

Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature in Malaya, the Philippines and Asian America

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Abstract

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This dissertation treats novels by Anglophone Southeast Asians who see their ascribed multicultural identities (Malaysian, Filipino or Asian American) as conflating notions of race, sexuality, nationality and labor. Southeast Asian Anglophone narratives allow us to trace contemporary global multiculturalism as a strategy of governance that emerged from three historical conditions: British colonial pluralism in Malaysia and Singapore, American colonization in the Philippines, and regimes of liberal tolerance in the United States. Whereas these histories are rendered invisible or incoherent by U.S. nationalist narratives and literary canons, Southeast Asian Anglophone texts expose them as legible counter-narratives. This dissertation is inspired by the Malaysian literary theorist Lloyd Fernando, who, in 1975, envisioned migrant cultures as “part of an unceasing process” that are “capable of continuing as

if an infinite series” (14). I dub this unceasing process "transitive culture" and trace its appearance as a theme in Southeast Asian Anglophone literature that sees migrants as self-consciously managing and reinterpreting multiculturalist identities.

This dissertation builds on work by scholars such as E. San Juan, Jodi Melamed and Vijay Mishra who argue that the narrative of western multiculturalism often bolsters the U.S. as an exceptional power, giving legitimacy to U.S. military and political interventions abroad. I engage with an overlooked archive of Anglophone writing to account for the multiple origins of multiculturalism that U.S. literature and discourses have helped obscure. While recent scholarship has used a framework of diaspora to disrupt nationalist formations, this has often marginalized the Anglophone cultures that imperial encounters have also helped produce. I adopt the label "Anglophone" to argue that texts from writers in Southeast Asia and in the diaspora allow us to see global multiculturalism as a governing strategy that conflates nation and ethnicity to mark national identities as befitting particular types of labor, and to cast “multicultural” nation-states like the U.S. as an exceptional force in global politics. By revealing the imperial strategies and historical emergence of global multiculturalism, Southeast Asian Anglophone texts disrupt the conflation of race, nation and ethnicity, and offer transition as a means of resisting rigid identity types.

Dedication

To my family

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Introduction

Multiculturalism on the Defense, on the Rise?

On April 23, 2010, Arizona governor Jan Brewer signed into law SB 1070, which required all suspected undocumented immigrants to have registration documents at all times and allowed "reasonable suspicion" to emerge on the basis of race and language capability. Because the law found any persons who had not fully assimilated into Anglo-Saxon cultural norms (language, appearance, culture, religion) to be suspect, SB 1070 was depicted as an explicit attack on multiculturalist ideals of tolerance, cultural preservation and diversity (Martell-Gómez). What was striking about the law was that it was highly favored in national polls, marking what seemed like the end of multiculturalist acceptance just as the 2008 economic crises and discourses of economic scarcity also took hold. One of the most outspoken opponents of the law, the U.S. Representative from Arizona, Gabrielle Giffords,¹ became a symbol of the rising tension when Giffords was shot in the head at point-blank range in Tucson, Arizona, while speaking to supporters in January 2011. A mere six months later, Indiana, Georgia, and South Carolina passed measures similar to Arizona's SB 1070, causing an exodus of Hispanics to states where they might face less discrimination.

The attack on multiculturalist values has put leftist educators on the defense, making critiques of multiculturalism appear inherently conservative or racist, so that multiculturalism continues to act as the dominant anti-racist discourse. In the academy, this defensive posture has been felt in the erasure of Ethnic Studies programs in Arizona, which has reversed a tide of

¹ Giffords has said of SB 1070 that it "stands in direct contradiction to our past and, as a result, threatens our future" (Martell-Gómez).

multiculturalist inclusion and education that has been ongoing since the 1980s. Yet American-style multiculturalism has also had ambivalent effects on people of color in the United States and around the globe. Multiculturalism's reliance on identities that conflate race, ethnicity and nation can make it seem powerless against discourses that scapegoat immigrants, and can also bolster support for overseas wars by highlighting the diversity of the American military and in contrast, the racial or religious intolerance of national enemies like Osama Bin Laden. Indeed, since its emergence during the Cold War, American-style multiculturalism has been strategically employed as "multicultural exceptionalism," a way to cast the United States as a morally superior power in order to legitimate imperial and capitalist projects abroad. As the scholar Lewis Feuer has pointed out, American-style multiculturalism has come

precisely at a time when throughout the world it is the American-English language, its literature, its motion picture art, and its democratic political culture that holds primacy...Not since the amalgam of Roman-Hellenic culture swept the Mediterranean region has the like been seen. (22)

The imperial dimension to American-style multiculturalism gives the U.S. moral legitimacy to invade "monocultural" nation-states—Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya—that are seemingly plagued with the "intolerance" of religious fundamentalism. From this transnational point of view, those who defend multiculturalism take the place of the American missionary, espousing multiculturalism as particularly American, and thus, America's great export to be (forcibly) emulated around the globe. How do we understand this broader effect of multiculturalism as both an imperial power and as a formal expression of anti-racist politics? How can we make critiques of multiculturalism as an imperial, capitalist or even racist form, at a time of multiculturalist "defense"? What alternatives exist that might offer a politics critical of imperial and capitalist practices?

To explore these questions, this dissertation considers literary representations of multiculturalism as a governing strategy that emerged with British and American colonial pluralism in the early twentieth century, only to become a dominant anti-racist form after civil rights and decolonization through discourses of "racial harmony," "tolerance" and "multiculturalism." Particularly, this dissertation focuses on the emergence and dominance of multiculturalist governance in Malaya, the Philippines, and on Asian immigrant populations in the United States, through literature produced by Southeast Asian Anglophone migrants. This dissertation argues that novels by Southeast Asian Anglophones can give us a deeper understanding of how contemporary buzzwords such as "diversity," "racial harmony" and "tolerance" are embedded in a deep, transnational history of imperial networks and colonial governance. Such narratives often depict the Southeast Asian Anglophone as an individual who is expected to perform an "authentic" and "tolerable" identity that is diasporic, empowered and hypervisible, as well as imperial, confining, and monolithic. As Southeast Asian migrants often have a long history of migrancy, where the "original" homeland is already several homelands away, these writers occupy a critical position that sees such identity performance as contributing a structural role, where cultural practices and traditions divide labor and classes, so that, for instance, the traditional needlework of Malays becomes a mark of talent in microprocessor factories, and the matronly affection of Filipinas becomes a mark for domestic servitude and nursing. For these authors, multiculturalism has been employed as a useful imperial strategy for incorporating ethnic bodies into global capitalist regimes, and for bolstering a "multiculturalist exceptionalism" that legitimates police and military violence on "intolerable" populations.

In order to consider alternatives to multiculturalism as the dominant anti-racist mode, this dissertation reads against a traditional approach to ethnic literature that privileges "authentic"

identities. Rather than praise or empower identity, the narratives treated here reveal how categories of identity have been appropriated to socially stratify populations and to disseminate free market reforms in the Global South. By retelling histories of migrancy and revolution through satirical and anti-realist styles, these narratives express how migrants manage multicultural identities in order to expose the continuous history of imperial dominance and capitalist demand for surplus labor that has contributed to their construction. In exposing the imperial histories behind dominant strategies, where buzzwords like "tolerance" and "diversity" have become daily invocations of a multicultural exceptionalism, these literatures push us to a vision of belonging that is neither static nor essential, but as the Malaysian literary theorist Lloyd Fernando wrote in 1975, a vision of cultural form as "part of an unceasing process" that is "capable of continuing as if an infinite series" (1986, 14). I dub this unceasing process "transitive culture" and trace its appearance as a theme in Southeast Asian Anglophone literature. Although the texts treated in this dissertation view gender, sexuality and global politics differently, they all contribute to a vision of migrant individuals as self-consciously managing and reinterpreting multiculturalist identities through the shared cultural practice of transition.

This dissertation will trace the figure of the Southeast Asian migrant through three "transit-points" within the larger, transnational movement of laboring bodies and diasporic networks: Malaya (peninsular Malaysia and Singapore), the Philippines, and Asian America. I choose these "transit-points" to explore how these narratives manage cultural and ethnic difference in contexts where neoliberal reforms have co-opted particular models of difference that, on the one hand, promote tolerance and diversity, and on the other hand, appropriate and produce difference to stratify ethnic groups. Rather than homogenize the migrant into national or racial constructs, these texts reveal the migrant's multiple and competing ethnic identities that

shift in every given space, as well as their ability to manage and transition among such identities in different contexts. To investigate the figure of the Southeast Asian migrant in resisting nationalist identities, this dissertation will focus on Anglophone texts that consider multicultural strategies through the use of English, a distancing language that is variously coded as "neutral," "universal" or "colonial." Because Anglophone authors do not fit their national ethnic norm, their literatures have been pushed to the margins of both the nation-state and the global English audience. Thus their use of English can also be seen as a means of positioning themselves outside of ethnic and national identities to better grasp the function and history of multiculturalist governance, and to expose how multiculturalism operates both internationally (from the Global North to the Global South) and domestically (from Manila to Cebu in the Philippines, from the Malay and Chinese majorities in Malaysia and Singapore).

I do not limit Anglophone literature to English literatures outside the United States and Great Britain. Rather, I see the term "Anglophone" as a way to account for marginalized literary traditions within the United States that do not fit easily into the Anglo-American literary canon, and are seen as foreign or minoritized. For the scholar Shu-Mei Shih, the term "Sinophone" does not merely include Chinese-script users of Hakka and Hokkein descent in Southeast Asia, but also includes non-Han minorities in China, especially in Tibet, Xishuan and Taiwan. For Shih, "Sinophone" exposes how global multiculturalism conflates nation and ethnicity to render "national cultures of the globe" into "ethnic cultures in the political economy of transnational representation" (2007, 63). The Sinophone renders the "new global regime of multiculturalism" visible by disrupting the nation/ethnicity conflation and by parsing through the complexity of "China" and what is considered "authentic" (2007, 63). The Sinophone thus disrupts U.S. imperial projects because its non-monolithic perspective makes it "difficult to consume," and

therefore "frustrates easy suturing, in this case, while foregrounding the value of difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity" (5). As Sinophone literature and culture crosses regional and national boundaries, the Sinophone "allows for the emergence of a critical position that does not succumb to nationalist and imperialist pressures" (190).

Shih's use of Sinophone to disrupt global multiculturalism allows us to consider how Anglophone might also offer alternative modes of seeing Southeast Asian cultures and Asian American cultures as similar in their attempts to gain recognition in global multiculturalism. Since the 1990s, Asian American Studies has maintained a critical perspective on American assimilation projects by focusing on discourses of diaspora and the homeland. Yet with the War on Terror and other state imperial projects, "diaspora" discourse can also reinforce the multiculturalist exceptionalism of the United States by focusing on how Asian Americans have gained recognition as non-Anglo citizen-subjects while ignoring how Asian American identity has been co-opted against so-called "threats to America," including Asian terrorism, religious difference, and "unfree" markets. This co-optation however appears less dominant when focusing on Southeast Asian migrants whose histories have been difficult to render, as they speak to more recent imperial projects in Southeast Asia, and their "success" as "model minorities" has been less visible than East Asian Americans. Their marginalization in multiculturalist discourse is manifest in the multiple terms used to describe them: "Southeast Asian," "Asian Pacific Islanders," "Asian Pacific Americans," "Filipino/a," "Malays" and "aboriginals." Here "Anglophone" becomes useful not as an identity marker but as a linguistic designation that bypasses "distinctions made solely based on ethnicity or race" while still accounting for the marginalization present in Asian American populations, who might still "be complemented for speaking good English...due to the racist equation of whiteness and authenticity" (Shih 2007,

199, 27). Rather than mark the migrant as tethered to the "homeland" and the "host country," or to co-opt the Asian American into multiculturalist discourses of success, "Anglophone" bypasses the desire to see the migrant as an "authentic" ethnic type. Rather, it allows us to trace how Southeast Asian Americans are continually considered to be marginal and "inauthentic" to English and American cultures.

As an expression of the "inauthentic," Anglophone literature allows us to understand multiculturalism as a governing power that emerged through multiple sites, mainly British colonial pluralism in British Malaya, American imperial pluralism in the Philippines, and liberal tolerance in the United States. While recent scholarship has focused on diaspora in order to disrupt contemporary nationalist formations, this has often marginalized the Anglophone cultures that imperial encounters have also helped produce. Southeast Asian Anglophone texts rather provide a critique of post-colonial nation-states and the U.S. as reproducing an imperial style of governance through discourses of multiculturalism, and expose how multiculturalist governance has taken colonial pluralist strategies and re-interpreted them to manage minority and migrant groups within nation-states, creating domestic e/umpires that stratify groups by allowing minority representation, empowerment, and resistance, through monolithic cultural types. In what follows, I chart a genealogy of multiculturalist discourse as it develops in Malaya, the Philippines and Asian America, in order to challenge U.S. discourses of multiculturalism that are thought to produce egalitarian (or "post-racial") spaces.

American Multiculturalism: Narratives and Critiques

In the United States, multiculturalism became a dominant mode of anti-racism after the culture wars of the 1980s, when liberal politicians and educators sought to formalize many of the

demands of the civil rights era by instituting programs that encouraged diversity, empowerment, and representation. Though much of this institutionalization came in the aftermath of civil rights, this discourse of claiming diversity and tolerance as American values was earlier expressed by turn of the century philosophers such as William James and John Dewey, who stressed an epistemological pluralism (or a pluraverse), and whose ideas were carried out into the political field during the interwar period through scholars like Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne. Arguing against "melting pot" models of assimilation, these writers advocated for a cultural pluralism characterized by "multiplicity in a unity [and] an orchestration of mankind" (Kallen, 1915). The racial nationalist violence of World War II shifted values around the western world against racist practices, while the moral arguments of 1960s civil rights in the United States made pluralism a necessary political philosophy, one ready to merge the demands of civil rights organizers with the managerial interests of the state.

The emergence of multiculturalism in state institutions during the 1970s and 1980s extended ideas of cultural pluralism through the integration of ethnic studies. But as critics of multiculturalism have suggested, this narrative of multiculturalism from cultural pluralism to civil rights to today, confines multiculturalist practice to a nationalist history. In so doing, this narrative legitimates U.S. imperial violence by depicting multiculturalism as *the* viable anti-racist practice, which allows the United States to embody "the universal, so that U.S. government and military actions are to be understood as being for a supranational good" (Melamed 2006, 16). In her essay "The Spirit of Neoliberalism," Jodi Melamed criticizes the view that civil rights discourse was the main genealogical "sea-change" that heralded multiculturalism throughout the globe, and considers instead how multiculturalism functioned to enable neoliberal reform worldwide. To posit multiculturalism as primarily American represents the United States as

exceptional for its diversity in its Armed Forces and transnational capital, allowing the U.S. to play the role of a “neutral” power, ideologically and hierarchically above “monocultural” others. In the context of the U.S. War on Terror, to see multicultural ideology as disseminating primarily from the United States onto the global “rest” allows the U.S. to make “monoculturalism” and religious fundamentalism “a category of stigma that justifies torture” (16).

Critiques of multiculturalism like Melamed's have emphasized the military interests of the state in appropriating pluralist ideas. Her genealogy of U.S. multiculturalism exposes its roots before the civil rights “sea-change,” and identifies World War II as the main historical event that transformed the U.S. from depicting itself as an assimilationist state to an antiracist state. For other scholars like Jodi Kim, the Cold War too gave ample reason for the U.S. state to color itself “plural” in order to cast the stigma of racial nationalism upon communist countries aligning with the Soviets. For Kim, this discourse enabled a new imperial governance that operated through “nonterritorial imperial tactics,” including “economic support,” “humanitarian aid,” and “structural adjustment policies” (18). Domestically, the Cold War resulted in greater migrations of Asians from French Indochina, a symptom of wars in Asia that was reframed as a symbol of multicultural diversity. Considering the formalization of multiculturalism in education and media representation throughout the 1980s, scholars such as Dylan Rodriguez and Ruth Gilmore have pointed out that the drug wars of the same period saw the prison population rise drastically, as many civil rights activists and people of color were incarcerated for possession charges (Rodriguez 2010). Yet this rise in incarceration would seem far less violent and racially antagonistic so long as “representation,” “empowerment” and “identity” were emphasized in education and popular media. Critiques of multiculturalism from Melamed, Kim and Rodriguez have emphasized how multiculturalism has been instrumental in deriving legitimacy for

institutions such as the U.S. military and the prison complex, and have refused the U.S.'s self-representation of multicultural exceptionalism.

While the scholarship discussed above sheds light on how multiculturalist values have been constructed through complex histories of nationalist and class interests, they do not account for the colonial roots of multiculturalist governance that appear in governing strategies from British colonization in Malaya and from American colonization in the Philippines. This dissertation adds to critical understandings of multiculturalism by linking it with colonial governing strategies, understanding multiculturalism as a particular imperial form that emerged "overseas" but has taken root nationally within a domestic empire of subjugated and stratified peoples. Both colonial pluralism and contemporary multiculturalism operate through highlighting cultural difference as "good," rather than "bad," and give ethnic groups adequate representation and political power to help them retain their cultural heritage in the face of cultural conformity. Both modes of governance, in other words, do not produce assimilationist "melting pots," but operate more like multiculturalist "salad bowls" that make differences hypervisible while providing stratified labor classes for the consumption of global capital.

By focusing on how colonial pluralism was practiced in British Malaya, then in the American Philippines, I hope to begin uncovering a transnational history that stresses the role imperial networks and colonial governance have played in shaping how we value diversity and multiculturalism today.

From Pluralism to Multiculturalism

Modern pluralist ideas that we today would recognize as multiculturalist can be traced to defenses of cultural pluralism in the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1688-1744), who

posited that past generations had seen the world in different “truthful” ways, and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who applied Vico's notion of multiple truths to notions of cultural difference, separating “truths” by cultures rather than historical periods (Berlin). Herder is often regarded as the first philosophical spokesman for both nationalism and multiculturalism (White 167). Though these ideologies may seem contradictory, for Herder the nation (or *Volk*) was a sovereign cultural whole, where each contained “a centre of happiness within itself” (Herder 186). Imperial powers like the Romans and Greeks, for Herder, imposed an artificial set of values that violated “the organic unity of the original culture” (White 172). Unlike his colonial contemporaries, Herder understood cultural belonging as a spiritual necessity that was being stripped away by European colonization. Herder's notions of cultural difference and tolerance would help formulate colonial administrative projects, especially in regions such as South and Southeast Asia, noted for their cultural diversity and absence of central state structures.

Pluralist forms of colonial governance did not fully emerge in the English-speaking west until after the Indian Mutiny in 1857, when an Indian colonial rebellion caused the British Raj to dissolve the East Indian Company to directly govern South Asia from the British crown. While the Raj tended to enact strict policies of cultural dissemination, alternative governing strategies were being considered in the more racially diverse colonies within Southeast Asia. Only five years after the Mutiny, the English political scholar, Lord Acton, wrote in his 1862 essay “nationality” that multi-national empires or confederacies were the best ways to ensure liberty, progress and civilization, rather than “unitary” states. For Acton, societies had to grow organically through semi-autonomous nations organized within a multi-national imperium that had no cultural center. As he writes:

Where there are only two races there is the resource of slavery; but when different races inhabit the different territories of one Empire composed of several smaller States, it is of all possible combinations the most favourable to the establishment of a highly developed system of freedom. (35)

Acton found the ideal progenitor of this political style in the United States, which he considered a great pluralist federal structure, so long as each state had autonomy. Though this ideal structure, for Acton, perished with the defeat of the confederacy in the Civil War, Acton's ideal of a multi-national empire was to be "tested" in the recent British colony in Malaya, which in 1867 fell into the control of London's Colonial Office. As a colonial entity populated by distinctly different ethnic groups—namely Chinese, Malays, and Indians—Malaya became governed under an emerging colonial pluralism, where the extraction of resources (tin, gold, rubber) met with a style of pluralist governance that allowed cultural and religious autonomy.

Perhaps the first philosopher of colonial pluralism was J. S. Furnivall, whose extensive research on colonial Burma and the Dutch East Indies in 1910 led him to characterize Southeast Asian societies as pluralist societies. In contrast to the kingdoms of South Asia and the state-centered empires in China and Japan, the "tropical dependencies" of Southeast Asia were seen as culturally and racially diverse. According to Furnivall, such plural societies were "in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine" (304). In Herder's and Acton's visions, such a plural society was a confederacy, a multi-national empire of political autonomous zones. Yet for Furnivall, the autonomy and independence of the economic sphere as a non-cultural space was an ongoing weakness of pluralist societies, not a strength. Furnivall's *Colonial Policy and Practice*, often seen as a great forerunner to multiculturalist discourse, in fact illuminates how pluralism can go wrong. Rather than praise the implementation of the pluralist society in

Southeast Asia, Furnivall found that spirituality and cultural traditions were replaced by the desire for commerce, wealth, and the worship of "Mammon," the god of money.

The "racial harmony" of the pluralist society, for Furnivall, was less a result of philosophical governing ethics, and more a symptom of class inequality and global capitalism. As he writes: "the fundamental character of the organization of a plural society as a whole is the structure of a factory, organized for production" (310). In lacking a central set of cultural values, plural societies also lacked a common "social will" that would pressure economic forces to provide a living wage and better working conditions. This, rather than a desire for political autonomy and diversity, was the central concern of plural societies, which only arose "where economic forces are exempt from control by social will" so that "social wants that men can satisfy only as members of a community remain unsatisfied" (306, 310). In such a society, "the disorganization of social demand allows the economic process of natural selection by the survival of the cheapest to prevail" (310). The ideals of colonial pluralism thus seemed to culminate in the exploitation of cheap labor for global consumption.

Because there were no regulations concerning worker's rights and working conditions, Western colonial powers were able to reap great profit from these tropical dependencies. Furnivall noted that the European's "life in the tropics centres round his business, and he looks at social problems...not as a citizen but as a capitalist or an employer of labour" (306). The colonial powers' system of pluralism was comprised of "separate racial sections; each section is an aggregate of individuals rather than a corporate or organic whole; and as individuals their social life is incomplete" (306). The plural societies of the tropical dependencies were the manifestation of multi-national philosophy and capitalism in its purest form; a society that

respected cultural values and perspectives so long as common desires were directed towards economic values.

While these pluralist societies were "test-run" in the "tropical dependencies," notions of cultural pluralism began to emerge in the United States as an alternative to assimilationism. Following the work of William James, the political philosophers Horace Meyer Kallen (1882–1974) and Randolph Silliman Bourne (1886–1918) defended notions of cultural pluralism during and after World War I, when American xenophobia against the "New Immigration" was at an all-time high, and had culminated in the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. In his 1915 essay "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," Kallen claimed that despite the new immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia, the melting-pot of "Americanism" was in fact synonymous with "Anglo-Saxonism," of people who were expected to be "individualist, English-speaking... [and] devoted to laissez-faire" economics (6). Anyone who wished to become an American and did not possess these qualities was expected to assimilate and lose their original culture. Arguing against this assimilationist model of immigration, Kallen advocated for a cultural pluralism characterized by "multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind" wherein "every type [of immigrant group] has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony." Like Herder before him, Kallen saw the right to cultural identity as essential to selfhood, and saw the perfection of pluralism in a "Federal republic" that would oversee a multicultural mix of ethnic-based nations, a "democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind" (1915, 220).

After World War I, Randolph Bourne published his essay "Trans-National America," expanding upon Kallen's ideas for a pluralist federation by investing the United States with the potential to become the first transnational society. For Bourne, becoming transnational meant

preserving the native culture and spirit of each immigrant population in America, allowing each distinctive racial group to fill a niche. He observed that “the attempt to weave a wholly novel international nation out of our chaotic America will liberate and harmonize the creative power of all these people and give them the new spiritual citizenship, as so many individuals have already been given, of a world” (10). By embracing and cultivating the differences of its many ethnic groups, the United States could also forego its ideological ties to Anglo-Saxon Europe, freeing them from overseas wars (10). Yet in valuing difference, Bourne also de-valued those who had assimilated and lost their “indigenous” culture, as he calls them, those “half-breeds who retain their foreign names but have lost the foreign savor” (254). These assimilated “tasteless” minorities were enemies to a possible pluralist America, while those diasporic communities with adequate “taste” rightly preserved the culture of the homeland, as they could offer intellectual and cultural difference within a cosmopolitan setting. To expect minorities to act differently than their distinct cultural norms was thus seen as a type of infection, an intrusion of an artificial imperial culture onto an "authentic" minority.

These notions of cultural pluralism seemed confined as an alternative to assimilationist strategies, that is, until the post-World War II era, and the emergence of multiculturalism in state institutions. In turn, we can begin to understand multiculturalism as a more general and transnational strategy that shares distinct qualities with colonial pluralism in the colonies and cultural pluralism in the United States, despite their vastly different contexts. First, all the writers discussed above seem to elevate the point of view of outsiders, and seek to validate their religious/cultural reality with that of Anglo-Saxons. This mutual respect is only possible given the assumption that each culture comes from a long and innovative history which must be preserved and protected from becoming "artificial" or "tasteless." Second, pluralist tradition is

not necessarily antagonistic to nationalism, but advocates for a larger "confederation," "multi-national empire" or "trans-nation" that organizes and manages the cultural differences among nations. The organizing power of such a confederation would have to be seen as neutral, fair, and bound by agreed upon rules—a global "umpire" to direct and manage ethnic populations. Simply put, the imagined rules dictating cultural contact had to be mediated by a "neutral" power or conglomerate. Finally, this pluralist tradition, as J.S. Furnivall's critique shows, emphasizes the equalization of cultural difference despite the vast asymmetrical inequality of class differences. Pluralism thus has the danger of splitting up nation-states into collectives bound not by a common "social will" but by capitalist forces that only seek to produce cheaper and sell higher. In both theory and in practice, pluralism's familiar stress on cultural diversity has smuggled along class inequalities, and alongside it, inequalities in gender, sexuality, and education.

Understanding this larger history of multiculturalism causes us not to speak of a "multiculturalism" that supposedly emerged from civil rights discourse, but of "multiculturalist strategies," "multiculturalist discourses" and "multiculturalist ideologies" that have grown out of pluralist strategies, discourses and ideologies. Both pluralist and multiculturalist strategies also carry similar assumptions to terms like "civilization" and "progress," in that "pluralism" and "multiculturalism" often refer to utopic endpoints, so that the power cast as "multiculturalist" is thus cast as "exceptional."

Multiculturalism in North America

The term multiculturalism was thought to have emerged alongside civil rights movements in a 1965 preliminary report of the Canadian Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The commission's final report was the first state publication to mention a

multicultural society rather than a pluralist society. Yet the term "multiculturalism" was actually first used in a book review in the New York Herald-Tribune in July 1941 during the Second World War, when the term "multicultural" was employed to contrast the racial nationalism of the Axis powers, comparing the "national prejudice" of the Japanese and Germans with "a 'multicultural' way of life." While "multiculturalism" in the Canadian commission had to be precisely defined as "respect for the ways of all nations and peoples," during World War II it had little need to be defined—it was simply the other to the racist prejudice of national socialism. Indeed, only months after its emergence, the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, providing impetus for the U.S. to become militarily involved in the war.

World War II marks a significant change in what pluralism stood for in America, a sea-change that brought pluralist values to the forefront after the racist violence characteristic of the war. Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and later communist Russia, were depicted as totalitarian powers that pushed for various forms of ideological, cultural, and political homogeneity. World War II's narrative of a diverse array of Allied forces against the anti-Semitic and racist Axis powers, would, during the Cold War, convert to envisioning a multiculturalist nation (the U.S.) against the totalitarian Soviet Union. In an effort to win the ideological battle, American media diagnosed the Axis nations as homogenous social structures, while in contrast, the United States was marked as a pluralistic nation accepting of difference, with immigrant groups as its literal living proof. With the emergence of the United States as a superpower, pluralism/multiculturalism was no longer an ideal that offered alternatives to overseas expansion, as Bourne would have it, or an idea that gave the U.S. moral superiority over the Axis powers, as it had been during World War II. It became the epitome of how a moral and just society was organized, an idea that could be exported abroad.

As a state-sanctioned mode of governance, multiculturalism was first institutionalized in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s and culminated in the 1988 Canadian Multicultural Act. Multicultural legislation also passed in Australia in 1972 to cope with the growing number of Asian immigrants. In the United States, the 1965 Immigration Act continued the shift away from an assimilationist-style social system towards a pluralist/multiculturalist one. The Act eliminated restrictions based on national origin, but added provisions that increasingly preferred upper-class “skilled” migrants. Similarly, the Canada 1976 Immigrant Act did away with categories of people based on nationality or sexuality, and instead conjured the category “inadmissible classes” to define persons who could become a burden on social welfare or health programs. As Furnivall warned, the integration of a pluralist society seemed to allow class inequality in exchange for the diversity of racial groups. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the term "multiculturalism" further gained credibility in public discourse to signify the integration not only of racial bodies, but of marginalized histories, literatures and cultures in education and popular representations.

Leftist critics of multiculturalist policies have been consistent since its dominance as the primary anti-racist politics. Such critiques have focused on particular elements and symptoms of multiculturalism, such as “boutique multiculturalism” (Regina Lee), “official multiculturalism” (Lisa Lowe), and “establishment multiculturalism” (E. San Juan). These concepts are meant to separate a corporate and state-sanctioned multiculturalism from the multiculturalism of cross-racial coalitions and large-scale societal transformations (“strong multiculturalism” or "critical multiculturalism") in order to reveal the inconsistencies of multiculturalist practices in the United States. In these critiques, multiculturalism has been a tool to incorporate and commodify difference, one that emerged as a mode of governance from the bind of *laissez faire* liberalism

with imperial encounters of pluralist societies. In the United States, scholars have pointed to the co-optation of civil rights discourse by state and corporate power in order to produce, in the broadest sense, Asian Americans as highly skilled “model minorities,” Latin Americans as service and farm labor in a “culture of poverty,” and blacks as trapped within a culture of patriarchy (Dylan Rodriguez, Lisa Lowe). As Michael Warner points out in “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” consumerist practices also take advantage of this valorization of difference, where “consumer capitalism makes available an endlessly differentiable subject,” and where multiculturalism encourages ethnicity and difference to be performed through the consumption of products, brands and cultural icons (Warner 384-5). While promoting free market values and meritocracy, these logics sustain class hierarchies by valorizing, and thus solidifying, modes of difference.

While most critiques of multiculturalism seem to center on its role in commodifying cultural practices and binding ethnicity with particular gendered labor practices, others have focused on its role in giving moral value to U.S. imperial practices worldwide. Building off of critiques that explore the bind of neoliberalism and multiculturalism, Jodi Melamed uses the concept of “neoliberal multiculturalism,” which she defines as “the contemporary incorporation of U.S. multiculturalism into the legitimating and operating procedures of neoliberalism,” to consider how multiculturalism has offered moral weight to justify imperial projects, and at the same time, to account for how multiculturalism, on a global scale, has enabled global capitalism to thrive. For Melamed, the era of multiculturalism and the era of neoliberalism coincide for a reason, as multiculturalism acts as an ideological force organizing conceptions of difference within capitalist regimes, and is the particular thread that makes diverse and unique histories of

people recognizable as forces of labor. Multiculturalism thus operates as a “cultural logic of multinational or global capitalism” (Žižek 1997, 44).

This dissertation expands on such critiques of multiculturalism by exploring the conceptual overlap between U.S. multiculturalism and pluralist social organization in Southeast Asia, shifting focus from valorizing it as an American export produced through civil rights, to seeing it as an imperial strategy produced through imperial encounter. This region’s complex and diverse histories of trade, economic migrations, investment capital, militarization, and national formations in the face of great cultural, linguistic and religious difference, reveals different historiographies of multiculturalism, and shows legible similarities with the post-World War II era in the United States. To assume that multiculturalism is an American construct continues to deny that there is any “outside” to Western discourse, and serves to “safeguard the primacy of the West as the source of methodological and theoretical paradigms” (Shih 2005, 92). From the vantage point of Southeast Asia, the U.S. brand of multiculturalism, which the scholar Chua Beng Huat has referred to as “liberal multiculturalism,” can be distinguished as a unique form of pluralism because it “insists on the ‘freedom to choose’ as a basic right of an individual” (2005, 171). For thinkers like Chua, multiculturalism in the United States appears less as the only legitimate form of racial egalitarianism, and more as a unique racial formation produced through the intersection of imperial strategies and American cultural pluralism as expressed by John Dewey, Horace Kallen and the anti-segregationists of the civil rights movement.

As the term “multiculturalism” shifts meaning within each context, I define it broadly as a conception of social integration that expects racial and ethnic groups to visibly and proudly express their given racial identities in order to be recognized politically and to be accommodated socially by state institutions such as public schools and the armed forces, as well as through

positive forms of cultural and media-based representation. Often these racial identities are claimed by racialized minorities themselves, as they are recognizable to state institutions and civil society, and make available diverse historical discourses. Yet such identities also tend to conflate notions of ethnicity, race, nation, sexuality, gender and labor, to produce monolithic racial types. Etienne Balibar has identified such conflation as enabling a “neo-racism” that continues racist institutions and social stratification by assuming that racialized bodies are fixed into “insurmountable cultural differences” (22). These differences expose “tolerance thresholds” that valorize difference only when it is presented as “tolerable,” a strategy of “acceptance” that also demands minorities keep within their respective monolithic identities. This conflation also makes race and ethnicity seem synonymous, while cultural practices become symbolic of a residual—and often atavistic—ethnic type.

This notion of multiculturalism as an imperial strategy used to produce self-regulating, neoliberal subjects, allows me to refocus multiculturalism onto spaces that also emerge from pluralist societies and discourses, such as Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. I thus use “multiculturalism” as an umbrella term in order to compare distinct social forms, including cultural pluralism, colonial pluralism, liberal tolerance, multiracialism, multiethnics, global multiculturalism, neoliberal multiculturalism, stratified pluralism, and others that meet the broader definition I have given. In many contexts, like the the Philippines, ethnic relations is generally cast as diversity, though it retains the broader characteristics of multiculturalism, and can compared to multiculturalism in North America and Malaya. The next section considers the histories of cultural pluralism and postcolonial multiculturalism in Malaya and the Philippines. These histories reveal multiculturalist modes of governance that share similarities with that of the United States, as well as strategies for resistance and revision.

Postcolonial Multiculturalism in Malaya and the Philippines

In contrast to the kingdoms of South Asia and the state-centered empires in China and Japan, pre-colonial Southeast Asian societies were characterized by a cultural pluralism that historians of colonial and pre-colonial Southeast Asia have built upon, claiming the existence of a regional “cultural matrix” that is far more diverse ethnically, religiously, linguistically and culturally than its neighboring regions of India and China (Coedes, Reynolds, Lieberman, Wolters). Southeast Asia in this discourse contains “the great merit of diversity, with examples of almost every type of phenomenon to be found in the broader world outside Western Europe and its New World offshoots” (Reid 6). The absence of bureaucratic, normalizing forces in pre-colonial Southeast Asia has often been credited to various characteristics, such as archipelagos or “lowlands and highlands” (Reid), cultivated traditions of state resistance or anarchy (Scott), or pre-colonial political forms of 'galactic structures' wherein “satellite principalities...orbit around a central planet enjoyed an autonomy that was more or less proportional to distance from the center” (Lieberman 1993, 485). The historian Victor Lieberman believes the colonial “fluid cultural matrix” has extended, in various permutations, to the present day, and is most visible in state nationalist discourses that promote varying forms of multiculturalism and tolerance. Thus, “cultural diversity” is often the “point of departure” for studies of Southeast Asia (Wolters), and has functioned as a characteristic that makes sense of the vast complexity within the region itself.

Some historians have seen the "diverse" construct of pre-colonial Southeast Asia as more of a Western imagining than a historical fact (since "pre-colonial" already suggests the absence of a hegemonic state/culture), the conceptions of post-independence Southeast Asia as “multicultural” have been more firmly established, since the very structure for multicultural

governance was reinforced by western colonial regimes that practiced “divide and conquer” rule, and ways to distinguish populations according to different forms of labor (Emmerson). Indeed, the practices of colonial pluralism continue through forms of multiculturalism that states usher into public discourse in order to form a “national people” out of “pluralist” societies located within state territory, and to de-radicalize groups capable of violent resistance. According to E. San Juan, United States colonists in the Philippines devised a particular form of multiculturalism (or, as he later calls it, “stratified pluralism”) that stressed ethnic and religious difference “in order to disintegrate former cohesive groups, foster antagonisms between and among their members, and prevent any sense of national unity that would challenge colonial rule” (1999, 1). Similarly, the Southeast Asian historian Anthony Reid has traced the growing distinctions between “state nationalism” and “ethnie nationalism,” the later defined as “a group that imagines itself as kin” that “promotes political assertion” (12). “State nationalism,” on the other hand, manifests through “education, state ritual and the media” as a way to bring together many different “ethnie nationalisms” into a state-sanctioned form of belonging. The difficulty of building nations from such disparate cultural groups has forced scholars like Reid to rethink Southeast Asian nationalisms as organizing forces akin to multiculturalist models that reinforce national belonging by valorizing the diversity of many ethnic nationalisms.

If “cultural diversity” often characterizes many narratives about Southeast Asia, “free market,” “commerce” and “trade” are often the second major concentrations, since much of Southeast Asia’s “diversity” has roots in the long-distance labor migrations that have been continuous since at least the sixteenth century. According to Victor Lieberman, even before Europeans arrived, “free trade” was the norm, as there existed “a system of multifocal Smithian exchange that strengthened the economies and political systems of both mainland southeast Asia

and China” (2003, 45). Trade routes were already well established without one power interfering with the culture and religion of others. The habit of labeling bodies by their ethnicity was propagated by colonial powers in order to match racialized bodies with particular fields of labor (Reid). Chinese became identified as traders or “Jews of the East,” while other ethnicities were divided into groups of soldiers, subjects, or rivals (Reid 89). Since the colonial period at least, ethnic distinction has been tied directly to labor stratification and the organization of global capitalism. However, as the historian Craig Reynolds has advised, to see the region as simply tolerant of European market forces is “a clear manifestation of the Western liberal imagination” (434). Rather, Reynolds stresses the “dynamic inter-dependence” of the region, insisting that Southeast Asian societies did not simply receive trading posts and imperial market-trade, but often designated ports for the purposes of hosting trading routes, hoping to take advantage of these markets. This suggests that ethnic identities, employed for colonial rule, were not purely products of colonialists themselves, but that colonial subjects often managed and reinterpreted these categories for their own gain.

J. S. Furnivall's oft-cited definition of a pluralist society seems to unite the diversity of Southeast Asia with its history of commerce. He writes that in a pluralist society, “each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways” and “as individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling” (313). This definition can be read as a precursor to a discourse that sees free market capitalism and multiculturalism as utopic, for it assumes that within a pluralist society, separate ethnicities are equal when they convene within a market setting. Yet Furnivall himself explicitly denies that such a society could be racially egalitarian when he acknowledges that within the pluralist societies’ “economic sphere,” “there is a division along racial lines” (313). Despite Furnivall's warning about the

racial inequality within pluralist societies, neoliberal discourse of pluralist societies often cite Furnivall to reinforce the notion of a “Furnivall-Smithian” social structure, which marries the “anti-racism” of pluralism with the “liberation” of the free market, as if, together, they form an ideal space of global communion (Young 17). This binding of pluralist/multiculturalist values with the free market allows us to trace the contemporary dominance of a global multiculturalism disseminated through free market attitudes, an ideological formation that stratifies populations of “difference” into regimented social classes. The assumption that the market is an equalizing and pluralistic force seems to be the very ideological incentive—as well as the ideological veil—that has allowed markets to thrive in an era of open borders and globalization, and has further divided ethnic groups.

Contemporary forms of neoliberal multiculturalism have enabled Southeast Asia to become the site of global capitalist exploitation through multinational manufacturing, resource mining (accumulation by dispossession), and economic migrancy. This is the case especially for the two major areas where literatures in English have been produced in the post-independence period: Singapore/Malaysia and the Philippines. These Anglophone literatures offer unique conceptual tools to understand the multiple forms of global multiculturalism, as their very use of English marks them as imperial products, highlighting their inauthenticity in a marketplace of “authentic” multiculturalist identities, and their strategic position to manage and reinterpret such identities.

In contrast to East Asian nation-states, post-independence Malaysia and Singapore (the former British Malaya) went through only short periods of state-driven, import substitution economics, and have pioneered foreign-direct investment and neoliberal reform throughout the region. Historically, such connections to global trade should not be surprising. Since at least

1567, when the Ming Empire allowed trading routes between maritime Southeast Asia and China, Malaysian cities like Melaka were used as geographically convenient trading ports, where early sultanates sat upon “long-standing crossroads of trade” that “had a tradition of cosmopolitanism, with traders from India, China, the Archipelago and the Gulf of Thailand” (Reid 41). This intrusion by various colonial powers—the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and finally the Japanese—partially produced the “diversity” of Malaya, as Chinese traders and Tamil laborers were imported to support the ancient trading center of Melaka, and later trading centers in British Georgetown, Penang, and Singapore. The founding of independent Malaysia in 1963 created the term “Malaysia” (as opposed to Malay) to give a common identity to an otherwise multinational nation-state and to “emphasize the national identity without necessarily marginalising[sic] minorities” (Reid 105). In contrast, the British had made no attempt to build a common “Malaysian” peninsular identity, encouraging instead a pluralist society in which the three main groups—Malay, Chinese and Tamil Indians—were largely separated by class, space and distrust. Racial riots in 1963 resulted in the separation of Chinese-dominated Singapore, and in 1969, a second series of racial riots in Malaysia led to the “New Economic Policy” (NEP), a set of guidelines meant to build cultural and religious tolerance while incorporating more Malays in schools and businesses. This legacy of producing “state nationalism” through multiculturalist policies continues today with the “1Malaysia” campaign. Meanwhile, Malays and Indians have continually been identified as exploited classes, casting Indians as the most unskilled laborers, and Malaysian women as the most obedient factory hands (Ong). While carrying similar ethnic distinctions, Singapore has emerged from the colonial period as a global city, and as such has been the source of neoliberal reform throughout the region, as is evident in the “growth triangle” between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, and in the ASEAN Free Trade Zone.

Anglophone literature from Malaysia and Singapore often reinterprets this history of pluralism and free trade to reveal hidden forms of class and racial violence, and to emphasize how ethnic identities are managed in order to resist or to take advantage of cultural, ethnic or linguistic hierarchies. In Malaysia, Anglophone writers have depicted the reality of racial divides, like the Chinese in multinational factory work (Chua), the oppression of Tamil temples (Maniam), and the resentment felt for state multicultural policies like the New Economic Policy or the Internal Security Act (Lim, “Joss”). Anglophone narratives by Chinese in Singapore often resist the commodified identity of being a “trade diaspora” or speaking Mandarin (as historically most Chinese in Singapore are Hokkein), while other narratives reinterpret both nation's racial riots to account for labor inequalities (Fernando, “Scorpion” and “Green”). These Anglophone texts also reinterpret English from being a “neutral” language—one not ascribed to any three ethnic groups—to speaking for cross-cultural and cross-ethnic communities. Since Anglophone novels are not seen as national literature, English-use has often been less subject to censorship from both countries' Internal Security Acts. In order to to avoid censorship, the political critiques within many Anglophone texts from Malaya and Singapore are often made through magical or anti-realist elements.

The Philippines has also been characterized by enormous class divisions that often correlate with linguistic, cultural, and religious difference. The dominance of the mestizo class over most of Philippine society can be traced back to the earliest moments of national formation, with the Chinese-mestizos *Ilustrados* Jose Rizal and Emilio Aguinaldo, and the Spanish-mestizos Andrés Bonifacio and Manuel Quezon. The contemporary Mestizo class makes up less than four percent of the population (Capelli), but, according to some estimates, mestizos still garner over half of the personal income (Demko). Most of the “Filipino people” are cast as

Malay, but there are more than seventy-five ethnolinguistic groups, the major ones being the Ilocanos in Luzon, the Cebuanos or Visayans, and the Tagalogs who inhabit most of Metro Manila, whose language, Tagalog, was made the national language of the Philippines. With the fervent religious differences between Catholics in Luzon and the Visayas and Muslims in Mindanao, as well as cultural and linguistic differences between groups, the Philippines is, as E. San Juan calls it, “vibrant with differences—at the price of the suffering of the majority of its citizens” (1999, 2). Writing extensively about multiculturalism as an imperial strategy, San Juan identifies multiculturalism in the Philippines as a stratified pluralism hidden within a language of cultural diversity and tolerance, which reproduces divisions along lines of wealth, religion, language, location and education. “Multiculturalism” in the Philippines, Juan writes, “abounds in [the] unstable, unequal, class-torn society.” This class-strife has been propelled by the estimated eight million Filipinos working overseas as domestic workers in places like Hong Kong, Korea and Israel, as nurses in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and as technicians, engineers, and merchant seamen worldwide. Often Filipino textbooks and media parade the image of the “family-oriented” Filipina, or the “sea-faring” Filipino, in order to shape national identities into *global* multicultural identities that are easily placed in global divisions of labor (McKay, Robyn Rodriguez). Unlike Malaysia and Singapore, foreign-direct investment in the Philippines has only been abrupt or stagnant, since the corrupt economic and political atmosphere has kept investors away. Instead, it is the export of Filipino bodies that has brought significant economic gains in the form of remittances, an estimated \$18.76 billion in 2010 (Remo). Multiculturalism in the Philippines thus allows us to understand how multiculturalist governance can function for an *intra-national* empire that seeks to “civilize the margins” through the hegemony of an oligarchy, and how this intra-national empire is also necessary for finding

recognition within a *global* multiculturalism that enables the Philippines to export commodified racial bodies abroad. In the Philippines, such multiculturalism has continued to reproduce a transnational lower-class, what Rhacel Parrenas has named the “servants of globalization.”

Philippine Anglophone literature explores multiculturalist strategies by emphasizing histories of violence, imperialism and economic migration that have been either lost or appropriated into multiculturalist discourses. F. Sionil Jose's novels capture the difficulties for Ilocano and Cebuanos to integrate into Tagalog-based state nationalism, and novels by Eric Gamalinda and Ninotchka Rosca reveal how histories of economic strife and imperialism spill out of multicultural histories that promote the Philippines as a place of “diversity” and “tolerance.” As is the case with Malaysia/Singapore, Anglophone literature often becomes an expressive haven for to critique nationalism and state policy in times of censorship. Famously, during Martial Law, Ferdinand Marcos seemed to censor almost every expressive medium besides literature in English, believing that Filipinos rarely read literature (English or otherwise). With even greater absence of state censorship after Marcos, narratives concerning queer subjectivity (Realuyo), Mestizo privilege (Syjuco), state oppression (Ty-Casper) or transnationalism (Ong) have characterized much Filipino Anglophone literature.

The post-colonial emergence of multiculturalism (also called “racial harmony” and “multiracialism”) in Malaya and the Philippines broadens the scope of multiculturalism towards non-western nations. By accounting for this larger transnational history, we avoid, as Vijay Mishra has put it, the “tendency to read multiculturalism as a purely Western phenomenon requiring urgent academic analysis and attention in the context of a largely post-1965 immigration of non-white peoples into Western nation-states” (199). I offer this brief summary of Southeast Asian history and Anglophone literatures not to simplify the region’s complexity,

but to invoke a genealogy of multiculturalism produced through multiple conceptions of colonial governance, free market commerce, and cultural pluralism. Though these discourses are widely different, they share intellectual overlaps that allow us to see multiculturalism as a discourse that emerged and developed beyond U.S. borders. The given discourses of pluralism and commerce provide a conceptual backdrop to understanding the limits of a U.S.-centric conception of multiculturalism in our contemporary moment. This transnational genealogy thus provides multiple gateways towards understanding multiculturalism as a strategy that reproduces imperial projects, whether they are capitalist projects in need of managing and organizing racialized labor, state projects in need of bridging a common identity among a racially stratified population, or military projects in need of legitimacy.

Southeast Asian Anglophone Narratives

This dissertation treats Anglophone literature of the transpacific from World War II to the War on Terror, which includes texts from Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, as well as from Southeast Asian migrants in North America. It claims that Southeast Asian Anglophone narratives expose a complex and transnational history of multiculturalism that enable us to isolate its typical logics, characteristics and procedures, and to derive new hermeneutics for resisting or managing this contemporary global formation. As Southeast Asian migrants often come from long histories of migrancy, these writers occupy a critical position that sees national identities (Malaysian, Filipino or Asian American) as conflating notions of race, nationality and labor. Indeed, if literature has had a hand in constituting ethnic difference, then literature can also reveal how multiculturalist discourses are dependent upon such representations of "authentic" identities.

Many of the texts examined are categorized in nationalist terms as Asian American, Filipino, Malaysian or Singaporean. For the Filipino American scholar Martin J. Ponce, Anglophone literature in places like the Philippines complicates approaches to reading "minority" literature, which privilege "race" and "nation," because they are shaped by "overlapping forces of colonialism, imperialism, and migration" (18). The racial histories of many Southeast Asian Anglophone writers is often too mixed to meet a reader's expectations about "minority" literature, and their refusal to incorporate with the language and culture of their own nation (or an imperial one) also refuses national identities. This ambivalence in a multiculturalist social order has allowed Southeast Asian Anglophone literature to either be ignored or marginalized as "second rate." In 1989, the Singaporean scholar Koh Tai Ann criticized scholars who see Singapore novels as "unworthy of consideration," and noted that most literary critics were unable to fully consider "the historical and cultural context in which such works are written and the reading is conducted" (277). In the American context, much of Asian American literature has been similarly ghettoized into a "literary Chinatown" that meets a reader's expectations for "real voices," and uses marketing techniques that emphasize authenticity and exoticism (Partridge). Rather than read these novels for notions of authenticity and "real voices," this dissertation follows materialist literary critics and reads these texts as reflecting and refracting the various histories of migration in the context of global multiculturalism.

I trace Southeast Asian literature in English to focus on what is casually conceived of as a 'neutral,' 'imperial' or 'cosmopolitan' mode of address, one that is often used by Southeast Asian novelists as a non-nationalist language free of the expectations and censorship of novels written in nationalist tongues. This characterization of English has cast it as an administrative language,

one more distanced and estranged, yet also more able to discuss identity and race as socially constructed categories rather than ontological ones². Topics otherwise deemed sensitive or silenced are often mediated through English as a way of exploring racial issues in a speculative, estranged discourse. Thus scholars have begun to see English-use in subordinate countries as a way for writers to avoid their ethnic language and the language of the nation-state, while still maintaining colloquial idioms and code-switching.

There is no doubt that English-use has become a highly valued skill among upper-class and lower-class migrants, and the use of English should not be separated from its imperial heritages or the desire to be published by Western presses. However, to cast all cases of English use as mimicry reinforces the notion that the English language is owned by the colonizers (who never had to learn it in schools), and that it is really only for Anglo-Saxon people. In places like Singapore and Malaysia, English has been used to establish a multicultural society where non-English languages are seen as ethnic or cultural. In some parts of the Visayas, Ilocos and Mindanao in the Philippines, English is used as an alternative to Tagalog, which can seem to some like an arbitrary national tongue. For Shirley Lim, to name English-use as an always imperial mode of address assumes that national languages are somehow more natural to Anglo-Saxon authors, when in fact national languages have a history of effectively marginalizing other linguistic groups. As Lim points out:

Chinese Malaysians, rejecting both Malay and Chinese cultural nationalisms based on paradigms of racial descent, assent to an international language that opens the future for themselves and their children, English. These Malaysians...are choosing a potential international identity formation over

² In Singapore, for example, ethnic Chinese are expected to learn Mandarin as their ethnic language, even though most Singaporean Chinese have spoken Chinese Hokkein or Hakka.

national identity politics that reinscribe ancient tribal feuds and territorial imperatives. (1994, 47)

Having grown up after de-colonization, many of the novelists treated in this study see English as a medium for speaking to other migrant groups and to imagined global communities.

By limiting this dissertation to Anglophone texts, this dissertation investigates how Anglophone cultures both adapt to and unsettle notions of racial types, and display flexibility in “bridging resistance and accommodation” (Nguyen 35). Only through self-conscious reinterpretation and management of their own imperial identities can Anglophone writers become dedicated to critiquing and exposing the very pluralist categories that have enabled their privilege. This dissertation then is less a project of retrieval, but rather one of dismantling liberal institutions and ideologies that work to render Anglophone texts “second rate” or illegible.

I re-categorize Southeast Asian American literature as Anglophone in order to mark its refusal to be complicit with or incorporated into U.S. imperial projects, as Southeast Asian bodies (Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian, Filipino/a) in the United States can be seen as a mark of imperial history. Scholars have already pointed out that labeling a text as an “Asian American novel” has become more difficult, especially for novels that take place outside of the United States (*Book of Salt*, *Dream Jungle*, *Gold By the Inch*, *The Dispossessed*, *Turning Japanese*) or novels that feature protagonists who identify as migrant or transnational (*Salt Fish Girl*, *This Place Called Absence*, *Brazil-Marú*). Though some Asian American scholars have seen the transnational turn as a threat to ethnic nationalism, so-called “transnational” novels offer insightful critiques of the United States by thematizing the performance of commodified ethnicities within a larger transnational context. Novels such as Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* or Le Thi Diem Thuy’s *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* depict the struggle to be

liberated from given cultural identities and to find an imagined place of refuge. As multiculturalism is commonly seen within a highly valued history of civil rights rather than a history of colonial pluralism, Southeast Asian Anglophone literature in the United States appears less as an aggressive, explicit critique of multiculturalist governance, and more as an implicit critique that can be exposed by reading against realist and auto-biographical tendencies. Rather than "de-nationalize" Asian American politics, these texts, when read outside the logics of "authenticity," can work to undermine multiculturalist myths by revealing how migrants manage and transition among identities.

The novels treated in this dissertation also share in their resistance to nationalist and ethnic narratives that reproduce the liberal citizen-subject and confirm nationalist histories of multiculturalism through historical and realist forms. Such forms often confirm notions of authenticity, and assume progressive historical narratives leading to the "Furnivall-Smithian" multiculturalist utopia. The novels treated here contain ironic spins on historical events, and forgo notions of authenticity and historical realism by developing styles of anti-realism through myth, irony, absurdity and speculation. These narratives thus function more as 'anti-histories,' deviating from sentimental and romantic genres in which nationalist and multiculturalist myths are most often mediated. Absurdity and play make history appear more as speculation, shoring up a seemingly infinite variety of ethnic identities to account for suppressed (or "intolerable") cultural practices.

While novels critiquing multiculturalist ideology are common in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, reading for such works in Asian American literature proves more challenging, as multiculturalism in the United States is more often seen as a leftist or progressive discourse rather than a state or imperial one. However, the tendency to read many novels by Southeast

Asian Anglophone writers like Han Ong, Jessica Hagedorn and Peter Bacho as realist, I claim, does not account for the non-realist elements within these novels. I read these narratives as non-realist social satires, as part of a speculative fiction genre that critiques notions of realism and authenticity. As Daniel Chandler reminds us, genres can often embody "certain values and ideological assumptions" depending on the audience (4). For Asian American scholars like Tina Chen, Jeffrey Partridge and Betsy Huang, Asian American literary production and criticism has long assumed an "autobiographic imperative" that casts "all Asian American fiction as forms of life writing" (Huang 7). I consciously shift the generic conceptions of these novels towards speculative fiction to better account for their critiques of authenticity.

This dissertation will build from a wide range of scholarship in Asian American Studies, Southeast Asian studies, theories of diaspora, postcolonialism and cultural studies. The historian O.W. Wolters' wrote that studies involving Southeast Asia should "delineate particular literary cultures in the region and illustrate the phenomenon of cultural diversity," since understanding and identifying the region's historical processes is its "pedagogical value" (93, 99). While I am more concerned with how Anglophone texts illuminate our understanding of multiculturalist strategies, I also feel that studying a region for its "pedagogical value" often positions not only the author, but also a text's readers, as primarily Western, even though historical and literary texts can have political and social impacts in the very region that they are "learning" from. At a time when classes of global English speakers dominate many nation-states seeking to be "global," the impact of any text in English seems unbound by national borders. As a mixed-race male who has lived in and traveled extensively in Asia, I still maintain much of the Western gaze. At the same time, as the descendant of mestizo Chinese Ilocanos, Irish and Germans, such discourses of authenticity that lead to concepts of the "East" and "West"—which are often read

as “innocent” and/or “imperial”—have always felt plagued by a multiculturalism that idealizes “subaltern” or “authentic” voices, as if imperialism, violence, and resistance are particular to any geographic hemisphere. Finally, as a self-professed victim of service labor who was once a copier, filer, popcorn-refiller, ticket-seller, television seller, cashier and custodian, it feels inadequate to see lower-class ethnicized subjects as incapable of managing or transitioning among commodified identities, as if notions of “authenticity” aren’t part of every ethnicized service worker’s toolsets. Many of the novelists, theorists, and scholars examined in this study share in this feeling.

Chapter Summaries

The first three chapters of this dissertation investigate multiculturalist governance in the three transit-points that are this study’s focus: Malaya, the Philippines and the United States. Chapter one treats Lloyd Fernando’s Malaysian Anglophone text *Scorpion Orchid* (1975), one of the earliest Anglophone novels published in Malaya, as a critique of nationalist multiculturalism and as a reiteration of British colonial pluralist strategies. Fernando’s novel follows four idealistic university students of different ethnic backgrounds living during the racial riots of the 1960s in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. By depicting the boys’ struggle to perform static racial identities, Fernando’s novel envisions transitive cultures, groups that consciously reinterpret, manage and transition among imposed racial identities. Rather than founding community on shared racial backgrounds, such communities build upon shared experiences of repression and identity-based expectations.

The second chapter reads Alfred Yuson’s *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* to explore how Yuson’s novel critiques multiculturalism in the Philippines as an extension of

American colonization. By constantly interrupting an absurd historical narrative of the 1898 Filipino revolution with a realist narrative of the 1986 "People's Power" Revolution. I argue that Yuson's novel reveals ways in which multicultural identities, once inhibiting and incorporating, can be "excessive" to the cultural practices encouraged by the state and capitalist actors, depending upon how those identities are practiced or managed. Yuson's magical time travel narrative investigates how cultural identities, constructed in times of revolution, can reproduce rather than flatten cultural hierarchies. In reimagining Philippines history as an absurd narrative of revolution and counterrevolution, Yuson's novel imagines transitive cultures that perform identity in excess of multiculturalist expectations.

The third chapter treats Peter Bacho's *Cebu* and Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* to explore how multiculturalism in the United States constructs American cities as "liberal" and "tolerant," while spaces outside the U.S., like the Philippines and Singapore, are constructed as bastions of historical trauma, violence, patriarchy and perverse sexuality. These Asian American novels reflect how such exceptionalism has made state and police power against minority and migrant groups seem legitimate. I argue that the intersection of imperial pluralist strategies with cultural pluralism in the United States has given rise to liberal tolerance as an altogether unique form of multiculturalist governance that establishes "tolerance thresholds"—imagined barriers between "tolerable" and "intolerable" cultural practices—which function to distinguish the "legitimate violence" of the state from the "arbitrary violence" of migrant and minority groups. Using theories of liberal tolerance by Horace Kallen, Alain Locke, Shirley Lim and Wendy Brown, this chapter considers how such tolerance secures violence within the cultural diaspora.

The fourth chapter considers how transitive cultures have emerged as both a response to global multiculturalist governance and as its most logical extension, through constructing the

transcultural cosmopolitan subject. Chapter four reads two novels produced in 2001, Hwee Hwee Tan's *Mammon Inc.* and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao*, to consider how transitive cultures can function as an alternative to both multicultural identities and cosmopolitan identities. Both novels represent Southeast Asian migrant service workers who transition among recognized identities in order to gain patronage from cosmopolitan clients. While doing so, these workers form new communities based not on ethnicity, but on their shared role as service workers able to transition among ethnic identities.

The coda considers the “anti-realist” elements in the texts treated in this dissertation and explores the rise of speculative fiction as a genre in Southeast Asian Anglophone writing since the 2000s. I argue that the “anti-realism” can be categorized as speculative, in that they push literary ethnic writing into non-realist spaces that comment on the conventions and assumptions of traditional ethnic narratives, which have been crucial to reconstituting multicultural identities and liberal subjectivity. I consider speculative fiction as a transitive cultural form, as it attempts to shock and de-stabilize multiculturalist identities, expressed in non-genre or “meta-genre” modes that refuse recognition within multicultural politics of recognition.

This interdisciplinary project seeks to make interventions in Asian American studies, American studies and literary studies in Anglophone literature. As a genealogical project, this dissertation highlights Southeast Asian Anglophone literature, an all-too ignored yet historically significant literary tradition, and explores how crossing national borders can reveal new ways of seeing our own post-war history as a pluralist superpower, and our present as a global managerial e/umpire. This dissertation thus investigates not only the production of transitive cultures, but also the limitations therein: who belongs, who does not, to what degree, and the specific divisions that disrupt supranational solidarity. My purpose in taking a more critical stance

towards multiculturalism is not to claim it a failure, or to "progress" multiculturalism into a new phase. Rather, I seek to emphasize how any project of supranational and racial solidarity must also take into account how American exceptionalism has been constructed in order to reproduce imperial networks and capitalist dominance worldwide. Exploring how Southeast Asian Anglophone narratives reveal unacknowledged histories and offer alternative ways of seeing culture and race will be the main investigative impetus driving this dissertation.

Chapter 1

Do You Want to Join This Society or Not?

Multiculturalist Umpires and Transitive Culture in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*

Lloyd Fernando's 1976 novel, *Scorpion Orchid*, places four university students of different racial backgrounds into a friendship that seems to represent the pluralism of postcolonial Singapore and Malaysia. Sabran is Malay, Guan Kheng is Chinese, Santinathan is Indian, and Peter D'Almeida is Eurasian. Their friendship, bound by the privileges of higher education, the English language, and a waitress named Sally, becomes tested by the surges of political, economic and racial violence that characterized the 1950s and 1960s, when the Federation of Malaya ceased being a British colony and integrated Singapore in 1963, only to exclude it in aftermath of the 1969 May 13 race riots. The boys' broken-down idealism of cross-racial friendship not only reflects the tensions of this period, but also opens spaces to explore an ideology of racial harmony that depoliticizes race and allows extreme inequality, repressive violence and one-party rule in order to idealize the tolerant attitudes of a multicultural nation-state.

Scorpion Orchid's main narrative of the four university students is consistently interrupted by italicized excerpts from myths, travel logs, official British histories, fictionalized histories written by university students, and unpunctuated stream-of-consciousness vignettes (Holden 2008:163). Each excerpt comments on and undermines the events of the main narrative by juxtaposing the violence and racial tensions of postcolonial Malaya (The Malaysian Peninsula including Singapore) with historical and mythological narratives that build common identities

out of diverse racial communities. In these excerpts, the violence, censorship and multicultural strategies of the two states are juxtaposed with the similar strategies of past colonial powers: the Japanese, the British, the Portuguese, the Chinese, and the Malay Sultanates. At the same time, the hopes of building alliances among racially diverse communities are set alongside romantic myths of racial mixture and permeable religious beliefs. While the main narrative of the four university students can be seen as a comment on the racial tension of the period, the novel's synthesis of the western-style *bildungsroman* with mythological and historical narratives of racial mixture and transition imagines alternative forms of cultural representation and practice.

As one of the first Anglophone novelists from Malaya, Lloyd Fernando helped develop a tradition of English-language literature as a fiction writer, a literary critic and a cultural theorist. His work appears alongside the "first generation" Anglophone novelists, which include Lee Kok Liang and the poets Ee Tiang Hong and Wong Phui Nam. As a first generation writer who began writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Fernando was raised in the British formal education and culture taught within schools and universities (Raihanah 56). As his novel is produced within a context of growing Malay supremacy in an otherwise pluralistic society, his work is often read as "nostalgic" for "the possibilities of an imagined Malayan multiracialism that emerged among the anglophone elite in the 1950s" (Holden 2008 163). In this reading, Fernando's novel idealizes the anti-colonial multiculturalism that formed in the 1950s, only to be shattered by the pro-Malay litigation following the race riots of 1969 (otherwise known as the 13 May Incident). For the literary scholar Philip Holden, Fernando's text mourns an "idealized space of multicultural knowledge...[that] can only be located now in the past, in the English-medium colonial school" (Holden 2008 166).

This chapter reinterprets the "nostalgia" in Fernando's novel as an imagined alternative to the colonial pluralism practiced by the British, which was later solidified by Malaysian and Singaporean political parties seeking to sustain one-party rule. Rather than idealize a past form of multiracialism, Fernando invokes a form of cultural expression imagined through his essays and novel that emphasizes cultural process and transition over rigid racial types. Indeed, the nostalgic reading of *Scorpion Orchid* is partially due to its being read within the canon of Anglophone Malaysian literature, even though the novel takes place in Singapore before it was part of the Federation of Malaysia, and thus considers the early racial politics of Malaya as a whole. Furthermore, Fernando himself was a migrant from Sri Lanka who studied in Britain and lived much of his life in Singapore and thus seems oddly positioned as a Malaysian author. Only recently has the novel broached its nationalist narratives, as in 2011 the novel was reprinted as part of the Singapore Classics series by Epigram Books, a Singaporean publisher, and has gained popularity as a novel that crosses nationalist canons. By reading the novel as a Southeast Asian Anglophone novel rather than a Malaysian novel, I hope to expose the critique of multiculturalism undergirding much of Fernando's narrative, and to read its "nostalgia" of multicultural ideals as an attempt to produce new ways of imagining cultural identity as transitive and self-fashioning. As a Sinhalese migrant from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) who lived in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, Fernando maintained a critical suspicion of any ethnic or nationalist identity, and rather recognized how racial types are produced through historical struggles by appropriating and refashioning such ascribed identities.

Through Lloyd Fernando's novel and essays, this chapter explores multicultural thought in Malaya as distinctive from multiculturalism in the U.S., as its institutional forms have been heavily influenced by colonial powers. At the same time, this postcolonial multiculturalism

shares legible similarities with multiculturalism in the U.S., in that most of its "diversity" is embedded in the desire for cheap and docile laborers, and in histories of wars, civil unrest, and imperial dominance. The postcolonial multiculturalism in Singapore and Malaysia today patterns with a global set of values and beliefs that emphasize cultural tolerance while allowing state and capitalist dominance, where the very bodies that symbolize diversity can also be seen as historical markers of imperial dominance. Lloyd Fernando's work allows us to explore the counter-narratives to this discourse, and to develop what I call "transitive culture," cultures that resist multiculturalist categories by seeing cultural transition and "self-fashioning" as a distinct cultural practice.

This chapter is split into three parts. The first section explores how contemporary global manifestations of multiculturalism can be traced to British pluralist governance in British Malaya (As Malaya was known before the Malay Union in 1946). The novel traces multicultural discourses that emerged from British colonial pluralism in British Malaya to Malaysia's autonomy as a part of the Commonwealth in 1946, and then as an independent nation in 1957, to the solidifying of Malay-favored multicultural governance in the 1970s, after the 13 May Incident. *Scorpion Orchid* allows us to track the similarities between the early imperial emergence of multiculturalist governance and a contemporary multiculturalism that functions as a mode of state and capitalist ideology.

In the second section I explore how English writing has produced counter-narratives by revealing repressed histories of class and racial violence, and by foregrounding how both Malaysia and Singapore have managed racial identities in order to sustain social hierarchies. For writers in English, the early postcolonial brands of multiculturalism have functioned as a tool for repressing political dissent by depoliticizing race. Fernando's early essays on English writing

allow us to conceive of ways of life based on cultural transition, a notion that directly opposes multiculturalist categories of depoliticized cultural “types.” In the last section, I will expand on my reading of *Scorpion Orchid* to develop the notion of a transitive culture, a culture that recognizes multiple historical narratives and takes on new identities as a cultural practice. I trace this cultural form by seeking out its limits. In this case, I investigate *Scorpion Orchid*’s racially ambiguous sex worker Sally, a migrant who is defined by her ability to transition between recognizable cultural forms, but only does so as a byproduct of her subjugation and labor.

As the term “multiculturalism” shifts meaning within each context, I define it broadly as a conception of social integration that expects racial and ethnic groups to visibly express their given racial identities in order to be recognized politically through state institutions such as public schools and the armed forces, and to be accommodated socially through positive (but often monolithic) representations in social media. Though often these racial identities are claimed by minorities themselves, they can also be co-opted by dominant powers in order to produce a “neo-racism” that assumes racial bodies are fixed into “insurmountable cultural differences” (Balibar, 1991: 22). "Multicultural governance" exploits such identities, and uses them to sustain social hierarchies that foster capitalist accumulation.

Pluralism and Multicultural Emergence in Malaya

The fundamental character of the organization of a plural society as a whole is the structure of a factory, organized for production – J.S. Furnivall

In *Scorpion Orchid*'s main narrative, the University professors of the elite, Anglophone University of Malaya, where the four boys attend, represent the rationale of the British Empire before its departure. While the English literature professor Ellman legitimates British rule through the “greatness” of British literature, another teacher, Ethel, lauds the British as successful managerial powers who keep peace among a pluralist society. As she says to Ellman after their casual sex encounter:

It's not a single society, really...thank God, the British are here. The Malays are in their kampongs, the Chinese own all the business, and the Indians are in the rubber estates. And the Eurasians...sit in their cricket club and imitate us, rather poorly actually. You see, they have nothing in common. If we left tomorrow, there'd be such a lovely bit of mayhem that we'd have to come back and keep the peace. No, I'm afraid we have to grin and bear it—the white man's burden, I mean. (Fernando, 1976: 89)

The rationale of the British Empire here relies upon rigid racial types, each defined through distinct cultural practices that can be reinterpreted as naturally befitting types of labor. The British must take on a managerial role, making pluralism and racial mixture a justification for the British to extract resources and to institute a class hierarchy using racial signifiers (Quayum, 2009: 31). Implicitly, Ethel's comments are directed not only at the protestors who seek to expel the British, but at Ellman himself, who has recently impregnated the South Asian migrant Neela, Santinathan's sister, and thus helped to unsettle the pluralist categorization of racial types through racial mixture.

Ethel's justification of the British Empire through invoking the universal reason of the British above the divisive interests of racial communities echoes the Catholic political scholar,

Lord Acton, in his 1862 essay “Nationality,” where Acton argues in favor of multi-national empires over unitary nation-states. For Acton, societies had to grow organically through self-governments organized within a multi-national empire:

Where there are only two races there is the resource of slavery; but when different races inhabit the different territories of one Empire composed of several smaller States, it is of all possible combinations the most favourable to the establishment of a highly developed system of freedom. (Acton, 1996: 35)

While Ethel’s hopes to sustain the British Empire are vanquished when the British are cast out, her confidence in a racial hierarchy defined through cultural and labor practices, along with her fear of racial mixture, are both prophetic for the future of the region.

Though the legacy of pluralism in Malaya would shift from the “multi-national empire” towards that of nationalist multiculturalism, its pluralist structure would remain in a similar form. While the divisive racial identities seem natural to a pluralist society, scholars like Robert Hefner and Philip Holden have pointed out that colonial pluralism in Malaya only had the effect of making racial differences more rigid, more segregated, and more incorporable into a colonial division of labor (Hefner, 2001: 42). Indeed, even before European colonization, The Strait of Malacca had been an important trading passage since the Ming Empire allowed trading routes between maritime Southeast Asia and China, and Malaysian cities like Melaka (Malacca) were used as geographically convenient trading ports. These early sultanates sat upon “long-standing crossroads of trade” that “had a tradition of cosmopolitanism, with traders from India, China, the Archipelago and the Gulf of Thailand” (Reid, 2010: 41).

It is in respect to the British colonial legacy that I group Malaysia and Singapore together, as their methods of governing pluralist societies grows out of the British colonial legacy of

pluralism (Raihanah 68). In 1910, the political economist J.S. Furnivall defined a pluralist society as groups who “mix but do not combine,” and where each group “holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways” (1948: 23). This notion emerges from Furnivall's economic analysis of Southeast Asian colonial states, “the Tropical Far East,” which were not only defined by this racial mixture, but also by a “feebleness of social will” that necessitated a strong colonial state to manage and exercise control over multiple racial communities. Such a plural society, by its emphasis on multiple but homogenized cultural norms, mixes races only in the market, as competitors or as opponents, who require a “neutral” empire or “umpire” to manage given cultural norms.

When Europeans first arrived in the Malay Straits in the early sixteenth century, they discovered a dynamic world of cross-cultural influences driven by networks of traders, religious profligates and the collaboration of small states (Hefner 12). The native Indo-Malay culture was permeable and had incorporated other cultural practices and beliefs (Islam among them). The intrusion by various colonial powers—the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and finally the Japanese—increased the “diversity” of the Strait, as Chinese traders and Tamil laborers were imported to support the ancient trading center of Melaka, and later trading centers in British Georgetown, Penang, and Singapore. Hoping to keep the Malay sultanates from resisting colonial rule, the British opted to import labor to extract tin and rubber. The transition to direct rule from the British crown in the late nineteenth century intensified these labor migrations as the diverse peoples could be similarly classified as British subjects. The preferred strategy was to import Indian laborers and allow Chinese laborers and merchants. By the early 1920s, Chinese outnumbered Malays in places like Malacca, Singapore and Penang, and Indians grew to a substantial presence. The separation of these two groups from the Malays in terms of labor,

language, rapidity of migration and regulation by the British made accommodation or cultural assimilation unnecessary, so that entire colonies like Singapore were spatially segregated into Chinatowns, Little Indias and Malays Kampung. Such divisions divided labor classes through common origins and racial divisions, while also disregarding the great political, religious and linguistic heterogeneity within these groups, since most of the workers did not come from families or communities (Gudeman 141), but came “mostly as individuals...up-rooted or forced out from their homelands,” and were brought “to the new land as mere factors of production” (Nam 170). The narrative of community and migrancy thus erased histories of individual and family labor migration, framing migration instead within a narrative that homogenized racial communities and alienated South Asians and Chinese by constructing them as diasporic extensions of a mother country, but with loyalties and social debt towards a hospitable colonial power. In this racial formation, Chinese were marked as commercial middlemen, Malays as indigenous peasant smallholders, and imported Indians as municipal and plantation laborers (Holden 2009, 5). This mode of pluralist governance was instituted geographically, socially and economically across British Malaya.

The governing tactic of separation encouraged Chinese and Indians to see themselves as part of an overseas diaspora, which marked these groups as "temporary residents or 'guests' without legitimate claim to their immediate locality in the eyes of the colonizers, because their nationalism was considered to be primarily directed toward the ancestral (not the adopted) homeland" (Bernards 314). Even the mixed Chinese and Malay Peranakans (Baba-Nyonya), who had settled and creolized in Malaya over hundreds of years, were suddenly of "the Chinese race" (314). By marking Indians and Chinese as outsiders, the British were able to perpetuate xenophobia within the Malays, which in turn, solidified Malay identity as indigenous, even

though many Malays were of migrant heritages. By tethering Malays to Islam, the British bound Malays not only to labor, but to religion and land (as aboriginals or *bumiputera*) (314).

In 1946, after collecting its former Southeast Asian colonies back from Japan, British powers released a white paper with the intention of creating a Malayan Union while changing the pluralist mode of governance by declaring equal rights and citizenship to everyone, rather than to privilege Malays. According to Roxane Harvey Gudeman, the segregation of British pluralism allowed the architects of the new nation-state of Malaya to inherit pluralist categories and even recognize them in the constitution. The British influence “helped create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which, over time, individual citizens have become more ‘Malay,’ ‘Chinese,’ or ‘Indian’” (141). This plan was immediately met with a “united and unforeseen Malay resistance” in the Malay political party *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Beratsu* (United Malays National Organisation—UMNO), founded in 1946, which advocated for Malay group rights and a reinstatement of a pluralist system, with the Malays replacing the British colonial government. This especially marginalized Malaya's Chinese, who represented nearly forty percent of Malaya, Singapore included. Chinese were also seen as the greatest threat to the Malaya state, since they were seen as active agents within insurgent armies against the Japanese, carried sympathies with British occupation, and were associated with communist revolutionaries in China. For the Chinese and other marginalized populations—South Asians, Peranakans and Eurasians—the growing strength of the UMNO seemed to continue the power structure of British pluralism, with Malay leaders replacing the British as the managerial power. Leftist groups emerged contesting the UMNO's reign, and in a period dubbed “The Emergency” (1948-60), a series of guerilla wars, protests and insurgencies resulted in laws limiting individual freedoms, paving the way for a very limited democracy (the UMNO today is one of the longest continuing ruling parties in the world).

The Emergency period in the 1950s was also fraught with protests and riots spurred by cross-racial labor unions, which laid the groundwork for a national anti-imperial movement that would eventually cast the British out of Malaya (Chua 2001, 89). The stagnant trading economy, the poverty, and the recent memory of British abandonment during the Japanese Occupation created public sympathy for a truly multicultural upsurge of protests that eventually led to violent confrontation with British colonial powers. The leader of the Alliance movement against the British, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who later became the first Malaysian Prime minister, added to an atmosphere of cultural alliance by envisioning a multicultural Malaysia built upon integration, equality and inclusion. Along with unionized workers and radicalized students, the Alliance sought an anti-colonialist agenda in the spirit of cross-cultural protest (Chua 2001, 89).

Yet with the end of the British presence also came the end of cross-cultural alliances against a common enemy. Anxieties against Malay supremacy found political voice in Singapore's leader Lee Kuan Yew and his notion of a "Malaysian Malaysia," which called for a de-segregated nation-state where all citizens were seen as "Malaysians" rather than as Indians, Malays and Chinese. Opposed to this was the notion of a "Malay Malaysia," a state that politically favored Malays and was dominated by the Malay language and culture. Singapore's entry into the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 came with the assumption that "Malaysian" identity would be integrative of various religions, cultures and languages, which would reinvigorate the anti-colonial sentiments towards dismantling the institutions of colonial pluralism passed on by the British. As Anthony Reid has pointed out, one of the greatest benefits of the formation of Malaysia in 1963 was that it created a neutral name, "Malaysia," distinct from any race, emphasizing "the national identity without necessarily marginalising[sic] minorities" (105). However, the disappointment in Malaysian politics produced much political

discomfort in Singapore, as leftist radicals who were against the ruling hegemony of the UMNO quickly became associated with communist insurgents and were expelled and persecuted, creating a fear of both the UMNO in Kuala Lumpur and the PAP (People's Action Party) in Singapore.

The legacies of the "divide and rule" governance that fostered inter-ethnic conflict came to violent upheaval in the 1964 race riots in Singapore, and in the 1969 May 13 Riots in Malaysia. In the 1964 Maulud (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) celebration, the Malay/Muslim procession fought with Chinese Singaporeans, culminating in race riots that resulted in twenty-two deaths and 454 injuries. The UMNO narrated the riot as anti-Malay, while the Singapore-based PAP blamed the UMNO's anti-Chinese rhetoric. The riot was cited as one of the main reasons behind Singapore's eventual break from Malaysia in 1965, where afterwards, Singapore was expected to collapse in the absence of a resource-rich hinterland. Since Singapore's residential population was approximately seventy-five percent Chinese, Singapore soon became associated with a pro-Chinese political party, the PAP, while Malaysia became associated with a pro-Malay political party, the UMNO. Following his call for a "Malaysian Malaysia," PAP leader Lee Kuan Yew then called for a "Singaporean Singapore," envisioning Singapore as a more equal and ideal pluralist society "to be ideologically reconstituted as the 'citizenry' of the new nation" (Chua 2009, 240).

Singapore's PAP continued the legacy of pluralism by depoliticizing race as a matter of national security and economic growth. But Singapore's self-depicted desire for an equal pluralist society was challenged by two major obstacles: first, how to reinstitute a discourse of pluralism among a historically traumatized and segregated nation-state, and second, how to survive economically without the natural resources (tin, rubber) from their former hinterland.

The solution to both of these problems came in shifting racial stereotypes to symbols of multiracial acceptance that stressed the utopian ideal of achieving the multiracial nation-state through hard-work, entrepreneurship, and a national devotion so intense that it ignores acts of state repression (censorship, brutal punitive measures, surveillance). Echoing the function of Acton's "multi-national empire," the Singapore state posited itself as structurally above the interests of each racial group, as a "neutral umpire that allocates resources and adjudicates disputes among the races" (Chua 2010, 188). This neutrality was produced through "neutral" signifiers, foremost in its use of English as a language of bureaucracy and business rather than as a language of art, literature or cultural belonging (188). The discourse of the Singapore state as "neutral" coded the nation's ethnic groups as trapped by cultural and religious interest, thus justifying the PAP's regime as an "umpire" necessary in maintaining racial harmony.

To be effective, this ideological construct of the Singapore state as a "neutral umpire" had to homogenize cultural groups as monolithic, so that they could "monitor closely and police racial boundaries" (Chua 2010, 188). After the death of Chairman Mao in China and the opening of Chinese markets in the 1980s, Lee Kuan Yew started the "Speak Mandarin" campaign, seeking to recognize Chinese heritage by requiring all Chinese children to learn Mandarin, despite the fact that most Chinese in Singapore spoke Hokkein, Hakka, Cantonese or Teochew. Mandarin, however, had the double-effect of both satisfying the multicultural commitment and producing an international business class of bilingual speakers. Similarly, keeping Malays tied to Islam also had a double-effect of serving the multicultural commitment while repressing political dissent among Malay unions and political organizations, since such regulation included instituting special courts that bound Malays to Sharia law. Finally, diverse South Asian migrants from Sri Lanka, Burma and West Bengal were reduced to a national identity as "Indians," their

identities pinned to an entirely separate nation-state towards which they were implicitly expected to return. For Chua Beng Huat, South Asians were integral in supporting a narrative of racial harmony, since without “Indians,” the nation would be seen as one racial group (the Chinese) economically dominating another (the Malays). These South Asians were then cast as a migrant group who validated the nation through their “success.” This discourse of multiculturalism, which was officially known as CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others), contributed to Singapore’s growing wealth by producing multiracial workers who were attractive to multinational capital and foreign direct investment.

The afterlife of colonial pluralism in Malaysia was similarly defined in periods of violence from the 1950s-1960s, which also resulted in attempts to depoliticize race, but in this case, by giving privileged status to *bumiputeras* or Malay Muslims. Like the 1964 riots in Singapore, Malaysia's May 13, 1969 racial riots that occurred between Chinese and Malays in Kuala Lumpur became fundamental to the type of multiculturalism practiced in the nation-state from then on. The riots, which led to a state of emergency, the suspension of Parliament, and at least 196 reported killings, also stemmed from the heated rhetoric of political campaigning. The largely Chinese Democratic Action Party (DAP), replacing the PAP in Malaysia, demanded a “Malaysian Malaysia” that would deprive the Malays (*bumiputras*, Sanskrit for "sons of the soil") of their group rights. The first electoral defeat of the UMNO in 1969 spurred the riots, which began in Kuala Lumpur but spread to small villages. In 1971, the UMNO responded with the New Economic Policy (NEP), a set of guidelines meant to build cultural and religious tolerance while giving “greatly enhanced rights and privileges to the indigenous native population,” almost all of whom were Malay (Keong 47). The riots thus created a crisis that legitimated pro-Malay public policies, which further hardened racial divides (Raihanah 50). As M. M. Raihanah writes,

the riots "led to a series of policy implementations in Malaysian public life in the name of peace, prosperity and the management of diversity" (46). Yet such policies also reversed the unifying effect of the term "Malaysia," as they privileged Malay culture and language. The state constitution was amended in 1970 to declare the challenging of the New Economic Policy as "a seditious criminal offence" (Ganesen 143). As is the case with Singapore, the race riots led to greater distinctions between races, and also greater censorship of any discussion of racial issues. After the trauma of May 13, in-depth discussions about racial relations were substituted for superficial representations of racial "types" that become essentialized into rigid categories of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Other, with each official racial category "assigned an official culture, and that culture [was] expected to be 'preserved'" (Philip 108). Through depoliticizing racial communities, both the PAP and the UMNO have maintained one-party rule since these early race riots.

The race riots led to unique forms of multiculturalism formed in the bedrock of British pluralism, which recognized certain racial types and promoted ideologies of multiculturalism in order to sustain state rule, so that repressive measures such as Singapore's and Malaysia's Internal Security Acts (ISA) were seen as the necessary evils of a benevolent "umpire" enforcing common rules and conduct among potentially violent racial groups. The homogenization of racial identities has rendered, according to the writer Eddie Tay, "the nuances of ethnic identities and languages...invisible" (2010, 13). These conditions have also helped produce populations of surplus labor for Malaysia's special economic zones, and for increasing Singapore's reputation as a multiracial utopia fitting for investment capital. Race here is thus conceived as a perpetual crisis, with the state as its consistent umpire.

Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*

It is in the 1970s context of emerging postcolonial multiculturalism that Lloyd Fernando wrote most of his essays and his first novel, *Scorpion Orchid*. His standing as "unquestionably one of Malaysia's most important Anglophone writers" has been engrained in Malaysian literary scholarship, yet his position within the Singapore Anglophone canon has often been evaded due to his prominence in Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur. After migrating from Ceylon to Singapore at the age of twelve (Newton 109), Fernando was forced to take work as a trishaw puller and a mechanic to support his family after his father was killed during the Japanese Occupation. He witnessed Singapore's union with Malaysia and Sino-Malay riots in the 1950s, and graduated from the Singapore's University of Malaya in 1959. He joined the University of Malaya as faculty, only to migrate to Britain to pursue his doctorate at the University of Leeds. Having heard of Singapore's 1964 riots from afar, Fernando later returned to find a city of heightened racial tensions where being "Malaysian," after the separation of Malaysia and Singapore, now meant he was no longer "Singaporean." He moved to Kuala Lumpur to become the Head of the English department in 1967, and published his first novel, *Scorpion Orchid*, nearly a decade later.

As a Sinhalese migrant, Fernando was never really a target of the 1950s and 60s riots in Malaya, since his outsider position even with the Tamil majority of South Asian migrants gave him an exterior point of view. His work reveals the unstated realities of racial tension and prejudice throughout Malaysia and Singapore, problematizing ideologies of "racial harmony" that have masked racial inequalities (Ng 115). As a lower-class Sri Lankan migrant who became identified as simply "Indian," Fernando was able to explore race relations in a way that exceeded the mere symbolic associations produced by the state. At the age of fifty-five, he made a move that many Singaporean fiction writers such as Eddie Tay and Philip Jeyaretnam would emulate,

and decided to forgo his literary career to become a practicing lawyer. Fernando's essays, his two edited anthologies of Malaysian writing in English (*Twenty-two Malaysian Short Stories* in 1968 and *Malaysian Short Stories* in 1981), and his two novels (*Scorpion Orchid* in 1976 and *Green is the Colour* in 1993), are crucial to any discussion of Anglophone writing in both Malaysia and Singapore.

Scorpion Orchid follows four college-aged men in 1950s Singapore, Santinathan, Sabran, Guan Kheng and Peter, whose racial identities reflect Singapore's multiculturalist discourse in stressing the four main identity types, CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others). The four boys are brought together in the University of Malaya, where they foster male comradeship by exerting dominance over college freshman (Fernando, 1976: 19), mocking each other's ascribed cultural traditions, and gazing upon the waitress Sally, who is not identified as any racial type, but who Sabran refers to as “the pole around which they had been magnetized all unawares” (103). The novel's narrative is distinctly multicultural, as it attempts to share the first-person intimate narration with all four boys, never allowing one voice to dominate the others, thus establishing a shared communal gaze. The novel introduces the four boys observing a procession, which the reader might mistake for an aestheticized multicultural parade. They “watched the Chinese, Indians and Malays jostle out of the ground, it seemed unendingly... Banners of white cloth in English, Malay, and Chinese crudely written in red and black ink began to unfurl and were held aloft on poles at each end” (11). Though this event is revealed as a protest march by cooperative unions, the four boys collectively suspect that it “might have been football partisans returning after a rousing game.” The boys' gaze, collectivized in the shared narrative of the novel, identifies the protest as an idealized (an depoliticized) form of multicultural belonging, and even the union speeches seem to celebrate diversity over their collective struggle, as each speech is

translated by students, first in Mandarin, then into English, then into Malay. The idealism of the novel's first scenes relies upon a common enemy: the British Empire, or as Peter calls it, "British Realty," a renaming of the colonial power as a company to reflect the privileged entry and exit of British capital. Though told in a realist tone, the novel "abandons realist conventions" by making the purposes and dates for these marches ambiguous, as the 1950s was a period of both labor struggles and anti-British protest. The ambiguity concerning the time and place of the procession is underscored by the confusion of the protest's participants, who begin to feud as each translated speech emphasizes different purposes and slows down the march (Fernando, 1976: 12).

Though the procession might be read as a means of idealizing multiculturalist values (that culminate in anti-colonial labor struggle), Fernando's own anti-realist style seems to parody even the anti-colonial form of pluralism through the symbols of mixed colors, as the different races jostle together in multicolored lights and a wheel rolls "in a vast circle while the coloured lights played on [the four men] like a kaleidoscope continually changing the colour of their faces...so that they looked like refugees in flight" (Fernando, 1976: 15). These joyous playing lights reflect the boys' symbolic identities, yet as each color shifts back and forth among their faces, each of the boys' identity seems playfully placed onto the others. By reducing race to multicolored lights, the boys' maintain a playful, depoliticized attitude of racial identity that augurs the idealism and naivete of independence before the riots. Rather than establish a "nostalgic" mood for this attitude, the novel exposes it as ignorant and insulting when Santinathan dares his friends to bet him ten dollars to join the other Tamils in their religious ritual by wearing a kavadi, a large necklace lined with needles to pierce the skin. The idealism seen as playful, naïve and disrespectful, is then seen as hypocritical when the four boys are among their own domestic, traditional households, and their attitudes about race dramatically shift to more conservative

attitudes that reproduce their respective cultural traditions, especially towards women. Though Santi finds humor in the kavadi, he refuses to let his sister, Neela, take a similar stance against her ethnic traditions, when he catches her smoking a cigarette that “didn’t go with her shabby sari, nor with their way of life” (45). Here the multicultural ideals of the four boys appear less idealized by Fernando, but rather critiqued as a naïve and depoliticized notion of ethnicity.

The class differences among the four boys also belie their ideal friendship. The novel begins with Santinathan, who is left in Singapore to finish his studies after his parents return to India. Free from his parents, Santinathan becomes an intellectual maverick who refuses to observe the conventions of university life by missing essay assignments and disrupting lectures and meetings. He is finally expelled, but instead of returning “home” to India, he finds work as a shipyard day laborer, reducing his position from a privileged University student to a laborer in Singapore’s back alleys. Similarly poor, the Malay, Sabran, is fervently political and is the only one of his friends to participate in the union strikes. Like Santinathan, his refusal to follow institutional conventions deprives him of his privileged position, as he is arrested and detained for his activities. In contrast to Santinathan and Sabran, the Chinese Guan Kheng comes from a well-to-do family, while the middle-class Eurasian Peter D’Almeida continues to sympathize with the British. It is not until the racial riots, halfway through the novel, that both Guan and Peter are forced to face their own privilege, as Guan abandons Sally to an enraged mob, and Peter is beaten and lynched by the mobs.

The separations of class and social privilege contrast the ideal multicultural friendship of the four boys with the more substantial friendship between the Malay Sabran and the Sri Lankan migrant Santinathan. Despite the violence of the riots, Sabran and Santinathan find “an indescribable way, not simply through language, of making their differing backgrounds respond

to each other in mutual sympathy. It was like being attuned, words were no longer always necessary” (Fernando 1976, 52). Sabran and Santinathan seem the strongest pairing in the novel, and as they are both from marginalized cultural identities—Indian and Malay—their differing backgrounds find shared experiences in a resistance to institutionalized conventions and British power: Santinathan mocks his British lecturers, while Sabran leads protests against “British Realty.” Their separate racial backgrounds seem not to separate them into tense competitors in need of a neutral “umpire,” but rather acts as a means of becoming “attuned” to one another through self-reflection upon their shared struggle. Guan Kheng and Peter, on the other hand, carry heavier investments in a state-condoned multiculturalism, which recognizes racial differences in a way that depoliticizes racial communities, thereby sustaining European and Chinese privilege. So long as these alignments are held, the “harmony” of their friendship remains superficial. The group’s idealism thus recognizes races as different colors within a procession, while the alliance between Santinathan and Sabran seek to resist hierarchical structures even at a loss to their own privilege.

The waitress Sally also never seems to belong among the multicultural community experienced by the four boys, likely due to her social standing as a sex worker of ambiguous racial origins. Sally can speak both Cantonese and Malay fluently, and goes by both a Chinese/English and a Malay name—Sally Yu and Salmah. Her mixed identity allows her to transition from one cultural type to another, or as Guan Kheng points out, she “changed her name and her language according to her customers” (160). In the beginning of the novel, Sally moves among the four boys “as with old friends,” aligning with their multicultural ideals (19). As a woman who escaped abuse at the hands of her elderly husband in the rural *kampongs*, Sally has migrated to Singapore in order to embrace a more multiculturalist state, where she can hope to

escape her conscripted identity. Like the rest of the group, she too has sought ways of establishing a new identity within a more tolerant space. Yet her labor as a waitress and sex worker, alongside her lack of formal education, restricts her from the same multiculturalist experience as the four boys, even as she provides emotional and physical solace for them.

The inconsistency in the boys' attitudes towards racial identity does not appear as a betrayal, but as an effort to form a mixed circle where they could comment and critique racial differences in an environment of higher education and the privileged use of English as a "neutral" language. Rather than seem nostalgic for such multicultural ideals, the novel exposes the gendered and class exclusions of multicultural belonging, and emphasize that the boys' desire to escape their given identities relies upon female and lower-class "others." Indeed, throughout the novel, women like Sally are assumed the burden of cultural preservation while performing service labor for "multiculturalists."

Preferential and Communitarian Multiculturalism

He loved the orchid whose stems flower, curving free away from the supporting posts, but feared the scorpion which lurked among the roots hidden in the rich soil.

—Scorpion Orchid, 128

The ideal multiculturalism depicted in the four boys of *Scorpion Orchid* is contrasted with a more critical and politically embedded racial alliance between Sabran and Santi. The difference in these visions of cultural belonging are represented in the symbol of the "orchid," a beautiful flower that seems to have no "supporting posts," and the symbol of the "scorpion," the poisonous creature lurking "among the roots hidden in the rich soil." For Fernando, state multiculturalism seemed to advocate for a multiculturalist society deracinated from the "rich

soil” of both pre-colonial and colonial Malaya, propagating depoliticized racial identities and legitimating rule by positing the state as a racially egalitarian power. To further explore this style of multicultural ideology, this section explores how multiculturalism in Singapore and Malaysia contrasts with multiculturalism in the West, particularly the United States.

As a colonial power itself, the United States has carried over notions and categories from colonial pluralism, which emerged in American efforts to emulate British pluralism in the Philippines (which I explore in the next chapter), in efforts to incorporate the “New Immigrants” and African Americans into an industrializing economy, and in the anti-assimilationists and political philosophers of the interwar period. During and after World War I, immigrant activists sought to critique assimilationist notions of national belonging through “cultural pluralism,” a term first introduced by William James, and later coined by his student, Horace Kallen, in the 1915 essay “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot.” Arguing against an assimilationist model of immigration, Kallen advocated for a cultural pluralism characterized by “multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind” wherein “every type [of immigrant group] has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony” (1915). In the interwar period’s synthesis of white ethnicities into a single Caucasian “whiteness,” Kallen’s hopes for a cultural pluralism seemed merely theoretical until the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and the emergence of multiculturalism in state institutions during the 1970s and 1980s.

Early multiculturalism in the U.S. was different from colonial pluralism in that it kept to a liberal, individualist framework, and marked identity as more adopted than conscripted. For the theorist Chua Beng Huat, this ability to adopt communal identity reflects a “preferential multiculturalism,” “an ideology that defends the copresence of groups that are constituted by and through freely chosen cultural preferences” (2005, 171). The liberal individualist model of

multiculturalism in the 1960s and 70s saw identity as a preliminary, non-essential social construct that one can freely escape through given liberalist assumptions: the valuation of individualism over community, the emphasis on individual rather than groups rights, and the conceptualization of culture as “an ongoing acquisition, subject to addition and deletion according to an individual’s freedom to choose” (173). Though skin color makes this preferential multiculturalism far more difficult for people of color, it is also reflected in racial identities, such as during the early years of Asian American movements, when “Asian American” was adopted as a pan-ethnic banner through which heterogeneous groups could align against white supremacy.

The U.S. style of “preferential multiculturalism” is often accredited as a global hegemonic force disseminated from the United States, though it has a long history that reaches back to modes of colonial governance set forth by the Western Empires including the Dutch, British and later the Americans. Rather than see multicultural ideals as inherently “western,” scholars like Robert Hefner (2001), Will Kymlicka and Baogang He (2005), Chua Beng Huat, Philip Holden (2009), and Will Kymlicka have seen multiculturalism as a construct of imperial encounter and have theorized non-western models of multiculturalism within Malaya. In contrast to “preferential multiculturalism,” Chua Beng Huat sees Singapore and Malaysia as representing a “communitarian multiculturalism,” where “exit” from a community is not a conceivable option, and where “cultural membership cannot be simply rejected when the balance sheet of gains and losses are not in an individual’s favor” (2005, 175). In the Malaya context, cultural identity is involuntarily ascribed rather than adopted, and is seen as a continuous shared duty respective to racial histories, rather than an acquisition of individual cultural practices and tastes. This construct also forecloses possible critiques brought through hybridity and mixed race, since the

Malaysian and Singaporean states have both set in place policies that ascribe the father's race to the child at birth (183).

"Communitarian multiculturalism" is perhaps best exemplified in how the Malaysian state yokes race and religion together in categorizing Malay identity, so that to be Malay is to be Muslim, and Malays seem to have no choice in adopting this conflation of race, culture and religion (Ng 173). At the same time, this synthesis of traits as an identity also guarantees a privileged status through the New Economic Policy (NEP), which has implemented pro-Malay policies in business and education, with the goal that Malays (*Bumiputeras*) would hold thirty percent of the national wealth. Yet native status is not given to non-Muslim indigenous communities like the Iban and Kadazan, as they do not fit into the state's conflation of Islam and Malay. To renounce Islam for Malays would be to renounce the privileges brought forth by the NEP for Malays, such as scholarships, quotas in ownership of company stock, and welfare.

While the preference for Malays increased after the 1969 riots, Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* critiques the solidification of cultures in "communitarian multiculturalism" that were already inherent to multiracial policies in both Singapore and Malaysia before the riots. The four boys see Singapore as a diverse space that would succeed British pluralism through a higher multicultural ideal. This ideal, represented by the lights and colors of racial diversity, is exposed as glossy "orchids" that ignore real social inequalities. While the public streets are presented as a kaleidoscope of colors, the alleyways are cluttered up with massive amounts of black smoke, a darkness that conceals the city's derelicts and hawkers' borrows (15). Peter and Guan, who affiliate with the upper-class Eurasians and Chinese, become so tantalized by the ideals of diversity and University success that they become complicit in silencing social struggle and unionization (14). Indifferent to social inequalities, Guan Kheng imagines that "he and Sabran

and Santinathan and Peter seemed in microcosm a presage of a new society, a world of new people who would utterly confound the old European racialist way of thinking” (67). “Old European” racism is traced throughout the novel not just as a residual social formation, but as re-emerging into a multiculturalism that depoliticizes race and suppresses real inequalities.

The indifference to inequality buttressed by utopian narratives of racial tolerance seems similar to multiculturalist governance in the West, yet communitarian multiculturalism operates more as a “counter discourse to liberalism, not a reformist one” (Chua 2005, 180). It is in this sense that we can see notions of “communitarian multiculturalism,” like “racial harmony” in Singapore or the recent “1Malaysia” campaign in Malaysia, as serving an ideological function by separating “Asian values” and “Western values” while still invoking a shared mode of multicultural governance. Though these multiculturalisms should be seen as distinct, both seem effective in depoliticizing racial communities and in incorporating racial “types” into a division of labor. In Malaya, the “benevolent” states are assigned the role of not only maintaining control and harmony, but in preserving each racial community in their assigned cultural homogeneity. Communitarian multiculturalism thus envisions itself as a break from western colonization and “the old European racialist way of thinking” while still maintaining its structures of dominance (Fernando, 1976, 67). By depicting itself as a counter-discourse against the West, communitarian multiculturalism naturalizes racial “types” as more “Asian” and thus more authentic, using “the naturalness of the social of immediate communities as an alibi” (Chua 2005, 175-6).

Rather than reinforce a story of multicultural success, the four young men of *Scorpion Orchid* are torn apart by the racial, class, and religious differences that were exposed in Singapore's early race riots. As soon as “the bond of their young manhood” seems at its most ideal, violent riots break out, and Santi witnesses a Malay mob burning a Eurasian man in the

streets because “he wanted to be European” (66). The riots leave the ideal of a colorful multiculturalism burned to black ash, as the boys each become disillusioned with their own friendship. For Guan Kheng, the riots become “a tacit acknowledgement that they were living in a kind of capsule. They had not now the patient, unremitting power of the flood around them” (70). This “capsule” symbolizes a state of suspension, from which they can ignore the tides of history that seemed, for Kheng, to push them in different directions. He describes his inclusion in the group as a sort of “jettison” from his own cultural background, and feels that “he had jettisoned enough, and he must look to conserving, however inadequately in his own life, the stabilizing sense of his own past” (71). The playful attitudes that Guan, Santi, Sabran and Peter inhabit together perishes in the violence of the riots, and their university years appear “suddenly to be too paltry an excuse for their continuing friendship,” as if those years belonged “to people they did not know” (73). After the riots, the novel ends with the four friends feeling estranged from each other as they retreat to their respective social groups—Guan to the business class, Sabran to union work, Santinathan to teach children on the rubber estates in Labis, and Peter to Essex to become a school teacher. By the end of the novel, each character follows the ascribed racial categories of the CMIO discourse by remaining within their own group. Only Peter later returns to Singapore as his “home,” hoping still to overcome “the true blight of the colonial era,” whose “invisible presence created goblins which everywhere interfered with the discovery of originality” (68).

Despite the novel’s tragic ending, *Scorpion Orchid* considers alternatives to Singapore's particular brand of multiculturalism through the main narrative’s style as an anti-realist novel in the guise of a socio-historic narrative. This anti-realist style allows Fernando to re-narrate the racial riots of the 1950s and 60s as symptomatic of colonial pluralism's afterlife. As Andrew Ng

notes, the novel exerts a type of speculative fiction that de-historicizes the 1969 riots in order to avoid censorship and to mark the riots as a real social and ethical problem that cannot be blamed on either the Chinese or the Malays. The novel offers fragmented versions of the riots that make them irreducible to simply racial difference. Through the influence of an underground religious leader, Tok Said, the novel's riots seem to reflect the religious extremism of the Maria Hertogh Riot in 1950, when a Muslim child was ruled by a Singapore court to be returned to her Catholic parents, and Malay Muslims rioted. However, considering the union busting present in the novel, the riots also seem to reflect the later 1950s labor revolts. And then again, the riots also are accompanied by the racist rhetoric that one might expect in the 1964 and 1969 riots, which were seen as anti-Chinese or anti-Malay. The superimposing of one riot for another stresses the continuous anxiety brewing beneath an otherwise multicultural glaze, that beneath each colorful orchid, a scorpion lurks "among the roots" (Fernando, 1976: 128).

English as Culture

"I have been faithful / Only to you, / My language. I choose you / Before country"

— Shirley Lim's "Lament" (18)

Despite the critical achievement of Fernando's first novel, it received little attention upon its release, and has remained out of print until 2011. This is likely due to its exposure of racial tensions, a topic deemed sensitive by the Malaysian state, which has greatly preferred works that "deflect attention from larger political issues" (Morse 95). Because the novel is written in English, it also cannot be placed within the realm of "nationalist literature," a state-mandated policy that Fernando himself lauded, as he advocated for bilingual education (Mandal 2000,

1004). Yet because English was seen as “non-nationalist,” Fernando was able to analyze imperial histories and multiple migrant groups who saw English as a “second tongue.” Understanding the “underlying values” and “cultural codes” of English, for Fernando, “counteract[ed] the intellectual hazards rooted in technological processes perfected in the West” (1986, 25). In his 1991 essay ““Truth in Fiction,”” Fernando claimed that in using English, he felt that his experiences as a migrant positioned him to write about other ethnic groups, while still having to “guard against swinging to the opposite twin enemies of artificiality and self-censorship” (1991, 222). To write his Anglophone multi-racial narrative, Fernando had to come to terms with his own racial thinking. As he writes, “if I portrayed so and so unfavourable it was not because I was anti-Chinese or anti-Malay or anti-Indian or anti-Eurasian but because I wanted to write truly about all of us. And I explained to myself—very earnestly, I remember—that I was not a racist” (1991, 222). Overcoming his own racial prejudices became necessary to narrating the racial riots, and breaching “the conventions of silence” that were the norm in both Malaysia and Singapore when discussing race (225). English, as an inherited language, provided Fernando with the discursive space to dis-identify with a particular race or ethnicity, going so far as to state, “I do not want to write about my own ethnic group—I have none” (225). This refusal to see himself as “authentic” to any given cultural identity goes against not only the CMIO system, but the very communitarian multiculturalism that has been the basis for state legitimacy in Malaysia and Singapore.

Scorpion Orchid explores the potentials of English through the novel's bilingual students, who often mock their British lecturer by exaggerating their assiduous note-taking (37), and by exposing the assumptions of English as a language “that attempts containment through classification and surveillance” (Holden 2008, 165). The authority and “neutrality” of the

English language is also mocked in one of the novel's italicized 18th-century historical accounts, a history of contact between Europeans and Malays that is later revealed to be a “bogus history” invented by one of the students (147). Simultaneous with this parody is the recognition that English has had and will continue to have an ongoing place in a multicultural society, as we see in the rally speeches, where disputes over faulty translations often create divisions (58). The mockery in Fernando's text reflects his political critique of English education, which saw the language as simply fulfilling a "utilitarian role" that separated English from its literature, values and history. Indeed, in both Malaysia and Singapore, English was made to function as a language of utility, marking Asian "mother tongues"—Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil—as languages of values and tradition. These "mother tongues" provided a "cultural ballast" or "moral compass" to stabilize traditional identities, enabling Malaysians and Singaporeans to not be "set adrift" in the mobile language of globalization.

The notion that English was "global" and lacked a "cultural ballast" brings along the assumption that English is not only a "neutral" language free of ethnic interest, but a language of power, business and the cosmopolitan upperclass. Seeking to see English beyond these connotations, Fernando attempted to build new cultural form through “owning” English not only as a linguistic alternative, but as an imagined community that could allow a discursive space to self-consciously manage and reinterpret multiculturalist racial categories. Fernando himself believed that English users needed to account for the imperial implications of English by using it not as a marker of superiority, but as a way to foster deeper understanding among the ethnic groups that formed the socio-cultural landscape of Malaysia and Singapore. For Fernando, adopting English could foster a Southeast Asian regional identity and resist "communitarian multiculturalism" by forging communities across race and nation (Newton, 108).

English use in Malaysia and Singapore can connote many different alignments. In Singapore, English use contains a multicultural/neoliberal double-effect because it does “not imply the language and culture dominance of any one group,” and is also seen as a world language used by an international business class, which makes the Singapore city-state attractive to English-speaking investors (Lim 1994, 39). In Malaysia, English has continued in private institutions and colleges as a language required for government work and business, while *bahasa melayu* or Malay functions as the Malaysian national language. In both countries, English is associated with neither Chinese, Indian nor Malay traditional cultures, and is depicted as a necessary, “neutral” medium for communicating among races. Conversely, writers in English have found this structurally privileged position of English as a discursive safe haven from the expectations of rigid racial “types,” but one that also carries heavy cultural and colonial implications. To account for this privilege, Fernando advocated both bilingualism and a familiarity with English’s cultural breadth as a way to eliminate its superiority (Mandal 2001, 1001). For Fernando, understanding the perplexed imperial histories of English develops a critical awareness of the language, and allows one way to resist state condoned multiculturalism by building cross-racial and cross-national communities (1004).

Using the non-national language of English, writers from Malaysia like K. S. Maniam and Shirley Lim have used English as a counter-discourse by revealing hidden forms of class and racial violence, revealing cultural, racial and linguistic hierarchies by exposing how racial identities are managed and produced. However, in Singapore, English language theater and poetry has been more prominent than the short story and the novel, due to the great amount of censorship once placed on the literary arts, which restrict “issues of race, especially inter-racial relations; issues of religion and interfaith relations; and direct political commentary” (Chua 2001,

95). Few novels about racial differences in Singapore could be published under such restrictions without losing their complexity, and many who have written about Singapore race-relations, such as Lloyd Fernando, have had to do so under the banner of a “Malaysian writer.”

As a "neutral" and managerial language, English has been well embedded in the British colonial polities that preceded the independent states of Malaysia and Singapore, where “a largely laissez-faire policy towards the use of English was adopted under the East India Company and later direct colonial rule” (Holden 2008, 160). State-sponsored English education was for the few, compliant elites. Even still, in a territory of migrants, English became more than simply a colonial language, but was used among migrant groups. From the early 1900s onwards, through connections between Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and the American Philippines, English also “served as a second lingua franca more widely in the region” (161). Though such transnational communities have been seen as an escape to a cosmopolitan or Western lifestyle, for many Anglophone writers, the turn to English recognizes histories of imperialism, migration, and racial mixture, which nationalist narratives have sought to reduce or erase to solidify national belonging. In his preface to 1993’s *Perceiving Other Worlds*, one of the first collections of critical work on Anglophone literature in Malaya, the Singapore poet Edwin Thumboo asserted that English had to be re-constituted and remade into a new cultural symbol, to be altered in order to discover “what it had over-looked, neglected or suppressed as a colonial language” (xvii). He goes on to say that “by subjecting English to our interests and our experience it becomes one of our norms and affirmations, a full system of meaning, of ideas, of notations and so forth” (xviii). For both Lim and Thumboo, English had become a convenient tool to self-fashion new communal identities opposed to rigid racial categories.

Counter to the history of English as a managerial and colonial language, English-use has also been tied to inter-ethnic coalition building. As a member of a vastly hybridized and long-standing Strait Chinese culture, and a Peranakan nonya, Shirley Lim has expressed a devotion to English “before [her] country.” Her alliance to English carries historical roots from the first non-British English language journal of the Straits, *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, launched in 1897, which provided an outlet for Straits Chinese (and Peranakans) to experiment with western literary forms. The Peranakans sought English use for intra-ethnic communication between Straits Chinese, who often spoke a myriad of Southern Chinese dialects, and who aligned with the British even over Chinese national interests. According to scholar Neil Khor Jin Keong, *The Straits Chinese Magazine* frequently used English to engage in political discussions, and even the fictional works “sought to inspire social change by using fictional characters to promote certain laudable values, whilst pointing out other characteristics which needed to be reformed or rejected” (41). English use and education then became a “main vector” that could shape a new identity out of the diverse and conflicting backgrounds of the Malaya Chinese, and most importantly, could produce a new identity “on their own terms” (41).

After independence, Malaysia began to restrict English use by instating Malay as *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa*, “language as the soul of the people” (Dan 155). English became relegated to a hollow language of business, science and commerce, but also a haven for those dissatisfied with the Malaysian state. The pioneers of Malaysian Anglophone Literature were mostly non-Malay, since Malay writers were more involved in “the construction of the identity of a new nation” (155). The 1969 race riots left their mark for Anglophone writers with the institution of the Malaysian Language Act, which was revised after the May 13 riots in 1971 to make Malay the dominant national language in all but specified “official purposes.” This caused an exodus of

English writers and speakers, many of whom went to Singapore, Australia or the United States, while Chinese or Sinophone writers migrated to Hong Kong and Taiwan (Bernard 316). Shirley Lim, who migrated to Singapore and then the United States, called the Language Act “a more effective silencer than tanks and barbed-wire” (Lim 1994, 299). For Anglophone writers and speakers, the Language Act was seen as a final blow to their communities, and belied the nation's multicultural ideals. As poet Wong Phui Nam has said, “without access to a meaningful tradition or claim to even a disintegrating one, the Malaysian writer in English brings, as it were, to his work a naked and orphaned psyche” (175). These "second generation" Malaysian writers felt associated with a soulless language, and were marked as “inauthentic” within any nationalistic or cultural tradition. Losing this ability to participate in national literature had the effect of positioning English as an alternative discursive space from which writers could critique “nationalism” and “authenticity” while fashioning new cultural content different from the multiculturalist system of recognition.

Since independence, Singapore has been far more hospitable towards Anglophone writers, as it has adopted the path of pan-racial, enterprise-based, economic nationalism, yet with this “hospitality” also came a host of new expectations for the Anglophone writer (Quayum 2007, 23). Unlike in Malaysia, Singapore Anglophone writers were not ignored by the state, but their use of a global language made their texts heavily censored and subjected to surveillance and editing by the PAP regime. Anglophone writing has been “accommodated” only insofar as it allows advancements in commerce, business and education, and continues to be seen as a global language with inherent "superiority of economic thinking to politics and culture" (Mandal 2001, 1005). As the writer and politician Philip Jeyaretnam has written, “Singapore literature, like all Singapore art, assumes a confinement of the soul from which only memory or exile can

free the soul. It is as if political independence has created a cultural prison, and material progress has been a spiritual straitjacket” (164). The socio-political commentary in much Anglophone novels from Singapore is likely to be overlooked, since English is seen as a business language rather than a literary one. As in Malaysia, Singapore Anglophone writers must navigate through a global language that is always marked as spiritually defunct; rather than a mother tongue, it is seen as a convenient stopping ground, cut-off from any substantial cultural tradition. The ideology of English as neutral, engaging in a soulless tradition, and as a multicultural tool to communicate between different “authentic” cultural spaces, often places the Anglophone writer in the position of a cultural interlocutor. Defying the position of English as an “umpire language,” Anglophone writers have recognized English as a culture rooted in imperialist networks that can provide a distance from nationalist cultural categories.

Because English is accorded a position between racial groups, Anglophone writing cannot be placed in any one group’s diasporic narrative, and can rather be used to discuss, critique and imagine alternatives to ethnic categories. As the fiction writer K.S. Maniam has pointed out, authors writing in Malay rarely handle the “multicultural reality” and “tend more to show an ethnocentric reality populated with Malay characters and issues that are seemingly exclusive to the Malay community” (Dan 162). Anglophone writers, however, tend to emphasize racial conflict, drawing “inspiration from problems arising from within a multicultural society” (162). For many of these novels, the writer’s race becomes ambiguous through the multiple narratives and voices. K.S. Maniam’s novels, for example, feature characters of each CMIO racial group, as do the novels of Suchen Christine Lim and Lloyd Fernando. At the same time, these narratives also work to re-imagine multiculturalism from a symbolic economy of rigid cultural categories, always in service to commerce and the state, towards a multiculturalism

where, as the writer K.S. Maniam envisioned, people can be “insiders and outsiders at the same time” by knowing “that they are conditioned by their individual cultures, but at the same time they will not let themselves be circumscribed by them” (qtd in Sharrad 72). This discursive space allows the individual to be both “inside and outside” of a racial identity, and to be conscious of conscripted cultural performances. In a context where race has become depoliticized and hyper-visible, English provides a space to problematize the discourses of “racial harmony” by using English to manage and reinterpret multiculturalist identities.

Counter-history as Form

Lloyd Fernando's work emphasizes the importance of imperial history at a time when, after decolonization, the state casted itself as a symbol of Asian values and traditions. In his early essay, “Literary English in the South East Asian Tradition” (1969), Fernando urged local Anglophone writers to account for the afterlife of colonial encounter:

If they [local writers] aim to deny the present which has been profoundly complicated by Western norms, and if they seek the restoration of a bygone, relatively homogeneous, Asian cultural order, they are likely to be caught, in V. S. Naipaul's phrase, in a middle passage. They should rather aim to retrieve and recast items of a great and neglected heritage in the light of the complexities of the second half of the twentieth century. (1986: 137)

True to his willingness to use the English language to "retrieve and recast" a "neglected heritage," Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* invokes a counter-history that accounts for the imperial formations of racial identities. It is only after the violence of the riots that the four friends begin to define themselves as “colonial creatures” and begin to see the violence of the riots within a

series of traumatic historical events. Noting this historical repetition, Peter feels they will witness it “again and again and again. And for no bloody reason” (Fernando, 1976: 130). Though Fernando's characters realize this too late, the readers of his novel encounter this counter-history through the fourteen italicized vignettes and excerpts that interrupt the novel's main narrative. The excerpts are mostly taken from two texts: the pre-colonial mythical chronicle *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), and the *Hikayat Abdullah*, the personal memoir of the eminent 19th century Malay scholar Munshi Abdullah (d. 1854). Other sources include *Memoirs of a Malayan Family*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, and *Syonan* (My Story by M. Shinozaki).

The most dominant text in these excerpts, the *Sejarah Melayu*, is a multi-genre Malay compendium of historical and mythical stories dating to the early 17th century. The text chronicles six-hundred years of Malay Sultans, covering the founding of the kingdom of Malacca, the spread of Islam, the migration of merchants from China, and the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese. The text's long historical grasp of Malay Sultanates is often used to reinforce a *bumiputra* (Malay indigenous) narrative. However, the extracts from *Sejarah Melayu* in *Scorpion Orchid* highlight moments of racial mixture rather than purity, and complement the novel's main narrative by providing a historical backdrop to the racial tensions faced in the novel. After Guan Kheng abandons Sally during the riots, this excerpt appears from the *Sejarah Melayu*:

Sultan Mansur Shah was astonished by the beauty of Princess Hang Liu, daughter of the Raja of China and by her he had a son to whom he gave the name of Paduka Mimat...the five hundred sons of Chinese ministers were bidden to take up their abode at Bukit China: and the place goes by that name to this day. It was they who made the well at Bukit China, and it is their descendants who are called “the Chinese yeomen.” (Fernando, 1976: 70)

The comparison of Guan Kheng's choice to abandon Sally, who he has fallen in love with, with a mythic romance of Chinese migration, interprets Guan's decision as a betrayal not only of Sally, but of Guan's own mythic history. Sultan Mansur of Malacca, famous for encouraging friendship with Chinese, married a Chinese princess after she had converted to Islam. Rather than restrict marriage within a social group, as national myths often do, this myth idealizes miscegenation and racial mixture through its mythic founding of Malay/Chinese relations, and also shows the permeability of Chinese identity in accepting Islam. Juxtaposed with Guan Kheng's betrayal, the story of Sultan Mansur makes the race riots seem unnatural rather than inevitable, an event more symptomatic of colonial history than of racial differences. As much of the *Sejarah Melayu* contests European (and Portuguese) histories of British Malaya, these alternative histories become vital in reimagining imperial violence, migration, and culture, outside of the given pluralistic models that stress monolithic cultural types. By emphasizing excerpts of the *Sejarah Melayu* that consider racial mixture and religious syncretism, Fernando also unsettles the common uses of the text as a history that simply upholds the Malay Sultanate genealogy.

The novel's second main series of excerpts are from the *Hikayat Abdullah* (Abdullah's Voyages), an 1845 autobiography written in first person by the Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, a Malacca-born man of Indian heritage who became known as the father of modern Malay literature. As a Munshi (multi-lingual writer), Abdullah witnesses the imperial formation of the Singapore state as it is purchased from a Sultan, and the organization of British Singapore into distinct Bukits (hills) for every race. This narrative emphasizes the history of slavery, opium and state repression, tracing histories of migration and race through the division of labor brought by British merchants. In one excerpt, a Malay warlord works with Chinese merchants and a Kapitan China (Portuguese title for the head of a Chinese enclave) in order to make his pilgrimage to

Mecca. As with the excerpt from the *Sejarah Melayu*, the bond of Malay and Islam is made permeable by intimate encounters between races without the need of a managerial "umpire."

The fourteen interspersed passages layer the novel with a mythical and dreamlike quality, which is also present in the novel's main narrative as time and space are constantly made ambiguous. According to the literary scholar M.Y. Chiu, the excerpts resonate thematically, and develop an associative "rather than a strictly chronological blueprint, laying down an underlining of latent significance" (Chiu, 2003: 50). The passages consider intimate interracial encounters within multiple genres, languages and historical periods, and reject the narrative of "preservation" adopted within Singaporean multiculturalism by insisting upon historical complexity and by developing a regional identity where history and culture are not conflated into normative racial types. Perhaps the most revealing of these excerpts is the very first, taken from the *Hikayat Abdullah*, which gives us a scene of ambiguous state torture:

A man came forward and struck him ten or twenty times with a bamboo cane. Then he was asked, "Do you want to join this society or not?" But the man remained silent... Then the master ordered him to be thrown face on the ground, while two men flogged him on the back with bamboo canes until he shrieked in agony. (Fernando, 1976 10)

Though this excerpt is from the *Hikayat Abdullah*, Fernando leaves the violent state power ambiguous. The flogging of the bamboo cane is a practice still upheld by the Singapore state, yet no racial bodies are identified in the excerpt. The question "Do you want to join this society or not?" can be answered with either a quiet acquiescence, or with more flogging, yet the question remains, as if the subject can freely give their consent.

The question “do you want to join this society or not,” bookends the novel, reappearing also at the very end in a fictionalized history of the Japanese occupation, where Peter’s uncle is tortured by Japanese soldiers who pump water into his stomach and then stomp on his bloated belly, repeating the question “Do you want to join this society or not?” (142). Here Fernando switches the abstract violence of the first excerpt with a specific antagonized power, the Japanese, and a more familiar subject, Peter’s uncle. The moral ambiguity of the novel’s first excerpt is made all too explicit in the moral impunity of the final excerpt. Here the presage of a new society, even one that seems racially egalitarian and multicultural, can function as an ideological construct to produce consent despite the constant threat of violence and repression. The question itself, “do you want to join this society or not?” functions more for the executioner and the audience than for the subject being asked. It implies that the nation allows the subject the freedom to choose, yet punishes those who do not make the choice that benefits the state. In bookending the text with these scenes of torture, Fernando invests the main narrative of four racially diverse men attempting to build a new society with histories of similar attempts accompanied by great violence and domination.

In the context of the May 13 riots, the historical excerpts from *Scorpion Orchid* suggest that the history of race relations does not end with the promise of racial harmony. Rather, Fernando emphasizes histories of cultural transition, racial mixing and intimacy, rather than social segregation and depoliticized racial types. The insertion of these secondary narratives disaggregates history from hegemonic state narratives of pluralism and racial harmony, and insists instead on narratives that might produce an entirely different “imagined community.”

Transitive Culture

Many critiques of multiculturalism have emerged in the United States, and as such, there have been numerous attempts to theorize alternative social formations, often by highlighting cultural form as “process.” Such critical multiculturalisms reverse ahistorical racial “types” by embedding each culture with historical markers, and by emphasizing lost histories and marginalized identities. Women of color feminism and queer of color feminism, for example, are two sites of critique through which multicultural categories can be dismantled by focusing on the intersections “of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices” (Ferguson 4). For the theorist Chua Beng Huat, many attempts to critique multiculturalism often only consider the “preferential multiculturalism” of the West, rather than see multiculturalism as a global phenomenon with multiple points of emergence. For Chua, this causes theorists to fall in one of three camps: 1) Those who deny “the importance of culture to individual identity formation,” allowing subjects to fully reject the cultures into which they were so ascribed (2005, 173). 2) Those who honor the civil rights of individuals as citizens, rather than acknowledging the possibility of group cultural rights. 3) Those who recognize “the embedding of the individual in different cultural contexts,” yet view culture as an “ongoing acquisition, subject to addition and deletion according to an individual’s freedom to choose” (2005, 174). For Chua, such critiques may seem less relevant for many postcolonial plural societies and for global multiculturalism as a whole, as they continue to see alternatives to multicultural identity within the freedom of the individual (174).

In contrast to this “preferential multiculturalism,” Chua’s “communitarian” subject cannot be a “free rider” to a culture, but “in every instance of membership, even as distant as a member of a ‘global’ community, there is a sense that one’s own well-being and destiny is inextricably tied to those of the other members of the unit” (2005, 175). The focus on family genealogy

present in Tamil, Chinese and Malay (Islam), also reinforces the notion that a subject cannot simply choose to “escape” or “think outside” their group without embarking on a type of social suicide, and being irrecoverably lost to history. This commitment to the unit means that one's identification within their ethnic heritage turns their “community” into “an ideology, into ‘communitarianism’ at various levels” (175). Rather than attempt to individualize subjects in order to alienate them from common alliances and political projects, communitarian multiculturalism casts individuals into groups who must be assisted, organized and managed by a benevolent power, transforming a “commitment to the unit” into a “commitment to the state.” It was thus the “burden” of many post-colonial states to conceptualize racial groups as coherent cultural units, as communities, in order to preserve and maintain a multiculturalist society.

It is in the context of communitarian multiculturalism that English has been ideologically divested of its cultural and historical dimensions, and utilized to conduct business and position the state as a “neutral” umpire. Yet Lloyd Fernando’s essays, written in the emergence of communitarian multiculturalism, attempt to theorize communitarian identities that do not seek to “preserve” an ahistorical culture nor to see it its members as individuals whose freedom is limited by the “straitjacket” of racial identity. Rather, they theorize a transitive cultural form, defined by the conscious ability to transition among multiple racial “types,” and to see this transition as a shared cultural practice that ascribes membership within communities. Since such communities are characterized by the very practice of transitioning from one recognized identity to another (Malay to Chinese to English to Indian), such communities are invisible to multiculturalist institutions, and can be seen as transnational or “non-national.” *Scorpion Orchid*’s fusion of a *bildungsroman* with examples from regional and imperial histories that are mythical or fake traces cross-racial communities based on this characterization of transitioning

among, rather than transcending from (or beyond) normative racial types. The complexity of these histories, read together, produces a cultural form not restrictive simply to race, but one that can fall on many intersecting scales: intra-national, inter-national, regional, or global.

Fernando's essays, especially those written between the 1969 race riot and the release of *Scorpion Orchid* in 1976, give us a window into this imagined cultural form. In his 1971 essay, "Sectional and National Literatures in Multi-cultural context," Fernando calls this emergent culture "in-between migrants" who refuse to perform either the national culture or the homeland culture, and who live "in a state of suspension...by believing that the tide of history has another alternative, by hoping that another set of conditions will prevail" (1986, 142-3). Fernando's dismissive tone reveals the ideological boundaries of nationalist historical narratives within the Malaysian and Singaporean states, which saw no real alternative other than to align with one nation. Any concept of cultural belonging outside of nationalist paradigms is thus seen as a position of mere retreat, one of exile into history's "waiting room." But in a 1975 essay, Fernando abandons this dismissive tone to further develop the concept of "in-between culture" as a psychosocial symptom induced by the trauma of migration and the alienation of having new cultural expectations put upon migrants by the multicultural state (in, for example, turning all "Chinese" ethnics into just Chinese). Fernando names this state of mind "detrribalization anxiety," a condition wherein the migrant experiences "complex stresses and strains resulting from the fear of losing his identity on the one hand, and on the other the fear that he may not succeed in achieving the new identity which he seeks to assume" (1986, 14). Because neither choice here is presented as authentic, Fernando indicates that neither the "homeland culture" nor the "national culture" come naturally, but must be "assumed" by the migrant.

Fernando defines detribalization anxiety not as a position of paralysis caused by the inability to choose, but rather as a symptom created by the ultimate fear “of completely valueless or undifferentiated existence” (1986, 14). The in-between culture seems valueless because it functions, as Fernando writes, as “part of an unceasing process” that is “capable of continuing as if an infinite series, with every stage of the series having no lasting validity” (14). If in-between culture has no lasting validity and comes in stages, then it stands directly opposed to a system of communitarian multiculturalism, which categorizes social groups based on their presumed ties to an authentic race. While this “infinite series” of cultural transitions may reverse such logics, Fernando doubts that this in-between culture will ever be accepted in the context of postcolonial emergence, as it holds no viable position in a world structured by nation-states and national citizenship. In 1975, it seemed clear that in order to build a national “folk,” the migrant must perform one of his given identities, no matter how “inauthentic” it may feel.

By 1976, the same year that *Scorpion Orchid* was published, Fernando had come to understand in-between culture as marked by its own unique imperial histories, and to himself identify as a member of this emergent cultural form. But rather than see this new cultural formation as “self-fashioning,” Fernando saw in-between culture as an imposed social position, and claimed that migrant authors “are forcibly thrust into the no-man’s land between cultures” where “colonial history in particular has left an indelible mark,” adding that migrant writers “deserve study because they explore intercultural problems under compulsion” (1986, 122). Here Fernando’s conception of the migrant shifts to a self-analysis, since his own novel, published the same year, unquestionably belonged to the category of in-between narratives that explore “intercultural problems.” Fernando modifies his understanding of in-between migrants from subjects who are “suspended” or “valueless” to a community of migrants who embody constant

transition among different multicultural identities, and who can trace this practice of transition back to imperial encounter. Transition thus becomes a tactic for survival that, like multiculturalism itself, emerged from imperial encounter, and functions now within a similar social formation that gives recognition based on monolithic identity types. Thus those who share in this tactic, whether they be seen as Chinese, Indian, Malay or "Other," can be seen as a counter-community, as their very presence fundamentally disrupts the assumed authenticity of multicultural governance.

Fernando's insights allow us to imagine alternatives to the confinement of multicultural identity, towards a culture "capable of continuing as if an infinite series," moving from one stage of identity to another, but one that can also be seen as a viable way of being, with its own histories and narratives. This cultural form I call "transitive" in the Latinate sense of "to go" (itus) "across" (trans), and in the dominant sense of "to pass into another condition" (OED). Transitive culture, like a transitive verb, highlights cultural identity as transitional by positioning the migrant between one subject (him or herself) and infinite conditions or possibilities, acknowledging ever-evolving, complex histories. But unlike Fernando's conception of in-between cultures, transitive culture is imagined as a sustainable cultural form that maneuvers through, rather than directly against, given multicultural identities and categorizations. By doing so, transitive culture also reinterprets and manages multicultural categories of cultural identity, and sees this very management as a shared cultural practice. By managing given modes of cultural normativity, transitive culture exposes both their inauthenticity, as well as the imperial gaze that produces and demands them.

Scorpion Orchid allows us to imagine transitive culture both through its juxtaposition of historical narratives with its main narrative, and through three transitive characters: Peter, the

hybrid Eurasian, Tok Said, the mysterious spiritual leader who becomes associated with religious extremism and communist insurgency, and Sally, the unidentifiable woman who the four boys seek to sexually "conquer." I focus on these three characters rather than Guan, Santi and Sabran, as they seem in excess of the multicultural bildungsroman narrative, which ends with the three boys returning to their given cultural communities. In contrast, Tok Said, Peter and Sally seem to represent identities repressed by the governments in Malaysia and Singapore. Peter is a hybrid who bridges different cultural norms and is therefore marked as "inauthentic;" Tok Said holds a radical commitment to his culture, one that cannot conform to that of a multicultural society; and Sally cannot be identified, and rather occupies an impossible position of mixture.

Peter D'Almeida's identity as a Eurasian, an "other" in the CMIO construct, alienates him from participating in the new postcolonial nation. At a time when Europeans were vilified by the UMNO as oppressors and colonialists, Eurasians became immediately associated with immorality and imperialism, which especially affected Eurasians raised in Malaya like Peter. When Sabran suggests to Peter that he try to fit into Singapore society by learning Malay, Peter says that he was born speaking Portuguese in Malacca, and then when

the British had ousted the Dutch, I learnt English and forgot my Portuguese. It was like taking out the parts and organs of my body and replacing them with others. Then the Japs came and we were told to forget English, learn Japanese. So once more I began taking out parts and putting in new ones—unlearning my language and learning another. Now it seems I must unlearn it once more and learn Malay. (1976, 132)

Peter compares the forced learning of a new language with replacing "parts and organs," marking his separation from his three friends through his staggering inauthenticity, for being

merely a “colonial creature.” Rather than represent a culture or an individual, Peter speaks here for a complex Eurasian history of transitioning from one forced cultural type to another, a continued experience that has “gone deep enough for it to hurt to try to remove it” (132).

By calling himself a colonial creature, Peter invokes an identity out of the very experience of being forced to stage different cultural types, allowing himself to act as a “record of colonial influence” (Chiu 53). As an “other” in the CMIO system, Peter is seen as a British “Eurasian,” yet performing Britishness had only been a means of gaining recognition. With the growing Chinese, Indian and Malay multiculturalism in Malaysia, Peter begins to notice that outside of the university he is seen as “a complete stranger,” “a creature made in the likeness of someone they did not know, whom they feared because he was so wholly foreign to them” (Fernando 1976, 61). This alienation compels Peter to leave for Britain, his “authentic” homeland. Yet in the novel’s end, Peter gets the last word, writing of his desire to return home to Malaya after he feels “slightly freakish” in England. Though Malaya social formations have rejected him, Peter sees potential for Singapore society to one day accept his identity as a “colonial creature.”

The second example of transitive cultural identity is the elusive Tok Said, who is introduced in the novel as a religious leader targeted by the Malaysian government. As a possible communist threat, Tok Said conjures the fissures of the 1950s Emergency period, when the Commonwealth forces and the Federation of Malaya fought a guerilla war with the Malaya Communist Party. Tok Said first appears as a rumor, and those who claim to have met him describe him as different racial personas. Santinathan claims that Tok Said is a Malay bomoh (shaman), Guan Kheng claims he is Eurasian, Sabran claims he is a Chinese geomancer, while Sally explains that when she met him he was an “Indian man with a greying beard... [and] he

only wore a sarong” (25). Each character sees him as an “other,” one who proves elusive and unconfined by multiculturalist categories (Wick 3). Even when the Singapore state funds an anthropological research team to find Tok Said, they only confirm that “any person of alleged supranormal powers by the name of Tok Said does not exist” (68). Yet the mythical qualities attached to Tok Said work to inspire awe in the populous, and his reputation as a religious radical gives the state an easy scapegoat to blame for the upsurge of racial violence. Just as the UMNO and PAP blamed cultural intolerance and religious fundamentalism on much of the violence in the 50s and 60s, in *Scorpion Orchid* the racial unrest is most often blamed on Tok Said’s religious and cultural influence, even though the state, secretly, believes him to be a myth.

Tok Said’s unidentifiable race allows the state to transfer blame for the riots on cultural intolerance rather than on the state’s acts of repression and union busting. Yet as the young characters separately meet Tok Said, they realize that the real threat of this mythical figure is not his religious extremism, but rather his pan-racial spiritualism, exemplified through his ecumenical spiritual movement. As Andrew Ng points out, such a movement would be a danger to the CMIO system because it would “vex the status quo by inspiring religiosity amongst other racial and religious groups, even to the point of encouraging them to adopt the expressions of belief of other faiths as well” (Ng 2009, 92). The racial types made rigid and inescapable through the communitarian multiculturalist system would be made irrelevant by this spiritual, ecumenical construct of cultural tradition and community. As with Peter, Tok Said’s true threat to Malaya society is that he refuses to stay within the boundaries of his own race and religion, and rather transitions among them, maintaining visible racial markers that mark him as distinct racial types in different contexts and towards different audiences—in this case, always an “other.” His

seduction, both as a revolutionary and a profligate, is that of a recognizable cultural other, inviting the subject into a shared inter-racial cultural space.

Sally and the Figure of Feminized Labor

Sally, as the “the pole around which they had been magnetized all unawares” is perhaps the most unsettling transitive character of the novel (45). Like Peter and Tok Said, her alienation starts with her racial ambiguity, yet unlike them, it is not her privilege or reputation that allows her to be racially ambiguous, but her subjugation as a migrant female sex worker whose transition is necessary for survival. As a racially ambiguous waitress and sex worker, she can appeal to many different types of clients, and is exoticized as an allusive sex object. Likewise, she is also multilingual, speaking Cantonese and Malay fluently with intermediate ability in English. She goes by both a Chinese and Malay name—Sally Yu and Salmah—and transitions between these ethnicities depending on her clientele. As Guan Kheng points out, she “changed her name and her language according to her customers” (160). At the same time, her labor provides emotional and physical solace for the four young men, and supports their multiculturalist ideals.

Like Peter and Tok Said, Sally also comes to represent an identity that casts her out of the CMIO system, yet one more affected by her gender and poverty. During the riots, she is abandoned by Guan Kheng, only to survive what is later described as a “multi-racial rape,” an act committed by four men who reflect the same racial identities as the four protagonists (114). At the hospital, Sally’s racial anonymity confounds the police and nurses, as she looks Chinese but her identity documents describe her as “Sally Yu alias Salmah binte Yub” (119). Her language also offers no racial clues, since “she speaks both Malay and Cantonese fluently” (119).

This becomes a problem for the state hospital, which relies on the racial categories marked by accent, name and skin color to know whether or not to treat the individual as a subject of Sharia law. If the three racialized protagonists represent nationalist cultures formed in order to map and control populations, Sally is a subaltern figure, and represents those who are unrecognizable to multiculturalist state institutions, but who are also essential as service workers. Rather than confound the populous like Tok Said, Sally is subjugated and silenced for her ambiguity.

Sally has been a controversial figure in *Scorpion Orchid*, as the scholar Andrew Ng points out, as Fernando uses the "brutality upon a woman to send his message through, [which] reinforces the point that there may be an unconscious sexism at work in the writer's portrayal of women" (2009, 124). Indeed, Fernando's use of Sally often reduces her to a locus of critique against the state for perpetuating violence in the name of multiculturalist ideals. But Sally's story is also useful in exploring the gendered dimensions of multicultural belonging, where men (the four boys) can feel "playful" and "resistant" with their assumed identities, while women are made to bear the burden of racial performance. As such women are defined as homemakers with the ability to reproduce their race, their "authenticity" and "community" are even more rigid. Rather than be invested with hope or resistance like Tok Said and Peter's stories, Sally's story takes the form of a sentimental tragedy. As a woman who escaped abuse at the hands of her elderly husband in the rural *kampongs*, Sally has sought Singapore as a means of survival and escape. In the beginning of the novel, she moves among the four racialized men "as with old friends" (19), aligning alongside their cosmopolitan cynicism and English-education prestige. Like the rest of the group, she too has sought ways to re-establish her given cultural identity within a more tolerant space. Just after this scene with Sally and the boys, Fernando inserts an excerpt from the *Hikayat Abdullah* that captures Singapore founder, Sir Stamford Raffles,

espousing his well-known aversion to sex slavery. A reporter tells Raffles that “the majority of the female slaves were Balinese and Bugis. They were bought up by men of all races, Chinese, Indians, Malays, who took them to wife and whose numerous progeny are here to the present day” (1976, 21). To this, Raffles responds: “If we live to be old we may yet see all the slaves gain their freedom and become like ourselves” (22). This Singapore ideal is immediately juxtaposed with Sally’s presence with the four boys, who treat her as a friend, but only with the implicit assumption that they benefit from her service labor. Likewise, she seems to accept her position within this ideal, hoping to use her occupation as a sex worker to help solidify multiculturalist belonging, as she says in an interview at the hospital: “Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians, I give them rest, I know they are confused, they talk bad of one another sometimes—sometimes even they get very angry. But when they are with me they become calm, they don’t argue, they don’t talk. Why shouldn’t this be called love, too?” (111). After the riots, it is only a fellow subaltern, a homeless vagrant named Arokiam, who comes to her aid. Though Guan Kheng and Sabran both visit her in the hospital, Sally only remembers Arokiam’s act of kindness. According to the Chuah Guat Eng, this event “enable[s] her to perceive the self-centered agenda behind [Guan Kheng and Sabran]’s offers of help” (27). As the violence of the race riots breaks the four boy’s multiculturalist idealism, Sally comes to realize the role she played as the sexualized other to such ideals, and thus refuses to recognize Guan Kheng and Sabran as her former friends.

The reader only discovers facts about Sally through the voice of Singapore authority, Inspector Adnan Hamid, who notes that “she was what you might call available for special customers, no race distinctions. She had no relations in Singapore, she came from the Federation...then she took a bus to Jahore” (113). Sally's rape, spurred by its brutality and

violence, disrupts the notion that "diversity" in itself can be ideal by associating it with a patriarchal violence that eludes race-based social justice. The investigator blames the rapists' multiples races as the reason for ending the case: "Normally it was always one group, no mixing. You could tell the pattern from that. That could give you a hunch—you know, race habits. Now how to tell?" (114). It is not despite—but *because* of their diversity that the four rapists go unpunished. Finally, Sally's accent and poverty also contribute to her remaining invisible to the CMIO system, as her poor English skills and poor education further separates her from the privilege of the four boys, as she says to the investigator: "What is a woman who has turn away from her husband to do? I cannot speak good English, I cannot get a job" (24).

The sentimental tragedy of Sally's story can be compared to the subplot of Santinathan's sister Neela, another significant female character in the novel, who also becomes a constant counter-point to the four boys. In the novel's first chapter, Neela's family shames her for being impregnated by the British teacher, Roger Ellman, and unlike Santinathan, the family attempts to domesticate her, and trusts Santinathan to do so after they leave for their homeland. As Santinathan's uncle says upon their departure: "'She's a slut, she will spoil our blood. After all I've done for her, see what she's done'" (5). Despite his own attempts to belong among a public multicultural society, Santi himself seeks to domesticate his sister, berating her for her pregnancy and even for smoking a cigarette, "thinking how incongruous it was that she should smoke it so expertly" (45). Despite these efforts by her family, Neela however overturns gendered cultural expectations and rejects both her family and Ellman's belated offer of marriage (100). Like Sally, she too spurns the burden of cultural authenticity, and refuses to play the authentic ethnic maid to contrast the ideal multiculturalism of the four boys. Yet unlike Sally's story, Neela's is hopeful

and heroic as she sets out in search of a new life with her unborn child, “casting about for a new orientation” (55).

Though Sally’s ability to transition among ethnic types is wrought from experiences of brutality and oppression, we can also her racial ambiguity as a communal identity that is shared among other marginalized figures. In the hospital, when Sabran discovers Sally’s Malay name, he empathizes with her as it “explained much about her which he had not been able to place formerly, believing her to be Chinese. Now he felt protective towards her, calling her in his mind *adik*, burning with resentment over what she had undergone” (118). Sabran believes he has some intimate knowledge of Sally due to her discovered “Malayness,” and seeks to call her “*adik*,” his younger sister. But like Neela’s refusal of her brother, Sally shuns those seeking to subjugate her as their kin, and refuses to see him again, telling him that “You think because we speak Malay together better than all of them you alone are responsible for my life...you simply wanted to take me out of their hands to put your own chains on me” (121). For Sally, to accept Sabran’s recognition would result in living in a private, traditional community where she would “cook and sweep—put up with the gossip about my life—[and] put up with old men’s ogling stares” (121). Furthermore, if she were ascribed a Malay identity, she would be subjected to Sharia law, and be forced by those around her to perform the identity of a Malay woman. Her racial ambiguity becomes the only way to resist a domestic lifestyle. By the end of the novel, Sally vanishes from the hospital, supposedly retreating into Singapore’s subaltern, underground economy.

Fernando’s representation of Sally is complex, yet seems relevant in the contemporary era of global multiculturalism, when marginalized networks of domestic laborers are often subsumed under a racial “type.” Sally’s complex representation allows us to begin tracing the representation of service work as a fetishization of “ethnic” workers who are presumed to be

“authentic” but in fact transition between valued identities. This gendered critique emerges in much Southeast Asian Anglophone literature alongside themes of transition. Though I call her transitive because her racial ambiguity marks her as an impossible figure who transitions between multiple multicultural identities, we must also consider that this ambiguity is due to Sally’s desire to escape those who wish to domesticate her. Sally’s refusal to “authentically” identify as a racial type gives her access to a wide range of potential clients, many of whom, like Sabran, Guan, Santi and Peter, embody ideals of racial harmony and capitalist success. Yet as the other that the four boys collectivize under, Sally’s gendered labor—and her sexual objectification—is also necessary to maintain the boys’ multiracial friendship. It is thus not merely the riots that disrupt the boys’ multiculturalist idealism, but Sally’s departure.

An Ongoing Critique

Through his life work, Lloyd Fernando has stressed that the divisions of a plural society have not simply been erased for a new ideal society, as the PAP and the UMNO would have it, but rather that the multiculturalism of post-independence Singapore and Malaysia carries on many of the hierarchies and presumptions of British pluralism. The one-party state and its projects of censorship and social segregation were legitimated by a “communitarian multiculturalism” that used one-party rule to “protect” each community, containing communities as if they would “corrode” through direct contact (Chua 2005, 180). In the more recent history of globalization and the dominance of multiculturalism, Fernando’s critique has not lost its relevance. When, in 1995, Fernando converted *Scorpion Orchid* into a play for both Singaporean and Malaysian audiences, he deprived the play of Peter’s more hopeful ending as a mixed race man finding home in Singapore’s pluralist community. Rather, in the play, Peter refuses to return

to Singapore, and like his friends, accepts his European identity in his migration to Essex. In his play, Fernando's outlook for race relations seems even more critical, as it ends without any vision for finding a more solid foundation for either the boys' friendship or for a multicultural society, suggesting to his audience that serious racial dilemmas had worsened (Diamond, 2011: 135).

Fernando's ongoing critique allows us to trace the historical backdrop of a global multiculturalism that emerged in the growing neoliberalism of the 1980s and has since been construed as a "racial harmony" necessary for the national imaginary and integral to incorporation within global capitalist infrastructure, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Southeast Asia's own regional trading block, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As I will expand upon throughout this dissertation, the age of global multiculturalism has gone even further in intensifying the ideals of multiculturalism and racial harmony in order to tactically erase public awareness of social inequalities and structural violence, and to produce and maintain a global, hegemonic and multicultural elite.

Chapter 2

So That The Sparks that Fly Will Fly in All Directions:

Alfred Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* and Revolutionary Identity

In the last chapter of Alfred Yuson's 1988 novel, *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*, the Cebuano revolutionary, Leon Kilat, is assassinated during the Cebu rebellion in 1898, only to magically reappear in a jungle with a "mysterious aura of grand polish," a place "where heroes are headed" (1996, 203). After passing a circular foyer made of seashells and a plaque that reads "GREAT PHILIPPINE JUNGLE ENERGY CAFÉ" (204), Leon finds himself "in the company of stalwarts toasting each other in particularly raucous corners" and discovers the Filipino English novelist Nick Joaquin "frothing in the mouth after his last swig of beer" (205). The first scene in the café stresses the interactions between these "heroes":

There was...Dean Lucrecia "King" Kasilag of the Cultural Center of the Philippines beside [Nick Joaquin], wiping a smoke-teared eye with the twirled point of a hand-kerchief offered by Pilipino poet Rio Alma, with James Dean across the table in red denim jacket listening to daily columnist Teodoro Valencia holding forth on the constitutional provision of inviolate separation of Church and State, to which Mr. Joaquin snarled contemptuously, "What are you, crazy? Darling, don't you think he's crazy?" and Princess Urduja of Pangasinan quickly came to the Batangueno gentleman columnist's defense by pressing another cup of coffee upon his hand, and...some proud mandarin says quickly: "I, Lim Ah

Hong, say that Church and State should marry and be one, for only in one is the Tao. Ask the Englishman Michael Adams, he will tell you it is so.

In this reimagined afterlife cafe, Filipino artists and writers such as Rio Alma, Dean Lucrecia Kasilag and Teodoro Valencia converse with the legendary Philippine warrior princess Urduja, the American icon James Dean, and the 16th century Chinese pirate who invaded Manila, Lim Ah Hong. The language Yuson employs in this passage considers these romanticized figures through their interaction with each other rather than through the mythos that defines their "heroism." The reader only meets Rio Alma through the handkerchief he offers Dean Lucrecia, while James Dean, Urduja and Lim Ah Hong are only relevant insofar as their opinions lend them to a conversation on the separation of "Church and State" (capitalization in original). Mythic figures like Princess Urduja and celebrities like James Dean are presented as if they are part of the setting. They are only relevant as voices adding to a critical discourse.

The jungle café is an imagined space encompassing the cultural history of the Philippines as a nation characterized by revolutionary change. The appearance of mythical, legendary and still living figures all conversing in English adds to the speculative nature of the café, and the appearance of James Dean, the "rebel without a cause," in a space characterized by rebellion and revolution suggests a commentary on how revolution can be imagined. The café space is historically and socially diverse, yet the various identities of its participants merely supplement the ideas fostered within its space. The inclusion of Chinese pirates alongside Hollywood figures, princesses and Filipino Anglophone writers can be read as an attempt to include what scholar Caroline Hau refers to as the nation's "excess," the nation's heterogeneous elements "that inform, but also exceed, nationalist attempts to grasp, intellectually and politically, the complex realities at work in Philippine society" (2000, 6). As a nationalism first imagined by mestizo elites to

gather disparate peoples against Spanish colonialists, Philippine nationalism has been necessarily reimagined and reevaluated throughout the 20th century, a process established through a history of revolutionary struggle. Yuson's imagined afterlife of a jungle café reimagines the nation not as post-revolutionary or post-colonial, but as a process of revolutionary and anti-revolutionary tides.

The novel's attempts to redefine revolutionary participation contests notions of Filipino nationhood as Tagalog, an ideology that has ironically been spread by dictators like Ferdinand Marcos, who was an Ilocano descendant of Japanese and Chinese mestizos. Like the British in Malaya, the Spanish and Americans too stressed racial differences in order to keep colonial subjects from armed revolution. Taking lessons from the British, Americans instituted a colonial pluralist mode of governance that saw Filipino "tribes" as distinct racial types, and English as the lingua franca, believing "that only through a common language could a self-ruling Philippine nation be constructed" (Mabalon 34). Similar to the British in colonial Malaya, this had the effect of making Americans appear racially superior and legitimized American colonial rule as a universalist "umpire" managing the particular interests of racialized bodies. Filipino independence marks a significant shift from colonial pluralism that has produced a type of multiculturalism distinct from the "liberal multiculturalism" of the West and the "communalist multiculturalism" in Malaysia and Singapore. After its independence in 1946, the Philippines continued to import foreign products in the model of free market capitalism that Americans had instituted, and continued to be economically dependent upon its exported labor force. While English-education added to the skillset of overseas Filipino workers, homogenizing the Filipino identity as Tagalog made Filipino identity easily incorporable into a global division of labor, a global multiculturalism wherein "Third World nationalisms become cultures to the extent that they are complicit with the global marketplace" (Shih 2004, 23).

This chapter situates Yuson's novel within Southeast Asian Anglophone literary culture to highlight how the novel resists multiculturalist identities by making them "excessive" to the cultural practices encouraged by the state and capitalist actors. Transitive culture, which I defined in the last chapter as the conscious management and reinterpretation of multicultural identities, appears here in the "excess" of Filipino identities, especially in the novel's emphasis on farce and laughter, its magical retelling of nationalist mythology, and its reconfiguring of Filipino/a gender roles. The novel reimagines historical revolution in excess to both the nationalist discourse of Filipino ethnicity and the colonialist discourse of diverse bodies who require an "umpire" to civilize and manage them. In juxtaposing the mythic revolutionary past with the "People's Power" revolution in 1986, Yuson's novel resists both of these narratives, and instead explores how the revolutionary Filipino has been constructed to produce a global market for cheap labor. In doing so, the novel allows us to see multiculturalism as not merely a state strategy handed down from previous empires, as was primarily the case in Singapore and Malaysia, but as a capitalist strategy to create hypervisible bodies fit for particular types of lower-class wage labor.

Yuson's novel reimagines revolutionary history through its playful shifting from the revolutionary past to the revolutionary anti-Marcos attitudes of the 1980s. In one of the novel's historical collapses, Leon Kilat leaps from 1897 into 1984 Manila and charges through Malacañang Palace, only to demand that the "dictator"—Ferdinand Marcos—signs a decree declaring an all-night rock concert atop Mendiola Bridge. Though this may seem a dismissive historical slight, it causes the reader to consider the multiple modes of revolutionary performance that culminated in the EDSA revolution that ousted Marcos two years later (but then resulted in more human rights atrocities under his successor Aquino). The rock concert brings feelings of

"liberation and reconciliation," and comments on how political revolution has often allowed the same stratified pluralism to continue. As the historian Vicente Rafael has written, the aftermath of the EDSA revolution of 1986 "brought about the reaffirmation of social hierarchy" rather than a reversal of it (2000, 198). By pulling various radical histories into dialogue, Yuson's novel imagines multiple forms of revolutionary practice and contests the investment in post-revolutionary identity types that have become solidified into a global Filipino identity. It is against this incorporation of revolutionary identity that Yuson's novel reinterprets instilled cultural types.

Similar to Lloyd Fernando's critique of multiculturalism as an inherited form of colonial pluralism, Yuson's critique also seems limited and bound by particular conceptions of gender. The revolutionary hero Leon Kilat uses his magical powers to impress women far more often than to battle the Spanish colonials, and his machismo often translates into challenging the paternalism of the Spanish colonials. Yet this challenge relies upon conceptions of the female body—Cebuano, Chinese, and Mestiza—to act as the passive site where revolutionary excess becomes legible. Indeed, Yuson's depiction of gender roles is telling of the revolutionary identities the novel seeks to reinterpret. In the final scenes of the jungle café, it is Pintada, a Cebuana, who, even after death, seems most engaged in revolutionary politics through GABRIELA and other feminist networks. Pintada's open sexuality and fierce political tactics resists the identity of the global Filipina service worker, the "caring" and affective identity of domestic workers and nurses. The fulfillment of subversive behavior, which seems to be the requirement for entry into the jungle café, thus seems multi-sited, with various methods of revolutionary performance that resists state ownership over a single revolutionary form. In accounting for multiple forms of subversion in revolutionary history, Yuson's novel seeks not to

incorporate the excess of the Philippine collective identity, but to expose its transnational function in producing a global lower class.

Though I read Yuson's novel in the Anglophone tradition, I also hope to account for the vicissitudes of the Anglophone literary tradition in the Philippines and to make a case for the wider readership of this novel as not only an Anglophone text, but as one that engages with modes of governance characteristic of contemporary global multiculturalism. As Yuson shows through his Anglophone character, Robert Aguinaldo, the Anglophone writer must go through a process of revaluation and reinterpretation of his own imperial identity in order to critique and expose the powers that have allowed his own privilege. As the Philippine Anglophone scholar Martin Ponce has pointed out,

the Anglophone Philippine writer's position has been and is a vexed predicament: English gets associated with class and intellectual elitism within the Philippines and thereby distances the author from the 'masses,' but it is also seen as a vehicle of connection with other Anglophone publics. (1996, 18)

Yuson's novel meditates on the position of the Anglophone Filipino as one distanced from nationalist identity, but critical enough not to merely reproduce imperial attitudes. The Anglophone text thus makes it possible to "articulate[] connections to and critiques of both U.S. and Philippine formations," and directs "critiques of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality toward several audiences at once" (20). As is the case with Singapore and Malaysian literatures in English, this requirement for self-reflexivity and the open critique of imperial powers—both national and transnational—allows for the emergence of transitive culture, defined through self-reflexivity and efforts to reinterpret given imperial identities towards revolutionary ends. As the English language scholar Ruanni Tupas argues, Filipino Anglophone writers must have the

capacity "to speak in different registers, as if one's identity were overlaid and occupied by other possible ones" (105).

Yuson's novel considers the effects of American colonialism then and neo-colonialism now, where the legacy of American English in the Philippines has been crucial to an ever-growing system of overseas labor brokerage, as well as domestic jobs like call centers. As Philippine Anglophone writing is intended for multiple publics, it has also reached out particularly to Filipino Americans, so that "not knowing a Philippine language does not automatically make the Philippines inaccessible" (Ponce 218).

Stratified Pluralism and Revolution in the Philippines

In the period of Spanish colonization, from the 16th century to 1896, the Philippines was doubly colonized, first through its administration by Spanish friars and state officials, and secondly from its agricultural exports, which incorporated the Philippines into a vast geographical capitalist system (Rafael 2000, 5). The Spanish sought to integrate the Spanish language, Catholic religion and Hispanic culture into Spanish-controlled provinces, which helped to produce a mestizo middle class who would, by the late 19th century, create a new nationalist identity centered upon revolutionary change (Reid 37). Yet this emerging Filipino identity carried with it new exclusions, as Spanish mestizos were privileged above those who differed from them in language and religion. Many of the Filipino revolutionaries against the Spanish collaborated with American forces during the occupation, and many prominent families stayed in power through the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s and even after the two EDSA "people's power" revolutions in the 1980s and 2000s. According to Rafael, this ongoing history of revolution and counterrevolution "forms one of the most enduring motifs in Philippine

history," wherein the egalitarian desire to level the social hierarchy has alternated with the re-establishment of social hierarchy by incorporating (and homogenizing) revolutionary politics (2000, 12). The manifestation of revolutionary practices, then, seems to only reproduce "the same nationalist figures and the same class formations." The desire for social revolution as a "motif" outlines the absurdity of Philippine revolutionary history, in the sense of the existential *absurd*, as the continuous encounter with the desire for an impossible outcome, where attempts for social leveling seem destined to continually meet its own impossibility.

Filipino identity is often determined by the historical narrative of the revolution against Spain, which "is recognized as the foundational event in the life of the nation-state," and is so emphasized in political rhetoric and education that "without a collective memory of the first war, the present nation-state would have no meaning to its citizens" (Ileto 2005, 217). During Spanish colonialism, the Spanish unified the Philippines by bringing politically autonomous *barangays* (or "villages") within the reach of a colonial state apparatus, setting the stage for a Filipino nationalism that would emerge in the last two decades of the 19th century, when mestizo elites sought to shift the term "Filipino" from including those born outside of Spain—a diasporic identity—into a nationalist identity of "those who would claim a fatal attachment to the patria regardless of their juridically defined identity" (Reynolds 427, Rafael 2000, 7). The overthrow of the Spanish in 1896 was led by mestizo *ilustrados*, "enlightened ones," like General Emilio Aguinaldo, who was seen as integral to producing the Filipino identity but was also the son of a wealthy landowner. The Philippines became an Asian model for anti-imperial nationalism that would influence revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen (Reid 25). Revolutionary identity was ostensibly inclusive of all Spanish colonial subjects within the territory of the Philippines, an

identity that functioned, as the literary theorist Elmo Gonzaga puts it, as "an oversimplified mask of subaltern identity that was opposed to the identity of the colonizer" (Gonzaga 25).

Despite the egalitarian status of this emergent identity, without the colonizer to act as the oppositional force, being "Filipino" was to be placed within a hierarchy of mestizness. Chief among these groups was the Katipunan, a revolutionary group who emerged in 1892 upon the exile of the Filipino revolutionary novelist Dr. Jose Rizal, and who shaped much of the nation's revolutionary discourse. The Katipunan stressed the new Filipino as one of individual self-cultivation (Hau 2000, 25), offering a revolutionary identity that both united the nation and implied a hierarchy of belonging based on a heightened level of needs and desires, "such that a community is created that would enable the Filipino to reach his full potential" (Gonzaga 26). The sought-after "full potential" of revolutionary identity became represented through the mestizo elite, who claimed "civilization" within a mask of subalternity positioned against the colonizer. With the revolution, Spanish colonials were replaced by low-level bureaucrats and provincial elites led by General Emilio Aguinaldo, who quickly sought to contain the more radical and egalitarian aspirations of the revolution by making back-door deals with the Spanish and emphasizing the revolutionary Filipino figure as *ilustrado* (Rafael 2000, 10). In contrast to Aguinaldo, the narrative of Katipunan co-founder Andres Bonifacio has emphasized a different type of revolutionary practice (Ileto 2005, 222). As the leader of a large peasant movement that advocated armed struggle, Bonifacio has been engrained into the historical memory as a martyr (killed in 1897 by order of Aguinaldo) and working class organizer. Both Aguinaldo and Bonifacio have continued to shape Filipino national identity, and are often used in both state and anti-state rhetoric. As the historian Rey Ileto has pointed out, even Marcos responded to communists who identified with Bonifacio "by portraying himself as another Emilio Aguinaldo."

Similarly, President Joseph Estrada "portray[ed] himself as a latter-day Bonifacio, [and] succeeded in drawing a massive following from the poorer classes despite his lack of sincerity in this identification" (229).

American colonization of the Philippines exploited the hierarchy of identities produced through Spanish rule while also co-opting the new revolutionary discourse. American colonizers reframed "tribal" categories as "racial" and centered the colonial project on helping Filipinos achieve a "civilized" independence, thus using the ideal of the revolutionary mestizo (made manifest in people like Aguinaldo) to mark racial differences as inferior. Having learned from both their colonial experience with Native Americans and the British experience in Malaya, American-style colonial pluralism co-opted revolutionary attitudes while continuing the pluralist project of fostering differences among colonial subjects and thus depoliticizing notions of radical national unity that would challenge American colonial rule. Aguinaldo and many mestizo revolutionaries collaborated with American colonialists, retaining their position atop the social hierarchy by reducing the heterogeneous multitude into an illusory unity based on a continuous social hierarchy (Gonzaga 26). Once the very means through which revolutionary fervor was articulated became co-opted by American rule, those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, who did not speak Spanish (or English), who were pagan or Muslim, or who were not culturally mestizo, were now incomprehensible to colonialist discourse and were marked as irrational, or worse, anti-revolutionary. This hierarchy produced peoples in excess to the greater Filipino populous, such as Chinese-Filipinos, who were made non-citizens and became easy targets for Filipino economic nationalism (Hau 2000, 135).

Rather than repress the historical memory of the Philippine Revolution, American colonial pluralism ensured that revolutionary attitudes continued by emphasizing the success of

revolutionary leaders like Aguinaldo (Ileto 2005, 217). Presenting itself as a model for constitutional democracy, U.S. forces emphasized nationalist collaborators like Aguinaldo as proof that the American imperium was exceptional to the rapacious colonialism practiced by the Spanish (Baldoz 21). Drawing heavily from the hierarchies of the Spanish and Filipino elites, the Americans depicted the Philippines as child-like and disobedient, yet stressed that mestizos and upper-class were less childlike than others, modeling Filipino identity according to their potential for "advancement under a program of collective colonialism" (Baldoz 22). Census surveys conducted in 1899, 1901 and 1903 ossified this hierarchy by producing new racial, linguistic and religious categories that valued peoples by "placing them into taxonomic grids that demarcated boundaries and relationships between population groups" (24). The surveys organized Filipinos into Malays, Indonesians, and Negritos, and then divided these "races" into eighty-four tribal groups ordered by "degree of civilization" (35). As in the case of Singapore and Malaysian identity management, these racial types undermined nationalist groups by marking each racial group as diasporic: Malays came from mainland Southeast Asia, Indonesians came from Indonesia, and Negritos came from Africa. Rather than a unified people, the Philippines was depicted as "a tabula rasa settled by successive waves of colonizers" (Rafael 2000, 36).

The mestizos, marked as peaceful and well-educated revolutionaries, were held up as examples of civility (Baldoz, 35). On the other end of the social hierarchy, the revolutionary tendencies in Negritos and provincial villagers were typified as having uncontrollable tendencies to "run amok" and commit indiscriminate homicidal violence (as the British had said of Malays) (37). The American colonizers' shaped "good" revolutionary identities as mestizo and "bad" revolutionary identities as provincial and racially inferior. The census thus abstracted various peoples from their historical realities and labeled entirely heterogeneous ethno-linguistic groups

into categories of "wild" and "civilized." Alongside these descriptions, photographs displayed individuals and groups in their "natural state," and reduced cultural differences into "an ordered range of variations and a set of representative figures" (Rafael 2000, 38). These photographs gave viewers a set of visual signifiers meant to code the subject's difference from "civilized" society. Tribal peoples were shown dressed for costumed ceremonies, while mestizos were shown in suits surrounded by books and desks. These visual representations solidified American rule by marking the "good revolutionary" as peaceful, educated and accepting of American tutelage.

As America itself was founded upon revolution, the American English-language education system stressed a revolutionary identity modeled on American democracy (Baldoz 47). Students were made to give the pledge of allegiance to the United States daily, and to feel incorporated into a paternal American Empire through the consumption of American literature, history and culture. Ideologically, this assimilation included learning about "heroes" such as Abraham Lincoln for abolishing slavery, and Booker T. Washington, whose educative model at Tuskegee went to influence colonial education. The special citizenship rights accorded to Filipinos as "insular subjects" bolstered notions of the United States as an inclusionary democracy that represented the logical ideal to a Philippine society based on revolution (32).

Since American colonization, memories of the revolution have continued to be used both to co-opt radical movements and to inspire resistance against the state and capitalist actors. The Hukbalahap, short for *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon*, meaning "people's Army Against the Japanese," attempted to use revolutionary rhetoric to overthrow the Japanese and later emphasized the narrative of Bonifacio in order to legitimate the overthrow of the mestizo president Manuel Roxas, who was a known collaborator with the Japanese. In turn, the Roxas

government also used the Bonifacio narrative to mark the Hukbalahap movement as non-Filipino or non-working class, seeing the Hukbalahap instead as importing a foreign revolution based on armed communist insurgency (Ileto 1993, 183). In the early decades of nationhood, the Hukbalahap struggle stands out as an attempt to wrestle control of revolutionary discourse from the state, and in turn, to challenge the seemingly unbreakable class hierarchy that privileged the mestizo elite (Gonzaga 35). As Rey Ileto has stressed, the revolutionary narrative privileging Bonifacio often uses the slogan of an "unfinished revolution" and has come "to have antiimperialist, neutralist and socialist meanings" (1993, 181). As Ileto writes, the Bonifacio narrative "points to the confiscation of church lands, the punishment and even execution of errant friar curates, and it carries a critique of the ilustrado betrayal of the cause" (182-3).

The inequality of state control and financial prosperity finally seemed at an end with the first "people's power" rebellion (the first EDSA revolution), which overturned the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and seemed to set the stage for an egalitarian nation that would finally see the social hierarchies instituted by the Spanish and Americans as a thing of the past. Despite this ideal, as current historians remind us, these revolutionary shifts seem now to fit into the revolution/counter-revolution motif of Philippine history rather than appearing as an exception that has brought lasting change. The revolution of 1896 shaped and gave meaning to Filipino identity, so that figures like Aguinaldo, Rizal and Bonifacio "are there...in order to enable Filipinos to think about, write about, and act out the different possibilities of "being Filipino" and participating in the unfinished drama of the nation" (198). Yet the mestizo identities emphasized in revolutionary discourse has also allowed state and capitalist actors to mark Filipinos as peaceful, subservient, and not yet civilized. For Vicente Rafael, Filipino nationalism functions on the global stage to "reify identities, freeze the past, and encourage the commodification of

ethnicity that situates Filipinos abroad in a touristic—that is to say, neocolonial—relationship with the Filipinos at home" (Rafael 2000, 13-4).

Alfred Yuson and English Literary Culture

Yuson's *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* reinterprets the Philippines' revolutionary history by resisting notions of revolution as naturally progressive, and rather sees them as re-occurring motifs that reproduce different forms of Filipino subjectivity. As Nick Joaquin says in his introduction to the novel, "in the world [the novel] creates, everything is happening under the light of eternity. So side by side occur the Revolution of '96, the demos against Marcos in the '80s, and banditry in the boondocks in the days of the Guardia Civil" (xii). Philippine identity is not locatable within any one revolutionary moment, nor in the subaltern identities produced through revolutionary fervor. Philippine identity in the novel is expressed as "the mind [and] the memory, that shuttles back and forth across the narrative" (xii). This view recasts the various Philippine revolutionary identities as excessive to the multiculturalist social order of the 1980s. As Joaquin says, "[Filipinos] are the sum of all our contradictions, divorces and anachronisms...that's why our meeting place is called the Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café." The café, where the various "heroes" of history meet to continue engaging with revolutionary discourse, seems an apt if not ideal symbol of the diverse modes and attitudes of revolutionary practice.

The novel's main narrative follows the Cebuano revolutionary hero of 1894, Leon Kilat, who fosters magical powers and revolutionary desires given to him by a "banana charm" and his own sexual desire for female bodies. Throughout this main narrative, the novel takes sudden, intermediary leaps to the novel's more immediate present, 1984 to 1988, where Robert

Aguinaldo, an Anglophone writer, seeks to uncover and reimagine the history of Leon Kilat in the hopes of selling a biographical script about him. Like Emilio Aguinaldo, Robert Aguinaldo is a mestizo who seeks to propound revolutionary history and rhetoric while also furthering his own career. Yet rather than focus on historical figures themselves, Aguinaldo is far more concerned with "the ethnohistory of legend making" (46). He first comes upon the legend of Buhawi, a revolutionary cult-leader who mentors Kilat and leads a village of thieves and pagans in the mountains of Negros. The novel posts Aguinaldo's own "underscored excerpts" (45) of a real essay on Buhawi and Kilat, which he makes using "a red Bic ballpen pressed against the side of a six-inch plastic ruler" (47). The essay, titled "'Studies in Philippine Anthropology (In Honor of H. Otley Beyer),'" was formed into a real book, "Buhawi of the Bisayas: the revitalization process and legend making in the Philippines" by Donn V Hart. This real research becomes an accessible link to the history of these figures, but for the reader, this accessibility is determined by the editing powers of the fictional character Aguinaldo, who attempts to make the story more "Hollywood" by stressing Buhawi's "superman" reputation as "the outlawed leader of a wandering band of rapacious rebels" (49). Aguinaldo becomes quickly fascinated by both historical figures, and walks "the streets of Dumaguete City with a friend, Julius Ruiz, and they would laugh and pretend they were Leon Kilat and Buhawi" (53). As he writes his script about Kilat, Aguinaldo fears that "he had made it a touch experimental [because] he had bracketed the legend with his own fantasy of being the modern counterpart of the obscure hero." It becomes clear that Aguinaldo's obsession with Kilat has shaped his own behavior and political views, partaking in the "fantasy" of identifying with a revolutionary identity.

Just as Aguinaldo's imagined heroism of Kilat and Buhawi seems at its most intense—and therefore its most nationalizing and problematic—the novel returns to the main narrative to

finally reveal Leon Kilat's historic first meeting with Buhawi. The novel's reimagining of this meeting, however, disrupts rather than reinforces Aguinaldo's own "superhero" reimagining of the two heroes, while still taking for granted their heroic status:

Buhawi appeared, of a sudden, behind a clump of freshly cut lambayang vines. Buhawi approached and Leon looked at the older man. Buhawi let loose a rollicking fart as he smiled at Leon. Leon instantly recognized him as the great leader by the manner he broke wind. Buhawi instantly recognized Leon by the degree of appreciation in the young man's face obviously marveling at the manner he, the older man, had broken wind. (60)

Through the comic gesture of the fart, this scene disintegrates notions of heroic attributes that were built up through Aguinaldo's desire to reimagine these historical figures. The scene does this without necessarily deviating from the revolutionary heroics associated with them, but through redefining the basis through which revolutionary heroics can be expressed. The fart is ironic but also disruptive of social norms during both Spanish colonization and in 1988, when the novel was published. Phrases like "rollicking fart" and "breaking wind" lend a carnivalesque quality to the action, assigning power and agency to the disruptive act rather than embarrassment. The heroics of the two characters emerges in their ability not to be controlled by repressive social impulses, but instead to smile at one another, showing a "degree of appreciation," and "marveling" at the disruptive social gesture. In this act, the novel is able to both reinforce these figures as subversive heroes and to disintegrate notions of normalizing tendencies that emerge from nationalist myth and hero making. The fart not only marks subversion to Spanish colonial powers, but also to the repression of bodily functions and the unpleasant excesses that they might generate.

Yuson's attempts to juxtapose anti-Spanish revolution with anti-Marcos revolution follows and reinforces a tradition of Anglophone literature in the Philippines, which emerged under U.S. colonialism, and has often critiqued Filipino nationalism and Tagalog hegemony through themes of racial mixture, class struggle and exile. Philippine Anglophone literature is often compared to Tagalog literature, which Anglophone writers portray as sentimentalist or overtly nationalist. Anglophone literature has tended to explore Philippine nationalist identity from a distance, emphasizing the continuous links of present neo-colonial contexts with colonial governance and with the cultural hegemony of metro Manila and Tagalog. One of the most well known early novels in English, Juan C. Laya's *His Native Soil* (1941), explores the identity of a Filipino returnee who attempts to bring in business models from the United States and ends up creating new alienating modes of labor among his own Filipino community. The novel warns of imperial domination coming both from abroad, and the incentive to use Filipino nationalism in order to commodify cultural practices for the world market.

Anglophone novels focus on imperial violence not only in the global sense of capitalist exploitation, military intervention and a global underclass of Filipino laborers, but also in the national sense of the post-colonial state creating a domestic empire by instilling colonial modes of pluralist governance. In comparing Filipino Anglophone literature to Singapore and Malay Anglophone literature, Philip Holden argues that English has remained in the Philippines "partly because speakers of regional languages in the Philippines preferred the neutrality of English to what they perceived as the hegemony of Tagalog-based Filipino" (2008, 26). Similarly, literary scholar Maria Martinez-Sicat has pointed out that "in the Philippine novels in English about the Revolution against Spain and the War against America, the concept of the nation is one that is free of foreign oppression but one that accepts native oppression" (4). In English-language

novels, these separate imperialisms are often too similar to prefer one over the other, so that nationalist revolution against a transnational imperial power does not necessarily rid the problem of imperial dominance altogether. One of the most formidable Anglophone writers, Nick Joaquin, has written many groundbreaking works that critique both overseas empires and local imperial tactics. His 1961 novel, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, reinterprets Filipino identity as one of mixture and historical complexity rather than of subaltern, rural identities, and accounts for how colonial subjectivity has helped shape Philippine identity. By exploring Filipino identity from a linguistic distance, Anglophone writers like Joaquin have tended to be more suspicious of both nationalist and colonialist historical narratives, as well as the identities produced through those narratives.

In the Post-war period until the 1990s, the critique against colonialism was driven by two main traditions in Anglophone literature. The first is represented in writers like N.V.M. Gonzalez and Sionil Jose, whose novels acknowledge imperial mixture as integral to Filipino identity yet choose to juxtapose these "mixed" subjects against an authentic Filipino "people,"—the rural and illiterate—to whom the "mixed" Filipino must dedicate their cause. The other tradition, represented by writers like Nick Joaquin and Alfred Yuson, seek rather to mine the complexity of mestizness, privilege and imperial complicity through exploring how nationalist and revolutionary identities have helped reproduce the imperial dominance of both neo-colonial states and the local Filipino state. By writing in English, these writers are already suspected of straying from Filipino identity by the mass of Filipinos, yet rather than "authenticate" themselves, many of these authors embrace the contradictions of Anglophone writing and use it to reflect upon the myriad ways of being Filipino. I read this tradition as transitive, in the sense that it has sought to self-consciously reinterpret and manage these given identities, and attending to

historical patterns where particular identities—Chinese, Muslim, queer—have been excessive. For Yuson, this self-conscious management must discover its identity through "the mind, the memory," and the historical intelligence expressed within the jungle café.

Yuson's use of English evades a Filipino nationalist tongue, and English literary culture offers a distanced position from which critiques of imperial dominance can overlap with critiques of the Filipino state. English first came to the Philippines through the education system promulgated by the Thomasites, and then through the English-medium American University (now the University of the Philippines) established in 1908, which grew quickly from sixty-seven students to eight thousand. This attempt to educate Filipinos in English resulted in a very quick cultural shift, and "by the 1930s, Manila had a vibrant publishing scene in English that outshone that of Singapore, Malacca, or Penang," which the British had been in since the early nineteenth century (Holden 2008, 161). After independence, English was still kept as an official language, used in education and commonly seen as an elite, mestizo medium, while Tagalog was then used as a nationalist language, followed by regional languages like Cebuano, Ilocano, Ilonggo, and Bicolano. Yet in the 1960s, when Tagalog-language texts emerged through the renewed sense of Filipino nationalism, writers who either did not speak Tagalog, or writers like Sionil Jose, who did not want to partake in the nationalism of Tagalog writing, continued to prefer English as both a national and a global *lingua franca*. As Sionil Jose has written, English has now become "the lingua franca of the world, and for us in the region, the medium of communication. But more than this, we get to know a people better not through their history books but through their literature" (14). Unlike in Singapore and Malaysia, in the Philippines, "English" could never mean "neutral," but rather it becomes associated with imperial interests, mestizness and cosmopolitan identity. Its immediate distancing from Filipino/Tagalog identity

allows a critique of sensitive social norms and strongly held nationalist ties. Though vernacular literatures too are often criticized by their "stern social criticism," literatures in English make imperial critiques not from the purview of nationalism or local communities, but from nationalist "exile," from being "excessive" to Philippine identity. Similar to Lloyd Fernando's view on English, Sionil Jose also sees Anglophone literature as bringing Filipinos "closer to our colonizers so we could understand them, and also curse them—to repeat, curse them in the language they handed down to us" (21).

The elitism of English as a language of international cultural capital is made more complex by the similar privileging of Tagalog. The Philippines has no national language, yet, according to Vicente Rafael, it does have "a history of state and elite attempts to institute a national language based on Tagalog in the face of the persistence of a linguistic hierarchy, where the last colonial language, English, continues to be hegemonic" (Rafael 2000, 9). As a source of political and cultural capital, English still sits comfortably at the top of a linguistic hierarchy, and often functions as an audio signifier for one's education and class background. American English especially operates as a sign of social mobility, as a symbol of the speaker's more revered type of English language education he received in school (Gonzales 20). At the same time, English has been integrated into vernacular languages, appearing in Manila as Taglish (a combination of Tagalog and English). Its prominence in secondary schools has also vernacularized English just as the late-nineteenth century ilustrados attempted to nationalize Spanish, making English also "a medium of nationalist identification" (Rafael 2000, 199). Similar to Singapore and Malaysia, English has been associated with business and politics rather than culture and heritage, as Yuson himself wrote "it is still English that is the pacifier and leveler, so to speak, when it comes to business, academic and legal communication " (2011, 259). These different conceptions of

English have created immense contradictions in English use, as writers claiming to write nationalist texts can't help but dis-identify from those at the lower, non-english-speaking rungs of the social hierarchy, and at the same time, are critical of those on top of that hierarchy (Rafael 2000, 199). The distancing of English-use is thus made possible by the privileged position of English itself, yet this privilege stands out as contaminated with the imperial history of the United States. To speak of revolutionary acts in English is in a sense to admit to one's own inauthenticity.

Similar to the use of Spanish during the colonial period, English now signifies an ambiguous political alignment with overseas imperial powers. As the English language scholar Ruanni Tupas has argued, Filipino writers in English require "a heightened sense of alertness to what comes before and outside of oneself" that implies "a perpetual and...privileged liminality" (Tupas 103). Rather than connote "neutrality," as is the case in Singapore and Malaysia, English in the Philippines, as Tupas states, "connotes a surplus of meanings as that which conjures the transition from the colonial to the national—indeed, as the recurring embodiment of that transition." This "surplus of meanings" thus allows the English writer to stay politically ambiguous while maintaining a distanced, critical stance on representations of history, memory and imperial dominance. Only through self-conscious revaluation, reinterpretation and management of their own imperial identities can the Anglophone writer become dedicated to critiquing and exposing the very stratified pluralism that has allowed their own privilege.

The meeting of Leon Kilat and Buhawi in Yuson's novel speaks to the complexity of the Anglophone tradition. Robert Aguinaldo's privileged position as an English-speaking scholar and fiction writer seems to conflict with his desire to speak for the Filipino masses, and to fantasize about "being the modern counterpart of the obscure hero" (1996, 53). Yuson acknowledges his

own privilege as an English writer, even lampoons it, as Aguinaldo gets taken in by his fantasy of aligning with the revolutionary desires of Leon Kilat, even though this fantasy ultimately serves his own self-interest in becoming a famous script writer. Through the course of the novel Aguinaldo's own Anglophone identity allows him a level of privilege and power that is not necessarily imperial, but one that can be also be used to express revolutionary action.

The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café and Historical Representation

Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* juxtaposes the final years of Spanish colonization and revolution with the years of the EDSA revolution that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship, and bounces about geographically as well, from Negroes Oriental, Cebu City, Manila, and back to Cebu City, reimagining the nation beyond its northern "center." The narrative begins with the revolutionary hero, Leon Kilat, growing up in Bacong on the island Negroes in the late 1880s, then leaps to 1975 Manila, when the Philippine Anglophone scholar Robert Aguinaldo stumbles upon the legend of Buhawi and Leon Kilat. Then we are whisked back to Buhawi's village of thieves in 1889 to witness the mentorship of Kilat by Buhawi; then the novel jumps to Manila in 1984, where we witness Robert Aguinaldo penning a script based on Leon Kilat's life; then we are plunged again into the past to witness Leon Kilat's antics in Cebu City, his love for the blind mistress of a Chinese tailor, and his fame after joining a wayward circus, the Circo Colonial de Calidad, which is really a front for the national revolutionary organization, the Katipunan or KKK. We leap again back to 1986, where Aguinaldo participates in the EDSA "People Power" revolution, then again back to 1896, where Leon Kilat witnesses Dr. Jose Rizal's death and becomes a leader in the Filipino revolution. Finally, Kilat crosses outside the boundaries of time, meets Robert Aguinaldo in 1986, and then

goes back to Cebu City in 1898 to be assassinated. The novel ends with Leon finding Aguinaldo in the *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*.

The circular experience of revolutionary history presented in Yuson's novel seems positioned against the desire for "authentic" Filipino representation, which might seek to overturn the long history of class hierarchy by relying upon notions of nationalist purity. A proponent of the latter tradition, the literary scholar Maria Martinez-Sicat has criticized Yuson's novel for using an elitist medium, English, to distort, trivialize and misrepresent revolutionary history. Her criticism seems positioned against many Anglophone writers, as she writes, "the use of the English language in Philippine novels points not only to the valorization of a foreign language but also to the existence of a privileged discourse inaccessible to the majority of Filipinos" (3). For Sicat and others, Tagalog plays the role of the authentic Filipino language, even though almost any language—vernacular or otherwise—might be similarly inaccessible to many Filipinos, especially outside Manila. Her reference to "the majority of Filipinos" also implies a subaltern nationalism positioned against the "minority" of Filipino elites, including English writers like Yuson. The novel's language, combined with its parodic tone, represents for Sicat "the squandering of an opportunity for unifying the past and the present as well as for integrating scholarly research and creative writing," and is "a grave loss to Philippine literature" (116).

Reacting to Sicat's reading, scholars such as Elmo Gonzaga (2009) and Jordana Luna Pison (2005) have seen Sicat as aligning with the nationalist tradition in Anglophone writing, which sees nationhood as "only emerg[ing] from the collective narrative of struggle against the domination of Spain and the United States" (Elmo 25). Her analysis allows critiques of nationalist hegemony only through the authentic and subalternized ethnic subject, rather than

through reflecting on the identity structure that produces concepts of complicity, privilege and authenticity, a critique fostered through much Anglophone literature. Both of these critiques of Sicat's analysis, Pison's in 2005 and Gonzalga's in 2009, carry a vastly different historical perspective of the EDSA revolution. By the 2000s, it was so clear that the EDSA revolution had maintained much of the class and social structure before it, that even the second EDSA revolution in 2001, which overturned Joseph Estrada's administration, seemed already a lost cause under the even-more corrupt rule of Estrada's replacement, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. In 1994, when Sicat's critique was published, national incorporation of the EDSA revolution as a significant moment in Filipino history was confirmed in museums and textbooks and legitimated by the international community. The human rights abuses, capitalist exploitation and state-sponsored terrorism that occurred under post-EDSA regimes was still overshadowed by the "people power" revolution of 1986. In other words, the romantic view of revolution was perhaps far more dominant in Sicat's own context, where the novel's parody of historical events and absurd style was controversial in reimagining Filipino history, and may have seemed cynical at the time, but in retrospect, the novel now seems like a relevant critique of revolutionary action.

Rather than see Yuson's novel as simply a parody of Filipino identity, I see it as producing transitive cultures, which reinterpret and transition among nationalist (and ethnic) identities. In a context where identities are produced in order to maintain imperial governance, transitive cultures coalesce around this cultural practice of transition, as it challenges the legibility of identity and its incorporation within a multiculturalist social structure. As Yuson's novel shows, the act of exploring different Filipino identities and revolutionary practices other than those condoned by revolutionary discourse can open alternative avenues for political participation. The novel's leaps back and forth through history are leaps across different modes

of expression that highlight the absurdity of subversive acts that mount in revolutionary fervor but reproduce similar conditions. Throughout Yuson's text, the English-language writer Robert Aguinaldo must constantly confront his own privilege as he becomes greatly concerned with the authenticity of his own book on Leon Kilat. During his research on Kilat, Aguinaldo discovers "a play on the obscure hero's last hours in Carcar. Robert never read the play; he couldn't, since it was in Cebuano" (1996, 115). Aguinaldo's inability to authentically represent Kilat's life due to his separation from the regional language and culture becomes his (and Yuson's) condition of possibility to reinterpret the nationalist historical narrative into a narrative of parody, magic and absurdity. Disregarding the very notion of authentic historical representation, Aguinaldo (and Yuson) writes a commentary on historical narrative rather than a reflection of it. As Aguinaldo writes, his Cebuano friend Resil—the real historian Resil Mojares—"sent him more material on Kilat, some of which Robert felt he couldn't use at all for his burgeoning novel, these being inapplicable, downright irrelevant or useless, or worse, it got in the fucking way of what he was beginning to like to call a para-genre" (1996, 115). Facts here become inconvenient for the historical truth that Aguinaldo seeks to express. His "para-genre" is the merging of genre conventions that we see throughout the novel, the splicing of myth, speculation and realism together to account for multifaceted types of revolutionary representation.

In the 1980s narrative, we are confronted with a realist form concerning Robert Aguinaldo and his choice to participate with the EDSA revolution. We witness Aguinaldo negotiating his role as an English-speaking "writer-researcher" who tries to find his place among the revolutionary fervor of the time. The realist narrative is of self-discovery and identity, where Aguinaldo must realize the advantages of his privileged position in order to take up the revolutionary mantle and finally join Leon Kilat and others in the jungle café. Unlike Lloyd

Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, where the more realist narrative dominates the seventeen interspersed mythic stories, Yuson's realist narrative is secondary to the more magical, historically reimagined narrative of the Cebuano revolutionary hero Leon Kilat, where famous historical events are made both magical and ironic by the reader's expectations for romantic depictions.

After Kilat leaves Buhawi's mountain village, he famously undertakes the voyage from Negros Oriental to Cebu City, yet in the novel's absurd rendering, Kilat does so by sailing aboard a sacred "silken handkerchief," called Luzviminda, which was given to him by Buhawi. In the legend read by Robert Aguinaldo, this handkerchief has been known to supposedly give Kilat "lightning-like" qualities in battles against the Spaniards (Kilat's name literally means "Leon of the lightning"), and to give him powers that cause bullets to bounce off his braided vest (1996, 19). Yuson first gives us the scene as we might expect it: "the silken handkerchief stayed in place, awaiting its rider. Leon barely managed to set both feet on the soft, undulating square, when the magic vessel Luzviminda floated instantly forward" (112). But then Kilat's journey quickly turns ironic for the reader, when the handkerchief, it turns out, can only move very slowly, and freezes Kilat in time upon a crossing that takes eight-and-a-half years. Despite this unlikely event, its historical reimagining of the journey to Cebu has no historical alternatives, since for Aguinaldo, little is known about this famous voyage except that it was assisted by a sacred handkerchief. The novel's ironic spin on the event—that it took far longer than a voyage by boat—does not deviate from the myth so much as it deviates from the sentimental, nationalist and romantic *genre* in which such a myth is most often mediated. As Daniel Chandler reminds us, genres can often embody "certain values and ideological assumptions" depending on the audience (4). By shifting the generic conventions of revolutionary history, the novel's main

narrative exposes these nationalist ideological assumptions. The novel takes claims of magic and myth at face-value, but restricts the glorifying expectations that accompany them, giving us the myths as they are constructed by readers in the 1980s, who have witnessed the tyranny of the nation-state as the EDSA “revolutionary” response. The novel's main narrative then reclaims these myths, and provides a different historical narrative without denying their validity.

The myth of Buhawi also captures Yuson’s absurd style, as he is similarly seen as a folk hero who trains Leon Kilat in the hills of Negroes Oriental. A figure so subversive that Spaniards forbade his stories (Pison 53), Buhawi is portrayed in the novel as the leader of a pagan spiritual group who has vast powers, a supernatural man who encourages his group to be "one with the trees and the wind" (Yuson 40). Yuson's Buhawi seems less concerned with his own subversion, or his revolutionary status, as he is with the livelihood of his camp and the game of *patintero* (a children's game of running past drawn grids) that takes place in it. A significant portion of the novel is taken up tracing the logistics of this local game with "four men to a team, three on parallel lines ten feet spaced, with the fourth sliding down perpendicularly dead center, eight feet equidistant from both sides" (70). The game is portrayed as a heated battle, yet seems trivial in light of the heroes' revolutionary reputations. The game bonds the group through the "camp dialectics" that emerge from after-game arguments: "He Cheated Yes He Cheated No He Didn't Yes He Did It No He Didn't He Simply Pulled A Diversion No He Didn't Yes He Did No He Didn't Then Prove It...Well Let's Ask The Mountain Well The Mountain Saw It The Hell It Did Oh Well In Any Case" (71). This stream of back-and-forth altercation emphasizes the passion of the players, with its capitalized words, and acts as a diversion from the speakers, who become overshadowed by the argument.

The game of *patintero* prepares the group for the battle to come by stressing "the vagaries of team effort, spirit de corps, group swell, [and] mob movement" (71). Reading this scene as a parody of realist historical fiction, Jordana Luna Pison sees it as "a tongue-in-cheek description of the 'real' dialectics revolutionaries observe" (97). Yet the ironic tone of the novel does not seem so divorced from historical truth, but also accounts for multiple ways of imagining revolutionary action. The game takes place only a day before Buhawi and his group charges a "contingent of 55 Guardia Civil sent up by Capt. Fabregas to hound the so-called religious revolutionaries" (83). The game not only prepares the village for this battle, but also shapes the battle, as the game's logic transfers to battle tactics, so that the Spaniards are depicted as an opposing team and every man killed counts as a point: "The score at the end stood at two native Guardia Civil dead, one's neck broken by Buhawi and the other hacked to an infinitude of pieces by Fidelito" (85). "Gaming" and "play" function throughout the novel not as a mere parody, but to account for the revolutionary potential of cultural practices that are commonly excluded from revolutionary history.

Perhaps the most absurd moment of the novel occurs when Kilat crosses over from Cebu in 1896 to Manila in 1984, and the reimagined revolutionary history of the Philippine Revolution is brought to the novel's most recent revolutionary history of the EDSA "people's power" revolution. Kilat meets Robert Aguinaldo, who, even as an "elitist" Anglophone writer, takes Kilat and his other Anglophone friends to charge Malacañang Palace, storming "right through the gates shouting 'One For The Revolution!'" (184) As suggested by the spirit of the time, the reader might assume that this charge may be the grounds for EDSA, or for a more powerful revolution reminiscent of the Spanish revolt that Kilat himself took part in. Yet after victoriously taking the Palace, Kilat and Aguinaldo force the "dictator" (Marcos) to sign a decree "declaring

the urgent national need for an all-night rock concert atop Mendiola Bridge" (184). The irony of historical reimagining here disrupts the revolutionary imaginary of the present. For Sicat, such a transcription of revolutionary community ridicules "real" revolutionary history:

This explicit statement on liberation and reconciliation—flagrant spending of public funds and a gargantuan foreign debt, militarization and the violation of human rights, grinding poverty and insurgency—ridicules the very idea of liberation. At the same time, it reduces human—and superhuman—dynamism to frivolity, a worthless peculiarity, particularly in effecting change. (106)

Sicat's accusation seems founded on a reading of this scene as if it were depicted through historical realism, rather than historical irony and magical-realism. As Roland Barthes has said of irony: "irony acts as a signpost, and thereby destroys the multivalence we might expect from a quoted discourse" (44). The ironic "signpost" in historical irony draws attention away from the text as one of historical authenticity, and signals to the reader a vast departure from serious historical narrative. Rather, the ironic signpost suggests a meta-history, a text that flouts "all respect for origin, paternity, propriety" and operates instead as a "transgression of ownership" (44-5). By signaling disrespect for "ownership" over history, and a disobedience to the censored historical narrative attached to historical imagination, Yuson's text announces itself as ironic, constructing a strategy of reading that is abusive towards expectations of historical ownership.

Yuson's ironic historical narrative is in direct contrast to the rigid narrative of Filipino history during Marcos. Its irony challenges the state's hegemony over revolutionary meaning, and reveals the very constructive process of historical narration. The scene in 1984 ironically reimagines the EDSA revolution in order to reveal the constructive process of its narrative. Before storming the palace, Kilat finds five men standing "seemingly in defiance of strangely

uniformed men with masks and clubs and shields and various other terrible weapons of destruction" (183). These five "newfound friends" are Robert Aguinaldo and "the Four Horsemen of Philippine Photography...Charlie Altomonte of Italian descent, Mike Alejandrino of mixed Spanish, Sangley and Indio-Pampango blood, the Japanese-American Neal Oshima, and Nap Jamir who was another Criollo-Indio." As photographers and journalists, these friends of mixed-backgrounds seek to use their privilege—signified by their "MEDIA badges proudly hanging on their breasts"—to expose the precariousness of state violence. The state's reaction to the "assault" becomes thoroughly documented by the photographers, and their demand—an all-night rock concert—seems necessary in forming a revolutionary imagined community in the years before EDSA. Similar with Buhawi's game of *patintero*, the concert sets the tone for future revolutionary action, as "everybody cheered and rocked all night long and such was liberation and reconciliation" (184). The concert envisions the desire for a society free of censorship or military dictatorship, and thus produces revolutionary fervor against the Marcos regime. It is only after playing a pivotal role in this task that Robert Aguinaldo "step[s] aside and eventually disappear[s], never to appear again until the final party at the jungle café when he signs his name drunkenly on an unpaid chit" (183). The fulfillment of subversive behavior, which is the requirement for entry into the jungle café, seems multi-sited, with various methods of revolutionary performance that resists state ownership over a single revolutionary form.

The stylistic shifts in the novel both follow and comment upon the alternative historical perspectives of the two protagonists, Kilat in the 1890s and Aguinaldo in the 1980s. Safe in 1984, Aguinaldo is able to rewrite Kilat's history, yet Kilat himself is also able to rewrite his own, as he absorbs a banana charm that distances him from his own history, making his own death foreseeable, and therefore, laughable. As he leaves Buhawi's camp, he laughs in "bold joy," and a

"banana's charm" drops into his mouth. The charm gives him "a sudden surge of overwhelming giddiness, then a vast range of iridescent colors, [he] felt them, then clarity, felt clarity" (19). The charm, an amulet of the Filipino *anting-anting* system of magic and sorcery, reveals Kilat's destiny of sailing to Cebu "in the magic handkerchief" and "to leap above ordinary men and land silently and still upon the merest leaf." The charm provides the foreknowledge of historical revolution, and Kilat sees a future that he can "laugh about" because "it was all open to him now, like the pages of comic books that would come years after his own passing." He sees a summary of his life, of being "in the company of a travelling circus, baking bread with a Chinaman... falling in love with the mestizo woman in the crowd who would ultimately become his undoing." Beyond his life, Kilat sees the revolutionary history of the Philippines that was to come: "Rizal shot in Bagumbayan, bicycles and ice coming to his country, the Americans, Nick Joaquin, Gary Cooper, the Japanese." For Kilat, the "open mysteries" of history become "alternating currents of laughter and rubble." The banana charm is the source of magic that allows Kilat to turn rifles into canes, and that makes bullets bounce off his vest. Buhawi, who has also swallowed the banana charm, also derives his strength from the memories the charm provides. He tells Kilat that "there is strength in all these, Leon. There is a strength in remembering, though your instinct is to laugh upon recall. I too, have my past and draw from it" (93). The magic represented by the banana charm comes from memory itself, a historical consciousness and power of reflection that can be harnessed towards revolutionary ends.

Through the memory of the banana charm, subversive acts are seen as multi-sited, appearing in both the "burping and farting" and in the "incendiary social commentary" of "the contraband volume of *Noli Me Tangere*" (93). Buhawi's reaction to the banana charm is to "lift his spirit" through the memories and gain strength as "the redeemer." As he says, through the

power of the banana charm, "surely did my people follow me to freedom...[and] I had become a living God" (94). Buhawi's reaction seems to embody the ethnic nationalist impulse to assume subaltern identities in the provinces by reinvesting in traditional myth. Buhawi becomes a god-like "pure" Filipino, unencumbered by Spanish contamination, Christianity or modernity. Kilat's reaction is different—it is to laugh at his own destiny, to assume distance rather than spiritual connection, even while fulfilling his revolutionary destiny (94). If Buhawi is the "pure" god-like ideal of Philippine authenticity, Kilat's immediate distancing and ability to critique historical events through humor represents a more transitive cultural attitude. Even while fulfilling his revolutionary heroism, Kilat still seems distanced from the task at hand, realizing full well the absurdity in overturning imperial governance, yet attempting to do so anyway. Where Buhawi is uncontaminated by modernity, Kilat leaves Negros to struggle alongside Chinese, mestizos and Filipinos in urban Manila, despite his foreknowledge that it will lead to his own death.

It is perhaps Kilat's impulse for laughter and distance that has caused scholars like Pison and Sicat to find the banana charm's historical distancing anti-revolutionary. For Sicat, the charm works "for the benefit of the individual self rather than the benefit of others," because Kilat is alone in his historical perspective, and the lives of others become meaningless (98). For Pison, the "laughter and rubble" is a "derogation of history" into "one big joke" (98). Yet it seems that Yuson's novel, published only two years after the EDSA revolution, explores difficult questions relative to his Anglophone audience about how revolution can be imagined given the inability of past revolutions to level social hierarchies. The "laughter and rubble" that Kilat sees does not stop him from taking up his destiny as a revolutionary figure—in fact, his ability to laugh, and to take it in stride, often allows him to continue despite the overwhelming odds against him. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, while others see "the appearance of a chain of events," Kilat

sees "one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet" (ix). The banana charm reveals this rubble to Kilat, but instead of feeling despair (as does the angel of history), Kilat finds joy and humor in the very fervor of revolutionary action, in acting out the desire for freedom even if the outcome is other than utopic.

The novel's ending in the jungle café is the culmination of the power of the banana charm; it is the physical manifestation of the historical struggle that the charm allows Kilat to understand. The jungle leading to the café, as Marie Martinez-Sicat writes, connotes "freedom from artifice [and] is a powerful metaphor for the lush authenticity of a culture untainted by the foreign" (107). For Sicat this metaphor of the "untainted jungle" is bankrupted of revolutionary meaning when the forest only leads to a café, which she calls a "foreign institution" that connotes "oversized, expensive, elaborate affairs" for "celebrities and pseudo-celebrities" (108). The jungle is the place of Buhawi, the spiritual leader who renames himself a new god to replace the Spanish. It is a space of myth, but also a place of seclusion, where history seems absent and national "authenticity" rests on being "untainted by the foreign." The café, on the other hand, resembles a community driven by discursive exchange, and the energy café itself is one bent on revolutionary fervor, with figures such as Jose Rizal, Gunnar Myrdal who authored the influential book *An American Dilemma*, John Lennon, Yoko Ono and of course, Marx and Engels. In this crowd Kilat hears voices bickering about the "constitutional right" of "peaceable assembly,"

& someone else replying rapidly, 'Shit, there's no 'clear and present danger of a substantive evil,' is there as the Constitution says there must be before forced dispersal becomes necessary'...& the other earlier voice snaps right back, 'the word 'inviolable' has to be defined... & Leon now looking more dazed (208).

The discourse here is inclusive of multiple points of view. The first voice takes a position on the nature of human rights, the next assesses the constitutional applications of ideal laws ("as the Constitution says...") and the third voice seeks clarification. In the jungle society where Buhawi might reign, these multiple contestations over truth, rights and speech would be suffocated by the authority of the self-made god, insisting upon ethnic purity over the contamination of new ideas. Yuson's paratactic use of ampersands rushes the dialogue, creating instant associations from one argumentative point to another, emphasizing discourse over the names of the speakers, more concerned with their points of view than their identities.

Where Sicat sees the café as "anti-historical" because it accepts all voices "regardless of religion, class, [and] race," she also ignores the discursive process held throughout the café (109). The café does not simply accept all points of view as equal, but produces new ideas and critiques through argumentative discourse. For Sicat's ethnic nationalist critique, the arguments of the café seem pointless because the space itself is presented as a "heaven," "an Atopia, where the utopia dreamed of is a present" (110). Yet this seems a misunderstanding of the novel's playful style. The café rather seems less like a "heaven," but an imagined space with figures who are not yet dead, and some who are still participating in revolutionary politics, such as Buhawi's follower Pintada, who tells Kilat that she has joined GABRIELA, the leftist Filipino women's organization that first began the EDSA revolution by marching against Marcos' State of Emergency. She continues to participate with revolutionary movements, and persuades Kilat to participate in these protests: "we're picketing the Bataan Nuclear Reactor plant tomorrow, be a dear & be there to help hand out leaflets" (206). The café's discourse is not isolated, but produces revolutionary politics; it is the spatial representation of the historical "magic" embodied in the banana charm given to Kilat and Buhawi. In a sense, the novel's ending feels like the magic

"drop" of historical experience being transferred from the characters to the reader, empowering them with the collective knowledge of subversive histories. It is a transitive space that sees various modes of resistance, none of which seem dominated by a "god-like" figure. Rather, they are left to be performed, managed and reinterpreted for multiple revolutionary identities.

The historical narrative in *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*, as Jordana Luna Pison writes, is both "syncretic and hybrid," using "different registers" that counter "traditional historical novels' use of 'linear register'" (97). These registers of irony, absurdity and magical realism offer ways of imagining revolutionary history that deviate from producing a nationalist identity. By fetishizing an "authentic" nationalist identity, nationalism produces a normative citizen-subject that erases or marginalizes its "excess"—whether it be mestizo, Muslim, Chinese or English-speaking. Rather than see the only alternative to overseas imperialism in nationalism, Yuson's historical narrative eludes the seduction of the normative citizen-subject. Like the café itself, the playful language and game-like qualities of the narrative reveal its own construction and historical inauthenticity. As Pison writes, "the novel's reader is not interpellated like the classic realist text's reader. On the contrary, the reader of *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* is conscious of his/her role in determining the text's 'meanings'" (97). Likewise, the conversations that occur in the jungle café seem a culmination of the historical negotiation that occurs throughout the novel. When he joins the Katipunans, Kilat witnesses the revolutionary center not as a hegemonic, nationalist core, but as a space of unending argument and contesting ideas:

'Rizal never said anything about fighting, for one.' Arnulfo looked scornfully at Revilla, then caught Senor B&B's eye with a haughty arch of the brow. He went

on, 'Rizal is a reformist, as we all know. The fighting is Bonifacio's idea.

Everyone knows that'" (159).

The exchange of ideas broadens the movement by including multiple perspectives and strategies into revolutionary practice. Through this experience, Kilat comes to understand "That The Movement needs dissent within its own ranks...so that the sparks that fly will fly in all directions..." (160). Through its back-and-forth narration that juxtaposes realist and absurdist styles, and through its conscious reconstruction of history, *The Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* draws attention away from the utopic promises of revolutionary action, but focuses rather on how revolution can be expressed and reimagined in ways that express parody, absurdity and transition among revolutionary identities. Yuson's novel reminds us that the way revolution is expressed *matters*.

Revolutionary Excess and Multiculturalism

To commemorate the launch of Sicat's book criticizing his novel, Yuson was asked to give a response, which he published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Rather than defend his work against Sicat's criticisms, he masks himself as "a comedian first, a party animal of memory second, and a serious writer only a poor third," and claimed that he did not "know enough about deconstruction to recognize any real antipathy toward [his] own book" (2001, 104). He goes on to admit that:

I obviously am not the kind of author that Tita Sicat was/is looking for. For one, I feel a terrible lack of confidence in my ability to help shape "collective identity." I am simply not made that way. I wrote GPJEC to express myself, and also so I

could receive some grant money to purchase many cans of Libby, McNeil & Libby's corned beef hash (2001, 103-4).

Yuson's response captures the performance of a writer who avoids the expectations of producing a nationalist "type," or in representing the national "folk," admitting that he is "not made that way" and falling back on Sicut's portrayal of him as a bourgeois writer who did it all for "grant money." At the same time, the confession in this scene is undermined by its absurdity, that this very "grant money" was desired only for "corned beef hash" (a very popular product in the Philippines). Rather than ossify his bourgeois reputation, Yuson here reveals the very absurdity in the imagined identity itself as the "other" to the "authentic" national subject. His humor here expresses a disobedience to these categories, encouraging the audience to align with him through laughter.

Yuson's novel presents revolutionary discourse through ideologically heterogeneous groups that parody post-revolutionary identities: the Katipunan traveling circus in 1896, the cultural producers leading to the EDSA movement in 1984, and the jungle café. These representations are ironic because they depict the supposed homogeneity of national collective action as a chaotic heterogeneity, with sparks that fly "in all directions" (160). The revolutionary communities insist upon multiple ways of performing revolutionary action and make available a seemingly limitless set of post-revolutionary identities. They are transitive cultural communities who assume various identity types towards revolutionary action. Rather than produce a "collective identity," as Yuson calls it, his novel seeks to disrupt the class and social hierarchies that have carried on despite revolutionary action by unsettling the post-revolutionary identities that are formed at the behest of revolutionary movements, but are co-opted and managed by new regimes.

As Yuson stated in a 2005 lecture on the influence of *Don Quixote*, his use of satire and irony reflect how the state's historical narrative itself has become an absurd parody of real events: "we can make a case of the prevalence of satire in our writing, of parody, which is almost a given in our country, what with our reality often appearing to be a farce" (2007, 46). Taking his inspiration from Miguel de Cervantes, Yuson continues to describe Filipino "contemporary history" as one similar to the farcical tale, with "its lightness of tone and winking worldview, its comic turns" (2007, 47). The phrase "comic turns" refers to the many revolutionary events that have occurred since 1986: the EDSA revolution in 1986, the subsequent people's power movement in 2001 that toppled Joseph Estrada's administration after an aborted impeachment trial for corruption, the attempts to cast out his successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, after she was accused of election rigging, and then again accused of dictatorship after her 2006 State of Emergency. These continuous revolutionary moments seem to be ineffective in bringing structural change, but mark revolution as a historical motif, repeated in indefinite absurdity.

The literary scholar E. San Juan has written extensively about the class hierarchy of the Philippines, calling it a "stratified pluralism" that has been reproduced through the ideal of social equality within multiculturalism. In his essay "The Paradox of Multiculturalism: Ethnicity and Identity in the Philippines," Juan identifies multiculturalism in the Philippines as hiding this stratified pluralism within a language of cultural diversity and tolerance, reproducing divisions of wealth inequality, religious difference, language, location and education. As Juan says, quoting the historian George Demko, "A few landowners have acquired massive wealth, while almost three quarters of the population of 65 million live in direst poverty, unable to satisfy basic needs. Mestizos make up 2 percent of the population but garner 55 percent of the personal income" (Demko, 295). Notions of cultural equality play a role as a great equalizer, distracting other

nation-states and the national populous from divisions based on class, religion, language and region. For E. San Juan, this social formation is not an exception to multicultural governance, but its very *modus operandi*, as a governmental modality "where heterogeneous, shifting identities and affiliations thrive amid economic and political vortices of strife. Multiculturalism indeed abounds in an unstable, unequal, class-torn society" (2011). The stratified pluralism that had characterized the Philippines since the revolution against the Spanish was, in the post-EDSA era, the very conditions of possibility for a state-condoned multiculturalist ideology, which stressed the victory of past revolutions while simultaneously keeping in place past social hierarchies.

Buttressing the supposed cultural equality of the Filipino nation are the Muslim groups living in the southern region of the Philippines, an "other" to the Filipino nation. The southern island of Mindanao, virtually untouched by Spanish colonizers, abounds in resources such as rubber, pineapple, cacao and coffee, as well as rich mineral deposits like lead, zinc, iron, copper and gold. Separatist groups establishing Muslim nationality have been fighting secessionist wars for this resource-rich land at least since independence, and indigenous movements have been common in the South, especially from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the 1960s-80s, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from 1987 onwards. For E. San Juan, the situation of the south is "exemplary of the problematic nature of the plural society as historically constituted in the Philippines," as Muslims are often marked as an intolerant/insurgent minority seeking to destroy the "pluralist" state (2011). The Philippine state's attitude towards the Moros as an "intolerable" threat have helped mask social inequalities and legitimate multicultural policies by seeing the battle against the Moros as a moral duty for the greater pluralist power. With the Muslims in South Mindanao as the "other" to the nation-state, the Philippine collective identity has continued despite the absence of a great colonial power like the United States. For E.

San Juan this solidity has been used as a tool for constructing a stratified pluralism, with Muslims at the bottom, and the "Filipino people" seemingly homogenized as a cultural melting pot but carrying implicit divisions.

E. San Juan links the emergence of the Filipino/a imagined community with the *ilustrados* during the late 1800s, as he writes, "though racially/ethnically diverse, [the Philippines] was then conceived by the ilustrado nationalists as an organic unity with one soul (*kaluluwa*), one mind (*isip*), and one heart (*puso*) founded on the security of the nation (*bansa*)." Since the revolution against Spain, this imagining of the Filipino nation has been used to posit a Filipino citizen-subject easily identified with state-figures like Ferdinand Marcos, and to evade dealing directly with forms of dominance between the wealthy and the penurious. In the post-ESA era, multiculturalism has only shifted the form of this stratification, to become a "divisive force" of "ideological supremacy" that highlights "various compromises deemed equivalent to the consent of the ruled." Discussions concerning "the cognitive and pedagogical value of multiculturalism for 'third world' societies" often ignore the violence of the neocolonial state in characterizing the populous as antagonists across alignments based on class, gender, nationality, religion, locality, and kinship. As is the case with multiculturalist practices in Singapore and Malaysia, multiculturalist governance in the Philippines has emerged from pluralist modes of dominance in order to control and manage groups by assigning hypervisible cultural identities. Yet multiculturalism in the Philippines does not have the same advantages of positing "the indigenous" against "the diasporic," as is the case in Singapore and Malaysia. As the Philippine racial histories are so mixed, Philippine identity has focused less on histories of migration and territorial belonging and more on revolutionary moments, which produce identities based on structures of power and resistance. Social hierarchies thus trace Philippine identity as

revolutionary "types," such as the revolutionary Filipino hero, who, according to the narrative, was either "authentic" and Filipino, or was an educated mestizo. Such revolutionary identities dismiss groups whose participation was overshadowed by the hypervisible mestizo organizers, and who are thus relegated as mere passengers on the revolutionary march of history. For Juan such a conception of revolutionary time divides groups by their relationship to historical relevance and "reinforces the temporal distancing found in all the strategies of Eurocentric 'civilizing missions'." This strategy has enabled the state to mark Chinese as irrelevant, Muslim insurgents as anti-revolutionary, women as "caregivers," and the non-Tagalog speaking provinces as less heroic.

By exposing different forms of revolutionary practice, Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* allows for the integration of multiple identities within the revolutionary imagination. Caroline Hau refers to the various others as "cultural enclaves" who limn national subjectivity as the nation's "excess," the elements "that inform, but also exceed, nationalist attempts to grasp, intellectually and politically, the complex realities at work in Philippine society" (2000, 6). Hau brings attention to the Chinese and Chinese mestizos, who for long periods of time were excluded from citizenship and were convenient scapegoats to blame for economic downturns. For Hau these excesses are not produced through the violence and prejudice enacted upon Chinese communities, but are "a constitutive feature of nation making, an irreducible component of the nationalist project of making community" (7). In accounting for multiple forms of revolutionary practices, Yuson's novel seeks not to incorporate the excess of the Philippine collective identity into a revolutionary one, but to expose its function in sustaining class and social hierarchies.

When Leon Kilat first arrives in Cebu, before he joins the Katipunans, he finds employment in a bakery run by the Chinese man, Yu Cheng Co, whose name is the same as a prominent banking family in the Philippines. Before he is employed, Kilat only hears of the Chinese through his former employer, who tells him to spirit down Colon, "that street of Chinamen with their Cebuana mistresses" (122). This intersection of cultures augurs Kilat's reputed journey in Cebu, where today, the street named after Kilat, "Leon Kilat Street," intersects Colon Street where Kilat supposedly worked. The historical investment in this scene suggests that Yu Cheng Co replaces Buhawi as Kilat's mentor. Where Buhawi may have represented the imagined "authentic" Filipino living in the jungle and worshipping pagan deities, Yu Cheng Co mentors Kilat in the myths of his Chinese homeland: "I cannot be master baker without an assistant," Yu Cheng tells him, "Please to be mine, honorable Leon." Kilat replies:

"To learn the kneading of dough?"

"And hear of the Great Wall."

"To taste of confectionaire's sugar?"

"And perchance to cross the great water." (125)

What Kilat interprets as an employment opportunity from a Chinese baker is in fact a strong mentorship that exposes Kilat to knowledge of the "Great Wall" and "the great water." The employer-employee relationship here becomes politicized in Yu Cheng Co's resistance to Spanish rule and in his tutelage of Kilat. If Buhawi's magic handkerchief can be seen as a symbol of Buhawi's tutelage, then Yu Cheng's gift of new pants can be seen as a similarly powerful contribution to Kilat's heroic narrative. Leon receives this gift "feeling terribly forlorn and shamefaced, [and] Leon decided to try the new pair of pants...Instantly he felt his little pearl swell to something slightly larger than a little pearl" (128). His "little pearl" is the manifestation

of his machismo, his erection, which until this point in the novel has remained robust yet "little." As a symbol of potency and desire, Kilat's erection also enters the sphere of magic through the pants that Yu Cheng provides, a potency that culminates in Kilat's lovemaking to Yu Cheng's blind Cebuano mistress, Teresa.

Libidinal desire characterizes Leon Kilat throughout the novel, and like his handkerchief, his penis too becomes associated with myth and magic. For Caroline Hau, excess can often take the form of everyday desires that cannot be contained by the discourse and institutions provided by the state. As she says, there is "something about everyday life and experience that is always in excess of the systems of thought and sociopolitical action that seek to apprehend and organize it" (7). By seeking excess in the everyday, Hau finds that the Philippine state often produces narratives that assign the primary agents of Filipino history to particular classes or groups (8). To consider the everyday excess—whether it is located in desire or performance—demands "a more rigorous examination of the Filipinos' capacities and limits as subjects of history." Kilat's "rod" provides a link between the censorship of Philippine myth under the Spanish, as well as the hybridity of Philippine life in its allusions to Chinese myth. When Kilat first has sex with Teresa, the "sweet little blind girl," he discovers his penis has transformed into "a perfectly enlarged ladestalk that had never been his but was currently a veritable weapon of damning possession" (133). Thanks to Yu Cheng's pants, Kilat's "little pearl" turns into an "immense rod." Libidinal desire here functions as an uncontrollable force that both gives potency and evades any attempts to contain it, as the novel makes clear when Teresa "tried to bring it down to a gentle simmer but it wouldn't, and Leon certainly tried to exhaust its possibilities and still it refused to go the limp way of all flesh." Kilat's potency can be read as a combination of mythical factors and subversive excess, all of which in the form of myth and in the novel itself rely upon a passive, receptive

female body, in this case, the blind Cebuano mistress Teresa, who begins making love to Leon by attempting to "measure its contours," but ends with their bodies resting "tightly together, such love, explored and consummated" (133). Kilat's libidinal desire thus seems typical of the Spanish "machismo," the fierceness and bravado of Spanish heroes, a notion of masculinity that passed into the revolutionary subject after the Filipino Revolution. Yet in this particular scene the "immense rod" also seems to allude to the fabled Chinese Monkey King, Sun Wukong, whose weapon, a phallic staff, could retract to the size of a needle and also extend to such a length that it was used to measure the oceans. Kilat's erection too leaps into absurd elongation reminiscent of this myth: "it throbbed, high and mighty-looking, an immense instrument that now seemed to touch the very peeling ceiling itself, indeed, threaten to puncture a hole through the shop's very roof" (133). The association with the myth of the Monkey King seems even more apparent when Yu Cheng returns to find a hole in his roof, and re-creates a kung-fu scene from Chinese Wuxia myth. Co takes "the cool celestial pose of efficacious martial attack...his kicks supreme and prosperous as would befit the mighty image of the Middle Kingdom" (134). Yuson's use of Kilat's sexual desire exposes the libidinal excess of the Filipino nation when subjected to paternal states, in Kilat's case, the paternal role of the Spanish state, who sought to contain tales of libidinal heroes and preserve themselves as the exaggerated symbols of male virility.

Kilat's libidinal excess acts also as a symbol of revolutionary power, a "veritable weapon of damning possession," that guides him closer towards his heroic destiny (as well as towards various erotic female figures). His first encounter with Buhawi, the tribal revolutionary leader, only occurs because Kilat is guided to the woods by his admiration for the woman Pintada and "her tattooed rump" (81). Seeking to marry her, Kilat finds that Buhawi's camp does not practice monogamy, but open and unrestricted marriage, which symbolizes a form of resistance against

the Catholic Church. Similarly, in Cebu, Kilat agrees to work for Yu Cheng Co when he discovers the blind mistress, who helps spur his "magical new member" (133). After he leaves Yu Cheng Co for the Circo Colonial de Calidad circus, Kilat becomes enamored by Pilar, a "mestizo of obviously high birth" (143). After joining the circus to be close to Pilar, Kilat learns that "the Circo Colonial de Calidad or C.C.C. was a front for the national revolutionary organization called the Katipunan or KKK... for the simple reason that practically all the proceeds were earmarked for the propagation of The Cause" (147). As Kilat begins training in revolutionary tactics, the narrative switches to Robert Aguinaldo marching at the EDSA, which also gets rewritten as national libidinal excess: "the onlookers perched on the pedestrian overpass rained yellow confetti on the marchers as they sexily filed past... Marcos, how ill was he really now, the poor man, he did seem too gentle sometimes, so paternal, in fact that seemed the chink in his Ilocano armor" (153). The "sexily lined" EDSA protestors are here contrasted with the "gentle" and "paternal" depiction of Marcos, a juxtaposition that relocates reproductive potency and machismo domination in the revolutionary crowd. The reliance upon potency comes full circle with Pilar, the mestizo circus performer, who uses Kilat's libidinal desire against him by seducing him into her quarters to assassinate him, marking the limits of libidinal excess in the female figure who claims agency and sexual desire for herself.

Yuson's novel traces the intersections of libidinal excess as revolutionary power in Kilat's final briefing before the revolution, when one of the Katipunans, Revilla, tells Kilat the revolutionary history of the "The Cause" thus far, yet all during the conversation, Kilat's desire for Pintada "hovers above the edges of Leon's thoughts," marking revolutionary action itself as a sexually stimulating manifestation of libidinal excess (1996, 163). As Revilla tells him about the "economic boom in the 1860s and 70s and then a rising tide of nationalism," Kilat thinks of

"Pintada, swimming naked in the river" (171). As Revilla tells him about the "denial of human rights, racial discrimination, maladministration of justice, heavy taxes, forced labor, religious intolerance," Kilat continues to imagine "Pintada squealing with delight" (171). Finally, the narrative of revolutionary history and that of libidinal excess form into the same prose, without paragraph breaks to signal change in Kilat's stream-of-consciousness voice:

Revilla's presence is confusing my sense of time zones but oh how delightfully his words are like the start and end of particularly nourishing rain like that time with Pintada but, ah, more spires and crosses rising to the skies what a lovely city...A big problem, this cavitismo machismo, now they look down on the Manilenos and the peons of Bonifacio who can only wave their boloes vaingloriously and vainly...doing it with Pintada" (172).

Kilat receives Revilla's rehashing of revolutionary history as "the start and end of particularly nourishing rain like that time with Pintada," invoking the excess of libidinal desire through the excess of erotic imagery. The "cavitismo machismo" refers to the revolutionary regional power located in Cavite, where in 1898, general Emilio Aguinaldo declared Philippine independence from Spain. Coined by the historian Renato Constantino, the term "Cavitismo" names a regional potency and pride that emerged during the revolution, and here is depicted as a combination of the excess of libidinal desire with the excess of revolutionary action. Kilat realizes that this reliance on "cavitismo" is "a big problem," as it produces a normative revolutionary subject that can then "look down on the Manilenos," those who fought in Manila, "and the peons of Bonifacio," those who followed the Katipunan's revolutionary leader Andres Bonifacio, but were excluded from becoming the revolution's ideal subject.

Through its ironic reversals and absurdity, Yuson's novel envisions revolutionary action with the nation's "excess," marking revolutionary memory as an opening up of possible identities rather than a foreclosure of revolutionary practices. Likewise, his work must be positioned against the ethnic nationalist tradition in Filipino English literature that commits to sentimental, realist narratives associated with an authentic Filipino subject. Rather than seek to construct an authentic historical narrative, Yuson seeks to expose how historical narrative constructs the present and imagines, even prophesizes, the future. Robert Aguinaldo, in the 1980s, often feels his own desire for revolution is brought to life by his fascination with Kilat: "he often thought he was indeed Leon Kilat, striding up a slippery mountain somewhere in Southeast Asia" (1996, 60-1). Later in the novel, in the 1890s, Yuson reveals how Kilat's historical influence may have been consciously constructed within the halls of the Katipunan during the revolution. In a scene where Kilat is rehearsing revolutionary history with the Katipunan's, the conversation they have about history becomes its own myth-making, and predicts the future to reveal the full plot of the novel, showing us scenes that are never revealed at any other time. As Revilla reveals, "[Aguinaldo] would later say—'When the smoke of battle had cleared, God revealed that all Cavite had been liberated from Spain,'" to which Kilat responds "He said that? He is to say that? I don't know that" (179). History here takes its role as prophecy, as its revolutionary identities go on to dictate how revolutionary action will be performed. Past and future tense mingle, emphasizing the importance of historical narration, as another member of the Katipunan, Tuadla, adds, "all of Cavite is awed by [Kilat's] knowledge of talismans and already they say perhaps he is Cavitenos not Cebuana already they claim him for their own" (179). Kilat's own story here is revealed to him as a contested narrative, with political investments over his own identity as "Cavitenos," the fabled center of revolutionary agency, or "Cebuana," a province relegated as a revolutionary

passenger. Written in drama form, Tuadla's narrative of Kilat is joined by another Katipunán's, Tanya's, as they rehearse Kilat's story, seeking to best the other in telling the more outrageous tale. They describe Kilat watching Rizal's death, Kilat borrowing a book from the "Supremo" of the Katipunán (Andrés Bonifacio), Kilat stepping into 1984 to assist Robert Aguinaldo in demanding an all-night rock concert, and finally, Kilat back in Cebu to "lead the continuation of the regional uprising there" (185). Through all these events Tanya and Tuadla describe Kilat as looking "dazed," as if he is conscious of their narrative spiriting him through the "rubble" of history, until he is finally sent "back to Cebu to regain some modicum of composure" (183).

When Tanya and Tuadla's voices cease, we are left to the voice of a new narrator, who admits that "nothing was very fully true, except the image of Cebu nearing one as one neared the narrowing corridors of destiny" (190). After Kilat's narrative has been traded from narrator to narrator like a baton, the only sense to make of the narrative is that it cannot be "very fully true," as every individual voice has placed their own spin on Kilat's history. This final narrator reveals himself by revealing Kilat's death: "He knew he would die in a matter of months. We knew he would die. Or at least now we know. I, Robert Aguinaldo, am telling you, anyway." The last to pick up the baton of historical narration, Aguinaldo, narrates the final part of Kilat's life, where he is best known as the revolutionary commander who led the revolt in Cebu and beat the Spanish in the Battle of the 3rd of April (Sicat 117). Aguinaldo, perhaps as a stand-in for Yuson himself, continues to acknowledge his own reimagining of revolutionary history and its prophetic ability to determine revolutionary performance in the future. As Yuson himself alluded to in his response to Sicat's criticisms, what the *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* accomplishes is not the formation of a collective identity through serious historical narration, but

the contribution of a comedic writer who uses irony and absurdity to expose the constructed nature of revolutionary identities, and thus to account for its excess.

In revealing multiple ways of performing revolutionary action, Yuson's novel explores cultural ways of life and discourse that exceed the boundaries dictated by the historical narratives promulgated through revolutionary discourse. I call this stylistic and political gesture transitive because it consciously seeks to manage and reinterpret given multicultural identities, in this case, post-revolutionary identities that have been used to reproduce the same stratified pluralism that has existed for well over a century by taking contemporary form as global multiculturalism. Yuson adds to this understanding of transitive culture by finding revolutionary momentum not in authentic cultural performance, but in the excess of constructed identities, the spilling over of categorical descriptions that occur through the novel's absurd historical narrative of Kilat's libidinal desires, and the revolutionary magic of Filipino and Chinese mythology. Rather than fetishize the "collective identity" of the Philippines itself, *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* exposes revolutionary action as the excess of this imagined identity, the desire, styles and "everyday experiences" that spill over. The heroes of Yuson's text perform revolutionary identity in excessive, ironic ways, marking their inauthenticity despite their revolutionary ends. For Yuson, to write fiction in the post-EDSA period was to reflect a world of irony and farce. As he says, in such a period the writer must be "quixotic," meaning "idealistic and impractical," in order to aspire for a "less exciting and less intrigue-ridden socio-political life" (46). The "excitement" and "intrigue" of political fluctuations in the Philippines seems to have been ineffective in shifting a deeply embedded social hierarchy. In response, Yuson's writer must point towards the farce.

The Revolutionary Housewife

The libidinal desire that catapults Leon Kilat's revolutionary adventures through Philippines history relies, no doubt, upon sexualized Filipina bodies. Yet unlike many novels concerning revolutionary history, these representations do not necessarily—and certainly do not always—depict the Filipina as a national symbol waiting to be rescued by her male counterparts. Rather, Yuson's Filipinas generate revolutionary desire not through their passivity, but by acting as contenders for the masculinizing acts of the male revolutionaries, both evading Kilat's desire to possess them, while at the same time, satisfying their own sexual desires and manipulating Kilat's for their own political ends. Despite Kilat's magical sex drive and heroic deeds, the women seem to react in quite distinct, complex ways, which transfer over into the realm of revolutionary and political participation.

The first female in the narrative, the fisherman's daughter Sisa, eludes Kilat at every turn, and expresses indifference to the masculinizing acts that become his points of pride and virility. As a child, Kilat is whipped by the Spanish parish priests, and retells his story to Sisa:

Sisa, fisherman's daughter, listens impassively as Leon recounts his morning's whipping...Sisa attracted Leon. His laughter would pitch at its most robust and Sisa would still stare out to sea with a calm that came close to idiocy...She looked at other faces, Leon's this moment, then looked out to sea.... Leon thus loved to tell her stories, time and again believing he came close to pricking her repose. (5)

Rather than applaud Kilat's antics, Sisa seems always distracted by a mysterious presence, of what, Kilat never discovers. Perhaps her father, who is a fisherman, or perhaps her mind settles on the islands beyond her own homeland. The mystery that captures her attention challenges Kilat's masculinity, as her meditative repose evades his own expectations for praise, and the

pitch of Kilat's laughter seems an effort to "prick" Sisa's impassivity towards him. In response, Kilat's antics only grow more rebellious, more subversive. When he tries miming mythical tales of Cebu, Sisa simply "absorbs him (thinks Leon), then looks back at the islands" (6). Sisa's indifference to Kilat's stories have the inverse effect, and "prick" Kilat toward more subversive acts.

Sisa's reaction to Kilat contrasts greatly with Kilat's reception by the other women in the novel: Pintada expresses sexual desire towards Kilat but refuses to be monogamous with him; Teresa acts as a passive, receptive subject who unleashes Kilat's libidinal desire towards revolutionary ends; Pilar manipulates and controls Kilat by seducing him, and finally has him assassinated in her tent. These four women, who often undertake revolutionary practices themselves, seem to account for multiple representations of the female revolutionary, while at the same time, expose the limits of the revolutionary "machismo" who must contest colonial power by dominating female bodies. These representations also emphasize that the historical awareness of how cultural identities have been constructed can often ignore the similar function of rigid gender roles. If Yuson's novel unsettles post-revolutionary identities, then they also ask how these post-revolutionary identities are always-already gendered. How can we read Yuson's representations of the revolutionary Filipina in context with the revolutionary history of the Philippines? How can we read this figure with attention to how it has produced a normative Filipina, easily consumable in a market of service labor?

Women's role in revolutionary history bears similarities to the role of rural populations, in that their activity is documented as aggressive, yet their historical position is overshadowed by the increased emphasis on the "machismo" of mestizo revolutionaries in and around Cavite and Manila, who are narrated as the primary agents of revolutionary action. For the western reader,

this absence slips easily toward a critique of Filipino patriarchy. Before leaping to the rejection of Filipino/a cultural norms as patriarchal, it seems crucial to bear in mind Chandra Mohanty's critique of western white feminism as producing third world difference: "that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in ['third world'] countries" (54). For Mohanty, the production of third world difference allows Western feminisms to "appropriate and 'colonize' the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries." The representation of Filipinas in Anglophone literature represents these complexities, yet at the same time, often emphasizes their roles as revolutionary subjects limited to a single identity. As Vicente Rafael has observed in early Filipino plays, women held complex positions that often personified "the beloved nation waiting to be rescued" yet also "generate[d] the conditions that make their rescue both possible and desirable" (2000, 49). Interpreted primarily as mother-figures, these Filipinas marked the Spanish and American colonial states as "illegitimate or unacceptable fathers" (51). While this was one dominant representation of Filipinas, the plays also suggested "alternative roles" and an "ambiguous construction of gender categories" that arose from "the specificity of Filipino notions of kinship historically articulated in relation to the turbulence of war, the revolutionary expectations of freedom (*kalayaan*), and the absence of a stable patriarchal state between 1899 and 1905." For Rafael, early representations of Filipinas projected a notion of the nation as distinct from the state, which allowed audiences to politicize kinship roles towards recognizing forms of social hierarchy induced by the colonial state.

Rafael's suggested interpretation of the passive Filipina "house-wife" as a figure capable of politicization and revolutionary investment seemed to emerge as a dominant interpretation in the EDSA movement of the 1980s. If the 1898 Filipino revolution silenced women's

participation, the 1986 EDSA revolution made it hypervisible. Even though the tradition of revolutionary marching was banned under Marcos, in 1984, the Filipino woman's organization GABRIELA marched over ten-thousand women in Manila to defy Marcos' decree against demonstrations. This march thus set the tone for the marches that would follow and eventually culminate in the EDSA to overthrow Marcos. The women of GABRIELA seemed better able to defy Marcos' brutal regime by reinterpreting their roles as traditional mother-figures who were responsible for directly (or indirectly) running the family unit and business activities, and were given equal importance in tracing lineage. The Filipina mother was thus responsible for reproducing values in the next generation, and often held the moral center of the family unit, operating as a figure of moral arbitration for the nation-state as a whole.

During the publication of *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*, the post-EDSA Philippine government was controlled by the opposition leader, Corazan Aquino, who became the first female president of the Philippines. Known as a revolutionary heroine, Aquino in fact distanced herself from the "machismo" revolutionaries of 1898, and instead proclaimed herself as a "plain housewife," a reputation that contrasted heavily with Imelda Marcos' reputation as an extravagant spendthrift, obsessed with being in the public eye. The interpretation of traditional feminine roles to invoke revolutionary action seemed, by the time Yuson was writing, a cemented and hypervisible marker of revolutionary activity. The post-revolutionary identity of the Filipina mother also made this hypervisible "type" an accepted characteristic of Filipinas, leaving the way for Filipina women to be "house-wives" in the sense of producing revolutionary values, but also in the sense of becoming a legible labor force culturally positioned towards domestic labor and nursing. As Robyn Rodriguez has pointed out, labeling revolutionary mother-figures as "heroic" has enabled the Filipino state, via Corazan Aquino, to characterize "out-

migration as "heroic" and to portray "international migration as a voluntary act of self-sacrificing individuals living in a democratic society rather than a kind of forced conscription under a dictatorial regime" (84). Yuson's female characters, through their receptivity, indifference and manipulation of sexual desire, reverse this type of the revolutionary housewife, and rather account for multiple forms of Filipina revolutionary practice, though in the novel, they are seen through the lens of the libidinal male gaze.

In the context of post-EDSA feminine visibility, Yuson imagines women still as revolutionary actors, but projects this figure as distinct from the affective, revolutionary housewife that was held up as the mother-figure for the nation. In Yuson's novel women are not national representations, but are sexual figures that generate libidinal excess towards revolutionary ends. Of the four women who guide Kilat—Sisa, Pintada, Teresa, and Pilar—none advocate traditional Spanish values, but generate revolutionary desire through their sexualized bodies, and not one of them is a mother or a housewife. When after many sexual encounters Kilat asks Pintada to be his wife, she responds "you shall. As all the others have" (41). Kilat's attempt to domesticate Pintada as the (revolutionary) housewife, who would support him and teach him to embrace revolutionary values, is here evaded to unsettle notions of the monogamous family unit. Her presence later in the jungle café as a revolutionary handing out pamphlets for GABRIELA also positions her as an agent of revolutionary practice herself, rather than just a domesticated moral arbiter. Pilar seduces Kilat towards the Katipunans, enjoining him into a revolutionary cause only to assassinate him. Despite Kilat's foreknowledge of this event (since he can see through history), he decides that his death is a fair exchange for fulfilling his lust for Pilar: "Your rose is all. Your rose, senorita, I dangle my guitar for, I twirl my cape, parry the sword, meet the dagger for. Pilar. Last woman of my life I surrender to as warriors must to

the last lust is holy now” (197). The libidinal excess that helped to invoke Kilat's heroism against the Spanish here leads him to his own assassination. Pilar's manipulation of Kilat's desire suggests a shift in revolutionary agency. He "surrenders" to Pilar, his libidinal "weapon" now at her disposal, imagining that "we were like lovers," and repeating the phrase thirteen times without punctuation breaks, convincing himself of her love for him, until "the assassin came stealthily into the room" (199).

When Kilat finally has sex with Pilar, knowing that he will be assassinated because of it, he associates the sex act with trans-historical revolutionary fervor:

the eyes, goddammit I wasn't born yesterday but the eyes, yes, oh fiery, feline,
 fucking feminist eyes, Viva Espana! Remember the Maine! Remember the Alamo!
 Abajo los Moros! Animo San Beda! Arriba Letran! Viva Mapua! La Salle Ateneo
 Jose Rizal!

Kilat invokes the great battle cries of the past century in his lovemaking, each from a war between American and Hispanicized forces—the Spanish-American war, the battle of the Alamo, and the Moro rebellion that would begin just after Kilat's death. Yet the rallying cries that begin in Kilat's libidinal excess slips towards cries for university sports teams that, in Manila, are held with great esteem. The colleges that host these teams, the San Beda, Letran, Mapua, La Salle and Ateneo were created by colonial regimes and are today still the top private universities where future presidents are expected to attend. Indeed, the libidinal excess that has so far been critical to Kilat's success as a revolutionary hero gets quickly distracted towards other feverish goals and attitudes. The de-railing of libidinal excess here is pronounced further by Pilar's betrayal of Kilat, when after he is killed by the assassin she has bargained with, she runs "through the almost-dawn with her theatrical screams faked" (199). Pilar's complicity with imperial power seems reinforced

by her mestizo background, just as Pintada's sexual freedom reflects her "Indios" background. When political interests collide, Pilar is able to defeat the heroic Kilat by performing the role of the passive female body.

Despite Yuson's attempt to rewrite women's participation as different from the relegated affective "housewife," as with Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, the privilege of historical distancing and interpretation seems like a man's game. The banana charm that gives Kilat his power to transcend time and construct a transitive culture, built through the self-conscious posing and managing of identities, is given only to Buhawi, Kilat and Robert Aguinaldo. Though the novel's women are not merely passive as revolutionaries, they remain uninvited to the privileged, neutral imagined space from which ethnic identities can be managed. Their position in Yuson's novel is as aggressive historical participants who generate the very desire for revolution and subversive behavior, which is perhaps a reflection of the hypervisible aggression of women's political involvement before and during EDSA. This representation of women's role as participants reimagines female revolutionary fervor in a way that cannot be co-opted towards the overseas worker projects of the Filipino state and of private brokerage agencies that rely on notions of the caring Filipina mother-figure, an easily consumable identity type for first-world consumers. Rather than be relegated towards an international division of labor that sees Filipinas as passive, motherly and caring, Yuson's novel allows us to trace identity management through the relationship between the "nationalist" imperial project of the Filipino state and the transnational imperial project. Like in Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, the position of the "neutral" universalist power, once assumed by the British and the Americans, has been overtaken by the multiculturalist male elite. In the next chapter, I expand upon this discussion through the Filipino American author Peter Bacho's novel *Cebu*. Through *Cebu*, I explore global multiculturalism

where the Filipina migrant is given attributes of care, love and duty, in order to relegate her to the bottom of an international division of labor.

Chapter 3

The Southeast Asian Migrant in Space of Liberal Tolerance:

Satire and Reciprocity in Peter Bacho's *Cebu* and Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence*

In Peter Bacho's first novel *Cebu* (1991), Ben Lucero, a Filipino American priest living in Seattle, makes his first trip to the Philippines to bury his deceased mother. While discovering his "roots" in Cebu and Manila, Ben witnesses surges of religious and political violence that prompt his quick retreat from the poverty and corruption of the Philippines back to the "order" and "sanctuary" of Seattle (133). Literary scholars like Elizabeth Pisares interpret Ben's retreat as an escape from his own social debt to the Philippines, that Ben "evades what he perceives as a foreign Filipino discourse represented by *utang na loob*, or reciprocal indebtedness" (80). Yet Ben's return can also be seen as a way of paying off a different social debt: his debt to the Pacific Northwest for providing a space of liberal tolerance. Throughout the novel, Ben shows gratitude toward the Northwest for providing a space where violence, corruption, and poverty are distanced into the Filipino homeland.

Despite Ben's imagined separation from violence, in the novel's second half the Filipino migrants living in Seattle become entangled in cycles of revenge and murder that rupture Ben's imagined spatial and historic distance from violence in the Philippines. To pay off his debt to both his host country and the homeland, Ben performs as the Asian American model minority, and encourages his Filipino congregation to do the same by abandoning their diasporic cultural practices, which he reads as gang violence in the case of Filipino men, and sexual promiscuity in

the case of Filipinas. Ben sees such practices, such as loyalty to one's *barkada* (their peer group and community) as cultural attitudes that are intolerable to the Northwest's multicultural social space because they foster religious ignorance and gang violence. As murders continue to pile up in Seattle's 1980's International District and migrant Filipinos are thrown into cycles of revenge, Ben identifies the violence as a Filipino cultural aberration, discovering "something in [Filipino] culture, however diluted it was by life in America, that allowed wild swings in cruelty and compassion, that...tolerated, even glorified, violence" (149). As a US-born Filipino American, Ben sees Filipino culture as promoting a level of violence that "life in America" must "dilute." When the murders and beat-downs in Seattle become so overwhelming that Ben cannot escape into his "aesthetic afternoon" at the Cascade mountain range (165), his impulse is to interpret the violence as a diasporic remnant of the Filipino homeland: "Ben wondered how many more would die before the killing would run its course. He feared the worst. He knew how Filipinos could nurture hatred, black and seemingly eternal, treating it like a pet sore to be scratched routinely to keep it from healing" (157). "Hatred" and "killing" here become innate characteristics of the Filipino "fresh off the boat" migrant, a diasporic residue left over from the homeland that might affect other Asian Americans like Ben's childhood friend Teddy, who "was like [the Filipinos], and Ben was afraid that, at his own deepest core, he was too" (157).

Published in 1991, *Cebu* considers how spaces of liberal tolerance were imagined during a national peak in violent crime and the rapid expansion of the prison industrial complex³. While the novel depicts an American "culture of violence" that seems generated through police indifference, South Seattle segregation, economic inequality, and the afterlife of the Philippine-

³ Steven D. Levitt charts the growth of homicide rates in urban cities as beginning in 1980 and peaking between 1990 and 1993.

American War, World War II, and Vietnam, Ben Lucero ignores these structural and political causes to instead blame the migrants themselves for choosing to retain intolerable versions of their culture. In order to continue a narrative of liberal tolerance that always posits itself as the bastion of multiculturalism, Ben must locate violence within the migrant's choice to retain a particularly intolerable cultural form, rather than within the political sphere, concluding at last that it is up to the individual to overcome his intolerable way of life. Bacho's portrayal of a religious Filipino American attempting to remain a "good boy" (or a good Asian American) provides readers with an understanding of liberal tolerance as a de-radicalizing ideology, one that Ben accepts in order to fulfill his own social debts to the "haven" of the Pacific Northwest (12).

This chapter investigates how two Asian American texts, Peter Bacho's *Cebu* and Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence*, allow us to read liberal tolerance as an ideological formation that secures violence within the cultural diaspora. In doing so, liberal tolerance represses histories that might foster political radicalism by blaming violence on the individual who chooses to retain an intolerable version of the culture. I define "intolerable" as imagined cultural practices that cross a "tolerance threshold," an imagined barrier between the "intolerable" and "tolerable" cultural practices that arise when racialized subjects are no longer "kept in their place" through segregation. Rather than assert racialized spatial boundaries, "tolerance thresholds" draw cultural boundaries for what is deemed "tolerable," thus reshaping boundaries of exclusion based on cultural performance. As Etienne Balibar defines it, tolerance thresholds "maintain 'cultural distances,' ... in accordance with the postulate that individuals are the exclusive heirs and bearers of a single culture" (22-23). I will read these novels as satires that expose the gaze of the liberal, tolerant reader, and open up new ways of seeing how tolerance

thresholds create imagined barriers between "intolerable" and "tolerable" cultural practices. For both novels, a concept of the migrant as the representation of an "intolerable" culture compels the Asian American/Canadian protagonists to re-present an authentic homeland in contrast to the "tolerant" spaces of Seattle Washington and Vancouver British Columbia. Bacho's and Kwa's novels expose the limits of liberal tolerance by representing them from the point of view of the migrant subject, where social affects of reciprocity, such as guilt, shame and debt, push the migrant to reinforce the multiculturalist exceptionalism of the United States by performing the "good" and "grateful" Asian American, while seeking to "rescue" other migrants.

Both texts consider how marking "third world" spaces and their diasporas as intolerant is characteristic of forms of liberal tolerance in the Pacific Northwest, and can be seen as a unique form of multicultural governance. In *Cebu*, Seattle's migrant Filipinos are defined by their arbitrary violence and their choice to continue performing an intolerable cultural form. It is this choice that makes liberal tolerance unique, as Chua Beng Huat says of liberal multiculturalism, because it "insists on the 'freedom to choose' as a basic right of an individual" (2005, 171). By continuing to consider multicultural forms in post-colonial Southeast Asia, I hope to see multiculturalism in the United States as a unique racial formation produced through the intersection of imperial biopolitical strategies as practiced in the Philippines, and the American tradition of cultural pluralism as expressed by John Dewey, Horace Kallen and the anti-segregationists of the civil rights movement.

I make a case to read these novels as satires to forego notions of ethnic authenticity that continue to dominate how ethnic literature is read, and to emphasize how satire can produce a transitive culture that departs from multiculturalist identities. Transitive cultures emerge as a

reaction to confining multiculturalist categories, which are unable to incorporate the imperial and complex histories of Anglophone cultures. Transitive culture, like a transitive verb, highlights cultural identity as self-fashioning by positioning the migrant between one subject (him or herself) and infinite conditions or possibilities, yet transitive culture is also imagined as a sustainable cultural form that maneuvers through, rather than directly against, given multicultural identities and categorizations. My first chapter considered how transitive cultures in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* interpret and manage multicultural identities, and expose the inauthenticity of such identities by noting the imperial gaze that both produces and demands them. In my second chapter, I built on this notion by introducing how such transitive cultures can also carry radicalizing and revolutionary potential through exposing how multiculturalist categories simultaneously fetishize and depoliticize resistant identities. Alfred Yuson's *The Great Philippines Jungle Energy Café* showed how transitive cultures posited multiple types of revolutionary identities, most in excess of revolutionary narratives from the Filipino state as well as the West. This chapter continues this inquiry by exploring how transitive culture emerges in North America in a context of liberal tolerance, when Asian Americans/Canadians are conscripted into multiculturalist identities through social affects of reciprocity, such as gratitude and social debt, that incorporate and de-politicize Asian American antiracist critique.

Both *Cebu* and *This Place Called Absence* foreground affects of reciprocity, such as guilt and gratitude, as entanglements in ideologies of liberal tolerance, with political and social consequences. Through the point of view of the second-generation Filipino American, Bacho's *Cebu* explores how the inherited diasporic disposition towards fulfilling social reciprocity, which demands that the migrant "pay-back" the host and home country, can also function to contain

acts of racial violence within a diaspora's homogenized, re-imagined culture. In *Cebu*, such inherited social debt drives Ben to satisfy both his debt to the homeland and his debt to the host country by "uplifting" the Filipino migrant. In *This Place Called Absence*, the fetishization of the queer sex worker allows the Asian Canadian protagonist to pay off a social debt toward her homeland, while at the same time, allows her to occupy a resistant position that can only be articulated through occupying a tolerable and politically passive queer identity. Both novels portray how liberal tolerance merges both of these social debts—the debt to the homeland and the debt to the host country—by directing them towards a common goal: the development and rescue of the “intolerable” cultural other, whose histories and diasporic ties allow their incorporation only as exemplars of an "arbitrary violence" that must be repressed and managed by the "legitimate violence" of the state (Reddy 37-38).

I continue to categorize these "Asian American" and "Asian Canadian" texts as Southeast Asian Anglophone texts to provide an alternative to nationalist canons that mark successful Asian migrants as living proof of multicultural success. Such nationalist readings buttress liberal tolerance and have shaped the limits of Asian American literary form towards expressing a primarily nationalist reading, which sees social critiques as desires for further political or representational incorporation within the US. In categorizing texts as "Japanese American" or "Chinese American," often readers assume that the protagonist is expressing an authentic ethnic voice, which in turn allows the (white) reader to occupy a "neutral" gaze while considering the "particular" point of view of the Asian migrant. As Lisa Lowe has pointed out, Asian American novels can disassemble multiculturalist identities by exploring the heterogeneity of the Asian American subject, making the "'disidentification' from national forms of identity... crucial to the

construction of new forms of solidarity" (53). Yet in a context of liberal tolerance, such "disidentification" from the nation-state can be used to produce diasporic Asian American identities that are seen as "resistant," but in practice, are politically passive and managed through imagined tolerance thresholds. While reading for an authentic diasporic identity can be useful in contexts where narratives of assimilation still dominate racial representations, the Pacific Northwest, as a regional space, is rather constructed as a space of multiculturalism rather than assimilation, where notions of "authentically Filipino" or "authentically Chinese" can work to conflate race, culture and ethnicity, and to decide what cultural forms can and cannot be tolerated. Pushing against the grain of liberal tolerance, I read these novels as satires that reveal how ideologies of liberal tolerance affect Southeast Asians Anglophones and encourage them to practice "tolerable" diasporic identities. As liberal tolerance in the United States is supported by a highly valued history of civil rights, the critiques within these narratives appear implicit and satirical, and can best be exposed by reading against the tendency to see their protagonists as "authentic."

When depicted as "tolerable" diasporic identities, Asian Americans become essential to forming ideologies of liberal tolerance, as their very presence and cultural expression can be held up as success stories that reinforce notions of individual choice and responsibility. Read as satires, these novels expose how the Southeast Asian Anglophone gets interpellated into performing such an identity through affects of reciprocity towards both the homeland and the host country. Social reciprocity helps to construct spaces of liberal tolerance in a way that represses political involvement, co-opts Asian American cultural production, and normalizes an imperialist attitude towards communities and peoples considered intolerable.

The Pacific Northwest as a Space of Liberal Tolerance

Since at least the mid-1980s, the Pacific Northwest has gained a reputation as a place of technological and corporate success, as well as a place of tolerance, progressivism, and multiculturalism. The region has become a constructed space where liberal tolerance has met its ideological ideal in both masking institutionalized racism and positing the Northwest as a multicultural haven for middle and upper-class migrants. The Northwest's largest urban centers, Seattle, Portland, and Vancouver BC, have long been seen as centers of liberal tolerance, even as the US census consistently ranks Seattle and Portland as among the whitest cities in the United States⁴. This social construction characterizes a "liberal valley" zone west of the Cascades that reaches from Ashland, Eugene and Portland Oregon to Olympia, Tacoma, and Seattle Washington, ending finally in Vancouver, British Columbia. Though demographically the "liberal valley" may be nearly seventy percent white, these metropolitan cities do not seem adverse to supporting people of color in prominent political and economic positions: The African American candidate, Norm Rice, was elected Mayor of Seattle for two terms from 1989-1997, and Washington's Chinese American Governor, Gary Locke, had wide popularity throughout the 1990s.

Forms of popular media have also had a hand in constructing the Pacific Northwest as a space of liberal tolerance. The popular sketch-comedy show "Portlandia," for example, mocks Portland's organic-food and indie culture, while the highly successful sitcom "Frasier" (1993-2004) portrays a practical, retired Seattle police officer who must constantly bear witness to the

⁴ According to the Seattle Times, "In Seattle, 66 percent of all residents" consider themselves "non-Hispanic white" (Turnball). In Portland, it is 72 percent, the highest in the country.

liberal and elitist antics of his two sons. Similarly, conservative pundits have labeled the Pacific Northwest as an outpost for liberal progressivism. In 2005 the Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly, once an anchor in Portland, named Portland the center of the "secular progressive agenda," an anti-religious movement with programs for "legalization of narcotics, euthanasia, abortion at will, [and] gay marriage" ("O'Reilly"). As the term "secular progressive" may be insulting in conservative contexts, it is celebrated in the Pacific Northwest, as the region boasts the highest number of atheists and agnostics per capita in North America⁵. To stress its economic power, the "liberal valley" has also been called "Cascadia" both by tourist campaigns and politicians who propose "Cascadia" as a region unique from both Canada and the United States in its environmental protection, leftist politics, and its corporate and technological success. "Cascadia" names a region that, after succession, would be among the top twenty economies in the world (Preston). Seattle alone boasts of having an economy larger than Venezuela (Chan).

The liberal tolerance of the Pacific Northwest also gives the region a veneer of anti-racist politics, as it is often contrasted to more "racist" spaces like Arizona and the segregated South. This narrative masks histories of racial violence and exclusion within the region, such as Oregon's exclusion laws and militant labor movements that targeted migrants. From 1847-1927, Oregon excluded black migrants from the state, with punishments for settlement ranging from its infamous "Lash Law" (requiring that black settlers be whipped twice a year) to forced labor (slavery in all but name) (McLagan). In the late nineteenth century, anti-Chinese race riots occurred in Vancouver, Seattle, Tacoma, Oregon, and Idaho, some so violent that federal troops

⁵ Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk have named the Pacific Northwest the "none zone," in reference to the amount of people who check the "none" box in religious affiliation. In addition to the "none" box, Killen and Silk also point out that the region is home to "the lowest level of illiteracy in the nation (13.5 percent of adults without a high school degree), and a relatively high level of advanced education (26.6 percent with a bachelor's degree)" (26). Also, compared to the rest of the country, "a larger percentage of the workforce is employed in professional and managerial occupations."

were brought in to suppress anti-immigrant mobs (Laurie 22). In the early twentieth century, the Asian Exclusion League, formed in 1905 from over 67 labor unions, gained influence from San Francisco to Vancouver, BC, segregating schools, pushing Canada's exclusion laws (McMahon, 23), and organizing riots against Sikhs, Hindus, and Chinese in Bellingham, Everett, and Vancouver ("Two-Day"). From the 1910s through the 1960s, Seattle neighborhoods practiced overt racial segregation through white-only clauses in property deeds. From the 1960s until 2006, this segregation became implicitly practiced through redlining tactics that lasted in Washington State until 2006, when Senate Bill 6169 allowed homeowner associations to remove "white only" clauses and other racial restrictions in their historic covenants and bylaws (Silva). While Seattle media boasts that Seattle contains the most diverse zip-code in the United States (98118), it can only do so by ignoring the long history of South Seattle segregation and poverty that has forced migrants and communities of color to live separate from the wealthier and white-dominated neighborhoods in the north (Gertsch).

The contemporary construction of the Pacific Northwest as multicultural and tolerant was formed largely in the 1980s, when the term "multiculturalism" gained credibility in public discourse to signify the integration not only of racial bodies, but of marginalized histories, literatures, and cultures in education and popular representations. By 1980, the U.S. 1965 Immigration Act had been in effect for twelve years, and had eliminated restrictions based on national origin, but added provisions that increasingly preferred upper-class "skilled" migrants. Similarly, the Canada 1976 Immigrant Act did away with categories of people based on nationality or sexuality, and redefined "inadmissible classes" as persons who could become a

burden on social welfare or health programs⁶. Both Acts have allowed the post-1976 Pacific Northwest to take in highly-skilled IT industry work and professionalized labor from abroad within a climate of multiculturalism, tolerance and consumer-ethics. The high visibility of imported labor from Asia to companies like Microsoft, Amazon, Boeing, and the plethora of small software and biotech companies, has allowed cities like Seattle to appear multicultural and diverse, despite the underrepresentation of blacks, Latinos, and Southeast Asian Americans in businesses and universities⁷.

The pairing of liberal tolerance with multinational corporate dominance puts the Pacific Northwest in a curious position in terms of radical politics. As multiculturalist ideals were challenged and formed in the "culture wars" of the late 1970s and 1980s, it became clear that new measures and rubrics would be needed to arbitrate what type of cultural practices would be encouraged, and which ones would be deemed too radical, violent, or unsettling. Canada's discourse of multiculturalism has risen to heights only implicitly imagined in the United States and has been described as "the most successful pluralist society on the face of our globe" (Stackhouse). Larissa Lai, a writer and professor of English at the University of British Columbia, writes of Vancouver as the exemplary pluralist society, as such multiculturalism has efficiently de-politicized cultural politics so that "the radical and productive aspects of [identity politics] have been largely contained, and...what remains effective is its conservatizing function" (138).

⁶ Section 19 of Canada's 1976 Immigration Act restricts those " whose admission would cause or might reasonably be expected to cause excessive demands, within the meaning assigned to that expression by the regulations, on health or prescribed social services" as well as "persons who there are reasonable grounds to believe are or will be unable or unwilling to support themselves and those persons who are dependent on them for care and support."

⁷ Most of Seattle's minority populations are socially segregated in the lower-income southeast districts ("Seattle's Population"). According to the 2001 Gender and Minority Inclusion Tables, only 2.3% of University of Washington students were African American, and only 3.3% were Latino ("Gender").

The political philosopher Horace Kallen, in a 1957 essay on Alain Locke, attempted to articulate the form and scale of the "cultural pluralism" model he had advocated over three decades earlier. For Kallen, the practice of cultural pluralism relied on conceptualizing liberal tolerance as four separate phases, beginning with *cold toleration*, signaled by a "balance of power" where individuals "stand over against each other at alert and ready to shoot," and ending with *cooperation*, "a voluntary cooperative relationship where each, in living on, also helps, and is helped by, the others in living" (1971, 126). For Kallen, this final movement toward cooperation was the basic appeal of cultural pluralism as advocated by himself and Alain Locke, two scholars who sought to overturn the restrictive 1924 Immigration Act and Jim Crow segregation (Kallen 1924, xxxiv). Today, the differences in degrees of tolerance seem to obscure the asymmetrical power relations implied in cultural pluralism. Rather than have a privileged majority tolerate the non-Anglo Saxon cultural practices of a disadvantaged minority, as Kallen and Locke might have it, tolerance today implies an already equal "balance of power" that motivates groups to tolerate each other in the mutual desire to go on living. This particularly liberal take on tolerance, as Wendy Brown points out, depoliticizes the subject by burdening the individual "with self-making, agency, and a relentless responsibility for itself" (17). The "subject of tolerance" here shares equal blame and responsibility for producing an atmosphere of tolerance, despite differences in class, race, gender, or other positions that leave the individual more vulnerable to social oppression.

In his 1965 essay "Repressive Tolerance," Herbert Marcuse saw the emerging post-civil rights discourse of tolerance as producing values based on friendship and cooperation that were too ill-defined, and that could be easily appropriated towards legitimating state violence and

capitalist exploitation. In his essay, Marcuse insists that a state-condoned “passive tolerance” encourages citizens to “tolerate the government, which in turn tolerates opposition within the framework determined by the constituted authorities” (34). For Marcuse, tolerance acts as a mode of governance that allows state repression by promoting passivity and non-aggression within a constructed utopian space. This ideology is at its worse when “false tolerance” is combined with “business and publicity,” since the desire to tolerate cultural difference could easily be “extended to policies, conditions, and modes of behavior which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery” (45). The degrees to which a society tolerates policies or even cultural difference, for Marcuse, is decided less by the degree of difference and more on whether or not that difference “serves the cohesion of the whole on the road to affluence or more affluence.” For a cultural practice or policy to be “tolerated,” then, requires that it also be profitable, or otherwise incorporable into a consumable product. Similarly for Brown, such discourses of tolerance function today as a “retreat from more substantive visions of justice” and are “part of a more general depoliticization of citizenship and power and retreat from political life itself” (89). In being nestled among liberal discourses such as individualism and market rationality, tolerance is able to mask “its own operation as a discourse of power and a technology of governance” (19). Tolerance in the United States then can be called particularly “liberal” since, as the Canadian sociologist Will Kymlicka has put it, liberalism of the West takes the individual as its object and emphasizes individual liberty, rather than the “hypercommunitarian” model of group rights, common in Singapore and Malaysia (1996, 96).

Liberal tolerance acts not as means to an end, but as the utopic end point to multiculturalism, aiming to transform social relations towards an end to divisive conflict. For Brown, the cultivation of tolerance as a political end implicitly constitutes "a rejection of politics as a domain in which conflict can be productively articulated and addressed, a domain in which citizens can be transformed by their participation" (89). Until this endpoint is reached, visible modes of inequality such as social segregation, police brutality, and a racist prison industrial complex seem like mere aberrations. Thus, keeping tolerance from this utopic endpoint are "intolerable" others, who make easy scapegoats, but whose presence also continues to test and expose the tolerance thresholds constantly being rewritten by tolerance discourse. For Chandan Reddy, where there is a presumed "true equality" among a national people, the state has "the ethical role of enforcing truly legitimate violence, of becoming the representative and material expression of that violence" (11). This anti-American violence is, on the one hand, "defined as that falling outside the core value of the national people and the US state (namely, tolerance)," and on the other hand, "has the unique character of being the defining limits of what can be tolerated" (11). While the "tolerable" category functions to produce cultural practices that can be commodified or made profitable, the "intolerable" is characterized by those cultural practices that lead to violence, and must be managed by the more legitimate violence of the state.

Cebu: Satire and Liberal Tolerance

What marks the Pacific Northwest as a unique space is not merely the erasure of racial and class inequality, but is also the visibility of successful Asian Americans that buttress the narrative of liberal tolerance. As the historian Quintard Taylor has pointed out, the history of

exclusion and segregation in the Pacific Northwest and Seattle specifically does not exemplify the American black/white racial binary, but demonstrates a "multi-racial and multi-ethnic" demographic pattern that includes Asian Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans (402). In Seattle, Japanese constituted the largest racial minority until World War II, yet despite the repeated denial of Japanese citizenship and the history of Japanese internment camps in Puyallup, Portland, and Tule Lake, Japanese American and Asian American success has been emphasized within a narrative that see racial injustices as a thing of the past (401).

In her book *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe points out that nationalist novels often follow a bildungsroman form, where the protagonist succeeds in becoming a national citizen-subject by relinquishing “particularity and difference through identification with an idealized ‘national’ form of subjectivity” (98). This typical form is inverted in many Asian American novels, where difference becomes hyper-visible, and a homogenized “ethnic tradition” becomes celebrated as a symbol of progress and multiculturalism. Yet as the scholars Viet Nguyen, Tina Chen, and Jeffrey Partridge have pointed out, such Asian American novels reinforce narratives of tolerance when marketed as authentic gateways to a homogenized ethnic subject. In doing so, many Asian American narratives are assumed to hold an autobiographical or socio-historical dimension, inviting the reader to examine the Asian American subject.⁸

In her book *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Jodi Melamed writes that the liberal multiculturalism of the 1980s traces a genealogy of official, state-recognized antiracisms since World War II, each of which utilized ethnic or "race" novels

⁸ The literary scholar Jeffrey Partridge, in his book, *Beyond Literary Chinatown*, analyzes marketing techniques for Asian American novels, and highlights themes of transportation and hidden demons that hold their source in the family's past (8).

in order to de-politicize radical antiracisms and to mark the U.S. as an exceptional imperial power. Melamed traces a period of racial liberalism that emerged after World War II, with the moral shifts that occurred in the defeat of Germany and Japan. The U.S. state then attempted to posit itself as the pluralist power during the Cold War by remaking U.S. culture so that "white Americans would lose their habit of prejudice and African Americans would be seen as culturally embodying the U.S. nation," and to attest "the racially inclusive nature of U.S. citizenship" (22). Yet this narrative of the U.S. as "the antiracist savior of the free world" was challenged in the early 1970s in the emergence of multiple ethnic nationalisms (Chicano/as, Asian Americans, Native Americans), the appearance of new migrant groups after both the 1965 Immigration Act and the Vietnam War, and the transnational capitalist development targeting the global South. All of these changes demanded a revision of pluralist social formations that could account for multiple minority groups desiring equal recognition, while at the same time, maintain a social hierarchy that continued to organize populations through forms of recognizable cultural difference. The desire of ethnic nationalist groups to be recognized equally by state institutions thus provided a capitalist managerial class with the ability to organize divisions of labor and methods of consumption based on these very recognized identity types. For Melamed, this began an era of liberal multiculturalism in the 1980s, which provided "new terms of social solidarity" that effectively (but not totally) de-politicized radical anti-racist critiques by encouraging cultural difference through discourses of empowerment, tolerance, and consumerism (2006, 27). This shift was cemented through literary texts, especially those by African Americans and Asian Americans, which were used as "a cultural technology to make antiracist knowledges productive" (27). Thus by presuming ethnic literature to be "authentic, intimate, and

representative," literary texts were tied to an ideology of American multiculturalist exceptionalism.

Against the narrative of multiculturalist exceptionalism, many Asian American scholars, teachers, and activists read Asian American literature by emphasizing what Viet Nguyen has called a "resistant" or "bad subject:" characters who are encouraged by "an ideological belief that Asian American is only a place of ethnic consensus and resistance to an inherently exploitative or destructive capitalism" (11). In practice, this occurs by valorizing Asian American characters and writers, such as John Okada, who consciously rebelled against the status quo and exposed the racist practices of the so-called "pluralist" nation-state. Yet for Nguyen, the valorization of the "bad subject" can often produce a false, idealized vision of radical change encapsulated within the diasporic ties of migrant cultures. This depiction smuggles along the assumption that by retaining parts of their homeland, the Asian American acts as a fetishized loci of anti-state, anti-capitalist resistance. Though this "bad subject" pushes against the dominant stereotypes of Asian Americans as model minorities, it also evades the structurally significant role that Asian Americans play in reinforcing multicultural governance through the representation of Asian American success, and continues to assume that Asian American novels represent authentic gateways to understanding (and thus managing) Asian American subjectivity. Rather than emphasize the role of Asian Americans in legitimating notions of "choice" and "self-making" inherent in liberal tolerance, the "bad subject" allows "Asian Americanness" to take a position of passive resistance, where the identity "Asian American" becomes in-itself a resistant, anti-state and anti-capitalist position. This fetishization of Asian American identity has allowed literary scholars to speak of Asian American cultural

production itself as resistant or critical of the U.S. state, despite the fact that much Asian American cultural expression, in the form of religious, political and diasporic media, allies with the U.S. state rather than against it, and much popular Asian American literary production is self-orientalizing.

I hope to avoid reading Asian American novels as either authentic voices or as idealizing resistant figures, and instead to read these texts as social satires, wherein the protagonist is ridiculed for their idealism in order to reveal ideological boundaries and to provoke social change. Read as an authentic representation of Filipino American identity, Bacho's *Cebu* insists that Seattle, left to its American values, is a space of liberal tolerance, free of racial violence and oppression. Read as satire, however, Ben Lucero becomes a figure much like Voltaire's *Candide*, and naively believes that the Pacific Northwest is the "best of all possible worlds" while blaming all violence and exploitation on the cultural differences within "fresh off the boat" Filipino migrants. Ben's attitude towards the "FOB"s is integral to the satire because it reiterates the attitudes of whites towards earlier generations of Filipino migrants who arrived on the West Coast to replace other Asian migrants after the 1917 "Asiatic Barred Zone" Immigration Act. At the time, Filipinos were exceptions to Asian exclusion Acts, since as colonial subjects they were considered "nationals" and "were not required to possess passports to enter the United States" (Fujita-Rony 17). This did not keep them from being marked as hypersexual and violent, a stereotype that Ben Lucero incorporates in his own view of Filipinos. It is important to note that Bacho's *Cebu* can and has been read as both an authentic representation and as a social satire. One can merely observe contradictory Amazon.com reviews, where one reviewer claims that Bacho's novel "provides an intimate look into the distant, brash, and passionate demeanor of the

Filipino psyche," while another reviewer claims "Peter Bacho's book made me laugh out loud ... His dry sense of humor is just the right touch" ("Cebu [Paperback]"). The novel's ambiguous narrative style allows critiques to emerge through satirical readings.

The novel's satire comes strongest in its representation of the Philippines as a land of temptation that Ben must resist in order to sustain his Catholic faith. In Cebu City, where Ben's "American sense of order was offended by Cebu's chaos and pollution," Ben sees the body of a man who has crucified himself (77). Ben's shock at this event is infused with a sense of cultural superiority as he calls Filipino Catholicism a "superstition passing for religion" (95). This event, which becomes the catalyst for the action of the novel, satirizes the view of the Filipino American tourist, since the first one-third of the novel details the violence of World War II that has led up to this crucifixion. Unlike Ben, the reader knows that the crucified man, Carlito, does not intend to die on the cross, but only does so because his friends run from fright before he asks to be taken down. The reader also knows that Carlito's crucifixion comes from the desire to be "*mahimo man*" (to become even) with God (44), sacrificing his own life so that his granddaughter might survive her Leukemia: "[Carlito's] only comfort was that soon it would end, and his pact—his negotiation with God—would be sealed" (66). The reader also knows that the hill where Carlito crucifies himself is also where he helped torture a Korean soldier who, as a colonial subject himself, fought for the Japanese army. Carlito cut off the man's limbs in revenge for the soldier's murder of an infant. The hill is thus a symbol of the violence of World War II, a place where "so much blood was spilled it was said to have colored the ground, giving it a reddish hue that not even the monsoons nor the passage of time and the erosion of memory could erase" (46). Despite the book's detailed historical account leading up to Carlito's crucifixion, Ben

reacts by calling it "fundamentally antireligious" and struggles to understand "what it was within Catholicism, or maybe culture, that drove Carlito to his death" (87).

The aftermath of Carlito's crucifixion leaves Ben so disoriented in Cebu City that he retreats to Manila, a city he hopes will be more civilized. Yet like Cebu, Manila too comes to represent a land of violence and sin when Ben succumbs to the temptation of his Aunt's secretary, the ex-sex worker Ellen, and then encounters violence once again in a state crackdown on a protest against the American embassy. The protest seems to recall the 1970 student protests against the United States for backing the Marcos regime and for continuing an imperialist war against the Vietnamese. Such protests, known as the First Quarter Storm, led to the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 (Ileto 1993, 72). Yet in the novel, Ben sees the protests as simply confirming the violent culture of the Philippines. When the protest breaks into a riot, Ben finds "a young boy, dead," and a man shot below the rib cage (Bacho 131). As Ben attempts to perform the last rites on the dying man, the man recognizes him from the hotel where he slept with Ellen, and in his last breath, the man tells Ben to go fetch "a real priest" (132). From Ben's own point-of-view, the violence of the Philippines—manifest through Carlito's the complex act of crucifixion and the protest against American hegemony in the region—is not a result of historical events, but is simply innate to Filipino culture. Feeling corrupted by this culture, Ben flees back to the "sanctuary" of the Pacific Northwest (133).

When *Cebu* is read as satire, the sin and violence of the Philippines appears less like an ethnographic fact and more as a commentary on the Filipino American Ben, whose Asian American identity is partially constructed through distinguishing himself from Filipino/as and Filipino/a migrants. The novel's very form seems to betray any semblance of an authentic

portrayal, since the first third of the novel barely features Ben at all, but concerns Filipinos during the Japanese Occupation, while the second third follows Ben's naïve and ahistorical interpretation of contemporary violence in the Philippines. Ben's experience at the student protest of the US Embassy plays into this satire, as Ben seems to foil the real-life Catholic priest, Edicio dela Torre, who was also present at the protests, but unlike Ben, was influenced by protestors' political courage to speak for the student movement, moving his political ties "from Christian reformist movements to the Communist Party" (Ileto 1993, 175). While Ben's position as a priest offers him the same possibilities, he instead interprets the movement in the same way the state-run Philippine media would, identifying it "with violence, pure disorder," and its participants as "gullible, immature youth" (177).

The stakes of *Cebu* as a satire become clear in the last third of the novel when Ben arrives back in Seattle and is faced the "gang warfare" of Seattle's Chinatown. Yet he sees the violence of the Pacific Northwest as an exception to the rule rather than as something inherent to American culture. Faced with the violence of Manila, Ben describes Seattle as "a sanctuary much safer than the madhouse he had entered" and longs "for Seattle's cool air, clean streets, and pronounced sense of order" (133). In Seattle, however, when violence appears in the International District, Ben refuses to blame the space itself, as he would have done in the Philippines. Rather, he places blame on the individual Filipino migrants who could not overcome their own intolerant cultural practices. Whereas violence in the Philippines is interpreted as structural, violence in Seattle is a matter of individual choice, of Filipinos who are culturally conditioned to "nurture hatred" (157). In other words, the violence of the Philippines is definitive of the third-world space, while the violence of the Pacific Northwest is coded as exceptional to

the liberal tolerant space. Seattle's violence is thus marked as a remnant of the Philippines, brought by the Filipino migrants who have yet to relinquish "intolerable" cultural practices.

Cebu: Seattle and Legitimate Violence

Cebu's last third begins with a meditation on the structural violence of the US, but unlike the novel's section in the Philippines, the excess of violence is distanced from the space of liberal tolerance by confining it within the community of "fresh off the boat" Filipino migrants. As Ben arrives at Sea-Tac airport, his traumatic experiences in the Philippines thrust him into his memories of the late 1960s when the Vietnam War "hit the old neighborhood hard, like a plague that swept a village" (139). His meditation on Vietnam seems prescient, as Filipinos themselves, for Oscar V. Campomanes, continue to "bear[] the brand of the US Empire on his or her forehead" (Tiongson 29). Ben's sympathy for the war's "choice victims" seems ironic when he returns to his post at St. Mary's parish in Seattle's International District and finds that his congregation is becoming filled with "more Filipinos, mostly recent immigrants" who are unable to "ascend" their cultural ties: "He had no experience with *recent* immigrants and spoke none of their dialects Ben didn't think he disliked immigrants; his mother, after all, was an immigrant." The narrator's distanced tone here makes the satire explicit. "Ben didn't think he disliked immigrants" rather than "Ben disliked immigrants," and "or so he told himself and others" belie any attempt to read this passage as an authentic representation of Filipino American subjectivity. Rather than see what Ben thinks, the reader only sees Ben's desperate efforts to mask himself as tolerant of Filipino migrants. His emphasis on language barriers allows Ben to blame his dislike for the "FOB"s on their individual inability to acquire sufficient language

skills. Ben also conflates the Filipino migrant with the Philippines itself when he refers to Manila as "just like St. Mary's" because it was "nuts" and filled with "too many Filipinos" (144). By perceiving of Manila and the fresh off the boat migrants as both "intolerable," Ben evades assigning any responsibility for poverty or violence in the U.S. state or U.S. imperial history. As a Filipino American priest raised by immigrants, Ben feels that he could hold no racist or intolerant attitudes towards Filipinos, and his prejudice against them thus appears "neutral" or common sense. The satire is particularly pointed when the narrative specifies the same vulnerable populations that were victims of the Vietnam War: "colored males, eighteen and older, poor."

To add a tragic element to this satire, those familiar with the history of Filipino/a Americans in Seattle would recognize the striking similarity between the violence in the novel and Seattle's Filipino/a American violence in the early 1980s, which was sparked by political protest against the authoritarian Marcos regime in the Philippines. Specifically, in 1981 Seattle newspapers claimed that the slaying of two young union leaders, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, was simply caused by ethnic gang violence. Yet by 1989 the Washington State Court recognized that the murders were ordered by the US-backed dictator, Ferdinand Marcos (Fujita-Rony 202). The violence of the International District can thus be seen as a part of the same tide of political protest as the killing at the US embassy in Manila earlier in the novel. Both scenes seem based on historical events that were shaped by the protest of the Marcos regime, and in turn, the United States, who had backed Marcos' rule.

Ben's passive prejudice towards the Filipino migrants finds ironic alignment with the attitudes of American imperialism embedded in the history of the *manong* generation. The term

manongs, Ilokano for "older brother," emerged to define a generation of Filipino migrants who arrived in the US as "nationals" prior to the 1936 Tydings-McDuffie Act, which both declared independence for the Philippines and restricted the entry of Filipinos to fifty immigrants per year. The *manong* generation distinguishes the early labor migrants from those who came after the 1965 Immigration Act and its amendments in the 1980s that promoted skilled and professional migrants rather than migrants for manufacturing and agriculture. From the 1940s through the 1960s, *manong* writers such as Carlos Bulosan and Bienvenido Santos depicted the Filipino migrant in the West as both an exploited laborer and an exile. Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* traces the Filipino migrant in a period of unprecedented growth of Western agribusiness in the 1920s, which spurred a search for cheap labor that was conveniently solved in the Filipino, who, as a "national," was exempt from exclusion laws. First brought to Hawaii to pick sugarcane, these migrants were later imported into the West Coast to take part in seasonal labor circuits, which stretched from southern California to Seattle and ended in the Alaskan canneries. Serving as the primary recruitment and departure hub, Seattle and the nearby area of Yakima County became hotbeds for racial antipathy and anti-immigrant violence (Baldoz 67).

At first Filipinos were depicted by journalists and state media as politically subservient and, as the historian Rick Baldoz writes, "'satisfied' with their place at the bottom of the economic hierarchy" (67). But their reputation for passivity was soon undercut by an association with labor agitation. In the 20s and 30s Filipinos were active in Washington State, organizing the first Asian American unions, specifically the Cannery Workers' and Farm Laborers' Union—simply called "The Union" by working Filipinos—and in starting newspapers like *The Filipino Forum*, which ran from 1928 to 1969 (Fujita-Rony 207). Despite their organizing skills, Filipinos

were continually cast as violent and sexually deviant, as Filipino men became characterized as "having a pathological attraction to white women that could not be contained by conventional modes of enforcement" (Baldoz 120). The earliest recorded anti-Filipino race riots, in fact, occurred in Yakima, Washington, in November 1927, "when white mobs initiated a campaign to "deport" local Filipinos from the Yakima Valley" (Baldoz 136). This violence spread across the state to Cashmere in 1928 and then to Exeter in 1929. Though Filipino men's affinity for white women became the main excuse for such violence, according to the historian Dorothy Fujita-Rony, "economic tensions were a primary cause ... Filipina/os felt that they had little choice but to accept the poor wages allotted to them. As a result, white workers condemned Filipina/os for undercutting wages" (112).

Though the history of the Filipino *manong* is often evaded in US public discourse, among Asian American scholars the figure of the *manong* often plays the role of the "bad subject" in affirming anti-state and anti-capitalist resistance through Filipino/a American identity. As E. San Juan has put it, Bulosan's depiction of the *manong* migrant provides a "metamorphic persona, a self disintegrated by the competitive labor market of the West Coast and Hawaii" that is "constituted by the itinerary of the seasonal labor hired by the farms and the ritualized forms of excess" (1991, 556). The *manong* in Bulosan is distinguished by his relationship with labor, migration, and the forms of (sexualized) excess that become coded as resistant. His entire being "in all of Bulosan's fiction" is mediated by the "residual memory of the national liberation struggle of millions of Filipinos against Spanish colonialism and US imperialism" (558). As a foundational Filipino American writer—and once the publicity director of Seattle's Filipino-

dominated International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 37—Bulosan's *manongs* define Filipino American experience as the "brute facticity of racist America" (558).

Texts like *America Is in the Heart* have privileged *manong* discourse in Filipino/a American history, which understands Filipino Americans as "single male heroes" (Fujita-Rony 7). Similar to the "bad subject," the *manong* can also function to reify Filipino/a American identities as resistant, thus allowing minority subjects to occupy such roles as a passive legitimization of state violence. According to Ethnic Studies scholar Dylan Rodriguez, this discourse of Filipino American identity allows an identity-based recognition when the "resistant" identity is practiced as passive or apolitical, undermining "the possibility of generating an authentically 'oppositional ideology' that positions Filipino group experience as a challenge to a white supremacist common sense" (2010 88). For Rodriguez, the ever-present history of Filipino engagement with the United States cannot be contained in the past or in a progressive tolerant future, but should be seen as "a relation of irreparability, illiteracy, and absolute antagonism" (2010, 100). Similarly, Oscar V. Campomanes expressed in an interview that Filipino/a American identity can often breed imperial complicity, since "for one to be identified as American is right away to become the privileged citizen of a peculiar and therefore powerful kind of imperium" (Tiongson 32). Filipino/a American identity can thus be taken as "resistant" while also seeking to maintain the privileges of American imperialism. By celebrating incorporation through assuming a history of resistance that progresses towards liberal tolerance, Filipino/a American identity can thus cohere "through a devout—and often tacit—allegiance to the institutional, moral and political forms of the U.S. State" (Rodriguez 2010, 83).

The post-1965 Filipino migrants were distinct from the *manong* generation, as they had undergone nationalist subjectifying processes brought forth by the dictatorial Philippine state. Philippine independence and the Marcos era pressured overseas Filipinos to identify as Filipinos rather than as Tagalogs, Illocanos or Cebuanos. Rather than work in the sugar cane fields as contract workers, these migrants worked for the United States' growing service industry as nurses, maids, clerks and other low-wage service employees, and were relegated into urban centers like St. Mary's, a community just within Seattle's International District, and the area where *Cebu*'s events in Seattle take place. In the dominance of liberal tolerance since the 1980s, the migrancy and poverty of Filipino migrants, in comparison to other Asian migrant groups, has recast them as "intolerable" subjects who must be incorporated.

If we read *Cebu* as an authentic representation of Filipino American subjectivity, the novel reproduces liberal tolerance by depicting the post-1965 Filipino identity as a successful progression from the earlier *manong* generation (coded as violent and sexually aggressive), to the successful Asian American, represented in Ben. This narrative of the *manong* can thus imply that Filipino/a American assimilation into the white middle class has been more or less complete, and that the violence and poverty within many Filipino communities—seen as a remnant of the violence in the Philippines itself—can be blamed upon the individual Filipino migrant who has yet to follow the same progression. Yet if we read *Cebu* as satire, the novel exposes how Ben's privileged position as a Catholic priest could empower him to create social change through faith-based organizing (in Seattle, St. Mary's church has often played this role). Instead, in the novel's end, Ben rejects this possibility to reiterate the prejudicial discourse against the *manongs* by cursing a violent and hypersexual Filipino culture. The novel comes to a climax when a Filipino

migrant boy confesses to murder in Ben's confessional. Ben offers the boy absolution only if he relinquishes his fellow Filipino migrants, his clan or *barkada*, and abandons his social debt to them, or his *utang*. When the boy refuses to do so, Ben condemns his soul, and the boy murders Ben in the confessional.

The young man was crying now. "I came to you because I heard you're Filipino and you'd understand. You're hurting my feelings, Padre. You don't understand."

"I understand," Ben said.

"No, you don't," he argued, "not like a real Filipino. Back home, there'd be no problem."

Ben was trying hard not to become angry. "You're not back home now," he said.

"Things are different here." (201)

The boy's invocation of the homeland, "back home," prompts Ben to similarly invoke the space of liberal tolerance, where "things are different" (201). According to Elizabeth Pisares, this climax emphasizes that Ben could never "understand the *barkada*, *utang na loob*, or the vengeance born out of loyalty that comprise [Filipino] culture," and in death he pays the price for his ignorance (90). Pisares' focus on Ben's death as a result of his inability to understand *barkada* and *utang na loob* dangerously repeats the tendency to privilege the "bad subject," in this case, the Filipino migrant, whose diasporic ties allow him to authentically represent Filipino culture. Yet the very notion that these cycles of violence are caused by *utang na loob* and *barkada* extend from Ben's alignment with a narrative of liberal tolerance, where racial violence and inequality can be quickly explained as cultural aberrations. As Dorothy Fujita-Rony reminds us, the

influence of the *barkada* for Filipinos in the US was often an effect of the racism they experienced after entering the United States, when racial prejudice and violence brought Filipinos to extend their kinship networks to those of "the same village, town, or region of origin" (13). As Filipino workers are especially vulnerable to low wages and migration, such social ties "were especially essential for community members far away from their home villages and towns in the Philippines" (97).

Ben's refusal to grant absolution continues to assume that Seattle's urban ethnic violence is perpetrated by groups of "intolerable" Filipinos who must be individualized (give up their *barkada*) and set on a course towards a liberal and tolerable Filipino American identity. While Ben sees the *barkada* as a burdensome remnant of the Philippines, the social ties of the *barkada* can actually resemble a means of adapting to the structural racism within the United States. That Ben's belief invokes a bitterness leading to his own death can cause the reader to reflect on the structural function of Filipino/a American identity and the myths that both preserve and incorporate it into spaces of liberal tolerance.

Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* and Rescuing the "Subject in Need"

Where spaces of liberal tolerance are posited as places of rescue and multiculturalism, violence and intolerance must be displaced into the cultural defects of the migrant. The cultural philosopher Slavoj Žižek follows Wendy Brown's insights on liberal tolerance in his essay "Tolerance as an Ideological Category." He states that tolerance induces a "culturalization of politics" wherein "political differences...conditioned by political inequality" and "economic exploitation" "are naturalized/neutralized into 'cultural' differences, different 'ways of life,'

which are something given, something that cannot be overcome, but merely tolerated” (2008, 660). The “naturalization” of ethnic difference here carries with it assumptions of sin and violence, and for Ben Lucero, self-corruption. To counteract this, Ben constructs his “Asian American” identity as a position of cultural superiority, while also seeking to possess and rescue them “intolerable” Filipino/as. For Slavoj Žižek, such desire to rescue the “other” appears as an emergent form of capitalism that relies on ethical value, a “Starbucks logic,” “where one can remain altruistic through the very forms of capitalism” (2011). The Seattle-grown company Starbucks exemplifies a model wherein “solidarity with the poor,” “resistance against capitalist exploitation” and feelings of “altruism” are “included with the price.” This logic allows the consumer to forget about political engagement by insisting that the good deed is achievable as a byproduct of their consumerism. Such consumption publicizes particularly distant bodies. Rather than depict a child whose father is in prison, these images depict children in Africa or women in Bangladesh, figures that seem to be innocent and plagued not by capitalist regimes but by their undeveloped culture and states. Violence and poverty are not blamed on them, but on the undeveloped structural, cultural and educational forces in a “third world” space like the Philippines. Questions concerning methods of production, taxation, trade, global forms of neoliberalism, and contemporary neocolonial empire are all downplayed in a logic that turns a fetishized “subject in need” into an emotive mechanism of abstract innocence.

An impeccable figure of the “subject in need” is the hyper-sexualized Asian “third world” woman, whose nativeness and motherly love signifies, for some Asian Americans, a gateway to one’s own “homeland.” In *Cebu*, this figure is embodied in Ben's Aunt Clara’s flirtatious assistant, Ellen, an ex-sex worker whom Clara has promoted from her own massage

parlors in Quiapo (95). As an ex-sex worker who has been gradually lifted up to a life of administration and entrepreneurship, Ellen quickly becomes identified as a “vaunted pinay,” who Ben seeks to know intimately as a means of possessing an exotic fantasy. As he says, such “pinays gave rise to pleasant, pubescent fantasies—the source of countless, puzzling midnight ejaculations until he was fourteen” (92). He loses his virginity to Ellen, but becomes disgusted with his own religious trespass only after she emphasizes that *he* was the main sexual aggressor: “I’d be sleeping,” she says, “or trying to, and then wake up with you on me, pumping like a Nissan piston” (127). Ben’s fetishization of Ellen as a figure of his homeland is disrupted when he is faced with his own desires for her. When they leave Ben’s Manila hotel together, Ben attempts to grope Ellen in public, which she reads as an act of possession. She compares him to her clients: “when I worked, men always thought they bought me. But they were wrong. My services, maybe, but never me” (129). Incapable of understanding his own privilege and complicity with sex tourism, Ben conjures the voice of his mother, Remedios, who once told him that “he wasn’t like other men; he respected women” (129).

Bacho’s *Cebu* offers the figure of the ex-sex worker as a gateway towards intimacy with an ethnic other, allowing Ben to possess an ethnic solidarity that is reduced to a patriarchal and imperial relationship. As a Filipina and former sex worker, Ellen comes to represent the sin and temptation of the Philippines. Her imagined hypersexuality makes her an easy scapegoat for Ben’s own religious trespass. Months after Ben’s return to Seattle, he receives a letter from his Aunt Clara explaining that Ellen has died during an abortion for his child. Clara’s declaration is a lie, an attempt to guilt Ben away from his priesthood and return to the Philippines for Ellen’s funeral. Yet even the devious Aunt Clara underestimates Ben’s ability to justify his own actions.

Rather than return to the Philippines to make amends, Ben pushes Ellen's death aside by falling back on the liberal notion that "people have choices," and he "didn't force her" (194). As soon as Ben is faced with his own reproduction of imperialist violence, the liberal tolerant injunction flattens Ellen into an individual who could not live up to the personal responsibility of her own choices. That this switch happens so quickly allows the reader to see the absurdity in this logic, and to understand Ben's Filipino American identity as constituted through his desire to belong in a space of liberal tolerance.

Similarly, Lydia Kwa's 2003 novel, *This Place Called Absence* offers the figure of the sex worker as a gateway towards intimacy with an ethnic other. The sex workers in Kwa's novel are different from Bacho's Ellen because they are not only the impeccable "subject in need," but are also, by their very livelihood, the "bad subjects" who offer positions of resistance to the tolerant and liberal reader. Like the *manongs* and "fresh off the boat" migrants of Bacho's novel, Kwa's queer sex workers are also distanced in space and time, appearing as imagined historical figures in early 20th century Singapore. Where Bacho's Ellen is blamed for her perverse desire, Kwa's sex workers are depicted as innocent, oppressed figures who reflect the patriarchal essence of the distanced homeland, and in turn, emphasize the tolerance of queer female identity in the Pacific Northwest. Kwa's novel turns these anonymous historical figures into meaningful ancestors for the novel's modern day protagonist, Wu Lan, a queer Singaporean migrant living in Vancouver, British Columbia.

After her father's suicide, Wu Lan is thrust into a psychological crisis, and she is forced to reflect on her "distance" from her family, her migration and her queer desire. As a refuge from this crisis, Wu Lan becomes absorbed in history texts about turn of the century Chinese sex

workers in Singapore. The narratives of two of these sex workers, Lee Ah Choi and Chow Chat Mui, appear as first-person narratives interspersed throughout the novel. Lee Ah Choi's narrative begins with her escape from her father into the patriarchal world of sex work and debt slavery. Though these first-person narratives are presumed to be Lee Ah Choi's intimate inner monologue, the narrative voice is constantly evaluating her lifestyle within the values of a middle-class, tolerant gaze, and with historical distance:

Here at 61 Upper Hokien Street. My cubicle, Number 2, next to the front room. Sum Tok told me when I first came, this brothel is special, used to be a mansion, I should be proud to belong...And Sum Tok, our kwai po, wicked den-mother. Yes, this is a mansion, a temple of hell, where bodies must crush other bodies. (9)

Ah Choi's narrative contains facts that locate her position in space, "61 Upper Hokien Street," and allude to the history of Chinese and Peranakan babas in Singapore, whose mansions were often sold and converted into brothels. Her naming of the exact address, rather than a description of the street or district (Chinatown), suggests a realm of historical fact, as if the writer is simply reiterating historical data rather than describing an urban landscape. The use of Christian figurative language—"temple of hell"—to describe the crushing of abstract, nameless "bodies" also belies the narrator's "authentic" voice.

The historical gaze becomes even more prominent when Ah Choi first arrives in Singapore and the narrative voice splits into two decipherable voices: the first, of a victim experiencing oppression, and the second, of a distant voyeur gazing upon that victim: "[the auntie] told [my father] I would be able to return once I finished paying back the money for the passage. At twenty I would be a *kong chu*, with no rights over my own body" (22). The first use

of “would” here describes a causal effect; that she would “return” only if she “finished paying back the money.” The second “would,” “I would be a *kong chu*,” can be read as a historian might describe an event that “would lead to the first world war.” This second voice of historical distance is also nearly identical to a passage in the history book that Wu Lan reads throughout the novel, James Francis Warren’s *Ah ku and karayuki-san: prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940*, where Warren describes the *kongchu* as “virtual slaves, ‘outsiders’ with no rights in themselves” (53). This voice of historical distance seeks to capture Lee Ah Choi’s life-story as one of total “innocence,” of a girl caught in a series of events that seem predetermined by her historical and geographic situation.

The two voices in the above passage parallel separate readings of the novel as an authentic ethnic autobiography or as a satire. As an authentic voice, we the reader access a figure who has been historically marginalized, and bear witness to the cruelty of the "third world" past, which constructs present day Singapore as homophobic (queer identity, once repressed by state legislation, has recently been encouraged), and present day Vancouver as Singapore's liberal, tolerant space of rescue. Wu Lan's narrative of dealing with her father's death and her own queer identity thus appear as remnants of an intolerant Singapore. If we read the novel as satire, however, we must acknowledge that Lee Ah Choi’s life-story is being imagined by the upper-middle class Asian Canadian protagonist Wu Lan in order to help relieve Wu Lan of her own psychological crisis and social alienation from her family in Singapore as a queer Chinese daughter. In this reading, the trauma and violence of the past is reimagined by Wu Lan in order to reaffirm her own "development" from such an origin story, and to establish Vancouver as a space of liberal tolerance. As Wu Lan continues reading about these sex workers through a

history book, her absorption into their lives turns into a desire to possess them as figures defined by their imagined subordination and resistance:

At the back of the book, there's a table with the names of ah ku who committed suicide...I wish I could get under their skins, to know what it was like...I already had begun to imagine details about the *ah ku* after reading that article, but now here were photographs, images that compel me, spur me on. (48)

As a Singaporean migrant who suffers from her own “absence” from family life and gender normativity, Wu Lan seeks to “know what it was like” when migration meant occupying a space of illegal and oppressive sexual labor. Despite Wu Lan’s position as a successful psychologist living in Vancouver, by the end of the novel she is convinced that “she is neither Ah Choi nor Chat Mui, although they are parts of her” (207).

The appearance of Wu Lan’s gaze within the sex worker’s own narrative allows the reader to see the construction of these figures, where their “ethnic authenticity” is invented to meet the needs of a liberal, tolerant audience, and to implicitly thank the host country for having “rescued” the migrant from the homeland’s oppression and violence. Whereas traditional heteropatriarchy “produces the prostitute” as its other, these transnational texts depict her as a “queer” migrant rather than a “deviant” one, setting her on a course of integration and “progress” within the infrastructure of global capital (Ferguson, 10). These representations thus reimagine the prostitute as a queer women of color, whose rescue comes in the form of market exchange, and is made possible through the neoliberal freedoms associated with development and globalization. As a satire, however, the novel points out how narratives of liberal tolerance become interiorized into even queer identity, as Wu Lan’s coming out to her family—her “big

shock,” as she calls it—can only be achieved at a distance, after Wu Lan has felt at home in the safety of a tolerant Westernized space.

Unlike *Cebu*, *This Place Called Absence* has rarely been read in a satirical mode. Critics such as Eleanor Ty have enforced a socio-historic reading, claiming that *This Place Called Absence* “preserves [prostitutes] from obscurity and rescues them from the seeming purposelessness of their lives as noted in the short entries on official documents. [Kwa] renders nameless victims into heroes of a sort” (2010, 28). While this interpretation may be “resistant” to moralizing narratives of sex workers, such resistance seems reduced to a passive role that merely “identifies with” an abstract “innocent” subject, and does so from a position of moral and cultural superiority, as if only the liberal, middle-class reader can give “purpose” to the “seeming purposelessness of their lives.” When the novel is read as a satire, these sex workers are realized as mere representations invented by Wu Lan to offer herself and the reader a level of intimate access and a position of resistance within a space of capitalist complicity and liberal tolerance. The novel refuses this access simply in its form, as the two voices of the sex workers, as well as the voice of Wu Lan’s mother, are “othered” by having chapter headings with the name of the speaker, whereas Wu Lan’s narration is never announced, but simply assumed as the normative voice rather than one voice among many others. Like the Filipino migrants who seek Ben’s spiritual guidance, the pluralist voices of the past are herein managed by a seemingly “neutral” subject, whose gaze occupies the position of the universal against the pluralist particulars. By narrating the queer sex worker through Wu Lan’s imagination, Kwa’s novel reveals how the very act of representing the ethnic “subject in need” is bound within the needs and desires of the

tolerant subject in order to provide a position of resistance within a context of undeniable capitalist complicity.

The desire to objectify the other as one so unlike ourselves, or to orientalize the other as exotic, as we see in Bacho's 1991 novel, is reversed Kwa's 2003 narrative, where tolerance instead encourages subjects to know the other so intimately that the other is no longer other, but rather part of ourselves. Kwa's sex workers are abstracted into figures of innocence and oppression that embody "difference" in almost every way imaginable: by sexuality, race, class, space and history. They are so distanced from the liberal tolerant consumer that any act of "rescue" can only be achieved through available forms of corporate or privatized charity rather than through political change. As Kwa's novel shows, it is the other's life-story that both rescues us from psychological despair, and also allows us to forget our own complicity with forms of capitalist exploitation, military invasion and institutionalized racism. Embedded in this logic is the assumption that the other's story represents her in all her authenticity, conveniently ignoring any real features of that other which may contradict one's emotive self-satisfaction. This presumption to innocence supplements a culture of liberal tolerance that, in order to see itself as free of racial violence, must transfer forms of elicited sympathy onto figures who we are radically distanced from, rather than people who may not be totally innocent, sincere, or caring, and whose very need of support exposes systemic racism. Kwa's novel forces us to ask whether or not we can empathize with subjects who are, abstractly, in need of some support mechanism, but in an intimate way, may themselves be cruel, abusive, or patriarchal. Satirical readings of Bacho's and Kwa's novels show how Asian American narratives, which are often read as gateways to ethnic authenticity, or are ghettoized as novels "for Asian Americans," can shed

light on the de-radicalization of our contemporary moment, and provide ways of seeing how liberal tolerance affects many Asian migrants in the everyday.

Claims of liberal tolerance seem most effective when they are vocalized by the other, and the narrative of Asian migration to the Pacific Northwest is unique in that it has been so integral to forming a narrative of rescue and multiculturalism. Yet this alignment with liberal tolerance, for the Southeast Asian Anglophone, can itself be seen as a means of overcoming feelings of social debt, duty and gratitude. I begin the next section by asking: How does liberal tolerance conscript migrants on an affective level? How do feelings of social debt and reciprocity towards a “homeland” become integral to reproducing imperial attitudes?

The Affects of Liberal Tolerance and Reciprocity

The imagined representations of Bacho's Ellen and Kwa's Singapore sex workers provokes questions about how liberal tolerance affects the Southeast Asian Anglophone migrant through guilt and gratitude. Liberal tolerance, as perceived by Marcuse, is an ideological construct, “a subversive liberating notion and practice” that no power, authority, or government has the capability to translate into practice (33). For Marcuse, conceptions of tolerance may be politically warranted, but the very concept of “tolerance,” in its most effective form as an end to itself, “serv[es] the cause of oppression” because it has been universalized into “utopian possibilities.” Tolerance leads to a repressive state where the subject to be tolerated is turned from an active political figure into a passive recipient, one who must tolerate the contradictions of a liberal democracy in exchange for their own cultural behaviors to be “tolerated.” In this mode, tolerance represses political action by legitimating the exploitation and violence

embedded within American empire. Yet liberal tolerance takes different meanings when we consider the position of Asian Americans, whose way of life must be “tolerated,” but whose very “diverse” bodies reinforce a space’s tolerant construction. In the Pacific Northwest especially, Asian Americans play a crucial role in this ideology since without them, state institutions, universities, and corporations would appear racist, privileging whites over blacks and latinos in almost every segment of society. In this context, the Asian American is brought into a contradictory position: on one hand, they are meant to idealize the Northwest as a space where tolerance and multiculturalism are practiced, while at the same time, the “price” for participating in this liberal utopia is the constant performance of a “tolerable” cultural form, thus discounting the very ideals of cultural diversity and difference that liberal tolerance is built upon. As we see in Ben Lucero’s Asian American performance, the successful migrant body acts as a symbol of liberal tolerance only when performed in a particularly “tolerable” way.

As it appears in these novels, reciprocity seems to supplement an ideology of liberal tolerance through an affective regime of duty and gratitude. “Affect” for the scholar Brian Massumi refers not to emotions, but to a “state of being,” and places the individual in “a circuit of *feeling and response*, rather than *opposition* to others” (552, italics in original). Where emotion is individual, affect scholars like Massumi have seen affect as social and able to produce communities with a sense of belonging, where affects such as “grief” or “trauma” can create what Jacqueline Rose has called “a monstrous family of reluctant belonging” (31). While affect studies has been criticized for its “over-aestheticization” and its tendency to be “diagnostic rather than prescriptive in nature” (Pruchnic 165), affects can help understand the production of “ideological effects by non-ideological means” (Massumi 102). For Massumi, “affect holds a key

to rethinking postmodern power after ideology” by revealing an ideology’s “real conditions of emergence” (104). Affects of social reciprocity can help us understand how minority subjects, particularly Asian Americans, are interpellated into productive, hard-working bodies that reinforce spaces of liberal tolerance through affects of guilt, sympathy and gratitude. The desire for an empowered, recognizable identity (like Asian American) can be framed as powerfully affective, where subjects perform ideology "as a crucial part of what it is to be themselves" (Eagleton 19).

The overlap between affect studies and ethnic studies has been fraught with controversy, as it has often assigned affects (like trauma, repression, guilt) to particular minority groups, as if it is inherent to their culture. The scholar Clare Hemmings has criticized such use of affect to merely paint minority groups as trapped within an affect, pointing out that “only for certain subjects can affect be thought of as attaching in an open way; others are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer” (561). For Hemmings, the figure of the third world prostitute is a prime example of this “over-association,” since the prostitute herself is objectified and over-invested with either shame or pity. Affect, as Hemmings says, is “not random, nor is the ability to choose to imagine affect otherwise” (562). On the other hand, noting how cultural communities are held together through affect can force us to observe how communities produce identities and alignments. Affect thus not only forms communities as conditions for ideological emergence, but forms subjectivity and normative ideals that can apply to families and nations, as well as “friendship, collegiality, a project, the state, a union, whatever has the capacity to deliver an affective, transpersonal experience of unconflictedness, belonging, and worth” (Berlant 282). The crossover between affect and ethnic studies can work to expose

ideological emergence, and to consider new politicized forms of community held together by affects that counter liberal tolerance. These effects are made possible by what Berlant calls “the convolutions of attachment... the potential openings marked out by fantasies of the good life, selfcontinuity, or unconflictedness” (297-8). Affects in this case not only bind individuals, but do so by connoting an unequivocal good that mark out fantasies of “the good life.” Hardt and Negri voice the stakes of affect studies when they identify a liberating potential within affect, one that “opens the way to a revolutionary political economy in which insurrection is a necessary ingredient” (88). It is this revolutionary potential that incites the complex production process, which allows Asian American/Canadian identity to appear as an effective “counterbalance” to deeply held affects.

The affects of liberal tolerance allow us to trace a “romance of reciprocity” that is depicted in both Bacho’s *Cebu* and Kwa’s *This Place Called Absence*. Both texts complicate notions of reciprocity, considering its effects as the “virtuous one of the gift (gift for gift)” and the “vicious circle of vengeance (blow for blow)” (Ricoeur 228). Reciprocity constantly occupies this ambivalence, where the idea of “gift return” will constantly remind the subject of the “generosity present in the first gift without any regard to obligation” that likewise summons “the obligation to give in return” (232). For Shirley Lim, reciprocity signifies affects that mask the subject’s awareness that their “debt” continues to maintain the power of the “creditor,” but instead they “perceive chiefly their [own] weakness and the others’ power to assist them” (1994, 33). Lim’s conception focuses on the “debt” that Asian migrants have upon arrival in the host country, as their dependency and gratitude upon a tolerant host nation presumes some degree of indebtedness. However, in both Bacho’s and Kwa’s novels, social reciprocity suggests a debt

towards the homeland as well, in the forms of *utang na loob* and in Wu Lan's effort to reconstruct Singapore history for its most marginalized figures.

In William Safran's 1991 essay, "'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,'" Safran conceptualizes the migrant's debt to the homeland as "the homeland myth," a myth that invokes feelings of guilt, shame, and duty, in order to obtain remittances or political allegiances. For Safran, diasporas are defined as having "the moral burden" of "reconstituting a lost homeland or maintaining an endangered culture" (85). This "moral burden" can then be exploited by both the host country and the homeland in order to mobilize pressure for purposes of war, remittances, investment, and political representation. The homeland myth reinforces feelings of guilt by emphasizing the homeland's historical violence, so that the subject feels both a sense of great debt to their homeland and a sense of great gratitude to their host country for providing a tolerant space. The myth distracts from the present-day ethnic and racial violence within the host country, and from the idea that homelands often "view the diaspora with a certain disdain for having been enticed by the fleshpots of capitalism and for retaining a vulgarized ethnic culture" (Safran 93). Though the myth itself maintains a level of social belonging and diasporic community, it also assumes particular nationalist identities that increase "ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration" (91). As an affective construct, the homeland myth is especially effective when it seems most "devoid of practical consequence" (91).

Similar to Safran, the Chinese Malaysian migrant scholar Shirley Lim considers the Asian migrant's "social debt" by figuring gratitude toward the host country as a reciprocal debt.

Lim defines “reciprocity” as “entangling nets of bonds of gratitude that arises almost involuntarily” in experiences of migrancy (1994, 32). “Reciprocity” binds migrant communities in “almost involuntary” relationships of social debt, “involuntary” because they are not posited as incentivized, rational outcomes, as they are invoked by guilt, gratitude, and shame. Lim sees such reciprocity as a de-politicizing affective regime “comprised of systematic, multiple, repeated, pervasive acts of injustices in which the complicity of the oppressed, their silence, passivity, and yes, cooperation, support and contribute to the power of the oppressor” (33).

Coupled with Safran's "Homeland Myth," Lim's conception of “reciprocity” as a debt toward the host country puts the Southeast Asian Anglophone migrant into an “in-between” position, where he is meant to choose between his duty to the homeland and his duty to the host country. However, as Bacho's novel shows, both of these duties come together in liberal tolerance through the act of rescuing those from the homeland by turning them into tolerant (or tolerable) subjects. Acts of rescue thus function as the ideal, logical outcome to a romance of reciprocity toward the host nation and the homeland: the duty to the host country is met through the repression of intolerable cultural practices, and the duty to the homeland is met by “rescuing” fellow migrants from those same practices, as Ben attempts to do with the “FOB”s in Seattle, and as Wu Lan attempts to do in turning marginalized sex workers “into heroes of a sort” (Ty 28). In both cases, the “intolerable” others are made “tolerable” for a westernized gaze. Both of these notions of reciprocity work to reinforce the social construction of the Pacific Northwest as a space of liberal tolerance, and as a progressive endpoint for the migrant's long journey.

Bacho's *Cebu* does not merely trace the “entangling nets of bonds of gratitude” that define social reciprocity, but expose how it can be construed as the definitive subjective

experience for Filipino migrants, and works to further place them into a pathologic group defined through their “entanglement” with social debt. Ben Lucero’s ability to cast all acts of violence and inequality onto the Filipino/a migrant is made possible by viewing migrants as hopelessly entangled with their *utang na loob*. Through this perception, Filipino/a American poverty and violence comes not from contemporary imperial relationships or structural violence, but from the inability to overcome historical trauma. Bacho’s *Cebu* foregrounds affect through notions of reciprocity, as the concept “*utang na loob*” enforces Ben’s duty to his homeland and the duty of the Filipino migrants to return violent acts onto rival *barkadas*. Ben discovers in his “homeland” a receptacle of historical violence that imposes a nationalist social debt on Ben and his family. His Aunt Clara’s wealth, for example, is a direct result of the Jeeps left behind by American troops. The jeepney business makes Clara “rich, very rich,” and gives her the capital to “diversify” into “smuggling, assorted vices, and politics” (22).

Bacho’s *Cebu* foregrounds notions of reciprocity through the concept “*utang na loob*,” the Tagalog idiom for reciprocal indebtedness. Relationships based on *utang na loob*, according to historian Vicente L. Rafael, are “based on the sensed *incommensurability* between the gift that is received and its return, particularly if the gift is unsolicited” (1987, 334). As Elizabeth Pisares writes, *utang na loob* “defines relationships through uneven gift-giving, where the subject cannot ever repay the debt in full,” but “instead, payments are accepted as gestures of gratitude” (88). As Clara’s *utang* keeps those around her in debt after the war, the war’s afterlife casts others into cycles of immense social debt for being “rescued.” During the Japanese occupation, Clara’s mute driver, Sitoy, was “the sole survivor of a Japanese sweep” who devoted his life to his regiment, choosing combat because “in the Filipino way, Sitoy owed his life to his saviors [a guerilla

patrol], and his *utang* to them would never end” (49). Carlito's place of crucifixion stems from Sito's *utang*, as Sito discovers the Korean soldier who Carlito, Clara, and Sito torture to death. Indeed, Sito feels relieved by the soldier's torture, since "in this war without rules ... only as a soldier could [Sito's] *utang* be repaid" (58). Carlito's crucifixion then convinces Ben of the violent kernel within Filipino culture, as he associates *utang na loob* with the need for vengeance and violence rather than its ethnographic associations with gifts or kindness. For Ben, *utang* reappears as a violent kernel of Filipino culture, first in Carlito's crucifixion, and again in the violence of Seattle's migrant Filipinos. As seen in Sito's violence and Carlito's crucifixion, *utang na loob* easily becomes synonymous with the need for vengeance.

Cebu explores how war and violence both fulfill and produce social debt through the concept of *utang na loob*, a notion that Ben uses to define Filipino and Filipino migrant subjectivity. But *utang* can also be read as a shared affect that, for Ben, has yet to be confined by liberal tolerance. For Filipino/a Americans, World War II was perhaps a seminal instance where the debt toward the homeland and the debt towards the host country became aligned for a single cause: the defeat of the fascist Japanese empire by the pluralist United States. According to Rick Baldoz, the racism of the Japanese empire enabled the United States to present itself as a pluralist savior, allowing Filipino/a Americans to view the war “as a chance to defend their native soil from Japanese aggression, as well as an opportunity to prove their fidelity to their adopted homeland and its democratic institutions” (195). This tactic was broadened and codified in the Cold War, which influenced a sense of tolerance worldwide, as “U.S. officials actively promoted ethnic pluralism as a touchstone of Americanism and counter-posed these patriotic principles to the racialist ideology of the Axis powers” (Baldoz 197). The sacrifices of Filipino

bodies in the war thus took on a complex set of meanings as Filipinos "pledged their undivided loyalty to a nation that had long treated them as an unwanted and unwelcome presence" (Baldoz 195). However, this alignment of debt against the Axis powers seemed to last only as long as the war, when afterwards Filipino veterans found that they had been paid far less than their white counterparts, and their participation was immediately forgotten as they continued to experience the same racist exclusions.

While Ben's Aunt Clara stands out as one who has taken advantage of cycles of social debt to boost her own success, Ben's mother, Remedios, whose very name is in reverence to god and the Virgin Mary, places the debt of the war in the God-like ideal of Douglas McArthur, thus overlaying her social debt to the homeland with her social debt to the United States as her "pluralist savior." As the novel explains, Remedios had

shot enemy soldiers, tortured prisoners, and executed Japanese wounded as eagerly as any male guerilla. Yet, despite the savagery of her existence, when she heard that MacArthur had landed, she knelt and prayed her thanks, crossing and crossing herself in Catholicism's universal sign. (30)

World War II becomes a moment when the Catholic beliefs set in place by Spanish missionaries are transferred to conflate God with Douglas McArthur, and in turn to express gratitude to the American military. This vision of the United States as the pluralist savior was partially produced through the Filipino school system, which after US occupation of the Philippines, encouraged "the remembering of the war against Spain and the forgetting of the war against the United States" (Ileto 205, 222). As the historian Reynaldo Ileto writes, according to Filipino "official interpretation of history," McArthur's liberation justified decades of colonial rule, as it "meant

the recovery of a lost age of happiness under America's tutelage" (2005, 226). For Remedios, McArthur's "rescue" produces its own social debts that compel her to move to the United States and place her son in the seminary. Her belief that "Douglas MacArthur was His indelible sign" demands the sacrifice of her first-born, making Ben's attempts to distance himself from *utang* a continually ironic gesture. For Remedios, McArthur becomes the ultimate symbol of "rescue," and she moves to the United States in order to help fulfill her social debt, believing that God "would test but never abandon His children, and Douglas MacArthur was His indelible sign" (30).

Cebu's ending revisits the traumatic haunting of continued imperial violence to satirize (and thus expose) Ben's attempts to separate himself from social reciprocity. While the murders and beatings near St. Mary's increases, Ben uses his own privileged position to "rescue" migrant Filipinos from their own cultural norms. Even as a child, Ben learns to despise his Filipino friends' lower-class standing and entanglement with violent acts, and in his youth, he prefers the company of Japanese, who "gave no one any trouble," unlike the Filipinos, who "as a whole...were rowdy and, depending on the city and its demography, usually consorted with blacks or Mexicans to wreak different types and degrees of juvenile havoc" (107). To evade the potentially violent discourse of *utang na loob*, Ben "distance[s] himself from the violence motivated by *utang na loob* and the Filipino discourses *utang* represents" (Pisares 92, 91). Yet this distancing is not enough, not if he is to "pay back" the host country. Rather than an outright rejection of his *utang*, Ben's refusal to grant absolution to the "fresh off the boat" boy in his church can rather be read as "paying back" the Filipinos from the point of view of the Filipino American who identifies with the American imperium. Ben tells the boy to leave his *barkada* by

“giving up [his] friends [and] companions” (200). Once “Filipinoness” becomes associated with sin and violence, Ben’s social reciprocity to the Philippines can only be performed through a narrative of rescue that assumes Asian American cultural superiority. Despite Ben's attempts to escape *utang*, his actions at the novel's end re-establish *utang*'s trans-generational effects.

As Bacho's novel satirically exposes, in a romance of reciprocity, it may not matter whether the migrant really became “free” in the host country, or really experienced trauma in the homeland. The romance of reciprocity reinforces and reproduces a historical narrative that separates violence and trauma from the subject by placing it in the past or in the distant homeland, where liberal tolerance offers a “way out” of this phantom other. It is through this narrative that sympathy and debt are placed on the homeland, and gratitude is placed on the host country for providing a place free of violence. Violence is thus not only distanced in time and space, but is privatized into the individual life history of the social group, rather than within the public realm where historical violence is shared in state policy and capitalist investment. The satire of Bacho's novel, where the “tolerant” Filipino American is ridiculed as naïve and himself imperial, exposes a transnational history of historical violence that has been rendered invisible through the over-investment of gratitude and debt. Peter Bacho’s *Cebu* represents the traumatic haunting of continued imperial violence when, in the end, Ben realizes that the same historical violence that was the catalyst for his Aunt Clara’s atheism was likewise the catalyst for his deceased mother’s devotion to the Catholic faith, which she then passed on to Ben, who became a priest. Thus Ben’s life in Seattle too is fused with a history of American imperial projects in the Philippines, a history in excess to notions of liberal tolerance because it exposes the imperial violence that made the “successful Asian American” possible.

Transitive cultures subvert this romance of reciprocity by reinterpreting Filipino/a American identity as antagonistic to rather than empowered by state and capitalist domination. Bacho's ending, as Pisares writes, refuses the bildungsroman of much Asian American literature, as the "reality of neocolonialism lacks the conditions necessary for a triumphant bildungsroman" and instead, "Cebu offers no blithe celebration of Filipino American identity or ethnic nationalist arrival" (81). Transitive culture thus appears not through particular "conscious" characters, but through the text's ambiguous tone, which can read Ben Lucero as an "authentic" Filipino American or as an object of satire. Whereas *Scorpion Orchid's* Peter, Tok Said and Sally all practiced transitive culture by performing multiple identities for different audiences, in both *Cebu* and *This Place Called Absence*, the authors play multiple roles for the American audience, allowing the reader to see a commodified Asian American identity, while also providing clues in the tone and the protagonist's naivety that this "authentic" representation is merely a gag. Likewise, the cultural invisibility and continuous legacy of imperial violence in *Cebu* allows us to read some forms of Filipino/a American identity as reproducing imperial histories and conforming to a de-politicizing liberal tolerance. Where Ben's attempts to "rescue" Filipino migrants allows him to pay-back his debts to the homeland and the host country, the novel's satirical style questions this ethical stance by illuminating the affective aftermath of these very desires and by insisting upon a transnational history of continuous imperialist violence that cannot be confined to the homeland or to the host country.

The overlapping alignment of social debt after World War II was troubled by the Vietnam War and the Asian American movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when cultural nationalist groups were brought together through "Asian American" solidarity, which

arose in the imperial violence of Vietnam and the recognition that Asian Americans had not been treated as equals. The U.S. nation-state was depicted as the common enemy for both the homeland, which was under threat by the Vietnam War, and for minorities in the host country who had been marginalized and subjected to state violence. Bacho's novel, published in 1991, depicts the late 80s and early 90s as a time when, for Asian Americans, the debt to the homeland and the debt to the host country no longer met in a common enemy. Rather, Asian American identities were reinterpreted into "resistant" positions that were also passive and easily incorporated in state representation. Rather than direct these two distinct debts towards simply villainizing the foreign, intolerable other of the Cold War, liberal tolerance since the 1990s has set them on a course of "rescuing" the "FOBs" by turning them into tolerable subjects. In Bacho's novel, rescue provides an ideal overlapping of the affects of reciprocity, as it satisfies the duty to the host country by repressing "intolerant" cultural practices, and satisfies the duty to the homeland by putting migrants on a path to a more "tolerable" cultural form, thus saving them from a seemingly purposeless existence.

Transitive Cultures and Tolerance

In *This Place Called Absence*, reciprocity appears as a shared ideological construct between the narrator, Wu Lan, and the Singapore prostitutes. Affects such as guilt and thankfulness guide the characters' actions, and reappear constantly throughout each narration. Lee Ah Choi's narrative expresses this in reacting to the conscious demand for gratitude: "Yes, I'm supposed to be grateful for this new life, for the hungry ones who pass by, peering through windows on the ground floor, searching for merchandise they can run their coarse hands over.

But it makes no sense to be grateful” (9). For both Chow Chat Mui and Lee Ah Choi, the very act of migration becomes incorporated into a narrative that emphasizes thankfulness for their “escape” into a life of debt-slavery and prostitution. Even after Chow Chat Mui is raped on her way to Singapore, the men who commit the act expect her gratitude, as “thanks to them, [she] would be able to find wealth in the new country” (12). This “wealth” of course leads to only more debt, even after her debt for migration is paid off, since Chow Chat Mui must keep her position in order to “pay for food and lodging and a new set of clothes each year” (36).

When read as a satire, the reader must remind themselves that Chow Chat Mui's struggle with gratitude is imagined through Wu Lan and builds upon her experience of living as a queer Asian American in Vancouver, BC. Whereas Chow Chat Mui escapes the homeland to be free of her “father's cage,” Wu Lan's migration to Vancouver comes partially as a way of coming out as a lesbian to her Singapore family. Throughout the novel, Vancouver is represented as a space of both queer tolerance and class and racial inequality. As she walks through Chinatown, Wu Lan wonders how she is “not like the bodies shuffling for space on the sidewalk” and asks “how many of these people are on the verge of utter despair? How many of them have tried to kill themselves, and which ones will eventually succeed?” (67). On Vancouver's Main Street, Wu Lan describes a shirtless white man with “a cookie tin for donations” and observes that “the people pass by, unsympathetic.” Immediately after she observes Vancouver's disadvantaged, she walks through the Vancouver streets hand-in-hand with Francis, a woman she meets in the library, and receives nothing but support and sympathy from passersby: “Two gay men pass us by. Later on, three dykes together. They look at us with knowing smiles, openly showing their approval” (158). Later on, when they kiss in public, “no one seems to notice” and Wu Lan feels

“like a kid again, not caring what’s showing or who’s looking” (159). In contrast to Singapore’s gay sex ban, Vancouver appears as a utopic space that deserves Wu Lan's gratitude, despite the constant reappearance of class inequality that is represented in the city’s derelicts and ethnic enclaves.

The depiction of Vancouver as a space of queer tolerance, as Gayatri Gopinath has affirmed, works to mask the racialized gendered labor that awaits female immigrants in the global city, which continue to utilize “hierarchical gendered arrangements of the familial space” (52). Gopinath, in her book *Impossible Desires*, investigates how the public visibility of the diasporic subject, in cultural performances and in the skilled labor force, encourages a developmental narrative while erasing the “hidden economies” of domestic labor. Here the similarities between old Singapore and new Vancouver seem hard to miss—the class inequality, the need to feel grateful for having been "rescued," the tacit indifference to the homeless. The focus on queer tolerance as the sudden redeeming virtue to mark Vancouver as utopic seems to satirize rather than reinforce notions of liberal tolerance and Asian American identity as, in itself, "resistant." Read satirically, Wu Lan’s implied celebration of the Pacific Northwest as a space of queer tolerance can thus be seen as an ironic reiteration of the sex worker Ah Choi’s celebration of Singapore as a space of freedom and opportunity.

One departure point for understanding Kwa's novel as transitive, in that the "authentic" representation is in fact a satire, is in Tina Chen's conception of Asian American "impersonation." Where acts of the imposture is to "fool others" into believing "a seamless performance" (7). Acts of impersonation simultaneously "pay homage" to "notions of authenticity and originality" while at the same time challenge them towards "more resistant

possibilities" (7). For Chen, Asian American identity is neither "essentialized [n]or constructed," but considers "the mutually constitutive dimensions of identity and performance" in producing "personhood" (8). Chen's attempt to break with common conceptions of identity is useful especially in accounting for impersonation among *East* Asian Americans—Korean, Japanese and Chinese—yet her project already seems to ignore that impersonation itself is a social privilege only available to groups who are already considered "tolerable" and who have valued cultural capital to perform. Southeast Asian Anglophone writers, whose public identities are highly contested if not invisible, are better positioned in North America to critique identity construction without also depending upon such identities in order to form "personhood." Transitive culture departs from acts of impersonation through the vantage point of the imperial subject, who sees acts of Asian American identity performance—as impersonation or otherwise—as reaffirming the "intolerable" culture of its other. Kwa's satire of Wu Lan's representation of queer sex workers allows readers to see how such "ethnic narratives" reinforce Asian American identity as vital to the reproduction of liberal tolerance.

Besides the descriptions of Vancouver's derelicts, the erasure of class is also present in Wu Lan's neglect for her own class entitlement. The novel's very title "This Place Called Absence" refers to the year of absence that Wu Lan takes from her job as a psychologist, a privilege that very few can afford. As Wu Lan spends this year-long absence at the gym and library, never once is there an explanation for how she can afford to take an entire year off without any income. The subject of Wu Lan's own financial state only becomes an issue when she meets a casual sex partner, Stephanie, who is attractive, white and queer, but of a lower class. When Wu Lan is first invited into Stephanie's place, she assumes that Stephanie is bisexual,

since she lives with a man named Dale in a one-bedroom apartment. When confronted about this, Stephanie explains that Dale is her brother, and that “one bedroom and one bed were the best [they] could do” (73). Angered by Wu Lan’s assumption of her bisexuality, Stephanie bursts: “I don’t know about you baby-boomer types...it’s tough making it in the city. Lotusland indeed. Tight-assed hypocrisies of corporate culture. Just how narrow-minded can a person get, anyway?” (73). Frustrated by Wu Lan's ignorance of lower-class culture in Vancouver, Stephanie calls Vancouver "Lotusland," a nickname for British Columbia that alludes to the Homer's Lotus-eaters, who ate lotuses as a narcotic to keep within a sleepy apathy. "Lotusland" has also been used to reinforce Vancouver as a space for "rich Asians," as the lotus is also considered a sacred symbol in China and Singapore, and is often present during festivals. In other words, Wu Lan's identity as a queer Singapore migrant, to Stephanie, appears to privilege her rather than marginalize her, making Wu Lan's imagined solidarity with queer Asian sex workers seem like the very "narcotic" that blinds Wu Lan from seeing everyday social inequality.

Despite Wu Lan’s admiration for Stephanie, Stephanie’s lower-class position keeps her from ever being more than an “adventure” for Wu Lan. In contrast, Wu Lan’s later sex partner, Francis, is a queer woman just as brazen and forthright as Stephanie, but is from the upper class. While Stephanie lives in a small one-bedroom shared apartment, Francis lives in a large wood-floored apartment with “two large, red velvet cushions fringed with golden tassels” (168). This much more privileged space gives Wu Lan a sense of safety, a “private temple of our own love making” (168). This temple, however, can only exist in adopting a narrative of utopic queer tolerance, and in conveniently forgetting the class inequality Wu Lan had faced with Stephanie. That the narrative never returns to Stephanie, but continues to bemoan the reimagined sex-

workers, speaks to the ambiguity through which this narrative can be read. The narrative reflects Wu Lan's psychological suffering as a queer Asian American lesbian, but also satirizes this "resistant" identity by depicting her as an uptight rich "Lotusland" Asian American. Meanwhile, Stephanie's story never seems complete; her economic position is neither transformed nor even referred to again. She is simply noted for the reader and then indifferently erased.

If, as Tina Chen suggests, Asian American acts of impersonating oppressed peoples of the past can "resist the ways in which their identities as Asian Americans are legally and socially over-determined," then this "resistance" often reproduces social inequalities by distancing historical violence into an "intolerant" past (xxii). As Chen says, "impersonation becomes an imaginative act that helps to redress the wrongs of history...even as one keeps in mind the impossibility of becoming that subject" (xxiv). Yet the "wrongs of history" seem to evade the structural violence that has been maintained in the long, continuous history of imperial violence. Such violence in fact lives on through the reproduction of the very social hierarchies that are enabled by confining violence into the past. Kwa's novel both reflects and produces transitive culture by exposing how Asian American identity can be used to mask one's own complicity with and reliance upon continual modes of structural violence, while remaining indifferent towards class inequalities.

Read as satires, Bacho's *Cebu* and Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* resist notions of reciprocity and liberal tolerance not only in revealing the very social structures through which they take hold, but also in showing the continuation of imperial social formations, which merge narratives of the "homeland" and "host country" rather than see them as discrete objects one can feel indebted towards. *Cebu* gives attention to these continual histories when Ben discovers that

the violence of World War II was the catalyst for his mother's devotion to the Catholic faith. Ben's very moralistic and cultural identity then becomes branded as an extension of imperialism, rather an exception to it, with Douglas McArthur as God's "indelible sign" (81). Similarly, in *This Place Called Absence*, the sex worker's very labor as an intimate and affective performance for rich clients parallels Wu Lan's occupation as a clinical psychologist. While Chow Chat Mui describes her labor as being "holed up in my box transporting men to some heavenly release," Wu Lan says of her labor that "if there's any religion in North America that supersedes Christianity, it's the business of secular confession" (186). In their association with religious symbols of "heaven" and "confession," both occupations are shown to fulfill a vital function within a successful capitalist society—the release from guilt, shame and self-disgust. Wu Lan appears to resent the class position of her clients, who would be "away on vacation with their families" only to come back "after the Labour Day weekend, [and] feel their anxieties catch up with them and insist on being seen immediately" (6). At the end of her "year of absence," four days before she must return to work, Wu Lan dreams of seeing her clients "dressed in cocktail party attire," their "faces all giddily festive" (179). Wu Lan's resentment for her rich clients parallels the sex workers' similar positions as affective supporters of the colonial government in Singapore, and allow us to trace the subjugation of gendered migrant labor within the limitless demands of global capitalism.

The historical parallels in both *Cebu* and *This Place Called Absence* expose multiculturalist imperial social formations that continue to the present day; we see that the characters' "debt" to the host country as pluralist saviors is always related to depictions of the nationalist state as anti-racist, multiculturalist or tolerant. Where Asian American identity can

allow the subject to possess a resistant position, transitive culture exposes how these very desires for identity interpellate the individual to perform Asian American identity as successful and tolerable, thus reinforcing the state's reputation as a space of liberal tolerance. These novels' critiques emphasize the cyclical reappearance of multiculturalist governance as both imperial and nationalist, insisting on the continuous reappearance of violence through the networked power of the dominant host country onto subordinate homelands, and in the nationalist state's imperial relationship to its own pluralist populous. Such critique unsettles the over-investment of gratitude, and emphasizes a more complex imperial history, which sees multicultural identities—even those coded as empowering, resistant or anti-racist—as adopting modes of recognition that relies on identifying "intolerable" cultural others.

Chapter 4

The Neutral Cosmopolitan and the Transitive Service Worker:

Cynicism and Ecstasy in Hwee Hwee Tan's *Mammon Inc.* and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao*

In Hwee Hwee Tan's 2001 novel, *Mammon Inc.*, the young English graduate student Chiah Deng Gan travels through experiences of cosmopolitan ecstasy after she is spotted by Mammon CorpS, a subsidiary of the world's most successful multinational company, Mammon Inc, to become an adaptor: a consultant who teaches up-and-coming business elites how to best use their racial and cultural signifiers to raise their social capital. Deng's trials to become an adaptor take her through Britain, New York and Singapore, as she studies how to turn symbols of “Chineseness,” “Britishness” and “Americanness” into corporate logos that symbolize cosmopolitan belonging. As she attempts to fit-in with the cosmopolitan “Generation Vexers” (Gen. Vexers) at the New York club Utopia, Deng first claims that she is from New York, but then asks if it is safe to walk around at night, asking “Won't we get mugged?” (144). Her guide—a fellow member of Mammon CorpS—suggests that to fit in, Deng share stories of being annoyed by New York tourists and “ranting about lower-income ethnic groups, like cab-drivers” (145). Deng is only included in the group when she takes this advice and successfully rants about a multi-ethnic protest:

So I step outside and see this mega protest against Police Brutality. All sorts of groups—African-Americans against Police Brutality, Arabs against Police

Brutality, Mothers of Victims against Police Brutality... And the people look at me like I'm *so* shallow, because they're out doing their bit to wrestle justice for humanity, while I'm out here shopping for beauty products. But I was like, *whatever*, just get out of my way. (148).

While Deng later seems disgusted with her own made up story, she later admits that being among the Gen. Vexers was the only time she felt like she had "found where [she] belonged" (274). Her acceptance as a cosmopolitan is only enabled by distinguishing herself from "lower-income ethnic groups," those "African American" and "Arab" others who are "doing their bit to wrestle justice for humanity."

Tan's novel cynically exposes how cosmopolitanism, like many imagined communities, defines itself by comparing cosmopolitan belonging to an other, usually defined by their ethnic or national identity, and their lower-class, immobile position. Chiah Deng's desire to transcend her ethnic position leads her to take a managerial role of "adapting" ethnic subjects, and her expertise in cultural mores only adds to her cosmopolitan self-depiction. While Deng's ability to "adapt" seems to resist multiculturalist categories by offering an identity beyond her ethnicity, her narrative's cynical tone questions how Deng's desire to distinguish herself from "real ethnics" actually reinforces ethnic stereotypes and reified conceptions of culture, as Deng and the Gen. Vexers must continually identify ethnic others to reassure their own "transcultural" identities.

Like Chiah Deng, the protagonist of Han Ong's *Fixer Chao* (2001), William Paulinha, also attempts to depict himself within an identity type separate from his own "given" ethnicity. Yet as a queer Filipino migrant who has worked in service labor all his life, Paulinha knows well that the desire for cosmopolitanism can act as an incentive to perform service labor and to play the part of the "ethnic" object of ridicule. Paulinha's desire is thus not to *become* a cosmopolitan,

but to *destroy* them. Paulinha transitions from his queer Filipino identity to the more highly-valued identity of a Chinese *feng shui* artist in order to "fix" the condos of rich elites, arranging their furniture to bring them bad luck. While *Mammon Inc.* focuses on the cosmopolitan's desire to distinguish herself from ethnic others, *Fixer Chao* considers the ethnic subject's ability to placate this desire by transitioning among ethnic identities, and thus gaining vengeance upon the cosmopolitans who help reproduce multicultural identities. Both novels express these desires through humorous tones that lampoon the desire to belong among a community of cosmopolitans as a spiritual fulfillment, an ecstasy that can only be derived through consuming the products and knowledges of an ethnic other. In their cynical tones distancing the reader from notions of ethnic authenticity, both novels consider how the ethnic service laborer utilizes performative modes of cultural expertise in order to satisfy the client, turning herself into a fetishized symbol that enables the cosmopolitan to live precariously through them.

This chapter treats two novels about Anglophone Southeast Asian migrants who seek to recast their given ethnic identity: *Mammon Inc.* by the migrant Singaporean writer, Hwee Hwee Tan, and *Fixer Chao* by Han Ong, a queer mixed race (Chinese/Filipino) migrant from the Philippines living in the United States. While Tan's Chiah Deng resists her given identity as a Chinese Singaporean by seeking to become cosmopolitan, Ong's William Paulinha does so by transitioning into other ethnic identities. While doing so, Paulinha builds transitive culture with other service workers like his friend Precoisca, a domestic servant who joins Paulinha by passing as a Chinese mystic. In their exploration of communities outside the nation, both texts can be categorized into what Azade Seyhan has called "transnational literature," "a genre of writing that operates outside the national canon [and] addresses issues facing deterritorialized cultures" (10). The "transnational" concern characterizes Southeast Asian Anglophone literature, as a genre that

refuses to express "gratitude" towards the host nation and rather exposes transnational histories of imperialism and violence while also attempting to build regional or transnational communities. Through their Anglophone dispositions, both authors envision a 21st century where transitive cultural practices—the practice of managing and reinterpreting one's cultural identity—are common among a global migrant underclass, especially among service laborers who are cast as ethnic subjects in order to bolster cosmopolitan communities. Both novels, written in 2001, depict the dyad of the cosmopolitan and the ethnic subject in a way that shifts our understanding of power from postcolonial models of 'East versus West' and 'white versus other' to neocolonial models of 'the cosmopolitan client' versus 'the ethnic service worker.'

In exposing the reliance of cosmopolitans on marking service workers as "ethnic," both *Mammon Inc.* and *Fixer Chao* explore how transitive culture, which formed as a way of interpreting, resisting and managing multiculturalist categories, can offer a mode of resisting multiculturalist categories different than that of cosmopolitanism. Since the rise of hybridity theory in the late 1990s and the new cosmopolitanism in the early 2000s, understandings of race that resist multiculturalist categories have increasingly valued mobile, transcultural and transnational subjects who often have economic privilege. However, these cosmopolitan identities can also reinforce ethnic categories by allowing the cosmopolitan to occupy a "neutral" position and a cynical distance from ethnicity, so that the cosmopolitan feels "quite aware of the social reality, but...none the less still insist[s] upon the mask" (Žižek 1989, 29). Cosmopolitan conceptions of culture implicitly posit a neutral power—a "multiculturalist umpire"—to manage ethnicized bodies, thus presuming that one's knowledge of cultural history (and absence of ethnic identity) is in itself liberating. In contrast, transitive culture considers the function of ethnic categories in maintaining an imperial power structure, and rather than posit themselves as

somehow more “enlightened” than “authentic” others, transitive cultures unsettle notions of authenticity by transitioning among cultural types and experiencing struggles of other "ethnic types" as shared struggles among a global underclass. Transitive culture does not transcend ethnic categories, but transitions among them to consider multiple experiences of subordination and possible means of resistance. Cosmopolitanism thus seems less like an alternative to multiculturalist categories, and more like a way of sustaining a multiculturalist power structure by producing "neutral" cosmopolitan subjects as natural managers of ethnicized peoples, a natural upper-class elite. As both novels stress, the cosmopolitan belief that one is free of ethnicity through their vast knowledge of diverse cultural practices, histories and traditions, can function as the very condition of possibility that enables multiculturalist management and reproduces ethnic identities.

These novels portray the cosmopolitan and the migrant service worker as similar managers of cultural performance and knowledge in their ability to use their vast cultural knowledge for their own interests. While the cosmopolitan uses this knowledge to make their upper-class positions seem natural, the ethnic subjects use cultural knowledge to gain recognition and economic mobility. For the cosmopolitan, cultural knowledge, performance and history are consumed as symbols of cosmopolitan belonging, signaling that the subject has surpassed ethnicized others, while for the ethnicized subject, they are tactics and strategies for gaining recognition and pursuing their own interests (even if that interest be revenge). The relationship between the commodification of ethnic cultures and the vulnerability of the migrant service worker raises questions about diasporic subjectivity and contemporary multicultural ideals as they intersect with mobility, class, and service labor. It should be emphasized that both of these binary identities—cosmopolitan and ethnic—are socially constructed, yet mark positions in a

global multiculturalist social hierarchy. This chapter traces the representation of this binary in order to show how both concepts are produced, fostered and reinforced through relationships based on service labor.

***Mammon Inc.* and Generation Vexed**

In Mammon Inc., Chiah Deng's narrative voice characterizes her as a sarcastic young woman caught in the joys of celebrity-culture, fashion magazines, corporate hierarchies, cultural exchange, hair-styles and Star Wars. Deng's vast expertise with consumer culture marks her as a subject laden with *cultural*-power, a symbolic identity of "chic" and "in-the-know" that gives her more value than other migrant Singaporeans. Deng's knowledge of cultural mores and "coolness" makes her especially valued in a context of global multiculturalism, where knowledge of cultural practices can be used to inform niche market strategies. All the while Deng follows a plot reminiscent of Doctor Faustus, of a genius caught between her cherished Jedi-like Oxford professors, and the lure of "selling her soul" to belong with the global cosmopolitan elite, which she compares to the devil, Chinese dragons, and the dark side. In depicting a world of global cities where cultural knowledge has become deprived of everything but symbolic value, Tan's novel explores the relationship between global capital and global multiculturalism as similarly functioning to maintain ethnic stratification by "adapting" resistant subjects into depoliticized commodities, who are higher valued on the world stage.

Like her protagonist, Chiah Deng, the Singaporean author Hwee Hwee Tan also grew up in a highly mobile environment. Tan first moved from Singapore to the Netherlands as an international student, and then to Oxford where she received her Masters degree in English. With the publication of *Mammon Inc.*, Tan grew to become, as the scholar Robbie Goh has written,

"the poster girl for the 'global' generation of Singapore writers," exemplifying "the split between the local and the global, traditionalism and progressivism, ethnographic and 'international' writing" (240). Tan's global outlook emerges from her critiques of Singapore's economic obsessions, which have produced a "quantitative prism" of viewing arts and development (240). For the scholar Philip Holden, Tan's critique is grounded in her life as a middle-class migrant, for whom "identification with national narratives [become] increasingly difficult" (2010, 285). Her migrations seem less like the economic migrations of Singaporean and Malaysian history, but rather consist of "a series of departures and returns" (285). *Mammon Inc.* was also one of the first Singaporean novels to be published by Penguin and distributed internationally, showing "greater influence from contemporary British and American fiction, and indeed from global popular culture than ... from earlier generations of Singapore writers" (285).

Like Tan herself, *Mammon Inc.*'s narrator, Chiah Deng, feels displaced between the Singapore city-state, which she sees as cultureless and materialistic, and England, which she fetishizes as a bastion of high-culture. In the novel's beginning, Deng marks herself as transcultural by showcasing her knowledge of Chinese and British identity, yet the British students at Oxford presume that she cannot think outside of her Chinese experiences and exclude her "not with a slur but with a compliment" (9). Frustrated by how her racial signifiers continue to mark her as a foreigner, Deng is presented with a way out of this dilemma when she receives a letter from Mammon Inc. inviting her to train to become an adapter, a professional with masterful knowledge of cultural capital who "provides Adaption services for the modern international professional elite: those executives who grew up in one country, were educated in another, and are now working in a third" (2). As an adaptor, Deng would train elites how to

transform their cultural signifiers—which might be marginal, intolerable or associated with a particular type of labor class—into profitable symbols of cosmopolitan belonging.

In order to become an adaptor, Deng must pass three tests. She must adapt her British flatmate, Steve, to successfully navigate a Singaporean dinner; she must adapt her Singaporean sister, Chiah Chen, to be accepted at an Oxford gathering; and she must adapt herself into a cosmopolitan, or a "Generation Vexer," a member of the upper-class who has "no fixed cultural identity" (143). The novel's language of "adaptation" conjures connotations of biological and evolutionary adaptation, where a biological organ is modified in order to make it more fit for its changing environment. Deng's task to adapt "Global Nomads," who are described as "bankers, diplomats, lawyers and consultants," means that she must shift their behavior so that they are tolerated and respected in different nations (2). They must not only perform a "tolerable" cultural identity, but a "consumable" one. The language of adaptation can thus be seen as a strategic shift to adapt to a new environment, in this case, to adapt the subject to the elite community of cosmopolitans within the context of global multiculturalism. Only the wealthy can adapt, while others remain stuck in their immobile cultural attitudes. To "adapt" is thus to "develop" the client into a proper global nomad, a cosmopolitan who belongs to a higher mode of civilization than their ethnicized counterparts. To become an Adaptor, for Deng, also means her own inclusion in this elite, as she is promised "a lifetime of free global travel" (2).

Deng's place as an adaptor in training catapults her from identifying as an ethnic Chinese graduate student to a globe-trotting cosmopolitan, and comes with the salary necessary to support the cosmopolitan lifestyle. Deng's invitation letter from Mammon CorpS arrives while she is studying in Oxford, a campus that has "always been accused of being too elitist, of only letting in rich public-school types" (168). As the only Asian in her college, Deng confronts Oxford's

xenophobia, which has only briefly accepted her in order to legitimate itself as a diverse institution, marking her as "the token foreigner from a poor underdeveloped country" (168). Yet Deng continues to fetishize Oxford as "an ancient and immortal Atlantis," a city "metamorphosed from hour to hour, quietly offering a kaleidoscope of spectacular sight after spectacular sight" (108). In some ways Deng's gaze seems typical of the colonized subject raised on literature praising the landscape of rural Britain, rather than urban Singapore. But her gaze also seems updated for the globalized world, where the halls of Oxford represent the esoteric knowledge and traditional cultures that have been extinguished by capitalist industry. She feels "envious of the professors who sipped wine from the college's private vineyard in Tuscany" because they "seemed like sentinels who guarded secrets from an enchanted age" (108-9). Her desire for Oxford is thus a desire for an "orientalized" Englishness, a desire to "become one of the wise guardians in this mysterious, magical wonderland" (109).

Considering Deng's frustration with Singapore's materialism, her fetish for Oxford can be read as an attempt to occupy modes of Englishness that embody a culturally-rich past, which function as an alternative to Singapore's rapid development and materialism. Her attempt to embrace Englishness however is defeated in the passive polite rejections she gets from her British colleagues, who all compliment her on her English, making it clear that she is only tolerated because she "was the only non-white person at [her] college" (9). The racism Deng encounters forces her to admit that her fetishization of Oxford was in fact contributing to the structural role that the university played in cultivating "among its members, the feeling that they were the possessors of some sort of esoteric knowledge available only to the elite" (20). For Deng the hypocrisies of British elites are clear in their prejudice towards racial bodies.

Mammon CorpS provides Deng with a cosmopolitan view of Oxford, and sees its elitist xenophobia as provincial rather than superior, as "out of date" and irrelevant in the age of global multiculturalism. The adaptors of Mammon CorpS contrast the Oxford students, as they too are wealthy, highly educated, but are also mobile and free of Oxford's backwards racist assumptions. To be among the adaptors, for Deng, is to belong among a crowd of young cosmopolitans, the 'Gen[eration] Vexers':

These Gen. Vexers were young, creative geniuses in glamour jobs, with nerd-high levels of education but a hip sense of humour. Like me they had no fixed identity. The Gen. Vexers were cosmopolitan citizens of the world, equally at home in a 212 or 0207 area code, equally well versed in the work of George Lucas and Joseph Campbell to be able to analyse the mythological archetypes in Star Wars. (Tan 2001, 143)

As Deng pursues becoming an adaptor, she meets more Gen. Vexers, noting that "for the first time in my life it was normal not to be a native" (138). Unlike her acquaintances in Oxford and Singapore, the Gen. Vexers seem to have "transcended" national roots. While in a club in New York City, the Gen. Vexer Marcus Evans tells Deng that "None of us are from New York originally...I arrived in the Big Apple via Minneapolis, Boston, Prague, Jo'burg, London, then here" (138). The Gen. Vexers take pride in lacking a single racial or national history, and define themselves by their mobility and their ability to get along with anyone, no matter their cultural ties. Despite the differences in race, they all share an imagined common identity: that they, unlike the vast majority of the world, have transcended the identity of a monolithic ethnic type.

While the Gen. Vexers presume to have surpassed the provincial racism of their homelands, they do not ignore race—rather they make it hypervisible, turn it into a farce so they

can distance themselves from their ethnic backgrounds and social histories. To meet these Gen. Vexers, Deng must get into New York's hottest club, Utopia, by using the "Glam-o-meter," a guide that helps determine whether or not an individual is high enough on "glam" to be considered a Gen. Vexer. On the scale, being Asian can earn someone ten points, being "Black AND look[ing] hip-hop AND [being] in a group of < four" earns one thirty-five points (112), while being white costs ten points and being "Black and look[ing] hip-hop and [being] in a group of > four" is minus fifty points, suggesting that groups of more than four black people might be construed as a gang (113). Though the Gen. Vexers consider race as an indicator of social value, they are more concerned with how that race is performed. While being "black and look[ing] hip-hop" might symbolize one's knowledge of cultural chic, the "Glam-o-meter"'s implicit concern is that there is something fundamental to the performance, that perhaps the wearer may breach décor and reveal an "authentic" or "fixed" identity. To break this implicit convention—in this case, to be in a group large enough to be considered a gang—shows that one is subjected to their cultural background rather than cynically distanced from it. Deng calls this implicit convention "the Look," an ambiguous set of expectations that depends upon the culture one is performing, so that any racial construct is determined by one's clothing, hairstyle, friends, education, and knowledge of cultural coolness. Having "the Look," as Deng discovers, indicates that the wearer shares a common culture with the Gen. Vexers. After weeks of shopping for the right clothes, tightening her body at the gym, and waiting for the best hairstylist in New York, Deng finally has enough "glam" to enter the club, but once in the club, she discovers her "Glam-o-meter" rating is actually higher than she thought, since "being Asian will be the new It thing during the summer" (141).

After becoming a Gen. Vexer, Deng's second task, to adapt her Singaporean sister to fit in at Oxford, similarly relies on her cynical observations about an ethnic culture. When her sister begins to praise Oxford, Deng writes in her notebook: "*Explain to sis that people come to Oxford not because it is a great academic institution...but because they want some of the elitist mystique to rub off on them*" (italics in original, 177). Deng puts these notes into two short guides for her sister to read: "Swank Up Your Speech—The Talking *Cheem* Guide for the Blur," (cheem, Singaporean slang for "cosmopolitan obscure"), and "The Guide to being an Oxford It Girl." Both guides attempt to separate valued cultural signifiers from those that are lower-class and crude. Her "Swank Up Your Speech" guide suggests that "anything you say in Latin [or French] will make you sound *cheem*." Deng's guides use cultural signifiers while ignoring their historical meanings, often giving no definition for terms, but simply stating "You don't have to understand...you just need to know how to insert it in your conversation" (184). During Deng's final test, she attempts to adapt her Oxford flatmate Steve to fit in with Singaporean Chinese. As with her sister, Deng trains him through implicitly mocking the local Singapore culture. She makes a note to "*replace Steve's enthusiasm for walking around museums of fine art with a passion for strolling through the air-conditioned corridors of food courts and shopping malls*" (italics in original, 242). Despite Deng's guidance, both her sister and Steve fail their tests, as neither of them seem motivated to become cosmopolitan. Unlike the mobile and transcultural Deng, both characters seem unable to find value in "overcoming" their respective national identities.

When the novel ends, Deng must finally choose between her life among her friends in Oxford or to become a Gen. Vexer and work for Mammon CorpS. Draco Sidious, the head of

Mammon Inc., reveals that her trials to adapt Steve and her sister were doomed to fail, and were actually designed to expose her own lack of belonging in either national culture:

in that moment [of failure], you felt completely alone. Because you knew you could never be totally Singaporean, since you were so ashamed of their lack of culture and sophistication...And you knew that you could never belong to England, because they would never accept someone as Chinese as you. (274)

Realizing that she cannot fit into a national identity, Deng chooses to belong among the Gen. Vexers, turning her knowledge of cultural performance into tools for the world's largest company. Rather than resist cultural categories she knows to be socially constructed, Deng chooses to spend her life managing and teaching wealthy clients how to take advantage of the racial assumptions generated through global multiculturalism. Deng's choice is thus pragmatic, choosing to use her special knowledge of cultural forms to game the multiculturalist system to belong among a transcendent (but narcissistic) cosmopolitan elite.

The Cosmopolitan as Multiculturalist

As a meditation on the desire for cosmopolitanism and the overlapping of consumerism and cultural knowledge, Tan's *Mammon Inc.* can be understood as a Southeast Asian Anglophone text, as it considers the depictions of race and capital within a Southeast Asian pluralist society. As explored in the first chapter, the economist J.S. Furnivall saw the danger of colonial pluralism in Southeast Asia within "a lack of a common social will," since every cultural group had different values and different gods. This social "lack" monetized cultural exchanges and fragmented social demand so that economic production became the only unifying focus

(450). With so many divergent interests in religion, cultural histories, values and civics, the only common values, for Furnivall, were in generating more wealth. "In a plural society," Furnivall wrote, "the only common deity is Mammon," the biblical deity of greed (308).

The hierarchical organization of a pluralist society led Furnivall to compare pluralist societies with factories. As he wrote, "the fundamental character of the organization of a plural society as a whole is the structure of a factory, organized for production" (450). For the Singaporean scholar Sumit K. Mandel, since the 1970s and 80s, when many post-colonial nation-states turned from industrialized economies towards service and intellectual economies, the pluralist social structure seemed less like a factory, and more like a global, cultural supermarket, with the nation-state, Singapore Inc., as the "modern holding company, with its citizens all shareholders and its institutions all geared to achieving maximum efficiency in a larger (business) world of winners and losers" (179). Singapore, as Singapore Inc., was tasked only with generating more wealth, and to "incessantly reinvent itself and refine its corporate vision and mission statements to retain its competitive edge" (179). The pluralist discourse that emerged saw Singapore's diverse cultural groups as signifiers of commodified difference, making them easier to conscript into structural hierarchies, and allowing the state to maintain dominance so long as the nation's economic success continued.

Tan's *Mammon Inc.* represents the hierarchies inherent to commodified difference in nation-states self-represented as "multiculturalist." As the literary scholar C.J. Wee states, *Mammon Inc.* makes it "emphatically clear...that artistic and technocratic culture need not be a monoculture; multicultural or interstitial cultures are welcome now" (201). Rather than have identities dominated by a national narrative, which places some as diasporic and others as local,

cultural meanings are provided through a global multiculturalism, which transcends national interest through the common desire for economic success. "Global multiculturalism," as Shu-mei Shih defines it, extends the "American national model of multiculturalism" that minoritizes "those who are outside Western metropolises" so that "in the new rainbowlike globe, each nation is supposed to represent one reified culture, with a set of recognizable traits, just as each ethnic minority community in the metropole constitutes one reified culture in an official multiculturalism" (2004, 30). Deng's sister and flatmate Steve are partial products of this reified culture, who take seriously their identities as Chinese Singaporean and British, while Deng's transcultural attitude sees them as provincial, or worse, "monocultured," able to identify and understand a single cultural way of life. Deng's desire to be cosmopolitan thus does not deny or upset the reified cultures of global multiculturalism, but rather reproduces them in order to distinguish the mobile elite as cosmopolitan. In this paradigm, for Wee, the inclusion of "other forms of culture are fine, as long as capitalism remains paramount" (201).

The interest of "Mammon" as the only common deity in a pluralist society reflects the common interest of a cosmopolitan global upperclass. Yet theories of cosmopolitan too often divorce the cosmopolitan attitude from its structural role as identifying "ethnic" subjects, who seem stuck in a provincial behavior that borders on intolerance, and thus criminality. In Taylor Astra's 2009 film *Examined Life*, Kwame Anthony Appiah discusses cosmopolitanism while walking through the corridors of an international airport. Appiah's brief statements about cosmopolitan ethics are interspersed with images of Appiah walking serenely through airport gates, standing on escalators, and gazing at the planes landing. He reflects that "within a few minutes you'll have passed more people than our remote ancestors will have passed in their

entire lives.” The airport invokes the gaze of a busy nomad who must enter into a discourse of mutual understanding and tolerance through globalized infrastructure. However, to imagine cosmopolitanism as a cohesive group ethics smuggles a hierarchy that values cosmopolitan subjects over what Appiah, in his book *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), calls “counter-cosmopolitans,” those hopelessly “ethnic subjects” for whom “universalism issues in uniformity” rather than diversity (144). If the cosmopolitan accepts that there must be many different ways of living, the counter-cosmopolitan practices what Appiah calls a “universalism *without* toleration,” (emphasis mine). Appiah defines cosmopolitans as those who “think that there are many values worth living by and that you cannot live by all of them” (144). In contrast, the counter-cosmopolitan is defined as monocultural, unable to overcome their presumably “authentic” culture, and is marked as “intolerant” in a world where tolerance characterizes the elite.

While Appiah's take on cosmopolitanism insists on “othering” the ethnic subject, Bruce Robbins' early work on cosmopolitanism, which helped begin the new interest in cosmopolitan ideas, similarly attempts to downplay the idealization of a cosmopolitan class. Yet Robbins also sees cosmopolitans as representing an endpoint to multiculturalist education, which can lead to both negative and positive political projects. In the negative sense cosmopolitanism invokes a globe-trotting prestige, and a dis-identification with national issues, while positive cosmopolitanism stresses “world-wide distribution” and “the more general sense of ‘belonging’ to more parts of the world than one's nation” (173). Here the transcultural subject is seen as “positive” because they are able to dis-identify with their nation, and can even be educated out of their provincial attitudes, yet many “transcultural” subjects—like Southeast Asian Anglophones—are not given such a choice, and may have never “belonged” in their own nation-state in the first place. Robbins' “positive” sense of cosmopolitanism thus still presumes a

cosmopolitan subject who can choose to belong to "one's own nation," which seems to discount those who seem exiled or nation-less, such as migrant workers, diasporic subjects, minorities, or Southeast Asian Anglophones like Chiah Deng, who seeks desperately to belong within nations (Singapore and Britain) that refuse her.

Robbins goes on to distinguish cosmopolitanism from "an abstract, ahistorical universalism" towards recognizing "its local applications," where the "unrealizable ideal produces normative pressure against such alternatives as, say, the fashionable "hybridization" (182-3). Against right-wing voices that might seek to stymie multicultural programs, "cosmopolitanism" for Robbins provides a "normative edge" that adds to "the inclusiveness and diversity of multiculturalism" (183). While Robbins' attempts to salvage cosmopolitanism by recognizing its critical and expansive worldview are notable, his defense of cosmopolitanism places it as an ideal outcome of multiculturalist dominance, so that "the term cosmopolitanism better describes the sensibility of our moment" (183). Robbins hopes that multicultural education, valued through the cosmopolitan ideal, can help to keep violent incidents like the first Iraq War from taking place. Yet the multicultural education he defends, especially when pursued in the Global South, seems to dangerously pattern the history of imperial education onto subordinate countries, where the figure of the tolerant and diplomatic cosmopolitan stands-in for the developed, civilized subject. If cosmopolitan, in this construct, figures as the result or the "unrealizable ideal" of multiculturalist education, then those who consume symbols of cosmopolitan belonging—Tan's "Global Nomads"—represent the *realized* ideal. They are products of an intense multicultural education, "adaptation," who find that their transcultural attitudes can be repackaged and commodified in a global multiculturalism.

Appiah and Robbins' cosmopolitan ethics both seek to build understanding between cultures and nations, yet implicitly reinforce the structural role of cosmopolitan elites, first in identifying (and de-valuing) "monocultural" or "ethnic" subjects, and second in positing cosmopolitan subjects as an ideal outcome of global multiculturalism. In his book *Inhuman Conditions* (2006), published the same year as Appiah's, Pheng Cheah questions the implicit desires and exclusions of such cosmopolitan ideas, tracing cosmopolitan from its positive connotations of including individuals without referring to race, gender or sexuality, to its tendency to become "entwined with a normative concept of culture as the human power of transcendence" (5). For Cheah, cosmopolitanism can never be separated from the desires that buttress its structural role: the desire to transcend or escape from one's "given culture," as Cheah calls it, to a cosmopolitan identity that views its community as "the world," but can only see that world through particular consumerist optics and capitalist networks. The new cosmopolitan subject not only aligns with a culture that claims to be global, but perceives of this global culture as the top of a hierarchy of an international division of labor.

As an imagined community, cosmopolitanism reflects the material conditions of economic migration and functions as a "necessary condition resulting from the development of forces of production on a global scale" (Cheah 28). This materialist understanding of cosmopolitanism invokes two distinct "layers" of cosmopolitan communities: the middle to upper-class migrants (what Aihwa Ong calls those with "flexible citizenship") who pursue cosmopolitanism as a means of doing business, and the lower-class migrants, often employed in service labor, and who must adopt a cosmopolitan ethics as a strategy to better serve clients. In both cases, cosmopolitan ethics function as an instrumental tactic produced through global capitalism. Cheah conceptualizes these two global networks of labor as *high cosmopolitanism*—

“the high-end cosmopolitanism of talented professionals”—and *low cosmopolitanism*, “the cultural practices of the underclass foreign domestic helpers who are the disavowed support of the aspiring global city” (199). Cheah illustrates these two types through two migrant figures, the traveling “liberal middle-class professional woman” and the “docile foreign domestic worker” (202), who is thought to possess “a form of culture that the local population generally regards as annoying babble” (199). For the liberal middle-class professional, cosmopolitan networks provide a sense of transcendence, an “emotional reward of striving toward a higher goal that transcends mere economic self-interest” (203). Though cosmopolitanism may be produced by the infrastructure of global capital, it appears to grant transcendence from one's given culture, making it an ideal that exists as its own *raison d'être*. In contrast, the “low cosmopolitan” foreign domestic worker sees “global culture” as the means to financial remuneration rather than an end in itself, and does not seek to transcend their “given culture” so much as their “given conditions.”

Cheah's analysis of “high” and “low” cosmopolitanism considers the cosmopolitan subject as a consumer of ethnic service labor, or what we might also call “affective labor.” Affective labor⁹ finds value in an immaterial substance (affect) and is thus immeasurable, leaving room for what Patricia Clough calls a “worldwide meshing of biopolitics with an affective economy” that marks some populations “as valuable life and others as without value” in order to cast some bodies as “superexploitable or exhaustible unto death.” (25). The trend of migrant affective labor coming out of the Global South, especially from Southeast Asia, marks the service laborer as Cheah's “low cosmopolitan” *par excellence*, who must adopt cosmopolitan values in order to produce affective value for consumers, but who also never becomes

⁹ Affective labor includes the immaterial labor of the service industry, of housemaids, nannies, and sex workers, and transfers value from the labor in producing a commodity to the laborer's very dispositions and attitudes, her moods and affective capacities, and her ability to “get along” with clients (Clough 24).

cosmopolitan, or “high cosmopolitan.” Cosmopolitanism in this case functions not only as a necessary condition for the extension of global capital, but as a trained attribute required of service workers who must work one-on-one with cosmopolitan clients in a performance of cultural acceptance and tolerance.

While Cheah regards “low cosmopolitans” as cosmopolitan in the sense of being multilingual and culturally savvy towards clients, it seems curious to explain migrant service culture as defined through the lenses of how upperclass migrants see themselves (cosmopolitan). Cosmopolitanism brings implicit hierarchies and exclusions, which are informed by race, gender, and sexuality, and ultimately are useful for a global elite to categorize and manage bodies based on organizing them by their presumed authentic cultural types, creating a seemingly infinite pool of affective labor. While Cheah's materialist view of cosmopolitanism does great critical work in dissecting its function, it does not account for the particularly “non-ethnic” space carved out by cosmopolitan belonging, nor its historical position as replacing colonial powers that once disguised themselves as “umpires” managing the divisive interests of ethnic communities. It seems more accurate to consider migrants who practice transitioning between recognizable multiculturalist identities, but who are presumed as “ethnic” or “monocultural,” as practicing a transitive culture. Transitive culture does not read as “non-ethnic,” nor as structurally fixed within a pluralist hierarchy. If, as Jodie Melamed writes, global multiculturalism values “attributes such as multicultural, reasonable, feminist, and law-abiding” and stigmatizes attributes such as “monocultural, irrational, regressive, patriarchal, or criminal,” then those who practice transitive culture are marked as the later (2006, 87).

The claim that cosmopolitanism enables an appreciation for other cultures can be dangerously close to treating “each local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people—

as 'natives' whose mores are to be carefully studied and 'respected' (Žižek 44). For Slavoj Žižek, these "multiculturalists," as he calls them, see themselves as able to occupy a "privileged empty point of universality," a position of neutrality that operates like an umpire over the chaotic and aggressive realm of ethnic subjects. From this position, the multiculturalist can "appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures," turning the tolerant respect for the other's difference into "the very form of asserting one's own superiority" (44). The discourse of cosmopolitanism, which appreciates particular cultures by positing itself as non-ethnic, seems less like an alternative to rigid multicultural assumptions, but rather, takes advantage of multiculturalist governance by occupying the subject position of the "multiculturalist umpire." Its critiques of racial authenticity are passified by envisioning themselves as outside of authentic ethnic identities. The cosmopolitan continues to see the culture of others, as Etienne Balibar predicted, "like a nature," and uses their racial signifiers to mark individuals as trapped within an "insurmountable cultural difference" (22).

Chick Lit and the Cynical Cosmopolitan

Hwee Hwee Tan's *Mammon Inc.* explores the desires for cosmopolitan belonging through its Faustian narrative of a woman who feels trapped by her Chinese racial identity in Oxford, and who "sells her soul" to become a cosmopolitan Gen. Vexer. The novel exposes the cosmopolitan overlapping of race and consumerism through its genre as an Asian Chick Lit novel, which gives the novel a first-person cynical tone that expresses "self-distancing irony, satiric orientation and sharp self-parody (with its multiple wink-wink, nod-nod elements)" (Wee, 200). The novel's Chick Lit genre not only disrupts notions of ethnic authenticity through a distinctly transcultural

voice, but also shows how the cynical distance from ethnic identity can maintain social hierarchies and posit cosmopolitans as culturally superior.

Tan's employment of Chick Lit, in the Singapore context, can be seen as a parody of the consumerist female voice. Chick Lit emerged in the late 1990s as a genre that examined the nature of commodity culture in which young women are primary targets for the marketing of consumer goods (Mazza). The name "Chick Lit" comes from two collections of writing by post-feminist authors, where "Chick Lit" was meant as an ironic title, aimed at those who would devalue Chick Lit authors because of their gender and readership (Mazza). Chick Lit writers, too, often see their own work as a parody of the urban single woman, though their books are often read as encouraging a consumerist and apolitical female identity. The genre's proto-typical text, Helen Fielding's 1996 book *Bridget Jones's Diary*, was taken from a column Fielding wrote criticizing the way women obsessed over consumer culture and women's magazines. Yet *Bridget Jones's Diary* defined Chick Lit in spotlighting a humorous, single, urban, confessional narrator who is well-versed in pop-culture, obsessed with fashion and shopping, and is constantly searching for romantic encounters. As in most Chick Lit, the novel's witty and sarcastic monologues express a cynical distancing from the novel's romance, even as the narrator feels this romance and becomes seriously affected by it.

Though the brazen attitude and sexual freedom of some Chick Lit narrators can be read as empowering, as scholar Wenche Ommundsen and other feminist critics have pointed out, "it is a freedom predicated on desire rather than politics, a 'liberation' sold to women through the conflation of feminism and consumption" (108). In countries like Singapore, China and India, Chick Lit has risen to challenge portrayals of passive and exoticized third world women, to instead portray "young women from non-Western countries as denizens of a global,

cosmopolitan modernity" (110). In a 2002 book review, Hwee Hwee Tan revealed that *Mammon Inc.* was meant to contrast the styles of Chinese novels that portrayed Chinese women as people who were

regularly beaten with belt buckles and ha[d] to wrestle with big issues like the struggle for political liberty and the freedom to love. Quite honestly, the major issues I've had to struggle with the past month were a) how to lose weight, b) how to remember where I've parked my car in the labyrinthine car park and c) what shade of highlights I should get for my hair. To tell you the truth—and this may disappoint Western readers who love the mythical figure of the Chinese Chick—most Asian women I know are more like Bridget Jones than Madame Mao. (66)

For Tan, western publishing companies seemed infatuated with Chinese heroines, like those portrayed by Chinese actress Gong Li, who "suffers hell" in the form of "an oppressive regime" and "male power figures," reproducing orientalist stereotypes of Asian women needing to be rescued. Chick Lit for Tan was a useful genre in replacing these stereotypes with depictions of modern Chinese women. While writers like Ommundsen see Chick Lit as a "marketing ploy," they continue to center their analysis on white women's Chick Lit, while "Asian Chick Lit" refocuses the genre on issues of race, labor and immigration (110). According to Singapore writer Eddie Tay, Tan's genre appropriation is strategic in distinguishing "the new Asian" from "Asians [who] had a reputation from the smell and mess of Chinatown" (2010, 125).

Mammon Inc.'s own Chick Lit style comes through in the immediate presentation of Britain, New York and Singapore as "late capitalist urban jungle[s]" with "temptations and dangers...in store for young single women worldwide" (110). Deng's knowledge of coolness, marketing ploys and expected cultural norms allow her to navigate the complex urban jungle

through her knowledge of cultural performance. Deng's attempts to foster her intelligence in Oxford and to weigh moral decisions with Mammon CorpS are distanced through her own wit and sarcasm, reflecting what Wee calls "mass-mediatised language usage, one that reads easily, well and quickly, and is comfortable with the culture industry" (201). Symbols from Star Wars, Lara Croft and "the opening scenes from Hawaii Five-O" make frequent appearances, borrowing from the lore of each cultural reference, while other references seem to ridicule political figures, as names like "Hoover" become synonymous with great loss or failure. The style reflects a woman able to navigate through pop cultural references and consumer products, while at the same time, seems reliant upon them to express the novel's ethical dilemmas, which would otherwise be muffled by Deng's distanced sarcasm.

In appropriating the Chick Lit genre, *Mammon Inc.* adopts a cynical tone that allows the narrator to distance herself from her given culture (Chinese) and her adopted culture (British), and to mark her as a consumer of global products, making her self-interested decision to join the cosmopolitan elite seem like a logical result of her cynical outlook. For Slavoj Žižek, such cynicism, while critical and distancing, can work to maintain existing power structures, as "the ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally...[cynical subjects] know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it" (1989, 28). The falsehood of the pluralist hierarchy, for the cynical cosmopolitan, is always apparent, but having invested a personal interest in that hierarchy, the cosmopolitan continues to distance herself from the system of power that she is made privileged by. Cynical reason then becomes a "paradox of an enlightened false consciousness" (29), as it seeks to negate multiculturalist ideology while still deriving material success from it (30). Chiah Deng's desire to belong as a Gen. Vexer is only made possible by distancing herself from ethnic or national belonging, and to act as if she

believes in ethnic authenticity despite her own experience with 's Oxford's polite racism. In other words, her cosmopolitan identity depends on the meanings of an ideology that she knows to be false, yet she takes advantage of others' beliefs in it. As Žižek writes, "Cynical distance is just one way—one of many ways—to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them" (1989, 33). Cynical ideology persists through the ability to "look outside" of an ideology (in this case, multiculturalism). Rather than resist the pluralist hierarchy, knowledge of its falseness is in fact the very condition that enables the "neutral" cosmopolitan to maintain a privileged position.

Tan appropriates Chick Lit as a genre about cosmopolitanism that reflects what Jodi Melamed has called "the contemporary context of global economic citizenship," wherein "the ability to consume defines membership in a transnational elite" (2006, 98). For Melamed, representations of women of color often play a pivotal role in maintaining neoliberal multiculturalism, as they work to consolidate and incorporate women of color as consumers of global products. This affinity "creates a symbolic relation where consumption indexes female liberation," and, in turn, "reinforces the presumed legitimacy of a transnational, multicultural consuming class to presume its own universality" (98). Similarly, for Slavoj Žižek, the "multiculturalist" maintains his privileged, universal position, not merely by "respecting" the other's identity, but by conceiving of "the other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance" (1997, 44). In *Mammon Inc.*, this distance is maintained through the female protagonist's ability to consume cultural symbols, and to use a plethora of cultural references, producing a pastiche of "in-the-know" references and

allusions. It is from the position of the cultural *consumer* that Deng appreciates (and depreciates) other cultures.

As a means of resisting conceptions of the Asian female victim, Tan's novel appropriates Chick Lit's cynical tone to ultimately critique the desire for cosmopolitan belonging, which can be seen in its Faustian plot, and the style of religious ecstasy that often interrupts the novel's cynical tone. In Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604), Faustus is born lower-class, but earns a doctorate and reaches the pinnacle of learning in every subject, except magic. Drawn by the power magic can offer, he makes a pact with the devil to live for twenty-five years with near unlimited power, but wastes his skills by playing tricks on historical figures, until the devil collects his soul and he is damned for eternity. As a revision of the Christopher Marlowe play, *Mammon Inc.* "updates" Marlowe's plot to replace the devil with the multinational corporation, Mammon, and uses the Chick Lit genre to emphasize how consumption and cosmopolitanism are integral to Chiah Deng's "fall from grace." Mammon's reputation, from the novel's beginning, seems like an all-consuming deity, a company that "owns everything," so that "Whether you were in London, Singapore or New York, you would find people in mcJeans drinking mcLite beer while talking about the latest mcMovie" (4). Often the comparison of Mammon with the devil appears in jokes, that Deng has been invited "to Corporate Hell." Sometimes Mammon appears as a direct reference to biblical illusions, such as when Professor Ad-oy compares Mammon Inc.'s logo, "the red dragon" to the "sign of Satan" from the Book of Revelations (31). The company's absolute dominance, coupled with its stand-in for Satan, adds a speculative element to the usual "memoir" and realist style of Chick Lit that unsettles the reader's attempts to identify with Deng's cosmopolitanism.

Rather than consolidate the identity of the individual consumer woman of color, Deng's journey into Mammon's "corporate hell" can be read as a Faustian fall, a damnation into the hollow world of consumer goods and cosmopolitan consumerism. As the scholars Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai have written, "collapsing of all chick lit into one category may indicate an inability to recognize difference not only within the genre, but between different feminisms as well" (4). This reading emphasizes Tan's appropriation of Chick Lit as a break from its "post-feminist" position towards a transnational feminist critique of global capital, emphasizing its gendered dimensions through woman's consumption. The "post-feminist" conception of Chick Lit seems a far cry from the critique that Tan's novel seems to offer, especially when we interpret Chiah Deng less as a "material girl" and more as a product-obsessed revision of Doctor Faustus, whose fall comes in the form of cosmopolitan desire.

Cosmopolitanism and Religious Ecstasy

While the Faustian plot adds moral and religious dimensions to *Mammon Inc.*, The Chick Lit genre is also interrupted stylistically by sections where the narrator, Chiah Deng, is pulled back from her cynical distance and into experiences of religious ecstasy. These ruptures seem traceable to Hwee Hwee Tan's own lifestyle as both a mobile cosmopolitan and an evangelical Christian. The coupled identities of cosmopolitanism and evangelical Christianity have become more common in countries like South Korea, China and Singapore, where evangelical Christians make-up part of the English-speaking professional class. Tan herself has been a figure in the evangelical movement, and after the publication of *Mammon Inc.*, she devoted herself to writing non-fiction Christian works, where religion takes the place of the cosmopolitan lifestyle as an ideal alternative to the materialism of Singapore society. Her Christian blog, as she states, is "full

of divinely-inspired insights that will help readers on their spiritual walk with God" ("Launch"). She describes her religious experience through prayer, writing that her connection with her faith is "a palpable energy," ("Peace"). At the same time, she explains how her faith has been strengthened by her dire circumstances, comparing herself to friends who are "materially blessed" and who drive "big, expensive cars and live[] in big houses and costly condominiums" ("Comparing"). For Tan, these friends have the "Singapore dream" of the "Five Cs": Cash, Car, Credit card, Condominium and Country club membership, while she has obtained little, until having been "called by God." Opposed to the materialism of the "Singaporean dream," Tan's material poverty means that she "get[s] greater spiritual attention in the body of Christ."

Tan's religious beliefs are visible in *Mammon Inc.*, as the Faustian narrative—which relies on a demonic figure to seduce the talented protagonist—allows Tan to replace the devil with that of the multinational corporation, Mammon. Deng's cynical narration is interrupted by tones of ecstasy, of experiencing the "global" through religious imagery. Her very position in Mammon CorpS rests on spreading these ecstatic experiences to new clients by teaching them to value cultures and global commodities for the spiritual experiences they offer. In valuing these ecstatic experiences over the particular histories of commodities and cultures, Tan's novel explores how ecstasy, brought about through encounters with the "global" or "universal," depicts the cosmopolitan not only as ethically and culturally superior, but as transcendent.

Throughout the novel, ecstatic experiences are conjured through global encounters that place the subject—the feeler—into a position of enlightenment, or implicit superiority over those who have not yet experienced it. Deng's first such experience is with her ex-boyfriend, Tock Seng, a white man born in America who migrated to Singapore with his parents just after he was born, but who has never felt at home in Singapore due to his white skin. To "help him fit in," as a

child, his name was changed to Tock Seng, after a national hero famous for his entrepreneurship and business acumen. Seng contacts Deng after having a dream of her being consumed by fire, and upon receiving his email, Deng describes Seng as an angelic figure:

I wondered what Tock Seng looked like after all these years. When we first met, I thought he was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. His curly hair wisped around his porcelain face like flames, making him look like the cherubs in paintings stored in museums far away in the West. All the other Singaporean boys looked like brown, skinny monkeys in comparison, screeching racial abuse at him while his pearl-grey eyes welled with tears. He looked like an angel with broken wings, trapped on this old earth, needing my help to mend his baby feathers so that he could return on dazzling wings to his Father's throne. (43)

Like Tan's description of a capitalist, alienated Chinese culture, here the description of a white male as an angelic, innocent figure also seems to reverse orientalist depictions. Motivated by a fetish for Seng's angelic features, Deng protects him from the teases of Chinese students, whose screams of racial abuse make them appear like "skinny monkeys." Deng's attempt to cast racial prejudice as barbaric employs the racist diction of the simian, dividing the "civilized" tolerance of the cosmopolitan from the "barbaric" prejudices of local cultures.

Deng empathizes with Seng whenever he is treated like a foreigner or is confused with "those white expats, holed up in their condos, who shuttled between their office and air-con restaurants in their Mercedes" (49). After never feeling at home in Singapore, Seng travels the globe and persuades Deng to join him to "find our tribe," but she rejects him after receiving a prestigious scholarship to Oxford (53). Later, in Brooklyn, Seng again attempts to convince her to join him as a world traveler. He tells her that he has "sneaked things through every border in

the world," and is "always seeing new things, always expanding [his] horizons" (80). As she remains unconvinced, Seng takes her to the top of the Statue of Liberty, which only disappoints and frustrates her. However, on the ferry back, the sunset gives her an experience of ecstasy:

In that moment when the world was caught in that vaporous light, everything suddenly flared into an incandescent glory. Never had I ever seen such a sight, the perfect fusion between artifice and nature... Tongues of fire, Pentecostal, like the spirit descending on the apostles... it was a perfect marriage between the man-made and God-created. (95)

The ecstatic experience seems to have no origin, but forms in the perfect balance of the rocking waves, the descending sun, and Deng's own heartbeat, which has been stressed by the long march up the Statue of Liberty. The experience seems to come from a space of pure transit, the emotional, ecstatic pay-off to the trials of never fitting in. Describing the experience as an "ecstatic epiphany," Seng asks Deng if she will marry him, but Deng rejects him because "having a spouse isn't enough... I need the whole tribal unit—friends, relatives, neighbours" (96).

In contrast to the cynical tone of Deng's narration throughout the novel, her experiences of ecstasy are interpreted primarily through direct and intimate religious imagery. For the scholar Robbie Goh, Deng's ecstatic experiences are most often "ambivalent insights" into her "hybrid soul" that give the reader "a kind of poetics of the global unconscious" (254-5). Seng's own desire for these ecstatic experiences function as a response to his rejection from Singapore and its culture of materialism. As he tells Deng, "no matter how Singaporean I might be in my soul, because of the way I look, I will always be treated like an ang mo gwei," literally a 'red-haired ghost', or a white man (49). As the scholar C.J. Wee points out, Seng seems to represent a transcultural spirit who, unlike Deng's sister and flatmate Steve, is not trapped by "cultural

difference," but is rather alienated from multiculturalist identities. As Deng puts it, she and Seng "are freaks, mutant hybrids of East and West like transcultural X-men" (53). Lost without a recognizable cultural community, these "mutant hybrids" seek out the elusive global unconscious, experienced only through moments of ecstasy. Chiah Deng's ecstatic experiences can be traced in the different identities she is tempted to accept. The first is with her travel partner, Tock Seng, then with her religious graduate school advisor, Professor Ad-oy ("Yoda" spelled backwards), and then the ecstasy brought forth by the cosmopolitan culture of the multinational corporation, Mammon CorpS.

Despite Deng's critical disposition produced through her rejection by Oxford students, her cosmopolitan desires seem to strengthen with her admiration for her professor, Ad-oy, a figure who blends the elitism of the university with the transcendent Christian faith. She meets Ad-oy "across the moat," in Dagobah Hall (20), where he lives in "Coruscant Tower" (21), two place-names taken directly out of Star Wars imagery of the light side of the Force. While the references to Star Wars seems merely to blend geek-culture writing with Chick Lit, the novel's Faustian narrative relies on positing the "globalness" of the religious scholar Adoy as the mystical, universal, spiritual power that "binds the galaxy together" ("Star Wars"). Ad-oy seems the mediator behind this universal power, as Deng finds him sitting beneath "an African crucifix," serving his own special blend of tea, made from "Polynesian Kava Kava, Roobios, Dong Quai and Black Cohosh from the Native Americans" (22). As an assembly of ingredients from Polynesia, South Africa (Roobios), China (Dong Quai) and pre-colonial America, the tea is a metaphor for a different "global unconscious" than that felt through Tock Seng's travel. Where Seng's experiences seem fleeting and reliant on the power (and fear) of transit, Ad-oy's is a

mystic, spiritual conglomeration of world religions and cultures. Rather than fetishize innocence, Ad-oy's "global unconscious" is one of wisdom, of a force that can "bind the galaxy together."

Similar to Tock Seng, Professor Ad-oy attempts to persuade Deng to join him by offering her a teaching assistantship to study "the mystics," assuming also that she convert to Christianity in doing so. She considers, "if I became a Christian, my soul would have to fly without my family...so I decided to stay on earth, and be among my family, worshippers of porcelain statues, gold chains and jade Mercedes" (25). Tan here seems to invert the stereotypes of orientalist novels by interpreting Chinese culture as corrupted by global capitalism and consumer culture, while Western culture, particularly western Christianity, signifies a spiritual, mystical understanding of the wisdom of the world's past. In becoming Christian, Tan believes she would be "like those souls consumed with the fire of love, shot through with that flame which gladdens and glitters with heavenly light" (25). In his last attempt to persuade Deng, Professor Ad-oy teaches her to pray "as the mystics did" (201). While engaged in prayer, Deng considers all the friends and family she has, and slowly lets them drift from her mind, until "all the images faded" and Deng has an ecstatic experience. First she sees "a vision of Christ," crying on the cross (206), and then: "My soul blazed with the fiery seraphim, singing and rejoicing, consumed by the love of Christ, bursting like a sweet red flame" (207). Deng's ecstatic experience in Dagobah Hall, like Luke Skywalker's on the planet of the same name, throws her in "a wave of ecstasy...like I had finally attained Jedi Knight mastery of the Force" (208). Like Deng's first ecstatic experience on the New York ferry, Tan's language breaks from the novel's Chick Lit genre, creating a rupture that seems to pull ecstatic feelings from a grab-bag of references, using allusions that are biblical and natural as well as consumerist and pop-cultural. Appearing as narrative ruptures, the

ecstatic experiences work to expose the narrator's sincere interest in discovering a force or a set of feelings beyond what consumption can allow.

In the same way that Deng rejects Seng because it would leave her without a tribe, she rejects Christianity for fear that she will lose her friends and family. Her flatmate claims she's going "all Billy Graham," and she realizes that, unlike her Gen. Vexer lifestyle, her Christian lifestyle would have her "making marmalade" and "get[ting] a dog" (211). Deng's sister adds to this troubling insight, claiming that as a Chinese woman, Deng should "worship [her] ancestors, not Jesus" (213). Deng's disillusion with cosmopolitan ecstasy from both Seng and Professor Ad-oy again betrays the cynical distance of the novel's Chick Lit style, which values the independent professional woman. Rather, Deng's desire for cosmopolitan belonging resurrects the cult of domesticity—the desire for a family-oriented home-life solidified through marriage and children. As in other popular Chick Lit representations, like *Bridget Jones* and *Sex and the City*, the cynical distance obtained through an empowered single, professional woman, is ultimately shattered by the desire for domesticity. The Chick Lit identity thus continues to operate as a transitional space until reaching a domestic family life. For Deng, the desire for transnational or "global" belonging must overlap with her family's desire for material wealth and secular beliefs.

While Tock Seng's travel and Ad-oy's Christianity are too individualizing, the cosmopolitanism of Mammon CorpS comes to represent a last refuge for the transcultural subject. When Deng first enters Draco Sidious' office at Mammon CorpS, she becomes enchanted by an original Dali painting of dunes "spread like breasts and buttocks" (59). It seems the beginning of her fall, for it signifies her greatest temptation: cultural sophistication. As she says "money did not tempt me, but Dali did" (610). Sidious appears draped "in Chinese Imperial robes" with a voice that sounds like "the mechanical voice you hear on PA systems in airports and shopping

malls" (59). The voice is ethnically "neutral", free of accent, "hint-free with regards to locale," and "exud[ing] professionalism." He introduces Deng to six adapters, each representative of global cultural identity: an African, a Western European, a Scandinavian, an Asian, a Hispanic, and Draco Sidious himself, the empty universal subject, chief over them all. Despite the racial diversity of the adapters, for Deng, their expensive lifestyles make them all look alike, and remind her of herself "if I'd received a million-dollar salary upgrade" (62). To convince Deng to join them, the adapters show her images of global elite spaces; the "Piazza della Signoria," the "Beijing opera house," the Xochimilco, where festivals took place for Aztec royalty, and others. For Deng, these images remind her of an Eden where she has become "a cosmopolitan jet-setter" (71). At the novel's end, Sidious takes Deng to New York to reveal that the adaptation tests were not intended to adapt her flatmate and sister, but were actually intended to show "how much contempt and prejudice the West has for the East" (274). Rather than just provide her with a salary, Mammon satisfies her desire for filial connections by offering "a tribe to belong to" (274). Finally, Sidious de-ionizes the glass walls to give Deng her last ecstatic experience, revealing a New York skyline where "everything in the world was on this island, all its glory and grim wrapped in a cloud of fiery pale chemicals" (277).

Standing in for "the world," Deng's gaze over New York City makes the workers below seem "like subway rats," further reinforcing her notion that cosmopolitanism can represent a spiritual transcendence just as much as a material one (278). As a reiteration of Doctor Faustus, Deng inevitably ends up choosing the demonic Mammon, yet her alternatives would all keep her from belonging to a community. She could reject her family by staying at Oxford and plunge herself into studying Christian Saints, or join her ex-boyfriend, Tock Seng, in his imperial adventures as a Chinese man smuggling products through Africa. Her choice to join Mammon in

the novel's end figures as both a cynical cosmopolitan choice and as an anti-racist political choice, one that happens to also reproduce global capitalism in hopes of finding the "tribe" of cosmopolitanism, which becomes the only community for "transcultural X-men." As J.S. Furnivall wrote in 1910, for those "in a plural society...the only common deity is Mammon" (308).

Fixer Chao and the Filipino/a Overseas Worker

In *Mammon Inc.*'s Chick Lit genre, years of transitioning among multiculturalist identities leads the protagonist to desire a stable identity and community, which she finds in the cosmopolitan elite. Yet as a cosmopolitan, Chiah Deng seems cynical towards everything but her own transcendence from ethnic or national belonging. What remains vital to Deng's cosmopolitan transcendence is the need for ethnic others to provide lasting proof of that transcendence, a relationship that manifests in her attitude towards her flatmate Steve and her sister Chiah Chen, who Deng sees as unable to think outside of their cultural difference. In Han Ong's 2001 novel *Fixer Chao*, this division between the cosmopolitan and the ethnicized others manifests in the relationship between the cosmopolitan client and the ethnic service worker. In Ong's novel, lower-class Filipino/a migrants offer upper-class cosmopolitans—like Tan's Chiah Deng—a type of cultural access to an authentic, ethnic subjectivity, one that is seemingly opposed to the very global capitalist forces that produced the service relationship. *Fixer Chao* depicts migrant service workers who are “incentivized” not only by remunerations, but also by the hailing of cosmopolitan escape, of experiences of ecstasy that commune with a global unconscious. Yet in contrast to *Mammon Inc.*, *Fixer Chao* depicts the relationship with cosmopolitan transcendence from the Filipina/o service labor class, while Chiah Deng's narrative

comes from a Chinese upper-class position. Unlike Deng, Ong's transnational workers do not necessarily find, believe in, or continue to pursue such transcendence, since their service labor relies heavily upon their racial markers such as accent, education, gender, sexuality and religion. Ong's novel, written in a humorous and cynical first-person narrative, allows us to see cosmopolitan belonging beyond a hierarchical, developmental structure from "monocultural" to "multicultural" or from "low" to "high," but rather, as a relationship that is generated through affective labor.

Born in the Philippines to Chinese parents, Han Ong migrated with his family to Los Angeles' Koreatown as a teenager where he gained recognition as a young playwright and earned a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts. After writing dozens of plays, some as collaborations with writers such as Jessica Hagedorn, Ong became one of the youngest to receive the MacArthur "genius" grant in 1997. Since then Ong has devoted himself to writing novels that tend to be about outsiders, like Ong himself, who are "othered" by being queer, migrant, lower class, and of mixed racial origins. His novels cast alienation at the center of migrancy, as his outsider characters seek new cohesive identities, not through a white citizen-subjectivity, but through a transcultural or cosmopolitan identity. Poised against the dominant way of reading "outsider" narratives, Ong's writing style has been described as an "unrelenting aria of high bitchiness and scathing satire" (Salon.com). His humorous style keeps the reader at a distance, better positioned to gaze critically at the representation of ethnic identities rather than assume their authenticity.

In *Fixer Chao*, the Filipino migrant William Paulinha seeks revenge against the upper-class elites in New York City who have gentrified the city's "seedy" spaces, which Paulinha had once accepted as his own queer, lower-class havens. Paulinha first introduces himself through his

past identities, which are defined not by his race, nationality or sexuality, but by his history of service labor positions: mail delivery, answering phones, data entry, typing, street hustling and sex work. This range of labor identities exemplifies what the literary scholar Hsuan L. Hsu calls Paulinha's "chameleon-like qualities," since his capacity to adapt to new types of service labor gives him a cultural capital that is strengthened by his ability to racially pass as Chinese, Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Brazilian (680). With the help of an upper-class stranger, Shem C., who shares Paulinha's rage against the elites, Paulinha becomes a con-man, weaponizing his chameleon-like abilities to fashion himself into "Master Chao," a Chinese Feng Shui artist, so that he can exploit the elite's desire to identify with fabled symbolic ethnicities. After Shem publishes an article in a made-up European lifestyle magazine, the New York elites are more than willing to believe in the fake identity of "Master Chao," and to placate their modern anxieties through the spiritual release of Chinese culture. As Master Chao, Paulinha's clients discover a counter-point to their own privileged, cosmopolitan life-style, as they each take William "into their homes and reveal[] the thing that they would never dare speak of in public... They had sons and daughters who were drug addicts. Spouses with drinking problems. They were the children of country bumpkin parents" (85). For the cosmopolitan clients, Master Chao represents an authentic "other world," which functions as a perfect reservoir for clients to fearlessly dump their psychological anxieties.

When Paulinha's Chinese persona becomes popular among the city's elite, soon he too begins to see "Master Chao" as a new identity that can rescue him from his own alienation after the seedy queer bars of the village have been gentrified out of existence. As he says, "I too wanted to be changed just like these people wanted to be changed. I wanted to put on a new shirt and discard the old, sweat-soaked one I had" (84). His attempts to transcend his social position

rely entirely upon his performance of an ahistorical, apolitical Chinese identity, as later in the novel he realizes that "I had no core...I merely went from one identity to another guided by nothing more than mimicry" (168). Transforming into "Master Chao" gives him access to wealth and social standing that contrast the seediness of the Savoy. When a second article about Master Chao appears in the trend-setting magazine *H*, Paulinha's clients shift from "women who had tragedies they wanted operated on" to "creatures who 'lived and breathed' fashion and wanted to be 'up' on trends" (195). Finally Paulinha's position in this fashion magazine-based cosmopolitan society becomes solidified when one of his clients, Rowley, leaves him his Manhattan apartment as an inheritance (188). By transforming into "Master Chao," Paulinha's position as the ethnic trickster thrusts him from a queer prostitute in a seedy bar to an accepted member of the cosmopolitan elite, but only insofar as he molds himself "according to a pattern that seemed—by its very age and durability—authentic [and] original" (168).

The Filipino/a Migrant and Service

As a worker hired to "fix" people's homes and anxieties, Paulinha himself never seems convinced that his new higher material position is also one of transcendence, and unlike Chiah Deng, he maintains his critical gaze even when tempted by the cosmopolitan lifestyle. His experience as a service worker makes him suspicious of notions of cosmopolitan transcendence, as he daily offers his clients a similar transcendence from the stressful, profit-driven lifestyles in New York, by masking himself as "a soul directly linked to the ancestral past, shot through with the very thing which 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" (66). Paulinha's sarcastic voice in phrases like "shot through with...spiritual enlightenment"

allows the reader to see his service role as providing a much needed ethnicized other who can offer a transcendent release from the client's capitalist guilt. This relationship is seen most blatantly in the obsession with Asian culture that many of Paulinha's clients project onto Paulinha: "The [client] had it bad. His huge crush on Asian culture was much bigger than Shem had led me to believe" (70). These "crushes" that Paulinha discovers far surpass the curiosity of the tourist, but are traced as genuine efforts to belong within an imagined spiritual culture.

As the service laborer, Paulinha confirms the cosmopolitan's desire to transcend their materialism through a spiritual ecstasy that is ironically only available through consumption: "Marvelous, I told him. You have done my culture proud. My instincts told me to put my arms around him, and I did, welcoming him to a club" (72). Like Tan's Chiah Deng, Paulinha's clients seek a spiritual "globalness" reliant on ancient wisdoms that seem inaccessible through cosmopolitan consumption. While the material aspect of cosmopolitanism depends upon the consumption of global products, the spiritual side, as both novels reveal, relies more on ethnicized others who attend to clients "in need of guidance" towards doing "my culture proud" (66, 72). Paulinha's ability to perform Master Chao is not an authentic gift he was born into, but rather a skill that Paulinha has developed through a lifetime of service work. His position as a lower-class queer Filipina/o migrant has helped him master a number of recognizable service identities, which he invokes as Master Chao: he becomes the "fussy housekeeper" to arrange furniture, and portrays himself as a psychologist when clients reveal "the thing that they would never dare speak of in public" (85). For the cosmopolitan clients, the desire to "transcend" is represented as a spiritual desire to escape an automatized, profit-driven culture, yet it relies on seeing ethnic "spiritual guides" as naturally talented and "authentic." While Paulinha's

experience with service work has brought him little material success, it allows him to exploit the cosmopolitan desire for transcendence by "welcoming him to a club."

Paulinha's migrant journey as a Filipino service worker contrasts Chiah Deng's, whose frustration with racial prejudice emerges in the "passive politeness" of the Oxford academy, while Paulinha's racial markers limit his ability to surpass his position as a service worker, making cosmopolitan transcendence seem an impossible (and thus less desirable) option. Indeed, Paulinha's desperation as a migrant stuck in service work is common among Filipino/a migrants in the context of global multiculturalism, where Filipino/as are often figured as the "servants of globalization" (Parrenas). As the writer E. San Juan points out, "the Philippines today is the largest exporter/supplier of affordable domestics—about ten million Filipino Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs), out of eighty-seven million Filipinos at home shuttle back and forth" (2007, xxi). While the Filipina/o identity has been bound to service work, the Chinese (especially Chinese Singaporean) identity has been bound with consumption and business, as Deng calls it, "*the air-conditioned corridors of food courts and shopping malls*" (italics in original 242). For E. San Juan, notions of cosmopolitan and transnational migration assume an equal power relation among nation-states, making "the newly arrived Filipina 'transmigrant' indistinguishable from the white American middle-class suburbanite" (San Juan 2000, 91). William Paulinha's experience as a migrant service worker thus makes him appear less like a "transcultural X-men" and more like an "ethnic service worker," whose homeland dictates his identity for the cosmopolitan upper-class. While Filipino/a labor migration was strong in 2001, when *Fixer Chao* was published, this trend has only continued, and now an estimated ten percent of Filipino/as work abroad, making it so that "the export of people can be more profitable than the export of clothing" (Rodriguez xii). For Paulinha, to transition to Master Chao is not merely to perform an

ancient spiritual guide, but to be marked as Chinese, part of a more recognizable and more trusted business class, free of the racial markers of the migrant Filipina/o. His choice to become Master Chao takes advantage of the growing demand for the performance of a wise Eastern mystic, a figure associated with Chinese philosophers such as Confucius and Lao Tzu, who represents a culture over five-thousand years old.

Today the identity of the Filipina matronly migrant has been cemented into a global multiculturalist order, which binds the Filipina with service or domestic labor, making intellectual or managerial work limited by Filipina/o identity, no matter what the migrant's previous training entailed. As discussed in the second chapter, at the end of the Marcos era, Filipinas were seen as progenitors of peaceful rebellion, and marked as affectual and moral mothers of the nation. It seems no coincidence that this shift in global national recognition was accompanied by the trend of Filipina/o overseas workers, one of the largest labor export systems in the world. The structural adjustment of the 1970s Philippines left a foreign debt of over \$42.8 billion by 1982, the same year that Marcos signed Executive Order 797, which created the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, a government agency used to monitor, supervise and collect remittances from Filipino/a migrants overseas. One year later, Marcos signed Executive Order 857, mandating that fifty to seventy percent of all overseas salaries be remitted through the Philippine banking system, and that migratory workers would be subject to punitive measures if failing to remit their earnings (Rodriguez 13).

As the scholar Anna Romina Guevarra has pointed out, the Philippines state and labor brokering businesses have helped produce the national image of the matronly Filipina through ad campaigns and diplomacy. As Guevarra writes,

Readers of the country's major newspapers are bombarded by the same promises [of overseas employment], which take up more than 90 percent of the classified ads every Sunday...[and then] there is the state, steadfast in its claim that it does not promote overseas employment yet participating in overseas "marketing missions," parading its citizens as the hottest global labor commodity, whose education, English-language fluency, and "tender loving care" attitude are their "comparative advantage" over others. (2)

This "tender loving care" of Filipinas has been prominent in Philippine national media. In 2002, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo spoke in commemoration of Migrant Workers Day, emphasizing that "The Philippine economy will [in] the foreseeable future continue to be heavily dependent on overseas worker remittances. The work and reputation of the overseas Filipinos confirm to the world that indeed, the Philippines is the home of the Great Filipino worker" (3). For Guevarra, the national and global medias forming the Filipina worker make up an ethos of labor migration that "distinctively characterizes the Philippines and governs Filipinos' way of life and aspirations" (4). In this contribution to global multiculturalist networks, state and employment agencies use racial, national and gendered identities to exercise "a kind of disciplinary power" that promotes "an ethic of responsibility to [Filipinas'] nation, families, and the image of the Great Filipino Worker" (5).

The Filipina migrant is perhaps one of the most successfully embedded national identities that make up global multiculturalism. As Guevarra has pointed out, this identity was partially formed from multiculturalist values of empowerment within the Philippines itself as the state encouraged workers who were "mothers [and] wives...[and] who must uphold a particular image

of femininity” (Guevarra 5). The globally recognized identity of the Filipina worker enables a consistent supply of global labor, trained and produced by the Philippines state and private agencies to become a constituting base of the world system (Tadiar 5). Thus cultural difference, in this example of global multiculturalism, becomes recognized as national difference, and the cultural background of the Filipina—Cebuano, Tagalog, Illocano, Mestizo—becomes homogenized by training programs and advertisements, producing the affective Filipina servant as a national type recognized across the globe. Han Ong's novel thus speaks from within our current global division of labor that relies on a multiculturalist logic, where "national difference is necessary to the racialized (and gendered) work hierarchies on which the global division of labor, and hence capitalism's profits, depends" (Guevara 64). As with cultural difference in multiculturalist governance, different national differences are "distinguished as possessing a kind of national labor 'specialization'" (64). These notions of Philippine labor continue to entrap national subjects into an "insurmountable cultural difference," so that low-wage service labor appears as natural to Filipino/a workers, and anti-racist societies can still maintain a racial labor hierarchy.

A Politics of Revenge

In *Fixer Chao*, William Paulinha's experience as a Philippine overseas migrant has made him bitter and resentful of the upperclass elites who preach multiculturalism and tolerance while relying upon ethnicized service laborers. Unlike Ben Lucero of Peter Bacho's *Cebu*, Paulinha makes no attempt to fulfill his duty to the host country for having "rescued" him, rather, Paulinha's response is to enact a politics of revenge, a refusal to pay his supposed debt with

gratitude. His antagonism against the cosmopolitan class seems unbreakable, as even when he inherits an expensive Manhattan apartment from his client Rowley, he continues to "fix" his clients houses to give them bad luck by setting mirrors in the wrong places to invite evil spirits. Revenge here refuses the historical narrative of multiculturalism and the utopia of liberal tolerance, and rather stays steadfast to marginalized histories of imperialisms that have continued to the present day, in William Paulinha's case, in service work and the reappropriation of queer-of-color spaces. As a queer Filipino migrant, Paulinha's politics of revenge is similar to Roderick Ferguson's "queer of color analysis," which contradicts liberal ideologies that see the nation-state and capitalism as "sites of resolution, perfection, progress, and confirmation" (4).

In contrast to Paulinha's politics of revenge, his friend and fellow Filipina migrant, Preciosa, is similarly cast into a globally recognized persona, that of the Filipina affectual migrant. Yet while Paulinha transitions to Master Chao for revenge, Preciosa transitions to the affectual Filipina in order to fulfill her own desire to become American, and continues to see the U.S. nation-state as *the* site of progress and multiculturalism. After working as a maid to a Chinese family in the Philippines, and then being "waylaid into prostitution" and escaping her brothel, Preciosa transitions herself into the affectual Filipina by sending an advertisement "intended to unite old white Americans with potential brides from the Third World" (309). She chooses only a dozen American suitors to come to the Philippines and hires a group of strangers to act as her family, transitioning herself into the identity of a "traditional girl, a girl close to her impoverished family, for whom marriage to an American—regardless of how fat and ugly most of them were—represented an upswing in life" (309). Preciosa adds to her market appeal as a foreign bride by increasing her ethical value, presenting herself not only as a beautiful Filipina

capable of house-work, but as a poor and disadvantaged brown woman, offering clients the chance to rescue her and thus escape from the guilt of participating in a shadow economy.

Preciosa portrays her potential marriage as a virtuous act, as a means of taking up the “white man’s burden.” Her strategy has great effect as most of her suitors are Vietnam veterans, haunted by the guilt of the war, and she ends up picking a well-off, much older man, the oldest of the potential suitors. Though she can barely imagine having to marry him, she invents a mantra for the occasion: “This man doesn’t have long to live. And besides, an American passport would be hers forever” (310). The image of the passport recurs through Preciosa’s struggles as an ideal object worthy of servitude and the risk of domestic abuse:

Preciosa all the while thought of the dark blue cover of her new passport, thought of the Philippines as of a dilapidated building on the wrong side of town passed by without a second glance from a dark-windowed, air-conditioned car. She had transcended something, and it was now at her back. Even if the sex was disgusting, it was still in Texas, USA. (311)

The attachment to the United States, even the “dry and boring” state of Texas, is not merely a reflection of Preciosa’s need for remittances, as Pheng Cheah’s “low cosmopolitan” might be understood. Rather, the United States comes to resemble a social transcendence, desired both as a cultural fetish and as a class transcendence, where the “air-conditioned” United States can provide a space of rescue from the “dilapidated” Philippines. The passport also represents Preciosa’s mobility, as an American passport is much more widely accepted than the Philippines passport, as Aihwa Ong has written, “the contours of citizenship are represented by the passport—the regulatory instrument of residence, travel and belonging” (120). Yet the narrative’s

sarcastic tone, apparent in phrases like "even if the sex was disgusting," exposes the passport as a fetishized object symbolizing a cosmopolitan belonging that masks itself as transcendent. Even after her American husband dies and Preciosa is left with his estate, she surprises his family by refusing nearly all of the inheritance, choosing to keep "only a small sum—enough to start a new life elsewhere—and toss[es] the rest right back to them" (311). Preciosa leaves the money as she left the Philippines, "at her back," choosing the cosmopolitan New York City over her late husband's wealth.

Despite Preciosa's attempt to build a fake family, to transition herself into a traditional Filipina, and to give back the money entitled to her, she discovers in New York City that she can still only participate in a cosmopolitan community through continuing to perform a barbaric Filipina identity. After refusing to look for service work in New York City, Preciosa finds herself performing the barbarian when, after dozens of auditions for Broadway plays, she is typecast as a Central American "primitive," wearing only a loincloth and poised to attack white missionaries. At first Preciosa is proud of fulfilling her dream to act on Broadway, but "after a few Filipino friends came to see the performance and she saw their faces...she realize[d] that what she'd perceived as a triumph was the farthest thing from it" (313). As with the many instances of upward mobility that came before, Preciosa must fulfill her role as an authentic Filipina in order to belong among a higher, "transcendent" culture, one that promises to put her "given culture" *spatially* behind her, yet also pushes her to perform a primitive Filipina, thrusting her back into the ethnicity she thought herself free from in everything but territory:

The audience and her co-actors on stage had to rear back, so convincing had she become, possessed by a desire to undo everything that everyone was willing into shape: this ridiculous story intentionally turning back the hands of time so that she

could be returned to the pages of a history book, all her English unlearned, her beautiful blue-black American passport handed back. In her mind, she was being returned to the Philippines, thereby doing away with the need for an actual trip.

(313)

Similar to the sections of ecstasy in *Mammon Inc.*, these sections of epiphany rupture the novel's sarcastic tone to instead take-on a more poetic style, with phrases like "so convincing had she become" and phrases that give agency to metaphors, like "this ridiculous story intentionally turning back the hands of time so that she could be returned to the pages of a history book." Such moments of epiphany, in stark contrast to Tan's novel, lead the characterizers away from the cosmopolitan ideal. In this moment Preciosa realizes she has compromised to the expectations of a cosmopolitan audience, finding herself "returned to the pages of a history book" as the once cherished status symbol of the American passport transforms into an object of resentment. The Philippines is given back to her in an abused form, substituting for "the need for an actual trip." Her shame comes not simply from performing the primitive ethnic, but from being complicit in performing a commodified ethnicity for an urban elite. Incensed by this betrayal, Preciosa joins Paulinha in his quest for revenge, performing as a *feng shui* priestess who grunts unintelligibly, shakes multicolored beads, and steals expensive decorations from Paulinha's clients.

The Seedy Savoy

Preciosa's desire for and eventual rejection of cosmopolitanism traces its ideological function in producing cosmopolitan consumers and ethnic service workers. As Preciosa's passport alone does not give her recognition as part of a transcendent cosmopolitan culture, so are her clients never recognized as a part of a "Chinese culture" simply by experiencing her

performance. Rather, both of these desires are aimed at transcending an identity produced through—not despite—class domination and affective labor. After Preciosa realizes that she can only be accepted through her cultural performance, she feels an immense responsibility towards her own “given” culture, reflecting upon “the places of her childhood turned foreign by development, by neglect, by the symbol-heavy defacings of various political movements” (160). For the literary critic Eleanor Ty, Preciosa’s desire to become Western is “a telling comment about the global impact of American culture,” as “people in the Third World are interpellated by American media and advertising so much that their desires are structured around these products” (2010, 130). While this may be true in many cases, the novel itself seems to emphasize not the media-induced pull to the United States, but rather the cosmopolitanism invitation to “escape” from what Pheng Cheah calls “the most rigorous sense of responsibility to the given” (119). In other words, embedded in the desire for cosmopolitan belonging is an imperial logic that rationalizes the dispossession of third-world spaces like Preciosa’s hometown, which has been demolished to make way for development projects. For Preciosa, the homeland is not a symbol of “spiritual authenticity,” but a territory appropriated by the cosmopolitan elite in the name of progress and development. As Preciosa realizes, this loss left the multicultural United States and cosmopolitan New York City as perhaps the only remaining alternative community, one that could only be pursued through the global service industry. Whereas Hwee Hwee Tan's Chiah Deng continues to desire the cosmopolitan community despite its relationship to global capital and racial hierarchies, Preciosa chooses to remain antagonistic to the cosmopolitan class, seeing its reappropriation of space and material resources as a shared struggle among a global underclass.

The pattern of development, then loss, then the desire for cosmopolitanism through service labor, is also present in the gentrified development of New York City's "seediness" that destroys what Paulinha sees as an "aura of sacredness" (Ong 259). The closure of places like "Peeps Corner" drives Paulinha to take refuge in The Savoy, the last "seedy" place left, a place where "the seats encouraged slouching, and the red lights made everyone's ugliness seem just a bit more tolerable" (150). The Savoy, named after a vaudeville Manila house where General Douglass MacArthur's mistress once performed, is marked as a space of communal belonging, always in danger of being reappropriated in the name of development. Like the now famous Stonewall Inn, the Savoy functions as a space for lower-class queers to convene and share experiences of subordination. The Savoy also alludes to the theme of "drag" from the 1969 Stonewall riots, which occurred after a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a drag queen bar that existed in a time when cross-dressing was illegal (Stein 156). The desire to masquerade as a different gender in the Savoy is interpreted here as the casual demand by the service working class to masquerade as ethnic guides for the elite.

The impending loss of "seedy" bars deprives William of his community, leaving cosmopolitan "transcendence" as an attractive alternative. As Paulinha's co-conspirator, Shem, says: "Nobody who wants Feng Shui can stand disorder, that's what they want Feng Shui for. And the Savoy...is nothing if not disorder. The Savoy is the antithesis of Feng Shui" (140). For the critic Hsuan Hsu, spaces like the Savoy are irreplaceable and sacred because they offer "possibilities of erotic and (in the case of Shem and Paulinha) critical encounters that are unavailable in the gentrified tourist area that has replaced them" (696). Only after retreating to the Savoy, and only after his "seedy" queer spaces have been reappropriated, does Paulinha seek to take revenge against the cosmopolitan elite.

Similar to Hwee Hwee Tan's catalogue of racial types by associated consumer styles—haircuts, fashion, cultural knowledge—Paulinha provides a particular commodified Chinese type, far removed from politicized images of the Red Guard or coolie labor. This style is more akin to Professor Ad-oy's global mysticism, as it offers spiritual tranquility through symbols like feng shui or Roobios tea. Yet the "cultural appreciation" of Paulinha's white clients, especially the poet Lindsay S., fetishizes "Oriental art" through a collection of Chinese "teapots and teacups, Japanese swords, calligraphic ink sets," along with "hundreds of Buddhas of dazzling variety" (71). As Eleanor Ty points out, Lindsay's appreciation of Chinese and Japanese art is "manifested mainly through the acquisition of objects and commodities from the East," seeing the East as "a large marketplace, a shopping paradise that enhances his stature as consumer and collector" (2010, 130). At the end of *Fixer Chao*, Paulinha is caught as a fake, and is cast as a scammer, not because he seeks wealth through ethnic performance, but because that performance is Chinese, when he is "authentically" Filipino. While Paulinha's performance is made more convincing by his race, his Filipino racial background, once revealed, allows him to perform only one "fixed" identity. His "fakeness" is thus assured not because he is consciously performing an identity for cosmopolitans, but because he is performing someone else's assigned identity-type. Ironically, he is excluded from the cosmopolitan elites for reflecting the same distance from ethnic authenticity that cosmopolitans used to define themselves.

Once Paulinha's Chinese "fixer" persona is revealed as mere performance, the clients become enraged, as they not only feel excluded from "the club," but are faced with their own desire for an orientalist stereotype. The cultural capital that had once freed clients like Lindsay S. from their own complicity was, in fact, "inauthentic," and therefore worthless. Despite their desire to "know" ethnic practices as a means of escape, the type of consumer cosmopolitanism

that Paulinha's clients practice is what the scholar Shu-mei Shih has called cosmopolitanism as "a politics of selective recognition," where "the non-Western other is recognized most readily through...modes of Orientalism" (2005, 78). The satisfaction of obtaining merely consumerist products of the other, for Shih, "cloaks the lack of desire to know the other," so that the consumerist impulse operates as "an alibi for the lack of interest in comprehending the non-Western other in its own terms, [and] reduc[es] the other to the site of difference to explain away the need to attend to its opacity and complexity" (2005, 78). In this framework, the ethnic service worker acts as an "authenticator," whose race, accent and lower-class position transfers affective value to cultural symbols, allowing the client to "cloak" their lack of sincere interest.

This meditation on authenticity foregrounds a critique of an Asian American politics that views authentic representation, cultural tolerance and inclusion as its main goals. This critique is made explicit when Paulinha witnesses an Asian American intellectual (Paul Lin) ranting about "hegemony, proletariat, diaspora, dichotomy, hagiography, [and] calligraphy" at a dinner party. Paulinha identifies Lin's remarks as "a complaint" that seems to ignore the speaker's own privilege of mobility and class dominance, while Paulinha's own strategy of "revenge" takes all of this immediately into account (109). Paulinha's performance seems just as solicited by the socially unaware cosmopolitan class as it is by Asian American intellectuals, as Paulinha's greatest act of revenge is not directed at a "white racist," but at Suzy Yamada, a Japanese American socialite. Paulinha "fixes" Yamada's apartment to give her bad luck by repositioning mirrors so that she and her son Kendo would "run into mirror versions of themselves" that would "serve as pincushions for their ire and everything that they normally saved themselves from—insults, anger, repulsion" (181). Rather than rescue them from their own anxiety and anger,

Paulinha uses the mirrors to reflect back their hypocrisy as Asian Americans who seek Master Chao as a figure to sympathize with, or as an authentic gateway to their "Asian" roots.

Conclusion: Cynical Distancing v. Absurd Engagement

If a main characteristic of transitive culture is dis-identification with a single "authentic" identity, then this can be made possible through cynically distancing oneself from authentic identities through humorous forms like mythical meta-history (Fernando), absurdity (Yuson), satire (Bacho), irony (Kwa), Chick Lit (Tan) or abrasive sarcasm (Ong). Yet, as Asian American scholar Tina Chen has pointed out, the mistake with such forms (forms of "impersonation" she calls them) is that they are often seen as unique to Asian American experiences, and can presume that other racial minorities are trapped within their cultural performance, while only the Asian American/Asian migrant can understand their own self-conscious performativity. For Chen, the temptation of cosmopolitan escape then is actually more affective towards privileged Asian Americans than other minority groups, as even the term "Asian American" was produced to name a political coalition, not a particular cultural authenticity (as African American and Chicano are often read). Yet the notion of a minority other who is unaware of their own performativity, for Chen, is itself a ruse, one that makes self-reflexivity appear as both transcendent and ethical, as if this "critical dimension" toward identity was somehow only available to certain "enlightened" subjects. In both *Mammon Inc.* and *Fixer Chao*, the Southeast Asian Anglophone's desire to transcend one's "given culture"—and therefore their "given labor"—is captured through languages of cynicism and sarcasm. Yet as I have stressed throughout this project, to be "distanced" from racial identities in order to manage, reinterpret and transition among them, is quite different from a "retreat" from political and social public life.

Rather, I read the "cynical distance" produced in the tone of these novels as enabling an "absurd engagement" for the reader, an attitude that takes on multiple multiculturalist identities despite the absurdity of their presumed "authenticity."

Both of these 2001 novels engage their readers by seeing migrant workers as "low cosmopolitan" only in the sense that they seem vulnerable to the "absurd" desires for cosmopolitan belonging. For the Southeast Asian Anglophone migrant tired of performing the identity of the homeland, cosmopolitanism seems an attractive alternative, especially when faced with the lack of a stable identity and with the reappropriation of queer spaces. Though Chiah Deng's ability to transition among identities allows her to manipulate the multiculturalist game, she seems unaware that her desires for cosmopolitan belonging are absurd, as they continue to believe in cosmopolitanism as a type of "transcendence" from ethnicized others, thus reinforcing the same multiculturalist racial types that Deng herself sees as inauthentic. In stark contrast to Deng's desire for transcendence, Paulinha's decision to manipulate the multiculturalist game by performing an absurd Chinese stereotype can be seen as a reaction to his disillusionment with cosmopolitan escape. After the loss of his "seedy" gay bars in New York City, Paulinha's act of revenge is to expose and exploit the desire for transcendence through his role as a service laborer who performs an atavistic identity. In a moment of self-reflection, Paulinha tells Preciosa that he was once convinced of the cosmopolitan ideal, and that he came to America for a "better life," a life constructed from images of luxury: "wall-to-wall carpeting" and brand names like "General Electric, Sunbeam, Hoover, Proctor-Silex, Pfizer, Zenith" (262-3). For Paulinha, these commodities possess a magical quality, and function as "a short-hand for beauty, for quality, [for] things that wouldn't break—as our appliances often did" (263). As Eleanor Ty points out, this immigrant dream is ironic, since these products "are now manufactured through transnational

labor, so that what William's family covets is very likely produced in his own or other Asian countries by using cheap laborers" (2004, 130-1). By the time Paulinha wears the mask as Master Chao, this dream has faded with the racism and sexism he has experienced as a service worker.

Critical of the dream, Paulinha begins to see cosmopolitan transcendence as less materially manifest and more like a consumerist desire that he can profit from. While he is disillusioned with the cosmopolitan dream, he is still unable to escape how others imagine it, and continues to transition among identities, as if he was unaware of their inauthenticity. Like Chiah Deng, his options at the novel's end seem dire, as even returning to the Philippines

seemed like an admission of defeat. Could you imagine the glee of relatives who would point you out in family gatherings, then launch into a story about going to live in the fabled United States only to crawl back with your tail between your legs-kicked out, in effect? (308)

Despite his politics of revenge against the U.S. elite, he must still cater to the expectations of others who desire cosmopolitan escape, who continue to see the "fabled U.S." as a multiculturalist utopia. With his seedy bars lost to development, and his homeland expecting his glorious return, at the novel's end Paulinha travels to Los Angeles, unclear of what identity he might transition to next.

If there is a definitive difference in the migrant service worker and the cosmopolitan elite in *Fixer Chao*, it is that the trickster, William Paulinha, seems critical of cosmopolitan "transcendence," and his sarcastic voice seems less to distance himself from ethnic struggles, and more as a way of absurdly engaging in acts of vengeance that continue even when it is in his own interests to become part of the cosmopolitan elite. Whereas Chiah Deng's sarcasm creates a cynical distance from her own ethnicity in order to bolster her own cosmopolitan belonging,

Paulinha's defies the temptation of cosmopolitanism to defiantly transition to new identities. Though Paulinha engages fiercely in a politics of revenge, he remains cynical because he resists the "common sense" gesture of pursuing the neutral, cosmopolitan identity built and reinforced by the neoliberal American dream. Likewise, Preciosa, after realizing that her inclusion in New York's elite is only possible through performing "the primitive," is also able to see the cosmopolitan ideal—and the ecstatic experiences that go along with it—as a product manufactured through affective service labor, and chooses to join Paulinha in taking revenge. In contrast to these epiphanies, Chiah Deng seems always "high" on her cosmopolitan identity, and never seems able to see beyond the magical, mystical qualities of commodity form, experiencing ecstasy pragmatically, without any concern of the origins, histories or processes behind her manufactured experiences.

Both of these novels, published in 2001, seem to take for granted that the form of global multiculturalism was to be the new world order. It is a depiction unprepared for the post-9/11 globe, where American economic, military and cultural dominance would only grow despite the growing irrelevance of the nation-state. In my coda, I consider the rise of speculative fiction in Southeast Asian Anglophone writing since 9/11, concerned especially with how the "intolerable" other has shifted towards the "intolerant" other through religious and insurgent identities. I consider how styles of ethnic autobiographies have lately been abandoned for making racial identities seem cohesive, liberal and hypervisible, and I explore how speculative fiction imagines non-realist spaces that comment on the assumptions of global multiculturalism by reinterpreting national identities into speculative ethnicities and races.

Coda

Songs of Transition:

Speculative Fiction and the Southeast Asian Anglophone

Alfred Yuson's short story "The Music Child," first published in his collection *The Music Child & Other Stories* in 1991 and later published in *Manoa* in 1992, depicts a Filipino American journalist who visits the Philippines to investigate the "dying issue" of muro-ami fishing, an ecologically ruinous business that previously thrived in the Visayas (2007, 171). While investigating the ecological damage in the fishing villages, the journalist, referred to only as "Pardner" by his driver, encounters stories of fishing companies exploiting young boys who are "packed in the hundreds in a small ship for months on end...when occasionally a boy of 13 or 15 didn't surface, attacked by sharks, or worse, the bends, then so sorry" (172). While investigating this story of capitalist exploitation by a multinational company, the journalist becomes distracted by the more exotic fantastical tale of a Visayas tribe that plays "violins with strings made of human hair." The journalist abandons his story of the fishing boys to follow these rumors towards the mountains, hoping to "take more pictures...and come up with a story that should titillate the punks in Frisco" (176). Once he finds the village, however, the journalist encounters yet another fantastical tale, this one of a mestizo "music child" with "a truly wondrous voice...a boy who never spoke but sang his every phrase, and mimicked to perfection all the bird sounds and jungle calls, the roar of the waterfall by his father's cornfields, the monsoon wind, and rustle of stalks" (176).

In Yuson's story, the fantastical tale of the music child, juxtaposed with the fishing boys, questions the nature of the fantastic by examining how cultural practices are marked as "spectacle" while political or imperial violence and exploitation, which can seem just as spectacular, do not warrant the same passionate gaze. Like Robert Aguinaldo in Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café*, the Anglophone journalist becomes a stand-in for "ethnic authors" or "national artists" who focus on the fantastic elements of their culture in order to cater to western audiences, thus emphasizing the other's irrecoverable ahistorical difference. Yet Yuson's story also shows how historical events like war or the capitalist reappropriation of land may appear just as fantastic, and may bring the reader closer to the reality of contemporary globalization. The "otherworldly," in the case of the fishing boys, exposes the anxieties and histories that lay at the heart of imperial encounters.

In 2005, Yuson's "The Music Child" was reprinted in the third volume of the *Philippine Speculative Fiction* anthology, changing the story's genre from magical realism (which often reads the story as national allegory), to speculative fiction, a label often used as an "umbrella term" to encompass all non-realist literary genres, but more important, a label that represents non-realist texts without a particular genre or subgenre. As every text in this dissertation has been read as "non-realist," "anti-realist" or "imaginative," they might also be categorized as speculative, since they all imagine alternative ways of representing the complexity of our globalized moment, where regimes of capitalist, state and imperial violence overlap in systems that seem unreal and remain indecipherable by multiculturalist narratives of liberal (and inclusive) progress.

I end this dissertation by returning to the "non-realist" form of the novels in this dissertation in order to explore how the speculative elements in Anglophone writing respond to

the gaze of the Western reader while rendering the obscurity of global capitalism and shifting discourses of multiculturalism into recognizable forms of imperial, state and capitalist violence. The formal attributes and generic conventions common in Southeast Asian Anglophone texts use speculative elements to deviate from multiculturalist forms of expression. As they do not fit the national ethnic norm in either their "homeland" or their "host country," Southeast Asian Anglophone authors are less effected by the tendency to depict themselves as an "authentic" ethnic type. Rather, their stories account for marginalized literary traditions that do not fit into the Anglo-Saxon norm, and are seen as foreign, minoritized, or otherwise "inauthentic" to national cultures. If the Anglophone is a way of tracing the "inauthentic" rather than the authentic, speculative fiction stories like "The Music Child" allow audiences to meditate on the very desires to see cultural texts as "authentic."

In refusing to simply express an "authentic" identity, texts that exemplify and produce transitive cultural practices have recently been recognized as belonging to the genre of speculative fiction. Indeed, many texts investigated in this project have contained speculative elements that do not reduce the text to a particular genre, but demand the invention of new generic labels, from the "meta-historical anti-realism" of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, to the "para-genre" of Alfred Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* (Yuson, 115), to the speculative memories of *This Place Called Absence* and the futuristic Chick Lit of *Mammon Inc.* In the project of consciously managing and reinterpreting multiculturalist identities, transitive cultures are figured as speculative not only because of their anti-realist elements, but because of their refusal to be read as authentic representations of a recognized ethnic identity—this radical political break, in itself, seems more aligned with the discourse around speculative fiction. The "speculation" is analogous to the transitive verb, which operates as an action linking a subject

with a seemingly infinite array of objects ("he *pushes*..." "she *holds*..."). The transitive verb does not foreclose meaning, but allows speculation beyond the logics seeking to confine it as realist, authentic or autobiographical. From the point of view that cultural practices can be outcomes of transition that fashion new, speculative possibilities. Anglophone speculative fiction makes new cultural forms legible without reducing texts to a single identity-based genre. Where transitive cultures help manage forms of multiculturalist governance, speculative elements depict a refusal to produce "authentic" minority texts that allow the reader to understand and homogenize a subordinated identity.

As a shared mode of expression among Southeast Asian Anglophone writers, speculative fiction has become a generic innovation that provides an alternative to "authentic" socio-historical novels that often buttress multiculturalist regimes. Multiculturalism's conflation of race, ethnicity, gender and class, is partially enabled by ethnic autobiographies and national literatures that repeat familiar motifs from the "American returnee" or the "diasporic family" to the glorifying of "resistance fighters" or "woman warriors." Indeed, ethnic narratives are often received and taught as authentic representations that reconstitute multicultural identities and reinforce narratives of progress that overshadow exploitative capital violence. Whereas authentic ethnic narratives carry genre conventions that help make racial identities cohesive and hypervisible, speculative fiction operates as a meta-genre that comments on the assumptions of ethnic socio-historical narratives. Anglophone speculative fiction like "The Music Child," has been re-interpreted as speculative fiction to absorb new audiences. As the availability of Southeast Asian Anglophone texts expands through speculative fiction journals and anthologies (many free online or sold as e-books), speculative fiction has recently become a preferred genre among Anglophone literary cultures in the Philippines and Singapore, as online communities

seeking non-western speculative fiction helps make such works accessible to expanding online audiences.

The current attack on Ethnic Studies in the United States has stemmed in part from the supposed irrelevancy of racial identities in our supposedly post-racial present. Under such attack, "authentic" multiculturalist identities appear as the only recourse. But for transitive cultures, troubling categories like Asian American and African American do not make such concepts irrelevant or "post-racial." Rather, this troubling works to expose how such identities function to reinforce imperial projects and capitalist exploitation, marking concepts of race as even more relevant in understanding social hierarchies in places where Ethnic Studies is being censored. Transitive culture makes it possible to reinterpret de-politicized ethnic identities. Whereas the "ethnic narrative" seems crucial to forming such identities, Southeast Asian Anglophone fiction can produce politically-invested racial identities by meditating upon the position of the spectator, the one who gazes and desires such monolithic conceptions of race.

Speculative Fiction

Since Robert Heinlein coined the term "speculative fiction" in a speech anthologized in *The Science Fiction Novel: Imagination and Social Criticism* (1959), the term itself has become an object of speculation. While anthologies and editors often note speculative fiction's genre-defying capabilities and political investments in minority and international voices, others have relied on it as an "umbrella term" that allows an anthology to include multiple non-realist genres. If we consider how the term has functioned since its appearance in 1959 rather than how it has been defined, it is clear that speculative fiction has operated primarily as an alternative to genre categories, from realism to autobiography to science fiction and fantasy (Gomez). Furthermore,

it has also been used to mark a text's political investments in social justice and antiracist projects. To assign the label "speculative" to a science fiction text, for example, can work to clarify that the text refuses to orientalize or exoticize the "alien" other, and to avoid "the space age settings and scientific jargon that had previously dominated the field (and that appealed essentially to adolescent boys)" (Gomez 949). Heinlein's 1959 speech similarly asserted that "speculative fiction is much more realistic than is most historical and contemporary-scene fiction and is superior to both" ("Science Fiction"). His contrast of the genre to "realism" emphasizes the genre's relevancy to speculating on the futures of current (and real) social norms. The novels of Ursula K. Le Guin reflect these political investments by using speculative fiction to promote non-heteronormative sexualities and to critique patriarchy and Judeo-Christian traditions. For Le Guin, the tendency to overlook speculative fiction is really a fear of "the true" as opposed to "the factual," and the foreknowledge that "its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life [Americans] have let themselves be forced into living" (44).

As speculative fiction is more frequently invoked the more "genre-less" a text is, much of the work that employs the speculative fiction label is published in small presses or in online literary journals, where the prospect of marketing a science fiction or fantasy sub-genre is less of a concern than is producing innovative and politically-invested texts. Speculative fiction journals like *Expanded Horizons*, *Strange Horizons*, *Scissors and Spackle*, and *Mobius: Journal of Social Change* have sought to use the speculative fiction label to consciously refocus anti-racist art towards re-presenting the transnational experiences of marginalized groups. One of the most popular of these journals, *Strange Horizons*, details a "Stories We've Seen Too Often" list that aims at ridding submissions of racist, sexist or otherwise prejudiced clichés. The list includes

cliché's like "#14: White protagonist is given wise and mystical advice by Holy Simple Native Folk" and "#3 Visitor to alien planet ignores information about local rules, inadvertently violates them, is punished" or "New diplomat arrives on alien planet, ignores anthropologist's attempts to explain local rules, is punished" ("Stories We've Seen Too Often"). By deliberately excluding such genre conventions, the editors seek to push writers to imagine new motifs within a larger project for social justice.

The political investments of speculative fiction speak to its popularity in the supposedly "post-racial" United States, where positive minority representations in politically and socially oriented genres like African American and Asian American Literature seem to confine issues of race into "authentic" minority experiences, solving (and thus forgetting) structural racisms that such texts can then be utilized to maintain. These identity-based genres have been used to both foster minority identities and to keep minority authors (and their audiences) "in their place," as they are often read with the assumption that minority texts only consider the particular experience of a (single) group. This assumption ghettoizes Ethnic Literature while promoting ethnic texts that subsume minority identities into a national subjectivity. For the literary critic Jewelle Gomez, speculative fiction broaches issues of constructed identities because it allows writers to depict the various experiences of marginalization. As she writes, "Speculative fiction is a way of expanding our ideas of what human nature really is, allowing us to consider all aspects of ourselves," (954). Such texts are not only free of confining popular genre labels, but are also free of similarly confining identity-based labels (African American, Chicano/a, Asian American) (Gomez).

Given speculative fiction's implicit mandate to use speculative elements in non-conventional (and political) ways, the genre has few trackable motifs or gimmicks, as the

constant demand to include that which goes unrecognized or which appears indecipherable keeps the genre invested in inventing motifs that reflect current social issues. Speculative fiction thus operates more as an "other" to popular genre fiction, establishing alternative imaginings that, once they become conventional, are no longer labeled speculative fiction, but become a genre to themselves. Labels like slipstream, steampunk, and biopunk, are now recognizable genres, but began with texts that were simply referred to as "speculative." Whereas science fiction is often seen as beginning with writers like Jules Verne and Mary Shelley, speculative fiction authors see themselves within a tradition stretching from parables and spiritual myths of non-western cultures (Ursula Le Guin and Nisi Shawl's work both set fantasies in Eastern and African mythos). Within this tradition of spirituals and myths, speculative fiction authors insist on contributing to epic narratives and re-establishing an anti-modern tradition, breathing new life into oral traditions by allowing the fantastical past to merge with the ultra-modern future. In this sense, speculative fiction does not merely "umbrella" non-realist genres, but excludes many texts based on their implicit (Anglo-Saxon, hetero-normative) values.

At a time when the "speculative" logic of global capital seems mired in complexity, the alternative social worlds imagined through speculative fiction texts offer different hermeneutics inspired by the experience of living through global capital. In 1979, Darko Suvin distinguished science fiction and fantasy through a rubric of believability and empirical evidence. For Suvin, science fiction "differs from other 'fantastic' genres" because it relies on being perceived as "not impossible within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch" (viii). "Fantastic genres," on the other hand, are "ensembles of fictional tales without empirical validation" (viii). Suvin's split of these two genre labels allows us to see the intervention of speculative fiction as pushing the limits of what we see as our shared "cognitive norms," as it

seeks to represent encounters that defy dominant logics, and proposes new logics and empiricisms (Hildebrand). As conventional genre fictions too often re-constitute a familiar racial identity, speculative fiction sheds light on that which has been unrecognizable, and speculates on why it was so diminished in the first place.

Speculative Fiction and Transitive Culture

In Yuson's "The Music Child," after abandoning his story of the fishing boys, the Filipino American journalist, "Pardner," again encounters the complex otherworldly sense of exploitation and violence when he travels further into the jungle and finds the music child's mestizo father, Don Julio. Rather than introduce the journalist to the music boy, Don Julio attempts to recruit him for a resistance movement against the state-protected multinational logging companies that have been decimating the nearby forest:

It all seemed inevitable now, *Don Julio* said wearily. Violence had already claimed the lives of his friends who had tried to block the new road ...

Accompanied by soldiers, the loggers had exacted swift retribution ... Worse, they had threatened to return to wipe out all resistance. (2007, 181)

Don Julio tells the story of his resistance against the logging companies presuming that the American journalist has arrived "to record all of this" for Western media, yet the journalist only tells Don Julio of his concern for the resistance as a ruse so that he can discover the fabled music child. Still, the journalist's encounter with the resistance, from his point of view, also feels like an encounter with the fantastic: "I wondered whether I had just heard a tall tale. We were nearing the end of the twentieth century, after all. Bad guys didn't just show up and kill off recalcitrant natives. It couldn't happen...Did these things still happen?" (182). As with the fishing boys,

capitalist exploitation and imperial violence are seen as fantastic, but at the same time, they do not entrance the western reader as an object of desire, like the hair-stringed violins and the music child do. Rather, the fantastic elements that remind the viewer of the reality of globalization are routinely suppressed, as they are capable of exposing the violence of present day imperial regimes. Given the anti-racist, multicultural and liberal discourses buttressing such regimes, these reminders of capitalist and imperial violence seem like fantastic elements that "couldn't happen," at least not in "the twentieth century" (182).

Yuson's story makes visible the difference between the otherworldly elements that go unrecognized, and those fantastic elements that global multiculturalism makes hyper-visible. Though both the story of the resistance and the story of the music child seem similarly fantastic, one gets marked as "spectacle" (as that which deserves spectators), while the other is simply marked as "implausible," as it speaks against engrained narratives of progress and multiculturalism, and exposes the complex overlapping of capitalist, state and imperial violence. In juxtaposing both the "spectacle" and the "implausible," Yuson's story reveals the imperial desires that mark them as opposing elements. The real violence of globalized networks, like the displacement of indigenous land, the exploited labor of factory work, and the decimation brought through capitalist accumulation, is made into obscure "implausible" elements. From the American journalist's point of view, these "real" elements only distract him from discovering the spectacle, the real interest story made to please his American audience. The desire to deny the "implausible" afterlife of imperial violence in the Philippines becomes satisfied by his desire for the "authentic," in this case, a village child imbued with folklorish magic.

Yuson's juxtaposition of capitalist reappropriation of land and the music child allows readers to meditate on the very desires and discourses that make some aspects of the foreign into

a "spectacle" and others into obscure and implausible events. This theme contrasts Anglo-American speculative fiction texts, which often focus on the magic of other cultures to "speculate upon" another culture as a stand-in for the "otherworldly," enabling them to construct "new" worlds while conveying other cultures as definitively anti-modern. Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* chronicles offers a new non-European fantasy setting, yet also seems to over-emphasize its difference to forms of Anglo-Saxon culture, a difference that becomes contained in Le Guin's construction of a "mythic past" seemingly irrelevant to an era of capitalist modernity. Southeast Asian Anglophone speculative fiction, on the other hand, often writes from the point of view of the spectacle, of "being looked at" and of the desires embedded within the gaze.

Anglophone Asian American novels like Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* and Peter Bacho's *Cebu* re-invent historical memory in order to expose the desires of their own readers, who seek an authentic representation. Yet because these texts are so often given the genre branding of Asian American Literature, their meanings are too often reduced to reading the narrator as an autobiographical voice, numbing the text's critiques of the American desire to see the other as an authentic spectacle. More recently, Asian American writers like Karen Tei Yamashita and Larissa Lai have turned to fantasy-driven speculative fiction, avoiding "authentic" labels of traditional Asian American narratives by incorporating speculative elements that defy western imperial logics. In Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, for example, the tropic of cancer moves North, making Los Angeles the border to Mexico. Meanwhile, Anglophone texts from Southeast Asia have presented even more explicit explorations of the act of speculation. In a region where American militarized and economic imperialisms converge in highly complex ways, such speculative fiction suggests that the manifestations of imperial violence—extreme inequalities, exploitation, and state and militarized violence—are so obscured that they can only

be mediated through the fantastic, given the discourses of racial harmony and global multiculturalism also present in the region. In other words, rather than expose how Eastern mythos can provide an alternative to the neoliberal logics of global capitalism, the "spectacle" in these fictions is located in the very disruptions and contradictions of imperial logics themselves, making visible the obscure role of Asian labor in maintaining contemporary global processes.

Under regimes that censor Anglophone writings, or under capitalist regimes that demand a work be marketable, speculative fictions use speculative elements to couch contemporary criticisms of both the nation and its western imperial allies. As the critic Andrew Ng has written concerning speculative fiction in Singapore, the speculative mode has become "a strategically useful literary vehicle to air criticisms against the current state of affairs...a textual strategy attempted, perhaps, to deflect away from the writer any accusation of sedition" (Ng 2009, 117). Though Singapore novels since Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* have contained speculative elements, speculative fiction from Singapore has mostly been accessible online, assembled through networks of blogs like "Speculative Writers of Singapore" and the 2012 print anthology *Fish Eats Lion: New Singaporean Speculative Fiction*.

In the Philippines, Anglophone literary culture has fostered the growth of speculative fiction through granting speculative fiction authors National Awards (Palanca Awards) and in publishing speculative fiction in English-language web and print journals like *The Digest of Philippine Genre Stories*, and *Story Philippines* as well as in anthologies like *Nine Supernatural Stories* and the *Philippine Speculative Fiction* series, which has been nominated for the Manila Critics' Circle National Book Award and is now in its ninth volume. Most of these speculative fiction works have found audiences far exceeding that of previous Anglophone writing: the *Philippine Speculative Fiction* anthology has found an international audience through selling

ebooks and showcasing works in "The Philippine Speculative Fiction Online Sampler," and *Philippine Genre Stories* now publishes most of its stories online. Almost every published author seems to have a blog or web presence. In 2012, international attention also came to Philippine print anthologies when the Chinese-Filipino speculative fiction anthology *Lauriat* was published by Lethe Press in the United States, indicating that although the anthology carries the branding "Philippine" in its title, like much of Philippine Anglophone literature, it seeks a wide readership, and takes the term "Filipino" beyond its "authentic" or nationalist assumptions.

Throughout the *Philippine Speculative Fiction* anthologies, Philippine authors have distanced themselves from national identities even while keeping the term "Philippine." In the ninth volume, the editor Dean Alfar considered the impact of speculative fiction in Philippine Anglophone writing as having created "a venue for Filipino writing of the fantastic sort, even as we struggle against the labels [and] deliberately break the barriers of genre" (Alfar 2013). The anthology's other main editor, Charles Tan, has supported Philippine speculative fiction through his controversial blog, *the Bibliophile Stalker*. As a Chinese-Filipino Anglophone writer who writes "Philippine stories," Tan views speculative fiction as providing a space to transition among different recognizable identities through metaphor and allegory, whereas most "national" or "ethnic" realist literature demands that "you can't write about cultures that aren't your own" (Tan, "No Foreigners Allowed"). For Tan, speculative fiction opens up the "possibility of genuine insight when an external party writes about another culture," because when there is "distance and a lack of presumptions, fresh perspectives arise" ("No Foreigners Allowed"). Traditional genre fiction like science fiction and fantasy, for Tan, reinforce multiculturalist identities that see cultures as finite and are only given value by their difference.

Tan's advocacy of cross-cultural writing has warranted controversy, with some naming Tan as an ally of "defensive white writers" who seek to mine inspiration from the mythos of others (Deepa). Yet Tan, like many Philippine speculative fiction writers, is of mixed ancestry (Chinese/Filipino), and should be understood as speaking within and from an experience of mixed backgrounds and imperial encounters that have so far not been incorporated into global multiculturalist identities. For transitive cultural writers whose identities are excessive to provided multiculturalist identities, to be able to write about another culture through a recognizable label like speculative fiction enables one to write at all. Indeed, the "inauthenticity" of Philippine speculative fiction is rooted in the given expectation to write about one's presumed national and ethnic identity. Yet many of these authorss come from a trans-cultural, mixed race and Anglophone backgrounds, and thus their ascribed "authentic" identity is not their experience. Writing about one's "spectacular" cultural traditions can seem as foreign as writing about "foreign" ethnic groups.

Many speculative fiction texts refocus the speculative element from cultural "magic" towards the "implausible" presence of global capital and violent imperial regimes. In a 2009 interview for the speculative fiction podcast *Rubber Dinosaur*, Charles Tan outlined how Philippine Speculative Fiction can speak to real politics in ways that go beyond seeing Filipino culture as fantastical. The interviewer, Matt Staggs, begins by asking Tan what speculative fiction authors can "draw from Filipino culture...what should we find interesting, what should we investigate in your culture?" (Staggs). Rather than answer with examples of Filipino myths like the aswang, the Filipino ghoulish were-dog, Tan offers examples of "speculative" elements from Philippines' history, beginning with Spanish, American and Japanese colonization, to the Marcos dictatorship and the "People Power" revolution. Rather than pull from "authentic"

cultural myths, Tan views political events like "People Power" as "speculative," describing it as the fantastic election of a woman who was not even on the original ballot (Cory Aquino), which began an uprising where tanks and soldiers were diffused with flowers and rosaries. When asked for more "cultural" speculative elements, Tan mentions the ubiquity of owning cellphones without being able to afford landlines, and the micropayment and loan system supported by NGOs, both of which speak to "science fiction in a third world country" (Staggs). Tan's reinterpretation of the question "what can we draw from your culture?" pushes his audience to see the social relevancy of speculative fiction as an inheritor to the political projects of ethnic and anti-imperial fiction. Rather than just see speculative fiction as part of a recovery project of lost cultures, Philippine speculative fiction forces us to confront how "magic" impinges upon everyday logics.

The editors of the *Philippines Speculative Fiction* anthologies encourage open defiance of genre conventions not simply to explore new speculative elements, but also to reinterpret this defiance of genre as a refusal to authenticate a limited and monolithic Filipino identity. As Dean Alfar writes in the first volume, in order to "create the fantastic,"

We must write literature that unabashedly revels in wonder, infused with the culture of our imagination—which means being Filipino and, at the same time, surrendering that very same limiting notion—being more than Filipino, unleashing the Filipino of our imagination, divorcing and embracing the ideas of identity, nationhood and universality. We need to do magic. (2006, viii)

The "magic" mentioned here is in imagining alternatives to Filipino identity while still participating in an anti-racist project. Here Philippine speculative fiction can be read as an expression of transitive culture, as it pushes the limits of Filipino identity, expanding it to

account for the "inauthenticity" of racial and cultural mixture, thus exposing the ongoing histories of imperial and neocolonial dominance, and in turn, re-politicizing Filipino identity against imperial projects. Such texts imagine worlds that make sense of our complex globalized context where imperial, state and capitalist regimes overlap, and confront the reader with his own desire for an "authentic" Filipino identity.

Overall, speculative fiction allows readers to read the text without notions of "authenticity," and to consider how the text's speculative elements and metaphors reflect political and social issues that may be too controversial to write in a realistic manner. In her 2010 essay "Waiting for Victory: Towards a Philippine Speculative Fiction," the Philippine fiction writer Anna Felicia C. Sanchez traces a genealogy of speculative fiction in the Philippines from writers like Nick Joaquin, Alfred Yuson and Charleston Ong, who use speculative elements "as a shield against censorship and [as] a means of transgressing taboos" (42-3). For Sanchez, Philippine speculative fiction intervenes by taking on a genre label "that sells" and also attempts a "quest for legitimacy" among critics. It does so by subverting paradigms visible in Anglo-American speculative fiction, while also overturning identity-based genre labels like "Philippine Literature," which encourage the view that "the unreal elements of speculative fiction have no place in the turmoil of local socio-political realities" and make the very brand "Philippine speculative fiction" appear as "an oxymoron" (41). This foregrounding of an alternative logic to genres based on political identities (African American, Asian American) and genres based on form (Science Fiction, Fantasy) enables Philippine speculative fiction authors to transgress reader expectations of Philippine identity, allowing them to make relevant social observations and critiques on how Filipino identity fits into the larger context of global capitalism. In refusing to meld into this structure, such texts account for global capitalism's complex world of

connections and contradictions, where the author himself often stands both complicit and resisting, both a critic of imperial governance and a product of imperial encounter.

Conclusion

At the end of Alfred Yuson's "The Music Child," when the Filipino American journalist finally encounters the music child, Luisito, he finds that all the rumors of the child's abilities to mimic any sound perfectly are true. But the journalist is still unsatisfied. The boy has changed since the rumors, has grown older and wiser, and no longer sings to mimic "the monsoon wind, and rustle of stalks," but sings "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Save the Queen" (2007, 176, 183). Like Anglophone culture, the mestizo music child is cast as "inauthentic," and is rather seen as "a great mimic, repeating exactly what he hears" (184). But he also "makes up his own music, chanting epic tales of courage and gallantry." Speaking in multiple languages, the boy mimics in order to create, to add "his own touches of whimsy cutting it here and there to suit his taste for the game, his own special game" (184). As spectacle, the boy is presumed by the American to be frozen in time, but his growth and maturity give him an awareness of his own role as a spectacle, allowing him to perform for the American gaze in order to satisfy their orientalist desires while speaking their tongue.

When the soldiers and logging companies return to decimate the "magical valley," the journalist chooses to retreat, but Luisito chooses to stay with his village. During the state and company's attack on the resistance movement, Luisito mimics what he hears, and sings "his version of the rifle shots." The boy's association with mimicry here becomes a different kind of spectacle, one that does not praise the West, but reiterates the sounds of violence, documenting the oppression of the present so that others can continue to hear it. As the journalist flees, he

hears the boy replicating the sounds of "running feet, shouts, gunshots, screams of pain" (185). The boy mimics the "fantastical" destruction that the journalist could only recognize earlier as "implausible." Finally, as the soldiers' victory nears and the villagers become decimated, the music child creates a "hymn of fury that soon dissolved into vibrant waves of lament...[praising] the bravery taking place around him" (187). The boy's voice, soon to be made silent by the complex overlapping of imperial, capitalist, and state violence, refuses to be recognized as simply an exotic spectacle or as an "authentic" narrative of historical suffering. Rather, the boy's song creates an "ineradicable memory."

The music child, like Anglophone cultures, is marked with the continuous presence of imperial histories. His songs resist narratives of multiculturalism to make present day imperial violences visible. While ethnic cultures can appear as a gateway to an authentic mode of being, an "insurmountable cultural attitude," as Balibar calls it, Anglophone literature shows that the irony of this expectation is never lost, for to learn to speak the tongue of the colonizer already troubles any claim to an authentic identity, just as shedding light on a dark object makes it visible, but takes away its property of being dark. Undefined and unrecognized by western audiences, Southeast Asian Anglophone authors write back from spaces of transition, where multiple identities can be imposed at once, but as soon as one expects them to sing of their homeland's "monsoon winds" they sing of "bullets" through a "hymn of fury" (184). Coming from a region decimated by imperial projects, civil wars, and global capitalist extraction, these writers and their texts have received far too little attention by literary scholars who seek to mine the American and British experience. To assume that Southeast Asian Anglophone writing is "irrelevant" to understanding British and American imperial culture erases the histories of imperial violence that produced them in the first place, and exchanges such histories for more convenient "ethnic texts"

that produce prideful national (though diverse) identities. More important, it allows global capitalism and current-day imperial violence to thrive unabated by anti-racist politics. This dissertation has tried to account for such cultures, to recognize them not within multiculturalist categories, but through the act of transition among recognized ethnic identities, and to see such transition as a viable cultural mode and as a strategy that has the potential to dismantle the complex overlapping of imperialist, capitalist, and state regimes, which all rely on the reproduction of multiculturalist identities in order to function.

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