same time, however, the attempt to cross-read Asian American and British Asian studies can also offer new perspectives on the two fields and can therefore result in an interesting discussion of the parameters that precisely play into the concepts of the two fields of study. Possibly, an investigation of the inherent differences between Asian American and British Asian critique will facilitate a broader understanding of the richness of these fields. This is the main contribution this special

issue seeks to make. Collectively, the essays featured in this special issue reposition contemporary trends in Asian American and British Asian studies.

As much as the scopes of Asian American and British Asian studies have been broadened over the past decades, so, too, have definitions of the term Asian American itself undergone multiple shifts in meaning. In a recent essay, Eleanor Ty, for instance, observes that due to the multiple positionings that writers address, North Asian American and European ethnic texts can no longer be defined by the intervention of hyphenated identities, especially in the context of writers whose texts are not “primarily concerned with the challenges of assimilation, racial prejudice, or with cultural hybridity” (239). In its place, Ty offers the term “Asian global narratives,” which she defines as “narratives by Asians in the diaspora whose works fall outside of this hyphenated paradigm of Asian plus adopted country” (242). Ty arranges these Asian global narratives into three different categories: first, works that stress globalization as major point of interest; second, works written by writers of Asian origin which do not offer depictions of the authors’ adopted countries; and third, works that do not have anything “Asian” as their subject matter (240). Going beyond the teleological narrative, these works, continues Ty, “highlight movement, instability, and importance of standpoint or location” (241).

Ty’s discussion of Asian global narratives is important in the context of this volume because it offers a rare comparative treatment of Asian American, Asian European, and Asian Australian cultural productions, emphasizing that they “are no longer simply bound by allegiances to nation, culture, and ethnicity, but [show] plural identities shaped by many other factors, such as sexuality, gender, class, religion, education, health, and age” (250). More importantly, however, Ty’s intervention also opens up the possibility for a definition of Asian American and British Asian studies that considers texts by authors who are not Asian American or British Asian to be relevant for an analysis of contemporary perspectives on these two fields. To the same extent as Ty categorizes works that are not about Asian subject matters alongside works, this volume considers mainstream American texts about China and Pakistani canonical literature in translation as equally representative of current trends in Asian American and British Asian studies respectively as works by Asian Americans and British Asians. This opening up of Asian American and British Asian studies to the multiple paradigms that shape the fields allows for much more innovative approaches than the construction Asian American and British Asian studies along the rhetoric of hyphenated identities solely. Hybridity, after all, always operates with an implied essentialism, since it “presupposes two anterior purities” (Gilroy 54).

What contemporary discourses in Asian American and British Asian studies forcefully exemplify is that America, Asia, and Britain are far from being culturally pure or homogenous entities, nor do they exist in isolation. In other words, the two fields of study not only refute essentialism, but also go beyond the boundaries of the hyphenated entities implied in the semantics of the terms that designate the two fields themselves. Arjun Appadurai delineates the limitations to the theorizing Asian American and British Asian strictly along hyphenation:

The formula of hyphenation (as in Italian-Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans) is reaching the point of saturation, and the right-hand side of the hyphen can barely contain the unruliness of the left-hand side [...] The politics

of ethnic identity in the US [and in Britain] is inseparably linked to the global spread of originally local national identities. For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its population to the United States as refugees, tourists, or students, there is now a decolonized transnation, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place or origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity. No existing conception of Americanness can contain this large variety of transnations (424).

In the past two decades, critics have recognized the imperative of reading Asian American literature largely from a transnational angle, thereby emphasizing the different locations and the associated discourses of power and privilege in which Asian American studies takes place. Most recently, Shirley Lim et al's book, *Transnational Asian American Literatures: Sites and Transits* (2006), considers "the complex, dialogical national and transnational formulations of Asian American imaginations" (2) while refusing to reject the US as primary location of Asian American thought (1). Unlike the Asian American cultural nationalists discourse of "Claiming America," Lim et al's book adopts a transnational scope in its investigation of the current body of Asian American scholarship and thus purports a definition of Asian American literature that "can no longer be viewed as merely a minor ethnic province of a domestic American canon" (22). Instead, Lim et al's collection emphasizes the multiple dynamics at play in Asian American cultural production, dynamics that result in

the diasporic, mobile, transmigratory nature of Asian American experience, a history characterized by disparate migratory threads, unsettled and unsettling histories churned by multiple and different Asian ethnic immigrant groups each with a different language and cultural stock, different value and belief systems, and different notions of literary aesthetics, albeit most largely mediated through the English language. (1)

Reading Lim et al's definition of Asian American culture and the ubiquitous reference to difference, one cannot help but notice the similarities to Lisa Lowe's groundbreaking essay "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" of some fifteen years prior to Lim et al.'s book. Lowe argues that "what is referred to as 'Asian American' is clearly a heterogeneous entity" (27). The complexity of this entity, however, becomes evident from Lowe's unequivocal definition of the field. On the one hand, Lowe points out the importance of "identity politics" in order to facilitate "a concept of political unity that enables diverse Asian groups to understand our unequal circumstances and histories as being related" (30). On the other hand, however, Lowe cautions us that "essentializing Asian American identity and suppressing our differences – of national origin, generation, gender, party, class – risks particular dangers: ... it inadvertently supports the racist discourse that constructs Asians as homogenous group, that implies we are 'all alike' and conform to 'types'" (30).

Similar attention to multiplicity can be noted about Sau-ling C. Wong's concept of "denationalization," a concept which, like Lowe's, foregrounds the inherently diasporic nature of Asian American identity. Wong's term refers to three major changes in Asian American studies: first, the subsiding of "cultural nationalist" discourses for

the sake of “a complication of identity politics” and the exploration of “other axes or organization and mobilization including class, gender and sexuality” (1); second, a “relaxation of the distinction between what is Asian American and what is ‘Asian,’ and between Asian American studies and Asian studies” (1); and third, a “diasporic perspective” that stands in clear opposition to the “domestic perspective” (2) of the “claiming America” trope of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Wong critiques this move toward “denationalization” for its “decontextualization” and its lack to take into consideration the historical development of global movements at large (14).

What becomes evident from Wong’s discussion of “denationalization” is the ambivalence toward criticism that stresses discourses of subjectivity exclusively. While Wong, and to a certain extent Lowe, recognize the general necessity to politicize Asian American cultural productions through identity politics, some critics reject the idea of a politicized experience all together. Shari Stone-Mediatore, for instance, offers a poststructuralist critique of experience which points out the dangers of over-emphasizing experience in empiricist narratives of female agency (111-16). Kandice Chuh, in *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (2003), even goes so far as to suggesting that the current condition of Asian American studies calls for a “subjectless discourse” in order to “create the conceptual space to prioritize difference by foregrounding the discursive constructedness of subjectivity” (9). Chuh identifies one of the pitfalls of contemporary Asian American studies to be too invested in the politicization of Asian American experience, thereby ultimately producing essentialist discourses that operate along principles of particularism and exclusivism rather than offering a candid investigation of the social parameters that inform Asian American cultural productions in the US and worldwide.

The question of identity politics is also a driving force in recent discussions of the Asian American literary canon. Mostly, the parameters that determine which authors and texts should be included in the Asian American canon are rather arbitrary, while, and this is what many critics assert, these parameters are descriptive and prescriptive at the same time. The texts that are featured as canonical works, and by extension studied and taught within the academy more than non-canonical texts, is itself a political statement about the visibility and agency of diverse groups of people, all of whom are subsumed under the umbrella term “Asian American.”

One specific area which puts to test the viability of the term Asian American and the implied identity politics is the field of canon formation. On the one hand, the intervention of an Asian American canon, as is true for all ethnic canons in general, is indicative of the inherent discourses of difference that segregate the margin from the center. On the other hand, contemporary discussions of Asian American literature emphasize the internal heterogeneity (gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.) among the cultural productions that the identity politics that are at play. Paradoxically, then, Asian American literature thus has been subsumed under the label of minority literature while there are also minorities within Asian American literature. It is this double referentiality to a center/margin binary, this emphasis on identity politics twice against the (main) stream that constitutes a major dilemma in the formulation of identity politics of Asian American literature. The following discussion of ethnic canons points out the discrepancy that underlies the labeling of literary texts and the social groups they

allegedly represent, thereby recognizing the problem of twice against the (main)stream as one that is prominent ethnic literatures in general.

Literary canon formation is an ongoing process whose fluctuations and innate tensions are often reminiscent of and correlate with contemporaneous socio-cultural changes in society. The issue of canon formation and the introduction of a strictly ethnic canon is one that goes hand in hand with definitions of socio-cultural changes in US society. If national literature is capable of representing the demographic make-up of a country in terms of its authorship as well as its reading audience, then certainly an American literary canon needs to be representative of the diversity and heterogeneity that defines the US cultural landscape. Recent attempts to multiculturalize the canon of American literature, with its special attention to deconstruct discourses of hegemony and homogeneity, for instance, replicate the dynamics pertaining to US national identity politics. The following quote by Cornel West delineates forcefully the interconnectedness between demographic, socio-cultural and canonical shifts in recent US academy:

During the late '50s, '60s, and early '70s in the USA [...] decolonized sensibilities fanned and fueled the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, as well as the student anti-war, feminist, gay, brown, gay, and lesbian movements. In this period we witnessed the shattering of the male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived liberal consensus. The inclusion of African Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and American women into the culture of critical discourse yielded intense intellectual polemics and inescapable ideological polarization that focused principally on the exclusions, silences, and blindness of male WASP cultural homogeneity and its concomitant Arnoldian notions of the canon. (24-26)

Precisely the question of who decides which texts and authors ought to be included in a canon is an important one, because it connotes not only to aspects of agency and visibility but also of power and privilege. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith reminds us, canon formation does not take place through a single referendum but is rather the product "of a series of continuous interactions among a variably constituted object, emergent conditions, and the mechanisms of cultural selection and transmission" (1340). If these mechanisms of selection rely mainly on assumed cultural parameters, tropes, and themes, such as depictions of past and present cultural practices, the historiography of an ethnic group, or the culture clashes and generation conflicts within an ethnic group, then clearly the canonization of these texts relies on a set of parameters that underscore ethnicity as primary representational logic. Werner Sollors' definition of a "mosaic procedure" in anthologizing ethnic American literature refers to this practice: "The published results of this mosaic procedure are the readers and compendiums made up of diverse essays on groups of ethnic writers who may have little in common except so-called ethnic roots while, at the same time, obvious and important literary and cultural connections are obfuscated" (255).

This is particularly problematic in the context of Asian American literature, a category that is maybe the least homogenous of all ethnic American literatures today. Susan Koshy emphasizes that unlike African American, Native American, or Chincano/a literatures, Asian American literature "inhabits a highly unstable

temporality of the ‘about-to-be,’” its meanings continuously reinvented after the arrival of new groups of immigrants and the enactment of legislative changes” (467). To define a canon that is representative of the diversity of Asian American culture, especially in the context of transnationality “where ethnicity is increasingly produced at multiple local and global sites” (468), is thus a particularly difficult endeavor. In fact, as Lisa Lowe argues, “Asian American literature *resists* the formal abstraction of aestheticization and canonization” (Palumbo Liu 54).

Koshy’s and Lowe’s reservations toward an Asian American canon highlight the essentialism that underlies such lumping together of ethnic writers of an allegedly similar origin. If Asian American literature is indeed its own canon, as is often implied by the forceful claiming of the umbrella term Asian American, how then can such a canon account for the different intersections of nationality, gender, sexuality, class and ideology that distinguish the individual writers from one another? In what way is the over-presence of Chinese American writers on the contemporary literary market representative of the dynamics and demographics of Asian American literatures?

This principle of selection is also at work in the establishment of anthologies that are entirely devoted to Asian American literature. The canonization of Asian American writers in anthologies of Asian American literature, as Koshy suggests, operates with similar hierarchical structures that produce the very glass ceiling between American literature and Asian American literature in the first place. Koshy distinguishes between “core” and “auxiliary formations” within the Asian American canon that are defined by the numerical dominance of certain ethnic groups among Asian American writers (475). For instance, the various groundbreaking anthologies of Asian American literature, such as *Aiiieeee!* and *The Forbidden Stitch*, portray the preponderance of Chinese American and Japanese American authors at the expense of South East Asian and South Asian American writers. Similarly, King-Kok Cheung acknowledges in her introduction to 1993 *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, that she was “unable to find scholars who feel equipped to discuss writings by Americans of Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, or Thai descent” (21) while it was not at all difficult to find scholars to discuss writers of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese descent. In “South Asian American Literature: ‘Off the Turnpike’ of Asian America,” Rajini Srikanth and Lavina Shankar lament the exclusion of South Asians in the major Asian American anthologies of the ‘80s and early ‘90s, pointing thereby to the very fact that Asian American cultural productions battled with the status of being a minority within the minority of Asian American studies.

The formation and transformation of an Asian American canon operates along identity politics that instill in Asian American writers the roles of ambassadors of Asian American and Asian cultures, a rather problematic role indeed. It is important to keep in mind that this attribution of a cultural function is inherently linked to a deeply rooted essentialism and is informed by orientalist expectations of what Asian American literature is *supposed to be* about. This notion of the “supposed-to-be” is important in the context of the positioning of identity politics within a binary construction. If one reads Asian American literatures as “proxies” for various Asian American experiences, a practice that David Palumbo-Liu asserts is quite common in ethnic American literatures in general, then what would be the “canonical” text that represents the diversity of Asian American experiences? This speculative question, with its implied

essentialism and its problematic characterization of Asian American literatures as ethnographic and anthropological case studies, points out the shortcomings of a canon formation that uses ethnicity as main representational logic.

However, the distinction between first-and second generation immigrant writers is relevant in the formulation of identity politics implied in the term Asian American. Who is Asian American, if this term does indeed conjure up an identity narrative that addresses issues of nationhood, origin, diaspora, coloniality, postcoloniality, and globality? And, by the same token, who isn't? Frank Chin et al's logic of exclusion in their anthology *Aiiieeeee!* comes immediately to mind here. Chin uses the term Asian American to denote a common history of exclusion and of racism, both being indications that the melting-pot myth of cultural assimilation is not part of Asian American authors' discourse but of the discourse of white supremacist hegemony. Chin is very selective in his appropriation of the term Asian American, as his infamous distinction between "real" and "fake" Asian Americans implies. In Chin's definition, the "real" Asian Americans are "American born and raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white culture" whereas first-generation Asian Americans, or "Americanized Asians," as Chin calls them, maintain strong cultural and ideological affiliations to their native countries while at the same time adapting to the images of the submissive and humble Oriental (vii). Chin's controversial anti-feminist postulations in context with his formulations of an "Asian American sensibility" (ix) have a long tradition of being re-negotiated, contested and re-evaluated in Asian American studies. Similarly, Chin's definition fails to address difference and diversity within the Asian American canon along the parameters of class, sexuality, and age.

Chin's formulation of an "Asian American sensibility" that resists racism and orientalism seems to be an act of "strategic use of positivist essentialism" (Spivak 205) against prevalent stereotypes of Asian Americans in US mainstream media. This strategic essentialism however is nonetheless quite problematic, especially as it prescribes loyalty and authenticity as the main categories of literary politics without adequately addressing aspects of aesthetics, maybe another dictate of the "supposed-to-be". To instill in Asian American authors a cultural competence and to read their texts as ethnographic handbooks still seem to be a recurring pitfall in the context of the classification of "minority" literatures. Thirty years after Chin's restrictive formulation of Asian American sensibility, Eleanor Ty poignantly addresses that fact that "[d]espite postmodernist notions of anti-essentialism, we are still frequently caught in discussions about origins, differences, and authenticity" (3).

Although South Asian and South East Asian, which figured as a minority within the label of Asian American cultural production, is at the center of scholarship in British Asian Studies, the question of identity politics in British Asian culture production in light of contemporary discussion of critical multiculturalism are very much similar to the recurrent problems of identification in Asian American studies. Certainly, as Claus Viol's recent discussion of British Asian popular music exemplifies, the hyphenated term "Br-Asian" is a rather clever pun but fails to shed light of the heterogeneity it connotes. Cary Rajinder Sawhney, for instance, specifies that in the term "Asian" in Britain denotes "the ethnicity of peoples originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka" (58). Sawhney, however, is quick to point out that the term British

Asian is somewhat problematic, given Britain's colonial history and the implication of a homogeneous identity that the term implies. This emphasis on South Asian origin of the British Asian might be the underlying reason for the prominent link between British Asian and Black identities, skin color and 'race' thereby featuring as common denominator.

British Asian identities have a tradition of being subsumed under the label of Blackness, a rather problematic practice. In her essay "Category Crisis: South Asian Americans and Questions of Race and Ethnicity," Susan Koshy argues that South Asian racialization in Britain affronts the difficult distinction between political agency and cultural identity. Koshy contends that the adopted label of "Blackness" mainly served as a vehicle for the South Asian British to gain political momentum (together with Afro-Caribbeeners) in the battle against racism and white supremacy in the 1960s and 1970s (309). This subsuming of an already established concept of racial emancipation, as Koshy emphasizes further, occurred at the expense of South Asian British cultural identity. The main argument against the adoption of the concept of Blackness is linked to the numerical presence of South Asians in Britain, who, being the largest minority group, should have a separate identity. The concept of Blackness, with its emphasis on 'race,' glossed over cultural differences not only between South Asian British and Afro-Caribbeeners but also within the South Asian British communities themselves.

However, subsequent shifts from a Black, highly politicized identity to a strictly cultural identity have equally met critical resistance among scholars of British Asian Studies. Koshy, for one, asserts that "the institutionalization of multiculturalism by state and local authorities led to a diversion of community struggles from issues of racial oppression to group-specific problems, thus promoting the growth of cultural difference at the expense of race consciousness" (310). This emphasis on culture has resulted in a general turn to particularism and subsequent conflicts among the various cultural groups of South Asian British. In the specific context of the politicization of Asian communities in Britain, the foregrounding of culture occurred without a coherent political discourse.

What becomes clear from this shift from political to cultural identity concepts is that with the strictly homogeneous parameters and the implied binary of either race or culture, there cannot be a viable discourse of the cultural production of British Asians. In light of this ambivalence between the two parameters, contemporary British Asian literature and cinema continues to produce cultural images that stress race and culture in an effort to "achiev[e] a balance between the dictates of the society in which they live and the dictates of their Asian heritage features" (Hand 9). In her discussion of Bollywood films, Dimple Godiwala holds that "constructed British Asian identities are as plural and as exclusive as India itself" (42). In fact, as Godiwala poignantly observes, British Asian-ness is "'translated' and indeed distorted in the construction and forging of identity" (43-44). Like the umbrella term Asian American, the term British Asian is far from satisfactory in light of the multiple inventions and cultural productions that the term needs to connote in order to do justice to the heterogeneity of the communities it is meant to describe.

The glossing over of cultural differences that the term Black in reference to South Asian British cultural productions entails and the subsequent shift to an exuberant emphasis of the cultural specificity of South Asian British experience is testimony to the

fact that cultural presence and political agency in British multiculturalism do not necessarily coincide. American multiculturalism seems to be somewhat different in this regard. In fact, as far as Asian American identity is concerned, the very genesis of Asian American thought is largely interdependent with Asian American political activism. In light of the restrictive immigration laws such as the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, legislative regulation of the numerical presence of Asians in the US has always been a fueling impact on Asian American identity politics. Given its emergence out of the civil rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s, Asian American thought, as Kandice Chuh, for instance, reminds us, “consistently foregrounds political activism, especially in the language of community work and social transformation” (5). Even in the context of the Asian American canon the foregrounding of politics has solicited harsh criticism. Some critics even suggest that the emphasis on “democratization and diversification” (Palumbo-Liu 49) of the American canon has sidelined aestheticism in Asian American literary scholarship. And whereas British Asian thought adopted discourses of Blackness, early discourses of Asian Americans as model minorities clearly separated Asian American from African American socio-political activism. One need only think of the concepts of Asian Americans as ‘model minority,’ a concept that was promoted explicitly to underscore the difference between Asian American and African American political activism. But, and this is a crucial point to remember, early Asian American thought was dominated by Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans and Korean Americans and marginalized South Asian American identities considerably, which is rather the opposite from the canon of British Asian literature. The dichotomy of race and ethnicity in South Asian American thought also has an impact on the shaping of Asian American thought in general. The panethnic coalition that characterized the Asian American movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Espiritu 10), has focused on hybrid identities as counter-narratives to mainstream US identities. Koshy argues that “[w]hereas in Britain ethnicity has offered a viable though still problematic means of politicization, in the US the emphasis on ethnicity, in the absence of other affiliations, tends to become an isolationist and apolitical move” (311).

Therefore, it seems as if the need to correct one-dimensional depictions of Asian American and British Asian identities persists— as the collective of essays in this volume suggests. While some contributing authors investigate canonical Asian American and British Asian texts, others invite us to stretch our definitions of the two fields beyond the inherited canons. Collectively, these articles explore a variety of different locations from which Asian American and British Asian cultural productions emerge and in which identity politics occur. Some of them are linked thematically, others by a similar commitment to a specific theoretical approach. Most importantly, the articles analyze the interplay of identity politics and cultural production of Asian American and British Asian culture with a strong emphasis on transnationality, thereby linking Asian American and British Asian studies by the common interest to redefine Asian American and British Asian identity politics in a global context.

Overall, the articles in the volume can be put in three different categories: the first category is best defined as “Resisting Stereotypes”. The articles in this category analyze Asian American and British Asian literature with specific emphasis on the author’s agency and ideology in the context of identity formation. While Sihem Arfaoui’s “Feeding the Memory with Culinary Resistance: *The Woman Warrior*:

Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen Good's Wife*" and Mehmet Ali Celikel's "Resisting Sweet and Sour, and Shifting Genders in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet*" offer discussions of cultural resistance to prescribed stereotypes by emphasizing food as subversive performative marker of identity. Ingo Peters' "Miracles, Authentic Hope, and the Chinese American Novel" analyzes the use of the non-essentialist concept of "authentic hope," arguing that this concept enables Chinese American authors to supercede stereotypical images of progress on the one hand and pessimism on the other. In a similar context, E.K. Tan's "Overriding Identity Politics with Affect in Ayub Khan-Din's *East is East*" considers the productivity and problematics of hybridity by highlighting affect as the melodramatic solution to familial and racial conflicts.

The second category of articles takes this concept of identity politics beyond subjective identity formation. The articles in this category can best be described as "Exploring Asian American and British Asian Identities". Lan Dong's "Representing Cultural Uncertainties in A Great Wall and Pushing Hands" explores the identity concept of hybridity in relation to the home and host country, applying discourses of both/and as well as either/or definitions of selfhood. Similarly, Klara Szmanko's "America is in the Heart and on the Ground: Confronting and (Re-) Constructing "America" in Three Asian American Narratives of the 1930s" acknowledges a persistent disconnect between an imagined and an actual experience of America. In a related context, Lee Wing Hin's "Traveling Subjects: Language, Resistance, and Cultural Identities" emphasizes how existing racial and sexual identity categories are geographically, linguistically, and culturally bounded by offering an autobiographical narrative as well as a critical analysis of the Toronto Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement in 2002-05.

The final category, "Expanding the Scope," features articles that foreground a global perspective of Asian American and British Asian identities by emphasizing the context in which Asian American and British Asian literatures flourish. Deborah L. Madsen's "Nora Okja Keller: Telling Trauma in the Transnational Military-(Sex)industrial Complex" and Rachel Farebrother's "Testing the Limits of the Transcultural: Travel, Intertextuality and Tourism in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* and Anita Desai's *The ZigZag Way*" explore the impact of sexual trade and tourism as global parameters that inform Asian American cultural productions, thereby taking into consideration aspect of power and privilege. A keen interest in deconstructing essentialist discourses of Asian American and British Asian identities is also apparent in Emily Cheng's "The Thrills of Motherhood: Female Citizenship and Transnational Adoptions in David Ball's *China Running*" and Masood A. Raja's "Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*: The Novel and the Politics of Writing Beyond the Nation State". Both articles, like the above two, emphasize cultural productions in a transnational context, but what makes these two particularly interesting in the general scope of the volume is that the articles discuss texts by Anglo American and Pakistani authors respectively, thereby looking for cues about identity politics in texts that aren't part of the (canonical) Asian American and British Asian inquiry.

All in all, despite the fact that three main categories of investigation emerge from the body of articles that construct this volume, I have arranged the individual contributions in a rather random order. It seems to me that to cluster them together and

to structure them in such thematic order would project a sense of coherence that does not coincide with the aspects of Asian American and British Asian studies the contributing authors wanted to promote in their discussions. Hence, this collection appears in a rather eclectic form, patchworking together a variety of critical approaches and intentionally working against a well-defined structure.

On a final note, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Şebnem Toplu and Seçil Saraçlı, the editors of *Interactions*, for allowing me to put together this volume, the journal's first ever special issue. Amazed, even flattered, by their readiness to embark with me on this endeavor - after all, it is also my first special issue - I am deeply honored to have served as their first guest editor. I am also indebted to the Editorial Board: Seçkin Ergin, Günseli Sönmez Işçi, Ayşe Lahur Kırtunç, Atilla Silkü, Rezzan Silkü and Nevin Koyuncu and the Assistant Editors: Gülşen Hatipoğlu, Züleyha Çetiner Öktem, Matı Turyel and Ayca Çetin. Many contributing authors have asked me at times to thank the anonymous readers from the *Interactions* advisory board for their critical readings, constructive feedback and detailed comments; as do the authors, I appreciate all your effort. And finally, my thanks go to the contributing authors for their interest in this project and their valuable contributions to the fields of Asian American and British Asian studies. Without them, this all could not have been possible.

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Representing Cultural Uncertainties in *A Great Wall* and *Pushing Hands*¹

Lan Dong

Lisa Lowe's insightful article, entitled "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," theorizes stratification within the Asian American communities that is based on gender, class, generation, as well as other elements (677-97).² Building upon the critical spectrum framed by Lowe, I intend to scrutinize the representation of Chinese-ness and American-ness in two films, and in the process add another aspect to the discussion on diversity within the body of work that we label "Chinese diaspora" or "Chinese American". In particular, I choose to analyze two family dramas – *A Great Wall* (1985) directed by Peter Wang and *Pushing Hands* (1992) directed by Ang Lee – in order to examine how the contact between Chinese Americans living in the U.S. and Chinese nationals from China leads to cultural uncertainties over being American and being Chinese.

Wang's film centers on a Chinese American family, the Fangs, who travel in the early 1980s to Beijing, where they stay with their relatives for about a month. Because of this journey back to the "homeland", the Fangs are compelled to reconsider the Chinese-ness and American-ness integrated within their own identity construction, as well as being reflected in the globalized contemporary lives in China and the United States. Also set in a context of cultural contact, Lee's film, *Pushing Hands*, portrays a journey in the opposite geographical direction: a retired Chinese Tai Chi master visits his son's family in New York. The film highlights the difficulties in communication caused by cultural and generational misunderstandings between a Chinese father, Master Chu, and his Chinese American son, Alex, as well as between a Chinese father-in-law and his Caucasian daughter-in-law, Martha. The attempt to lead a Chinese life in an American household (in the case of Master Chu) proves to be as difficult a task as balancing a double identity comprised of being a Chinese son and an American husband (in the case of Alex Chu).

In both films, uncertainties about the "root" and "host" cultures in cross-cultural settings arise from the encounters between Chinese Americans and Chinese nationals through familial connection. I argue that these two films allude to the different approaches to Asian American identity in cultural production: *A Great Wall* hints at the "both/and" approach through which the Fangs combine their Chinese heritage with American actuality in constructing their Chinese American identities; *Pushing Hands*,

¹ Acknowledgement: The author would like to thank Silva Schultermandl and Fanny Rothschild for their comments on an earlier version of this essay.

² Citing Peter Wang's film *A Great Wall* in her essay paralleled with Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* as a film version of alternatives "to the dichotomy of nativism and assimilation by multiplying the generational conflict and demystifying the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship", Lowe considers Wang's film by concentrating "on a primary contrast between the habits, customs, and assumptions of the Chinese in China and the Chinese Americans in California" (690).

on the other hand, brings about the message of “either/or” in which Alex has to make an ultimate choice: either to be a filial Chinese son or a good American husband.³

A Great Wall: What Is the “Wall”?

As the first collaborated production between the United States and the People’s Republic of China, Peter Wang’s film, *A Great Wall*, chronicles the “return” of Leo Fang, along with his American-born wife and son, to his hometown of Beijing to visit his sister’s family. Using a comedic tone, this film portrays Chinese Americans’ reverse migration to their *root culture in the present tense* that challenges their understanding of cultural origins. On the one hand, the narrative illuminates the cultural misunderstandings between Chinese Americans and Chinese nationals; yet on the other hand, it shows the filmmaker’s attempts to compromise the conflicts between the characters by way of emphasizing the harmonious atmosphere among the family members during their interchange of views about life in China and America. In the end, *A Great Wall* offers the possibility to Chinese Americans to embrace *both* the Chinese heritage *and* the American culture.

The film opens with a series of crosscuts between Beijing and California, setting up a contrast between Chinese and Chinese American lives: the glance of a crowded public bathing house in Beijing is followed by Leo’s private American house; the Tai Chi practice of Mr. Zhao (Leo’s Beijing brother-in-law). Tai Chi practice is presented along with Leo’s morning jogging; and next, while Chinese youngsters play ping pong in their club, Leo and his son Paul enthusiastically watch a football game on TV, to name only a few. Using Lisa Lowe’s terminology, we observe that these shots comprise “a type of continual filmic ‘migration’” and “a continual geographical juxtaposition and exchange between a variety of cultural spaces” (690). From the sharp contrast between each set of scenes, it is not surprising for Lowe to draw the conclusion that Wang’s film “concentrates on a primary contrast between the habits, customs, and assumptions of the Chinese in China and the Chinese Americans in California” (690). In my view, such juxtapositions between two locations function as an introduction to the main part of the story: namely, the Fangs’ month-long trip to Beijing, during which cultural uncertainties are portrayed, questioned, and reconsidered. Despite these cultural differences, the Fangs get along well with their Beijing relatives and feel “at home” staying in their courtyard house.

Following Lisa Lowe’s lead, Asian American film scholar Peter Feng emphasizes the rupture between the China in the present and the one in the past, constructed to serve as a nostalgic destination for the Chinese diaspora. Pointing to the reverse migration of Chinese Americans represented in Wang’s film, Feng contends:

The disparity between China as seen and China as previously narrativized is recoupable within the logic of narrative itself, as transformation. Narrativizing the journey to China incorporates a multiplicity of Chinas, rejecting (as Lisa Lowe does) the notion that China exists as a discrete space. Thus, the visit to China is not an attempt to see *what is there now*, but to find traces of *what was*

³ For discussion on the both/and, and either/or approaches to identity in Asian American studies, see Ty 239-52; Chuh 1-29; Lim et al 1-26.

there before. The visit attempts to substitute a spatial for a temporal migration. (106; emphasis added)

This film portrays such *disparity* mainly through the main character Leo Fang; particularly the difference between the hometown in his memory and the Beijing that he sees now. He had left China for America when he was ten. At the time of the film's narrative opening, he is in his forties and has a successful American life working as a senior engineer in a computer firm and enjoying his life in a cozy house. Even though Leo has been talking for five years about going to Beijing for a visit, it has been no more than a hope or nostalgia until the conflict between him and his boss intensifies. When a new PC Division is established, Leo confidently expects to be promoted to the position of Director, given his expertise in the field and his widely recognized contributions to the company's success. Yet he loses the position surprisingly to a Caucasian colleague, who is no better qualified than he is in terms of experience, technological skills, and management capability. Acknowledging Leo's accomplishments in his job, his boss Mr. Wilson is not able to give a satisfactory explanation for his decision; neither is he willing to reconsider the promotion. Outraged, Leo confronts his boss, "Let me tell you what you think. You don't believe that a Chinaman is good enough to be the director. That's what you think!". Frustrated and angered by the unfair play in his worksite, Leo pours a cup of steaming hot coffee on Mr. Wilson's pants and decides to take a long vacation without caring about the risk of losing his job.

To what extent Wang's film is realistic in reflecting the racial tensions in American society in the 1980s is beyond my scope of analysis here. Instead, what catches my attention is that Leo's quarrel with his boss becomes the direct reason that leads to his trip back "home" to China after being away for decades. Considering this prelude, I tend to interpret Leo's journey to Beijing as an adventure in search of his cultural "roots". In this sense, Leo disembarks on his voyage, consciously or unconsciously, with a yearning to belong.

During a bedtime before the Fangs' departure, Leo tells his American-born wife Grace that Beijing "is a city surrounded by walls, big thick walls... to keep the invaders out or to confine the natives in. It is just as difficult to leave the city as to go back". Right after their arrival in Beijing, Leo is shocked by the fact that the landscape in front of his eyes does not fit with the image from his memory; in particular, there is no wall in sight. The reason for this discrepancy is explained by Grace's reading a travel book: "The wall of Peking city was torn down right after liberation for the purpose of expanding the nation's capital". Even though Leo's sister's family, the Zhaos, still live in a courtyard house, the audience realizes that the life that Leo remembers from more than thirty years before no longer exists.

Despite the language differences that handicap the characters, Wang's film emphasizes the shared communication between the Californian and Beijing families. Born and raised in America, Grace and Paul never learned Chinese while the Zhaos, except for their daughter's broken English, speak only Chinese. Upon their arrival, the Fangs are warmly welcomed with a homemade feast that they consume by chopsticks. After dinner, Grace tells Leo, "I feel like I've known them for a long time". Shortly after the Fangs' settling down in the courtyard house, the characters naturally

congregate by generation: Paul hangs out with his cousin, Lili, a high school senior; Grace enjoys spending time with Mrs. Zhao, chatting about fashion and children; and the two brothers-in-law have a good time drinking in a tavern and complaining about their over-critical wives. The scene in which the two families visit Leo's father's grave underlines the shared ancestry and closely bonded kinship. The evening conversation of the Fangs and Zhaos in the courtyard is marked by a language barrier and cultural differences. Nonetheless, their interactions are presented in a harmonious tone. In this scene, Leo, the only bilingual family member, does not function as a translator between his English-speaking wife and Chinese-speaking sister and brother-in-law. Rather, their conversations over jobs and family life seem to be smooth and mutually understandable, given the obvious language obstacles and cultural differences.

Given the particular cultural indication of the Great Wall, Lisa Lowe interprets the film title "A Great Wall" as an allusion to the Great Wall of China, "a monument to the historical condition that not even ancient China was 'pure,' but coexisted with 'foreign barbarians' against which the Middle Kingdom erected such barriers" (691). In an interview, Asian American writer Diana Chang talks about "A Great Wall" as a metaphor in Peter Wang's "very amusingly and movingly done" film. She contends, "[t]he wall is the wall between Chinese-Americans and real Chinese" (cited in Hamalian 37). In my view, the film title holds multiple meanings. It alludes to the Great Wall as a historical landmark for *the China in past the tense* that is constructed in the cultural memory of the Chinese diaspora. Because of such a construction, the Great Wall is no longer a fixed location, but rather becomes a signifier that is reinvented in varied forms. In this sense, the Chinese American family's trip to China in the film might be considered a voyage in search of a "Great Wall". Given the differences in generation, gender, and age, each of the Fangs discovers his/her respective versions of the "Great Wall".

If Leo's family starts their journey in the exploration of their cultural "roots," they come back to their Californian home with their respective gains. The closing scene portrays Leo practicing Tai Chi in his yard in a similar style to that of his Beijing brother-in-law and Grace is gardening while wearing the Chinese dress her Beijing sister-in-law made for her, both of which suggest their reestablished connection to their "root culture" in China as well as to the coexistence of their bi-cultural heritage. In the same scene, Leo's boss visits him, a sign of the promising reconciliation in Leo's future. Leo's American-born son Paul aptly summarizes the blurring boundaries between being American and being Chinese at the end of the film: "People in America become too Chinese and then people in China become too American". To this degree, presented in a witty style, the film concludes with a happy ending. Nonetheless, the cultural uncertainties incurred by the Chinese Americans' adventure to their "root culture" provoke further consideration from the viewers.

Pushing Hands: Pushing the Boundaries

Ang Lee, born in Taiwan and educated in the film production program at New York University, had won international recognition as a director of films that reveal family relationships before his Academy Award winning feature *Crouching Tiger*,

Hidden Dragon (2001).⁴ *Pushing Hands* was shot in New York on a budget of \$480,000; it was a success in Taiwan, nominated for nine categories and winning three Golden Horse Awards (Feng 182). In terms of searching for cinematic representation of the situation of and the cultural uncertainty among diaspora Chinese living in United States, I consider Lee's better-known feature film *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) a continuation and a new exploration of the questions raised in *Pushing Hands*.⁵

In *Pushing Hands*, the narrative starts when Master Chu, a widower and recently retired Tai Chi master, visits his son Alex in New York. Master Chu's confusion and difficulty in fitting in with the "host" culture are highlighted through the incompatible father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship as well as through the intensified miscommunication between father and son. At the same time, the film portrays Alex's struggle to keep a balance between his Chinese-ness and American-ness in understanding and negotiating his Chinese American identity. Similar to Peter Wang's film, Lee's narrative opens with a series of shots showing contrasting worlds that are not geographically apart, but rather culturally different. In the morning, Master Chu practices Tai Chi and then meditates. In the other half of the living room, his daughter-in-law Martha, a freelance writer, tries to write her new novel on a computer but feels hopelessly distracted by the presence of her father-in-law. They have been spending every single day during the past month in the same room, but cannot communicate with each other. These first few minutes of the film contrast the daily routines of Master Chu and Martha with no dialogue: the two characters do not and cannot talk to each other, given their language barrier. The only sound of the morning life in the house is Martha's typing on her keyboard until Master Chu tries to warm his lunch bowl, covered by tinfoil, in the microwave. Upon hearing the exploding noise, Martha rushes into the kitchen and "redresses" his wrongdoing. She warns him, "No metal in the microwave! No metal!" As a matter of course, Master Chu has no clue what these words mean and obviously does not understand the problem at all. Thereafter, the "silence" between the two resumes. Unlike the characters in Wang's film, *A Great Wall*, who communicate through gestures and mutual concerns about family, Master Chu and Martha are portrayed as being separated by their language and cultural differences and living in differing worlds within the same household.

Another contrasting juxtaposition is presented at lunchtime, when Martha has salad and crackers from a plate, a weight-watching approach to eating, while Master Chu has a large bowl of Chinese food. They sit at the table, facing each other and eating in silence. Similar to the Fangs and Zhaos in Peter Wang's film (except for Leo who is fluently bilingual), the Chinese father-in-law and American daughter-in-law are separated by the fact that they do not speak the same language. Lee's scene at lunch, however, is obviously not as harmonious and visually communicative as the parallel scene in *A Great Wall*. Not only do his two characters have distinct eating habits, but

⁴ Among the family dramas that Lee has made, *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) has received wide acclaim from audiences and reviewers and has attracted much attention from film critics and scholars. For critical discussion on *The Wedding Banquet*, see, for example Berry 1993, 52-54; Berry 1996, 157-82; Chiang 273-92; Marchetti 275-97.

⁵ Lee's family dramas have been considered "at the juncture of transnational film production and consumption, Asian diasporic and Asian/Chinese American cultural formations" (Liu 1).

they also have different approaches to exercise, entertainment, and other aspects of everyday life. They at any rate do not seem to be interested in communicating with each other. The film's visual narrative at the beginning, devoid of conversation and voiceover, nonetheless powerfully characterizes cultural misunderstanding and estrangement through the lack of communication between Master Chu and Martha.

Furthermore, *Pushing Hands* reveals the dilemma of Alex Chu, the first-generation Chinese American son of Master Chu: Alex is stranded between his Chinese father and American wife. As Ping-Hui Liao observes, in the film "people in cultural hybridity and in constant motion generate a sense of excessive exuberance, of impropotional expenditure, in which political uncertainty in everyday life is playfully and temporarily negated" (56). Born and raised in China, Alex has lost his mother at a young age. As the only son, he has grown up with his devoted father and always has believed in filial piety. Having migrated to the United States as a student and spent years working hard at his education and then at his career, Alex has raised his own family in America and now is willing to incorporate his father into this family. Nevertheless, Alex does not realize how complicated the situation can become when the Chinese-ness represented by his father and the American-ness reflected by his Caucasian wife clash within the same household. As a result of such conflict, Alex is compelled to negotiate between his Chinese heritage and his American life.

The tension between the Chinese father and American daughter-in-law explodes when Alex arrives home from work one day. The dinner table, filled with a cross-cultural mixture of Master Chu's Chinese cooking and Martha's American food, turns into a competition site for the father and wife as they vie for Alex's attention. Further crosscurrents arise as Master Chu and Martha simultaneously try to talk to Alex, one in Chinese and the other in English, leading to Alex's uneasiness and ultimately to the impossibility of enjoying a meal, let alone the coziness of a family gathering. Using chopsticks as well as knife and fork during the same meal, Alex visually struggles to balance his dual positions as a filial son and a good husband. In some film reviews, this character has been viewed as a good son who "tries to show his obligation, respect, and obedience to his aged father, providing care and support to him" (Wang 61). In contrasting critiques, Alex has been negatively perceived as reluctant and unable to reduce the tension between his Chinese father and Caucasian wife (Liu 19-20). To be fair, this character does make an effort to be a good host to his father. Upon arriving at home from work, Alex always greets his father first. Despite his busy schedule, he plays Go (Chinese chess) and chats with Master Chu in the evening, rents videotapes to entertain his father, and brings him to the Chinese club during weekends where Master Chu can pass the time teaching Tai Chi and making friends with other Chinese. Alex's dilemma, however, seems insolvable as the story builds up to its climax. This climax epitomizes the film's treatment of Chinese American identity as caught in an "either/or" instead of a "both/and" approach. Alex's need to choose between his allegiance to his father and his commitment to his wife exemplifies this notion. He cannot, as the film shows, simultaneously be a good husband and a filial son as much as he cannot find a satisfactory definition of his Chinese American identity.

As the distancing and tension grow, several distressing plots unfold in the film. Firstly, Master Chu gets lost during his afternoon walk, leading to an outburst of resentment from Alex toward his wife. This resentment obviously has been

accumulating during the course of his pressured home life, caught between two people for whom he cares so deeply. He queries Martha, "I grew up believing you should care for your parents the way they care for you. My father is a part of me. Why can't you accept that?". Trying to be a filial son and a responsible husband, Alex thus is trapped by these cultural conflicts. Waking up the second morning after getting drunk, he finally makes up his mind that "the old man has to go". At this point, the film portrays Alex's choice of America (which is associated with his wife, family, and private house) over China (that is represented by his Chinese-speaking and acting father). Without a possible middle ground to negotiate for both cultural heritages, Alex's solution to the household problem as well as his identity dilemma is embedded with loss. Unable to figure out a way to fit into his son's family and feeling alienated by Alex, Master Chu chooses to leave. He leaves a letter to Alex that sadly expresses his confusion and disappointment about the change in their father-son relationship:

You know the saying 'It's easier to struggle together than to pass happy days together'. I never imagined this would apply to us. In China, we managed to stay happily together through so many bitter times. But here in America with so many fine material things, it seems that there's no place in your home for me.... Don't look for me. Enjoy your life with your family. I wish you all the best.

Signed, Father.

Determined to stand on his own feet in America yet without a legal working permit, the only option left for Master Chu is through the black market: he works as a dishwasher in a Chinatown restaurant where no special training is needed and no English required. Given his age and inefficiency in getting used to his new job, Master Chu endures austere, poor living conditions and the harsh blame from his snobbish boss until he becomes irritated beyond control. After bare-handedly beating up the gangsters hired by his boss to teach him a lesson and causing a riot in the Chinese restaurant, Master Chu is detained by American policemen who come to restore the order. It is not until Alex sees the news on television that he is able to find out his father's whereabouts. Alex arrives in time to straighten out the mess and free his father from legal charges. In the cell, Alex bursts into tears, begging his father to move into their larger, new house.

The film ends with Master Chu renting an apartment near Chinatown, teaching Tai Chi lessons, and living on his own. Alex brings his family to visit him once in a while. Citing the actions that Master Chu insists on living by himself independently and that Martha respectfully hangs the old master's sword in the newly purchased house, Shaorong Wang considers the ending of Lee's film as "some hints of the mutual cultural acceptance between the old Tai Chi master and his American daughter-in-law" (54-55). Cynthia Liu, on the other hand, interprets the closing scene of the film more darkly: the scenes illustrate the son's inability to bridge the differences between his father and wife, given his own bilingual and bicultural position. Instead, the seeming harmony in Alex's own household "soft-pedals scrutiny of his sin of omission" (Liu 19-20). There is yet another interpretation of the final scene of Lee's film. I consider the ending as an indication that the tension caused by the cultural conflicts in this particular family is only temporarily relieved. I see an ambiguous message hinted at the conclusion of the

story: just as there is uncertainty about Master Chu's relation to Alex's family, as well as no resolution regarding Alex's bewildering position between his father and wife, the audience is left to ponder the possibility that a cultural dialogue will fill in the gaps between Chinese nationals and Chinese Americans. Because of the *Pushing Hand's* binary construction of "either/or," there is no real closure to Alex's positioning within his environment. The movie's ultimate message seems to be that such "either/or" construction is an unfruitful way of approaching identity politics, as shown by Alex's failed trial to maintain a balance between his Chinese-ness and American-ness.

This examination of the two films, *A Great Wall* and *Pushing Hands*, thus joins the ongoing discussion of the complexities and uncertainties associated with the label "Chinese American" and addresses how each film's characters rethink the cultural differences between being Chinese and being American. Citing Wang's film technique and emplotment in *A Great Wall* as "a possible model for the ongoing construction of ethnic identity in the migratory process," Lisa Lowe has suggested that "we might conceive of the making and practice of Asian American culture as nomadic, unsettled, taking place in the travel between cultural sites and in the mutivocality of heterogeneous and conflicting positions" (692). The discussion above has provided additional support for Lowe's conclusion that "the grouping 'Asian American' is not a natural nor static category; rather it is a socially constructed unity, a situationally specific position that we assume for political reasons" (692). Therefore, the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity outlined by Lowe may be influenced by as well as lead to cultural uncertainties.

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Özet

***A Great Wall* ve *Pushing Hands* Adlı Eserlerde Kültürel Belirsizliklerin Temsil Edilmesi**

İki farklı aile draması olan, Peter Wang'ın yönettiği *A Great Wall* (1985) ile Ang Lee'nin yönettiği *Pushing Hands* (1991) adlı eserleri çözümleyen bu makale, Çinli-Amerikalılar ile Çinlilerin yakınlaşmaları sonucunda ortaya çıkan "köken" ve "ev sahipliği" temalarına ilişkin belirsizlikleri incelemektedir. Bu iki film, kültürel oluşumdaki araya eklenen tire işareti ile birleştirilen Asyalı Amerikalı kimlik olgusuna karşı farklı yaklaşımlara sahiptirler: Fang'lerin Çinli mirasları ile Amerikan gerçeğini harmanlayarak oluşturdukları Çinli Amerikalı kimliklerini yansıtan *A Great Wall* hem/hem de yaklaşımını benimserken; *Pushing Hands* adlı eserde Alex Chu ya Çinli bir oğul ya da Amerikalı bir koca olmak arasında tek bir seçim yapmak zorunda kalmaktadır ve eser ya/ya da yaklaşımını benimsemektedir.

Miracles, Authentic Hope, and the Chinese American Novel¹

Ingo Peters

*In the course of any normal person's life,
miracles happen at a rate of roughly one per
month.*

—LITTLEWOOD'S LAW OF MIRACLES²

Chinese Americans today are virtually surrounded by a number of conflicting stereotypes. On the one hand, they are often portrayed or seen as hyphenated Americans, as people who by definition will always be at odds with U.S. society and its values because they allegedly are either dangerous and untrustworthy—the Wen Ho Lee case comes to mind, and recent reports suggest that even in the world of online gaming, ethnic Chinese struggle against the reputation of being shady (Liu 30-31)—, or passive victim figures, influenced by a culture of conformity and unable to cope with the demands of an individualist country filled with tough go-getters who speak up. “Chinese are artsy, cutesy and chickendick” complains Donald Duk in Frank Chin’s eponymous novel (3). On the other hand, Chinese Americans are of course also associated with the well-known “model minority” idea. In complete opposition to the above-mentioned prejudices, it is claimed that they are especially, indeed almost magically adept at “making it” in America, a reputation that not only pits them against other minorities but also serves to deprive them of badly needed support. The problems of Chinese American communities are easily ignored for the simple reason that they, in many people’s eyes, don’t have any.

These contradictory sets of stereotypes, one depicting inhuman, the other superhuman Asians, present Chinese American novelists with a dilemma, a veritable catch-22. Whenever they strive to refute one of the clichés in their works, they are in danger of strengthening another. If they tell a success story in order to work against the perception that Chinese Americans can never be “real” Americans, this might be read as a confirmation of the dreaded model minority thesis (Gus Lee’s *China Boy* could be an example). If, however, the authors paint a gloomy, pessimistic picture to discredit said thesis and cast light on existing injustices and problems, they easily boost the idea of

¹ The article is a revised and translated version of chapter 3.3.1.1 from my study *Der chinesisch-amerikanische Roman und seine Schlüsselthemen: Geschichtserfahrung, Gegenwartsdeutung und Zukunftserwartung* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2006).

² John Littleton was a mathematician at the University of Cambridge. Physicist Freeman Dyson explains the law by pointing out that “during the time that we are awake and actively engaged in our lives, roughly for eight hours each day, we see and hear things happening at a rate of about one per second. So the total number of events that happen to us is about thirty thousand per day, or about a million per month. With few exceptions, these events are not miracles because they are insignificant. The chance of a miracle is about one per million events. Therefore we should expect about one miracle to happen, on the average, every month” (quoted from Shermer).

Chinese Americans as passive victims (see Patricia Chao's *Monkey King*, although this case is far more complicated). As I have shown in *Der chinesisch-amerikanische Roman und seine Schlüsselthemen*, both the concept of progress—simply put, the conviction that there is a steady, irreversible, irrefutable change for the better (Rapp 11-12), which belittles any problem by implying it will go away sooner or later—and the concept of pessimism or hopelessness are unfortunate choices for Chinese American writers as narrative or philosophical underpinnings of their works, provided these writers are interested in correcting prevalent stereotypes about their ethnic group (Peters 101-110, 192-228). Thus, every Chinese American novelist faces, consciously or unconsciously, a difficult question: How can you, while criticizing the present situation, signal hope and confidence without advertising the belief in progress at the same time? How can you voice optimism without saying we are moving forward, without saying that things are getting better?

Several authors have answered this question successfully, all of them using such similar strategies that a pattern emerges. The best starting point to explore how the notion of hope finds its way into the Chinese American novel while the idea of progress stays out is David Wong Louie's *The Barbarians Are Coming*. Essentially, this book chronicles the downward spiral that is the life of protagonist Sterling Lung, a Connecticut chef in his late twenties. Sterling is both influenced and put off by American racism. Embarrassed with his parents (who came to the U.S. from China) and his ethnic background, and repulsed by the mockery and rejection handed out by society, especially at the posh Richfield Ladies' Club where he works, he desires purity, a "prodigious transformation from son of immigrants to denizen of Plymouth Rock" (41); a futile quest which turns the main character both against himself and his surroundings, and makes him gradually lose his grip on reality and his sense of what really matters. Occasional moments of happiness notwithstanding, he feels less and less comfortable with his identity as Chinese American, and projects his boundless hate of China onto his first-born son Moses, who looks like a copy of Sterling's father Genius. He is unable to prevent the failure of his marriage to his Jewish wife Bliss Sass (a union which he had initiated primarily because of his dubious theory that it would promote his Americanization). Driven by feelings of ethnic inferiority, he confronts Bliss and her (white) lover, causing an accident which kills his other son Ira, whom he adored because he looked completely Caucasian. Furthermore, the protagonist wastes every single opportunity to reconcile with and understand his dying father Genius.

Thus, the stages of development that Sterling passes through do not exactly point towards a happy ending. It looks like a final catastrophe is a certainty for the self-loathing main character, especially since his blind zeal seems to be ever-growing and incurable. Yet, towards the end of the novel one suddenly comes across the following thoughts by Sterling, in his darkest hour of all things, his son Ira's funeral:

Will the [...] ancestors claim me, after my breakneck dash from them and into the arms of any willing American girl who would have me—my desperate attempt to overcome the unremarkableness of being a Lung, and create a family more to my liking? I embraced school because school wasn't home, European cuisine because Escoffier wasn't home, Bliss because she wasn't home. My sons were the blades of scissors that were supposed to snip me permanently, and genetically, free from home, from past and present, from here and over there.

(With Ira, whom everyone deemed pure Sass, I thought that I had succeeded in erasing every trace of myself, committed genealogical suicide.) [...] I feel what I've imagined my father must've felt all these many years—lopsided. Maybe I'm the one who's lopsided, I'm the one who's off balance. Genius stares ahead at the distance. There's a shimmer in his eyes, and in this drop of liquid light I see for the first time Ira's face in his, and seeing Ira in my father, Ira comes to me vividly [...]. And there he is, alive in Genius. (323-324)

All at once, the protagonist is grasping the position he got himself into with crystal clarity here. He names every single facet of his messing-up with flawless reasoning. He admits to marrying Bliss in order to free himself from being Chinese. He confesses to having used his children as instruments for this end. He acknowledges how compulsive and irrational his whole Americanization project has been by employing the characterizations “breakneck speed” and “desperate attempt”. He announces that said project was wrong in every respect, that not his father and what he stands for have been “off balance” and “lopsided”—and thus located outside the sphere of what is acceptable and necessary for a good life in America—, but he himself, because of his conviction that “balance” could be achieved by erasing his ethnic identity, and by separating from his family. He sees that Ira, his “pure” all-American son, his intended aide in the escape from the Lungs, can be recognized in Genius, precisely the person whom the child was supposed to blot out. This, in turn, makes Sterling—the missing link between the two—finally realize how close he really is to Genius.

In these moments the protagonist succeeds in leaving the world of doubt and despair. He who doesn't have a clue “gets it” for the first time. His view of himself and the others is now correct, his intellectual insight not blurred by anything. That alone is amazing enough, if you consider how irrevocably he seemed to have gotten caught in his own twisted theories. Moreover, similarly remarkable is the fact that, in the moment of his analysis, he has already made the next step. The new, corrected attitude or outlook, which should now, after all the revelations, be developed, has already been adopted. Sterling voices the criticism of himself in the tone of a speaker for whom this criticism is not even valid any more, who, when it dawns on him for the first time that he will have to change, has already changed. The symbolic place he wanted to get away from, which contains his father, his mother, the family's laundry in New York, and China, is termed “home” three times by him even in a sentence that is apparently still intended to emphasize his dislike of that place with condescending and callous words. Since Sterling normally employs decidedly negative, “barbaric” metaphors to describe his family, “home” cannot be understood as a neutral, value-free expression here. That word, clearly used intuitively here, shows that the main character now *feels* he is a Chinese American, and that this feels good. Besides, to denote that which he wanted to put into oblivion—everything Chinese about him—he does not use an impersonal term that suggests distance, but the word “myself”: “I had succeeded in erasing every trace of myself”. Sterling identifies absolutely with exactly that part of his identity that he had always been trying to get rid of until now. This is also proven by the fact that he automatically begins his reflections with worries about his relationship with the ancestors from the Middle Kingdom. Because he talks about his life and deeds up to now in the past tense, one can safely assume that they are dead and gone for him—not long gone, to be sure, but still without any bearing on the present.

The personal turnaround has been fully completed even before the protagonist has finished his musings about his behavior. There is no gradual shift of opinion. Sterling Lung becomes a whole new person in an instant, as if by inspiration. There is a vast gulf between the old and new Sterling, but no identifiable bridge. No transition can be found. And no explanation for the change either; after all, right up to the scene in question there is not the slightest hint that he who is so hopelessly misdirected might change his outlook or attitude—only a few pages back he badmouthed his Chinese-looking son Moses as a “traitor” (315). Sterling’s transformation literally comes out of nowhere. It is, one has to use this term, a miracle.

This impression is not diminished by the observations that the miracle does not protect the main character from occasionally relapsing into the old ways of thinking, and that it does not seem to improve his life very much at first. Ira is dead and will remain so, Sterling’s marriage is still a shambles, and he will not have the badly needed heart-to-heart with his dying father. Nevertheless, his turn does have consequences. He changes not only the way he thinks or feels, but his actions as well. While in his awful TV show “Peeking Duck” he used to cast himself as a bumbling Chinese fool, he now proclaims to the audience—again giving the impression of being visited by a miraculous inspiration—that China is not to be laughed at, and that he wants to be a Chinese American, in touch with his ancestral line and family, no matter if someone thinks its members are too Chinese or too American. As far as Sterling is concerned, the old division of the Lungs into these two parts has been overcome for good:

Then I hear myself saying, “Salt was invented by the Chinese. [...] We flooded fields with seawater, and after its evaporation, we harvested the remaining crystals from the soil....”

I hear myself say “we,” as if I were there with the ancestors, among the world’s first Lungs, smoothing the pans of seawater, pulverizing large sediments into edible grains. Or better yet, Ira and Genius and Moses and me, the four of us together working the salt, barefoot in the brine, and when it inevitably happens that someone picks on Ira because he looks different, calls him a barbarian, we will close ranks and protect him, and I will make the claim, “He’s one of us”. (332-333)

Here, the protagonist publicly denounces his own former either-or thinking. The “we” and the “us” fuse Ira—previously the American safeguard against China—and Genius and Moses, the “Chinese” of earlier days, into one integrated whole. At the same time Sterling is aware that he cannot be satisfied with declarations, poetic flights of fancy, and theoretical statements of purpose alone. “I know what I’m doing is not nearly enough”, he makes clear (333). He takes action and starts working on the relationship with the only one of the three mentioned above that he can still reach. When Moses, after Genius’s funeral, confesses to his father how much he misses the two deceased, Sterling strives to console the boy with the help of a special recipe by Genius, which he had never tried to prepare before: “‘I know the perfect thing. It’s what my father used to make for me for a snack when I came home from school. [...] This was so good on cold days,’ I say” (370-371). Father and son prepare the mixture of saltine crackers, sweet condensed milk, and boiled water together in the kitchen of the funeral home, with

Sterling being proud of Moses, “[h]e’s inherited from me a fastidiousness in the kitchen”, he reports (371). The novel ends with the child inspecting the finished meal:

I slide a bowl in front of Moses. He lowers his head for an appraising whiff. He frowns, disappointed, You’re psyched over this?

“It’s Chinese,” I say.

He stares harder at the bowl. I can see his exertions. His temples pulsing, his glasses fogging up. He looks over the top of his black frames at me. He doesn’t believe.

Trust me. If you can only know what I know. Let the steam caress your face, smell the roasted sweetness, the milk’s own sugar, and feel the glow of well-being radiating from within. I don’t blame Moses his skepticism, because until this moment I wouldn’t have believed either. But I’m not making these feelings up, they are as real as the food is pure: just flour, water, sugar, milk, and salt. I spoon some of the cracker stew from my bowl, blow, and offer it to Moses. He won’t bite. “It really is Chinese, you know. Ah-yeah [Genius] used to make it for me. It’s a special recipe he brought from China. And think about it, you and I just whipped this up together!”

I see Moses’ brain processing what I’ve just said. Finally he claps his hands and says, “We just cooked Chinese food!”

“That’s right. The real thing!”

Moses opens his mouth, and lets me feed him. (372)

This scene is not really about food or nutrition. It has to be viewed in a metaphysical light. The reader is witnessing another miracle, the instant reconciliation of two people whose relationship had been utterly and irredeemably wrecked. The fact that the meal is Chinese turns it, simple as it may be, into a panacea for both father and son. Here Sterling has transformed the miracle that happened to him earlier—the sudden revelation of the right way to live—into something more tangible and concrete, or, more precisely, into a ritual that enables Moses to participate in the miracle. The word “believe” must be understood in its religious meaning. In the end, the child does not just believe that the cracker stew will taste good; thanks to Sterling’s nod to Genius’s cuisine he believes in Sterling, who used to despise him and China, but whom he now knows to have become a new person, and he believes in the future they will have together. The “we”, which had been but a fantasy before, has been made reality by the process of cooking Chinese food as a team. Because he has the courage to take action, the protagonist turns from receiver of miracles to miracle worker. Although the ending of *The Barbarians Are Coming* is certainly not an exclusively and unambiguously happy one, Sterling’s behavior still marks a credible new beginning out of the blue.

Thus, through the wondrous transformation of his main character, David Wong Louie conveys hope. But it is a very particular kind of hope. The novel dismisses the idea that hope must be based, in one way or another, on real events—that one has to look for things which, as the saying goes, “give reason for hope”. Sterling’s conversion cannot be foreseen; it plainly contradicts everything that one can possibly expect after considering all the given facts. It happens anyway—and changes everything. What reveals itself in *The Barbarians Are Coming* is a hope that you may entertain although (or perhaps even because) there is nothing there that supports it, and although the

present is of the worst possible kind. There is no connection here between the current situation and the awaited Good.

This puts the novel into a specific line of tradition. The sixteenth-century church reformer and theologian Martin Luther was the first to distinguish between two different forms of hope. Luther sharply criticizes the “*spes hominum*”, which is based on what is currently available or in existence, and which expects the future to be a continuation of present beginnings. For him, this sort of hope has only a safeguarding function and does not really transport one into a new future. The “*spes Christianorum*” favored by Luther, on the other hand, does not proceed from what is presently possible for human beings, but only looks to God’s future (Luther 17-20, 24-26). If one wanted to avoid any reference to the Christian God, one could very well call this future, as removed from present-day realities as it is, “the miracle”—Walter Benjamin’s “redemption” comes to mind as well (251).³ For his novel, David Wong Louie employs a secular version of the “*spes Christianorum*” (which the existential theologians Bultmann and Gogarten had preferred to call “authentic hope” or “genuine hope” [*eigentliche Hoffnung*, Gogarten 522-523],⁴ a term that is more suitable for the discussion here than Luther’s). It is this secular, authentic hope that allows the author to write an optimistic book without spreading the idea of progress, because the latter is represented by the inauthentic hope or *spes hominum*, with its stress on striding ahead on existing paths.

Moreover, the authentic hope in *The Barbarians Are Coming* points to aspects of traditional *American* thought hidden in the book. What had been—with Luther—just a theoretical construct of a theologian, after all developed an all-too-practical, real-life meaning in New England in the seventeenth century, when the Protestant settlers landed with extremely ambitious goals in an extremely inhospitable place. A hope that was grounded in that which existed at that time in that place had to appear baseless and untenable to the Puritans in their concrete situation. Scholars have explicitly pointed out that the settlers were clearly aware of the realistic hopelessness of their enterprise; “to be a Puritan in the New World entailed a painful knowledge about a better life one could never have”, explains Martha Banta (170). From the mid-seventeenth century on, when England had officially rejected the New England model, the feeling of failure was greater than ever—after all, the model had been intended to reform the Anglican Church. David Minter emphasizes the “knowledge that men and events on both sides of the Atlantic were saying no to the Puritan design” (47). And yet precisely at that point (the nadir), began the heyday of the American Jeremiad, an affirmation of the conviction to prevail in the disguise of a ritual lament about the present. Sacvan Bercovitch notes the “unshakable optimism” of the Jeremiad (*American Jeremiad* 7). The hope it expresses in times of great distress can only be the authentic hope for a miracle.

David Wong Louie and the Puritans both turn to a form of Luther’s “*spes Christianorum*”, the similarities going right down to the smallest detail: Louie, too, spreads hope exactly at the time when things look worst. It is no accident that Sterling’s transformation takes place during his mourning the death of his son. The author so

³ The original German term is “Erlösung”.

⁴ Gogarten’s terminology relies heavily on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who is notoriously difficult to translate. In spite of existing controversies, “authentic” is the common English translation of Heidegger’s *eigentlich* (Inwood 26).

directly juxtaposes the miraculous new “we”-sense of a common bond with the incredible pain of the protagonist, that there can be no doubt about their connection:

Moses hugs Genius’s legs and buries his face in my father’s crotch. [...] I am the bridge between them, the reason they look upon each other and immediately love. The horrible moment comes. [...] [O]nce the workmen release the pulleys and Ira is lowered into the ground, all the world is in that shiny white box. Every tree, every stone, every breath, every scrap of love. (328)

The passage makes clear that authentic hope must not be confused with a feelgood therapy that distracts from reality’s burdens. On the contrary, it can only arise when the true scope of the crisis is being grasped and acknowledged in full. Not only does this correspond to the theory of despair by the late Kierkegaard, who stated that one could only overcome despair by a miracle (in his case, God’s grace) if one had forced one’s despair to its extreme first (39-74). It is also reminiscent of an influential school within the American history of ideas. Walt Whitman advertised hope as the only option to despair (Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad* 198), by which he did not mean that the two are mutually exclusive, but that it is the desperate who especially needs hope. Whitman had understood the Jeremiad and knew the liberating potential of an authentic hope that arises despite of current horror, or rather because of current horror: It can liberate the future from the present; it allows people to look forward to a future which is not just an arduous continuation of that which was and that which is, of the eternal “tepid andsoforth”, as Rüdiger Safranski puts it (207).⁵ The future becomes a sphere of genuine possibilities again: The True American, according to Whitman, is “encloser of things to be” (quoted from Bercovitch, *American Puritan Imagination* 13)—because for him or her, the future is not bound to the momentary conditions. Whitman’s words, in which we can discover characteristics typically associated with America or Americans (the openness towards new things, the embrace of change, the visionary tendencies, the refusal to be impressed by setbacks), seem revolutionary, but do in fact little more than to reformulate the divorce of the future from the present through the concept of hope put forward in the American jeremiad. At least in this sense the poet is an heir to the Puritans and the school within American thought that looks radically forward.

In the literary and philosophical discourse in the United States, there often emerges behind debates that seem to revolve around completely different issues the argument for and against authentic hope. When Martha Banta treats William James and Josiah Royce as antagonists in the field of epistemology—because Royce claims that “the pattern of America” is “already out there, waiting to be perceived and embraced”, and James assumes it is “the force of our thought that creates [...] the reality of our experience in America” (Banta 36)—one can as well read the whole thing as a clash between two concepts of the future: one that depends on the currently given, and one that is divorced from it. The same is true for Gertrude Stein’s division of Americans into those who run and those who read or think. The runners (Banta calls them “actual

⁵ Safranski’s German term is “flaches Undsoweiter” (literally “flat andsoforth”), the translation is mine.

Americans”⁶), who hurry through life steadily hoarding a bit more of the same—money, status, power—, are not only a caricature of the modern materialist, but also of the worshipper of the ideology of progress, with his *spes hominum*. The thinkers and readers (“real Americans”), however, represent authentic hope, since they do not allow themselves to be bound to the externally given only, as Banta’s characterization “the inside is kept separate from the outside” makes plain (201). With his miracles, David Wong Louie places himself into the line from the Puritans to Stein and thus appropriates their radically open future for the Chinese American situation. *The Barbarians Are Coming* says, exactly as Charles Sanders Peirce had done in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, that reality is not merely the realized achievement, but the potential and the possible (Banta 34, Peirce 286-302).

It can thus be stated that the function of the miracles is to provide the Chinese American novel with an optimistic component that can be specifically traced to the U.S. tradition (and thus actively claims America for the Chinese Americans), without softening the criticism of the present-day conditions in the United States. This also means that an easy dismissal of the literary quality of the novel’s ending, as justified as it seems at first, would be off the mark. It would be missing the point entirely if one complained that Louie suddenly conjured up an unrealistic solution shortly before the end, that he got himself out of his own mess only with the help of a trick incompatible with the rest of the plot, and that the book was therefore half-baked. It would be the same as criticizing fables for their simple, didactic morals, or fairy tales for their ahistoricity and formulaic “once-upon-a-time” structure: All this may offend certain literary tastes, but only the moral makes a fable a fable, and only by being ahistoric the fairy tale becomes a fairy tale. In analogy, it is certainly true that Louie conjures up an unrealistic solution out of the blue (as another word for this, obviously, would be “miracle”), yet only this solution turns the book into a Chinese American novel that works. *Without* the miracle, the novel would be half-baked—i.e., depicting an exclusively gloomy and hopeless Chinese America. The logic of this book actually demands events that contradict the expectations to which the plot has given rise.

The Barbarians Are Coming does not stand alone in this. Miracles do appear in Chinese American literature with a regularity that brings “Littlewood’s Law of Miracles” to mind, according to which the laws of probability guarantee that extremely unlikely things happen at steady intervals which can be predicted quite precisely. Remarkably conspicuous parallels to Louie’s neither foreseeable nor explainable salvation of the protagonist can for instance be found both in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (the famous fictional 1976 “memoir” which turned Kingston into the most-discussed living author at American universities [Simmons 15] and hardly needs an introduction) and Shawn Wong’s *American Knees* (a novel that tells the story of Raymond Ding, assistant director of minority affairs at Jack London College in Oakland, chronicling his at times almost comical obsession with questions of ethnic identity, as well as his tumultuous love life).

The first of these parallels lies in the main characters’ personal life situation at the beginning of the closing chapters. In both cases, they seem no less stuck than

⁶ If one wanted to stay within Heidegger and Gogarten’s terminology, one could say “inauthentic Americans”.

Sterling Lung. Three problems that have dominated the plot up to that point are still unsolved, respectively. In *American Knees*, they are the inability of the protagonist to commit to the love of his life, his troubled relationship with his father Woodrow, and the latter's plan to marry a young Chinese picture bride; in *The Woman Warrior*, the main character suffers from a kind of despair that is reminiscent of Sterling Lung's final stages before his conversion: She cannot come to terms with or reach out to her mother, she hates China—the country that for her symbolizes her mother—, and she does not feel at home in America at all. The authors make sure one gets the impression that there is no way out of the misery. Unlike Kingston, Shawn Wong does not present his Raymond Ding merely as a victim of unfavorable circumstances (which could change), but as part of the problem, as a person who is not too interested in solutions in the first place. As late as shortly before the end Raymond sabotages any chance to a possible reconciliation with his girlfriend Aurora, thanks to his unwillingness to let go of his ex-lover Betty, who is going to move to Oregon soon: "He wondered if he should research job openings in Portland. [...] He drove to Betty's apartment" (224). This doesn't exactly sound like a resolution to work hard for Aurora's love. A new beginning—which would be unlikely enough even if both were seriously trying—seems completely out of the question due to Raymond's inconsistency and pronounced fear of commitment.

In the last chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, in which the narrator Maxine (i.e., it appears, the author herself) relives her childhood once more, Kingston emphasizes the insurmountability of the girl's crisis by first describing, in minute detail, her planning an ambitious mother-daughter reconciliation, only to let it fail dismally right afterwards. To the child Maxine, the mother has always been the embodiment of Chinese irrationality, cruelty, and unpredictability⁷—she reports how her mother cut her tongue for mysterious reasons when she was a baby ("She pushed my tongue up and sliced the frenum", 163-164), or how her mother forced her to demand "reparation candy" from a pharmacist who had delivered the wrong medicine (170). In order to become closer to the parent, the girl wants to confess her secret wishes and thoughts to her, with whom she has never been able to communicate in a meaningful way: "I had grown inside me a list of over two hundred things that I had to tell my mother so that she would know the true things about me [...]. If only I could let my mother know the list, she—and the world—would become more like me, and I would never be alone again" (197-198). Although she is very afraid, Maxine brings herself to confess something new every evening. Bit by bit, she owns up to things like her wish for a horse, her prayers to a kind

⁷ How closely these three characteristics are connected to Chinese culture in the mind of the protagonist is illuminated by her numerous negative comments and anecdotes. An old man scolds his great-granddaughters at the dinner table as: "Maggots! Where are my grandsons! [...] Look at the maggots chew!" (191). An opera singer in San Francisco sings a strange line: "'She is playing the part of the new daughter-in-law,' my mother explained. 'Beat me, then, beat me,' she sang again and again. It must have been a refrain; each time she sang it, the audience broke up laughing. Men laughed, women laughed. They were having a great time" (193). To Maxine, the irrational and brutal Chinese are "they", the indecipherable others: "You get no warning that you shouldn't wear a white ribbon in your hair until they hit you and give you the sideways glare for the rest of the day. They hit you if you wave brooms around or drop chopsticks or drum them" (185).

of God, and her bullying of that Chinese American classmate whose helplessness reminded her of herself. In the fifth night, however, the mother, who had not shown any reaction up to that point, puts a sudden end to the scheme: “‘I can’t stand this whispering,’ she said looking right at me, stopping her squeezing. ‘Senseless gabbings every night. I wish you would stop. Go away and work. Whispering, whispering, making no sense. Madness. I don’t feel like hearing your craziness.’” (200). The step-by-step escape from the malaise, evoked by the author’s child-like alter ego in sentences like “Just two hundred and six more items to go” (199), does not work. Maxine realizes that her list is not getting any shorter. On the contrary, “in the telling, it grew. No higher listener. No listener but myself” (204). After the mother’s tirades, the idea of a possible progress does not seem viable any longer at all. Any reader has to be convinced at this point that Maxine will remain the girl that suffers from feelings of exclusion and inferiority: “I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It at our house? Probably me” (189). Kingston makes it look certain that in the future Maxine will stay without a voice and without comfort, that she will neither find these in Chinese school, where the way she talks reminds herself of a “crippled animal running on broken legs” (169), nor in White America, where her teachers send her to speech therapy.

Faced with such a conscious arrangement of a dead-end situation, one is justified to call the actual ending that follows miraculous. The grown-up Maxine is narrating now and abruptly announces she is going to relate a tale: “Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending mine” (206). As if it was the most natural thing in the world, as if there had never been any communication problems or aversions to China, the protagonist makes clear in this brief passage that she has not only discovered aspects of Chinese culture (such as “talk story”) for herself, and is now able to have fruitful conversations with her mother, but also that the two of them—and thus America and China as well—create something new and good together. The story of long ago that she shares with the reader deals with a Chinese woman kidnapped by barbarians, who sings songs of such intensity to the sounds of her captors’ flutes that they understand her in spite of the language barrier. According to the tale, one of the songs is now known in China as “Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” and is played by the Chinese on their own instruments. “It translated well” are the last words of the story, and thus of the novel as well (209). Just like in *The Barbarians Are Coming*, suddenly there are no barbarians and no “they” anymore, there is just successful exchange, and a “we”—symbolized both by the contents of the tale and by the harmonious circumstances of its creation and presentation.

Instantly, Maxine is comfortable with herself, her mother, and her life as a Chinese American. One searches in vain for an explanation for the optimism of the ending and the main character’s transformed outlook, as one does in Louie’s novel. If anything, the turnaround seems even more wondrous in *The Woman Warrior*, since the miracle itself, the moment of sudden inspiration that changes everything, is not explicitly presented as an event, whereas it is in *The Barbarians Are Coming*. In Kingston’s book we have only Maxine I and Maxine II, what was lying in between is not visible. The transition might well have been a gradual one; the crucial point, however, is that the author does not want to show it as such. Kingston’s literary

presentation clearly depicts the change as a sudden, miraculous conversion without apparent reason and without attendant circumstances that could help to analyze it. She, too, aims at an authentic hope that cannot be derived at by looking at the presently given. It is not an accident that the novel ends with a fictional “story,” i.e. with something independent from external reality. The tale is not intended to be understood as a mere rounding-off or as one episode among many others, but as the one really crucial story which makes us see the rest in a different light in retrospect. It (and only it) provides the book with its final—optimistic—meaning; this is why, after all, the long closing chapter carries the title “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”.

In *American Knees*, the authentic hope reveals itself in a more direct way again, through miracles that are explicitly mentioned. All three problems are solved in a wondrous manner shortly before the end. Protagonist Raymond suddenly “gets” his father: Under circumstances that are not further elaborated, the father’s engineering manuals fall into his hands; he reads them, and lo!, he understands that Woodrow is “not so much traditionally Chinese” but “a typical engineer who measured the world as a structure and applied the principles of buildings to families, lovers, dreams” (237). The father’s change of mind as far as the picture bride is concerned is equally astounding. Confronted once again by Raymond with the pictures of the “candidates,” and asked about his plans, he denies all at once to have ever entertained them:

“Do you remember these, Dad?”

“What are these, friends of yours?”

“No, Dad. You were planning a trip to China.”

“China?”

“Yes, Dad, to China. [...] You were planning a trip to China to find a wife and these are the ones you narrowed it down to.” [...]

Wood picked up the pictures and examined them. “Well, they are all beautiful, but it’s modern times. You should pick out your own wife.” [...]

“No, Dad, these are women you were thinking of marrying.”

“Me?” (231)

The father cannot even remember his resolution to marry, voiced with so much determination earlier on. He says, with certainty: “Look son, you go to China if you want to. I’m not going” (231). A highly complex cultural and generational problem that for months threatened to drive Raymond crazy instantly dissolves into hot air in an almost absurd dialogue. It is of minor importance if the father’s memory loss is real or if he just fakes it, having changed his mind for different reasons. Both cases would constitute a miracle, since he had stressed his wish to marry his favorite not only before but also after the minor stroke that had caused him temporary confusion: “Grace was the one”, is how the narrator had put the father’s thoughts into words (215). How surprising the latter’s new point of view is, is furthermore revealed by the reaction of Aurora, who also witnesses the dialogue: “Aurora started to laugh” (231). It is the disbelieving laughter of a person who is at a loss for words.

Then again, Aurora’s presence in Raymond’s house already hints at the overcoming of the third and last problem, too—the troubled relationship of these two. Shortly before the scene with the father, the reader is treated to another revelation out of nowhere that changes everything, one that makes the chronically indecisive Raymond

realize that there can be only Aurora: "Did they feel different together because Betty had been in his arms? Did Aurora know what she had meant to him? Did they both feel safer and more secure for all that had happened? If he answered yes to all these questions, then he would feel powerless and undefined. *Yes*. This was where he began to fall in love with Aurora again" (230). Raymond does not work hard at loving Aurora, the love comes over him, overwhelms him. As he points out himself, he finds Aurora precisely because he has no control, because he is "powerless." At the moment of the protagonist's greatest helplessness, Shawn Wong lets a miracle happen to him, just like David Wong Louie did to Sterling Lung at the funeral. Aurora must have been blessed with a similar inspiration, because she allows the new beginning. How bizarre and unlikely this new beginning must appear after everything that happened before is elucidated by the reaction of Aurora's best friend Brenda. She says, when Aurora tells her about falling in love once again: "You sound like he's hypnotized you or blown opium in your face" (234).

Now one could comment that these three amazing instances of salvation in *American Knees*, and also the transformation of Maxine in *The Woman Warrior* are in a way not as unforeseeable as it has been claimed here. Shawn Wong's novel, one could object, can after all be fairly easily identified as a romantic comedy, and the reader of such one knows that all problems can be expected to get solved in the end, even if they are described as insurmountable. In a similar vein, one could say about Kingston's novel that the grown-up, positive, and sensible first-person narrator Maxine at the end does not have to surprise anybody. After all, the author presents her book as a kind of autobiography; and probably not many readers will imagine the writer Maxine Hong Kingston as a silent China-hater with an inferiority complex, however misguided she might have been as a child.

These arguments do indeed make sense, but they do not in the least weaken the validity of the thesis that the books want to spread a kind of hope that comes out of nothing, and thus does not depend on what is currently available. On the contrary, the arguments even support this thesis. Wong and Kingston choose their respective genres (romantic comedy and autobiographical account of a childhood in the form of a novel, "Memoirs of a Girlhood" is what the subtitle reads) because both practically demand authentic hope from their readers as starting point and fundamental philosophy. Whoever happens to study the autobiography of an esteemed person has to expect that the protagonist will be this esteemed person in the end, no matter what happens before. Similarly, the reader of a romantic comedy expects salvation in the end, whatever events have taken place up to then. In *American Knees* and *The Woman Warrior*, the miracle, the carrier of radical, arch-American optimism, so important for Chinese American literature, is already present right from the start, in the form of the book, not only in the content. The authors do not merely show through the fate of the main characters that what matters is a hope which has nothing to do with progress, but through making use of the readers' expectations of specific genres. One does not only read about authentic hope, one has got it.

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Özet**Mucizeler, Özgün Düş ve Çinli Amerikalı Roman**

Eserlerinde yaygın olan stereotiplerle savaşıyan Çinli Amerikalı roman yazarları, hem ilerleme fikrini desteklemeyen (çünkü bu “model azınlık” tezini güçlendirecektir), hem de “pasif” ve “ölümcül” karamsarlığı ortaya koymayan bir hikâye anlatmak zorundadırlar. David Wong Louie, Maxine Hong Kingston, ve Shawn Wong eserlerinde, Çinli Amerikalıların bugün karşılaştıkları sorunları önemsiz gibi göstermemekle birlikte bir çeşit umut taşırlar: “özgün umut”. Bu, mevcut koşullar ve dış görünüşe bağlı göstergeler üzerine temellendirilmemiş ve dolayısıyla sürekli ilerleme fikrinden bağımsız bir umuttur. Bunu, başkarakterlerin yaşamlarını radikal biçimde iyi yönde değiştiren öngörülemez mucizeler ortaya atarak yaparlar. Bu mucizelerin taşıdığı, geleceğin radikal anlamda açık olduğu ve mevcut geri çekilmelerin asla yenilgi anlamına gelmediği tarzındaki felsefi göndermeler, Amerikan düşünce tarihinin mihenk taşlarıdır; bu bağlamda yeniden düşünüldüğünde, Çinli Amerikalılar, “özgün umut” kullanarak kendi haklarında oluşturulan stereotiplerin aksine aktif bir biçimde Amerika’daki konumlarına sahip çıkarlar.

**Feeding the Memory with Culinary Resistance:
The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, The Joy Luck Club
and *The Kitchen God's Wife*¹**

Sihem Arfaoui

Although *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1975) by Maxine Hong Kingston as well as *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) by Amy Tan are, in one sense, postmodernist novels emphasizing "all that is peripheral to the American mainstream", generically, these works are at variance more than identical (Zeng 2). As a matter of fact, Kingston's narrative has more affinities with outlaw autobiographies given its disruption of traditional genres besides the oscillation between fiction and non-fiction. To a certain extent, *The Woman Warrior* puts forward the word autobiography and functions as a controversial personal history centred on reflections about Kingston's life as she attempts to understand and interpret the cultural codes that shape her life (Huntley, *Maxine* 77).

In the meantime, other passages in *The Woman Warrior* make of it more a mosaic of memoir, history and fiction (rather than a life-writing book *per se*) which are used as media to tell and retell stories that change with each telling and take on layers of signification with each new version (Huntley, *Maxine* 77). Nonetheless, Tan's books are conspicuously popular bestsellers, that is to say, more or less disengaged with technical craft and language experimentation, especially that their writing style oscillates between using broken English and relatively simple English. Thus, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* make a generic compromise with Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

Despite the fact that both of Tan's books are less sophisticated than Kingston's, there is reason to argue that it is always possible to investigate them in comparison with each other. Noticeable, in this respect, is their joint exploration of mother/daughter dyads and issues of cultural identification and non-identification.² What could make the comparative discussion of their novels even more compelling for the purpose of this

¹ The first part of the subtitle in this article, "Feeding the Memory," draws on Barbara Frey Waxman, "Feeding the Hunger of Memory and an Appetite for the Future: The Ethnic Storied Self and the American Authored Self in Ethnic Autobiography," in *Cross-Addressing: Resistance Literature and Cultural Borders*, ed. John C. Hawley (New York: State University of New York, 1996) 207-220.

² See M. Marie Booth Foster, "Voice, Mind, Self: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*," in *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 208-27; Jacqueline P. Franzen, "Breaking Boundaries: The Autobiographical Revolution in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Edna Wu's *Clouds and Rain*," Diss. (University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1996) and Wendy Ho, "Mother-and-Daughter Writing and the Politics of Location in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*," Diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1993).

essay are their respective incorporation of culture-specific tropes among them ghosts, talk-story and food which constitutes the core debate of the current paper.³

As one of the manifestations of the so-called food studies, culinary symbolism amounts for a sub-yoke that could participate in decreasing the allegedly generic disconnection that emerges out of Kingston's and Tan's writings. Contesting the above separatist genre argument, this article parallels Kingston's and Tan's texts on the common ground of the culinary density that emanates from their amalgamation of symbols, motifs and icons reminiscent of feeding. It is helpful noting that feeding here is used in its material/physical sense that applies, mostly, to grotesque dishes as well as for its imaginary/intellectual connotation of storytelling. Thus, as a preliminary objective, this comparative essay, metaphorically, feeds on Chinese American writer Chuang Hua's assumption in her novel, *Crossings* that "[w]riters belong in the kitchen" and that "[c]ooking is an essential part of their imaginative environment" (qtd. in Chang 149).

To this end, contemporary Chinese American fiction is assumed to use all that surrounds the preparing, presenting and consuming of food to greatest effect that makes this literary corps hold together. Amy Ling's essay, "Emerging Canons of Asian American Literature and Art," compares the reading experience to the experience of eating at a restaurant with a menu which includes foods from many ethnic origins:

Coming to the dining room, we prefer to find or make ourselves a seat at the table rather than overturn the entire table and not allow anyone to eat. Not only do we take a seat, however, we also want to change the menu and to introduce new foods to the table; instead of an unrelieved diet of boiled meat and potatoes, we bring with us stir-fried vegetables, enchiladas, sushi, and a host of other new and exciting tastes and methods of preparation. (qtd. in Chang 157)

King-Kok Cheung makes a similar statement, pointing out in "Food for All Her Living," that "[b]eing part of the melting pot does not mean losing one's own flavour; rather it is the addition of one's own distinct spice, be that soy sauce, miso, or tabasco. Then will we have food fit for the living" (qtd. in Chang 157). Compelling, in that sense, becomes the implied reference to the salad-bowl metaphor of US multiculturalism.

With a few exceptions, food and feeding in Chinese American novels still stand as an overlooked, often misunderstood subject. A glance at some sources, ranging from reviews to critical articles, proves to what extent alimentary symbols in this segment of Asian American fiction and non-fiction are encoded, and unrightfully so, as a form of stereotyping. Suffice it to mention the literary reviewers who evaluate and respond to the so-called Chinese American culinary literature "as though they are savouring dishes" or evaluating cookery books (Chang 155). Joan Chang quotes a statement in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* about *The Kitchen God's Wife* as "a tour through the senses, making smells, sounds, sights, tastes and textures of the pre-communist China"

³ Some would reinforce the link between these texts by stressing their equal entertainment of similar receptions that range from incrimination to celebration. See Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," in *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. Chan et al, (New York: Meridian, 1991) 1-92.

(106). In a parallel reference to *The Joy Luck Club*, Leslie Bow criticizes writers and critics “particularly interested in investigating works that lend themselves to questionable clichés about East and West” and takes the example of a reviewer who found Tan’s book “‘snappy as a fortune cookie and much more nutritious,’” a statement which is no less surprising than shelving *The Woman Warrior* as a cookery book (160).⁴

There is more than one drawback to such over-simplified comments. In fact, they participate in conditioning *The Woman Warrior*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* altogether as Chinese American literary texts which take us into Chinatown guided tours inclusive of Chinese dishes requiring bizarre ingredients, somehow cannibalistic and cruelly derived (Wong, “Autobiography” 146).⁵ It follows that readers, most often eager for exotic ethnic markers, praise such books for their unfamiliar, at times unpleasant, alimentary presentations as much as they consider the culinary flavour as the fountain of any marketable popularity that these particular texts could entertain.

Moving from mainstream readers to Asian American literary criticism, one realizes the degree to which misconceptions about the integration of the culinary in these books are still disseminated, despite the fact that some experts in the field have moved beyond essentialist discussions of food.⁶ Kingston and Tan are, indeed, often held responsible for perpetuating “wrong” attitudes about Chinese food, hence, the accusatory term “food pornography [...] first coined by Frank Chin to denote the commercialization of the *exotic* and bizarre aspects of one’s ethnic food choices and eating styles” (Chang 155). According to Wong’s book chapter “Big Eaters, Treat Lovers, ‘Food Prostitutes,’ Food Pornographers,’ and Doughnut Makers” in *From Necessity to Extravagance*, Chin perceptively analyzes the practice of food pornography in his play *The Year of the Dragon* (1981) (58).

To abridge this leitmotif into such a rigid perspective is to lose sight of the intrinsic political implications which I have tried to envelope in this article title, “Feeding the Memory with Culinary Resistance.” Certainly, there are other ways to grasp food metaphors; readings out of the authentic/fake binary oppositions but no less devoid of the centre/margin controversies. It is such a reading that this paper offers by embracing food as an ethnographic marker to grapple with an area, on the whole, misinterpreted, an area wherein the culinary feeds the memory with resistance, veering towards an aesthetic of liberation. I argue that Kingston’s and Tan’s texts associate the culinary discourse with issues of subversion and empowerment, thus, overemphasizing food for reasons that transcend catering to readers who crave for exotic clichés.

⁴ The quote is part of a review by Rhonda Koeing, “Heirloom China,” *New York Magazine* (20 March 1989): 82.

⁵ From here on *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* is referred to as *TWW* in citations, *The Joy Luck Club* as *TJLC* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* as *TKGW*.

⁶ Specific examples include and go beyond Kingston’s and Tan’s texts. I am particularly referring to Alicia Otano, “Food as a Metaphor for Cultural and Familial Affiliation,” in *Speaking the Past: Child Perspective in the Asian American Bildungsroman* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004) 82-84. See also Marie-Therese Sulit, “The Philippine Diaspora, Hunger and Re-imagining Community: An Overview of Works by Filipina and Filipina American Writers” as well as Patrycia Kurjatto-Renard, “Metaphors of Hunger and Satiety in Patricia Chao’s *Monkey King* and Lan Samantha Chang’s *Hunger*,” in *Transnational, National, and Personal Voices: New Perspectives on Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004) 119-150 & 215-230.

With respect to this postulation of an aesthetic of liberation, a major part of the paper holds that Kingston's text provides a perspective wherein nurturing and storytelling as well as the culinary and the memory intrinsically crisscross. The affinities established between these two realms not only inculcate a resistant, feminist surge but also make us think of an important statement made by James W. Brown in his emphasis that eating and speaking "are fundamentally communicative acts" (qtd. in Chang 150). The rest of the essay will be dedicated to an exploration of the affiliative uses Tan makes of the culinary to bond and re-bond mothers and daughters. At a later stage of the article, I will argue that challenging Chinese American stereotypes of femininity is part and parcel of the pragmatic function of the alimentary imagery in *The Kitchen God's Wife*.

As a sensitive and revealing story of a Chinese American woman's coming of age in America, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* moulds short prose narratives that recount the reciprocal strictures between a mother and a daughter, who is not named but who is, in very significant ways, the author herself. As a generically-problematic novel "treated to an early canonization," *The Woman Warrior* equally reclaims voices of immigrant women's generations whose silence has kept their stories from being told and from being worthily included in histories (Ferraro 154). Throughout this controversial autobiographical novel, odours of Chinese meals, delicacies as well as aromas of frying, sautéing and baking are countless.

The book's opening section motivates this essay to emphasize the use of the culinary as a defiant honouring of women's memories and relationships. Starving the adulterous aunt's spirit in the material and symbolical senses of the word turns into a means of ostracism, reinforced with Maxine's inference: "Always hungry, always needing, she would have to beg food from other ghosts, snatch and steal it from those whose living descendants give them gifts" (*TWW* 16). Her "not being talked about means that she is not being fed; she is not supported as an ancestor" (Ludwig 73). Right here, starving becomes analogous to silencing, hence Paul Outka's reference to the "No Food Woman" in parallel with Maxine's reference to her aunt as No Name Woman (4).

Daringly, Maxine commits an act of defiance equally unforgivable as her aunt's adultery whereby she uses her writing as narrative nourishment in order to make up for the community's condemnation of the nameless female pariah. She is intent on feeding the hungry spirit of the nameless aunt, supplying it "with a story and thus an identity" (Ludwig 73). In this counteractive ritual of ancestor worship, writing replaces feeding and becomes allegorical for speech in keeping with Maxine's confession that "after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her" (*TWW* 16).

Worthy mentioning also is the point that the notion of writing serves as an emblem of reverence to the author's bicultural ancestors, especially that her writings evoke the influence of American as well as Chinese literary traditions. In re-writing and re-drafting food imagery through narrative sustenance, Kingston indirectly expresses Orville Schell's notion of a "sustaining fund of memory" (qtd. in Huntley, *Amy* 72). In consequence, the nameless aunt evolves from a victim to a victor, shockingly occupying the centre stage of the first chapter in Kingston's memoir.

Ironically, the very publication of such a Hesterian tale ranks the narrator as "an outlaw knot-maker" and, in turn, best depicts imaginary feeding as a reversal of the banishment of the outcast aunt from alternative honouring rituals (*TWW* 163). There is

more than one feature to this symbolic act of culinary resistance. In speaking of the adulterous aunt as a nameless woman, the narrator assigns her an identity and a voice (Lim 261). The gesture even makes a pun on feeding in the sense of resuscitating an ostracized spirit and filtering it into the symbolical realm of language. In this section of *The Woman Warrior*, feeding and remembering are prevalent to the extent that the biographical impulse becomes a means of self-liberation from marginalizing systems.

In a similar way to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* twists nourishing and serving food until they become equal to or based on relating, another synonym of remembering. However, in contrast to Kingston's text, *The Joy Luck Club* consists of vignettes that alternate back and forth between the lives of four Chinese women in pre-1949 China and the lives of their American-born daughters in California. The book begins with the mothers talking about their own childhoods and the relationships they have had with their own mothers. In parallel, it focuses on the daughters and their upbringing to draw on their current lives. In a circular narrative structure, Tan's text moves back to the mothers whose second set of stories, in contrast to Kingston's, finish this ployvocal mother/daughter narrative.

By extension, the correlation of concrete nourishment with questions of agency and self-affirmation is consolidated with regard to the Mah Jong Club itself, of which the mothers and daughters form essential members. Through this joint social occasion for dinner celebrations and psychological release, the mothers are actually the core and the daughters have difficulty entering the game, as Jing-mei's opening story exemplifies. The link between feeding and remembering grows out of the meetings, gathering women *diseuses* in feasts of interchangeable eating and story-telling (Minh-ha 119). As Suyuan narrates the events of the Joy Luck Club she founded in China, "[w]e feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky" (*TJLC* 12). Similarly, the participants of the San Francisco Joy Luck Club meet to feast, cook symbolic dishes associated with good luck and recount tales that target any impending apocalyptic news.

With their creation of a social organization based on feeding and storytelling, the Chinese American mothers are no longer stereotypically victims or family outcasts. They depict themselves as rebels and artists. Significantly, the eating-telling monthly festivities empower the mothers with a sense "of continuity, strength, shared pain, and resistance in the collective counter-memories of unrelated women bonding and telling stories to each other and talking-back to those who would steal their stories and lives" (Ho, *In Her Mother's* 182-3). Thus, the creation of the San Francisco version of the club gives a prompt to the shared re-bonding of mothers and daughters as a counteraction to any phallic ruptures. It is embraced within a load of struggle seen in the mothers' culinary competitions, especially through Suyuan's plan to prepare black sesame-seed soup for the club members, since another major mother member had served red bean soup at a previous club dinner (*TJLC* 5). The choice of diverse foods to prepare forefronts not only the degree to which the mothers are desirous to point out their inherent distinctiveness but also the ways in which they could be hard-working and resourceful at mothering, in the sense of nourishing. Implied in this "culinary rivalry," among other meanings, is every club member's intention to demonstrate how her meals, recipes and feeding talents are special (Huntley, *Amy* 59).

Similarly striking in *The Joy Luck Club* is the paradigmatic interchange between feeding and feeling through the so-called *shou* ritual, described in relation to An-meï Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan, mainly in the short stories entitled “Scar” and “Magpies.”⁷ As an example of food grotesquery pushed to the extremes, the narrative of An-meï’s mother cutting her arm to feed Popo, the grandmother, on the death bed is overarching in this sense.⁸ At its simplest, the cannibalistic soup is meant to enliven the grandmother’s dying spirit and bring her back to life, a scene which makes the daughter rather than the mother the nurturer of her tenderness in a self-sacrificing, almost mystic gesture.

In this process, An-meï asserts a female tale of compassion, solidarity and female inscription that requires pain. It is a transformation of the culinary into a metaphor for the umbilical cord that runs from grandmother to mother and daughter in a sublime, healing, resuscitating way, symbolized by the blood connection. It is almost the state in which An-meï identifies with her mother as a mirror to herself, thus, forming a “very fragile kind of identity” that “unconsciously depends on someone or something outside ourselves, from which we are separated, for its support” (Minsky 141).

Besides trying to save the mother from inevitable death, the daughter evinces the transcendental ability of the pre-Oedipal love to overcome all sorts of anger, including the patriarch’s ostracism of Rose’s grandmother as a belligerent promiscuous wife. Of the pre-mother/daughter connection, Hélène Cixous holds:

In women there is always, more or less, something of the “mother” repairing and feeling, resisting separation, a force that does not let itself be cut off but that runs codes ragged. The relationship to childhood (the child she was, she is, she acts and makes and starts anew, and unites at the place where, as a sense, she even others herself), is no more cut off than is the relationship to the “mother,” as it consists of delights and violences. (qtd. in E. Anne Kaplan 38)⁹

The passage takes An-meï into a phase of total merging with her mother, into a realm that corresponds to the imaginary, symbiotic stage whereby the union of mother and child, pre-oedipally, sounds so perfect that it lapses into a state of utopia, characterized by volatility and endlessness.

This way the soup An-meï’s mother made for the agonizing grandmother replays a tradition that counteracts the law of the father encircling the former’s ostracism as an outcast. We should bear in mind that such a culinary scene enfolds a turning point in An-meï’s relation to her mother, since it enables the daughter not only to share her mother’s pain in a sublime experience but also to acknowledge that woman as her mother. Nothing but this telepathy enables An-meï to identify with her biological mother, despite early separation: “I knew she was my mother, because I could feel her

⁷ *Shou* is an equivalent for filial piety, meaning the respect and obedience of one’s parents and elders. The opposite would be *bu Xiao* to refer to not filial (Isham 453).

⁸ *Popo* is the way a woman calls her mother-in-law or her maternal grandmother, especially in Southern China, with *lao lao* as an equivalent used in Northern China (Isham 453).

⁹ See Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing of *La Jeune née* (1975), introd. by Sandra Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University of Press, 1986).

pain" (*TJLC* 242). Eventually, the soup made of the blood and arm flesh of An-mei's mother begets An-mei's most significant decision to give up all the privileges of respect amid an extended family in favour of an alliance with a widowed mother whose social status as a concubine fits nowhere (*TJLC* 245).

The whole process yokes mother and daughter in a utopian coalition, in turn, giving birth to a metaphorical form of resisting the symbolical realm of female coercion. At its deepest, the sacrifice ritual teaches An-mei the true meaning of motherly respect:

This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is *shou* so deep it is in your bones. The pain of the flesh is nothing. The pain you must forget. Because that is the only way to remember what is in your bones. You must peel off your skin, and that of your mother, and her mother before her. Until there is nothing. No scar, no skin, no flesh [Sic]. (*TJLC* 41)

The cannibalistic food continues to inspire An-mei, after her mother's death, into liberating her sadness and anger. When An-mei voices out the loss of her mother-ally: "I can see the truth, too. I am strong, too [...] And on that day, I learnt to shout," she proves to have learnt not to surrender to the oppressive order of the father (*TJLC* 271, 272).

Embedded with a culinary title, Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* stands as an absorbing narrative of Winnie Louie's life which she offers as a gift to her daughter, Pearl. Blaming all the negative aspects of Confucianism, Winnie allows her daughter into her past life and achieves a sense of reconciliation with herself in a retrospective demonstration of her blossoming feminist consciousness. Winnie re-emerges with a sensibility wherein the figure of the absent mother is strikingly painful and irreplaceable. In her connection to her daughter, Winnie sounds endlessly after a quest for motherly nurture and care, occasioning the growth of a connection recently founded on compassion, sympathy and understanding and achieved mainly through food metaphors.

Nobody fails to notice the culinary beginning and closure of *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The latter instils feeding with a communicative load whereby the culinary is concomitant with the retrieval of women's relationships from oblivion. In fact, Tan's second text is replete with food feasts with various secrets in between. In a moment that goes far beyond inculcating an ornamental grotesque material, Winnie treats Pearl to a Chinese soup before divulging the hidden rape. She asks Pearl to finish a bowl of hot noodles that she has just prepared; plainly putting in her hopes that Pearl captures the love, the truce, the affection behind it, expecting that "she would remember how soothing my soup made her feel" (*TKGW* 101).

Through Winnie's invitation, "Eat some noodle soup first. See what I made? Same kind when you were a little girl, lots of pickled turnip, a little pork just for taste. On [sic] cold days, you were so happy to eat;" I tend to see a pre-oedipal mother's endeavour to transcend the constraints of an environment heavily loaded with biases likely to distort a mother/daughter union (*TKGW* 101). Beyond this, we can establish a reference to 'jouissance' as a description of sources of pleasure exceptionally feminine, "associated with the search for an alternative identity through the reunion with the mother, the originator of all desire" (Minsky 162). This specific invitation encompasses

a mother seeking her daughter's alliance, the necessary psychological support, compassion and sympathy that Pearl is summoned to hold for a survivor of violation.

As suggested by Tan's title, the culinary motif plays out a saga about resisting phallic boundaries and setting up a paradigm of female liberation. Being centred on the affiliative impact of nourishment on the mother/daughter connection, *The Kitchen God's Wife* stresses the removal of the kitchen god from the altar in an arbitrary dethroning process and its substitution for a goddess who has no status at all, not even a named statuette (530). The seller tells us that the Goddess is one made by mistake; indeed, "they forgot to write down its name on the bottom of her chair" (TKGW 531). Winnie names her mistake-statuettes Lady Sorrow-Free instead of attributing to her the more respected title Mrs. Kitchen God (104; TKGW 531).

Incorporated into Tan's text, the myth embodies the mother as a goddess-figure. Reconstructed, it marvels in deifying the betrayed wife and mother to the detriment of the kitchen God himself, thus, transcending the stereotype of Chinese mothers as victims or social outcasts. Not only do we go beyond a tale that deifies the male figure, but also we end up with a resuscitated myth about Winnie as a survivor of gender inequities in an unprecedented gesture cognizant of her success as "the mother of an accomplished daughter, and the grand-mother of two American children" (Huntley, *Amy* 85). As a result of this, staying enclosed within the superficial limitations of the exotic culinary flavour in the Chinese myth is likely to overlook Tan's feminist subversive message.

Tan's text debunks alimentary tokens to adjust them to a seditious impulse wherein feeding triggers a womanist tradition as the sphere of a woman who "Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless [sic]" (Walker 370). Observing mother and aunt arguing while lifting the leftovers from the wedding banquet, Pearl ponders "perhaps it is not arguing. They are remembering together, dreaming together" (TKGW 526). Further implicative of food as an arena of nourishing the memory with hope is Winnie's remembrance of her eloping mother in a moment enfolded by culinary imagery. The link between food and memory as a space for female lineage and connectivity is communicated to us by reference to the morning the mother abandons her daughter, who consequently refuses to eat her bowl of *syen do jang* (TKGW 115). Clear enough becomes the connection between the daughter's sense of security and the mother's role as a provider of meals and vice versa.

At its simplest, the association could be read as a pointer to the physical and spiritual nurturing presence of the mother. *Syen do jang*, Winnie clarifies, is the same salty soy-milk soup that Cleo, the grand-daughter, devours without spilling a drop (TKGW 115). Implanted in Winnie's reminiscence is the culinary thread hooking up Shanghai and San Francisco and, by far, the six-year-old grandmother in the 1920s China and the three-year-old granddaughter in the 1990s America (Huntley, *Amy* 96). Displaced as a token of a unifying matrilineal tie, the culinary defines the daughter's relation not only to the mother, but also to herself and the world as a whole.

As shown through the specific examples of *The Woman Warrior*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, feeding in certain segments of Chinese American fiction and non-fiction is mature enough to transcend physical survival and issues of assimilation in order to maintain female narratives in pursuit of resistance and

liberation. Becoming an opportunity to experiment with themes of agency and mother/daughter dyads, the culinary is metamorphosed into a prominent site of women's quest for affiliation. It seems a basic component to the enterprise of Chinese American womanhood, hence, calling upon readers of women of colour literature to look with more depth into the so-called culture-specific tropes informing their writings.

Further on, this article takes part in minimizing the boundaries between Kingston and Tan on the basis of food symbols as joint culture-specific motifs. *The Woman Warrior*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife* also bring the culinary more into focus as a site of resistance and give us a strong sense of the coexistence between feeding, storytelling and struggling. The culinary is also a site of heterogeneity within the Chinese American community, with special respect to the daughters' dislike and unfamiliarity of the foods their mothers at times provide.

Literarily merged in the involved Chinese American texts, feeding and eating become a pointer to the risk of essentialism in narrating women's stories through the kitchen. When women writers such as Kingston and Tan resort to a named conventional activity and exploit the domestic sphere as a location of female agency, they twist it into an arena of telling female stories about unifying with other women, stories that used to be buried. In a counteraction to ostracism, both physical and imaginary feeding is used as a tool to answer back traumas of erasure and commemorate a matrilineal legacy. Even the passages where food equals grotesquery represent an act of resistance more than a form of exotica, a significant signal towards opposing strategies of oblivion and nourishing the inscription of a female tradition in a Chinese American sense.

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Özet

Mutfaka Direnerek Belleği Doyurmak: *The Woman Warrior*, *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, *The Joy Luck Club* ve *The Kitchen God's Wife*

Bu makale, Çinli Amerikalı yazar Chuang Hua'nın *Crossing* adlı romanındaki, "yazarların yaratıcı ortamlarının özü mutfaktan geçer" önermesinden beslenmektedir (Chang 149). Kingston ve Tan'ın kitaplarında mutfak terimlerinin yoğunluğu, yiyecekleri hem maddesel hem de sembolik ve yaratıcı anlamlarıyla kullanmalarından kaynaklanmaktadır. Makalem, bu çelişik duygular taşıyan halkbilimsel (ethnographic) belirleyici olan mutfak imgelerinin, kız evlatların belleklerini karşı koyuşla dolduran ve hiç de davetkar olmayan, estetik bir özgürlüğe açılan bir alan olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Kingston ve Tan eserlerinde, besleyici olma ve yemek söylemlerini iktidarı devirme ve güç kazanma konuları ile bağlamaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet baskılarına karşı direnme ve kendini onaylama anlamında kullandıkları yemek metaforları *The*

Woman Warrior ile *The Joy Luck Club* ve *The Kitchen God's Wife* adlı eserleri daha derin olabilecek herhangi başka bir motiften çok daha fazla yakınlaştırmaktadır.

**Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*:
The Novel and the Politics of Writing Beyond the Nation-State**

Masood Ashraf Raja

In 1999, when Qurratulain Hyder's Urdu novel, *Aag Ka Darya*, was published in English, it received raving journalistic reviews. Aamer Hussain, in a *London Times Literary Supplement* review, called it a "work which is to Urdu fiction what *A Hundred Years of Solitude* is to Hispanic literature". Since its publication in 1959, *Aag Ka Darya* has always been considered the greatest Urdu novel of the twentieth century in the Urdu critical circles both in India and Pakistan, and it was hoped that with its transcreation¹ it would take its rightful place amongst the great novels of our time. Surprisingly, however, despite the rave reviews and great promotional efforts by the New Directions Publishers, *River of Fire* has not gained as much academic critical attention as a work of such brilliance and importance deserves². Certainly, we cannot blame the novel for this lack of academic engagement; some responsibility must be attributed to the metropolitan critics and their modes of selecting the non Anglo-American texts.

The reason *River of Fire* has not been able to interest serious metropolitan academic scholarship is because it defies the very logic of critical expectations of the postcolonial or the commonwealth novel. Since the novel was particularly written for a Subcontinent audience, a fact that remains centered even in the transcreation, it is much different in its technique, in its intertexts, and in its representation from canonical postcolonial novels. A good postcolonial novel, especially for it to become part of the metropolitan counter-canon, must possess certain aspects privileged in the metropolitan academy. Aijaz Ahmad captures these attributes as follows:

The essential task of a 'Third World novel, it is said, is to give appropriate *form* . . . to the *national* experience. The range of questions that may be asked of the texts which are currently in the process of being canonized within this categorical counter-canon must predominantly refer, then, in one way or another, to representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions, and so forth. (124)

With this set of predetermined questions about the authenticity of postcolonial works, as Ahmad explains later, only the works that invoke the accepted tropes of postcolonial past and present are selected for critical attention. This tendency to privilege a certain kind of aesthetic in the Third World texts, Ahmad points out, is "framed by the cultural

¹ Instead of calling it a translation, Hyder calls the English version a transcreation, which implies that even though the work is an English rendition of *Aag Ka Darya*, it is rather a new creation that employs author's current ideas and views since the first publication of the novel in Urdu. I think this fact alone, the translation of the novel by the author herself after forty years of its first publication, should form a fascinating subject of comparative study.

² An article search in May 2006 on two major library databases—Project Muse and JSTOR—did not produce a single article that dealt exclusively with the novel.

dominance of the postmodernism itself; and ... that there is enough in the authors upon whom critical attention is so trained which is appropriable for those kinds of readings" (125). Within the British postcolonial context, works of the authors like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and V. S. Naipaul are ideal for canonization because they meet the aforementioned characteristics of the postcolonial or diasporic literature. Besides meeting these requirements of postcolonial texts, these authors also benefit from the very timing of their entry into the metropolitan literary market, an advantage that Hyder, having written her major works in the late nineteen fifties does not enjoy. Her late entry into the metropolitan arena, to some extent, also explains the lack of critical attention she has received. Despite her late entry into the metropolitan market, her works, especially *River of Fire*, do transcend these predetermined critical signifiers and that is one reason *River of Fire* has not garnered much critical attention.

I suggest that the elusive nature of the novel, its capacity to elude categorization, its power to exist beyond the critical expectations and the cultural stereotypes should be seen as its greatest promise. The novel does deal with all major signifiers of the history of the Subcontinent—vedantic India, Muslim arrival, colonialism, and partition—but does not let any single event become a totalizing experience for articulation of the Subcontinent history. Hence, the novel neither privileges the early Indian history nor the Muslim era and certainly does not posit the experience of colonialism as the most significant traumatic event of Indian history. Another important aspect of the novel that deserves critical attention is its translation, which Hyder terms transcreation. An act of translation is usually mediated through the consciousness and lived experiences of the translator, but in this particular case Hyder's own lived experiences bear upon the novel as she translates it after about forty years of its publication in Urdu. This act of transcreation could easily be an important subject for critique not just in the field of postcolonial literary studies but also under the general rubric of translation studies. But most of all, it is the novel's subtle critique of the nation-state and its refusal to be territorialized that makes it a subject of serious critical attention. This paper, besides introducing *River of Fire* to a wider academic audience, attempts to analyze its role in imagining the post-Independence history of the Subcontinent beyond the confines of Indian and Pakistani nation-states.

River of Fire captures two thousand years of Indian history through the lived experiences of four recurring characters: Gautam, Champa, Kamal, and Cyril. Out of the four characters, the first three enjoy a more privileged position within the narrative drive of the novel. Overall, through a long, complicated narrative, the Subcontinent is represented as a repository of varying cultures that enrich the soil and are tamed by India. The final chapters, the main focus of my inquiry, capture the post-partition history of India and Pakistan within the metaphor of the family. It is in the final sections of the novel that one can trace an important and sophisticated critique of the nation-state, which, considering that the Urdu version was published in 1959, is a literary attempt far ahead of its times.

The post-Independence Urdu novel dwells mostly on the trauma of the partition and in Aijaz Ahmad's words: "The major fictions of the 50s and 60s ... came out of the refusal to forgive what we ourselves had done and were still doing, in one way or the other, to our own polity" (119). Ahmad, of course, is using this argument to prove that the Urdu novel was neither always about the nation nor about colonialism, and hence

one cannot call all Third World texts “national allegories” (Jameson 69). But Aijaz Ahmad is himself generalizing, especially since he invokes Qurratun Hyder’s name as one of the authors whose fictions fall into what is loosely termed the partition literature. Such an argument, I suggest, flattens the complexity of Hyder’s literary works. There is no doubt that the final chapters of *River of Fire* are an attempt at coping with the trauma of the partition, but this representation is less focused on the violence of the partition and more on the experience of living the new form of national identity as it unfolds across the Indian landscape. Hence, in a way exactly at a time when the Urdu novel is taking a nationalistic turn, Hyder’s *River of Fire* attempts to critique the nation-state and highlights the importance of the artificiality of Indian national divide itself: the novel thus becomes a moving critique of the nation-state.

Most theorists of Indian nationalism and the partition trace the genesis of the Hindu/Muslim divide to the political mobilization of preexisting objective differences. Paul Brass, for example, explains this process as follows:

Involved, first, is the attachment of value and pride to the ‘objective’ markers of group’s identity. Second, however, there is a search for new symbols of group identity from the past. Third, there is also involved a process of identification of oppressors, of those who have held or do hold the advancement of the group in check. (29)

As is obvious, for a political group identity to form the objective symbols of group identity must become subjective. Paul Brass considers language and religion as two varied “criteria of ethnic identification” (27). It seems obvious from this that if one group was able to mobilize these ideas as markers of political identity, a national imaginary will emerge. The modern nations are also considered “imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays an important role” (Brennan 49). Hyder’s novel, however, does not mobilize difference in articulating the nation; it rather invokes the mythologies of similarities and common interest to articulate the Hindu-Muslim relationship. It is this homogenizing drive of the novel that makes it an unusual work of its time: it refuses to imagine the nation-state as we expect of a traditional Indian or Pakistani novel.

As the novel covers over two thousand years of Indian history, it is almost impossible to sum up the many connotations of Indian historical development in one brief essay. But it is important to note that the novel’s overall progression is dialectical: all new additions to the larger Indian cultures are assimilated and become a part of the larger India that Hyder attempts to represent. Her focus, however, is not on articulating the objective differences but the possibilities of merger and coherence in India’s two thousand year journey. Oudh is the main setting of her novel’s modern historical part. The choice of Oudh over Delhi is strategic and deserves our attention.

There were two major cultural centers of the pre-British India under Muslims: Delhi and Oudh. The British actually treated both these political and cultural centers as two major political entities. In choosing Lucknow as a model of Indian possibilities, Hyder privileges the possibilities of convergence over difference, for it was in Lucknow, the most culturally diverse city in the kingdom of Oudh, that the Muslims and Hindus were able to develop a culture that transcended their religio-linguistic

objective differences Hyder portrays this particular aspect of the Lucknow culture as follows:

The Nawab Vazir's of Oudh banned the killing of monkeys in deference to the Hindu monkey-god, Hanuman. Dussehra and Holi were officially celebrated by many Mughal kings in the Red Fort at Delhi, Holi and Basant were official festivals in Lucknow. Asaf-ud-Daullah's mother, Nawab Bahu Begum, used to come to Lucknow from Fyzabad to celebrate Holi. Sadat Ali Khan, the fifth Nawab Vazir's mother, Raj Mata Chhattar Kunwar, built the famous Hanuman temple in Ali Gunj, Lucknow, with a crescent atop its spire. The Nawab Vazirs created a culture which combined the finest elements of the civilizations of Iran and India. (131)

Of course, one could easily dismiss this representation of Lucknow culture as the class-specific views of the author pertaining only to the ruling classes of Oudh. But my critical quest is not about the veracity of the representation or about the patrician-plebian aspects of its articulation. My emphasis precisely is at retrieving and introducing the writer's attempt at imagining a different history and future of the nation at the point in Indian history when that past and the possible future had already been altered in the name of irreconcilable differences that resulted in the nation-states of India and Pakistan.

Hyder also portrays the degree of inter-religious alliances during the Indian rebellion. Her narrative, I must point out, relies heavily on the aesthetic aspects of the relationship: of loyalty and honor accorded to the Oudh's rebel Queen by her Hindu as well Muslim nobles. In a chapter entitled "The Queen and Her Knights"³, Hyder captures this inter-religious allegiance in the following words:

On the 16th of September Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde, entered Lucknow with his army. The Queen had summoned the feudal barons to her aid, and swashbuckling knights arrived on their charges from all sides.

Raja Debi Baksh Singh of Gonda, Raja Sukh Darshan, Lal Madho Singh of Amethi. ... and the Pathan and Sheikh taluqdars of Nanpara, Malihabad.

The Begum visited the front line on elephant and palki. Our men fought valiantly in defense of the city. On the 25th of February 1858, in the fierce battle of Alam Bagh, the Begum again rode out on elephant and took part in the action. Raja Man Singh of Shahgunj showed such valour in Alam bagh that Begum Hazrat Mahal called him her son and gave him her own dupatta, along with the robe of honour. (160-61)

This account of peace and wartime alliances between the Muslim rulers and their Hindu nobles invokes a past of collective sharing and struggles for the Hindus and Muslims. It is this shared heritage, privileged by Hyder, that had to be abandoned to articulate the future Hindu-Muslim politics of India. Hyder foregrounds in this and so

³ The chapters dealing with the actions of Hazrat Mahal, the rebel Queen, were not included in the original work. Hyder adds a detailed narrative of the Queen and her followers fight against the British. This strategic insertion in the transcreation in itself should form an interesting topic for a comparative study of the Urdu version and its English transcreation.

many other passages the fact that at one time in Indian history, the Muslims and Hindus lived and died together, and that if history plays any role in articulating the nation—which it does—then forgetting this history is a great loss.

The Begum's alliance with her Hindu and Muslim nobles is not only a matter of material gains and interests; it is posited on the plane of honor, and lasts even when the Queen had lost her influence. In another moving passage, Hyder describes the loyalty of the Queen's Hindu nobles after the defeat: "Raja Beni Madho Singh had reached his castle in Shankarpur. He told Lord Clyde that he would surrender his fort because it was his property, but he would not give himself up because his person belonged to his Sovereign" (162). This captures the hegemonic aspect of the Muslim Hindu alliances: the nobles were a part of the Muslim Queen's loyal group through their own consent and this consent was generated through a much deeper inter-cultural understanding. If the Muslim-Hindu differences had always been irreconcilable, then alliances like this would have never lasted especially when the Muslim power was on the wane. By imagining and rearticulating this aspect of Indian history in a novel, Hyder foregrounds an important aspect of Indian history that does not get much attention in the Pakistani departmental history. This act of historical retrieval, then, is conducted against the normalized terrain of Indian and Pakistani post-partition historiography and it is this aspect of the novel that makes it into a critique of the nation-state. Lucknow as a setting also provides a real-life historical place where Muslims and Hindus were able to create a composite "high culture"⁴, which the later national divide erased.

It is this Lucknow of the Indian history in which Hyder's post-partition characters were born and raised. This is the heritage upon which they draw, as Talat, the narrator for this part of the story, narrates her childhood memories to her expatriate friends while sitting "in front of a log fire in a flat in St. John's Wood in London" (184) in 1954. The Indians of history have now become the residents of the metropolitan and their combined experiences have already been sundered by the post-partition realities. It is this aspect of the post-partition realities that this part of the novel captures: how do you reconcile the present difference with a collectively shared past? Precisely, how do a people learn to be two different nations? Almost all the characters can trace their link to one particular house in Lucknow: Gulfishan. Talat, Kamal, and Tehmina are siblings who lived in Gulfishan, where their cousin, Amir Reza, joined them in 1936. Hari is the adopted Hindu member of the family and Tehmina is his "rakhi sister"⁵ (187). We also get to know Champa, from a lower middle-class Muslim family, who becomes a part of the group in Lucknow and Gutam who joins them as well. On the whole all these expatriates, now living in the heart of the empire, are living their post-partition existences in the former center but their collective experiences go beyond the national

⁴ Ernest Gellner considers the creation of a unified high culture an important aspect of modern nationhood. For details see Ernest Gellner, 57.

⁵ Rakhi or Raksha Bandhan is a Hindu custom in which a sister ties a holy thread around her brother's wrist: the thread signifies a bond of protection. In Indian history rakhi also became a custom between Hindus and Muslims, especially the nobility, where Rajput princesses would sometimes send rakhis to the Muslim king or nobles. The Muslim counterpart to this custom is the tradition of "Mun-bola-bahi/behn", according to which a person can name another as his or her sibling. Most of this information was gleaned from <http://hinduism.about.com>, visited on June 3, 2006.

divide. Their relationship can be best described in the metaphor of the family. Hence, this gathering of people formerly linked to each other with blood as well as cultural connections is a brilliant staging of the traumas of nationhood after the national divide. The nation-state, in such a scenario, becomes the very vehicle of destruction of harmony instead of being the true expression of the will of the people.

Compared to usual representation of the partition, this certainly is a much detached and tame version of the experience. For most post-independence fiction the violence of the post-partition massacre itself becomes the main subject of representation. Hyder's attempt at tracing the impact of partition on the lives of her middle class, urbanite characters, therefore, is hard to characterize as a traditional representation of the partition. We can only view her representation of the partition trauma as weak or invalid if we look at it from what happens to be an established critical method of looking at the partition. Ananya Kabir explains this critical matrix quite brilliantly:

The violence of partition comprised both physical and psychological wounding, with the physical wound bound up with aspects of somatically marked cultural identity. For men, bodily symbols of religious affiliation—circumcision or its absence, uncut hair of Sikh males—exposed their bearers to life-threatening violence. But, as in the other moments of collective violence, it was in the systemic rape of women that trauma and the body were most obviously linked. (179)

Such a representation of the partition violence captures the object of this violence in the very moment of its violation and attempts to represent it. The resultant fiction is more immediate and, as Kabir points out, these works “function very much as testimonial narratives do for survivors of the Holocaust” (178). It is such a representation of the partition violence that has had a privileged place in the canonization of works from both sides of the national divide. Compared to this tradition, Hyder's attempt is of a different kind: it captures the emotional toll and psychological impact of the partition as an event on the hearts and minds of characters who were heavily invested in the idea of a united India in the form of a composite nationalism. The trauma thus created is more introspective and concerns the characters' attempt at coming to term with a reality—divided India—that now aims to sunder the very familial ties that they had experienced and sustained through a more inclusive view of the nation. Hence, it can be said that Hyder's treatment of the trauma of the partition deals with the lives and experiences of those who were caught in the middle of the national divide: those who had unwillingly become subjects of an identity politics that was hatched and matured far away and often at odds with their cultural imaginary. This insertion of divisive politics as an intrusion into a composite high culture also finds voice in Hyder's other works. Writing about Hyder's earlier work *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* [translated as *My Temples, Too*], Sonya D. Choudhury opines as follows:

My Temples, Too evokes this very world, the stately, gracious Lucknow of nawabs and Coffee House conversations. ... The gang gets together all the time at Ghufra Manzil ... They loved to talk. They felt that the cultures and literatures of the world belonged to them, that they were the rightful owners of all civilization

... They wanted to learn to do things. They were heart-breakingly young and enthusiastic. This dreamily idealistic world. ... is destroyed by the politics of the day, as a mounting feeling of futility and a sense of impending doom creeps in. (2)

The expatriate characters of *River of Fire*—all of them connected to Gulfishan—also suffer the same fate. Their lives are also altered by the events much larger than them. The world created by a composite high culture of Lucknow is replaced by the realities of the partition. These characters, thus, enact their altered national identities through their interactions. This aspect of a new reality had already become obvious even before these characters had left India for London. Immediately after the announcement of partition, Champa had experienced it at a wedding at which both Hindus and Muslims were invited guests. It is through this experience that what until then was “*heimlich*”—India as home—comes to confront her as a foreign place as the “*unheimlich*” (Freud 129). A young Bengali asks of Champa:

Hellow, there! How is Mr Jinnah? How is it that he has gone away to Karachi and left you behind? Champa was completely taken aback. Who was this stranger? How had he guessed that she was a Muslim? Was it written on her face? Was this how Muslims were going to be sneered at in the future? (264)

This realization, to be treated as the other in the most promising composite culture of undivided India, is a good rendition of a different kind of trauma: the trauma of being seen as the other. This brief encounter between Champa and the Bengali stranger signifies that for those who chose to remain in their age-old homes and hometown, the partition had introduced a new reality, a sort of national consciousness that had othered the very people who had previously seen each other as part of one large high culture. In Champa’s case this problem is further compounded by her interaction with her Gulfishan friends. Kamal, who had known Champa all this time, accosted her the same evening in the following words: “Champa Baji, Congratulations! Your Pakistan has come into being, after all” (264). Part of this certainly comes from Kamal’s own bitterness, for he, unlike Champa who had sympathized with the Muslim League, was completely opposed to the idea of partition. But this exchange portrays that partition was not only an inter-religious and inter-communal trauma; it even affected the Muslims who had long known each other. On an individual level, they are still the same people but the change in political structures within which they existed has also altered their individual view of each other. This situation also emphasizes the plight of the Muslims who did not migrate to Pakistan and who were actually the ones left behind in the bitter struggle for the division of India. Champa’s these two experiences, thus, are emblematic of the plight of the Muslims who either could not or would not move to Pakistan. The number of these Muslims was significant. In fact, according to Aeysha Jalal, at the time of partition “thirty-five million [Muslims] were left inside India, remarkably, the largest number of Muslims in a non-Muslim state” (2).

It is also important to note that Hyder’s views of the Hindu-Muslim relationship fall in the middle of the two major political stances on the subject. These two ways of dealing with the subject are quite aptly expressed by F. K. Khan Durrani and B. R.

Ambedkar in their respective works. Writing about the history of the Hindu-Muslim relationship, Durrani argues the following:

Much has been written on the irreconcilability of the religious conceptions, beliefs and practices of the Hindus and the Muslims. ... Yet, in spite of them all, there is something in their respective faiths, which enabled the two peoples to live amicably together for many centuries, and which, if what they have learnt and suffered under British rule could be washed out of their minds and the same old religious mentality could be recreated in them which inspired their forefathers of a century ago, would enable them again to live amicably together as good neighbours and citizens of the same state. (37)

In Durrani's views, then, the Hindus and Muslim had maintained non-antagonistic relationships, a practice that, in his view, became contaminated by the nationalistic thought introduced due to the divisive influence of colonialism. And as it is not possible to retrieve that unsullied past, for Durrani the creation of Pakistan is the only solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem. It is important to note that for Durrani the Hindus and Muslim did share a past in which their separate religious identities did not make them into belligerent communities. B. R. Ambedkar's views of the past represent another position on the Hindu Muslim relationship. He supports the creation of Pakistan but his argument is based on the irreconcilable historical differences between Hindus and Muslims:

The methods adopted by [Muslim] invaders have left behind them their aftermath. One aftermath is the bitterness between the Hindus and the Muslims which they have caused. This bitterness between the two is so deep-seated that a century of political life has neither succeeded in assuaging it, nor in making people forget it. As the [Muslim] invasions were accompanied with destruction of temples and forced conversions, with spoliation of property, with slaughter, enslavement and abasement of men, women and children, what wonder if the memory of these invasions has ever remained green, as a source of pride to the Muslims and as a source of shame to the Hindus⁶? (204)

As is obvious, for Ambedkar the tarnished history of Muslims and Hindus makes it impossible for them to reconcile their differences and live as one nation; hence, he sees the creation of Pakistan as the only prudent way of solving the Hindu-Muslim problem. These two historians—one a Muslim and the other a Hindu—touch upon two important aspects of the Hindu Muslim relationships and both of them, though different in their approach to early history of Islam in India, consider partition as the only true solution.

By using the history and the present of the Lucknow culture as her milieu for a composite nationalism, Hyder places her view of the nation in between these two extremes. *In her historical Lucknow and the Lucknow of the partition*, there seemed to have been no need for the partition. Hence, her novel becomes an articulation of the

⁶ The page numbers are from a digital copy of the book available at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00ambedkar>.

lives of those who found themselves in the middle of the two political and historical extremes.

The partition also initiates the exodus of the people in general but Hyder's Gulfishan group in particular. Those of the Gulfishan group who left for Pakistan had all their different reasons. On the whole, it seemed as if moving to Pakistan had become a path to socio-economic advancement. Amir Reza was one of the Gulfishan group who chose to move to Pakistan. In Champa's views the decision to leave for Pakistan was also highly gendered and it meant something different for men: "Amir Reza had left because, apart from horses, sports cars and pretty women he now had a fresh interest in life: a brand new country, promotions, greater opportunities and challenges. Men have an entirely separate world" (266). For the women, however, the cross-border migration was a much more dangerous affair. As Ananya Kabir points out most of the atrocities during the partition violence were committed against women's bodies. Also, the chances of upward mobility were not as readily available for women as for the men.

The gathering of the Gulfishan family in London is a good example of what is left of their collective familial heritage and what has altered after the national divide. Amir Reza, a Pakistani naval officer now, is in London as a diplomat, while Gutam represents his own government. In this nationally divided group identity, the family interaction is contaminated with the residue of the recent partition. In this charged atmosphere, the collective past was the only cement that kept them going: "They were addicted to their past because it was safe and intact, more so for Kamal and Talat because there was no fear of Partition in it" (305).

The new identities disrupt the group affiliations in various ways. During one of the group's picnics, when Amir Reza leaves abruptly, Roshan, a Pakistani, asks Talat: "Why did he leave in such a hurry?" (287). The resultant conversation goes as follows:

[Talat]: See we are Bharatis and he belongs to Pakistan's armed forces, therefore he avoids us if he can.

[Roshan]: Why should he do that? You wouldn't try to steal defence secrets from him, would you?

[Talat]: Roshan—do you have a divided family? I mean, close relatives who were divided between India and Pakistan?

[Roshan]: No, I am a native of Lahore.

[Talat]: So you won't understand this dilemma, and anyway we belong to Nehru's India. We give a sort of complex to people like Cousin Amir. (287).

Talat's explanation of the problems between her cousin and the rest of the group are quite instructive: she captures the long-term trauma of the divided families. The members of the family must perform their nationality even when on neutral ground. And as the two nations become belligerent states immediately after the partition⁷, the problems are further aggravated. It is important to note, however, that the situation is even worse for the Muslims who remained in India: they cannot easily associate with their Pakistani relatives, but because of their Pakistani connection, they are even suspect in India. It seems as if they have become migrants in suspended animation, in a state

⁷ Immediately after the partition, India and Pakistan fought their first border war in 1948 in the Kashmir region.

according to which a few Hindi newspapers can consider “all Indian Muslims ... as traitors and potential Pakistanis” (Hyder 266).

Hyder traces the impact of a slowly changing national identity through the experiences of Kamal who reluctantly decides to leave for Pakistan. Kamal’s experience also hints at the lack of possibilities for the Muslims in India immediately after the partition. On his way back to India, Kamal learns of his own new identity, in the eyes of the others, through the following remark by a British poet: “Forster wrote his novel in 1924, at which time he created Dr Aziz as a representative Indian. Dr. Aziz is no longer Indian—Muslims are now identified only with Pakistan. ... Now our Kamal Reza is not the typical Indian, only our Pandit Gaur is” (368).

Obviously, for someone deeply invested in the idea of composite nationalism, this is a shocking statement: “The remark hit Kamal; between the eyes. Lightning seemed to have struck him” (368). When he reaches Lucknow, he sees the immediate consequences of the partition. Lucknow of his childhood “had become a derelict and shabby city” (369). He finds out that because of the abolition of the zamindari system, his parents were “almost starving in Gulfshan” (370). The creation of Pakistan had left his family destitute for the Indian government had “abolished zamindari first in U. P. because most of the landowners were Muslims” (370). This aspect of the post-partition politics is far removed from the physical traumas of the riots and the violence, but explains the juridical violence against the lives of those who had chosen to stay in India after the partition. Hyder, in sharing Kamal’s experience with us foregrounds the often-neglected lives of the Muslims who chose to stay behind, for whom their own country had become a foreign place.

Soon Kamal and his family also lose the house. As Amir Reza had immigrated to Pakistan, Kamal and his parents’ property had, therefore, been declared “evacuee property” (371). The new political realities also impact his personal life and ambition and make him question his own self-view. Kamal learns that it is really hard in the new India to find a job, for “there were no vacancies at the moment, even in the Muslim University at Aligarh” (373). Eventually his family loses their court case and Kamal finds himself “a homeless unemployed refugee in Lucknow” (374). Hence, Kamal, and so many others like him, who had put their faith in the united India, learn that being Muslims, they have no future in India. Kamal eventually immigrates to Pakistan, but through his story, Hyder enacts the failure of a composite culture that had been created over centuries.

Much of what Hyder writes is also based on her own experiences. Her indictment of nation-state politics also mirrors her life. She is probably the most cosmopolitan of postcolonial writers. Unlike Salman Rushdie, who only spent his childhood in India, and V. S. Naipaul who is skeptical of his Trinidadian and Indian heritage, Hyder has lived both in India and Pakistan and also lived for quite some time in England while working for the British Broadcasting. She can easily be called an Indian-Pakistani-British author. Her works, therefore, benefit from the experiences of an author who herself has often transcended the confines of a national identification. She is probably the only author from the Subcontinent who was awarded the national honors both by India and Pakistan: Iqbal Award in 1987 and Jnanpith Award in 1989.

Unfortunately, because of its late translation, *River of Fire* has not received the kind of welcome other diasporic works have, but maybe in this critical neglect lies the

greatness of Hyder's novel: it highlights the critical deficiencies of the metropolitan approach to the works of the global periphery. For the metropolitan critics to attempt to write about *River of Fire*, a new method of reading the works of the periphery will have to be adopted: a method that reads the works from the periphery from the point of view of the people of the periphery and involves a deeper knowledge of the form and content of the Urdu novel. What are major tropes in other works, the partition and colonialism, are just a few milestones in Hyder's novel, and that is what the metropolitan and postcolonial critics will have to learn. Also, what she imagines and invokes in her novel gives us a different account of Indian history and a different rendition of the possibilities that were squandered in the name of the nation-state. The India of her imagining was much larger than the one invoked by the Hindu fundamentalists of India and the mullahs of Pakistan. In Hyder's world we find an India where Muslims and Hindus lived together and formed a great high culture. It is a part of Indo-Pakistan history that must be remembered and taught, for only then, maybe, one day both Indians and Pakistanis will be able to see beyond the politics of religion and nation-state and connect with each other as human beings who once shared a common history.

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Özet**Qurratula Hyder'in *River of Fire* Adlı Eseri:
Roman ve Ulus Devlet Ötesinde Yazma Politikaları**

Çıkış noktası olarak Qurratulain Hyder' ın *River of Fire* adlı eserini kullanan bu makale, roman türünün Hindistan'ın 1947'de bölünmesinin bir eleştirisi olarak rolünü incelemektedir. Bu roman incelemesi, iki ayrı ulus devlet olan Hindistan ve Pakistan'ı yaratan ulusal bölünmenin siyasal bir tercih olduğunu ve bunun bir *bölünme/ayrılma* olarak yasalaşmasının, Hyder'in romanının geçtiği yer olan Oudh tarihine dek izleri sürülebilecek olan bir ülkü bağlamında, Hindistan tarihinin bileşik yapısını susturduğunu iddia etmektedir.

**Testing the Limits of the Transcultural:
Travel, Intertextuality and Tourism in
Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* and Anita Desai's *The Zigzag Way***

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Transculturality, a concept applied to literature that crosses geographical, temporal and cultural boundaries, has been the topic of recent postcolonial debate. In her essay "Investigating the Motif of Crime as Transcultural Border Crossing" Vera Alexander offers a helpful definition of the term. For Alexander, transcultural literature occupies a restlessly dynamic, amphibious position between cultures: it "confront[s] readers with spatial and temporal border crossings, forcing them to bridge different geographic locations and time levels, and to experience the continual crossing between them" (141). In this respect, theories of the transcultural lay stress upon cultural identity as an activity or process rather than a static entity. Susanne Reichl, for instance, argues that this fluidity lends the concept special potential as an expressive resource through which to challenge colonialism's legacy. In Reichl's hands, the transcultural becomes a utopian space of resistance, in which writers draw upon a variety of cultural referents without necessarily slotting them into a hierarchical value system.¹ Yet, while Reichl's formulation undoubtedly adds to a specific critical vocabulary of cultural description, there is something missing from such celebratory accounts. An exclusive focus on culture threatens to eclipse the political, historical and economic realities that underpin these gestures towards hybridity. Given the recent emergence of patterns of globalization that, as Stuart Hall has shown, often eerily mimic colonial structures of dominance, this celebration of cultural pluralism at the expense of historical awareness seems a rather troubling omission.²

To underline the need for closer attention to the politics of transculturalism, this essay will interrogate the representation of transnational histories in two novels by writers of South Asian descent who are currently based in the United States: Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993) and Anita Desai's *The Zigzag Way* (2005). In accordance with Vera Alexander's definition of transculturality, both Mukherjee's and Desai's novels traverse times zones and continents, considering recent phenomena, such as globalization and backpackers, in the light of specific histories of colonial plunder and economic exploitation in India and Mexico respectively. In other words, these novelists extend their narrative focus beyond the nation's borders, aligning the machinations of contemporary multinational corporations, which often reinforce

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¹ In the course of her essay, Vera Alexander cites Susanne Reichl's discussion of the term: "[t]ransculturation is also a narrative device, a semiotic technique, a translational strategy. Transcultural novels resort ... to inventing and creating, appropriating and syncretising, seizing and subverting, or simply adhering and reinforcing, materials transmitted from the various cultures which they seek to bridge or mediate between. None of those cultures and materials, in theory, is privileged more than the other" (Alexander 147).

² See Hall for an informative discussion of colonialism as a form of globalization.

colonial inequalities, with cultural and economic transactions that predate the late twentieth century. Yet, in spite of these shared preoccupations, the stylistic features of these two novels could not be further apart.

Taking its title from Alexander von Humboldt's description of Mexican Indian miners, who adopted a zigzag route in the silver mines so they could breathe more easily, Desai follows an indirect path to unearth a forgotten history of intercultural contact linking Cornwall, Maine, Austria and Mexico. Set primarily in Mexico, *The Zigzag Way* derives its structure from the journeys undertaken by Eric, an American tourist, as he traces his personal history as a descendant of Cornish miners who settled in Mexico after the silver mines there were left derelict by the wars of independence from Spain (Todd 17). Much of the novel is filtered through a tourist's perspective, with panoramic inventories of the landscape and wide-eyed accounts of an abundant and sensate Mexico City that struggle to move beyond the surface; but a different, altogether more subtle portrait of Mexico is revealed if we are attentive to Desai's epigraphs, which allude to a history of economic exploitation that remains at odds with such exoticism and escapism.

In contrast to this understated approach, which loses some of its impact because Desai's strangely detached narrative perspective gives the portrayal a quality of "ghostly thinness" (Messud page n.), Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* is a postmodern *tour de force*, a bold and colourful revisionist account of American history. The novel is packed with adventure and incident, and offers a rich array of characters ranging from pirates, traders and Puritans to a fisherman-boy-turned-playwright, a Raja and the great Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. Like *The Zigzag Way*, the novel travels into the past to excavate a history that spills beyond national borders, but, in *The Holder of the World*, our guide is the American Beigh, an "asset hunter" whose quest for a valuable Mughal diamond leads her to the extraordinary story of Hannah Easton (H 45). A white American woman from Puritan Massachusetts, Hannah travelled with her husband to India under the auspices of the East India Company, conducting an affair with a Raja before returning to America with her illegitimate, mixed race child. Inspired by her experiences in India, Hannah becomes a champion of American Independence.

Given Desai and Mukherjee's shared project of unearthing histories that exceed national borders, bringing to light international networks of migration and trade, what value do these writers assign to the transcultural? My essay is structured around two possible approaches to this question. First, I will consider these narratives as revisionist accounts, which set out to challenge prevailing assumptions about the forging of national identity. Then, paying particular attention to the elaborate patterns of intertextuality in the pages of *The Holder of the World* and to Desai's complex use of epigraph in *The Zigzag Way*, I will look more closely at particular examples of transcultural contact in the novels. Weaving together these two strands reveals some of the tensions and ironies that lie at the heart of Mukherjee's and Desai's treatment of globalization.

According to Huggan's theory of "the postcolonial exotic," it is imperative to examine the "cultural commodification of postcolonial writing" (ix) in the light of an increasingly globalized culture, and, more specifically, what he terms the "cosmopolitan alterity industry" (12). In line with Huggan's exploration of the connections between "the perceptual mechanism of the exotic and the metropolitan marketing" of

postcolonial cultures in the West, I aim to show that the hybrid cultural formations present in *The Holder of the World* and, to a lesser extent, *The Zigzag Way*, may be intimately connected to economic and cultural trends of globalization (77). However, I part with Huggan in my emphasis upon the historical dimensions of such global affiliations, an approach that serves to complicate the inadvertent ethnocentric bias of his account.³ Attention to the trope of tourism, for instance, reveals that while intercultural contact acts as a catalyst for new cultural forms and developments, it is often born of exploitative colonization, economic plunder and asymmetrical power relations. In this context, it comes as no surprise that, in both texts, cross-cultural contact is ultimately portrayed as a by-product of travel initiated in pursuit of economic gain.

I shall begin, then, with a discussion of transnational narratives as revisionist histories. With its focus upon economic and cultural transactions between seventeenth-century America and pre-colonial India, Mukherjee's novel challenges exceptionalist accounts of American history; it is, as Beigh explains, "the story of North America turned inside out" a narrative that queries assumptions about the distance that is often staked out between America and colonialism (*H* 160). In this sense, as Mukherjee has explained in an interview with Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie, the novel is "not a book about India, but about the making of America and American national mythology" (18).

Mukherjee positions *The Holder of the World* against American exceptionalism, challenging the assumption that American culture is unique and cannot be explained by theories that account for the unfolding of history in Europe and the rest of the world. In the course of the narrative, she makes reference to classic narratives of exceptionalism, that is to say texts underpinned by a belief that American culture was shaped by influences that lie squarely inside the nation's borders. She cites such famous exceptionalist theses as John Winthrop's speech, "Modell of Christian Charity," which presents America in biblical terms as a "Citty vpon a Hill" (Sollors 43); Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, with its emphasis upon expansion westward as the key to American character (Turner 3-28); and Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, an account of her capture by Narragansett Indians, who kidnapped her in 1676 during a series of attacks on colonial settlements known as "King Philip's War" (Rowlandson 309-40).⁴ By contrast, Mukherjee queries the introspection, if not insularity, of such national myths, exposing the importance of global trade to the forging of American identity.

In particular, Mukherjee calls into question the origin of ideas that have been understood to be specifically American. Sending up the overblown rhetoric of American exceptionalism, she reveals possible Indian sources for such ideas:

Perhaps piracy on the Coromandel Coast – going to sea, raising a flag of one's own, being the boss and dividing the loot, scuttling the sobersided sons of sea cooks who stood in the way – was the seed of the frontier dream, the circus dream, the immigrant dream of two centuries later. (*H* 165)

³ Huggan tends to view globalization from a western, cosmopolitan perspective, but Mukherjee reminds us of intercultural connections that exceed or redefine the parameters of the colonial relationship, such as the extensive trade networks of the Mughal empire.

⁴ For a comprehensive overview of American exceptionalism, see Madsen 1-40.

Mukherjee names three “dreams” that have been interpreted as being representative of American cultural identity: the frontier, already mentioned as being associated with Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic construction of the West as the crucible of national character; the myth of the self-made man, represented in the novel by entrepreneur P.T. Barnum but inaugurated in American letters by Benjamin Franklin; and, finally, the now routine description of America as a “nation of immigrants”.⁵ Mukherjee undercuts such claims, linking these ideas (behind which lurks the elusive notion of the American dream) with colonialism and unscrupulous economic plunder of India. As such, she celebrates certain American qualities of adventure and determination, while revealing what she has called the “underside of the American Dream” U.S. involvement in imperialism and economic exploitation of the colonies (Chen and Goudie 15).

As other critics have noted, this emphasis upon the global trade links that underpinned America’s wealth in the seventeenth century is pressed home by Mukherjee’s revision of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), a novel that is at the centre of the American literary canon. In her meticulously researched analysis of *The Holder of the World* as a revisionist text, Judie Newman argues that Mukherjee rewrites Hawthorne’s classic tale of transgression and guilt to underline Salem’s imperial connections with India, fleshing out a narrative of economic plunder and dependence on trade with the east that is pushed to the margins in Hawthorne’s novel. In this way, Mukherjee’s version of the text, which straddles east and west, and past and present to establish points of contact between the seventeenth-century colonial plunder and late twentieth-century globalization, “takes its place in an honourable tradition of filling in the gaps in history, correcting and amplifying the record, and curing that amnesia which is America’s second name” (74).

Desai’s project in *The Zigzag Way* is less ambitious in scope, but it is also guided by an attempt to uncover a neglected history of intercultural contact. “[T]he intricate cat’s cradle of the voyages of [Eric’s] family” (Z 53) becomes a platform for an exploration of complex migratory patterns, which connect Maine, Cornwall and Mexico, creating threads of attachment across the world. An episodic representation of Eric’s holiday to Mexico with his girlfriend Em, his father’s emigration to the States from Cornwall, and his grandparents’ experiences as Cornish migrants to Mexico, is set in counterpoint to the story of Doña Vera, who fled Austria during World War II (it is suggested that she has Nazi connections) to marry a rich Mexican merchant before becoming a champion of Huichol culture. Given these intersecting travel narratives, it is important that the novel repeatedly loops back to concepts of the strange and the familiar. Yet, rather than fixing down our understanding of such ideas, Desai forces the reader to think always in terms of multiple meanings and fluid definitions. For example, there is considerable slippage between what is strange and familiar in Eric’s perceptions of Mexico, particularly in the somewhat unconvincing moment when he attends a lecture given in Spanish, a language he does not understand, only to find that he recognizes certain words because they remind him of a forgotten childhood moment when he listened to his grandfather’s tales of his life as a miner in Mexico. Yoking together an image of excavation with Lewis Carroll’s “rabbit hole,” an allusion

⁵ See Oscar Handlin’s famous introduction to *The Uprooted*: “[o]nce I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history” (3).

suggestive of an unstable world in which the familiar frequently tips into strangeness, Desai implies that our sense of what is “alien” often complicates ethnic and cultural lines (Z 31). Thus, Spanish, a language that Eric at first experiences as “a welter of strange words” (Z 31) becomes oddly comprehensible, while a “dull” domestic Cornwall scene is rendered “strange” because it conflicts with Eric’s expectation that an adventure story ought to be set in a landscape of “rocks, canyons or mountains” (Z 32). In this fashion, Desai challenges the idea that individuals can be divided into discrete cultural or national traditions, a point accented in the closing pages of the novel by Eric’s ambiguous encounter with a ghostly Cornish woman, who tells him “[e]veryone comes from somewhere else” (Z 176).

Both novels revel in cultural diversity and variety, reaching towards a generous and pluralistic vision of the world, which chimes with Susanne Reichl’s claim that the transcultural can facilitate opposition to such hierarchies of difference as centre and periphery, black and white, colonizer and colonized. Indeed, as Bruce Simon has argued, given the schematic direction of Mukherjee’s plot line, which charts Hannah’s progression from the constraints of Puritan Massachusetts towards her transformation in the fluidity and richness of India, “[i]t is entirely plausible to read *Holder* as a paean to pluralism, a celebration of diversity” (428). Notwithstanding the validity of such interpretations, an approach that places undue emphasis upon the subversiveness of transnational histories threatens to smooth over the complexities and tensions that underlie intercultural encounter in *The Holder of the World* and *The Zigzag Way*. Attention to the patterns of intertextuality in both novels reveals that while intercultural contact can act as a catalyst for new cultural forms, it may also be a consequence of what Mukherjee has called “the will to imperialize” (Chen and Goudie 15).

It has often been noted that Mukherjee adopts a heterogeneous, collage-like form, cramming her novel with references to texts and forms that effortlessly range across time and space: shipping records, museums, diaries and letters rub shoulders with Mughal miniatures, Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” Thomas Pynchon, Mary Rowlandson, Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, or the *Art of State-Craft*, and multiple versions of the *Ramayana*, to name but a few. As Shao-Pin Luo has pointed out, such “textual hybridization” (88) certainly enables Mukherjee “to rewrite and reconstruct lives and histories, and to recreate transcultural spaces across time and geography” (89), laying particular emphasis upon the formative influence of South Asian culture upon American identity. Yet, Mukherjee’s rendering of cross-cultural encounter is not simply celebratory. Throughout the text, she frequently sounds a note of caution, noticing that asymmetrical power dynamics continue to shape intercultural transactions.

Nowhere are these concerns more apparent than in Beigh’s attempt to establish a framework for interpreting female experiences, which perhaps too easily equates women from diverse cultural and class backgrounds, like Hannah and her Hindu servant Bhagmati. Taking the captivity narrative as her template, Beigh lines up Sita’s abduction by Ravana, Hannah’s dramatic affair with the Raja, Rebecca’s staged capture by Nipmuc Indians and Bhagmati’s relationship with her master, the Englishman Hedges, as practically equivalent episodes. In this respect, Mukherjee highlights a common narrative in which women’s sexuality is controlled in an effort to maintain strict racial hierarches, but she also questions the limits of such universalization, making

it clear that Beigh's narrative rearticulates colonial structures of dominance by "translating" non-western culture in accordance with pre-existing western concepts. Echoing Gayatri Spivak's influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," which wonders whether the subaltern classes are in fact rendered voiceless by western discourses that marginalize them, Beigh expresses concern about the silencing of women's voices in captivity narratives: "[w]here is Sita's version of her captivity in Lanka?" (*H* 177). Yet, with no small measure of irony, Beigh herself is guilty of such coercion: she proceeds to displace the "subaltern," asserting authority to speak for Sita because she "know[s] from [Hannah's] own captivity narrative what Sita would have written" (*H* 177). At such moments, Mukherjee betrays anxiety about the way in which white Euro-American feminists' claim to speak for all women has led to a silencing of women doubly disadvantaged by race and class. For Mukherjee, a genuine sense of such differences must be preserved, as is indicated by the contrasting fates of Bhagmati and Hannah. While Hannah chooses to defy social norms through her relationship with Jadav Singh, Bhagmati is forced to leave her family because of the disastrous social consequences of rape for a Hindu woman.⁶

This concern with the ambivalence of transcultural encounter is taken further through Mukherjee's sustained engagement with Mughal miniatures as a model for her cross-cultural art.⁷ Accounts of Mughal art that are alert to its refined and sophisticated synthesis of Hindu, Muslim, European and Persian themes and techniques are by now fairly familiar. There is a celebrated painting of Jahangir by Bichitr, for instance, in which Persian devotional styles are employed alongside meticulous imitation of European painterly techniques: the artist includes a small portrait of James I below his representation of the pious emperor, a portrait which is rendered in accordance with contemporary Flemish realism, with no attempt to disguise its model.⁸ It is less often remembered that such cultural synthesis was not only a by-product of empire and global trade, but it was also, to a certain extent, mobilized as imperial propaganda. The Mughals ruled over a powerful, centralized empire, and miniatures served a political and an aesthetic purpose, creating a visual embodiment of imperial confidence and power that consolidated the emperor's image as a heroic visionary known throughout the empire.⁹

I would contend that Mukherjee mines such ambivalence both through specific references to paintings in the novel and a more general effort to adapt visual techniques

⁶ For a sustained discussion of Mukherjee's critique of American feminism in *The Holder of the World*, see Iyer.

⁷ In her monograph of *Bharati Mukherjee*, Alam offers a brief analysis of Mukherjee's adaptation of the miniature's visual techniques to fiction in *The Holder of the World* (134).

⁸ Bichitr's painting (c 1625) shows Jahangir seated on an allegorical throne. In the centre we see Jahangir handing a book to a *mullah* while powerful kings such as James I are relegated to the margin of the picture. This positioning affirms the emperor as pertaining to an elevated, spiritual realm and his ruling therefore as divinely sanctioned. In the specific context of this essay, the miniature emphasizes Bichitr's fluent blending of Hindu, Muslim, European and Persian cultural influences, which gives a forceful example of transculturality. See Craven 208-09.

⁹ Roy Craven argues that Mughal painting "reflects Akbar's policies of cultural synthesis" (205). Akbar actively encouraged his court painters to blend Hindu and Islamic elements in their art; he hoped that such cultural synthesis would help create unity in his diverse empire.

to fiction.¹⁰ Attention to Mukherjee's representation of a miniature that Beigh names after Keats, *The Unravish'd Bride*, endorses this reading of the novel. On the one hand, this lavish painting encapsulates many of the positive features Mukherjee finds in transcultural Mughal art: it is an inclusive and democratic image, in which the margins are as carefully delineated as the centre, and the viewer's eye can rove freely from one detail to another without being constricted by the ordering framework of "perspective and vanishing point" that was prized by contemporary European artists (*H* 19). Yet, in spite of this rich variety, it is clear that there is a political implication to such formal innovation. In keeping with Beigh's sweeping comment that "[e]ach conqueror museums his victim, terms him decadent, celebrates his own austere fortitude and claims it, and his God, as the keys to victory" (*H* 10), Mukherjee reveals that the painting's structure and balance derives from its staging of a stark opposition between the irresponsible, indulgent and sensual lovers, Hannah and Jadav Singh, and the methodical and organized, if "gloomy," emperor (*H* 18). Consequently, the painting could certainly be read as a sophisticated mode of propaganda, which justifies Aurangzeb's rule by establishing a hierarchy that places asceticism above decadence.

Comparable juxtapositions animate other transcultural forms on the pages of *The Holder of the World*, formulating a tension between the hybrid character of cultural experiment and the manipulation of such forms to maintain cultural hierarchies. Hannah's embroideries, with their "visionary" depictions of a colonized Coromandel Coast as a kind of exoticized pastoral idyll, complete with "palm trees, thatched cottages" and "colorfully garbed bare-breasted women" (*H* 44), echo early European representations of the Americas, which combined emphasis upon natural abundance, excess and productivity with an assumption that it was legitimate to conquer and exploit the American Indians because of "their lack of civilised culture" (Fothergill 37). In a recent essay, Bruce Simon explains that it is no coincidence that Mukherjee names the embroidery as "one of the great colonial samplers" (*H* 44), since Hannah's bold transcultural vision, stitched in exotic threads from "Bandar Abbas, Batavia, Bimlipatam" (*H* 44), is not innocent, but rather "made possible by the world system of colonial exchange" (Bruce 426).

Analysis of transcultural artifacts scattered across the pages of *The Holder of the World* forestalls any attempt to read the novel as a straightforward celebration of hybridity. Mukherjee's frame narrative, with its sharp analysis of the power dynamics that lurk behind displays of Puritan and Mughal material culture in the Museum of Maritime Trade, forces the reader to acknowledge that culture is never politically neutral. Not only is the museum a by-product of pre-colonial trade connections with India; it is also depicted as a space in which disparate cultures collide and clash, but where "Puritan practicality" is ultimately prized over the Mughals' "flashy" "decoration" and "cosmetic masculinity" (*H* 12). Mukherjee subsequently introduces an economic vocabulary into her discussions of cultural products that have survived from the seventeenth-century, not least because of Beigh's professional status as an asset hunter. Moreover, recourse to the language of economics adumbrates a line of connection between the conditions that encouraged cultural synthesis in Puritan

¹⁰ In an interview with Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie, Mukherjee explains how her fiction draws inspiration from Mughal miniatures (3-4).

America, contemporary America and pre-colonial India. For example, a striking representation of the colonial port of Salem as a multiracial and multilingual centre, in which cultural differences are temporarily set aside as traders scramble for profit, caring “little which regal head graced the ducat” (*H* 39), is aligned with a later description of the thriving economy on the Coromandel coast. By explicating these events in 1680s India through 1980s jargon of deregulation (*H* 101), “late-stage capitalism” (*H* 101) and “multinational factories” (*H* 102), Mukherjee creates a sense of violent disjunction which makes the reader think about the persistence of exploitative global trade in the modern world. While Mukherjee could certainly be accused of eliding cultural specificity here, there is a serious point behind her tactic of juxtaposition. She brings to light the extent to which her truly transcultural frame of reference, exemplified in her deployment of a genuinely international and transhistorical vocabulary in the two passages I have mentioned, is the fruit of a long history of economic exploitation and plunder.

If Mukherjee’s novel probes the ambiguity of cultural synthesis through elaborate patterns of intertextuality, Anita Desai orchestrates discord between the perspective on Mexico provided by her characters (who are all outsiders or travellers), and her epigraphs, which often ironize and complicate what these characters say and feel. For the most part, *The Zigzag Way* offers a highly figurative, panoramic portrait of the Mexican landscape, written from the view of an outsider or tourist. Desai’s long description of Eric’s response to Mexico City, for instance, references several tropes that are familiar from travel narratives, including “[t]he arrival scene in a foreign city” (Cronin 68). It soon becomes clear that Desai is invoking exoticist stereotypes in order to expose the limitations of Eric’s view. In keeping with John Urry’s concept of the “tourist gaze,” which places “visualization” and particular models of perception, or “ways of seeing,” at the centre of “the travel experience,” Desai depicts Eric looking upon the city, staking out a sense of distance between himself and the Mexicans he watches (Urry 4). Rarely noticing anything beyond the superficial, he is captivated by surfaces and colours: the “city ... strewed its sights before him” (*Z* 27); vendors show him goods for purchase; he admires architectural “façades” (*Z* 27); and even the boy who shines his shoes gives a “spectacular display” (*Z* 28). Eric’s intent gaze upon the city does not yield deep understanding of Mexican culture: he fails to look beyond the gloss, a point underlined by Desai’s repeated references to “tinsel” (*Z* 27) and cultural masking (*Z* 27).

Furthermore, in accordance of Graham Huggan’s analysis of the persistence of the “exoticizing imperial gaze” in new, postcolonial settings (81), Eric’s quest for authentic cultural experience is thwarted because tourism is “a relentless extension of commodity relations” (John Frow qtd in Huggan 177). What Huggan has termed the “alterity industry” is alive and well in Mexico, as illustrated by the variety of commodities on sale: carpets, jewellery, sweetmeats, lottery tickets, safety pins, dried herbs, creams and lotions and jumping beans jostle for attention (Huggan x). When Eric does encounter a traditional cultural performance, he is treated to what Daniel MacCannell has called “staged authenticity” (Urry 9), an Aztec dance that has been packaged and contrived “for tourists with cameras, purses and pesos” (*Z* 28). Just in case the reader has missed the point, Desai makes her emphasis upon consumption concrete, developing an elaborate comparison with food: “[i]t was as though he had

been starving throughout his northern existence and now, reborn a traveller, could feast and gourmandise without restraint till he was so replete that he had to sink down on to a bench" (Z 28). Given his passive enjoyment of the city as something akin to "Ali Baba's cave of curiosities" (Z 29), Eric could certainly be accused of self-absorption: travel has simply become the platform for solipsistic self-invention. Moreover, reference to "abundance" and "feasting" points towards the realities of hunger and poverty in Mexico that are swept under the carpet as Eric conflates Mexico with the exotic, fairy tale world of *Arabian Nights*. Precisely because *Arabian Nights* has been "a signifier or shorthand for magic and the exotic" since the Victorian period, Desai's allusion allows her to formulate a critique of the tourist's self-absorbed, if not irresponsible, escape into a childhood fantasy realm (Boehmer 45).

An analysis of the dynamic interplay between the main body of the text and the epigraphs helps us to make sense of Desai's chosen narrative point of view. Some chapters are preceded by quotations from European and American historians or anthropologists who studied South America, often drawing heavily on personal experiences. Other epigraphs slot into a long European tradition of representing South America as a mythic land of plenty, a New Eden. Through her allusion to ancient Chinese and Huichol beliefs at the beginning of parts one and three, Desai adds an alternative perspective, extending the novel's motif of journeying to include travel into the past and the imagination.

Taken as a whole, such references offer a kind of interpretive template, guiding our reading of the text. The first two epigraphs, for instance, imply that the novel should not simply be regarded as a faithful portrait of Mexico, but rather an attempt to capture the limitations of many Euro-American fictional and non-fictional accounts of South America. In this sense, it is significant that Desai begins her novel by citing the neglected early twentieth-century American novelist and travel writer Charles Macomb Flandrau, who published, *Viva Mexico!*, a portrayal of a visit to his brother's Mexican coffee plantation, in 1908. The epigraph records a conversation between Flandrau and his brother. When his brother talks of the "agreeable people one runs across in queer, out-of-the-way places," Flandrau assumes that he is talking about Mexicans. But, in fact, his brother, a solipsistic traveller who shares Eric's outlook, shifts the reader's attention from the viewer to the viewed, from "them" to "us": "I was thinking of *us*." Considered in conjunction with Desai's second epigraph, from Elizabeth Bishop's poem "Arrival at Santos," with its ironic unveiling of the tourist's "immodest demands for a different world, [and] a better life, and complete comprehension," this quotation implies that Desai is angling for a new perspective, a new way of seeing. Rather than focusing exclusively upon the culture being viewed, or the "other," the tourist here becomes an object of scrutiny. Desai's approach might be paralleled with Toni Morrison's project in *Playing in the Dark*, which she describes as "an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (90). Yet, this ambitious attempt to dramatize the limitations of the tourist's self-absorbed gaze poses certain challenges, not least because her narrative focus is constrained by Eric's superficial interest in Mexican culture. In the first two sections of the novel, Desai recapitulates the conventions of western exoticism with a gesture of critique, but she also risks inadvertent reaffirmation of such stereotypes. Consequently, readers have to work very hard to carve out an

alternative perspective from Desai's oblique form, remaining alert to latencies that have been pushed to the margins of the text, impressionistic asides and clues in the epigraphs.¹¹ Nevertheless, careful interpretation of the epigraphs reveals the logic underpinning the formal structure of this unusual, if flawed, novel.

Moreover, a second set of quotations taken from such writers as A.C. Todd, Bernal Díaz, Carl Sartorius and Alexander von Humboldt, gesture towards a history that remains at odds with Eric's escapism: namely, European exploitation of Mexican economic resources that stems back to the conquistadors. Reference to Carl Sartorius's *Mexico and the Mexicans* (1859), in particular, enables Desai to shadow forth an alternative to the romanticized, even pastoral, images of landscape that prevail in the novel. A German who established a productive hacienda in Mexico, Sartorius is remembered for his wide-ranging anthropological study of Mexico, which details everything from flora and fauna to festivals and mining practices. Desai's allusions to Sartorius situate her novel in the context of a long tradition of European writing about Mexico, in which escapist fantasy and exoticism exist cheek by jowl with economic exploitation. First, the chapter in which Eric goes to stay at Doña Vera's hacienda, now an international centre for research into Huichol culture, is prefaced by a quotation from *Mexico and the Mexicans* that describes the Spanish landing in Mexico, and white adventurers' greed for gold. Next, as the narrative emphasis tilts towards Doña Vera's life in Mexico and her shady past as a probable Nazi sympathizer, Desai begins with Sartorius's vivid representation of the backbreaking working conditions that Mexican Indians endured in the mines. As well as underlining an extensive history of economic exploitation of Mexican people and resources by Europeans, both interventions complicate Vera's claim to be a champion of Huichol culture. It becomes clear that the centre's credentials are compromised by its dependence upon money gained through the exploitation of Mexican Indian miners. Finally, Desai quotes Sartorius in the main body of the text: we witness Eric reading a shocking description of labour practices in the mines. Testing the limits of a tourist perspective, Desai documents Eric's response to the passage: "[l]ooking up at the mountains that stood in the pure light of the milk-blue sky as if they had never been trod upon by man or beast, Eric failed to relate them to such toil" (Z 85). While Eric adopts an aestheticized, elevated gaze on the landscape, which lays stress upon poetic, if somewhat hackneyed, details, the attentive reader is made aware of truths and realities that have been silenced or denied by such fantasies of a virgin land or "New World".

The figure of the tourist lies at the heart of Desai's exploration of the ironies and tensions of transcultural encounter. As Graham Huggan has noted, tourists occupy an uneasy and ambivalent position in modern western culture.¹² While travel holds the potential for an enriching experience of other cultures, tourists are often ridiculed for cultural ignorance, rigid adherence to preconceived ideas and itineraries, and a slavish addiction to mass culture. Such ambivalence, which often includes a substantial dose of snobbery, is registered in the rise of the "anti-tourist tourist" (Huggan 193), and in

¹¹ Alternative interpretations are often implied by juxtaposition rather than spelt out explicitly. For example, Desai stages an encounter between Doña Vera and a group of Huichols to undercut Vera's "legend," which casts her in the role of selfless benefactor (Z 93-94).

¹² See also Kaplan and Grewal.

critical responses to travel narratives, which have run a direct line between the rise of the tourist and the scarcity of good quality writing (Kaplan 54).¹³ Given this context, it is important that Mukherjee also hones in on the figure of the tourist in her consideration of Hannah's residence in India:

The word did not yet exist ("traveler" was in common usage), but if it had, she might have used it: she was, in some original sense of the word (as a linguist is to language), a tourist. She was alert to novelty, but her voyage was mental, interior. Getting there was important, but savoring the comparison with London or Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure. (*H* 104)

What is revealing about this passage is Mukherjee's self-consciously anachronistic choice of terms. Presenting Hannah as a "tourist" establishes a point of contact between seventeenth-century India and contemporary America, forestalling interpretation of the novel as an escapist fantasy. Yet, in an echo of an earlier description of economic boom on the Coromandel coast as a form of "late-stage capitalism" (*H* 101) stimulated by the productivity of "multinational factories" (*H* 102), this rearticulation of a modern vocabulary in an unfamiliar context also serves to underline that this account of India is inevitably filtered through a late twentieth-century perspective, or "lens," to borrow Beigh's apt metaphor (*H* 59). In other words, although Mukherjee reveals connections between India and America, she tries to avoid the pitfalls of universalization that characterize Beigh's treatment of the captivity narrative. A technique of linguistic disjunction sharpens awareness of cultural specificity, shedding light on the differences between east and west, past and present.

Through her reference to tourism, Mukherjee maximizes the narrative ambiguity surrounding transculturality. On the one hand, she implies that Hannah's travel is implicated in global networks of commerce: however beneficial Hannah's experience of self-invention and transformation in India might be, it is still underpinned by unequal power dynamics and an assumption of privilege. And, like Eric's, Hannah's enjoyment of an exotic and unfamiliar culture seems to be predicated on a surrender of the self, a passivity that inevitably involves an abdication of responsibility. On the other hand, Mukherjee explicitly cautions against essentialist attempts to make national or racial identity exhaustive. Challenging the by now commonplace caricature of the "vulgar" tourist, she acknowledges the potential for transformation and illumination in Hannah's encounter with India. Indeed, comparison with the "postcard view of modern Madras" that Venn sees when he enters the computer simulation of seventeenth-century India reveals that there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to the relationship between exoticism and ethnicity (*H* 281).

To conclude, Desai's and Mukherjee's representations of transnational economic and cultural links deserve mention in relation to recent theorization of the transcultural, which have, at times, been marred by insufficient acknowledgement of the historical conditions that made such cultural transactions possible. My argument for a historically informed conceptualization of transculturality takes its cue from Mukherjee and Desai, who give voice to historical and political realities that remain unspoken in exoticist

¹³ For a classic example of this argument see Fussell.

representations and celebratory accounts of cultural pluralism. In a novel that traverses boundaries of time, space and culture, Mukherjee not only disgorges the underside of American history; she also places America's involvement in colonial exploitation in the context of a longer, global history of empire. Although less successful as a work of fiction, *The Zigzag Way* raises pertinent "questions of travel" pointing to unequal power dynamics and economic exploitation that are masked because of the tourist's desire "simply to observe, imbibe" (Z 29).

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Özet

Kültürlerüstü'nün Sınırlarını Zorlamak:

Bharati Mukherjee'nin *The Holder of the World* ve Anita Desai'nin *The Zigzag Way* Adlı Eserlerinde Yolculuk, Metinler-Arasılık ve Turizm

Kültürlerüstü terimi, coğrafi ve kültürel sınırları aşan edebiyatı tanımlamak için sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır, fakat bu tarz bir girişimi mümkün kılan siyasal ve ekonomik koşullardan çok daha az bahsedilmektedir. Bu makalede, kültürlerüstü metinler olan Bharati Mukherjee'nin *The Holder of the World* (1993) ve Anita Desai'nin *The Zigzag*

Way (2005) adlı romanlarının, kültürel melezleşmenin gelişmesine neden olan tarihsel koşulları öne çıkardığı iddia edilmektedir. Örneğin, Mukherjee'nin romanı, geç yirminci yüzyıl küreselleşme ve Hindistan, İngiltere ve Amerika'yı bağlayan sömürge öncesi ticaret ağları arasındaki ilgiyi kurmak için akıcı bir şekilde geçmiş ve bugün arasında, Hindistan ve Amerika arasında gidip gelmektedir. Güçlenen bu bağları belirtmek için her iki yazar da tarihsel ve ekonomik soruları belirleyerek yenilikçi bir tür olan deneysel roman uyarlamaları sunarlar.

**Nora Okja Keller:
Telling Trauma in the Transnational Military-(Sex)industrial Complex**

Deborah L. Madsen

Introduction

In this paper, I explore war as a historical moment that reveals transnational patterns of domination and subordination. My subject is Nora Okja Keller's novels *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*, which have come to prominence recently as key texts that break a silenced historical trauma: the enforced sexual servitude of Korean women and girls under the Japanese military occupation during World War Two, and the on-going sex trade in South Korea under U.S. military occupation.

Keller's emphasis upon a systematic form of transnational patriarchal oppression is congruent with the very origins of the 'comfort woman' movement, which was organized by the efforts of feminists in Korea and Japan to draw attention not to the isolated incidence of military sexual slavery during the war in the Pacific but to focus the attention of the world upon the sexual exploitation of Asian women generally and Korean women specifically in the global sex trade. Elaine H. Kim, Kandice Chuh, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, and Pamela Thoma are among the critics who have engaged the various forms taken by the 'Americanization' of the comfort women issue and Lisa Yoneyama has written powerfully about the "'Americanization' of redress and historical justice". The economic exploitation of Korean women's sexuality is seen as an expression of powerful patriarchal narratives that dominate both cultures: Korean and American. So where the survivor narratives of former comfort women may shatter cultural narratives of human rights, for example, these narratives also affirm the continued power of narratives of Asian feminine sexuality and patriarchal dominance. That the intersection of discourses of patriarchy and Orientalism is also powerful in American culture is evidenced by Keller's equation of Akiko's suffering as a comfort woman with her suffering as the Asian wife of an American man. This interest is, of course, explored further in Keller's second novel, *Fox Girl*, which addresses directly the experience of contemporary Korean women who provide sexual services to the U.S. military personnel still stationed in South Korea.

The 'Americanness' of Keller's novel, then, lies in part in this connection between imperialism, patriarchy, and the sexualization of Asian femininity; but I would like to suggest that it also resides in the nature of Keller's rhetoric of trauma, as she recreates the conditions of 'subjectivization': the political process by which an individual is culturally constructed and interpellated into a specific subject-position.

In the second part of the essay, I turn to Keller's use of the cathartic role of literary language in the process of healing. The special characteristics of poetic language are deployed in her two novels as a mechanism by which the full horror of the traumatic event can be recreated or recovered. The theoretical argument that trauma somehow lies beyond representation, an argument assumed by some poststructuralist approaches to trauma literature, is interestingly engaged in these novels. I want to focus upon the potentially cathartic role of Keller's literary language in the fictionalized

process of healing, where the special characteristics of poetic language can act as a mechanism by which something approaching the full horror of the traumatic event can be recreated, in order to be purged. Here, the 'Americanness' of Keller's novels is significant: her subject matter concerns the sexual exploitation specifically of Korean women in the context of World War Two and the Korean War yet this is not an 'Asian' text -- it is an Asian *American* text and the role of America as one of the symbolic landscapes of the novel is quite ambiguous, as is the status of the writer/witness as an Asian American subject.

Technologies of the Self and the Rhetoric of Subjectivization

In this first part of the essay, I want to explore Keller's novelistic use of war as a historical moment that reveals transnational patterns of domination and subordination. The extremity of war exposes a gap between what Giorgio Agamben calls "the political life" and "the bare life". Agamben is interested to explore connections between the 'Political' and processes of subjectivization; I am interested in focussing on the complexities of subjectivization itself within the context of war and the international sex industry that is an integral part of the military-industrial complex. My subject is Nora Okja Keller's novels *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*, novels that have come to prominence recently as key texts that break a silenced historical trauma: the enforced sexual servitude of Korean women and girls under Japanese military occupation during World War Two, and the on-going sex trade in South Korea under U.S. neo-imperialist military occupation. But it seems to me that the context of trauma *qua* trauma is largely incidental to Keller's interest in gendered relations between the 'bare' life (or survival) and living (or the politicized life of and in the *polis*). Rather, Keller is engaged in what Agamben, in *Homo Sacer*, describes as "the examination of the *technologies of the self* by which processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power" (5). Agamben continues, in his reading of Foucault's theory of "bio-power" or "bio-politics" to observe that:

Clearly these two lines [subjectivity and external power] ... intersect in many points and refer back to a common center. In one of his last writings, Foucault argues that the modern Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization to an unprecedented degree, and he speaks of a real "political 'double bind' constituted by individualization and the simultaneous totalization of structures of modern power" (5).

The paradoxical condition of individuals who achieve a sense of self only at the point of intepellation into a totalized structure of power, so that subjectivity and agency are indistinguishable from external cultural determination, is the condition Keller explores in her narratives; this is a condition that can best be exposed in its extremity within the novelistic setting of war.

Agamben opposes to these subjective *technologies of the self* the *political techniques* "with which the State assumes and integrates the care of the natural life of individuals into its very center" (5). War is crucial to Keller's work in so far as the disruption of 'normal life' in war strips away and exposes the fundamentally *technical*

nature of these technologies. In both novels she emphasizes the organized nature of the system of sexual exploitation in which characters like Akiko and Hyun Jin are enmeshed. In *Fox Girl*, sex workers are monitored, tagged, subjected to regular medical inspections, and are incarcerated if they fail their medical tests. A clear disciplinary regime controls these women and places them in the subject position of 'prostitute.' However, government officials (agents of what could be called State political techniques) refer to the women as 'hospitality workers' or 'patriots of the Republic of Korea' (43). These linguistic indirections are themselves resonant of the euphemism 'comfort woman' that obscures the status of these women as having been sexually enslaved by the Japanese military. Laura Kang's extensive account of the difficulty faced by surviving comfort women, who seek to name their ordeal as sexual slavery, underlines the ways in which the experiences of sex workers can be variously constructed, and appropriated, according to how they are named. She argues:

One possible way to contest the discursive Americanization of "comfort women" is through tracking the contested range of possible names and terms that have been deployed under the hegemony of English as the language of international activism, adjudication, and knowledge-production, in which Korean/American cultural and scholarly productions are also partially implicated. The problem of translation into English from not one but two languages [Korean and Japanese] is exacerbated by different ideological valences of a range of terms in Japanese and Korean (p. 44).

"Comfort women" as voluntary camp followers or prostitutes, as military manual workers (who did not perform sexual labor), or as military sex slaves: the language of naming is a crucial means by which subjective experience is rendered as an external politicized condition. The political techniques by which the State (be that the Republic of Korea or Japanese-occupied colonial Korea or, indeed, the U.S.) controls the natural life of individuals are not obscured but are recreated by technologies of the self that construct individual identity through naming. The binding of the individual to consciousness and to the external power that makes available and validates those names happens through the process of naming a subject-position. The 'political' and the subjective thus are not opposed, but complementary.

One such name is 'prostitute' and, in both *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*, Keller explores the ways in which the 'bare life' is transformed into 'social life' through the interpellative power of the name. In *Fox Girl*, Keller poses the question: "are prostitutes born or made?". The question is explored through the problematic of blood – as inheritance, as fate, as destiny versus nurture. When Sookie is abandoned by her mother, the prostitute Duk Hee, Sookie becomes a sex worker because she has no alternative livelihood. However, Hyun Jin's adoptive mother interprets her move into prostitution as the triumph of 'bad blood'. She demands of her husband: "Tell her what she is"

"You are what you are," my father said.
 "See!" his wife gloated. "Blood will tell!"
 [...] "She's right, Hyun Jin," he said. "Blood will tell". (125)

This interpretation, indeed the very question of ‘blood,’ exposes the myth of a ‘pre-culture,’ a pristine site before culture that is innocent of ideology. It is against this assumption of ‘the pre-cultural’ that the processes of subjectivization are exposed. For Hyun Jin’s mother, prostitutes are *born*; in contrast, we witness in the fiction the process by which Hyun Jin is *made* a prostitute. When her ‘original’ identity as Duk Hee’s daughter is exposed, together with the ‘original’ relation to the world this presumes, Hyun Jin is literally thrown away by her parents and left to survive how ever she can. When she sells her body to a group of GIs, this is a continuation of the history she has recently learned: that she was sold by her birth mother to her father and his wife. To learn how this could happen we have to look to the points at which *Fox Girl* intersects with the earlier novel, *Comfort Woman*.

From ‘Pre-Culture’ to Culture

In a 2002 *AsiaWeek* interview with Terry Hong, Keller describes these books as the first two parts of a planned trilogy that would reconstruct a historical pattern of cause and effect that began with the sexual enslavement of Korean women by the Japanese military. She explained:

I see *Fox Girl* and *Comfort Woman* as being linked together. *Fox Girl* was the natural follow-up: What happened to these women after they served as comfort women? I feel the women in *Fox Girl* are the descendants of the comfort women. It’s a natural place to go — the ‘America Towns’. So many of the women who came back from Japan after World War II did not, could not, return to their families because they felt so ashamed and ostracized. They had no other choice but to continue to be prostitutes. And the children, especially the daughters, remained trapped in that cycle. [...] [The next novel will be] a follow-up to *Fox Girl* — you can see a glimpse into a sequel in the epilogue. It will again be linked to both *Fox Girl* and *Comfort Woman*. I have to think about how it will be different, with a new perspective, a new shift. And I do I see the three as a trilogy (n.p.).

Sookie’s mother, Duk Hee, may have been a comfort woman: the narrative is silent on that point but it hints strongly that she had to resort to selling herself in order to survive. Duk Hee accounts for her familiarity with Hyun Jin’s father by telling how, at the end of the Second World War, they travelled together from the north to southern Korea. We should recall that in *Comfort Woman* Akiko was not abducted by the Japanese military, as we hear in so many survivor testimonials, but was deliberately sold by her sister. She describes how: ‘I was her dowry, sold like one of the cows before and after me’ (18). In such narrative details, Keller emphasizes the operations of patriarchy, which transforms women and girls into commodities to be sold. Akiko is sold by her sister; Hyun Jin is sold by her birth mother; Sookie is sold by Lobetto who also pimps for Hyun Jin. Nonetheless, this is not represented in these texts as an exclusively *Asian* patriarchy.

The oppressive patriarchy that makes of Akiko a victim even before she enters her life of rape and torture as a comfort woman is generalized from Asia to encompass the U.S. when Akiko migrates with her missionary husband. She finds little difference between the husband who rapes her and the Japanese soldiers who raped her:

He [her husband] cooed to me and petted me, then grabbed and swore at me, as he stripped the clothes from our bodies. When he pushed me into the bed, positioned himself above me, fitting himself between my thighs, I let my mind fly away. For I knew then that my body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men (106).

She finds in America that she occupies a subject-position that differs very little from that which she occupied in Korea. In this way, the process of subjectivization is exposed by Keller not as a pre-cultural 'blood' phenomenon but as a coercive patriarchal technology that grants an individual woman a place within the social life but, paradoxically, at the expense of exclusion. The prostitute, the sex worker, the sex slave: all are named in order to be vilified, included in order to be excluded, even as they validate and at the same time deny an 'original' blood identity with consciousness and the external power that names them. For at the same time that the subjectivization of Keller's characters creates an identity with the name 'prostitute,' this subjectivization also involves a dis-identification with, and reassertion of, the distance separating the 'bare life' from the social life. When Akiko begins her life as a comfort woman she describes this transformation as death: she dies as a subject and becomes an object of sexual use. "I was twelve when I was murdered, fourteen when I looked into the Yalu River and, finding no face looking back at me, knew that I was dead" (15). Similarly, when Hyun Jin is brutally gang raped (though the GIs pay to use her body and so this is named as prostitution rather than rape) she describes the separation of consciousness from her body as she lets her "real self fly away" (154). Like Akiko, Hyun Jin is unbound from a consciousness and identity, as the bare life of the body is experienced as something alienated from the discursive social world of language.

I screamed. And then went numb. I could barely hear them above the whimpering, the small animal cries. When I grasped that the inhuman keening was coming not from a cat cornered in the alleyway, but from me, I gave up the struggle of trying to decipher what the GIs were saying. And I gave up trying to hold on to my body, the body that disgusted me with its crying and mess and pain (154).

Hyun Jin, in this episode, surrenders language to wild animal keening; Akiko surrenders to hysterical muteness: this surrendering of the social and the discursive happens at the moment of their subjective interpellation into the military sex-industrial complex as 'prostitutes'. Keller's 'prostitutes,' consequently, are represented not as 'born' but as 'made'.

As I noted in the introduction, Keller's emphasis upon a *transnational* patriarchal process of subjectivization is congruent with the very origins of the comfort woman movement, which was organized by the efforts of feminists in Korea and Japan to draw attention not to the isolated incidence of military sexual slavery during the war in the Pacific but to focus attention upon the sexual exploitation of Asian women generally and Korean women specifically in the global sex trade. The economic exploitation of Korean women's sexuality is seen as an expression of powerful patriarchal narratives. That the intersection of discourses of patriarchy and Orientalism is also powerful in *American* culture is evidenced by Keller's equation of Akiko's

suffering as a comfort woman with her suffering as the oriental wife of an American man, and this interest is of course explored further in *Fox Girl*, which addresses directly the experience of contemporary Korean women who provide sexual services to the U.S. military personnel who are still stationed in South Korea. In the second novel Keller suggests that the U.S. provides the model for the sex industry in South Korea – ‘America Town’ in South Korea is indistinguishable from Hawai’i in terms of the sex clubs, street prostitutes, and porn shops. The Club Foxa Hawai’i is indistinguishable from the Foxa Club in Korea. In Yoon’s Hawaiian club, Hyun Jin has a moment of complete disorientation when she believes she is back in Korea, in America Town. Later she reflects, “though I was three thousand miles away from Korea, I was still trapped in America Town” (269). Indeed, the dominant image of sexual violence in *Comfort Woman* is the image of Induk speared on a pole from vagina to mouth; in America Town a “GI whore” is discarded by her lover who throws her from his balcony. The narrator remarks wryly that her death is named as suicide even though she died with an umbrella inserted into her vagina. Thus, the image of Japanese sexual brutality finds easy comparisons in the U.S. context.

‘Pre-Culture’ and the Rhetoric of Trauma

The coercive process of subjectivization, in which patriarchy names women as commodified sexual objects, is exposed in the context of military conflict (World War Two and its Cold War continuation, the Korean War) but, Keller suggests, this exposes a technology of the self to which women are subjected by patriarchy: whether the agents are Japanese or American, whether the location is Korea or Hawai’i. Complementing this transnational perspective on the oppression of commodified women is Keller’s use of literary language. As I have argued, in both novels, Keller discredits the notion of a ‘pre-culture’ that shapes relations between consciousness and the ‘Political’ life. However, she reintroduces the very notion of the pre-cultural (or that which is before and outside culture) through her use of myth, dream, and symbolism.

Akiko is unable to articulate her traumatic experience except through her ritual mourning of the women who did not survive the ‘comfort’ camps. She does not even speak her trauma but sings it. Keller represents trauma in highly poetic terms, through dreams, visions, and myths. The language of dream is, according to Keller in the 2002 *AsianWeek* interview with Terry Hong that I have already mentioned, the vehicle by which she became possessed by (and came to possess) the historical trauma of surviving comfort women. Keller explains how she came to write *Comfort Woman* after hearing the testimony of Keum Ja Hwang, a survivor of the wartime Japanese comfort stations, at a University of Hawai’i symposium on Human Rights in 1993. The friend who accompanied Keller told her, in Keller’s words, “You should write about this, you’re Korean”. Keller continued,

But the topic was too big, I couldn’t even find the words to express how horrified I was, much less find the vocabulary to talk about the pain in this woman’s life. But her story took hold of me. I felt so haunted, I began dreaming about images of blood and war, and waking with a start. Finally, I realized that the only way to exorcise these dreams and the story from my mind was to write them down. So I got up one night and began to write bits and pieces of my dreams and the comfort woman’s words (n.p.).

Through writing her dreams and nightmares, Keller claims she sought to exorcise the ghosts of historical trauma. She does achieve, in her novel *Comfort Woman*, validation of the suffering of surviving comfort women but catharsis is reserved for the generations who are damaged as a result of the originary historical trauma. As these generations witness the historical testimony of survivors, Keller suggests, the possibility for self-healing opens through the cathartic power of language. In *Comfort Woman*, historical trauma is experienced by Akiko but catharsis is reserved for Beccah, Akiko's American-born daughter, and is articulated in the text by the shared imagery of their dreams.

A number of narrative tropes or symbolic images trace back to Akiko's originary trauma, the trauma she cannot articulate in the terms of ordinary language to her daughter. Indeed, the healing of Beccah's traumatized psyche is represented through dream imagery, imagery that arises from the story of Princess Pari who tricked her way into hell so that she could find her parents and drag them free by the strips of cloth she ties around her waist (49). Later, Beccah dreams that she is held underwater by a shark that transforms into the figure of her mother holding her legs, Beccah says, "as though I could save her. Instead I feel myself sinking" (141). Beccah feels herself to be punished by her inability to conform to the ideal established by Princess Pari until she discovers her mother's true identity and learns of her mother's traumatic history as a surviving comfort woman. Only then is Beccah able to shake off the suspicion that she is modelled upon the little frog who was incapable of correctly burying his mother. Then Beccah is able to conduct the ritual preparation of her mother's body, though with the difference that she binds the body with cloth strips torn from the bedsheet upon which she has transcribed Akiko's tape-recorded testimony. Beccah does this in the belief that when her mother's body is cremated, the flames will carry her words away and free Akiko's spirit both from her body and from her history also. The cloth with which Princess Pari saved her parents becomes the cloth shroud Beccah uses to liberate her mother. In the process, Beccah liberates herself.

In the final dream that she reports, Beccah dreams that she gives birth to herself, a new and 'whole' self. She dreams again of being immersed but rather than drowning now she swims through the sky, as she describes, "higher and higher, until, dizzy with the freedom of light and air, I looked down to see a thin blue river of light spiralling down to earth, where I lay sleeping in bed, coiled tight around a small seed planted by my mother, waiting to be born" (213). This image draws together several of the rhetorical strands of the narrative. It recalls the advice given to Akiko that in order to find something lost she must free her mind and allow her unconscious to spiral in towards the lost object; this in itself recalls Akiko explaining to Beccah that her trances are her mind's attempt to find something that she has lost – her past, her history, lost to the devastating power of trauma. The river represents throughout the narrative a gateway to the spiritual realm, be that hell or home. Beccah scatters her mother's ashes in the river by their home, the river that Akiko has ritually united with her daughter through a bond of blood that is extended to encompass herself as Beccah touches her mother's wet ashes to her lips, " 'Your body in mine,' I told my mother, 'so you will always be with me, even when your spirit finds its way home' " (212). The conclusion of the narrative, then, enacts the recovery of traumatic memory and its reintegration into

the narratives recalled by Beccah. As a consequence, daughter is united with mother, the unity of the generations is preserved, and ritual is united with history as body is united with spirit.

These discourses of dream, symbolism, and myth, which exceed in their representational power the limits of normal mimesis, demonstrate the ability of poetic language to transform history from event into a discourse that approaches the horror of the originary traumatic event. Once remembered and recreated, the trauma can then be purged. Admittedly, the status of *Comfort Woman* as an Asian American text raises more questions about the status of the text's language than the text itself can resolve (for instance, why only Reno's Hawaiian accent is transliterated when other characters, most notably Akiko, must speak not only an inflected English, but indeed Korean in sections of the text that are not marked by any such linguistic switching). The rhetoric of trauma, however, operates throughout the narrative, in the recurring images that accumulate meaning until they meet and meld at the end, into a seeming plenitude of meaning that transcends particular technologies of subjectivization by displacing identity into a mystical realm outside the text, language, and culture.

In *Fox Girl*, Keller uses a similarly Romantic (with a capital R) approach to symbolic language but this time she deploys the oriental myth of the shape-shifting fox spirit as the unifying trope of the narrative. It is in this notion of a mystical power of self-transformation that Keller is able to engineer the (I have to say implausibly) happy ending of the novel. The narrative repetition of variations on the tale of the fox spirit works with the thematic concern with blood: Keller makes of the fox spirit a kind of vampire that sucks the blood of its victims, though the fox spirit more usually possesses dead bodies. But Hyun Jin's final escape from a subjective identification with the category of 'prostitute' and her assertion of individual agency over the dictates of 'blood' is achieved rhetorically when the narrative turns from its insistent identification of Sookie with the fox girl and instead names Hyun Jin as the mystical shape-shifter. Hyun Jin is then able to move into a new discursive world, a feminized world apart from the subjective technologies of transnational patriarchy.

In these endings, and with this powerful literary language, Nora Keller achieves a symbolic validation of suffering. She suggests that trauma is the mode of subjectivization for *all* women living under patriarchy. The bare life is intolerable but the technologies of the self that are available to women exclude them from the social life, the life of the *polis*, even as they are included within a regime of sexual commodification. The simultaneous identification of self with both internal consciousness and external power is constructed in such a way as to transform women into commodities for sale and for sexual use. Although Keller is able to expose the myth of the pre-cultural *as* only a myth, a function of ideology, she reinstates myth through her own use of a Romantic discourse of mystical transcendence that once again displaces culture into the realm of the 'pre-cultural', and the writer into a realm of imaginative sovereignty that bears an ambiguous relation to the military industrial complex that provides the war-torn settings for her novels. Keller's symbolic discourse, which exceeds the limits of normal mimesis, demonstrates the ability of language to transform history from event into discourse and into naming. The process of subjectivization, such as I have described it, is a process that takes place in language but in a language that attempts to transcend itself by evoking a pre-cultural, pre-linguistic

condition. Keller's use of symbolic language attempts the same kind of transcendence, but to propose a different kind of subjectivization: one based on a relation to (feminine) consciousness, a relation that obscures the role of external power in the process of subjectivization.

This rhetoric of catharsis risks collusion in the processes of interpellation by which the subject is integrated into the normalizing cultural narratives of the military sex-industrial complex. Keller's casualties of war, then, are not the Korean women who are subject to commodification and sexual exploitation. All women are the casualties of war and this feminine suffering is, in Keller's fiction, overcome through a symbolic feminine relation (to the mother, in Beccah's case, or the mother figure, for Huyen Jin) that can bring the individual to bind herself to her own identity and consciousness. But this technology of the self cannot address the external patriarchal power that validates the processes of subjectivization and so the paradoxical condition of Agamben's 'exception' -- the inclusion that is exclusion, the exception that *is* the rule -- remains in place. Thus, Keller's novels end indecisively: with Beccah awaiting her symbolic rebirth; with Huyen Jin living as a fugitive who can only fantasize about freedom. For these casualties of the 'war between the sexes' there can be no world outside patriarchy: no position from which to *tell trauma* that is beyond or before, the technologies of the self of the transnational military sex-industry complex.

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Özet

**Nora Okja Keller:
Milletlerüstü Askeri (Seks)Endüstrisi Sistemi İçinde Gelişen
Ruhsal Sarsıntılarının Anlatımı**

Bu makalede Nora Okja Keller'ın *Comfort Woman* ve *Fox Girl* adlı romanlarında kullandığı dili sanatsal savaş anlatıları bağlamında ele alıyorum. Keller'ın yazınında, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasındaki Koreli kadınların Japon askerler tarafından travmalara neden olan cinsel köleleştirilme durumunun, Güney Kore ile Amerikan ordusu arasında hala süregelen seks ticaretinin tarihsel bir uzantısı olduğu aktarılır. Keller'ın romanları bu küresel sorunu askeri-endüstriyel sistem bağlamında ele alır. Yalnız, onun romanlarda ele aldığı endüstri, başlıca egemenlik kurma biçimlerinden biri olarak gördüğü seks endüstrisidir ve bu görüş onun uluslarüstü çatışmayı kadın ve kızların ataerk tarafından bastırılmaları olarak temsil etmesine olanak sağlamaktadır. Sömürgecilik ve küresel ticaret gibi başka yönlü uluslarüstü hâkimiyet alanları bu söylemsel ve maddi içerikli cinsel hâkimiyet kurma biçiminden doğmuştur.

**Resisting Sweet and Sour,
and Shifting Genders in Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet***

Mehmet Ali Çelikel

Timothy Mo is a British author of Cantonese origin. His novels are about the definitions and redefinitions of hybrid identities in multicultural London. His first two novels *The Monkey King* and *Sour Sweet* have been acclaimed as the most prominent of his novels about the identity problems of the post-colonial Chinese community in Britain. His second novel *Sour Sweet*, published in 1982, is a novel about the immigrant experience in Britain, questioning the modified power relationships of a migrant Chinese couple in London in the 1960s. The novel underlines the dilemmatic situation of Lily and Chen, caused by their constantly changing gender roles after migration. Having to make a choice between their old and new cultural values, they are obliged to break with cultural expectations and, to some extent, exchange gender roles. While, in a broader sense, the novel underlines the general hardships and culturally contradicting situations faced by the migrants in daily life, it specifically attempts to focus on familial relations and tensions of the Chens in order to highlight how migration affects gender roles and power relationships within a family. Mo represents the Chen family's rejection of English values and resistance to cultural assimilation in their isolated life among all the symbolic Englishness, without ignoring the fact that the family cannot avoid approaching those rejected values inch by inch everyday.

Sour Sweet recounts the story of the Chen family in London during the 1960s and relates their story to the Chinese community in London. Consisting of thirty-six chapters, the novel contains two overlapping plots: one is the simple life struggle of the Chen family; the other is the violent story of the Chinese triads. The two stories eclipse each other and they are narrated in alternate chapters, making the reader meander between a peaceful family story and fierce gangster violence.

Mr. Chen, who has been working in a Chinese restaurant in Liverpool, goes to his home village for holiday and meets his future wife Lily at a party: "She had been wearing a dab of 4711 cologne at the dance where she met Husband. This function had taken place in his home village of Tung San. It had been thrown for emigrant bachelors like himself in search of wives to take back to Europe" (4). They get to know each other and marry during a short summer break and go to England as a newly wed couple. After getting married, Chen moves to London with his bride. The novel centres on their marriage life in the isolated Chinese community in London and begins in the fourth year of their stay in the UK. The author depicts Chinese migrants as the central characters and the English as the peripheral throughout the novel in order to emphasise the isolation of the migrants. As Lars Ole Sauerberg suggests, Mo deploys the English people only as "extras" in *Sour Sweet* (130). When their son Man Kee is born, Lily's sister Mui comes from the homeland to live with them and help Lily with the housework. However, Mui is in a cultural shock, and refuses to go out of the flat and watches TV all the time. She even turns her back to the window and the courtyard below, in order to reject her new environment. She wants to occupy herself with the

created Chinese interior of their household, rather than being distracted by the exterior Englishness. Nevertheless, she eventually gets over her shock and even starts to go out after saving her nephew when he falls off the window sill.

Lily, who has saved a considerable amount from the housekeeping money provided by her husband, is not satisfied with what Chen earns. She strongly desires to start up their own business in order to invest her savings on what she thinks would be the most profitable thing to do, and frequently asks her husband:

‘Who does business better, Husband, Chinese man or Indian man?’ She was not sure what she was going to throw her efforts behind but she did know there was money to be made somewhere: for [their son’s] education, for a motor-car, for a bigger television, maybe a colour set. (7)

She not only keeps a track of a sort of competition between emigrating nations, but also complies with the mainstream understanding of all migrants: making money as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, Chen’s father gets into financial trouble over a land dispute with his neighbours and asks his son to send him a large sum of money, an amount that is impossible to cover with Lily’s savings. Although Chen originally wanted to get away from his own people, he turns to them to raise the amount that his father requires, and borrows it from the lenders in the Chinese community whom he meets through a friend, called Roman, at his workplace. Roman, being a gambler, first convinces Chen to gamble for the money he needs, but then arranges the money from the triads after Chen’s failure at gambling. Thus, Chen complies with his “traditional duty towards his father” (Sauerberg 130), because he considered himself as “conscientious about sending money to his father as when he had been single. He was a dutiful son” (60). Afterwards, Chen agrees with his wife to open a food counter in the suburbs, intending, in hindsight, to go away from central London, once he realises the difficulty of paying the debt.

The two overlapping plots of the novel create suspense in the storyline because Chen’s creditors are the members of a leading Chinese gang in London. In their food counter, which they run next to a garage owned by a Greek mechanic named Mr. Constantinides, Chen hides away in the kitchen doing all the cooking, while Lily and his sister-in-law Mui conduct all the counter-service at the till. When they start receiving anonymous phone calls, probably from the triads although not mentioned explicitly, Chen begins to meet his lender at the back of Mr. Constantinides’s garage, to whom he introduces the triad as his brother-in-law. He manages to keep his trouble secret. However, he takes up gardening, quietly leaving all the work and management to his wife and sister-in-law. Following a silent pact between herself and her husband, Lily kindly accepts her husband’s silence. Even Man Kee joins his father in the garden. As a result, Chen gets more domestic and looks after their son while Lily becomes the breadwinner, reversing the traditional gender roles, which used to be the other way round on their first arrival in the UK.

Mo includes many stories in the novel, providing his narration with a multi-layered structure: After the death of his mother, Chen’s father arrives in the UK and starts living with them. Mui gets pregnant, but she never reveals the father’s name. It is hinted in the novel that the father is one of the lorry drivers that stop by Mr. Constantinides’s garage and buy food from their shop. The novel tracks the story of the

Chens until Chen himself disappears suddenly, and Mui gets married to Mr. Lo, a friend of Chen's in his former workplace. This multi-layered structure appears to symbolise the abrupt changes in the habits and attitudes of the characters in the novel.

The aim of this study is to analyse the modified gender roles in the Chen family after migration. It will also focus on, in Childs et al.'s terms, "the lines of resistance" (26) in the context of migration, and question whether or not the Chen family in Mo's representation become "more English than English" (Ashcroft et al. 195). It is also important to point out Elleke Boehmer's view that Timothy Mo is one of the writers that "produced definitions of postcolonial literature as almost necessarily cosmopolitan, transplanted, multilingual, and conversant with the cultural codes of the West" (237).

Elaine Yee Ho points out that the novel's discourse "focuses on the family as the site of cultural tradition, identity formation and social relation" (51). However, as the Chens try to preserve their cultural values, their struggle to survive at their new homeland leaves them in uncertainty. In the first four years, they cannot form a new identity due to the lack of social relations, at least before opening their own shop, and they also fail to protect the site of their cultural tradition. The memorable opening sentence of the novel underlines this paradox faced by all migrants: "The Chens had been living in the UK for four years, which was long enough to have lost their place in the society from which they had emigrated but not long enough to feel comfortable in the new" (1).

This paradoxical situation is, somehow, endurable, because the UK is described by the author as the "land of promise" (1). As they eventually lose their ties with the homeland and their traditions, they hardly find a comfortable position, because although the UK is a "land of promise" Chen still regards himself as an "interloper" and a gate-crasher (1). Despite the fact that "no one had yet assaulted" him, he "felt it in his bones, could sense it between his shoulder-blades as he walked past emptying public houses on his day off" (1). Foregrounding the virtual pressure over Chen's shoulders, Mo depicts how overwhelming the English surrounding can be on the Chen family, and how much it alienates them.

They are frequently reminded of their alienation by the fact that the flat they live in is so much desired by the white English people, which makes them feel more of a foreigner there (1), although they try to make a home out of it for themselves. Chen feels that he is more secure with other migrants: "A huge West Indian bus conductor regularly undercharged him on his morning journey to work. He knew because the English one charged him three pence more. Chen was sure the black man's mistake was deliberate" (1). As a result, the immigrants mutually understand and acknowledge each other's alienation and isolation. In other words, immigrants create solidarity among themselves.

Although Chen works in a restaurant, his wife Lily prepares an evening meal for her husband, because she intends to continue her cultural tradition. She likes to do "things in the 'Chinese' way" and migration "only serves to intensify this given identity" (Ho 54):

Lily Chen always prepared an 'evening' snack for her husband to consume on his return at 1.15 a.m. This was not strictly necessary since Chen enjoyed at the unusually late hour of 11.45 p.m. what the boss boasted was the best employee's dinner in any restaurant. (2)

She believes that she would fail to be a proper wife otherwise, so Chen has to have a strong, spicy and hot soup cooked according to authentic Chinese recipes. Lily acts as a “model of the wife’s servitude to the husband, rigid but unimpeachable” because she is attached to “her inherited gender role” (Ho 56). As food functions as a “cultural currency” for their communication (Ho 55), the soup ritual continues every night. She is not yet aware of what the UK, her new homeland, might offer her in terms of gender equality in public space. In the meantime, she continues her role as a dutiful housewife in her limited domestic life, which is ornamented by Chinese understanding and traditions. Lily’s situation exemplifies a typical depiction of the wives of immigrants. They are brought to a new country by their husbands who confine them into households which are usually surrounded by an alien host culture. Moreover, they are generally required to resume their traditional duties while being alienated.

Lily’s journey to the UK is a remarkable example of a new migrant’s first flight to an alien land. Lily exemplifies a provincial, traditional woman –an inexperienced flyer- to be attended to during a flight:

Chen buckled his wife’s safety-belt for her, held his own clammy pad against her cool, dry palm during take-off and, whenever necessary, escorted her to the rear of the cabin, standing guard at the flimsy-looking door and eventually starting a large queue before the assembled eyes of which the Chens returned to their seats. (6)

This tragi-comic depiction of how much Lily needs protection and attendance signposts her confinement in her new home. After settling down, they find themselves more alienated, or in other words, surrounded by the host culture, making them feel they are different and alien. However, the accusing looks also provide Chen with a mutual perspective:

Chen supposed that the English [women] stared at him because he was Chinese and he squinted obligingly at them while he shuffled his feet and waited for the bus. This staring no longer disconcerted, although he found the accusatory quality of the stares puzzling. There was a reassuring anonymity about his foreign-ness, Chen understood: a lot of westerners looked the same to him too. (9)

The clothes they wear while going to look for a house and a shop to rent make them more distinctive and alien surrounded by a typically English environment (81-82). The fact that alarm cords in the buses are placed so conveniently, making them easy to pull, is considered as the “irresponsibility of the English authorities” (82), which points out a cultural prejudice.

This alienation and isolation of the family manifest their most powerful effect especially on Mui who finds asylum and self-identification in TV soap operas (17). She spends all her time in front of the TV, and she does not understand the names of the characters in TV series: “She gave the characters the names of her own devising; Boy, Hairnet, Drinker, Cripple, Crafty, Bad Girl. The composite picture she was able to glean of the British population was an alarming one. More than ever, she was reluctant to leave the flat” (10). By Mui’s engagement with the TV, the author reflects a new

arrival's integration to a new culture through soap operas on TV in order to "induct [herself] into 'British' society" and "acquire basic English idioms of social exchange" (Ho 61). As a result of her transfixion into soap operas, Mui eventually acquires a better command of English than her sister Lily. Her good command of English is due to her intense interest in soap operas on TV, her gradually growing confidence and her negotiation skills with people.

As Mui improves her English, Lily resists the changes "that geographical relocation inevitably brings to her own family in London" (Ho 53), because she has more masculine qualities. Despite living in England, for instance, they comply with their own traditions and follow the husband loyally (84), or admit his authority without questioning it: "You know best, Husband" (86). In other words, they preserve the "patriarchal hierarchy" (Ho 56).

Staring becomes a cultural barrier for them because when they stare they do not realize it may prompt anger in English people: "The English were peppery, often manufacturing pretexts for anger where none reasonably existed: a stare held too long, failure to meet their round eye at all" (83). As Sauerberg points out, "the tables of prejudice are turned on the English" and Mo smoothly counters the stereotypical Western anticipation of non-reasonable oriental anger and also non-reasonable oriental corruption (132).

Homi K. Bhabha asserts that the geographical relocation, caused by migration, puts people into "in-between spaces" that provide "new signs of identity" (1994: 1). Although Lily resists new identities in order to avoid cultural assimilation, she begins to gain new roles as the result of the changes in her responsibilities. When they buy an old second hand van, a new problem of responsibility comes into being in their familial roles:

Now here was an embarrassing problem. On learning none of them could drive, the man who had sold them the van had kindly offered to give a few lessons. Chen was the obvious recipient. The girls did not wish to trespass on what was obviously a male prerogative. Chen himself was keen to learn. The trouble was he had no aptitude, none at all. That much was made plain within fifteen minutes of the first lesson. (148)

After a few more attempts at driving, their instructor concludes that Chan is not mechanical enough to drive. However, Lily turns out to be more "mechanical" than her husband and becomes the driver of the family, trespassing on a "male prerogative" (150):

She and Mui went out to the van together. 'I'm sure it can't be that difficult,' Lily reflected. She opened the left-hand door with caution and slipped gracefully into the driving seat. She could reach the pedals easily enough with those legs that belonged on a Northerner. (150)

This, once again, alludes to the masculine characteristics that she acquires after migrating to the UK, because contrary to her traditionally constructed gender roles, she now finds herself having to take on responsibilities like running the shop or driving the family car. Although driving or running business are traditionally classified as areas

under male sovereignty, Lily and her sister are more in the control of this service business. Moreover, her driving prompts a new confidence in her. It gives her the liberty to get around outside the shop. She now has the control over shopping for their food counter. Through her driving experience, Lily acquires such a confidence that she even vilifies English people, relying on her prejudices. She believes that the English also have tendency towards bribery:

Of course, she didn't intend to take anything so mundane as a driving test. ... Mui wasn't happy about this. She reminded Lily of the large fines, the possibility, even, of prison. Lily scoffed. "I shall put a small tea money in a plastic folder. That'll be my licence, Mui." (152)

This underlines the proposition that members of different cultures tend to have prejudices against each other. In Lily's case, there is a cultural tendency of morally purifying the "self" and vilifying the "other". Sauerberg regards this as Mo's reversal of stereotypical Western assumption that "non-WASPish" parts of the world have tendency towards bribery (132).

Mui, because of her better command of English, starts working at the till and dealing with the officials. This position contradicts her situation upon her arrival in London. She acts as an independent lady who has overcome her cultural shock and started to gain a new female identity, which is rather different from the one she grew up with in China. Although Mui still remains both marginal and mysterious in the narration of the novel, being confined within the Chen family, she begins "to recognise and identify with the outside world", which liberates her from "most of the racial and cultural prejudices" against the English (Ho 61). As she improves her English, she begins to find an easier access to the host culture and receives acceptance in public space. This brings, as a result, a rather abrupt shift in her personality. While keeping her femininity, she finds herself more liberated both culturally and sexually, as she experiences sexual relationships with English lorry drivers. This suggests liberation from the cultural boundaries of her upbringing, a liberation provided by the host culture. However, the situation is problematic here. Cultural assimilation, regarded as degrading and, thus, usually avoided by immigrants, provides liberation in terms of gender equality.

After starting their own business, Chen begins to realise for the first time that Lily and Mui have a livelier life than he presumed: "Life had been going on behind his back", which is something he never realised (108). This is where the important difference between genders occurs. Chen notices that the ladies have dominance in the household matters, contrary to his assumptions that they keep an isolated and a rather limited life. Being brought up by Chinese traditional patriarchy and having never been accustomed to seeing Chinese women so dominant, Chen is surprised by their alertness and awareness about business. The gender roles, therefore, start to clash in the sense that, as Chris Barker puts, "gender is a cultural construct" and "it is open to change" (2000: 187). Chen gets angry at Lily's suggestions about the financial matters and primly says "You think wife tells Husband what to do?" (107) although it is Lily who deals with all the financial matters. The strong alliance between the two sisters enables them to command the business (109), converting the gender roles totally. As a result, Chen regresses in his masculinity. He is no longer the breadwinner, which is caused by

Mui and Lily's better negotiation and service skills in the food counter. The sisters use their traditional ability of serving in the service business. However, the regression in Chen's masculinity is not only because of his wife's and sister-in-law's better service skills. He deliberately confines himself within the back-kitchen, because he escapes from the Chinese triads from whom he borrowed the money to be sent to his father, a fact the ladies are unaware of. His work in the kitchen provides a shelter not only for himself, but also for his family, because by doing so, he protects his family from possible attacks, too. He is not in the front, so he is unseen. As an inevitable result of this he regresses in his masculinity in terms of his prescribed gender roles. Nevertheless, he is still the protector of the family in hindsight.

As they work in the counter, Lilly and Mui begin to acquire different prejudices and varied approaches against English people. The more Mui gets to know them, the more she is able to tell English people apart, but they all "looked the same" to Lily (137). Mui's new opinions, like taking side with the English people or taking up an impartial approach, seem to Lily to be the act of a traitor. While Lily thinks the English exploit them, Mui disagrees with her:

"Really, those foreign devils just try to exploit us all the time," said Lily, on the verge of angry tears back in the kitchen.

"Don't you think we do the same to them?" [said Mui]. (147)

Gradually, their habits change in compliance with their new home, and they begin to celebrate Christmas. The smell of their kitchen is alienated for Chen. He thinks they are becoming English, an inevitable fact that annoys him. This assimilation begins to be felt through the smell of their kitchen: "The smells, wafting through the wide-flung windows, were so evocative of the locale, so *English*, so indescribably alien, they set his nerves tingling, quickened his pulse: aroma of compounded of creosote, wood-smoke, pipe tobacco, grass and mud" (135).

Even though they try hard to Anglicise themselves, their Englishness is the reflection of post-colonial hybridity. Like in all post-colonial novels, the native words are deployed within the English text: "What do the *gwai lo* sing, Brother-in-law?" (83). When Chen begins to take over his son's care in fear that the boy is being effeminated by the two ladies in the household, another example of the vernacular words occurs. Chen uses the two terms "denoting female and male cosmic forces in Taoist belief" (Ho 58-59): "Let *yang* balance *yin*" (110). However, he does not realise that the gender roles are totally displaced by this take-over. His original purpose is to balance Man Kee's female qualities with some masculinity, because he thinks his son spends too much time with the ladies who have a stronger control of his development. In an attempt to balance femininity with masculinity, he does not realise that his gender role has long shifted.

Although they speak English while serving the customers, their voice, used to the intonations of their mother tongue, is shrill and lifeless in English (135). Similarly, like their language use, the food they serve is also hybridised, and on a busy schedule, what is served as Chinese food is far away from its authenticity (138). Like the characters who cook it, the food also suffers from a shift in its identity.

Mo also playfully alludes to the notion of cultural hybridity in the restaurant's name. There is a pun about the native word DAH LING, the name of their village, by which they call their restaurant. The word inevitably recalls the English word "darling"

(95). This is a situation of hybridity and a cultural clash. However, they do not realise that they fall into amusing situations when they answer the phone by saying the name of their shop.

At the end of the novel, Chen disappears suddenly one afternoon. Lily looks for him all over Chinatown in London hoping that he has gone there to see his friends. She even suspects that Chen has left her for another woman, which she believes is a very unlikely possibility. After a while, she loses all her hope and begins to face the circumstances without her husband. She becomes “effectively a single mother – a very ‘un-Chinese’ family formation – she would never dream of considering herself as such” and transforms herself from “being a victim of external circumstances” to “becoming an agent in her self-transformation” (Ho 59-60). Months later, an envelope, full of money, arrives through the post, bearing no name of the sender. The letter gives away that Chen disappeared to flee to Holland for a better-paid job. In the novel, it is never revealed to Lily that Chen has gone away to escape from his creditors, but only hinted that he tries to make them lose his track. In order to preserve his anonymity, he never includes a letter in the envelope, and does not write his address on it.

Besides the Chens, the novel has characters from Chinatown including the staff in the restaurant where Chen used to work; Mr Lo, Chen’s colleague who marries Mui at the end; and Mrs Law, a rich and elderly Chinese lady. By deploying a character like Mrs. Law, Ho underlines the fact that the Chinatown is not only composed of the post-colonial migrant workers in London, but also rich elite Chinese people. Mrs. Law becomes a family friend of the Chens and offers Mui shelter before her illegitimate daughter is born.

The novel further analyses the relationship between Lily and her son, Man Kee:

The mother’s determination to shape her son within a single tradition, and thus perpetuate her cultural heritage, comes up most sharply against the equally irresistible acculturation of the son into ‘British’ society in the process of education outside the family. (Ho 63)

As she becomes the model of an independent single mother, a situation that is seen as the sign of Englishness, the situation of Mui is a stronger example of becoming English. She is not only a single mother before getting married to Mr. Lo, but also gives birth to a hybrid child: an Anglo-Chinese daughter. Her transformation is striking in the sense that she Anglicises herself more visibly than Lily, because she gained access into Englishness.

Yet, both Mui’s and Lily’s Englishness is symbolic and hybrid. They are alienated from their own culture because they now have rather manipulated identities. Lily has to cope up with the situation of being a single-mother. Besides, she is not only the mother of her son anymore, but also acts like a father figure for her son. Mui, on the other hand, is no more a dependent of the Chen family. She is not a culturally-shocked provincial woman anymore, but a confident, integrated and, yet imperfect, assimilated immigrant with a hybrid child. Ho argues that the characterisation of Mui is problematic, because “the aligning of the ‘feminine’ in ‘Chinese’ culture” with skills of negotiation and mediation replicates a “gender stereotype” (62). However, Mui still seems to be outside the cultural gender stereotypes because she proves to be more

adaptable than Mui. These adaptive qualities enable her to deal with the legal problems of the family with the British officials.

Childs et al. argue that cultural resistance occurs after colonialism. This type of resistance emerges in two forms: the native resistance to Western control, and Western resistance to history (1997: 26). In other words, indigenous people resist Western culture, while the Westerners pretend that colonisation never took place. In this context, Mo depicts how the immigrants try to determine their “lines of resistance” (Childs et al. 26). They reject Englishness while trying to exploit the English by selling them food that they do not even consider as real Chinese food. It is paradoxical for them to draw a line of resistance. At first they avoid the Western values, which they think would spoil their own values, but then they enlarge these lines of resistance to survive. The first outcome of this enlargement is a sacrifice in the substance of the real Chinese recipes which are very costly and time-consuming. Therefore, they begin to simplify their food. Their simplified food becomes the sign of their assimilation. The real Chinese food, that they try to preserve in their first years in the UK during soup rituals at nights, loses its real taste and flavour. Food, as a cultural significance, becomes Anglicised by English recipes and spices. Same as the situation of the Chens as a family, the Chinese food they serve in their food counter loses its cultural and traditional content although it still looks Chinese in appearance.

The change in the taste and smell of their food symbolises not only their assimilation as a result of their geographical re-location, but also suggests an irreversible shift in their identities and gender roles. The shift in their identities is irreversible, like the food, the taste of which is also irreversible once the ingredients are changed. Their new homeland, as the title of the novel suggests, is the combination of sweet and sour. It is sour despite the financial welfare it offers. As a result cultural resistance becomes, “something of a forgotten subject” (Child 27). They succumb to the inevitable conditions of hybridity.

On the other hand, the English people also resist recognising the existence of the immigrants. When Lily works at the till, she feels like a vending machine into which money is inserted and that expels food in return. Lily and the customers avoid each other’s eyes, in a pejorative act of resistance to recognise each other’s existence.

This resistance turns out to be a resistance to both cultural values. They resist Englishness, and they reject being Cantonese. Yet, they cannot avoid hybridity that is caused by “the major social displacements”, the “political and economic refugees” in which case the homogenous national cultures are subject to transmission of traditions (Bhabha 5). As a result, while Lily remains a single mother struggling to overcome all cultural and economical burdens and to preserve her own self as an abandoned female immigrant; Mui, unaware of her hybridity, is more English than English because she manages to get a British citizenship and knows the ins and outs of the country’s laws. However, as Ashcroft et al. argue, there are “varieties of English” which means that “the concept of a standard English has been exploded” and this situation is caused by the very existence of the post-colonial condition (196). Mui, who stands out as the most Anglicised member of the Chen family, is one of those varieties of Englishness. She is now more English than the English because she ends up defending the English people who come to their shop.

The theme of cultural hybridity, as Richard J. Lane and Philip Tew argue, “features strongly in contemporary British fiction, not just as subject matter but as part of the creative act of writing itself,” because contemporary authors are aware of “a range of British identities and cultural contexts” (143). Lane and Tew also suggest that “hybridity is not simply an issue of migration but of plural cultural identities” (143). In this context, the hybridity of *Sour Sweet* is not only the result of migration. It also stems from the fact that Timothy Mo brings together the juxtaposing values in contradicting situations, which have increasingly taken an important place in post-Second World War Britain.

As the members of the Chinese community in multicultural London, the Chen family cannot avoid this hybridity forced by the migrant communities of various cultural origins. In other words, this hybridity is not caused only by migration, but also by the multitude of cultural identities that they come across in London. This situation either results in self-isolation to preserve authenticity, or integration despite inevitable hybridity. What the Chens preferred in the beginning was isolation. However, in a typical understanding of the migrants, they opt for integration to run their own business.

In a very brief conclusion, while they try to resist both sweet and sour, in a symbolic reference to their traditional values, the Chens can neither remain peaceful in exile, nor return home. Although this dilemma puts them in contradictions such as shifted gender roles and modified cultural identities, Timothy Mo’s representation of the Chen family is a celebration of hybridity. The Chens, as the metaphorical title of the novel suggests, acquire a hybridised taste, same as their indispensable traditional ingredient.

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Özet

Timothy Mo'nun *Sweet and Sour* Romanında Acı ve Tatlıya Direnç, ve Değişen Cinsiyet Roller

Timothy Mo'nun *Sour Sweet* romanı, Britanya'daki göçmenlerin güç ilişkilerinde ve cinsiyet rollerinde yaşadıkları değişimleri sorgulayan bir romandır. Bu çalışma göçmen bir Çinli ailenin aile içi ilişkilerde yaşadığı değişimlere odaklanmayı ve değişen cinsiyet rollerini çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Göç yalnızca cinsiyet rollerinde ve aile içi ilişkilerde değişikliklere yol açmaz, aynı zamanda kültürel melezleşmeye de neden olur. Bu melezleşme içinde, tüm göçmenler ev sahibi kültüre karşı direnç çizgilerini belirlemeye çalışırlar. Ancak, bir süre sonra, direnç çizgileri esner ve direnç artık unutulmuş bir koşul olarak kalır.

**The Thrills of Motherhood:
Female Citizenship and Transnational Adoption in David Ball's *China Run***

Emily Cheng

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the visibility and practice of transnational adoption. While transnational adoption to the U.S. has origins in the aftermath of global conflicts, especially World War II and the Korean War, since 1990 China has become the country of origin for the largest number of children adopted by Americans. Adoptions from China have far surpassed those from other “democratizing” nations in Eastern Europe and Latin America, from which transnational adoption to the U.S. has predominantly taken place since the early 1990s. The number of adoptions from China has risen from 61 in 1991, the year that the Chinese government passed an adoption law that allowed for international adoptions by childless single parents or couples over the age of 35, to 7,044 in 2004. The total number of adoptees from China now reaches about 48,000.¹

This essay considers the representation of adoption from China and focuses on David Ball's 2002 novel *China Run*, a thriller which dramatizes adoption from China as the “rescue” of “abandoned” female orphans from China. This novel is representative of a broader discourse that situates practices of adoption within political debates surrounding human rights and U.S.-China geopolitical relations in the post-Cold War period. Its focus on issues of women's and children's human rights reflects the dimensions of gender and race in adoption from China: over 95% of the adoptees from China are of female, and the vast majority of U.S. adoptors are white.² Because markers of racial difference between parent and child are particularly visible, transnational adoption from China might be understood as particularly emblematic of the intersections of kinship, identity, and citizenship in the U.S. multicultural regime.

Written by an author who has himself adopted two girls from China, *China Run* dramatizes adoption as “rescue” of children from their violent fates in China. Though the premise of the novel is that a group of would-be adoptive parents flee with their children, the plot centrally focuses on the heroine Allison Turk, who leads them and is ultimately the only one who does manage to escape with her adopted daughter, Wen Li, and her stepson, Tyler, as her family formed through re-marriage and adoption is consolidated through the dramatic narrative. Their flight becomes a series of intrigues with “the Chinese” pursuing the precarious new American family. In the process of the fugitive flight, Allison discovers that the reason for the mysterious exchange of the children at the beginning of the novel is in fact an underground trade in children, in which girls are being sold as wives, or on the private adoption market, or to the international sex trade, or most lucrative of all, to private organ marketeers. In the end, Allison exposes the evil designs of the Chinese officials to sell orphans on illicit

¹ Data on the number of transnational adoptions come from <http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption_resources_02.html>

² *ibid.*

markets, and vindicates her actions and her motherhood. Ball's novel provides sensational scenes which focus on the sufferings of the bodies of Chinese orphans and dissidents. The casting of the white American as the heroine complicates the feeling of the audience for the corporeal suffering of the Chinese characters in the novel in that this relationship is always mediated through the figure of the sentimental heroine. In saving "her" child from the corrupt and threatening Chinese bureaucracy, Turk's heroism is tied to the domesticity of sentimental themes by highlighting the vindication and construction of U.S. domesticity abroad, and situating herself as the subject of rights.

In the midst of the drama, Turk, reveals a government cover-up of a plot to trade the bodies of the orphans in various human trafficking schemes. Ball's novel attempts to resolve the complexities of the contexts in which adoption from China takes place into binaries of good and evil and relies on intense emotions that dramatize intimate affective relations. This narrative locates the intersections of liberal ideology, the struggle for human rights, and the sentimentality of the narrative in order to foreground the production of the U.S. as a space of freedom. I argue that the novel re-deploys the nineteenth-century cultural modes of sentimentalism and sensationalism in this twenty-first century adoption plot to represent the resolution of the contradictions of racial difference and the racialized dimensions of the U.S.-China cultural and geopolitical relationship in the "American Chinese" family. Foregrounding Ball's use of sentimental and sensational narrative modes will allow for an examination of how the themes of domesticity and family inform the novel's understanding of the relationship between the U.S. as liberal nation and the foreign space of China.³

The large number of Chinese girls available for Western adoptions is commonly attributed to China's so-called "one-child per couple" policy. The "one-child" policy became prominent in the U.S. as one of several human rights violations that were widely debated in politics and media during the 1990s as signs of China's unsuitability for membership in a Western ethical community.⁴ In 1979, the U.S. restored full diplomatic relations with China and even granted China Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status. However, MFN status needed to be renewed annually in accordance with the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which in 1972 linked normal trade relations to emigration and human rights policies of Communist or formerly Communist nations. The incidents at Tian'anmen Square in 1989 brought into crisis the linkage of human rights and U.S. economic ties to China, stirring heated Congressional debate over whether withholding MFN status would effectively bring about changes in human rights practices in China or whether expanded economic relations would, in the long term, effect more freedoms and improvements in human rights in China.

³ "American Chinese" is a term used in adoptive communities to denote the inter-racial and inter-cultural status of the family and is distinguished from Chinese American identity.

⁴ For an example of U.S. rhetoric about human rights and orphans, see United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *Roundtable On China's Children: Adoption, Orphanages, And Children With Disabilities*. 107th (2003). For human rights NGO sources on culture and gender in China, see Human Rights in China's *Caught Between Tradition And The State* (1995) and Human Rights Watch/Asia, *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages* (1996).

The relevance of this popular rhetoric to discourses on adoption from China has to do with gender, in that the large numbers of orphaned girls in China are commonly attributed to the privileging of sons in “traditional” Chinese culture. This misogyny supposedly manifests in this contemporary family planning policy, instituted in 1979 as a control on the rapid population growth following the Communist takeover in 1949, and revised with China’s changing modernization goals.⁵ This logic understands adoption to be a direct intervention into gendered human rights violations. However, the very low numbers of asylum cases based on flight from reproductive rights violations in China that are approved in the West provide a stark contrast to the large numbers of girls adopted by Western parents.

This essay addresses the particular human rights logic in adoption that is narrated in David Ball’s *China Run* to illuminate this contradiction. I argue that the novel portrays adoption as a form of human rights action based in bourgeois domesticity that “saves” children through family formation and migration to the U.S. The story of family as a structure that has power to “save” the child specifically privileges the American mother as the agent of rescue. In the adoption scenario of *China Run*, the white mother’s feeling for the Chinese baby demonstrates her humanity, such that sentiment becomes the signifier of humanity and of the liberal structure itself. In Ball’s novel, the logic of adoption as rescue identifies China as other to U.S. humanitarianism and liberalism as the Chinese state reveals its illiberal basis in its foreclosure of individual rights, here equated with freedom. The novel’s narrative of transnational adoption from China may appear to uphold the promise of U.S. liberalism that all individuals may have access to equality and rights without differentiation by race, or national origin, or gender. Indeed, Ball accepts that liberalism protects the rights of the abstract individual and that the state assumes the power to protect the equality of its individual subjects. In the novel, the American mother performs liberal citizenship through her womanhood and her freedom to act as a liberal subject through her rescue of herself and others in the foreign setting of China.

The mother’s demonstration of American liberalism also invokes the spatialization of modernity and culture, as China becomes a space culturally defined through gendered violations of human rights, in contrast to the portrayal of the U.S. as a space defined by liberal freedoms. In a sense, U.S. judgments of China’s suitability for expanded trade relations can also be understood as a judgment of China’s suitability for modernity. The focus on the treatment of women that results in the orphaned “lost daughters” suggests the vitality of a liberal discourse of identifying non-western nations as non-modern through their adherence to supposedly traditional misogyny. Leti Volpp has written about the dangers of liberal feminist claims that Western minority or Third World cultures are more sexist than Western liberal cultures and that construct gender subordination as “integral to their culture” (1185). Further, these discourses suggest that “only minority cultures are considered traditional, and made up of unchanging and longstanding practices that warrant submission to cultural dictates. Non-western people are assumed to be governed by cultural dictates, whereas the capacity to reason is thought to characterize the West” (1191).

⁵ See for instance Karin Evan’s *The Lost Daughters of China* (2000).

In the transnational adoption narrative discussed in this essay, the danger lies not only in positing the “fact” of women’s freedom from subordination in the U.S. as a sign of universality and modernity, against critiques of violence and mass abandonment of girls in China as a “cultural” trait, but in enabling a narrative of salvation that upholds U.S. claims of liberal equality. Such logic denies the roots of China’s population control policies in modernity; as anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh argues, more so than simply evincing the coercion of women’s bodies, the rationale driving China’s population policy “has been about the nation’s dreams of achieving wealth, power, and global position through selective absorption of Western science and technology”(355).

Sentimentalism, Sensationalism, and Human Rights

Understanding U.S. liberalism as a discourse that underwrites individual rights and transcends difference, this essay proposes that in Ball’s novel the liberal subject is embodied through the genres of sentimentalism and sensationalism. Turning to the history of the cultural modes of sensationalism and sentimentalism in the U.S. helps to demonstrate how they operate together in this particular narrative of transnational Chinese adoption. These modes are effective in allowing the Chinese baby to be humanized and written into the U.S. and national body politic. Sentiment justifies ‘saving’ the babies in the sensationalized rescue narrative. Together the genres engage U.S. foreign policy discourse of human rights vis-à-vis China. In the novel, the Chinese characters and the nation are dehumanized because they lack a concept of and a commitment to human rights. Adoption itself becomes a form of human rights activism that, in the novel, substitutes for internationally-sanctioned human rights action.

Sentimental rhetoric and figures are re-deployed in *China Run* through the staging of scenes of pathos and action that establish liberal womanhood (and motherhood) on the side of universal “good.” Lauren Berlant has identified U.S. liberal sentimentality as a particular subset of sentimentalism that structures a relationship between affect and intimacy, and U.S. citizenship and national life. Berlant writes that liberal sentimentalism has “been conventionally deployed to bind persons to the nation through a universalist rhetoric not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen’s core” (636). Sentimentality characterizes the ways in which “different types of persons” are interpellated into the U.S. nation on equal terms as feeling subjects, and are in fact humanized in this process; persons are “hailed by the universalist (but really national icon) of the person who loves, suffers, and desires to survive the obstacles that bind her or him to history” that is found in the sentimental aesthetic (637). Sentimental politics then presuppose the universality of private feeling, as the domain of the political and public is rendered through private, affective terms. As Berlant puts it, “Sentimental politics are being performed whenever putatively suprapolitical affects or affect-saturated institutions (like the nation and family) are proposed as universalist solutions to structural racial, sexual, or intercultural antagonism” (638). However, this appeal to abstract individualism and universality remains “unfinished,” as the desire to reimagine the real world in terms of transcendental and universal identifications of feeling cannot suppress contradictions of “relative privilege within the sentimental field of the universal human,” which continue to reappear “along axes of apparent national nonuniversality – in zones of class, race, and gender” (643).

While sentimentalism emerged as an eighteenth and nineteenth century structure of feeling in England and the U.S., the historical manifestation of sentimentalism that is most significant here is the mid-nineteenth-century sentimental-domestic novel. These novels, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, represented a convergence of feminist and abolitionist discourses in as the call for abolition was commonly imbricated within the ideology of separate spheres and was also associated with a middle class, female readership of novels. According to Shirley Samuels, nineteenth century sentimentality was a "set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer," that functioned through affect and identification that might forge connections across gendered, race and class boundaries (4). In the experience of emotional response, the reader or viewer is produced as a sentimental subject in the U.S. national body politic. Of particular interest in this essay is the centrality of domesticity and domestic scenes to the sentimental mode. Through a reliance on the affective power of the "home," nineteenth century sentimentalism was involved in a national project of "imagining the nation's bodies and the national body" (3).

The interdependence of the private and national domesticity in this earlier sentimental genre also structures Ball's novel. While the iconography of the home is not the major setting of the novel, it plays an important role as the anchor of the plot in that the plot turns on the white adoptive parent's need to complete the U.S. domestic family, as the Turk family home has been disrupted through a series of failed attempts to have a child, either biologically or through domestic adoption. The Chinese setting for most of the plot is portrayed through distinctly non-domestic, non-sentiment laden spaces, often outdoors, suggesting the absence of safe spaces in China. Indeed, the home lies at the mercy of the state, as the total subsumption of family and home into the state represents communist China's major difference from and moral inferiority to the U.S.

In *China Run*, sensationalism governs Chinese life with grave consequences. As Shelley Streeby argues, "sentimentalism generally emphasizes refinement and transcendence, whereas sensationalism emphasizes materiality and corporeality, even or especially to the point of thrilling and horrifying readers" (31). Streeby characterizes mid-nineteenth century sensational popular culture as having "combined thrills and terror; frequently showcased visual tableaux and action scenes rather than emphasizing domestic scenes and the interior, psychological development of rounded characters; aimed to provoke extreme embodied responses in the reader; and often lingered on the grotesque and the horrible" (30). Streeby demonstrates the importance of expanding critical attention to the body in the culture of sensation in the mid-nineteenth century U.S. to include not only working class bodies but also the politics of race and empire. She suggests that "urban scenes" and "foreign views," thematized a relation between city and empire within the context of the expanding boundaries of U.S. empire. Along these lines, the sensationalist mode in *China Run* underscores the suffering bodies of Chinese subjects. Such a portrayal might evoke a corporeal response in the American reader that situates her within U.S. liberal values and U.S.-China geopolitics and will perhaps move her to the act of "saving" the orphans.

Given the context of the novel's focus on the U.S. family as a structure that grants rights, American philosopher Richard Rorty's 1993 essay, "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality" proposes an interesting interpreting of sentimentality as

a means for achieving human rights. He assesses the shortcomings of a human rights foundationalism based on the “shared human attribute” of “rationality” that “supposedly ‘grounds’ morality” to prevent mass atrocities (116). Rorty defines the failure of philosophy to provide independent support for generalizations of human moral intuition, and of common rationality as a basis for a concept of universal human nature to create a universal moral behavior. He proposes a historically and culturally contingent morality that is relativistic rather than universal. Rorty takes up “human rights culture” to argue that the moral choices that separate human beings from animals are based only in the “historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts” (116). He argues that there is no “ahistorical human nature” that is “relevant to our moral choices,” and therefore, rather than looking for universalist human rights, human rights culture must be relativistic. Sentimentality allows for practical identifications across communities, such that people can “feel *for each other*” and thereby expand their idea of “who counts as a fellow human being,” that is, who belongs in one’s moral community. Human rights culture thus “seems to owe everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories” (119).

However, Rorty’s examples of groups who could benefit from instantiating a humanity based in sentiment imply that his notion of relativism is problematic in its own ahistoricity, as he suggests that “sentimental education” would work to “get whites to be nicer to Blacks, males to females, Serbs to Muslims, or straights to gays” such that human rights culture would allow for sympathies across alterity (114). His notion of human rights based in relativism then serves to reinscribe a Eurocentric and patriarchal power structure that does not necessarily compel a common humanity but retains the volitional logic of inclusion into humanity and rights that has characterized power structures in the U.S. especially. In considering rights globally, Rorty’s formulation relies on the maintenance of a division between enlightened and unenlightened nations and peoples that is bridged by the unidirectional expansion of rights. The reading of *China Run* that follows addresses the contradictions inherent to liberalism in narrating the U.S. as a global actor on the side of human rights. By focusing on the novel’s deployment of the narrative modes of sensationalism and sentimentalism, this article critically interrogates the discursive site of Chinese transnational adoption through which the Western liberal subject is constituted and justified.

Running From China: The Sentimental Heroine and the Adoptee

Two strands of the adoption narrative that suggest the gendering of inclusion into liberal individualism are the gendered violations against girls represented in the institution and effects of the one-child policy in China and the benevolence of the white American woman in rescuing the girls into the U.S. bourgeois domestic family. In *China Run*, the adoption scenario takes place in a gendered private sphere that presumes the female children’s ability to experience affective family bonds in the U.S. In this “privatization” of the China – U.S. encounter, the complex social, political, and economic terrain of the China – U.S. relation is reduced to site of private domesticity. The fictional narrative about the inclusion of Chinese girls and women into the U.S. family reveals the contradictions inherent in sentimental and sensational versions of the U.S. as an actor on the side of universal human rights in the global arena.

It is the maternal figure of the sentimental heroine that references the larger structure of liberal sentimentality in the U.S., for the nation's claim to freedom, rights, individuation, and liberal society is premised on the feeling subject, here, the mother. The reduction of liberal rights to the axis of family sentiment, that is, the freedom to form domestic, sentimentally held family relations, and indeed, the freedom to feel at all, defines U.S. liberalism against China's deficiencies in Ball's novel. The white woman performs her claim to U.S. liberal citizenship abroad, in her role in the adoption of the foreign Chinese other, and thus suggests U.S. liberalism's transnational reach. The adoption scenario represented in *China Run* harks back to the feminist and abolitionist use of sentimentalism in the nineteenth century, such that the white woman recalls the nineteenth-century sentimental heroine who becomes animated as a U.S. liberal subject against the "negro" slave.

In the novel, sentimentalism at the level of the private family reveals transformative potential and critique of human rights culture, as opposed to the public discourse available to state or business interests. The extreme violation of rights in China is sensationalized to draw attention to China as an enemy of sentiment. Yet, at the same time, Ball implicitly reveals that the U.S. state is incapable of recognizing the Chinese orphan as a liberal subject worthy of rights either. Whereas in the public discourse, mothers, as American citizens in China, are legible within human rights culture, in the realm of the sentimental mother-daughter bond, the child evokes pathos. It is her plight that stimulates the intrigue and action. For instance, after the group of American fugitives initially flee from the hotel, Allison calls the U.S. consulate in Shanghai for protection from a stolen cell phone. Speaking to a junior clerk, Allison hopes to request asylum for the children, for feeling that Wen Li is "[her] daughter" transforms the child into a particular individual, who should have the rights accorded an American. No longer a nameless Chinese other, Wen Li should have rights, including the right to family, rather than being a ward of the state, "stuck in an orphanage" (Ball, 61). The novel validates adoption in terms of inclusion within the domain of the family, rather than understanding adoption as a form of commodity exchange, a viewpoint represented by the clerk who advises Allison to "give her back and let them give you another baby" (61). Unlike the public domain of the legalistic rights regime, it is only within the private domain of family that the baby has value as a subject of rights.

Ball's novel posits the family as the exemplary site of human rights. While early in the novel, the family lies in tension with the U.S. state, by the end the U.S. is redeemed as the space that allows for its citizens to form family bonds. The novel conflates U.S. citizenship and the possibility for family formation as the right of U.S. citizens over and against the foreign Chinese threat. Part of this threat is the denial of "family" in China, as suggested by the existence of the "surplus" child. In this passage, Ball articulates the disjuncture between the official framing of the child as a "Chinese national" whom the Americans have "kidnapped," a framing based on a legal definition of the child's rights, and Allison's claim to the child as hers, for she feels that Wen Li is already "her daughter" (60). In response to the clerk's explanation that there must be "legal ... persecution" for Allison to have recourse to U.S. law, she argues that

Wen Li was abandoned. They were all abandoned. Stuck in an orphanage for the rest of their lives. That's persecution of a sort, isn't it?

I'm on your side here ... (but) you can't possibly hope to evade the authorities. This is China. It's a police state, Mrs. Turk ... Hell, (the Chinese) may even throw you in prison. They're not squeamish about that sort of thing. They're not sentimental, either. Break their laws and they'll make you pay ... Allison's heart sank ... She'd found a small-minded bureaucrat whose veins ran with regulations, not blood. (61-2)

Allison suggests that the prospect of allowing her "daughter" Wen Li to remain in an orphanage is a form of persecution, and with Wen Li standing in for "all" the abandoned girls in China, she contrasts life under the care of the Chinese state to the U.S. private family, defining the latter as the only desirable form of "life". The opposition between the state apparatus of China (and the U.S.) and the family is made clearer in their differentiation through sentiment, or "blood"; the state bureaucrat's body is metaphorically fed by "regulations," rather than the blood of humanity. As sentiment is what prompts Allison to flee with Wen Li, it is also the grounds on which the reader is called upon to feel for the female protagonist and her child. As people without sentiment, "the Chinese" may not be moved by feeling, but neither can the form of U.S. law allow for sentiment. However, by saying that he is "on (Allison's) side," the clerk articulates an opposition between the U.S. and China as nation-states, as does his naming of "the Chinese," which continues to invoke U.S. rhetoric toward enemy states.

A further implication of this passage is that the subject of rights in the novel is not the child but rather the white American woman abroad. As Allison Turk is the one who is threatened with being "(thrown) into prison", she is also the subject of the media coverage of the event, and the focus of concern for the international human rights activists. Weaving into the narrative "news reports" from CNN and the Reuters news service about the women as well as the subsequent international protests at Chinese embassies over their safety, Ball portrays an international political drama that emerges out of what Allison views as a moral and private act. Ball writes that the "American networks were full of the story, which had touched a raw national nerve" (183). The story of the adoptive parents has entered into a U.S. national consciousness, not through the conscious reasoning of Americans, but through a collective sensory experience that goes straight to the "nerve". However, the focus of concern in the U.S. and internationally is the legal endangerment of the women, with the children serving as foils for the agency of the U.S. women. Commenting on information released by a "Hong Kong-based rights watchdog group," the "White House ... calls for the immediate release of any prisoners on humanitarian grounds" and calls "for restraint, noting the protests that had turned violent outside the Chinese embassy in Paris" as "human rights demonstrators ... hurled vegetables at the embassy" (323). The reports make clear that what is of interest in the public protests and state responses is the legal treatment of the American citizens under an international human rights regime. The salient subjects of internationally recognized human rights are the American "parents" and not the adoptees, thus shifting attention from the adoptee, whose plight ostensibly drives the narrative, to the "parents" and the U.S. liberal family structure they represent. The parents are the only ones who view the child as a subject of human rights.

The relationship between U.S. state discourse, adoption, and sentimentalism in *China Run* is ambivalent. One can see the state attempting to claim sentimentality and family as its proper domain and the family privatized as distinct from the public domain

of the state. Fred Pollard, whose sister Ruth is one of the fugitives, clarifies the state attempts to unify itself with the interests of the family. Emphasizing the linkages between international business and politics and human rights, Pollard states on CBS Evening News:

The one-child policy is just another capricious violation of human rights ... The Chinese government's disregard for the sanctity of human life is long-standing. And now my sister and two other women have simply tried to rescue infants from the Chinese torture chambers, and the government has made them criminals ... When the Congress votes on MFN next month, I don't think the issues could be clearer. What is most important to our nation? Do we vote for morality, or money? God, or godlessness? Babies, or the butchers of Beijing? (183)

In Fred Pollard's position as both a U.S. Congressman and the sibling of one of the fugitive parents, the state and the family converge as ways of representing the U.S.-China relationship. The basis for moral action within both private and public realms in appeals to sentiment and morality heightens the distinction between good and evil in castigating the Chinese government and nation against the liberalism of the U.S.

Though privately Pollard does not support Ruth's decision to flee or to adopt from China at all, his public rhetoric expressed from an official state position reveals the power of appeals to moral and religious virtue in compelling public sentiment and swaying emotion for political action. Citing the plight of the women who are in turn saving "innocent children," Pollard holds up "family values" as a national trope through which to make legible the severity of China's long history of "disregard" for "human life" itself. To ignore such a violation of universal human rights can then only be evidence of cold blood, not dissimilar to China's criminalizing of sentiment, or to the rhetorical equation of "money," "godlessness," and "the butchers of Beijing." Against Rorty's utopian vision, here the novel deploys sentimentality exactly to represent China as un-enlightened, and to celebrate the human rights culture of the U.S. In fact, the comparison of U.S. and China posits a cultural and national relativism that is indexed *through* sentiment to maintain divisions. Here, sentimental modes of communication hardly encourage feeling "*for each other*" (Rorty, 119, emphasis in original). Indeed, the costs of China's desire to enter the free market betray the non-liberal basis of its modernity in this context.

Congressman Pollard's invocation of the "butchers of Beijing" suggests how sensationalism infuses the adoption narrative as well. The reader is invited to linger on pain and suffering, on the horrifying details of either the victim's suffering, on the criminal's exploits, and on the violated body, all of which represent China as the scene of horror. Not only do the sensational elements of the novel draw attention to the sentimental pathos of the heroine Allison Turk, but these elements also highlight a distinct non-sentimental basis for subjectivity in China. Through the suffering of all the Chinese characters in the novel under the corruption of the state, the Chinese nation itself becomes sensationalized as a space of degradation. China's need for the intervention of U.S. benevolence is narrativized specifically through the adoption plot. As the sentimental heroine's exploits are recounted, figures and rhetorics of sensation dramatize the suffering body outside of liberalism and position these bodies' relation to larger structures of state power, international politics, and the family. Pollard's

articulation of the boundaries of sentimentality to associate the U.S. with sentiment and morality against China suggests the limits of Rorty's turn to sentimentality as a non-universalizing basis for human rights. The work of the novel to generate the reader's empathy for suffering in China continues to reinscribe the logic of global divisions of free and unfree, modern and non-modern spaces.

Modernizing China

Counterposed to Rorty's emphasis on the cultural contingency of human rights, China comes to be identified culturally and naturally with the lack of rights. While this essay has argued that Allison Turk, the novel's heroine, is the liberal, sentimental subject with whom the reader is asked to identify, the adoptee is not just a vehicle through which the American parent can form a family but is the driving force of the family plot and geopolitical drama. It is the figure of the Chinese female orphan that fundamentally invokes debates over human rights and evokes the geopolitical context of the turn of the twentyfirst century in which adoption from China takes place. In a sense, the narrative of adoption can be understood to be an allegory for Chinese modernity in the U.S. discourse of the Asia Pacific economic boom of the 1990s. Contradictory representations of China as at once a looming global economic power and a nation of anti-democratic social systems (at a time of assertions in the U.S. that free markets would generate political freedoms) suggest that in a culturally, politically, and economically transnational era, China could enter modern geopolitical relationships but not without the resurfacing of reminders of its long-held alterity to Western rights and reason.⁶ China may achieve economic modernity but is still seen as non-modern in terms of society based on western rights and reason. In the context of this set of discourses, the figure of the adoptee also symbolizes for Americans the contradictions of the old and new in understanding China. Portrayed as the victim of misogynistic tradition and anti-democratic authoritarian government, the adoptee is also a modern figure who can be redeemed through adoption into the American family.

Not only does the novel narrate sentiment as the means to achieve human rights, and the U.S. white woman as the sentimental heroine rescuing her Chinese adopted daughter to the U.S., the proper space of sentiment. Sentimentality also gives China the potential to modernize and reveals the limits of a relativist notion of rights are revealed at the same time. In the course of the novel, a whole set of Chinese people *feel* for the plight of the child and are moved to act to help them, but their lives prove to be expendable as they die for their actions. The fact that these people will sacrifice their lives to help the babies escape and become Americans reaffirms the U.S. as a destination of freedom, and the Chinese subjects as lacking human rights. Through the sensory experience of walking through Lao Ding, the underground orphanage that would have been the fate of the adopted children had the American "parents" returned the children, Major Ma Lin is "humanized" and decides to help the fugitives to safety. Ball describes Ma Lin's reaction to his discovery of the orphanage and the fate of the children as so astounding that he is physically affected:

⁶ See David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, especially Chapter 10, "Asia Pacific: A Transnational Imaginary" for a discussion of the 1990s rise of East Asian economies and U.S. cultural politics.

He spent the next hour in a state of surreal detachment ... It was the scale and audacity of it all that took his breath away ... Lao Ding was a giant clearinghouse of human flesh... Ma Lin walked through their quarters as if through a dream, his sense of unreality growing in each room. (347-350)

Not only are the adopted children saved from their fate, but through his involvement Ma Lin is also “saved” by the children. The sensational experience of viewing what could have happened to the children shocks him into action, and he is now able to recognize the importance of Allison’s “determination” to save the baby, for she is a “woman who will die rather than yield” her baby (366). This recognition of the pathos of the child and the imperative to save her “galvanize(s) Ma Lin into action. For the first time in his life, he acted on instinct, against order, against authority” (367). The pathos of the situation causes him to act on the level of his feelings and sensations, and to help the adoptees become subjects of sentiment. Though Ma Lin is redeemed morally in the logic of a narrative underwritten by a culture of sentiment, his execution at the end of the novel for aiding the fugitives to escape reminds us that sentiment is anathema to the illiberal Chinese state. Ma Lin’s decision to help the family is necessarily a sacrifice of his life for those of the children within the structure of the state.

Though Ma Lin may experience sentiment, he is neither a subject of sentiment nor of human rights. The relativism of rights proposed by Rorty proves to be exclusionary in this instance; if the novel shows the grave stakes in transporting the child to freedom in the U.S. (it maps both a geographical and symbolic journey, as the plot moves across the country, indicated by a map of China at the start of the text), the potential modernization of China reaches this limit. The adoption scheme turns out to be good for the Chinese state itself, for exposing the underground orphanage also exposes the corruption at the high levels of government. At the critical moment of economic liberalization and changes in the communist rule, the adoption scenario exposes the deputy minister of the state government as the leader of the Black Bamboo triad, the most powerful underground gang in China. Ball writes that “in the midst of communism’s death throes, Tong and his kind were helping to criminalize the state apparatus itself” (359). The result of the investigation leads to arrests in three provinces and the execution of the deputy minister, who was also the leader of the triad. To be sure, the triads are remnants of an old China:

They were the seamy underbelly of China, more powerful sometimes than the government itself. They were ancient secret societies, created originally to overthrow the Manchus. Thwarted in their political desires, the triads turned to crime. Many moved to Hong Kong ... The ensuing centuries saw them flourish on both sides of the border as their networks grew worldwide. (329)

Illicit and oppositional social forms of the triad predate the contemporary government and still remain as a threat. Here the novel portrays on the persistence of archaic traditions in China’s present that keep the nation from embracing a modern human rights culture. Even more damaging, the “underbelly” operates beyond political borders, suggesting the threat of the global expansion of anti-democratic forms of social order and business practices that China represents as an emerging superpower.

The transnational adoption drama appears to flout Chinese laws as American fugitives kidnap the children in the interest of the U.S. families' private, sentimental bonds. Yet the drama eventually winds up vindicating a larger affective freedom that, in fact, benefits the Chinese state by eradicating some of its antiquated social forms, such as the feudal societies. Nevertheless, the Chinese state remains in a primitive stage in the teleology of freedom: references to a "new China" in the text indicate a process of transformation and modernization that falls short of attaining liberal statehood. The children are the excess of the state, as Wen Li, the only baby to escape, is described as "a child the state didn't want anyway – a baby cast off, like the countless thousands of Lao Ding and Suzhou – children with no names and no future" (366). As the unwanted excess of China's one-child policy, these children have no place or future in China. The novel suggests, however, that their future can be in U.S. Significantly, China's modernity cannot account for these children, as the sea route that Allison, Tyler, and Wen Li take to freedom is the one used in "operation yellow bird," an "underground railroad set up to smuggle dissidents" out of China after the Tiananmen massacre (270). In contrast to the scene discussed above, where abandonment was not grounds for asylum, the importance of saving these children is framed as political act, akin to the emancipation of refugees, within the context of the family.

The bourgeois domestic family, then, justifies the U.S. as the proper space of freedom and rights, and China the antithesis of this. It is not the international pressure that effects the family's escape to freedom, marked by crossing the boundary into Hong Kong waters, then still a British colony, but rather the individual choices of sympathetic people. The reduction of the political and social considerations into individual acts brought about by the pathos of the child (for in the family formation plot it is the child, not mother, whose life is at stake), upholds the sentimental tropes of motherhood and family as universally human categories. For instance, when Allison reaches a temporary refuge at a monastery, the "abbot" asks her:

'I have heard Beijing radio speak of the criminal Turk ... We also receive the BBC and on that radio we have heard of the heroine Turk. It is most unusual to find two women inhabiting one skin. I am just an ignorant old man, so you must please tell me. Which stands now in the presence of Buddha?'
'I don't know,' she said. 'I'm just ... a mother.' (337)

The competing claims of the Chinese and British media that consider Allison to be either criminal or hero, are both deferred to her status as "mother." The sentimental appeal to a feeling relationship takes precedence over public discourses. This appeal to the category of motherhood appears to universalize the ability to feel for the child. Indeed, as Rorty suggests, it is through "sentimental education" that the "little, superficial, similarities as cherishing our parents and our children" that everyone can understand that a common basis for humanity is instantiated. If the radical potential of the aesthetic mode of sentimentalism is the possibility of the reader's transformation through "identification with alterity," then the sentimental heroine of *China Run* serves to deflate this potential. The identification with what is foreign is mediated through the identification with the white American mother (648).

This focus on the family serves as a displacement of the psychic and physical violence staged in the sensational scene, from the public domain of international human

rights that is intertwined with politics at the level of states, the media, and non-governmental organizations, into individual actions that take place within the private family, for instance, through adoption or the consolidation of the non-biological family. Both forms of action in response to the endangerment of life in communist China are underwritten by a recognition of who counts as human and what counts as acting as a good human according to a moral register (based in sentiment not reason), which corresponds in the novel to western liberal values associated with the U.S. In particular, the mother's liberal agency in her moral imperative to save the racial other by bringing her into the white family brings to the fore the white woman as the proper subject of inclusion into liberalism, and the U.S. as a liberal state.

In *China Run*, not everyone does have access to universal relationships of family, and in fact, it is the ability of individuals to feel a family bond that sets the American characters apart from the Chinese. While the American woman is able to disengage her identity as mother from the claims of public discourse, there is an inextricability of the state and family in China throughout the novel. For example, when Ma Lin tortures Yi Ling, the Americans' language guide (whose decision to help them escape arises from her own trauma from her state-coerced abortion that denied her motherhood) he injects his subject with drugs to extract information from her subconscious (198). Telling her that he is her "father" and that he would like information about the American women's whereabouts, a metaphoric family relation becomes intertwined with the authority of the state. Wanting to help her "father," Yi Ling says, "You are Ma Lin. My father ... Yes Father. You are good ... I will help, Father, I will" (196-7). Her (female) submission to the (male) state is staged as a voluntary desire to help her father. This sensational scene of psychic and physical violence demonstrates the impossibility of a bourgeois private domain of the family, and suggests communist state as a perverse patriarchy. Ma Lin glimpses the possibility of becoming a feeling subject when he is moved for the first time to "tears (that are) real as he held [Yi Ling] close" (253). He is moved to help her, as a means to atone for his estrangement during the Cultural Revolution from his biological daughter. But his execution for his dissident actions at the end of the novel forecloses the possibility of the sentimental subject in China.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the novel affirms the U.S. as the space of human rights and sentimentality in contrast to the unfree space of China. Yet the U.S. achieves this status only within the realm of the domestic; indeed, the private sphere in this novel seems to be the space in which the contradiction between familial bonds and the U.S. state is resolved. Ball suggests that the private sphere is distinct from that of the public, and that the private is in fact a site of resistance to the power of the public sphere of state imperatives. At the end of the novel, for instance, the U.S. government covers up the real events of the families' "china run" as well as the agency of the women in saving the children as it credits its own actions with effectively saving the families from China. In response to a media question about the U.S. state "instrumental(ity) in helping Mrs. Turk to escape from China," the "White House Press secretary" implies that the CIA was responsible for her safe rescue, and thus, the state and dominant media appropriate the story for political purposes (374).

If *China Run* is overtly a novel of sensation that calls upon the reader to act, then the appeal to action rests on a definition of the media and state untrustworthy and unable to act to save lives. Instead, direct action based on sensational appeal must be responsible for saving the Chinese female child. Bringing her to the U.S. as part of a family makes her a subject of rights, and is represented in the novel as a form of human rights activism. This activism is not defined as political, as in the organized public demonstrations reported in the media, or in legal and moral claims of the state. Rather, saving the child is an individual action based on private, familial bonds. However, as this essay has suggested, this ability to act, to complete the paperwork and supply the money to convince the Chinese government that one is a worthy parent, is a privilege of particular western subjects and maintains the boundaries of modern/non-modern that lie at the heart of Rorty's relativism. Not only does the adoptee's inclusion into the American family articulate her as a subject of human rights, but the novel further suggests that the effect of the adoption scenario is that China itself may even be able to modernize through sentimentality, rather than through measures at the level of the state or international politics or non-governmental organizations. If the sentimental heroine here in fact stands in for the interests of the liberal state, the U.S. emerges as the space from which the sentimental can be staged, as Allison's performance of sentimental subjectivity in China depends upon her freedoms as a U.S. citizen as she enacts American family formation through her adventures.

Though sentimentalism overtly relies on a logic of separate spheres to differentiate the private and public realms in the U.S., and between the U.S. and China (at the national domestic level), what this essay has tried to suggest is that the ease with which the U.S. state subsumes events into its own narrative demonstrates in fact that conjoining of the private and public in the novel as both are contained by the structure of U.S. liberalism in the novel. While the history of transnational adoption must be understood through U.S. wars in Asia, in particular, the current wave of adoption from China does not come about through military intervention, but rather in a very specific post-Cold War moment of Chinese economic growth and fears of Chinese threats to U.S. global dominance. By going past narratives of rescue in popular culture can encourage understanding transnational Chinese adoption within the relationship of global geopolitics and domestic race and gender politics.

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Özet

Annelik Korkusu:

David Ball'un *China Run* Adlı Eserinde Kadın Vatandaşlığı ve Uluslarüstü Evlat Edinme

Bu makale; kurtarma, insan hakları ve duygusal aile terimlerini Çinli bir çocuğu evlat edinme bağlamında gelişen çağdaş söylem çerçevesinde ele almaktadır. Çözümlemeyi aile ideolojisi ile Amerikan liberal özgürlük kurgusunun kesiştiği noktaya

yerleřtirerek, Amerikan ailesinin evlat edinmeyle biçimlendirdiđi temsili, daha geniř bir yapı olan Amerikan liberalizminin bir uzantısı olarak, popöler bir metin olan David Ball'un 2002 tarihli *China Run* adlı romanı aracılığı ile arařtırmaktayım. Çin'i bir kadın düşmanlığı ve řiddet alanı olarak ve Amerika'yı hakların uygun mekânı olarak tanımlayan romanda özellikle duyumculuk (sensationalism) ve duygusallık (sentimentalizm) gibi kültürel biçimlere odaklanıyorum. Bununla beraber, bu biçimlerin, beyaz anneyi bir kahraman ve Çinli çocukla kurduđu ilişkiyle ve Çin devletine karşı haklılığını kanıtlamasıyla aktif bir birey olarak gösterdiğini ve böylelikle eşit olmayan ırk ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerinin kurulmasına olanak sağladığını iddia ediyorum.

**America is in the Head and on the Ground:
Confronting and (Re-) Constructing “America” in Three
Asian American Narratives of the 1930s**

Klara Szmańko

Juxtaposing three 1930s narratives by first generation Asian American authors of different ethnicities, I would like to examine how the outlook upon the United States is conditioned by the material situation confronting newly arrived Filipino Americans, Korean Americans and Chinese Americans in the 1930s. The focus of my investigation falls on Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart*, Younghill Kang's *East Goes West* and H.T. Tsiang's *And China Has Hands*. In all three narratives, the construction of Americanness goes hand in hand with the self-definition and the construction of individual as well as collective identities based on the negotiation between the new environment and the homeland left behind. All three narratives are transitional, giving the reader a detailed account of the initiation into the new land. Each text is a revisionist exercise. Revision and reconstruction function here on two levels: the reconstruction of the expectations of “America” formulated before arrival in the United States and an attempt at the revision of power dynamics in the United States and in their homeland societies. The key questions for me are: How far are these narratives going in their revision and what strategies do they pursue? Do they manage to avoid essentialism or do they become entangled in othering practices themselves? To what extent do they expose oppression in the United States and in their motherlands?

Only *America Is In the Heart* has received a wide critical acclaim, while *And China Has Hands* and *East Goes West* have languished in obscurity until recently. *And China Has Hands* has not been reprinted since its original publication in 1937 until 2003 (Fleud Cheung 13). King-Kok Cheung mentions the novel in her introduction to *Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* published in 1997. Similarly, *East Goes West* (originally published also in 1937) went out of print in 1944 to be reprinted only in 1966, later in 1997 and in 2006. Why have these two narratives languished in obscurity until now? The answer may lie in the transformations which took place in the discipline of Asian American Studies in the 1990s. While since the 1970s until the 1990s the prevailing discourses in Asian American Studies have been dominated by Frank Chin and other Asian American cultural nationalists of the 1970s, the 1990s saw the shift of the discipline in a different direction. Cultural nationalists of the 1970s accentuated their American birth, drawing a distinction between “real” Asian Americans and fresh immigrants. In *Aiiieeee* Chin defines Asian Americans as “American born and raised” (VII). He distinguishes between “American by choice” and “American-born” (X), Asian Americans and “Americanized Asians” (XV).¹

¹ In one of his statements on immigrants Chin says: I'm not shunning immigrants. I'm stating a fact that I am not Chinese. I am not shunning Albinos, elephants, dwarves, and midgets either. But call me one and I'll just have to set you straight (Chin cited in Sheng-mei Ma 29).

The nationalist accentuation of nativity has since attracted a lot of criticism. While in the 1970s, Asian American Studies focused on American birth and rootedness, from the 1990s the trend has shifted and Asian American Studies can no longer hold within the borders of the United States. It is essential to underline that scholars of both periods find themselves confronted with diametrically different historical circumstances. In the 1970s Asian Americans born outside the United States were still a minority. The 1965 changes in the immigration law² triggered an influx of immigrants from Asia. Currently, Asian Americans born outside the United States are no longer in the minority but in the majority. Scholars like Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Arif Dirlik, Cynthia Sau-lin Wong, Lisa Lowe, David Eng have contributed to the recovery of diaspora. Trying to dispel the myth of a sojourner, Frank Chin said “We came here to settle” (Afterword to *MELUS*, 17). David Eng, on the other hand, wonders whether the discourse of settlement really captures the situation of Asian Americans. Considering their tumultuous history, their literal and figurative exclusion, persecution and exile, it might really be questionable whether the discourse of settlement with all its usual connotations really applies in this case. Their hard work and aspiration to settle did not make them settlers on even par with other ethnic groups in the United States. Eng underscores the importance of external locations in the formation of Asian American subjectivity. He asks “Where is Asian America? Can Asian America finally be located?” (204). We could answer this question with a quote from Arif Dirlik:

Asian America is no longer just a location in the United States, but is at the same time a location on a metaphorical rim constituted by diasporas and motions of individuals. To understand Asian Americans it is no longer sufficient to comprehend their roots in U.S. history or, for that matter, in countries of origin, but a multiplicity of historical trajectories that converge in the locations we call Asian America, but may diverge once again to disrupt the very idea of Asian Americanness. (13)

The multiplicity of geographical locations goes hand in hand with the multiplicity of other locations, accounting for greater heterogeneity within Asian American Studies. Frank Chin’s model of authentic Asian American identity was displaced by multiply located identities. This celebration of multiple locations cannot, however, draw Asian Americans away from issues which still need to be settled within the political and geographical landscape of the United States. Cherishing heterogeneity, Asian

² Neil Gotanda observes that the changes in the U.S. racial policies and specifically in the United States immigration and naturalization laws were frequently influenced by the American foreign policy. The progress in American Civil Rights was often driven by the discordance between American domestic policy and foreign policy. The ideals of equality uttered in the international arena did not tone in with the minority politics at home. That was the case in 1965, when the United States engagement in South East Asia did not play well with its national origin quotas on immigrants from Asia, including refugees from the Vietnam war. The Cold War provided the background for the unfolding Civil Rights campaign. Gotanda draws similar parallels in reference to earlier changes in the immigration and naturalization policies. The 1943 Magnuson Act, which abolished exclusion laws was to a great extent an attempt to counter anti American Japanese propaganda (141). The McCarran Walter Act, which gave Asian Americans the right to citizenship was passed during the war in Korea.

Americans of different national roots face common challenges, which they can confront only by joining their forces.

Since this paper is written in the spirit of New Historicism, I would also like to include a historical background pertaining to the three ethnic groups discussed here. In the 1930-s there were fewer than two thousand Korean Americans in the United States – approximately 1,700 Korean Americans (Takaki 271), 44,086 Chinese Americans,³ around 45,000 (45,263) Filipino Americans in the mainland United States: mostly in the states of California, Washington, Alaska and 53,000 Filipino Americans in Hawaii (McWilliams IX). For many whites the numbers of Filipino Americans in the United States presented a threat to the country's racial purity, to wholesome labour relations and to white womanhood. On the one hand, they were seen as a convenient source of cheap labour, on the other hand, an alien intrusion, competition on the labour market and in the graces of white women. The hostility to Filipino Americans resulted in persecutions as well as the legislation levelled against them. The 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act established a quota of 50 persons per year allowed to enter the country. Anti-miscegenation laws against Filipino Americans were passed in 1931 (McWilliams XXII). Chinese Americans in the 1930s shared the status of alien intruders, being confined to ethnic Chinatown ghettos and belonging to the Chinatown economy.⁴ The 1904 Exclusion Act permanently banned Chinese immigration. Those who entered the country most often did so illegally, risking their own lives. Small numbers of Korean Americans in the United States of the 1930s did not shelter them from racial discrimination.⁵ They were often mistaken for Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans (Takaki 271). Due to their small numbers, Korean Americans in the 1930s did not compose separate residential communities, which does not mean that they were not exposed to residential segregation, finding themselves confined to black ghettos or "Mexican towns" (Takaki 271). If Korean Americans received any sympathy from American society in the 1930s, it was linked to the Japanese occupation of Korea and the mood swinging against Japan in American society at the time.⁶ When the Filipino American narrator of *America Is In the Heart* (1946)⁷ reads of Chungpa Han's adventures in *The Grass Roof* (1931), the prequel to *East Goes West* (1937), he knows

3 The male population counted 39,109, while the female population 4,977. 58.8% Chinese Americans were foreign born ("Chinese American Immigrants").

4 Apart from working in various Chinatown businesses, Chinese Americans also worked on the railroad, in agriculture (for example in the wheat field of California, on sugar plantations in Hawaii), in canneries, laundries and in the mining industry (Chan 25-45).

5 Steady Korean immigration to the United States began in 1902, when the Korean government opened an immigration office in Seoul (Mangiafico 77). Most Koreans worked on the Hawaiian plantations, in Honolulu pineapple canneries, at the docks, or were cabinet makers and tailors. The immigration stopped in 1907, when the United States government refused to recognize Korean passports. Between 1910 (the annexation of Korea by Japan) and 1924, 541 Koreans entered the United States. Several hundred Korean students entered the United States after 1924 and most of them returned to their country after graduating (Mangiafico 79).

6 Distinct Asian American ethnic groups found themselves in favour or out of favour in American public opinion depending on the perceptions of their homeland societies at a particular moment (Ferens 19-21, 108-109).

7 Although *America Is In the Heart* was published in 1946, I call it the narrative of the 1930s because it depicts the events unfolding in the 1930s.

that Chungpa Han succeeds in the United States thanks to his particular educational background, not because of his Korean descent (Bulosan 265).

The above-mentioned narrator of *America Is In the Heart* - Carlos - fights against oppression in a two-fold way: through unionization of Filipino Americans, consciousness raising in that group and through his writing. Carlos conducts an incisive analysis of race and class relations both in the United States and in the Philippines. After transforming "America," he hopes to transplant socialist struggle to the Philippines torn by conflicts between various classes. Carlos sheds as much light on the exploitation in the Philippines as he does on the oppression in the United States. Criticism of "America" is offset in the narrative by the fragments brimming over with unfaltering faith in the country. *America Is In the Heart* vacillates between the critique of the United States and admiration for "America."

"America" focalized through Carlos' point of view is first of all the America of contradictions, America that cannot be affirmed or condemned "in one sweeping generalization" (227). "America" is "the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree" (Bulosan 189). The vision of "America" drawn in the narrative is best encapsulated in the fragment:

I began to wonder at the paradox of America. ... Why was America so kind and yet so cruel? Was there no way of simplifying things in this continent so that suffering would be minimized? Was there no common denominator on which we could all meet? I was angry and confused, and wondered if I would ever understand this paradox? (Bulosan 147)

Depending on his personal circumstances, Carlos is more or less forgiving towards "America," revealing alternately its "cruel" and "kind" faces. The narrative registers every possible act of cruelty and humiliation inflicted both on the narrator and on other Filipino Americans: beatings, expulsions, chases, castrations, killings. Despair, agony and above all loneliness culminate in such statements as: "We were cornered beyond recognition and the only escape was death" (288), "This is the country of survival of the fittest" (170), "there seemed to be tragedy and horror everywhere I went" (175), and "It was a crime to be a Filipino in California" (101). All the horrors described in *America Is In the Heart* have a desensitising effect on Filipino Americans, prompting Carlos to plead with God: "Please don't change me in America" (126). The injustice and violence against Filipino Americans are counterbalanced only by individual acts of kindness, mostly from white women. These acts are few and far between.⁸

"America" in Bulosan's narrative functions on two planes:

8 As mentioned earlier, Filipino Americans were seen by white men as a threat to white womanhood, which resulted in a ban on interracial marriages. Interracial unions between Filipino American men and white women could not be legalized until 1931, when it was adjudicated in *Roldan vs. Los Angeles County* that a Filipino was not a Mongolian. Opponents of interracial unions immediately amended the anti-miscegenation law by supplanting the phrase "or member of the Malay race" (McWilliams XXII). For further investigation of the theme in *America Is In the Heart*, see Rachel Lee's "Fraternal Devotions: Carlos Bulosan and the Sexual Politics of America."

1) the sphere of the ideal – the America of the mind⁹

2) the sphere of fact and reality – what I call in this paper the “America” on the ground; America on the ground consists in all adversities confronting Filipino Americans in the United States. America of the mind is the vision cherished by Carlos before arriving in the United States – America as the country of Abraham Lincoln the “poor boy who became president of the United States and died for a slave” (70). While a number of Filipino Americans relinquish their dream of “America” after confronting the stark reality on the ground, Carlos is desperate to see the positive side of “America,” believing that “America” can become what it purports to be. *America Is In the Heart* stresses that “America” can regenerate itself only by embracing people like Carlos and by acknowledging their input. At some points of the narrative the rhetoric extolling the promise of the American democracy verges on propaganda. The final fragment gives the narrative a semblance of a promotional text: “the American earth was like a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me “no man – no one at all – could destroy my faith in America again” (326). It is up for grabs whether this assertion really comes from the heart or if it is aimed at generating a wider readership among the interracial audience.

Like Carlos Bulosan, Younghill Kang also strikes a balance between the embrace of the United States and the criticism of its race relations and its materialism. The first-person narrator of the novel - Chungpa Han - is not mollified by a measure of success which he achieves. His dream-vision at the end of the narrative is a poignant illustration of the distribution of power along racial lines in the United States of the 1930s. In the dream Chungpa Han finds himself at the top of the tree symbolizing the acme of his success in the United States. Far away in the distance he can see a luxuriant paradise, presumably his homeland Korea left behind. This paradise is connected to Chungpa Han's tree with a bridge. Two of his childhood friends are standing on the bridge, calling him back and urging him to join them. Rejoiced at their sight, Chungpa Han begins to climb down, trying to reach the bridge. In the process things begin to fall out of his pockets: money, keys, business letters and especially the key to his American car. Upset by the loss of his car key, Chungpa Han forgets his childhood friends and starts to look for it. Up to this point the obvious reading is that he is diverted from his roots by the pursuit of the American dream and the materialistic success. In the second part of his dream vision Chungpa Han falls down the cellar, to the very bottom of American society, where he finds himself together with African Americans. The white lynching mob sets them on fire. At various points in the novel Chungpa Han consciously reflects on his own position in American society, comparing it with that of African Americans. It is through his black friend Wagstaff that he is introduced into what he terms as “the caste system comparable only to India” (273). Chungpa Han concludes that “It was beyond the power of individuals to break through” (273). Despite realizing that he has never experienced racial prejudice to the extent that Wagstaff does, Chungpa Han is still acutely aware of his own vulnerability. Any person of colour at the top of the tree, as he is in his dream, is always in danger of falling down, always

9 A Filipino American writer of the next generation – Peter Bacho – also speaks about the “America of the mind” concocted by Filipino Americans in his short story collection *Dark Blue Suit*: “They lived for this fable, this America of the mind, and they chased it across an ocean to its source. Little more than children many still in their teens, they were blinded by the gossamer dreams of the young” (109).

susceptible to “outside forces,” which Chungpa Han holds responsible for the death of his Korean American friend - Kim (362). Travelling in his dream up and down the tree, Chungpa Han resembles Henry Louis Gates’ signifying figure that walks up and down towards success instead of moving in a straight line (47). Throughout the narrative Chungpa Han signifies to befriend white Americans and at the same time remain true to himself. Sunyoung Lee notes that the position of Chungpa Han, the character is in some ways parallel to that of Younghill Kang, the author of *East Goes West*. Neither can afford to antagonize his American audience (Lee 289-290).

Diplomatic as Chungpa Han is, he sometimes voices his misgivings unequivocally. This happens for example during his conversation with the Senator Democrat Kirby. The Senator urges him to see himself as an American and always believe in “America” even if it is a little hard sometimes, to which Chungpa Han retorts that he legally cannot be an American,¹⁰ pointing out that “Orientals” have a tough time in America (352). Chungpa Han questions the vision of the American melting point, while reflecting on the party to which he invites his multiracial and multiethnic friends. His afterthought is that they are like oil and water (274).

East Goes West is a critical view of race relations in the United States of the 1930s, yet at some points the narrator becomes entangled in essentialism himself. The portrayal of the east and west smacks of stereotyping and of Kipling’s “East is East and West is West”. This tendency to draw clear-cut divisions between the East and West is especially visible at the beginning of the novel, evolving into the broader perspective in the course of the text. Initially the vision of “America” drawn by Chungpa Han confirms his earlier preconceptions of the country formulated before his arrival in the United States. Chungpa Han contrasts rural Korea with the industrialized United States, “the best testimony to the Age of Machine” (6). New York is Chungpa Han’s idealized epitome of America. It embodies “swiftness, unimpeded action, fluidity, the amorphous New” (6) youth and dynamism standing in opposition to old- aged and sluggish Korea.¹¹ New York offers opportunity, enterprise, prosperity and success. Korea, on the other hand, the country occupied by the Japanese gives no opportunity to the young ambitious man like himself. The collapse of China is, in Chungpa Han’s view, a punishment for its resistance to the age of Machine (12). To some extent, Chungpa Han’s characterization of the East and West is in line with the textualization of the East described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*: in Said’s terms, the East has been constructed as a mirror reflection of the West. If the West was associated with reason, morality, maturity, restraint and courage, the East represented irrationality, immorality, hypersexuality, femininity and cowardice. New Yorkers in *The East Goes West* have a business interpretation of life and are very purposeful, while “Asiatics”, as they are called at one point, are “drifting aimlessly up and down” (152). The motif of moving up and down was present in the above-mentioned dream, but now it is “aimless” drifting up and down, not a strategic action.

10 The white only criterion for naturalization was abolished only by the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952 (Gotanda 145).

11 Still, like the protagonist of *And China Has Hands*, Wan Lee, who eulogizes the Chinese past, Chungpa Han idealizes the Korean past. Juxtaposing “the agricultural peace of Asia” with the “rebellion of the West”, he initially declares “washing off the dirt of the Old World that was dead” (11).

The vision of the West presented in the novel is dynamic, undergoing a transformation in further sections of the narrative. Chungpa Han's own experience and his numerous conversations with representatives of other minorities modify his earlier visions of "America." The enchantment with modernity makes room for the critique of Americans' materialism, their incessant quest for profit. Chungpa Han exercises the most critical judgement during his association with Boschnack's store, which diametrically contradicts his boyhood vision of America: all "enchantment and romance" (295). Instead it reveals itself to him as the "annoying world of dollars and cents" (305). Clearly disenchanted, Chungpa Han tries to "recapture the magic and mystery with which [he] had first dreamed America," but his belief in "America" is not nearly so unswerving as that of Carlos. If New York is Chungpa Han's dream-come-true, Boston receives a much harsher appraisal. Boston is "the accumulation of puritanic dirt" (235). Bostonians are characterized as hostile, cold and standoffish (185).

With the passage of time, Chungpa Han redefines his view of the East and the West. The East is no longer strikingly different, but "the same with a difference" (366). "The same with a difference" resembles Homi Bhabha's definition of mimicry as repetition with a difference (88). A similar situation takes place when Chungpa Han's friend - Kim - advises him to study "Orientalia" from a Westerner's viewpoint (323), "to be ... like a Western man approaching Asia" (257). What Kim advises Chungpa Han is a certain amount of distance to the subject matter. He is to emulate white ethnographers of the time. They were also expected to approach their subjects with a scientific distance. The action of *East Goes West* unfolds at the height of modernism, the period when orientalism was in vogue. Western craving for things oriental enables Chungpa Han to capitalize on his Korean training in Eastern classics.

A similar distance to this recommended by Kim in the study of the East is visible in the study of the West in the novel itself. It is not a scientific distance but a well-measured approach, embracing both the positive and negative faces of the United States. Criticism of as well as proclivity towards certain aspects of American culture are expressed with thoughtfulness and restraint. The text equally includes numerous moments of enthusiasm and disenchantment. However, they cannot be compared with the emotional intensity of Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart*. The contrast undoubtedly stems from a different subject matter. *East Goes West* is free of the horrors recounted in *America Is In the Heart*. The professional background of both authors is not without significance either. Carlos Bulosan was not only a writer but also an activist, while Younghill Kang was first of all a scholar and a writer.

H. T. Tsiang's *And China Has Hands* (1937) provides a contrast to the two previously discussed literary texts. It is no longer a first-person narrative, but a third-person novel written in an experimental modernist style, reverberating with echoes of Gertrude Stein and Walt Whitman. Thus, it is revisionist not only in its contents, but also in its form. Unlike Carlos or Chungpa Han, the protagonist of *And China Has Hands*, Wan Lee, does not identify himself as an American, but as a Chinese, a "man of the Middle Kingdom" (30). The demonization of the United States is accompanied by the idealization of old China. No character discussed here is as essentialist and intransigent in the portrayal of white America as Wan Lee is. He comes to the United States with a fixed, negative view of Americans and the tribulations that he goes through reinforce his earlier preconceptions. It is not uncommon to hear Wan Lee speak

of the “savage land” (26), “those old savages” (30), “foreign devils” (33), “fakers” (35). Ill-disposed as Wan Lee is towards Westerners, he is at the same time very cautious not to air his views in the presence of white Americans. Quite on the contrary, he is all shrewdness and diplomacy, calling himself “Ambassador Wong Wan-Lee” (30), a mediator between cultures. Like Carlos and Chungpa Han, he is all too aware that as Sunyoung Lee claims, “defining oneself is only half the struggle. How society defines you is not, for most, a matter of choice – even more so when you are an Asian immigrant living in America of the twenties and thirties” (Lee 383).

Signifying before the outside world does not prevent Wan Lee from clinging to his China-oriented nationalist ideology. Why is he so nationalistic? Is it entirely his choice or is his nationalism triggered by “outside forces”? The harassment from white society and from his fellow Chinese Americans definitely adds to his nationalistic zeal. Wan Lee, the owner of a Chinese laundry, is exploited by an immigration officer, a laundry inspector, a detective who extorts money from him, a loan shark and by his Chinese American employers in his prior restaurant job. Exposed to the ghettoization in a predominantly male Chinatown community, Wan Lee grapples with overwhelming solitude. The confinement to the precincts of the ghetto gives him limited opportunities of striking interracial acquaintances. Chinatown raids and arbitrary deportations of Chinese Americans intensify a sense of being under siege from the white world.¹² The situation in China is not without significance either: the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the interference of foreign powers, the splintering of the country by wars. All this kindles a patriotic fervour. Wan Lee blames open door policy, the virtual colonization of China and the meddling of foreign powers for chaos in his homeland country.

Wan Lee sees communism as a vehicle for transforming, revitalizing China and wiping out exploitation and racial discrimination in the United States. It is questionable whether he wholeheartedly supports communism or whether he treats it as a means to an end. Proletarian ideals clash with nomenclature employed Wan Lee. He calls himself an “owner”, “a boss”, “the inheritor of ten thousand fortunes”, the descendant of the emperor (127). An idealization of the ancient Chinese past under the Chow Dynasty (1122-221 B.C.), the time of the Middle Kingdom again raises questions to what extent he embraces communism or whether he concocts his own version of communism. For him the reign of the Chow Dynasty was an example of communism (72).

The leftist movement was fairly popular among Chinese American laundry owners in the 1930s. The 1930s saw the mechanization of white laundries, which forced Chinese American laundries to lower prices in order to survive (Tong 60). Trying to eliminate Chinese American competition, white laundries secured from authorities an annual thousand dollar fee levied on Chinese American laundries in 1933 (Tong 60, Lai 13). In response to the harassment from white authorities, Chinese American laundry owners founded in 1933 the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance. Since the Alliance did not receive sufficient support from the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, it began to cooperate with the Marxist Left, which reached out to garment and maritime workers as well (Tong 60). Chinese American laundry workers were drawn towards the

¹² For example in the 1903 Boston Chinatown raid (Tong 47).

Marxist Left also because unlike Kuomintang, it openly protested racial discrimination in the United States and Japanese occupation of China (Tong 62).

All these factors account for Wan Lee's inclination towards the leftist movement. However, the above-mentioned ambivalences concerning among others the nomenclature raise doubts to what extent *And China Has Hands*, the text, promotes communism. Stylistic devices employed by the author cast yet another shadow of doubt on the commitment of the text to the communist ideology. Characterizing Wan Lee, Tsiang uses irony and sarcasm, poking fun at his protagonist. Even the final scene of the novel, which leaves Wan Lee shot, maybe fatally wounded, is full of humour and irony.

It is fairly safe to claim that the novel subscribes to transformational identity politics, combining people of various races and ethnicities working together against oppression: in this case both racial oppression and class oppression – oppression not only from white people but also from members of the Chinese American community. One of the songs chanted by interracial demonstrators proclaims unity among “the white, yellow and the black” (124). A point of divergence from transformational identity politics is an anti-Japanese rhetoric in the novel. Wan Lee openly speaks out and demonstrates against “Japs”. All three narratives are written by immigrants from societies occupied by the Japanese. Younghill Kang is the only author scrutinized here to steer clear of any overtly anti-Japanese rhetoric in his novel. His character, earlier mentioned Chungpa Han, is eclectic and open-minded towards all cultures, even that of an occupier.

The narratives analysed in this essay make an attempt at revisioning power dynamics in the American society of the 1930s. In the process of exposing and undermining the structures of oppression, they become to a certain extent embroiled in essentialism and contradictions themselves. Still, these contradictions should come as no surprise, considering the reality on the ground confronting representatives of respective ethnic groups in the 1930s. They respond to the contradictions stemming from the clash between the reality on the ground and the vision of “America” championed by dominant discourses. Positioning themselves in between their own communities and the host society, both the authors and their characters make the most of inimical conditions, shedding light on the forces of oppression and at the same time doing their best not to be swallowed by these forces themselves.

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Özet

Zihindeki ve Yerlerdeki Amerika: 1930'lardaki Üç Asyalı Amerikalı Anlatıda Amerika'ya Karşı koymak ve Onu (Yeniden-)Yapılandırmak

Bu makalenin odağı, birinci tekil şahısla anlatılan Carlos Bulosan'ın *America is in the Heart*, Younghill Kang'ın *East Goes West* ve H.T. Tsiang'ın *And China Has Hands* adlı 1930'lara ait üç adet Asyalı Amerikalı öyküsüne bölünmektedir. Her üç öykü de farklı etnik kökenden gelen ilk kuşak Asyalı Amerikalılar tarafından yazılmıştır. Her metin Amerika'daki güç ilişkilerini yeniden ele alırken, *America is in the Heart* ve *And China Has Hands* adlı eserler aynı zamanda geride bırakılan anavatan içindeki güç ilişkilerine de değinir. Bu makalede, her biri kendine özgü olan bu üç anlatıyı çözümlerken, ortaya çıkan çatlakları ve özcülüğe (essentialism) geçişi göstererek, eserlerin ne ölçüde başarılı olabildikleriyle ilgileniyorum. Bu makale Yeni Tarihseclilik ruhuyla yazıldığından, her bir anlatının 1930'lardaki Filipinli Amerikalı, Koreli Amerikalı ve Çinli Amerikalı olma durumuna ilişkin olarak sosyo-tarihsel zemine karşı bir duruş olduğunu varsayıyorum.

Overriding Identity Politics with Affect in Ayub Khan-Din's *East is East*

E. K. Tan

In April 1968, British politician Enoch Powell delivered a speech, which was later known as the “rivers of blood” speech, against further immigration into the United Kingdom. Powell’s speech opens by identifying the problems spawned by the growing immigration population as “avoidable evils”. To support his argument, he employed the depiction of an Englishman’s resentment of the threat of losing England to “the black man” in 15 or 20 years’ time.¹ This example functions as an act of “othering”, first of all to cast the non-white, non-Englishman as “the other” based on ethnic absolutism²; secondly to deny the rights of immigrants in the UK by claiming white sovereignty over the land. Powell supplied the example in the essay with a double-negative justification by arguing that as discriminatory as the claim might sound, as an Englishman, he “[does] not have the right not to do so” (1). What is interestingly missing in this nationalistic discourse on the preservation of the history of Great Britain is the role of British colonial history, which is the main cause of the immigration flow as Britain began removing its colonial deployments at the end of WWII.

Powell feared the change in the culture climate of the United Kingdom, with the government’s immigration law that allowed approximately 50,000 dependents into the country each year at that time. This governmental attitude towards immigration, according to Powell, was a form of madness that engaged the nation in a gesture of “heaping up its own funeral pyre” (2). Powell was not solely interested in controlling the dimension of immigration into the United Kingdom; his true concern was with the immigration population that is already in the country. To address this concern, he suggested a second regulation for the immigration law of the Conservative Party—re-emigration. The law promoted the notion of helping immigrants return to their home countries. However, the implications behind this proposed policy is after all one of repatriation—a gesture that implied the denial of one’s sense of belonging by the host country.

Even though Powell’s concern was about immigration in the United Kingdom, from the example he cited in his speech, the larger discourse is a racist one. Racism can be understood as the aversion of someone based on one’s knowledge of the person and

¹ Powell quotes the conversation he had with “a middle-aged, quite ordinary working man employed in one of our nationalized industries”. The man bemoan, “I have three children, all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan’t be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this country in 15 or 20 years’ time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man” (1).

² Paul Gilroy in his essay “Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism” defines ethnic absolutism as “a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable” (65).

his or her background. Knowledge is manipulated in Powell's speech to justify the legitimacy of the call for repatriation of immigrants. The white supremacy is revealed when Powell argues that even though there is no social distinction such as "first-class" and "second-class" citizens in England, immigrants should not assume that they share equal rights and privileges as the citizens, namely the white, English people.³

Set in 1971, Ayub Khan-Din's 1999 Film Four production *East is East* tells the story of a Pakistani's struggle with his biracial family and his at-stake Pakistani identity in Salford, England, a neighborhood haunted by the repatriation discourse fostered by Enoch Powell. The film is an adaptation of the play under the same title written by Khan-Din. The play made its debut in 1997 as a Tamasha/Royale Court production, winning the 1997 Writers' Guild Awards for Best End Play and Best New Writer, and the 1997 John Whiting Award. No less successful than the stage production of *East is East*, the film directed by new director Damien O'Donell received the Audience Award for Best First Best Film for Galway Film Festival 1999. Ayub Khan-Din explains his intention in creating this autobiographical project based on three main reasons:

I started to write it for various reasons, the main one being that my mother had just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and suddenly, as the disease progressed, it felt like whole sections of my life began to disappear with her memory. At the same time the neighborhood I grew up in Ordsall in Salford, was being demolished and the whole community was about to be broken up. I wanted to capture the spirit of the area and the people I had grown up with; to discover how that world had influenced the way my mother and father brought us up. One other important consideration, particular to me at the time, was that I wanted to create a decent part for myself. I was fed up of seeing the crap stereotypical roles dished out to Asian actors: you either ran the corner shop or were a victim of skinheads. I had no idea after leaving drama school that I would suddenly be stamped BLACK ACTOR! (ix)

What seems really important to Khan-Din is the capacity to preserve the memory of one's past. His mother's Alzheimer's disease in this case acquires a metaphorical meaning as a facilitator for his creative retelling of the story based on the negotiation between the past and the present. Besides the dialogue between old and new, *East is East* also questions the significance of diasporic identity, family relationships, racial politics, multiculturalism and hybridity. This essay first explores in *East is East* how the Anglo-Indian protagonist George's obsession with religion-tinted ethnic purity is a crucial source of his identity crisis. Following is the discussion on the productivity and problematics of hybridity as a state of being based on the analysis of George's biracial family. The essay then concludes by describing the street as a rhizome of hybrid and

³ Powell introduces this in his speech as the third element of the Conservative policy. The explicitly racist statement in this segment of his speech is his claim that the non-existence of social class distinction does not mean that "the citizen should be denied his right to discriminate in the management of his own affairs between one fellow-citizen and another or that he should be subjected to imposition as to his reasons and motive for behaving in one lawful manner rather than another" (3).

trancultural activities, and by highlighting *affect* as the melodramatic solution to familial and racial conflicts.

George Khan—The Symbol of Pakistani Patriarchy

In the beginning of *East is East*, George fails as a father when his eldest son Nazir, the bridegroom, runs away in the middle of his Pakistani wedding. The incident challenges his paternal authority and shatters his dream of embracing his ethnic identity. Speaking of his own father, who is the model for the character George, Ayub Khan-Din questions:

So why did this man who was married with a first wife and two daughters in Pakistan, who settled here in the early 1930s and married an English woman, who proceeded to have ten children whom he allowed to celebrate Christmas and Easter, why then did he decide that they could only marry Pakistani?

The same questions are directed at the audience as we watch the family saga of the Khan household unfold. One big contradiction we see in George lies in his deliberate naming of his children with traditional Muslim names such as Abdul, Sajid and Meena, while replacing his own name Nazeer with a Christian name George. Naming, as a gesture of identity assignment explains a lot about George's inner desire to raise his children Muslim in this "foreign" land that constantly reminds him of his displacement from the homeland—Pakistan.

What does it mean to be Pakistani in England? Are the two identity categories Pakistani and British mutually exclusive? Amitav Ghosh says, "It is impossible to be perfectly Indian. There is no notion comparable to that of the colonial. Were it possible to be an imperfect Indian, everybody in India would be" (77-8). For Ghosh, being Indian is not about authenticity. Also rejecting the notion of authenticity is Homi Bhabha who argues that cultural purity does not exist because culture, as a component of ethnic identity, is not homogeneous. To support this claim, Bhabha posits the reevaluation of cultures through an inter-space, which he refers to as "the third space" (2). The third space is the zone where cultures come into contact with one another; it is also the place where cultures acquire new meanings through the process of negotiation and translation (5). At the hospital after Sajid's circumcision, George asks the doctor who is of Indian descent: "Are you Indian?". The doctor looks stunned for a moment and answers him with "I'm sorry?" (Khan-Din 26). There is a double meaning in the doctor's reply; the literal one being that he has not understood George's question, while the pun for the audience is that he is sorry that he is not Indian in the way George defines Indian. The miscommunication between George and the doctor lies in the doctor's inability to understand the distinction George raises between his racial and national identity. As the plot develops, George's refusal to acknowledge identity as heterogeneous expands into the major conflict of the film.

Indianness for George is inevitably connected to his religious identity. Besides wanting traditional Pakistani marriages for his children, he insists on sending his children to a religious school. In the scene at the religious school, the attempt to raise his children as good Muslims does not seem fruitful:

We are in the living room of a large Victorial house, which is completely bare except for a carpet and wooden benches, which are laid out in lines across the room. Behind the benches sit Pakistani KIDS, BOYS at their own bench away from the others, are reading from a variety of different books. They are all bobbing up and down as they learn the verses. The KHANS just sit, looking bored, with little pink cards with Arabic alphabet on. Their stillness is highlighted by MANEER's bobbing up and down in the middle of their line as he learns his verses. (Khan-Din 17)

Spirituality cannot be located in the description of the activities in the religious school. The setting seems materialistically ironic with the big "victorial house," which is dull and empty. Religion, besides its function as an authority, means nothing to the children who are forced to attend the Koran reading session. George believes that he can raise his children as Pakistanis through religious teachings. However, it is precisely the conflation of secular and religious Pakistani identities that renders George's misrecognition of religion as the foundation of ethnic identity construction. In a sense, George's sense of identity mirrors the Pakistani identity, in which the national and religious identities are seen as inseparable. Abdus Sattar Ghazali explains that the founding of Pakistan as a nation under the lead of Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah is based on the belief in developing a modern democratic state that emphasizes equal rights for its citizens regardless of religion, caste or creed (3).⁴ Unfortunately, this belief was far too ideal. The partition of India was basically marked by the distinctive separation between the specific religious groups, the Hindus and the Muslims. Hence, as the national movement of Pakistan acquired a specific religious component, the secular and religious became deeply interconnected (Ghazali 17). So, how does George expect his children to understand the meaning of being a Pakistani in an almost meaningless religious setting like the religious school, and in the United Kingdom, a nation that does not define itself specifically through religion?

Another example of George's obsession with his pure Muslim identity emerges through the episode of Sajid's circumcision. George over-reacts when he finds out that Sajid is not a good Pakistani because he has not been circumcised. As he arrives home from the religious school, he storms:

Done? I tell you what he bloody done, Mrs. He makes a bloody show of me. All your bloody family always makes a bloody show of me. I go to that mosque long time, now how can I looking Mullah in a bloody face 'cause your son got bloody tickle-tackle. (Khan-Din 20)

Again, we see George building his concern about religious purity on a rather meaningless reason. More than the preserving religious traditions and rituals, shame and embarrassment in this case seems to be the real trigger of his anger. It is not so much the question of being a good Muslim, but the desire to prove to the Pakistani community his

⁴ Ghazali quotes Jinnah's speech from February 1948: "In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims-Hindus, Christians and Parsis -- but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan" (1).

pure religious identity. In this case, George's shame can be understood as an outward expression of his ego. This ego is almost always at guard in fear of losing what seems extremely important. Borrowing Freud's structure of the Oedipus complex, George experiences an identity crisis that can be explained with the castration fear. During the Khans' trip to Bradford, George experiences a phase of identity reconstruction. When he talks about his initial immigration to England, he cannot contain his excitement in describing how he feels respected by a white film director who does not reject the notion of eating with Indians. However, after thirty years in England, he suddenly realizes that things have not changed much and his encounter with the director is a mere exception. At the fish market, he comes to a revelation that he can never be seen as equal to an Englishman. Thus, he says to Sajid, who is apparently not paying attention:

You puther; this country not like our people's see. I have been here since 1937, I try to make a good life for my family. Your mother is good woman, but she not understands, son. I love my family, but all time I have trouble with people, they not like I marry your mother. Always calling your mother bad name. That why I try to show you Pakistani way to live. Is good way. All my family love each other see, Bradford, Pakistan, all same, nobody different. (Khan-Din 86)

England in the late sixties was filled with racist sentiments against immigrants. On one hand, the "fear of castration" signifies the fear of not being able to become "fully English", on the other hand, it designates to losing ethnic and cultural roots. The feeling of losing authority over his own life is also represented by his failure to raise his children as Pakistanis; especially by the failed wedding plan he has orchestrated for Nazir. The only defense mechanism George has against the racial castration threat is his resort to rituals such as visiting "Bradistan" (a Bradford that is occupied by Pakistani immigrants) and going to religious schools. As the van proceeds into Bradford, George becomes happy seeing all the fascinating "Pakistani" cultural symbols, like a little child.

The mini-bus travels along the Bradford streets. Streets signs in Urdu, all the FACES in the street are happy and smiling PAKISTANIS, WOMEN are in traditional dress (Shalwar Kameeze), Girls wear the veil. Maybe the type of advertisements that you see in India, huge, brightly painted hoardings. George looks happy. (Khan-Din 43)

However, we as audience know that Bradford is a mere sight of cultural neurosis. On the one hand, the Pakistani community that occupies Bradford includes immigrants who are supposedly undergoing assimilation yet, ironically, they obsessively refuse to give up their previous lifestyle by recreating it in the host country. Even though James Clifford does not discuss diasporic experience specifically in terms of the Oedipus structure, his discussion on loss and displacement does seem helpful in complementing the psychoanalytical reading of George's identity crisis. Clifford in his essay "Cultural Anthropology" says:

Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive

distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (312)

Leaving Pakistan in search of a better life, George has already experienced loss, marginality and displacement. However, this dreadful feeling is further enhanced by the falling apart of a dream and the repression from an inhospitable host environment. With loss and displacement as the defining elements to understand his or her identity, the diaspora seeks alternatives to compensate the loss.

Interestingly, Khan-Din's portrayal of George appears to be mostly one-dimensional. Most of the time George is seen as a tyrannical father who cares not for the benefits of his children, but focuses more on the notion of religious and ethnical purity. This not only prevents his character from developing, but also fails to provide the audience with an understanding of his inner feelings. However, in the scene where George engages in a conversation with the Mullah, we see the vulnerable and humane side of him. In this scene, George regrets leaving Pakistan in pursuit of a better life. During a deep conversation with the Mullah, he laments: "Sometime I think... maybe... maybe I wrong coming England. Leave family an' wife in a Pakistan"(31). For the first time, we realize that guilt is one of the sentiments that has been haunting George for decades. He feels guilty not only for leaving his family, but also for deserting his homeland. Floya Anthias clearly explains this specific emotion of diaspora as follows:

In many cases, however, [diasporas] may be attached to the homeland in terms of national feeling and, indeed, see their role as being to uphold the interests of their original homeland. However, the politics of the homeland (that Anderson 1995 calls a nationalism from afar) may have significant differences to that of those "who stayed". It may assume a heavy sense of guilt and overcompensation, a ritualistic and symbolic fervour often found in the attempt to retain the old ethnic ingredients (leaving groups in a type of time-warp). There may be differences depending on how near or far the diaspora are from the original homeland (if there is one)... (564-5)

The "politics of the homeland" for George is represented in the film through his immediate concern with news, regarding the social and political upheavals in Pakistan on television and on the radio, and his desire to bring his first wife and daughters to England. This strong urge to follow closely to the news back home and to help the homeland is a product of guilt that has sprouted with one's departure from the homeland. As the departure symbolizes a certain loss for the diaspora, he or she practices nationalism more rigorously than those "who stayed", in order to compensate the threat of losing cultural or ethnic affiliations. In the same conversation, George attempts to compensate what he has lost as part of his cultural and religious identity, as he talks about his family in relation to the Muslim faith and his Pakistani roots:

My wife here good person, always respecting me, respect my religion. Give me six son. But ... is difficult, 'cause she English, no understanding all, you sees. Maybe I should have take family to Bradford long ago. More Pakistani there see, no have this problem. Is why I think I have problem with Nazir. (Khan-Din 31)

What George reveals here is a typical dilemma of diasporas: one that involves the desire to assimilate into the host culture, and harbors the guilt of losing one's home culture. However, what is particularly problematic in George's case is his reluctance to live in the present. Nostalgia in this case has led him to regress into a hollow past that is fabricated with romanticized memories, where he gradually becomes an ethnic absolutist not much different from Mr. Moorhouse, George's racist neighbor, or from Enoch Powell, even. Memory is a response to displacement and migration always leads to an eventual re-vision of one's present situation. There is always a desire to reclaim the past; however, this is when nostalgia becomes dangerous as it adopts marginalization as the dominant form to control the understanding of one's diasporic experience and identity. The memories George holds on to are mainly linked to his guilt of leaving his first wife and daughters in Pakistan, and his realization that his assimilation into the English culture has not provided him and his family a better life. It is specifically the guilt of leaving Pakistan and the resentment for the United Kingdom that trigger George to adopt memories, a pleasant one in this case, as a counter-narrative for his present plight.

Paki, Anglo-Indian, Eurasian or English

If the acquisition of one's identity involves ascription and identification, identity categories are then significant as markers of belongingness for individuals. During an argument with their white neighbors Stella and Peggy on the curb of the Victorian Canal, the Khan children are forced to come up with the best term to categorize themselves. The argument begins with Peggy calling Tariq "Paki". A chain of identity categories evolves from this argument. First of all, they do not identify themselves as "Pakistani". Saleem claims that he "thought" (Khan-din 34) they were "Anglo-Indian". This uncertainty in Saleem reveals the ambiguity of "Anglo-Indian" as a category, which is supposedly British but not quite. Meena firmly claims that they are "Eurasian", which sounds "romantic" (Khan-din 34) to everyone. Finally Tariq ends the argument by explicitly claiming his British identity because of the privileges he sees in being "British". Meena's claim seems the least political because the term "Eurasian" does not involve any national allegiance. However, it does not provide much function for the Khans children living in an environment such as England where multiculturalism is celebrated based on ethnic and cultural differences as well as national origin. "Anglo-Indian" comes closest to the diasporic background of the Khan family. Yet, an oxymoronic category like this has not successfully facilitated George's life in England either. "Anglo-Indian" as a category marks the Indian diasporic population as affiliated to England with the use of a hyphen to represent the relationship between the two. This hyphen connects the two; yet, it creates a distinction between the two based on different degrees of belonging to the country. Furthermore, "Anglo-Indian" often times exists only as a category because it does not encompass any cultural specificity that is crucial to the discourse of identity. Even if it does, it is often a site of contestation and negotiation. Identity, in the case of *East is East*, suggests a connection that is not based on categorization or grouping, but one that echoes Stuart Hall's concept of identification. For Hall, besides functioning as a force of unity and providing a sense of belonging, identity also involves a *process of identification*. Identification leads to the active positioning of oneself in history, culture and power (225).

East is East uses the genre of satire to depict the problems experienced by the biracial Khan children as they position themselves in opposition to their father's notion of identity. The conflict between George and his children suggests the splitting of England between white and black, which is pointed out to George by the Mullah. The Mullah says, "Until your sons join the community fully, they will always be a worry to you" (32). For the Mullah, Pakistani and English identities are mutually exclusive; acceptance is based on which identity group you subscribe to. This inflexible identity politics does not leave space for any form of negotiation. Biracial people like the Khan children living in a social environment that is still obsessed with the notion of racial purity, experience double-degree "marginalization".

There is no questioning of George's good intention in seeking safety and security for his children and a life that is different and less tough than his. However, for George, the main conflict in the film is his insistence in raising his children as Pakistanis. His deliberate denial of their biracial identity is bound to arouse in his children the anxiety of not belonging to a specific cultural group.

Even though the Khans children do not necessarily suffer from identity crisis like George, they cannot be truly open with their background. Almost all the Khan children carry complex identities: Saleem the engineering student is a fine arts student; Nazir, the runaway son escapes not because he rejects his Pakistani identity, but because he is gay; Tariq calls himself Tony in social settings outside his family; and Sajid hides all the time in his Parka. In a society where you can only be either/or in terms of identity, hybridity functions contrarily as a tool to escape reality and a hindrance to self-acquisition. In the case of *East is East*, displacement happens at home, making it impossible for the Khan's children to feel at ease with themselves at home.

James Clifford in the introduction to his book *Routes* avers that hybridity is not as apolitical as it appears⁵. Hybridity is always within a power structure governed by at least one hegemonic source that claims authenticity and rights over the rest. In the case of *East is East*, hybridity survives by contesting violence and negotiating with the two allegedly "pure" sources of Englishness and Indianness.

Ayub Khan-Din sees the violence represented in his father, which he depicts through the character George. Based on Khan-Din's experience, George does not believe any middle ground exists in the British way of life. He tries to explain that to Tariq during their argument. He insists, "Son, you not understand 'cause you not listen to me; I trying to show you good way to live. You not English, English people never accepting you. In Islam, everyone equal see, no black man, or white man. Only Muslim, it special community". George is not totally wrong with this advice for Tariq. However, what George is blind to is his alternative, which is to acquire another essentialist impossibility of being a pure Pakistani. The dichotomy of Pakistani versus English is the element that elides any possibility to negotiate for a new or diverse identity. Tariq does understand what George was trying to say especially after running away from home and marriage. He realizes that escape does not promise a different and better life.

⁵ ... there is no reason to assume that crossover practices are always liberatory or that articulating an autonomous identity or a national culture is always reactionary. The politics of hybridity is conjunctural and cannot be deduced from theoretical principles. In most situations, what matters politically is who deploys nationality or transnationality, authenticity or hybridity, against whom, with what relative power and ability to sustain a hegemony. (Clifford *Routes* 10)

We see his hesitation in staying with Nazir and his French boyfriend when he finds out that what he envies of Nazir has turned out to be not what he actually desires. However, Tariq's desire to be English does suggest to a certain extent a positive aspect in contrast to George's notion of Englishness. Tariq's notion of Englishness challenges the white superiority embodied by a fixed-English identity as it puts the "authenticity" of Englishness into question. In this sense, identity for Tariq is defined by one's sense of belonging to a nation/country, and not by one's skin color.

Abdul pushes this notion of identity to a further degree, to a degree of understanding identity based on the knowledge structure of Descartes "I think, therefore I am". When Sajid asks Abdul if he were a "spaz" (short for spastic) for not wanting to part with his Parka, Abdul responds by asking if Sajid likes it. If so, Abdul says rhetorically, "That's all it matters then, eh?". At the end of the film, Sajid finally parts with the Parka. What this signifies is that we are who we are, and categories like race, ethnicity and class are as loose as garments; they offer us with positions in the realm of social and political relations.

Conclusion: East is East, West is West, and ...

The title *East is East* comes from the first line of Kipling's poem "The Ballad of East and West"⁶:

*OH, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat; But there is
neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand
face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!*

Kipling's stanza shows an attempt to break down the East/West dichotomy. The gesture to deterritorialize the earth leads us to the basic notion of humanity. Gayatri Spivak, in her analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, claims that diaspora is full of affect (334). What is often overlooked within the discussion of identity politics is the notion of love, a basic human sentiment that is not tainted by any form of political agenda. Jacques Lacan in his seminar presentation titled "Love and the Signifier" posits that "love aims at being, namely, at what slips away most in language—being that, a moment later, was going to be, or being that, due precisely to having been, gave rise to surprise" (38). Building his concept on Freud's discussion on the relationship between *eros* (love or being) and the *death instinct*⁷, Lacan highlights here the fact that love is capable of freeing itself from language, in other words from any symbolic arrest, to

⁶ Screenonline.com critic Shanli Chanda claims that the title of the film comes from Kipling's verse based on information provided by Channel Four Television, the company that produced the film. She writes, "O'Donnell turns Rudyard Kipling's adage, 'East is East, West is West, and never the twain shall meet' cleverly on its head, in a hilarious and moving portrayal of the culture clash between a traditionalist Pakistani father George (Om Puri) and his English wife and seven westernised children".

⁷ Explaining the meaning of the evolution of civilization Freud suggests that this evolution "must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 82). Eros, as Freud defines, carries the function of uniting an individual with its family, race and people into a larger community of mankind.

enable human connections based on unity and harmony. There is a need to focus on two strands of thoughts with examples from *East is East* to grasp this concept.

First, as mentioned earlier in the previous section, it is hard to define a middle ground or borderland for the diaspora population. However, by borrowing the questions raised by Saskia Sassen in her essay “Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global”, we can easily locate such a space in Salford, the main setting of *East is East*. Sassen asks, “What are the activities that distinguish borderlands? How are their contents produced?”. The street and the old Victorian canal in the movie seem to be spaces of transcultural and hybrid activities. Compare the streets in Salford to the ones in Bradford—the Pakistan in England, it is not difficult to envision that it is indeed these cultural exchanges on the street that mark a border not as a separating tool among people but a space for culture (re)production and a space that is free of racial and class differences. The street becomes what Appadurai calls in Deleuze and Guattari’s term, a *rhizome*. Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as “an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined sole by a circulation of states. What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality but also to the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics ... all manner of becomings” (21). The street in *East is East* is a hybrid space, which embodies such a system. This space is constituted by both order and disorder, where new cultural forms spark from entropic collisions of cultural exchange. Racism within this space is not only ridiculed, but deliberately ignored by all the characters, except Mr. Moorhouse. Every non-Pakistani, in the community seems friendly to the Khan’s family. Communal harmony is portrayed at several instances, one of which is when George drags and beats Maneer along the street after Tariq smashes the wedding accessories, neighbors look on, eager to intervene but not knowing how to. Even though the scene is one of violence, a strong sense of communal affect is present. The most poignant example is none other than the friendship between Sajid and Earnest. In the section when Earnest and Sajid talk about Mr. Moorhouse and George, the interaction is momentarily void of political implications such as race; it reveals how similar the two families can be in terms of problems in daily life and events.

Second, the exemplar of love can also be located among the Khans. One example is mentioned earlier in the previous section on the relationship between Abdul and Sajid. George, at the end of the film proves to the audience that he is also a man of feelings when he finally responds with “Waalacum-salaam,” (“Peace be upon you” in Arabic) after Earnest’s persistent attempts to greet him. This is one crucial moment of George’s revelation of his ignorance about racial differences, for he has never understood Earnest’s intention to connect by adopting his native language, until the end of the film. Ella seems to be the embodiment of love, as Khan-Din portrays her as the understanding wife, friend and mother.⁸ This courage and sincerity to love is expanded

⁸ Ayub Khan-Din speaks of his parents’ relationship as one that transcends racial and class differences. He says: “the more I looked at my parents and their relationship, especially considering the times they lived in, the more admiration I felt for their bravery. This was not a time of mixed-race marriages, which were barely acceptable in the middle-class salons of London. Anywhere in Britain a white woman with a black man would be considered a prostitute. It must have been very hard for them, the hatred and bigotry they would have faced. But what I

to a greater sphere of the family, and community as we see the story of *East is East* unfolds. As for George, no matter how tyrannical he appears in most part of the film, his most immediate concern is to secure a better life for his children.

Racial and ethnic problems function as an important backdrop for *East is East*; even though throughout the film we do not see much of these problems revolved, we as audience are able to laugh it off together with the characters. Love evolves as the central theme that ties the characters together to present a view of a transcultural environment. Diasporic experience is closely related to the local and yet is beyond the local. In this sense, limiting categories such as class, gender and race are hardly enough to encompass the broad range of experience of the diaspora.

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realized after looking at them from an adult perspective is what an incredibly strong relationship it created" (Khan-Din x).

Özet**Ayub Khan-Din'in *East is East* Adlı Filminde
Kimlik Politikalarını Duygusallık ile Geçersiz Kılma**

Ayub Khan-Din'in 1999 Film Four yapımı olan ve tüm olayların 1971'de geçtiği *East is East* adlı filmi, bir Pakistanlının, Enoch Powell tarafından teşvik edilen ırkçı söylemlerle kuşatılmış Salford'taki (İngiltere) toplumsal ve siyasal çevrede, riskli ve şansa kalmış Pakistanlı kimliği ile çift-ırklı ailesi arasındaki mücadelesini anlatır. Bu makale, öncelikle Anglo-Hintli başkarakter olan George'un dini anlamlar taşıyan "etnik saflık" takıntısının kimlik bunalımının temel kaynağı haline döndüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Daha sonra, George'un çift-ırklı ailesinin çözülmesi üzerine odaklanılarak melezleşme sorunsallarını ve üretkenlik konularını irdelemektedir. Makale Salford'taki sokakları melez ve kültürlerüstü faaliyetlerin birleşimiyle oluşan birbirine dolanmış karmaşık kökler olarak tanımlanmasıyla ve *duygunun* melodramsal ailevi ve ırksal çatışmaların tek çözümü olarak sunulmasıyla son bulur.

Traveling Subjects: Language, Resistance, and Cultural Identities

Lee Wing Hin

1. Introduction

The convenience and efficiency of global travels have promoted recent works on diasporic, migrant, and homebound populations in a variety of fields including queer, migration, and postcolonial studies (see Eng 2001; Gilroy 2005; Luibhéid and Cantú 2005). This project is part of a collection of my own reflections as well as academic dialogues about multi-locational subjects. In the first half of the study, I draw on autobiographical narratives as a *queer* and *Chinese* traveling subject to highlight ways in which identity categories are highly bounded by languages and cultures. When identities travel and are continually transplanted in multiple locations, their meanings and implications are repeatedly destabilized and revised. Local histories, stories, and languages often dress identities in unanticipated assumptions and definitions. At the same time, traveling subjects – like myself – can use transnational experiences to develop strategies to resist stereotypes inherent in many existing identity markers and boundaries.

Using the Toronto Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement in the past few years as a case study in the second half of this investigation, I navigate away from traveling subjectivities towards ways in which identities are malleable and can be manipulated. Evoking singular, universal, and timeless notions of Chinese authenticity, opponents to same-sex marriage in Canada constructed boundaries of “Chinese-ness” to articulate specific understandings of heterosexuality, Christianity, and Western morality. While limitations and existing narratives of identities can be especially harmful to communities who depend on them for representation and survival, I contend that locations, cultures, languages, and these very limitations can be manipulated to become strategies for resistance, visibility, and political gains.

2. Traveling Subjects and Subjectivities

In diasporic and postcolonial studies, central notions such as “diaspora” “displacement” and “migration” emphasize movements of bodies from certain locations to others, bringing with them local histories, legacies, and cultural values. Race scholars like Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall use concepts such as “hybridity” to help articulate immigrant identities as a fusion of souvenirs and memories from the homeland, as well as local customs and values of the adopted territories (see Bhabha 1996; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1991; 1996; 1997). Rather than focusing on linear transitions from one location to another and the subjects’ subsequent immigrant identities, in this section I discuss the multiple subjectivities of multi-locational traveling subjects.

My notion of a traveling subject resembles the gay male Filipino *transmigrants* in works by queer studies scholar Martin F. Manalansan IV (Manalansan 2000; 2001; 2004; 2005). Manalansan describes his subjects as *transmigrants*, and not immigrants or migrants, in the United States, because of their “multi-stranded relationships” with both

their adopted nations and places of origin (“Diasporic Deviants/Divas” 184). Rather than experiencing a “permanent rupture” from their homeland or “total subservience to the hegemonic practices of the adopted nation”, Manalansan’s transmigrants “continually create, maintain, and transform circuits of articulation and exchange of ideas, memories, objects, people, and technologies” (“Diasporic Deviants/Divas” 184; “Biyuti in Everyday Life” 160). Through modern communication and traveling technologies, transmigrants expose permeability of geographically distant national borders to allow expansive cross-national and diasporic analyses of rituals and cultures (“Diasporic Deviants/Divas” 185).

Yet, unlike Manalansan’s transmigrants whose experiences rely largely on their memories of families and friends and nostalgic recounting of religious, sexual, and social experiences in their homeland, a traveling subject understands her identities and experiences based on constant travels to and from her place(s) of origins. As a result, a traveling subject is in close touch with the contemporary realities of two or more societies simultaneously. While many of Manalansan’s subjects call the United States home, a traveling subject is hesitant to identify her adopted nation(s) as her home base(s). In other words, a traveling subject’s experiences are in direct opposition to the traditional narrative of migration as resulting in “withering ties to home countries, nor [do they] presuppose a unilinear process of assimilation” (Luibhéid and Cantú xxii).

Rather, borrowing from Nigel Rapport’s and Andrew Dawson’s studies on migratory identities, a traveling subject is not only “at home in movement, but that movement can be [her] very own home” (Rapport and Dawson 27). As global traveling becomes increasingly convenient, accessible, and efficient, this notion of an ever-mobile traveling subject is beyond simply a theoretical alternative to existing subjectivities in migration and diasporic studies. Traveling subjects are international students, business expatriates, “snow-birds,”¹ and any person who does not reside in a permanent location where she calls “home”.

My introduction of “traveling subjects” in a growing collection of personal accounts and theoretical studies of multi-locational subjects is inspired by philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s notion of “nomadic subjectivity”. In *Metamorphoses* (2002), Braidotti encourages a shift from thinking of identities and being as “who we are” to a “kind of hybrid mix we are in the process of becoming” (2). According to Braidotti, all subjects are “in a permanent process of transition, hybridization, and nomadization”, and thus are “decentred and multi-layered” (2). To illustrate accounts of their lives and identities, she believes that every individual must develop “a figuration” that is “a politically informed map that outlines our own situated perspectives” (2). She warns that rather than “figurative ways of thinking”, figurations are “highly specific geo-political and historical locations” (3). Through this “cartographic gesture,” Braidotti states that subjects can achieve a “nomadic subjectivity” that provides accounts of space and time “in terms of power as restrictive but also as empowering or affirmative” (2). Central to Braidotti’s notion of a nomadic subjectivity is the recognition of power relations, histories, and meanings present in various locations and moments in time. At the same

¹ In North America, “snow-birds” is a popular term that refers to persons who split their time between summer residences in the northern part of the continent (Canada or northern United States) and winter homes in relatively warmer climates.

time, an account of nomadic subjectivity must also acknowledge that such power dynamics, histories, and meanings are not constant and universal, but are contingent on *interactions* between individual subjects and the specific place and time.

In this first part of the study, I adopt Braidotti's theoretical framework of a nomadic subject and subjectivities in its most literal form to become a traveling subject. Similar to Braidotti's nomadic subject who draws "politically informed map[s]" of her "situated perspectives", a traveling subject charts literal maps of her travels and develops identities and personal narratives contingent on her geographic locations (2). Like Braidotti's figurations, these identity categories and narratives reveal the power relations present in the interactions between the subject and her specific locations at particular historical moments. In other words, as a traveling subject with multiple identities navigates geographic boundaries, her mobility and transnational experiences highlight ways in which meanings of identity are heavily contingent on the simultaneously evolving local languages, cultures, and histories within those borders.

In the next section, I use autobiographical narratives to illustrate how nomadic subjectivities of a traveling subject – like myself – affect her own articulations of identities and how locals read her in various locations. At the same time, my experiences demonstrate that while cross-national transplanation of identity categories are necessary and often inevitable, local languages and cultures intimately shape existing understandings of identities. Consequently, the shifting of languages and cultures during my travels help illuminate the at once empowering and limiting nature of Western conceptions of identity categories.

2.2. Being *queer* in Hong Kong

After spending most of my life in Hong Kong, in 2000 I moved to Ontario, Canada to pursue my university education. Six and a half years later, I now live in Toronto and travel to Shanghai and Hong Kong every year to visit my expatriate parents and relatives. My parents were both born and raised in Hong Kong and moved to Shanghai approximately ten years ago. During my adolescence, I attended an Anglican, single-sex girls' secondary school. At around the age of 15 I began to develop crushes on other women and began to identify as "lesbian" both to myself and my friends. After six years of research and education in sexuality studies and queer theory and several emotional relationships with both women and men later, I find myself identifying most with the sexual identity and description "queer".

At 20 years old, a year and a half after my move from Hong Kong to Canada, I came out to my parents as a "women-loving woman" during one of my yearly family visits. At the same time as I was growing more comfortable with the identity "queer", my parents and I discussed queerness extensively in the contexts of both my academic studies and personal experiences. In almost all instances, I insist upon my identity as "queer", and not "nui tongzhi"² ("female homosexual" in Cantonese), "TBG" (meaning "tomboy girl," a local reference to femme lesbian), or "seung sing luen" ("bisexual" in

² "Tongzhi" popularly mean "homosexual" among both the heterosexual and non-heterosexual populations in Hong Kong. See Travis S.K. Kong's "The Seduction of the Golden Boy: The Body Politics of Hong Kong Gay Men" (2002).

Cantonese). I strategically choose the label “queer” in English to distinguish myself from stereotypical portrayals of women-loving women in Hong Kong popular culture.

In Hong Kong media, popular culture, and non-heterosexual communities, *nui tongzhi* is an exclusively homosexual identity. In the popular discourse, *nui tongzhi*, like all women, are born heterosexual and only later “convert” to homosexuality. Their “conversion” is often explained as results of traumatic experiences of sexual abuse, influences by their friends or classmates in their single-sex primary or secondary schools, or a combination of both.³ Mainstream Hong Kong culture often portrays young *nui tongzhi* as inhabiting an adolescent phase, from which most teenage girls would naturally depart upon graduation from the single-sex academic environment.

In this discourse, only a minority of teenage girls who claim to be *nui tongzhi* remain attracted to women as adults, and they are usually visibly distinguishable from “normal” heterosexual women with stereotypical masculine demeanor, personalities, and aesthetics. They are identified as “TB” (meaning “tomboys”). TBs are stereotypically described to be exclusively attracted to women, repelled by men, and take the “masculine” role of actively seeking female partners and sexual gratification.⁴ In popular culture, TBs are only attracted to stereotypically feminine women, who are labeled “TBG.”

In popular culture, TBGs are rarely considered “true” *nui tongzhi* who have been attracted to women at a very young age. Rather, they are believed to be “converted” by TBs’ masculine charm. Also, TBGs are not popularly seen as *nui tongzhi* because they are believed to remain attracted to men, thus they are often implicitly described to be *seung sing luen* (Cantonese for bisexual). Yet similar to the popular North American stereotype of bisexuals as untrustworthy, indecisive, and ultimately a temporary identity prior to lifelong committed heterosexuality or homosexuality, TBGs are expected eventually to abandon their same-sex desires and marry biological “real” men. Among popular beliefs, while all women are born heterosexual, TBs’ desire to become men and hence their attraction to women is often too overpowering to harbour cross-sex desires. On the contrary, TBGs’ attraction to women are believed to be a fleeting reaction to single-sex environment and/or romantic pursuits by TBs. Consequently in the mainstream discourse in Hong Kong, to claim a *nui tongzhi* identity is at once perceived as a sexual and gender identity that bears significant implications on one’s “authenticity” as a female homosexual.

Since the word *queer* does not exist in the Cantonese dialect (unlike *gei*, a direct phonetic translation of “gay”), I escape from the aforementioned Hong Kong stereotypes of women-loving women deep-seeded in the Cantonese identity *nui tongzhi* through adopting the English identity of “queer.”⁵ Also by not identifying as either TB

³ Single-sex primary and secondary schools are very common in Hong Kong, with most of them started by foreign missionaries during the late 19th to mid-20th century.

⁴ Other descriptions of TBs often include short-hair, loose men’s clothing, careers in male-dominated professions, deep voice, and active roles in sexual activities.

⁵ In recent years, several scholars such as Travis S.K. Kong from Hong Kong and Liu Jen-peng and Ding Naifei from Taiwan explored queer theory in their published academic works (see Kong 2002; Liu and Ding 2005;). Yet *queer* as a sexual identity distinct from “homosexual” and “gay” remains understudied in the academy in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Since homosexuality remain criminalized and all education institutions are state-owned, little to no known work on “queer

or TBG, I do not claim any fixed gender identity and at the same time try to resist this socially entrenched gender dichotomy. Although my parents may espouse some of Hong Kong's stereotypes of women-loving women, my insistence on *queer* has helped defend me against many local heterosexist, homophobic, and often biphobic images of women.

Moreover since *queer* is new to my Cantonese-speaking family, the history of *queer* in the West is missing. That is, the Western narrative of *queer* initially as a derogatory term that was later reclaimed by queer activists, and currently popularly commodified becomes absent in the context of my Hong Kong family (see Luibheid and Cantu 2005; Patton 1994; Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 2000; Warner 1994). Consequently, I have introduced the category of *queer* to my family as a strategy to oppose local stereotypes, while at the same time avoid *queer*'s complex legacy of degradation, triumph, and commodification in the West.

Yet by transplanting the English word *queer* to describe my sexual identity as a traveling subject from Hong Kong, my family has understood my declaration of queerness as one of whiteness. Mainstream Hong Kong culture shares the popular belief among many non-white nations that same-sex desires, especially those belonging to traveling subjects, are not indigenous to the local communities. Rather, borrowing the argument from race scholar Ian Barnard, these local communities enact "a process of displacement where homosexuality is foreign to [native] people" and believe that native queers "have been contaminated and co-opted by imperialist white culture" (Barnard 33).⁶ Like South Africa, Barnard's subject of study, Hong Kong is also a previously colonized territory that often claims negative Western moral influences over traditional Chinese ethics. Echoing this local sentiment, my mother has long insisted that my queerness is the product of lax Western sexual morals that also tolerate, if not encourage, promiscuity, divorce, pre-marital sex, and non-marital cohabitation.

Throughout the past few years, introductions to my white male partners while insistence on a *queer* identity further confirm my mother's belief of intimate connections between whiteness and queerness. In other words, it seems to my mother that what is queer in otherwise seemingly heterosexual relationships is that all such cross-sex relationships are set in a predominantly white Canada. Moreover, the English identity category of *queer* that is untranslatable into Cantonese helps reinforce my mother's belief that since the identity *queer* is present only in the English language, queerness exists only in white cultures. Thus according to her, same-sex desires are mostly present only among Hong Kong persons who have contacts with the West.

In *Queer Diasporas*, Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler write that "[s]exuality is intimately and immediately felt, but publicly and internationally described and mediated" (2). They continue to state that "[s]exuality is not only not

theory" is published from Mainland China (a term referring to the People's Republic of China excluding Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau).

⁶ Also see William J. Spurlin, "Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies: Emerging 'Queer' Identities and Culture in South Africa"; Kendall Thomas' "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing': Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity"; Martin F. Manalansan IV, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma."

essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; sexuality is on the move” (2). Likened the sexualities of all traveling subjects, my “on-the-move” sexuality, though “intimately and immediately felt,” relies on identity categories that are “publicly and internationally described and mediated”. Yet my experiences demonstrate that cross-national mediations require transplantation of language and identity categories that inevitably leave specific histories and legacies behind in their places of origin.

At the same time, interactions among traveling subjects, the destinations’ cultures, and the subjects’ adopted identities encourage “intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire [to] take place” (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 3). As I strategically adopt the English identity *queer* in a Cantonese-speaking environment, I am able to uncover, what Bradotti calls, “the creative and affirmative potential” of nomadic subjectivity (5). This subjectivity allows me to claim *queerness* independent of its violent and complex history in Western narratives, and simultaneously resist local stereotypes of same-sex desires. However, due to Hong Kong’s precarious past and present relations with the West, *queer*’s very introduction into Hong Kong culture prompts *queerness* to take on racialized implications mostly alien to Western queer narratives. While my sexual identity and forms of sexual expressions have changed very little throughout the years of my travels, the familial, racial, and political meanings and implications of my sexual identity *and* my body have and continue to be destabilized and revised as I navigate national, linguistic, and cultural borders.

2.3. Being *Chinese* in Canada

While my sexuality is a site of contestation and disruption during my travels to Hong Kong, I find my racial identification in Canada similarly challenging. In Canada, I am often asked whether I am *Chinese*, and I would say “Yes and no. I’m not from China, but I’m from Hong Kong”. After consulting friends of various generations who also travel between Canada and Hong Kong, I discover a similar resistance to adopting the racial identity *Chinese*, and a knee-jerk reaction against Hong Kong’s geographic and political inclusion into China. Like cultural studies scholar Yukiko Hanawa’s “Asia”, I contend that *Chinese* is a “deceptively straightforward identifier” (42). According to Hanawa, “‘Asia’ is a discursive field that has emerged in a historical and political context of centuries of violent conflicts” (42). At the same time, Hanawa insists that “the very politics of the referential site (Asia) is not outside the racial discourse of the Other, even as (or particularly because) the articulation of Asia is supposed to deliver us from the ideology of race through self-representation of our racial otherness” (44).

Hanawa’s framework is correct to indicate that the meanings of *Chinese*, like *Asia*, are products of decades of political and historical discourses. Also she is accurate to argue that articulations and meanings of racial identities such as *Chinese* in both the West and China are intricately tied to Western discourses of the Chinese as the Other. Yet Hong Kong population’s popular choice of the Cantonese equivalent of the identity “Hong Kong-ese” over *Chinese* in self-identification is a proof that many Hong Kong-ese distinguish themselves – actively or inadvertently- from both the previous colonial identity of British nationals and the present status as citizens of People’s Republic of China (PRC). In other words, to describe Hong Kong-ese as *Chinese* oversimplifies and

glosses over Hong Kong residents' turbulent and ambiguous relationship with the Chinese identity during their colonial past and their post-colonial present.⁷

During the ninety-nine years of British colonial rule over Hong Kong, and specifically in the half a century after the Second World War, the Hong Kong economy progressed from a reliance on manual labour to a nearly total dependence on service industries, thanks to "Britain's colonialism and de-colonizing strategies of nonintervention" (Kong 40). In the early years of British governance, Hong Kong's primary industries were fisheries and agriculture. The sixties and seventies brought the peak in factory manufacturing in Hong Kong. In the nineteen nineties, Hong Kong became largely dependent on tertiary businesses of finances, tourism, and cargo transportation and, as "the capital of freewheeling capital," was one of the largest and fastest booming economies in the world (Kong 40).

In the two decades prior to the handover in 1997, while the British government continued to appoint governors as the head politician in the colony, universal suffrage was introduced to Hong Kong for elections of regional representatives into the Legislative Council, equivalent to the parliament in the British political system. Economic prosperity coupled with a higher degree of political autonomy created a relatively peaceful and cordial relationship between the British government and the local Hong Kong population until the handover in 1997. This rather tranquil colonial relationship between Hong Kong and Britain is significantly different from political and social turmoil in other colonial territories, such as India, Nigeria, and South Africa, as documented extensively in the past decades of post-colonial studies (See Appiah 1992; McClintock 1994; Nzegwu 1999; Spivak 1988; 1996; Stoler 1995; 2000).

At the same time, Hong Kong residents and Mainland China as well as the Community Chinese government shared a turbulent and sometimes hostile relationship. Under British colonial education and glorification of Western democracy as well as Western bodies, Hong Kong society has always been suspicious of the Chinese Communist authority, especially the national military unit – the Chinese Liberation Army. This brewing anxiety and mistrust peaked during the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, where the Chinese Liberation Army (CLA) and police officers violently suppressed protests by Mainland students and workers in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989. In several instances both prior to and after the suppression, more than one million Hong Kong residents, more than one-sixth of Hong Kong's population at the time, participated in demonstrations and fundraising efforts to support anti-government rallies, and at the same time condemn violent tactics of the Communist government and the CLA. Every year since 1989, Hong Kong has hosted the largest vigils and demonstrations in the world to commemorate and condemn the massacre.⁸ In the early to mid-1990s the Tiananmen Massacre fuelled existing fears and uncertainties

⁷ My use of "post-colonial" parallels Kandice Chuh's and Karen Shimakawa's use of the term where the "'post' of postcolonialism marks not a discrete end to colonialism but instead signals a configuration of global relations characterized by both continuities with and disjunctures from colonialism's practices" (Chuh and Shimakawa 5).

⁸ Hong Kong is only one of two Chinese locations where commemoration activities are allowed by the Community government (the other is the former Portuguese colony of Macau).

among Hong Kong residents about their political future, and prompted large scale emigrations abroad.⁹

Ironically since the handover in 1997, Hong Kong's colonial history and influence have become extremely apparent in the face of Chinese Communist rule. While there remains large scale yearly demonstrations and vigils to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, Hong Kong residents also stage frequent large-scale political demonstrations against the local Hong Kong administration and the central Communist government in Beijing. The reasons for these annual rallies include recent economic downturn, high unemployment rate, multiple failed education reforms, censorship on freedom of speech, religion, and publication, and the federal appointments, rather than democratic elections, of the Chief Executives of Hong Kong.¹⁰ Often highlighted in these rallies and local political debates are comparisons between high employment rate, prosperity, and economic non-intervention during the colonial era and economic depression, unemployment, and political suppression of freedoms under Communist rule.

Although the colonial and post-colonial history of Hong Kong is too complex to illustrate in great detail in this study, the aforementioned portraits of Hong Kong prior to and after the handover help explain clearly the suspicious and sometimes hostile relations between Hong Kong and Mainland China.¹¹ As results of decades of colonial rule and oppositions to PRC's domestic policies, such anxieties among the Hong Kong population help account for their hesitancy to identify as *Chinese*, and not Hong Kongese. For an individual from Hong Kong like myself, transnational travels especially highlight the historical, political, and social complications in a *Chinese* identity.

Unlike many migrants who negotiate their racial identities through relations with memories and artifacts from their homelands, a traveling subject must confront immediate and sometimes drastic changes in familiar places. A traveling subject from Hong Kong is a dramatic example of such realities. As Hong Kong transitions from a colony to become part of the PRC, the population's long-standing ambivalent tolerance for Britain quickly transforms to an intra-national precarious relationship with its "motherland" China. A traveling subject, like myself, frequently witnesses such changes firsthand and tries to ensure that the present ever changing realities are reflected in cross-national discourses of Hong Kong and Chinese societies. While confronting contemporary situations in multiple societies and the traditional migration narratives as a single permanent rupture from the homeland, a nomadic subject traveling between

⁹ According to statistics compiled by the Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong, about 30,000 Hong Kong residents emigrated annually to Canada from 1991 to 1996. A majority settled in the large city centers of Vancouver and Toronto. During that time, Hong Kong-to-Canada immigration comprised over half of all Hong Kong emigration and about 20 percent of the total number of Canadian immigrants.

¹⁰ Chief Executives answer directly to the Beijing administration and are expected to pay annual visits to Beijing to report on Hong Kong's social, economic, and political conditions. Since the handover, both Chief Executives Tung Chee-wah (1997-2004) and Donald Tseng (2004-present) have not been well-received by the public. It is widely believed that Tung left the position before the end of his term due to heavy pressure from both the Hong Kong public and the central government.

Western and non-Western nations is able to guard against Western hegemonic conceptions of the non-Western world as contained in static historical time-frame (see Hall 1996). In the specific context of my traveling experiences to Hong Kong, to reject a overly simplified and falsely homogenized racial category of *Chinese* in a predominantly White society of Canada is one way to problematize strategically the erasure of Hong Kong's colonial past and post-colonial present. Through continually transporting hidden histories and local stories overseas, a traveling subject can consolidate a Hong Kong identity that is different from yet intimately related to and affected by the racial category *Chinese*.

While racial identities such as *Chinese* may be problematic to many persons from Hong Kong, it is crucial also to explore why such identities remain popular despite enduring controversies. Manalansan's framework of "the contrasting realities of erasure and preservation" in his investigations of Filipino immigrants in America is useful in our discussion (167). According to Manalansan, many Filipino immigrants perform particular "quotidian tasks" such as prayer, dinner, chores, and leisure collectively or privately to erase complex histories of displacement and difficulties living in the United States. Yet at the same time Manalansan argues that such tasks aim to remind his subjects of their religious, social, and/or family lives back in the Philippines. As a result, through preserving memories and rituals from their places of origin, the immigrants simultaneously erase their daily difficulties in America through mundane events (167).

Similarly for many traveling subjects from Hong Kong who identify as *Chinese* overseas while they may not do so in Cantonese in their place of origin, such identification may also be explained as acts of erasure and preservation. By claiming a seemingly unified and singular Chinese identity in English, a traveling subject renders invisible and erases the volatile and sometimes violent relationships among Hong Kong, Britain, and Mainland China. At the same time, by claiming to be *Chinese*, she preserves her membership as part of the *Chinese* visible minority population overseas. Like Manalansan's subjects who seek solidarity as Filipino minorities who often endure social and economic difficulties in America, a traveling subject from Hong Kong may claim a *Chinese* identity to heighten the visibility of a minority population of Chinese heritage that is already marginalized through under-represented and racism. Thus in nations such as Canada that boast multiculturalism and equal opportunity policies, it remains necessary for a traveling subject to confront, what Stuart Hall calls, "global postmodern" - white cultural domination - and "negotiate, incorporate, and reflect (partly) the differences it was trying to overcome" ("The Local and the Global" 181-82). In other words, for all the local histories, stories, and particularities lost in the English category of *Chinese*, the communities gain visibility and solidarity overseas.

3. Case Study: Chinese Opposition in the Canadian Same-sex Marriage Debate, 2002-5

To demonstrate further the complexities as well as strategic responses to existing borders and implications of identity categories, I devote this section to study some arguments by Chinese Canadians in opposition to same-sex marriage legislations in

Canada between 2002-2005.¹² I intend for this investigation to serve as an informative window into how seemingly limiting identity categories and their boundaries may not be necessarily harmful to racial communities. The first section of this study shows how the languages of and cultural assumptions behind identity categories can restrict and sometimes misrepresent a traveling subject's sexual, racial, and historical backgrounds in cross-national contexts. This following study shifts from traveling subjectivities to focus on the malleability of boundaries of identity categories. While I demonstrate earlier that articulations of identities suffer from cultural and linguistic limitations, this case study emphasizes how diasporic and migrant subjects self-consciously use, manipulate, and reshape these same sexual and racial assumptions and limitations to their political and social advantages.

3.1. Background

In the past five years, the legalization of same-sex marriage has sparked controversial nationwide debates in Canada. Various religious and ethnic minority groups such as the Toronto Chinese community have participated in this discussion both in favour of and in opposition to the redefinition of marriage as "a man and a woman". By looking at Toronto Chinese arguments regarding same-sex marriage legislation in *Sing Tao Daily (Eastern Canada Edition)* and *Ming Pao Daily (Eastern Canada Edition)*¹³ between 2002 and 2005, I hope to illustrate the ways in which many Chinese opponents to homosexuality and same-sex marriage evoked multiculturalism, nationalist, and religious arguments to construct and reshape boundaries of the Chinese identity.

Although Chinese immigrants in Canada had engaged in various political activities since their arrival in Canada in the late nineteenth century, their participation in the recent same-sex marriage debate is one of the population's largest and most publicized political efforts.¹⁴ In July 2002, an Ontario Superior Court Justice ruled that prohibiting same-sex couples to marry under the law was unconstitutional and violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. This ruling fueled an existing debate on the legality and moral validity of "same-sex marriage". Legal debates in the federal government ended on 28 July 2005 when the Liberal Party's Bill C-38, titled "Law on Civil Marriage," passed a final reading in the House of Commons. At present, same-sex marriages are legal and have taken place in all provinces and territories in Canada.

From July 2002 to June 2005, the Toronto Chinese community organized various highly visible political, Christian, and ecumenical events in opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage.¹⁵ In June 2004 and 2005, the Toronto Chinese

¹² This investigation is by no means representative of all Chinese Canadians' view on same-sex marriage, nor does it include all arguments against same-sex marriage made by Chinese Canadian in the last few years.

¹³ Heretofore referred to as *Sing Tao* and *Ming Pao*. All newspaper articles were published in Chinese and all cited reports are of my translation.

¹⁴ For example, the Chinese Canadian communities campaigned for the repeal of the Canada Immigration Act in 1967 and organized post-Tiananmen Square Massacre rallies in Toronto in 1989.

¹⁵ While the Chinese community also participated in groups such as Asian Canadians for Equal Marriage (ACFEM) and Religious Coalition for Equal Marriage that were in favour of same-sex

Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship devoted two Sundays to the annual “Pray for Canada Day” in front of Toronto City Hall. The Fellowship represented more than 150 evangelical Protestant churches in the Greater Toronto region, and it invited evangelical churches representing multiple cultural communities to pray for the defeat of the legal redefinition of “marriage” from “a man and a woman” to “two persons” (“5000 Christians”). The Fellowship also launched anti-same-sex marriage letter-writing campaigns among the Chinese communities in shopping malls and evangelical Christian churches asking Chinese-Canadians to convince their local Members of Parliaments to vote against the change in the “traditional” definition of “marriage” (“30,000 Signatures”). On 9 April 2005, the Fellowship along with various Chinese Catholic churches formed a marching team of more than 1,000 in the “Save Marriage Rally” in Ottawa, the largest anti-same-sex marriage demonstration in Canada to date (“80 Different”).

As was evident in these events, Toronto Chinese anti-same sex marriage voices mainly emerged from conservative religious Chinese communities, in particular the evangelical Protestant community. During this period, conservative Christian voices dominated the print media coverage of Chinese Canadian reactions to same-sex marriage politics in the two top-selling Chinese newspapers in Toronto, *Ming Pao* and *Sing Tao*.¹⁶ In this investigation, I explore the Toronto Chinese anti-same-sex movement’s public discourse as reported in *Ming Pao* and *Sing Tao* from 2002 to 2005, and reveal how opponents to same-sex marriage consolidated their position through strategic alignments between two seemingly disparate notions: authentic “Chinese-ness” and conservative Christian morality.¹⁷

3.2. Chinese Authenticity

In one of the earliest reports on the Toronto Chinese immigrant community’s views on the same-sex marriage debate on 11 June 2003, a *Sing Tao* reporter interviewed Cheung Kwai Ting, a Hong Kong immigrant and “devoted mother of two”. When asked about her opinion on the legalization of same-sex marriage in Toronto, Cheung stated that, “because of my strong Chinese upbringing,” she cannot and will not accept the “new open, Western view on homosexuality and same-sex marriages” (“Ambivalence”). Cheung’s use of Chinese culture as an argument against homosexuality and the legalization of same-sex marriage was shared by many Toronto Chinese opponents of same-sex marriage legislation.

On two occasions, when the media asked Pastor Tse On Kwok, a spokesperson for the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship, to articulate his views on same-sex marriage, he stated that “since Chinese culture values morality and love, Chinese immigrants need to unite to oppose homosexuality and same-sex marriage”. Pastor Tse also declared “[Although] Canada has always prided itself on its protection of rights, same-sex marriage is not simply a social phenomenon that needs to be granted

marriage, the focus of this section concentrates on the anti-same-sex marriage movement within the Chinese community.

¹⁶ By “conservative Christian voices,” I refer to both evangelical and conservative Protestant groups as well as Catholic organizations.

¹⁷ Both newspapers are published in Chinese and I am responsible for the English translations of all referenced contents in this article.

recognition and rights. Rather, it is a social problem that reflects a Canadian community that is disoriented" ("80 Different"; "Legalization"). Cheung's and Tse's references to Chinese culture were echoed by Father Au Siu Leung, the president of the Ottawa Chinese Catholic Community, a close partner of the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship in the anti-same-sex marriage movement. During the "Save Marriage Rally" in Ottawa on 9 April 2005, Father Au encouraged Chinese immigrant families "to join the Community and the anti-homosexual movement to advocate a stronger family values education that is inherent in traditional Chinese culture" ("80 Different").

In using phrases such as "strong Chinese upbringing," "Chinese culture [that] values morality and love," and "traditional Chinese culture" to argue against homosexual behaviours and same-sex marriage, these opponents assumed the existence of an authentic, homogeneous, and universal Chinese culture. Implicit in the interviewees' arguments was the perceived existence of only one Chinese culture – the culture that they know and in which they were brought up – and the belief that this Chinese culture had always run contrary to homosexual desires, behaviours, and same-sex unions. According to these opponents, Chinese morality precludes the existence of Chinese queers. At the same time, since they perceived Chinese morals to be inherently anti-homosexual, Chinese morality also precluded the possible existence of any "true" Chinese person who supported same-sex marriage.

This discourse of a singular and unitary Chinese culture and tradition is grounded in what race and queer scholar Kendall Thomas calls "the jargon of racial authenticity" (119). In Thomas' study of African-American masculinity "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing': Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity" (1997), he argues that authentic "blackness" has always been equated with black masculinity that is necessarily heterosexual and homophobic. To Thomas, "the heteronormative logic that conditions the ascription of 'authentic' black identity" relies "on the repudiation of gay and lesbian sexualities" (120). Departing from "actually existing black lives" that include black queer experiences, he believes that the black heterosexist and homophobic jargon of racial authenticity is in fact an "abstract, etiolated language" that has been "increasingly accompanied by authoritarian effort to impose its normative vision in the name of an imagined unity" (Thomas 124; 129). Thomas argues that such jargon has given rise to "an aggressive, antidemocratic impulse" (129).

Like the discourses of black authenticity depicted by Thomas, articulations of a Chinese culture that is essentially anti-homosexual and anti-same-sex marriage operated on the basis of a "heteronormative logic" that necessarily repudiates gay and lesbian sexualities. These articulations suggest, in other words, that since Chinese cultures, traditions, and values are and have always been anti-homosexual, no authentic Chinese person can be queer or espouse pro-same-sex marriage views. Yet while there is in fact no singular, unchanging black essence, there can be no universal, essential Chinese culture shared by all Chinese persons at all times. Rather, like Thomas' "authentic" black subjects, the Toronto Chinese interviewees attempted to use an "abstract, etiolated language" of authentic "Chinese-ness" in the name of an imagined Chinese essence. This was both "aggressive" and "antidemocratic". That is, by stating that Chinese cultures inherently reject homosexuality and same-sex marriage, the possibility of a

diversity of Chinese opinions on the topic, and hence democracy within the Chinese community, ceases to exist.

In addition to invoking an anti-homosexual Chinese culture, the Toronto Chinese newspapers also conveyed anxieties about the contamination of “Chinese-ness”. While Cheung indicated that acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is a “new open, Western view” that runs contrary to her authentic Chinese upbringing, Pastor Tse pointed to a “disoriented” Canadian community that legitimates and normalizes the “social problem” of homosexuality through same-sex marriage. This recognition and fear of an external, homosexual- and same-sex-marriage friendly culture was most evident in narratives about the younger Chinese generations. In a letter to the editor published in *Ming Pao* on 18 June 2003, Guang Hua Tao states that:

The education of our next generation will suffer immensely as a result of the legalization of same sex unions. Young people know nothing much about world affairs and they tend to think whatever is protected by the law is good and must be promoted. Hence in the not too distant future, Chinese students might be publicly displaying “hip” homosexual behaviour, with their teachers and parents too scared to interfere for fear of being charged with human rights violation.

Guang Hua Tao’s fear of the “popularizing” of homosexuality paralleled another Chinese reader’s worry for the younger generation. In a short response to earlier reports on legalizing same-sex marriage published in *Sing Tao* on 11th June 2003, Mrs. Cheung stated in a letter to the editor that recognition of same-sex marriage would “lead to the popular view that gay adoption of children is natural and unproblematic”. She then asks rhetorically, “What am I supposed to tell my Chinese children?” (Cheung).

The fear of contaminating the minds of young Chinese through support of same-sex marriage reinforced the assumption that authentic Chinese-ness and queerness are mutually exclusive. As articulated in the last section, many post-colonial and critical race studies theorists have explored the argument that since many non-white populations believe queerness had not and cannot exist in their indigenous cultures, queer non-white bodies must be products of white contamination and co-option. In addition, traveling and/or diasporic subjects – like myself – often inadvertently perpetuate such perceptions of queerness as a racialized marker through strategically adopting *queer* identities to resist culturally specific stereotypes and labels of same-sex desires, such as *nui tongzhi* and TB (see Section 2.2).

Yet in declaring racial and cultural solidarity on behalf of all Chinese members in the diasporic community, anti-same sex marriage opponents also evoked Christian anti-gay “traditional” marriage discourses. As indicated earlier, the majority of Toronto Chinese who participated in the public anti-same-sex marriage debate were openly religious, and most of these activists belonged to evangelical Protestant congregations. On 28 January 2005, the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship issued a bilingual declaration that was published in all four Toronto Chinese newspapers. In the declaration, the Fellowship wrote that “[as] Christians, we know that changing the tradition of marriage in the manner proposed by the Federal Government goes against the intention of God’s creation - and it runs counter to the moral traditions deeply held by Chinese and people from other ethnic backgrounds”. The Declaration concluded by welcoming “Christians from all denominations, and those who endorse our declaration,

to join us in our endeavour to defend traditional marriage as between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all other" (Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship).

As well as sharing a "traditional" definition of marriage, Toronto Chinese Christian groups and mainstream, largely white evangelical organizations in Toronto supported each other's anti-same-sex marriage and anti-homosexuality events. On 9 April 2005, more than 1,000 Toronto Chinese Protestants and Catholics participated in the mainstream evangelical-dominated "Save Marriage Rally" in Ottawa. At the same time, non-Chinese evangelicals comprised approximately one-fifth of the two "Pray for Canada" days organized by the Toronto Chinese Evangelical Ministerial Fellowship in 2004 and 2005 (see "10,000 Rally"; "5,000 Christians").

According to the Chinese anti-homosexuality and anti-same-sex marriage discourse, while to be Chinese is not necessarily to be Christian, the movement's parallel evocation of Chinese and Christian identities demonstrate that authentic Chinese morality and conservative Christian sexual values, and thus Chinese and Christian identities, are compatible and mutually affirming.

The movement's alignments of Chinese and conservative Christian communities were by no means accidental. Rather, such religious markers of the boundaries of Chinese identity were highly strategic. As articulated earlier, the Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement attributed same-sex desires and unions to be parts of Western culture that are not indigenous to the "pure" Chinese culture, and thus need to be combated. Yet nowhere in the movement was the mention of Christianity as historically alien to Chinese societies and culture. While there is little historical or contemporary evidence of homosexual contamination originating from Western cultures, the presence of Christianity within Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese cultures is owed extensively to European colonialists who systemically introduced Christianity through welfare programmes, education institutions, and state policies in the past two centuries. Accounting for such paradox is essential to understand the strategies with which these diasporic communities' construct their racial identity.

In *Question of Cultural Identity* (1996), Stuart Hall writes, "[every] identity has at its 'margin,' an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure" ("Introduction" 5). Borrowing Hall's vocabulary, earlier stated essentialist arguments of Chinese authenticity seem to marginalize any Chinese person who disrupts the culture's "united" and "internally homogeneous" stance against values foreign to Chinese culture. That is, the Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement claims that pure "Chinese-ness" rejects any Chinese subject who is influenced – hence contaminated – by the West. However, the movement's alignment with the Canadian and largely white conservative Christian communities proved the Chinese opponents to be selective in their anti-Western arguments. In claiming partnership with an existing, powerful, and mostly white conservative religious communities and participating in ongoing religious activities against same-sex marriage, the Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement helped secure a highly visible position for the Chinese community in a Canadian nation that prides itself in multicultural and religious tolerance.

3.3. “Chinese Votes Count in Next Election!”

Such strategic articulation of a pro-Christian and anti-homosexual Chinese identity was especially highlighted on a banner with the catch phrase “Chinese Votes Count in Next Election!”. This banner was present in almost all anti-same-sex and anti-homosexual gatherings organized by the Toronto Chinese community, most of them explicit Christian events. In claiming that “Chinese Votes Count in Next Election!” opponents of same-sex marriage implicitly invoked notions of Chinese authenticity and compulsory Chinese heterosexuality. That is, since the participants perceived authentic Chinese persons to be heterosexuals and Chinese culture necessarily to reject same-sex marriage, they warn that political alienation of Chinese supporters of “tradition” definition of marriage would inevitably result in a loss of support from an *entire* racial and cultural community.

This slogan’s racial reference in almost exclusively religious events identified the same-sex marriage debate as an issue of racial and religious inclusion. In demonstrating on behalf of a perceived culturally and religiously homogeneous Chinese population, “Chinese Votes Count in Next Election!” signals a racial and religious community’s call for political recognition as full and legitimate Canadian citizens in a democratic system. By framing voting preferences as culturally and religiously marked, this slogan also aims to remind the government, competing political parties, and the public of a multicultural Canada. The phrase directly calls attention to the existence of a politically influential and active Chinese population and the urgent political roles that racial and religious minorities play in a nation that champions multiculturalism.

In this study of Chinese movements against recognition of same-sex marriage in Canada in the last few years, the discourse demonstrated clearly the instability of boundaries of identity categories. Despite their present political grievances and turbulent histories, many communities from various geographic locations of Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan congregated to claim a seemingly unified *Chinese* identity. In this debate, the anti-same-sex marriage movement drew the battle line along claims of racial authenticity articulated through sexuality, religion, and national multiculturalism policies. Opponents of the marriage legislation had strategically reshaped meanings of a Chinese identity to become a code for a singular, pure, and timeless “Chinese-ness” that is at once heterosexual and conservative Christian. In other words, a *Chinese* identity in this political contest is a racial category and, at the same time, a sexual and often religious identification.

4. Concluding Remarks

Diasporic and postcolonial studies have always contended that migratory identities are constructed off feelings of nostalgia, displacement, and memories of the homeland. Yet transnational movements are rarely linear and the search for familiarity is always complex. Introductions of a traveling subject, nomadic subjectivities, and my personal narratives as I travel between Canada, Hong Kong, and Mainland China help demonstrate how racial, cultural, and sexual identities are products of multiple and ongoing processes of negotiations, contestation, and resistance. I argue that existing identity categories are not only unstable and contingent, they interact intimately with local languages, culture, and histories. Using the examples of transplanation of *queer* and *Chinese* identities in Hong Kong and Canada respectively, it becomes apparent that

when one glosses over complications of existing categories and their boundaries, culturally- and geographically specific histories, stories, and realities are often erased and forgotten.

While existing boundaries of identity categories can be limiting and detrimental to representations of racial and sexual communities, the case study on Chinese opposition to same-sex marriage legislations in Toronto, Canada in the last few years reveal how these borders also can be manipulated to serve specific social and political agendas. In the Toronto Chinese anti-same-sex marriage movement, proponents of the “traditional” cross-sex definition of marriage imagined a singular and heterosexual Chinese identity and culture articulated through discourses of Chinese authenticity and evangelical Christian morality. At the same time, the movement evoked a nationalist image of a multicultural Canada and the integral political positions of racial minorities in the process of democracy.

However, whether one relies on individual or collective movements to reshape systems of identity representation, responsibilities to upset identity boundaries still largely rest on shoulders of the marginalized. Hence, it is essential for persons at the centre *and* peripheries to imagine resistance strategies so articulations of identities no longer require repudiations and expulsions of histories, sexualities, or cultures.

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Özet**Gidip Gelen Özneler:
Dil, Direniş ve Kültürel Kimlikler**

Diaspora çalışmaları, göçmen kimliklerinin, uluslarüstü hareketlerin düz bir çizgide gelişmeyip daima karmaşık bir yapıya sahip olmalarına karşın, ekseriya sıra özlemi, bir mekâna ait olamama duyguları ve yuvaya ilişkin anılar ile kurulduğunu iddia eder. Var olan ırksal ve cinsel kimlik kategorilerin nasıl coğrafi, dilbilimsel ve kültürel anlamda birbirine bağlı olduğunu göstermek için, Çinli ve sıra dışı (queer) seyahat eden bir özne olarak otobiyografik anlatılar üzerine odaklanmaktayım. 2002-05 yıllarını kapsayan Toronto Çinliler arası eşcinsel evlilik karşıtı hareketini durum çalışması olarak kullanarak, diaspora kimliklerinin biçimlendirilebilir olduğunu da göstermekteyim. Karşı cinsle yapılan evlilik yandaşları, gerçek Çinlilik, Hristiyan ahlakı ve Kanada çok kültürlülüğü söylemlerini kullanarak tek ve heteroseksüel bir Çinli kimliğini dile getirdiler. Sınırlamalar ve mevcut kimlik anlatıları özellikle temsil edilme ve hayatta kalabilme meselelerine ihtiyaç duyan azınlık grupları için zararlı olabilirken, ben bu makalede, bu ciddi sınırlamalar ve kesin anlamların direnme, fark edilme ve siyasal çıkarlar sağlama bağlamında birer strateji haline dönebileceğini iddia ediyorum.

Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers

Kadija George, ed.

London: Aurora Metro Press, 2005. 296 pp. ISBN 0-9515877-2-2.

By Giovanna Buonanno

Originally published in 1993 *Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers* has recently been reissued by Aurora Metro Press with a revised introduction by editor Kadija George. It collects the works of six black and Asian women writers which were either produced on stage or broadcast as television or radio drama between the late 1980s and early 1990s in Britain. As George suggests in her new introduction, the collection had a clear pioneering function when it was first published in 1993 at a time when productions of plays by black and Asian women in Britain were still largely confined to experimental, fringe venues and playscripts hardly ever circulated in print. As she argues, despite the fact that a few anthologies of plays by black and Asian writers existed this was the first edited volume exclusively devoted to women playwrights. She briefly re-traces the careers of Winsome Pinnock, Maya Chowdhry, Zindika, Meera Syal, Rukhsana Ahmad and Trish Cook, the authors presented in this anthology who since this early publication have steadily worked for the stage and across a variety of media, such as radio, film and television, besides having various other works published—on the whole with a degree of critical acclaim. George suggests that the growing visibility of black and Asian women in theatre and related arts in Britain has been achieved also thanks to the interest in their works progressively shown over the last decade by educational institutions and the BBC—which has increasingly supported writer-in-residence schemes—as well as by major regional and London-based theatre companies. This “exciting development” has opened up new possibilities for new women writers of African and Asian descent, aided also by the long-standing commitment of established theatre companies such as Kali, Talawa and Tamasha to promote new writing by black and/or Asian women. Furthermore, George mentions other important achievements concerning British-Asian theatre: the establishment of the Salidaa digital archive, an open access resource that documents many aspects of literature and culture of the South Asian diaspora, including theatre and women’s writing¹, and the academic project currently researching the history and practice of British-Asian theatre at the School of Performance Arts at the University of Exeter. However, she rather surprisingly fails to mention the rich collection on black and Asian theatre history at the Theatre Museum in London.² While optimistically registering

¹ Available at <http://www.salidaa.org.uk>

² The collection includes a vast amount of material documenting many aspects of black theatre history and practice in Britain. *Black and Asian Performance at the Theatre Museum - A User's Guide* is available in print and can also be downloaded at <http://www.theatremuseum.org.uk/research/resourcelists/blackasian.php>. ‘Blackgrounds’ and ‘Blackstage’, two interesting projects carried out in cooperation with London based black theatre company Talawa which record oral history interviews with black theatre practitioners from the 1960s to the present day are also part of the national Performance Archive at the Theatre Museum. Other major online resources are

successes and achievements, George is aware, however, that showcasing black and Asian writers' work is still not enough and the challenge remains one of "moving from this fledgling position to fully staged productions" (7).

Along with the introduction by the editor the volume includes two brief essays that focus primarily on aspects of black British theatre of Caribbean and African heritage. In "The Importance of Oral Tradition to Black Theatre" Valerie Small poses a series of questions on the nature and specificity of black theatre and wonders to what extent it is still shaped by white models and possibly still competing with them. She argues that the very nature of black theatre is popular and thrives in the revival of "oral traditions buried in the depths of the race memory" (10), such as popular myths and ancient stories, the art of storytelling and language pluralism featuring dialects and *patois*. She concludes by remarking that black theatre in Britain is coming of age and as a sign of its maturity, it should show a certain confidence in reclaiming the past and allowing for a gradual merge of the popular and the literary.

Deirdre Osborne offers "A Recent Look at Black Women Playwrights" and deals in her essay with a 'new crop' of women playwrights who have moved into the steps of the more established authors presented in this anthology. She considers 2003 to be a particularly remarkable year when a sizeable number of high profile black playwrights had their works staged in important theatre venues such as the Royal Court Theatre and the Royal National Theatre in London. Despite the still predominant male inflection of black theatre and the relatively small presence of black women directors to stage the work of black writers, Osborne concludes her overview with a positive note by saying that over the last few years the "sustained visibility and developing assurance of Black British drama is becoming increasingly apparent in ways not previously seen" (19).

The second section comprises the six plays which testify to the wide array of issues and techniques that characterised back in 1993 black and Asian women playwriting, as well offering an "effortless depiction of characters devoid of stereotypical images and typecast roles", as George argues (8).

A Hero's Welcome by Winsome Pinnock opens the collection. The play was first performed in London at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 1989, presented by The Women's Playhouse Trust in association with the Royal Court Theatre. A Black British writer of Jamaican parentage, Pinnock has had many of her plays published, produced and broadcast since the late 1980s. *A Hero's Welcome* is set on a West Indian island in 1947 and deals with the return home of Len, a soldier who has fought for the British in the second world war. As a counterpoint to Len's desire to settle down back in his village while trying hard to leave the horrors of the war behind, three young local girls dream of love, marriage and a better future possibly far from their village. Among them is Minda who after a troubled adolescence and a tainted recent past is determined to start a new life as Len's newly wed wife. As posters advertising a recruitment campaign to England begin to appear on the island, the opportunity to leave "this rarted place" is promptly grabbed by Stanley, a young villager who is lured by the prospect of "cars as

accessible through the website of UK based organisation FUTURE HISTORIES, at <http://www.futurehistories.org.uk>. Established in 2005 FUTURE HISTORIES is a leading cultural heritage organisation and a national repository for African, Asian and Caribbean performing arts in the UK.

long as rivers, houses that touch the sky. And the people [...] so rich that gold and silver falls out of their pockets as they walk along the streets an' they don't even bother to run back an' pick it up" (56). Minda, who has often dreamt of England, runs away with Stanley and Len is finally left alone to confront his true role as a "hero" in a war he had never fought:

LEN: I never fought ... The nearest I get to a gun was pushing bullets through a machine factory in Liverpool. [...] I worked in a munitions factory [...] When I came back everybody was treating me like a hero. I couldn't disappoint them [...] They wouldn't work beside us. They didn't want to pay us what we were worth, they even went on strike to get rid of us. We forgot what the real war was because we were fighting one right there. (68)

Pinnock's characters who each in their own way contribute to exposing the myth and reality surrounding the involvement of Caribbean soldiers in World War II along with the post-war "come to England" campaign, its impact on Caribbean life and the ensuing migration towards the "Motherland", use a mixture of standard and creole English reinforcing the double cultural and geographic dimension of her work.

Monsoon, the second play in the anthology was originally broadcast as a BBC 4 radio drama as part of the BBC Young Playwrights festival. It originated, as British-Asian author Maya Chowdhry states in her short preface to the script, in a poem she had composed about menstruation, the feeling of heat, the overriding presence of dust and of the colour red associated with monsoon in India. As a play *Monsoon* became an investigation of "the spiritual cycles of life, weather, love and death" (70). The play follows young British born Jalaarnava's visit to India, the country of her parents, where she feels estranged at first and where—despite her filial ties—she really feels like a tourist. Her relationship with the place becomes more complex, and her presence there as a tourist progressively challenged when she befriends Nusrat, the daughter of the family where she finds lodgings. Their friendship, originally occasioned by a business arrangement, with Jalaarnava being Nusrat's family's paying guest, gradually develops into affection and love against the backdrop of natural turmoil following the advent of the monsoon. Evocative descriptions of nature woven with strong and sensual images of female subjectivity and sexuality frame Jalaarnava's journey of self-exploration and sexual awakening. The celebration of a woman's life cycle, sexuality and lesbianism in *Monsoon* "created a storm", when the play was broadcast, which Chowdhry ironically recalls in her preface: "There appears to have been too much blood and lesbianism in the play. I hope so because there's not enough anywhere else" (70).

Leonora's Dance by Zindika, a play for five female characters first performed by Black Theatre Co-operative in 1993, and the third piece in the anthology, centres on the character of Leonora, a woman of mixed-race parentage and a gifted dancer, whose progressive alienation grows out of her difficulty to relate to the space she inhabits and gradually leads her to develop a serious nervous condition. Leonora uneasily shares her dwellings with her Jamaican niece Daphne and her Chinese lodger Melisa, who both contribute to the author's distressing depiction of multicultural Britain as an alienated space. When Leonora's Jamaican mother Frieda comes to visit, trying to help her daughter by offering to take her back to Jamaica, Leonora is confronted with her "divided loyalties" and the question of belonging :

FRIEDA: Face realities girl [...] Come back home with me. You see what happens when you stay away too long – You forget where you belong. Divided loyalties.

LEONORA. But can't you see mama, this is where I belong. This is my father's land [...]

FRIEDA: But it's your mother's line that is important, after all who knows who your father is? (137)

The arrival of Frieda reveals the family's harrowing secret and Leonora's fraught childhood but eventually seems to envisage the prospect of the daughter's recovery while restating the mother-daughter relationship and their return to Jamaica. Black culture and heritage is explored principally through the character of Frieda and in the recurring theme of motherhood, as well as through the presence of the 'in-house' spirit Medusa, the fifth character in the play, whom Frieda tries to challenge on her arrival by resorting to her own knowledge of magic and sorcery, a legacy of her African origin. The element of magic and the evocation of spirits on stage also serve to counterpoint the realism of the play and its setting.

My Sister Wife by Meera Syal is the fourth play in the anthology. A well established British writer and media figure of Asian parentage who has also enjoyed international fame above all thanks to her successful West-End musical *Bombay Dreams*, Syal offers in this early work an exploration of women in British-Muslim culture and raises the issue of intercommunal clashes. In *My Sister Wife*, the first screenplay written by an Asian woman to be produced by the BBC, Syal enacts the identity crisis of two Pakistani women in Britain bound in the very uncomfortable relationship of being sister wives, namely married to the same man. They are depicted as utterly different at first, with the second and younger wife standing for the westernised second generation Asian woman in Britain, who is financially independent and apparently only moderately influenced by her parent culture. However, she is attracted to the already married Asif who understands "all of me [...] both sides", Asian and British (144), to the point of marrying him and accepting a very complicated arrangement, at least by Western standards. Farah is mirrored by Maryam, the first wife who is a submissive Asian woman, a housewife and the mother of two daughters, whose role in the family is little more than that of a servant. The initial clear-cut divide between the two women is increasingly blurred and detailed stage directions testify to the visual and physical transformation of the two women. They engage in a tense power game that brings them to constantly plot against and try to upstage each other. Adapting to this very uneasy situation involves many crises, intense rivalry and rare moments of solidarity, but first of all calls for a revision of themselves. In the end by capturing elements of the other, each woman goes through a difficult process of transformation. Farah becomes more aware of her Asian roots and is not afraid of exhibiting them, whereas Maryam challenges her assigned role of submissive wife by going out to work. However, the impossibility of a carrying on a traditional arrangement in a contemporary and culturally contested setting is finally exposed as Farah's miscarriage and Asif's tragic death at the end of the play signal.

Song for a sanctuary, the fifth play in this volume penned by Pakistani-born writer Rukhsana Ahmad brings in a more distinct political strand as the play was written

in part as a response to the killing of an Asian woman in a women's refuge in Britain where she lived after fleeing her violent husband. It was first produced in 1990 by Kali Theatre company and then toured nationally and was then broadcast as a radio drama on BBC 4. As a co-founder of Kali and previously of the Asian women writers' collective, Ahmad has made the political activism of Asian women in 1980s Britain an important part of her work. The play tells the story of Rajinder, the woman who is finally tracked down in the refuge and killed in front of her children by her husband, but as it is mainly set in the women's refuge, it is conceived as a choral work, giving voice to the other female characters—residents or social workers—their experiences and emotional lives. For this reason, a central feature of the play is the exploration of differences among the various characters and the impact that their diverse cultural, class and educational background have on their mutual relationships. The setting becomes a public space where individual stories unfold and important issues are discussed, often through tense confrontation among the characters which reinforces the rather didactic or "Brechtian" dimension of the play.

Trish Cook's play *Running Dream* closes the collection and offers an ideal complement to *A Hero's Welcome*, the opening piece, as it is also set in the West-Indies and deals with the themes of journey, migration and difficult relationships. First performed in 1993 at the Theatre Royal in Stratford East the play elaborates on the author's family history. As Cook, born in Britain of Dominican parents, suggests in a short introduction, the piece is about three generations of women in her family, some of whom had travelled to England, while others stayed in Dominica (242). Three young sisters Clementine, Grace and Bianca experience both the sense of a close bonding as well as huge differences between them as their lives are mostly spent apart on two opposite sides of the ocean, longing for their mother and her affection. The presence of a chorus that both comments on and intervenes in the action enhances the dream-like quality of the play which is also achieved through the recurring use of Dominican *patois*, a French creole, the interpolation of songs and frequent spatial and temporal shifts.

The reissuing of this collection of plays is a timely reminder of the contribution of these six women writers to the expanding field of 'Black British' writing and offers the opportunity to new readers to have access to works these authors produced at a time when they were still negotiating their presence between the margins and the mainstream, both on the page and in the wider theatrical and media circuits. For black and Asian women writers in the early 1990s the role of enterprising publishers such as Aurora Metro Press, specifically set up to promote women writers, was crucial, as well as of those theatre companies, such as the already mentioned Talawa and Kali, who expressly encouraged black and Asian women playwrights. Over the last decade other publishers have become more alert at the work of black and Asian women writers for the theatre and consequently authors have begun to see their work in print as individual writers, rather than as contributors to collections. This new edition is also a tribute to the spirit of the early 1990s when the promotion of multicultural writing was largely still unaffected by the current tendency to set up well-defined community boundaries. It draws the contours of a multicultural British scene and the female presence in it, which seems to have become an increasingly exacting task in these early years of the new millennium, when the multicultural project has been seriously undermined by

devastating political events which have fuelled divisions between communities. As Gabriele Griffin argues in what is to date the only academic work in English to analyse plays written by contemporary black and Asian women in Britain, paying detailed attention also to the writers selected by Kadija George:

The homogenizing term 'Black' can no longer easily be used in 2003. There is a recognition now, for instance, that contemporary British culture has been differentially shaped by Black and Asian influences [...]. The cultural identity that diverse Asian communities have carved out for themselves in Britain during the 1990s is both prominent and distinct from Black British cultural identities and operates across somewhat different cultural terrains (10-11).

At this stage of increased visibility of Black and Asian literature and arts it is becoming more common to discuss their respective contributions to contemporary British culture separately, as recent scholarly publications suggest. Among the latest anthologies of critical writing on black British culture, *A Black British canon?*, for instance, while investigating aspects and meanings of 'black British' across a wide array of texts and practices, from the literary to the visual and the performing arts, and therefore providing an interesting multidisciplinary approach, opts, though, for a restricted use of the term 'black', focusing exclusively on British writers, visual and performance artists of African and Caribbean lineage (Low and Wynne-Davies: 2006). Similarly, the 2005 collection *Write Black Write British* edited by Kadija (George) Sesay offers an ample variety of critical essays on both well established and emerging black British writers of the African diaspora (2005). In a similar analysis to that offered by Griffin, editors Gail Low and Marion Wynne Davies suggest that the current more restricted use of the term 'black British' is the result of the fragmentation of the "fracturing of political alliances across cultural and ethnic groups" in Britain which began to be apparent in the 1990s and has since encouraged: "The increased utilisation of separate categories, such as 'British Asian', 'Asian British' or, more importantly, the politicised constructions of a religious and ethnic identity such as, 'British Muslims' " (Gail and Wynne-Davies 4).

In conclusion, re-publishing *Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers* in 2005 is still worthwhile in that the volume presents the works of these six writers collectively, and functions as a reminder of their struggle to carve out their cultural identities in contemporary Britain from a common terrain of longstanding exclusion and marginalization as black and Asian women, that the current move towards separation in an attempt to shun homogenisation tends to overlook.

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Mona in the Promised Land

Gish Jen

London: Granta Books, 1996. 304 pp.

By Esra Sahtiyancı Öztarhan

Mona in the Promised Land is Asian American writer Gish Jen's novel about the identity quest of a Chinese American girl heroine Mona. The story takes place in early 1970's where Mona lives in a Jewish suburbia in Scarshill, NY, with her China born parents and her American born sister. The novel centers on the conversion of Mona into Judaism, thus reconstructs notions such as nationalism, assimilation, multiculturalism and identity that are the common themes of immigrant literature. Jen's novel brings new approaches to these notions by her choice of a young protagonist and her humorous style.

All the novels of Gish Jen are humorous stories about serious issues like racism and identity quest of Chinese Americans. Her first novel *Typical American* (1991) follows the lives of Ralph Chang, his sister and his sister's roommate who later becomes his wife. The novel is a satirical account of the family's various efforts of fulfilling the American dream, of becoming a "typical American" and the obstacles they face. The first line of the novel makes it clear that "it's an American story" in which the characters try to adapt to the American Dream while trying to hang on to their Chinese roots. Jen has also written a collection of short stories entitled *Who's Irish?* (1999), about the immigrant experiences of Chinese Americans, but also of Jewish Americans, African Americans, Irish Americans, etc.

Her latest book of 2004, *Love Wife*, explores similar issues such as being Chinese American in white mainstream society by portraying a racially mixed family. The family consists of Carnegie Wang, his WASP wife, whom Carnegie's mother refers to as "Blondie", their two adopted children and one biological son. Their family life is disturbed by the arrival of a Chinese cousin, who is arranged by Carnegie's mother to work as a nanny to the children. It becomes quite clear early on, however, the Carnegie's mother brings the Chinese cousin into the family with the intension of presenting "an ideal wife" for her son. The Chinese cousin not only disturbs the relations of the couple as a "love wife," she also brings with her stories and traditions of China. Thus she enables the characters', mainly Carnegie's rediscovery of his Chinese roots. Jen's novel discusses concepts like what is real, what is constructed or what is natural, which will construct the basic problematic themes in her other novels as well.

Mona in the Promised Land is the continuation of her literary tradition of exploring the Chinese American experience in contemporary United States. The novel is the story of the Chinese American family Changs (who came to America in her first novel *Typical American*) that is told through the eyes of their daughter Mona. Mona is a typical adolescent having problems with her family and her peer group, who finds herself being converted to Judaism amidst these cultural controversies. The novel is a good example of ethnic *bildungsroman* with a clearly defined identity search. The *bildung* of the novel is reached when Mona, the rebellious adolescent, comes to a final

reconciliation with her mother, and by so doing with her ancestry and roots and, paradoxically enough, it is precisely through Jewish rituals and conversion that Mona comes to understand her Chineseness. It is stated in the novel as such: "Now that she is Jewish, she feels more of a Chinese than ever"; or she says: "The more Jewish you become, the more Chinese you'll be" (66, 190). Gish Jen, therefore succeeded in portraying the pain of finding oneself in adolescence as a communal representation for the larger identity quest struggle of Chinese American immigrants as a whole. Therefore Jen defends the irresistible charm of returning to one's roots in coping with the racist and multicultural atmosphere of United States.

The novel apart from being an adolescent narrative, just like any immigrant story, reflects the in between situation of Chinese American Mona split between the Chinese and the American cultures. Jen depicts Mona's uneasiness as being like "a sore thumb... sticking out by herself" (231). Being born and raised in America, she is under constant pressure from her parents who are still tied to their Chinese roots. She is also surrounded by her peer group, which pushes her to be like "an American girl". Mona has to find her own identity as opposed to her hyphenated one determined by the dominant culture, free from the identity her parents and peer group design for her. In this sense, Gish Jen's novel has so many common features with the Asian American women's fiction of 70's and 80's like Kingston, Ng and Tan's works. These works of Chinese American women with Jen's focus on the situation of the Chinese daughters born in United States torn between their parent's world and the new world. These novels reflect the ongoing generation struggle between "the swan feather mothers" and "Coca Cola daughters" so to say.¹

At the same time, Jen brings a fresh insight to Asian American women literature in the 1990s to "what it means to be an Asian American girl in 70's". Her novel is quite revolutionary by portraying a purely postmodern identity model for the new immigrants. It is Mona's solution to be torn between two cultures. As Mona summarizes by saying: "American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish" (49). Mona with her new chosen identity of a "Catholic Chinese Jew" differs from the hybrid characters of the earlier literary examples (44). In her depiction of Mona's active claiming of Judaism, Jen criticizes the American Dream in the earlier immigrant literature by choosing to portray a character who claims fluid identities. The new American experiment is about the naturalness of choices. A Possible reason why Jen used conversion to Judaism in the novel is because in the United States, the Chinese are called the "New Jews" (3). That is because they seem to be the living proof of the American Dream, the "model minority". And it is exactly what Jen criticizes in her novel.

Mona's choice of changing her identity is a practical reflection of Homi Bhabha's "third space" concept of immigrant experience. It is defined as an empowering position, which enables the subject to choose among the various possibilities. Thus, Mona being in the third space, being neither a pure Chinese nor a

¹ I borrowed the term from: Ho, Wendy. "Swan-Feather Mothers and Coca-Cola Daughters: Teaching Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in Teaching American Ethnic Literature: Nineteen Essays. ed. John R. Maitino and David R. Peck. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1996. 327-345.

typical American, feels free to choose whichever she likes. Belonging to neither culture is not a disempowering situation, but an interplay of identity for Mona. She tells her friends that she “just have to switch and that’s all” (14). From time to time when her exoticism attracts attention in class, she acts as if she knows Chinese and Chinese civilization. She tells her friends that: “[S]he knows karate ... she can make her hands like steel by thinking hard ... she knows how to get pregnant by tea ... she knows Chinese” (5). But in fact all she knows in Chinese is how to say: “Stop acting crazy. Rice gruel. Soy sauce” which becomes enough to impress her friends (6). And from time to time she can reject her Chinese culture and roots entirely when she felt being oppressed by Chinese traditions. Mona converts to Judaism, because she believes it to be about “ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey” which is exactly the opposite of what she always hears at home about being the oppressed minority (137). These identity switches are predominant throughout the whole novel in other characters as well like her Jewish friends who decide to be a WASP, and back again at their convenience (14). Also for example her sister decides to become more Chinese than her parents all of a sudden. Mona’s boyfriend joining the black power although he is white is another example of identity switch in the novel. This postmodern sense of unfixed identity is a criticism to Orientalist discourses and essentialist theories.

Jen changes the standard notion of Americanness, Jewishness and Chineseness completely by her work. Being a Chinese American women writer herself, she deconstructs all existing stereotypes. That is to say she criticizes the model minority myth of the previous generations. Some critics like Frank Chin label the works of Kingston, Ng and Tan as a continuation of the Western myth of “the model minority”.² In this respect Jen unlike the previous Asian American women writers subverts this existing tradition. Gish Jen intentionally creates unconventional and unrepresentative characters in her novel to reinvent Chinese Americanness to the same extent as she re-inacts her Americanness. Jen says: “This book is not a denial of my heritage, but [America] is the place where I grew up. This is my country; this is what I know. And, in this book, I lay claim to that”. In the same interview of *The Asian Week*, Jen confesses that she created her own definition of American. She says: “It is not something that you come into [and] particularly does not involve abandoning where you came from. I think of Americanness as a preoccupation with identity. It is the hallmark of the New World because we live in a society where you are not only who your parents were, and you don’t already know what your children will be. That is not to say that I am blond and eat apple pie, but any definition that finds me less American-well, all I can say is that something is wrong with the definition”.³ This reaction against essentialist definitions of identity brings out one of the best examples of a protagonist with a fluid identity in *Mona in the Promised Land*.

Despite its many strengths, there are a number of small weaknesses in the novel, like the plot being a bit erratic. The coming of age story of Mona ends too quickly at the

² Chin Frank. “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake”. *The Big Aiiieeee: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*. eds.. Jeffrey Paul Chan and et al. New York : Meridian Book, 1991. 1-91

³ Shiroishi, Julie. “American As Apple Pie: In Her Second Novel, Gish Jen Constructs Her Own Definition of American”. *Asian Week* 27 September-3 October. 1996.12 April 2005. <<http://www.asianweek.com/092796/cover.html>>

end of the novel. The final *bildung* of reconciliation with her mother and her marriage are mentioned at the last two or three pages of the book before we understand how she grew up that fast. However, *Mona in the Promised Land* is an important and timely novel on postmodern identity. It opens new horizons in the minds of the reader in bringing forward brand new definitions to Asian American identity. Jen's criticism of Oriental identity and stereotypes provides new meanings to contemporary Chinese American and contemporary immigrant fiction. Moreover the story of Mona - often very humorous- offers new dimensions to many concepts of American culture like assimilation and discrimination. Academicians who are interested in ethnic studies, Asian American literature, identity theory, girl studies and contemporary women's literature can find Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* worth reading to witness the experiences of the new immigrants like Mona.