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**Tell Me Who I Am: Representations of Prostitution and the Construction of Masculinity
in Five Contemporary Asian-American Novels**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Deborah Yuki Altgilbers

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The Graduate School

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(Asian-American and Postcolonial Studies)

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation examines the ways five contemporary Asian-American authors portray their protagonists' attempts to construct viable masculine subjectivities contravening popularly sanctioned, institutionally dictated possibilities for social iterability. In each novel, depictions of prostitution and the prostitute as tropes illustrate subordinated, often 'failed,' masculinities. Critical attention is called for because prostitution and prostitutes feature prominently and illustrate the existing dearth of representational vehicles available to Asian-American authors to discuss disenfranchisement from U.S. mainstream society while not employing, but arguably exploiting, another group of marginalized individuals to fully realize the gravity of their grievances. In each chapter, the ways Asian-American men are specifically impacted when prevailing social mores and internalized racism make self-actualization nearly impossible is explored through the particular ways prostitutes are deployed to enable readers to begin thinking about the effects upon men whose sexuality and gender have been racialized, while race has also been gendered and sexualized. This investigation includes works about hetero- and homosexual men, in both national and transnational contexts. The goal is not to solve the dilemma posed by the formation of alternative ways of being in the world, but to begin creating a representational lexicon reflecting less anxiety about not meeting the conventional definition of manhood and not silencing those who, in unique ways, have experienced a form of social death. This dissertation essentially asks how we begin the process of democratizing identity formation in literature.

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Introduction

1. Reflections and Observations

Growing up in Alabama in the nineteen seventies, I was somewhat of a novelty in my neighborhood. Even though only my mother is Asian, Japanese to be precise, we were the token Asian family. And, I was alternately that little Oriental girl, the Jap, or the Chink—the one whose mom spoke “Ching-Chonglish” and “ate fish eyeballs” according to local legend.

Similarly, when we made one of our infrequent visits to Japan, I was also treated as somewhat of an oddity. However, there, my gangly build and long legs which had earned me the nickname “Grasshopper” back home, in conjunction with my wavy hair and well-defined nose, were seen as portents of high fashion marketability in a country increasingly enamored with Western ideas of beauty. This, notwithstanding, I was still always the “*foreign*

granddaughter”—paraded around by relatives, but also left out, almost always with a sorry shake of the head that said, “She wouldn’t get it. After all, she isn’t one of us.”

I was a nowhere girl, and no matter what I did I could not escape this face which was both highly visible and invisible. As a child of twelve or thirteen, I think I just wanted to be that ‘neutral’ color which my friends were, the color that didn’t incessantly prompt questions about origins or martial arts prowess. Or, cause people to view me as one of those delicate, pale dolls under glass, which I wasn’t by any means. I was a ruddy brown from summer softball, swimming, and running up and down the block playing cowboys and Indians. But people couldn’t see it. Even when I tried to become an All-American girl scout, I was invited to my neighbor’s troop meeting, but only to model kimonos for the other girls.

So, while my mother was free to hide out in her garden or her makeshift artist’s studio on the second floor of our house, I was sent out to weather the taunts of cruel school children—situations my mother felt I could somehow avoid or simply steel myself against. Secretly, I hated her for that, I think. And, I know that I hated myself for being marked by this dis-ease called ‘half Japanese’

Not so unlike some of the characters to be discussed in this dissertation, I wanted to be a ‘real’ (read: white) American with a ‘normal’ American family. And while I knew it was too late to pray for a different mother, Shirley Temple hair, or Bo Derek’s buoyant breasts, I suspected that I could vicariously experience some sort of validation of my desire to be authentically American if I could sufficiently downplay my difference, reject it, or at least compartmentalize it. High school offered the perfect opportunity to do so.

More specifically, ‘dating’ became a way of making a statement. I was often asked by friends and classmates whether or not I’d date an Asian man. The answer was always an automatic, emphatic “No!” We’d all seen the re-runs of “Bonanza” with the ever-effeminate Hop Sing dishing out baked beans to Hoss and the boys and wielding his butcher knife like a harried housewife, the re-runs of “Kung-Fu” where an anemic, asexual Keith Carradine roamed the desert alone—always alone with the exception of his young male companion, Grasshoppa’; and more, recently, John Hughes had given us the sex-crazed, under-socialized, snot-slinging, linguistically-challenged Long Duk Dong to show a heart-broken Molly Ringwald, and, by extension, the audience, that ‘life could be a lot worse.’ In fact, with the exception of Henry, a Korean math ‘geek,’ there were no Asian men to date at my school, and Henry, at least in my assessment, didn’t seem too eager strike up a relationship. Furthermore, my own mother had warned that as an American girl, my “mouth would be too big” for any Asian man to tolerate.

What I didn’t see at the time was that my mother’s own marriage to a man of German descent had not made her any less ‘alien’ in the eyes of our community. And, in fact, I continued to readily dismiss Asian and Asian-American men as potential romantic partners until I was almost thirty. Until then, I really didn’t even give much thought to the reasons behind my aversion to Asian men. As far as I was concerned, I simply just wasn’t attracted to them. But, clearly something deeper was at work, as I vividly remember snickering when my mother announced to me that one of my childhood playmates, a pale, stocky blonde prone to acne and bouts of shyness, was planning to marry a young, half- Korean man who went to school with us. “I guess she couldn’t do any better than *that*,” I said to myself, partially with

genuine sympathy, but mostly filled with a sense of relief and confidence in the fact that I would not experience a similar fate. This, even though, in retrospect, he was rather handsome, seemed polite and, truthfully, I barely knew him.

Needless to say my decision to date non-Asian men came fraught with its own set of representations and attendant expectations which I had to navigate and negotiate. Just as my images of Asian and Asian-American men had been manipulated by what Jeff Adachi, in his 2006 documentary of the same name, refers to as the “slanted screen,” so had many of my partners’ ideas of Asian women been dictated by mainstream images of Asian women—simultaneously exotic and inscrutable, devious, self-sacrificing and submissive to name a few of the most frequently applied adjectives.

As a young adult, I had no idea that such a thing as Asian-American studies existed and that authors and activists, such as Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston and other pioneering writers of the seventies, had already laid the foundations for a forum that would permit Asian Americans to speak about precisely what I was feeling about myself and about Asian men. What I was well aware of via mass media was that there were few options for role models available to me—the ‘Madame Butterfly,’ the ‘China Doll’ and the more ruthless, but by far sexier, figure of the deviant Asian woman, the ‘Dragon Lady,’ as portrayed in the Fu Manchu films or the Flash Gordon series. Ironically, in order to become legible to those non-Asian men with whom I wanted to affiliate myself in order to integrate into white, mainstream society, it became necessary to take on one of these roles or to play one if the situation demanded it.

Most often, I chose to play to the exotic, hyper-sexualized images of Asian women. I identified with, perhaps even romanticized, these marginal and dubious figures during my childhood and adolescence, as these were times when I had so keenly felt myself to be carrying on a precarious existence at the periphery of both Southern U.S. and Japanese society. And, women such as Sax Rohmer's sadistic Fah Lo Suee were appealing not only because they acted without thoughts of repercussions, but also because they had the uncanny ability to change their identities to gain advantages over their adversaries. Even though I knew they could never be allowed to win out over the blonde beauty queens or damsels in distress, the dissembling 'Dragon Lady' figures were, at least, more interesting to me than the porcelain-skinned, perpetually smiling Southern belles and Barbie dolls.

As mentioned previously, though, this was a costly choice. While it bought me a modicum of 'acceptance,' it was still always conditional acceptance. It was contingent upon terms dictated by others, more specifically by prevailing ideas of what Asian-Americans were 'supposed' to be like—be they the ideas of my mother or social/cultural institutions.

It was not until much later in life, after living in Asia, being married to an Asian man, and working in an organization with Thai prostitutes that I was able to see things more clearly. I undertook a trip to Thailand, believing that I had undergone some sort of spiritual and politically oriented transformation. Despite what my mother had said, I knew that I was destined to be with an Asian man. Perhaps, I exoticized Lek to some degree. Maybe, I didn't. Perhaps, he was an emblem of my newly found 'Asian pride' and political consciousness, both of which really emerged after I entered graduate school and as a result of a trek through the Thai jungle and a conversation I found myself having with my dead *oba-chan* (grandmother)

one day. Then again, maybe, my husband was not just a symbol of a shift in my beliefs. It was and is still difficult to untangle my thoughts and feelings on the matter.

What I did feel sure about when I decided to live in Thailand was that my plan to live with Lek and to work with prostitutes would bring me closer to an understanding of myself. At that time, I felt myself to be like them. They were kindred spirits in my imagination--fringe dwellers valued for the roles they played, images they knowingly projected to an audience deceived into believing that they had devalued them. They were the living embodiment of Fah Lo Suee. At the same time and, perhaps, more importantly, they represented the opportunity to 'aid' those who, like me, had never been 'allowed' to be 'themselves.'

When my plan to live and work in Bangkok became a reality, it was much more complicated than I had anticipated. My husband did not want to associate with my prostitute friends because it was socially 'unacceptable,' and I began, wrongly, to suspect him of being a prostitute himself—in part, as a result of the fact that it was easier for me to obtain a well paying job with a salary that would always far surpass his, simply because I was an American. At one point, I believed he was staying with me for the money and what it could do for his family. (One should know that Thai prostitution is oftentimes characterized by 'gift' giving as opposed to outright sex in exchange for money.) However, I would learn over time that his apparent 'selfishness' concerning money was really the manifestation of residual fear and shame stemming from the extreme poverty he endured as a child. In his mind, poverty was associated with abandonment (unable to afford to care for three boys, Lek's mother sent him to a grandmother and later to a monastery school) and emasculation--not a desire to 'take advantage' of the American tourist.

Also, in Bangkok, after numerous encounters with sex workers, I began to reflect on my belief that I shared something with the men and women for whom prostitution had become the best, and sometimes, the only choice. I thought about my rather naive assumption that ‘we shared a reality.’ But, my problem was something quite different. It was not economic. In the words of David Mura in *Where the Body Meets Memory*, “I’d elevated whiteness, I’d inculcated its standards of beauty, I’d believed on some level in the myth of white superiority. That was part of my sickness, part of the colonizing of my sexuality. [Every rejection] somehow reaffirmed both my sense of a color line and my sense of debasement” (232).

I also realized that I had no concept of the actual material impact that the various stereotypes of Asian women, which I in my quest for a more solid sense of self once perpetuated, had on individuals involved in the sex industry. That is, not until I witnessed firsthand how ‘johns,’ basing their understanding of Asian women on said stereotypes, treated Thai sex workers. Earning money for extended families depended on how simultaneously sexy and subservient one could be. I learned this by watching and intimately interacting with sex workers. Male, female, and transgender prostitutes—it made no difference. Projecting the ‘correct’ image was, sometimes quite literally, *everything*.

Also, I learned this lesson the hard way--by direct experience. However, the experience didn’t really make sense until I had spent a lot of time with sex workers. On my first visit to Thailand, before moving there, I went to a bar one evening for a beer. Not long after arriving, I was approached by an American who began speaking to me in ‘baby talk.’ Loudly and slowly, he pronounced each monosyllabic word, just as if he were talking to a deaf preschooler. The longer I stared at him in silent disbelief tinged with rage, the more enthusiastically and

emphatically he tried to communicate. When I finally said, “In graduate school, prostitutes like me learn to speak perfect English,” he became furious, calling me a “troublemaker” and a “bitch.” Turning to the Dutch bartender expecting help, I was surprised to find him vigorously agreeing with the disgruntled man and pointing an angry finger toward the door. He was asking me to leave! The same proprietor with whom, minutes prior to the arrival of the American, I’d been having a jaunty conversation was showing me the door. I hadn’t played the part acceptably and was, therefore, bad for business.

What began as a desire to understand myself as a gendered racialized subject and to understand my shifting attitudes toward Asian and Asian-American men, as well as what informed those attitudes has transformed, over time and with experience, into a desire to examine the larger picture. Now, I want to try to grasp the inter- and intra-personal conflicts and anxieties concerning sexual transgression, masculinity, assimilation, and iteration--issues which have eloquently been taken up in the works of writers like David Mura and David Louie Wong, among others. The difference here is that I am less interested in how Asian American authors use ‘respectable’ white women to gain access to the benefits of full subjecthood, and more concerned with how they employ figures of the demimonde, those twilight figures with whom I identified as a young woman, to construct themselves as Americans.

2. Methodology, Works, and the Larger Historical Context

In her article, entitled “Courtesans and Streetwalkers: The Changing Discourses on Shanghai Prostitution, 1890 – 1949,” historian Gail Hershatter employs readings of guidebooks and the press in search of “clues to the lives” of a highly varied population not typically involved in the process of historical self-representation. Indeed, she acknowledges that any attempt to provide a “real” or authoritative picture of the Shanghai sex industry is futile. However, what she is able to cull from the various discourses she examines is a certain portrait of how all of those involved with sex work, from prostitutes, to customers, to regulators, to reformers and authors engaged with the subject, “perceived and experienced their relationship to the world and to one another.” In addition, she provides a map, however incomplete she claims it may be, detailing the changes in Shanghai society as reflected in attitudes toward prostitution; and, these attitudes, she suggests, shifted in accordance with conditions brought about by increasing urbanization, transformations in labor patterns, and external pressures to ‘modernize.’

“Prostitution,” Hershatter writes, “was not only a changing site of work for women but also a metaphor, a medium of articulation in which the city’s changing elites and emerging middle classes discussed their problems, fears, agendas, and visions” (246). She informs us that while near the turn of the nineteenth century, “prostitutes appeared in elite discourse as the embodiment of sophisticated urbanity,” by the 1940s prostitutes were used to differentiate “respectable ‘petty urbanites’” from a “newly threatening urban disorder” (246). These visions of and anxieties about self-definition, as well as agendas designed to delineate Self from Other, were articulated and (re)produced in popular media of the time.

Hershatter remarks that significantly different “snapshots” of the courtesan and the streetwalker emerge from the guidebooks written for Chinese new to Shanghai and newspapers written by and marketed to Shanghai’s literate population (248). These portraits transformed over the almost sixty-year period she examines in accordance with changing notions of Chinese national identity. This raises questions not only about the “facts” these media reported, but more importantly, by extension, about the “preoccupations” of editors, writers, and readers. These preoccupations ranged from nostalgically extolling the beauty of and pleasure afforded by courtesans of yore, to recounting the “titillating details” of their affairs with Shanghai’s powerful elite, to offering practical tips on how to properly woo a courtesan or avoid the financial scheming of these women, to taxonomizing courtesans and street walkers and, finally, to lamenting the ubiquity of the street walker who was simultaneously portrayed as a ‘victim,’ as dangerously disruptive to the existing social order, and as a carrier of disease (246, 249, 252).

Ultimately, however, discourses of pleasure were superseded by those formulated by

Chinese elites, and later by the Communists, who associated all forms of prostitution with “national shame” and linked China’s subordination to “stronger” nations to the exploitation of women and the pursuit of pleasure. According to one Chinese Christian of the nationalist, anti-imperialist May 4th generation of 1919, “The amount of money wasted in Shanghai on prostitution in half a year [was] enough to redeem the railroads which have been mortgaged to the Japanese” (265). Meanwhile, under the Communists of the late forties and early fifties, the creation of a “re-educated,” “new” woman was, at least rhetorically, equated with the liberation of China from an ignominious history (265).

I summarize Hershatter’s study of prostitution and Chinese modernization because both her thesis and approach are central to the way I wish to consider the issues of Asian-American masculinity and prostitution in contemporary Asian-American literature. Whether, as Hershatter writes, “prostitution is always about the sale of sexual services” is debatable, given the variety of arrangements that may or may not be called prostitution, depending on, for example, how one defines what constitutes sex (247). However, I do agree with her that prostitution is about power relationships and contests over meaning. And, in agreement with her, perhaps, “much more can be learned from that transaction--about sexual meanings, about their social relations, about sex as a medium through which people [talk] about political power and cultural transformation, about nationhood and cultural identity” than can be learned from more conventional discursive exchanges involving sex, exchanges which are often riddled with unspoken or hidden assumptions and motives that may go unremarked upon because, on the surface, these interactions do not transgress what is considered socially acceptable, what has been ‘naturalized’ (247). I also invoke her study because it provides an interesting counterpoint

to and barometer by which to measure popular and legal discourses about immigrant Asians prevalent in the United States during roughly the same period she investigates. Those discourses depicted Asian men, mostly laborers on the railroad or involved in service jobs, as pathological in their sexuality, painted Asian women as prostitutes and called for the expulsion and/or exclusion from the nation of both. Furthermore, the changing attitudes toward prostitution and the agendas behind them, which she describes, as well as her argument of sex as a means of talking about other types of social arrangements also give us insight into the way prostitution is invoked to talk about contemporary Asian-American issues.

Given the long history of Western association of Asian sexuality with disease, chaos and dysfunction, a history which shall be elaborated upon below in more detail, and given the dearth of mainstream texts which present “love relationships” between Asian Americans, “particularly as lead characters,” one of the basic questions that this work seeks to engage is why the prostitute has, in the last fifteen years or so, come to appear with such frequency in texts written not about, but *by* Asian Americans for popular consumption (Tajima qtd. in Fung 183). A few examples are Yoji Yamaguchi’s *Face of a Stranger: A Novel* (1995), Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (1999), Han Ong’s *Fixer Chao* (2001), Lawrence Chua’s *Gold by the Inch* (1998), and Don Lee’s *Country of Origin* (2004), all novels which will be dealt with in the ensuing chapters. Also, what are the “preoccupations” of producers of these texts as they relate to Asian Americans’ attempts to realize themselves within a cultural, legal, and political framework which has alternately cast them as unassimilable aliens, outright perils to the democratic ideal and, most recently, as the model minority? Finally, why, how, and to what effects do these works deploy various representations of prostitution in the struggle over what

it means to be Asian, American and male at the turn of the millennium? And, what does their use of the trope of prostitution mean for those actually involved in sex work? To attempt to answer the last question would exceed the scope of this dissertation, but the question is certainly one worth considering as prostitutes are and have been at the center of policies and discourses related to national and local identity making and popular conceptions and depictions of them, in conjunction with these policies, have impacted their livelihoods and their personal lives, as shall be discussed in Chapter One.

Before delving deeper into the questions previously posed, it will be necessary to perform a few tasks. The first is to supply a working definition of prostitution and what it means to be a prostitute, both of which shall be expanded upon as this study progresses. This, because prostitution, as Hershatter's account and debates over sex work among feminists and prostitutes themselves attest to, cannot be conceptualized in binary terms as a unitary, static phenomenon operating independently of the historical and social circumstances in which it occurs. In Hershatter's work, summarized above, we begin to see how the prostitute is a malleable entity easily adopted and shaped to allow a particular society to make statements about itself, and, as we have seen, those statements are not necessarily uniform, as different groups within a particular society each have their own interests invested in how prostitution is represented and regulated. In the survey of prostitution and policy that follows, I will show how s/he has been historically employed to make statements about nation, class, religion, gender, and sexuality. Various communities have used the prostitute to ventriloquize their concerns and further their own interests, and Asian Americans are no less culpable. They have used representations of the prostitute and of prostitution not only to talk about injustices of the

past, specifically that of Asian Americans who were excluded based on the belief that they had immigrated to sell sex or who have been subjected to sexual colonization by the U.S. military, but also to elucidate issues and injustices related to the Asian-American ‘condition.’ As I will argue later, certain male authors have used the prostitute to represent anxieties about identity.

After reviewing the positions on prostitution articulated by a variety of sources, I will, in Chapter Two, touch briefly on studies of European imperialism in Asia since in conjunction with Hershatter’s work, the observations of post-colonial scholars concerning the function of gender and sexuality in sustaining hegemony and of forming and reforming the identities of, as well as relationships between, ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed,’ have created the foundations that make this investigation possible. In fact, many of the prevailing attitudes toward subject peoples outlined in these studies were starkly reflected in white, mainstream American discourses pertaining to early Asian immigrants, which, as we will see, points not only to the “internal repetition” characteristic of colonizing discourse, but also reveals its “adaptability” to “specific historical situations” (Proschan 438). Not so unlike the especially potent viral infections that Asian women, read: prostitutes, were purported to have brought with them, these discourses found their way from the European metropolises and their outposts to the United States and infected the collective consciousness of its white citizenry throughout much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Primarily, this section will provide an historical overview of how Asian-Americans, particularly males, have been envisioned in the U.S. national imaginary over time. Prominent here will be a discussion of the ways in which representations of sexuality once shaped and continue to influence popular perceptions of Asian Americans. Such a discussion should yield

insights into early inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts over identity involving Asian-American communities in the United States, knowledge of which is necessary if we are to locate and analyze the residuals of these conflicts as manifest in recent Asian-American cultural productions, which is the subject of this dissertation.

In order to contribute an interpretation to existing discourses concerning how these early conflicts have been understood and, more importantly, where sexuality and gender fit into this understanding, and how these elements have been rendered to say something not only about the past, but also about the present, I examine Yoji Yamaguchi's historical 'comedy of errors,' *Face of a Stranger: A Novel*. Though racial and sexual perceptions of Asian-Americans have not remained static and are not uniform, Yamaguchi's work provides a good starting point from which to work in that it gives us a window into problems experienced by early immigrants, and it allows us to begin a discussion of the doubts and fears that permeate later works to less comedic effect. What Yamaguchi lays out: the problems of invisibility, the exploitation of prostitutes, both real and for the purposes of making his point through fictional representation, inform and substantiate my readings of subsequent works, which become increasingly less humorous and more prone to focusing on absolute alienation and abjection of Others, particularly the prostitute who is presumably a symbol of shame and, by virtue of his/her trade, more susceptible to becoming a disenfranchised repository for desire and anxiety, a target of the displaced aggression that may accompany seemingly unrealizable empowerment, and a means by which to assuage the discomfort accompanying thwarted efforts to realize a viable identity.

If, in Yamaguchi's story, mistaken identity functions as a metaphor for the

disidentification Asian Americans from white Americans that they were subjected to in their encounters with the latter and which took place upon the arrival of early immigrants, then the seductive, but ultimately empty promise of the 'American Dream' and of American ideals are, arguably, made legible by the deceptively, alluring prostitute who, while s/he is enticing, is ultimately a body interchangeable with other bodies and evacuated of substance. The loss of personal history incurred in the transition from Japanese to Japanese American is likened to the suppressed personal history of the prostitute whose issues become secondary to elucidating the social death of the Asian male immigrant.

Similarly, what is at stake for the protagonists described in Chapter Three is identity; however, while the protagonists of Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao*, are not recognized on their own terms, both 'willingly' adopt a persona in order to benefit from the larger society. Misrecognition is self-induced, paradoxically, in order to achieve recognition. Further, neither is beyond employing violence in order to achieve his ends. Whereas Doc Hata's and William Narcisco Paulinha's primary goal is to 'belong,' belonging means abjection of self and others to preserve the illusion of an intact, agentic self. Furthermore, maintaining the illusion relies on injurious behaviors. Dehumanized as a male hustler, Ong's Filipino character, Paulinha, voluntarily offers himself up as another kind of prostitute when he masquerades as a *feng shui* master, a decision which ultimately prompts him to commit acts that make it impossible for him to reclaim any semblance of humanity. Again, the prostitute functions as a metaphor for (self) objectification, invisibility, and a threat to the order of things. Similarly, Lee's Doc Hata, by striving to become an 'authentic' Japanese and then, later, his suburban American town's number one, honorary white citizen engages in

lifelong self-betrayal, exploitation, and violence. This results in ostracizing the ‘fallen’ women to whom he is closest and in self alienation, and, thereby, reinforces his image as a travesty of humanity who attempts to reconstruct order in the image of it as defined by the hegemonies which will not recognize him.

Attempts to achieve visibility according to the terms of a society that is blind to the Asian-American Man finally lead back to invisibility in Lee’s and Ong’s novels, and the violence so often associated with mainstream concepts of masculinity does nothing to make these characters more recognizably ‘masculine.’ In fact, the stories seem to reveal how the nationalist, masculine ideal interferes with the acquisition of visibility, agency, and humanity, whether the characters are struggling against that ideal or attempting to conform to it as a means of self-assertion. These are misguided characters, who are understandably confused and deserving of sympathy, but there is no apparent effort made to construct an alternative, genuinely empathic masculinity.

Even in an international context, wherein it might be assumed that alternate possibilities for identity formation exist, the protagonist of Lawrence Chua’s *Gold by the Inch*, cannot overcome the effects of being colonized, even if only at the symbolic level, and, consequently, refrain from acting as a colonizer. This is the subject of Chapter Four. In this chapter I examine Chua’s loosely structured work, which alternates between the narrative of a young, gay Thai-American hustler and his obsession with a Thai prostitute, the story of the former’s uncomfortable arrangement with a white interior designer and his reflections on an unhappy childhood, as well as a series of historical snapshots of Southeast Asia and sometimes venomous diatribes concerning colonialism and neo-imperialism in the region. The story is

ultimately one of a failed search for identity in that going home again is not truly a possibility for the protagonist, who for all of his experience with being a white man's accessory and the poverty he endured as a child in Thailand and the US, is no longer accepted by and cannot accept the local Thai population. He is at once angered and repulsed by the poor, but is not above playing at being one of them in an effort to achieve a twisted mastery over the white Oppressor; and while he experiences a certain discomfort around Bangkok's elite, he is not unwilling to employ his relative wealth to experience a power to command the body of the Other, who is also himself, in a way he has never been able to do before. It is perhaps more evident in this novel than any other, that prostitution is about securing a masculine identity based on domination by utilizing the advantages that accompany uneven distribution of power and wealth. And, the perpetrator of the colonizing act need not be a white Man, but one who has internalized the values and beliefs which helped justify colonialism and (neo)imperial expansion.

The confusion of the unnamed protagonist in Chua's novel permeates nearly all of the works, but becomes more pronounced in Don Lee's *Country of Origin*, which is a mystery that centers on the disappearance of a young, multiethnic woman and doctoral student, Lisa, drawn into the Tokyo sex industry. The search for Lisa is a device by which the author illuminates the issues faced by a Korean-American foreign services officer, a Japanese-American CIA operative, and a socially awkward, native Japanese detective who is regarded as peculiar and incompetent by Japanese society, which he, nonetheless, idealizes for its 'superiority' to American society. In his view, which is crucial to understanding the other characters' desires and motives, the U.S. is a failed experiment in equality plagued by crime, racism, and lack of

communally-oriented sentiment or action. Like Chua's protagonist, most of cast of characters in Don Lee's novel seek to find or recreate themselves outside of the confines of the American racial hierarchy with all of its historical baggage or they define themselves according to the degree and nature of their alienation from the white American mainstream. Each of the primary male characters has something to gain from Lisa, though her multiethnicity is disturbing to all of them, in that it threatens the fragile, albeit ascendant, concept of normalcy and, consequently, destroys the illusions these men harbor about themselves and their worlds.

Lisa defies categorization, and this is both compelling and disturbing because none of the male characters can help but feel some sort of connection with her. It is no coincidence that she is a prostitute, either; for, prostitution also entails a combination of desire and repulsion for something that is not considered human or 'natural.' Lisa embodies a disruption of the heteronormative relationship, wherein the male is expected and expects to assume the mantle of patriarch. For Tom Hurley-- a low-level, Korean-American foreign services officer, and Detective Ota—a social misfit, Lisa is the means by which each is permitted to enjoy a restored, albeit traditional, masculinity. Meanwhile for Vincent Kitamura, the CIA operative, Lisa, in conjunction with his overly ambitious attempt to prove himself a 'real' American, contributes to the dissolution of his marriage to the white woman who professes to love him. Though his wife's love is not free of reservations about (lack of) social mobility which she, perhaps rightly, attributes to Vincent's Asianness, the marriage, ironically, does more to solidify his authenticity than anything he can ever do as an operative for the Embassy. Lee's novel provides an opportunity to discuss the relatively new experience of the transnational bi- or multi-ethnic individual in relation to identity formation and self-perception within a

historical context that predates by just a few years the advent of a dubious multi-ethnic chic which appears to celebrate the ethnically ambiguous individual, but actually objectifies her by transforming her into a marketing tool.

All of these novels endeavor to deal with the problems associated with identity formation, and each novel contains within it a commentary, whether it is intentional or not, on the racialization of sexuality and its relation to the achievement of enfranchisement within a larger sociopolitical context. What is potentially problematic is that all of the novels must in some way engage the prostitute or prostitution as tropes to talk about ‘subordinate’ or ‘failed’ masculinities. This is problematic in that it employs the prostitute to embody feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, and self-loathing of the male protagonists, as well as a body upon which to take out frustration at being overlooked, illegible except in certain incarnations, and deemed ineligible to assume the role of Male citizen subject. However, the novels barely speak to the concerns of prostitutes themselves, except perhaps to point out global inequalities and the part they play in the perpetuation of certain forms of prostitution—undoubtedly important, but still less concerned with the nuances and complexities of prostitution, its various sociohistorical contexts and the varied composition of the actors and actresses who participate in the sex industry. This begs the question: is it necessary to use the prostitute to discuss the issues with which Asian-American males must contend? As Julia O’Connell Davidson points out, “In film and fiction prostitutes are often used as the Other against which ‘normal’ society’s moral values can be endorsed, measured or debated [...], and competing representations of prostitutes are often juxtaposed in such a way as to construct a division between the prostitute as sexual *victim* and the prostitute as sexual predator” (1998, 136).

So, what is to be learned about the Asian-American condition and social mores and attitudes toward race and gender from the Asian-American narratives that do employ the prostitute? Furthermore, how do we find alternative ways to talk about the disenfranchisement of Asian-American males and, perhaps more importantly, how do we construct viable alternatives to the masculinities available to Asian-American men that do not involve the abjection of others? While I do not profess to have an answer, I think investigating concepts of masculinity as rendered by the authors I have chosen is a step toward imagining alternative iterations of self that do not simply respond to unflattering mainstream constructions of Asian-American Masculinity and that do not rely on the simplification or exploitation of complex and questionable tropes derived from various understandings of prostitution in order to point out what is wrong with hegemonic renderings of masculinity in America.

Chapter 1

What is a Prostitute?

(Or, Reflections on the Naughty, Knotty Subject of Those Who Engage in Sex for Hire)

The courtesan is also a woman who, in a sense, has ‘left the world’ and can see through its vanity. She has awakened to the (conventional) truth, because she can see behind appearances, through the veil of illusion. She is no longer bound by ordinary social ties and conventional norms, because she can see through men’s games. She is not impressed by their social distinctions--priests, commoners, or nobility, all are the same to her--and she can, like a true teacher, manipulate them through their own ‘skillful means.’ (Faure 131)

What is the history of Fantine? It is society buying a slave. From Whom? From Misery. From hunger, from privation, from loneliness, from abandonment, from privation. Melancholy barter. A soul for a bit of bread. Misery makes the offer, society accepts. The holy law of Jesus Christ governs our civilizations, but it does not yet permeate it, it is said to that slavery has disappeared from the European civilization. This is a mistake. It still exists; but it weighs now only upon woman, and it is called prostitution. (*Les Misérables: A Novel. Fantine*, 1862, Hugo 109)

The main title of this chapter, “What is a Prostitute?,” is taken from English physician and moral reformer William Acton’s 1870 second edition of a controversial ‘scientific’ study of prostitution. His response, though less poetic than either that of Faure or Hugo, is in a sense not so different from theirs. According to Acton, the prostitute was a woman with “half the woman *gone*, and that half containing all that elevates her nature [emphasis added]” (Acton qtd. in Bell 55). Even though Faure’s courtesan may, unlike Acton’s prostitute, use her power to redeem others, acting like one of the bodhisattvas who “frees men by fulfilling their carnal desire,” she is still not considered totally human; she is not of this world anymore (qtd. in

Dumpert 107). Meanwhile, Fantine is dehumanized by economic circumstances which not even the 'divinely ordained,' the otherworldly laws of Christianity can help her transcend. A "slave," she is divested of her personhood. Fantine is simply described as a product of the masses; her exact origins and parentage, are unknown, and even her name has no significance. She was given it at the "whim of the first passerby who found her," and finally she was "laid away in the darkness with bodies which had no name" (Hugo, 1987, 187, 122; Hugo, 1862, 171).

Much more recently, Shannon Bell has taken these varied, albeit similar, notions of the alterity of the prostitute further to contend that s/he is not a pathological, partial, or alien being. Rather, the prostitute's body is an "*empty symbol*" [emphasis added] (72). This empty symbol, she claims, was "produced," that is: negatively constructed by bourgeois scientific, political and moral discourses of the nineteenth century (72). However, according to Bell, as a discursive construct, the prostitute can and has been rearticulated and reconstituted through the work of contemporary performance artists as a "sexual healer, goddess, teacher, political activist, and feminist" (184).

Given all of these definitions that hint at incompleteness, instability or the ephemeral, what is a prostitute, then? In what sense does the prostitute exist for, say, the media, modern feminists and social reformers, sex tourists and other consumers of sexual services, government authorities, religious leaders, or producers of various popular cultural artefacts, for example? More importantly, how do race, ideas about national belonging, and material conditions inform constructions of prostitute identity and other subordinated sexualities in general, and what is it that these constructions tell us about how race and nation are imagined?

The first question can be dealt with to some extent in a review of the array of assessments put forth by feminists concerning the issue of prostitution. The other questions pertaining to identity will be considered, here, primarily in the context of various policies concerning prostitution enacted by the Victorians and contemporary American politicians, as well as governments in Asia, and of the efforts of social reformers and prostitutes to further their respective interests.

Later in the dissertation, these questions will be examined in connection with colonial administration of sexuality in Asia, American neo-imperialism and the formulation of Asians as sexual Others, and attendant anxieties about national sovereignty and racial ascendancy as they have manifested themselves, popularly and institutionally. My focus will be on how the aforementioned phenomena and factors have shaped and continue to influence not only attitudes toward subjugated groups of people, but also the self-image and culture of both the marginalized and those in power. As is evident in the novels I investigate, identity is a serious concern, and a complex constellation of power relationships have emerged in response to changing historical circumstances. Further, oppressive strategies for solidifying identity are not restricted to those who wield the most power, but are also exercised by those who desire to be recognized. In other words, those who feel they do not have a voice internalize the tactics of the institutions that subjugate them and attempt to use those tactics to silence other marginalized groups in order to delineate and elevate themselves.

Before continuing a discussion of what defining Asianness and Asian sexuality has meant for both white Europeans and white Americans, the relationship between 'deviant' sexualities and Asian/Asian-American identity that has been established, and the importance of

sexuality to Asian-American cultural producers interested in representing Asian-American experiences, I would first like to present an abbreviated overview of arguments pertaining to a much written about subject that has vexed feminists and activists for well over one hundred and fifty years. Not only have there been conflicts over the issue of prostitution among feminist theorists, but there has also been a sustained tension between the latter and sex workers themselves concerning it. And, to further complicate matters, discourses on the separate, though related, problem of sex trafficking have been injected into the debates, oftentimes by those who would like to see prostitution abolished—a perhaps noble, but, as history and global economic disparity show us, impractical cause.

Academics and researchers such as Joyce Outshoorn, Charles Bernheimer, Gretchen Soderlund, Julia O’Connell Davidson, Judith Walkowitz and Shannon Bell, to name a few, have very succinctly outlined the most prominent positions on prostitution and/or their evolution in the West. Soderlund, O’Connell Davidson, and Bell, as well as Jo Doezema, and Kemala Kempadoo, among others, have attempted to provide a thorough critique of the various positions as they pertain to contemporary approaches to the ‘prostitution question.’ With regard to the construction of the modern prostitute body, Bernheimer and Bell suggest that it was the combined ‘research’ of William Acton and Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet conducted in the nineteenth century in tandem with the philosophies of early benevolent and feminist organizations dedicated to disciplining the prostitute which were perhaps most influential in shaping early views of this body. It is to these early views on prostitution that I will turn first in order to provide a point of comparison for current views on and methods of handling the matter, which, in reality, have not changed so drastically. Moreover, I focus on these views

because they continue to determine, to some degree, how prostitution throughout the world has been/is dealt with on a practical level.

Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, who was trained as a sanitation researcher and, thus, exposed to the waste of the unwashed masses, from which many prostitutes were said to come forth, insinuated that his experiences in the sewers of Paris prepared him to conduct his studies. According to him “prostitutes [were] just as inevitable in an urban district as [were] sewers, dumps and, refuse heaps” and that “authorities should take the same approach to each” (qtd. in O’Connor 75). Meanwhile, in the 1857 study *Prostitution*, Acton made the link between prostitution and detritus equally explicit in citing the prostitute’s “inner rottenness” and likening the threat to the social fabric posed by prostitution to the dangers that vermin and disease posed to public health. It was the harlot’s “daily occupation” to “[spread] abroad [...] a contagious and deadly disorder (qtd. in Sutphin 519; qtd. in O’Connor 75)

And yet, according to Walter Benjamin, it is through a society’s detritus, what has been discarded, that we possibly gain the most insight into that particular society. As I will show in more detail, this is particularly true of Victorian society, wherein the identity of various groups hinged on defining the Prostitute, directly or indirectly, as ‘waste’ and on deciding how to deal with the ‘problem.’ While Parent-Duchâtelet called for regulation as a solution, throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, Joyce Outshoorn tells us, in her article entitled “The Political Debates on Prostitution and Trafficking of Women,” that abolition was the privileged approach to dealing with the issue, primarily, though as we shall see, not exclusively among groups with strong affiliations to the Church and among Southern European women’s organizations (145). In addition to those who were vying for abolition based on

religious grounds, groups formed as part of the burgeoning feminist movement and ‘social work’ initiatives in Victorian and Edwardian England, as well as in the United States, took up the cause of prostitution and abolition for very different reasons and in competition with the “regulationist” strategies advocated by Parent- Duchâtelet and implemented in France (Doezema, 2002, 22).

According to Paula Bartley, it was thought by early British reformers that prostitutes could be ‘rehabilitated.’ Reform consisted of institutionalizing prostitute women and attempting to provide them with skills which would enable them to divest themselves of their former lifestyles and to inculcate them with a desire to emulate “middle class morality.” When this proved unsuccessful, prevention became the favored approach. This meant taking women from working-class backgrounds and providing them with skills training, as well as establishing homes for unwed mothers and “feeble-minded” women whom it was believed were more susceptible to becoming prostitutes. Again, these measures did not produce the desired effect. Ultimately, Victorian feminists advocated for suppression through “moral purity crusades” and via the channels provided by the state, calling for stricter laws against commercial sex directed primarily against procurers, brothel owners and clients and for more rigorous police enforcement of legislation. (N.F. Anderson 1046)

Yet, at the same time, laws passed by the British Parliament in the mid 1800s were regulationist in nature and suggested that prostitution was a ‘necessary evil.’ More specifically, the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 were passed to protect British troops from the ever increasing threat of venereal disease. What the Acts required was the cooperation of military and local authorities in establishing “districts” for prostitution in garrison towns and

enforcing mandatory testing of women *allegedly* involved in prostitution for sexually transmitted diseases. Failure on the part of these women to comply meant they could be summoned to face a magistrate, subjected to compulsory physical examinations, and detained in locked hospitals for anywhere from three to nine months if they were found to be infected with a sexually transmitted disease (Pivar 257).

Advocates of the Acts saw the legislation as crucial to maintaining “public health, public decency, and public order.” They were useful, too, it was believed, in controlling “public spectacle of vice” and in setting off prostitutes as a group distinct from the ‘respectable’ working poor (Walkowitz, 1992, 23). As a matter of fact, prostitute women were constructed as unnatural aberrations to be set apart from humanity in general. Those who favored the Acts claimed that prostitutes were women who had lost their femininity and had become manlike in their “lust” (Bell 57; Walkowitz, 1992, 23). At the same time, however, they were desexualized. This is evident in arguments and policies which promoted the idea that men and women should not be treated the same with respect to prostitution. Women should be subjected to regular examinations, since for them prostitution was a “matter of gain.” On the other hand, it was argued that men were simply engaging in “an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse” and should remain exempt from medical probing (“Report of the Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1868-1869” qtd. in Walkowitz, 1992, 23).

The Acts were not without their critics, however. A letter written by “One who was There,” meaning in France at various locked hospitals, and published in the “Correspondence” section of the November 20th, 1869 edition of the *British Medical Journal* complained that

with the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the “old laws” pertaining to prostitution had been reduced to a “dead letter.” The writer, purportedly a gentleman of Bristol and presumably a doctor, argued that the Acts actually worked to “legalise” prostitution, stating that “any Act which forbids prostitution, and makes it illegal unless certain conditions are complied with, sanctions it, and makes it legal, if they are complied with” (572). Further, he lamented the curtailment of civil liberties which he felt the Acts brought about and their failure to control the spread of disease, stating that: “No one can have seen the working of this law abroad without dreading the application of such a curse to our own land. It debases women, debauches men, sanctions the introduction of spies into our social system, destroys the liberty of the subject of which we so proudly boast, and not only fails to check disease, but also [...] tends to increase it” (572).

The “Parisian system,” in this individual’s experience, not only failed to “lessen venereal contagion,” but it was also inherently evil in that it turned women of the “Dispensaire” into nothing less than “white slaves” who had “no liberty , but [were] as completely under the *espionage* of the police as a galley slave” (572). The Habeas Corpus Act could have no meaning for these women, according to the author, who ends the letter with the question: “If you call that equality of rights, what is inequality?” (572).

Others such as Dr. Sedley Wolfenstan, who was the house surgeon to the Royal Albert Hospital--a lock hospital-- and who testified before the British Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts, concurred with the above writer, stating that in his experience, the Acts seemed only to increase the spread of disease rather than curb it. Moreover, clinicians were decidedly ill equipped to accurately differentiate

contagious from non-contagious discharges. One of the consequences of this was that non-prostitute women, particularly those poor women who might cohabit with men to whom they were not married, were sometimes mistakenly confined. Any assertions of accuracy concerning diagnoses and any justification for internment could only be based, then, on whether one had been “labeled” a prostitute. The difficulties ‘experts’ had in recognizing prostitutes and their ineffective efforts to control disease merely led some doctors to assert that it was imperative to “separate prostitutes from other women” rather than rethink their criteria and methods (Bell 59; Pickthorn qtd. in Bell 59). More importantly, the call for segregation of some women from others, which could be quite arbitrary considering that there were no reliable ways to delineate between prostitutes and non-prostitutes, further reinforced the notion that women who did ply the trade were inherently different from other women. The preoccupation with the inability to firmly determine who was and was not a prostitute was, I believe, a manifestation of anxiety related to controlling women’s reproductive function, a measure necessary to insure the survival of the middle class and maintain its ‘legitimacy.’ It suggests that the prevailing belief was that women, in general, had an innate tendency toward “dissimulation,” which posed a threat to hegemony of the middle class and to Victorian patriarchy (Sutphin 512, 518-19).

So, it would seem, the “equality of rights” of which the unnamed writer cited above speaks were not to be applied to ‘identifiable’ prostitutes. As previously mentioned, Judith Walkowitz has argued that the Acts, in effect, alienated prostitutes from their working-class communities. And, their implementation did nothing to address the more complicated issue of defining and regulating “occasional prostitutes,” i.e. working-class women, perhaps married

with children, who engaged in sex work as a means of supplementing household incomes (1992, 23; 1980,14).

Nor did equality of rights extend to military and civil servants or the poor white population, the ‘insane,’ or indigenous women of the colonies. At various times throughout the nineteenth century, the governments of several European nations forbade low-ranking soldiers and colonial officials from marrying and encouraged them to engage in what was, arguably, another form of prostitution, only it was called ‘concubinage’ and sanctioned by officials as necessary to preserving the morale of soldiers and the illusion of equality among (white) men in ‘civilized’ societies. For the colonists, native women existed strictly to perform services, sexual and otherwise. High officials involved in administration of the colonies reasoned that even if a soldier or official received a low salary, he should be able at least to appear to enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. Marriage or having to hire help would deplete the meager funds of many of those serving in the colonies, but keeping a “bed servant” would insure that they had all of their needs met with minimal financial and emotional demands placed upon them (Stoler, 2002, 49).

At the same time, poor whites in India and other European colonies, were quickly repatriated or locked away in workhouses to avoid the creation of a “white proletariat” in the colonies, and “unseemly whites” were often institutionalized so as to curtail any speculation about the masculinity and vigor of the colonial forces. In British-ruled India, where it has been estimated that half the colonist population consisted of poor whites, approximately six thousand undesirables were placed in workhouses by 1900 (Stoler, 2002, 35-36). Moreover, colonial administrators were retired at the age of fifty- five in order to insure that no colonial

subject would see his master in a state of ‘decrepitude.’ All of this was done in order to preserve the image of “European prestige” necessary to justify colonial presence and communicate white superiority to the locals (Stoler, 2002, 65).

Appearance, as I have tried to show above and as will be discussed in further detail momentarily, was very important both for the people of the colonies and those of the metropolis, and the ambiguity that characterized prostitution and seeming elusiveness of the prostitute produced acute societal anxiety, which afflicted not only officials and medical practitioners, but also members of the general population. In fact, many social activist groups and public campaigns emerged that were concerned with prostitution and were often led by ‘virtuous,’ moneyed women, who were no less affected by the anxieties that plagued the men of the upper classes. Despite their concern for prostitutes, the mostly middle- and upper-class women involved in reform also felt the need to separate themselves from women of questionable morals, and this prompted many of them to call for limited rights and mobility for so-called fallen and working-class women.

Perhaps the most well known of women’s organizations that called into question and vehemently condemned the Contagious Diseases Acts was the Ladies’ National Association headed by Josephine Butler. Butler was revolutionary for the fact that she shifted the responsibility for prostitution onto men and harshly condemned the gender discrimination and the “class tyranny” which she believed characterized the legislation. The Acts were, after all, intended to “[guard] the *men* of the army and navy from contagion” (Bell 56). Unlike some of her male predecessors, she firmly believed that prostitutes were not irredeemable. Nevertheless, standing before the Royal Commission, Butler railed against Patriarchy and its

institutions in the dominant discourse of the day, focusing on chastity, purity, and ‘fallen-ness’ without questioning the class-based, gender-biased and, arguably, nationalist and racist underpinnings of these notions. Chastity and purity were attributes which could not be applied to ‘inherently degenerate’ native women, who were, according to many colonial scientific reports, carriers of “contagions” perilous to the individual and the white (European) race; relations with them, it was thought, would lead to “debased sentiments, immoral proclivities, and extreme susceptibility to uncivilized states” (Stoler, 2002, 46, 67-68). A broader sense of social justice which included the colonized as individuals of concern would not manifest itself until later in the century, interestingly in the work of social feminists (Koven 195).

Butler’s protestations, however well-intentioned, thereby simply supported commonly held notions of the prostitute body as diseased, and they helped to further solidify the belief that prostitutes constituted a class of persons distinct from society’s untarnished women. They comprised a certain type of woman who “must be brought back to womanly dignity and virtue” through “reclamation” activities which adhered to and maintained the prevailing notion that asexuality in women was desirable and a prerequisite for respectability. Fallen women were to be trained to assume the venerated roles of wife and mother as constructed by the privileged Victorian society of which Butler was a part (Bell 63, 62).

The general consensus among scholars of the period is that organizations like the LNA were less concerned about the actual working conditions of prostitute women and more inclined to invest their resources in attempting to shape prostitute women according to middle-class norms (Bell 62). For example, MABYS, or the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, contended that their charges could be saved from a life of “sexual dirtiness”

by “subjecting themselves to the tutelage of mistresses and devoting themselves to cleansing the domestic dirt of bourgeois households” (Koven 193). As far as the philanthropists heading MABYS were concerned, “servant girls want[ed] to feel somebody *above*, yet with them [emphasis added]” (Koven 193).

According to Seth Koven, it was, at least in part, the dirt of the working-class woman which these benevolent organizations sought to eliminate from the slums and that permitted upper-class women to experience their own purity. Yet, there was more than this underlying the motives of slum philanthropists (195). Clearly with regard to the MABYS project, there was a desire, even a need, to keep women of the ‘lower’ classes in their place, whilst ‘reforming’ them--not only because their work enabled these women of higher socio-economic status to maintain a clear sense of identity as it related to their sexual virtuousness and virtuosity as keepers of the home, and by extension, the nation, but also because their activities helped them establish for themselves new identities as political subjects.

One could argue that MABYS’ charitable activities served multiple purposes. On the one hand, the organization assisted in filling the growing need for ‘good’ domestic help. On the other hand, MABYS’ mistresses’ attempts to forge a relationships with and, thereby, gain the loyalty of their ‘less fortunate’ sisters functioned as a means of helping elite women create the base of support necessary to meet their own political ends. Domestic help and their work with the underprivileged enabled them to escape, in good conscience, the confines of prescribed roles of wife and mother and integrate themselves into public life—ironically, a ‘privilege’ heretofore reserved for ‘actresses’ and prostitutes.

Undoubtedly, too, prostitutes with their unchecked and 'filthy' sexuality, along with another fluid population--that is: vagrants--were, on some level, emblematic of the threat to the emerging middle class, not to mention to the nation, which the working class posed. Both were embodiments of the guilt and anxieties experienced by the former in relation to the rise of capitalism and large-scale exploitation of workers, and they were an integral part of the "conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire" which went into creating Victorian and modern subjectivities (Stallybrass and White qtd. in Walkowitz, 1992, 20). Arguably, the proliferation of benevolent organizations for the poor which occurred throughout the nineteenth century had just as much to do with middle- and upper-class concerns about themselves as it did with a concern for the poor. Such organizations became a way of managing the "low-Other" whose subjugation and exclusion was necessary to insure the "prestige and status" of the "top." Perhaps more importantly, though, they served as a tool by which to 'know,' a vehicle that permitted the systematic study of the "low," who functioned "symbolically as a primary eroticized constituent of [the top's] fantasy life" (Stallybrass and White qtd. in Walkowitz, 1992, 20). Vagrants and prostitutes were to be pitied and scorned, yet each was necessary to the collective fantasy of dominance shared by the "top," and each posed a threat to the domestic social order and to the virile national self-image required by imperialism.

In the case of vagrants, anxieties were expressed in racialized terms as evidenced in the popular vernacular of the day. According to Koven, the widely employed synonyms for homeless persons, such as "street arabs" and "nomad" indicated that the poor were akin to "members of a savage race." They lived outside the confines of a normalized and normalizing domesticity. They were semantically "orientalized" and, by extension, effeminized, and

considered a “race apart,” “sub-human” and living outside the national community.” They were symptomatic and emblematic of blight on the concepts of English manhood and Civilization as envisioned by the bourgeoisie. (61).

With their ability to move freely and undetected between the domestic and public spheres, prostitutes were another story. They were not so readily contained. They were the “permeable and transgressed border between classes and sexes” (Walkowitz, 1992, 22). Acton observed with alarm the relative ease with which prostitutes could transition into the roles of mothers and wives and with which wives and mothers could become prostitutes. In fact, he claimed that it was not impossible for the “better inclined class of prostitutes [to] become the wedded wives of men of every grade of society [....]” (Acton qtd. in Bell 54). The somewhat confusing elision of wives and prostitutes is, however, later disambiguated when Acton firmly associates prostitution not only with physical, but moral sickness and disease, which, as some of his contemporaries believed, could be remedied if the body of the prostitute were regulated (Bell 55, 59). Still, others such as the Reverend Lowry extrapolated from the prostitution debate that the moral constitution of the working classes, as a whole, was inherently different from that of the upper classes. He acknowledges Acton’s claim that prostitutes did marry and makes his point about the questionable morality of the lower orders, stating that many “sailors” quite “prefer” to marry prostitutes (qtd. in Bell 60).

Actually, Walkowitz argues, the poor and the working class were ‘different’ in the sense that, to some extent, the “notions of respectability among the poor did not completely mirror those of the middle class.” The level of acceptance of prostitutes by working-class compatriots varied from community to community, but, not surprisingly, they often did have

an easier time establishing bonds with working-class clients. Acceptance or rejection by working-class communities *seems* to point more to the degree to which a community had espoused middle class ideas about sexual propriety and, more importantly, to what extent “official pressure” and rhetoric, as encapsulated in the contagious diseases legislation for example, had been exerted “on those who led economically fragile lives,” however, than to beliefs about an inherent deficiency in prostitutes, mental or otherwise (1980, 29-30). Prostitutes in England actually demonstrated an admirable, albeit at times understandably conflict-ridden, ability to organize themselves. “In fact, a strong female subculture was a distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century prostitution.” Meanwhile, female brothel keepers demonstrated “respectable pretensions” which surprised the moral reformers who flatly rejected these women’s applications to join temperance groups and other organizations (1980, 25-26, 28).

Even as charitable groups dedicated to the ‘moral betterment’ of the poor encouraged working-class women to emulate their benefactresses, there were limits to which the former should do so. Lines still needed to be drawn in order to differentiate those who were respectable from those who were not, those who were of higher social standing from those who came from lower classes. As previously noted with regard to the lock hospitals, distinguishing a prostitute from a non-prostitute was tricky business. Character profiles of prostitutes proliferated, yet none could be agreed upon as definitive. Acton and Parent-Duchâtelet would not concede that the prostitute was any less frail or susceptible to disease than were other women. This, despite Parent-Duchâtelet’s association of detritus with prostitution. Furthermore, regardless of his analogies between prostitution and public health risks and the

fact that selling sex brought prostitutes into contact with clients and diseases of all kinds, Acton professed that many of them exhibited a healthy resilience. They were, in many cases, no more prone to many of the “attacks” which beset women who led “orderly lives.” In fact, because of the indolent lives they were purported to have led, some prostitutes were said to have fared better physically than women who plied more ‘honorable’ trades. In other words, prostitute bodies could quite feasibly, at least outwardly, be unmarked bodies (Bell 54).

Appearances, then, were deceiving—deceiving to the point that “love of finery” by working-class women was discouraged and became a component of one of the many profiles for determining who might have the potential for becoming a prostitute, already be one, or be one who was recalcitrant to change . Even as some of those who worked with prostitutes claimed before the Commission that poverty was the reason women entered into the sex trade, they also cited “vanity and love of dress” and the inability of women of the lower classes to “distinguish between necessary dress [...] and surplus finery” (Bell 60). As previously mentioned, the morals of the “lower orders” were thought to be different than that of the upper classes, and as Walkowitz has pointed out, they were, but not in the ways, perhaps, that the middle class alleged. For example, it was claimed that many working-class parents were, in fact, proud to have their daughters engage in prostitution and that “tawdry dress” permitted prostitute women the illusion that they were “fine ladies” (Lowry qtd. in Bell 60).

For the middle class, the tendency toward excess in working-class women and the refusal to wear the “austere” clothing deemed appropriate for them indicated the moral stature of the individual. Furthermore, a prostitute’s ability to overcome the love of dress was included as a factor in determining her capacity for reform or potential for recidivism. Taking all of

these observations by reformers and ‘experts’ into consideration, Bell concludes that “imitation of the ‘respectable’ woman by the ‘low’ woman” where issues of appearance were concerned “was transcoded as a marker of impurity” (Bell 60). The cardinal sin it seems was less a matter of sexual deviance than of class insubordination. As was previously mentioned, prostitutes upset the “natural” order of things. Yet, even as they were viewed as “socially peripheral” beings, they were, nonetheless “symbolically central.” “The low-Other [was]/is despised, denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it [was]/ is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoire of the dominant culture” (Stallybrass and White qtd. in Walkowitz, 1992, 20).

At the same time prostitutes were chastised for dissimulation and transgressing social boundaries, it was perfectly legitimate for elite women to dress as working-class women in order to infiltrate the slums. Their willingness to do so was actually thought to lend an authoritative air to their reports of life in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. And, while it was said by these women who disguised themselves in order to work among women of ill-repute and the poor, in general, that the latter were “permanently stranded on lower levels of evolution,” it was also suggested by these same women that swift and prudent social legislation to improve the filthy circumstances in which poor women lived could also save them from the downward spiral of prostitution (Higgs qtd. in Koven 188; Koven 188). The soiled environment in which slum women lived, it was contended, was a major contributing factor to the descent into a life of immorality and sexuality which endangered not only themselves as individuals, but also the health of the nation (Koven 188).

Interestingly, “the prostitute, as the embodiment of all that was dirty in Victorian

culture,” writes Koven, “functioned simultaneously as the female slum worker’s doppelganger and her opposite” (189). Whereas, love of dress was seen as a betrayal of class when working-class women dared to wear the garb of the upper-class woman, such was not true in the reverse. Those always already ‘pure’ women who donned the dress of the working-class woman thought of themselves as “pollut[ing]” their bodies in order to “protect” the “imperiled purity of their outcast sisters” (189). But, even as those women who refused to conform to middle-class ideas about what was appropriate for proletarian women were regarded with suspicion, so were those who worked among the poor considered questionable in their intentions by both their contemporaries and recent scholars. It was speculated and, in some cases, confirmed that some women who had chosen social work had wanted to escape “male authority” and the strictures of romance and family imposed on them by the bourgeoisie. The slums became a place where they could “fully realize *their* aspirations [emphasis added]” (Koven 201). They imagined and created same-sex communities, which were based on utopian visions of “cross-class sisterhood” and which stood “outside the institutional, sexual, and psychological borders controlled by men” (Koven 203).

As one can imagine, portraits of these women as constructed by their contemporaries were not always as generous as those involved in reform operations would have it. The socialist H. M. Hyndman snidely remarked that bourgeois women took jobs in the slums simply to snare husbands from among the men committed to improving slum conditions (Koven 201). Elsewhere, in “The Sisterhood of Women,” published in 1896, Mrs. Roy Pember- Devereux was much less forgiving in questioning the motives of ‘virtuous’ women who chose to consort with those who were ‘fallen,’ specifically “modern” women and

“spinster-do-gooders” (qtd. in Koven 201, 202) For Pember-Devereux, these women’s humanitarian acts were mere pretenses that enabled them to indulge in a pathological attraction to the morbid and “towards the gutter,” and their ‘reform’ work simply functioned as a means of “coquetting with sin.” Further, she contended that rather than alleviating the wretched conditions of the poor, these women were being sullied by it because their actions did not stem from “genuine sympathy.” She believed that the motives of these upper-class sisters were rooted in self-interested voyeurism. Under such conditions, she reasoned that it was only natural that respectable women would be “blackened” by that with which they came into contact (qtd. in Koven 223).

Like the prostitutes they worked with, middle-class women were portrayed as both susceptible to and attracted by the potentially ‘unnatural’ proclivities of the lower classes. And, this fear of the working-class female and effeminized working-class body as evinced in Devereux’s work and discrimination persisted into the early twentieth century. This is evidenced in a 1912 book by Jane Addams, wherein she concedes that while “economic pressure” was justification for a woman’s decision to enter into prostitution, economic necessity was “often exaggerated” and secondary to the more “immediate” cause of a “love of pleasure” (qtd. in Doezema, 2002, 23).

Similarly, in a 1917 treatise on prostitution entitled *Prostitution: The Moral Bearings of the Problem*, M. F., a representative of the Catholic church and admirer of Parent-Duchâtelet, writes that prostitutes are predominately “deficient in will power, in brain power, and in moral sense” (13). M.F. further deems prostitution a “moral infection of personal degradation” and states that men, once they have been exposed to prostitutes, never fully “mentally” recover

from the experience (21, 19). Finally, he warns that prostitutes, particularly “partial” ones, can never be fully rehabilitated, for they will always “continue to believe that so-called virtue is only successful hypocrisy and that men as a whole have no moral standard whatsoever” (25). As a result, society, when it attempts to “reabsorb” the fallen woman, “[pays] the full penalty”—not just in terms of damage to the individual body, as his section on venereal diseases tells us, but to the national body (M.F. 25).

Yet, alongside these commentaries and the others which invoked images of manly spinsters and bemoaned a pathological modern society, there emerged other more productive, socially conscious examples of criticism. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy also found the relationship between ‘social worker’ and client to be problematic, but for reasons different than those offered by Pember-Devereux. In 1898, she lamented the inequality inherent in social work. For her, it was predicated on the notion that working- class families were “clients to be investigated and instructed.” Elmy asked how it was that “women’s position of slavery” had resulted in women seeking “power to coerce others,” rather than attempting to “free themselves” (Koven 225; Elmy qtd. in Koven 225).

Indeed, the relationship between the working poor and those who wished to save them was a conflicted one. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was clear that abolitionist attempts did nothing to assuage the prostitution ‘problem.’ Just as Butler and her association did not concern themselves with the actual working conditions of women in the sex industry, neither did those who engaged in fighting ‘white slavery.’ In fact, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, legislation advocated by the latter only served to worsen the demise of those involved in prostitution and those who consorted with them as lovers and husbands.

Ultimately, laws passed to assuage the problem of sex trafficking in the early twentieth century hurt prostitutes. For one thing, they could no longer ply their trade in red light districts. They were forced to retreat to the outskirts of towns and cities; thus compromising their financial situations, not to mention their safety. Moreover, foreign-born men or immigrants of color who became involved with prostitutes as spouses or lovers were increasingly subject to dubious legal practices due to the establishment of various “white slavery” acts in England, on the Continent, and in the U.S. The case of Jack Johnson, the first African-American world heavyweight boxing champion, shows how prostitution was intertwined with institutionalized racism. He was the first person prosecuted under the 1910 Mann Act (The White Slave Traffic Act), a law still on the books as of the writing of this dissertation, for consorting with a white prostitute *before* the Act was passed, and he eventually served the maximum prison time of one year and one day for the offense (Doezema, 2002, 24; Glass).

From the above, it is clear that defining prostitution was not an easy task. As Christine Sutphin points out and as we have seen from the controversies surrounding the Contagious Diseases Act and the white slavery acts which followed, deciding just who was involved in prostitution, in what capacity, and to what degree were all factors and issues of concern that were difficult to ascertain. At the same time, any woman who put her “charms to vile uses” or who “surrender[ed] her woman’s virtue in a manner that excit[ed] moral disgust” was considered a prostitute by some, although others argued that women who entered the sex trade were also considered victims of filthy living conditions and mental deficiency or as having involuntarily been inducted into the life by conniving slave traders (Mayhew/Hemyng qtd. in Sutphin 517). They were victims and mercenaries, as well as a means by which middle class

women could access public life. Specifically, by taking up the abolitionist cause, the latter attempted to show themselves as indispensable caretakers of the nation and, in fighting for the rights of colonized women involved in prostitution, of empire. What we shall see below is that embedded in modern Western feminism are elements of the Victorian beliefs and attitudes discussed above.

Unlike in the Victorian era, wherein there were virtually no proponents of sex as a legitimate form of work, in the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist thought on the matter has evolved to comprise two very distinct strains. On one end of the spectrum, there are “pro-sex worker” feminists, to borrow O’Connell Davidson’s term, including those who view sex work as work and “‘sex radical’ feminists” like Shannon Bell, Martha Nussbaum, Wendy Chapkis, and Pat Califia, just to name a few, whose arguments concerning prostitution will be elaborated upon later (Davidson, 2002, 88). On the other hand, radical feminists, espousing the viewpoints of, most notably, Carol Pateman, Kathleen Barry, the founder of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women International (CATW), and Andrea Dworkin and carrying on in the tradition of many nineteenth century feminists who opposed efforts at state-regulated prostitution and called for state intervention in abolishing it, have portrayed prostitution as the ultimate form of oppression. For them, it is nothing short of slavery.

Interestingly, the sub-discourses which underwrite the positions of both pro-sex worker and radical feminists tend to ‘construct’ “captivity and freedom as diametrically opposed states of existence” (Soderlund 65). Moreover, they tend to frame gender relations in terms of a “dyadic master/subject model” with radical feminists placing blame on the “client” or “third-party controller” for the ‘wretched’ state of the prostitute and pro-sex work feminists clamoring

against the “legal apparatuses of the state” (Fraser qtd. in O’Connell Davidson, 1998, 124-125; O’Connell Davidson, 1998, 16). This is problematic in that these types of narratives and ways of envisioning prostitution and issues attending it do not account for the diversity of participants and practices that comprise the sex industry, nor do they adequately explain the complex social arrangements and conditions that constitute identity, be it sexual, racial, ethnic, class or otherwise, and the relativity and fluidity of power within and between communities.

Evidence of this complexity and fluidity is to be found in a situation which concerned alleged arrangements colonized women made with white colonizers of “modest or impoverished means” and which vexed colonial officials. Ann Laura Stoler writes that the former, whom we have already seen were alternately considered suitable “bed servants” and sexual threats, were said to have paid European men to ‘recognize’ their mixed or “purely native” children, making for “racial reordering outside the state’s control.” She continues: “[T]he perceived danger of such false paternity claims was that they ‘both exposed the [European] element to being submerged by a flood of naturalized natives and introduced into their midst a questionable population.’ The prevailing fear among colonial officials that fictive paternity could produce fictive Europeans suggests that some claims to alliance and descent subverted rather than substantiated racial taxonomies” (1995, 49). Thus, we see that on a larger scale, the various ways in which ‘problematic,’ racial and sexual identities, i.e. those that resist containment within traditional, hegemonic categories and configurations, have been handled reflect the myriad anxieties about and notions of how kinship (read: national identity) should be constituted, who is fit to be an acting member of the polity and who is not, how and to what degree individuals are permitted to participate in the Nation, and who gets to decide all this.

This is a very general statement about concerns which persist today and which will receive more attention below and in ensuing chapters, where I discuss how sexual behavior and the perceived propensities for certain kinds of sexual behavior have been used to shape ideas of an acceptable national self.

Prior to examining the more pro-sex worker position(s) on prostitution, I will first address the rhetoric and strategies of today's abolitionists. What is obscured in abolitionist discourses and solutions to the 'problem' of prostitution are the sometimes rather spurious intentions of those involved in 'rescue and reform' efforts. These efforts can often be characterized by 'misunderstanding' rooted in a very class-inflected, ethnocentric view on the part of rescuers of the circumstances under which individuals enter into prostitution and an overarching disregard for the material conditions which prompt them to remain involved in it (Soderlund 65). In fact, Jo Doezema writes that for Kathleen Barry, "women's subordination is the result of sex," thus the prostitute is always dehumanized and that precludes the possibility of another type of experience within prostitution that does not involve "injury" (Doezema, 2001, 26, 28).

While I certainly do not wish to conflate sex trafficking with other forms of prostitution or sexual labor, I think it is important to mention several salient points made by Gretchen Soderlund in a study of recent "crusades against sex trafficking and the rhetoric of abolition" because the questions her work raises force us to think about the issues of choice and agency upon which abolitionist arguments hinge and the attending problems regarding visibility that their narratives spawn. Equally important, she performs a crucial and necessary inquiry into the motives and tactics of those whom she refers to as "new-fangled abolitionists" – individuals

and groups engaged in a “quest to free the world’s sex slaves” who see the campaigns against sex trafficking as “a step on the path toward the eradication of all forms of sexual commerce” and whose efforts have not only been subsidized by right-wing religious and political coalitions, but have been further supported and informed by more ‘objective’ exposés put together by media heavy-hitters, such as MSNBC *Dateline*, *The New York Times*, and *The New York Times Magazine* (65).

First, Soderlund very astutely assesses the importance of combating sex trafficking to the beleaguered administration of George W. Bush, a regime which struggled to cover egregious missteps where both foreign and domestic affairs were concerned. Not only did sex trafficking put a “human face” on its “war on terror,” it also helped to construct a threatening world filled with predators and, thus, further perpetuated the climate of fear which permitted the Bush administration to act with impudence in world affairs, setting up tribunals, both formal and informal, to distinguish the guilty from the innocent, to separate the ‘perpetrators’ from the ‘victims,’ and to capitalize upon its decisions (68).

It would appear that still today the abolitionists currently have the upper hand with regard to the way that prostitution is handled, and they wield significant power over how it is viewed. This is evidenced by the fact that under former Attorney General John Ashcroft, more money was contributed by the United States than any other nation to combat the ‘problem,’ approximately 100 million dollars annually, to be precise (Soderlund 67). U.S. organizations that advocated Christian reform were the ones that achieved ascendancy over all others, gaining control of most of the funds apportioned to the cause (68). Consequently, some unlikely partnerships between faith-based organizations and secular activist organizations

formed. This phenomena was seen by Laura Lederer, editor of *Take Back the Night*, as a positive move in that it injected “a fresh perspective and biblical mandate” into the women’s movement and because such alliances invited “international attention” to the cause of sex trafficking that it would not otherwise have received (Lederer qtd. in Soderlund 68)

However, Soderlund tells us that even in the decade preceding 9/11, various women’s rights campaigns of the 90s coalesced around violence against women, particularly sexual violence against Third World women. While focusing on “sexual violence” against women served the purpose of “mak[ing] the gender-specific content of the violence visible to key human rights bodies and actors,” activists often privileged the “victim subject.” They relied heavily on testimonials from the “most abject sufferers” as a means of garnering attention. This, with the intention of creating a sense of “commonality” among women of various social, cultural and economic backgrounds (Miller qtd. in Soderlund 69-70; Soderlund 69-70).

But, as we shall see over the rest of the course of this chapter, this focus on the most down-trodden was and continues to be problematic. Despite desires to foster a sense of community among women based on stories of sexual violence and prostitution-as-victimization, deep divisions regarding the issue of sex work surfaced, especially where sex trafficking was concerned. On the one hand, there were those who saw it as emblematic of the oppression suffered by all individuals involved in the sex trade and whose efforts to stem all forms of commercialized sex were colored by a “moralistic approach.” Conversely, others felt that the almost obsessive focus on trafficking detracted from ‘free’ sex workers’ efforts to gain political ground. And still others argued that this myopia did a greater injustice in that it did not allow for perspective on the continuum of human rights abuses which included all of the ills of

“gendered poverty” and of which sex trafficking was only a part (Soderlund 70).

Soderlund’s observations point both to the way that some ‘rescuers’ have based their rationale on a “Manicheistic,” as she calls it, reading of prostitution which reduces it to a narrative of involuntary servitude versus liberation and to how “interventionist tactics” increasingly blur the lines between rescuers and captors. The effect of this is to rob individuals involved in various forms of sex work of their subjectivity (65). Most often, intervention consists of “measures that couple Christian-based forms of rehabilitation with law-enforcement-style brothel raids” and leads to limited, arguably questionable, success (66). She writes that:

While the stories abolitionists tell tend to focus on the moment of the raid and the successful deliveries of the rescued slaves to safe houses, events that occur in the aftermath of raids often belie the claims that all of the rescued women are sex slaves held captive and against their wills in brothels. Reports from sex worker rights organizations and testimonials from individuals who manage shelters suggest that rescue escapes are exceedingly common throughout Asia and Southeast Asia. It appears that while some women use brothel raids and closures as an opportunity to leave the sex industry, others perceive the rehabilitation process itself as a *punitive form of imprisonment* thereby complicating the captivity/freedom binary asserted by abolitionists [...] [emphasis added]. (Soderlund 65-66)

Soderlund goes on to say that according to Empower (an NGO based in Thailand that equips individuals to either leave the trade or better navigate it and advocates for harm reduction), one raid conducted in the name of “humanitarian purposes” to rescue Burmese women from purported sexual servitude mimicked that of a “criminal arrest.” Once they were in possession of their cell phones, many of the women immediately contacted Empower for assistance, or they escaped from their ‘rescuers’ within the first twenty-four hours. Inside of a month, nearly

half had fled “safe houses”--unwilling to cooperate with rescuers’ demands that they testify against their “traffickers” (66).

It would also appear that even more progressive journalists, such as Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times*, have been afflicted with ‘white (hu)man’s burden’ syndrome. In 2004, Kristof wrote a series of articles on prostitution in Cambodia. He was investigating brothels there and, eventually, ‘bought’ two, teen-aged, Cambodian prostitutes and returned them to their families. In the follow-up article to this series, entitled “Back to the Brothel,” Kristof expresses dismay when he finds that, only a year later, one girl has returned to her ‘captors.’ Rather than questioning neo-abolitionist strategies or the paradigms underlying them, which now too often position sex workers as “victims,” he assesses the situation as follows: “This 21st century version of slavery has not only grown in recent years, but is especially diabolical—it poisons its victims, like Srey Mom [one of the ‘rescued’ teens], so that eventually chains are often redundant” (Kristof). Despite his ‘good’ intentions, he only further reinforces the images of prostitution put forth by political conservatives and evangelicals.

If what has been presented thus far does not say enough about current neo-abolitionist reform efforts or the way that sensationalist, First World media and special interest groups have co-opted the voices of individuals involved in the sex trade, the comments of Phil Marshall of the United Nations Project on Human Trafficking Southeast Asia’s Mekong Region ought to carry some weight in buttressing the largely unarticulated, nonetheless clearly present, sentiments of some of the world’s “sex slaves.” When asked about the existing set of “rehabilitation strategies” most frequently employed, Marshall remarked that he had “*never seen an issue where there is less interest in hearing from those who are most affected by it*

[emphasis added]” (Soderlund 66).

What is most unfortunate is how paternalistic attitudes toward non-procreative sex and moral standards set by conservative factions have been translated at the level of policy-making. The Trafficking Victim’s Protection Act Reauthorization Act of 2003 stipulated that any agencies “advocating prostitution as an employment choice” or perceived as supporting legalization or decriminalization of sex work were not “appropriate partners” for the U.S. Agency for International Development and, therefore, ineligible for further funding. As a result, agencies, such as Empower, which engaged in HIV/AIDS outreach or offered language, literacy, and other adult basic education programs for sex workers but which refused to take an abolitionist position were cut off. Meanwhile, in the same year, the Global AIDS Bill was passed. In order to receive funds, participating organizations were required to sign an “oath” that they did not support any form of prostitution and would not use grant monies to assist with abortions or to promote “harm reduction among sex workers” (Soderlund 80).

This unwillingness on the part of certain sociopolitical institutions to listen to the needs of sex workers and to stifle their attempts to participate in processes of self-actualization and ‘liberation’ have also been noted in sociological studies involving first world sex workers. In *Prostitution, Power and Freedom*, Julia O’Connell Davidson interviews “Desiree,” a British prostitute whom Davidson describes as operating within the upper echelons of the sex industry. In one particular interview, Desiree remarks that there was only one “plausible” line in all of the film *Pretty Woman*. It occurs when Richard Gere in his role as ‘john’ asks the prostitute, played by Julia Roberts, what her name is. Her response: “Anything you want it to be.” For O’Connell Davidson’s interviewee, this encapsulated the “invisibility” of the prostitute for the

client. Desiree's comment on Robert's response to Gere was: "I'm just a role, a fantasy...I don't exist for them as a person" (qtd. in O'Connell Davidson, 1998, 109). Elsewhere, Desiree reports that at a conference organized and attended by feminists and activists and intended to address prostitution as a form of male-on-female violence, she and women like her who described having fulfilling, long-term, romantic relationships with non-clients, for example, or who claimed that they had chosen prostitution because it was more lucrative than other forms of work available, were, in her assessment, effectively silenced. Conversely, those who spoke out as victims or relatives of victims were lauded for their bravery in coming forth with their stories.

Similarly, at a conference I attended in Thailand while working with Empower in 2001, a well-known academic specializing in issues related to prostitution announced to the audience that there was much less of a stigma attached to the profession than before. She was immediately contradicted by a sex worker who lamented the fact that people were not able to see her in her capacity as the mother of a two-year-old child, or in any other role other than prostitute, for that matter. Those outside of the industry were unable to see individuals such as Tik, Nak, and Nan (not their real names), all women I worked with at Empower, in their roles as family providers, sisters, daughters and students making active efforts to improve their quality of life and that of others. Nak, for example, invited me to what she said proudly was the first concrete house in her village, one which she had built through her labor as a prostitute and at the sad expense of losing two children, both of whom drowned near her family's home in the rural northeast while she was engaged in the business of supporting her family in Bangkok. And Tik had, with her 'massage business,' managed to care for up to thirteen family

members—among them, her aging mother and three who were severely disabled. None of these women, in the year that I spent with them, shared any stories that would imply that they considered themselves victims. Instead, Leslie Ann Jeffrey remarks that many Thai prostitutes “consistently interpret themselves as family wage-earners” (31).

If some, like Nan, expressed regret regarding their choices, this was attributed to the way that prostitutes were looked upon by ‘respectable’ society. For one class assignment, Nan wrote:

I have an old classmate whose name is ‘Mam.’ For thirteen years, we studied in the same class from kindergarten to high school [*sic*]. I was like her shadow, and she was like my shadow. After we finished high school, she chose to study at Mahasarakham University. I decided to come to Bangkok with my aunt. This year Mam’s living in Bangkok. In May, she called me. She’s proud of herself, and she’s looking for a job. She asked me about my life and my job. I’m a night lady. I’m not brave. I can’t tell her the truth. I’m not feeling sorry for myself, but I don’t want other people to look down on me. I think everybody is equal. I can’t solve this problem. Now, I don’t know what she thinks about me. Our past is important to me. I miss her, but I avoid meeting her. I don’t want to talk about my job at the bar with old friends. I think other people don’t understand night ladies and disagree with their reasons.

Rather than dwelling on whatever led to their involvement in the sex industry, the individuals I met spent their time advocating for protection against such things as corrupt police procedures and for the use of condoms. None of them saw their profession as conflicting with their strong Buddhist convictions. (Discussions of the relationship between Buddhism and prostitution in Asia are numerous and varied, and while the arguments are informative and thought provoking, a survey of them exceeds the scope of this chapter and this dissertation.)

At the same time that they have been negatively “cast as a separate class of persons,”

women like Tik, Nak, and Nan have also been invoked as victims by compatriot intellectuals and state organizations in order to further various political causes and critique neo-imperialism (O'Connell Davidson, 2002, 84). They have become "objects of policy" as opposed to the "subject of politics" (Jeffrey x). How and why this occurred is complex and involves a lengthy discussion, so I will only briefly address the phenomenon here via two examples. In each case, prostitutes were at the center of international relations between the US and two Asian countries, specifically South Korea and Thailand and, in both cases, it was less about prostitutes themselves and more about what they represented for the state and/or political movements at various times that was at stake.

In the case of South Korea, where many 'camptowns' began proliferating around US military bases in the 1960s, prostitution and venereal diseases among U.S. soldiers were largely considered an 'American problem.' However, in 1971, when the Nixon Doctrine began reducing U. S. troop numbers, the Park Chung Hee administration, worried about the threat of attack from the North, became actively involved in "clean-up" campaigns in the various camptowns. Not only did the government intensify efforts to control VD, it also worked to improve camptown infrastructure, educate camptown workers in 'fair treatment" of both black and white soldiers, and work to rid the area of crime and black market activities. Most importantly, for the purposes of this work, the government went from positioning prostitutes as national embarrassments, to lauding them as patriots making the ultimate sacrifice for their country by offering up their bodies to American servicemen in order to keep the Americans happy and, thus, mitigate perceived threats from a volatile and militant North Korea. Not surprisingly, according to interviews conducted with women working as prostitutes at the time,

very few of them bought into the rhetoric promulgated by the Hee government (Yuh 25-27).

In a slightly different context, but one not so dissimilar from that which occurred in South Korea, women's sexual behavior became the focal point of democracy movements led by middle class students in Thailand who were opposed to the national military dictatorship of the sixties and the increasing American military presence there-- a presence which fostered fears of American imperialism among the Thai intelligentsia. Rural women became the symbol of Thai cultural identity at a moment when not only the above variables were at work, but also when there was internal unrest in the country created by the peasantry who resented and resisted the central authority of Bangkok. They figured prominently as focal points for the democratic struggle and campaigns to forge a unified national selfhood among Thai elites both in pre- and post-democratic Thailand. Needless to say, rural women who entered into prostitution became a source of much "social anxiety," as they represented 'cultural decline' for both the upper classes intent on forging a 'correct' Thai identity and the pro-democracy activists, who saw prostitution among rural women as a direct result of corrupting Western influences (Jeffrey 30, 32). Even though peasant women were symbols central to Thai national identity and Thai prostitutes, in particular, were emblematic of the need for proper guidance from their more fortunate sisters in achieving said identity, discourses which positioned the latter as "arbiters" of what that identity 'ought' to be effectively "silenced [rural women's] political and social agency and their voices" (Jeffrey 32).

It is, then, no wonder that some sex workers feel the need to defend their 'choices' against the visibility afforded them by mainstream forums, even those which, as we shall see, would permit them to 'speak' for themselves. For, their words and choices have often been

embedded within tales of victimization as constructed by their self-purported allies and used to ends which prostitutes themselves may not condone. In short, potentially ‘positive’ visibility comes at a price. Too often, we have been encouraged not to believe what sex workers say about their own decisions. Frequently, prostitutes are depicted as having selected the best from a set of bad options. In “10 Reasons For Not Legalizing Prostitution,” a set of arguments authored by Janice Raymond for the CATW, the claim is made that most women in prostitution do not make a “rational choice” to enter into it. According to her, the individual prostitute’s “choice” is better read as a euphemism for a “survival strategy” that benefits pimps, brothels and customers, but not those who must provide the actual service(s) demanded by the former. In fact, Raymond writes: “Women in prostitution must continually lie about their lives, their bodies and their sexual responses. Lying is part of the job definition when the customer asks, ‘Did you enjoy it?’ The very edifice of prostitution is built on the lie that ‘women like it.’ Some prostitution survivors have stated that it took them years after leaving prostitution to acknowledge that prostitution wasn’t a free choice because to deny their own capacity to choose was to deny themselves” (Raymond). For Raymond and the CATW, even women who say they have chosen prostitution, often do so in “public contexts orchestrated by the sex industry.” They are not “rational” (read: capable of making informed, reasonable decisions). And, in a faulty analogy, she likens opting for prostitution to deciding to partake of “dangerous drugs,” asserting that as with such drugs, we don’t legalize prostitution, presumably, because the need to prevent harm to an individual trumps that individual’s right to consent to a specific action (Raymond).

Alice Miller has asked, and I believe rightly so, to what extent the emphasis on

victimization and the very specifically formulated, almost Victorian, approach toward reform has, under the guise of liberation, simply reinforced efforts to control female sexuality (qtd. in Soderlund 69). In a response to a “20/20” interview with Diane Sawyer for her special “Prostitution in America,” one self-identified prostitute, who blogs under the name “Debauchette,” had this to say of her experience with the pioneering and influential anchorwoman. In her blog, she expresses fear of being “outed” as something she could not handle at this particular point in time. She criticizes mainstream media for perpetuating nineteenth-century tropes of prostitution and the equation of women’s virtue with their sexual practices.

When Sawyer asked why I agreed to speak with her, I said, ‘I don’t know.’ But I do know. I did it because she asked. It was flattering, if a fucked form of flattery, but I was mostly interested because her perspective stands in diametric opposition to my own. She represents the view of middle America; she works for a family-friendly network with no tolerance for grey area in a subject as inflammatory as sex work. It was clear that there could be only one slant for her documentary, being the old Victorian trope of the broken, dysfunctional, fallen prostitute, incapable of forming her own opinions or making her own decisions (and I find it interesting when self-described feminists reinforce this). A network like ABC wanted Dickensian sex workers and that’s precisely what they were going to show. But here I was being given a chance to offer my own take and experience, which runs counter to their thesis, and more specifically, I was being offered the opportunity to sit down and talk with this woman personally.

In reality, Sawyer was much more even-handed than she appeared on-screen, though her questions reflected a set of very backward assumptions. As I said to her then, I knew that one interview wasn’t going to change anything, but I was hoping it might make a dent in the assumptions some people have about sex work [...]

Sawyer asked me about preserving the ‘sanctity’ of my body as though sex without the imprimatur of love were inherently degrading.

I feel like I can only sigh, because I doubt I can begin to penetrate the many layers of misunderstandings and preconceptions, let alone that relentless working assumption that a woman’s value as a human being decreases as she gains sexual

experience [*sic*]. (Debauchette)

In a similar vein, another self-titled ex-courtesan, blasts feminists for pigeonholing prostitutes as victim-Others:

When women remain Victims, they need to have others around to support their feelings of 'rightness.' If someone disagrees with their 'club' they become 'the enemy' and lose that club's support. Lines are drawn, the battle ensues, with Victim demeaning Other to make its point (dirty battle tactics of someone with no internal sense of power). All the while the one who thinks differently just asks for the right to exist as they choose. Victim requires that everyone have its point of view. It needs the support of the club to survive. The club is the only place it can find strength because it has none itself.

If a woman, say like a Whore, challenges that viewpoint they come under the crossfire. Victim clings tenaciously to the rightness of its position and need to crush, ostracize the 'other,' to maintain that position. I keep wondering how feminism supports women when it takes this tactic. I certainly don't see that it does. What I get is the message that we all have to conform to the standard MO or we are attacked more fervently than 'the Patriarchy.'

Important Post Script

As this is the internet and I have no idea who will be reading this [...] I want to state very clearly that I abhor the idea of prostitution anywhere. My definition of prostitution is where anyone does anything they don't want to do just for the money, whether it's selling their body, a vacuum cleaner, or their time sitting at a computer terminal...and obviously Trafficking Women is in a different league than selling a vacuum, OK? These are not feminist issues...they are societal issues, humanist issues. They are neither the same thing nor the same discussion of a woman or man who chooses to become a sex-worker and that decision's impact on feminism. OK? (Gillette)

Even though it may appear that now prostitutes tend to be viewed, publicly at least, with more sympathy--as victims of circumstance and patriarchal violence as opposed to morally, spiritually and mentally bankrupt--Doezema points out that the rhetoric of prostitution today resonates with that of the early reformers. For example, Cecilie Hoigard and Liv Finstad,

whom Kathleen Barry holds in high regard, have likened sex worker's vaginas to "garbage cans for hordes of anonymous men's ejaculations" (qtd. in Doezema, 2001, 26). Simultaneously, however, even as the prostitutes of all nations are pitied for having to "incorporate dehumanization into their identities," First World prostitutes, in particular, are also "blamed" by some feminists for promoting the oppression of all women by "adopting a politics of sex workers rights" for the purposes of personal benefit (Doezema, 2001, 28). This assignation of blame, of course, reveals a failure to consider that prostitution is not a monolithic phenomenon. More importantly, it suggests that there is something wrong with choosing to 'benefit' from sex work, and it reveals a desire to construct all women as equally oppressed in order to advance a particular First World feminist agenda that needs both 'good' (read: victims) and 'bad' (read: alleged pro-choice mercenaries) prostitutes, as well as Third World women of color to legitimate itself. According to Pateman's theory of the "sexual contract," defending certain "racialized and sexual codes" permits "good women" some degree of power and insures their right to protection in "imaginary communit[ies]" which are "constructed by and for men's 'benefit'" (O'Connell Davidson, 1998, 132-133).

This need for the "broken down Dickensian prostitute" and the tendency to cling to the supposed victimhood of prostitutes whilst condemning any inclination toward 'mercenary' behavior as evinced in pro-sex work movements has been attributed to what Wendy Brown has called "injured identity." Injured identity is an ontological state wherein "certain groups have configured their inclusion in the liberal state in terms of 'historical 'injuries' [*sic*]" (Doezema, 2001, 16; Brown qtd. in Doezema, 200, 16). Jo Doezema has expounded upon Brown's theory and the work of Antoinette Burton to suggest that the "suffering" of Third

World women, specifically, facilitates “subject formation” for modern, abolitionist, First World feminists in much the same way that the travails of the poor and the colonized did for women involved in Victorian reform and abolitionist movements (2001, 17). As in the Victorian era, recent theory has positioned Third World prostitutes as atavistic beings, completely unaware of their lack of rights and the loss of human dignity which characterizes their situations. This perspective, in turn, allows for First World feminists to engage in interventionist tactics that grant them access to political life. And the “suffering” of the Third World woman permits commentary on the suffering of all women (Doezema, 2001, 32, 33, 16). In actuality, however, rather than creating a politics of resistance, the approach taken by groups like the CATW which uphold the Third World prostitute as the epitome of suffering and base their identities on combating perceived injuries may merely cater to existing power structures as opposed to offering alternatives to said structures.

Besides what the authors cited above have to say about general social attitudes toward commercial sex and the conflation of prostitution with the erosion of self and victimhood and the on-going battle between radical and pro-choice feminists and sex workers, their assessments lead to questions about the nature of ‘free will,’ of *consent*, in all of this. At the same time that there are individuals who vehemently condemn it, there are those who range in their sentiments from seeking protection and political enfranchisement for prostitutes and decriminalization of prostitution to seeing the act of exchanging sex for money as a symbol of liberation, and it is the theorists and sex workers/former sex workers who privilege prostitution as an icon of women’s power to decide how they will perform their identities and deploy their bodies that I now address.

In opposition to the rhetoric that claims that “all prostitutes are battered women” and “recognizes all commodifications of women’s bodies for sexual exchange as violations of human dignity and therefore of human rights,” there are individuals such as Shannon Bell who, via channels opened up by postmodernist thought and the work of Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, argue for the “rewriting” of the prostitute as a “radical political subject” (Bell 125; Barry qtd. in Bell 125; Bell 123, 102, 106). For Bell, a self-designated “postmodern hetaera,” this reinscription is best realized through performance art, a medium that she says comes closest to “exemplif[ying] postmodern aesthetics” which she privileges for the potential of this set of aesthetics to “dissolve the distinctions between the real and representations of the real.” Performance art “interrogates and destabilizes the dominant representational image” and “disrupts and complicates the strict boundaries of texts” (139). Bell contends that in prostitute performance art there is an elision of the “sacred and the profane.” The “artists use their bodies as sites of resistance to reunify what ‘patriarchy has pulled apart’” and to “transgress public and academic space” by introducing the “pornographic, carnivalesque into these realms” and “produc[ing] a new social identity” within them (Bell 142; Elwes qtd. in Bell 142; Bell 184).

Some First World feminists such as Martha Nussbaum and Wendy Chapkis have implied that if we could achieve the ‘normalization’ of prostitution in society, it might be possible even to “celebrate the existence of a market for commoditized sex,” as O’Connell Davidson puts it (O’Connell Davidson, 2002, 84). Sybil Schwarzenbach has contended that the legalization of prostitution could culminate in a situation in which it would be possible for prostitutes to be “therapists” engaged in helping to relieve society’s “sexual miseries” (qtd. in S.A. Anderson 758). Similarly, Pat Califia has made the claim that “prostitution serves

valuable social functions and would not disappear even in a society that had achieved full gender, race, and class equality.” For, “there would always be those without the ability to give as good as a they get” – the “unattractive,” the “disabled, folks with chronic or terminal illnesses, the elderly, and the sexually dysfunctional,” individuals against whom prostitutes do not discriminate despite the “milieu of ingratitude” in which they are currently forced to operate (O’Connell Davidson, 2002, 89; Califia qtd. in O’Connell Davidson, 2002, 89).

For her part, Heather Lee Miller encourages us to think of prostitution as a “nexus” of sex and work leading to new sexual identities (145). She takes as her foundation assertions put forth by the historian Ruth Mazo Karras in her study of medieval Europe’s *meretrices*. According to Karas, “prostitution is a historical category of sexual identity, rather than simply an occupation” (qtd. in Miller 147). Miller encourages us to consider the broad range of sex acts and configurations of fantasy in relation to prostitute identities in order to depart from the stifflingly oversimplified victim/agent binary.

Meanwhile, far removed from these more utopian scenarios, others involved in various forms of prostitution in developing countries have been theorized as being imbued with resistance to precisely the inequalities that make the exchange of sex for money viable. For example, Lenore Manderson has attempted to show how public sex performance in Patpong, one of Bangkok’s most established red light districts, allows for “silent satire” of the patrons, and she seems to insinuate that prostitution as a way of demonstrating “filial piety” is, in some senses, essential to maintaining the Thai social fabric (451, 469). Still others, like Cleo Odzer, author of *Patpong Sisters: An American Woman’s View of the Bangkok Sex World*—a book based on her dissertation research in Thailand, have been more uncritically straightforward,

asserting that Thai women involved in the sex trade are generally more “liberated” and self-assertive than those women who are not. Odzer compares Thai prostitutes to “superstars,” claiming that they enjoy advantages over their more ‘repressed’ middle and working-class compatriots because they are “financially independent” and are exposed to “adventure, excitement and romance.” Fortunately for them, they have experiences they’d otherwise never be exposed to, such as flying in planes and being taken abroad or going abroad to work” and learning to “swim, bowl, play snooker,” and speak other languages (303). Odzer’s portrait ultimately reinforces precisely the narrow, ethnocentric prescription for becoming a liberated woman that has been critiqued by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her seminal essay, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonialist Discourses,” and it fails to account for those individuals who have been mistreated by clients, harassed by corrupt public servants, and sent home to villages to die from AIDS, the stigma of which is such that they receive little community support and have limited or no access to adequate medical and social services.

Elsewhere, in “The Scandal of the Whorearchy: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi,” a review of Luise White’s *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, Anne McClintock extols White’s account for its refusal to participate in the rhetoric of prostitution which relies on “western idioms of victim and vice, pathology and pollution” (93). White, she says, has been compelled by her study of Kenyan prostitutes to see “prostitution as a defiant form of labor.” White believes that prostitution, in the Kenyan context, is about women avoiding the pitfalls of “colonialism, forced marriage, hunger and destitution. Prostitution gives women access to both ‘money and property’ and functions as a “strategy for survival, a device against oblivion” (McClintock 93; White qtd. in McClintock 94). For White, Kenyan

prostitutes of the colonial era were “urban pioneers” who came from “strong families” and were able successfully to avoid colonial wage labor, support rural families and become heads of household (94).

Most often, ‘liberal’ arguments relating to prostitution have centered around whether or not sex can be exchanged in the same way that other forms of wage labor can and have promoted securing the rights of prostitutes to “freely alienate their sexual labor” as part of a process of “promot[ing] greater equality and freedom” (O’Connell Davidson, 2002, 86). While Julia O’Connell Davidson would like to see prostitutes gain the same rights and protections accorded other citizens, she argues that prostitution is about “degree[s] of unfreedom” and sees no cause for the “celebration for a market for commoditized sex” (1998, 11; 2002, 84). The prostitute is not oppressed by the “bad laws of bad ‘guys,’” as pro-sex worker feminists might argue, nor is s/he simply the victim of “undifferentiated” power as some abolitionist feminists would presume in making their claims (O’Connell Davidson, 1998, 15, 41). Rather s/he is subject to what Iris Young identifies as the “five faces of oppression,” namely: “exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” (qtd. in O’Connell Davidson, 1998, 41). According to O’Connell Davidson, regarding the prostitute as one who is excluded from the “sexual community” renders her, in effect, socially dead (1998, 134).

Likewise, Scott A. Anderson believes normalizing prostitution will not contribute to the formation of a more equitable society. He has approached assertions related to sex as labor from a philosophical standpoint, focusing his argument on the preservation of “sexual autonomy.” In “Prostitution and Sexual Autonomy: Making Sense of the Prohibition of Prostitution,” Anderson contends, paradoxically, that the abolitionists have gotten it ‘right’ --

decriminalization of sex work could ultimately lead to a loss of freedom. Anderson puts forth several hypothetical situations in order to make a case for the continued prohibition of sex work, arguing that normalizing prostitution and simply treating it as another form of work could potentially: 1) “impact incentives to have sex,” meaning that sex might become a job requirement, a condition of receiving welfare or unemployment benefits, or a part of “enforceable contracts” complete with legal penalties and restrictions for those who fail to uphold said contracts, 2) encourage “third party control over sexual practices,” meaning that a) “large, aggressive corporations may develop sexual practices for consenting adults using whatever business practices are acceptable to other sorts of consumer goods” and, thus, exercise legal rights to control the sexual practices of employees, b) workers may not have choices concerning whom they service, c) government regulatory agencies may be permitted to enforce prohibitions on sexual practices, both at “on the job and off,” and 3) allow for pressures to be exerted on “sexual attitudes and values” through advertising campaigns and educational institutions, which might encourage students to enter into the sex trade by offering the “training” for them to do so (762). Even in circumstances in which prostitution was “normalized,” he argues, prostitutes would still be denied basic protection of their fundamental rights and sexual autonomy and would, thus, continue to be individuals segregated and excluded from the larger society (762, 765). Precisely because prostitutes could be placed in situations which threatened their sexual autonomy, e.g., being forced to fulfill the demands of corporate style “micromanag(ement),” they would constitute a set of marked bodies; and, among those bodies, the ones that would suffer the most if prostitution were to be legalized are precisely those that are so degraded now—namely, those of the “poor and powerless” (765, 766).

Anderson's hypothetical situations have been, in a sense, put to the test under German labor and welfare law. Prostitution was established as a legal profession in Germany in January of 2002. Lawmakers decreed in December, 2001 that prostitution was a legitimate form of labor and that prostitutes were eligible to receive the same rights and benefits afforded any other tax-paying worker. While rumors about unemployment benefits being denied if women refused employment in brothels were unfounded, there has been a lot of speculation about how much prostitutes have benefitted from legalization. Areas where prostitutes can ply their trade are arbitrarily mapped. Often they are relegated to working in dangerous, poorly lit, industrial areas. Also, if prostitutes attempt to work on the books, they are penalized by the tax office, sometimes being charged between five and ten years worth of back taxes. There are also no special health provisions for prostitutes. Moreover, nearly half of Germany's four hundred thousand sex workers are foreigners and do not possess work permits. Therefore, they are not eligible for protection under the law. Additionally, there has been speculation as to who is really profiting from the laws. Can prostitutes actually receive the benefits of a "union" in a business where "criminals," who evade taxes, are in control? Finally, even though prostitution has been legalized, most prostitutes strongly feel that the stigma associated with sex work persists ("German Prostitutes in Rights Plea").

Clearly, defining prostitution is a difficult, if not impossible task, given the variety of incarnations prostitution may assume and the diverse, historically and geographically specific contexts in which it occurs. Moreover, we are faced with the dilemma of untangling political motives of theorists and activists from the plethora of renderings of the business of sex and those involved in it—an informative exercise, but one that tells us less about prostitution and

prostitutes and more about the society which seeks to understand them. It seems most productive to think of the prostitute and prostitution in the way that Lesley Ann Jeffrey does—as “constructed categories” that are “highly elastic” (xv). Or, as Heather Miller argues above, an “historical category.” To say that the prostitute is an “elastic” construct, a “category,” however, is not to say that the prostitute is an “empty symbol,” as Bell would have it. Though s/he may be treated as such by activists, feminist theorists, and policymakers bent on advancing specific agendas, as I have attempted to show above, s/he is, in fact, overdetermined. S/he is the product of the efforts of numerous and diverse groups to secure a unified sense of gender, sexual, and national identity and as such has been rendered practically unrecognizable. As a matter of fact, so ambiguous a figure is s/he that, in many places, it is often left up to the “common sense” of law enforcement officials to “determine who is or is not a prostitute” and “at what particular moment and in what place a woman [or man] becomes a prostitute” (Jeffrey xv-xi).

Indeed, the prostitute is, as Shannon Bell contends, a product of discourse. But, contrary to what Bell believes, it will take a lot more than performance art to counter the current pervasive discourses and attitudes that influence and are influenced by institutional policies and to reshape interactions in the social and political arenas that prostitutes and prostitution. Conflicting and conflicted representations of the prostitute abound, and those representations are not without ‘real’ consequences related to agency—who exercises power over whom.

If it seems that I have spent an inordinate amount of time discussing the history of prostitution for what is also fundamentally a proposed study of representations of Asian-

American masculinity in literature, the reasons for this will become evident in the ensuing chapters. For now, let it suffice to say that the works I have chosen are essentially stories about power, and ‘unorthodox’ or ‘problematic’ sexualities are central features of the plot. To see the significance of the prostitute in the novels selected, it is necessary to understand the multiple forms prostitution takes and how prostitutes and prostitution have been interpreted. More importantly, as I have attempted to map out, there are myriad ways in which images of prostitutes and prostitution can be very easily manipulated, exploited even, to serve the causes of a wide variety of social and political entities, most often, in order to assist those entities in achieving a firmer sense of identity and projecting a certain image in order to appeal to a particular social or political base. A knowledge of the ways in which prostitution is and has been made manifest, of how it is and has been understood and portrayed, is key to understanding the ways in which representations of it are deployed to discuss the particular social and historical circumstances depicted in and issues being advanced by the novels under investigation here. Furthermore, this knowledge will provide added insight into some of the problems inherent in the decision of the authors being discussed to employ the prostitute as a central trope to convey their concerns.

Before delving into the novels, I should also explain that the Victorians figure prominently here because they have set many of the precedents for the way we think about prostitution. The legacy of the Manicheistic vision of prostitutes and prostitution is readily apparent in the ways which contemporary feminists, politicians, and other legislators have, most often, simply cast prostitutes as victims or castigated them as enemies of the desired order. And, evidence of Victorian influence is apparent in the reactions of those who celebrate

them as empowered individuals capable of overcoming social strictures governing sexuality and prescribed gender roles; for, often, this is none other than a reaction to estimations of prostitutes as weak, bad, or morally deformed women. The authors whose works I investigate are not immune to this legacy, even if their intent is, in part, to redefine perceptions of (Asian-American) sexuality and gender. In fact, it appears to inform these authors' perceptions of what is desirable and undesirable, and those perceptions speak not only to real social conditions, but also frequently mimic the beliefs held by the hegemonies that alienate and reject prostitutes and Asian-American men.

Finally, if I have focused mostly on women, here, it is not because I consider male prostitutes unworthy of discussion, but because a disproportionate amount of available research has made female prostitutes a focal point. This conspicuous concern with women's bodies has many implications and speaks to a number of different issues; however, I will only mention two which I think are pertinent to this investigation. First, it reflects a sexual double standard that links a woman's identity, her worth, and her 'right' to subjecthood to sexual behavior, and this overemphasis on defining a woman according to her sexuality, privileging it as an elemental component of her being is, as we will see, adopted by some characters to be analyzed. In at least three of the novels, the virtue of women, or lack thereof, is important to the protagonists' quests to understand themselves in the larger context of the nation.

In the remaining two novels, which feature homosexual characters, virtue is not a point of concern; but, the issues regarding power that undergird identification of those who deserve membership in a society and those who do not, in large part, as a result of sexual choices and the ways that sexuality is imagined as a constituent element of identity, remain intact.

Ironically, for the Asian-American characters discussed in the following chapters, mainstream standards of purity and sexual ‘acceptability’ do not necessarily apply equally or evenly to men and women of races that have been dubbed sexually Other. In other words, with regard to Asian/Asian Americans, both male and female bodies have been the object of intense suspicion and scrutiny, as well as of a commodified desire that necessarily empties its object of any moral substance or force as a way of maintaining the ascendancy of the one who desires. This does not mean, however, that Asian-American men and women are valued or devalued as sexual beings in identical ways, either by mainstream society or within the Asian-American community. The specific discrepancies will be discussed later.

In conclusion, it could be said that prostitutes have often ultimately been invoked to tell us who we are or who we would like to be as gendered and racialized individuals, as societies, and as nations. The more we know of what representations exist and how they are deployed at various historical moments, the more we understand about a particular group’s desires and anxieties as they relate to identity and power. For Asian Americans, who, as a race, have been sexualized and gendered and whose sexuality has been racialized, the prostitute has been and continues to be especially relevant to identity and to identity making. This has to do with the fact that various representations of aberrant sexuality among Asian Americans were a powerful way of dehumanizing early Asian immigrants and denying them positive visibility and rights; and, certain intractable, intrinsically gendered and sexualized stereotypes continue to function as a way of excluding Asian Americans from or including them in mainstream society and of determining the degree of visibility and agency they are permitted at any given time. Issues surrounding sexuality, gender and race have been further complicated by the fact that in

attempting to counter stereotypes of, for example, the emasculated or desexualized Asian-American man, some Asian-American authors have opted to use the prostitute body as a means of trying to elucidate injustice and (re)define the male self by employing that body in ways that warrant examination. For, images of prostitutes have been constructed not only to perform the constructive function of shedding light upon Asian-American problems and the specific forms of inequality to which Asian-American men are subjected. Their invocation also raises questions about the methods by which authors and their fictional characters deal with the often conflicted and complicated processes involved in self actualization—about how to depict the concerns Asian-American men have with regard to self making and iterability. How prostitution pertains specifically to the history of Asians in the U.S. will be addressed in the next chapter, and it is my hope that the reader will keep in mind the porous nature of images, reflecting on what has been presented in this chapter as I begin developing other images, which though they may differ in the details do not necessarily differ in nature from the ones offered above.

Chapter 2

The Early Asian Immigrant in Public Discourse and Contemporary Asian-American Fiction

1. “To Be or Not to Be.”

In order to understand the significance, and perhaps problematic nature, of the deployment of the prostitute in relation to issues concerning masculinity in recent works by Asian-American authors, the relationship between sexuality and popular attitudes and legal policies directed toward Asian immigrants to the United States from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s must be traced. For, just as ideas about the sexuality of colonial subjects and mechanisms put into place to control it by, for example, prescribing codes of ethics which encompassed everything from fraternizing with native women to proposing ‘suggestions’ for rearing children in European outposts were important components in setting the parameters for ‘authentic French-ness’ or ‘real English-ness,’ so have they been instrumental in maintaining

the at times rather precarious 'properly' white sense of self in North America and in creating the 'subordinate,' racialized masculinities and femininities that have both unsettled and bolstered that self (Stoler, 1995, 11, 32, 35, 41, 46-47). At the turn of the twentieth century, emphasis on and anxieties concerning race, gender, and especially sexual ideals permeated the popular and legal discourses which facilitated permutations and new configurations of hegemonic identities. Actually, though, injunctions against interracial unions were put into place in North America, Maryland and Virginia to be precise, as early as the 1600s in order to keep the sexuality of both men and women in check. More specifically, lawmakers sought to protect the "fate of the [white] race and the nation[s]" from the 'inevitable contamination' which would occur if white women, perceived as "unruly," "lustful," and white men, described as prone to acting according to "natural inclinations," were not prohibited from establishing socially-sanctioned, sexual/romantic relationships with desiring (and desired) groups of people considered 'unfit' to be European subjects. (Fredrickson qtd. in Stoler, 1995, 41-42; Stoler, 1995, 41-42). However, Nayan Shah points out that "[c]orrelating American national identity with sexual normalcy was a new development of the twentieth century" when policing and a number of judicial decisions "underlined racialized sexualities that endangered the state as well as national masculinity" (Shah 705). The combination and proliferation of popular, political, and legal discourses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that invoked "sodomy," "white slavery," and "child prostitution," among others, and which attempted to set the standards for appropriate sexual conduct and gender appropriate behavior worked to normalize ideas of white masculinity and femininity while pathologizing that of Asian immigrants to the effect that the "Asian was not only more tenuously located in American history, but [...] his

and her identity had been defined as that of [...] alien by race” (Shah 706-707; Koshy, 2001, 54).

Certainly, as Shah notes, some of the cases from the early twentieth century he cites point to the tenuousness and instability of the concept of the national masculine subject which officials were attempting to construct. Furthermore, in analyzing select cases of those prosecuted for sexual offenses, we are made aware of certain individuals’ rejections of attempts to “normalize” and privilege a particular type of national subject by way of social and legal discourses. But, the incidents that Shah documents should also, he says, alert us to historical attitudes and practices that warrant examination not only for what they say about the past, but for the ways in which they inform our current perspectives on race and gender (720-721). Undoubtedly, the historical displacements that resulted, in part, from demeaning, often conflicted, sexually-related depictions of and discriminatory legal actions taken against early Asian immigrants to be discussed in more detail below have facilitated a “compromise of traditional notions of masculinity” among Asian immigrants and induced feelings of self-alienation among Asian Americans---factors, which remain, as we shall see, central to the concerns of the authors I examine (Eng 92).

While Europeans came to know Asians primarily in a colonial context, North-American ways of thinking about them developed in response to a combination of the communiqués of missionaries during the burgeoning era of U.S.-Asian contact in the 1800s, encounters with immigrant laborers from Asia and sensationalist reports about them, anti-coolie propaganda which proliferated during the eras of Emancipation and Reconstruction, and the consumer culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Paternalistic

sympathy and erotic longing for these ‘inscrutable’ people existed alongside fears regarding the Asian immigrant’s inherent, “pernicious morality” and the Asian’s perceived capacity to overtake and degrade not only the bodies of individuals, but more importantly, the national body (Shah 704).

According to Martha Mabie Gardner, early Chinese immigrants, in particular, came to be associated in popular rhetoric with economic competition to those “free [white] Americans,” women and men alike, who once comprised such a large portion of the labor market (*The Truth* qtd. in Gardner 78). Chinese men were said to have supplanted the latter. They were likened to “thieves, tramps, vagrants, paupers,” or, at best, referred to as “common laborers” (*The Truth* qtd. in Gardner 78). Some California newspapers went so far as to claim that it was the Chinese male immigrant who was responsible for the fall from virtue of certain white women. For, it was he, they said, who, after the completion of the Transpacific Railroad in 1869, had taken over domains of industry traditionally allotted women, such as providing laundry and domestic services and working in factories; thus, allegedly, forcing many of these women into destitution and, eventually, into prostitution (Gardner 80). In fact, so prevalent in the labor press of the mid- to late 1800s were stories of women forced by economic circumstances to turn to prostitution that these stories comprised a “virtual genre” (Gardner 74).

Popular discourse decried not only the demise of women, but that of white men, too, as conceptions of American masculinity became largely linked with the image of what Michael Kimmel refers to as the “Self-Made Man” of the nineteenth century, who, after having tamed the wilderness, developed an anxious masculinity in response to rapid industrialization that depended heavily on “preoccupation” with the “self”--“individual achievement” and

“industry,” and, most unfortunately, the exclusion of blacks, women, immigrants, and Native Americans (89, 18-19, 90). Ohio Congressman Samuel Sullivan Cox, who opposed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, worried that “the manly warlike people of Ohio [...] would become, in spite of Bibles and morals, degenerate under the wholesale emancipation and immigration of [black slaves]” (qtd. in Kimmel 90-91). Also, in 1862, one pamphlet produced by the Workingmen’s Party of California, or WPC, asked: “What though the labor of Coolies [East and South Asian men who were brought to work plantations in the British and Spanish colonies] be cheaper than that of stalwart men of our own race? We must nevertheless lose by the exchange. If the former drive back these hardy pioneers, who shall defend the land? Who shall whiten the plains with their homesteads? Who shall form the families of the Republic?” (qtd. in Gardner 74).

A related and more urgent sentiment was expressed in a 1909 article written for the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. The article, entitled “Chinese and Japanese Immigrants--A Comparison” and written by Chester H. Rowell--editor of the *Fresno Republican*, purported itself to be a comparative analysis of the Japanese and Chinese; but, as the final words of the work reveal, it was actually just propaganda, asserting that the immigration of Asians had the potential to rob the White Man of his place in history without acknowledging the contributions of those who had, ultimately, ceded a place in history for Him to achieve that position and to undo the whole of Civilization as imagined by Him. In his article, Rowell maintained that the “Pacific Coast [was] the frontier of the white man’s world, the culmination of the westward migration which [was] the *white man’s whole history*,” a history that ought to be protected at all costs against the Asian hoards who would surely

jeopardize the “permanence not merely of American civilization, but of the white race on this continent [emphasis added]” (10).

Race riots were not uncommon in the second half of the nineteenth century as the nascent white working class tried to distinguish itself from non-white immigrant labor. Take for example the June 4th, 1885 Rock Springs, Wyoming incident. After several years of working together, Chinese and white miners clashed over who would work a “rich room” in the mines. An angry mob of some 200 hundred white miners set upon their Chinese coworkers, who numbered just over 600 and who had been working the mines for nearly a decade before the arrival in the early 80s of the mostly Cornish and Welsh immigrants that comprised anti-Chinese organizations like the Knights of Labor. Though this was by no means the only instance of violence involving the Chinese during the 1870s and 80s, it was perhaps one of the most infamous cases. The mob burned Chinese homes sending all 600 Chinese inhabitants fleeing and, in the end, there were forty-four casualties among the Chinese: twenty-nine dead and fifteen injured. Federal troops were sent in to quell the riot. Unfortunately, all of the whites involved were acquitted since “no individual killers could be identified” (Lee 64).

Rhetoric expressing the perceived threat that Chinese immigrants posed to the integrity of the working class was inextricably intertwined with narratives of perversity, disease, and the dangers of excess, all of which cast the Chinese immigrant as somehow less than human. In contrast to the chasteness of the white woman and the fortitude and resilience of the white man, Chinese men and women were alternately conceived of as sexless and sexually predatory. Chinese male immigrants were depicted as “abject slaves.” Such was the “humility” and “servile obedience” of the aforementioned, states one WPC pamphleteer, that one could no

longer discern that he was even “a man” (qtd. in Gardner 78). In fact, the Chinese Man, wrote Rowell, was the “perfect human ox” (4).

The choice of the term “slave” was undoubtedly influenced by arguments made before the Civil War and during the Reconstruction. And while questions about the status of Asian laborers as free or enslaved originally emerged as both a domestic and an international question, this was “not so much,” Moon-Ho Jung argues, “as a result of anti-Chinese rancor in California but of U.S. imperial ambitions in Asia and the Caribbean and broader struggles to demarcate the legal boundary between slavery and freedom” (678). The anti-coolie movement in the United States functioned not to better the conditions of coolie laborers, however, it paved the way for other legislation which would work to disenfranchise Asian Americans and mark them as irredeemably ‘Other.’

How was one to distinguish whether coolies were slaves or free individuals; and, what was at stake in the debate over coolieism for the parties involved, among which included abolitionists and pro-slavery activists, as well as U.S. diplomats, European officials and migrant workers themselves? The answer to the question regarding the status of the coolie depended upon the economic and political agendas of the parties engaged in debates over the issue. Early British abolitionists initially viewed coolieism as just another variant of slavery. By the mid-1840s, however, coolie labor was being advocated by some officials for its potential to expedite emancipation. Unlike laborers exported to Cuban plantations, they argued, those transported to the British West Indies were part of a system which guaranteed them protection from enslavement via state intervention. This allowed the British planters and officials to claim “moral superiority” over their Cuban counterparts (Jung 682).

Popular perspectives concerning coolieism in the United States varied. As with British social reformers, American abolitionists of the 1840s sought to publicize the deplorable conditions that coolies endured. Certainly, outright coercion had been exercised in many cases involving labor imported from China and India. In the 1850s, so prevalent were cases of 'recruitment' involving fraudulence or force that the Chinese began referring to the importation of male Chinese workers as "pig-dealing," and anti-foreigner riots in Guangzhou (Canton) were not uncommon (Jung 685, 688). If migrant workers were not kidnapped or tricked into boarding vessels bound for the West and indentured servitude, they entered into exploitative arrangements out of extreme economic necessity and often at risk of abuse by their handlers (Jung 685). It was alleged by abolitionists that coolies faced extremely inhumane conditions akin to slavery once arriving in the colonies, particularly Cuba, where until 1886 the free and enslaved worked alongside one another.

Even though, in the 1850s, some individuals had begun to see coolieism as a viable end to slavery--a "happy medium" between "forced and voluntary labor" as one *New York Times* editorial put it, reports of abuse and protests against the practice among the Chinese led the American government to take action in part because the struggle to prohibit coolieism, i.e. 'slavery,' allowed the U.S to establish its identity as a "free" nation state and, simultaneously "deepen and defend its imperial presence in Asia and the Americas" (Jung 683, 679). In 1862, a year before the Emancipation Proclamation, Abraham Lincoln signed into law a bill which would "divorce 'coolies' from America" (Jung 678). However, while "An Act to Prohibit the 'Coolie' Trade' by American Citizens in American Vessels" forbade the transfer of persons "to be held in service or labor," it did not define what a coolie was. As a matter of fact, almost all

Chinese emigrants were known as coolies—technically laborers, but, more accurately, indentured servants who were looked upon as less than human and often forced to live under conditions resembling those of slavery, says Jung. To make matters more confusing, yet another section of the law allowed for the “free and voluntary emigration of any Chinese subject.” It failed to account for the many Chinese who had ‘willingly’ signed away their freedom to planters and other U.S. economic interests as a consequence of extreme financial hardship (Jung 697).

American slaveholders who were in direct competition with European plantation owners vociferously fretted over the imminent danger to American economic interests both at home and abroad that unchecked importation of laborers from China and South Asia represented. Though they balked at the idea of state intervention in “matters concerning race and labor,” in order to keep American slavery in place, they argued that the “natural order of slavery” was confirmed by the social and economic “failure” of abolitionism and the “utter decay” in the Caribbean wrought by coolieism. Hypocritically, they argued that the institution of American slavery must be allowed to continue lest “the degraded, barbarous and weak races [...] be induced *voluntarily* to reduce themselves to a slavery more cruel than any that has yet disgraced the earth....” Though they did not succeed in having their way, slave holders’ views buttressed the ever increasing the anti-coolie sentiment which eventually led to the passage of Lincoln’s ‘Coolie Act’ and opened the way for legislation in the 1880s that would eventually limit and prohibit immigration based upon race (Jung 690-691; Debow qtd. in Jung 692).

While initially the coolie question was framed as a question of human rights, it ultimately became the grounds for exclusion of the Chinese in the United States. The debate

over coolieism had considerable impact on the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882— an act which made it impossible for all but a few Chinese, primarily merchants, teachers, and students--to enter the country and was the first U.S. immigration restriction to be based upon race (Stevens 277). According to Moon-Ho Jung,

Indeed by the 1880s alongside the prostitute, there was no other more potent symbol of chattel slavery's enduring legacy than the 'coolie,' a racialized and racializing figure that anti-Chinese (and putatively pro-Chinese) lawmakers condemned. A stand against 'coolies' was a stand for America. For freedom. There was no disagreement on that point. The legal exclusion of Chinese laborers in 1882 and the subsequent barrage of anti-Asian laws reflected and exploited this consensus in American culture and politics: 'coolies' fell outside the legitimate borders of the United States [...]

Ambiguously and then unfailingly linked with slavery and the Caribbean in American culture, "coolies" would eventually make possible the passage of the nation's first restrictions on immigration under the banner of 'freedom' and 'immigration' [emphasis added]. (678)

The Chinese Exclusion Act proved to be a prelude to a series of other laws to be enacted later which influenced and were influenced by the belief that not only the Chinese, but other Asians were unassimilable aliens and that it was, therefore, better to employ legislation to curb any "race problem" before it began as opposed to "turn[ing] back the wheels of history" and repeating the mistakes of the South (Jung 677; Rowell 10).

Similarly to the coolies, Chinese women who were not the wives of merchants constituted a class of persons which Mae M. Ngai has referred to as "impossible subjects." Though she applies this term to a discussion of illegal immigration and its impact on creating a category of persons which she refers to as "alien citizens," or those born here, but who by virtue of their historical association with populations "constructed" as illegal have been cast as

perpetually foreign, her definition of the impossible subject aptly describes the status of working-class Chinese women at the turn of the century. For, certainly, these women, whether born in the US or not, constituted a “caste, unambiguously situated outside the boundaries of formal membership [in the American polity] and social legitimacy” (Ngai 2).

Chinese women were, for the most part, when discussed at all, portrayed as both passive slaves and hypersexualized and ‘barbaric’ beings capable of “grossness, animalism and lechery” (Tong 28). They were the object of a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, they were largely absent from the public sphere and popular cultural manifestations, except insofar as they were invoked to support the assertion that the Chinese kept prostitutes for “abhorrent sexual practices”—a claim used to construct the ‘China Man’ as monster (Tong 28). Or, they were often rendered as “voiceless,” except for the abolitionists who would speak on their behalf. According to Robert G. Lee, the absence from the public sphere and the “voicelessness” of Chinese female prostitutes was necessary for two reasons. First, it served to distract attention from the exchange in these women’s bodies in which both white and Asian men were complicit and from which both profited. Secondly, for social purity reformers the Chinese prostitute’s silence and “sexual enslavement” allowed reformers to employ her as a “synecdoche for all prostitutes, indeed for all women whose passionless True Womanhood was at the mercy of predatory male sexuality” (Lee 91). Interestingly, however, Benson Tong argues that whereas white America viewed prostitutes as fallen women in need of reform, Chinese prostitutes had more “social mobility” than white women engaged in the business. As opposed to the former, the latter were viewed as “dutiful daughters.” As such, they were much more likely to be accepted into Chinese working-class society as wives or among the Chinese

“gentry” as second wives (Tong 164).

Despite the popular rhetoric which positioned them as victims, however, Chinese prostitutes did not escape the vitriol of the WPC (Tong 28). They were variously referred to as the “vilest strumpet[s] on earth” and as a “mass[es] of corruption” (WPC qtd. in Gardner 79). The Chinese prostitute woman and, by extension, Chinatown, which was thought to be a den of lasciviousness and sexual deviance, figured centrally as symbols of imminent danger to white “propriety” and “cleanliness” (Gardner 79). This particular depiction of the Chinese was in keeping with the assertions of certain politicians who sought to deny entry to Chinese in the 1880s based on perceived differences which marked the coolie as unfit for integration into the U.S. national body. According to one of the most active proponents of Chinese exclusion, California Senator Horace F. Page, the Chinese did not share “our religious characteristics,” and Chinatowns were “overflowing with coolies,” i.e. all Chinese laborers, and “women of a class that [he] would not care to mention” in the presence of those involved in Congressional hearings to decide the fate of Chinese immigrants (Page qtd. in Jung 677).

Consequently, the Chinese man became the suspected carrier of invisible, but deadly diseases. Additionally, it was feared he would sow seeds of debauchery. Due, in part, to his alleged involvement with Chinese prostitute women, whom Gold Rush era journalist Frank Soulé specifically designated “the filthiest and most abandoned of their sex,” he threatened to infect and corrupt the white working- and middle-class homes with which he came into intimate contact as a result of his increasing presence in the domestic and service industries in the years just prior to and after 1869 (Soulé qtd. in Tong 27). On the other hand, as an itinerant, seasonal worker, it was feared that, owing to his “disgusting, Oriental depravity,” he

would engage in ‘unnatural’ sexual acts with susceptible youths (Haight qtd. in Shah 703; Shah 711).

Despite all of this, beginning in the 1880s and 90s there was an infusion of the Oriental style into mainstream consumer culture. This is evidenced in the profusion of decorative arts and domestic goods from Asia which defined the “feminized consumer culture” at the turn of the twentieth century (Lee 124). In addition to procuring Asian curios, wealthy San Franciscans hosted Japanese style teas and luncheons replete with Turkish and Chinese teacups and even servants only from Japan (Sueyoshi 82). Consumption of the Orient did not stop there. In her article detailing Japanese assimilation and immigrant dress of the era, Amy Sueyoshi tells us that both Japanese and South Asian women “enhanced whites’ personal lives on a very personal level” (81). Men who held stag parties preferred women from the Orient or, at least, women masquerading as such. Meanwhile, for writers working for publications like the *Overland Monthly*, Japanese women in particular came to represent “Ideal Womanhood” as opposed to their less ‘feminine’ American counterparts engaged in the “New Woman” movement (Sueyoshi 81).

Women engaged in the movement were, beginning as early as the 1870s, often painted as having transgressed the boundaries of public and private life to such a degree that they came to be associated in the popular press with “fallen” women for their challenges to the sexual status quo (Friskin 91). In an effort to encourage women’s self sufficiency, some sex radical feminists such as Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin went so far as to equate marriage with prostitution. At the same time, they refused to condemn those engaged in the sex trade, stating that: “Women, for no other crime have been following the dictates of a natural appetite,

are driven with fury from the comforts and sympathies of society"--a statement which implied that women were not passionless creatures, but did indeed experience "sexual desire" and that prostitutes were not always necessarily "victims," as some regulationists vehemently argued (Woodhull and Claflin qtd. in Frisken 94; Frisken 94).

Japanese women, on the other hand, were not necessarily popularly considered sexual agents, unlike Chinese women and despite official justifications for enactment of the Page Acts, which presumed that many Asian immigrant women were prostitutes and which will be examined in more detail, shortly. Rather, the Japanese woman had, according to one writer whose article appeared in a 1913 issue of the magazine *Musical America*, "for ages been trained to absolute subservience [...] She has been taught practically to efface herself, but, with the infinite charm of womanhood, she has managed, at the same time to evolve a delicacy, a refinement and a graciousness of demeanor which are captivating" (qtd. in Yoshihara 91). Thus, Japanese women were the objects of erotic longing not only for men, but for women as well--some of whom openly and unabashedly expressed this in essays and other literary works. Gertrude Holloway, for example, wrote a poem entitled "A Coquette" in which she expressed her desire to kiss a Japanese woman (Sueyoshi 82).

As Holloway's poem seems to indicate, Japanese womanhood as it was conceived of by white Americans also became a conduit for self-expression among some women of the New Woman Movement. In addition to employing the Asian woman as a means of articulating the desire for greater sexual freedom, Mari Yoshihara writes that there was an abundance of white women performing Orientalism in various stage productions at the beginning of the twentieth century and that it was "not incidental" that the proliferation of such performances occurred at

a time when women were seeking to recreate themselves as autonomous subjects. For the New Women, this act of constructing a “new gender identity,” she says, “was closely linked to, and was articulated through, enacting roles other than their own. The performance of Asian femininity thus provided an effective tool for white women’s empowerment and pleasure” (78). Although it may seem paradoxical that white women chose as a vehicle of empowerment the subservient and tragic figures of the Orientalist imagination, such was actually not the case; for, first of all they were seen in their roles as professional actors as “*producing*” of new identities [emphasis added] (78). Furthermore, these displays were made possible, in large part, as a result of “white women’s material and representational power over real Asian women and men”—a power that was exercised “both on and off stage” (78-79).

The vogue for Oriental products, lavish Asian-themed social affairs, and delicate Japanese beauties, notwithstanding, Asia and Asians still represented the potential for social decay. The desire for the “luxury” of the Orient was associated with the perils of “seduction,” over-consumption,” and “addiction to pleasure” with all of its attending “joys and pains” (Lee 124). One popular cultural production of the time which makes an immediate association between these dangers and the East is Cecil B. DeMille’s 1915 *The Cheat*. I think the film is worth mentioning because though in real life, Sessue Hayakawa, who plays the film’s antagonist—Hishuru Tori, enjoyed unprecedented fame and success as an Asian-American actor in an industry dominated by whites, he was nonetheless used as a vehicle to convey fears about the Asian-American man as a threat to the sanctity of the (white) American bourgeois family and the dangers posed to it by the ‘unhealthy’ Oriental penchant for luxury. In the film, Tori, a worldly, but “treacherous” Japanese merchant, promises to expunge the debts of a

“glamorous and recklessly extravagant” married Long Island socialite if she will commit to sex with him (Koshy, 2001, 52). When she tries to remedy her predicament by later offering to give him money to satisfy her debts, he attempts to force himself upon her and uses a poker to brand her, as one might do with property, thus, evoking the association of Asian immigrants with slavery and prostitution (Lee 124-125).

Besides revealing white distress felt at the time about the stability of the “domestic order,” the plot also maintains the identification of the “Orient with desire” and, by extension, the identification of the East and Asian men with all that is “erotically female” and infantile. Tori is in a state of arrested moral development. Mesmerized by the “premature pleasures of the senses,” he lacks “logic, language and self-control—powers arrogated to Western men.” He cannot fulfill his desires except through blackmail and physical coercion (Lee 124-25). He is unable to meet the “standard” President Calvin Coolidge claimed was applied to “*our* inhabitants” which was that of “manhood [emphasis added]” (qtd. in Stevens 271).

Anxieties about Asians and their threat to white American ideals of productivity, individualism, family and of middle and working class femininity and masculinity manifest themselves not only in media and in popular culture and protest movements, but in policymaking. From 1854 until 1868, when the Federal Civil Rights Bill was passed, “a Chinaman had no rights that a white man was bound to respect” (Lee 49). It was argued that were the Chinese afforded the same status as free whites in legal matters, it would not be long before they assumed positions of power as voters, jurists, judges, and legislators (Lee 49). And, though the Federal Civil Rights Bill allowed Chinese men a modicum of recognition as political subjects, as of 1870 when citizenship rights were extended to include both free white

men and African-American men as well, Asian Americans were still barred from citizenship under the Immigration and Naturalization Act. Anti-Chinese sentiment eventually culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

In addition to the 1870 law denying citizenship to those of Chinese descent, the Page Act of 1870 was part of a series of acts which severely limited the number of Chinese, as well as Japanese and “Mongolian” women, who could legally enter the United States. The Page Act operated on the “presumption of bad moral character” of Asian women in general, though it seemed in practice to be introduced primarily in order to single out and deny entry to Chinese women, in a time when fears were renewed about the “social hygiene of the new cities of the West” (Lee 89). Why, for a time, Japanese women enjoyed slightly more legal immunity had, perhaps, to do with the way they were socially imagined as discussed above and, more importantly, with diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Japan, a factor to be addressed in the following paragraphs. Even though the number of Chinese and other Asian women engaged in prostitution was, in fact, very low when compared to women of other ethnicities, a great deal of sensationalism and stigma surrounded Asian immigrant women. Thought to have attempted immigration with the sole intention of entering into the sex industry, they were subjected to lengthy, degrading interrogations upon arrival at US ports of entry. In addition, it was maintained that they were the carriers of especially “virulent and deadly” forms of venereal disease (Lee 90).

The Chinese, in particular, were positioned at the crux of what Robert G. Lee has argued was an imaginary “social crisis” because they posed an “erotic threat to domestic tranquility” for two different but not unrelated reasons involving perceptions of both Asian

men and women (90, 88). As a result of the fact that, in the late 1800s, 10,000 Chinese women were, mostly forcibly, brought to the U.S. as prostitutes, they became representative of “the available and mute but proletarianized sexuality that mirrored the exoticized female long displayed in the Western literary of Orientalism” (Lee 88). “Race” and race-related restrictions were the only way to control this unchecked, ‘pernicious’ sexuality and to preserve the image of the “passionless True Woman” who was the “moral center of the chaste and obedient social order” (Lee 89). Just as it was thought that the Asian-woman-as-prostitute would tear apart the social fabric, it was believed that the displaced Chinese male immigrant threatened to undermine the structure of the family as he gradually made his way into the domestic sphere after work in manufacturing, agriculture, and mining were no longer options. He took jobs traditionally assigned women. His sexuality, already suspect, came to be regarded as even more perverse because economic necessity drove him to do jobs that a ‘real’ man would not do. Yet, ironically, it was also feared that his presence would lead to relationships across class and race that would “disrupt the patriarchal hierarchy of the family” (Lee 89).

Despite the popular rhetoric which positioned Asian women as national sexual threats, there is compelling evidence to suggest that there was no real cause for widespread panic. For example, it was found that around the time of the instatement of the Page Acts the number of Chinese women engaged as prostitutes was, according to Lucy Cheng, around 900 in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Meanwhile, only three ‘Orientals’ were found by the reformers Helen Campbell and Thomas Knox to be working in New York’s Chinatown. Anne Butler also only reported encountering three Asian women in Denver, where, in 1875, several hundred prostitutes plied their trade (Lee 89- 90).

Although the Chinese were essentially forbidden entry to the U.S. after 1882, other groups from Asia continued to immigrate relatively freely. For example, between 1885 and 1908, approximately 150,000 Japanese came to the States, where they secured employment on sugar plantations in Hawaii, filled positions as laborers once held by Chinese workers, or were hired as domestics, or “*Schoolboys*” as they were commonly referred to at the time [emphasis added] (Glenn 438). This, despite being met with organized discrimination, barred from union work and working in white-run businesses and stores (Glenn 435). Several hundred were even permitted to become naturalized citizens in the 1900s and 1910s because the US government was desirous of good diplomatic relations with Japan which had established itself as a formidable imperial power and because courts were still struggling to determine what constituted a “white person,” the primary requisite for establishing eligibility for citizenship (Ngai 39, 41, 45)

Still, while the Japanese went to great lengths to assimilate into mainstream American culture by adopting Western dress, working to perfect their English and distancing themselves from the Chinese, they were by no means immune to unfavorable bias, however different in nature it may have been from that experienced by the latter. When speaking of the Japanese, nativists, who were situated primarily on the West Coast, were “[s]ensitive to Japanese power and American diplomatic interests.” Therefore, they “shunned allegations of racial inferiority” - an argument frequently invoked to justify Chinese exclusion (Ngai 40). Nonetheless, these nativists believed that the Japanese were indisputably and intractably different from the ‘average’ American. We need only consider the statement of one-time California senator and mayor of San Francisco from 1897 to 1902, James Phelan. Phelan, the son of an Irish

immigrant who, ironically given the history of the Irish in the U.S., ran for a second term in the senate under the banner “Keep California White,” expressed in no uncertain terms his opinion of the Japanese. “A Jap [is] a Jap.” Certainly, he and his sympathizers had “nothing personal against the Japanese.” But, Phelan qualified this assertion by stating that “[the Japanese] will not assimilate with us and their social life is different from ours, so let them keep at a respectful distance” (Phelan qtd. in Ngai 40). Chester H. Rowell further substantiates this belief that Japanese social mores were irreconcilably different from that of whites, stating that the Japanese could not be trusted to honor a “business contract” as a “moral obligation” and seemed to have no compunctions whatsoever when it came to the issue of prostitution (5). “The women themselves,” he asserted, “[were] under less social ostracism than the women of corresponding class of other races, and they appear to be less personally degraded” (8). Finally, while William Stephenson acknowledged the increasing relevance of the East in global trade and concomitant rise in the exchange of ideas that would take place due to the heightened contact between East and West necessitated by shared economic interests, he stated that it was “*manifestly impossible*” that “our white race [would] readily intermix with the yellow strains of Asia” in order to form a “new composite human being” (Stephenson qtd. in Ngai 40).

In fact, many nativists saw Japanese attempts at assimilation as a “foreign conspiracy” to wrest California from white hands (Ngai 39). According to Rowell, unchecked immigration from Asia would be nothing short of cataclysmic. While we “survived” the European masses and could assimilate them more easily, “against Asian immigration we could not survive.” For, should Japanese immigrants, especially, demand and be granted the same rights afforded the white man they would be “backed by a powerful and jealous nation in maintaining them.” Our

“vitality” would not withstand the full scale immigration of Asians, and, he warns, there could be “no other possible national menace at all to be compared with this” (10).

Even though the nativists failed in their attempts to have formal exclusion of the Japanese enacted, other ways were found to keep the Japanese at a ‘respectful distance’ without doing significant damage to US international interests. For example, immigration of the Japanese was forestalled when Congress instated the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1907—a provision which required that Japan ‘voluntarily’ cease issuing visas to its nationals. But, the agreement benefited both Japanese and US official national interests in that it “predicated the Root –Takahira Agreement of 1908, in which Japan and the United States pledged to respect their respective interests in Korea and the Philippines, and the U.S-Japan Treaty of Navigation and Commerce of 1911” (Ngai 39). While the provision may not have been totally satisfactory to either nativists or Japanese immigrants, it should be noted that President Theodore Roosevelt’s attempt at a ‘diplomatic’ solution to the Japanese question in California did allow for Japanese men already in the U.S. to arrange to have picture brides sent for from Japan (“The *Issei* Immigrants and Civil Rights” 4). These loopholes remained effective until 1921 when mounting anti-Japanese sentiment, which translated into propaganda that deemed the picture bride system “immoral,” reached a pitch sufficient to pressure the Japanese government to stop issuing visas to prospective brides (Glenn 438).

Permanent settlement in the U.S. was also discouraged by the enactment of the Alien Land Law which was passed in California in 1913 and which prohibited the *issei*, or first generation Japanese, from owning land or leasing it for periods of more than three years if they had been deemed ineligible for citizenship (Glenn 434). The establishment of the 1917 Asiatic

Barred Zone, a part of the Immigration Act of 1917, further prevented persons of Asian descent and Pacific Islanders from specific geographic regions from entering the U.S. (Lee 108). Meanwhile in 1921, the state of Washington put into place legislation which forbade “aliens ineligible to citizenship” from practicing in fields such as law, pharmacy, pedagogy and real estate (Ngai 40). And, with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, immigration from Asia all but completely ceased until 1945, when the foreign-born brides and adopted children of American servicemen were temporarily permitted to immigrate to the U.S. under the War Brides Act. The exception to earlier restrictions was extended in 1946 and 1947 under the Soldier Brides Acts. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act was passed. This act repealed earlier laws that entirely prohibited Asian immigration and naturalization; however, tight immigration quotas for certain countries were maintained. The law favored Europeans, and only a token number of Asians were permitted entry into the U.S. It was not until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, a law which privileged family reunification, that immigration from Asia really resumed.

Immigration restrictions like the Page Law Acts, in conjunction with anti-miscegenation legislation, such as the 1922 Cable Act, which stripped any American female choosing to marry an alien ineligible for naturalization, e.g. an Asian immigrant, of her citizenship, land laws prohibitive of community building, and laws limiting the professional development of Asian immigrants functioned to distort perceptions of gender and sexuality in relation to Asian immigrants not only in the minds of white Americans, but in the minds of those subjected to measures which increasingly curtailed basic civil rights. Drawing on the analyses of Lisa Lowe, David L. Eng, and Alice Y. Hom, Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J.

Santa Ana contend that where Asian men were concerned. “U.S. Immigration and labor practices [...] in barring Asian immigrant laborers from ‘normative conceptions of the masculinity legally defined as white,’ effectively naturalized ideas of Asian immigrant men as ‘emasculated’ and ‘feminized’ in their work, in their communities, and even in relation to their own cultural norms” (Wong and Santa Ana 179; Lowe qtd. in Wong and Santa Ana 179; Eng and Hom qtd. in Wong and Santa Ana). Exactly how this internalization of emasculation and displacement has manifested itself in Asian American cultural productions is what I would like to examine next.

2. “As You Like It”

Life is...the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality. I used to feel this as a child—couldn't step across a puddle once, I remember, for thinking how strange—what am I? (Virginia Woolf qtd. in *Shame and Identity*, Lynd 15 -16)

In the first section of this chapter, I have attempted to show how early Asian immigrants were received and cast within the larger context of the nation. Though it is never explicitly stated, the goal of the overview was not to depoliticize the Asian-American subject by simply enumerating the various identities foisted upon Asian Americans or to reveal an identity crisis originating in a rift between the perception of an ‘original’ Asian self and an adopted American self. Such a reading of events would be facile and would contribute to the prevailing notion that Asian-American studies, in contrast to African-American Studies, Latino/a Studies, or Native American Studies, is less about collective politics and history and more about identity as a personal struggle (Juliana Chang 867-868). The point of the above section is to provide entry into an extended discussion of what identities, like the demure Japanese woman, the dirty Chinese prostitute, and the effeminate, sexually deprived Asian man say about the general sociopolitical and economic climate of the United States prior to

1965. More importantly, it is intended to provide some information that will be useful in thinking about how characters constructed by contemporary Asian-American authors in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries use those fictional formulations to negate, negotiate, assume, and affirm identities in an environment that has yet to let go of the notion that the term Asian-American is an oxymoron, if not an existential impossibility.

In beginning an investigation, it is, perhaps, informative to start with a novel that attempts to depict the lives of some of the first Asian communities in the U.S. and to see how this novel engages and employs some enduring historical images of the Asian immigrant, particularly that of the castrated male and the Asian woman as prostitute and danger to the social fabric. This, in an effort to draw attention to the struggles of Asian immigrants to recreate themselves in a new country and to humanize them. Who it humanizes and how is the object of scrutiny here, as, I argue, certain stereotypes remain intact in favor of contending primarily with anxieties about the relevance and validity of Asian-American manhood.

The particular literary work to be analyzed here, Yoji Yamaguchi's *Face of a Stranger: A Novel* (1995), seeks to typify the experiences of the Asian immigrant in the early twentieth century and invokes the prostitute as a vehicle showing the anxieties about Asian-American masculinity and the nebulous status of the Asian-American man in U.S. history. *Face of a Stranger* tells the story of Takashi Arai, a "vain, handsome," and indolent young man who, after disgracing his wealthy merchant family in Japan, heads for America, probably sometime between the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and 1903, when Filipino laborers began to replace Japanese migrant workers. In America, Arai hopes he will find the "veritable human paradise" that one exporter's advertisement promises (*Face of a Stranger: A Novel*,

hereafter cited as *FS* 10, 1). Rather than becoming a wealthy merchant as he anticipates, however, he is relegated to working for two squirrely spinsters as a houseboy.

Face of a Stranger is also the tale of Kikue, a woman forced into prostitution by a duplicitous marriage broker. Her life, as well as the lives of numerous other minor characters from pimps to Japanese Christian purity reformers, is changed forever when she boards a steamer bound for America in order to meet the man in the picture she expects will become her husband. The face in the picture, it is believed for most of the novel, belongs to none other than Arai who, at the behest of Kori, a less attractive acquaintance allegedly seeking to marry, sells a photograph of himself to aid his friend in his quest for a wife.

As it turns out, Kori is not the only one who uses the photo to improve his lot. The photo also falls into the hands of other desperate men in search of wives, as well as pimps like the infamous Kato who uses it to lure Kikue and other young women into prostitution. At least thirteen women arrive at Angel Island looking for Arai among the crowd, only to be snatched up by “jarringly homely husbands” or carried off to saloons or brothels (*FS* 8). Unlike the other unsuspecting brides-to-be or prostitutes in Kato’s stable, however, the resourceful Kikue and her equally quick witted prostitute companion, Shino, use trickery to exact revenge on the unwitting Arai, or “Master Face,” as he is laughingly referred to among the denizens of San Francisco’s Japanese quarter for his ability to have “entranced” so many women “just by looking at them” (*FS* 5). They plot to fool him into thinking that he is going to marry the daughter of an affluent family. In actuality, however, the impossible young “Blue Stocking,” Hana, who has been detained at Angel Island because authorities think she is insane as a result of her stubbornness, has no idea who Arai is.

What ensues is what reviewers cited on the back cover of the 1995 Harper Perennial paperback edition have variously referred to as a “romp with parallels to Shakespeare’s comedies,” a “comic tale of clever ruse” and a “witty delight” as Kikue and Shino wreak havoc on the Japanese community, exposing its greed, pettiness and hypocrisies. The questions posed by this text are as follows. At what is this laughter directed and at whose expense does this laughter come? Do the characters in the novel function to subvert normative ideas of white manhood and re-envision history from the point of those whose stories have been withheld? If so, then how? Does the novel itself, despite its seeming glorification of the Asian prostitute as heroine and apparent rejection of “an Asian American cultural integrity” characterized by, among other things, a “participation in an ‘Asian American heroic tradition’ distinguished by courage, wisdom, and pioneering male ethos” belie a desire to occupy that space hitherto forbidden the Asian-American, male Other? This ethos was privileged in the groundbreaking Asian-American literary anthology *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, edited by Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, and Lawson Fusao Inada and first published in 1974, as well as in a sequel to the anthology entitled *The Big Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1991). It is an ethos which has been roundly criticized by Asian American female critics for enabling a “vertical transmission” of cultural values, which ultimately favored a male perspective and “suppressed racial, gender, class, and national differences” (Chin qtd. in Ling 6, Ling 6-7; Lowe qtd. in Ling 7). If the novel does indeed convey nostalgia and longing for a particular masculine ideal, what does it say about the kinds of anxieties restricted access to certain mainstream formulations of ‘manhood’ produce? How do these anxieties manifest themselves? And, what are the implications of the reliance on stereotypes, particularly those of

the Asian woman as prostitute, to express apprehensions produced by the interdictions related to conditions associated with inhabiting the space of a ‘subordinate’ masculinity? In other words, what are the repercussions of “literature’s mimetic claims and the actual result of its representation” (Ling 20)?

Prevalent throughout the novel are issues revolving around shame and dissembling as they relate to the loss of identity—or, perhaps more accurately, the necessity of the Asian immigrant to re-invent him/herself in order to survive in a country, where, much to Takashi Arai’s chagrin, every *kugakusei*, or a ‘indigent schoolboy,’ is known as “Charlie” to the Warren spinsters. For the spinsters, two sisters, Arai is readily disposable and easily replaced by another ‘schoolboy’ like himself (*FS* 3). Unlike the heroic, discernibly ‘masculine’ characters who populated classical Asian literature and whom the editors of *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* purposefully attempted to resurrect as a response to ‘feminizing’ stereotypes of Asian-American men in *The Big Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, Arai is divested of any traditional notions of manhood very early in the novel. We get our first real look at him and begin to gain insight into his lowly status in the U.S. when he is carted off to visit a prostitute—none other than Kikue—by some drinking buddies eager to unmask as a novice the self-aggrandizing youth who had earlier claimed to have had more amorous liaisons at twenty-four than most men could hope for in a lifetime (*FS* 14). Upon seeing him, Kikue queries the older men. “What am I supposed to do with him? He is dead to the world?” (*FS* 15-16). Her questions, no doubt, speak of both his drunken, unconscious state as well as to his invisibility to his Japanese family, who has disowned him, to the Japanese-American society in which he now lives, and to white America. He is now

recognizable only as a face in a photo and an indolent braggart and servant. Resisting the urge to brand his exposed buttocks with a hot poker—to symbolically enslave him, just as she feels she has been enslaved by all the men she has had to endure in her vocation as prostitute, she instead empties pockets of the “comatose john,” whom she recognizes as the one whose face was used to lure her to America and gazes at his naked, prone body. “Jarred” suddenly by the sight of him, she thinks: “Takashi did not look as taut and vital as when he was first brought in; he now looked flaccid, his skin pasty and jaundiced in the dim light, his limbs bony and angular, knobby at their joints. His bowleggedness was even more apparent. And Kikue pitied his poor sex, desiccated and shriveled, a miserable, puny, thing” (*FS* 23).

Shamed images of the vulnerable, emasculated, deformed, or tainted body of the male rejected by both the fatherland and the adoptive homeland are prominent in *Face of a Stranger* and represent an inability to achieve entirely the status of Self-Made Man as defined by Kimmel. For example, even though Arai’s ‘friend,’ the farmer Kogoro Doi, succeeds, to some degree, in living the ‘American Dream,’ he is plagued by vestiges of his former life which are only reinforced by his status as a second-class citizen in the United States, where he also perceives himself to be a blight. Prior to immigrating to the U.S., Doi was an outcast in Japanese society, where, owing to his “rough features, his abnormally guttural voice, and his utter lack of anger,” people considered him to have a “feeble mind” (*FS* 142). His father was thought to have drunk himself to death, in fact, for engendering “a monstrosity of a son”—one who could not possibly be his, but rather the product of “adultery, bestiality,” or “communion with the devil” (*FS* 143, 67). As with some of the early Asian immigrants described above, Doi is associated, if only indirectly, with the ‘unnatural’ sex acts and perversity toward which white

Americans believed that Asians were inherently inclined.

Despite his inauspicious beginnings, the kind, sensitive Doi manages to become a self-sufficient and relatively well-to-do farmer in the United States. One evening as he is heading home he considers “his present situation: a man of means, an independent farmer, driving, actually driving, an American-made truck that was his biggest pride and thrill on a road in California, the United States of America” (FS 68). Yet, his self-satisfaction is short-lived, as he is soon drawn back into reality when he runs over a skunk. “A rancid odor permeated the cab, making his eyes water and causing him to gag. He did not attribute the smell to the carrion, though. Even his truck, his prized truck, was a source of disaster, he thought, chagrined: he could not accomplish a task as simple as driving down a desolate, moonlit road without doing harm. No, the stink, he was certain, came from him—*it was the odor of his shame, which clung to him like contagion all the way from Japan to America* [emphasis added]” (FS 68). The empowerment he derives from a sense of ownership representative of the Self Made Man and from the freedom of the open road, an enduring symbol of the unencumbered, pioneering man conquering the frontier, is quashed by the inescapable feeling that he is tainted, or, perhaps more exactly, infected with a transmissible form of shame that relates to his childhood and continues to detract from his prowess as a man in this country. For, in the United States, despite the masculine labor he performs, he is considered neither a man nor, for that matter, fully human.

Men in the novel exist in a liminal state as “contagions” and contaminants carrying with them not the risk of physical infection, but that of invisibility. At the beginning of the novel, Kikue resigns herself to serving the “priapic needs” of men on a daily basis and to

becoming the “nonperson” that Kato the pimp seeks (FS 43). After plotting with Shino to deceive Arai, Kikue momentarily feels what resembles a slight bit of compassion and, perhaps, love for him. But, then she promptly chastises herself for her weakness. Arai, she decides, can only represent the danger of reducing her to a non-entity. “*Because of him you were robbed of your past and future, left only with a present that is a lie, just as he is a lie, an illusion made flesh; inside you, he would fill you with his very falseness, and it would obliterate you, negate you, so that you would be nobody, nothing, an illusion just like him, just like the thing Kato would have you become*” (FS 128). Whereas both male and female characters recognize the fact that they are considered disposable or may easily be reduced to the status of nonperson, in this case, it is not the male who ultimately succeeds in reinventing himself.

Even the pious Inada, a reformed Christian whose job is to assist in the rehabilitation of prostitutes, is at the mercy of both Kikue to whom he owes a debt for helping him open his inn and bring his wife to America. And, if that were not enough, he is the object of constant ridicule by his overbearing wife, who resents the fact that Kikue is permitted to reside for reasons unbeknownst to her in one of the inn’s best rooms. Similarly, Inada’s nemesis, the pimp Kato, is as Kikue informs him upon preparing to negotiate her freedom, a “nobody.” Of him she asks:

What greatness? Even if you weren’t a pimp and a thug, or if you weren’t up to your neck in debts, you’d still be nobody in this country. How can you be a big shot in this country when you can’t even own property? Important men live wherever they please, not just where the hakujin *allow* them [...]

Face it—in the hakujin eyes, you’re no better than me; neither are those blowhard [Japanese] Christians, for that matter. We’re all the same to Americans.” (FS 174)

Kikue's comparison of the Japanese pimp's and Asian-American Christian's status to that of a prostitute suggests not only the marginality of these figures as far as white, mainstream America is concerned, it also emphasizes the fact the narrative, especially where men are concerned, is circular in nature. All the male characters, like the prostitute, experience a form of social death and are doomed to re-enact the same worn out fantasies on a daily basis.

Any sense of acceptance or progress is illusory. Just as Kato is "reduced to haggling with a whore" as opposed to finding his "number one gold mine" in America, so the farmer Doi cannot escape the stench of dishonor which he perceives clings to him (*FS* 174). As a matter of fact, in the scene in which he kills the skunk discussed above, he can only think of the person whom he disappointed most and who forced him to do women's work as punishment for being an "infernal curse" (*FS* 144). While the fatally injured animal writhes around, Doi helplessly wonders what he can do for it, and the "dizzying" vision of his achievements in America is superseded by the image of his father. What he recalls is not the fearsome, emasculating patriarch whom he could not please or help, but a man weakened by "coughing fits" and "near[ing] the end of his life" (*FS* 68). Similarly, Arai cannot rectify his situation in the end. He remains as unrecognizable to others at the end of the novel as at the beginning. When Kikue finally shows him the infamous picture of himself which has been circulated amongst pimps, prospective brides and would be suitors, he realizes, after careful inspection, that it is not actually him in the picture, but someone else. His protests fall on deaf ears, though, as the shrewd Kikue, who has managed to negotiate her freedom with money she has saved as well as with debtors' notes from clients, all so desperate to build a foundation for themselves in America that they had at one time or another gone to the prostitute for financial

assistance, turns her back to him and proceeds to walk away to begin her existence as an independent woman.

For Kikue independence is about having control not only over her own actions, but over others as well—a detail which warrants discussion, as it speaks to contests over representation which have, at times, created a deep rift in the Asian-American community and made Paul Spickard’s question “What must I be?” an even more difficult one to answer (255). We are told a bit earlier in the work that as Kikue’s plan comes closer to reaching fruition that “she was giddy—and not so much at the prospect of tricking Arai. More important to her was the sense that, for the first time since coming to America and maybe the first time in her life, she was able to control events, determine matters—not only hers, but those of others as well, namely Arai’s: in short, do rather than be done to” (*FS* 162). In “Warrior Woman versus Chinaman Pacific,” King-Kok Cheung writes of a period in the 1970s and 1980s when Asian-American men and women struggled to redefine themselves in relation to the stereotypes mentioned in the first section of this chapter in such a way that their efforts ultimately lead to derision within the Asian-American community itself concerning how gender ‘ought’ to be represented. As noted above, Chinese-American men have been subjected to what King-Kok Cheung refers to as “historically enforced ‘feminization’” (Cheung 308). Though she is speaking specifically of Chinese-American males, I think we can, based on the evidence supplied in the first section of this chapter, safely state that this was, and possibly still is, an experience shared by Asian-American men of varying ethnicities. Elaine Kim, among others, contends that Asian men and women’s sexuality has been [re]produced in relation to “white [men’s] virility” such that Asian men have come to be thought of as “asexual,” while Asian

women have been regarded as “only sexual, imbued with an innate understanding of how to please and serve” and “the putative gender difference among Asian Americans—exaggerated out of all proportion in the popular imagination—has according to Kim, created ‘resentment and tensions’ between the sexes within the ethnic community” (Kim qtd. in Cheung 310; Cheung 310).

Nowhere have these tensions been better evidenced, perhaps, than in disputes involving Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, and Maxine Hong Kingston over how to respond to long existing representations of Asian Americans. Chin, Chan and their colleagues attempted to rescue Asian-American manhood and imbue it with “manly valor,” but in doing so relied heavily upon gender stereotypes. In *The Big Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, arguably the literary culmination of this battle over how Asian-American gender and sexuality ‘ought’ to be represented, a number of maxims, supposedly derived from Chinese epics and war manuals, were cited. For example, not only did they assert that “[l]ife [was] war,” they also suggested that “private revenge” [was] a warranted “ethic” (qtd. in Cheung 311). Elsewhere, in a previous work from 1972 entitled “Racist Love,” Chin more explicitly voiced the desire for a certain “recognized style of Asian-American manhood” which devalued as feminine those things associated with the domestic, celebrated as masculine the qualities of creativity and bravery, among other traits, and also implied an element of violence (Chin qtd. in Cheung 310; Chan et al. qtd. in Cheung 310; Cheung 310). “The white stereotype of the Asian is unique in that it is the only racial stereotype completely devoid of manhood. Our nobility is that of the efficient housewife. At our worst we are contemptible because we are womanly, effeminate, devoid of all of the *traditionally masculine* qualities of originality,

daring, physical courage, creativity. We're neither straight talkin' or straight shootin'" (Chin qtd. in Cheung 310).

So, while Asian-American feminists, Cheung says, were struggling to rethink and reformulate the "entire Western code of heroism," writers and editors like Chin and Chan were, on one level, undermining these efforts in their own attempts to recuperate a seemingly lost Asian-American manhood and construct an Asian-American national identity (311). On the other hand, Jinqi Ling points out that Chan, Chin, et al. and the "internal contradictions" in their early works, like "Racist Love" and *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, paved the way for a new set of social conditions and formations to emerge that allowed for post-1980s era Asian-American literary production; and, in fact, many of the themes which dominate contemporary works, e.g. those related to "diaspora," were, in some form, already present in "realist and nationalist" literature produced prior to 1980 (28-29).

The question remains then, does Kikue's victory actually represent a reformulation of the "entire code of Western heroism" or ask us to rethink gender expectations and sexuality, including prostitution, as each relates to Asian Americans? Also, does it bring us closer to an understanding of the travails of Asian-American men at the turn of the century? Or, is this strictly a tale of vengeance and a lament for a longed for ideal of Asian-American manhood which exists at the expense of vilifying women? Men in the novel are emasculated or stripped of identity, oftentimes by women, only to be burdened with a new less flattering self, all to tragicomic effect. Arai, for example, has had another's "debts, obligations, affections and grievances—foisted on him" (*FS* 5). Furthermore, his grandiose assertions made earlier in the novel that he would "avenge" all houseboys, be a "hero" who would conquer the "*Hakujin*," or

“White Devil,” ultimately come to naught, as he is a “stranger” not only among the *Hakujin*, but also among his compatriots—a face to which any name might be attached. And, ultimately, he is left penniless and humiliated by Kikue and Shino (*FS* 83). Meanwhile, the beautiful, willful Hana ultimately makes off with Doi, but as she does so, she simultaneously notes the farmer’s ungainliness and claims that her willingness to escape with him is only as a gesture of rejection of her would-be, patriarchal, Christian rehabilitators. Her acceptance of him as a savior depends not on his heroic merit, but is contingent upon an absurd situation in which she finds herself being chased by the seemingly mad Arai and the reformers. Arai insists, despite her protests, that he is her husband. At the same time, Inada and his gaggle of assimilationist cohorts have mistaken her for a lost soul to be easily led down a path of sin without their intervention. Her decision to accept Doi is also part and parcel of an earlier rejection of the very unappealing prospect articulated by her father in Japan, who foresaw for his daughter “life in a nice house,” “raising beautiful children” (*FS* 126).

For the men in the novel, there is no redemption of a viable masculinity. With the exception of Doi, who is a farmer and who comes closest perhaps to exemplifying a more empathic, self-reliant incarnation of masculinity, the men are not depicted as engaging in the more manly pursuits of working the sugar plantations of Hawaii or farming the fields of California. Even the figure of Doi as symbolic of an alternative form of masculinity is undercut by the fact that he is considered ‘subhuman’ by all. Meanwhile, upon finding that he has lost his job as a houseboy, Arai asks himself, “[W]hat could he look forward to in this country? Another house, another white suit? Was a broom the promised end for them all?” (*FS* 82). In fact, each of the men, with the exception of Doi, can only envision, as Kato does, mountains of

gold acquired via the labor of women, or, as in the case of Arai, of women who will rescue them from their less than fortuitous predicaments. Similarly, Inada's identity is entrenched in his Christianity and his dedication to helping fallen women. This, though he is a laughingstock among most of the women in the novel.

In the meantime, the prostitute, even as she reveals that no one in her community is beyond reproach, remains a morally questionable figure. She must be a trickster intent on exacting revenge in order for the plot to move forward, and she must pose as a "lady," donning Western dress to distribute her IOUs first and, later, a white wedding dress to fool Arai into thinking his bride to be has come to meet him, all in order to liberate herself and formulate a subjectivity based on her own terms. Or, are they her own terms? At the end of the novel, Kikue merely scoffs when Arai asks about the three hundred dollars he borrowed from Doi in order to pay Kikue to make arrangements for him to marry Hana, the wealthy girl she has falsely promised will be his and whose family, she has told him, will quickly and gladly repay the debt. She informs him that he owes Doi the money, or three year's labor. When he insists that he gave the money to her, she retorts, "Iya, you gave [that money] to a whore. That Kikue's dead and gone. You killed her" (*FS* 201). As with so many novels, the "whore" must die in order to become "[s]omeone"; and, it is her symbolic death which facilitates Arai's knowledge of who he is not—namely, the man in the photograph whose face has impacted the lives of so many (*FS* 201). By duping and then rejecting him, she reminds him of who he strives to be in America, but cannot be precisely as a result of the physical marker of his difference, his face. Paradoxically, it is this marker of difference that prevents him from becoming an *individual* male subject in that his face is also what sets him apart as an inhuman,

homogenous Other not only among white Americans, but also within the Japanese community.

In fact, in order to get Arai to fall for her scheme, Kikue taunts him, saying, “you’re a *monkey man* to the Americans [...] I tell you Baka-chan [stupid], you’ll never be anything in this country until you raise a family. Gamblers are a penny a bushel. You’ll always just be a *buranke katsugi* [literally “blanket carrier,” or itinerant worker] unless you settle down, make a home, have kids [emphasis added]” (*FS* 152). Whether or not Yamaguchi intended this exchange as an indictment of a system which privileges heteronormative sexual activity within the confines of marriage as one of the primary prerequisites for achieving the masculine ideal as imagined by the Anglo-American mainstream, and by, extension, inclusion in the national body is questionable, and the issue should be addressed. It is certainly possible that this exchange between Kikue and Arai represents recognition of the conditions which restricted Asian-American men from forming family units and contributed to representations of these early immigrants as perpetual foreigners and sexual deviants.

However, in telling Arai that he would never be considered anything but an animal and landless peasant dependent on others unless he produces a family, Kikue not only plays on Arai’s fears about his own impotence and inadequacy, she also inadvertently condemns herself and all of the prostitutes represented in the story for their engagement in non-procreative sex; and, by extension, she advocates for a very narrow concept of what constitutes respectability which shows that despite her rejection of the efforts of the Christian reformers in the story, she has bought into the notion that self-actualization can only be achieved when one conforms to the criteria attached to prevailing expectations concerning gender appropriate behavior, more

specifically Western notions of it. That she adopts Western attire, especially the white wedding gown, in her bid for independence says two things. Though made in a different context, David Leiwei Li's observations are relevant here. In Kikue's case, "identity seems to become an equivalent of garments, to be worn and discarded at ease; the social dimensions and power relations that occasion masquerade in the first place are lost [...]" We are distracted from the systemic oppression of Japanese immigrant women, which the story attempts to depict, by the spectacle of the vengeful 'bride' relishing the success of her artful dissembling. More importantly, her "borrowing" of the dress "seems to be an unprotesting acceptance of the authority of the West, prompting us to ask whether [her] act of transformation has actually altered the hierarchy of value between [...] West and East and the corresponding relationships dependent on it," not to mention the "hierarchy of value" between prostitute and non-prostitute (Li 159-160).

Even as she exercises agency in concocting the scheme to purchase her freedom, Kikue clearly regards herself as less than human, a fact which is evidenced in her musings over her state of enslavement: "After two or so months in America, for a time Kikue forgot her parents altogether, became in fact the nonperson Kato was seeking" (43). While she is, perhaps, right to recognize herself as socially dead as a result of her occupation, race and, gender, it is noteworthy, that at the end of the novel after gaining her freedom, she remains indecipherable—as is the case with prostitutes and as mentioned in the previous chapter, she is a cipher waiting to be whatever we want her to be. When Arai asks her who she is, she replies, "Someone you [and, possibly, we as readers] will never know" (*FS* 201). If anything, we see from her admonition to Arai and in her subsequent rejection of him, as well as in her harsh

assessment of Kato and the havoc that she wreaks on local businesses when she decides to sell her promissory notes to the latter that she effectively functions as the castrating female. Even as she serves as an instrument in helping Arai define himself and Inada and Kato, among other men in the novel who owe her debts or who have in some way benefited from her labor, in achieving a modicum of success, she robs them of their masculinity, which is highly dependent on the real subjugation of women in the case of Inada and Kato and fictional conquests with respect to Arai.

Kikue's actions could be seen as subverting gender norms except for the fact that in order to be able to call herself free, she must necessarily rely upon deceit--the 'trademark' tool of the (female) prostitute so maligned by early reformers and social scientists, and, paradoxically, on an enactment and acceptance of ascendant notions of sexual propriety with all of the attendant strictures. I am hesitant to go so far as to say that Kikue aids Inada or Kato in realizing their own vision of the 'American Dream,' for, on many levels, as Tina Chen rightly points out in *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture*, "the masquerade and confusion about identities in *Face* result from—and are extreme examples of—the illusory promises America makes to potential immigrants" (29). It is not only Arai who has been deceived by promises of a "veritable human paradise" awaiting him in America, but also, as we know, Kikue and other women who made the journey from Japan expecting to be married only to find that, as previously mentioned, their husbands were not the individuals depicted in the photograph or, worse, that they were to be used as prostitutes (*FS* 10). As a matter of fact, Chen applauds the novel for bringing to the fore these women's histories, which consist of "stories of deception and betrayal that the picture bride system

fostered [...]” (28).

In addition to praising the work, which, incidentally, has received scant critical attention, for its emphasis on the travails of the women who formed an integral part of early Asian-American communities, Chen also values it for its potential as a critique of social and political institutions and of essentialist ideas about identity, which, as was discussed in the first section of this chapter, have proven to be so detrimental to Asian immigrants in their efforts to be recognized as national subjects.

Face utilizes the trope of the unlike(ly) photograph in order to comment on the social, political, and economic contexts within which Asian American immigrants labored. By making evident the ways in which the exchange of Arai’s picture heralds more than individual acts of imposture but rather, signals to the proliferating contexts that undercut the ‘pretty picture’ of the United States that is equally misleading for immigrants, Yamaguchi develops in his novel a politics of impersonation as a critical practice, a method through which social and political critique can be mounted [...]

In constructing a politics of impersonation, *Face* features a motley cast of characters—all of whose acts contribute to the notion of identity as constructed and impersonation as an act that not only offers a way of performing into being Asian American identity but also concomitantly performs into being an insistent regard for the importance of institutional critique. (Chen 29-30)

While I agree with Chen that *Face of a Stranger* performs an important recuperative function in telling the lost stories of men and women who immigrated to the United States under false pretenses, only to be met with institutionalized discrimination, indentured servitude, or outright slavery, and while I believe she makes a valid point when she asserts that “impersonation [...] *can* be undertaken as a way of disrupting pre-existing categories of identity even as it maintains identity as a powerful way of understanding subjectivity,” as I have argued above, the narrative relies heavily on conventional representations of the prostitute in order to

illuminate the sorry conditions in which the men, in particular, find themselves [emphasis added] (Chen 16). This, without questioning those representations which have proven so detrimental to both prostitutes and Asian-American women and without probing more thoroughly the actual material conditions of prostitutes with fewer resources than, say, Kikue.

That said, the following claim made by Chen deserves further investigation. She writes that “embedded within the performance of Asian Americanness exists the awareness of the ways in which such an identity has, from its earliest moments in U.S. legal and social history, been constituted as an oxymoron but comprises the conflicted reality that those who have been ascribed this identity must nonetheless embody, confront, and adapt to their own ends” (19).

The extent to which Asian-American men have been affected, both individually and in their interpersonal relationships, by this “conflicted reality” and how they choose to navigate it using fictional representations will be further investigated in the next chapter. There, I examine two novels, one by Chang-rae Lee and the other by Han Ong, in which acts of imposture and impersonation figure centrally to the plot. This, in order to consider the efficacy of self-conscious acts of impersonation as a means of conceptualizing and formulating an identity and as potential critique of the various institutions and discourses which have distorted and thwarted processes of Asian-American identity formation. I also look at how the prostitute and/ or prostitution functions in each of the novels as a vehicle for communicating the feelings of alienation experienced by the protagonists and as a means by which their subjectivity is developed; for, as in *Face of a Stranger*, prostitution plays a central role in these works in that the male protagonists in both texts come to know themselves and their limitations as a result of either their encounter with a prostitute or their own participation in prostitution. However,

unlike in the 'comedic' *Face of a Stranger*, what we shall witness is the emergence of disturbing and violent tendencies related to gender performance and sexuality.

Chapter 3

The Masquerading Minority: Untenable Models of Masculine Identity

Asian American representation does not mean simply staking a claim to the nation or the ancestral homeland; *it also means gaining control of ethnic cultural intelligibility*. Race is both appearance and performance, or rather an appearance-generated performance. Since appropriate behaviors are demanded of certain morphological compositions, this normative equivalence between race and performance contradicts the state's commitment to formal equality and overtakes its role of social regulation at the level of everyday feelings and interactions [emphasis added]. (Li 153)

There is the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. (Woolf 667)

Whereas in *Face of a Stranger*, imposture and impersonation are employed to expose “formal equality” and the ‘American Dream’ as the stuff of myth, Yamaguchi’s comedy refrains from showing the “violent effects of racial abjection on the body” that we find in two other works in which the Asian-American male protagonists also adopt various personae as a survival strategy (Ty 143). These two novels are Chang-Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (2000) and Han Ong’s *Fixer Chao* (2001). While quite different in style, tone, and texture, both of these narratives critique the ‘American Dream’ which Hamilton Carroll writes, “relies on a telos of

assimilation, incorporation, and individual success,” i.e. “social mobility” as a product of “economic success,” in that each is, on some level, a narrative of “failed self-making.” Despite their best efforts, the primary characters cannot shake the “racist assumptions” which prevail in their respective milieus (Carroll 597, 612). And, in both cases, attempts at self-actualization and the concomitant failure to achieve the status of subject are the catalysts for violence.

Though the main characters differ significantly in that Lee’s Doc Hata is a quiet, upstanding resident of the suburbs—albeit one with a dubious past, as we shall see—and, Ong’s William Paulinha is a cynical, urban, former male prostitute turned confidence man, what they share is a certain longing for recognition from and acceptance by mainstream American society; and, it is indicated by their actions that they feel that a desirable form of visibility can only come if they mask or deny crucial components of their identity and revise their personal histories. More importantly, identity formation for both men involves abjecting and/or doing outright harm to those who either threaten the fragile sense of self to which each man clings. Hata’s anxieties are made manifest in his fervent attempts to prevent his perceived ‘failures’ and inadequacies from being registered by those around him and in his boundless capacity for self-delusion. Whether by choice or as a matter of circumstances, his is a life devoid of feeling and filled with empty gestures. Meanwhile, Paulinha is given to malicious thoughts and deeds, in part, because he fears being revealed as a fraud.

In both cases, these acts of denial and deception represent attempts to accommodate those whom they imagine to enjoy the privileges of full citizenship and, thereby, gain access to the world which these ‘complete’ subjects inhabit. For Hata, this world comprises the predominantly white, upper middle class inhabitants of the fictional upstate New York town

where he lives. Meanwhile, for Paulinha, it is a bit more complicated in that he would like to enjoy, to some degree, the advantages of New York City's fashionable, wealthy crowd. Yet, he also harbors a great amount of disdain for these very same people. Nonetheless, he still fears invisibility. In the end, however, despite Doc' Hata's best efforts to forget, euphemize, or revise his past and despite all of Paulinha's machinations, neither succeeds in achieving enfranchisement or "gaining control of the cultural intelligibility" that David Leiwei Li advocates in the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter.

As with Yamaguchi's work, in each of the novels, prostitution, either enforced or as the result of necessity born of global inequalities, serves as a trope which limns these failures and/or enables the articulation of disillusionment with the false promise of equality America holds out to Hata and Paulinha. For Hata, the military sex slave represents a means by which to establish a viable identity—one of many identities, in fact, that he will unsuccessfully try to assume over the course of the novel; and, she is, arguably, also crucial to helping him establish his masculinity which, incidentally, it is necessary for him to prove twice over in Lee's novel—first fighting for the Japanese in World War II and, later, in the American suburbs. However, the military sex slave, or 'comfort woman,' refuses to enable the young Japanese lieutenant, and this refusal ultimately leads to a tragedy, the specters of which will haunt Hata for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, in the U.S., Hata feels compelled to show himself as "competent enough to enjoy the subject status of [citizen] in a registered and recognized participation of American democracy" by securing material comfort conspicuous enough for all to see and acting as an upstanding citizen (Li 6). His partial "structural integration" into the community does not translate into his desired goal of full "cultural assimilation" and is, in part,

symbolized by what he perceives is a failed attempt to raise a daughter who is likely the product of military prostitution and who adamantly refuses to conform to his bourgeois notions of respectability. “In terms of outcomes, structural integration essentially reduces to the ability to live, be educated, and be employed according to merit, removing race as a criterion of selection. Cultural assimilation means both adoption of mainstream cultural norms and loss of indigenous cultural distinctiveness” (Hall).

Han Ong, on the other hand, uses prostitution to comment on the emasculation of the Filipino and the Philippines, itself, by white men “whose power need[s] an audience” (*Fixer Chao*, hereafter cited as *FC* 310). His protagonist is not structurally integrated. In fact, his acceptance as an authority is contingent upon Orientalist ideas about race. Moreover, he is justifiably conflicted concerning cultural assimilation. On the one hand he wants to escape the ‘invisible hypervisibility’ associated with being Filipino for the ‘comforting invisibility’ of being privileged and white. On the other hand, he recognizes that what assimilation translates into is willed blindness toward and amnesia regarding the real material conditions of Filipino/as abroad and in the United States and the sacrifices many make precisely to achieve the cultural norms of the dominant culture. More on this later, however, as I would now like to examine *A Gesture Life* in more detail.

1. The “Transparent” Man?

Chang-Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* recounts the failed *Bildung* of Doc Hata also known as Franklin Hata, and prior to his coming to America, Jiro Kurohata. Hata, now living in the small, suburban town of Bedley Run, likes to think of himself as being “perfectly suited to the town,” someone who had “ become oddly and officially its finest citizen, the living breathing expression of what people here wanted—privacy and decorum and the quietude of hard-earned privilege” (*A Gesture Life*, hereafter cited as *GL* 275). Regardless of his efforts to insert himself into a narrative of immigration and successful assimilation, though, Hata cannot accomplish his goal. His failure, as well as his propensity to delude himself into thinking that he has successfully assimilated and integrated himself into any particular society are illuminated by two significant and profoundly traumatic relationships from his past that continue to plague him “despite his attempts to defray [the] costs [of these relationships] by living a life free from affect” (Carroll 592). One of these relationships is with Kkhutaeh, or “K” as he mostly refers to her, a woman given over to the Japanese by her family to serve as a “comfort woman” whom Hata encounters while serving as a medic in the Japanese army during World War II. The second relationship is with his, now virtually estranged, adopted daughter, Sunny.

As we shall see, in rare moments of clarity as he is reflecting on these relationships and upon his life, in general, Hata experiences doubts about who and what he is. Quite late in the novel, he confesses: “Now and then, I forget who I really am” (*GL* 285). Sometimes, analyzing these doubts culminates in a heightened awareness of where he really stands in relation to the society of which he so desperately desires to be a part. “Most everyone in Bedley Run knows me, though at the same time I’ve actually come to develop an unexpected condition of transparence, a walking case of others’ certitude, that to spy me on my way down Church Street is merely noting the expression of natural law. *Doc’ Hata*, they can say with surety, *he comes around*” (*GL* 21-22).

However, more often than not, his uncertainties lead him to make self-deceptive assessments of himself and his actions that enable him to preserve illusions of his enfranchisement and of being in possession of sense of wholeness. For example, when Renny Banerjee, Hata’s Indian friend and the town hospital’s purchasing manager, comments that the white locals appear to be becoming increasingly insular and perhaps even a bit xenophobic toward new, non-white residents, Hata calmly asserts that while he may have encountered situations that caused him some discomfort, the “uneas[iness]” he felt was “not anyone’s fault but [his] own.” Being “complimentary, as a *citizen* and a colleague and partner” in response to uncomfortable situations is the product of his knowledge that he “must make whatever peace and solace of his own [emphasis added]” (*GL* 135). This is, of course, problematic in that he tacitly denies actual racism and dismisses real persecution. He explains these phenomena away as being merely products of (mis)perception informed by a self-created sense of apprehension, and he does so for good reason. The reader is gradually made aware that Hata’s illusions of

himself as a self-contained, respectful, honorable citizen are often bound up with his own racist assumptions to be discussed momentarily and, more importantly, with expectations about gender performance as it relates to ethnic and national identity. A quiet horror overtakes us as we are permitted to see through the distorted prism of Hata's reflections on the past that the struggle to 'be himself' has provided him with justification for engaging in the sometimes "violent subjugation" of Asian and Asian-American women, particularly those whose virtue has been 'sullied' in some way. (Carroll 595).

Kkutaeh's and Sunny's suffering, though, is not the "mute suffering of those who must be left behind [however fondly remembered] in the quest for Americanness," and they do not only "embody an alternate reality whose abjection helps to define the limits of the Asian American author [or, in this case, protagonist] as subject" (Chu 52). On the contrary, in the form of flashbacks, their stories persistently intrude on his own narrative, and, thereby, undermine the credibility of Hata's assertions about himself and, as Hamilton Carroll writes, challenge the "gendered constructions of citizenship" upon which his claims to "national enfranchisement" are based (593). And, as will be discussed shortly, his interactions with these women, as well as with his sometimes lover, Mary Burns, also provide insight into the complex processes of self-making that beleaguer postnational individuals who must continuously contend with a plethora of intractable stereotypes. Such stereotypes are an unfortunate residual of the collective impulse toward the "construction of the national Other" as a means of producing "a totalized image of the national community" as we have seen, for example, in Chapter One, where 'good women' band together to construct sex workers as 'bad women' or 'victims' in order to secure their position in the community. This impulse to

construct a 'national Other' was also examined in Chapter Two, where I discussed the fact that Asian immigrants were alternately cast as objects of a collective exoticized desire that titillated male spectators and empowered groups of white women and as scourges threatening the livelihoods, virtue, and physical bodies of white Americans (Pease 5). In fact, as was previously mentioned, ultimately, the belief that Asians could not be integrated into U.S. society due to their absolute 'alienness' and 'questionable' morality prevailed and contributed to the passage of the first race-based exclusionary immigration legislation.

Hata's situation is complicated by the fact that circumstances related to formal and informal exclusion have compelled him to assume a number of different identities throughout his life, and, as mentioned above he has had other identities foisted upon him. The narrator, Doc or Franklin Hata, who, in the opening lines of the novel, insists that "People know me here [in Bedley Run]" is soon overtaken by a shadowy incarnation of his former self that no one in the sleepy little town knows, namely: Lieutenant Jiro Kurohata, a former medic for the Japanese Imperial Army and an ethnic Korean born in a "ghetto of hide tanners and renderers," who is eventually adopted by a "well to do, childless Japanese" couple (*GL* 72). But, by those who "know" him in the contemporary time of the novel, he is simply referred to as Doc Hata, an alias with a benign ring which he believes is effective enough to shroud his dark history, if not to undo it. The rebirth he desires and tries to facilitate through the process of naming is not an entirely satisfactory or successful endeavor, though. As he explains to Mary Burns people resist calling him Franklin, a name he has given himself quite probably, though it is never made explicit in the text, out of a desire to be associated with one of the country's 'founding fathers' and, thus, shed his any vestiges of his Asian heritage. The fact that they choose not to

call him Franklin suggests a refusal on the part of the townspeople to recognize him as an authentic American. Moreover, the tendency to refer to himself “using a dismissive diminutive not of his own choosing,” Carroll asserts, “foregrounds the protagonist’s inability to assimilate on his own terms” (598). In one particular encounter, even the cartoonish nickname is called into question by Mr. Hickey, a young man who, together with his wife Anne Hickey, has purchased Hata’s medical supply store from him only to find that the business is not worth what he paid for it. This exchange further reveals that Hata is not the esteemed member of Bedley Run that he fancies himself to be and further contributes to the creation of a picture of the protagonist as a sorry, tragicomic figure. After informing Hata of the fact that he has involved Hickey in a hopeless business venture, the latter wryly comments:

‘Mr. Hata appreciates knowing what happens in his town. We don’t need a mayor because we have Mr. Hata. I’m sorry—*Doc’ Hata*. I never understood why you’re called that when it’s obvious you’re not a doctor.’

‘I don’t refer to myself as one.’

‘That you don’t. That’s true. But you seem to like the title. And I think it fits you, too [emphasis added].’ (*GL* 10-11)

Hata’s status as internal alien is further reinforced by the blithe comments of his white, female friends. Liv Crawford, the real estate agent who is bent on acquiring the main source of Hata’s pride, his house, at one point refers to him as a “noble Japanese” while she, Hata and her lover Renny discuss the influx of non-white shop owners into the area; and, even as she says that community acceptance is not a function of money or skin color, she feels it necessary to insinuate that Hata is fortunate to be in Bedley Run. His “*situation*” is not what it could be, she argues [emphasis added]. “Bedley Run, after all, is not Selma” (*GL* 134, 136). Even as she

insists on his nobility, Liz Crawford's comment concerning Selma suggests that Hata is not really a full-fledged member of the community, but is accepted, or perhaps simply tolerated, *despite* his difference. In another incident, Hata's lover, Mary, unabashedly "confide[s] how odd a recognition it was for her, at least at first, to find herself deeply attracted to an Oriental man." Hata then recalls, that "[s]he laughed and said there was no reason she shouldn't have been [...] but that feeling was there and she ought to be truthful, and *whether it was shameful or not probably didn't matter in the end* [emphasis added]" (GL 52). Unlike in older, canonical works by Asian-American men, such as Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*, the "white woman's responsiveness" to the Asian-American man/ Asian immigrant does not "[guarantee] his masculinity in a world that continually negates it," nor "does "interracial intimacy" such as that Hata shares with Mary Burns, "[emerge] as the utopian ground for alternative imaginings of community" (Koshy, 2004, 127). In fact, he speculates at one point after her death that their "days together were perhaps sullied from the beginning and all the way through, right up to the last," most likely because he is inured to the past by the insistent presence of Kkhutaeh, his relationship with whom shall be discussed in more detail later (GL 316).

Though he ultimately alienates Mary, it seems, at times, that comments such as hers do not seem to ruffle him. For example, in the opening, Hata optimistically, and rather euphemistically, declares, "I somehow enjoy an almost Oriental veneration as an elder. I suppose the other older folks who live here receive their due share of generosity and respect, but it seems I alone rate the blustery greeting, the special salutation" (GL 2). In a somewhat self-congratulatory fashion, he then goes on to distinguish himself from the "blacks and Chinese" saying that though when he settled in Bedley Run in 1963, he expected to be "treated

as *those* people were treated,” but instead “wherever he went [...] it seemed people took an odd interest in telling [him] that [he] wasn’t unwelcome [emphasis added]” (GL 3).

This remark is not simply an acknowledgement of the reality of racist exclusion. Rather, it is only the initial indicator of the extent to which Hata has himself internalized hegemonic discourses concerning race and equality in constructing his identity contrary to assertions discussed above that he is unaffected by racism. He is the epitome of what Derald and Stanley Sue refer to as the “Marginal Man”—“an Asian American male who desires to assimilate into mainstream American society *at any cost* [emphasis added]” (Sue and Sue qtd. in Eng 21). Paraphrasing and elaborating on the Sue brothers’ concepts, David L. Eng writes:

This type of assimilation is only purchased through elaborate self-denial on the part of the minority subject of daily institutionalized acts of racism directed against him [...] The Marginal Man finds it ‘difficult to admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he aspires to join a racist society.’ Caught in this untenable contradiction, the Marginal Man must necessarily become a split subject, one who exhibits a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time he displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals.

Ultimately the untenable predicament of wanting to join a mainstream society that one knows clearly and systematically excludes one’s self delineates the painful problem of becoming the instrument of one’s own self-exclusion. (Eng 22; Sue and Sue qtd. in Eng 22)

Despite his hopeful assessment of his status and the fact that he seems unperturbed by the remarks of Liv Crawford and Mary Burns, Hata is not wholly oblivious to his position as an outsider regardless of what he may, at times, claim. This is attested to by certain of his observations. He remembers how the town boys used to play “mischievous” pranks on him like “slather axle grease on the dumpster handles,” “[make] faces” at him outside his window, and

“[chalk] statements” in front of his store when he first came to town. Yet, he dismisses these acts as nothing more than the folly that characterizes youth. He says that he never confronted them and that later when these boys had become men, they treated him with the same respect they would any doctor (*GL* 4). He also speaks of meeting a Japanese man at a convention, where upon encountering one another, both he and the stranger were both unsure of themselves—“unsettled.” He is unable to figure out why, initially, but then upon arriving home, he concludes: “I thought perhaps it was that we felt different from everyone by being together (these two Japanese in a convention crowd), and that it was this fact that made us realize, for a moment, our sudden and unmistakable sense of not fitting in” (*GL* 20).

Later his observations become more pointed and perceptive. While recuperating from a fire that nearly destroys his house, he ruminates:

Even with a mantel full of [get well] cards, I know that more often than not in the past few years of my retirement [from the medical supply business], I’ve found the collective memory here to be shorter than I wished to believe, and getting shorter still. I’ve gone from being good Doc’ Hata to the nice old fellow to whoever that ancient Oriental is, a sentence (I heard it whispered last summer while paying for my lunch at the new Church Street Diner) which carries no hard malice or prejudice but leaves me in wonder just the same. For while I’m certain this sort of sad diminishment befalls every aging gentleman and –woman, and even those who once held modest position in the town’s day, I am beginning to suspect, too, that in my case it’s not only the blur of time and modern life’s general expectation of senescence, but rather the enduring and immutable fact of what I am, if not who; the simple constancy of my face. I must wonder then, too, whether a man like me should be happy enough with the accrued comforts of his life, accepting the minor losses, or else seek out those persons who no matter how sharp their opinions or emotion at least know him in all his particulars. (*GL* 200-201)

Elsewhere, he wonders if it is not a “transmogrification” he desires, “a wholly different heart and shell and mien that would deliver [him] over to a brand-new life” (*GL* 277). Even more

extreme is his wish for total “erasure” in order to escape the “chronic condition of [his] life [...] the cast of [his] belonging” which “involves molding to whatever is at hand” (*GL* 290).

Regardless of these flashes of insight into his simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility and his acknowledgement of the necessity of constantly having to reshape himself in order to acquire legibility and legitimacy, Hata is clearly in denial. This is evidenced by his insinuation that he once held more than just a “modest” position in the town and his expression of the belief that the remark regarding his Asian heritage was not born of spite. He refuses to admit that he has been the object of racist discourse and persists in his convictions concerning his “popularity and high reputation,” despite the acknowledgement that, regardless of his best efforts to assimilate, his face will always be the unrelenting indicator of his marginality—his status as ‘Other’ (*GL* 275).

Sadly ironic is the fact that Hata, himself, is imbued by an intractable tendency to mark racial and ethnic difference and practice exclusion based on differences. As was mentioned above, this inclination is hinted at in his comment concerning the Chinese and African-Americans, but it is made more glaringly apparent in his interactions with and thoughts about both Kkutaeh and Sunny. Kkutaeh, the long dead young woman brought to serve as a ‘comfort woman’ for Jiro Kurohata’s unit in Burma continues to haunt the aging Hata, even as he tries to deny his past and his complicity in violent acts against both Koreans and women, all in the service of Japanese imperialism and as a result of his need to prove himself a loyal Japanese subject in spite of his Korean ancestry. In her essay “Discomforting Knowledge : Or, Korean ‘Comfort Women’ and Asian Americanist Critical Practice,” Kandice Chuh states that (Kuro)Hata “feels a sense of failure about ‘K’—about failing to have saved her either by

vanquishing her tormentors [i.e., her Japanese captors] (with whom he does not ally himself despite his formal affiliation to them), or by ending her life” as she implores him to do in order to avoid being made an instrument of the Imperial Army (*GL* 14-15). This is the only statement which I find arguable in an otherwise very important commentary on the necessity of analyzing how we represent ‘comfort women’ and what is at stake in promulgating various representations of them.

First of all, as Kurohata, the Doc does align himself with the Japanese, even as he professes his undying love for “K”. He says that when living in Japan as a Korean with his natural parents, he and his compatriots existed in “twilight.” But, after his adoption, he claims that he “first appreciated the comforts of real personhood.” Leaving his Korean family, he continues, marked “the true beginning of [his] real life” (*GL* 72). One could read this as Kurohata’s recognition of the ways in which Japanese colonization of Korea enabled and was enabled by the construction of Koreans as second-class citizens. But, as is so often the case with Hata, this potential critique is undercut by a negation of aspects constitutive of his identity. When “K” confronts him about his Korean heritage, he soundly denies her assertion. And, when she asks him what his Korean name is, he lies and tells her he does not have one. This is not unrelated to his insistence on calling her “K” which further reduces her to less than what she is and tacitly implies a rejection of all things Korean and, it should be added, represents an attempt to assert dominance over her. Tina Chen writes, “as the very names of the ‘recreation camps’ [where women enslaved by the Japanese military were held] and ‘comfort women’ make clear, naming is no ideologically neutral act but instead ‘a coercive system of norms and rules, a primary means of correction and appraisal’” (Chen 124; Min qtd.

in Chen 124). Furthermore, as Hata listens to her speak, he adamantly clarifies the distinction, however conflicted, between himself and the Other, noting that though he does not wish to go on speaking with her, he cannot stop listening to “the language, the steady, rolling tone of it like *ours* and not, *theirs* perhaps coming more from the belly than the throat [emphasis added]” (*GL* 235; Carroll 603).

Finally, and, most importantly, while Kurohata may have had dreams of one day marrying “K” and taking her back to Japan with him to start a family, these fantasies of blissful domesticity do not stop him from committing what is, in essence, rape. Even as he romanticizes her, stating that if he could be “near [...] to her sleeping mind, he might somehow be found,” this does not stop him from ultimately objectifying her (*GL* 240). He claims to want to “preserve her [...] keep her apart from all uses in any way [he] could” (*GL* 251). He insists that he is disgusted by the thought of “K” being subjected to multiple assaults in the comfort house and, as he will later learn from his superior, Ono, of her becoming an instrument in the plan for “Pan-Asian prosperity as captained” by the Japanese (*GL* 268). Nonetheless, as she sleeps, he takes her, and as he does so, he remarks that “she lay as if she were the *sculpture* of a recumbent girl and *not a real girl at all* [emphasis added]” (*GL* 260). In a second incident which could also be argued as the equivalent of taking “K” against her will, he refers to her “as the most beautiful statue of herself” (*GL* 295). Kurohata distances himself from the act of violence he commits against the desperate “K” by “evacuat[ing]” her of her “subjectivity” and transforming her into an object of aesthetic and sexual pleasure (Carroll 605). Meanwhile, the elderly Hata attributes the bodily invasion to his having been “young and callow” (*GL* 296).

The depersonalization which characterizes his interactions with “K” mirrors the depersonalization Hata experiences both as a youth and as a young adult, and the rapes may, in some way, be a form of displaced resistance to the attendant emasculation he suffers in his relationships with Japanese boys from his childhood, as well as with Captain Ono, who has made “K” Kurohata’s special charge. To keep others away from the infirmary where “K” is being held, Captain Ono instructs Kurohata to be on the lookout for a black flag. The symbolic intention of this choice of signs is not lost on Kurohata whose name means “black flag” The black flag, he explains, was a “banner a village would raise by its gates in olden times to warn of a contagion within,” and “Captain Ono’s choice, of course, was intentionally belittling” (*GL* 224-225). (Here, I think it is worthwhile to note that the metaphor of the internal contagion is one which is invoked as integral to the self-image of the protagonists in nearly all of the novels being deconstructed.) After acknowledging that the Captain means to denigrate him, though, Hata proceeds to excuse Ono’s behavior stating that it was only “natural” that such a sign would keep others away, and since there had been no recent fighting, it was difficult for even officers to have any “privacy” (*GL* 225).

However, as Hata will learn there is a contagion within and it is not “K”, but Hata, himself. Contemplating murdering Ono for the sake of “K”, Kurohata reflects on the treatment that he received as an adolescent: “But in the core of my heart I was tending the darkest fires. I had certainly despised others before, particularly the boys in school I attended after being adopted by the Kurohatas, boys who treated me with disdain most of the time and at worst like a stray dog. Each day I vowed to wreak vengeance on them [...] But nothing ever transpired. I never attempted to mark them, and soon enough we passed on to the upper school and there

were plenty of others to befriend, both cause and enmity mercifully fading from my mind” (*GL* 263). Clearly, Hata feels a sense of indignation at being treated as less than human and, in effect, emasculated by the boys and would like to harness the residual anger he feels to confront Ono. But, just as he eventually relents to his peers, he is deterred from executing his plan to kill the Captain by a combination of convivial ‘smooth talk,’ criticism, and finally outright physical force on the part of his superior. When Ono first approaches him, “no more avuncular than he ever was,” Kurohata admits “for the first time feeling somehow equal to him, imminently free” (*GL* 265). Instead of praising Kurohata, though, the Captain proceeds to tell him that his impending criticism is not motivated by “blood,” that is: Kurohata’s Korean lineage. For, “[b]lood is only so useful or hindering.” After clarifying himself, Ono sketches out the following, and, thereby, devalues the Lieutenant’s claims to have escaped his “narrow existence” in the Korean ghetto by virtue of his industriousness and ingenuity and despite adverse poverty and political and social disenfranchisement. (*GL* 72, 266). “*There is a germ of infirmity in you, which infects everything you touch or attempt.* Besides all else, how do you think you will ever become a surgeon? A surgeon determines his course and his acts. He goes to the point he has determined without any other faith, and commits to an execution. You, Lieutenant, too much depend on generous fate and gesture. There is no internal possession, *no*

embodiment. Thus you fail in some measure always. You perennially disappoint someone like me [emphasis added]" (*GL* 266). As shall be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, this notion that he is a contagion and living according to empty gestures will continue to haunt the aging Hata, who neither succeeds in killing Ono, nor in saving "K". In fact, after Kurohata is pistol whipped by him for insubordination, it is "K" who kills the Captain by stabbing him in the jugular with a scalpel and who, eventually, facilitates her own gruesome suicide, as well as the death of her unborn child by a most vicious gang rape committed by the half-crazed soldiers inhabiting the forgotten outpost to which they have all been relegated.

"K" fails to become the catalyst whereby Kurohata might find redemption and full-fledged personhood as a Japanese national were he to have made her his wife, started a family, and assumed the position of patriarch. She does not allow him to complete the process Lisa Lowe describes as essential to fulfilling the "American nationalist narrative of citizenship," which though she is speaking about enfranchisement in the United States, I think is still applicable here. Lowe writes that the racialized male only becomes a citizen "when he identifies with the paternal state and accepts the terms of this identification by subordinating his racial difference and denying his ties with the feminized and racialized 'motherland'" (Lowe 56). "K" will not allow him to forget his connection, however distant, to the Korean motherland. For, she does not remain silent when he insists that he has no Korean name and that the reason for his ability to speak Korean is "none of [her] concern." When he tries to stem the conversation, she responds by "brightly" telling him her name (*GL* 235). Thus, he is stripped of the power to use language "as a mark of power, as an expression of domination, as a way of erasing identity and constituting a different reality" (Chen 124).

Moreover “K” refuses to permit Kurohata identification with the paternal state, resisting subordination within the confines of heterosexual marriage. She will not be a part of the formula which Patricia Chu states characterizes the British romance and that is “romantic success, figured by a marriage to a worthy and loving mate of equal or higher social class” as the “resolution of all other issues” (Chu 131). I mention the British romance here because in the novel, Kurohata, at one point tells “K” about European novels in an effort to quell her anxiety, and she uses this opportunity to make clear that though she may enjoy the stories, they are but stories. Despite the desire she expresses at one point to “pretend” she and Kurohata are living the “lives” of “those European people in the novels, involved with their own particular problems, which [she] is sure must be very compelling,” she resists being drawn in to the plot as a means of gaining legibility and currency (*GL* 249). In fact, exhibiting a keen understanding of her value as simply an instrument in Kurohata’s own attempts at self-making, she takes him to task concerning his professed love for her. When he begs her to come away with him after the war, she responds: “I don’t want your help! [...] I never wanted your help. Can’t you heed me? Can’t you leave me be? You think you love me but what you really want you don’t yet know because you are young and decent. But I will tell you now, it is my sex. The thing of my sex. If you could cut it from me and keep it with you like a pelt or favorite stone, that would be all. You are a decent man, Lieutenant, but really you are not different from the rest” (*GL* 300). In killing Captain Ono and then slashing a guard who has come to take her away, she makes it patently clear that she does not want, as Kurohata presumptuously surmises, “her own place in the accepted order of things,” a position which involves “bear[ing] children and do[ing] her necessary work” (*GL* 299). Hence, upon recalling seeing “K’s” body

after it is torn to shreds and her unborn baby lying nearby, the Lieutenant shows no emotion, merely stating in reference to his relations with her, “I could not know what I was doing, or remember any part” (*GL* 305). “The love plot of intimacy and familialism” which “signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way” eludes Kurohata as a result of “K’s” fatal rebellion (Berlant qtd. in Koshy, 2004, 105). His wish to “be part (if but a millionth) of the massing” goes unfulfilled (*GL* 299).

Moreover his later relationships, particularly the one he half-heartedly and, perhaps, disingenuously, tries to forge with Sunny and, as I have discussed above, with Mary Burns are in some ways colored by and doomed to fail in part because, even in death, “K” maintains a hold over the aging Hata. In the dead of night, she appears as an apparition clad only in a black flag, a phantom who is in also every way real, a “once-personhood come wholly into being” and with whom he is forced to acknowledge that he has an “historical pact” (*GL* 286). Whether that pact involves his unfulfilled vow to protect her or whether it involves telling her story is uncertain. Perhaps, passing on her story functions as a means of bringing a lost history to the forefront, but more than likely recounting the narrative offers a way for Hata to come to terms with his own complicity in imperialist violence. For, while at certain times, he exhibits a keen understanding of himself and his “situation,” he is more often inclined to fervently engage in revising the past so as to mitigate his own role in the subjugation of others.

What is clear is that much like Sunny, who will be discussed in the following paragraphs, “K”, even though she is no longer alive, will not let Hata complacently enjoy the role of patriarch and the accompanying sense of mastery over himself and his life for which he yearns. She will not let him take comfort in the only symbol of his achievement of America

that he has managed to hold on to, namely: his house. The ownership of property which was denied Asian Americans throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and for a good portion of the twentieth century is insufficient to bestow upon Hata the positive visibility of the fully integrated citizen and the innocuous invisibility of the white man. Despite his protests in the fantasy conversation he has with her in which he imagines that they have “an impressive house and property in the best town in the area, where [they] are happily known and respected” and possess “ample time and quiet means,” all of which he argues that he has done “his best to provide for [her],” she states that she is “anxious” and “cannot die” in this house. Hata finally understands that his achievement is nothing more than the “penultimate trap of living” as far as she is concerned. She cannot pass quietly to the other side as she would like (*GL* 287).

Furthermore, even as she gives herself to him over and over again in his imaginary encounter with the dead woman, there is no satisfaction for him in this. Perhaps recognizing himself as an imposter with a predilection for what is ‘unnatural’—perverse, even, he remarks that with “each time an ill feeling comes over me, the soiling, resident sickness you develop when you have never in your life been caught at something wrong, when you have never once been discovered” (*GL* 288). Having rejected Mary Burns, his daughter, and everyone else who has attempted intimacy with him by the time “K” appears, Hata is made more acutely aware by her fleeting presence of the unfortunate truth that his house is but “the darkened museum of a one-man civilization” (*GL* 289).

After “K’s” nocturnal visit, Hata, in a rare moment of what might be read as compassion mingled with remorse, confesses that he can no longer “shed loss and leaving like any passing cloud of rain.” This is an observation he makes when reflecting on the death of

Anne Hickey and one which contradicts his claims to have remained “whole and sovereign”—“unvanquished” by love (*GL* 332, 216). And, yet immediately after entertaining this thought he mocks himself for the sentimentality he feels concerning Mrs. Hickey, calling it “almost pathological” (*GL* 332). A serious internal conflict is generated by his desire to “pass through with something more than a life of gestures” and his apparent insistence on maintaining himself as a model of Asian stoicism and inscrutability—a stereotypical image upon which he seems to pride himself. This conflict, in addition to the perpetual, poorly disguised disappointment he feels concerning Sunny, irreparably damages his relationship with his daughter (*GL* 299).

As has been noted by Kandice Chuh, it is easy to mistake Hata’s decision to adopt Sunny as an effort to redeem himself after having failed “K” (15). After all, he eagerly anticipates his new daughter’s arrival from the orphanage in Pusan, envisioning it as an event that will “mark the recommencement of [his] days” (*GL* 74). But, to see Sunny as a stand-in for Kkutaeh would be a facile reading of the actions of a man who has no clear sense of himself as a result, in part, of his convoluted history and the decisions that he has made while engaged in the process of trying to construct a viable and acceptable identity. If we examine the relationship more carefully, it would appear that the adoption represents yet another empty gesture. It is less an act of love and more an effort on his part to assert his masculinity—this time not as a lover or potential husband, but as a father to a girl who fails him from the very start by virtue of her parentage.

First, it should be noted that, Hata was originally seeking a Japanese child, a fact that casts doubt on any assumption that he is somehow trying to resurrect “K” and which indicates

that he is still trying to disengage from the part of himself which is Korean—‘unworthy.’ While he finally claims that it is of no consequence to him that the agency can only offer him a Korean child, when Sunny finally appears, grave disappointment in his new acquisition (and, Hata does think of everything in his life in terms of an acquisition as is evidenced by the numerous photographs of all of the objects he has owned which he keeps stored in boxes along with photographs of Sunny) immediately manifests itself. He surmises upon seeing her that Sunny is the offspring of what he, in no uncertain terms, considers a dubious union--a detail which he is sure will not go unnoticed by others in the community and that he imagines will reflect poorly upon him. Looking back on his first encounter with Sunny, he thinks:

I was disappointed initially; the agency had promised a child from a hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family who had gone down on their luck. I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single-parent kind then at least one that would soon be well reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run. But of course I was over hopeful and naive, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of much less dignified circumstances, a night’s wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. I had assumed the child and I would have a natural affinity, and that my colleagues and associates and neighbors, though knowing her to be adopted would have little trouble quickly accepting our being of a single kind and blood. But when I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion. Her hair, skin, were there to see, self-evident, *and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her.* And perhaps it was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, *the blighted hope in my eyes* [emphasis added]. (GL 204)

As has already been indicated, Hata is all too aware of the racial hierarchies that prevail in the United States. Therefore, he is disturbed that his daughter is the embodiment of a long-standing taboo held not only by white Americans, but also by members of certain groups of Asians, most notably the Japanese, and that is the taboo of miscegenation. Having failed to become a

full-fledged Japanese citizen by enlisting himself “in what should have been a glorious war,” he is faced with the prospect of being further discounted as an American (*GL* 205). Undoubtedly, on some level, he understands “that power inequities between groups differentiated by race and gender are thickly woven into the fabric of America’s national narrative of ‘opportunity’” (Lowe 71). Consequently, Sunny’s racial indeterminacy can only be a hindrance in his quest for social acceptance. As far as he is concerned, she represents “blighted hope” not only because she is racially ‘impure,’ but also because she is the product of an ‘unchaste’ transaction (*GL* 204).

Besides regarding her as the “litmus test of the success of [Hata’s] own assimilation,” a “role” which she cannot successfully fulfill by virtue of the circumstances of her birth and the choices which she will make later in her life and which shall be detailed momentarily, (Kuro)Hata may also see in Sunny traces that remind him of his own participation in colonialist endeavors, and he harbors the hope that she will provide him the opportunity to “rewrite” his history in such a way that he emerges as a ‘benevolent patriarch’ (Carroll 609). She is, after all, the progeny of a “system of militarized prostitution” not unlike that created by the Japanese during World War II, which has been and is “so pervasive and so central to the U.S. presence [in Korea], that Korea scholar Bruce Cumings calls it ‘the most important aspect of the whole relationship (between the United States and South Korea)’” (Yuh 17; Cumings qtd. in Yuh 17). Unlike the Japanese, however, who were openly expansionist, the United States has justified its continued presence in Korea in the name of protecting democracy, even as it has practically institutionalized the subjugation of Korean and other Asian women in order to boost the morale of the “red-blooded American soldier” (*Second Infantry Division, 102nd Military Intelligence*

Battalion Soldiers' Book, 1987 rev. ed. qtd. in Yuh 16). And, much in the way that “Korea is inscribed as the feminine other in need of protection” while “the United States [plays] the role of the masculine superior and guardian,” Hata sees it as his duty to keep watch over Sunny, to ensure that she remain “pristine, unsoiled” (Yuh 10; *GL* 114).

Even as he insists that Japanese fathers are “famously overgenerous to their children” contrary to “what most Westerners would presume and wish to think,” Hata is still very critical and often feels ashamed by Sunny’s failure to conform to his vision of her as an accomplished pianist and young lady fit to attend country club dances (*GL* 71). Sensing her father’s shame, Sunny fiercely resists his attempts to “police” her body and to transform her into a model of upper middle-class propriety by increasingly aligning herself with the fringe elements of polite society (Carroll 609). Much like “K”, she thumbs her nose at Hata’s ‘achievements.’ She mocks him by banging away at her piano, virtually destroying the pieces of Western classical music he so loves, and harshly criticizes him for bowing under the pressure to conform to one of the many stereotypical images of Asian-American men. She despises him for his inability to be genuine. Sunny understands that she is extremely important to helping him maintain a positive public and self image, and she appears to resent being made an instrument of his unfulfilled desires. Echoing the words of Kkutaeh who claims to have wanted nothing from Hata, when Hata confronts Sunny about whether or not she is engaging in sex with Jimmy Gizzi, the town drug dealer, she responds to his subsequent inquiry as to what it is she is “seeking” with a scathing indictment of his character:

‘I don’t want anything [...] Nothing. I don’t want love and I don’t want your concern. I think it’s fake anyway. Maybe you don’t know it, but all you care about is your reputation in this shitty, shitty town, and how I might hurt it.’

‘This is nonsense. You’re speaking nonsense.’

‘I guess I am [...] But all I’ve ever seen is how careful you are with everything. With our fancy big house and this store and all the customers. How you sweep the sidewalk and nice-talk to the other shopkeepers. You make a whole life of gestures and politeness. You’re always having to be the ideal partner and colleague.’

‘And why not? Firstly, I am a Japanese! And then what is so amenable about being liked?’

‘Well, no one in Bedley Run really gives a damn. You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a ‘good Charlie’ to organize the garbage and sidewalk cleaning schedule. That’s how people think of you. It’s become your job to be the number-one citizen.’ (GL 95)

Despite his protests concerning his “position” in the town, and his insistence that “[p]eople heed his words,” Sunny remains unconvinced, informing her father that they do this only because he has “made it so that everyone owes [him] something” (GL 95). And, when he expresses his disgust at Sunny’s willingness to “degrade” herself by continuing to associate with Gizzi and his cohorts, informing her that she would no longer be welcome in his house should she continue to do so, she flatly informs him that although he may have “needed her” for whatever reason, “it was never the other way” (GL 96).

Thus, Hata is divested of the roles of kind father figure and notable citizen with a voice and reduced to the ridiculous figure of a “good Charlie”—a name that evokes the image of the obsequious, docile, feminized, anonymous Asian domestic servant featured in Yamaguchi’s novel. Recall that the Warren sisters referred to all of their houseboys as ‘Charlie.’ For all his economic success, Hata cannot elude classification according to a castrating stereotype which came to be as a result of “economic hardships” that forced many early Asian-American

immigrants into “woman’s work,” first because “he remains trapped in a racist logic that ties him to the departicularized register of Asian American identity” and, second, because he has internalized this logic and dutifully executed, to the best of his ability, its shifting and contradictory dictates in order to meet the expectations of white, mainstream America (Eng 92; Lee 104; Carroll 597).

Though Sunny rebels against Hata’s attempts to inculcate her with his values and transform her into the ideal American daughter by leaving his house, this does not deter him from continuing in his efforts to retain command over her body and her sexuality. But in trying to do so, he encounters sights which only further disappoint him and cause him to take actions which eventually culminate in Sunny excising him from her life for several years; and, even when they do manage to eventually reconnect in the present time of the novel, the continuance of the relationship is contingent upon Hata’s promise to maintain that he is a “family friend” (*GL* 276).

The disintegration of the tenuous father-daughter bond is accelerated by two noteworthy events that occur during Sunny’s adolescence. The first of these occurs after Sunny runs away from home for the first time to live with Jimmy Gizzi and his cohort, Lincoln Evans. One evening, Hata goes to the Gizzi house in search of his daughter, and what he discovers there virtually destroys the already conditional love he has for her. Specifically, he witnesses her giving Gizzi and Evans what amounts to a highly provocative sexual performance. So appalled is he as he watches her dance and taunt the two men, all the while laughing in what he describes as an “illiberal and vile” manner, that he wishes that “she were just another girl or woman [...] no longer [his] daughter or [his] kin or even [his] charge [...].” He recalls, “I

made no sound as I grimly descended [the stairs leading to the room where the spectacle was unfolding], my blood already trying to forget, growing cold” (*GL* 116). As a result of Sunny’s ‘transgressions,’ the familial bond and concomitant social acceptance that Berlant speaks of eludes Hata yet again, and his authority is undermined as she opts to experience both her body and her sexuality on her own terms. “Like K before her, Sunny becomes for Hata—despite his own desires—a sexual being and a profound failure” as she not only “simply involve[s] herself intimately with all these men white, brown and black, but [lives] with them as well, with no other company but theirs” (Carroll 610; *GL* 102). Perhaps influenced by his past experience with “K” and possibly in an effort to re-establish himself as the paternal figure he never actually fully managed to become, Hata warns Sunny that in offering herself “so freely” and forgoing the “security of the family,” the chances are great that she will “inevitably descend to the lowest level of human society and be forced to sell every part of [herself], in mind and flesh and spirit” (*GL* 149, 144). Just like those who condemned and preached the danger of unrestrained sexuality in women and who labeled as perverse men inhabiting early Chinatown bachelor societies, for Hata, the heteronormative family is the foundation for and penultimate symbol of the order with which he so desperately seeks to associate himself.

Hata’s admonition does not deter Sunny from moving to New York with Lincoln Evans, who has fled Bedley Run for New York City in a bid to escape being implicated in a stabbing which occurs when Jimmy Gizzi rapes Sunny. When Hata asks why she did not report the incident to the police, Sunny gives voice to what he already thinks, despite his show of concern, and that is that no one would take a “whore” seriously. Sunny then flatly informs Hata that she will commit suicide before ever allowing someone to do that to her which evokes fear

in Hata, as her statement brings to the surface memories of “K”, who not only threatened the same, but accomplished it, quashing Hata’s first adult attempts at self-making (*GL* 150). It is telling that Sunny’s threat does not necessarily invoke or sustain fatherly emotions, as he will readily admit. Contemplating the incident in the time before Sunny departs for good, he concludes that he was “never *infected* to the marrow [by worry] as [he] assumed a *real* father should be [emphasis added]” (*GL* 275). His word choice suggests that Hata has never forgotten the words Ono spoke to him regarding his alleged weakness of character. Hata has come to associate weakness and failure as a man and citizen subject with ‘loving’ someone, namely: “K”, who was ‘tarnished’-- ironically enough by none other than (Kuro)Hata himself, and, thus, rendered ineligible as a suitable partner for a Japanese lieutenant.

Determined to prevent Sunny from committing social suicide and, thereby, spoiling the illusion he continues to harbor that he and Sunny could, on some level, resemble the family that he had always hoped would solidify his sense of belonging, Hata, when faced with a second “difficulty” involving his ‘wayward’ daughter, orchestrates what proves to be a violent invasion of Sunny’s body (338). After nearly a year of living, presumably, with Lincoln Evans in New York City, Sunny contacts Hata for help. At eighteen, she is pregnant and close to full term, a fact which makes Hata “furious” and which compels him ask himself “where now was her ‘lover’ [...] so genuine and serious and gentle?” (*GL* 339). It is almost as if he were asking himself this in relation to his brief involvement with “K” which, itself, finally lacked the qualities he mentions in relation to Sunny and Lincoln. Moreover, Sunny’s pregnant body, he remembers, was, at the time, for him “a most sickening vision” and the “clearest pictures of *my* defeat, familial and otherwise [emphasis added]” (*GL* 341). There is, dare I say, something

almost perverse in his reaction; the boundaries between paternal ward and embittered, insecure lover are disturbingly blurred. In order to avert what Hata describes as the “imminent disgrace and embarrassment that would hang about the house like banners of *our* mutual failure,” Sunny is forced to undergo a dangerous and illegal late-term abortion with which he insists, despite his lack of formal training, on assisting the doctor [emphasis added] (*GL* 340). It is only after much hesitation and many manipulative statements made by Hata that the doctor finally agrees to perform the procedure and to do so with Hata’s help

Hata’s sense of failure and deep shame arise not only from his inability to prevent his daughter from engaging in sex outside the boundaries of ‘respectable,’ middle-class marriage, but also because the father of her child is African-American. His paternal (and patriarchal) authority is not enough to prevent the disintegration of the family and the infiltration of ‘undesirable’ elements that have the potential to further disrupt the fiction he has created for himself that he is a racially pure Japanese man who has managed to shed the status of ‘perpetual foreigner’ and ascend to the ranks of full-fledged American citizen. So deeply entrenched is his acceptance of the United State’s hierarchy of race, which often posits the Asian as a model minority over and against the African-American Other as underachieving menace, and his denial of the signs that indicate that he is not the celebrated figure he persists in representing himself as that after Sunny departs for what is the final time, he denies her Korean/African-American heritage and his actual relationship with Sunny to the Hickeys. After Anne Hickey finds old pictures of Sunny in the shop that he has sold her and her husband inquires about them, Hata says his adopted daughter is a relative who came to study in the United States and returned to Japan long ago. And, later, he asserts that he is such an integral

part of Bedley Run, in his words one of its “primary citizen[s],” that his “well-known troubles with Sunny were not a strike against him or a sign of personal failure, but a rallying point,” thus relinquishing any responsibility for her rebellion and decision to disengage from him (*GL* 13, 275). Despite the “grave misfortune” that has befallen others, he remarks that he “persist[s], “ever securing good station” in the “[last] place that [he] will belong” (*GL* 346).

This does not mean that his past does not haunt him, as is clear when he notes that too often he is at the “vortex of bad happenings” and that he should “festoon” his house and car with “immense black flags of warning” so that, like Sunny, others might avoid the “steadily *infecting* path” of his “too-satisfied umbra” and “accept any difficult and even detrimental path so long as it led far from [him] [emphasis added]” (*GL* 333). Like the Farmer Doi, discussed in the previous chapter, the stench of the past clings to him, and all he can do is wish for an “erasure” of himself and of all the material wealth he has accumulated (*GL* 290). This wish he almost fulfills by practically allowing a fire to almost consume his treasured home. Interestingly and symbolically, it is the family room which sustains the most damage. The family room is not only a place where he and Sunny spent a significant amount of time together, for Sunny enjoyed the fireplace, though not necessarily Hata’s company. It is also a symbolic temple of idyllic, Western, middle-class, family unity and a reminder of Hata’s failure as patriarch to secure that unity. If the family cannot be redeemed, then it is, perhaps, best for Hata that its emblem be razed.

Even as he acknowledges that his efforts to control his destiny and shape himself have been damaging to others, there is something pathological about his belief that he is at the center of all that happens—bad and good. Also present are indications of a condition bordering on

hysteria in the sense that it is regarded as “analogous to a kind of overinvolvement in history” and as such “serves to exhume the disavowed, alternate and buried stories of its sufferers” (Freud qtd. in Eng 177). The voices from Hata’s past will not be silenced. Furthermore, taking his cue from Žižek, Eng contends that hysteria also marks “a ‘failed interpellation’ into the normative ideals, official histories and symbolic order” (Žižek qtd. in Eng 177; Eng 177). For all of his attempts to “live up to the demands of the Oedipalized world,” Hata fails to be “gendered ‘male’” because, as I have tried to show above, he has so often been denied “power and speech” and the concomitant access to enfranchisement, to the effect that he has carried out despicable acts involving the abjection of women in order to prove his masculinity (Eng 177, 179). He has become what Eng refers to as the “hysterical Asian American male” in that, throughout his life, he has been excluded from “occupy[ing] a symbolic position within national ideals of a proper masculine citizenry” (Eng 179, 181).

Hata’s vexed situation is rendered clearer and all the more tragic by the fact that, regardless of moments of revelation regarding his own condition and the toll his actions have taken on others, he steadfastly refuses to be held accountable for the decisions he has made. Based on his ability to rationalize every past (mis)deed and his often blind insistence that he is a valuable and integral part of Bedley Run society, it would seem that he has very little sense of how he is perceived and of who he is. “I think one person can hardly understand why another has conducted his life in such a way, how he came to commit certain actions and not others, whether he looks upon the past with mostly pleasure or equanimity or regret. It seems difficult enough to consider one’s own triumphs and failures with perfect verity, for it’s no secret that the past proves a most unstable mirror, typically too severe and flattering all at once,

and never as truth reflecting as people would like to believe” (*GL* 5). Undoubtedly, he has developed an elaborate set of defense mechanisms, which include stifling any emotion, minimizing the effects of his conduct, euphemizing his past interactions with the people closest to him, and changing his identity to suit his immediate surroundings in order to avoid the guilt that self-incrimination would cause him to suffer.

In depicting this psychological disconnect between past and present, Lee provides a commentary on the difficulties of identity formation for the Asian-American male subject, particularly when his actions and the consequences of those actions do not match up to the way in which he envisions himself. Chuh reads this disconnect as Lee’s “refusal to relate the past to the present within a cause and effect paradigm.” “Lee,” she writes, “has mapped the reductiveness of seeing identity and history in terms of linear cause-and-effect” (14). Hata, in all his various incarnations, embodies the on-going, often messy, process of “self-identity formation” that is the effect of being engaged in and subjected to a web of complex and contradictory historical events (Chuh 13). The narrative does not allow us to take solace in the idea that somehow coming to grips with the past or giving voice to the specters of history, specifically those persons, “K”, Sunny, and himself included, whose “latent history” has until now been left “unspoken, unsung,” offers any sort of salvation, liberation, or more stable sense of self (*GL* 289). For, at the end of the novel, we find Hata alone and uttering these words, which gesture not toward heightened self-awareness necessarily, but more toward surrender, to something that eludes the reader:

Perhaps I’ll travel to where Sunny wouldn’t go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores. But I don’t think it will

be any kind of pilgrimage. I won't be seeking destiny or fate. I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead.

Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow when this house is alive and full, I will be on the outside looking in. I will be already on a walk someplace, in this town or the next or one thousand miles away.

I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home. (*GL 355-356*).

2. William Narcisco Paulinha and the Case of Failed Narcissism

As with Lee's Doc' Hata, there is no satisfactory resolution to the difficulties encountered in the pursuit of enfranchisement for Han Ong's protagonist in *Fixer Chao*. In contrast to the law-abiding Hata who attempts to secure a place for himself first as a soldier, then as a respectable businessman, good citizen, and father, William Narcisco Paulinha plies the underside of society, first earning a living as a male hustler in New York's Port Authority Bus Terminal, then drifting from one clerical job to the next, and, finally, earning a name for himself as a confidence man, who dupes New York City's elite out of tens of thousands of dollars. Initially, many of William's decisions are governed primarily by economic necessity. However, not unlike in the case of Lee's protagonist, they are also motivated by a desire to attain visibility and legibility; and, the consequences of his decisions are no less detrimental to himself and others than the effects of the choices that Hata makes—especially, because William, whatever his wishes may be, harbors no illusions that he can be accepted on his own terms and is not above treachery and exacting vengeance on those who would otherwise reject

him should it be revealed that he is not the venerated Feng Shui master he poses as throughout most of the novel. In the end, for both Hata and William, dreams of attaining positive visibility do not materialize, regardless of the fact that they both achieve varying degrees of upward social and economic mobility, and despite the various masks they don, paradoxically, in order to be recognized.

Whereas Hata appears to adopt his roles in earnest, only for it to become clear to readers that he is often merely gesturing, William plays the roles dealt him with a certain amount of cynicism that is fueled by an understanding that truly ‘belonging’ is out of the question for a young, gay Filipino immigrant with no means or connections. Hence, when Shem C., a failed writer with a chip on his shoulder, approaches William in the Savoy--a New York City bar that is host to an assortment of ‘colorful’ and ‘seedy’ characters ranging from transvestites to other hustlers and prostitutes to writers of Westerns no one had ever read—it doesn’t require much for Shem to convince William to masquerade as ‘Master Chao’ (FC 150).

Master Chao is a concocted figure, allegedly from Hong Kong, whose personal history is fabricated by Shem and William and whose expertise on the subject of Feng Shui is derived from pamphlets on the subject and library books. As Master Chao, it is William’s job to ‘fix’ the apartments of those whom Shem feels have wronged him, those who are, in some way, affiliated with the individuals who have done him perceived injustices, or, as William will eventually learn, those who have simply become more successful than his embittered accomplice. ‘Fixing’ involves rearranging the furnishings of these people’s homes in such a way as to “assist” them in “their quest for buffers against the harsh world of New York: *peace, harmony, prosperity* settling over their frantic modern lives.” Except, Shem stipulates, just one

thing needs to be done “wrong” in order to disrupt the lives of his ‘enemies.’ And, even if Feng Shui has no real power—no “veracity,” he continues, fixing means “scamm[ing]” these people out of thousands of dollars. It would “still be like a big fuck-you in the middle of where they live. Like a rape [...] Like sneaking into their homes and doing ugly, hateful things to the things they love [...] all with their cooperation” (*FC* 56).

While William does not initially share, or even fully comprehend, Shem’s burning lust for revenge, his heart grows increasingly dark and his intentions more sinister as the story progresses. This is fueled by a growing awareness of the fact that “[b]ecause he is Asian and gay, William is doubly abjected and othered by his race and gender” (Ty 151). Though it is primarily a parody of New York’s upper class, the narrative functions as a commentary on race, gender and sexuality, seeking not only to illustrate power differentials and material inequalities that are the product of and determined by these shifting concepts and are inextricably bound together with regard to identity, but also, as with a *A Gesture Life*, to show what some of the potential effects are on individuals when the “nation invites them in, only to deny them the privileges of comfort in their own skin” (Freeman qtd. in Ty 150). In some ways, for Narciso Paulinha, the narcissistic process, part of which Freud theorized involved the impulse to turn inward as a means of ultimately enabling the formation and preservation of a distinct self, is thwarted by invalidating, external factors that make it uncomfortable, even painful, to look inward (Ramadanovic 179).

For William, who has, since childhood, possessed some understanding of the uneven distribution of wealth and the stronghold on privilege held by white America as a result of spending part of his youth in the Philippines under the tutelage of the Catholic Church, it is

self-evident to him even before he embarks on his career as Master Chao that there is “nothing mysterious about the future, it would be a furthering of the past and the present, the same power, the same money, same straight unperturbed line through the American landscape.” All would be “[n]ow as it shall forever. Amen” (*FC* 60). And, within this landscape, he would remain “perpetually worthless,” despite “the advances [he] had made through petty crime” (*FC* 73). These beliefs are, in part, the product of his experiences as a male prostitute in the United States. He recalls that in his early twenties he had to compete with “frisky Puerto Ricans and athletic black boys for a cut of the overweight white businessman business.” According to William, these men “on their way home to the suburbs” had had “disastrous days” and wanted to “take out their frustration on someone.” He was “perfect, a skinny colored kid almost like the ones they see a lot of nowadays on T.V., except shabbier.” Feeling as if they had their power usurped by a “whole crew of new, mystifying faces” and possessed of an incredible sense of self-entitlement, they wanted someone “to pay, be humiliated, physically put under them like restoring their *natural position* in the world [emphasis added]” (*FC* 12).

Now thirty, William is further reminded that he cannot escape being defined by race as Shem flatly states his “need” for “an Oriental” to help him pull off his scheme; and, the more deeply ensconced he becomes in Shem’s circle, the more keenly aware he is made of the hierarchy operating under the umbrella term ‘Oriental.’ Unbeknownst to William when he first agrees to participate in Shem’s plan, he is accepting a proposition that will permit him to enjoy, at least for a short time until the plot begins to unravel, great socioeconomic advantages that go along with allowing himself to be fetishized as a Chinese master. Once he assumes his role as Master Chao, he quickly realizes that while his new profession offers him a new life saturated

with opportunity that starkly contrasts with his prior hand-to-mouth existence as a Filipino man just trying to stay true to his professed desire to be “good” (*FC* 119). Were he unwilling or unable to fulfill the stereotypical fantasies about the East valued by his clients in their search for spirituality and, ironically, authenticity, then he would have limited options. He would continue to be defined by the “*hypercorporeality*” that his job as a hustler required and which helped his friend and compatriot, Preciosa, who came to the United States as a mail-order bride, obtain her blue passport. “Hypercorporeality”, according to Susan Koshy, entails the “reduction” of, in this case, “Filipino subjectivity to primordial sensations, appetites, and propensities and the corresponding equation of Filipino culture with a primitive level of social and cultural development” (Koshy, 2004, 101). Or, he would be locked into a series of dead-end jobs in the mailrooms of offices where no one knew his face, much less his name, and thus doomed to the same ‘invisibility’ and depersonalization experienced by the nannies, domestics, and doorman—virtually all from developing nations and /or people of color—that he encounters as he makes his way into the homes and lives of the wealthy New Yorkers who seek him out for advice (*FC* 57, 119).

Koshy writes that, historically, “Western nations acknowledged the antiquity of Asian nations like Japan and China, although they simultaneously construed this antiquity as a sign of the decrepit or the tradition-bound; the Philippines, by contrast, was seen as primitive, nonliterate, and lacking in any claim to a continuous or unified culture.” She explains the ways in which various Orientalisms evolved in relation to East and Southeast Asia and notes the effects that relationships between the United States and the countries mentioned above had on

constructing certain very powerful and enduring representations of the people inhabiting those nations:

The emergence of certain representations was in part due to the way that relationships between the United States and the aforementioned nations developed. The circuits through which Orientalism emerged in Japan and China were more varied, consisting of aesthetic, missionary, commercial, intellectual, and political/diplomatic discourses and thus produced a greater melding of positive and negative representations. In the case of the Philippines, however, the relationship was not only a directly colonial one defined by the exigencies of pacification and expropriation, but the United States annexed the country after a brutal war of conquest (1899-1902) that required a monumental effort of censorship and justification in the American media and public discourse [...]

Colonial discourses furthered the characterization of Filipinos as civilizational and evolutionary throwbacks, or 'little brown monkeys,' as they were termed. They were perceived as subjects defined primarily by their physical being and consequently as being deficient in the 'higher faculties.' While spirituality or aestheticism was attributed to other Oriental cultures such as the Japanese or the Chinese, Filipinos were portrayed as dog eaters or headhunters and any propensity they displayed toward cultivation was attributed to their powers of mimicry [...] the trope of Filipino mimicry functioned within imperial ideology to deny interiority, intellect, or spirituality to the Filipino by treating any intellectual or creative activity in the culture not as a reflection of an inner capacity but an imitation of more evolved cultures. (Koshy, 2004, 100-101; Rafael qtd. in Koshy, 2004, 101)

Just as Hata capitalizes on the stereotype of the Japanese, playing perfectly the role of the stoic, venerable town elder, William seizes upon the chance to reap the benefits that assuming the role of the dignified Chinese man will offer him. Even though this trade-off means getting himself into a "complicated, manufactured" life, the draw of respect and material comfort overwhelms any sense of allegiance to his heritage, which has, for the most part, brought him shame and instilled in him feelings of privation and disgust with himself for having once believed that "[t]he idea of luxury" could be concretized and that the realization of wealth in

the form of various brand names like “Proctor and Silex” would translate so easily into equality for those like him and his family. Such beliefs, he says, reflecting on the gullibility that characterized his youth, belong to “people who [believe] so strongly in the categorization ‘Third World’” (*FC* 133, 263).

To escape a life which entails using “the cost of a McDonald’s hamburger to relate the worth of everything,” William gladly obliges Shem’s “people” whom he remarks “were more than happy to preserve me in the brine of ancient stereotype; a soul linked directly to the ancestral past, shot through with the very thing the white man had given up in exchange for technological advancement-- spiritual enlightenment—and the lack of which now made him inferior, in need of guidance” (*FC* 307, 66). Though, on one level, he feels “trapped” by having to conform to the stereotype that is Master Chao, William is not beyond desiring a part of the wealth and power that Shem’s fashionable circle has, and so exclaims, “All right, if that’s what you want, that’s what I will become. I will turn myself into something I am not. I will be your *Condé Nast* for you [...]” (*FC* 66).

Though William escapes the incredible humiliation of being made into an inarticulate ‘native’ in the way that Preciosa was after having been cast as one of the gibberish-speaking, naked ‘primitives’ in a play entitled *Primitives* back in the days when she aspired to be an actress like “Barbara Stanwyck or Bette Davis,” he, nonetheless, functions as a “trophy” for individuals like Lindsay S (*FC* 313, 200, 79). Lindsay boasts an impressive collection of Oriental objects ranging from Japanese, swords, to Chinese silk screens, antique teapots and hundreds of Buddhas of a “dazzling variety.” However, as William observes, these icons are but an outward manifestation of Lindsay’s Asian fetish and appear to have “lost their native

force.” They are “powerless to warn Lindsay, who acted not so much as a believer but as a parent, a collector, an owner with powers far above those possessed by—and accruing from—the very things he owned” (*FC* 71). Despite his self-satisfied proclamation to have narrowly escaped the fate of becoming a part of Lindsay’s collection, as Master Chao he makes a stereotype of himself and caters to his first client’s Orientalist fantasies, thus becoming equally as powerless over his own destiny and as mute as the figures in Lindsay’s home museum.

Certainly, his new life as a Chinese sage contrasts sharply with his former existence. No longer is he one of a multitude of faceless, nameless skinny brown kids whose job it is to be made the object of sexual humiliation by resentful suburban white men. This is a fact to which he must acclimate by adjusting the way he regards himself. Referring to the series of photos that he and Shem take in a Brooklyn furniture store and which will accompany a bogus article touting the miraculous powers of Master Chao, William notes the facial expression in the photos and realizes that his new job requires that he start thinking of himself not as “Filipino and available,” but as “Oriental” and “sexless” (*Fung* 339).

I was familiar with that look I had seen it in many photographs taken of me before and had always thought it made me look more handsome, which was why I was continuing to do it. But now I realized it was only that I confused handsomeness with inane mimicry of pop star poses in magazines, poses calculated to establish a pop star’s integrity by aligning him with black traits: surliness, indifference, mischief. Well, Shem and I didn’t want any of that. What we wanted was a look that was the opposite of a pop star, or rather a pop star whose aura was white rather than black, sexless and filled with wisdom. (*FC* 87)

William’s revelation, here, conveys an understanding of the ludicrousness of aligning himself with icons of African-American manhood. For, actually establishing such an affiliation would

not be lucrative for him, nor would it even be recognized given the dictates of the current “race-gender status quo” (Fung 339). While in the early part of the century, male “Filipino sexuality was defined against white bourgeois sexual norms as deviant and primitive,” and Filipino men were considered “sexual menaces” dangerous to the moral order, a set of competing, contradictory discourses also emerged which cast them as “feminized males, not homosexual, yet not fully heterosexual either” (Koshy, 2004, 102; Ngai 112-113). Finally, yet another assessment has found its way into the popular imagination. In this assessment Asian men are regarded as “sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism. So whereas, Fanon tells us, ‘the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis,’ the Asian man is defined by a striking absence down there” (Fung 340; Fanon qtd. in Fung 340). It is this last stereotype of the Asian man to which William knows he must conform in order to raise himself out of obscurity and poverty,

William’s first act of vengeance actually stems from a series of remarks that are made at a dinner party and effect a metaphoric castration which William does not anticipate having to contend with in playing the role of the desexualized Master Chao. The comments render immigrants from the “Third World,” and Filipinos, in particular, subhuman by suggesting that those who come to the United States from developing nations are not competent to exercise agency and are best suited to serving others. The culprit who elicits the exchange that triggers William’s wrath is Cardie Kerchpoff, the daughter of a successful cardiologist and, herself, a “big-shot editor” (*FC* 101). At first, simply complaining about her Indian nanny, a very dedicated employee, whom Cardie does not appreciate for the care she takes, the editor,

encouraged by an audience of her peers, launches into a vicious tirade, attacking her help and all Third World people in the process. Cardie interprets her nanny's persistent conscientiousness as a running critique of Cardie's own capabilities as a woman, wife, and mother. Instead of reflecting on the insecurities her employee evokes, she expresses in no uncertain terms to the group attending her dinner party that she sees her privilege as the guarantee of her superiority, and this superiority justifies her indignation at having help that would dare to question her authority:

[M]y God, if you've ever tried to explain American nuances or Western nuances to a Third Worlder, are you in for a marathon! And you know what? Ultimately I don't even have to explain to her the difference between important lowercase and capital letters, because it's my goddamn house and I have sovereign rights, excuse me very much. So she should just take what I say as divine truth. And shut up. And put up. My God why do I allow myself to be tyrannized by this short woman—I mean, it's ridiculous, she barely comes up to my armpits! (laughter). (FC 102)

While made uncomfortable by the long diatribe, it is what immediately follows that inflames William. As soon as Cardie finishes, a “well-to-do Asian man,” echoing sentiments prevalent among 1930s white Americans, “lean[s] in and, without a trace of irony” suggests that she get a “Filipino” because they “make the best servants.” It does not help the situation, remarks William, that right at that moment Lindsay S's Filipina maid appears “bearing another dish, as well as a look of permanent apology on her face” (FC 103; España-Maram 137).

Perhaps, William is so incensed because such comments serve as a reminder of his own powerlessness as a Filipino to defend his compatriots not only against the denigrating assessments of wealthy whites, but also against other Asians. He understands that without his

“kung fu slippers,” the mark of his descent from an ‘ancient’ and ‘venerable’ culture perceived by all the “sick” people he meets as Master Chao as containing powerful secrets for healing, he would not be the prized commodity that fetishists such as Lindsay S have made him into; instead, he would remain a “lowly thing these people would never deign to acknowledge, much less spit on” (*FC* 84, 97). However, I don’t think this is the sole reason for the “murderous feelings” he experiences in relation to Cardie (*FC* 103). Interestingly, it is not the Asian man who is the object of his ire, even though he is the one who advises Cardie that Filipinos make the “best servants.” Clearly, the man in question feels no solidarity with other Asians and has bought into rhetoric from days gone by in which it was asserted that, for example, Filipinos were “*just the same as the manure that we put on the land--just the same,*” conveniently forgetting or blissfully ignorant of the discriminatory practices to which all Asian immigrants to the United States have been subject at various points in the nation’s history. Yet, at the same time, he is, undoubtedly, all too aware of the “ethnic and class inequality within the pan-Asian structure” (“Interview Of A Secretary Of An Agricultural Association in 1930” qtd. in San Juan 443; Espiritu qtd. in Koshy, 2000, 489).

Nevertheless, the Asian guest does not seem to make the same impact on William that Cardie does; for, William associates the demeaning remark with her and vigorously seizes on the opportunity to malign the arrogant and effusive Russian Jewess who, seemingly oblivious to the long history of anti-Semitism and upheaval caused by it, cannot identify with those dispossessed and dislocated by economic and political circumstances and, finally, forced to live what William describes as a “peripatetic life” (*FC* 73). As he ‘fixes’ her house, he takes care not to touch the “servants quarters,” having envisioned “in one bed Preciosa and in the

other [him]self” (FC 104). And, as he goes about rearranging her accommodations in the hopes that some misfortune will befall her, the following goes through his mind. “Filipinos make the best servants. I hadn’t been able to help it. It was such a catchy line, and it had echoed effortlessly in my head like a pop refrain past any powers of contradiction I might have had. Filipinos make the best servants Filipinos make the best servants! Why? Asked not in opposition, but to ease the joke to its punch line: *Because they kneel by instinct and bend over like clockwork* [...] [emphasis added]” (FC 104). It is obvious from this last sentence that, on some level, he feels he has been emasculated and defiled, as it is not he who dominates in the narrative running through his head. Rather he, and by extension all Filipinos, are the passive recipients of what he imagines as a desecration and violent invasion of the body. The question remains why Cardie is the focus of his hatred. I think that David L. Eng’s observations in his introduction to a reading of Lonny Kaneko’s “The Shoyu Kid” may offer some insight into William’s psyche:

[Kaja] Silverman proceeds to note that in our present-day social organization of the field of vision those images traditionally idealized in society—masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness—cannot be readily available to all. Indeed, idealized images are available only to those whose bodily egos are somehow culturally authorized to see themselves within them. Consequently, one’s psychic identifications with these prized images is [*sic*] not only dependent on self-willed identification; it is also dependent upon cultural norms and prohibitions that regulate the circulation of these idealized representations. That is, one can neither simply choose through a singular act of will how to be seen nor can one freely conjure up those idealized images with which one would like to be aligned. Without widespread social validation, the concomitant mapping of a bodily ego and imago that produces a feeling of self-sameness cannot be sustained. Psychic ‘presence’ is forfeited; jubilant identification is impossible; and the subject is left with a profound sense of fragmentation, disunity, and loss.

In this regard, we must remember that idealized images such as masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness also imply an obverse set of images such as femininity, homosexuality, and racialization. These culturally devalued images

are ones that socially marked subjects are encouraged to loathe. Even more, they are encouraged to disidentify with these images. When held to these unpleasant and devalued identifications, the subject experiences them as external impositions, which leads to a negative sense of self and a psychic sense of dislocation. (115)

Though it is the Asian man who makes the comment that so angers William, this man is also a racially marked subject, himself, which *might* explain William's displaced aggression. Cardie, on the other hand, is, as far as William is concerned, the embodiment of the white mistress and as such reminds him of the limitations he faces as a homosexual, Filipino man whose name would not in the foreseeable future replace the names of such icons of white masculinity as Mel Gibson--no matter how he reconfigures his name to sound more Western in a private game of fantasy that he plays when watching trailers for the Hollywood films he and Preciosa so love (*FC* 156).

Cardie's whiteness coupled with privilege and a blatant disregard for the integrity and humanity of her 'Third World' "servants" act as a reminder that American democracy and the attending promises of enfranchisement based on merit and hard work that are extended to Asian immigrants are false promises. Moreover, it is clear from the nature of the sexual metaphor that William uses to describe the situation of the Filipino that Cardie also conjures up specters of the 'sexually deviant' Filipino houseboy popularized earlier in the twentieth century (Koshy, 2004, 114). Cardie is the wealthy and powerful white woman to whom everything has been handed. As such, all the anxieties that white men have historically experienced in relation to their "little brown brothers" are writ large on her body (San Juan 443). Contrary to expectation, though, after Master Chao 'fixes' her house, Cardie's husband is not there to

defend her honor against the ‘impudence’ of the treacherous “brown hordes” as embodied by her ‘meddling’ servant and, later, she will find by the enraged Paulinha (*España-Maram* 106). Rather, her husband ultimately finds her “wanting as a woman,” has her “replaced,” and takes her child; thus, confirming the fears instilled in her by her nanny that she has been inadequate in fulfilling her roles as a wife and mother (*FC* 254). And, because she articulates precisely the sentiments that contribute to the “negative sense of self” and “sense of fragmentation” that William feels as a result of his inability to conform to socially-sanctioned, “idealized representations,” it is no surprise, however ignoble his actions may be, that he orchestrates a situation which destroys two crucial components of Cardie’s identity. In doing so, he disrupts a structure—the nuclear family—so integral to the maintenance of and justification for uneven distribution of wealth and sense of class ‘superiority,’ though this does not necessarily, in the end, improve the lives of New York’s immigrant working classes or imbue him with a more complete sense of self or positive empowerment.

As with Yamaguchi’s Takashi Arai and Lee’s Hata, William’s fragmented sense of self derives in part from having, as he puts it, “a face other than your own [...] grafted on top by the outside world” (*FC* 109). However, unlike Arai and Paul Chan Chuang Toledo Lin, the author of a book that bemoans the feminization of the East, especially its men, by the West and whose “screed” brings William to the aforementioned conclusion, William is not content with simply “huffing and puffing”; and, actually, even as he agrees with Lin about the feminization of Asian men by Westerners, he also pities and despises the celebrated writer for his fears that his work will be discredited because he is American born and, therefore, “lack[s] authenticity.” William is disgusted by fact that, in his attempt to capitalize on his Asianness in the way that

William does, Lin aspires to “some kind of fake history of purity” in order to garner acceptance and approval (*FC* 109-110). Interestingly, when, toward the end of the novel, Lin dares to remove the mask, finally articulating what William already suspects, namely: that he is homosexual, the author’s “staunchest (Asian) supporters” express unmitigated disapproval, claiming that his “homosexuality was an impugning of their masculinity that they wanted promoted to the world and for which they believed they’d found the perfect spokes person in Lin” (*FC* 370). Even though Lin eventually drops the mask, he does so, as far as William is concerned, in order to resuscitate his writing career—arguably, turning his back on one marketable subaltern identity in favor of adopting another. Perhaps confused or perhaps simply lacking in conviction, Toledo Lin ultimately opts to capitalize on homosexual fetishization of the gay Asian male as opposed to masculinization of the sexually disenfranchised heterosexual Asian male

William is not like Lin in that he is less inclined to simply rant. Instead, he is more like Hata in that he is not above employing violence to secure and maintain the tenuous, often illusory, position of power he holds in relation to whatever company he is currently keeping. However, whereas Hata would never concede that his actions were invasive and self-serving, William openly admits that he means to do harm. He operates according to the belief that “human beings, having begun low, only degenerated further, and that the only correction possible came from a kind of violence, a kind of wresting away of privileges which were undeserved, things granted which it was time to repossess, to reveal the naked, fatty, vulnerable thing underneath; a feeling closer to death than to life” (*FC* 109).

Despite his confident assertion that he means to do damage to those who have reaped unmerited wealth and power and his disdain for “sham[s]” such as Lin, whom he describes as cutting a pathetic figure in his “mask” and expensive suits that regardless of cost still looked as if they had been “passed down from sad, spendthrift immigrant parents” not so different from William’s own parents, William, like Lin and Hata, is plagued by doubt concerning his perceived lack of a solid, ‘authentic’ identity of his own making (*FC* 128, 107).

*For a moment there was the clearest picture, a white light of full indictment. I realized that I had no core, that I merely went from one identity to another guided by nothing more than mimicry. As a child I had imitated devoutness because there was the example of my family before me. And when that no longer served my needs, when I had slowly grown to accept—or rather when I stopped denying—my homosexuality, and found nothing in that faith to help or sustain me, I threw it aside and took the example of other people who had thrown it aside before me [...] In Los Angeles, I had followed men who skulked in parks, giving each other covert go-ahead signals with their eyes, thus learning one way homosexuals behaved: a conscious, if not exactly showy, flouting of the rules of Catholicism. In New York, I had fallen in step with the young, directionless, poor homosexuals who were my peers, and had supported myself the way I had seen them do, congregating at the Port Authority where the smell of disinfectant and of urine mingled to form a boozy perfume that had the effect of turning every sordid action unserious, lightweight. And, now, what was I doing? I was merely acting out the idea of villainy from past movie villains I had seen, molding myself according to a pattern that seemed—by its very age and durability—authentic, original. It was all there in the brain, like a card file, turning from one type to another, and then taking on the salient aspects of that type that I needed to become to be able to advance a station or two in life, or in some cases to backslide [emphasis added]. (*FC* 167-168)*

These thoughts that, at bottom, he is a man of no real substance form but the counterpart to the previously mentioned anxiety William expresses regarding his fundamental worthlessness, and they reveal the degree to which a “sense of rootlessness” not to mention, as we have seen, “class and racial differences” have contributed to William’s self-abjection (Ty 150). Not only

does he believe, like Hata, that he is the bearer of some kind of “contamination” from which others must be “protect[ed],” he also fears that the “world, keying in to the frequency of unease and unbelonging that radiated so strongly in [his] heart, would do the only thing that was right and grant [him] his wish: Point at the sucker and laugh!” (*FC* 58, 251-252). As a result, he clings to Shem, for Shem possesses a “*plan*,” however spurious, and William yearns to be “overtaken by facts, tenets, by rules, some order, some architecture to give purpose to [his] unraveling existence [....]” (*FC* 144).

Part of that sense of purpose, he claims, derives from a desire to separate rich New Yorkers, practically all of them white, from their money--to make the “preemptive move of laughing first” and being the one to do the “pointing” at his would-be “tormentors”; for, after several encounters with them in his capacity as Chao, William finds himself having finally come “face to face with the enveloping extent of [his] racial grievance” (*FC* 251-252, 249). Rather than develop the “look of silent defeat, like having been handed a bill of divorce” that he says he sees on “older Asian men” or, as in the case of his own father, the look of an “insurance salesman unable to convince strangers of the value of what he had to offer—a man formed by being on the receiving end of a steady string of noes,” William is determined to escape the “indignity of poverty” and a lifetime of hard work coupled with humiliation upon humiliation (*FC* 278, 298). In cooperation with Shem, he hopes to “reverse everything, turn the tenets of the social order against itself [...] so that the hollowness of their [i.e. the privileged, white Americans’] code, of their hierarchies [would be] revealed” (*FC* 329).

Furthermore, he seeks recompense for the injustices dealt Preciosa, or at least the satisfaction of avenging her and restoring some of her humanity to her. For, her life

demonstrates not only the extent to which the legacies of colonialism and U.S. imperialism pervade present day attitudes toward Filipinos, but also the insidious ways in which the material conditions of neocolonialism and global capitalism have worked in tandem to transform certain bodies, such as William's and hers, into commodities. As mentioned previously, during her early days in New York, she dreamt of becoming an actress. Unfortunately, she tells William in a rare, unguarded moment of confession, her biggest and only official role was that of a possessed 'savage' in a play entitled *Primitives*, which portrays the experiences of missionaries "who go to some country in Central America and try to set up its first Christian village" and which was so well received that it won a Tony Award (*FC* 125). This last detail reveals the extent to which the audience, no matter how educated, was able to suspend its disbelief, readily turning the "colonial gaze" upon her and unquestioningly accepting a Filipino woman as a ranting, inarticulate, bare-breasted Central American native (Koshy, 2004, 102).

The highly provocative spectacle, which was made all the more provocative because a deeply shamed and angered Preciosa—humiliated by having Filipino friends in the audience see her reduced to a babbling, partially nude tribeswoman--gave a bedeviled performance that frightened even the other actors in the play, was enthusiastically received by non-Filipino/a viewers. "[R]eturned to the pages of a history book, all her English unlearned, her beautiful blue-black passport handed back," she conformed perfectly to the premise of the play, which "highlights the selectivity in the construction of the colonial archive, within which signs of the Filipino's already-existing acculturation, like Christianity, are erased by the quest for a native subject who can represent the antithesis of American civilization" (*FC* 313; Koshy, 2004, 103).

Casting Preciosa as a gibberish-speaking ‘primitive’ marked a refusal to acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of her individual identity, and it effected an erasure of her ethnic identity, thus suggesting that all brown bodies are interchangeable. At the same time, the director’s choice to fill the role of the defiant, naked ‘savage’ with a Filipina simultaneously was a product of and reproduced the “identification of Asian sexuality with forms of desire that are excluded from the parameters of a civilized moral order, and hence the object of fascination because they are seen to represent that part of the self that must be surrendered to the exigencies of civilized life” (Koshy, 2004, 103).

This, however, was not the performance of her life. For Preciosa, almost everything related to life in the United States has entailed using her racialized body to achieve her goals. Before being cast in *Primitives*, circumstances required that she play a much more crucial, albeit riskier, role that would enable her to escape a life of poverty and ostracism. Preciosa confides to William that after being duped into prostitution as a young girl and eventually fleeing the brothel where she was confined, she was disowned by her family for the shame she had brought upon them. Embittered by her experiences, she says that she, subsequently, formulated a plan to get out of the Philippines, or what she thought of as that “paradise of TB and malnutrition” (*FC* 310). She placed an advertisement in a publication which matched “old white Americans with potential brides from the Third World, young girls filled with the talent for pliancy which in American girls had long gone out of fashion” (*FC* 309). They were mostly Vietnam veterans who were, she recalls, in search of a “servant, a nurse, a companion, and whenever and wherever they wanted, an imaginative and responsive whore,” and they saw in young Filipina women the possibility of a “reinstatement of their carefree and powerful youth”

(*FC* 309). Understanding that many of these men viewed “indebtedness as an aphrodisiac” and wanting to be perceived by them as a “traditional” girl, Preciosa says that she hired a group of people she did not know to play her family and set them up in a “reasonably dilapidated” house near a “squatter area.” To emphasize the closeness of the impoverished family, she also instructed her ‘mother’ to act as if Preciosa were a “precious and rare commodity” when potential husbands arrived to inspect the merchandise (*FC* 309-310).

Ultimately, Preciosa settled on an elderly gentleman from Texas and, luckily, avoided a life of “voluntary servitude” or other more disastrous fates, such as death for disobedience--things which, she had been warned by women working in the brothel where she was formerly imprisoned, might happen were she to marry an American (*FC* 310). Any fears she may have had proved to be unfounded, as her husband, she recounts, was kind, if ancient, ugly, and covered in “carbuncles”; and, he never resorted to threats or violence to “reinforce the orders his kind had historically grown used to issuing to her kind.” She endured sex with the “frog” for these reasons and because it was, after all, “sex in Texas, U.S.A.”—compensation for the coveted “blue-black passport” and for the opportunity to have “transcended something,” presumably, poverty and life as a commodity for sex tourists and servicemen (*FC* 311).

So, while Preciosa experienced objectification, she also cashed in, so to speak, on the “sexual capital” that Asian women have “accrued” in the wake of white women’s growing demands for equality and challenges to the “model of family-centered femininity” and in relation to the controversial pathologizing of black femininity and family life in order to better her economic situation (Koshy, 2004, 16; Lee 184). However, she explains to William that upon striking out on her own after her husband’s death and trying to make a name for herself in

New York, she found that she was limited in her career by the inescapable fact of the very same body that once enabled her to live in relative luxury in Texas. Feeling the need to redeem herself after *Primitives*, she sought other roles, only to be told “again and again” by writers and directors that they couldn’t see her “embodying” the words of the characters for whom she was expected to speak and was, therefore, “better suited to silence” as an extra (*FC* 313). She was only suited to be a voiceless background feature whose body could function as a medium through which ‘primitive’ ghosts and the dying spirits of old soldiers might be channeled, but which would also act as a prison of identity, an inescapable reminder of the fact that she would always be exiled from mainstream American society.

Consequently, in the contemporary time of the novel, she finds herself “torn between the competing pulls of the fiction of the promised land, on the one hand, and the fiction of the sustaining mother country.” As William remarks, she is, like him, the quintessential “eternal immigrant”—an apt description of the Filipino condition in that, historically, Filipinos have occupied a murky position within the American polity (*FC* 326). Initially subjected to racial violence by the U.S. military that was unprecedented in its scope until World War II, Filipinos, in the process of being subjugated, “confounded U.S. disciplinary regimes of knowledge production and surveillance” by employing various forms of “insurgency” and “resistance” constitutive of and refined during an ongoing three-hundred-year-old struggle for sovereignty (San Juan 444). At the same time, they were at the center of a controversy initiated by President McKinley’s policy of “benevolent assimilation” and positioned as neither “American citizen nor alien” until the Tydings- McDuffie Independence Act of 1934 officially deemed them aliens (San Juan 447; Ngai 96; San Juan 449). Now, as Ong’s narrative shows, Filipinos

are still assailed by stereotypes from days gone by and, often, forced to bow to economic oppression by the United States; therefore, they must continue to fight for “reinscription” of their “subject-ion” as an “independent” and “self-reliant” people (San Juan 457).

Like Doc’ Hata, Ong’s Filipino characters have led a wanderer’s life, devoid of a “core” because circumstances have compelled them to leave their home country and “mold” themselves to the situation at hand as a matter of survival in new country that reluctantly tolerates them (*FC* 167, *GL* 290). Realizing that it was becoming “harder and harder to keep up the fiction that she had something to gain in this country, that she could give something back, or could be made to feel productive,” Preciosa, “as if carrying out some deficiency encoded into the genes, a hunger, some basic discontent,” disappears to “another in a long line of somewhere elses” (*FC* 262, 326). William, on the other hand, remains, putting his faith in Shem’s ‘plan’ and relying on the “bilious hate” which is “radiating” from and “invigorating” his “black, black heart” in order to sustain him as he engages in his quest to exact justice for the “hurt” he feels at having been perpetually “cast aside” (*FC* 306, 355). At the same time that he believes reprisal is in order, though, he also experiences moments of self-loathing and self-destructiveness, during which he wants “someone to treat [him] like the *fake* [he] is” and to reveal him for what he believes he really is, namely: a “high school dropout with gutter tastes [emphasis added]” (*FC* 209, 280). He wants to live something other than the life of gestures that Hata has been fated to live.

William is too deeply embedded in the lives of his ‘clients,’ however, to risk unmasking, which leads him to question exactly who “was being liberated. Was I now free?” (*FC* 210) In trading in his life as a small time hustler turned office clerk and then opting to

prostitute himself out as a phony Feng Shui master servicing an incestuous circle of rich and powerful clients, many of whom harbor some sort of grudge against another in their set and want him to facilitate revenge, William becomes ensconced in a plot that will eventually spiral out of control and lead to damage far worse than that visited upon Cardie Kerchpoff in that it is irreversible. Interestingly, although he claims to be airing racial grievances by primarily pursuing white individuals, he seems to be most disgusted by other people of color who have capitalized on their status as fetishized Other in much the same way he does. Feeling that he is dangerously close to being exposed, he sets about ‘fixing’ as many houses as he can to make money and, in the process, comes across a famous director of musicals, Peter L. He feels no solidarity with this man who is of mixed race, but rather ridicules him:

This man was the least humble of anyone I’d met. Ironically, he was part black and part Native American (a jackpot, guilt-inducing combination!), but that was precisely why he thought his achievement possessed an exponential sense of victory—because he had double color to overcome. In my presence, he trotted out the same tired-sounding rhetoric of having to be ‘ten times better than a white counterpart’ to succeed at the level he had. Even if true, this was only one in a long series of excuses and explanations he was offering all afternoon—and the defensiveness which underscored these pronouncements undercut the picture of himself as an unqualified success that he was trying to paint [...]

[P]erhaps his having been a colored man wasn’t a hindrance at all, but rather a boost, seeing that so many people, eager to apologize for history’s wrongdoing to the black and the Native American races, conspired to crown this man—chosen for no other reason than that he was close at hand: a literal two birds by which one stone would provide the easy solution—as the king of what had been essentially a white American enterprise—the musical—thereby forcing the twentieth century to a close with the homiletic sight of the banner of ‘the brotherhood of man’ flying sturdily and high above the American horizon. (*FC* 318-319, 321)

William’s biting commentary, in part, underscores the fact that, as detailed in Chapter Two, redress for discriminatory practices directed toward and offenses committed against Asian

Americans and recognition for their contributions to building and defending the nation have been slow in coming, if at all. Further, it points to the racial tensions that have been created and exacerbated due to the Cold War construction of Asians as the ‘model minority.’

Lee writes that during the 1950s and 1960s, “ethnicity theory” became popular among liberals who, eager to promote the image of America as a “color blind society,” articulated a “doctrine of individual competition,” and in doing so, “evaded a critique of the historical category of race altogether.” This particular theory extended the “promise of equality,” but stressed that this equality was not to be achieved through “political organization and community development.” Rather it would be secured through “individual effort, cultural assimilation, and political accommodation--a move intended to “develop the Negro” while, simultaneously, silencing and rendering benign “black demands for the systematic and structural dismantling of racial discrimination.” Set over and against representations of the ‘rebellious’ black community, “the representation of Asian-American communities as self-contained, safe, and politically acquiescent became a powerful example of the success of the American creed in resolving the problems of race” (Lee 160). The institution of the stereotype of the model minority, though meant to resolve the “problem of race,” only allowed for the creation of a hierarchy of race. Over the past thirty or so years this hierarchy has fostered increasing tension between various Asian and black communities, the culmination of which was the multi-racial rioting in Los Angeles in 1992 which cost Korean immigrant business owners over half of the \$850 million dollars in damages done (Lee 205).

That a hierarchy was in the process of being constructed and was the product not only of assumptions about race and ethnicity, but gender, too, is further evidenced in the fact that

whereas, at the time that “ethnicity theory” was being heavily promoted, priority was given to preventing the marriage of black men and white women. Meanwhile, there was a steady influx of Asian war brides whose “Americanization—Orientalism domesticated” formed a crucial component in restoring the American ‘promise’ of inclusion and equality. The war bride’s “ethnic assimilation and domesticity” proffered the potential to “restore credibility to the ‘American creed’ that reconstructed the American family as modern, universal, and multi-ethnic, if not exactly multi-racial.” Transformed in this “tale of Americanization” from “dangerously transgressive into a symbol of domesticity,” she also became a “stalwart of a restored postwar patriarchy.” Conversely, Asian men “*remained outside the American family, marginalized, invisible, and racially Other* [emphasis added]” (Lee 162).

While the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 finally lifted decades old restrictions on Asian immigration and encouraged many Asian professionals, particularly those skilled in the sciences and technology, to settle in the United States, after the mid 1970s, the demographics of Asian immigration shifted such that, now, “working-class immigrants and refugees” comprise the majority of the Asian immigrants. Nonetheless, the myth of the ‘model minority’ has persisted partially due to Asian Americans’ reluctance to utilize social welfare despite “disproportionate” poverty rates. Lee argues that one reason for this reticence can be located in a collective mistrust of the government on the part of Asian Americans that has developed as a result of recent historical injustices, such as the internment of the Japanese and the 1957 Chinese Confession Program, which was used as an excuse to deport those with leftist leanings and those who sympathized with Communist China (Lee 188-189, 151). And, this mistrust was/is reciprocal, as the stereotype has persisted in a slightly altered form since the Vietnam

War. While still valorizing Asian Americans for their “economic productiveness,” Americans also “transferred” on to them “anxiety over economic decline and the psychic trauma” of this war, which, incidentally, acted as a reminder of other wars and insurrections linked to the “American imperial career in Asia and the Pacific”—conflicts, wherein all Asians were regarded as “gooks.” Lee states that, in this revised version of the concept of the ‘model minority,’ which also positions them as scapegoats responsible for the “breakdown of American unity” that characterized the sociopolitical climate of the Vietnam years, “[Asians] appear silently, like the Viet Cong, as an alien threat in these narratives of multicultural dystopia and besieged nationhood, at once ubiquitous, invisible, ersatz and inauthentic” (Lee 191,190).

While William is a product of the working-class family which Lee describes as constitutive of the latest wave of Asian immigration, he does not want to be the ‘model’ citizen, but strives to be the architect of the destruction of American unity—to be the secret agent who masquerades as the model minority in order to deprive his victims of class privilege and prosperity. William’s success depends on how well he performs an amicable, manageable version of a minority persona that otherwise both amazes and frightens his followers. However, his aversion to his mixed-race client is not solely governed by “class disdain,” and it belies his claim that he intends to take up his racial grievances primarily with white clients (*FC* 333). Arguably, William is, despite his goal to create upheaval, paradoxically, influenced, to some degree, by a belief in the artificial racial hierarchy which has positioned Asians as ‘model’ citizens over and against African-Americans, who have been “identified with social chaos and violence”; for, despite his claims that he would never “think in terms of duping” the mostly

African-American and Latino doormen that he met, in “assessing [himself] against these men,” he concedes that while they were “the way he had been. What differentiated him from them was his “ambition” (Lee 184; *FC* 269). At the same time, it is also a distinct possibility that William is motivated by a certain envy and contempt which is prompted by his belief that the director has been able to prosper as a result of collective guilt felt in relation to some, but not all, the groups who have been historically oppressed by white Americans. As an ‘invisible’ and ‘inauthentic’ American, William is like the children of another of his “racially mixed” clients, Rowley P, in that both William and Rowley’s children are “committed to inherited histories of racial hurts” for which they have “sought to find present-day equivalents.” But, whereas the latter had been “safely cocooned” from “very real and poisonous prejudice” by virtue of their “wealthy upbringing,” William was never so fortunate (*FC* 113).

Exactly what misfortune befalls Peter L is not revealed. Even though the interaction between the director and William serves as an interesting elucidation of attitudes about race and of the complexities of race relations, whatever William does to the director cannot match the scope of the destruction he carries out, interestingly, against other Asian Americans at the behest of Shem, who wants to hurt the famous author that ‘stole’ his wife, and of Rowley, who is desirous of avenging his deceased wife. The target of his malevolence is Isuzu “Suzy” Yamada, “the unofficial queen of her set” (*FC* 330). To assist him in setting up Ms. Yamada, William seeks out Gurinder, previously known as Neil, who was once the janitor/bouncer for the peep show being run under William’s apartment, but who now uses his Middle-Eastern appearance to help him peddle access to fabricated sites of terrorism and terrorist lairs in New York. He asks Gurinder/Neil to break into Suzy’s house and cause enough damage so that she

has no choice but to call upon Master Chao, who has thoroughly researched his client beforehand in order to uncover her fears and weaknesses. He then brings Preciosa along to play her final role as a 'primitive' shaman. Together the two 'diagnose' Suzy's problems, 'fix' Suzy's house, and rob her of certain items, which they later pawn.

However, Suzy seems unstoppable, and William's situation is further complicated by the fact that he falls in love with "the beauty"—"something purely impersonal," as he puts it, of her rebellious son, Kendo (*FC* 150). In fact, upon first encountering William, Kendo recognizes that he is a sham, and this pleases Kendo. Unaware that he is fetishized by William, Kendo, on the one hand, wants to befriend William because he sees in him a comrade of sorts. Having been burdened throughout his school years with a "stamp on his forehead that read: Most Likely Not To Trouble the Waters" as a result of his Asian heritage, Kendo, William surmises, "wanted badly to break free of it." As with William in his younger days, Kendo looks to African-Americans as a role model of masculinity; he thinks them "lucky" because they had that "revolt, that rebuke built into the way they looked, the way they spoke" (*FC* 226). Kendo "store[s] away" the "personal histories [of his Latino and African-American friends] in the event that one day he need[s] to pick a disguise for himself," showing that he, too, in response to being subjected to the myth of the model minority, has bought into discourses that hypermasculinize African-American and Latino men and paint them as a violent, unruly subjects (*FC* 229).

Moreover, Kendo seems to have a certain reverence for his real father who is Chinese and refuses to conform to the mores that govern his mother's world. After divorcing Suzy, Kendo's father takes an African-American wife, and Kendo describes the pair to William as

perfect for one another in that they are both “downwardly mobile.” Apparently not registering that William is ‘Chinese,’ Suzy attributes her former husband’s ‘failure’ to the Chinese characteristic of being “too carefree” in comparison to the Japanese who believed in “formalities” (*FC* 178). This reveals yet another instance of emasculation and ethnocentrism that is not so different from that inherent in the comment about the servile qualities of Filipinos made by the unknown Asian man mentioned earlier.

As with his unconventional father, whom Kendo admires precisely because he is “downwardly mobile,” Kendo regards William as an emblem of “negative heroism.” He believes that like himself, William “align[s] himself with the ‘seedy’ and not altogether savory things out of a need for recreation” (*FC* 233, 226). At the same time, though, Kendo wishes to use his knowledge of William’s secret to control him and does so by stalking the latter and forcing him to commit petty crimes. Little does the young, naive Kendo know that finding himself “at the mercy of a potential ‘unmasker,’” William will do anything to survive (*FC* 121). Therefore, when Gurinder is paid by Suzy to kill William after finding out that she has been duped, and Kendo tries to intervene, but is stabbed in the process, William foregoes calling for help and allows his ‘friend’ to die. This, even as he sees that the dying Kendo is no real threat, but is instead a “simple boy without the vitalizing aspect of hate, of revolt” (*FC* 346). What is worse, in his last moments, Kendo must look on, helplessly, as William coldly wipes the knife clean of fingerprints and places it beside him. However beseechingly he regards William, it finally becomes clear to him that his friend’s “stoniness” in response to the situation is no “joke” (*FC* 345, 347).

William's grand plan to "reinvent [himself] so totally" that his "footprints" would be "erased" and he would "not be found" is rendered untenable (*FC* 236). Afraid of being linked to the murder and having been publicly exposed as a fraud by an old 'colleague' from the Port Authority bathrooms, William seeks refuge first in upstate New York at the home of his friend, Devo. Oddly enough, he seems to feel no remorse for what has transpired. Instead, he continues to think of himself in terms of a messianic arbiter of justice. In his friend's upstate home, he thinks of his "accusers" and imagines them, "waiting to come face to face with the man who had mirrorlike, revealed them as the buffoons that they were, the man who in himself had incarnated every single millennial fear that they'd nurtured, wishing for these things to come true, be proven right, so that they could finally face their guilty consciences squarely and be purged of the fear that was the price exacted by such a life of drive, such forward momentum" (*FC* 353). Even Kendo, he thinks, got what he 'wanted,' which was to rest among the "thieves and skank celebrities whose predilections had as good as turned them into compass needles pointing toward death" (*FC* 354). To evade capture, William decides to flee to California, where he believes he will, "like Jesus Christ," be "resurrected." Once there, he feels certain that it will be possible to turn "over the pages of a book, to a new chapter, a blank page," all without having to be "good." The desire for that he blithely attributes to the folly of youth (*FC* 354-355).

While he may escape punishment by relocating to California, William cannot escape himself or his past, even though he says he likes California precisely because it is "full" of people like him--"ghosts with histories receding daily" (*FC* 374). First, he lives in fear, certain that an unknown man has been sent to track him down and kill him (*FC* 373). Also, he is

confronted with an article in *New York Magazine* written presumably by Shem C about a Mr. William Paul. William Paul, the article asserts, was a man of “*mixed parentage*” who could not reconcile his “*split character*” and wanted so desperately to be “*white*” that he did everything possible to subdue the signs of his “*Asian heritage*” only to find that “*what allowed him entrée into the white world was to adopt a highly exaggerated version of the self he had killed a long time ago: the Hong Kong Oriental*” (FC 367). While this is the story of the infamous Master Chao and his treacherous deeds, it is also William Paulinha’s story, too, in that, like Chao, William had aspired through the denial of his ethnic heritage to be a part of that world of white privilege and enjoy the respect associated with white manhood. It is possible that he still wants this or, at least, still wants to be someone else—to escape the ghosts of his life as a Filipino. For, although he attempts to write his own story in response to Shem’s—a story that features him as a proud Filipino protagonist, he finally reverts to attempting to pass as something that he is not. His story breaks off with the following: “*My name is William Narcisco Paulinha. I am Filipino. Not Chinese. I used to say yes to everything. Are you Puerto Rican? Why not? Dominican? Of course. Brazilian? Not only that, the boy from Ipanema to boot. Usually, these things didn’t matter. Small lies, useful for ending unwanted conversations two lines in*” (FC 372).

Despite his apparent desire to embrace his identity, William cannot seem to completely do so. When the opportunity to align himself with an image that is nearer to a Hollywood image of masculinity manifests itself, he seizes upon it. “Walking the malls of L.A., I felt that I was a truly changed person. It was only a matter of time before I began not looking Chinese, or even Filipino. I didn’t know how it happened. Living in the sun, I turned darker by the day.

Most people mistook me for a John Wayne Indian. Sure, I told them. What tribe? They'd ask. And I would pick out the obvious brand names: Navajo, Cherokee, Creek—names I'd heard from the movies [....]" (*FC* 374). Though he could never be that cinematic epitome of white American manhood, John Wayne, he could at least be mistaken for one of the 'noble' warriors of the American frontier. Since he does not see himself represented in mainstream cultural productions, this alternative appears to appeal to William. (Never mind that behind the glamorized Indian portrayed in the old Westerns is the real Native American, who was subjected to numerous broken promises by a white hegemony and is still suffering the consequences of a brutal legacy of displacement and genocide.)

That he is drawn to playing this role casts doubt on his final assertions concerning his condition. He states that:

[M]y life remained an uninflected one of stalking around unbothered, until finally one day a thought succeeded in forming itself: that what had been a lifelong irritant—that I walked around the world unseen, as if invisible—had now become a strange and beautiful blessing, freeing me to live my life all over again, as if the previous one had only been a rough draft, a vague outline to be crossed over, exceeded, to be transcended, as if that life was the earthly one and this one, the California one, with myself benumbed and calm and floating inside the bubble of mall after white mall—places that were like hospitals with their piped-in music and blanching light—as if this life, finally, was the heavenly one. (*FC* 377)

First, there is a conflict between his professed comfort with "invisibility" and his pleasure in being taken for a "John Wayne Indian"—an easily recognizable and problematic but culturally-esteemed simulation. Moreover, the fact that he derives solace from the "manufactured" atmosphere of shopping malls and that he likens them to "hospitals," places for healing or dying, and counts them as part of something approximating heaven makes it unclear as to

whether or not he has truly transcended anything, despite the fact that he claims to feel the nearness of “God” now more than ever (*FC* 374). If he is simply “benumbed” but not healed, then it would appear that he has merely ensconced himself in a paradise of commodities as a means of escaping his particular reality; he has become one with those things which he coveted as a child in the Philippines, which he scoffed at and yet also desired as a hustler, and which finally represent nothing and have no value other than exchange value—empty symbols whose worth, like that of Master Chao, depend on what is invested in them by external forces. Much like the ending of Lee’s novel, this particular ending does not exude hope of redemption or recognition for its lonely protagonist.

Chapter 4

“You can’t go home again.” Masculinity and the Challenges of Transnational Identity

If, as in the cases of William Narcisco Paulinha and Doc’ Hata, disenfranchisement within the context of the racial hierarchy that exists in the United States translates into a loss of sense of self and the abjection of Others and acts of violence as a means of constructing and securing a tenuous sense of self, then what happens when Asian-American men must develop a voice and find a place for themselves in an international setting? More specifically what happens when they find themselves in an Asian country, perhaps a homeland, to which, by virtue of having spent most of their lives in the United States, they no longer truly possess a connection? And, finally, related to this last question, what are the difficulties they face when they have never really experienced any secure sense of attachment or of belonging to the United States or a mother country because they are of mixed parentage? In other words, what are the implications for identity formation when the protagonists, as a result of either immigration or of being of two or more ethnic backgrounds, find themselves caught between cultures?

In the next two novels I discuss, Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch* (1998) and Don Lee's *Country of Origin* (2004), many of the characters struggle with feelings of displacement, and even though they often possess a keen understanding of the racial, political, and historical conditions in which they are enmeshed and that contribute to their failure to be regarded as subjects, this understanding is not sufficient to prevent them from participating in precisely the sets of systems that work to oppress both them and the other non-white individuals with whom they are affiliated. In the case of Chua's unnamed male protagonist, who will be the focus of this chapter, this means engaging in precisely the kind of commodification of the Other to which he has been subjected by his well-to-do white boyfriend. While in the United States, he is the possession and plaything of his white lover. However, once he is in Bangkok, he realizes that it is he who has the power, albeit limited as we shall see, to 'buy' the bodies of young Thai men, and it is his encounter with one in particular that permits readers to experience the anger and frustration the narrator feels regarding his unsuccessful attempts to navigate multiple cultures and successfully reconcile aspects of the various cultures that comprise his identity.

Meanwhile, for Don Lee's protagonist, Tom Hurley, and peripheral characters like *sansei* CIA operative, Vincent Kitamura, who will be analyzed in the next and final chapter, it means concocting false histories and 'forgetting' their connections to the homeland in order to be accepted into the microcosm of the United State's Foreign Service Office in Tokyo—embraced by an organization that in recognizing them as political subjects will make them 'Men.' What ties these two together is not only their Asian ancestry, but also Tom's professed love for Vincent's white wife and their separate affiliations with the missing PhD student involved in the sex industry whose personal history as a woman of mixed descent in many

ways parallels Tom's and functions to give insight into the way that the men in the novel respond to their own conditions as postnational individuals.

Like Chang-rae Lee's and Han Ong's works, neither of these novels functions as a simple "resistance narrative," wherein the protagonists struggle to assert themselves and find a way to overcome obstacles to enfranchisement associated with race or, in the case of Chua's narrator, race and sexuality. Rather, insofar as these are "more intricate narrative[s] of complicity and resistance," they trouble "any sort of coherent notion of what it means to be Asian American," and, by extension, they point to problems inherent in (re)defining the Asian-American Male as subject (Sohn 119; Nguyen in Sohn 119). Even when living abroad and freed from the strictures of hegemonic constructions of race in the United States that position Asian Americans as 'internal aliens' and 'little brown brothers,' for example, the characters must struggle to construct viable alternatives. This is attributable, in part, to the fact that members of the host country wholly discount or only recognize their Asian heritage and/or the individuals in question are affiliated with American institutions abroad, wherein the racial hierarchy persists or other hierarchies related to Western neo-imperialism exist. Furthermore, the way in which these characters try to construct themselves is usually problematic because they have internalized discourses of race and class prevalent in the United States. This gives rise to an unfortunate condition in which postnational individuals' interactions with others are colored by these internalized discourses. As a result, they are prone to treating native subjects and Others, who, like themselves, have been abjected, with the same disdain to which they have been subjected. The characters to be discussed in this chapter and the one that follows inhabit a transnational limbo and must work to define themselves within that transitory space

where perceptions of them are constantly shifting according to who is doing the looking and to which they bring their own sets of preconceived ideas about the local population, as well as about the American and European expatriates with whom they come into contact.

In order to begin to illustrate the distress that some postnational individuals may experience and even create when they return 'home' in order to find and establish an identity, it is informative to first look at Lawrence Chua's novel, as it gives detailed, (nearly) first-person insight into the torturous affair of attempted 'rebirth' in a region of the world that has undergone as much change as has the wayward, 'Americanized' protagonist. Both the countries and the individual depicted have been caught up in the increasingly complicated relationships that evolve out of and are shaped by the forces of globalization, and this makes for a volatile cocktail wherein issues of power and control among the disenfranchised are at stake. Chua's narrative is set in Bangkok and Penang and tells of an unnamed Asian-American narrator of Thai-Malaysian descent who has left his American lover, Jim, after becoming increasingly dismayed by the latter's tendency to constantly objectify him, in order to join his brother Luk, an architect working in Bangkok. He embarks on the journey with the hope of reestablishing connections with the people and cultures of his childhood homes and thus, to (re)discover himself.

However, what starts out as a quest to recover long lost components of his identity and to access new facets of it in order to feel a sense of wholeness quickly transforms into a descent into drug abuse attributable, partially, to his obsessive, unrequited love for Thong, a young Thai hustler whose name, not coincidentally, means 'gold.' The narrator can never truly 'possess' Thong, despite the money and care he lavishes upon him. In fact, he only deludes

himself as he desperately insists on the commonalities that the two share and dares to entertain the notion that Thong may not be motivated by financial gain after all, but by love. As a result of the failed relationship with Thong, he emerges not with the sense of wholeness that he seeks, but rather, arguably, even more psychically fractured than before. This is because he is ultimately unable to escape vestiges of his past relationship, wherein he was positioned as yet another exotic ‘accessory’ to be owned and shown off to others by his interior designer boyfriend in the United States, and he is simultaneously regarded as nothing other than one more ‘john’ in a long line of American sex tourists during his stay in Bangkok. Regardless of his Thai heritage and the fact that he was brought up in relative poverty and that he had functioned as a trophy boyfriend for a white man, he is not embraced by those with whom he thinks he might have the most in common, namely: Bangkok’s sex workers; for, the whole scene is much more complicated than he anticipates.

Despite his earnest desire to establish some link with the country and its people, he is alienated from them not only by the fact that he is only able to speak rudimentary Thai as a result of his long absence and his father’s insistence that only English be spoken in the household, but also by the fact that even as he is himself consumed by Jim, he and his brother are not beyond using the power of his American capital to purchase the bodies of Others. Regardless of his memories of the “tin walls” in which he was born, a gulf between the past and the present has opened up. He now understands that if he and his brother had “not returned as architect and tourist” he would be “stuck down there, [s]hoveling cement over wet sand” just like the laborers working on one of Luk’s latest projects. Life would be “unbearable”—“not possible” or only “something to endure” (*Gold by the Inch*, hereafter cited as *GI* 17).

The workers remind the narrator that the Thailand of his childhood was underdeveloped and that that he was once poor and disposable like them. In fact, at the end of the novel many of them die or are injured in the collapse of an unfinished building designed by Luk—a fact which the narrator ponders after hearing the news and finding that Luk has fled the country, but seemingly without sympathy. Flatly, he states that he will repeatedly use the number of bodies pulled from the rubble—147—to place bets and buy lottery tickets. He will use the number, he says, long after he has forgotten its meaning (*GI* 199). With drugs and American money filling his pockets throughout most of the novel, Chua's protagonist is often casually able to dissociate himself from poverty and forget the mean circumstances into which he was born. Thoughtlessly he dismisses his early life and the Thailand of the poor as “a dingy sideshow” of which he is no longer a part. As a result of his own recently acquired relative economic prosperity and the abundant and inexpensive amenities made possible by the rapid development of Southeast Asia in the 90s, the contemporary time of the novel, his prospects are, he proclaims early in the novel, “endless” (*GI* 17). If, as a child, he was part of a national and personal “sideshow,” his status as an American in this new Thailand, he initially believes, enables to him to assume center stage for the first time in his life. The personal myth of his rebirth as a man of consequence eventually becomes more problematic than the narrator anticipates, though, in that he will frequently try to resurrect and reconcile the reality of his childhood and the reality of his status as a white man's plaything with the image of himself as an agentic, influential force in order to try to forge a connection with and, simultaneously, colonize the object of his desire—Thong.

The schism between what the narrator once was, child of the Bangkok slums, and who he is now, an amalgamation of poor Southeast Asian boy and relatively privileged, albeit still marginalized, young, American man, is made apparent in an exchange with a young 'bar boy,' aptly nicknamed Olé after a "cheap candy," whom he meets while out cruising local nightspots with Luk. The narrator casually asks why Olé is in the bar and not in school, but quickly realizes the stupidity of his question--how he has "betray[ed]" their "fundamental difference" (*GI 9*). He tacitly attributes his indiscretion to how long he's been away, but fails to articulate that the "difference" of which he speaks has less to do with temporal distance or issues concerning character or ability and more to do with the advantages to which he has had access to as a result of his upbringing in one of those First World nations he will later criticize. To atone for the momentary lapse in judgment, he somewhat dramatically vows to do penance by spending the rest of his life in Bangkok, but "only" if he can "fall in love" (*GI 9*).

However, any remorse the protagonist feels is undermined by comments that he makes which suggest that he has lost the capacity to identify with Bangkok's poor and downtrodden. On the one hand, the narrator, who is descended from the Han and aware of the degree of power and wealth that Thais and Malaysians of Chinese descent have amassed relative to that of other local ethnic groups and the attending resentment felt by some of those groups, vehemently protests that he is not "some chinky dentist's son" who gets to travel to Thailand every year, but that he has had to "work hard" to return in order to make the point that he is, on some level, like the male prostitutes with whom he associates (*GI 13*). At the same time, though, almost immediately after he expresses something akin to remorse for having highlighted how economic disparity has determined how his life and someone like Boi's life

have been affected, he remarks, after having done a prodigious amount of cocaine—still a fashionable and expensive drug in the time in which the novel is set-- that he likes how he looks in a photo taken of him in his Armani suit as he sits in a “nice” bar outfitted to conform to an “American fifties retro theme”—a place where the children of Bangkok’s elite congregate. “Besides the fact that I look kind of cute in this picture, what I like most is the feeling it gives you. You the voyeur. That you’re part of something you never had” (*GI* 11). While he considers himself an outsider as a result no doubt of his life as a “trophy boyfriend” in the United States and his impoverished childhood, he has no problem navigating the territory of those to whom he refers as the “lost tribe of the Beautiful” with their “fresh faces” and “arrived English” (Sohn 109, *GI* 10).

In a separate but loosely related incident, Thong and the narrator are enjoying an ice cream cone at a cappuccino bar in one of Bangkok’s sprawling shopping malls, Central Plaza, when they are approached by a young girl begging for money. When Thong asks if the narrator feels “pity” for her the narrator must “scrape his veins for the right words” and finally consult his dictionary to convey his emotions. He points to the Thai word for “empathy” (*GI* 34). His sentiment is, perhaps, motivated by the poverty into which he was born and the lean years his family experienced upon their arrival in the United States. But, just as quickly as he discounts the transgression he has committed in his conversation with Boi, so does he summarily dismiss the girl as an entity that disturbs the ‘paid-in-full’ illusion of love that he is enjoying with Thong. In fact, she becomes emblematic of the larger problem of global inequalities, the recognition of which ultimately taxes the narrator and makes him happy for the distance from the visible signs of such inequalities that money makes possible.

I watch the girl amble into the crush of milling consumers outside the bar. Somehow, the poverty that spawned her seems even more remote than she is. We were growing, far above her tiny vanishing figure. Soon she would mean nothing. We were growing so fast and we needed respite from people like her, from the fried locusts and stumbling sidewalks outside the mall. We needed to retreat from those reminders.

Now I know what development means: air conditioning.

With air conditioning, we can have civilization, which exists only in temperate climates. We can abandon the tropical streets to beggars and leave the temples in ruins. Those places are no longer safe. They're pockmarked with crime and disease. The only safety is in the private ammonia-scented of the mall like this one. Here we can find happiness and security under the oppression of the senses. (*GI* 35)

Interestingly, as in the scene in which the narrator, numbed by drugs, feels a sense of belonging, he is similarly desensitized within the sterilized microcosm of consumerism that is so far removed from the poverty-stricken, unwashed masses and the culture and traditions with which he had originally intended to reacquaint himself and is, therefore, able to "shed" one of his "cumbersome presences," in particular the "one that walks with the stilted pace of a boy who's been wounded on the playground." More specifically, he is momentarily overtaken by this feeling of freedom in the mall as he gazes upon a "display case full of glittering metal and wheels of unending chain [...] Gold by the inch" (*GI* 35). And, perhaps, in what will prove to be a futile effort to secure his 'right' to Thong's body and emotions, the protagonist impulsively purchases a gold ring for him.

Situated in a developing country, the narrator is overtaken by a desire to enjoy privilege and to access and utilize the hitherto unavailable forms of power that money and American citizenship automatically bestow upon the otherwise disenfranchised, queer Asian-American. In Thailand, his desires starkly conflict with what he tells us he feels when confronted with the

living embodiments of uneven development. On the one hand, there is the purported “empathy” he feels for the girl and the remorse he expresses after his encounter with Boi. Fairly remarkable, too, is, his apparent understanding, however flawed, of what colonialism and neo-imperialism have wrought on Southeast Asia, as well as the concomitant ire which seems to overtake him when he considers the plight of the colonized. On the other hand, however, strong indications of his desire to maintain control over others are apparent. His sympathetic feelings and outrage at the indignities associated with subjugation of Southeast Asian peoples taken together with his apparent need to assert dominance make him a difficult character to analyze. Still, due precisely to his nebulous status, he is an important figure who must be considered. He presents a challenge in that he is rendered meaningless except as a white man’s accessory. However, this does not mean that he does not understand “[t]he beauty of wealth and the exploitative power of sexuality” (Sohn 106). This is made apparent in his use of Jim as a means of living a life otherwise unattainable to him and in his obsession with and attempts to own the beautiful and distant Thong.

Nonetheless, the protagonist realizes that in Europe and in the United States, his worth cannot be disentangled from his sexuality, race and association with his fair-skinned benefactor. Positive legibility in the West was always contingent on his relationship with Jim. Reflecting on one occasion when he was stopped in the Paris metro by police after paying the wrong fare and was treated with disdain and smugness even after the officers had found his American passport, he says that “[a]gainst the police officer’s breath, [his] skin became a decaying act of resistance, a virus marking [him] as an illness.” Subsequent anxious remarks regarding skin in the work will be discussed later. To continue, the momentary feeling of

freedom, “pride,” and, most importantly, of being “at home” that he had experienced whilst strolling the Parisian streets were instantly dashed by the encounter (*GI* 56). The narrator remarks that this sort of thing “never” occurred when he was together with Jim, who actually thought the metro incident was a fabricated story intended to “amuse” him, and he realizes what “purpose” his former lover served in his life. Jim, he notes, had given him “the appearance of belonging: to a place, to a time, to him,” not to mention a monetary “value” determined by his functions as “decoration” and “worthy companion.” He reflects that, at that time, he was reading Adam Smith, and he notes “I was almost obsessed with my value” (*GI* 57). Obviously, this value is what gave and continues to give him his subjectivity, in a manner of speaking.

That said, the narrator is not above paying Thong, whom he, in his sex tourist fantasy, constructs as a figure that must “hold his hand” out of economic necessity (*GI* 13). As in the case of the white men who come to court Preciosa in Han Ong’s novel, the narrator operates under the assumption that “indebtedness” functions as a powerful “aphrodisiac” (*FC* 309). This assumption enables the narrator to feel as if he possesses power, however illusory, while also allowing him to believe that because he has himself been objectified and indebted, he and Thong share a special bond. In connection with the memory of his first encounter with prostitution in the form of a stranger on the train who offered the protagonist money for fellatio when he was still just a boy—an experience which simultaneously titillated, frightened and disgusted him, the narrator thinks the following regarding Thong:

Here’s what I want you to do. This is the costume I want you to wear. This is what I’m into. *My thing*. You know. You are young, driven by poverty like every generation to do this. But you’ve fallen in love with me.

We have so much in common.

I pack the bills into the hotel stationery lightly, scribble his name on the front. I leave it tucked into the English phrase book he's brought with him. I want him to leave it behind him, but he doesn't [emphasis added]. (*GI* 15)

Clearly, there is confusion and an internal conflict at work here as the narrator looks to love and be loved by Thong. Thong is not only an object of innocent fantasies--one who will readily return the protagonist's love and be grateful to hold his hand. Rather, he is essential to helping the narrator achieve other, more sinister aspirations, namely: that of transforming the beautiful, willful hustler into a repository for his unfulfilled desire for hitherto unknown control over another, or '[m]y thing' as he refers to it, trying semantically to soften any suggestion of coercion, economic or otherwise. Doing otherwise would destroy the delicate illusion of mutual love and understanding, despite the urge to enslave, that has been cultivated by the narrator.

Similarly his account of, for example, how the British pressured the Thais to grow rice for export, and how the ensuing development of the country, in turn, led local farmers to become more materialistic is riddled with contradiction, as it is a critique of semi-colonial conditions and cultural imperialism that is tinged with racism and class prejudice. Even though in the United States he sought a better quality of life by engaging in prostitution, a fact which he tends to euphemize on occasion, he condemns not only the British and modern day sex tourists, but the rural Thai population for desiring the trappings symbolic of upward mobility

and attributes the rise in prostitution, in part, to the Thai farmer's "greed"—their dissatisfaction with mere "subsistence" as a result of rapid development of the country. Even as he implicates himself, speculating that his own "origins" might be found among the "promiscuous migrants crossing rivers of piss and concrete, imported to form an impotent [landless, urban] working class," he simultaneously distances himself from what he in cruder terms describes as the darker-skinned, undereducated, northern locals (*GI* 18).

You [...] Remember other schedules walking. Remember that the dry season coincides with the sex tourism season here, *dumb brown trash* pouring in from the hills to keep their families alive during the drought. In the nineteenth century, prostitution expanded after the British pressured Thailand to grow rice for export. The small upcountry farmers had always grown rice, even in the most unpredictable of moments. But now there's a new hunger to feed. A new tempest to weather. It wasn't so much the crops that changed. It was the language. Subsistence became poverty, greed became ambition. Your great-grandparents became a resource. They learned to understand their bodies as prospects, dependent on an unquenchable commerce, dominated by foreign desires. Desires that never reach the limits of necessity [emphasis added]. (*GI* 18)

Not content to simply criticize the farmers for their avarice, he also comments on a fundamental belief that prevailed before a unified Thailand existed and is partially responsible for the current demise of upwards of 70 percent of young village women, namely: the belief that "the daughter is still responsible for the family" (*GI* 18). The advent and growth of the sex industry simply made it easier for young villagers to provide financial support and, eventually, access to 'luxury' items. There is a certain historically-rooted nostalgia for a pristine, atavistic 'peasant' body which is undercut by the narrator's own participation in the very economy he condemns.

At the same time, unwilling to accept one government minister's attempt to attribute the 'prostitution problem' to local parents' obsession with material wealth, the narrator rails against men like the Australian tourist whom he hears refer to the "country" as a "pretty bitch" that, as a matter of course, would "get raped." When speaking of the white tourist, he resumes associating himself with those whose "bod[ies]" have become "equation[s]," claiming that though he was born neither "pretty," nor a "bitch," "unseen vines tie [him] close to the equator, a place where the canals are thick with relentless history and garbage." Even though he now comprises part of that "5 percent" which, he scoffs, "gorge[s]" itself "on half of the wealth generated by the entire world" and is extremely judgmental of the farmers for their decision to 'sell' their sons and daughters—the "dumb, brown trash"— he still considers himself a part of the Third World and gives readers the sense that he is unable to disengage himself from it. (*GI* 19). Nonetheless, as has been mentioned, he takes a certain delight in the access wealth gives him to the bodies of those he at times identifies with, but also, as we see above, views condescendingly. He protests that at twenty-three he doesn't really "need to pay somebody." However, there is a part of him that savors the experience of "breaking rules," "transgressing roles, crossing borders, that kind of thing," which taking Thong on daytime dates entails (*GI* 21). On the one hand, it seems that he is implying that being able to take Thong out during the day, rather than paying the bar fee required to take him out in the evening as is the usual practice, suggests that he is somehow different from the quintessential white tourist he condemns; and, it allows him to believe that Thong may, indeed, have feelings for him.

On the other hand, "breaking the rules" may indicate his belief that he is transcending the racial hierarchies that govern gay Asian-American/Asian relationships. In "Looking for My

Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn,” Richard Fung explains that all too often in gay porn Asians and Asian Americans are depicted as “passive” recipients of the white man’s desire. And, even though they may be featured in a particular film with other non-white actors, these “men of color are not invited to participate in the internationalism that is being sold [in the narratives], except through the identification with white characters” (345). This fact in conjunction with the “desexualized image of Asian men,” he writes, “has seriously affected our relationship with one another, and often gay Asian men find it difficult to see each other beyond the terms of platonic friendship or competition, to consider other Asian men as lovers” (Fung 344). In the sense that the narrator is one of two “little boys” on a “date in the tropics,” the narrator is transgressing boundaries. Rather than the white-Asian coupling so frequently encountered not only in pornography, but also, arguably, in real life, Thong and the narrator are representative of “Asian-Asian desire” (Fung 344). David Henry Hwang has commented that in relationships between white men and Asians/Asian-Americans, “the Asian virtually always plays the role of the ‘woman’; the Rice Queen, culturally and sexually, is the ‘man.’ This pattern of relationships has become so codified that, until recently, it was considered unnatural for gay Asians to date one another. Such men would be taunted with a phrase which implied they were lesbians” (qtd. in Chang). Expounding on Hwang’s observation, Jason Chang writes in “The Truth About Gay Asian Men”: “The use of the term ‘lesbian’ to identify gay Asian men who are attracted to each other is a stunning indication of how many gay Asian men perceive that only white men are ‘real’ men and that Asian men who date each other are therefore ‘lesbians’-- two ‘women’ together. Mainstream society’s stereotyping of Asian men as feminine is raised to a grotesque level in the gay community.” Incidentally, the narrator

remarks that Thong has “the kind of body you don’t see in porn videos [...] Like a loaded gun. Powerful. Hard to imagine” (*GI* 21). This image is perhaps difficult for the narrator to envision because Thong is not the feminized, “passive,” “bottom,” “the good wife” or “houseboy” that Richard Fung tells us is so prevalent not only in American-produced gay pornography, but also, as has been noted in previous chapters, in the American popular imagination (343, 345).

That the narrator speaks of himself and Thong in diminutive terms-- “two little boys”—suggests not only the extent to which the narrator cannot fathom the idea of himself as a ‘real’ man, but also that he has displaced his own doubts about his masculinity onto the Third World hustler and sees him as an easy target of subjugation and a vessel to contain displaced anger, aggression, and pain manifested in the narrator’s assumption of First World hegemonic ideals and attitudes. As the quote above regarding how the narrator wants Thong to do what he likes and wear the “costumes” he desires suggests, the narrator is reluctant to relinquish the “houseboy fantasy” which is “one of the most persistent white fantasies about Asian men” and is “a reality in many Asian countries where economic imperialism gives foreigners, *whatever race*, the pick of handsome men in financial need [emphasis added]” (Fung 345). No matter how attuned to one another and similar he may think they are— “[p]erfect lovers. Two identical clocks side by side ticking time in perfect harmony”—the protagonist cannot but continue to operate under the illusion that Thong ‘needs’ him, and this gives him a false sense of having accessed a kind of power that was not his as Jim’s lover (*GI* 29). It is not until Thong invites the narrator to stay in his home that he begins to realize that nothing could be further from the truth. On the way to his ‘lover’s’ home, the narrator constructs the following scenario: “He

doesn't know who his father is. His mother works in a factory. He has two brothers, two sisters. They all live in a shack with a dirt floor somewhere in the slums of Klong Toei. Somewhere along the railroad tracks that bring you into the city" (*GI* 31). In fact, Thong's father is a successful sugar merchant, and Thong's family's house, located in "suburban Ladprao," is "three times as big as the leased shack with the tin roof [the narrator and his family] left a decade ago" (*GI* 31).

The problem is not poverty or a broken home in the traditional sense, but the fact that Thong's father, Thong tearfully confesses, does not "love" him, presumably because he disapproves of his son's homosexuality; and he, therefore, will not support him either emotionally or financially, except to provide him food and a place in the basement to sleep (*GI* 29). It is evident in the exchange that follows that despite his desire to be loved by Thong, the protagonist, on one level, sees him as merely another prostitute. For, following Thong's uncharacteristically emotional outburst, the narrator, rather than consoling him with a compassionate response, which would be more appropriate considering the fact that the protagonist's own father was abusive and the family ultimately had to flee him--something which caused the narrator much grief and inner turmoil throughout his life, proceeds to hurl a "wad of bills" across the room at a mirror. Thong is quick to reprimand the narrator. "You should know better. You should show some respect" (*GI* 28). Here he is not only talking about the narrator's display of impudence with respect to His Majesty, whose portrait is stamped on each note, and the concomitant show of disregard for the nation that throwing the notes constitutes. Thong is also making the implicit demand that the protagonist recognize him as a subject. The narrator is sorely mistaken when he smugly and glibly asserts that there is

“equilibrium” in the “relationship” with Thong. “I treat him like a prostitute and he treats me like an equal” (*GI* 157). The mirror becomes a moot and mute symbol, but it is, simultaneously, a powerful image that speaks to the narrator’s failed desire and frustrated attempt to identify with Thong; it reveals that an image is not enough to secure a connection. Mimicry does not provide a satisfactory compromise or solution to the larger problems which the novel attempts to address.

Further evidence that the narrator defines Thong primarily by his occupation is to be found in the fact that in an effort to gain Thong’s confidence, he tries to ask his ‘lover’ about his “customers” so the two can share a “laugh.” But each time Thong tells him he does not understand, immediately shutting down any discussion of the issue (*GI* 28-29). Clearly, as Stephen Hong Sohn points out, Thong refuses to be commodified or to think of himself as an object. His unwillingness to discuss the issue of prostitution with the narrator coupled with his simple but direct reproach to the narrator following his disrespectful response to Thong’s apparent distress “epitomizes the very power Thong possesses in this relationship.” Sohn writes that “[j]ust as he is able to reiterate his humanity through this statement, Thong presents himself throughout the narrative as an agent imbued with charisma and force [...] Finally, the inclusion of the ‘mirror’ in this scene recalls the episode in the train. Where the man throws money at the protagonist in hopes of buying the sexual encounter; here the situation is reflected in reverse, as the narrator throws the wad of bills to compensate for Thong’s services” (116). In fact, after the narrator is invited to stay at Thong’s house to save money on hotel rooms, Thong once again asserts himself by quashing the narrator’s hopes of establishing a genuine love relationship with him. Flattered that Thong has invited him into his family’s home, the

protagonist asks Thong if his father knows what the “deal” between the two of them is—a question to which Thong simply replies, “Do you?” (*GI* 32) On one level, this response, in effect, works to disrupt the balance of power in that it implies that nothing is as it seems, that the narrator’s position in the relationship is a tenuous one and, in fact, it is not the prostitute in this case who is disposable, but the ‘john.’

What Thong’s terse and cryptic response probably means is that not only does he not love the protagonist, but it also represents a tacit attempt to make the narrator aware of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of their love, particularly given that “[w]hile there is evidence of an emerging middle class gay lifestyle in some parts of Thailand (see Altman, 1995; Jackson, 1995, 1997), it would be wrong to assume that there is a readily identifiable community of men who have sex with men. This is particularly so for Thai male bar workers, whose support networks are fragmented and whose friendships are usually confined to one or two other men who come from the same village or region (see McCamish and Sittitrai, 1997)” (Storer 146). While Thong is no displaced young man from upcountry, his roots are certainly not urban as is attested to by the Khmer tattoos that the narrator notices cover Thong’s grandfather’s body and by the “cadence” with which he speaks, so “dusty and rural it shames his children” (*GI* 31). Though, as Prudence Borthwick has found in a study of homosexuals living in rural northern villages in Thailand, upcountry gay men are indeed readily included in the “social organization,” one can imagine that the pressure to conform to the ‘rules’ that govern Bangkok’s gay culture, which is, arguably, different, must be greater for someone like Thong who is of humble origins and is the product of a conservative, middle-class upbringing (70).

As mentioned previously, Thong's family clearly does not condone his behavior, a fact which may contribute to the desire he expresses to have a baby one day (*GI* 34). What the narrator does not understand is that one way Thai men attempt to avoid the stigma of emasculation that would result if their engagement in homosexual activities were discovered is by entering into a heterosexual marriage and producing a family (Storer 143). By asserting what may be read as heterosexual desires, Thong is also asserting his masculinity and preserving "face." He is for all intents and purposes still a Man as opposed to the ubiquitous *kathoe*y, or male-to-female transgender homosexual. The *kathoe*y is deemed a "second type of woman" and, thus, denigrated by Thai society. S/he is a pervasive social presence from whom male homosexuals in Thailand have struggled to dissociate by constructing an image that contradicts popular conceptions of homosexual men as decidedly 'effeminate' and, consequently, aberrant (Storer 144, 142).

It is conceivable that since he receives no support from his family, Thong engages in sex in exchange for 'gifts' as a means of maintaining a gay lifestyle that has become increasingly defined according to changing "constructions of masculinity" in response to the "feminine" representation of homosexuality," and this lifestyle is, now, a costly endeavor. For example, "gym culture has become a dominant gay image" (Storer 149). Images such as this have been "appropriated" from Western culture in an effort to "challenge the notion that gay means *kathoe*y, submissive, weak or wimpish" (Storer 149). However, as Graeme Storer remarks, "The play in many Bangkok gay venues is about avoiding stereotypes and rigid categories of exclusion and inclusion (Halperin, 1995, p. 32). Unfortunately, this imaging generates its own commodified techniques of normalization. There is now a new and right way

to be gay in Thailand, which costs a considerable amount of money and many men find themselves unable to afford the lifestyle” (149). Thong’s need to maintain certain multiple and contradictory statuses is illustrated in the scene where he becomes embarrassed by and upset at having encountered several friends from a private college which he attended the year prior, but was forced to quit, presumably because his parents would no longer support him (*GI* 28). The reasons for his engagement in sex work are not so unlike the reasons for which the narrator aligns himself with rich, white men. These alliances afford material comfort. More importantly, though, they provide the means by which to obtain a certain credibility and legibility—not just within the context of national narratives with their unique and nuanced notions of what constitutes manhood and upward social and economic mobility, but also within the context of the gay community.

Yet, unlike Thong who apparently possesses a strong sense of self worth, the narrator’s alliances with men like Jim still do not allow him to experience any solid sense of self. In fact, such ‘partnerships,’ profitable as they may be, arguably serve only to increase the narrator’s discomfort in his own skin. This is made apparent in his description of a chance encounter with a Danish tourist he meets while fishing on a beach with his cousin in Malaysia, where he has gone in a bid to rediscover his heritage by searching for clues to the mysterious death of his grandmother and to escape his growing obsession with the increasingly impenetrable and unavailable Thong. When the tourist approaches, the protagonist avails himself to the Dane’s mistaken, though predictable, assumption that he, a dark, young man loitering on the beach, is a local in the business of selling sex. The narrator, deceptively “fumbling” for English words as he acquiesces to rub suntan lotion on the unsuspecting tourist, ultimately, accompanies the self-

satisfied vacationer back to his hotel, where there unfolds a scene fraught with unarticulated contempt and sexual violence. It is already clear from the narrator's thoughts about the man whom he describes, upon initially sighting him, as being as "pink as the rotting" piece of "melting shrimp" the narrator is holding in his hand that the narrator despises this walking embodiment of privilege. Furthermore, after making contact with the tourist, he suddenly feels as if his cousin, whom he takes care to inform us is classified as "*khek*," or a descendant of "mercenaries and pirates," is "closer than he was before," and this too suggests that the narrator intends to derive his gratification at the pain and expense of another (*GI* 115).

Clues to the source of the violence are to be found in the thoughts of coolie labor brought in to work the Malaysian rubber plantations that punctuate the narrator's description of the scene and are evoked by the tourist's apparent penchant for wearing a full rubber suit, including mask, during sexual encounters. These thoughts are precipitated by the narrator's contemplation of the word "*tain't*"--"*Tain't ass and tain't dick.*" Not only does this carry sexual meaning, but, in the narrator's mind, the word suggests "spoilage and poison[ing]" of the resources of colonized countries. And, the narrator cannot help but feel "implicate[d]" in the "elastic web of violence" that was once "muscle" and energy expended by those who had to work the plantations as he fixes his gaze on the "black stream" of rubber that "crosses" the tourist's "slightly out of shape [...] belly" (*GI* 117). His admitted indirect complicity in the history of exploitation, however, does not stop the embittered protagonist from engaging in sadism in an effort to punish this tourist for the injustices of exploitation: first the narrator urinates inside the man's rubber shorts which causes surprise that "quickly fades into indignation" (*GI* 116). He then spans the stranger's bare buttocks with all of the force he can

muster, grabs him by the hair, and makes him fall to his knees while he undresses—all to no effect. “His humiliation,” thinks the narrator, “is perfunctory. You want to make it sublime” (*GI* 118). He considers “rip[ping]” the man’s jaw “off his face,” but opts out of purported laziness to “truss the man up like a pig” or a “package,” gag him, bending his head in “tribute” or “shame” and after doing so to pour beer all over him and, eventually, recklessly anally penetrate him with the empty, glass bottle (*GI* 118-119).

While in their article “Race, Violence, and Terror: *The Cultural Defensibility of Heteromascuine Citizenship in the Virginia Tech Massacre and the Don Imus Affair*,” Amy L. Brandzel and Jigna Desai are primarily interested in how the media profiles school shooters, what they say with regard to the tendency of media to invoke “wounded masculinity” and how it has been deployed to explain the tragic incidents at Virginia Tech and Columbine has some relevance here. In the case of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, they argue that to be unable to “obtain the privileges afforded to (white) heteromascuinity” gives “violent white boys” a certain “cultural license to ‘retaliate’ for being victims of the loss of heteromascuine privilege.” However, they assert that to invoke “wounded masculinity” as the cause for Virginia Tech shooter Seung-hui Cho’s rampage is to obscure other reasons for his actions that would prove discomfoting for a nation that prides itself on ‘equitable’ treatment of all of its citizens should they be publicly discussed (Brandzel and Desai 68). To refuse to speak about “the ways in which his isolation was directly related to white normative citizenship, the alienation of Asian Americans, and disenfranchised racialized ‘queer’ masculinities,” they maintain, forecloses on the “the other hermeneutical option,” namely: “the racially oppressed retaliating for their isolation from the privileges of normative citizenship” (62).

Though Chua's narrator is by no means a psychologically disturbed mass murderer, the fact that he invokes repressed histories of exploitation as a means of almost justifying his treatment of the tourist suggests that he is buckling under the weight of the white heteronormative privilege inherent in colonial and neo-imperialist endeavors and the white homosexual privilege that has made him a trophy boyfriend and, in the case of the Dane, a prostitute once again. Despite his best efforts to humiliate the man, it is ultimately the Dane who still wields power, having the last laugh, so to speak, when he leaves the narrator a couple of "50—ringit notes" for his stellar performance (*GI* 120). Unable to speak as a subject and be heard, Chua's narrator resorts to violence within the safety of relative anonymity as a means of venting his frustration at not being able to author his own history as a queer Asian-American man. The only way he can be visible to the Dane is through a process of dissembling—pretending to be the needy colonial subject dispossessed of voice. However, his masquerade is really no masquerade. In reality, the narrator is a Caliban, whose unruliness, he knows, titillates the modern day sexual 'explorer.'

Certainly, the tourist is, for the narrator, emblematic of histories of colonization and semi-colonization, of plunder and of the dehumanizing practices associated with the institution of 'coolieism,' the last of which were discussed in Chapter Two. More than this, though, he is representative of the legacy of these practices, which, in the narrator's perception, have robbed him of a share of the power and the accompanying sense of entitlement that he attributes to practically all of the white men who appear in the novel and at whom he directs a lifetime's worth of anger. Of course, there is the incident with the Danish tourist. Besides this, he seeks to wreak vengeance on Jim. Caught up in a fit of spitefulness while in Malaysia, he decides to

report his cocaine-addicted former lover to authorities in the United States for narcotics trafficking. It should be mentioned that while his former lover does have a cocaine problem and had a penchant for snorting the white powder off of the body of his brown-skinned lover, he is certainly not involved in trafficking. The only other white male character who appears in the novel is a “middle-aged” man he encounters while wandering Silom—an area popular among vacationers, as well as sex tourists. He notes the U.S. Military Academy bag the man is carrying and, unsure whether he is in Thailand as a “businessman, tourist, or torturer,” immediately begins attaching sardonic labels to him, such as “Mr. America” or “Miss Military Adviser” (*GI* 191).

The narrator is of two minds as far as this stranger is concerned. Carefully observing him as he stops to see what is on the menu being proffered by a barker touting one of Bangkok’s infamous live sex shows, the narrator wonders if he should feel “rage” toward the man for his arrogance. Only minutes before, the man was nearly hit by a motorcycle taxi driver and exploded. In response to the outburst, the narrator remarks that with “five words” the white man presumes he can “reorder the universe.” Interestingly, though, his rage, he claims, subsides, and he subsequently wonders if he shouldn’t be “overcome” by “low-grade sorrow” and “pity” or a “need” to “fuck him senseless” (*GI* 192). The self-professed “need” to “fuck him senseless” does not suggest the narrator harbors any charitable feelings toward “Mr. America,” however. In fact, the sentiment is tinged with violence born of resentment. For him, this man’s “body” finally represents the “prospect of order and civilization,” whereas the narrator’s own body is but an “obstacle.” Still he acknowledges that “these two bodies are merely explanations of each other,” that “[h]istory is as trapped in both of [their] bodies as

[their] bodies are trapped in history.” This leads him to wonder what happens when the body is gone, what happens to the “legacy,” or the “part that cannot concede that anything is impossible.” Finally, he contends that it is this legacy, presumably the white man’s legacy based on the revulsion he feels for his own ineffective body, which will “[b]urn whole libraries of truth to write history. Anything but accept impotence, mortality, and limitation” (*GI* 192-193).

In his musings on the production of histories and the consequences of development, which are most concretely manifest in large-scale tragedies involving workers at construction sites for two new hotel projects that his brother has designed, the narrator makes frequent references to angels. He speaks specifically of the ‘fallen’ ones comprised of “dark-skinned children” like himself and, more notably, the “angel of history” (*GI* 194, 80). However, unlike Walter Benjamin’s angel, who seems to be haplessly blown forward into the future by the “storm” of “progress” while being made to helplessly look on as the “debris” of the past piles up, the narrator’s angel is cast in a more purposeful and sinister light (Benjamin 257-258). He is portrayed as not so unlike the various white men that the narrator has had sexual encounters with in public toilets; and, like “Mr. America,” this angel will not “accept impotence.”

This angel, the narrator claims, is “made of matter”— “fiberglass” or “flesh.” It is wholly immaterial whether he is comprised of one or the other, he is devoid of spirituality; and, yet the “laws” he brings with him are regarded as divine and, therefore, naturalized, a detail which makes it seem impossible for the narrator to resist the angel’s demands (*GI* 80). He “falls into the city to give history a monopoly on time” and “to strip the imagination of its ability to undo time” (*GI* 79). And he wishes, the narrator believes, to exact tribute. What the

angel requires-- fellatio while enthroned upon a toilet seat-- is an act in which the narrator simultaneously unwillingly and willingly participates. Even as the narrator is handcuffed to the toilet and the object of desire and repulsion is virtually forced upon him, after swallowing the angel's semen, he proclaims his "wish to die a hundred times this way, *the object of somebody else's history* [emphasis added]" (*GI* 80-81). He is vexed by conflicting compulsions. On the one hand, he is resentful and his mouth resists the angel's member. Yet, he is also doubtful of the possibility of resistance, for as one of the beneficiaries of the angel's materialistic "wickedness," he is, by default, complicit in the same "progress" that would also make him into an "object" of "history" as opposed to one of its architects (*GI* 80-81).

While there is no denying the fact that history has been rewritten to justify and/or to mitigate the damaging effects that colonialism, semi-colonialism, and U.S. military imperialism in Southeast Asia have wrought upon local peoples, one important detail that the narrator fails to consider is the way in which local economies have contributed to some of the ills that the narrator associates with development cited earlier in the chapter (See pg. 12.) and in the passage cited above with the U.S. militarism as embodied by "Miss Military Adviser." Here, I am referring specifically to the rise of prostitution, which, in its various manifestations, plays such a central role in the novel, often functioning as a metaphor for what the narrator perceives as the dominance of white masculinity over other subordinate masculinities, West over East, etc. Concerning prostitution in Thailand, Peter A. Jackson writes:

The American military presence has become a much repeated and mythicized origin story that in different tellings traces both the 'exploitative' sex trade and 'liberative' gay identity in Thailand to American influences. Paradoxically, America is credited with being the source of both the 'good and 'bad' features of modern Thai sexual cultures. In contrast, Altman correctly observes that 'the

indignation at the widespread sex industry in modern cities such as Bangkok or Rio is often uninformed by any historical sense.’ Bangkok’s heterosexual sex industry emerged in the early twentieth century, long before the Cold War and the era of mass tourism, as one outcome of the abolition of slavery in Siam in the late nineteenth century. Loos states that ‘brothels absorbed many of the former slave women who had no means of subsistence. In addition, the new salaried bureaucracy contributed to an increased demand for commercial sex...Siam’s full integration into global trading networks and the resulting monetization of the economy had helped produce circumstances in which women, with few other employment options, were channeled into sex work.’ Scot Barmé observes that ‘by the 1920s it was no exaggeration to say that...prostitution was one of the most ubiquitous features of [Bangkok’s] urban landscape.’ The reports here counter narratives that equate sex work in Thailand with the exploitation of subordinated Thai bodies to the dictates of foreign men and transnational capital. (377)

While Jackson does not deny that exploitation has occurred and continues to be a problem, his survey of alternatives to the explanation of foreign influence and capital as the primary forces behind the growth of the sex industry in Asia reveals that the narrator’s ire may be somewhat misdirected. Even though, as noted earlier, the protagonist criticizes the rural, local people for succumbing to “greed” and criticizes what he feels is the archaic belief that daughters should be required to support the family financially, he stresses that it was the imposition upon them of “foreign desire” that was initially to blame for their displacement and for prompting them to regard their bodies as exchangeable goods. And, while he goes so far as to speculate that he may be the unfortunate beneficiary of this process of development and consequent urban migration of unskilled workers, it is apparent in his haste to blame the British and the vitriol which suffuses his interactions with and assessments of white men that he is bitter about the hypocrisies that permeate the ideals of American democracy as they are practiced.

Clearly, as previously mentioned, the narrator is not at home in his own skin—a condition which is made most readily apparent in his dealings not only with white men, but

with Thai men like Thong as well, and in the numerous references to skin that he makes throughout the narrative. This discomfort is very likely one symptom of the distress induced by “isolation from the privileges of normative citizenship” as they have been extended to his white American and European counterparts and by the fact that he cannot find his place in Thailand, a problem to which I shall return after considering how his immersion in white European and American culture has impacted his self image. Just to cite a few examples, right after he decides to report Jim, he remarks that “This ground [in Malaysia]. More than a landscape. More than a backdrop for my own travels. This ground has left its indelible stain on my skin” (*GI* 89). After his encounter with the Dane, he elaborates further on what it means to be “stained” by the ground upon which he walks: “Your skin is your uniform. A beacon and a membrane. Something to hold it all together. A uniform like dirt, but not close enough to earth. Dark, but not dark enough to hide your insides. Skin that betrays difference. Foreignness. *Contagion*. [emphasis added]” (*GI* 121).

This is not the only time he will refer to something pernicious lodged within him. While contemplating the actions of “Miss Military Adviser” as he ambles past men advertising the ubiquitous Bangkok sex shows, he takes the American’s signs of interest as an indication of something more—a quest for “youth” and a “tonic” to “arrest the course of the flesh” (*GI* 193). From there he begins to ponder the superficiality and emptiness of his own life and search for himself. Not surprisingly, that ‘self’ is one bound to skin which seems to exist solely within a physiological, mostly sexual, context. “Flesh with no worth beyond life. Life in the pitch of cinemas, bathhouses, public toilets, park bushes, underneath banyan trees. When that

life recedes it reveals bones that are as white and colorless as ghosts. Angels with skin that cuts like razors. As white and colorless as the monster inside me” (*GI* 193).

This particular quote is interesting because, in conjunction with his comment about his skin as a “virus” which was mentioned earlier in the chapter, it helps to exemplify the extent to which, despite and because of his American upbringing, he has internalized his status as object and as contaminant, as well as other stereotypes that he both embraces and rails against. More attention will be given this problematic internalization of negative self images and how it influences his view of others who are simultaneously like and not like him later. What is also noteworthy about the assessment of what constitutes his life cited above is the fact that in it we find one of the few occasions in the novel in which he refers to himself in the first person. That he constantly uses “you” to describe himself suggests how alienated he feels from both himself and the identities he strives to inhabit. The fact that, in this instance, he refers to himself in the first person when associating himself with what is inhuman is indicative of the psychological damage that has been visited upon him as a result of the experiences of childhood abuse and the experiences of immigration and failed assimilation, as well as the stress of having to navigate multiple cultures, including those related to both his ethnicity and his homosexuality.

Besides being a “uniform” that physically marks the Asian-American individual and cannot disguise the “contagion” or contain the “monster” within, he also acknowledges that the skin is a “membrane”—porous; and this fact, coupled with the narrator’s comments about the inevitable disintegration of flesh, reflects his burgeoning understanding of the porous and unstable nature of identity. He is an inauthentic American in his relations and encounters with white men and not quite Thai in the context of his dealings with individuals from his former

homeland. The seemingly innocuous, yet undeniably painful, inquiries regarding his origins reverberate in his memory and work to solidify his belief that he is doomed to inhabit the periphery of genuine intimacy and human experience: “Where are you from? The suspicion always cuts like a knife. Where do you want me to be from? The same question on both sides of the tropics. In smoky bars. In the light of day. I lie under the sun, hoping it will bake the answer into my skin. Bake in my belonging” (*GI* 121). Thong, in the process of finally disposing of the narrator, will viciously and pointedly inform him that just as he does not belong to the narrator, the narrator no longer belongs to Thailand.

Returning to Thong’s house for what is to be the final time, the narrator is met by the voices of his ‘lover’s’ parents and rattled by their words, as they are words familiar to him from his own childhood. From outside he can hear them berating their son and the sound of Thong crying—only the second time, he notes, that he has ever heard him cry. “Lazy. Good-for-nothing. Waste. Trash.” The narrator is referring as much to himself as he is to Thong when, after hearing the bile pouring forth from Thong’s parents’ mouths, he thinks, “*Ba. Ma. Mommy. Daddy. You exist only to ruin them*” (*GI* 200). Unlike in the first instance, when Thong is lamenting the damaged relationship with his parents and the narrator hurls the wad of money at the mirror, this time the narrator tries to console him, telling him about his tribulations with his own father and, in a show of bravado, perhaps laced with sarcasm, he remarks, “—And look at me now.” To which the agitated Thong retorts, “—This is just a vacation for you, isn’t it?” Stunned, the narrator is rendered momentarily speechless, but, finally, he silently concedes to himself: “In the end, you are just an American darker than the rest, doing things in Thailand you can never do at home. This makes you invincible. So

invincible that you think he can hurt you as much as he wants, you just don't want him to leave" (*GI* 201). At this point, it is made explicit that the narrator is as dependent on his affiliation with Thong, the man whose love the narrator believes he can and has purchased, for his sense of identity and purpose as he once was on his relationship with Jim, for he is neither Thai, nor, despite the revelation above, an American.

Up until the moment when Thong makes the distinction between him and the narrator painfully clear, the narrator has been content to "build [his] love on a lie. A lie so beautiful even [he] will forget it's pure fiction" (*GI* 205). This lie involves not only love, but a false sense of power, and rather than determining and reinforcing the sense of self that he yearns for, his own actions and his affair with Thong lead to the loss of the last vestiges of "dignity" he possesses (*GI* 201). What remains is punditry and self-loathing. Not only is he 'stained' and inhabited by something inhuman, in his mind, he continues to align himself with that which is meant to be indulged in, fetishized, used, exchanged and tossed away as if it were a commodity. High on cocaine—the drug that appears to assuage his feelings of abandonment and rootlessness and affords him a temporary sense of mastery and acceptance, he contemplates, among other things, P.T. Barnum's 'acquisition' of the famous Siamese twins—Chang and Eng, and their subsequent assimilation into and participation in the dehumanizing practices of the "antebellum" South. That he would ponder the twins, considered 'oddities' and 'freaks' in their day is not surprising considering the way he describes his own body as "laughable," but, but like the Eng brothers, he capitalizes on it nonetheless and is not above using that capital to further his own interest in owning the body of another (*GI* 193-194, 122). He then pauses to think about the "banal[ity]" and "unattain[ability]" of the very same

“paradis[iacal]” shopping malls that he had previously frequented with Thong to steel himself against everyday scenes of suffering that pervade Bangkok and where he notes only the “commodity has rights”; and, in keeping with his understanding of Third World peoples as denied or given rights depending on their value as commodities—the ‘marketability’ of their cultural productions and their bodies as spectacles of suffering, he sarcastically asks himself what “flavor the World Bank is offering this season” (*GI* 194).

His thoughts concerning the mall as a haven and the commodities with their “rights” echo in an uncanny way the professed comfort Paulinha from Ong’s novel feels as he spends his days wandering the malls--bastions of ‘civilization,’ where so many anesthetizing symbols of ‘progress’ are collected in one site. “Here [in the mall] we can find happiness and security under the oppression of the senses” (*GI* 35). Though he will, as Paulinha does, eventually surrender to the comfort of the status quo as represented by Jim, this does not occur before he voices the conclusion that “progress moves like a dumb tourist in a straight line of alabaster conquest” (*GI* 194). Meanwhile, kisses, he remarks, no longer designate human intimacy, but have become a “means of consumption,” presumably of the Other, for the purveyors and representatives of development—those who build the malls, ply the streets of Patpong in search of young flesh, and decide who merits aid in the struggle to establish better living conditions (*GI* 193-194). This last comment concerning consumption echoes an earlier question posed by him as he laments the ascendance of American cultural imperialism which is evinced by the ubiquity and popularity of McDonald’s in Malaysia. “What was life like before the body became merchandise? Free with the purchase of a medium-size soft drink, fries, and a Big Mac. Free with the purchase of a Happy Meal” (*GI* 63) If for William Paulinha,

McDonald's represents his economic and social disenfranchisement, for Chua's narrator, it is the manifestation of a mentality that no longer has regard for worth of the individual human. The fast food consumer, particularly in the setting of a developing country where McDonald's is a luxury, is constructed as the product by the invading culture. Individual freedom and the ability to establish one's individuality is, paradoxically, contingent on the possession of a mass-produced object, which has taken on a life of its own. A parasitic relationship between consumer and product develops. The product which infiltrates the host community becomes indispensable to making the Other visible, legible, and relevant not only to the rest of the world, but also to herself.

The Other is, of course, not only Thong or Boi or the girl in the shopping mall, but the narrator himself. This is further illustrated near the end of the novel in an exchange the protagonist has with and the old beggar woman who calls him a "poor excuse for a white woman" (interestingly, not a Thai man or homosexual or simply a *farang*, or 'foreigner') after he growls at her "to surprise him" by doing something besides ask for money (*GI* 197-198). She, simultaneously, sets him up in a position of power relative to the Third World Woman while demeaning him by robbing him of masculine privilege and emphasizing his status as an outsider. Meanwhile, his perception of himself as "merchandise" is given credence by the events of the night that precede his encounter with the beggar. In the bar, again doing lots of cocaine, he receives word that his friend, the prostitute Boi, was duped by a 'doctor' who, posing as a 'john,' ultimately drugged the young man, removed a kidney, and left him in a hotel bathroom with a note and a phone. Thoughts of this lead the narrator to focus on a "blank"-eyed go-go dancer he sees weaving aimlessly, almost suicidally, in and out of

downtown traffic. After providing us with the information that the first go-go dancer was “introduced” to Thailand in 1969 by a U.S. Air Force mechanic, he immediately spits out one of the derogatory names that was originally assigned to Southeast Asian men and women by occupying and visiting forces, “Little Brown Fucking Machine” (*GI* 195). It would appear from the progression of associations that he makes that as far as the narrator is concerned his body, like Boi’s disposable body, that of the anonymous go-go dancer, and the bodies of the other sex workers with whom he associates, is the “sum of its organic functions” and the concrete manifestation of a “scientific system of potential services” (*GI* 195). And, such are the conditions, like it or not, to which one must, in the narrator’s words, “[a]ssimilate” (*GI* 195).

On the one hand, his body is ‘loved’ because it is “expensive”; it is celebrated for the services it renders the one who has the capital to possess it (*GI* 208). On the other, in his perception, it is a diseased and undesirable body. He is, after all, the son of his unstable father who was not beyond “child-beating” and other criminal acts, including shoplifting Christmas gifts for his son in front of the narrator when the latter was a child. More seriously, the narrator’s father tried to burn down the family house in Malaysia as a result of some inexplicable rage—perhaps the manifestation of a psychic disunity produced by years of being deemed unfit to enjoy the rights and privileges offered to fully recognized citizens of the U.S. (*GI* 195, 49, 51). The narrator is not oblivious to the tribulations of his father whom he recognizes as having used stolen “objects” to achieve “dignity in a place that was constantly trying to rob [one] of it [...] Crime gave [one] dignity, made [one] feel human [...] made [one] feel alive” (*GI* 103). Of course, thievery and amassing material goods could only temporarily remedy the symptoms of alienation and degradation associated with the immigrant condition.

Given this, it would seem that his father's decision to marry a white woman after having been left by his wife could be read as a last ditch effort to attain an ever elusive acceptance and mastery over what has proven to be an untenable life in America—a tact not so different from the one adopted by the narrator when he made the decision to become Jim's partner.

Besides these primal scenes of theft and violence, what the protagonist remembers of his father is a man wasting away from some unspecified, degenerative tropical disease, perhaps the metaphorically hereditary and insidious disease of disenfranchisement that now infects the narrator who tells us that there are “a million viruses inside this body. *I* is just one of them” (*GI* 195,131). He also recalls his father as a broken man leaving behind a mountain of “useless technology,” “emptied vodka,” a “broken life,” and “[b]rown stains”—the same “brown stains” that, to the protagonist's dismay, delimit his options for self-making in the West, preventing him from becoming a ‘true’ American. And, paradoxically, his dark complexion is not anymore advantageous to him when he is in the East; for, when coupled with what are interpreted as signs of his ‘Americanization,’ he becomes the object of scrutiny and suspicion among those with whom he initially believes he might forge solidarity (*GI* 195-196). He is perpetually cast as the proverbial ‘wolf in sheep's clothing,’ and, as a result, he experiences a steady decline as he endeavors to obliterate the ‘self’ that can, at best, only find conditional acceptance. In fact, it seems that, over the course of the narrative, the protagonist exhibits with increasing frequency the same self-destructive tendencies and lack of self control that plagued his late father. Besides placing himself in risky sexual situations with strangers as Thong grows more and more distant, he attempts to mute his feelings and forget the emptiness of his life with a combination of alcohol, Percodan, Quaaludes, and, of course, large quantities of

cocaine. Indeed, after a night spent with a heterosexual couple whom he meets at random and who have a penchant for bondage, the narrator experiences a feeling of deep satisfaction as he gazes into the mirror and wipes blood from his mouth. The “smile” that crosses his lips originates not from memories of sadistic sexual pleasure, but from the profound state of “numb[ness]” that he has managed to attain (*GI* 181).

Moreover, Thong has functioned to gradually divest the protagonist not just of an already tenuous sense of belonging by withholding intimacy and emphasizing the narrator’s difference, but has also slowly eroded his confidence in his masculine identity, however distorted his perception of what constitutes a man may be, and in his relevance as a human being. Besides bringing other male and female partners to the bed that he and Thong once shared, Thong has apparently confided in another friend that it is not him that Thong loves, but his “money” (*GI* 154). Furthermore, their final exchanges, which only consist of one or two lines each, are allotted in three separate pages, thus emphasizing the significance the words hold for the narrator. Filled with false courage and motivated by a well-intentioned though half-hearted desire to reestablish his self worth, the narrator attempts to insult the seemingly impervious young hustler by uttering a forthright “--Fuck you.” Unfazed, Thong snidely retorts, “--*You got to have a dick to do that, baby*” (*GI* 202). In the next to the last exchange between the two, detailed on the page that immediately follows, there are also only two lines. Here, Thong threatens to “cut” the “smile” off the narrator’s face (*GI* 203). While this may, on the surface, appear to be a meaningless, childish insult, it has symbolic import in that it serves first to deprive the narrator of a means of expressing himself and second because the smile is a trademark of the Thai national character. The comment further marginalizes the narrator,

tacitly communicating to him that no matter what he may do, he cannot claim a version of Thai identity as his own. Ultimately, the narrator leaves, but not without first making a pathetic plea on a single otherwise blank page “—Aren’t you going to stop me?” (*GI* 204). When he tells Thong that he is leaving, he receives no response. Thong’s silence is a clear sign that the hustler is just as preoccupied with the difficulties specific to being a young, gay man and hustler in Thailand as the narrator was and is, perhaps, obsessed with escaping his own role as the object of Orientalist desire. Thong will not be the object of fetishization; the kind of freedom he seeks is not to be found in such an arrangement. He will not be an accessory to what he perceives as the protagonist’s confused and controlling type of ‘love.’ Suspicions regarding true understanding, real connection, and commerce are raised, and they further muddy the already murky relationship. Just as Thong cannot see the protagonist as anything but another mark using his financial and cultural capital to enjoy all of the advantages of sex tourism, so the narrator cannot see Thong as more than an “equation”—the sum of economic desperation and his bodily parts. To further complicate matters, the protagonist finally cannot see himself as other than what he was and is to his white lover.

In the end, the narrator’s search for an alternative way of being in the world comes to naught. Washing down Rohypnol—“*A memory killer*”—with Maekhong whiskey, the narrator makes ready for his return to Jim (*GI* 206). The need to wash away the memories of Thailand and attempts to resurrect secret pasts as a path to increased self awareness with Rohypnol and a whiskey, ironically named for a river—symbol of transience and cleansing, and his decision to reunite with Jim suggest that the narrator has given up any hope of establishing a self that is independent of the white benefactor whom he may, but probably does not, love and wants to

obliterate any thoughts of the failed attempt to do so. Interestingly, this time, as Jim empties cocaine onto his prone body, the narrator refers to the two of them together as “you and I”—tellingly, the only other instance outside of when he considers himself a ‘monster’ and when he thinks of himself as Thong’s lover that he speaks of himself in the first person (*GI* 208). “I lie back naked on the bed and you carefully empty a gram of pure heaven onto my body. You take care to shape the powder into long white ski trails along the slopes of my arms. Chest. Legs. A skinny collection of sharp turns that flattens into a mirror of itself. You and I” (*GI* 208). Even though he speaks of himself as “I” in the final scene, as if he is an entity distinct from and independent of Jim, this is deceiving. Much in the way Thong did for him, Jim simply restores legibility to his otherwise “illegible body” and endows it with currency again, loving it for the price that can be attached to it or exacted from it, depending on whether it is Jim or Thong who is experiencing his body (*GI* 125, 208). The narrator’s assertion of self is only made possible as a result of the “mirror.”

In other words, nothing has changed in that this self is still very much reliant upon his ability to provide a pleasing reflection, despite his (recently failed) attempt at assuming the mask of a certain type of angry, authoritative, dominant masculinity. What has occurred with Jim is simply a re-negotiation of self after his ill-fated trip ‘home,’ so to speak. Paraphrasing and expounding upon Lacan’s statement that “[a]ll sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors,” Eng writes:

In its metaphorical capacity, the mirror stage must be continually (re)negotiated if the subject is to have a stable and coherent sense of identity over time. In other words, identity comes to be profoundly dependent not merely on the ‘original’ image of self encountered in the mirror frame (primary identification) but on a

constant stream of socially sanctioned representations that comprise the visual screen (secondary identifications).

Lacan tells us [...] that in order to emerge within the field of the visible the subject must not only align himself or herself identificatorily with the images of the screen but must be validated in that guise by multiple others (in the form of the unapprehensible 'gaze'). (Lacan qtd. in Eng 114; Eng 114)

All is just as it was before in that to access the semblance of a unified self the narrator must return "home." And, "home" is ultimately defined not by a specific geographical location, but as the narrator's place beside Jim. Unfortunately, the narrator does not find the love he seeks to receive or to give; for his "arms," he finally says, "will always form the perimeter of an open sore" (*GI* 208). Rather, he simply (re)gains acceptance, and his sense of security is contingent upon adhering to the conditions laid out by the prostitute Desiree in Chapter One and William Narcisco Paulinha in Chapter Three. That is, he will be, he must be whomever he is asked to be.

Chapter 5

“Lost in Translation”: Multiethnicity and Legibility

But I have learned well the lesson most multiracial people must learn in order to live with the fact of not belonging: there is no identity for me ‘out there’ [...]

I wish I could say that race wasn’t important. But it is. More than ever, it is a medium of exchange, the coin of the realm with which one buys one’s share of jobs and social position. –Ai (277)

While, at times, far less serious in tone than Lawrence Chua’s *Gold by the Inch*, Don Lee’s *Country of Origin* (2004), a ‘whodunit’ set in Tokyo during the Iran hostage crisis, deals with some of the same concerns addressed in Chua’s novel, specifically the postnational individual’s search for origins, a ‘home,’ and acceptance, as well as some of the challenges Asian-American men face in establishing credibility within an international context. As we shall see, the non-white characters are, in a sense, hostages to intractable ideas related to myths of racial purity and what constitutes an acceptable identity; and, some even advocate a wounded identity as an acceptable alternative or a path to an agentic one. At the center of the story is Lisa Countryman, an American national born in Japan to a GI father of “muddied origins”—“Creole and/or Bahamian and/or Mexican and/or German and /or Dutch”— and a

Japanese, but more likely Korean mother rumored to have been a “bargirl *yariman*” and, later, adopted by an African-American serviceman’s family (*Country of Origin*, hereafter cited as *CO* 19, 238). In the contemporary time of the novel, Lisa is a Berkeley doctoral student who vanishes in Tokyo while researching the status of Japanese women for her dissertation and searching for her biological mother. Her surname, Countryman, is ironic in that as the story unfolds, we are made increasingly aware that as a multiethnic, postnational individual, she belongs nowhere; as shall be discussed, she is without a ‘country of origin’ as far as state records detailing her birth are concerned, and she is a racial misfit in the U.S., her adoptive homeland. She possesses no official documents verifying and sanctioning her right to exist as a citizen-subject, and she is unable to be easily recognized and placed as a result of her face, which is a source of discomfort because it defies expectations and troubles beliefs about race—not just ideas concerning racial purity or authenticity, but also those concerning who can mix with whom in a world that has slowly and begrudgingly allowed for racial boundaries to be permeated. Thus, her credibility and her desirability as a citizen are, if not denied outright, then subject to intense scrutiny and question. Lisa’s disappearance is, for the most part, given short shrift by both the members of the local police department and the employees at the American embassy. This, as a result of her real and metaphorical exile from both the U.S. and Japan and the fact that at the time she vanished Lisa was working as a ‘hostess’ in one of Tokyo’s ‘gentlemen’s clubs’--a job that involves minimal physical contact between customer and client, but is still considered a component of Tokyo’s elaborate and expansive sex industry.

Only three men take any interest in the case, and her story ultimately gives way to theirs. Nonetheless, Lisa continually returns to haunt them. One of these men is the shy,

socially inept, Japanese detective, Kenzo Ota, who is prone to nerve-induced skin ailments, is neurotic about even the slightest bit of noise causing him to suffer frequent bouts of insomnia, and has long since been relegated to a 'window seat' in his office-- a gesture understood by all as indicating redundancy. To add to his troubles, he becomes obsessed with determining if the young, overweight American born boy he encounters, merely by chance, as the latter strolls with his estranged wife, who has apparently recently returned to Japan from America, is his son. The other man concerned with Lisa's whereabouts is Tom Hurley, a Korean-American who holds a relatively low-level position in the embassy that was only given to him after he betrayed a colleague in Brazil. Finally, the Japanese-American CIA 'officer,' Vincent Kitamura, sees in Lisa the makings of an unsuspecting agent who will enable him to secure a deal with the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications.

For each of the men, Countryman represents a chance to (re)establish himself on either a personal or professional level. With respect to Ota, her case helps him to cultivate a relationship, after years of involuntary celibacy, with his equally quirky landlady, Miss Saotome, and, ultimately, regain his position at the center of the office. Meanwhile, for Tom, Lisa represents, at least in his mind, the opportunity to draw closer to the object of what amounts to an obsession; for, as shall be discussed later, there are practically no opportunities for advancement within the Foreign Services office for any of the men of color depicted in the narrative. Specifically, by taking an interest in the young woman's disappearance, Tom hopes to curry favor with paramour Julia Tinsley, the beautiful, blonde, American wife of Vincent Kitamura. Julia has for mysterious reasons taken an interest in Lisa's fate, and Tom uses this as an excuse to draw closer to the enigmatic Julia, whom he envisions as exuding privilege and

refinement and is, therefore, emblematic of a world from which he has been perpetually excluded. First, his father's career in the military meant the family was frequently forced to move, so Tom was never able to establish lasting bonds with others. Second, he came from a broken home, where money was always tight. And, finally and most importantly, he was/is faced with personal and professional obstacles that he believes, probably rightly so, are linked to his Korean heritage. Consequently, he tries to hide the details of his childhood and mask any telltale signs of his ethnic background through an intricate, albeit sometimes clumsily executed, set of lies.

Similarly, Vincent Kitamura is concerned with leaving behind the shame-inducing elements of his Japanese-American past, and Lisa, he feels, is essential to helping him prove his continued loyalty to the United States. Unlike Tom, he cannot entirely divorce himself from the physical traits that mark him 'foreign,' but, as a CIA operative, he goes to great lengths, over and over again, to prove himself worthy of the privileges of full American citizenship. Like Chua's narrator, Tom and Vincent aspire to wield some of the power that their white superiors in the Foreign Service office possess; however, whereas Chua's narrator both envies and despises what he regards as white men's unearned advantage over men of color and the children of immigrants who are, in his experience, forced on a daily basis to assert their worth in the most demeaning ways, Tom does not initially appear to possess much ability to self-reflect or to reflect on his circumstances in a way that would invoke the indignation that, at times, consumes Chua's protagonist. And, we can only infer from the painstaking, calculated approach to his job that Vincent takes that he understands the depth and breadth of the experience of marginalization, though he will never openly acknowledge the reality of this

experience. This will be investigated further later, as it indicates the extent to which the current social climate discourages expressions of criticism and dissent in relation to the ways in which the U.S. racial constellation has been popularly configured and the ways in which popular and institutional configurations work to complicate and, often thwart, the self-actualization process not only for Vincent, but for other non-white individuals depicted in the novel. Harkening back to Yoji Yamaguchi's *Face of a Stranger* and prior arguments that dissembling is the way that a prostitute becomes recognized yet it is also what sets him/her apart from others, for the characters in Don Lee's novel, role-playing is both necessary to helping characters achieve visibility, but it, simultaneously, makes them objects of collective suspicion.

Although Tom understands race and class to be setbacks, he is not as divided as Chua's protagonist is between wanting to assert the same kind of control over others that has been wielded against him and experiencing feelings of uneasiness about partaking in the same advantages of those white men who would subordinate him. He often appears more readily inclined to look for ways to gain entry into the moneyed, ivy-league educated, 'old boys' club' whose members fill all of the positions of note within the embassy than to question the system that only allows him and his other non-white associates limited mobility within the structure of the Embassy, which ultimately acts as a microcosm of the United States itself, replete with all of the latter's racial and class tensions. But, even if Tom's self-awareness and degree of understanding concerning how or why he participates in a system which oppresses him grows only slightly over the course of the narrative, we will see in his story, as well as in Lisa's and Vincent Kitamura's that, as one reviewer for the *Boston Globe* puts it: "beneath the surface of this novel are those nagging and eternal questions: How deep the desire to belong really is,

how vulnerable the mixed-race individual feels as soon as he [*sic*] realizes what he is, and how that vulnerability affects all kinds of choices” (Silman).

The individual predicaments of Tom and Lisa predate by almost twenty years an interesting development which contradicts the *Boston Globe's* reading of the “mixed-race individual” and deserves discussion here, as it exemplifies the relevance of the relative unintelligibility and powerlessness of fictional bi- and multiracial individuals depicted in Don Lee’s novel to a recent phenomenon in which real postnational individuals have been endowed with a dubious legibility. And, this ‘neutralizing’ phenomenon is confirmed by Edward J.W. Park and John S.W. Park who assert that America has not really come to terms with its anxieties about miscegenation and increasing diversity and whose argument shall be elaborated upon in more detail below. Over the last ten or so years, a questionable kind of apolitical optimism has emerged surrounding the ‘new face’ of America, which is neither entirely black nor entirely white. In its “Style” section, of all places, a 2003 *New York Times* article celebrates the constituents of what it calls “Generation E.A.,” or “Generation Ethnically Ambiguous.” Interestingly, the article appeared just *one year before* Lee’s novel detailing the problems faced by bi- and multiethnic individuals was published, and this is what it has to say regarding postnationals: “‘Today what’s ethnically neutral, diverse or ambiguous has tremendous appeal,’ said Ron Berger, the chief executive of Euro RSCG MVBMS Partners in New York, an advertising agency and trend research company whose clients include Polaroid and Yahoo. Both in the mainstream and at the high end of the marketplace, what is perceived as good, desirable, successful is often a face whose heritage is hard to pin down” (Berger qtd. in La Ferla 1; La Ferla 1). Also in the article, a managing editor for a fashion magazine speaks of

“exotic, left-of-center” beauty as the new standard and makes the rather hefty and unsubstantiated claim that such beauty transcends “race” and “class.” However, based on the anecdotal evidence that some multiethnic individuals cited in the article provide concerning the social advantages they have gained as a result of the indecipherability of their features, one is left with the impression that they are merely participants in their own co-opting and subsequent commodification—trading in race to achieve a kind of class mobility that would have been until just a few years ago virtually impossible to attain. Purported benefits range from having access to the best seats in the trendiest urban venues, to high end modeling jobs, to gaining, as one interviewee put it, an “edge, a certain sexual appeal” (Barnett qtd. in La Ferla 1; Akkad qtd. in La Ferla 1). This is a far cry from colonial and other related discourses that once portrayed the mixed race individual as lacking the “‘inclination’ to skilled work, the ‘suitability’ for it, the self-discipline, sexual morals, and economic independence that would count them among a citizenry fit to rule” (Stoler, 1995, 130).

Still, as shall be discussed throughout this chapter, one cannot help, despite the overall optimism of this article and the declarations of journalists caught up in the multicultural fervor which characterized the beginning of the millennium, but feel that the ‘changes’ in attitude being touted are limited in scope and do not signal a true victory for multiethnic individuals. The author, Ruth La Ferla, does permit two multiethnic individuals to articulate concerns that they are being treated as “troph[ies]” favored for their “exotic” appeal, or, worse, that advertisers and producers are casting them in a calculated manner “to cover all their bases” (Suguro qtd. in La Ferla 2; Hazelwood qtd. in La Ferla 2) However, this constitutes the extent to which dissent is permitted. Clearly, La Ferla and her editors at the New York Times wish to

highlight the current trend which, she argues, favors “racial neutrality” presumably in order to show that we are entering into an era in which race has less social currency than ever before. According to her, we have arrived at a pivotal moment wherein “racial diversity” is being “portrayed” less as a “beautiful mosaic” and more as “a melting pot” (La Ferla 2).

Gauging from the quotes above, as well as from statements made by representatives of major clothing retailers and other “professional image makers” also cited in the article, though, this trend is being cultivated primarily by advertising and marketing entities, a detail that should compel us to ask why we are being sold this particular image at this moment in history and that makes questionable the extent to which what we are being sold reflects the everyday reality of multiethnic individuals. It should give us cause to question the self-congratulatory assessments of one Chief Executive for a major marketing company that “many cultures are assimilating” (to what, he doesn’t say) and that, with regard to multiethnic individuals increasingly becoming a mainstream, public presence, “[f]or once [...] it’s about art imitating life” (Padilla qtd. in La Ferla 2). I think it is more accurate to say that it is art imitating life as it is constructed by the vast machinery of marketing.

As the image managers cultivate and celebrate the marketability of multiethnic individuals and busy themselves with coining catchy monikers, like “Generation E.A.,” for the most recent crop of urban ‘twenty somethings,’ any discussion of political visibility or viability is muted or conspicuously absent. It would seem that the struggles of multiethnic individuals, who really did not begin to form coalitions or be ‘claimed’ by all the ethnic groups with which their parents affiliated themselves until the early nineties or receive recognition until 2000, when for the first time the US Census permitted individuals to check off more than one race,

and journalists were buzzing about “multi racial chic” and excitedly declaring 2000 as the “year of the mulatto,” have already been neutralized through acts of commodification and consumption (Spickard 269; Gamble 15; Gaskins qtd. in Nakashima 5; Senna qtd. in Nakashima 5). Though La Ferla would like to be optimistic about the forecast for the “ethnically ambiguous” individual, even invoking Kwame Anthony Appiah and Evelyn Hammond, to suggest that “race is a fiction,” a “human contrivance,” she does so at the expense of self-identified mixed-race individuals like Ai who was cited at the beginning of this chapter and who understands that there is no identity “out there” for her, that race--not its invisibility-- is, for the multiethnic subject, “the coin of the realm” (La Ferla 2).

While Michael Omi and Howard Winant offer a very lucid, thorough introduction to a “process-oriented theory of race” that takes into account the increasingly complicated “geography of race”-- its “global” nature—and they reject the notion of race as being strictly either an “ideological construct” or an “objective condition,” they do not deny that race as a concept has varied significant implications for communities and individuals (204, 205, 200, 202). Its “enforce[ment]” as a “social construct” has, over a period of five hundred years, made it into a “fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation” (202). They continue:

The longevity of the race concept, and the enormous number of effects race-thinking (and race-acting) have produced, guarantee that race will remain a feature of social reality across the globe, and *a fortiori* in our own country, despite its lack of intrinsic or scientific merit (in the biological sense) [...]

[A]t the level of experience, of everyday life, race is an almost indissoluble part of our identities. Our society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity at all. (202)

And, regarding the prevalence and increased visibility of the mixed race individual in the media, both Michael Omi and Williams-León and Nakashima counter claims that the “rudest reminders of racism have been washed away.” The “color line” is not “fraying all around us,” as Ellis Cose has asserted. Rather, Williams-León and Nakashima write that the “qualitatively varied experiences of multiethnic/multiracial people simultaneously contest and reify the very structure of U.S. race relations confirming that ‘race’ is a sociopolitical construct.” As a result, “the social meanings of that accompany racial matters—whether during interpersonal interactions or within and across institutional arrangements—seem only to become more entangled as multiethnic/multiracial people enter the racial equation in the United States.” Undoubtedly, Williams-León and Nakashima argue, the “issue” of the “color line” will “persist into the twenty-first century as it twists, turns, and morphs into multidimensional shapes” (Omi qtd. in Williams-León and Nakashima 4; Cose qtd. in Williams-León and Nakashima 4; Williams-León and Nakashima 4).

Starting from the assumption that, despite what La Ferla and associates may believe, race continues to be an issue not only for those who can claim a single non-white racial identity, but also and especially now for those who must navigate multiple worlds in an increasingly postnational global society, I would like to return now to Lee’s work in an effort to begin deconstructing La Ferla’s claims and to reveal the ever present connection between race and identity. Lee’s narrative opens with Tom making contact with Julia Tinsley for the first time while both are doing morning laps in the embassy compound’s pool. Already, a certain flirtatious competitiveness develops between them and a kind of fascination, at least on

Tom's part, begins to emerge in this seemingly insignificant encounter. Meanwhile, the night before, unbeknownst to anyone but the male companion she was with, Lisa Countryman has choked to death on her own vomit after ingesting pain killers, a Quaalude, and a significant amount of alcohol. This, just before she would have earned the money necessary to leave Japan and start life anew by engaging in sex with a high profile client. Though there seems to be little connection between Tom, Vincent, Julia, Lisa, and Ota, what they all share are pasts fraught with familial strife and varying degrees of trauma related to family dynamics and/or the inability to identify with any particular ethnic or national entity. While details of Julia's childhood experiences, which she withholds in a bid to pass as someone she is not, will be elaborated upon in more detail in a subsequent discussion, suffice it to say, for now, that they speak to Tom's own problems with an emotionally and, ultimately physically, absent father. Her experiences also resonate with those of Vincent. According to Vincent, his mother could not endure the grief induced by the experience of the internment camps and, therefore, was not a presence in his life. The familial upheaval is not so unlike that experienced by Chua's wayward narrator. However, Julia has some particular advantages over the Asian-American men depicted in both novels in that, as a white woman, she does not bear the physical markers of difference which can and do create distress for the aforementioned characters.

On the other hand, Lisa's travails as a multiracial, postnational individual, who was neither accepted by all of the members of her adoptive family, specifically her sister, nor welcomed by Berkeley's ethnic activist communities and is relegated to the shadows throughout most of the novel, bring into sharper relief Tom's own discomfort with his Korean ancestry and help to illuminate the reasons behind his decision to masquerade as someone he

decidedly is not. This penchant for masquerade is, incidentally, one that he shares not only with Julia, but also her husband, Vincent, a *sansei* whose almost pathological tendency to assume various personas will be examined later. Finally, Ota, even though he is primarily a comic figure, arguably, prone to exaggeration, is useful in adumbrating some of the attitudes that hinder racially mixed and post-national individuals living in Japanese society. Moreover, like the others mentioned, his own childhood, which was spent partially in the United States, was punctuated by traumatic events and acts of betrayal, and his recollections of it reveal some of the types of ostracism to which Asian immigrants to the U.S. have been subjected. His experiences give us some insight into how acts of discrimination have shaped his perception of himself, of America, and of what he rightly believes are disparaging American attitudes toward “*haafu*” such as Tom, whom he pities for his racial impurity, and toward the *nisei* boy, Simon, whom he wrongly presumes, for much of the novel, is his lost son in need of guidance from and ‘authentication’ by a ‘real’ Japanese father (CO 130).

Ota’s experience and assessment of the U.S. reflect the persistent and powerful assumptions under which many Americans continue to operate. For him and many others, the country’s population is essentially comprised of two races, black and white. In fact, how Latino/as and Asian Americans “participate” in American society as “racialized agents” has, according to Park and Park, been both under analyzed and minimized (Park and Park 205). On the one hand, race theorists, such as Andrew Hacker, have gone so far as to refer to these two groups as mere “spectators” looking on as the “two prominent players try to work out how or whether they can coexist with one another” (qtd. in Park and Park 290). At the same time, according to whatever political agenda is ‘on the table,’ these groups have also simultaneously

been “subsumed” under the timeworn, comfortably familiar, but inadequate paradigm which positions Americans as “black or white” (Park and Park 294). The alternating urges to refer to Latino/as and Asian Americans as spectators or to categorize them as black or white demonstrates “anxieties” about and a reluctance to acknowledge and contend with the complexities which have accompanied the profound demographic shifts that have transformed the U.S. into an increasingly multiracial, multiethnic society (Park and Park 304). As of yet, there is no well-defined place in the equation for Vincent, Tom, some of Tom’s non-Anglo colleagues in the embassy, or, as Ota recalls, for himself as a child growing up in the States. Meanwhile, as *hapas*, or multiethnic individuals, Tom and Lisa even more radically confound the issue of how to talk about, much less theorize the complexities mentioned above. Moreover, as we shall see in the case of Tom, Vincent, and Lisa, employing history, images and experiences derived from a “home culture” as many Latino/a and Asian immigrants have been said to do to in order to “decipher their place in American society” is not an option that will help these characters to understand where and how they fit into the social fabric of this society, or any society, for that matter (Abelmann and Lie qtd. in Park and Park 302).

Whereas Tom and Vincent adopt strategies that will make them more ‘visible’ and ‘comprehensible’ within a mainstream schema that does not celebrate difference and which, ironically, involve either masking their Asianness or overplaying it, and Ota uses his childhood experiences as justification for his belief in the superiority of communally-oriented Japanese society, which, incidentally, is portrayed as equally intolerant and uncomprehending of ‘outsiders’ and which, paradoxically, rejects him although he is Japanese, Lisa is denied the resources necessary to construct an identity for herself and so dies twice. As a result of her

parentage and as a consequence of her occupation as a glorified prostitute, she experiences the “social death” described by O’Connell Davidson in Chapter One. Then, of course, there is her actual death. Both are necessary to assist Lee in limning the struggles of his male characters and illustrating the lengths that Tom and Vincent will go to in order to establish themselves as men and as full-fledged, ‘worthy’ citizens while suspended in a transnational limbo.

Lisa Countryman first becomes a presence in Tom’s life when he begins receiving calls from her sister, Susan, who, it will later be revealed, is less interested in her adopted sibling’s well being than with having the missing woman sign documents which would give her sole access to the assets left behind by the sisters’ parents after they perished in a car accident. When Susan begins barraging him with demands to find her sister, he has no idea how Lisa, though she is not present, will subtly and indirectly, but profoundly transform his life. At first, his desire to mobilize the resources necessary to find out what happened to Lisa lacks urgency, and her sister’s calls are more of an annoyance that the Junior Officer in the American Citizens League must contend with while other, ‘weightier’ historical events are occurring—affairs from which he is barred from participating in, even indirectly, because his position in one of the embassy’s Consular Sections affords him no opportunity to do so.

It is not until Julia Tinsley expresses a desire to know of her fate, attributing the reason for her interest to an incident in college in which one of her friends mysteriously vanished and was never found, that Tom gains a sense of purpose that extends beyond “fetching Jujufruits for a pothead in jail”—a task his closest friends and professional colleagues, specifically a Latino named Jorge Hernandez and an African American, Benny Daws, rightly note are reserved for those who aren’t “tidy-white” and don’t have “last names for first names”—“good

Eastern Seaboard, old-money first name[s] like Ellsworth or Thorne” (CO 27). In fact, so obvious is the racial and class discrimination within the organization that Jorge dubs Tom, Benny, and himself the “Triplets of Token, the Three Mudketeers,” and the “Rainbow Brethren” in a sad attempt to make light of circumstances wherein resistance is futile (CO 29).

As we shall see, were it not for Lisa and meeting Julia, whom he associates with upward social mobility as opposed to his current girlfriend, Sara Sobeske, a Polish woman whom he is fond of teasing about her heritage with bad Polish jokes and who, like himself, is merely an administrative cog in the Embassy’s labyrinthine, nonetheless, racially speaking, very transparent organizational machinery, Tom might have continued to live as he always had: “He was a dilettante, a self-aggrandizing dabbler, in almost everything he did, not able to follow through to the end with anything, in particular with women” (CO 13). At the beginning of the novel, not only is he unable to “follow through” on whatever he sets out to do, but he also cannot admit to his two closest friends how, with far less education and experience than the two of them combined, he managed to obtain a job in the Tokyo Embassy better than stamping passports. Tom cannot tell them how, in São Paulo, he betrayed a colleague, Roberto Ramirez, for registering a formal complaint about internal, furtive acts of discrimination committed by the Embassy against visa applicants. Tom did this in order to get himself off of the much maligned “Cucaracha Circuit,” the Latin American offices to which many individuals without the proper, ‘old money’ connections are relegated and left to languish (CO 80, 28). And, what is revealed by his actions is not simply overblown ambition or a lack of conscience, but a serious inability to conceive of or, more likely, a refusal to acknowledge collective oppression based upon class and race.

Unlike his friends, who bond by secretly ridiculing the preferential treatment bestowed upon white men in the embassy, but also silently accept their place within the established order, Tom cannot settle on an identity for fear that taking a firm stance would be an acknowledgement of ‘inferiority’ and ‘failure’ to conceal his humble origins. It seems he feels that openly acknowledging his Korean heritage may, perhaps, culminate in his being subjected to the scrutiny and to the discrimination that Jorge and Benny have already acknowledged is operative within the confines of the Embassy and to which he erroneously seems to think himself immune, else he would not be so bold as to pursue the white wife of a CIA officer. Tom was/is an imposter content to perpetuate mystery surrounding his origins. Rather than readily admitting that he is Korean American when asked about his heritage, he claims to be a Hawaiian--a “*hapa haole*.” While the term can be used to designate almost anyone of part-white ancestry, it is generally used to designate an individual who is of white and Hawaiian ancestry. In his mind, this semi-fallacious assertion represents a “declaration of racial neutrality” and is a way of “avoid[ing] further inquest” into his racial identity (CO 12). Nonetheless, in a moment of partial honesty, Tom concedes, when pressed by Julia, that he is “half and half,” but continues to maintain what will eventually be revealed as a lie—that he is originally from Hawaii. He only tells her the specifics of his parentage after he feels confident that by inquiring whether or not he is “native Hawaiian,” she is not asking “*Where are you from? What are you?*” which, in his mind, is simply “code for *You don’t look like a real American [...]*” (CO 38). Recall that it is these same questions with the unarticulated suspicions and implied accusation of duplicity which prompt and permeate them that cause Han Ong’s William Paulinha pass himself off as a ‘Hollywood Indian.’

The perpetually annoying and “presum[ptuous]” question, “What are you?” that Paulinha and Tom wish to avoid also follows Lisa whose racial indeterminacy has been a source of problems throughout her life and whose situation helps to explain Tom’s discomfort with being racially marked and, simultaneously, racially unintelligible—a discomfort which he will acknowledge only insofar as to make the effort to mitigate its effects by refusing to own the elements of his ancestry and substituting his history with one he finds more exotic and acceptable (*CO* 19). On the other hand, Lisa, who has spent a lifetime warding off racially-charged insults and trying to untangle the mystery of who she is, is more obviously sensitive to the impact of racism, as one scene in which she curses and vehemently chastises two Japanese schoolgirls that she encounters on a Tokyo train for describing an African passenger as “*saru*,” or a “monkey,” shows (*CO* 19-20). In junior high school, Lisa had been called “gook monkey, bamboo coon, chigga jigaboo, dim-sum casco, yellowbone chinkamoslopehead nine-iron UFO ping pang yangmo buckethead,” and sundry other creative slurs concocted by African-American and white students, alike (*CO* 19).

After she reached adolescence, however, Lisa’s various ethnic “features blended together,” and she was labeled as anything and everything, except black. She notes that people now thought she was: [some]*thing*, some sort of dark exotic mixture, but not really dark, not a real darkie, Not—God forbid—black. When people presumed to ask, ‘What are you?’ they discounted black, they didn’t want to believe black, because black was too threatening, too uncomfortable, it wasn’t a *fun* color. (*CO* 19). Rather than helping to heal the wounds of an unhappy childhood by enabling her to capitalize on her ‘exotic’ appeal, the way that Tom had with women, or to ‘pass’ and , thus, ‘forget’ the cruelty meted out to her as a child, this

unexpected change in her appearance simply complicates her situation. She continues to seek positive affirmation of her identity, and before journeying to Japan to determine her origins and experience the acceptance she believes is embodied by her birth mother, she thinks she might find it at Berkeley. Ironically, once at Berkeley, her racial ambiguity only made her feel more like an outcast in relation to members of various special interest groups on campus, who were determined to assert their ethnic and racial pride and with whom she mistakenly assumed she might finally find solidarity. In fact, however, she becomes caught up in an irresolvable quandary that will follow her into the contemporary time of the novel, one in which no one except nurses and government officials privy to the circumstances and documents related to her birth are aware that her real father was black. When a black serviceman, Omar, whom she briefly dates inquires as to whether her initial reluctance to go out with him is because he is black, Lisa is initially “taken aback” and then becomes somewhat despondent for his inability to recognize that she is part African-American (CO 66). But, she is, possibly, more wounded by his attitude toward her earnest quest to pinpoint her origins and, thus, find a place in the world. He dismisses it, out of hand, stating that there is no reason for her to be concerned if she has not succeeded in gaining “insight” into her true identity, failed at the “whole *Roots*, Kunta Kinte thing.” She is a “Third Culture Kid,” having been brought up on naval bases, and he infers that her search for her origins makes her somewhat of a “cliché” (CO 65).

Rather than reinforcing her in her efforts to solidify a sense of self, Omar only reminds her that she cannot belong anywhere or claim, in good faith, a viable ethnic persona, and it is easy for him to do so, as he has a recognizable, practicable, albeit troubled in a different way, racial identity which makes the formation of self and of alliances possible. Despite what La

Ferla and the majority of her interviewees contend, ‘ethnically ambiguous’ individuals continue to struggle with finding a home in a society that reacts to them with suspicion or completely disregards them if they do not appear to be pure or meet certain externally imposed visible criteria for being properly multiethnic. The problem of being ‘neutral’ is that it can translate into a social ‘invisibility’ that does not account for the very real internal and external conflicts postnationals like Lisa may experience or encounter.

She was never black enough, or Oriental enough, or white enough, and everyone always felt deceived if she didn’t announce her ethnic taxonomy immediately upon meeting them, as if not doing so were a calculated sin of omission, as if she were trying to pass. But, just as often, when she did claim racial solidarity with a group, people didn’t believe her, suspecting she was merely trying to appropriate the radical-chic color of the month.

For a while on the Berkeley campus, some biracial student activists had campaigned for miscegenation as the country’s only hope and, with great merriment, had handed out leaflets that crooned ‘Cross-Fuck for a Better World!’ They could joke because they were blessed. They at least *looked* like they were mixed. They were identifiable as something. They could seek membership in a tribe. Multiple tribes. Lisa—appearing absent of color—was excluded from even applying. (CO 67)

Whereas Lisa does not attempt to intentionally mislead others by either refraining from divulging her racial identity or openly enumerating its facets, she is still viewed with suspicion. Clearly, Lisa is actively working toward establishing a self-identity built on truth—a detail attested to by both her efforts to join the Berkeley activists, to master the Japanese language, and, finally, by the desperate, poignant, and, ultimately, futile plea she makes to her birth mother upon finally locating her: “Tell me who I am” (CO 298).

As was previously discussed, Park and Park have compellingly argued for revising and expanding upon prevailing theories of race to include those who do not conform to the two

categories most readily invoked to classify the various racial/ethnic groups comprising the United States' constantly evolving 'minority' population; but, their work does not extend to include the specific concerns of the multiethnic individual, who is undeniably becoming a more prominent feature of America's racial/ethnic landscape. As representatives of this changing landscape, no one would benefit more from positive recognition than Tom and Lisa; however, their life circumstances and experiences with mainstream societal attitudes toward multiethnic individuals predate the era of the dubious "multiethnic chic" described above, and there is no "fraying of the color line" apparent in the historical moment in which they live. In Lisa's case, she is aware of how embracing blackness may work against her. Conversely, it is evident from her fruitless attempts to secure a place for herself in one of Berkeley's multiethnic communities that appearing to be raceless, or claiming a particular marginalized racial identity when no physiological signs of a particular race are apparent, can be highly problematic for one intent on establishing a racial or ethnic identity. In Tom's case, he sees his Asian parentage as an obstacle and as the origins and indicator of a fundamental lack. Even Kenzo Ota, whose wife, incidentally, left him and subsequently married a white American, understands as a result of his own time in America the tribulations of being *hapa*. Upon meeting Tom, a "little bit of Kenzo felt almost sorry for him. Handsome or not, it couldn't have been easy for Hurley, being a *haafu*," or half-- an expression popularized in the 1980s in Japan in order to counter less flattering descriptors previously applied to multiethnics and to increase their marketability as entertainers, models, and pop idols, but which occluded, by virtue of its association with glamour and celebrity, instances of discrimination "*haafu*" individuals experienced on a daily basis (Murphy-Shigematsu 212-213; *CO* 130). (By the way, the dilemma of the *haafu* is not so

different from what I find about the more recent marketing in the U.S. of “Generation Ethnically Ambiguous.”) Interestingly, Ota does not focus on the difficulties faced by multiethnic individuals in Japan, at this point. Rather, he uses Tom to critique the United States for its inability (and reluctance) to effectively address disparities and injustices linked to race. “From personal experience, Kenzo knew about the state of racial equality in America. It was sound in theory, but not in practice. It was a glorious dream, but just a dream. It would never work—not anywhere, not anytime in history—and the US was the only country foolish and hypocritical enough to try” (CO 130-131).

Unlike Lisa, who is of “muddied” and uncertain descent, however, Tom at least has the benefit of knowing who his parents are, and though he is *haafu*, he has been able, to some degree, to hide that of which he is ashamed, specifically his mother and a childhood spent on military bases envying the privilege of those who inhabited the world from which his family was excluded. This exclusion is, in part, the result of his father’s occupation as a GI and humble South Boston origins, but, more significantly, it is a product of the fact that his mother was a Korean and had committed the cardinal sin of carrying on a relationship with a white man. His shame, the difficulty he has openly admitting that he is and has been the victim of racism, and his desire to be those who would oppress him are brought to light in an exchange he has with Jorge while watching members of the embassy’s almost exclusively white upper echelon playfully engaging one another by the pool. When Jorge expresses his belief that “all” white people are essentially racist, Tom roundly dismisses this. However, he cannot help but think that with “merely by the way they walked and talked--their good looks and affability, the ease of their gestures and their lack of self-consciousness,” these people he is observing from

afar “seemed to flaunt their ownership of the world, the absolute surety that they were kings.” Moreover, he cannot deny his own failure to “straddle the line,” “to be both” them and not them, as Jorge accuses him of wanting to do (*CO* 125).

Maybe for a time, growing up, Tom thought he could be both. At each new post or town, he had tried to blend in, not bringing attention to himself, but it had never quite worked. His mother, his Asianness, always seemed to single him out as different, as other. On Yongsan Eighth Army base in Seoul, she had been called a moose—the white wives’ epithet for any local girl who bagged a GI. Everyone had assumed she was a hooker from Itaewon, as did most Koreans. Her family had disowned her long ago, when she had first gotten pregnant with Tom. (*CO* 125)

Though he fails to be “both,” this does not preclude his harboring the wish to engage with those whom, he will come to find, have no problem resorting to the basest cruelty when a member of their inner circle is threatened by one of his kind. Upon seeing his paramour, Julia, sharing company and cocktails with and laughingly tolerating what is perhaps a too familiar, sexually suggestive gesture made by his arch enemy Congrieves, a top CIA officer who represents that world of East Coast privilege from which Tom and his friends have been excluded, Tom’s desire to be those white ‘godlike’ men frolicking around the pool, carelessly sipping cocktails becomes more readily apparent. He does not recoil from or experience disgust at the sight of those who think of him as little more than a joke. Instead, he nostalgically describes an image from his childhood. “On Yongsan, the embassy housing compound had been next door to the Army base, and Tom remembered looking across the fence at scenes like this, scenes of bourgeois comfort and glamour. It had seemed to Tom the best life imaginable” (*CO* 127).

The passage cited above detailing Tom's memories of his mother coupled with his childhood wish to enjoy the relative comfort, stability, and prestige represented by the embassy compound would explain why, as an adult, he is content to attempt to 'pass'--to be racially "neutral"--and why he valorizes his father, to some extent. While his recollection of the obstacles his mother faced provides a commentary on the reality of the discrimination that Asian-born U.S. military wives face, his memories are also laden with a sense of shame. Despite the fact that she worked hard to raise him by herself after Tom's father left, what Tom chooses to remember about her, privately, is that she was an impediment. As a military bride of Korean descent, she was branded a prostitute, considered morally suspect by mainstream white society as represented by white military wives on the bases where they lived and by Koreans—not an uncommon phenomenon considering the prevalence of transnationally state-sanctioned brothels near U.S. bases abroad. Perceived as a "hooker," she was socially dead, and she could only represent downward social mobility. Moreover, he equates his mother with his Otherness, his "Asianness," and literal and figurative bastardization. In his assessment, his mother's Asianness robbed him of the opportunity to belong to his own father, and openly embracing that part of himself which was Other would make it more difficult than it already had been for him to advance under the auspices of the (white) patriarchal state.

By contrast, there appears to be no real animosity toward his white father, even though he left his wife and son to fend for themselves far from the embassy compound about which he had fantasized. In fact, they were forced into a public housing project when his mother's two low-wage jobs proved not enough to support her and Tom. Furthermore, Tom's father had "bullied" him into "adopting the nomadic life of a soldier, an infantryman" and "had warned

him not to get too attached to anything or anyone.” All that Tom could count on from his father was the fact that this man would never accept any permanent position. His father “vowed” that he would never be a “REMF—rear-echelon motherfucker” (CO 163-164). Indeed, whether Tom understands this or will admit this to himself, his father was the embodiment of the imperialistic arrogance that characterizes the subtext of official discourses justifying the United States’ continued ‘benevolent,’ and paternalistic, military intervention in South Korea and has, at times, openly permitted American soldiers to treat the local inhabitants as disposable sexual objects. As a matter of fact, he speculates that his father is now “remarried to a *nice* girl from Southie and [has] a boatload of kids [emphasis added]” (CO 116).

In one of the rare moments in which he is seemingly absolutely honest with himself, however, Tom understands that his “peripatetic” lifestyle, the same lifestyle that Ong’s Paulinha understands so well to be the permanent condition of the immigrant (and the internal exile), is not a sign of “toughness,” but a means of “self-protection.” For, “[if] he avoided staying in one place too long, if he avoided relying on someone to be there with him, to accept him for what he was and wasn’t, to look upon him with complete devotion, he would never get hurt” (CO 164). So deeply ingrained is Tom’s self-loathing and apprehension about not being accepted that he has foregone true intimacy for most of his life and is content to risk being revealed as a “fraud,” dabbling in just enough of the ‘right’ things to give him the appearance of being somewhat erudite and moneyed (CO 80). Moreover, though he had only visited Hawaii as a teenager, he decided to claim it as his home. He constructed an entire “personal mythography” around it because Hawaii seemed to him the only place where it was “possible” to be both “Asian and American at the same time,” and “he found it simpler, and more

appealing, to say that he was Hawaiian” whenever people asked him the dreaded question, ‘What are you?’ (CO 115).

His fear that his Asianness would make him less desirable is not unfounded. When he confesses to Julia that he is not from Hawaii, is not an accomplished surfer, and did not graduate from UCLA, this does not seem to disappoint her. She is herself not what she would have people believe she is, i.e. the picture of East Coast refinement, but is rather self-admittedly the progeny of a “long line of white trash” from Texas. However, her great failing, she unabashedly admits, is that she “busted [her] her ass to get to Princeton” only to “idiot[cally]” fall in love with a third-generation “Jap”—a relatively well-off one, but a “Jap” just the same. Vincent Kitamura, for all of his “stupid patriotic” fervor, evinced by the enthusiasm with which he plays the various roles required of him as a CIA “spook” despite “knowing what he’d be going up against,” i.e. the discrimination within the organization, is decidedly not the “Yankee blue blood” she had intended to marry (CO 117). Though she is not of the social stratum of men like Congrievs, she, like Tom, aspires to be; and, by virtue of her Caucasian features and corresponding conventional physical attractiveness, whether she is the product of “trailer trash” or not, she has a certain advantage over Tom, his friends, and her husband Vincent in that she does not have to prove herself to be an ‘authentic’ American. Unencumbered by racial anxiety, she cannot truly understand Vincent’s overzealous need to prove his allegiance to the United States or Tom’s desire to mask his racial identity.

It could also further be argued that Tom’s obsession with her is, in part, an obsession with her whiteness and all that it represents for him. Julia, in fact, calls him on this, pressing him to admit that he has “always” had “white girlfriends,” to which he responds, “No, not

always.” It is when she inquires as to whether he’s ever had an Asian girlfriend—a question that elicits only a shrug from him—and whether or not he ever plans to visit Korea again that he becomes “irritated with the inquisition” (*CO* 216-217). Undoubtedly, she has touched a nerve by reminding him of his childhood and the blight of alterity visited upon him as a consequence of his father’s ‘indiscretion.’ In keeping with his father’s implicit message that settling down can only result in pain, Tom calls to mind the fact that he was the “type of man with whom women had affairs, but did not marry.” Arguably, he resists admitting his weakness for Julia, consoling himself with the thought that this was a “comfortable role” for him, one he had always “sought.” However, clearly, she has the upper hand in this; for, when he begins questioning her about whether she is sleeping with both him and her husband, she subtly hones in on potential insecurities about his manhood right away. “Next you’ll ask who’s better, who’s bigger [...]” (*CO* 215). This may seem a somewhat innocuous and childish assault on Tom’s manhood, but it is undoubtedly very pointed attack when we consider how Asian men have often been desexualized or emasculated in popular culture. Further, it is hinted at by her own husband that Julia is nothing but self-serving and untrustworthy. Upon meeting Tom for the first time at one of Julia’s photo exhibitions, one of the last things Vincent says to Tom is “Tell me [...] what is it she’s trying to get from you?” (*CO* 162).

Whereas Tom presumes he can, though not always successfully as we have seen, use his racial indeterminacy and ‘exotic’ good looks to curry favor with women and Vincent can harbor the illusion of exercising some degree of control over his identity and how he is perceived as a result, paradoxically, of the disguises he must don for his job as an undercover agent and the narratives his work requires him to spin, Lisa does not have the luxury of using

her multiracial background to any advantage. Her experience corresponds to what T.K. William's describes when he states that "the presentation of their outward racial selves [is not] something biracial [or, in this case, multiracial] people necessarily manipulate, but rather something that is viewed by and responded to contextually by their audiences" (qtd. in Weisman 232). After meeting Vincent at the hostess club where she works and then running into him 'by chance' in a park, Lisa confides in David Saito, one of Vincent's many aliases, that she had no friends in Japan and despite her possible Japanese parentage and her ability to speak Japanese, she was still regarded as a "*gaijin*, through and through." She laments that "people sometimes changed seats on the subway when she sat next to them" (CO 204-205). In fact, she continues, rather hysterical by this point, "People hate me [...] It's some sort of genetic joke, the way I look [...] I should look ethnic. I should be ugly. I'm a freak. I've been a freak all my life." Obviously, her efforts to keep at bay thoughts that she was "bad," "worthless," and "unlovable" had all been in vain (CO 210).

It is actually during the conversation with Lisa discussed above that we learn most about Vincent. Unlike Lisa, he has constructed a fiction by which he can live. While Vincent/David may have, on a previous occasion at Lisa's club, agreed with Lisa's most ardent admirer, who unbeknownst to her was also the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, that even as a *sansei*, or third-generation Japanese American, he was still essentially a loyal Japanese subject, he tells Lisa quite a different story in private (CO 200). For him, there is no internal "conflict" living in Japan as a Japanese-American. Though people often mistake him for "Japanese-Japanese" refusing, like his own wife, to acknowledge the fact that he is American and though he readily admits racism exists within the State Department and reveals

that his own mother suffered a permanently debilitating nervous breakdown which left her unable to care for him after she returned from her internment at Manzanar, where his loyalty really lies is quite clear. Seemingly unaffected by the fact that his own family was torn apart by state-sanctioned racist policies, if the story of his mother is indeed true, and adopting a “prosaic,” somewhat dismissive tone when pressed about the racism within the embassy, Vincent/David puts an end to what must be an uncomfortable conversation, stating that he still believes that the U.S. is the most “tolerant” country in the world, though it will not let him be what he is, i.e. Japanese-American. Further, he claims no “visceral connection” to Japan or its people. “My grandparents made a choice for themselves and their progeny when they immigrated. Once you make that choice, I don’t think you can be ambivalent about it” (*CO* 204-205).

In contrast to Lisa, neither Tom nor Vincent is particularly interested in an idea of home or in really questioning the institutionalized racism with which they must both contend on a regular basis in order to enjoy self sufficiency and, presumably, a modicum of respect. They are so fully inculcated by the unspoken doctrine that being Asian American is a regrettable state of existence that they adopt the attitude of white characters in the novel like Julia, who, upon leaving the scene of the accident with a complicit Tom in tow initially panics, but later refers to the situation that arises around it as an unnecessary “brouhaha over a fender-bender,” showing very little concern for the well-being of the Japanese woman she has hit with her car and seriously injured (*CO* 171). Or, as in Tom’s case, they admire the ways of people like Congrieves or, arguably, of the freewheeling British expat, Tony Somers, who exclaims to Lisa that, as far as Japanese women are concerned, he, as a white man, is a “fucking god” (*CO*

69). Just as Vincent pledges to honor and serve without question a country that saw fit to commit grave injustices where his family was concerned and in spite of the fact that his father served in the 442nd Battalion—World War II’s most decorated battalion and one comprised nearly entirely of Japanese-American soldiers, so Tom ‘ignores’ his Korean half and participates in the betrayal of a colleague who condemns racist practices within the embassy’s visa section in order to advance his own career. But, his ‘compatriots’ will not allow him to forget from where it is he comes. According to Benny and Jorge, Tom is nothing less than an “Uncle Tom” because he desires Julia. Jorge tells him “You think you’re inside, but you’ll always be outside [...] You’re blind to who you are.” A frustrated, disgusted, and, perhaps, somehow wounded Tom retorts, “What is with this self-righteous Che Guevara act, huh? [...] I’m sick of this. I’m sick of you. I can’t help it if you hate yourself” (*CO* 263).

It is certainly possible that there could be some truth in what Tom says to Jorge. One could argue that Tom understands how Jorge may have been made to feel less worthy and more defensive as a result of having had to continuously contend with racism as it is manifested institutionally and in popular discourse. Considered in this light, Tom could almost be regarded as somewhat heroic for refusing to be limited in his endeavors by the dictates of a prevailing racial discourse which continues to position non-white masculinities as subordinate. But given that Tom effectively abjects his mother and, thereby, attempts to eradicate ‘undesirable’ aspects of his heritage, it is difficult to accept that he is driven by principle to take a stand against discrimination. Dissembling, as we have seen, is an integral part of Tom’s life, a prominent feature of his interactions. Jorge and Benny are not the only ones that note his inability to adhere to any particular cause or firm sense of self. After one of their trysts, Julia

tells him, gently and perhaps halfway in jest, that he doesn't understand "ambition" or appear to possess the ability to share goals with an intimate other. Nor is he committed to the dissemination and preservation of the lofty ideals one would expect a Foreign Service officer to hold dear; and, his lack of "self-awareness," she says finally, is "quite spectacular" (*CO* 215-216). Such characteristics she attributes, by contrast, to Vincent. She praises the man who, ironically, dissembles for a living and has rejected the mother(land) by dismissing the travails of his own mother and accepting the law of the white father as embodied by President Roosevelt—the man responsible for imprisoning and ruining the lives of at least two generations of Japanese Americans. Vincent has been able, unlike Tom, to capitalize on self-negation and self-reflexivity, possibly because similarly to Omar, he possesses a firmer understanding of who he cannot be which originates from a history that is traumatic, but one that is also shared with a community of survivors.

Tom's superiors and Julia's friends among the CIA officers are less delicate in criticizing Tom for his lack of conviction and weak sense of self. Like Jorge, they make him aware that he cannot be one of them. First, his own boss, Kimball Reeves, does nothing to hide his belief that Tom has succeeded within the organization as a result of some "affirmative-action largesse" (*CO* 77). Also, rather than scold him by calling him a failed white as Jorge does, Julia's friends taunt him with his failure to be Korean. They ridicule him for forsaking his ethnic heritage and succeed in simultaneously showing him his 'place' as a man of color. Acting on the pretense that he does not want to see his friend Vincent cuckolded and coming on the heels of Jorge's harsh criticism, Congrievs takes it upon himself to speak for the 'inner circle' and make it clear that Tom is of a lesser caliber than he and his men. He approaches the

unsuspecting younger man and begins speaking Korean to him, explaining to Tom only after humiliating him that he had done two tours of duty in Korea. Tom registers that it is Korean Congrieves is speaking, but is at a loss because he never learned to speak his mother's native tongue—a fact which gives the latter his first opportunity to strike a blow. Commenting on Tom's inability to understand or speak Korean, he says that it is “[a] shame. I'm sure it breaks your mother's heart.” Interestingly, Tom's first reaction to this observation is suffused with suspicion as opposed to anger born of regret or embarrassment induced by the patronizing tact taken by Congrieves. Instead, he wonders what Congrieves knows about his mother, how he knows that he is half Korean, and whether or not the superior officer had performed a background check on him (*CO* 264). He is worried more about being publicly exposed as half Korean than about the snide insinuation that he has committed an unforgiveable act of betrayal by forsaking a fundamental element of his identity. Furthermore, he cannot control the mixture of intimidation and something akin to admiration that he feels when confronted by Congrieves. The man is at once a “loom[ing]” presence and the walking example of a “ruddy,” handsome model (*CO* 264-265).

Even when Tom begins to suspect that Congrieves is trying to establish “dominion” by throwing him off guard and leveling increasingly pointed criticisms, he continues to listen in silence. At one point, Congrieves expresses his preference for the Koreans over the Japanese and wryly asks if Tom is not a “*chin-il-pa*”—not exactly an “Uncle Tom,” but something similar. In other words, Congrieves compares Tom to a Korean who collaborated with the Japanese during the annexation (*CO* 265). From there though, he launches into a very militaristic, heteromasculine diatribe in which he asserts that all too frequently the U.S. waffles

on its policies, and, as a result, “[the] paradigm breaks down”—presumably the paradigm which validates U.S. global hegemony and the inherent ‘superiority’ of the White American Male. “It gets all fucked up [...] you have countries you defeated and occupied and redeveloped emasculating you.” His grievances do not stop there as he proceeds to curse the “no-name shithole banana republics pissing in your face” and “the parasitic ragheads burning your flag” (*CO* 266). While he may say that he is concerned for Vincent, it is obvious, from the anxiety about white male privilege permeating his ‘observations,’ that he cares more about protecting white womanhood against treacherous, insubordinate brown men like Tom who overstep their boundaries by being foolhardy enough to think that they can have what does not ‘rightfully’ belong to them. Clearly, it is easier and more comfortable to place the racially indeterminate American in a category that conforms to the black/white schema discussed earlier. It is not until Congrievs makes clear that Tom must stay away from Julia, for everyone’s good, that Tom manages to utter a weak rebuttal. “Go fuck yourself.” However, Tom’s moment of defiance is wasted, as Congrievs knows that Tom self-servingly failed to defend Ramirez in Brazil and threatens to make this public. His condescending parting warning to Tom, “I know what you do when pressed. You do what you’re told, like a good little Ricky”—something not so far from the truth in that Tom, in his pursuit of the perceived benefits of whiteness, has become a kind of comic lackey, another “Charlie,” catering to anyone who will accept him or help him to advance his interests (*CO* 266).

What warrants discussion here is the seemingly universal inability and/or reluctance that both Congrievs and Jorge demonstrate above to conceive of the multiethnic/postnational individual as comprised of two or more parts which form a whole. Misunderstanding of and

insensitivity to this condition is what plagues Tom and, to some degree, Vincent, as well as the American-born boy Simon, whom, as mentioned above, Kenzo Ota mistakenly believes to be his son and who, much to his mother's dismay, flatly refuses to take any interest in his Japanese heritage (CO 241). They are all made to feel as if they must choose 'sides.' Even Ota who is not biracial, himself, but experienced alienation and trauma early in life, both in the U.S., where his father had accepted an extended research fellowship, and in Japan, had, as previously mentioned come to the conclusion that America's race "experiment" was a tremendous failure. Like Lisa, he was taunted for being Other--for his "slanty-eyed dogeater tapehead Jap looks." Mercilessly, the children would remind him: "'We dropped the bomb on you.'" (CO 47). What is ironic about his present stance on American identity politics is that the Japanese had been no more generous toward him when his family returned to Japan. He recalls that he had been "ridiculed more than he had been in America," in particular because he spoke Japanese like a "*gaijin*" (CO 47). That said, his less than favorable view of Americans may have been influenced not only by the prejudice he encountered, but also by the fact that his mother temporarily left his father for a white colleague while they were in St. Louis, and though she eventually returned, her infidelity ultimately destroyed the marriage. This scenario, in a slightly altered form, is one that would repeat itself in Ota's adult life when his own wife, Yumiko, frustrated by what she called her "humorless, passionless, sexist wimp" of a husband—the "epitom[e]" of all that was "wrong" with Japan-- eventually left for America and married a white man. Apparently, she had adopted certain sets of beliefs which have proven to be the undoing of characters discussed not only in this chapter, but also in previous chapters.

She had bought into the American myths of “Equality,” “Independence,” and Individualism” and accepted the unfortunate stereotypes that dog the Asian/Asian-American man (*CO* 49).

I think it is in order to make a small digression here which is not unrelated to the confusion that is experienced by the primary figures in Lee’s mystery and which makes their motivations and behavior harder for observers to decipher. It is noteworthy that throughout the novel, Lee constructs the Mother/Woman as a ‘failed’ purveyor and protector of culture and tradition. She is repeatedly located as the source of anxiety and alienation. And, the ‘indiscretions’ of mothers and wives—insanity, infidelity, miscegenation, sexual promiscuity, real or imagined—are perceived as the origin of the nearly all of the internal struggles involving the main characters’ feelings of alienation, ineffectiveness, and impotence, and they have significant influence upon the decisions which the characters make about how they attempt to self actualize. For Tom, Vincent, and Ota, trauma that involves race in some capacity and is invisible to those who fail to understand the choices made by postnational individuals, has been handed down by primary caregivers who somehow crossed forbidden boundaries, either by choice or, as with Vincent’s mother, inadvertently by having the wrong face at the wrong time in history. As we will see momentarily, Lisa’s own birth mother, too, is a devastating source of disappointment. She cannot perform the restorative, authenticating function Lisa desires because Lisa is the evidence that she has transgressed the boundaries of what is socially acceptable. Not only is her ancestry a problem, but her alleged former employment as a bargirl, and her sexual liaison with an African-American soldier, if discovered and publicly revealed, would completely discredit her and destroy the carefully constructed façade of a ‘respectable’

Japanese woman upon which she has built her life and career. To acknowledge Lisa would be social suicide.

Whatever it is that Ota, Vincent, or Tom may have endured as a result of the ‘betrayals’ of mothers and spouses who would not or could not provide affirmation or legitimization, nowhere is the dilemma of the postnational subject more apparent than in Lisa’s case. And, it is her demise which brings into sharper relief the issues faced by these characters and allows us insight into the corresponding attitudes they have developed in relationship to others and as a means of navigating their individual worlds. Lisa has no recognized history. She was born, according to Japanese law, “stateless” because her father was a black American, and her mother was allegedly not Japanese after all. Rather, she was *zainichi* Korean, one of the “remnants” of Korean colonization who remained in Japan as a “second-class noncitizens” (*CO* 256, 237). Upon consulting a private detective that Lisa hired in her quest to find her mother, Ota finds, in his search for the missing woman, that according to one of the nurses attending Lisa’s birth, she was considered by virtue of her parentage, a “pollut[ant]”; she was, the nurse says not hiding her disgust, a “*kurombo*,” “(h)alf-nigger,” a “*dojin*,” or “[e]arth person.” Lisa was, therefore, according to the orphanage director interviewed by Ota, better off having been taken to America where she could enjoy a more “equitable life” (*CO* 237, 239). Actually, though, no matter how she tried to fit into her adoptive family, wishing “more than anything” to “look truly and unquestionably black” like Susan, the latter had “exploit[ed] every chance to be cruel to her adopted sister,” and Lisa’s traumatic experiences with school children, as well as the Berkeley students, have already been discussed (*CO* 252-253). Finally, even her biological mother whom Lisa finally manages to locate, shortly before her death, is

unwilling to accept her. There is no joyous reunion. Rather, she finds her birth mother, who has, in the years following Lisa's birth, become a famous *enka* singer, to be rather vapid. Fearing that her daughter has come to ruin her, the woman denies, somewhat awkwardly, that she ever gave birth to an illegitimate child, offering the desperate, lost, young woman money to keep the 'secret' to herself. Essentially, Lisa has, Ota rightly notes, "become a ghost," both literally and figuratively speaking (CO 91).

Whereas Lisa seems to have few opportunities to define herself, the men in the novel believe that their affiliations to others permit them to choose how they realize themselves. Ota has the option of telling us that he is "afraid of fat people"—a fear he developed in Missouri and one that persists in relation to his own overweight 'American' son. He also freely expresses his anxious disdain for "loud people, uneducated people, and black people," and he is, thus, able to distance himself from these 'undesirables.' Finally, he feels he can ridicule Yumiko's husband for his "bland, corporate American good looks" and criticize the latter for possessing what, in his words, is a "colonial fetish for Oriental women." He feels entitled to these attitudes because despite his awkwardness and the fact that he is *madogiwazoku*, or one of the "window people," he still believes, or at least harbors the illusion, that he belongs to a "tribe" (CO 51, 49, 48). As a CIA operative Vincent can feel that he, too, is part of an elite clan. Whether or not he possesses any real power is debatable; nonetheless, his job is to try to manipulate others. His occupation and the fact that he looks Japanese, but holds an American passport, enable him to act as a chameleon. This ability to freely exchange personas undoubtedly permits him to believe he has some sense of control over where and to whom he pledges his allegiance. Meanwhile, Tom has a solid understanding of his parentage and

personal history, however unfortunate that history may seem to him; and, it is this knowledge that, paradoxically, allows him to justify conducting his life as if he were obliged to ally himself with no one, to place his loyalties nowhere (*CO* 38).

Though Lisa's mother's behavior mirrors that of Tom and Vincent and seems unjustifiable, her fears are somewhat understandable in that as a *zainichi*, she has had to struggle to prove her worthiness to be accepted as an 'honorary' Japanese citizen. In fact, as I have stated in various ways many times throughout this chapter, all of the characters are in search of a sense of belonging that eludes them no matter where they are, even as they try on different identities and leave in their wake a whole population of "ghosts" comprised of past personas. Tom is a dilettante "Hawaiian" surfer, Vincent a "spook" fond of changing aliases, "wigs," "makeup," and loyalties, Ota, the would-be super sleuth, resorts to a "Love Academy" in order to make himself more attractive and socially graceful-- to prove that he is not the Asian wimp his wife has accused him of being, Jorge aspires to be a kind of nouveau revolutionary completely disgruntled by the continued dominance of the white man, and Lisa masquerades as a prostitute in part to experience a kind of "power" she had never possessed largely due to her racial (in)visibility (*CO* 147, 74, 183).

Returning to my initial statement that what is worth noting is the inability or reluctance on the part of people like Congrieves or Jorge to try to make sense of the multiethnic/postnational individual, I would like to add that their attitudes are informed not only by direct and unadulterated racism, but also, paradoxically, by the multiculturalism celebrated by Lisa's Berkeley peers. Moreover, the decision that some, though not all, of the multiethnic/postnational characters make to 'play' seemingly calculated, compartmentalized

versions of themselves or to conform to expectations of them that are linked to race is connected to values undergirding multiculturalism, specifically those that emphasize the importance of ‘authenticity.’ This emphasis on authenticity as it relates to multiculturalism is divisive in its own insidious way, and, arguably, it creates tension and inner turmoil for those who cannot claim a single heritage or, as in Ota’s case, regardless of his own perception of himself as thoroughly Japanese, a firm sense of national belonging that has not been tainted by childhood experiences or permeated by denigrating Western conceptions of the fundamental character of the Asian man. Historian Vijay Prashad writes that:

In its crudest rendition, then, multiculturalism adopts an idea of culture wherein culture is bounded into authentic zones with pure histories that need to be accorded a grudging dignity by policies of diversity. In his work *The Ticklish Subject*, critic Slavoj Žižek calls this ‘racism with a distance,’ since the benevolent multiculturalist treats the concept of culture as a homogenous and a historical thing that can be appreciated, but that remains far outside the enclosed ambit of one’s own cultural box. To retain this distance and this sense of self-enclosed culture is to pretend that our histories are not already overlapping, that the borders of our cultures are not porous. This ‘racism with a distance’ forgets our mulatto history, the long waves of linkage that tie people together in ways we tend to forget [...] Literary critic R. Radhakrishnan asks if the search for authenticity is ‘a spontaneous self-affirming act, or if authenticity is nothing but a paranoid reaction to the “naturalness” of dominant groups’ (Prashad 61; Žižek qtd. in Prashad 61; Radhakrishnan qtd. in Prashad 61).

What the novel does well is to show that achieving the process of becoming authentic and, by extension, ‘legitimate’ is a complicated, nearly impossible goal, as both culture, itself, and cultural authenticity are determined in large part by historical and social contexts, which are, of course, extremely fluid. Regardless, those interested in preserving the privileges that come with being affiliated with the ascendant group or groups within a society, as well as, Prashad rightly

notes, even the most well-meaning supporters of “diversity” tend, each in their own way, to continue to treat culture as something atavistic and impervious to extraneous influences.

Caught somewhere between culture as an entity that is constantly evolving and attitudes that position culture as something monolithic, the multiethnic individual has no chance of becoming “authentic” or even functioning under the illusion of authenticity and is, as we have seen, relegated to a limbo outside of history and history making, or is forced to constantly switch allegiances in order to be a part of history. Lisa is merely a specter as difficult for others to decipher in death as she was in life, but equally as easy to label as undesirable and, subsequently, abject. She is punished for having the ‘wrong’ identity, disregarded as having no identity, and victimized while seeking an identity. Tom and his non-white colleagues must be content to look on as momentous events such as the hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the U.S.-Japanese trade war unfold around them. After all, their opinions on the matter might run counter to the discourses that make global oppression by a white/black elite possible. Finally, Vincent, as has been discussed, feels compelled to use his ethnic background, as well as various aliases and disguises, to survive the challenges of the CIA. “He knew what he’d be going up against,” says Julia (*CO* 117). Though Tom feigns ignorance, he clearly understands Julia to mean that Vincent was aware he’d be “up against” challenges presented by his racial Otherness. Vincent’s primary consolation is that he is prized for his ability to be invisible in the United States and Japan, and he takes pride in this. Tina Chen provides an apt description of Vincent in her assessment of Henry, the protagonist of Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*: “Working as a spy, Henry feels the useful conjoining of his life

experience with his professional interests. His outsider status and the alienation that delimit his cultural position as an ‘American’ are precisely the qualities that his spymaster values” (161).

As a matter of fact, though, in Japan, Vincent’s efforts come to naught. He does not manage to secure American access to the untapped, highly profitable market represented by the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation, in part, because Lisa proves to be an unsuccessful “recruit.” Though he “prey[ed]” on her vulnerabilities much in the way a “pimp” might, playing the sympathetic but aloof Saito, he had not anticipated she would behave so impetuously after falling in love with him (*CO* 75). He could not predict that she would confront Julia, that Julia would recklessly drive away inadvertently injuring Lisa, or that the pain of those injuries would lead her to ingest pills and alcohol and, consequently, die in the apartment of the Minister of Post and Telecommunications. And, though her death initially proved a boon as it gave Vincent the opportunity to blackmail the Minister, who desperately feared scandal and confided in Vincent that he had hired a *yakuza* boss to dismember and dispose of the body, in the end, Vincent could not foresee the Minister falling suddenly and mysteriously under the wheels of an oncoming train.

While everyone in the novel is interested in crafting a persona, in part, as a “reaction to dominant groups,” which Prashad speaks of above, the one who seems most concerned about finding and establishing authenticity is Lisa, who ultimately fails. In fact, instead of achieving a more complete sense of self, experiencing a re-membering of all of her disparate parts, she is finally dismembered and forgotten—her identity is completely shattered, similarly to the way in which those of the ‘transgressive’ mothers depicted in the novel is. Nonetheless, her shifting status throughout the novel tells us something about history. As has been already noted, the

insults she suffered as a child in conjunction with the events at Berkeley and the *New York Times* article touting the rise of the multiethnic individual in the U.S. show us how attitudes toward these individuals have not necessarily evolved, but have changed within the American context. They have been assigned a 'positive' value for their ability to titillate consumers. Meanwhile, the various terms applied to Lisa by the Japanese reflect not only the animosity felt toward the American occupiers, but also bespeak the changes in U.S.-Japanese relations over time, as well as mirror shifting beliefs about and policies that have been aimed at mixed race individuals from the age of colonialism to Vietnam and have been historically prevalent in the West as a whole. The terms reveal the significance of racially 'impure' bodies not only to national perceptions of self, but also the roles these bodies play in how various groups of people endeavor to represent themselves internationally.

In the novel, Lisa is alternately referred to by as "*Ainoko*," "*Konketsu*," and "*Daburu*" (CO 237, 234, 239). *Ainoko* was applied to American-Japanese individuals during the American Occupation, and they were subjected to discriminatory policies related to citizenship that were enacted by both the U.S. and Japanese governments. Even if they managed to obtain legal recognition in Japan, they were still socially marginalized. The term, meaning "child of mixture," is "derogatory" and is "used for animals" as well as people (Murphy-Shigematsu 208, 210). *Konketsu* or *Konketsuji*, "mixed-blood child," was intended as a more "neutral term" and had been used to describe other ethnic mixtures before it was applied to American-Japanese. The position of *Konketsuji* in Japan was somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, they were depicted by the media as living "fast and loose lives" when, in reality, they were often "overrepresented in single-parent families," frequently dropped out of high school, and

burdened with identity issues that were “complicated” by discrimination and instances of “abandonment.” On the other hand, there was also a “sexual fascination” with them, and talent scouts sought them out for modeling and singing careers. Regardless, the “fascination” with them was mixed with “repulsion,” and they were “still objectified.” Later, dubbed a “problem” in that they were emblematic of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, mixed-race individuals would become a central issue in the island’s ongoing struggle for sovereignty (Murphy-Shigematsu 210-211). These terms eventually gave way to others like *Daburu*, which is taken from the English “double.” The name came into being during the years following the International Year of the Child in 1979 and preceding Japanese legal reforms regarding citizenship rights for multiethnic individuals passed in 1985. While *Daburu* is better than *Ainoko* or *Konketsuji*, many multiethnic Asians refuse to identify themselves as such for reasons that exceed the scope of this chapter. Let it simply be said that the moniker “reflect[s] the fact that Amerasians in Japan are increasingly associated with children of intact and well-to-do families who have lived abroad.” The “bilingualism” and “multiculturalism” of these individuals have “earned them respect in Japanese society and increased their opportunities in the United States,” as well as, arguably, in a world in which it is now imperative for nations to create and maintain a globally-oriented market in order to successfully compete economically (Murphy-Shigematsu 213-214).

Besides being an embodiment of sociohistorical changes, Lisa also manages to insert herself into the personal histories of the men she encounters in order to reveal to us what the men in the novel cannot articulate and that is their own failure to make history. Regardless of that failure, though, her death—the death of a multiracial prostitute—seems to restore a version

of the traditional order that privileges the male. It allows him to find acceptance among his peers, and he is able to do so within the confines of a socially-sanctioned heterosexual relationship, where he can assume his 'rightful' role as family patriarch and, thus, regain his masculinity. Lisa helps Ota achieve a position of respectability and power. He will ultimately become "head of Criminal Investigations" at one of Tokyo's central police stations (*CO* 312). Whereas everyone else dismisses the case as unimportant, Ota doggedly pursues it and eventually uncovers the link between her and the Minister. But, it is only by agreeing, at the behest of his superiors, that he keep silent about the Minister's involvement in her death that he regains his seat at the center of the room. Although he must forego public recognition and, worse than that, must adhere for life to the official advisory that she is "missing and presumed dead," the search for Lisa gives the awkward detective the opportunity to draw closer to Miss Saotome, his landlady, and the woman he will later refer to as his "life," his "country of residence," thereby iterating the chaste Woman as necessary to the continuation of national values and 'legitimate' conceptions of manhood, of personhood, and emphasizing the need to protect her 'virtue'--her 'purity' (*CO* 312, 313).

Tom also becomes compelled, at a certain point, to find Lisa not just because Julia has expressed an interest in knowing her whereabouts, but also because, he believes, he could have easily been her—"abandoned in an orphanage" (*CO* 268). Incidentally, this is the closest he comes to an admission of any understanding of himself as the disposable byproduct of U.S. neo-imperialist ventures. Though he does not succeed in locating her because he is abruptly dishonorably discharged from the Foreign Service for asking Benny to approve a visa that has already been denied as a favor to a Japanese police investigator who threatens to reveal Tom's

participation in covering up the accident in which Julia seriously injured a woman, Tom does ultimately find peace and happiness in Hawaii. He marries a multiethnic woman, starts a family, and becomes a well-respected high school teacher. Only Vincent, whose affiliation with Lisa was most spurious and sinister, seems to have carried on with life in the shadows. During a chance encounter in Hawaii between Vincent and Tom which occurs several years after Lisa's disappearance, the former reveals the details of Lisa's demise. Vincent also confides in Tom, rather unemotionally, that Julia left him only a couple of years after Tom had been relieved of his duties.

Interestingly, but perhaps not unsurprisingly, upon hearing of Lisa's fate, Tom immediately returns to his wife and children, who are contentedly frolicking in the ocean. He does not even take a moment to reflect on her or what he has heard about her. Rather, his final thoughts, at the close of the novel, are consumed by an appreciation for how "lovely and warm" the Pacific's waters are (*CO* 311). Tom's forgetting Lisa in the comfort of the all-encompassing warmth can, perhaps, be read as symbolic of his rebirth as a Hawaiian. Meanwhile, from his conversation with Tom, we gather that, even in retrospect, Vincent is unremorseful for misleading a distraught, confused, and somewhat naive young woman. He views Lisa and her death instrumentally. For him, she merely represents an actor in an unfortunate incident that, at the time he was touring Japan, presented an opportunity to apply a little more pressure on the Minister for favors that would make it possible for him in to meet his obligations to the CIA and the U.S. government. By the end of the novel, there is no unquestionable indication that these two characters, in particular, reach the level of self awareness for which Lisa strives in her own misguided way, by which I mean that she was

seeking legitimacy by looking for a single authentic identity to claim as her own. This, as opposed to embracing all of the possible identities afforded her by her “muddied” heritage. Of course, she cannot be faulted for this, as the social climate which prevails in the contemporary time of the novel is not conducive to cultivating or embracing a self-identity that defies pat, blanket categorizations.

Nevertheless, Lisa, in her quest, comes closer to achieving the sense of self that Michael C. Thornton and Harold Gates associate with “Dimension II” in their article “Black, Japanese, and American.” Though, as the title of their work suggests, they are interested in documenting the process of self-identity formation as it pertains specifically to the condition of being black, Japanese, and American, I think that their description of the development of self in relation to what amounts to a ‘black and white’ world could easily be applied to other bi- or multiethnic/bi- or multiracial/postnational individuals, as well. The process is complicated, and my synopsis below does not do justice to Thornton’s and Gate’s thoughtful and well-researched analysis, which accounts for a spectrum of characteristics and responses informants display as a result of individual experience. But, broadly speaking, what, in their schema, generally differentiates the ideal Dimension II individual from the Dimension I individual is as follows. Dimension II informants show an increased understanding of cultural heritage that allows the individual to do more than simply enumerate superficial, sometimes stereotypical, traits of a given culture. They display a greater awareness of self in relation to larger social issues associated with the existing racial economy, as opposed to the Dimension I informant who has an individualistic understanding of self in the world. Most importantly, they possess a sense of agency that inspires an active effort on the part of the Dimension II individual to

define herself as a subject based upon individual experience without relying solely upon that experience as a barometer for possibilities of self-definition. Rather, in the act of defining 'self,' the individual also takes into account experiences derived from investigating existing social discourses, constructions, and formations (100-102). Paraphrasing Paolo Freire, Thornton and Gates write:

Freire (1970a,b) would describe Dimension II as an altered, semi-intransitive state, when there is a noticeable rift between reality and what one had once believed to be reality. There is a transition from a fatalistic world in which the dominant culture and ideals found in Dimension I remain unquestioned, to a world in which one begins to distinguish what was not clear previously. This consciousness is inseparable from acting on reality. The entire process involves transforming one's worldview from being or existing in or being determined by the world as an object, to being in the world and going beyond mere existence to critical reflection and the transformation of one's environment as a subject (Freire, 1973, 1972a,b). (102)

Whereas Lisa initiated inquiry into matters that concern her origin which would have doubtlessly further altered her worldview, perhaps someday allowing her some choice as to how and with whom to identify, her compatriots Vincent and Tom have chosen, without giving much thought to the matter, to attempt to ally themselves with the "dominant culture." It is possible to argue that Tom's decision to marry a woman of multiethnic descent might stand as testimony to some type of budding awareness and positive acknowledgement of his identity as a biracial, postnational individual. But, such a claim is difficult to ascertain given that throughout most of the novel he aspires to be like Congrievs and his men, and it is clear in the novel's conclusion that the empathy he may have expressed for Lisa, his acknowledgement that he could have very easily been her, was obviously fleeting since he does not give her death

even a moment's thought. And, as we know, Vincent always allied himself with the state-sanctioned order without ever seeming to question the machinery that permanently traumatized his own family, as well as thousands of others. Even if the story of his mother is but another prop among the many he employs to bolster the elaborate set of disguises he boasts and was intended to invoke the sympathy and win the trust of a highly vulnerable, politically conscious young woman seeking solace and solidarity, the fact that he has no qualms with what amounted to a racist policy, purportedly enacted in the name of preserving national security and in spite of the willingness of many Japanese-Americans to serve in what would become one the most decorated battalion in U.S. history, suggests a lack of critical reflection on his part concerning the problematic place of Asian Americans within the American polity.

One possible explanation for the readiness of Tom and Vincent to attempt to downplay their Asian heritage is, of course, linked to a desire to dissociate from prevailing social perceptions of the Asian-American male as alien, effeminate, treacherous—all discussed previously. But, what of the Asian-American male who can 'pass'? Vincent can pass as Japanese, but he will forever be racially marked in the U.S. because both of his parents were Japanese. Tom, on the other hand, has more options, but decides to try to remain 'neutral,' to pass as Hawaiian rather than own what he feels is the dubious hyphenated identity that actually more accurately describes a facet of who he is, though it certainly does not, as he wrongly believes, constitute the totality of what he is. His reluctance to identify as Korean-American is, undoubtedly, linked to the ostracism he experienced as a child and the discrimination his mother had to endure. Meanwhile, his apparent readiness to identify more with his white, militaristic, unavailable father, his evasive response to Julia's question regarding whether he

has ever dated Asian women, his womanizing as a means of avoiding attachment and the inevitable pain that would accompany his being unmasked-- revealed as something he is not, and his genuine surprise that the beautiful, white Julia would unexpectedly dote on the Japanese-American Kitamura, and not the other way around, in a way that Tom says no one would ever dote on him all seem to indicate discomfort with himself as a sexual being and a biracial, Asian-American man (*CO* 163-164). This stems not only from childhood trauma, but also from popular depictions of the Asian-American male. T.H. Mukoyama found in a study of biracial Japanese-Americans conducted in 1998 that not only did more Japanese-African Americans actively investigate and “embrace ethnic heritage” than Japanese-White respondents, in part as a result of greater encouragement and support of “ethnic identification” on the part of parents, but also that men in both categories were more likely to identify as monoracial. Her explanation for this was that “biethnic males may have more societal pressures that promote monoethnic identification, while women may be freer to cross ethnic/social boundaries” (Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner 85)

This statement regarding Asian-American women’s mobility is substantiated by Koshy who was cited in an earlier chapter for noting the “sexual capital” they have accrued in the wake of increasing challenges by white women to “the traditional model of family-centered femininity.” Instead of being representative of unrestrained, dangerous sexuality as before, embodying desire and ‘traditional’ values, the Asian woman is now perceived as emblematic of a viable alternative that can help the American family to survive (Koshy, 2004, 16). Christine C. Iijima Hall and Trude I. Cooke Turner also take note of this “capital,” but elaborate on the observation by pointing out how skin color and different standards of beauty

for men and women play a role in determining how the biethnic individual is received by the U.S. mainstream (89). When “physical and social” images that are “perfect,” meaning they match popular standards of attractiveness and desirability, are “mixed with another, not-so-accepted image, the status may change.” Thus, they claim that “Asian-White” females may be more “acceptable in U.S. culture” than “Asian-Black” females because the former are more reminiscent of females “stereotypically preferred” in the United States and closer to the “physical and social image of Asian women,” i.e. “petite, light-skinned, and passive (Hall, 1995a, b, 1997)” (89-90). Interestingly, where biethnic males are concerned lighter skin may not be an advantage. For “men, the preferred male image is larger, more aggressive (but not violent), and darker (but not too dark) (Welsing, 1991).” Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner continue, “The Asian-White male may not possess all these qualities, but the Asian-Black male may have many of these and thus be preferred by all racial groups.” Whereas Iijima Hall’s (1980) Black-Japanese male informants reported that they were popular among women for their “exotic looks and muscular body stature,” Asian Hispanic males “may have an added social image of being strong and in control (Lopez-Baez 1997)” (Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner 90).

While Tom and Lisa have, to an extent, been able to capitalize on their “exotic” good looks, Lisa is the only one who understands the hierarchy that governs the terms according to which biethnic and multiethnic individuals are accepted as a result of the discrimination she faced early in life. Though Tom also never fit in and cannot escape those aspects of his physical makeup that make him an object of both desire and ridicule, he made a decision early on to construct an identity for himself that he felt would be considered unequivocally

American when he chose to pass himself off as Hawaiian. Rather than working toward the development of consciousness about his ancestry as Lisa does, he is happy to live as an imposter in order to secure advantages that, in his assessment, which is one that is probably not so far removed from reality, might otherwise be denied him. The image of the playboy surfer he projects gives him not only some control over how he is perceived, but also makes him less ‘alien.’ Meanwhile, Vincent, who does not have the physical advantages described by Iijima Hall and Cooke Turner, overcompensates for the image of being “strong and in control” that he lacks by perfecting his skills as a master manipulator for a patriarchal State apparatus. This apparatus sanctions his Americanness and, by extension, eradicates the history of madness and questionable loyalties that is associated with his Japanese heritage and is both a source of shame and grounds to perpetuate stereotypes of Japanese-Americans, like himself, as ‘the alien enemy within.’

Among the men, Ota is the only one who appears to have achieved a modicum of insight. Several years after the Lisa’s ‘disappearance, when Japan is in social and financial crisis because the economic bubble has burst, Lisa’s remains are found interred in the foundation of a building. Contemplating the discovery of Lisa’s body and the turmoil caused by existing socioeconomic conditions, Ota is compelled to entertain briefly the notion that the Japanese may have been wrong in being so insular and adhering to the “imperatives of racial purity” (CO 313). He seems to appreciate the personal stability that her death has indirectly afforded him and vows to have her body sent back to the United States, remarking that “he wished he had been able to give her soul some peace and dignity, since her life seemed to have meant so little to anyone” (CO 314). There is at least some recognition of her as a subject and

an appreciation for the fact that she provided an opportunity for him to have a new, improved life.

Conversely, Tom and Vincent, each bound by insecurities regarding their status in a country, i.e., the U.S., that would never fully accept them, treat her primarily as a vehicle that would further them in their quest to achieve a full, palpable sense of enfranchisement. She represents a means by which each could, on some level or another, become a “Self-Made Man.” For Vincent, Lisa is but a pawn in an important trade deal. For Tom, her abject, brown body, one not so unlike his own, is the means by which he thinks he can win the heart of the (white) woman and, thereby, move one step closer to his dream of acceptance. Little does Tom know that it is Julia who indirectly contributed to Lisa’s death when she sped away in her car, injuring Lisa just after the latter approached her somewhat hysterically exclaiming that Vincent no longer loved Julia, but rather was now devoted to her. It is doubtful that this detail would have mattered to him, though, so obsessed was he with gaining entry into the white world. Arguably, as Mukoyama has hypothesized, men like Tom may be burdened more by “societal pressures” to identify as monoethnic. And, for Vincent, though he is not biracial but is biethnic, there was/is, as has been stressed throughout this dissertation, a particular pressure put upon Asian men to legitimate themselves over and against discourses that undermine their agency, authority, and identity.

This does not excuse the fact that for neither Vincent nor Tom is Lisa ever really human, but it may explain the fact that she is regarded as nothing more than an object of exchange. First, the *undetectability* of her Otherness by Detective Ota and Tom and sudden revelation of who she actually was produces anxiety, more so for Tom than for Ota, who, as

was pointed out above, eventually seeks to return her humanity to her. For Tom, she becomes a reminder of what he regards as a shameful aspect of his identity---his Korean heritage. Near the novel's end, he is unsettled by the sudden revelation that she had originally come to Japan in search of her own (Korean) mother. She was seeking to unearth precisely that thing which he had spent a lifetime trying to bury---the traces of his own mother and the unhappy legacy of Otherness which she had bequeathed him. Upon being presented Lisa's history by her sister, he asks to see Lisa's photo one more time. "Why hadn't he noticed before, the contradictory facial features, the parts that didn't quite fit together, as on his own face. *She was revealed to him now* [emphasis added]" (CO 230).

Because she resists easy identification or categorization, she is a source of discomfort for Tom and Vincent, both of whom have been seeking recognition as complete subjects by institutions that (re)produce discourses which naturalize and valorize historically specific models of heterosexual white masculinity, often by relying upon the subordination of other masculinities. Having been born a "stateless" individual with "no right to exist," 'tainted' by her black blood, and finally ending up a 'hostess' in the sex industry subject to the jibes and whims of the clientele, she invokes fear in them of the threat of their own depersonalization and objectification (CO 237). Thus, it is, perhaps, easier for them to reject her, to transform her into an object of perverse desire rather than recognize her as a subject with whom their own experiences with discrimination would allow them to identify. They do not 'detect' parallels between their own lives and hers and will, themselves, it seems from the novel's conclusion, remain 'missing persons'--disenfranchised participants in and self-deluding contributors to an alleged 'all-inclusive,' democratic system.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly address the reasons why Lee may have chosen to adopt the mystery genre as a way of making commentary on race and ethnic identification, particularly as it pertains to multiethnic/postnational individuals, and to comment on the novel's ending which seems to celebrate America, even as Lee's work reveals the complications that race-oriented judgments create for the individual at home and abroad, where American racial hierarchies may have influenced the attitudes of the local population depicted in the novel or not. I say may or may not because, according to John G. Russell, Japanese attitudes toward dark-skinned people have not been static and were developed in response to a number of influences over the centuries (91). Certainly, Western beliefs and theories related to the "science of race" were, at times, invoked by the elite to further national and international sociopolitical interests (Russell 96). Moreover, in the years following the Occupation, Whites, it has been argued, have been increasingly "perceived as less foreign" than Blacks, even as blackness has, simultaneously, been "commodified." Ultimately, it has been asserted by Russell that blackness has helped, in various ways, to "mediate Japanese identity in relation to whiteness" (Molasky 74, 73). Since it would be a lengthy and likely impossible task to try to ascertain how and to what extent American discourses on race have impacted Japanese attitudes toward blackness, and such a discussion exceeds the scope of this dissertation, let me return to the questions originally posed, making some minor adjustments. Why does Lee utilize detective fiction to speak about racial inequities and racial/ethnic identity formation and why does he conclude by presenting an idealized image of America as a haven for the disenfranchised while mostly painting Japan as a bastion of intolerance (the one exception in the overall portrait being Ota who, at least, finally begins to question Japan's insularity)? For

example, besides being referred to as a “*kurombo*,” “half-nigger,” a “*dojin*,” “earth” person, and ostracized as the daughter of an African-American and a Korean bargirl, Lisa is also the object of ridicule by men who come to one of the clubs where she worked before her death. They disdainfully speculate about her nose calling it “too broad and flat”—“almost like a black person’s”—and refer to her lips as “Negroid” (*CO* 239, 106). Meanwhile, Tom is looked down upon by for being bi-ethnic, while Vincent is embraced as a Japanese compatriot as a result of his Japanese appearance.

Though it is acknowledged that Lisa, Tom, Vincent, and Ota have each struggled in their own ways with discrimination in American contexts, as well as in Japanese ones, the critique of America and American racial discourses that, it has been argued, are to be found in ethnic crime fiction originating from the United States is undermined by Lisa’s demise and subsequent commentary. All of the characters but Lisa seem to find their place and, perhaps even their bliss. Nonetheless, the author still has the victimized female ultimately praise America and tacitly empathize with those who, at best, never truly understood her and, at worst, tried to benefit from her vulnerability. While much has been written on African-American detective fiction, less attention, it seems, has been paid to the detective fiction written *by* Asians/Asian Americans than about detective fiction written *about* them. Therefore, in order to continue this brief discussion of the ways in which Lee gets it ‘right’ and to emphasize the sudden disturbing and inexplicable utopian impulse which is manifest in the conclusion, I will turn to what has been written about African-American detective fiction.

Certainly, I am not going to attempt any comparison of the Asian-American identity development with that of African-American identity formation, but I believe that some of the

more general statements made by scholars investigating African-American crime fiction, such as Daylanne K. English, among others, can be applied to a reading of Lee's work. According to English, the "elusiveness of identity" and the "nature of modern and postmodern African-American identity" and, arguably, other ethnic identities as "increasingly irresolvable mysteries"--mysteries with which all of Lee's characters must contend on some level or another--"[invite] use of the detective form" (774). Though, for what are perhaps different reasons, trying to construct a pan-ethnic collective consciousness among Asian Americans and corresponding identity that could be used as a political tool, has, been just as much of a challenge as it has been for African Americans. This, not only because of the incredible diversity of Asian groups living in the U.S., the historical circumstances under which they came and which have shaped their various relationships with one another, socioeconomic differences, issues concerning attitudes toward gender and sexuality that originate from within the community and come from without, and disagreements about how this identity would be represented.

Further complicating the issue are multiethnic/postnational individuals like those Lee features; for, often they are not necessarily able to lay claim to any particular ethnic identity, experiencing misrecognition or outright rejection from those with whom they would endeavor to form bonds. By their very existence, these characters, in fact, call into question claims to an "authentic" national/cultural identity. While English is speaking specifically about African-American identity, I think that her assertion that an "authentic" national/ cultural identity is "by definition a receding mystery, the ever-detected, yet never-found" is relevant to a reading of Lee's novel (789). As in classic, hard-boiled fiction the detective, Ota, as well as many of the

characters are “liminal figures” who “dwell between regions, classes, and discourses, between legality and illegality, and between legitimacy and illegitimacy.” Some of the characters also, however, inhabit “the borders between races” which is “the site not only of the criminal act but also...the site of culturally transgressive possibility” (Lock qtd. in English 779; English 779; Mason qtd. in English). As I have intended to demonstrate, Lisa, though she is the victim, is that site of “culturally transgressive possibility,” but even as her death permits others an opportunity to adopt new, in some cases radically different, personas, it undermines transgressive possibilities for the catalyst of change herself.

To be fair, what Lee does well is to construct a “racially inflected mystery surrounding families and genealogies”—one of “two ongoing mysteries,” the other being “color-coded justice,” that surround race (English 774). Further, he rightly seizes on the opportunity to employ “legal failures and injustices” to “dramatize the intimate relations between racism and democracy.” However, in concluding, he fails to resist the urge to employ what Sean McCann has described as the neat endings characteristic of nineteenth century classical mysteries. Such endings do not do justice to the complexities of modern life, and how Lee opts to end his critique is problematic (McCann qtd. in English 774-775). He emphasizes the ‘success’ of Asian-American male protagonists at the expense of any actual change in the attitudes of his male characters, who seem satisfied to give themselves complacently over to comfortable, self-affirming changes made possible by effectively ignoring injustices related to racial discrimination. Granted, Ota is, to some degree, the “philosopher-detective” who McCann describes as having “discover[ed] that the modern legal and social order is neither redemptive nor consolatory. In fact, it may be both incompetent and malignant, particularly toward

vulnerable individuals,” like Lisa (English 775). But, any indignation or sympathy Ota might feel, any understanding of the injustice, is cancelled out by the fact that he is content to maintain the lie about the Minister in order to retain the privileges that secrecy has enabled him to enjoy. Ultimately, he defers to the status quo in order to have his masculinity restored, become a husband, and enjoy the prestige associated with his new position as a high ranking homicide detective—one who temporarily breathes life into the dead and temporarily restores humanity to those who are quickly, publically forgotten.

Meanwhile, even though Tom also recognizes that twenty years after his discharge from the Foreign Service, everything and nothing has changed, he speaks of recent events, particularly ethnic divisions, with a certain detachment; and, he attributes societal rifts primarily to money and individual desires—not to prevailing racial stereotypes which continue to hold people like himself hostage:

After 1980, everything had changed -- decades of solipsism and greed that seemed without end. The Cold War was over. The Japanese economic bubble had burst. Countries and civilizations rose and fell. But the great divisions of ethnicity and class and religion raged on, and everything was still, in the end, about money. The world was a much meaner place now, more superficial, more corruptible. There were scandals, but nothing was really scandalous, because the worst things imaginable happened everyday and were immediately packaged into entertainment. No one seemed to have any innocence left to lose. Yet, underneath it all, people still lived out a million heartrending dramas of no consequence, searching for love and kinship, finding joy and betrayal. Hostage to their hearts. (CO 310)

Perhaps, we are supposed to assume that Tom’s marriage to a multiracial woman designates a form of acceptance of the Other, but based on the text, it is impossible to ascertain that this marriage signifies self-acceptance, as everything is ultimately about money, and matters of the

heart are “dramas of no consequence. “ They do not, it would appear from his choice of words, seem to apply to him. Additionally, there is no indication of sympathy for or acceptance of the racial Other whose sexuality does not conform to heteronormative notions of propriety, as revealed in the exchange with Vincent described above.

Any critique of U.S. racial relations is further undermined by the vision of a progressive America that gleams and holds out promise unlike Japan, which is depicted as having fallen into disarray because, it is insinuated, of its archaic racial discourses and ‘misguided’ emphasis on the merits of collectivism as opposed to American individualism. The novel ends with a deceased Lisa ‘solving’ the mystery of her identity by dreaming the memory of an idyllic America and a mythological rebirth experienced with her ‘true’ parents, “Bobby and Miyako,” as they pass under the Golden Gate Bridge on a navy freighter. She then remembers a Korean adage that “Miyako” had once spoken and “with which Lisa had promised to live her life: *chin, son, mi*. Truth. Goodness. Beauty”; Lisa associates these words with what she imagines her fictitious ‘mother’ must have been “feeling” and what she, herself, claims to have recollected as they first encountered the shores of the United States. This place must be “[a] land where all was possible, where truth prevailed, goodness was rewarded, and beauty could be found in the meeting of outcasts. Oh, what a sight, Lisa marveled [...] We are orphans, all of us, she thought. And this is our home” (CO 315). While I find the attempt to resurrect Lisa as the voice of optimism--speaking for a country whose existing racial climate has become increasingly complicated by the growing presence of multiethnic individuals/postnational individual—difficult to accept, Lee’s efforts to elucidate the complications associated with the multiethnic/postnational condition not only mark an

important step in expanding upon what it means to be Asian American, but they also reveal the difficulty with which individuals who straddle cultures navigate the system and negotiate an identity when confronted with existing racial paradigms. If we accept Park and Park's assessment, which asserts that racial discourses are too often coded in terms of black or white and that everyone who does not fall within the parameters of the paradigm is considered a "spectator," then it is easy to see how Lisa can only be a mystery.

In a sense, Lee is channeling Lisa to challenge the unspoken injunction that ethnic writers 'keep it real'—in other words, cater to mainstream reader's expectations that an ethnic writer's job is to give us access to a culture not our own, to represent a particular ethnic community as a fixed, unadulterated entity. Above all, the representation must be 'realistic' enough that the reader has a sense that they have visited a true ethnic enclave and learned something about the Other, but the content of that knowledge must not be so foreign that it is unrecognizable to readers and the preconceived notions they bring with them. These expectations are senseless, even counterproductive, when "'we' [Asian Americans] were in fact *invented* in the space of the impossibility of cultural coherence [emphasis added]" (Hattori 244). In Lee's novel, we have a metacritical narrative that speaks to the problematic notion of an 'authentic,' 'singular,' atavistic, 'truthful' Asian-American voice and shows us the impossibility of constructing a corresponding persona capable of self-actualization that is unimpeded and uninfluenced by socioeconomic and institutional constraints and the complications with which ideas about nation, race, class, and gender are intertwined.

That said, even as Lee very thoroughly elaborates on the issues associated with juggling multiple heritages, the narrative movement and the underlying commentary in his novel relies

upon the victimization and abjection of a women of color—Vincent’s mother who is punished by the executive and legislative system for being Japanese American, Tom’s mother who is ostracized for miscegenation and alleged prostitution and Lisa, who happens to be the child of a purported prostitute and an African American and is, in fact, a prostitute herself for a short time. Lisa’s death is used to criticize the social order that punished the women who came before her, but it is also crucial in enabling the men to find a place within the very same order that is being scrutinized. This last detail, in conjunction with Lisa’s final dream of America as a golden gate to freedom and a haven for the parentless and stateless—all that it never was for her in reality-- ultimately, helps to reinforce that order.

Surely on her imaginary journey to the Golden Gate Bridge, Lisa must have passed Angel Island, the place where so many Asian immigrants--Chinese, in particular--were interrogated and detained, sometimes for years. As one of the hundreds of poems carved on the walls by early inmates of the center indicates, the U.S. was not the Promised Land that many Asian immigrants had envisioned.

America has power, but not justice.
In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty.
Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal.
I bow my head in reflection but there is
nothing I can do. (Anonymous qtd. in Mintz)

Lisa felt imprisoned in her own body as a result of prevailing social attitudes toward

multiethnic individuals—never Asian enough, never black or white enough. She was victimized as if guilty, and her explanations went unheard or were dismissed. Then, she was interred in the foundation of a building in Japan and officially forgotten. If the U.S. only holds a place for her in death, then what is it that Lee's mystery is really saying about possibilities for transgressing the racialization of sexuality, about overcoming social death, and being recognized on one's own terms? Perhaps, Lisa, speaking as a ghost--the way that Kkuhtaeh does in Chang-rae Lee's novel and the way that the forlorn poet cited above does, serves to remind us of suppressed histories of, for example, Tom's and Vincent's own mothers. However, it seems that the author disposes of Lisa primarily to highlight the plight of the postnational Asian/ Asian-American man. Rather than sailing on a ghost ship which, like the ships of the unwanted Asian immigrants of the past, may never dock, this man enjoys the company of his wife--his "country of origin," or he plays by the Hawaiian seaside with his children, having, perhaps, finally found a place in the world and a sort of relief from the burden of identity.

Conclusion

Reading and Writing the Asian-American Man in the Twenty-First Century: Some Final Thoughts

It does not take criticism to tell us who we really are, what our cultural "truth" really is. Asian America does not need a face-lift: a fresh coat of paint in the same color on the same ghetto house. What it desperately needs is a de-facement in the sense that Paul de Man uses to radicalize autobiography. Asian American culture needs to be liberated from the obligation of compulsory auto-ethnography. We need to be liberated from the endless rehearsal of the trauma of our identity, from the prison of the endless performance of the yellowness of our bodies. (Hattori 244)

This singularity of meaning—I *was* my face, I *was ugliness*—though sometimes unbearable, also offered a possible point of escape. It became a launching pad from which to lift off, the one immediately recognizable place to point to when asked what was wrong with my life. Everything led to it, everything receded from it—my face as a personal vanishing point. (*Autobiography of a Face*, Grealy qtd. in Hesford 22)

In each of the novels that have been examined, the men have undergone a “de-facement,” though perhaps not always in the radicalizing sense for which Hattori calls. They have been depicted as seeking, each in their own way, to free themselves from the bodily “prison” of the “of the endless performance” of “yellowness,” but, as we have seen, this is not

easily accomplished. In fact, it seems impossible. In keeping with de Man's theories of autobiography, there is no chance of retrieving some pre-existing fully formed self through the act of telling; for, the self has, in all cases, already been fractured or somehow disfigured by one or more traumatic historical events and by social and institutional oppression. But, unlike the de Manian autobiographer, the Asian-American individuals that populate the works discussed previously are precluded from successfully narrating another self into being no matter what personas they adopt or tales they spin about those personas because, finally, there is no escaping social and institutional injunctions to enact certain narrowly-defined roles that spectators, be they white, Asian/ Asian-American, or another ethnicity, have come to expect these individuals to perform. Or, the characters perform these roles without questioning the legitimacy of them because they have internalized the discourses that inform them, and they desire ultimately to meet cultural expectations (Hesford 19).

Wendy S. Hesford argues that although it may be tempting to posit that "historically marginalized groups share with Barthes and de Man a non-representative displaced sense of subjectivity," we must exercise caution in making such a leap. Citing Bidy Martin and Shoshona Felman, among others, she warns of the dangers of drawing comparisons.

While such comparisons like these have a 'certain allure,' as Bidy Martin Points out [...] in actuality they 'constitute a certain danger, given the institutional privileges enjoyed by those who can afford to disavow 'identity' and its 'limits' over against those for whom such disavowals reproduce their invisibility' (1988b, 78). Barthes's conception of the 'death of the author' and the author's inevitable return may have deconstructed the concept of referentiality and views of the reader and writer as static fixed entities. The contemporary effacement of European white male critics is not, however, equivalent to the historical and literary *absence* of women or men or of color. One might argue, then, that the image of disappearance put forth by Barthes and de Man reifies a dominant white Western male space; although the author has disappeared and may be invisible, it

is a privileged and thus superior invisibility. In de Man's "Autobiography as De-facement" and Barthes "The Death of the Author," the 'master subject' plays his usual disappearing tricks. What neither de Man nor Barthes considers in these essays is how the 'making of history is tied up with the makings of a *silence*' (Felman 1992, 184). In fact, for many women and men of color, writing often feels like emerging from social death or confinement, in the sense they have been culturally silenced or regarded as an absence (Bronfen, 404). (Martin, Felman; Bronfen qtd. in Hesford 21; Hesford 21)

But, endeavors to claim *authority* and to establish a presence are, for many of the individuals in the novels examined here, fraught with complications. The male protagonists' efforts at self-authorship often entail perpetuating social hierarchies that further alienate those who inhabit regions furthest from the center. Unfortunately, in most, but not all cases, the emerging subject's feelings of self-loathing and inadequacy are finally only intensified. "Social death" and "confinement" persist for the men, as they seek to establish themselves by denying the humanity of those who disrupt the coherence of their narratives and threaten the validity of their claims to fully integrated, unachievable subjecthood.

Taking into consideration the fate of the male characters, it would seem that the novels' authors have overcome "cultural silence" only to reveal the site of "absence" occupied by the Asian-American Male and his inability to find a voice of his own. In fact, the premium placed on coming into voice is underscored by the repeated failure to do so as depicted in the works under discussion. However, David Leiwei Li warns that we must proceed with caution, carefully taking into consideration who gets to break silence and how. He boldly asserts in his account of the evolution of the institutional legitimization of Asian-American studies and Asian-American literature was brought about, primarily, by the antagonistic collusion between Asian-American "feminists" and "ethnic nationalists"; and, it is the "class privilege" that they

“enjoy as men and women of letters” which has allowed them to make claims about the Asian-American condition—a fact that has gone largely unaddressed and is not without consequences. “The clamor for voice among the native intelligentsia,” he argues “has perpetuated the muteness of the true subaltern of the Asian American constituency” (189). Meanwhile, the more recent “poststructuralist recognition of Asian American difference” which has compelled “Asian American intellectuals” engaged in the “business of articulating identity” to “separate their own privilege within the dominant institution from the privation of Asian Americans outside it” and enabled “media[tion] of the internal contradictions of Asian American social demography” has, nonetheless, also had a silencing effect in that it does not allow for coalition building based, in part, upon a pan-ethnic identity and historical, shared sense of “alie[nation]” and “ab[jection].” Thus, efforts to effect large-scale change are impeded or foreclosed. “The poststructuralist recognition of Asian American difference is rarely understood as a concomitant relationship between members, or between members and non-members, but as a contradiction in the autonomous subject itself.” As a result, “negotiation in the social arena” is “replaced by the needs of individual psychological fulfillment.” Dehistoricized, “[i]dentity becomes a matter of personal choice, like picking up groceries at the supermarket” (Li 192-194).

In 2007, I sat at a restaurant with a group of Asian-American men and women, all of whom were involved in a social organization designed to bring young Asian Americans from the New York City metro area together. On my end of the table, which happened to be populated mostly by men, someone asked about my dissertation project—a question which led to a discussion of stereotypes of Asian/Asian-American men. While most of the men seemed at

ease with their Asian-American identity, and some demonstrated a healthy sense of humor regarding the stereotypes of Asian men that we discussed-- both reassuring signs of changes in the existing racial climate—one particular story from a Korean adoptee, Steve (not his real name), which will be detailed below, led me to wonder if the situation was indeed improving or if there were men out there still struggling to find a sense of wholeness, as individuals and as national subjects like the characters studied in the previous chapters.

After our discussion, I decided to solicit via the internet for interviewees to ask them what they felt about issues regarding the Asian-American ‘condition’ as a way of trying to determine the salient points in the literature I was examining and to find out whether or not that literature spoke to the lived experiences of individuals outside the academy. Given Li’s assertion that, too often, the voices of those Asian Americans uninvolved with the academy and with the business of ‘officially producing’ Asian America go unheard and that we Asian Americanists and ‘our’ authors tend to speak for minority subjects, a risky activity in that what we say about and how we represent Asian-American communities has tremendous influence upon how the mainstream understands Asian-American experiences, it seemed imperative to me to communicate with actual members of the population about which I have been writing. Two responses I received to my advertisement, as well as the story shared by Steve, warrant some discussion in that they resonate strongly with the perception of the self as fractured or marked and/or a sense of voicelessness and victimization to which the protagonists of the works discussed previously react and which demonstrate that identity is still the product of “normative regulation and contestation” and subject to the forces of history. Identity-making, for these individuals, did not appear to be simply a matter of ‘choosing’ whether or not

“difference” is an “idiosyncratic merit or drawback to be cherished or conquered by the individual” (Li 194).

Before continuing, I should say that I was not necessarily convinced by individuals at the dinner who glibly claimed to have no race-related personal issues or anxieties, but that is, for obvious reasons, a moot point; for, who am I to contradict their perceived realities? Nor was I particularly interested in the impersonal answers regarding the ‘issues’ surrounding Asian-American masculinity which I received from a young, well-meaning Asian-American Studies student. While his interest in this project was appreciated and I suspect that, with time, experience will lead him to his own independent conclusions, clearly, he had been influenced by precisely the institution which, Li warns, we should, at times, regard from a critical distance. I was much more intrigued by the individuals who spoke candidly about their anxieties and the complications that were involved in ‘finding’ themselves, and by those who, in their responses, were even antagonistic toward me--to understate matters—because underneath that antagonism lay frustration at being spoken about as opposed to being spoken to or being permitted to speak.

Whether or not I actually made contact with that abstract population of the “subaltern” which Li describes is open to debate, but clearly some of what was encountered dialogues with the complexities of identity formation depicted in the works and the unreliability of the past as a “mirror,” to quote Doc Hata. For example, the Korean adoptee, Steve, described the volunteer work he did with young Korean adoptees, saying that for him it was a way of gaining proximity to his Korean heritage while helping others like himself who by virtue of having been raised in a ‘white environment’ had little connection with their Korean heritage. Delving

deeper into his situation, I found that he had, as an adult, made a pilgrimage back to South Korea in hopes of locating his birth mother, even going so far as to appear on a television show, the premise of which was to reconcile adoptees with their birth mothers.

While that produced no results, he did manage to find out the location of the clinic where he had likely been born and informed me that given the fact that it was a good clinic, he guessed that she must have been from a relatively well-to-do family and had to give him up to preserve the family's honor. This discovery put to rest his long-held belief that she was a prostitute who could not afford to keep him. The 'truth' did not appear to provide that much solace, perhaps because, on one level, it involved a more 'voluntary' relinquishment. It seemed that the latter construction of his mother, while not optimal, was preferable in that this prostitute mother's choices were the product of hardship. And, he openly admitted to having taken comfort in the company of prostitutes before he became aware that his mother may not have been a prostitute, after all. He claimed that they represented a way of drawing closer to his mother and, thereby, to a part of himself that he was trying to recover also in his work with young adoptees. In no way did he desire to reject his Koreanness or what he had grown up thinking was his 'dubious' parentage, and one of the ways in which he chose to lay claim to his heritage was by asserting his sexuality as a means of grappling with an aspect of his identity hitherto concealed from him—not so unlike Chua's narrator, although Steve's narrative was not suffused with the vitriol that characterized that of the Thai-Malaysian protagonist drifting from one Bangkok night to another. Whether for Steve hiring prostitutes was motivated simply by the need to access his unknowable past and construct a usable (personal) history or whether it also involved a desire to experience the illusion of complete mastery over another's body and

the attendant sense of power is impossible to know; but, as will be discussed below, his means of reconnecting with the past and achieving self mastery is potentially problematic.

The affable tone and calm self-reflection that characterized Steve's discussion of his personal history were nowhere present in another response penned by an anonymous individual using a Japanese screen name, "Utamaro," whose reply left little room for speculation as to whether or not he was disgruntled. "Utamaro" responded rather caustically to the advertisement for interviewees that I posted online, suggesting that not only was I using my work as a ploy to meet men, but as a way to separate my prospects from one another according to ethnicity/race and avoid possible interaction with the 'undesirable' Asian man.

You aren't fooling anyone. This one has been done before. We know you are apprehensive about embarrassing [*sic*] yourself by mistaking someone for someone of your same culture, even though racially are the same. Just say whether you are Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, or whatever, and that your mother tongue is _____, and that your parents are from _____.

1st generation, 2nd Generation, 3rd generation?? [*sic*] Native English speaker, speak a second language?? Speak English with an accent, slight accent, no accent?? Foreign born, native born, naturalized [...]

But really you are not fooling anyone. I've taken part in something like this before. It's a great idea, a wonderful way to meet someone in depth [*sic*]. But is was just a method to meet men [*sic*]. I've known certain women who have organized to teach language and culture of China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc. They were very, very nice and kind to the white men students. But when a female student registered and enrolled in class they were very, very difficult with her, as well as to non-white male students [*sic*].

In addition to indirectly speaking to the high rate of 'out marriage' among Asian-American women, what seems to underlie the insinuations that my "apprehensive[ness]" about inadvertently meeting someone of Asian descent, as opposed to the 'highly sought after' white

Prince Charming, are suspicions that I am prone to a form of self-loathing that manifests in the hatred of ‘my own kind.’ In my opinion, “Utamaro’s” articulation of such possible suspicions reflects anxieties related to his own feelings of worthiness as a subject. The overall tone of his response and the anecdote he tells about his classroom experiences indicate feelings of powerlessness in the face of not only Asian-American women, but also knowledge-producing institutions. “Utamaro’s” observations make visible the ‘disadvantages’ of being an Asian-American man in the twenty-first century and, by extension, counter the post-structural construction of the individual as being in “full possession of the power of meaning-making and self-invention” (Li 194).

That the legacy of alienation and abjection persists in spite of post-structuralism’s emphasis on the power of “personal choice” as a means of constructing identity is further substantiated by his preoccupation with establishing my ethnic ‘authenticity’--as if determining that would provide further insight into my ‘actual’ intentions and whether or not I was qualified to speak, to question (Li 194). Was I masquerading as an Asian—a white woman with an Asian fetish who would ultimately objectify him? Or, was I just another traitorous Asian woman attempting to analyze, and, by extension, humiliate the ‘second-class’ Asian-American Man for personal gain—academic, sexual, or otherwise. Was it possible that I was simply looking to exercise power over him that was made possible by the “sexual” and social “capital” I have accumulated as a result of the position Asian-American women now occupy in the popular imaginary? It is difficult to say what he believed or what his intentions were, particularly, because “Utamaro” shot back by displaying an example of his own foray into race/gender research, perhaps intended to instruct me and inform me of his struggles to be

recognized as a man or to devalue me in the same way he may have thought I was trying to devalue him by turning the tables and transforming him into the object of ‘the gaze.’ It came in the form of an image of a book cover that featured a photograph of a white woman wearing a negligee-like, antique white, lace dress and shot in soft focus, who, rose in hand, looked like she’d just stepped off the cover of a Harlequin romance novel. The title of the book by Adam Quan: *How to Date a White Woman: A Practical Guide for Asian Men*. Whatever the case, his goal clearly involved self-empowerment, and ‘mastering’ the White Woman appears to have been the means by which he felt he could realize this.

“Utamaro’s” insistence that this has been “done before” coupled with the defensiveness that pervades his response to the advertisement suggests that, at least some Asian-American men feel that they are still not an acceptable part of American social fabric. This is an old story and though the form discrimination takes may be less overt, it continues to haunt individuals. However, their experiences of alienation are ignored or go unnoticed as the mainstream continues to celebrate multiculturalism’s triumphs and ‘applaud’ the Asian American for becoming the ‘model minority,’ a construction of Asian-American identity that has been largely discredited by Asian-American scholars as an interracially divisive myth that also ignores the real material conditions of various Asian-American communities, among other things, but which has, at the same time, found its “parallel” in post-structuralist formulations of “self in difference” (Li 194). Li writes that the post-structural formulation of the “self in difference” which favors the “the sovereign individual” over “a critical sense of community” is ultimately “atomic and ahistorical,” as “past and present forms of historical and social determination are eventually dismissed as extraneous.” The concept is readily comparable to

the “myth of the Asian-American ‘model minority’ whose individualist initiative will always triumph, independent of institutional functions [...] Individual difference not only encourages an illusory identification with the conquerors of history but also an active disidentification both with the conquered and the colored makers of that same history” (194).

A study done by Pawan H. Dhingra offers compelling evidence for the power and effectiveness of the myth that emphasizes the individual’s capacity to trump “institutional functions” through “individualist initiative” and that permits identification with White History makers as opposed to “colored” participants who have been denied their part in History, even as this myth also allows the sovereign individual to disregard the historical. In Dhingra’s study, young, second-generation Asian-American professionals were interviewed about racial identity. An overwhelming three quarters of the participants could not identify with other minorities, nor did they exhibit an awareness of the larger historical context in which they, as Asian Americans, have been and are positioned. In fact, it was African Americans, and not the informants themselves or their parents, whom many interviewees constructed as “cultural foreigners” whose inability/refusal to adopt “U.S. middle class norms,” for example speaking standard English, was one of the reasons they had not, as a group, successfully integrated into American society (Dhingra 128, 129). Subjects also asserted that programs like Affirmative Action were, at best, unnecessary and a misguided way of achieving racial equality. At worst, such programs were harmful to ‘hardworking’ Asians (Dhingra 130). In talking about economic inequality, one professional, Tom, made it clear that institutionalized racism and historical, race-related injustices were, in his opinion, not significant contributing factors. “If you look at affirmative action, and if Asians are looking out for Asians, and I tend to think a lot

of them are, then getting rid of it has increased the population of Asians in schools [...] Asian Americans don't raise as much hell about being impoverished as African Americans and Latinos do. That's because we realize that we're poor because we're poor. And to get out of that, you have to work hard. African Americans and Latinos say, 'We're poor because the White man is keeping us down'" (qtd. in Dhingra 131). Elsewhere, another informant, Susan, acknowledged that Asian Americans do live in a "White world," and since this was the case it was necessary for Asian-Americans to have "such strong work ethics, we don't want to be seen as just another minority group" (qtd. in Dhingra 129-130).

The need to work harder and be self-reliant citizens who are not perceived as 'uneducated, poorly-spoken, criminals,' as other individuals in Dhingra's study characterized Blacks, belies the confidence these professionals have that they are indeed closer to white Americans than their African-American and Latino counterparts (129). The perceived need to distance themselves from other minority groups imparts unease. It suggests that, on some level, the speakers still do not consider themselves fit to be proper national subject by white American standards, and as we have seen in the novels, this creates a quandary that very well could be the source of acute psychic distress and confusion about who one really is.

Furthermore, as we have witnessed in many of the works analyzed here, the 'choice' to embrace or to reject an identity is hardly sufficient consolation in that personal choice can provide no viable, sustainable solution to disenfranchisement. The power to choose is itself, illusory—governed not only by institutionalized racism, or racial stereotyping, but also, as in Chua's and Ong's novels, by the forces of late capitalism which lull consumers into a false sense of possessing a choice and being included in a democratic process because they have

access to goods and see their intellectual and cultural products featured in the mainstream. In essence, this ‘inclusion’ may further solidify difference in that the market tends to cherry pick and attach particular “cultural products” to certain ethnic groups to form a kind of “boutique multiculturalism” that ultimately works to sustain “social distinctions” (Fish qtd. in Li 195, Li 195). The anger and violence induced by confusion about whom to identify with, whether to embrace or reject identities, and the ultimate inability to escape alterity no matter what one ‘chooses’ that permeates the two works mentioned above, as well as Chang-rae Lee’s text, were, I was informed by one young Chinese-American male friend, characteristic of what is called “rice rage.” Rather flippantly, he tossed out this term—unfamiliar to me, at the time, and which is problematic in ways I will discuss momentarily in the context of a conversation about yet another provocative email I received from a Japanese-American, Lewis (not his real name).

As with “Utamaro’s” correspondence, the opening lines of Lewis’ email seemed to constitute another withering reminder to the academic who just doesn’t ‘get it’: “This has been done before.” What was striking about his response, though, was not its consistency with “Utamaro’s” statement about the ‘unoriginality’ of my work, but that he included a photograph of him pointing a revolver directly at the camera, which he, in a very matter of fact way, informed me was part of a small arsenal of various weapons he had supposedly amassed—just in case. “I just like to have them, because ‘it’s better to have a gun and not need it, than to need a gun and not have it’ like Christian Slater said in *True Romance*.”—one of his self-proclaimed favorite movies, next to Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*.

Lewis went on to make other statements which, initially, confounded me. On the one hand, he apparently identified not just with Tarantino’s Clarence Worley, but also with Travis

Bickel, Scorsese's anti-hero from *Taxi Driver*. He claimed that *Taxi Driver* was his favorite movie, and a poster of Bickel brandishing a gun is prominently displayed in the background of the photo he sent me. On the other hand, he expressed solidarity with Virginia Tech Shooter, Seung-Hui Cho: "I have a lot of the 'angry Asian male' syndrome, which is what I suspect that Korean 'Cho' guy who shot up all those people was suffering from. It's just too embarrassing [*sic*] to put into the video you send to the news station. Instead you mention vague things about 'rich people' and the 'privileged.' Probably if he was honest, he'd say something about 'white men' and 'Asian women.' I totally understand where he was coming from. I'm amazingly empathetic, compassionate and understanding, that way [*sic*"]". I can only assume that he conflated admiration for Scorsese's and, arguably, Tarantino's protagonists with "compassion" for Cho because they each symbolize alienation and an effort to 'remedy' the perceived injustices of a hegemonic society, which ostracizes those unwilling to accept their 'place' in the given order. The "empathy" he feels for Cho perhaps originated in the belief not only that Cho was an outsider-- dubbed "the question mark kid" by fellow students--bent on achieving 'social justice' (though Cho, Lewis says, failed to address the 'real' source of his discontent), but also in the fact that Cho, in taking up the mantle of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, whom Cho referred to as "martyrs," had "taken decisive action on behalf of all the disenfranchised" ("Killer's Manifesto: 'You Forced Me into Corner.'").

As I have stated above, however, there is something incongruous about these identifications when taken together with Lewis' claim to be an "angry Asian man." Certainly, the fictional Travis Bickel and Slater's character in Tarantino's machismo-infused film and the real Cho, Harris and Klebold were considered 'outsiders' who, each in their own way, saw it as

their 'mission' to level the playing field. However, as was pointed out in Chapter Four, Brandzel and Desai argue that media comparisons of Cho with Dylan and Klebold are problematic in that while all parties clearly perceived themselves as ostracized by the mainstream, the trope of "wounded masculinity" which has been invoked to give violent white men and boys "cultural license to 'retaliate' for being victims of the loss of heteromale privilege" does not take into account the problems faced by other masculinities struggling within a sociopolitical economy that is still racialized, despite the deceptive rhetoric of equality upon which this economy endeavors to stand (Brandzel and Desai 68).

Even as comparisons were drawn between Columbine and Virginia Tech, Cho did not entirely escape a racialized assessment of his personality and behavior based on hegemonic ideals of manhood and the seeming inability to reconcile race, gender, and violence. An analysis of "the life of Cho along the five dimensions of human growth and development" by Roger L. Depue, who oversaw the F.B.I.'s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, finally concludes that Cho's actions were most likely motivated by intellectual 'failure,' but not without first noting that, physically, "Cho was average to below average. He was frail and sick as an infant/toddler. Even the autopsy report remarked about his lack of muscle for the body of a 23-year-old male." Meanwhile, he was emotionally "stunted" by his "selective mutism" (Depue qtd. in Nizza). Thus, the weakly Cho is constructed as childlike, emasculated, and alien. He is depicted as having failed to be a good Asian son (read: model minority) due to his academic performance; he was depicted as a 'failure' in relation to his older sister—a Princeton graduate who helped her hardworking, Asian immigrant parents with their dry-cleaning business. Meanwhile, his "mutism" (in reality, probably a product of and/or

exacerbated by severe anxiety) combined with the numerous descriptions that focus on his face contribute to the idea of the Asian-American as the indecipherable, sinister Other—the ‘gook’ who unexpectedly and inexplicably was able to infiltrate our collective psyche. One journalist for the *Washington Post* wrote of his “strangely slack, absent-eyed countenance” which is “now permanently burned into our collective cultural consciousness” (Shriver).

In the assessments of Depue, Nizza, and Shriver, Cho is marked as Other, and the Orientalist stereotype of the ‘inscrutable Asian’ is reinforced. He is set apart--decidedly not one of ‘us’; and, the issues of race and gender, though undeniably present, go unremarked upon, making a truly productive discussion of the tragedy or construction of an accurate profile of the perpetrator difficult even to begin. And, this was not simply part of an Orientalist contrivance on the part of non-Asian America. In the wake of the tragedy, Asian-American journalists felt compelled to claim that they were first and foremost Americans, despite their Korean heritage—a move which simply worked to “affirm the nation as a guarantor of identity” (Song 6-7). Adrian Hong of the *Washington Post* wrote: "The Korean claim to guilt and shame on behalf of Cho Seung Hui is well-intentioned but misguided. We are Americans first. While we share an affinity with Korea and appreciate and respect Korean culture, at the end of the day we are Americans" (qtd. in Song 6).

None of this really mattered in the end, for, as Min Hyoung Song points out, the issue of race was soon superseded by other narratives that focused on Cho’s “sexual deviance.” And, the correlation of the killing spree to issues related to Cho’s sexuality could have, according to Song, “accentuat[ed] through a process of racial emasculation the sense of a beleaguered sexual identity, or, more accurately, the perception of violence as itself a behavioral

manifestation of a frustrated sexuality” (Song 14). Sexual frustration and any attendant sexually aberrant proclivities are certainly not sufficient to explain Cho. However, the implicit connection between sexuality and race that becomes apparent when considering narratives of his sexual deviance, in conjunction with portraits that did Orientalize him—as if making him more foreign would enable us to more easily “demonize” him, could have provided a springboard for frank discussion of anxieties about national identities, as well as of Asian-American sexual and gender identities and the relationship of these identities to violence and abjection (Song 7).

However, this did not happen—at least, not on a mainstream level. As previously mentioned, some members of the Asian-American community were more concerned with publicly putting distance between themselves and Cho’s (and their own) Koreanness, suggesting, to loosely and liberally paraphrase Song, that we Americans who are of Asian descent still sense an uneasiness felt by the mainstream that stems from doubts about who we ‘really’ are. There is still something perceptibly “suspect” about our viability as citizens. We are, therefore, as Hong’s preemptive and unsolicited “loyalty oath” above shows, reluctant to let go of the borders that “secure” our American identities (Song 5-7). Furthermore, public discourse was relatively quickly evacuated of talk of issues concerning sexuality and race, and the “spotlight” was finally turned toward less politically and historically charged, generic, expert profiles of serial killers as a means by which to talk about school shooters. Cho was subsumed by the public experts under the current paradigm governing theories about serial killers and school shooters and transformed into one of the “cookie-cutter people, so much alike,” one commentator quipped, that “psychologically I could close my eyes and be talking to

any one of them” (Seltzer qtd. in Song 9). Cho was simultaneously constructed as foreign, an example of failed assimilation according to the dictates of the ‘model minority’ stereotype or “Asian immigrant redemption narrative,” and yet no different from white killers (Song 22). Though further discussion of race, gender, and sexuality as it relates to criminality, media representation, and legal decisions exceeds the scope of this chapter and particular discussion, to understand more about the particular pitfalls and problems of institutional proceedings related to cases of murder/mass murder wherein race and racial representation are also a factors, it is well worth looking into the press coverage of Andrew Cunanan (Filipino-American), press coverage and legal arguments pertaining to Chai Vang (Hmong-American), and at Leti Volpp’s article “(Mis)Identifying Culture: Asian Women and the ‘Cultural Defense.’” Together with the way that Cho was constructed, Cunanan’s and Vang’s stories and the cases detailed by Volpp tell us a lot about who is discursively and legally allowed to be Asian American and who is not, as well as how they are permitted to be so.

For Lewis, the fact that issues of power(lessness) and a related discomfort with his identity are clearly at stake is manifest not just in his identification with Cho as a ‘lone avenger’ to the ‘underdog,’ but in his admiration for the anti-heroes of movies like *Taxi Driver* and *True Romance*, who deploy violence, what could loosely be deemed heroism, and (hetero)sexuality as means self-making—all “descriptive,” though not “prescriptive” qualities of the type of normative masculinity that Asian-American masculinity must often confront (Yoon 101). Worley is a comic books salesman who takes on a drug mafia and rescues, falls in love with, and marries the (white) prostitute, Alabama; and the awkward Vietnam vet Bickel unsuccessfully tries to romance a white woman, fails, makes it a personal mission to rescue a

young white prostitute, Iris, and spends the rest of his days haunting porn theaters. He feels he has been emasculated as a result of Betsy's rejection and becomes increasingly alienated from society—factors which, arguably, compel him to attempt to execute his own brand of vigilante justice and plans for vengeance, part of which includes assassinating Betsy's boss, Senator Palantine, who as a presidential hopeful is representative of the privilege unavailable to Bickel. Lewis' criticism of Cho for not addressing the 'real' issues of racial disenfranchisement and, more importantly, emasculation of the Asian-American male provides insight into experiences largely ignored by mainstream media and so deftly dealt with in the fiction of the authors presented earlier. But, it is undercut by his identification with the dominant group, as manifest in the films/characters he selects, the fact that he subscribes to traditional, mainstream notions that power obtained by force is characteristic of masculinity, and in his comment that the 'problem' is "Asian men" and "white women." As with "Utamaro," sexuality, social recognition, and power are bound up together and accessibility to that power is embodied by (white) women; in Lewis' case, it appears that the way to achieve at least a semblance of empowerment is not only through amassing weapons to compensate for a perceived denial of his manhood, but also through the subjugation of (white) women--in his purview, tacitly associated with prostitutes and objects--if not in reality, then at least at the symbolic level to which cinema provides access. In accepting both white male violence and seeming to espouse the notion that men are 'entitled' to certain, objectified bodies as components of normative masculinity and as avenues to empowerment, Lewis, and arguably "Utamaro," risk reproducing the very same patriarchal norms that have not only contributed to the oppression of women, but also to the oppression and effeminization of Asian males.

To say that any of the real or fictional individuals presented here simply suffer from some syndrome called “rice rage,” however, is to deny the complexity and ambivalence that characterize efforts at self-making and articulation when those efforts are inflected by the racialization of gender and a sense of alienation not only from society, but from one’s self as a result of not being recognized as a subject endowed with agency. Moreover, by racializing and pathologizing the anger felt by men like Lewis, the speaker clearly seeks to avoid confronting his own racialization. Invoking the term “rice rage” as a pejorative descriptor allows him to distance himself from these Asian-American men, whom he perceives as wrongfully indignant, and to maintain the illusion that we currently inhabit a “raceless,” equitable society wherein “clinging to one’s racial identity is, at best, an outmoded primordial attachment, and, at worst, a voluntary surrender of freedom” (Chong 33). However, even as he criticized the racially inflected anger of Lewis and “Utamaro” as seemingly unwarranted and the product of individual psychological issues, the young man who introduced me to the expression “rice rage” could not resist telling me how his mother had encouraged him to date white women for the sake of upward social mobility and how he was once romantically affiliated with a famous (white) politician’s daughter.

Much like the characters that populate the novels discussed, the individuals described above struggle with issues of what Paul J. Yoon refers to as “social iterability” (Yoon 100). For Steve, “Utamaro,” and Lewis, there is a dearth of options for performing subjectivity, for “racial self-imagination” (Yoon 100). In the cases of “Utamaro” and Lewis, “iterability” is limited by the image of the “racially castrated” man, as “agentic and powerful” male images from Asia are transformed into disfigured and disfiguring stereotypes in an American context;

and, liberation from the available options of “kung fu master,” “math whiz,” castrated houseboy, asexual purveyor of ancient and exotic wisdom, docile “good Charlie” is, in their minds, equated with achieving the ideals of ‘normative,’ read: white, masculinity through gestures of aggression and/or abjection of the Other (Eng qtd in Yoon 100; Yoon 100; *GL* 95). Though Steve’s narrative is not saturated with animosity or characterized by indignation at having been ‘cheated’ out of his manhood and though he has attempted to establish a Korean-American identity by assisting other Korean adoptees, by virtue of his association with prostitutes, he has, arguably, attempted to exercise mastery over another’s body in order to symbolically master the past. It is plausible that the body of the prostitute may have provided the vehicle by which he could gain a palpable sense of control over his mother’s body and, by extension, the motherland—object of U.S. military imperialism-- and, thereby, achieve a more complete sense of self as an individual and as a heterosexual Male. Perhaps, he was motivated by the hope that this less fragmented, more ‘powerful’ image of self would, in turn, better enable him to navigate the limitations and contradictions associated with being an Asian-American man.

Similarly, in the fiction of Yoji Yamaguchi, Chang-rae Lee, Han Ong, Lawrence Chua, and Don Lee, the male characters must grapple with the issues Yoon raises concerning “troubled” images of Asian masculinity and their capacity to not only inform Asian-American self-image, but also to be readily transformed into stereotypes with which Asian-American men must contend in the construction of that self-image. In contemplating the possibilities for “expanding the boundaries of social iterability” for Asian-American men, he acknowledges that the transfer of representations of “good” masculinity is unidirectional, produced by Asia

but not reciprocated by Asian America; and, he offers something of an explanation for this in the form of a question that tacitly acknowledges the limited dimensions of legible performance for Asian-American men. Yoon writes: “The question is what do we do with normative points of recognition when they do not allow us to be fully ‘ourselves’?” (100-101).

In Yamaguchi’s comedic narrative of mistaken identity, Takashi Arai is but a *houseboy* who, it turns out, is completely indistinguishable from and interchangeable with other Japanese-Americans in that he is but one in a long succession of Asian-born, faceless ‘Charlies’ whose job it is to serve white Americans. Try as he might, he cannot escape emasculation by white Americans and compatriots alike, and, paradoxically, the commodification of his face by others who use mass-reproduced images of it to turn themselves into Self Made Men-- pimps and husbands-- leads him further into an inescapable maze of (mis)recognition, though the metaphorical death of the prostitute at the end does enable him to see an image of what America will not let him be because of his face, namely: a man. That neither “Master Face” nor Takashi Arai really exists in the story speaks not only to the illusions of democracy and of the attending promises of social and material fulfillment upon which America is built, but also to the invisibility of the Asian immigrant. That both still manage to wreak havoc, despite their ‘non-existence,’ speaks to the hypervisibility of that same immigrant.

For us to fully understand Arai’s dilemma, which includes his gradual emasculation, however, Yamaguchi seems to think it necessary to invoke the conniving Asian woman-as-prostitute and then to have her ‘die’ at the end, only to be transformed into a model of propriety, complete with wedding gown. Kikue embodies a missed opportunity for Arai to

obtain financial security and to establish himself as a virile patriarch. Meanwhile, Yamaguchi simultaneously orchestrates the odd coupling of Hana, the bluestocking, and the simple Farmer Doi. Arguably, the attention given to socially-sanctioned heterosexual couplings at the end represents an effort to counter narratives of Asian-American sexual deviance. But, this is somewhat problematic in that what this historical comedy ultimately does is to work with what Wu describes as the “narrative of racial progress” that emphasizes “racial and economic exploitation” as barriers to marriage in order to explain sexual “deviance” in early Asian immigrant communities. These two factors are often cited as having made it difficult for Asian men to form conjugal unions, and by celebrating the eventual entry of Asian women into those communities, historical accounts that suggest that the absence of marriageable women was the source of deviance naturalize heteronormative relationships. This is not to say that conceptions of race have no relation to the way that sexuality is imagined, but to point out that the assumption that the “natural desir[ability]” of heterosexual marriage and attendant forms of sexual behavior needs to be challenged; for one, because “normative images of family life” invoked “to advance [early Asian-Americans immigrants’] claims of cultural citizenship” effectively “marginalized the array of kinship, social, and sexual relationships that existed within the community” and, I would add, those engaged in non-traditional relationships. Other sexualities, masculinities and femininities have been and are discounted through the valorization of heterosexual marriage (Wu 59-60; Shah qtd. in Wu 60). Yamaguchi provides a necessary commentary on the historical “racial victimization” and emasculation experienced by Asian immigrants, but by ‘rehabilitating’ his prostitute and domesticating his rebellious bluestocking, he misses the opportunity to employ a portrait of the “compulsory condition of

‘deviance’ among the early generation of Asian Americans” in order to engage in “non-normative sexual exploration” (Wu 60).

This emphasis on “cultural citizenship” as achievable under the auspices of the institution of heterosexual marriage or the formulation of a family is further complicated by works such as Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*. But, before discussing how this is so, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by “cultural citizenship.” While Judy Tzu-Chun Wu does not clarify what exactly she means by “cultural citizenship,” I assume based on her discussion of early immigrants’ emphasis on marriage and family formation as a means of countering representations of “social deviance” that she is referring to cultural citizenship as it has been defined by Renato Rosaldo. William Flores, who worked together with Rosaldo and others in developing the concept, explains that cultural citizenship is constituted by the “broad range of activities of everyday life through which [historically disenfranchised] groups claim space in society, define their community, and claim rights.” In the process of “attaining membership,” they “retain difference” and engage in “self definition, affirmation, and empowerment” (Flores 262). Interestingly, as a result of the privileging of the heteronormative familial configuration, difference within everyday life was gradually suppressed as the legitimacy of other types of existing relationship formations within early Chinese communities was questioned and the importance of those relationships minimized, except insofar as they could be resurrected by historians to enable us to illustrate the oppression and exploitation of early Asian-American, primarily male, immigrants.

Rosaldo concedes that “[t]he term *cultural citizenship* is a deliberate oxymoron, a pair of words that do not go comfortably together.” In other words, Lily Cho writes, “To be

diasporic is to be marked as culturally alien, and yet for such a subject to claim citizenship is to suspend difference in the name of the universal.” (Rosaldo qtd. in Cho 477; Cho 477). More than being oxymoronic, the concept as defined by Rosaldo is deceptive and problematic, says Aiwha Ong. While marginalized groups might think they can “in spite of their cultural difference from mainstream society” achieve cultural citizenship through, for example, the vehicle of the family like in the case of early Chinese immigrants, as Ong notes, “the demand of disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship” regardless of “difference” creates “the erroneous impression that cultural citizenship can be unilaterally constructed and that immigrant or minority groups can escape the cultural inscription of state power and other forms of regulation that define the different modalities of belonging.” She also goes a step further than Cho, stating that not only is difference “suspen[ded]” in this formulation, but also that in this concept of cultural citizenship advocated by Rosaldo, “subscription to the very liberal principle of universal equality he seeks to call into question” is implied (738).

To return to Chang-rae Lee’s novel, the “activities of everyday life” which would, according to Rosaldo, Flores, et al., enable marginalized individuals to “claim space,” “rights” and achieve the status of fully-formed subjects to be recognized on their own terms are curtailed not only by dominant institutions and discourses, but also as a result of the internalization of hegemonic attitudes by the novel’s disenfranchised protagonist himself. For the three primary characters in the novel, “belonging” is discursively and institutionally regulated by race, class, gender and historical circumstances, and “retaining difference” means social, if not actual, death. Kurohata is eager to leave behind the “twilight” existence of his Korean birth parents and to prove his loyalty and his manhood by signing on with the Imperial

army. Not only does he deny his Korean parentage, refusing to speak the language which “K” is sure that he knows, he envisions himself as her savior. Nonetheless, he violates her and, by extension, does violence to the motherland. His personal interest in “K” is inextricably intertwined with the colonial institution that forces her into military prostitution; and his belief in his capacity as savior patriarch entitled to the use of her body mimics colonial mentalities. The ‘impure’ comfort woman no longer fit to be the bearer of tradition and culture must be eradicated so that her ethnicity does not shatter the Lieutenant’s fragile sense of national identity and her ‘transgression’ does not disrupt his fantasy of marriage, which would secure for him a respectable place within the existing social structure.

Later, Franklin Hata endeavors unsuccessfully to police the body of Sunny as part of an effort to play the good Japanese father and, to some degree, uses her to integrate himself into a community that, regardless of his efforts, continues to view him as alien. Despite the piano lessons and country club dances, which he hoped would secure Sunny’s entrance into the upper middle class white world, Sunny slights her father, who has always been disappointed by the fact that she is not the racially pure child of ‘decent,’ hardworking folk that he had hoped to adopt, when she aligns herself with Lincoln Evans--a figure marginalized as a result of his race, class, and disdain for the bourgeois values that prevail in Bedley Run. For most of the novel, Sunny, thus, embodies Hata’s perceived failure to become any of the various people that he imagines he is or can be. However, even without Sunny in his life, no matter how successful he is financially or in his efforts to establish a relationship with the desirable white woman, Mary Burns, he is still illegible as a man and an individual. He is considered Other, the “ancient Oriental,” by the white inhabitants of the town some of whom he counts among his

friends; and, no matter how well he plays the part of the dutiful Asian, imagining himself to be the object of “Oriental veneration,” he is regarded as a hollow caricature of the Asian Man by his daughter (*GL* 200, 2). All possibilities for asserting cultural citizenship are foreclosed, as Hata neither has a firm sense of who he wants to be in part because he is never permitted to fully be himself. The various characters he plays are problematic in that their construction relies upon internalizing and imposing hegemonic ideals of what constitutes the ‘socially desirable’ citizen, who must adhere to gender appropriate behavior and attending standards governing the expression of sexuality as dictated by expectations related to race.

Achieving intelligibility, “expanding the boundaries of social iterability,” and asserting cultural citizenship are further problematized by Han Ong in *Fixer Chao*. As in Lee’s novel, the protagonist’s attempts to overcome racial, sexual, and socioeconomic obstacles are laced with violence, and the multiple failed attempts at self actualization only intensify feelings of alienation. If in his incarnation as Doc Hata, Jiro Kurohata strives to be Bedley Run’s token model Asian, then William Narciso Paulinha is an object of desire who participates in his own exoticization and commodification to the effect that he further dehumanizes himself rather than becoming the subject endowed with agency which he aspires to possess. As a young hustler, he is in his own words one of a myriad of exotic skinny brown boys whose anonymous participation in the illicit activities of the ‘brown hoards’ at Port Authority is enough to placate the white businessmen needing to release their frustrations upon those they can abuse with abandon before returning to the sterility of the suburbs. As a Third World gay man, he earns a living on his knees--exactly where, he assures us, his white customers believe it is he should be. Once elevated to Master Chao, William must juggle the performance of ‘authenticity’ and

‘individual’ difference with stereotypical flattening of difference. He must become a socially-sanctioned, commodified package that conforms to a certain one-dimensional vision of difference which, in a way, mimics what he has had to enact in the Port Authority bathrooms--only this time he is touted as ‘unique’ in his performance, and his ‘difference’ is celebrated by New York’s elite.

His demise as Master Chao is best described by Trinh T. Minh-ha as she is cited in the context of Ellie M. Hisama’s article on the fetishization of Asian women in popular music by white musicians, some of whom would claim to be empowering Asian women when, in fact, they merely fuel certain “orientalist representations” (Hisama 99). It is also mirrored in the life experiences of Paulinha’s elder and friend, Preciosa. Trinh writes:

It is as if everywhere you we go, we become Someone’s private zoo...We no longer wish to erase your difference, We demand on the contrary, that you remember and assert it...

Now i am not only given the permission to open up and talk, i am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they’d been cheated: We did not come to hear a Third World member speak about the First (?) World, We came to listen to what the voice of difference likely to bring us *what we can’t have* and to divert us from the monotony of sameness. (qtd. in Hisama 99)

Hisama invokes Trinh in an effort to make a statement about her own experiences of objectification. As with Trinh’s observations, I think that Hisama’s comments regarding the dearth of roles available to her are applicable to Chao’s situation and, in fact, perfectly encapsulate his encounter with Lindsay S. Their meeting will set the tone for the rest of his interactions with the spiritually-starved Americans searching for ‘answers’ that they believe can be provided by the ‘atavistic’ East as embodied not by the “demure,” but hypersexual,

highly fetishized Asian woman, but in the figure of the desexualized token of mystical wisdom, Master Chao. Over time, being “expected” to play a certain role time and time again has the effect of making the individual feel as if s/he is an “object” like Lindsay S’s Buddha statues, “to be installed in some museum to assure the collector of his own identity” while the identity of the collected is left “blank, without a personal history or time” (Hisama 99). As a Third World, gay, hustler, Paulinha is divested of personal history--invisible; and as a Feng Shui master, the only history that is legible to those he serves is the history that he and Shem C contrive to lend him legitimacy. Achieving legitimacy involves aligning Paulinha with one of those select Asian countries which have been elevated in the Western popular imagination as a result of the perception that they are the origin of powerful, exotic, ancient, esoteric philosophies, despite their otherwise ‘backward and despotic’ ways.

There is no opportunity for Paulinha to claim space as a homosexual, Filipino man in America, much less to forge solidarity with other Asian men from whom he is distanced. He cannot forge a connection with men of color due to his disdain for his own immigrant upbringing, which he readily displaces onto them, and as a result of issues related to social class, especially as a justification for oppression, and of problems he has concerning race, specifically how it is employed by racial Others and hierarchicalized within U.S. society. Paradoxically, with regard to race, he is as perturbed by the attempts of men of color to capitalize on their ‘Otherness,’ like he does, as he is by the injustices he sees committed by privileged whites. It is his fear of being unmasked, revealed as the ‘wrong’ kind of Other that ultimately leads him to do nothing as another Asian-American man, whom he fetishizes, dies in front of him—an act which consigns him to permanent invisibility and a ghostly existence

spent wandering among and taking comfort in the presence of the objects he once coveted but also understood to be emblematic of the false promises held out by the U.S. to Third World immigrants. These objects are as hollow and lifeless, as devoid of use value, as he becomes over the course of the novel, though a version of Paulinha lives on in the fabrications of Shem C, the opportunistic journalist who takes full advantage of Paulinha's inability to speak for himself. Having failed to perform adequately and consistently the "yellowness" of his body, as Hattori describes in the opening quote, Paulinha is doomed to have no identity.

In the last two novels which have been discussed, the protagonists resort--not unlike "Utamaro" and Lewis—to abjection and violence in order to preserve images that are both personally and publicly acceptable. "Utamaro" rejects Asian women as hostile, dissembling, and deprecating. Meanwhile, though Lewis does not carry out violence, his identification with violent, but 'manly' white heroes preclude him from having to fully acknowledge his feelings of disenfranchisement, making his claims to empathize with Cho as a disgruntled Asian man tenuous, at best. Neither seems particularly motivated to claim Asian masculinity for himself and make it his own, as if attempting to do so would be futile. If we use the dilemma of Paulinha and Chua's narrator as a barometer of possibility, then the reasons for this become clearer. Whereas Paulinha no longer sees the Philippines as viable alternative to life in the U.S., Chua's narrator, in an attempt to escape objectification, looks to the East as place of refuge where he can potentially reconstruct himself as opposed to being defined by the white men he services. But, as Kamo-no-Chōmei wrote in 1212 in *Hōjōki* ("The Ten Foot Square Hut") with regard to *mujo*, or the transience of the world, "Ceaselessly the river flows, and yet the water is never the same, while in the still pool the shifting foam gathers and is gone, never

staying for a moment” (1). And, so it is the case that despite his intentions, the narrator cannot return to the home of his childhood and recover lost wholeness. Just as he was misrecognized by the French police in the Paris metro without his white lover, so is he misread by the Thais, who despite his appearance, reject him as yet another foreign tourist. Clearly, as was discussed in Chapter Four, he understands that their reticence and suspicion are products of colonialism and neo-imperialism in Southeast Asia; and, while he may experience race-related self-loathing as part of the legacy of colonialism and the immediacy of neo-imperialism and as a result of encounters with racism in the West, this does not instill in him any consistent, genuine compassion for the local inhabitants.

More than simply being unable to empathize, he, at times, commits acts of overt aggression toward those over whom his relative wealth gives him power. It would appear that he has only partially undergone the process which Paolo Freire refers to as “conscientization” (qtd. in Osajima 61). In his study of how, in the post cultural nationalist era, young Asian-Americans develop pan-Asian “critical consciousness” and arrive at the place where they understand their individual experiences as contributing to and reflected in a broader collective experience, thus inciting them to political action, Keith Osajima stresses the importance of making meaningful connections with other Asian Americans. He writes that:

Isolation is closely tied to the powerful ideological emphasis on individualism in the United States. Andrew Barlow notes that Americans ‘are told that their well-being is up to them, that people must fend for themselves as far as their personal welfare is concerned.’ A consequence of growing up with this view is implicit in the interviews. Respondents had interpreted their experiences, good and bad, through individual lenses, as events that happened, in isolation, only to them. Through interactions with other Asian Americans, they had realized they were not alone, that others had similar family and cultural experiences, and experiences with racial discrimination. This discovery had led them to question their

individualistic interpretations and had opened the possibility that their lives could be understood as part of an Asian American experience (69; Barlow qtd. in Osajima 69).

Chua's narrator, though he demonstrates a fairly extensive understanding of histories of oppression and understands what it is to be a white man's expensive accessory, appears to have lived the same alienation as his deceased father. His father would not permit Thai, the language of the family, in the house, he viewed America as a hostile place where honesty and merit go unrewarded, and he preferred to busy himself with 'useless' gadgets—tokens of a distorted version of 'success'—and alcohol until his death. As a result of his inability to speak Thai, the forbidden, now seemingly "synthetic" language, and the legacy of mistrust he inherited from his father, the narrator cannot relate to Thong, nor can Thong relate to him (*GI* 26). I would suggest also that the narrator's inability to forge a bond with the Thai hustler and the poverty-stricken Thais whom he encounters and his nihilistic *Weltanschauung*, which, arguably, causes him to demean others and allow himself to be denigrated by white men, has just as much to do with being inculcated with this "ideological emphasis on individualism" and experiencing the attending sense of isolation as it does with the fact that he is now, by virtue of his Americanization, representative of historical, institutional, and socioeconomic inequalities that cause Thong, for example, to bristle. This, even though the latter may count himself among Bangkok's privileged classes.

Though the narrator's personal story and his experiences with inequality may superficially resemble that of the disenfranchised Thais he meets, the stories are not interchangeable. Histories of oppression are unique regardless of the delusions of similarity

between types of disenfranchisement that, at times, seem to inform the narrator's feelings, beliefs, and decisions. Moreover, the narrator is regarded as American, and as such, he is free to move between the worlds of Bangkok's elite and that of the masses, with whom he generally finds it difficult to communicate, despite his own humble beginnings.

The social, historical, and economic disconnect and consequent psychological distress are evinced in the fact that his feeble attempts to establish a rapport, a connection with his former compatriots, are complicated by contradictory urges. On the one hand, he wants to assert control, to engage in the act of 'passing' for a wealthy Thai-American who can buy something as "expensive" as Thong's body and loyalty (*GI* 208). On the other, he tries to engage in acts of "passing-as-if," or "assum[ing] an identity that is reviled by the mainstream but has gone through a counter-mainstream revalorization process" (Roshanravan 8). He wants simultaneously to be the savior, angrily narrating history from the outside, and to align himself with those Third World prostitutes in need of 'saving.' This is not quite the move toward coalitional politics that Shireen M. Roshanravan is describing, but I think that some of her observations are applicable here in that "the pretense in passing-as-if is not that there are no differences between oneself and those with whom one seeks identification, but rather that these differences do not matter for the purpose of making and sustaining resistant company" (Roshanravan 9). Establishing "horizontal" solidarity is problematic in that, as Thong among others lets the narrator know, this means of "reconciling the ambiguity of one's racialized experience and the desire for a revalorized, racial-ethnic, gendered self" fails to take into account "relations among the heterogeneous gendered, raced, classed, sexed, sexual, cultural, historical, and national localities occupied by those involved." Moreover, the move empties

revalorized identities of “their complex historical, social, and cultural specificities that contextualize and give meaning to these identities” and, incidentally, “rel[ies] too much on an evacuation of one’s locus” (Roshanravan 9, 12, 15). The consequences of that evacuation are most evident in the circumstances under which the narrator finally returns home slipping (un)comfortably back into the role of the fetishized ornament.

To be fair, though, the narrator’s dilemma is not entirely of his own making. Despite intermittent attempts to control how he is perceived by attempting to share stories of prostitution and ‘johns’ with Thong, through calculated deception of the Danish tourist and manipulation of the tourist’s preconceived ideas about the local population and their capacity to be exploited, or through diatribes on history in which he castigates the Thai farmers for their complicity in the skin trade, for example, he is by no means the master of his own identity. He cannot act or narrate himself into being. As I think has been made clear in the preceding chapters, regardless of whether or not identity politics has fallen out of fashion among academics, much of what I have focused on involves issues associated with identity, or the lack thereof, and its continuing relevance for Asian-American men. David Palumbo-Liu writes that in the era of “postethnic” thought, it is taken for granted that we have resolved concerns surrounding the “articulation of identity” and when the topic is broached, it is met with a certain weariness at having to address issues that have been already been ‘settled.’ Identity politics are now associated with “*bad* politics,” and we have been encouraged to “subordinate” group interest in “individual rights” to “coalition building,” “economic justice” or, better yet, “the Nation” (765-766). Contrary to popular belief as advanced by the right and the left, all that much discourse on identity has done is to illuminate existing issues and help define positions

when necessary. The fact is that so much of what many prominent sociologists refer to and what is commonly understood as identity is, in reality, based on “naturalized assumptions” that impede us from ever arriving at “identity,” which is often confused with “type,” and this is not without repercussions (Palumbo-Liu 766-767).

In the introduction to his argument concerning the “limitations of the interactive model of identity production,” David Palumbo-Liu writes:

I am concerned here with the assumption that certain people marked by race are predisposed toward certain actions that in turn disclose their racial character. My contention is that in this case we are speaking not of identity, but of social roles, or types, which *pass* for identities (the collective passes for the individual), and that this confusion sometimes brings with it profoundly destructive outcomes. Most specifically, I want to address the situation wherein the interpretive act that assumes that certain behaviors accrue to certain identities moves along a set of put-in-place narratives that proleptically inscribe the outcome of acts which are themselves presupposed to be in the making. In these cases, there is a clear sense that it is the interpreter who has taken upon him or herself the power to assign an identity to another. This assumption of power could not have been made without assuming as well the projectability of identity upon that Other [...]

Here I will emphasize this issue of power, arguing that, as much as we might believe that assumptions of identity work both ways, to and fro between the dominant and the minority identity, we cannot ignore the way one set of assumptions is embedded within a firm set of institutional practices that maintain an uneven distribution of power. (768, 769)

Clearly, in Chua’s novel the narrator never really engages in what would be called a “*democratic transaction*,” wherein identity is formed in an encounter according to “mutual recognition” and “a *consensual* sense of the identities being produced,” and “the sequence of actions and behaviors to be ‘expected’” is “well founded (consensual or no)”; for, “narratives

which precede the social encounter” are not, as those who advocate for a “postethnic” society, such as Herbert Gans or David Hollinger, would wish it, easily “erased” or deactivated. The “revulsion” Americans purportedly feel in relation to “ethnoracial prejudice” is not nearly pervasive enough to “render the ideal of postethnicity worth developing” (Scheff qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 772; Palumbo-Liu 772; Hollinger qtd. in Palumbo-Liu 777). Chua’s narrator is subject to assumptions in the United States and also makes assumptions like the ones to which he is subject about the Thai prostitutes with whom he interacts to the effect that he is, arguably, never in possession of an identity derived from an encounter that is not somehow governed by expectations grounded in racial, sexual, or class narratives which undergird and perpetuate inequality. This is, I believe, true of all of the characters discussed thus far, as well as the individuals described above, who seem prepared for the inevitable preempting of their identity in whatever social encounter they may have and respond accordingly by assuming an aggressive or socially endorsed masculine posture. In the case of Steve, the Korean adoptee, it could be argued that he assists parents in the production of a particular identity, but a discussion of this exceeds the scope of this dissertation and is best left to those who specialize in the issues which affect transnational adoptees and their parents.

Even though Don Lee’s novel does involve transnational adoption, it is hardly about well-intentioned parents trying to foist their conception of ‘traditional’ culture on an adoptee, and more about the deepening mystery into which identity evolves when bi- and multiethnic individuals accustomed to the racial climate of the United States attempt, in an international context, to challenge identities formerly imposed upon them in their private and public exchanges with hegemonic America and its institutions. For Tom Hurley, Japan represents an

opportunity to escape the stigma of being branded a 'prostitute's son. Becoming a Hawaiian surfer, he simultaneously aligns himself with a culture popularly imagined to be more tolerant of diversity and with a type of exoticism which is, arguably, more palatable to mainstream American society than the difference embodied in a 'half-breed,' Asian-American army brat. His sexual history which consists of the serial conquest of white women, in conjunction with the scrutinizing gaze to which he subjects Lisa's photos, taking notice only of the presumably undesirable 'incongruities' that comprise her face, represent further attempts to distance himself from the 'deformed' bi-ethnic and the desexualized, alien Asian American man and to become more like the white patriarch as represented, in his mind, by his father and men like Congrieves. Incidentally, but not unimportantly, the belief in the inherent mental, physical, and moral defectiveness of mixed-race individuals dates back to the age of empire. And, even in the late twentieth century, neither his father, who rejects him and his mother for what he imagines is a nice, white, suburban family, nor Congrieves will allow him to define his identity according to his own terms. While he cannot be white enough for them, he also cannot be ethnic enough for his friends Benny and Jorge, who to some extent make an identity founded upon their status as racialized and stigmatized individuals.

Similarly, Lisa begins studying Japanese and escapes to Japan to find an incarnation of her 'self' that is not limited to the various derogatory monikers concocted by her classmates and transcends the invisibility that she experiences at Berkeley when she tries to identify with multiracial activists. This, only to find that by all official accounts she has no identity at all. While the opportunity exists for her, as a blank slate, to completely redefine herself as an individual, her occupation as a prostitute translates into an unfortunate set of circumstances in

which her attractiveness, elements of her sexuality, and finally her worth are measured according to racialized standards of beauty that carry with them all of the loaded assumptions about particular races and ethnicities. She becomes a blank slate upon which other individuals may inscribe their anxious desires. Likewise, for the nation that denied her personhood, she is an empty page onto which can be written collective social anxieties regarding the Other. These fears are voiced by the nurse who attended her birth, a detail which is not without meaning in that as a maternity nurse she is, on a symbolic level, one of the guarantors of the survival and perpetuity of the nation's cultural and racial integrity. Whereas Lisa desperately seeks an identity only to become a tabula rasa, Tom endeavors to efface himself and don a more socially acceptable mask that will cover his otherness. He invents a prosthetic self, which precisely because it is the product of hegemonic ideas about what constitutes a true American (read: white) Man. Others are not taken in by the masquerade, which is a sorry attempt to refute his history. What is common to both of their experiences is the failure to secure individual identity; and, each of them, regardless of their performance or aspirations to find a viable way of being in the world, remain, to some degree, blank screens upon which others project their insecurities about race, national belonging, and sexuality. There are, in the end, only consolation prizes for Lisa, who is, in death, finally 'identified' and for Tom, who finally becomes the 'Hawaiian' he purports himself to be. What is ultimately celebrated is not the actuality, but the *potential* of a nation, the U.S., as a destination where arriving at a less fractured, less traumatized self identity is still but a *possibility*. Lisa dreams this possibility, and Tom lives it, but only by sublimating history.

Writing this conclusion has forced me to return to the novels and to consider the concerns of some Asian-American men. While their points of view certainly do not represent Asian Americans as a whole, they are nonetheless relevant additions to the dialogues circulating not only within academia, but in the larger context of the nation. To say that we now live in an ethnically ambiguous age, wherein difference and difference-as-neutrality are to be celebrated, and that the increasing number of interracial couples is a sign of progress is to ignore the continuing impact of race on social relations, economic inequalities and sexual ‘choices,’ among other things, and to disregard it as a powerful organizing tool used not only to tell us who we are, but also to serve the agendas of various political entities. Here, for example, I am thinking about the flap over comments made by former USDA official Shirley Sherrod. The picture that is derived from the comments of interviewees and the concerns of the novels investigated here is bleak, as racially-based disenfranchisement is still a problem; and, in some ways, as the novels show either intentionally or unintentionally, we lack the language and the metaphors to talk about or contend with it in constructive ways that do not involve abjecting Others, in this case prostitutes and ‘impure’ women. Constellations of existing racial, sexual, gendered images as they are configured in the novels appear inadequate to express satisfactorily the frustration that accompanies personal, social, and political alienation in that they often rely upon the existing power structures to depict beleaguered, troubled masculinities.

It may seem that what I have done through my readings is to formulate Asian-American males as a coherent group made legible, primarily, through their victimization. This was not the intention. Rather, my examination of the works represents an effort to understand, through

their cultural productions, how Asian-American men experience themselves in relation to the racialization of their sexuality and gender and how they respond to the tenacious, unflattering images that have been developed around the confluence of race, sex, and gender. In her article on Darrell Hamamoto's *Yellowcaust* and James Hou's *Masters of the Pillow*, both porn films which claim that their purpose is to reconstruct and reconfigure Asian-American masculinity and Asian-American sexuality in general, Celine Parreñas Shimizu seems to feel, as I do. While cultural artefacts intended to refigure the Asian-American Man provide necessary, useful insight into the fact that sexuality and gender, in particular, continue to be relevant sites of struggle for Asian-American men, we must exercise caution in our encounters with these cultural objects. "Through representation such as *Masters of the Pillow*, we can see how Asian American men can simultaneously experience stress, pressure, and pain as well as demonstrate complicity in the domination that produces their subjectivities not only in relation to women but also in how they define viable Asian American manhood as the opposite of asexuality and effeminacy or gayness (Parreñas Shimizu 172).

Critical engagement is paramount. All of the works previously discussed do represent, to varying degrees, efforts to candidly reflect on what Asian-American men want and need and the pitfalls encountered in having those desires and needs met, but just as "[t]he pornographer's privileging of conventional masculinity reveals a lack of security in manhood outside those norms," so does the authors' and characters' invocation of and/or reliance upon the trope of the prostitute suggest unresolved problems with the way that we go about constructing alternatives to the conceptions of masculinity presently available to Asian-American men (Parreñas Shimizu 172). Rather than invoking sexuality to impose an identity

on another or, worse, to deprive an individual of an identity so as to secure a particular idealized vision of gender and self, much in the way a 'john' does to a prostitute, renderings of sexuality should be used to begin investigating possibilities for responsible, conscientious, or what Shimizu calls "ethical" masculinities (186).

Representations of sexuality should be a starting point from which to (re)formulate masculinities that function as viable departures from those hegemonic ones which, problematic as they are, remain intact largely because the masculinity of the Other continues to be pathologized, deformed, objectified, and overdetermined, but limited to that which makes possible the power of dominant modes of gender performance. It is the responsibility of Asian-American 'image makers' to resist the urge to employ the same funhouse mirror that enables reproduction of the aforementioned forms of subordination as they perform the necessary work of speaking to and about the problematic realities associated with sexualities and genders that have been weighed down by multiple, conflicting representations, of deconstructing these representations, and of seeking out new ways of defining the Asian-American male self.

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