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## **MIGRATION, ETHNICITY, RACISM: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN ASIAN AMERICAN WRITING**

### SUMMARY

The entry of Asian bodies into the United States continent is part of the worldwide labor migration that began in the sixteenth century and culminated in the U.S. imperial domination of the Philippines with the Spanish-American War of 1898. To symbolize the traumatic experience of uprooting and racist violence suffered by Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino migrants in the United States, ethnic artists from these diverse communities deploy several strategies: postmodernist affirmation of heterogeneity (in Frank Chin and Jeffery Chan), counter-identification and dis-identification (in Maxine Hong Kingston, Bharati Mukherjee, Hisaya Yamamoto), and prophetic figuration (Carlos Bulosan). These strategies articulate some of the ways in which Asian Americans attempt through ideological critique to overcome racism, exclusion, marginalization, and cooptation. In this process, the "Orientalized" or exoticized subject, grounded in the vicissitudes of U.S. capital accumulation (Depression, Cold War, and global commodification), can be appreciated as an oppositional, emancipatory force with its own viable if limited historical agency. The goal of this ethnic art is the transcendence of racial oppression and liberation from the bondage of transnational capital.

**KEYWORDS:** immigration, racism, ethnicity, Asian Americans, narrative strategies, community, capitalism

After about four centuries of the worldwide circulation of commodities - including the hugely profitable trade in slaves from Africa that inaugurated, for Marx, the "rosy dawn" of capitalism - the stage was set for more intense capital accumulation based no longer on commercial exchange and the regional discrepancies in the price of goods but on the process of production itself. "Place" gave way to space; lived time divided into necessary, surplus, and "free" segments. Linked by relations of exchange governed by the logic of accumulation centered in Europe and later in North America, the trajectories of peoples of color, the "people without history" in Eric Wolf's reckoning, entered the global labor market with the expansion of indus-

trial capitalism, the commercialization of agriculture, urbanization, and the concomitant dislocation and displacement of populations from their traditional homelands.

We are still in the epoch of transnational migrations and the traffic in bodies. The breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, plus the exacerbated ethnic/racial conflicts in their wake, promise mutations less tractable than the configurations of earlier boundary shifts. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the movement of the bearers of labor power, "free" workers, at first involved mainly peasants pushed toward the industrial centers of the European peninsula; later, 50 million people left Europe between 1800 and 1924, 32 million of them bound for the factories and mines of the industrializing United States. (Of the 200 million migrants between 1500 to 1980, 42 million are from the continent of Asia.) Meanwhile, the victory of imperialism in China with the Opium War of 1839-1842 allowed foreign entrepreneurs or brokers to establish the apparatus for the "coolie" trade that eventually facilitated the transport of 200,000 Chinese to the United States between 1852 and 1875 (Wolf, 1982). In the 1860s, about 14,000 Chinese laborers were hired to build the transcontinental Central Pacific Railroad. Unlike the Chinese "pariah capitalism" in other regions (Safran, 1991), the Chinese exodus to North America could only mediate between an exploitative host society and a moribund tributary formation already subjugated by Western powers.<sup>1</sup>

With the Native Americans resisting the conquest of their lands and alienation of their labor-power, and with the majority of Africans still bound to the slave plantations, there was no alternative but the temporary implantation of the Asian "alien" into the territory of the United States; when no longer needed, they were "Driven Out" - demonized as the "Yellow Peril," then purged via the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (in force until 1943). This was reinforced by the "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1907-08 that interdicted laborers from Japan and later Korea. It was supplemented by the 1917 Immigration Act that created the Asiatic Barred Zone (all of Asia including Afghanistan and Arabia, Asiatic Russian, most Polynesian and all East Indian islands), and by other pararegal, genocidal acts of violence (Cashmore, 1988; Bouvier and Gardner, 1986).

## I.

The inaugural scene of any diaspora involves the uneven terrain of the world-system I have alluded to that is simultaneously differentiated and homogenized by the

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1 For a summary of the historical background of Asian migration see Chan (1991: 3-24).

logic of capital accumulation. This twofold process is concretized in the movement of peoples and nationalities at specific conjunctures where for the most part the bearers of the culture of precapitalist formations are inserted into a capitalist mode of production and forcibly undergo cataclysmic transformations. Ethnogenesis or ethnicization occurs when a consciousness of this inaugural scene is acquired by the dislocated group, a consciousness of a shared crisis signified by the terms "alienation," "uprooting," separation, exile, and isolation. Such consciousness always evolves in specific historical contexts, within definite temporal-spatial parameters, in the conjunction of inner and outer concourses of events, such that whatever strategies of resolving the crisis are forged engages structures and institutions with their more or less fixed traditions and contingent modes of representations (Patterson, 1983). If this shared crisis of exile and uprooting implies a removal from the time-space orientation of the homeland, the sacralized site of beginnings and endings which provides the boundaries of personal identity, in what way then (apart from the return carried out by sojourners, or the mythmaking of deferred homecoming sustained by "symbiotic" ethnys) have the remembering and resolution of such a crisis been explored in the writing of Asian Americans without necessarily entailing the recovery of a literal homeland?

In essence, the crisis assumes the form of the disintegration of a way of life (its telos and its conception of a collective good) nourished in organic formations when they collide with the forces of the free market and its ethos of bureaucratic individualism. Such a collision, epitomized by the colonial subjugation of peoples of color, ultimately signifies the breakup of the intelligible meaning-producing narratives of the life of whole communities and their dispersal into monadic fragments or anomic bodies. What is lost is not only temporal-spatial continuity but, more important, the practice and vision of some collective good that informs the unity of character and life-histories of its individual members. What subtends the "liberal individualism of the market system" and its utilitarian norms is the process of reification, seriality, the instrumental rationality of means-ends, and so forth, which on the whole negates history and unity of character. Commodity fetishism subverts or undermines any impulse to construct a narrative of diaspora, of dismemberment, and its overcoming. Given this trajectory, one can outline in general the responses to this crisis of collective alienation and fragmentation inscribed in several broad symbolic configurations or genres which are not mutually exclusive and which are amenable to qualification because of the discontinuities in the migration patterns and sociohistoric backgrounds of the constituent Asian groups. Far from essentializing agency, these responses inflect the energies of "cultural nationalism" toward geopolitical and dialogical confrontations.

The first strategy is what I would call a postmodernist affirmation of heterogeneity within the thematic limits of an ideologically pluralist society. It seeks to valorize the amorphous and diverse as against the uniform (the assimilationist model of Anglo conformity), the hybrid and heteroglotic as against the predictable ethnic stereotype. One example may be found in Frank Chin's protagonist in *The Chickencoop Chinaman* who tries to exhibit the virtuosity of a bricoleur as he posits a polymorphous subject-position for his syncretic genealogy: "Chinamen are made, not born, my dear. Out of junk-imports, lies, railroad scrap iron, dirty jokes, broken bottles, cigar smoke, Cosquilla Indian blood, wino spit, and lots of milk amnesia.... For I am a Chinaman! A miracle synthetic.... I speak nothing but the mother tongues bein' born to none of my own, I talk the talk of orphans" (1991: 118, 120-21). Of course, Chin's commitment is not to his group's ability to absorb or reflect the varied surface phenomena of U.S. society but to the artist's expansive and capacious spirit, a sensibility that leaps over boundaries of nation or race. This is an elective affinity, an affiliation chosen to supersede tribal filiations. As an antidote to the Chinatown mentality, Chin's parodic pastiche refunctions the seriality of commodified humans to prove somehow that U.S. society itself is as decentered as the populist architecture of Las Vegas, a mammoth bricolage, without any nationalist marker. Whether or not this strategy of selective identification captures and resolves the existential predicament of young Chinese Americans, what is certain is that this route of trying to beat the enemy in his language-game is filled with recuperative temptations. In other words, this verisimilitude may be a Pyrrhic victory over Leviathan.

A modification of Chin's strategy is that of Jeffery Chan in his story "The Chinese in Haifa" (which I discuss below). To counter the loss of historicity in the diaspora, Chan envisages a community of all the dispossessed and disinherited, delineating the paradoxes of loyalty and betrayal in the process and also questioning linkages based on custom versus ties based on personal preference. This response characterizes the enclave micropolitics of the intellectual who rejects ethnic collectivism and opts for spiritual marginality and exile as a permanent possibility. It is possible that both Chin's and Chan's postmodernist approach, albeit with varying idiosyncracies, can nullify if not neutralize the two intellectual operations at work in theoretical racism pointed out by Etienne Balibar (1990), namely, the mode of hierarchic classification and the deployment of anthropological universals. At least, what they refuse is the obsession with purity (racial, cultural, or whatever) as an ideal or transcendent value, the metaphysical underpinning of all racisms.

In contrast, Maxine Hong Kingston combines both counter-identification (a reversal of the negative image of the alien) and dis-identification, a taking up of antagonistic positions (MacDonell, 1986). In both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, the

damaged narratives of her family are reconstituted to thwart the racial categorization of bureaucratic individualism. Hers is a versatile approach to envisaging community as an ongoing collective project, one that posits the intelligibility of individual lives as premised on a new civic morality so that, in effect, the extended family or the ghetto sometimes functions as a surrogate for a polis that has been eroded by colonialism and racist violence. I am not saying that Kingston has simply rehabilitated Confucianism and the ideals of the old tributary, patriarchal regime in her articulation of a social good inherent in certain practices of resistance by her characters. Indeed, her feminism enables her to thwart the seductions of pragmatic relativism as she outlines the vicissitudes of a "group-in-fusion" (to use Sartre's term) and dramatizes the ruses of dis-identifications adopted by beleaguered immigrants as they test the limits of the law.

In *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee (originally from India) attempts to rewrite expatriation as an allegory or montage of spiritual transmigrations. While the novel also probes the limits of patriarchal law, its strategy hinges on unfolding the narrative of a quest replete with reversals and recognitions. Mukherjee, in an interview, claims that Jyoti (reincarnated as Jase and Jane) personifies the feminist revolutionary, a love goddess or life force who gets what she wants. Unfortunately the novel ends with Jasmine's life being embedded once again in the narrative of another person's life. Its quasi-picaresque and necessarily episodic action, while registering the crisis of modern industrial society in its architectonics, foregrounds the problematic status of an intrinsically romantic project of self-transformation (Jasmine, according to Mukherjee, "ends up being a tornado who leaves a lot of debris behind"). Paradoxically underlying the trope of a protean form of life in motion are the doctrine and institutions of the free market - a postmodern allegory, perhaps, of a "postcolonial" writer whose vision of international solidarity seems compromised in her use of the myth of the American West as an open frontier devoid of aborigines (see Mukherjee, 1990: 29).

What Mukherjee's narrative seeks to achieve but fails is a goal associated with this genre: the composition of a narrative of a life whose unity and intelligibility spring from its being embedded in a history of a community which, though transplanted, continues to survive with some degree of autonomy. This objective, I think, has been masterfully attained by the Japanese-American writer Hisaye Yamamoto in her story "Las Vegas Charley". Denarrativization (emblemized by the city and its mutabilities) is countered by practices demonstrating the residual power of certain public or civic virtues that serve to connect the segments of a character's life and redeem it from victimage. Las Vegas Charley refuses the route of Stoic self-mastery or of empty moral, categorical imperatives. Yamamoto's rendering of scenes in Charley's life suggests that its unity is not derived from his psychology or a superimposed

ethical substance but from certain concrete practices whose actualization embody social goods - indeed, the subtext of this story may be the almost insurmountable difficulty of conceptualizing these goods when all sense of responsibility (personal and civic) in the majority of citizens has been attenuated or dissolved altogether (see MacIntyre, 1984). In that case, Matsumoto appropriately wears the mask of a whole city founded on the cash-nexus that extinguishes alterity and difference, a mask whose antinomic interiority may be discerned in the central character of John Okada's novel *No-No Boy*.

In stories like "Las Vegas Charley," the strategy is twofold: while the artist of the diaspora seeks to recreate a community in exile by a resumption of traditional practices with social goods internal to them, these practices in turn generate a utopian pathos because they can no longer satisfy the individual whose will and passions have become detached from any viable community. Pure becoming or absolute contingency displaces the unity of lives sharing pasts and futures. Alienation then becomes translated into an opportunity to enact a measure of autonomy and integrity. In place of the limited understanding of the character, the author interposes her will to reconstitute if not discover the migrant's life-destiny via the mediation of a symbolic causality that threads the otherwise contingencies of an ordinary immigrant's wanderings.

Finally, in the works of the Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan, we find a strategy of prophetic figuration that seeks to disclose the complicities between metropolis and periphery. The image of collective labor and resistance discovered in the native tradition of anticolonial revolt as it is transposed to the present becomes a kind of "objective correlative" to resolve the crisis of isolation and exilic anguish. This organon of counter-memory opposed to official history is, however, not primordial or culturalist in intent because it is anchored in anticolonialism and determined by class partisanship. (Of all Asians, the Filipinos are the only subjugated "natives" who have resisted U.S. symbolic and physical violence since their homeland was occupied in 1898 in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.) Alternatively, Bulosan focuses on multiracial work as a social practice whose rhythm and intrinsic sociality endows it with a self-renewing habitus. In the struggle for recognition, the protagonists in Bulosan's fiction (see, for example, "Be American" or certain chapters in *America Is in the Heart*) learn cooperation, mutual trust, courage, sympathy, and mobilizations of latent resources as they confront the brutality of white vigilantes and the coercive ideological apparatuses of the state. This need to belong to a group in a state of siege is not fated; it is chosen, it is a commitment to a path whose unfolding is assured but unpredictable. Its goal is clearly defined as internal to its practice: not the resurrection of the homeland but the founding of a community of producers in the territory of North

America where the basis of class exploitation (the commodification of racialized labor power) has been abolished.

In this sense Bulosan preempts the ethnic crisis by reinscribing alienation in the matrix of class antagonism. With this perspectival shift, the resolution to the crisis of loss of home (the colony) and ethnic alienation becomes also the resistance to imperialism founded on exploitation of class and national subalterns. Although this mode of renarrativization is not without its dangers, it is preferable because it has the power of curbing the seductiveness of ethnic chauvinism for demagogues as well as for victims who all too often spontaneously react to the racialized oppression they suffer. Bulosan tries to modulate the utopianism of a desired classless society by the symbolic validation of a fertile and beautiful land owned by no one, shared by all. Such a geopolitical site, a possible home to all citizens, is still extraterritorial insofar as goods are not shared equally and hierarchization by race still prevails. Bulosan's narratives envisage emancipation not of the human essence but of social relations; they prefigure liberations not anticipated but actualized in the struggle to break down the ethnic ghetto and root one's identity in a struggle shared with others across ethnicity, nationality, and race. Home, the primal scene of deracination, is therefore not a place but a process of unifying one's life through acts of solidarity and resistance with others dehumanized by the constructed criteria of race, class, gender, and nationality.

## II.

In order to dramatize the unique expressive gesture of each strategy, I focus on certain aspects of Asian diasporic texts that articulate the cultural politics of collective self-transformation in late capitalism. I begin by remarking on the forced "return" or exclusion of Asians as a racial group which I referred to earlier as an historical event that finds an inverted simulacrum in the way their entry is represented in Kingston's *China Men*.

Kingston narrates two versions of the father from China entering the fabled "Gold Mountain" (the legendary image of the United States). Of these two versions, the second is the legal way of passage through Angel Island in San Francisco Bay where "a white demon physically examined him, poked him in the ass and genitals, looked in his mouth, pulled his eyelids with a hook" and detained him until, purified by this ordeal of commodification, he passed the "American examination". The first one is, in contrast, a violation of customs law. Midwived by smugglers, the father deposits himself in a womblike crate that is stowed in the dark belly of a ship where

soon he "began to lose his bearings." Caught in this self-made prison, the speaking subject becomes dispersed in a sequence of images that dissolves memory and unbalances consciousness, affording a new sensorium for the protagonist:

"Various futures raced through his mind: walking the plank, drowning, growing old in jail, being thrown overboard in chains, flogged to tell where others were hiding, hung by the neck, returned to China -- all things that happened to caught chinamen....

Because of fear, he did not eat nor did he feel hungry....Rocking and dozing, he felt the ocean's variety--the peaked waves that must have looked like pines; the rolling waves, round like shrubs, the occasional icy mountains; and for stretches, lulling grasslands....

He heard voices, his family talking about gems, gold, cobbles, food....The villagers had to make up words for the wonders. Something new happens every day, not the same boring farming.

The sea invented words too. He heard a new language, which might have been English, the water's many tongues speaking and speaking. Though he could not make out words, the whispers sounded personal, intimate, talking him over, sometimes disapproving, sometimes in praise of his bravery". (1989: 50-51)

When finally a voice interrupts the cacophony of sounds, "It's me. It's me," an announcement that identifies the Other (the smuggler/outlaw) who then delivers the father from his self-fashioned captivity, Kingston's antihero is ready to "claim the Gold Mountain, his own country." Born from the ruse of the illicit Other, this subject (or subject-position) thus thwarts the normative paranoia of self-identification.<sup>2</sup>

The act of problematizing boundaries coincides with the refusal of one paradigmatic narrative of migration centered on the Symbolic Order authorizing racial difference. We elude the repetition compulsion of ethnic historiography epitomized by Ellis Island and the state apparatus of statistical control. Finally landing on solid ground, the stowawayed father glimpses a statue of a woman "who carried fire and a book" - the female as mythical embodiment of the civilizing mission, not so portentous a figure as the one that greeted the fictive immigrant of Kafka's *Amerika*. "'Is she a goddess of theirs?' the father asked. 'No,' said the smuggler, 'they don't have goddesses. She's a symbol of an idea.' He was glad to hear that the Americans saw the

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2 Note the analogous rite of passage in Younghill Kang's arrival in the United States recounted in "East Goes West": "It was in New York I felt I was destined really 'to come out from the board.' The beginning of my new existence must be founded here. In Korea to come out from the boat is an idiom meaning to be born, as the word 'pai' for 'womb' is the same as 'pai' for 'boat'" (1974: 217-18).



idea of Liberty so real that they made a statue of it" (1989: 52-53). The prudent father in Angel Island censored this idea: "If the U.S. government found out his thoughts on freedom, it might not let him land" (1989: 56).<sup>3</sup> With the fetish of the assimilating mother avoided thanks to this narrative artifice, we confront an "uncanny strangeness" in the unsettled characters and tempo of Kingston's "talk-stories." We sense "a disturbing Otherness" implicit in the recognition of that "erotic, death-bearing unconscious" which Julia Kristeva considers the basis of human solidarity; the living through of this internalized difference allegorized by the primal scene of arrival in the continent is the "ultimate condition of our being with others" (1991: 192). Before this condition is reached, however, the ghetto of Chinatown must be traversed first.

In establishing the practice of alterity as the condition of possibility for the Chinese fathers, the narrative disavows the doctrinaire claim that art creates authentic identity and redeems fallen reality. Although the ostensible project of *China Men* is to dramatize the negated agency of the Chinese male immanent in the pathos and waste of their experiences, what stands out is not the foundational rite of Eurocentric Americanization - adaptation to the Puritanical conquest of the wilderness, individualism, the work ethic, and so forth. Rather it is their resistance to hegemonic corporate power and the racialized nation-state. A distinctly utopian celebration of manual work on the land aims to subvert the drive of an expansive economy toward differentiation and equalization while a desire to reconstruct the genealogy of the "castrated" patriarchs substitutes for a promised return to the homeland the continuity of certain virtues tested in actual practice - such as the Brother's refusal to kill Vietnamese - integral to the preservation of the community. A return is deferred, then displaced; memory induces a delayed effect, making the land of origin coeval with the present. In effect, the resistance to colonial oppression is relocated to the interior of the metropolis. This does not of course disrupt the circulation and exploitation of migrant labor power. But the evocation of a territory free from the imperial plunder of the past (the People's Republic of China), and of the resistance of the Vietnamese (whose victory ironically will provide the next reservoir of cheap labor for a deindustrializing economy), together with the suture of archaic myth and documentary testimonials in an open-ended account, suffice, I think, in neutralizing the dominant theoretical paradigm of ethnic success (via accommodation/integration) which has so effectively underwritten the racism of the past and the injustices of the present.

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3 For testimonials of how Chinese lived through their ordeal in Angel Island see Takaki (1989: 231-39).

### III.

In tracking the dispersal of "Asian" bodies in the United States, it is imperative to stress one elementary proposition: that the heterogeneous cultures of both ethnic and racial minorities (in Robert Blauner's terms) are not "primordial" social relationships preserved from the past but historical effects of asymmetrical power relations between uneven formations, specifically of labor market segmentation. This segmentation derives in turn from the shifting ratio of fixed capital (machinery) to variable capital or wage labor. What results is the phenomenon of uneven development of the world system - the spatial configuration of the margin and periphery, the core and the dependencies - that configures the way Asians, among other people of color, have been marked for the calculation of their price in the global labor market. The geography of early imperial conquest has pre-defined Asians when absolute space (feudal relations) was abolished through the universalization of wage labor; but simultaneously, various relative spaces (on the scale of the urban, the nation-state, and so on) were generated within which the bourgeoisie through the state organized the expansion and accumulation of capital, in particular the political control over the working class. As Neil Smith puts it: "The internal differentiation of national territories into identifiable regions is the geographical expression of the division of labour, both at the level of individual capitals and the particular division of labor.... Capital produces distinct spatial scales - absolute spaces - within which the drive toward equalization is concentrated. But it can only do this by an acute differentiation and continued redifferentiation of relative space, both within and between scales" (1984: 144, 147). This systemic process of spatial realignment underlies the allochronism of Western discourse on people of color. It also informs Eurocentric knowledge - production premised on relativism and denial of coevalness with these Others whose existence its self-identification required (Fabian, 1983).

How was this hegemonic knowledge challenged by Asian writers in the United States? Since the emergence of Third World labor and its differential incorporation into the Euro-American polity are consequences of the uneven development of the capitalist mode, of the dialectic of equalization and differentiation embodied most starkly in colonial subjugation (of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, among others), how writing represents Asians transgressing the boundaries of the U.S. racial order can suggest a framework for articulating the character of the diaspora not simply as an uprooting of peoples from their homelands but also as a process of transformative critique and self-determination. Deracination thus precipitates the dream of autonomy. Instead of projecting a collective myth of return that constitutes the diverse libidinal economies of their peoples, Asian writers endeavor to dramatize the vicissitudes of ethnogenesis, opposition, and self-empowerment. If capital ingests or devours the

bodies of immigrant workers, how are they able to survive this "incorporation" and preserve their integrity?

Although the syndrome of "the West and the Rest" is usually deconstructed by postmodern thinkers in order to prioritize a politics of radical difference, we might use for research purposes the attempt of schizoanalysis to explain the particularity of Asian dissemination. The first move is to refuse the claim of purity. Rejecting capital's ideals of universality identified with the self-identical subject (patriarchal, ego-centered, white) and a representative Totality, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) suggest that those who are able to survive the cannibalism of the Whole belong to the tribe-race practising nomad thought. "Deployed in a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert, or sea," this "race" necessarily bastard and mixed-blood is defined "not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination". Instead of invoking a myth of return, the nomadic race dissolves the differentiated space engendered by capitalist modernity and invents a new habitat. Deleuze and Guattari offer this thesis: "In the same way that race is not something to be rediscovered, the Orient is not something to be imitated; it only exists in the construction of a smooth space, just as race only exists in the constitution of a tribe that peoples and traverses a smooth space" (1987: 380). Migration plays with and around fixed boundaries, soaking up heterogeneous influences and contriving new environments.<sup>4</sup> Schizoid thought, however, seems to flatten the map prematurely by hypothesizing a liberated "space" not hitherto codified by previous engagements where authority or some sovereign power shows its hand. Can this space of "free play" and promise of mobility be the alibi of immigrants who have mortgaged their labor (life) time beforehand?

#### IV.

The topography of the United States, however, was not smooth (literally or figuratively) when the Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indians, and Filipinos first arrived. In the West Coast from California up to Alaska, it was already demarcated by the seasonal routine of planting and harvesting that defined the itinerary of the Filipino migrant-workers chronicled by Carlos Bulosan in the classic testimony, *America Is in the Heart*.

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<sup>4</sup> This praxis of playing with boundaries and limits signifies, for Fredric Jameson (1991), the act of totalization which he privileges as the necessary orientation for any emancipatory or revolutionary project.

After more than a decade of suffering and struggle, the representative persona in Bulosan's ethnobiography sums up: "The terrible truth in America shatters the Filipinos' dream of fraternity." Prohibited from marrying white women, isolated in barracks and confined to gambling halls and cabarets, target of lynching mobs and the state's coercive bureaucracy, these Filipinos reclaimed tabooed spaces and transvalued them. Circumscribed in their movements, they conducted a reconnaissance of the landscape of EuroAmerican ambivalence and contradiction in private letters, anecdotes, photographs, and various modes of semiotic resistance other than linear print. Like Kingston, Bulosan charts the territory from a carnivalesque perspective that combines the pastoral idealization of the farmer/artisan in the homeland with the myth of America as a site of inexhaustible opportunities and resources.

In the story "Be American," for example, Bulosan celebrates the line of flight and fluctuation, "multiplicities of escape and flux", whereby the colonized "native" tries to encompass and name his predicament. Eventually the narrator anchors physical motion to an idealized perception of nature that functions as a reactive answer to the degradation of the environment by monopoly agribusiness:

"Yes, indeed, Consorcio: You have become an American, a real American. And this land that we have known too well is not yet denuded by the rapacity of men. Rolling like a beautiful woman with an overflowing abundance of fecundity and murmurous with her eternal mystery, there she lies before us like a great mother. To her we always return from our prodigal wanderings and searchings for an anchorage in the sea of life; from her we always draw our sustenance and noble thoughts, to add to her glorious history" (1983: 58).

Such nostalgia for the organic community incarnate in virgin land which is fecund but not denuded, coupled with the fact that Bulosan received generous help from white American women in a time of vicious racist attacks on Filipino workers, enables Bulosan to represent the Filipino experience as a transitional stage, a border zone of passage, from dispossession to autonomy. Unprivatized land becomes fetishized as everyone's maternal home, refuge, and haven. The Filipino resistance to Japanese colonialism, evoking those against the Spanish and the American invaders in the past, inspires a recovery of ideals that the young Bulosan originally ascribed to a mythical America and thus redeems the fallen present. This evokes a neoStoic ideal of human fellowship that transcends the ethnocentrism of the nation-state. In *America Is in the Heart*, the Filipino condition of exile ends when Filipinos join in the united front against world fascism to liberate the homeland and also purge their host's body of the imperial virus. But the Cold War and McCarthyism extinguished Bulosan's hope. Nearly forty years after Bulosan's death, the Filipino nationality in the United States,

now in the process of comprising the largest segment in the Asian American category, continues to inhabit an internal colony that reproduces in microcosm the dependent status of the Philippines and its caste-like role as supplier of cheap labor for U.S. multinationals.

It appears that the "New World Order" inaugurated by the war against Iraq replicates on a different scale the uneven development of capitalism in the 19th century. A complicating factor is this: demographically the racial minorities in the United States, soon to be the majority in the next fifty years, are bound to reconstitute the racial politics of neosocial Darwinism and alter the iniquitous hierarchy of power. The concept of minority, however, is not quantitative or numerical; it signifies the emergence of a new subject-position in the global ecology of permanent crisis. What characterizes the minority are multiple connections that "constitutes a line of flight..., a universal figure, or becoming-everybody/everything" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 470). In opposition to the axiomatics of the State and the logic of the market, minorities cannot be integrated or assimilated into denumerable sets or subsets with regional, federal, or statutory autonomy because their calculus proceeds "via a pure becoming", flows, events, incorporeal transformations, "continuums of intensities or continuous variations, which go beyond constants and variables; becomings, which have neither culmination nor subject, but draw one another into zones of proximity or undecidability" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 507): a plane of consistency or immanence that multiplies connections. This postmodern conception of minorities may exhibit a certain excess; but it is, I think, more faithful to their metamorphic responses to the dilemma of dispossession and dislocation than either the old functionalist race-relations cycle or the prevailing ethnicity paradigm which underpins the "model minority" myth.

So far, the Chinese in Kingston's fiction and the Filipinos in Bulosan's memoirs are represented as decolonizing flows or becomings that strive to recuperate the meaning of home in cooperative work or in their precarious residence in the United States. They problematize the polarity of inside/outside. Meanwhile, two world wars intensified uneven development, ravaging the hinterlands and preventing any return for sojourners and expatriates. In the aftermath, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, victimized by assorted discriminatory laws and practices, have reterritorialized their alienation via claims to property and the rights of full citizenship. Their strategies of multiplying connections were deployed for a time in a regime of signs that valorized the depths and eccentricity of singular psyches, a sacred realm of interiority that resisted conversion to the counters of exchange value. In the age of mass consumption of spectacles and simulacra, however, even the borderlands of fantasy, sexuality, and utopian desire are now subject to the surveillance of the interventionist state, a panoptic gaze reinforced by sophisticated electronic media and computerized communica-

tion. The paranoia of subjectivity attached to the cash-nexus can easily become the surrogate for ramifying connections, affiliations, solidarities until the ghetto mentality is revitalized - this time armed with a micropolitical rhetoric to match the dispersive and atomistic logic of postmodern capital (Smith, 1984; Harvey, 1989).<sup>5</sup>

## V.

Perhaps a telltale figuration of the postmodern mode of incorporating the Asian, specifically the Indian subject, into the crucible of flexible accumulation can be found in Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*. Mukherjee's fiction is a protracted meditation on the plight of immigrants, refugees, expatriates, exiles in a world transfigured by the rapid consumption of space as a means of production. What the narrator apprehends is the dialectic of sameness and difference, the shifting ratio of capital and labor in racial categorizations that demarcate the zones of contact and separation:

"But we are refugees and mercenaries and guest workers; you see us sleeping in airport lounges, you watch us unwrapping the last of our native foods, unrolling our prayer rugs, reading our holy books, taking out for the hundreth time an aerogram promising a job or space to sleep, a newspaper in our language, a photo of happier times, a passport, a visa, a laissez-passer.

We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribe. We are dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of intercontinental vagabondage. We ask only one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue. We sneak a look at the big departure board, the one the tourists use. Our cities are there, too, our destinations are so close!....

What country? What continent? We pass through wars, through plagues. I am hungry for news, but the discarded papers are in characters or languages I cannot read. The zigzag route is straightest" (1989: 90-91).

The last statement anticipates the waning of allochronism in Western epistemology and the realization of coevalness in affirming the cotemporality of speaking subject and listener (more on this later), where the Other occupies the same ground and

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5 Perhaps a revealing indication of this contradictory process may be illustrated by one urban policy in Britain to achieve racial integration by way of "ecological dispersal" (see Cashmore, 1988: 80-81).

the same time as ourselves. We suspect that the implied referent here that can only be alluded to but not realistically described is the massive, ongoing "warm-body export" of the Asian countries to Europe, the Middle East, and North America. This summons up a horizon of trajectories and redundancies whose passage across continents mocks the claims of market liberalism to underwrite and promote equality, modernity, and progress everywhere through the principle of difference.

A new speaking subject, the "I" behind the apparatus of enunciation, is initiated into the discursive field of the internationalized Gothic novel where diachrony collapses into synchrony. In this context, time dissolves into spatial disjunctions. Difference indeed relates, but from what point of view? We find that the narrative releases an allegorical force from the woman's obedience to tradition, a force that counterpoints the effects of the global shift of production and appropriation in the life of the Third World subaltern. Jasmine may be said to personify the return of the repressed - the primal scene of deracination - so as to make it (rootlessness) a generalized lived situation for all.

What is striking here in the light of my remarks on Kingston's *China Men* is an analogous smuggling of the Asian, this time a woman obsessed with the past rather than with future success, into U.S. territory via a break in the unguarded coastline of Florida. (In both *China Men* and this novel, the Caribbean functions as a locus for testing the vulnerability of the nation-state's closure.) She is ferried by The Gulf Shuttle commanded by Half-Face, a sinister figure who "had lost an eye and ear and most of his cheek in a paddy field in Vietnam," in what he calls "the armpit of the universe". This deformed exemplar of the rugged individualist is a survivor of the U.S.'s disastrous attempt to dominate the Pacific Rim and roll back the gains of several Asian revolutions. Jasmine's first sight of the New World undercuts well-known literary analogues - from the Puritan evangelists to *The Great Gatsby*. Her recollection foreshadows the suicidal agonies of the Iowa farmers and registers the surface mutations of uneven development at the core still visible to the newcomer:

"I smelled the unrinsed water of a distant shore. Then suddenly in the pinkening black of pre-dawn, America caromed off the horizon.

The first thing I saw were the two cones of a nuclear plant, and smoke spreading from them in complicated but seemingly purposeful patterns, edges lit by the rising sun, like a gray, intricate map of an unexplored island continent, against the pale unscratched blue of the sky. I waded through Eden's waste: plastic bottles, floating oranges, boards, sodden boxes, white and green plastic sacks tied shut but picked open by birds and pulled apart by crabs....

I wonder if Bud even sees the America I do. We pass half-built, half-deserted cinder-block structures at the edge of town, with mud-spattered deserted cars parked in an uncleared lot, and I wonder, Who's inside? What are they doing? Who's hiding? Empty swimming pools and plywood panels in the window frames grip my guts. And Bud frowns because unproductive projects give him pain. He said, 'Wonder who handled their financing?'

My first night in America was spent in a motel with plywood over its windows, its pool bottomed with garbage sacks, and grass growing in its parking lot" (1989: 95-97).

Retrospection insinuates the presence of Bud, the patriarch-banker, impotent before the signs of unproductivity. Raped in a room that seemed to her like a madhouse or prison, Jasmine performs a ritual of purification and then kills Half-Face, agency of the Symbolic Order of laissez-faire competition, who has transported her to the land where she has vowed to sacrifice herself according to the code of marital obedience. Allochronism gives way to coevalness. In the borderland between incompatible life-worlds, "undocumented" cheap labor confronts microchip technology; the time of suttee intersects the age of mercantile, booty capitalism.

One can stress here how Jasmine's violation by Half-Face, symbol of the ethos of commodification and white male supremacy, releases her from her vow and assigns her to a new mission, a cognitive and mock-naive mapping of the United States. Among the connections revealed by her experience - her sequence of becomings, if you like - is the kind of commercial circuit that links her countryman, the Professorji in Flushing, New York, with Indian women whose virgin and innocent hair, compared to the "horrible hair of American women" ruined by shampoos and permanents, are highly prized as an integral component of the defence industry and high-tech business. One wonders: Is the diaspora a pretext for recolonizing the Third World?

After a stay in New York City with a seemingly ideal couple, she ends up temporarily in Iowa with Bud Ripplemeyer, purveyor of credit and the future, whose body, paralyzed from a shot by a disgruntled farmer-customer, betokens the plight of the heartland. But it is her association with their adopted Vietnamese child Du that enables Jasmine, who has "bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase," to recover her sense of being "rhizomatic," open to multiple transactions and intensities. She is, however, still vulnerable to the seductions of the stereotype: "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am" (1989: 178). Gender inequity becomes romanticized under the aegis of Orientalism, a compensatory response to the indifference of cultural relativism and the mystique of American pluralism.



In contrast, it is instructive to note how, for the Korean Younghill Kang, the West taught him "rebellion against nature and fatality"; confronted by the pithless derelicts of New York City, he invokes the Korean experience in Japanese prisons: "And yet I clutched to a new world of time, where individual disintegration was possible, as well as individual integration, where all need not perish with the social organism...." (1974: 239).

In Mukherjee's novel, it is Du, however, who reconnects Jasmine to the traumatic violence of Half-Face and the whole mechanism of exchange in business society. As mysterious as her own image, Du is Jasmine's "silent ally against the bright lights, the rounded, genial landscape of Iowa." Her reading of Du's past - she has counseled herself before to "learn to read the world and everyone in it like a photographic negative of reality" - constructs a site for affirming her capacity to mobilize energies suppressed by the power of a disciplinary regime based on reification and private property. Who is this survivor of the seemingly gratuitous violence of Half-Face and the whole phallogocentric machinery? Jasmine thematizes the allegory of the refugee as the typical inhabitant of the postmodern milieu:

"Considering that he has lived through five or six languages, five or six countries, two or three centuries of history; has seen his country, city, and family butchered, bargained with pirates and bureaucrats, eaten filth in order to stay alive; that he has survived every degradation known to this century, considering all those liabilities, isn't it amazing that he can read a Condensed and Simplified for Modern Students edition of *A Tale of Two Cities*?"

Du's doing well because he has always trained with live ammo, without a net, with no multiple choice. No guesswork: only certain knowledge or silence. Once upon a time, like me, he was someone else. We've been many selves. We've survived hideous times. I envy Bud the straight lines and smooth planes of his history" (1989: 189-90).

But this hermeneutics of the refugee who eludes hegemonic power by the myth of transmigration expresses not only Jasmine's intuition of difference, the "uncanny strangeness" personified by Du. It also foregrounds the hypocrisy of pluralism and the inadequacy of religion or metaphysics in helping her comprehend the geopolitics of the Vietnam War. Moreover, it reflects in general the limits of the Westernized Indian intellectual's understanding of the lived situation of other people of color: "I should have known about [Du's] friends, his sister, his community. I should have broken through, but I was afraid to test the delicate thread of the hyphenization. Vietnamese-American: don't question either half too hard" (1989: 200). The last half is scarcely interrogated - unless Half-Face, Bud, and their ilk function as synecdoches.

It is at this juncture that Mukherjee's protagonist installs the psychoanalytic figure of the lack, the absence, on which the political economy of the Symbolic Order of difference thrives; the lack premised on castration of the female, the absence that can only be rectified by Taylor rescuing her from the panic-stricken farmlands of Iowa and delivering her to a fabled haven in California. In this context, the Asian Indian diaspora refunctions the syndrome of the escape/journey to the Western frontier as a vehicle for its realization of the vicissitudes of karma. Nevertheless we are expected to understand that the encounter between the flux of the Asian female body and the axiomatics of possessive individualism has again confirmed the perception that for capitalism, both nature and women are "objects of conquest and penetration as well as idolatry and worship" (Smith, 1984: 14). The fact of Indian economic success in the United States does not detract from the truth of that perception. Based on the latest census, Indians among Asian immigrants today earn the highest income and enjoy privileges denied to the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmongs, and other recent arrivals. Mukherjee's novel does not address this fact but rather allegorizes the fate of the Asian woman (especially one invested with the touristic charm of Hindu mythology) who is still conceived by mainstream U.S. society as a fetishized object of pleasure, all the more seductive because behind the docility and magical fatalism lurks an inscrutable and enigmatic power that seems to resist domestication by the liberal code of individual rights, administrative rationality, consumption goods, money, and bourgeois feminism. On the other hand, Mukherjee believes that she has once again narrativized her belief that "we murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of our dreams" (1990: 8).<sup>6</sup>

In one sense, *Jasmine* is a parable of *M. Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon* metamorphosed into an avenging messenger of the body, of ancestral habitats, of places wrecked by the drive for capital accumulation. Emblematic of the "combined and uneven development" of two modes of production, *Jasmine's* journey across the United States stages a reversal of the immigrant pattern of adjustment and adaptation, unfolding the paradox of the postmodern compression of time/space as the matrix for the return of the repressed: the Other as accident, chance, pure contingency.

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6 For a critique of Mukherjee's temporizing responses to her Canadian and U.S. milieus, see Tapping (1992).

## VI.

Returning to the theme of minorities and the notion of multiple connections and deterritorializations theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, I want to comment finally on two other representations of the Asian diaspora that implicitly critique the narrative of resolved crisis exemplified by the fiction of Kingston and Bulosan and the model of aesthetic sublimation offered by Mukherjee's novel. One detects in them a fundamentalist retreat to a rich coherent tradition (Kingston), to the organic romanticism of an insurrectionary peasantry (Bulosan),<sup>7</sup> and the reconciling catharsis of transcendental myth (Mukherjee). These may be deemed three capitulationist tendencies immanent in the diasporic archive that still exercise some influence today.

It is possible to demonstrate that aestheticized humanism as an essentialist ideology lingers in the interiority of the characters portrayed by our three exemplars. This ideology seeks to defuse the critical-satiric force of their narratives and recuperate their vision of self-empowerment in order to legitimize commodity fetishism. It is appropriate now to propose extra-territorial (more exactly, deterritorializing) alternatives to the exorbitance of aestheticized humanism practised by celebrities like Amy Tan, Gish Jen, and others. I have in mind two texts, one by John Okada and the other by Jeffery Paul Chan, that explore horizons beyond the parameters of descent (*ius sanguinis*) and putative consent (*ius solis*) that circumscribe the apologetics of academic discourse on ethnicity and its imaginative rendering. The first exemplifies the route of negativity and the refusal of a pluralist synthesis; the second illustrates the route of interpellating the Asian subject-position via a triangulation of the family breakup, the diasporic return, and the discovery of the stranger within (the margin brought to the center).

Published twelve years after the end of World War II, Okada's *No-No Boy* attempts to capture the agony of self-division in the life of Ichiro, a second-generation Japanese American, who is caught in the dilemma of claiming an identity from the nation whose government has imprisoned his parents and his racial kin. His problem replicates that of his friend Kenji while detained in the concentration camp during World War II: to prove that he is a Japanese who, in spite of or because of his descent, loves America. This predicament is only a symptom of that malaise bedeviling the nisei who grew up in the camps: "Was there no answer to the bigotry and meanness and smallness and ugliness of people?" Because Ichiro refused to forswear allegiance to Japan and serve in the U.S. armed forces, he was imprisoned; his nay-saying, how-

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7 I initiate a new approach to Bulosan in essays contributed to two volumes (San Juan, 1994a; 1994b).

ever, does not affirm his mother's fantasy of a victorious Japan nor his father's pathetic resignation. His predicament may be intractable, given the absence of any community that reconciles natives and aliens as well as the ascendancy of a rhetoric of exchange devaluing wholeness into atomized fragments: "But I did not love enough, for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese..., I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half of me which was you bigger than the half of me which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel" (1974: 281). How does Okada symbolize the way out of this suspended state where difference tends to be essentialized, where an irresolvable antinomy becomes invested with libidinal affects?

The return to the "primal scene" of a repeated deracination, of life before concentration camp, adumbrates the passage beyond negativity and aporia. Okada conceives of a process of living through the contradictions and paradoxes of the whole society, a practice of negotiation associated with the chronotope of the stratified city. In the following section, the novelistic discourse intimates a mode of knowledge in which the protagonist begins to see himself in the eyes of victimized Others amid the urban decay of the Asian quarters spatially removed from, but also communicating with, the affluent district by a single street. Here class segregation qualifies the doxa of racial difference, freezing temporal motion in the landscape of a dream aborted into nightmare. In the way Ichiro's homecoming becomes transfigured by the encroachment of what U.S. nationalism/white supremacy has so effectively repressed, its racialized antithesis in the image of blacks performing a parodic carnival, we comprehend the illusory substance of pluralist democracy:

"Being on Jackson street with its familiar store fronts and taverns and restaurants, which were somehow different because the war had left its mark on them, was like trying to find one's way out of a dream that seemed real most of the time but wasn't real because it was still only a dream. The war had wrought violent changes upon the people, and the people, in turn working hard and living hard and earning a lot of money and spending it on whatever was available, had distorted the profile of Jackson Street. The street had about it the air of a carnival without quite succeeding at becoming one. A shooting gallery stood where once had been a clothing store; fish and chips had replaced a jewelry shop; and a bunch of Negroes were horsing around raucously in front of a pool parlor. Everything looked older and dirtier and shabbier.

He walked past the pool parlor, picking his way gingerly among the Negroes, of whom there had been only a few at one time and of whom there seemed to be nothing but now. They were smoking and shouting and cussing and carousing and the sidewalk was slimy with their spittle.

'Jap!'

His pace quickened automatically, but curiosity or fear or indignation or whatever it was made him glance back at the white teeth framed in a leering dark brown which was almost black.

'Go back to Tokyo, boy.' Persecution in the drawl of the persecuted.

The white teeth and brown-black leers picked up the cue and jogged to the rhythmical chanting of 'Jap-boy, To-ki-yo, Jap-boy, To-ki-yo....'

Friggin' niggers, he uttered savagely to himself and, from the same place deep down inside where tolerance for the Negroes and the Jews and the Mexicans and the Chinese and the too short and too fat and too ugly abided because he was Japanese and knew what it was like better than did those who were white and average and middle class and good Democrats or liberal republicans, the hate which was unrelenting and terrifying seethed up" (1974: 270-72).

Initiated in this ritual of lostness, resentment, and self-affirmation of one's presence as the enemy, Ichiro reaches home - a passage forecasting the diaspora's true destination.

So here the Asian mock-prodigal son returns not to a utopian image of a tribal hearth but to a reaffirmation of what is antithetical to exchange value, to the bureaucratic rationality of a regime founded on racial/ethnic segmentation: the virtue of the slave's labor (valorized by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*). In this case, virtue inheres in Ichiro's courage to refuse subjection by the racial state. But while this entails Ichiro's repudiation of his mother's fantasy (mirror-image of imperial power), it sublates personal guilt born of an irrecusable dualism (American nationalism versus Japanese) and ushers a condition of indeterminacy on which the genre of the diasporic novel turns and returns. This uneven development in the protagonist's dilemma attests to the delayed after-effects of the phenomenon of "unprecedented transportation" which John Berger characterizes thus: "Emigration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing water, living amongst strangers, but, also, undoing the very meaning of the world and--at its most extreme--abandoning oneself to the unreal which is the absurd... To emigrate is always to dismantle the center of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments" (1984: 56-57). Ichiro's life may also be evaluated as a defeat, a failure of synthesis. But what is the rationale for this denouement? One answer is: "To whisper for that which has been lost. Not out of nostalgia, but because it is on the site of loss that hopes are born" (Berger, 1984: 55). I suspect that what we are witnessing here is the emergence of a new subject-position that interrogates what "American" signifies, just as we perceive in the absences punctuating the life of Yamamoto's protagonist a locus of agency whose condition of possibility is prefigured by the misrecognition and circumstantial heterology embedded in the name "Las Vegas Charley." Is the juxtaposition of city and stereotype a ruse to frame and contain the threat of an alien acciden-

tally revealing the internal corruption of the host society?<sup>8</sup> Isn't Ichiro's bifurcated psyche symptomatic of the return of this repressed?

## VII.

We are still operating within the problematic of exile and homesickness introduced by Hugo of St. Victor in the epigraph to this chapter. The home for some groups of the Asian diaspora is, as we have seen, not already predestined by the contingencies of mass dislocations; instead it is constructed by the mundane tasks of everyday life, by enduring and learning from the ordeal of racial exclusion and the problems of separation, the disintegration of the family, the surrender to the lure of reconciliation, and the ephemeral catharsis of mass consumerism. Fantasy and hallucination attend these critical moments of the passage. If the victimization of Asians in the United States is an effect of the overarching metanarrative of Enlightenment modernization and progress, a master-plot legitimized by an epistemology founded on allochronic distancing of Others, their reduction to objects of instrumentalizing knowledge and bureaucratic manipulation, then is a praxis of coevalness and dialogism<sup>9</sup> the solution? Chan's intriguing story, "The Chinese in Haifa", problematizes this approach and stages the nuances of its implications.

Brooding on the after-effects of his recent divorce and separation from his children, Bill Wong - the central character in Chan's story - is comforted by Mrs. Goldberg, a Jewish mother visiting her son Herb and his wife Ethel, Bill's close friends and neighbours. In answer to the question, "What are families for?" Mrs. Goldberg replies: "So when you lose one, you have more.... Everybody's got a family.... You come from one family, you make another" (1991: 88). This is the filiative solution to reification. Bill's situation of solitary freedom and anxiety to escape it enters into an am-

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8 Aside from Kristeva's speculative reflections on the function of the stranger in history, I recommend Georg Simmel's (1977) essay on "The Stranger" as one of the most provocative, seminal reconaissance of this character-type and social phenomenon.

9 For some, the scenario is that of postcolonial subaltern academics at last priming themselves up to speak to Western poststructuralists. One recent instance can be cited. Elaine Kim has taken on board the postmodernist notion that identities are "fluid and migratory," that the dominant culture is "not monolithic and unitary"; and this leads her to recycle the assimilationist paradigm in a new apologetic version: New Asian immigrants, she writes, "have moved to cities and towns where few Asian Americans had lived before and are doing things to earn their livelihoods that they could not have imagined when they were in their homelands: Cambodians are making doughnuts, Koreans are making burritos, South Asians are operating motels, Filipinos are driving airport shuttle buses" (1993: XI). Erasing the prodigious history of intervention of U.S. imperialism into the homelands of these newcomers, Kim revives the "Statue of Liberty" slogan of the United States as the home to refugees, persecuted peasants, and so on - resurrects, indeed, the ghost of Charlie Chan!

biguous dialogue with Mrs. Goldberg's traditional view of the family, marriage and children, as the stable, harmonizing center of society - a view that has also characterized the tributary formation of Confucian China and recent "politically correct" neo-conservative programs of reinstating U.S.-style apartheid. This mentality is then syncopated with the fragmentation of life in a world where spatiotemporal distances are compressed in order to secure a differential politics of exchange:

"Ethel winked at Bill from over her shoulder. 'Maybe you can find Bill a nice Jewish girl, Mama, in Haifa.'

'Are there Chinese in Haifa?' Herb asked.

'The Jews and the Chinese,' she said, standing in the middle of the room and weaving her eyes back and forth from her son to his wife, 'they're the same.' She walked to the door and Herb followed. 'You know there are Jews in China, there must be Chinese in Haifa. It's all the same, even in Los Angeles'" (1991: 90).

But are the two diasporas the same? When Mrs. Goldberg flippantly suggests to Ethel, "you get him married," this concern acquires a self-fulfilling resonance when we learn later that Ethel and Bill have already begun a secret liaison, an affair that belies Herb's claim of his successful marriage as one based on "sharing and caring." But such an attempt of the narrative to establish linkages between this anguished Chinese intellectual and his Jewish friends becomes an ironic commentary on the humanist belief in the naturalness of trust and interdependency among beleaguered communities.

Given the unrelenting war for Lebensraum in Palestine, encountering the Chinese in Haifa is less conceivable than meeting Jews in China. Amid the trials of such dislocations both real and imaginary, Bill and Ethel offer extraterritorial compensations. Hovering over this somewhat idyllic relation between Bill and the Goldbergs is a reported event that makes the quest for the homeland (fantasized or documented) an occasion for a minor holocaust: three Japanese terrorists, equipped with machine guns and grenades, opened fire on passengers getting on an Israeli jetliner in Rome. Herb's exclamation of perplexity foregrounds the issue of allochronism and coevalness: "And here my mother's going to Israel today. Christ on his everlovin' crutch! What in the hell do the Japs have against us?" The ironic pathos of Herb's question is symptomatic of a failure to make connections. Internationalism, the "bad faith" of narcissistic nationalism, becomes a paltry apology when Herb assures Bill Wong that he can tell he's not a Japanese. On the other hand, what is Chan's message about the adequacy of the individual Chinese male whose resentment begins to invent a chain of signifiers that binds together incongruous elements such as the Palestinian loss of their land, the Japanese Red Army's internationalist sympathy with the Palestinians, Jewish Zionism, Israel's image as pariah state, and Bill Wong's (and his generation's)

alienation from the ancestral culture? Contrast the burden of history intimated by the opening passage: "Bill dreamed he heard the cry of starving children in Asia bundled together in a strangely familiar school yard," with the fantasy of power conjured in the last sentence: "A vague collection of swarthy Japanese in mufti crowding around Herb's station wagon at the airport grew in his mind's eye." Is this a symptom of anarchist resentment that fills up the space once occupied by Confucian virtues, or an index of "an extreme individualism" flawed (as Kristeva puts it) by "a weakness whose other name is our radical strangeness" (1991: 195)? This surmise prompts us to suggest that here, as in the other texts analyzed, the dynamic of collective envy and loathing articulates itself with the ethos of market liberalism to produce the expenditures of spirit witnessed in all diasporic testimonies.<sup>10</sup>

In commenting on Jean Mohr's photographs of Palestinians conducting their normal lives in abnormal circumstances, Edward Said observes that his people are "presented addressing our world as a secular place, without nostalgia for a lost transcendence" (146). And even as we look at these victims of a resolved or reversed diaspora, they are also scrutinizing, assessing, and judging us. Perhaps this is what our Asian American writers have also accomplished in their staging of difference (cultural, sexual, racial) into dialectical contradictions; in reflexively transcoding Asian difference into a historical predicament involving the dominant group; in articulating the immigrant consciousness as sensuous practice, a body speaking and producing meaning through the materiality of language and thus constituting minds and sensibilities as cotemporal participants in the process of social interlocution. In superseding the spatial hegemony of Western culture by a temporalizing strategy of recall that disrupts the instrumental coherence of the market and the discourse of exchange, Asian American writers have been trying to express and communicate to a world-audience the historical specificity of the Asian diaspora in the United States. They have sought to locate their ethnic and racial subjectivity in a semiotic domain hitherto ruled by a homogenizing, albeit multiculturalist, ideology where "Asian" still bears the stigmata (though now conjugated with its function as "model minority" defending private property against Latinos and blacks) of being inscrutable, devious, cunning, and exotic. This socially constructed Otherness, confirming the putative superior identity of the EuroAmerican bloc, manifests its double in an officially coded presence endowed with the miracle-inducing "wisdom of the Orient." This Orientalized subjectivity, a repeated ideological effect and a product of symbolic violence,

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10 In an insightful article, David Palumbo-Liu (1994) inquires into the instrumentalization of the "model minority" myth by the media apparatus to direct envy and loathing toward hegemonic ends.



is deeply compromised and has been gradually eclipsed by the fetishism of the "superminority" model.

We are now able to grasp the truth of this commonsense conception of the Orientalized subject as soon as it is concretely grounded in the historical events marking the expansion of U.S. monopoly capital throughout the world. The diverse and uncoordinated narratives documenting the specificities of the Asian diaspora have to contend not only with the legacy of such received notions, but also with the juridical limits established by a racial state, as attested by two unprecedented actions: the 1882 Exclusion Act and the imprisonment of 110,000 Japanese Americans during World War II.<sup>11</sup> The uneven development of the world-system of capital after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of various state/bureaucratic socialisms has so far evolved to a point where the systemic crisis of capital accumulation will now conflate residual, dominant, and emergent impulses, margin and center, metropolis and periphery, in spaces where Western hegemony will take on new forms and guises. With the movement of populations in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, the primal scene of deracination returns to haunt the premature celebration of pluralist freedom, unity in diversity, and "common culture."

Here I want to enter a brief parenthesis that can only suggest the scope of further research into the aesthetics and politics of an emergent and genuinely international genre. The advent of a feminist praxis in Filipino writing (most notably in the novels of Lualhati Bautista) in the 1970s and 1980s may be explained by the phenomenon of millions of Filipino contract laborers, mostly women, sojourning in the Middle East, Europe, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and elsewhere. When these migrant workers return home, they construct stories of their heterogenous experiences that assume a narrative form conflating the quest motif with the seduction/ordeal motif - a plot that violates all probabilities found in the schemas of semiotic narratology. When the female subaltern returns, the mimesis of her struggle for survival almost always implicates the diegesis of the world system as a metanarrative of the global circulation of commodified bodies and phallogocentric energies. Exchange of her labor power short-circuits the time/space compression of the postmodern economy. Whether as household servant in Kuwait or "hospitality girl" in Tokyo, she narrates the lived experi-

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<sup>11</sup> Contrary to the thesis (argued by Nathan Glazer and others) that the United States was founded *inter alia* on the principle of free entry granted to everyone, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 stands as a landmark decision in which members of a specific ethnic group for the first time in U.S. history were denied entry. From 1910 to 1940, the Angel Island Immigration Station served to process Asian immigrants. A sample of the writings of Chinese immigrants carved on the walls of their detention barracks in Angel Island can be found in Lauter (1990: 1755-62).

ence of victimage as a reversal of the "civilizing mission." She thus repeats the whole epic of colonization - but with a difference: her gendered subject-position or agency yields not surplus value but the hallucination of commodity fetishism when consumer goods and traumas become cargo myths for native consumption in the Philippines. In this sense, the migrant worker as "speaking subject" destabilizes the regularities of the "New World Order" and the "free market" discourse of individual self-fulfillment. Her fabula decenters the *szuzhet* of technocratic modernization. Overall, this new genre of migrant narrative explodes the traditional definitions of the gendered subject provided by the Symbolic Order of dependent capitalism while its transgressive allegory destroys the conventional plots of immigrant success and postcolonial hybridity.

Meanwhile, the scenario in the United States may be said to vary only in its determinate historical particularities. New Asian immigrants will have to invent their own imaginative responses to changed class and race alignments that subtend U.S. political dynamics in the 21st century. However, the task on the whole remains the same: the reconstitution of the Asian subject-position as an agency of resistance to racist oppression and of emancipation from the bondage of globalized capital. In the words of Genny Lim, a distinguished Chinese American playwright (in Houston, 1993: 153-54): "We are living in such adverse times - ecologically, economically, morally and spiritually - that any effort made to mobilize peoples' consciousness into self-determination, self-validation, compassion, and racial, class, and sexual understanding is a step further along in the difficult journey of human survival on this planet."

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## **MIGRACIJE, ETNIČNOST, RASIZAM: NARATIVNE STRATEGIJE U KNJIŽEVNIM DJELIMA AZIJSKIH AMERIKANACA**

### SAŽETAK

Ulazak azijskih masa na američki kontinent dio je svjetskih migracija koje su započele u 16. stoljeću, a vrhunac dosegle nakon španjolsko-američkog rata 1898. godine, kada su Filipini potpali pod imperijalnu dominaciju SAD-a. Kako bi simbolički prikazali traumatsko iskustvo iskorijenjenosti i rasiističko nasilje kojima su izloženi kineski, japanski i filipinski migranti u Sjedinjenim Državama, etnički umjetnici ovih zajednica razvijaju nekoliko strategija: postmodernističku afirmaciju heterogenosti (Frank Chin i Jeffery Chan), kontra-identifikaciju i deidentifikaciju (Maxine Hong Kingston, Bharati Mukherjee, Hisaya Yamamoto) i proročko oblikovanje (Carlos Bulosan). Te strategije izražavaju neke načine kojima azijski Amerikanci pokušavaju prevladati rasizam, isključivanje, marginalizaciju i kooptiranje pomoću ideološke kritike. U tom procesu "orijentalizirana" ili egzotična tema, utemeljena na sudbini akumulacije kapitala u SAD-u (depresija, hladni rat i širenje potrošačkog društva), može se smatrati oporbenom, emancipirajućom snagom sa svojim vlastitim životnim, premda ograničenim, povijesnim djelovanjem. Cilj je ove etničke umjetnosti transcendentnost rasnog ugnjetavanja i oslobođenje iz ropstva transnacionalnoga kapitala.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** imigracija, rasizam, etničnost, azijski Amerikanci, narativne strategije, zajednica, kapitalizam