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Empathetic Humanism and Multiethnic Narratives

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EMPATHETIC HUMANISM AND MULTIETHNIC NARRATIVES

by

ASHLEY CHEYEMI MCNEIL

Under the Direction of Elizabeth West, PhD and Alfred Hornung, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation uncovers how select multiethnic American literatures imagine minoritarian subjectivity that is not premised on categories of nationalism or American mythos of agency, but rather privilege non-Western humanist subject-formation processes. Given their outlying position in the American literary canon, multiethnic, interracial texts have the capacity to engage not only alternative frameworks of subject formation, but also specifically humanist frames – meaning, encounters of inclusion that occur because of a reciprocal recognition of a shared condition of being. Investigating narratives of interethnic reception, this project illuminates how some modes of being, such as suffering and joy, illustrate a new humanism predicated on radical empathy. Employing an archive of narrative works that range from Barack

Obama's *Dreams of My Father* (1995) to Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010), alongside texts such as Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990), this dissertation shows how minority subjectivities can be cultivated beyond the domain of settler agendas: how, for example, ethnic difference incites cross-cultural dignity, not racial subjugation; or how militaristic violence heralds guardianship amongst its victims, not reactive hatred. Ultimately, this narrative methodology works to undermine mechanisms of agency that create subjects only to control, condition, and constrain them.

Exploring how multiethnic literature expresses underexamined humanist encounters between minoritized peoples, this dissertation demonstrates the potential to destabilize the exclusionist nationalism that first marginalized them, without engaging or relying on said national codes of subjectivity. To that end, this project concludes by exploring how a methodology of empathetic humanism can be put into praxis. Providing examples of partnerships with local disenfranchised groups to co-create public-facing projects that expand the frame of "who counts" as a viable subject, this dissertation closes by demonstrating how empathetic humanism as a theory and methodology can be employed to benefit the public, common good.

INDEX WORDS: Humanism, Cosmopolitanism, Suffering, Spatial subjectivity, Multiethnic
        literature, Critical race studies

EMPATHETIC HUMANISM AND MULTIETHNIC NARRATIVES

by

ASHLEY CHEYEMI MCNEIL

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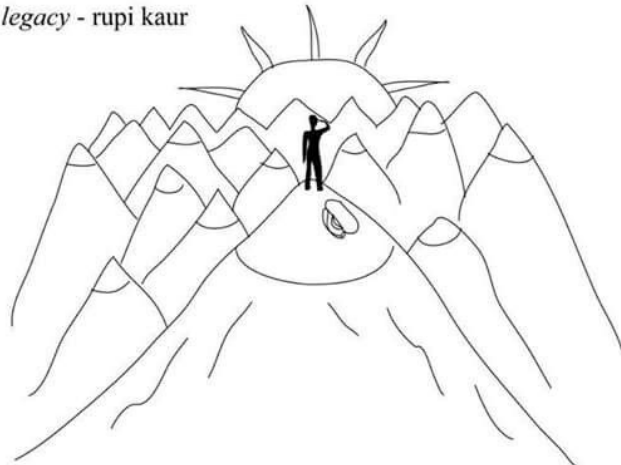Referent/in: Dr. Elizabeth West, PhD / Georgia State University

Korreferent/in: Dr. Erin Suzuki, PhD / University of California, San Diego

DEDICATION

I am the product, reflection, transmitter, and legacy of many brilliant, strong women, both living and deceased. Without them, this work would never have been imagined. Chief among this community is my mom, who showed me fortitude, but taught me it means nothing without love.

i stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
what can i do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther

legacy - rupi kaur

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1   INTRODUCTION: EXPANDING THE FRAME

> The function of the university is not simply to teach breadwinning,
> or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre
> of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine
> adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life,
> an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization.
> – W.E.B. Du Bois
> "Of the Wings of Atalanta"
> *The Souls of Black Folk*
> (1903)

In the last few years of my degree seeking process, I have been an Innovation Fellow at Georgia State University. In this capacity, I imagine and manage complex projects that are both technical and cultural in nature, leading interdisciplinary teams on public-facing advocacy projects that privilege ethnographic aims. Collaborating with community and academic partners, my work finds ways to make (often undertold) life stories communicable and shareable in form. The underlying goal of these efforts is to reimagine academic work to be directed by and through minoritized people, and in doing so, to democratize the process of writing life to foreground those who historically have been excluded from that purview. Part of what I have come to understand through this work—which includes fostering ties in the local community to create steering groups; talking with migrants, refugees, and returning citizens; listening to stories of travel, displacement, and incarceration alongside goals of dignity and well-being—is that any scholar or academic institution has much to learn from these disenfranchised minority groups. Theirs are stories not only of intense suffering and gross victimization, but they are also stories of tenacity, mercy, and joy. In every case, they are testaments of what it means to be human and, as such, have hailed me to forge a critical, philosophical reckoning of humanism to help situate the work I do in the public sphere. Their stories have galvanized my doctoral research and

spurred me to consider how the institution of higher education can be best leveraged in humanistic work. Though often thought of as a hierarchal network of research and teaching institutions with varying prestige, the system of higher education in reality has strong intellectual, technological, and social connections with local, regional, and national non-academic organizations. The university system is a capacious infrastructure that can promote stability in working with minority groups—and, I argue, has a responsibility to do so. In other words, I have come to understand Du Bois's conviction that the university can provide "that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life" and, even, lend it form.

As a humanist, I consider myself to be a builder: of meaningful scholarship, interdisciplinary teams, tactful students, trans-institutional collaborations, cross-cultural coalitions, and dignity in disenfranchised communities. Yet my research has taught me that as academics we should always remember that the analytic of "human" has historically been invoked to enact violence and siphon education into restrictive boxes of identity rather than promote inclusive expansion, despite what the taglines of liberal multiculturalism would have us believe. Establishing and maintaining prerequisites to agency, even in a well-intentioned manner of "giving voice" to people of color, ultimately only creates, endorses, and maintains disenfranchised groups. Recognizing this ever-precarious facet of humanistic work, my project seeks to discern how minority people promote connections and receptions that remain heterogenous to the order of bio- and geopolitics that economize and condition agency.

To that end, I have learned to weave together my research, teaching, and fellowship work in ways that foreground humanistic and participatory scholarship. For the past two years, for example, I have co-lead an international grant project that partners with teams in Hong Kong and Pretoria to investigate housing precarity and well-being for migrants to help guide the United

Nations' current "new urban rights agenda." Our Urban Migration grant research leverages big data and geospatial visualization of migrant newcomers to contextualize the stories we receive through our personal interviews with migrants and refugees in the Atlanta area. As a preliminary relationship-building effort, I first meet with representatives from the migrant community from which we seek interviews so that we can come to know one another as collaborators and partners. I had dinner with two extraordinary women from Mexico and Columbia as one of these preliminary partnership meetings. Both women came to the United States fleeing profound poverty and domestic violence and survived impossible odds: one was sixteen years old when she travelled on foot, alone with her three year old son, for almost two weeks across barren border land; the other woman left her homeland when she was nineteen years old, travelled for many months with a group of migrants, often having to hide away in strange barns and warehouses for days at a time while on her northern route. Counter to typical American discourse, their travel stories were only a small part of our long conversation that evening. The vast majority of our time together was spent talking about how their small apartment communities of mostly undocumented newcomers share parenting and childcare responsibilities, how they have organized a complex and fail-proof system of notifying every member of the community when Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents are at their door, and how the elaborate pranks they play on one another is a form of gifting and solidarity. These stories are anecdotal and, for protective purposes, will not be detailed much further here. Yet they are important to cite in this introductory chapter because they show instances of how disenfranchised people in "real life" build agency amongst one another through empathetic reception – and how that agency not only defines their humanity, but also works outside the norms of American nationalism that typically restricts their identities as either victims or trespassers and always as

illegal. Working with vulnerable communities, the projects I manage are a natural extension of my research focus on interraciality and new humanisms. I believe that literature already shows us how radical empathy flourishes in dire conditions and imagines subject formation processes in which Western frames are not the metrics of agency.

Simply put, literature helps us imagine and consider what is possible, in which settler agendas are not the end game. Over the last century we've seen a proliferation of texts that work within this heuristic and presuppose my work with disenfranchised communities of color. Creative works written by minority authors have already imagined ways to position traditional national tropes—such as race, religion, language, territory, and even militia—as part of, but not essential to, subject formation. As such, my project's aim is to uncover how select multiethnic literatures have imagined minority subjectivity that is not premised on either categories of nationalism or American mythos of agency, but rather privilege non-Western humanist subject-formation processes.

These imaginations have been occurring through American-authored literary works for some time now, though often fleeting in narrative scope and glossed over by scholars. For example, James Weldon Johnson includes a brief chapter in his 1912 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* dedicated to describing the "Club" in New York where "both white and colored people of certain classes" socialized without racial stigmas (55). Located in the basement of a house, the Club was a Chinese restaurant and lounge, owned by a "Chinaman," who made sure that all "the walls were literally covered with photographs or lithographs of every colored man in America who had ever 'done anything'," from Frederick Douglass to West Indian heavyweight boxer champion Peter "Black Prince" Jackson (55). The "Chinaman proprietor" not only made room to visualize and celebrate "great colored" subjects, but also ensured there was plenty of

floor space in his establishment for the "colored bohemian" patrons to see "new and ambitious performers" practice their dancing and acrobatic acts. The Chinaman created space for unemployable acts of non-conformity, "because no manager could imagine that audiences would pay to see Negro performers in any other role than that of Mississippi river roustabouts" (56). It is interracial narrative moments such as this scene described by Johnson that register a subject-formation mechanism of and by marginalized people that literary scholarship has to date left under-attended – which in turn also inspires my project's analytical pursuit of non-Western humanist encounters in literature.

Insofar as narratives have the capacity to register both particularity and ambiguity and therefore unsettle static definitions of identity, literature uniquely allows an analysis of race (positioned historically as a tool of post-Enlightenment European thought to fabricate "Man") as ethnicity (as it is premised on a plurality of cultural indicators). As such, literature privileges individual experience over tendencies to either homogenize and sanitize difference (a maneuver of containment often evoked by liberal multiculturalism) or articulate difference solely through the sieve of established national paradigms (a common chasm created through transnationalism). And yet, as any bibliophile knows, stories irrevocably bind us to one another, and are capable of forging solidarity through the counter-narrative it may present. In her 2004 monograph *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler offers a reminder that "[w]hen we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class . . . we have to present ourselves as bounded beings – distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law, a community defined by shared features" (24). Ethnic nationalisms, like all nationalisms, are enlivened by narratives. Going further, Partha Chatterjee acknowledges that minority peoples have historically employed ethnic nationalism as a method of colonial resistance. But Chatterjee also argues that minority

peoples have suffered the consequences of those efforts being undermined and relegated as a static counterforce to the dominant, which ultimately reified the structure of hegemony. I argue that it is precisely because of the historical tie between nationalism and anticolonialism that my project's literary archive is uniquely situated to recognize how the nation ultimately seeks power for itself, not its constituents, and therefore has the capacity to imagine other forms of subjectivity that cannot be subsumed and relegated to the domain of the nation. Butler, too, proposes a similar caveat as Chatterjee when she cautions that "perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about," as it cannot "do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own" (*Precarious* 25). Literature, of course, hails Butler's call for justice, in that is the most sturdy and capacious vehicle that allows us to receive others "irreversibly, if not fatally" (*Precarious* 25).

To be clear, my research does not merely seek to expose how people of color have been *represented* by other non-whites in the United States – this would only to serve to trace the game of hierarchal jockeying that Western modes of thinking established through imperialism (which admittedly is also a charge against early 20th century humanist thinking, but I will clarify my usage of the term in a later section). Rather, I seek ways that Others *receive* Others beyond the domain of domination that is easily executed through parameters of national belonging: how, for example, ethnic difference incites cross-cultural dignity, not racial subjugation; or how violent persecution heralds guardianship amongst its victims, not reactive hatred. Given their outlying position in the American literary canon, multiethnic, interracial texts have the capacity to engage not only alternative frameworks of subject formation, but also specifically humanist frames – meaning, encounters of inclusion that occur because of a reciprocal recognition of a shared

condition of being, such as suffering and vulnerability. My project explores how interracial literature expresses underexamined non-Western humanist encounters and interactions between minoritized peoples and thereby illuminates a potential to destabilize the exclusionist nationalism that first marginalized them, without engaging or relying on said national codes of subjectivity. As a non-Western humanist theoretical approach can strike a key balance between homogeneity and universalization on the one hand, and the particular and the individual relation on the other, it is through this approach that I focus my exploratory inquiries of minority subjectivities.

In many ways our current moment seems to be already moving beyond the centrality of nation-based paradigms and structures, as evidenced by my descriptions of my work with community partners. But what are we moving toward? Late capitalism and globalism are certainly key trending terms in the humanities, as they should be. We cannot afford to passively under criticize neoliberal forces. But as David Harvey suggests, it is the responsibility of academics "to ask what kinds of scholarly knowledge production will be necessary to sustain or transform a world in which millennial capitalism seemingly reigns triumphant" (530). Dismantling such deeply rooted systems of oppression, historically taken on by minority, postcolonial, and area studies, has proven to be a slippery endeavor though, as the very articulation of any sort of hegemonic force, even in an effort to combat it, often cements its power. To use a familiar reference, we can consider the intersection of race and nationalism. While "race" and "nation" historically have been tightly bound together (especially in sociological studies, such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant's hallmark text, *Racial Formation in the United States*), this common practice has come to hinder our capacity of other imaginings of agency and Others. At the heart of our mythologies of American exceptionalism are the castings of race as "the melting pot" or "the salad bowl," both of which purports a sort of

stable harmony and congruency amongst all races and ethnicities in the U.S., hinging on the

neoliberal logic that hard work and ambition defines what it means to be American and trumps

all other suits of difference.

Yet recent civil domestic events have crudely proved otherwise: the only homogenization

of Americans is how deeply we are all entrenched in a hierarchal system of race and class. Or, as

Marxist philosopher Etienne Balibar remarks, "[I]n already constituted states, the organization of

nationalism into individual political movements inevitably has racism underlying it" (37). As we

are fully immersed in a global, digital age, transnational studies as a field has worked to attend to

the chasm between underrepresented subjects and national ideologies. However,

transnationalism is itself at heart a political movement, and therefore subject to the underlying

racism that it seeks to combat as part of its project. This fact does not render transnationalism

obsolete, but rather incites imaginative alternate approaches. I agree with Susan Koshy's

contention in her essay "The Postmodern Subaltern": "if the challenge of forging a new politics

is to be met, globalization studies, area studies, ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies will need

to work synergistically together to locate the 'spaces of hope' on the global terrain, instead of

insisting on the vanguardism of globalization theory" (111). In its most compact sense, my work

here seeks such spaces of hope.

1.1   Current Insufficiencies of Transnational Studies

Scholars have been theorizing "the transnational turn" for some time now. And it seems

that the academic obsession with the term will only continue to inspire conference themes,

special issues of journals, syllabi, and institutions of higher education. Winfried Fluck simplifies

the mass appeal of transnationalism, suggesting that "to pursue a transnational approach means

to go beyond the borders of the nation-state as an object of analysis. In an age of globalization,

such a project is obviously timely and the description of transnational studies as a bold step

across borders is ideally suited to serve as a commonsense legitimation" (365). It is for good

reason, then, that transnational studies has been particularly enticing to minority studies scholars

who argue for the recognition of marginalized peoples. Although transnational studies continues

the critical work of reframing history and offering alternative contexts of social relations writ

large, we need subject-based methodologies to keep pace. The transnational is, to date, still a

mercurial term in that it has been defined in varying degrees to various ends by scholars across

the humanities in which alterity is often the object of analysis, but not the unit of analysis. In his

introduction to *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, Donald Pease has no

qualms in admitting that the term "transnational" lends itself to potentially haphazard and

incongruent usage:

> Endowed with minimal analytic consistency, "the transnational" is as devoid of semantic
>
> coherence as it is of social existence. "The transnational" does not represent consistent
>
> political attitudes, and it lacks thematic unity. The term's definitional variousness has
>
> generated a surfeit of representations, meanings, definitions, and attributions. It operates
>
> in different syntactic iterations and at asymmetrical levels of heterogenous discourses to
>
> accomplish disparate aims. (4)

In the widespread excitement of adopting "the transnational" into academic discourses, its

categorical use can be borrowed too casually and perhaps too broadly; while the intellectual

parameters of the term are indeed far-reaching, we should be cautious of superfluous labeling.

We need to take care to remember and attend the subject—the living, feeling, conscious entity,

despite the theoretical instability of even these terms—when driving so hard to expand the scope

and promote the "globalize and reframe" discourse that is so popular today. And so too should

we be cautious to recall the initial impulses that catalyzed "the transnational turn" across the humanities. Shu-mei Shih contends that transnationalism began as a reflexive push to understand the emerging global economic order. "This urge [to be more expansive in our scholarship in the contemporary era of globalization] was first expressed by scholars who studied the West, born of the perception that globalization was fast spreading from the West as new technologies and finance capitalism compressed time and space across the world," she writes ("World Studies" 430). Reconciling the West's place with the shifting power postures throughout the world was the primary goal for these scholars and became the ever-present common denominator in formulations of the transnational. Shih continues, "Some strands of the conversation were about how either the West will homogenize the rest or the rest will heterogenize the West and about the worries and celebrations that will attend either outcome. The conversation, in other words, was centered on the West" ("World Studies" 430). And, as Shih likewise states alongside Francoise Lionnet, who together are the editors of *Minor Transnationalism*, the conversation still is centered on the West. "Critiquing the center," they assert, "when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and main object of study. The deconstructive dyad center/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it" (3). A self-reproducing pattern—a sort of feedback loop—is created when we study minority subjectivity through the referent of the center, rather than the margins. For this reason, one of the tenets of my project is to focus my analyses on encounters and relations that illuminate a context of interraciality and elide the tendency of understanding the self through opposition to dominant, Western- and Euro- centered discourses. I am interested in the ways that creative works by minority writers express minority subjects perceiving their individual agency

through encounters with other and different minority subjects, who thereby resist the dominant, universalizing forces of the center without even engaging them.

We need to be attendant to the (often accidental) erasures that occur when revision scholarship, such as some trends in the field of transnational studies, ironically collapses alternative frameworks in its effort to asymptotically broaden history's scope. In other words, we need to remember that we are interdependently responsible for privileging the human even in this present global age in which finance capitalism and digital relations are so often the vehicles of knowing one another, or at least are popular foci in humanities scholarship. Vivek Bald's study of Bengali peddlers in New Orleans in the early 20th century is a prime example of the kind of national revision I refer to here. In his essay "Selling the East in the American South," Bald traces underexplored lines of transit of peddlers from the central eastern region of India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as they sold goods that they brought over from their homeland. These peddlers followed American vacationers into U.S. southern states, creating a hub of commerce in New Orleans. Bald's intensive study of primary source immigration documents shows that many peddlers never permanently settled in the United States; rather, they made numerous trips "back home" to the Hooghly region. Importantly, Bald also shows how the peddlers continued their businesses into the Caribbean (arguably helping situate New Orleans as the northern most point of the Caribbean region), using the southern United States as a gateway to farther-reaching destinations. I cite Bald's work not as a springboard for my own research aims, but rather to provide an example of what I believe is a successful analytic of transnationalism in which the United States is decentered and, more importantly, the minoritized subjects' (i.e. the peddlers') experience of being in transitory states is privileged. While location and geography are obviously a crucial component of Bald's study, the notion of place and

belonging underscores his thesis. I see Bald's work engaging transnationalism in a more inventive way than what many other reckonings in the field—for example, diaspora and borderland studies—have canonically pursued. That is not to say, of course, that field-forging studies such as Lisa Lowe's 1996 *Immigrant Acts* or Gloria Anzaldúa's 1986 *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and the countless works they have in turn inspired, are not just as crucial to scholars today as they were twenty and thirty years ago. But just as the Bengali peddlers traversed across and through the southern U.S. while en route to broader markets, I propose that traditional frameworks of place-based ethos are nodes, not end points, along the transitory rhizome of the study of minority subjects and interraciality of the United States.

Bald's research of the Bengali Muslim peddlers responds to the 2006 argument made by Americanist historian Matthew Frye Jacobsen, in which he asserts that the "durable nationalist framework" of America has been (sometimes inadvertently) established through a transnational historicizing of immigrant populations. Recent decades have produced an American narrative that hinges on a nationalizing notion that immigrants come to the United States in order to be Americanized, that is, as seekers of liberty, justice, and social mobility. Jacobsen contends that "in situating the transnational history of immigration so firmly as *American* history, in lashing the subjects so securely (if tacitly) to American exceptionalism, and in positioning immigration itself in such a way that it might become the very thing occluding a more complicated history of the peopling of North America," previous generations of humanities scholars have situated the transnational as overly "*national* in its orientation and pervasive sensibilities" (74). While this "nation of immigrants" might seem passé in many circles of transnational scholars, its rhetoric has reassumed a global platform through current presidential political campaigns: the immigrant Other is, yet again, at once center stage while not even being on the stage. Likewise, it is not just

the integrity and purpose of the discipline of transnational studies that suffer the ramifications of nation-centric approaches, but actual populations of migrants and their descendants experience violent expressions of the very nationalism that is made possible by their presence. The stakes of this political and democratic power structure could not be more high as our current historical moment could very well be historicized as an age of fear, terror(ism), and mass murders.

While *the need* to go beyond Western, national qualifications of subjectivity has been theorized, we are still largely lacking models of a productive alternative methodology. In his 1993 monograph *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee clearly positions this lack in his response to Benedict Anderson's argument that nations are not so much "determinate products of given sociological conditions" as they are communities self-imagined into being (4). Chatterjee counters Anderson's stance, inquiring, "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (5). A decade after Chatterjee's famous remark Kandice Chuh published her highly acclaimed critical text, *Imagine Otherwise*, in which she argues that we must go beyond Western epistemology of who (or what) qualifies as a subject. Chuh's monograph marks new territory for minority studies and, I think, provides some of the most exciting work to date that responds to Chatterjee's critique.

Extending Chuh's aim—though admittedly at the risk of being redundant—it is crucial that I make my stance clear: nationalism does not have to be the harbinger of subjectivity. As Chuh states, such a relation turns back on itself, objectifying the very subjects it once sought to affirm. Multiethnic literatures of the U.S., as a field, seems to be in the quagmire of resisting systemic oppressions. Such resisting is relevant and necessary. But the concept of being American—belonging to a community, culture, or set of ideas linked to the territory of the

United States—without reinscribing or being dependent on agency from being American is difficult to express. To date, this concept is not yet fully realized through transnational approaches to American literature. Thus my project seeks to bridge this gap: my chapters look at how interracial encounters and subject formation have the potential to embody the most liberatory aspects among the aspirations of those in transnational studies. In their discussion of what "minor transnationalism" is and how it differs from the smartly implied "major" transnationalism, Lionnet and Shih do well in expressing the conundrum I seek to attend:

> What is lacking in the binary model of above-and-below, the utopic and the dystopic, and the global and the local is an awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries. All too often the emphasis on the major-resistant mode of cultural practices denies the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples and hides their micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires. Common conceptions of resistance to the major reify the boundaries of communities by placing the focus on action and reaction, excluding other forms of participation in the transnational that may be more proactive and more creative even while economically disadvantaged.
>
> (7)

Ultimately my project is inspired by the more transformative aspects of the transnational, which Pease is able to pinpoint with as much dexterity as he is able to assess its more feeble aspects. Pease's recognition of the difficulties in locating consistency in usage or meaning of the term is necessary, as its liberatory potential resides in its mercuriality. "The transnational mobilizes plural, often competing discourses that generate contradictions, new truths, and ruptures. Indeed,

this promiscuous signifier operates through an empty discursive vacuum that seemingly thrives on the incompatible claims the transnational is made to represent" – and by doing so, can theoretically be employed to make anything new again, in any study, context, or history (5). Pease continues and offers the most cohesive, yet still infinitely dynamic, rendering of the term to date: "The transnational is not a discourse so much as it is a volatile transfer point that inhabits things, people, and places with surplus connectivities that dismantle their sense of a coherent, bounded identity. Drawing upon an interstitial dynamic that it advances, this complex figuration bears the traces of the violent sociohistorical processes to which it alludes" (4). In this study I reimagine and expand on work in transnational studies that is illustrative of Pease's definition and I explore in particular how this view of transnationalism can serve as a platform to establish non-national interracial reception as a necessary framework for multiethnic literary studies.

1.2   Humanism, Interraciality, and Comparison

The void that nation-premised agency exposes can be ameliorated, I argue, through humanism, which I use as the organizing principle to my project. In his posthumous *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Edward Said argues that "there can be no true humanism whose scope is limited to extolling patriotically the virtues of our culture, our language, our monuments" (28). Not only does humanism's scope outreach the national matrices of culture, language, and monuments for Said, it also asserts an ambiguity in its capacity to both extoll virtues and, implicitly, expose declensions. Said arrives at this articulation through the many shifts humanism has undergone historically. Modern academic approaches to humanism have varied greatly – indeed, even within the chronological scope of my archive, roughly the mid 20th to early 21st centuries, humanism has undergone revisions. These revisions do not indicate a weak intellectual grounding, though. Rather, the transformations and new interpretations of the

philosophical concept are an essential aspect of humanism's core: for humanism to maintain its overarching purpose of assessing the values of the human, it must remain open to the shifting ways that humans interact with and perceive themselves, each other, and their environments.

While humanism as a school of thought can be traced through pre-biblical texts (though many philosophers cite God's positioning of Adam to rule over all other life in the garden of Eden as a "natural" starting point), for my project, the most necessary distinction rests in the varying interpretations of the term in the 20th century. Until the 1960s, according to Said, a resurgence of humanism swept through American art and scholarship as part of the national project of first defining and then elevating the human spirit. The key to access this heightened status was cultivating and reading canonical Western cultural and literary products by educated individuals who had the intellectual ability to interpret the progress of mankind. This strain of humanism was "very restricted and difficult," and functioned "like a rather austere club with rules that keep most people out" (16). Along with Said, other major scholars whose work address humanism, like Judith Butler (in her later works) and Paul Gilroy, self-consciously distance themselves from the pre-civil rights humanism in order to profess a non-hierarchal humanism. More recent usages of humanism tend to focus on how the human is established through universal experiences of being as "an emancipatory intervention to social reality" (Suárez Müller 478). This definition of the term departs from the construction of "the human" as part of the Western epistemological project of the early 20th century. In Said's revision of humanism, he urges an approach that is "not a way of consolidating and affirming what 'we' have always known and felt," but instead as "a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties" (28). While I concur with Said's premise that neither we nor our experiences are all

the same, I maintain there exists common emotional and experiential threads among humans that can help us examine subjectivity across populations, places, and time. I seek to employ the ways that humanism highlights shared universal conditions in order to express how minority agency is fostered through reception and empathetic encounters with other racialized subjects.

It is generally understood that humanism rests on a foundationalist philosophy; in other words, if humanism is in part a belief that there are shared universal conditions of being, then the premise born out of this assertion would hold that those conditions of being exist outside of culture, language, socialization, or politicization. Humanism, then, asserts a sort of "norming" epistemology, and in this way, the architecture of humanism looks eerily familiar to the binary structures I have argued my project seeks to circumvent. Critical Race Studies scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva specifically focuses her critique on this quandary of humanism, tracing "the analytics of raciality" as the historical and scientific production of Man in her 2007 monograph *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Silva shows how the racial (as an analytic that privileges difference) was historically brought to the social fore through the European Enlightenment to define reason as a universality. Reason—as a quality universally obtainable, though mastered only by elite European intellectuals who are therefore endowed with the authority to conquer those perceived to be without reason—is thereby divined as self-evidenced freedom. Those "Others" who are not able to ontologically grasp reason are also unable to be universalized, or in other words, to be fully humanized. Thus reason becomes a logarithm of exclusion, racially inscribed across the globe through colonial and imperial pursuits of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Presenting a consistent dilemma in the humanities, then, foundations—to which humanism is historically and ontologically trussed—take on a plethora of guises: defining the margin from the established center (see Lionnet and Shih), extracting the "trans" from the

"nation" (see Jacobsen), approaching the Other without recourse to stymied matrices of agency (see Chuh), and illuminating how the racial is productive of an exclusionary universality (see Silva). When the "nation" goes unproblematized as a claim in transnational studies its power is reinscribed and the potential for political transformation and social justice is cauterized. This logic holds for any unproblematized claim or, even, critical theory, as the function of unproblematizing works in the interests of hegemonic power. Any method that is based on normatives, foundations, or universals can just as readily function as a boundary-maker as it can a liberator. I have to contend with the inherent flaw of my approach: am I, too, not reinscribing the mechanism that has stifled liberatory theory of race relations? In response, I adopt Judith Butler's stance, that "[i]f we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically—and ethically—about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, deproduced. This latter inquiry does not exhaust the field of ethics, but I cannot imagine a 'responsible' ethics or theory of social transformation operating without it" (*Undoing Gender* 222). Any approach, any framework, any theory has weaknesses and runs the risk of collapsing under its own weight and being subsumed by the very thing it worked to resist (for example, recall Multiculturalism and its failings). My project then must take on the responsibility of reflectively guarding itself against such reification and foundationalization by maintaining a checks and balances system of inquiry into humanism as methodological approach.

If humanism as critique is to avoid being subsumed into foundationalist philosophy, then it must remain open – it must be contingent, ambiguous, and vulnerable to multiple reactions and outcomes. This tension in the concept of the shared universal condition and its potential to incite unpredictable reactions is fitting for this kind of study because it is *in this precise tension that agency is generated*. As choices and ethical directions are exposed in humanist encounters,

action follows. Making the case for the usefulness of this ambiguity, Butler cites Levinas, who articulates the sense of precariousness that the face of the Other triggers. For Levinas the face "is at once a temptation to kill and an interdiction against killing" (Butler *Precarious Life* 139). It is worth the risk and anxiety of foundationalism to engage humanism because, frankly, we cannot afford not to engage: at some point we must engage, we must connect shared conditions of being in order to seek meaningful social justice and equity in the lived world. Said harkens this point, emphasizing that in a constantly shifting post-9/11 world, when even academia has been piecemealed and commodified perhaps beyond redemption, the role of the intellectual has never been more crucial. "The intellectual is perhaps a kind of countermemory, with its own counterdiscourse that will not allow conscience to look away for fall asleep," Said states; and the work of the intellectual must be driven by the fact that "[p]eace cannot exist without equality; this is an intellectual value desperately in need of reiteration, demonstration, and reinforcement" (142).

While humanism is the guiding principle and broad theoretical device of my project, interraciality is the framework through which I locate and analyze how minoritarian subjectivities are created in concert with other minoritized peoples. As an analytic, interraciality has been widely approached through various methods and disciplines, from literary studies to sociology to legal history, and used to support varying claims about race relations – almost always the objective being to distinguish where the Other is located along the binary black-white format. Of course, a subtle anxiety concerning the "color line" permeated American literature and politics since the mid-19th century and a more explicit negotiation and hierarchy of race has been worked through by African American authors since the early 20th century. But the usage of "interraciality" is a much newer event. The proliferation of critical race studies in the academy is

a relatively young endeavor—Asian American departments, for example, only came into existence in the mid-1960s through the Civil Rights Movement, and even then were limited to west coast—and the academic inquiry of how minority communities connect with one another younger still.

Creating the springboard for interracial frameworks is Gary Okihiro's often-cited chapter "Is Yellow Black or White" in his 1994 monograph *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Okihiro argues that African Americans and Asian Americans share a deep history of colonization and oppression that makes them a "kindred people," claiming that "insofar as Asians and Africans share a subordinate position to the master class, yellow is a shade of Black, and Black a shade of yellow" (62). This sympathetic attitude has both been proven and falsified with numerous primary texts, especially from the early 20th century, that show brotherhood and hostility between the two racial groups. While many scholars in the 1990s enthusiastically espoused interracial coalitions, others such as Daniel Kim and Julia Lee have come along and taken a more objective stance, cautioning that "the legitimacy and urgency of this anti-racist project [should] not obscure the disharmonies and suspicions that are as integral and formative a part of interracial histories as the convergences" and collaborations (Lee 3). As such, recent studies of interraciality—such as Leslie Bow's *Partly Colored* (2010), Jennifer Ho's *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* (2015), and Lisa Lowe's *Intimacies of the Four Continents* (2015)—have embraced sociological and historical methodologies, focusing their inquiry on how racialized representations emerged and were produced through contemporary historical settings through primary works such as legal documents, journalism, census data, testimonies, and narratives. For the aims of my research, I extend and re-envision

the ways that interraciality has been most popularly employed to date. Interraciality is not my unit of analysis, but rather it defines and qualifies my archive.

Another methodological gap I must address is the inherent definitional conundrum that arises when race (or interraciality) and identity (or subjectivity) is perceived beyond the nation. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant have argued, a central paradigm of race is in fact the nation, along with the paradigms of ethnicity and class. Omi and Winant caution that the nation and its attendant nationalisms are paramount to an understanding of race formation precisely because of its "retention of an explanatory framework based on race" (47). They qualify, however, that "[n]ationalism is easily reduced to minority militance or separatism, for example, if no effort is made to specify its historical and theoretical origins in particular minority experiences of colonialism" (37). Thus Omi and Winant suggest that when nation, ethnicity, and class are not considered within the context of one another there are only "partial encounters and partial 'misses'" which limit a more productive analysis of race (49). Instead, Omi and Winant offer the alternative: "The effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle," whereby "*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*" (55). Their argument is widely-received and proven through the countless reports of violent discrimination that have reignited country-wide civil rights movements and protests.

Yet, as Susan Koshy points out in her essay "Why the Humanities Matter for Race Studies Today," there is a difference in disciplinary approach here. Omi and Winant develop their racial formation theory within and for the field of sociology, where the main sources of sociological analysis—maps, surveys, interviews, legal documents, etc.—are often more static

than narrative texts and, more importantly, used for different pedagogical aims. While sociologists like Omi and Winant work to define parameters that establish a "coherent and conscious racial subject" (Koshy "Why Humanities" 1545), my work seeks to limn out subjectivities that are not contingent upon those parameters which are more often than not designs of exclusion. Toward this goal, I situate my project primarily in literary texts that imaginatively explore experiences and identities not evidenced or bounded by the nation. I heed Koshy's articulation of the strength of literature as archive for study of racialized subjectivity because "literature is more receptive to the contingencies of racial formation," in that "the opacities of otherness, the partial light in which action and agency unfold, the ineluctable gap between intervention and outcome, and the temptations and perils of authenticity and full description" are brought forth narratively, not empirically (Koshy "Why Humanities" 1545). With this consideration we can see why Omi and Winant's sociological model of racial formation is often employed in literary studies: if, as Viet Thanh Nguyen remarks, the most powerful and compelling aspect of Omi and Winant's thesis is that "race has no fixed meaning" (71), then narrative can be a vehicle to navigate the transformations (as opposed to fixed formations) of race – transformations that occur not just through a proliferation of genetically mixed phenotypes, but through the ways that race is experienced, perceived, interpreted, and received.

In this way, literature can uniquely expose the farsightedness of focusing on relationality to dominant discourses of the center. My analysis of narratives of interraciality often requires a comparative approach, "a move from specifying the boundaries and internal heterogeneity of particular groups to an understanding of their interarticulation" (Koshy "Why Humanities" 1548). That being said, comparison as method has traditionally garnered an intense critical

pushback for being parochial and absolute – designating something as either exclusively local or exclusively global, for example. This criticism is well-founded and should function as a constant cautionary device to promote a more rigorous research and argumentation practice. Yet not comparing can be just as dangerous, as a lack of comparison often promotes a synecdochal analysis. Susan Stanford Freidman thoughtfully unpacks these pitfalls in her essay "Why Compare?", noting that "the refusal to compare can potentially turn into a romance of the local, a retreat into the particular and identity-based, a resistance to the cosmopolitan. The political problem that comparison can reaffirm the universalism of the dominant as the implied standard of measure is real" (756). The crucial counterargument is that "there are also political consequences of restricting the inquiry to one cultural group, one nation, or one region of the world" (756). Comparison here is not a one-to-one formula that establishes a binary structure of myself/not-myself, right/wrong, or familiar/foreign. Comparison as an analytical approach for interraciality instead "defamiliarizes what one takes as natural in any given culture" (Friedman 756) and "brings submerged or displaced relationalities into view" (Shih "Comparative Racialization" 1350). Privileging multiethnic texts and comparing interracial instances of humanist reception that are not referents of post-Enlightenment Eurocentric worldviews responds to the slips that have occurred in the shift from area to global studies that transnationalism has lead. But in another way, specifically comparing multiethnic narratives through forms of humanism that disregard the Enlightenment construction of Man (and the subsequent versions of the notion thereafter) also works to create new bastions of agency that cannot be imagined right now. There are infinite Others who are heterogenous to the Western world order defined by capital and territory; this project keys in on forms of humanism that generate more comparative inquires to be posed and for all those relationalities to be explored.

1.3   Looking Ahead: Overview

Each of my three body chapters analyze narrative works to explore three different expressions of empathetic humanism: cosmopolitanism, suffering, and spatial subjectivity. Though I leverage terminologies and ways of thinking from multiple philosophers, my organizing theoretical approach is strictly situated within non-Western humanism. Cosmopolitanism, suffering, and spatial subjectivity are three ways that I see an interracial and interethnic humanism being expressed and, in that way, minority agency being revised in non-Western terms. Each chapter explains and discusses its philosophical analytic of humanism separately through the terms and conditions the narrative works it is paired with provide.

Chapter two looks at a new formation of an old trope of belonging to the world. I refer to two autobiographies, Barack Obama's *Dreams of My Father* (1995) and Seiichi Higashide's *Adios to Tears* (1993), to employ the philosophical notion of cosmopolitanism—the worldview that all humans are part of a common communal order—to consider how Others could be received in our current sociopolitical moment, in which all national governments must reckon with being under-prepared, both in terms of humanitarian resources and also empathetic capacity. This reading of cosmopolitanism focuses on migrants—specifically, to disenfranchised, displaced people—as subjects who are able to maintain roots to homeland and home people, but in their migration are able to assert a different agency through knowledges acquired through transit, not pledges to land, flags, or imagined governmental borders. Given their extraordinary histories and stories of travel and migration, Obama and Higashide provide narrative material that show transnational and cosmopolitan subject positions in a way that can be mutually inclusive.

Chapter three engages the notions of suffering and joy to frame two minority-authored American novels that also contend with usurpation of identity (and all the joys and fallouts therein): Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010) and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998). Digging into the underbelly of the human condition by articulating an agonistic humanism through expressions of suffering, and its counterpart, joy, this chapter explores narrative scenes in which suffering expands the frame of humanity and incites mercy and jubilation. Both novels feature protagonists who purposefully corrode and conflate their identities as a way of becoming agents of their subjectivities. Through their suffering of violation and displacement, they shed their masquerade of survival to subversive jubilation, locating their agency not in reason or knowing, but rather in their bodies, as a sort of embodied empathy. Suffering works to embody the subject with agency that rejects structures of logic and Reason, thereby subverting Western notions of humanity. In turn, these subjects are able to open themselves to pleasure and joy in ways that were previously inaccessible.

Chapter four, the final body chapter, proposes an ecologically-derived form of humanism, which I term "spatial subjectivity." Spatial subjectivity names a new humanism that, counter to normative logic, de-centers the human. This method works against Western frames of subjectivity by levelling the foundation of who—or what—can be imbued with agency. Focusing on Karen Tei Yamashita's imaginative novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), I argue that if we perceive nature as a space that both is itself a subject and engenders subjectivities, rather than as a rhetorical nation-building object, then we can work through covert mechanisms of oppression in radically productive ways. While the term "space" commonly carries connotations of distance, interval, or area, this chapter advocates that that perceived void is actually full of emanant relational capacities that resist mutative impulses of Western doctrines

of subjectivity. Asserting space as an emergent, full entity, as a progenitor of networked relations that serve each subject by connecting it to other beings, this chapter offers an approach to subject-formation processes that undermines the categorical hierarchy and privilege of the human itself, thereby engaging a minoritarian methodology of subjectivity. The concepts of nature and ecology as framed in Yamashita's work make available a perspective of Others receiving Others unconditioned to the category of the Western construction of human/Man; by removing the human as the central object of analysis, the humane transpires and the subjectivities of those historically considered less than human come into sharp focus.

Chapter five, the conclusion, draws together the analyses of empathetic humanism that chapters two, three, and four explore to consider how to put humanistic ethos into practice that purposely functions outside the academy and benefits the public. I argue that partnering with local community groups on projects that serve the public common good is one "real life" expression of the humanisms my dissertation explores. Furthermore, I contend that employing digital tools and platforms for the delivery of community-engaged work is the best methodology for these kind of participatory public-facing endeavors as it not only permits unmitigated access to research and project outcomes, but it also opens the potential for extended community partners to be critical co-creators in the work, positioning all contributors as equal stakeholders.

1.4   Closing Note: My Personal Stake

In the summer of 2012, right before I started my PhD program, my family and I made a pilgrimage to Heart Mountain, Wyoming, to the site of the concentration camp in which my family, being of Japanese descent and carrying a Japanese moniker, was imprisoned without trial or proof of wrongdoing during WWII. The barbed wire fences, plywood residential barracks, and cleared dirt roads are gone now; the land is returned to its barren, expansive state. Visiting the

incarceration site, new meaning came to the literature I had studied in my Master's degree coursework: John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home* all seemingly transformed to be indicators of "real life," not just the fictive, immersive worlds their stories had carried me through before. On the camp grounds, I felt the ever-present red fire ants crawl up my legs and leave burning bites that ached for days after, the sharp wind that scattered grainy dust into my eyes and chilled me to my core despite the warm sunshine, and I watched the Nisei gaze around the vacancy, their bodies somehow becoming temporarily heavier and more brittle as stories, memories, and realizations creeped up into them through the dirt. Though we were only there for two days, my family's return to Heart Mountain has, in the time since, shaped me as a reader and scholar, and invariably affected this dissertation project.

The way we write about life, the stories we tell about being and belonging, undoubtedly shapes individuals, communities, and generations. As such, I would be remiss not to confess my own stake in this dissertation: it is an academic project, but it is also a political work and a personal effort toward recovery of my family's ongoing losses and pains, and it is, at heart, a salute to survival and a celebration of love. In other words, this project is a life writing project, as life is written in and through multiple mediums – it swells and seeps in all around us at all times. Literary works are one deliverable of life writing, which this dissertation takes as its focus and archive. Always, though, life writing is personal. And as many people of color know, the personal is political. This project, then, is meant to be participatory and ongoing, to pave some pathways for Others to recognize themselves in the world, and to instigate reception as a hallmark of minoritarian subjectivities.

2   TRANSNATIONAL COSMOPOLITANS:

SEIICHI HIGASHIDE AND BARACK OBAMA

> We live with seven billion fellow humans on a small, warming planet.
> The cosmopolitan impulse that draws on our common humanity
> is no longer a luxury; it has become a necessity.
> – Kwame Anthony Appiah
> "There is no such thing as western civilization"
> *The Guardian*

At the time of writing this chapter, the United States was in the immediate aftermath of the longest government shutdown in history. This shutdown was due to what is commonly referred to as "Trump's wall." The two political parties of the United States were in a gridlock over the issue of building a wall barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, a key promise of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. President Trump demanded $5.7 billion dollars for the construction of a wall barrier to be included in the bill that would fund the government. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, crafting tight lines of loyalty amongst her Democratic colleagues (who have an easy majority of 235 of the 435 total seats in the lower congressional chamber), refused any legislation that funded Trump's wall. After 35 days of shut down, the government reopened with Trump agreeing to sign a bill absent money for the wall. Days and weeks following, the President maintained that his decision was in no way a concession, and that he would shut down the government again if no compromise for a border barrier was reached, though ultimately he resorted to declaring a national emergency to obtain monies for the wall. In general, this was a costly feud for his administration, and by extension the GOP party has suffered a major political loss.

This political stalemate in part reflects the anxieties that people worldwide harbor because of global migration. As Bruce Robbins explains in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics*, this anxiety is also particularly American in the way it pitches global migrants as the antithesis to Trump's version of American nationalism, which "sees itself as civic rather than ethnic, hence not really nationalism at all," and prioritizes the "defense of the national interest – a national interest that gives much to the rich and little to the poor, of course, but that still favors the national poor over the nonnational poor" (13). Susan Stanford Friedman articulates the connection between migration increase and fear-based nativism in her recent study of how Muslim woman writers engage notions of diaspora and cosmopolitanism. "Widespread flare-ups of nativist nationalism, always a latent potential in the imagined homogeneity of the nation," she writes, "are a direct result (indeed, a symptomatic reaction formation) of this intensification of human mobility" (200). While anthropological archaeologists remind us that humans have always been mobile, traveling across and to different lands than the one where they were born, there is good reason why migration occupies much of the American social psyche today. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, there were 258 million international migrants in 2017, roughly 3.4% of the world's entire population. For comparison, there were 173 million international migrants in 2000, which means the total number of international migrants increased by roughly 50% in less than two decades. In other words, in recorded history there have never been more people traversing geographies and crossing nation-state borders as there are right now.

This global phenomenon must inform any 21st century inquiry into humanism as migration is not only a human condition (and always has been), but also effects how every being—in transit or stasis, global Northerner or Southerner, human or non-human—is in the

world and works toward their own individual or collective well-being. It forces us to think deeply about why people migrate through imagined sovereign lines despite the odds, injustices, and brutalities that work against them through transit. It harkens a consideration of who gets to be where, and how those mandates are enforced. The institutional, governmental, and social reactions to the state of global migration today ultimately asks: Who has the right to pursue perceived safety, to move into ecologies of well-being? Moreover, when transnational travelers are marked as distinctly national (through race, language, war time fears, or global politics) in ways that render them as perpetual strangers, what other methods of belonging can migrants receive and offer?

This chapter employs the philosophical notion of cosmopolitanism—the worldview that all humans are part of a common communal order—to consider how Others could be received in this current sociopolitical moment, in which all national governments must reckon with being under-prepared, both in terms of humanitarian resources and also empathetic capacity. As I examine these questions of global migration, cosmopolitanism, and how the ties and imprints of the nation are always present and regulatory therein, I refer to two autobiographies that provide a lens for this analysis: Barack Obama's *Dreams of My Father* (1995) and Seiichi Higashide's *Adios to Tears* (1993). Given their extraordinary histories and stories of travel and migration, Obama and Higashide provide narrative material that show transnational and cosmopolitan subject positions in a way, I will argue, that can be mutually inclusive.

2.1   Cosmopolitanism and Global Migrants

Cosmopolitanism is a rendering of humanism that is uniquely equipped to contend with the philosophical contours of global migration and transit. Etymologically, the term cosmopolitan derives from Greek and is usually interpreted as "world citizen." It has been

drastically reconceived for the 21st century as postcolonial and critical race scholars have worked to counter its 18th century Enlightenment aloofness of the budding bourgeoisie. Writing in 2000, David Harvey suggests that cosmopolitanism is "now portrayed by many … as a unifying vision for democracy and governance in a world so dominated by globalizing capitalism that it seems there is no viable political-economic alternative for the next millennium" (529). Although there is often a sense of hope and progressiveness associated with cosmopolitanism, there is also often a feeling of skepticism and even threat that is loaded into the term. "The cosmopolitan possesses the power to unsettle," Ross Posnock states in "The Dream of Deracination," because the cosmopolitan is often perceived to purport "a refusal to revere local or national authority and a desire to uphold multiple affiliations" (802). In the introduction to the seminal special issue of *Public Culture* dedicated to cosmopolitanism, editors Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckinridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty explain:

> The cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized 'virtues' of Rationality, Universality, and Progress; nor is it embodied in the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world. Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community. Too often, in the West, these peoples are grouped together in a vocabulary of victimage and come to be constituting the 'problem' of multiculturalism to which late liberalism extends its generous promise of a pluralist existence. Cultural pluralism recognizes difference so long as the general category of the people is still fundamentally understood within a national frame. Such benevolence is often well intentioned, but it fails to acknowledge the critique of

modernity that minoritarian cosmopolitans embody in their historic witness to the

twentieth century. (582)

To wit, Susan Stanford Friedman renames contemporary migrants as "the new cosmopolitans"

(203). This make-over of cosmopolitanism should not be mistaken as a purely intellectual foray.

Cosmopolitanism must be taken seriously in our present day as a response to the many and

varied ways that institutions have failed the basic rights of humans in every part of the world. In

his 1996 work, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness,* Derrida foregrounds this perspective,

explaining that "[w]henever the State is neither the foremost author of, nor the foremost

guarantor against the violence which forces refugees or exiles to flee, it is often powerless to

ensure the protection and the liberty of its own citizens before a terrorist menace" (6). The

branch of cosmopolitanism that this chapter focuses on is the branch that has been reimagined in

the face of ever-expanding violence against today's global migrants. Cosmopolitans are no

longer beholden to the 18th century's concept of Man through Reason (even if tenants of the

notion initially draw from Enlightenment works), nor are cosmopolitans restricted to the figure

of the privileged, aloof European world traveler of the 19th century.[1] Minoritarian scholars have

recalibrated cosmopolitanism for the 21st century to pronounce our individual responsibility to

the Other and our obligation to humankind as a way of being and of sharing the world. This

chapter explores the contours of minority subjectivity evoked by this cosmopolitan spirit.

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[1] Sylvia Wynter goes even further back in history than the widely-referred to marker of the 18th
century European Enlightenment to locate Man; she instead cites Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man"
circa 1490. See Walter Mignolo's deeper discussion of this historical tracing in his essay "Sylvia
Wynter: What does it mean to be Human" in Katherine McKittrick's collection *Sylvia Wynter:
On Being Human as Praxis*. For an example of the privileged cosmopolitan figure of the 19th
century, see Henry James's 1878 novella *Daisy Miller*.

Any current discussion of cosmopolitanism must include the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah, whose scholarship on cosmopolitanism has defined his academic career and redefined how every scholar after him engages a much richer, more capacious regard for cosmopolitanism. Appiah is often credited with pulling cosmopolitanism out of its 18ᵗʰ century Enlightenment box to expose how it can, as both a philosophy and a practice, robustly engage with our most dire dilemmas of modernity. Indeed, cosmopolitanism has always been locked between charges from both ends of the political spectrum: "The unsettling challenge of the cosmopolitan has historically incited the charge of deracination, especially by nationalists for whom blood and soil are sacred," Posnock explains. "In the US and elsewhere cosmopolitanism has often been attacked by both ends of the spectrum: the Right regards it as unpatriotic and hence suspect; the Left finds its detachment elitist, apolitical, and hence irresponsible …both sides regard cosmopolitanism a betrayal of roots, hence inauthentic" (Posnock 803). Yet Appiah has led the way in navigating between these competing viewpoints. Appiah's work both goes beyond the European Enlightenment mentality that abandoned difference and discredits his contemporary colleagues' attempts to revamp the term as an updated version of multiculturalism.[2]

As the inventor of the term "rooted cosmopolitanism," Appiah clarifies that there are two components of the thought at play. "One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship," he states, notably emphasizing obligation as a connective social tissue. "The other is that we take seriously the value not just of a human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that

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[2] See Martha Nussbaum's "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (1994) and Appiah's response, "Cosmopolitan Patriots" (1997).

lend them significance" (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). It is the second component of Appiah's outline that sets his conception of cosmopolitanism apart from previous versions that focused solely on difference, mandating that any quality of particularity be dismissed in the name of a more egalitarian universal community of world citizens. Friedman explains why Appiah's definition of the concept captures us as something worth working through. "Appiah's affirmation of the 'cosmopolitan ideal' as 'our obligations to strangers' is not just an ethical abstraction but *a viscerally felt imperative* in today's world, when spectacles of individual suffering spread virally across the global mediascape" (203, my emphasis). The straightforward argument that Friedman makes here is that dismissing Appiah's cosmopolitan theory is akin to dismissing the millions of people who are at risk and suffer greatly, who are unknown to us but are nonetheless deeply a part of us.

While Appiah embraces difference, he does not see it as negating common humanity or the goals of humanism. His best-known earlier essay on cosmopolitanism, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," identifies the core struggle of competing loyalties that new cosmopolitanism must navigate in order to be relevant and useful in our present time. All people are part of many communities that vary greatly in scope and scale: a person is loyal to both the local or particular (often formulated as the state or nation, "one's own") and to the universal or general (humanity writ large, across time, space, and difference). "The favorite slander of the narrow nationalist against us cosmopolitans," Appiah writes in the essay, "is that we are rootless; what my father believed in, however, was a rooted cosmopolitanism, or, if you like, a cosmopolitan patriotism" (112). Or, as Friedman notes, Appiah uniquely balances "a form of patriotism that incorporates an identification with both nation and the world (the polis and the cosmos), one in which hospitality to the stranger is nonetheless an ongoing ethical value" (204). Appiah's concept of

being "rooted" has stuck with many iterations of cosmopolitanism that have been articulated by scholars since. It is now academically accepted that a cosmopolitan ethic can be deeply connected to a sense of homeland while still feeling obligations to humanity at large. This idea is reiterated in his monograph, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), in which Appiah starts each chapter with a story that expresses an ethical situation, usually personal and familial in scope, to pre-prove the ethical argument of the section. Appiah addresses issues considered to be "high philosophy" (including relativism, positivism, moral value, praxis, and purity) directly, but always primarily through anecdotes of lived experiences, small stories of people's intimate delights and dilemmas with one another. In other words, Appiah puts the human before the scholar.

The tension between the two components of cosmopolitanism that Appiah suggests is meant to be generative, but not necessarily conclusive. "As we'll see, there will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash," Appiah cautions in the preface of *Cosmopolitanism*. "There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is not the name of the solution but of the challenge" (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). There are two reasons why this challenge is not necessarily something to be overcome: one, cosmopolitanism cannot be finite – the aspect of pluralism that is inherent in the concept means it will always be expanding and in flux to encompass all peoples and ways of being; and two, cosmopolitanism can never be in stasis – it must always be working between the two components of being universal while being rooted because that work incites critical dialogue between those two poles which then enables just action. The editorial team of the *Public Culture* special issue have it right when they state that "Cosmopolitanism may instead be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite

specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do" (Pollock et al 577). That capacious mercuriality (or what critics may call instability) is that thing that hails us to act, for as the editors also rightly note, "[a]s a practice, too, cosmopolitanism is yet to come, something awaiting realization" (Pollock et al 577).

2.2   Narratives Structured through Global Migration

As creative narrative works, *Dreams of My Father* and *Adios to Tears* show how migration and the cosmopolitan ideal interact through subjects uniquely beholden to the United States. Admittedly, *Dreams of My Father* is known by most American readers as a key text that launched Obama's Democratic Party stardom, while *Adios to Tears* has never been on any best-seller list and has remarkably little commentary or scholarship produced to accompany its popular or critical reception. These works nonetheless offer cogent explorations of this chapter's underlying inquiry, inherently posing questions of national belonging and citizenship beyond the state structure.

Seiichi Higashide was born in the Otoe Village in Sorachi District in Hokkaido, Japan in 1909. His family farmed and helped lead their village of other farmers during the turbulence of the post-WWI global economic depression. From an early age, Higashide was never content with a career of farming, seeing the hardship of poverty and long-term unviability of the work through his community; instead, he had ambitions to go to school and become an architect. Higashide left his family home to pursue his goal, making his way to Sapporo and then Tokyo for school. Although Higashide found apprentice work in an architecture firm, he was unable to complete his degree. Understanding that options and opportunities were limited in Japan at the time, Higashide sought overseas possibilities. "My first choice was really to go to America…a great,

vast country based on the principles of liberty and equality," Higashide recalls. "But some years

earlier, the United States had completely prohibited immigration from Japan, so to go to America

was an impossible dream" (36).[3] Lured by the success of Japanese immigrants in Peru, Higashide

immigrated to Canete in 1930, immediately settling in with the Japanese community there.[4] In

1935 Higashide married a second generation Japanese Peruvian woman (i.e. his wife was a

natural born Peruvian citizen as her parents immigrated to Peru from Japan), moved south to the

town of Ica, and started his family and a small goods store business. Although his business

prospered in Ica, "the Pacific War intervened and everything was reduced to nothing" (95). Anti-

Japanese sentiment spread throughout the Americas, including throughout Peru despite there

being no history of Japanese discrimination. Higashide was wrongly blacklisted by the Peruvian

government as a dangerous Axis national in 1941[5] and in 1943 he went underground in hiding to

evade being sent to the United States as part of a prisoner exchange program (wherein the U.S.

would import and then exchange Japanese Peruvian "prisoners" with Japan's American

prisoners). On January 6, 1944 Higashide was caught in his hideout—a hole he dug under his

family's house—and arrested by Ica police.

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[3] Higashide refers to the United States' Immigration Act of 1924 here, which enforced a "national origins quota" that limited immigrant visas to two per cent of each nationality already in the U.S. according to the 1890 census. This law directly and disproportionately targeted immigrants from Asia. Erika Lee's article "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas" puts immigration legislation in context of the broader political landscapes across the Americas and shows how the global migratory flows of Asian peoples influenced and were effected by U.S. immigration policies.

[4] Higashide notes that he chose to immigrate to Peru for many reasons, including the promise of upward mobility away from agrarian work: "Most of the Japanese who had crossed over to Peru had done so as agricultural workers, but later moved to urban areas to build successful commercial enterprises. In that sense, at that time the Peruvian Japanese community was even more advanced than Japanese immigrants in North America" (39).

[5] "We learned that the [black]list had been leaked to reporters by a local U.S. agency," Higashide recalls in reflecting on the turning sentiment toward Japanese Peruvians in the late 1930s (114). That blacklist was subsequently published in local Peruvian newspapers.

Higashide was shipped to an American military camp in Panama as a prisoner of war, one of 29 other Japanese prisoners; of these, "five or six were naturalized Peruvians and one or two were Nisei who had been born in Peru" (144). In Panama, the "Japanese people's army," as the American soldiers called the deportees, were forced to do hard manual labor from sun up to sun down. They cleared the dense underbrush around the camp, guarded at all times by two military policemen carrying bayoneted rifles (145). In 1944, Higashide was imported to the U.S., first detained at the Kenedy Alien Detention Camp in Texas, and then moved to the Crystal City incarceration camp in Texas, where his wife and children came to meet him and be reunited in a foreign, hostile land.

After the war, Higashide remained in the U.S., refusing the alternative of going to Japan which would have been an entirely different world for his family (and destitute in the aftermath of the atomic bombs). Peru, along with eleven other Central and South American states that had deported Japanese people to the U.S., would not permit the deportees reentry. On the other side, the U.S. labeled the deportees as illegal aliens because they did not have visas when they entered the country, which therefore made their residence illegal. Nevertheless, Higashide, his family, and some other deportees were granted restricted parole in 1946 and could endeavor to work for a new, independent life. Seabrook Farms in New Jersey offered to be the guarantor of the remaining Japanese Peruvian illegal aliens. Almost 300 Japanese Peruvians moved north to another form of imprisonment and labor: Seabrook Farms heavily taxed their wages, charged unreasonable rent in their shoddy company town, and hyper-inflated store good prices at the company store, ultimately instituting an indentured servitude under the guise of parole guarantor.

In 1949 Higashide and his family escaped Seabrook by moving to the Midwest to Chicago, nearly broke but free from company debt.[6] "Our first two or three years in Chicago was a time of complete and ultimate poverty," Higashide explains (198). Every family member who was old enough worked multiple jobs to keep the family afloat financially. Eventually, Higashide was able to convince a local bank manager to sign off on a loan so that Higashide could purchase a small apartment building. This property acquisition initiated a period of meager stability and livable quarters for the family.[7] The Higashides stayed in Chicago for many years; all seven of the children attended primary schools and universities in the metro region. Eventually, though, the cold air and never-ending work of managing rental buildings became enough of a hardship for Higashide to consider warmer and more culturally familiar climates for retirement. Higashide and his wife retired to Hawaii in 1974, where two of their children had by then also moved and started their own families.

In his retirement Higashide undertook the task of recording his memoir wherein he was able to consult many historical texts and academic works to help him remember the timelines and converging political and social events that instigated many of his travels. Ultimately, with the exception of his final move to Honolulu for retirement, every one of Higashide's geographical transitions—from Japan to Peru to Panama to Texas to New Jersey to Chicago—

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[6] Although Higashide does not specify which areas of Chicago his family resided, it should be noted that post-WWII was a period of extensive immigration for the city: along with migrants from Europe, Central America, and Asia, African Americans were moving north as part of the Great Migration. See Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010) for a deeper analysis and narrative depiction of this migratory period and pathway.

[7] Until they owned property, the Higashide family was in a perpetual state of housing insecurity: "Although 'for rent' signs could been everywhere, wherever I inquired, when it was learned that we were a family of eight …the landlord just shook his head …many times I went into such sections of the city which seemed gradually to be deteriorating into slums. But even there the landlord refused. In the case of apartments in the black areas, rather than the size of families or anything else, the main obstacle was the iron rule 'for colored only'" (195-6).

were out of necessity, either as an act of economic survival (Japan to Peru, New Jersey to Chicago) or forcibly as a war-time commodity (Peru to Panama to Texas to New Jersey). Given his history of multiple forced displacements, Higashide's autobiography is a testimony of international repressive biopolitics.[8] In his decision to record his nomadic life, Higashide ensured that his testimony lends political agency to those advocating for deserved redress for Latin American Nikkei, as they were not included in President Reagan's Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that granted reparations to Japanese Americans who had been incarcerated in concentration camps in WWII.

Similarly, Barack Obama's *Dreams of My Father* could be read as a testimony of biopolitics in that it too lends political agency to minoritized people – both citizens of the United States and citizens of the world. Obama famously positions himself as a subject shaped by many different people from Kansas to Kenya, though only in America would his life story be possible.[9] Obama's memoir was originally published in 1995 and subsequently re-released in 2004 after he won his Illinois federal Senate seat and provided the keynote address for the Democratic National Convention (an honor that historically marks the most promising rising congressional star of the political party). In many ways his autobiography follows a traditional bildungsroman arc, wherein the narrative starts when the protagonist is young and progresses through his early adulthood, cataloguing life events that shaped his emotional and psychological development to stand testament to the fact that he has indeed "come-of-age." Though for Obama, his life was

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[8] Ignacio López-Calvo describes in detail how *Adios to Tears* functions in the genre of Latin American *testimonio* (see chapter 1).

[9] Obama's ancestry elicited as much criticism as it did solidarity. Linda Selzer writes that "the difficulty of fitting Obama into preexisting conceptions of Americanness made it easier for opponents to represent the candidate as two-sided and suspect rather than singularly American …Obama's representational ambiguity also provided opportunities for supporters to praise him for embodying something radically new in politics and national life" (22).

organized as much by geography as it was by time.[10] Divided into three parts, *Dreams of My Father* suggests a life order and worldview that is sieved through his many depictions of geographical, epistemological, and political transit.

The first section is titled "Origins," which describes his childhood in Hawaii with his mother and maternal grandparents, his years spent in Indonesia with his mother and step-father, his undergraduate semesters on the California coast, and his first truly independent move, to New York, to figure out his post-degree life. All of these places, which span the Pacific Ocean and over the continental United States, inform his origin. Reflecting on the story his mother would tell him as a young boy about why his father left the two of them early on, Obama writes, "the path of my father's life occupied the same terrain as a book my mother once bought for me, a book called *Origins*, a collection of creation tales from around the world" (10). As a boy, *Origins* provided the framework of explanation that defies logic but is nevertheless positioned as absolute truth—"stories of Genesis and the tree where man was born, Prometheus and the gift of fire, the tortoise of Hindu legend that floated in space, supporting the weight of the world on its back" (10)—and offer great security and comfort in their telling. That same framework was conveniently used to explain his absent father, gone to Harvard for his PhD and back to Alego, Kenya to combat the after effects of colonization in his fatherland. Although he makes clear that he was always protected and loved, Obama remembers a turning point in his childhood when he read an article in *Life* magazine about a black man who tried to peel off his skin. The article had a profound impact on Obama's own understanding of himself as being phenotypically different from the rest of his boyhood household in Hawaii, but he recalls feeling the need to hide the

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[10] See Robert Kruse's "The Geographical Imagination of Barack Obama: Representing Race and Space in America" for more on how *Dreams of My Father*, as a geographical text, uniquely spatializes racial identities.

magazine article from his mother: "I still trusted my mother's love – but I now faced the prospect

that her account of the world, and my father's place in it, was somehow incomplete" (52). Just as

a child eventually questions how a giant tortoise might float around in space, Obama naturally

sought a more holistic understanding of how he fit into the world.

As Obama grew older and matured, he realized that race changes with geography, or

rather, that the social expressions of race are dependent in part on one's location. Part two is

titled "Chicago" and focuses on his time spent as a community organizer in the Midwest

metropolis. Obama's account clearly shows the rigidity of the social and governmental housing

system not only in Chicago, but also throughout the United States, as he traces many of the low-

income housing issues in inner-city neighborhoods to be common to a federal system that has

purposefully turned away from the insecurity and displacement that many minority communities

confront.[11] Walking to community meetings in the evenings, Obama would glance down any

given street in the Altgeld neighborhood in Chicago and see "boarded-up homes, the decaying

storefronts, the aging church rolls …loud congregations of teenage boys, teenage girls feeding

potato chips to crying toddlers, the discarded wrappers tumbling down the block" (157). The

communities he came to know and advocate for in Chicago informed his outlook on black

identity within a national American and experiential framework. "By the time I reached

Chicago," Obama tells us, "the phrase self-esteem seemed to be on everyone's lips…it was a

handy catchall to describe our hurt, a sanitized way of talking about the things we'd been

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[11] Glenda Carpio's "Race and Inheritance in Barack Obama's *Dreams of My Father*" further
analyzes Obama's national and world view of race. She argues that "Obama may have survived
the obstacles to black self-realization, but throughout his autobiography, he is acutely aware of
the gap between him and other young black men …[who] have inherited their predicament in
ways that may be measured through the 'hard statistics' of prison records, unemployment, and
health and housing disparities that have come down the generations" (82).

keeping to ourselves" (193). A frequent criticism of Obama during his campaign was his understanding and support of black nationalism even in its more virulent forms.[12] But in this section of his memoir, Obama develops a more nuanced articulation of American black identity politics than his critics ever cared to understand. He saw the fissures and deep cracks in the message of value and upliftment that some of his black nationalist friends and neighbors in Chicago championed: "It was a message that ignored causality or fault, a message outside history, without a script or plot that might insist on progression" (198). These messages of solidarity are necessary and based in truth, though often do not have the capacity to carry the full rooted story of being connected to others who are not you. Being black in the South Side of Chicago was not the same experience or identity of being black in Hawaii, or Jakarta, for that matter. Obama had to migrate to Chicago to understand the critical tension produced when groups of people loyal to one another create messages of common survival – here, by way of being poor and black in Chicago in the 1980's, though it could just as easily be said of Jews in New England in the 19th century or Hispanic undocumented migrants today.

Finally, in the last section of the book, "Kenya," Obama recounts his travels to his father's homeland, where he meets all of his father's side of the family and gradually develops a more complex understanding of who is father was. In doing so, he realizes that the problems of the American black community that he articulated in his work in Chicago cannot be reduced to a simple a loss of culture, as so many of his neighborhood colleagues subscribed. In Kenya, Obama immediately and unexpectedly accesses the deep, unique connection with the land of his paternal ancestors that, perhaps, had always already been residing in him. Upon his arrival to the

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[12] See Linda Selzer's discussion of Obama's affiliation with Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who gained national attention during Obama's presidential campaign for videos of him saying "God Damn America!" in sermons (17-18).

Kenyatta International Airport, Obama is helped by a staff person in locating his luggage. She easily recognizes his surname as his father, a doctor, had helped many families in the area. "That had never happened before, I realized," Obama writes, struck by the allegiance to one another formed through the simple recognition of a name. "For the first time in my life, I felt the comfort, the firmness of identity that a name might provide … My name belonged and so I belonged, drawn into a web of relationships, alliances, and grudges that I did not yet understand" (305). Accompanied by his half-sister, Auma, an intelligent, self-questioning professor at the University of Nairobi, he travels through urban and rural Kenya and grapples with the convolutions and complications of family ties, identity, human flaws and failings, and the history of how global power has been executed over time. He finds no easy answer to his questions, but his understanding deepens and he cultivates a new hope and embodies a newfound cosmopolitan spirit.

2.3   Cosmopolitanism of Old and New

The term cosmopolitan often connotes one who has no national attachments or prejudices. The philosophical underpinnings and intellectual history of the notion, however, are predictably convoluted and unstable, as many ancient worldviews that have been rebirthed and reinterpreted over the course of many centuries tend to be. Most scholars of cosmopolitanism trace the intellectual use of the term from Immanuel Kant forward through time, as Kant is credited for espousing cosmopolitan principles through the European Enlightenment. Bridging Kant's 18th century groundwork for cosmopolitan thinking to our current sociopolitical moment must be done with caution and skepticism, though, as his work was deeply ethnocentric and helped establish a foundation for a worldview of racial hierarchy. Thomas Jefferson, for example, relied on aspects of Kant's work in "Query XIV" in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*,

in which he argues that Africans should have no permanent place in democratic nations as they are less human than the white people to whom they belonged, as "their griefs are transient" and their "difference is fixed in nature" (145). The Enlightenment, to which Kant's work was a central pillar, largely hinged on the construction of (white) Man developed through a knowledge system of (Western) Reason. [13] To wit, in his 1784 essay "What is Enlightenment?", Kant declares that "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred nonage," wherein "Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another" (54) – a worldview that is clearly extended through Jefferson's depraved belief that "*in reason* [the African slave population is] much inferior [to whites]," as "their existence appears to participate *more of sensation than reflection*" (146, my emphasis). According to the equation of exclusion that Kant composed and Jefferson enacted, people of African ancestry in the United States lacked the gumption to intellectually draw themselves out of their natural inferiority through intellectual might of reason and reflection, therefore never emerging as Enlightened Man, always only a child-animal that had to be tamed, broken, and controlled by the superior, self-emancipated white class of masters. With this in mind, Kant seems to be an oxymoronic foundation for cosmopolitan ethics. Nevertheless, scholars of cosmopolitanism have used a selection of Kant's work to articulate a starting point of revising terms of sovereignty and political power beyond the nation-state.

Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, written and published in 1795, is often cited in cosmopolitan discussions because he lays out a new set of principles for sovereign states to assure their

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[13] Although "Enlightenment thinking" was not homogenous, either. Of particular note is Johann Gottfried Herder, who was Kant's pupil and contemporary, and deviated from the "rationalist" construction of the Enlightenment (Kant's camp). See "Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited: The Revolution in Scholarship in the Last Quarter Century" by Zammito, Menges, and Menze.

security – principles seen as radical for the 18th century (and for the 21st century, for that matter), in that they are not based on their ability to make and sustain war. Although cosmopolitanism is often and understandably pitched against nationalism in current discourse, the two have not always been antagonistic. In his essay "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace," Allen Wood points out that Kant wrote *Perpetual Peace* after the 1795 Treaty of Basel between Prussia and France, which effectively ended the War of the First Coalition between the monarchical states of Europe and the French Republic (59). Given Kant's contemporary historical context, *Perpetual Peace* can be read as an endorsement for the new republic of France and its burgeoning capacity to lead a cosmopolitan federation in Europe.

Peng Cheah, co-editor of *Cosmopolitics*, notes the events that likely incited *Perpetual Peace* predate "the period between 1825 and 1831 when nationality, in search of statehood, emerges for the first time, as the primary basis of revolution" (23). In other words, cosmopolitanism as outlined by Kant came before nationalism. Cheah argues that Kant wrote *Perpetual Peace* in an effort to quell the disorder of the newly formed independent states in Europe as his "vision of cosmopolitical right … attempts to provide an ideal institutional framework for regulating the anarchic behavior of states" (24). As Ross Posnock confirms, "[c]osmopolitan civility arose as the behavior of an emergent bourgeois class now permitted to participate in the public sphere unregulated by aristocratic privileges of birth or land" (803). The guidance that *Perpetual Peace* intended to provide was sorely needed in Kant's eyes. In one of his most famous passages from the essay, Kant calls for caution and broad-sightedness as new republics emerged. "The peoples of the earth have entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it is developed to the point where a violation of laws in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*," he writes (107). Kant sees cosmopolitanism as a moral-political project that

extends beyond an ethics of common humanity into a global political community premised

through right. "The idea of cosmopolitanism law is," he continues, "a necessary complement to

the unwritten code of political and international law, transforming it into a universal law of

humanity" (107). Recalling that Kant is writing *Perpetual Peace* at a time when revolutionary

proletariat are casting off the rule of imperialists and monarchs, we see how cosmopolitanism

gives name to the belief that every person has equal right to exist anywhere on Earth and is

actually enacted through pre-existing political structures that connect disparate groups of people,

such as trade, commerce, and the arts. Cheah confirms this logic, writing that "Kant's notion of

cosmopolitan right is not anti- or postnationalist," but "is instead a form of right based on

existing attachments that bind us into a collectivity larger than the state" that "is not in the least

an ideal of detachment opposed to national attachment" (24). Cosmopolitanism, then, was not

initially imagined to float above national alliances or state allegiances (again, the concept of

"national" as we know it today was in an embryonic stage during Kant's time), untethered to any

loyalties of social governance and local particularity. Cosmopolitanism was imagined as a way

of re-attaching—or even an ongoing series of reattachments of—people to one another through

common rights that both included and extended beyond absolute state models.

It follows, then, that cosmopolitans are loyalists in multiple senses. They are loyal to the

idea that all humans are fundamentally connected to one global community; they are loyal to the

belief that there are rights inherent to every human; and they are loyal to the institutions (nation,

state, governments, and other forms of social organizing) that are best able to ensure those rights.

Cosmopolitanism should not be mistaken to be an altruistic identity, though. Rather, it is a

practice that requires rigorous cultivation and commitment by those who espouse its worldview.

Bruce Robbins explains that the "willingness to consider the well-being of people who do not

belong to the same nation as you is not … something that is mysteriously pre-given by the simple fact of belonging to the human species" (6). As with face-to-face, interpersonal, individual relations, loyalty is established through process, usually earned through deed and act. "Larger loyalties can either be there or not be there," Robbins writes, "[t]hey have to be built up laboriously out of the imperfect historical materials … that are already at hand. They do not stand outside of history like an ultimate court of appeal" (6). In other words, we may all be connected by virtue of being part of the same species that shares the same Earth, but that in itself does not guarantee a fraternal or ethical loyalty to one another. Therefore, to return to Kant's phrase, some "universal law of humanity" must be established, wherein "[p]olitics must be forced to include the variable power of sympathetic imagination to define collectivities of belonging and responsibility" (Robbins 9). This is where forms of new cosmopolitanism actively come into play. If Kant deemed *what* was required in the changing political landscape of the West's Enlightenment, cosmopolitans of modernity reckon with *how* to ethically practice that worldview. Paul Gilroy states the case well in his monograph *Postcolonial Melancholia* when he contemplates "how we might invent conceptions of humanity that allow for the presumption of equal value and go beyond the issue of tolerance into a more active engagement with the irreducible value of diversity within sameness" (55).

Many versions of cosmopolitanism have sprung forth from the intellectual cornerstone provided by Kant, including Appiah's aforementioned idea of rooted cosmopolitanism, that implicitly seek to respond to Gilroy's inquiry. Walter Mignolo, for another example, argues for a "critical cosmopolitanism" that is grounded in the history of colonialism and the lived experiences of global migrants today; Scott Malcomson largely aligns with this strategy, naming his extension "actually existing cosmopolitanism." Mignolo sums up how the historic shifts of

human rights necessitates consistent foregrounding in works of cosmopolitanism, in "that the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rights were discussed in relation to humans and (Christian)

believers, that from the eighteenth century onward rights were discussed in terms of man and

national citizenship, and that since World War II right have been discussed in terms of

humanity" (725). Because rights have been perceived in such divergent ways over the centuries,

Mignolo argues that critical cosmopolitanism today "must negotiate both human rights and

global citizenship without losing the historical dimension in which each is reconceived today in

the colonial horizon of modernity" by remembering that "human rights and global citizenship

[need] to be defined across the colonial difference" (725). Other scholars show similar concern.

In his article "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," David Harvey

recognizes the potential of cosmopolitanism to fail the people who today most aptly embody the

cosmopolitan project: global migrants. Harvey contends that "it boils down to this: [minority

peoples] have to reform themselves to qualify for consideration under the universal ethical code

(thereby flattening out all geographical differences), or the universal principles operate as an

intensely discriminatory code masquerading as the universal good" (535). Harvey argues that,

although all part of the same human species, people are undeniably different, hailing from

different parts of the planet, different nation-states and governments and cultural histories, and if

these differences are ignored then cosmopolitanism becomes just another rendering of systematic

world-wide oppression.

Gilroy suggests that one way to ensure a safeguard against the potential failing of

cosmopolitanism is to emphasize "civic and ethical value in the process of exposure to

otherness" (55). This "vulgar or demotic cosmopolitanism," as he calls it, "glories in the ordinary

virtues and ironies—listening, looking, discretion, friendship—that can be cultivated when

mundane encounters with difference become rewarding." Gilroy looks to the eighteenth century

French political philosopher Montesquieu to further define the complexity of estrangement from

self:

> The cosmopolitan position from which Montesquieu wrote suggests that imaging oneself
>
> as a stranger in a limited and creative sense might instructively be linked to actually
>
> becoming estranged from the cultural habits one is born to … Montesquieu seems to have
>
> been among the first thinkers to suggest that we must learn to practice a systematic form
>
> of disloyalty to our own local civilization if we seek either to understand it or to interact
>
> equitably with others formed elsewhere. (57-58)

Exposure to otherness enables both detachment and reattachment to a range of communities you

belong to as it not only detaches you from nativist nationalism that prohibits empathy for others

unlike you, but it also simultaneously reattaches you to particular differences in others through

ordinary living. The proximity to strangers that demotic cosmopolitanism calls for produces self-

knowledge, which has of course always been a dominant goal of Western philosophies,

particularly in the Enlightenment era (recall my earlier critique of Kant). The cosmopolitanism of

the 21st century—the migrant's cosmopolitanism—uses tools of empathy and attachment to

difference to reconstruct the frame of humanity via self-knowledge. However, Gilroy cautions

that this self-knowledge, though "certainly precious" and "worthwhile," is "no longer the

primary issue" and "must take second place" to a commitment to "consider how to cultivate the

capacity to act morally and justly not just in the face of otherness—imploring or hostile—but in

response to the xenophobia and violence that threaten to engulf, purify, or erase it" (55-56). A

"principled and methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement from one's own culture and

history" then is "essential to a cosmopolitan commitment" "especially in turbulent political climates" such as the one we occupy today (55).

For as many revisionist champions there are of cosmopolitanism such as Gilroy, there are still other scholars who argue against it. On one hand, there are competing views of how and why cosmopolitan beliefs are employed. For example, Linda Selzer explains that Obama "frequently posits a cosmopolitan ethic understood as both a *practical* response to a world that is increasingly marked by shared risk and as an *idealistic* appeal to principles that can function as regulative ideals for future action" (28). Selzer draws this conclusion from her analysis of Obama's speeches abroad during his presidency, which foreground Obama's attitude toward policy and international relations rather than his personal, familial life. Selzer is right to point out that President Obama recruited international allies by emphasizing an increasing level of shared global risk, which in turn necessitated alliances to be formulated through a central understanding of common human dignity for planetary survival.[14] On the other hand, another counterargument to cosmopolitanism can be incited against its outcomes. Katherine Hallemeier, for example, argues outright that the contemporary common practice of engaging cosmopolitan readings through sympathy relies on "problematically normative definitions of the 'human'" that actually "works to foreclose the very differences that it purports to embrace" (88). Her critique notably extends the previously mentioned concerns articulated by David Harvey. More broadly, though, Hallemeier's thesis is indicative of an overarching hesitation that scholars have when admitting cosmopolitanism's capacity to be a form of globalization. Sheldon Pollock and his co-editors of *Public Culture* clarify the philosophical trap when they write "All the derring-do between the

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[14] See "A New Beginning," the speech that Obama gave in June 2009 in Cairo, in which advocated for cooperation between the U.S., the West, and the Muslim world.

local and the global in the dialectic of worldly thinking should not conceal the fact that neoliberal cosmopolitan thought is founded on a conformist sense of what it means to be a 'person' as an abstract unit of cultural exchange," which is itself a direct outcome of a neoliberal worldview that emphasizes "individualist aspirations and universalist norms" through which "a genuine desire for equality as a universal norm is tethered to a tenacious ethnocentric provincialism in matters of cultural judgment and recognition" (581).

In ever-increasing frequency, national boundaries and state borders conflate, cement, and collapse as more and more people travel from location to location, across vast expanses and deep differences in pursuit of well-being, exposing how opportunistic neoliberal globalization and myopic ethnocentric nationalism remain major world powers. So, given this contemporary moment that is largely defined by varying global migrants, what does a cosmopolitan ethic reveal itself to be today? Here again Pollock and his co-writers articulate how "Cosmopolitanism, in its wide and wavering nets, catches something of our need to ground our sense of mutuality in conditions of mutability, and to learn to live tenaciously in terrains of historic and cultural *transition*" (580). Admittedly, cosmopolitanism has been justly critiqued to be "a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character" are "yet unspecified," but this is but a perceived weakness, the co-authors argue. Keeping this mercurial form, cosmopolitanism is a political project, ethical imperative, social ordering, intellectual abstraction, lived experience, and infinite ways of being all in one livening breath. Cosmopolitanism endeavors to imagine "ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home – ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller" (587), despite the fact that, as a practice, "cosmopolitanism is yet to come, something awaiting realization" (577).

2.4 Locating a Cosmopolitan Ethic

In the conclusion of his autobiography, Obama spells out questions that are not only wrestled with throughout his entire memoir, but also deeply resonate in Higashide's own life account: "What is our community, and how might that community be reconciled with our freedom? How far do our obligations reach?" (*Dreams* 438). These questions are at the heart of cosmopolitan inquiry, inciting varying camps of cosmopolitanism in scholars' efforts to respond.[15] Obama's and Higashide's creative narrative works focus these questions not only through their lived experiences, but also through an adamantly geographical lens. Their narrative framing links up with Harvey's argument that any consideration of cosmopolitanism must include an investment in geography, as geography is the key factor that instills particularity across both space and time, and it is particularity that must guide ethics. Harvey contends that putting cosmopolitanism and geography into critical conversation forces each system of thought to be more self-reflective and rigorous, going beyond a litany of smart sub-sets of either school. He asks, "What kind of geographical knowledge is adequate to what kind of cosmopolitan ethic?" and argues that a "[f]ailure to answer that deeper question condemns cosmopolitanism of any sort to remain an abstracted discourse with no tangible meaning other than the … opportunistic application of universal principles to particular geographical instances" (547). Recalling the statistics of migrants' global travels from the introduction of this chapter, coupled with the premise that global migrants most aptly embody cosmopolitans today, Harvey's insistence on a geographical approach to cosmopolitanism offers an incisive way to read

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[15] Bruce Robbins' chapter "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms" in *Cosmopolitics* offers a robust discussion of sub-branches of cosmopolitanism as a way of confronting the charges against literature departments that their efforts to "universalize" courses (i.e. make syllabi more reflective of minority communities) without updating their pedagogical approach is a disservice to the subjects they seek to include.

Obama's and Higashide's narratives that illuminates how they presuppose our current academic

discussions of a patriotic and rooted cosmopolitan ethic.

In his travels through environments of disenfranchisement—from the dirt roads and

shacks on the outskirts of Jakarta, the systems of displacement that form the projects of Chicago,

to the mud-walled homes and tall steel buildings that comprise the wonder of Kenya—Obama

recognizes how imperial pursuits and oppression have made colleagues in strangers (though

perhaps not always comrades, as tribalism, colonial powers, and history still hold on). He

perceives a cosmopolitan order that flows through minority and disenfranchised groups, even if

they themselves never see it or travel to see themselves in others. In the final and most

philosophical section of his autobiography, Obama muses about a passerby he encounters during

one of his daily strolls through the urban surroundings of his sister's apartment in Nairobi.

Giving an empathetic account of the subject position of a stranger's life, Obama specifies the

draining struggle of another man who is not him, but very well could be, and who is nonetheless

a part of him:

> He's learned that the same people who controlled the land before independence still
>
> control the same land, that he still cannot eat in the restaurants or stay in the hotels that
>
> the white man has built. He sees the money of the city swirling above his head, and the
>
> technology that spits out goods from its robot mouth. If he's ambitious he will do his best
>
> to learn the white man's language and use the white man's machines, trying to make ends
>
> meet the same the computer repairman in Newark or the bus driver back in Chicago does,
>
> with alternating spurts of enthusiasm or frustration but mostly with resignation. And if
>
> you say to him that he's serving the interests of neocolonialism or some other such thing,

he will reply that yes, he will if that's what's required. It is the lucky ones who serve; the

unlucky ones drift into the murky tide of hustles and odd jobs; many will drown. (314-15)

Clearly, there is little optimism here. Neither is there a sense of Obama's infamous hope that

flourishes in the face of adversity. Rather, there is a man who is born to a land that will never be

his, to the possibility of privileges and opportunities for which he will never be eligible. What's

more, this man is the same man in Lagos as he is in Newark or Chicago: they are all connected,

despite their different geographies. Indeed, quite the opposite comes to the fore here, as Obama

leverages geography to prove both common global community and individual particularities of

national belonging. But disenfranchisement is not the only thing common between these

hypothetical people; it is moreover the fact that he/they see the system of which they are a part

and they know themselves to not be alone, not only in class or skill or paygrade, but in

enthusiasm, frustration, and resignation. However gloomy it may be, there is undeniable

attention given to both the universal and the particular in this scene, and there is a generative

tension palpable between the two.

   During his time organizing in the South Side of Chicago, Obama contends with a social

outcome of that tension. He notices that the concept of self-esteem was often cited in black

revitalization conversations around his neighborhood. Instead of solely seeing his community's

lack of self-esteem as something robbed by another, more privileged, group, Obama includes an

internal critique, suggesting that his community was also failing itself by not always actively

engaging "[t]he continuing struggle to align word and action, [their] heartfelt desires with a

workable plan" (204). Obama believes that black American's self-esteem could not be supported

by statements of racial or cultural purity (in accordance to the foundations of black nationalism).

Instead, he writes, "Our sense of wholeness would have to arise from something more fine than

the bloodlines we'd inherited. It would have to find root … in all the messy, contradictory details of our experience" (204). Later in the same section, Obama qualifies the universal yearning that he sees as inherent to humankind, which cogently foreshadows his narrative of the gloomy stranger. "I find myself thinking that somewhere down the line both guilt and empathy speak to our own buried sense that an order of some sort is required," Obama tries to articulate. He clarifies, though, that this is "not the social order that exists, necessarily, but something more fundamental and more demanding … that one has a stake in this order, a wish that, no matter how fluid this order sometimes appears, it will not drain of out the universe" (270). In this passage Obama most directly answers his conclusive question about obligation. His answer: all peoples are threaded together in global systems of labor and inherited systemic struggles, which forces us all to be in the tension of being both universal and individual. Our obligation, then, reaches to each corner of the spectrum of connection, as the tension that is generated by inhabiting both poles is generative and maintains the energy required for one to recognize their "stake in this order" and keep hoping that the order—the tension of being both universal and particular—will not "drain out of the universe."

While Obama shows what may be the darker version of how cosmopolitanism might look on the ground and through everyday lives of people, Seiichi Higashide demonstrates a rosier version of cosmopolitanism in two key passages. First, Higashide describes how Japanese migrants participated in the building of Peru's Presidential Palace in the early 1920's. Higashide explains that there were many architects vying for the construction project, but "the time allowed for the project was so short that even companies backed with large amounts of capital from England and the United States had hesitated to undertake it" (39). A Japanese immigrant architect, Mr. Tominaga, also competed to build the Presidential Palace, and eventually won the

contract (though whether or not he was chosen as a last resort is left ambiguous to the reader) to

the great excitement and pride of the local Japanese Peruvian community. "When they heard of

the news," Higashide explains, "the Japanese in Peru spontaneously came forth to offer their

assistance and approached the construction as a cohesive group … The project was completed

without incident by its deadline. Mr. Tominaga received a letter of commendation from the

President and the project greatly enhanced the reputation of the Japanese in Peru" (39). What

makes this passage such a compelling example of a cosmopolitan ethic is how it illuminates

nationalism in non-statist terms. Recalling that Kant's interpretation of cosmopolitanism is not

antithetical to nationalism—not only does *Perpetual Peace* predate usages of nationalism per se,

but also, as Appiah explains in "Cosmopolitan Patriots," nationalism is a form of rooted,

patriotic belonging (96-97)—Higashide's narrative shows how allegiances to multiple nations in

different geographies "can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted

cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but

taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different,

people" (Appiah "Patriots" 91).[16] Clearly, the Japanese Peruvians who come together to

complete the honor of building the Presidential Palace do so because of their pride that a fellow

Japanese national immigrant was awarded the bid, but in their efforts to ensure Mr. Tominaga's

success (and by extension their success as a migrant community), they participate in a distinctly

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[16] This should not be confused to be an absolute endorsement of nationalism. As my introductory
chapter argues, as an ideology, nationalism has prohibited equity for many disenfranchised
people. Sheldon Pollock and his co-authors confirm that "nationalism, whether of an ethnic or
religious or other stripe, has lost little of its power for producing evil in the world." That being
understood, though, it is also important to recognize the modes of agency that nationalism has
enabled when produced by minority groups. "In recognizing the harm that nationalism does in
promoting territorially based identities, we do not suggest that it has always and only been a
negative force," Pollock et al write. "It is famously Janus-faced, and nowhere more so than in the
non-West" (578).

Peruvian national project – after all, presidential residences are as much, if not more, a national

cultural site as they are a central seat of state government. Here, across geographical differences,

the Japanese Peruvian community sees their stake in contributing to a sense of order that places

them both separate from the countrymen of their adopted home of Peru and a critical part of that

national culture and community. The Japanese Peruvians joyously embrace both ways of being,

implicitly understanding the internal relation between geographically-based difference and a

cosmopolitan ethic. And yet it must be said that, recalling Obama's more glim perspective, the

Japanese Peruvians' cosmopolitan pride was capped to their internal community and ethnic

memory; the Peruvian government does not recognize Mr. Tominaga or the Japanese Peruvians'

contributions to any part of the palace construction.[17] When it comes to an ethnic minority

community envisioning itself as being part of the larger community wherein it resides, there are

parameters of what is permissible and, as Obama's reflections attest, oftentimes the national

master narrative does not permit a minoritarian cosmopolitan ethic to be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, Higashide holds fast to that ethos, even if he himself had not expressly planned to

do so.

Another way that Higashide situates himself as a cosmopolitan comes through when he

begins his narrative by stating in the first line of his preface, "I feel that in my life I have come to

have 'three motherlands.' Although I am aware that a person can't have three motherlands,

please allow me to say so because that is truly how I feel" (7). While Higashide did indeed have

three major and distinct chapters of his life in three very different communities and countries of

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[17] See Peru's government website, which has a page dedicated to the architecture of the palace: "Historia De Palacio De Gobierno." Tominaga is not the only example of a minority architect going unacknowledged in historic national constructions; Benjamin Banneker, the 18th century surveyor and urban planner of the U.S. national capitol, was likewise erased from official national memory until the latter half of the 20th century.

the world, it is worth considering a more cosmopolitan interpretation of his opening lines. For in

another way, Higashide sees himself as a continuous part of all three environments, including the

people, political and social events, and overarching pathos that have defined each land for him.

We see this more clearly in the way he chooses to close his life story. In the final paragraph of

his memoir, Higashide reflects on where and how he ended up in Hawaii. Consistent with his

ever-appreciative outlook, he is in just as much awe of the deep blue ocean waters and green

mountainous slopes that surround him as he is of his extraordinary life journey. To sum up his

feelings of gratitude and connection, he shares how he has embraced the Hawaiian notion of

aloha. "I have heard that 'aloha' basically means 'love,'" Higashide writes, "but in this case it

differs from the Christian understanding of 'love.' Here, the term seems to be more directly

connected to the earth that sustains us and to acceptance of human emotions. In that sense,

'aloha' includes everything that I have sought for over many years. If that is true, I need not now

write more words" (244). It is clear that Higashide recognizes a spirt of aloha in all beings

around him and throughout his life. As a reader, I am keen to take him for his word. In this

passage, Higashide uses the personal plural pronoun "us" in a way that includes and implicates

the reader, a grammatical use of "us" that he applies nowhere else in his memoir. So too is this

the only passage in which Higashide mentions "human emotions," saluting the common, inherent

obligation that we all have to one another in a very real and experiential way.

Perhaps unknowingly and unintentionally, Higashide and Obama clearly position

themselves as cosmopolitans in their respective autobiographies. Harvey argues that

"geographical and anthropological knowledges play a crucial, though often hidden, role in

defining what any cosmopolitan project might be about in theory, as well as in practice" (532).

Obama and Higashide give narrative testament to Harvey's thesis: through their extensive travels

and migrations they developed an experiential epistemology of peoples, cultures, nations, and places that ultimately shaped their worldviews.

2.5   Receiving Strangers

Skeptics ask cosmopolitans how we could possibly care about every human being. Their doubt carries a sharp double-edged logic: first, no one actually knows every human being, and second, how could someone actually care for another person who is unknown to them? What skeptics are really asking is how can someone have a sincere, emotional and material investment in the well-being of a stranger whose individual existence they may never actually know? In *Cosmopolitanism*, Appiah understands what drives those skeptics, agreeing that "the objection is not that we can't take a moral interest in strangers, but that the interest is bound to be abstract, lacking in the warmth and power that comes from shared identity," because ultimately "[h]umanity, in the relevant sense, is not an identity at all" (98). We are all strangers, connected by our common humanness, but that in itself has weak cohesive ability to situate us in belonging to either one another or to the Earth. The central issue here, then, is the concept and perpetual presence of the stranger. Yet cosmopolitanism does not ask its participants to base their commitment to a shared global community on a theoretical abstraction of a stranger; it instead demands an intellectually creative and open approach. Appiah reminds those skeptics that "the great lesson of anthropology is that when the stranger is no longer imaginary, but real and present, sharing a human social life, you may like or dislike him, you may agree or disagree; but, if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end" (*Cosmopolitanism* 99). The principles of international right that are binding on all human beings collectively depend on a capacity to recognize and receive the stranger, to cultivate some sense of shared identity. Obama and Higashide's narratives provide rich, often nuanced, accounts of this reception. This

process takes many forms and necessarily shifts from person to person and time to time (if it cemented into a single prescribed set of ethical rules, then it would no longer be cosmopolitanism), but examples of how the stranger can be received through a cosmopolitan ethic are readily available if we choose to be curiously open to their reading.

Adios to Tears provides the most tangible examples of this ethic. Stories of strangers being received are peppered throughout the narrative, giving the reader a sense that they help Higashide navigate his memories of his three motherlands. His earliest account is from his boyhood in Hokkaido. Higashide remembers walking through town with his father and seeing shirtless, dirty, underweight men digging trenches and building brick barriers. "According to father, nearly all of the laborers were young Koreans who had been tricked into coming there from Tokyo," Higashide recalls, ashamed that slave labor was responsible for constructing the irrigation system that his Japanese hometown took such pleasure and pride in (19). Even as a child, Higashide recognized that there was something wrong with the scene of clearly abused people being coerced to work by other people standing guard over them. Higashide's father also recognized the injustice being committed against the Korean laborers and chose to aid "two laborers [who] escaped from the nearby construction site and suddenly appeared at [Higashide's family home] seeking help" (19). The escaped slaves did not speak Japanese and had no other connection to Higashide's father or family. But their foreignness did not prevent Higashide's father from risking his own safety to give them shelter. Higashide recounts, "Father silently took them over to the stable and hid them … Before they left for an unknown fate, Father gave them some old shirts and pants and, handing over one or two yen in cash, warned them to be extremely careful" (19). Many years later, when Higashide was in a WWII military labor camp in Panama as a prisoner of war, he made friends with a fellow Japanese Peruvian prisoner, Mr. Yagi, who

reminded him of his father. Mr. Yagi's hometown was in Lurin, outside of Lima, in between the

capitol and rural farmland area that had many "contract immigrants" who worked on cotton

farms and sugar cane plantations. These immigrants' working conditions were extremely harsh,

subject to "inhumane treatment" from their "employers," which sporadically incited small groups

to attempt to escape to Lima. Their escape efforts were notoriously dangerous as they would

often go many days without food only to be "caught by pursuers, beaten and returned" to their

owners. Some, though, made it to Lurin, and "Mr. Yagi would take them into his home and

provide them with food and clothes" (148). Mr. Yagi never asked their name or where they were

from. Instead, he did everything he could to treat them with decency, believing that although he

did not know them they deserved aid. Higashide explains that "if [the escapees] were sick, [Mr.

Yagi] took them by horseback to the Chorillos Hospital in the suburbs of Lima. He found jobs

for those who were still healthy" (148). In these examples, Higashide's father and Mr. Yagi

recognized the lives of strangers – not just their physical existence, but their right to live in safety

and pursue their well-being. The way that they expressed their belief in that right was by aiding

escapees to work against the capitalistic institution that sanctioned slave labor.

Assisting indentured laborers' escape was not the only way that Higashide cites as a

method of receiving strangers, though. Another possibility is through giving medical and end-of-

life care to strangers in need. For example, Mr. Yagi would not only give shelter to runaways,

but also "for those who died in [Mr. Yagi's] home, he would take care of funeral arrangements"

(148). Here, Mr. Yagi follows-up the human right to life and safety by recognizing the stranger's

dignity through death. Providing proper burials for the deceased conveys that those lives were

recognized to be worth something, connected to others somewhere, and to be worthy of

mourning. Higashide notes that Mr. Yagi was not alone in this ethic of care as he recounts one of

his own caretakers when he first arrived to Peru and became very ill. Madre Francisca was a French nun who left France for Peru in 1899, the same year that the first Japanese immigrants set foot in Peru. Madre Francisca devoted over 50 years of her life "to aiding and nurturing Japanese immigrants," working in the Dos de Mayo Charity Hospital where she attended thousands of patients from immigrant populations, as they were particularly susceptible to contracting serious diseases such as malaria, typhus, and dysentery when they arrived to Peru. As most immigrants had little capital or knowledge of local healthcare networks, they ended up at Madre Francisca's charity hospital. Higashide reflects on Madre Francisca's loyalty and generosity in her care, noting that the "Madre used her own funds to purchase necessary items and medications. She even went out to buy meat and eggs for the patients" (231). Away from their homeland, without resources or recourse to local language, often invisible in their status of imported laborers, these immigrants were utterly alone, true strangers, unrecognized in their humanity. Beyond the material necessities like nutritious food and basic medicines, Madre Francisca also tended to her patients' emotional ailments, especially for "the many Japanese immigrants who spent their last hours at the hospital," many of whom, "in high fever, grasped her hands and called out, 'Okaasan!' (Mother!), as she kept vigil over them" (231). Taking care of other strangers: this too is a possible outcome of a cosmopolitan ethic. It is no coincidence that Higashide's father, Mr. Yagi, and Madre Francisca all chose to espouse a cosmopolitan ethic and receive the strangers in their midst. They were all strangers themselves, in a foreign land, uniquely poised to recognize other strangers as humans with distinct and uncompromising rights and inherent dignity that was worthy their recognition and personal investment.

While Higashide provides examples of actual strangers and how they can be received, Obama provides a more nuanced portrayal of strangers and estrangement in his narrative. When

Obama was in his 20s and living in New York, his mother and sister, Maya, came to visit him from Hawaii. Obama recalls that one evening his mother was reading the paper and saw that *Black Orpheus* (1959) was playing across town. In a rush of excitement, she pulled both of her young adult kids into a cab and rushed to the revival theater where the movie was being screened. Obama describes the event in vivid detail as something that made him recognize his difference, not only in his mother's understanding of the world at that time, but also in himself. He recounts:

> The film, a groundbreaker of sorts due to its mostly black, Brazilian cast, had been made in the fifties. The story line was simple: the myth of the ill-fated lover Orpheus and Eurydice set in the favelas of Rio during Carnival. In Technicolor splendor, set against scenic green hills, the black and brown Brazilians sang and danced and strummed guitars like carefree birds in colorful plumage. About halfway through the movie, I decided that I'd seen enough, and turned to my mother to see if she might be ready to go. But her face, lit by the blue glow of the screen, was set in a wistful gaze. At that moment, I felt as if I were being given a window into her heart, the unreflective heart of her youth. I suddenly realized that the depiction of childlike blacks I was now seeing on the screen, the reverse image of Conrad's dark savages, was what mother had carried with her to Hawaii all those years before, a reflection of the simple fantasies that had been forbidden to a white middle-class girl from Kansas, the promise of another life: warm, sensual, exotic, different. (123-24)

As he does numerous times throughout his book, Obama gently reveals the complexity of difference with a non-judgmental spirit, yet names it for what it is: prejudice, here in the form of

racial exoticism.[18] To prevent a presumptive reading of his mother as only having a surface

investment and aesthetic fascination with hyperbolic Brazilian culture, Obama tempers his story

by locating her history as "a white middle-class girl from Kansas" which produces that exotic

perception through her. Glancing at his mom's "wistful gaze" during the movie, Obama sees the

Western master narrative in which she places the movie characters in order to make sense of

them, in order to recognize those strangers who are so different from herself and receive them

into her worldview. More than that, though, in witnessing his mother's investment in that master

narrative of exoticized race, Obama also sees how he, too, is a stranger: first, he realizes he is a

stranger to his mother because her worldview at that time was based on her terms of recognition,

not his subjective lived experiences; and second, he realizes a part of him is a stranger to himself,

in that he had not yet discerned where he belonged locally and how that informed his

commitment to a global order of human rights. In other words, Obama understood in that

moment with his mother that a stranger can be "real and present," "sharing a human social life"

not only as a person-who-is-not-you, but also as a dynamic within one's family, community, or

self.

Obama and Higashide's autobiographies help us investigate how minorities practice and

experience reception with and through other minorities in the context of geographical transit.

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[18] Lucia Nagib explains the history of *Black Orpheus* production as film and how it was morphed into a Western depiction of the exotic. Marcel Camus, a French filmmaker, created and directed the 1959 film version of *Black Orpheus*, adapted from Vinicus de Moraes's original 1956 play "Orfeu de Concieção." Moraes rejected Camus's production, refusing to sign off as a co-author of the script, as it only served the filmmaker's taste for "exoticism which, intending to portray the blacks as a free people in their spontaneous creativity, in reality imprisoned them in a musical 'ghetto'" (95). It was not until 1980 when Brazilian filmmaker Carlos Diegues reimagined Camus's film production that the play was brought back to de Moraes's vision of an "entirely black universe where the Afro-descendent transcends his condition [of the favelas] and equals the gods" (96).

Both authors extend existing paradigms and perceptions of migrants to foreground a cosmopolitan ethic of self-knowledge through empathy for difference with Others. Obama and Higashide's stories are dynamically different, the former based in a self-reflective critique of race and the human condition while the latter offers an outward gaze of geo- and bio-politics; yet both gesture to a broader phenomenon in the world, wherein many disenfranchised peoples uniquely access an empathetic humanism despite their often precarious well-being. The cosmopolitan ethic that Obama and Higashide's narrative works reflect is relevant, and even imperative, today in ways that has not been realized in the past in part because global migration informs all our lived experiences in unprecedented ways. It makes sense, then, that cosmopolitanism is best expressed through life writing, as it champions the multiplicity of people's connection and belonging to both local ties and the global community of humankind.

Ultimately, as a lived condition and way of being, the cosmopolitan ethic is best told through stories, and although I chose autobiographical accounts, "[f]olktales, drama, opera, novels, short stories; biographies, histories, ethnographies; fiction or nonfiction; painting, music, sculpture, and dance," are all equally viable vehicles of story-telling as they all "reveal to us values we had not previously recognized or undermine our commitment to values that we had settled into" (Appiah *Cosmopolitanism* 30). The value of being human is uniquely expressed through story-telling in ways that other modes of expressing human lives—through quantitative data sets that catalogue conditions of well-being to empirical analyses of cultural change— simply cannot capture. Appiah speaks to this power and necessity of telling stories about our lives as it is common across geographies, races, cultures, and time – "it is part of being human …it's just one of the things that humans do," he writes. "People tell stories and discuss them in every culture …they were discussed, evaluated, referred to in everyday life. We wouldn't

recognize a community as human if it had no stories, if its people had no narrative imagination,"
Appiah further contends; stories "align our responses to the world" when we evaluate and
respond to them, which "is, in turn, one of the ways we maintain the social fabric, the texture of
our relationships" (*Cosmopolitanism* 29). In other words, story-telling, especially the telling of
one's own stories, proves a common humanity and integrity of a shared way of being. It confirms
humanity and paves the path for a cosmopolitan ethic that rejoices in difference and fights for the
rights of all members in the global community of world citizens. Stories have the capacity to
change lives, and, if we recognize the right of all strangers to narrate and receive their subjective
experiences, then stories could also have the power to change the social ecology of the world.

3   SUFFERING AS SUBVERSION

IN *BITTER IN THE MOUTH* AND *THE PAGODA*

> Let's face it. We're undone by each other.
> And if we're not, we're missing something."
> – Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*
> (2004)

In an interview on NPR's *All Things Considered* program in August 2016 discussing his

Emmy Award nomination for *RuPaul's Drag Race*, RuPaul Charles made a poignant

clarification about how mainstream identity in the world of drag is used to undermine social

norms. "Drag at its core is about challenging the idea of identity. It actually mocks identity. So it

could never be mainstream. Mainstream is about pick what you're gonna be and stick with it,

because you'd make us feel very uncomfortable if [you] started shapeshifting and changing

'cause that will wreck my head. So drag will never ever ever ever be mainstream." While our

current milieu is keen to construct compact boxes of identity that define whom and what one is

and, further, should want to be, drag essentially complicates and muddies those straight lines and

right angles. Later in the interview, RuPaul's explanations about the intention of his show

become an insightful political commentary on what drag offers to both the participants and

viewers: the aesthetic transformation—the wigs and makeup, the tucks and augmentations, the

platform heels and sequin dresses, the talk and the walk, the character—is merely a vehicle of

undermining the mainstream (where here, "mainstream" is synonymous with "identity"). The

costumes and such are accessories, but do not constitute or define the act of drag. Ultimately,

drag is not about the performance (though drag queens are certainly professional performers)—it

is not about masquerading about dressed up as the opposite gender of your own sex and

hyperbolically mimicking gendered tropes; rather, at least according to RuPaul, drag is a calculated, conscious act of subversion. In his recent article in *The Atlantic* on RuPaul in the Trump-era, Spencer Kornhaber succinctly states the core of RuPaul's political contribution: "drag's real purpose has less to do with passing for another gender than with highlighting gender's artificiality" (n.p.). That drag is more closely aligned with the genre of parody rather than performance heightens its capacity to critique both society and self. And this strain of parody, as it depends on a hyper self- and social awareness to assert its subversive intent, situates itself as dangerous and threatening to the heteronormative collective consciousness.

In *RuPaul's Drag Race*, not only does drag deliberately misuse a major governing social norm, in doing so it also offers refuge to those outside the status quo, which enhances its threatening potential. In the show, this curation of communal safety through usurping heteronormative conventions is laden with traumatic sadness (the young gay men contestants on the show are often thrown out by their family and community and are prone to various forms of harm and abuse) but it is matched by a keen, humorous jubilation. This particular aesthetic of mourning and joyful solidarity inspires this chapter and serves as the prelude for two minority-authored American novels that also contend with usurpation of identity (and all the joys and fallouts therein): Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010) and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998). Both novels feature protagonists—Linda and Lowe, respectively—who purposefully corrode and conflate their identities as a way of becoming agents of their subjectivities. Linda and Lowe suffer greatly due to their alterity, perpetually struggling to manage their outsider status, which upsets and threatens the norms of their local communities. I argue that through their suffering of violation and displacement, Linda and Lowe shed their masquerade of survival to cultivate a subversive jubilation. Surely, there is great pain in that

transformation. Ultimately though both protagonists locate their agency not in reason or knowing, but rather in their bodies, as a sort of embodied empathy.[1]

Bitter in the Mouth, Monique Truong's sophomore novel, is set in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, a small town that has a dwindling population of old-timey folk who are mostly set in their ways and beliefs. The main character, Linda, is adopted by Thomas and DeAnne Hammerick when her Vietnamese migrant parents are killed in a mysterious fire of their trailer home. The rest of Linda's adoptive family includes Iris, DeAnne's harsh mother, and Iris's much younger gay brother, Baby Harper, who unconditionally adores Linda. Loved by her father Thomas and tolerated by her mother DeAnne in her adolescent years, Linda is given the guest room of their upper-middle class home, staring at the decorative framed prints of sailboats hung on the plaid patterned wallpapered walls. At eleven years old, Linda is sexually abused and raped by the teenage boy who DeAnne employs to mow their lawn. Linda brings the reader along through her growing up years in North Carolina to her early adulthood when she goes to Connecticut for university and then to New York, where she stays to pursue partnership at a prestigious law firm, effectively avoiding any return to her home that was never really home. As an adult, Linda reckons with another physical assault, this time in the form of cancer, which totally unhinges the professional and personal ambitions hid behind for so long.

Linda adjusts to her adoptive world quietly, most successfully through her letters with her best friend, Kelly, who lives down the street.[2] The written word is much easier for Linda to

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[1] My use of "embodied empathy" should not be connoted to or confused with Octavia Butler's imagining of "hyperempathy," a fictional condition of transference, in which her protagonist, Lauren Olamina, literally feels the pains and pleasures of those around her. Rather, I argue for an empathy that is corporeally promoted and situated.

[2] *Bitter in the Mouth* is inspired by Truong's 1991 short story, "Kelly," which focuses on the friendship between the two young girls growing up in Boiling Springs, North Carolina.

digest rather than the spoken word, as Linda has the unique capability to literally taste the words that she hears – a secret she entrusts only to Kelly while growing up, and much later to DeAnne. Linda has a neurological condition known as auditory-gustatory synesthesia, wherein words incite an involuntary taste reception. Linda's synesthesia transforms how she knows the world: her name, for example, tastes of mint, while "Jesus" tastes like fried chicken. In this way, Linda both perceives the world and is perceived by the world (here, the town of Boiling Springs and the U.S. south) in non-normative terms.

Linda is a stranger to her Boiling Springs community in many ways, though Baby Harper stands out as a site of belonging and refuge to Linda. As a "singing-talker," as Linda describes him, Baby Harper's cadence and tone of voice register as song instead of speech and because of this Linda has no "incomings" of tastes when he speaks. Linda and her great-uncle Baby Harper form a quick allegiance to one another relationally, too, as they both intimately understand the hardships and heartaches of being outside the realm of white, upper-middle class, southern social acceptability. Unable to change the expressions of her phenotypes, Linda instead masks her Asian markers by donning heavy make-up and wearing dark clothes from punk and emo shops, fashioning herself into "a visual expletive, a sartorial expression of the bile, acid, and longing that would have otherwise stayed locked inside me," seeking "different ways to hide" from others and herself (148). Linda explains, "One way [to hide] was to disappear into a crowd. Counterintuitively, another way was to stand out in a crowd. People saw only your costume and your mask, and they turned a blind eye to all that was underneath" (146). Baby Harper also hides by covering himself up, though his method of choice is to blend into normativity. As an adult, Linda reflects on the way Baby Harper presented himself to the world, retrospectively noting how he maintained his deepest secrets. "If he had lived in an earlier era, he would have worn

gloves and a hat every day. If he had lived in a big city, he would have worn dark sunglasses,"
Linda surmises. "I understood that my great-uncle, Harper Evan Birch, if he could have chosen,
would have inhabited a body different from the one that God had given him. His body wasn't his
temple" (120). Rather than exposing his body, "[e]ven on the muggiest of summer days, he never
wore shorts and never rolled up his sleeves," Linda observes (120). If Baby Harper had dressed
for the hot weather, his shaved arms and legs would have revealed his preference for embodied
femininity. Linda and Baby Harper both devote enormous energies to camouflaging into their
community through their masquerades. They know that hiding their alterities is crucial to their
survival. It is only later in their relationship, after Linda confesses her traumatic sexual abuse to
Baby Harper, that they both shed their veneers and become agents in their otherness, engaging
subversive jubilation.

Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* likewise is a text that renders analysis of agency
manifested through suffering and joy. The novel takes place in mid-nineteenth century rural
Jamaica, the adopted home of Lowe, a Chinese immigrant who owns a general store and
attempts to make a life for himself and his daughter, Liz. Lowe presents himself as a man to his
community, but the reader comes to learn that he is actually a woman masquerading as a man in
order to survive. Lau A-yin, Lowe's given name, first disguised herself as a man to escape her
impending marriage to an aging, stifling man that was arranged by her father to settle a debt.
Though just a teenage girl, she stole away on a cargo ship heading to the Caribbean pretending to
be a deckhand.[3] Eventually taking ill on board, Lowe was discovered by Cecil, the ship's
captain, who became his abuser, healer, rapist, impregnator, benefactor, and match-maker. Using

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[3] Although biologically a woman, Lowe is identified both in his fictional community and
narratively to the readers through the masculine pronoun. Therefore, this chapter will follow
Powell's use of "he/him/his" when referring to Lowe henceforth.

the autonomy provided by Lowe's masculine cover, Cecil does his best to control and protect

Lowe and their child, setting Lowe up with a shop in Jamaica and bringing Liz gifts whenever

his cargo shipments bring him back to the area. Cecil even arranges for Lowe to marry a wealthy

octaroon woman (who passes for white), Miss Sylvie, to be mother to Liz – though this

arrangement also comes with the demeaning expectation that Lowe be fully partnered to Miss

Sylvie and keep her sexually satisfied. The novel begins some twenty years after this backstory,

though, commencing with a devastating scene of Lowe's shop burning down, taking Cecil (who

was in the back sleeping off a drunken night) and Lowe's personal sense of place and purpose

along with it.

Assuming the arson was by the hands of the native-born black townsfolk, Lowe bitterly

comes to understand his foreigner status. Reckoning with his perceived betrayal by the people he

most closely identified with in his town, Lowe realizes that the collegiality and neighborliness he

felt with the townsfolk, while not false, did not compete with the institutionalized segregation

and expulsion of settler colonialism that prevailed over Jamaica for generations before he came

to the island community. "He was there only on sufferance," the narrator describes, "Himself

and the other five thousand Chinese on the island. He realized now how the Negro people must

have secretly despised him for being there, how secretly they must have envied him and his shop

and his relationship to Cecil and Miss Sylvie, for here now was the proof" (13). Early on, then,

Lowe exhibits a self-conscious awareness of his racial and social trespassing – an awareness that

festers throughout the novel into rage, resentment, paranoia, and reclusiveness. The arson made

Lowe see himself as trapped between the black and white racial poles of his community, in

which he believed that "the whites didn't give one blast if the [black] others burned [his shop]

down. So long as their houses were untouched" (13). Lowe retreats into himself, obsessively

planning to rebuild his shop into a pagoda-style meeting hall for the other Chinese residents on the island. Lowe's retreat becomes a phenomenal, though painful, self-discovery in that he rebels against his constructed, false identity of hyper-masculinity as he figures out how to survive this second round of betrayal (first, by his father; then, by his community). Lowe begins appreciating more feminine aesthetics such as ladies' hats, ribbons, and slippers. Opening himself to learning sensual pleasure with a trusted townswoman, Joyce, Lowe even redefines the use and purpose of sex to go beyond debt-betrothal, rape, or payment for marriage. But Lowe's choice to embrace some feminine features is not a return to his biological sex. Rather, it is a release of the bonds he tied himself to in order to escape the patriarchal order. Lowe recognizes that as a man, he is an individual and free agent, at least in public. As a woman, he is always just a commodity, in which sex was payment, either for debt, passage, or safety.

Lowe's public gender persona, then, is instigated by survival. Initially, Lowe ensures his survival by publicly projecting himself as male. It is only when Lowe is confronted with the decimation of that male identity—the burning of his shop, the perceived betrayal by his community—that Lowe sheds his false, heteronormative masquerade. Confronted with the realization that his life is a mere veneer to living, Lowe transgresses his own, self-styled front of being a man and opens himself to the counter-logical precarity of embracing some pleasures that he associates with femininity, like wearing "pretty things" and seeking sensuality. And when he finds pleasure in doing so, this too is subversive. Lowe is fully aware that undermining certain tenets of his masculine identity is a major risk to his own safety: Miss Sylvie will leave him if he does not choose to embrace performing fully as either a man or a woman; his fellow Chinese countrymen will abandon him if they see him as a man parading around as a woman. Yet he chooses that pleasure nevertheless.

To understand how a subversion of identity issues forth through suffering, we must first engage the contours of suffering, then trace how identity can be disrupted, and finally consider how that disruption is confronted. Though Linda and Lowe inhabit very dissimilar narrative worlds, they both understand themselves to be outside—or rather, in between—the codified poles of belonging within their respective communities. *Bitter in the Mouth* and *The Pagoda* specifically explore Asian American subjectivities in important, historically under-scrutinized ways.[4] But what uniquely situates these novels within multiethnic and interracial contemporary literature is how they usurp constrictive identity conditions and instead employ an empathetic humanism instigated by common suffering. Being neither black nor white, both protagonists reject articulations of self that are defined either through racialization or along the color line; rather, they locate agency in the body that is inclusive of but not conditional to racialized knowledge. The cataloging and understanding of suffering is paramount in this chapter, as ultimately it becomes the alternative, sturdier foundation of self-knowledge and deep social connection that elides the constraints of identity yet still supports agency. Suffering remakes these characters into something unconditioned by traditional social epistemologies of labeling, categorizing, and ordering into containable hierarchy. It is the grounds of a new variation of humanism based in bodies, not knowledge, and through empathy, not Cartesian logic.

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[4] Truong engages and extends the transracial adoption narrative genre that Asian American literary scholars have robustly contended with; similarly, Powell's narrative traces the lesser-known Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean and engages the instability of belonging to a community when gender norms are shed. See, for example, Begoña Simal-González's "Judging the Book by Its Cover: Phantom Asian America in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*" and Tzarina T. Prater's "Transgender, Memory, and Colonial History in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*."

3.1   Suffering

If humanism of old sought to define and defend what comprised and qualified as Human, then the humanism of new seeks to identify the most basic common grounds that foster ethical conduct. Political scientist and democratic philosopher Bonnie Honig describes this push for "a newer variant" of humanism as "one that reprises an earlier humanism in which what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality, not the capacity to reason but vulnerability to suffering" ("Antigone's" 1). If recent discourse on the so-called ethical return to humanism is populated by the notions of a capacity to suffer and a disposition of vulnerability, [5] then Linda and Lowe highlight the major failing of early humanism: how the very category of being is dictated and prescribed by knowledge. What kind of knowledge one has, how one is known, if one came to know things in the right way and have the same accepted truth outcomes – these facets of knowledge are the sieve for early versions of humanism. Linda and Lowe not only have atypical environmental knowledge (both being Asian in predominantly black and white communities) but also have atypical bodily knowledge (Linda's synesthesia and Lowe's masculine embodiment). Their unique epistemologies, beautifully described in often sorrowful detail, make them susceptible to suffering and vulnerable to pain.

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[5] While the philosophical tradition of ethics traces back to Ancient Greek thinking, the modern idea of "the ethical turn" can be rooted in Levinas's work (especially *Humanism of the Other* [1972] and *Ethics and Infinity* [1982]). Articulating a new, different sense of the Other from his predecessors and contemporaries, Levinas steps away, or beyond, the phenomenological works of Husserl and Heidegger. His theories are often thought of as "an ethics of ethics," as Jacques Derrida notes in his 1967 essay "Violence and Metaphysics," which he wrote on the work of his dear friend. Many philosophers and critics, such as Judith Butler, Hannah Ardent, Gilles Deleuze, and Giorgio Agamben—all of whom are referenced to varying degrees in this chapter—often springboard from Levinas in their work. Perhaps more importantly, though, the idea of a return to ethics is pervasive beyond academic or philosophical contexts. In popular print, see Anne-Marie Slaughter's excellent political dissemination of the ethical turn in her 2016 *Foreign Policy* article, "The Only Way Forward."

Honig situates this turn to a new humanism not only as a revised critical approach, but also as a new way of knowing, which follows Judith Butler's methodology in her 2004 monograph, *Precarious Life*.[6] Butler clearly addresses the instability of "human" as philosophical subject and the corresponding reach of her project when she defines her use of the term, stating that she is "referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology" (33). The new humanism that Honig and Butler work through is nothing short of a new ontology, which itself resonates in other contemporary philosophical works.[7] Where both philosophers locate their impetus and meaning for engaging humanism, though, lies far beyond the realm of the philosopher. "If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment," Butler portends in the closing segment of *Precarious Life*, "it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense" (151). *Bitter in the Mouth* and *The Pagoda* narratively present those "emergences and vanishings" at the limits of perception described by Butler. Both Linda and Lowe have been displaced from their birthplace and birth families and often are not recognized,

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[6] Although *Precarious Life* is not considered one of Butler's major works—its recognition and notoriety do not come close to the ubiquitous *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), or the follow-up *Undoing Gender* (2004)—it is nevertheless a major insight to Butler's long-reckoning with the philosophical subject. Allowing her focus on feminist and queer theory to rest, Butler broadens her consideration of human lives by concentrating on *what* makes human lives human (precarity, vulnerability, suffering) rather than *how* humanness is conditioned and embodied (performativity, gender).

[7] For example, see Sina Kramer's "On Negativity," Moya Lloyd's "Toward a Cultural Politics of Vulnerability," and Ann Murphy's "Corporeal Vulnerability and the New Humanism."

much less understood, to be individuals in their communities: "chink" is often used as placeholder for "Linda" by the children in Boiling Springs, while "Chin-ee" for "Lowe" on his Caribbean island. They are also both victims of rape, forced to hide their assaults from their family and communities. Our protagonists are frail, both from what they bear and from our limits as readers to fully appreciate their conditions. Their expressions as agents emerge and vanish in expected ways and times throughout the narratives, always carried through by their psychological and physical suffering.

3.1.1 *Language*

There are multiple ruptures from the safety of heteronormativity that instigate suffering and thereby harken Linda and Lowe's transformations as agents. Both protagonists disconnect from their heteronormative worlds primarily through language. Indeed, their indices of meaning and relation are disconnected from normative understandings of self in their respective communities through breaking with language – or rather, perhaps, they are severed from the domain of normality because language fails them phenomenologically, in that the structures of their consciousness are not trussed through language.

Bitter in the Mouth most clearly delineates the failure of language in this schema. Linda admits that in her augmented perceptual world, in which meanings are in perpetual sensory flux and contradiction, one-to-one correlations between taste and word are instable. Recalling her first memory, a taste, Linda cannot ascribe to it a mere single noun. "I have not yet found a corresponding flavor in food or in metaphor," she states, "[b]ut such a 'match,' even if identified, would only allow me the illusion of communication and you the illusion of understanding" (15). Language fails, as Linda freely admits, and risks producing false intimacies of understanding on both sides of interlocution. In an inverted way, Lowe is also estranged through language.

Language is Lowe's foremost tool for his appropriation of masculinity. His survival depends on completely embodying the male version of himself, so he not only assimilates the movements and gestures common to men in his community (such as heavy walking, belching, and grunting responses), he even changes his voice into a lower, gruffer register. Lowe adapts in order to survive, taking on every aspect of manliness that he is able and internalizing it in every way possible: "he wore his costume [of masculinity] like a glove, a second skin. After forty years there was nothing womanly about him, not even his voice, which was a soft harsh bark, its octaves mellowing with time" (118). When Lowe thinks about trying to sound more feminine, he feels his vocal chords constrain and get sore. Lowe is not just masquerading in men's clothes and a masculine bearing; rather, Lowe's performance of being a man is a subversive act as it does not permit an outside knowing of him.

Just as the break instigated by language permeates throughout Lowe's body, it also seeps deeper to a relational level between Linda and her most cherished friend, Kelly. Describing how she and Kelly built their long-lasting friendship through their letter-writing, Linda explains the more nuanced understanding of one another they gain through their writing: "Anger, disappointment, and shame at times have slowed [the letters'] comings and goings, but we understood, without really fully understanding, that the words that we wrote to each other couldn't have existed in speech" (26). Writing is unencumbered with taste for Linda and therefore grants her access to use language to make unencumbered meaning. Still, there is more going on in Linda and Kelly's implicit understanding of the limits of speech. Words are unspeakable not only because the words themselves are too overwhelming for Linda given her synesthesia, or because vocalization of trauma is too intimate, but also because language itself could not hold such pains and complications that Linda and Kelly experience. Writing letters is

the most direct and honest lingual mode for Linda and Kelly when they were school-age girls. But later, as adults, the best friends find an even purer method of communication: in silence, sitting side by side, being patient with the other's hurt. When Linda returns to Boiling Springs as a woman in her early thirties for Baby Harper's memorial service, Kelly picks her up from the Greyhound bus station and the women spend the next few weeks relearning the contours of their friendship as adults. One late evening Kelly admits to Linda that the father of her 13-year-old son is Linda's first love, Wade, whose name tasted of orange sherbet.

While this adolescent affair may seem trivial, the recognition of Kelly's betrayal—the first and only betrayal between the two women—deeply effects Linda. "'I think it's time*cottagecheese* to go*boiledcarrots*'," Linda says to Kelly after Kelly admits her one-night tryst with Wade. "'I said no*grapejelly*. We're go*boiledcarrots*ing to sit here*hardboiledegg* until you*cannedgreenbeans* for*Triscuit*give me, Linda*mint*'," Kelly retorts. After a long silence, Linda gets the courage to name the cruelest part of Kelly's affair: "'Did you*cannedgreenbeans* know*grapejelly* about Wade*orangesherbet* and me?'," she asks, knowing that Kelly was always jealous of Wade's obvious affection for Linda when they were all growing up. "'Yes,' Kelly replied." Consistent with all the dialogue in the novel, this scene of tense conversation carries the accompanying tastes that Linda experiences with certain words. The disruption of the tastes here though, in a scene of such a common, ruthlessly bitter betrayal, highlights the failure of language more than any other scene in the narrative. There is a dismal double-revelation in the terse language between Kelly and Linda. As the words provoke tastes (a gustatory-sensory reaction in the body) that in no way reflect the intense heaviness lodged in Linda's heart (an emotional reaction in the body), language itself is revealed as the more humiliating betrayer.

The conversation over, Linda narrates what the remainder of the night brought forth for them. "We sat on that bench until the stars faded, until the birds began their songs," she recalls. "Kelly fell asleep with her head on my shoulder . . . my ears full of the steady breathing of my best friend" (264). The last idyllic imaginings of her adolescent years smashed, Linda confronts the fact that the only fantasy she had ever permitted herself—of pure, sweet, and trusting desire—was taken from her by her most trusted companion. Sitting there through the night, though, shoulder-to-resting-head with her best friend, she is able to find gentleness and understanding for Kelly. "I knew she wasn't the cause for what I was feeling," Linda eventually admits. While growing up in Boiling Springs, the townsfolk (metonymically the South) made sure Linda understood that her place in their social order was to be the perpetual outsider. "The truth was that I believed that it was this place and its people who had kept the orange sherbet boy and me apart," Linda explains (264). And although Linda is too sophisticated to entirely excuse Kelly's secret-keeping, she lets "the steady breathing of my best friend" fill her senses and bandage the long-festering wound that finally broke open between the two of them.

Bitter offers a rare rendering of how, when sieved through the interior, psychological condition of synesthesia, language can be a disruptor of normativity and can instigate suffering. But when language is affected communally, how does it break a subject's perceptual world and cause them to endure pain? What about when language is forgotten, stolen, or silenced, either through self-shame or social strangulation? In this, *The Pagoda* offers valuable insight. Toward the end of the novel, Lowe is reunited with his now-adult daughter and meets his grandson. Liz brings her family over to Miss Sylvie's estate for a family dinner, providing Lowe an opportunity to visit with his grandson. In the study, Lowe and the boy are surrounded by maps, artifacts, architectural drawings, watercolors, and books scattered throughout the space. The boy draws

some boats on paper, compelling Lowe to reach back into the recesses of his memory to help him

sketch out an entire fleet. Thoroughly enthralled with his grandfather's artful hand, Lowe takes

advantage of the boy's attention to explain to the boy an abridged version of their origin story.

Lowe "deftly produced the huge sleepy duck that was the outline of China," turning the drawing

activity into a lesson plan, he "dotted in the names of the coastal provinces and of his own,

Kwangtung." Slowly adding narrative to the geography, Lowe "penciled in the circuitous route

of the Yellow River and explained how it got its color from silt and loess and was a river most

notorious for rising above its bed and breaking through dikes and drowning millions of people

and inundating their fields" (185). He continued:

> 'We are Hakka,' he told the boy, who stared at him unblinkingly. Lowe proudly drew for
>
> him the yellow dragon of the Chinese flag. Then he was silent, aghast, for he had no
>
> authentic word for his grandson; nothing to prove he was indeed Hakka, he had so
>
> successfully erased his language. He had so successfully forgotten. Was that possible?
>
> For if language was the carrier of culture, then he'd erased his culture too, and so now
>
> what was a person without language and without culture? What was he there on that
>
> island, what had he become? (186)

Lowe's panic from his sudden realization that he could be further unmoored in his life on the

island than he had ever realized is understandable, though falsely premised. That Lowe is so

deeply committed to building a pagoda for the Chinese diaspora on the island, that he is so

singularly intent on curating a dedicated space for his ethnic community to gather, educate, and

promote their interests, shows that he has not lost his home culture. By that logic, Lowe proves

that language is not the sole carrier of culture. Further, it makes sense that Lowe remembers the

geography of his homeland through its waterways—after all, his father was a boat maker and the

family's livelihood depended on understanding the rivers and the appropriate vehicles for navigating them.

Yet it is telling that his inability to recall the vernacular of his birthplace instigates such alarm. Lowe went through great pains to remake himself into the respectable townsman and business owner that he is. The other Chinese on the island also struggle to overcome the shame of being sold by their own Chinese kinfolk into the indentured labor force and to forge a worthwhile life despite those psychological and physical hardships. Still, Lowe is deeply ashamed when he forgets his mother tongue. He feels fraudulent, given his efforts to build the pagoda, and undeserving to teach his grandson about their ancestors.

Language fails Lowe as thoroughly as it fails Linda – both protagonists' suffering is anchored in their displacement of self through language. Their inability to engage language in heteronormative terms causes them to be distrustful of their agency thereby rendering their subjectivity to be, at best, perpetually insecure. These protagonists suffer through myriad manifestations of violence against them, so horrific it cannot be scaled. By first situating their lingual break I do not suggest that the brutality done to their bodies is in any way secondary to their internal disruption through language. The fact that language fails Linda and Lowe, however, leaves a residue of interiorized displacement of self that pervades all the other bodily transgressions enacted against them. Importantly, this lingual rupturing of normativity delineates a profound grief in Linda and Lowe that ultimately transforms them as actors. If the limits of language testify to suffering and even precarious mortality, it also harkens the implementation of subversive transformation through empathetic encounters.

3.1.2 Vulnerability

Butler contends that a critical approach to suffering has the capacity to reformulate our understanding of humanity. As a human trait and experience, unconditioned by physical or intellectual or social markers, and therefore inherent in all persons, suffering is always instigated by loss – loss of safety, love, belonging, home, comfort, or security. "Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all . . . each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies," Butler explains. In this way, "[l]oss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (20).[8] More often than not, however, the exposure to threat trumps all other considerations of others. If we are physically and socially vulnerable to other said vulnerable bodies, then it does not immediately make sense that our vulnerability incites alliance, empathy, and protection. In this, Butler turns to Levinas.

Any biologist or Freudian psychoanalyst will confirm that the primary purpose of living things is to survive, and thus survival becomes a universal biological instinct. In this way, a primary human instinct is to eliminate what could be a threat to you, what is not you. Levinas

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[8] Butler is cautious in her use of "vulnerability," as she recognizes that it can be used as an index to determine who qualifies human enough to be embraced humanitarianly. She concedes: "A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen. Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognized and that it will be constituted as 'unrecognizable,' but when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. In this sense, if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject" (42-3). Butler speaks to the persistent, reigning weakness of humanism as a literary theory and method. Perhaps more than any other critical approach, humanism must be handled with extreme care—it must always be positioned with counterarguments and caveats, otherwise it can quickly and quite easily be used against itself, conditioning the very thing it seeks to liberate (the human subject).

contends that the Other—the one that is not you—activates this instinct. Yet he argues that seeing "the face" of the Other creates a tension that wars against that kill instinct. This tension in one's psyche of fighting against the perceived need to kill the other is the kernel of the seed of ethics and empathy. In the opening of *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas explains the theoretical contours of the face: "The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill. I can wish. And yet this power is quite contrary to power. The triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill realizes itself, the other has escaped me . . . I have not looked at him in the face, I have not encountered his face" (9). It is in the tension of the desire to kill, "the temptation to murder and the interdiction against it," that the face can truly be recognized (Butler 139). "The temptation of total negation . . . this is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other face to face is to be unable to kill" (Levinas 9). In *The Pagoda*, Lowe exhibits a direct manifestation of the struggle to overcome the temptation of total negation. Increasingly threatened by Miss Sylvie's manservant, Omar (who not only knows Lowe's biological secret but also, it is revealed, destroyed Lowe's shop and has information to blackmail to Miss Sylvie), Lowe plots his elimination. Knife in hand, Lowe ambushes Omar early one morning, intent to eliminate the heavy anxieties of deception that Omar threatens to weaponize against Lowe and Miss Sylvie. Tackling Omar in a surprise attack, Lowe pins Omar on the ground, blade pressed intently at Omar's throat:

> 'What I do to you, man?' He pressed the point deeper into the soft hollow at the base of Omar's throat. 'What I do to you? The food you eat come from the shop there. And you burn it down . . . You so full of grudge and hate, you burn it down. Flat flat. Just now I should just cut off you blasted head and lean it up by the pot there. Just now I should just

slice off you blasted balls and feed them to the hogs. Just now. If you move, you blood

run like river this morning. Run like river.' (161)

Lowe desperately wants to kill Omar. Although he had been sharpening his knife and imagining his revenge for many nights, he does not go through with the murder. Lowe does not actualize his power to negate the Other. Something stops Lowe from following through with his fatal intention. What makes Lowe abandon violence to privilege mercy? What permits Lowe to see Omar as the face of the Other, rather than the threat to his survival that he had been up to this narrative scene? Butler leverages this shift from threat to mercy to position her call for empathy based on recognizing the precarity of the Other. She writes: "the face—which is the face of the Other, and so the ethical demand made by the Other—is that vocalization of agony that is not yet language or no longer language, the one by which we are wakened to the precariousness of the Other's life" (139). Butler notes that in Levinas's essay "Peace and Proximity," "the term 'face' operates as a catachresis" in that it refers to expressions in the human body that speak of vulnerability and pain (*Precarious* 133). Levinas describes a story of a line of political detainees in Moscow eagerly gathering to hear the latest news, "a line where one can only see the backs of others": "A woman awaits her turn: [she] had never thought that the human back could be so expressive . . . craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream" ("Peace" 167). Seeing the face of the Other, then, also requires an openness to perceive vulnerability.

Pinning Omar down, Lowe knows he has complete dominion over Omar's existence. Crying out in hot, vengeful anger, "plucking the blade into the warm soft skin, picking away at the flesh," Lowe feels "a jigger of blood" spurt into his hands and spread across Omar's chest (162). The morning remains quiet, a stark contrast to the intensity of the scene. Lowe becomes

aware that Omar understands his own mortal contingency that morning. He perceives Omar's vulnerability through his body when "Omar started to cry. No sounds at all, just the trembling stomach underneath Lowe's rump . . . his stomach chopped. And the heart battered against his shirt" (162). Seeing and feeling Omar as a breathing body, a life, though still a cruel and spiteful man, Lowe starts to think about what brought them to that scene of such harrowing power. Lowe "saw how they all were in this together . . . all together, some innocent, some not so innocent . . . And now here they were killing and killing and killing to cover up more deceptions, more lies. Here he was fighting Omar for land and for property that didn't even belong to them, that was still damp from prior bloodshed" (162). Recognizing the land they were on was already super saturated with the blood from slaves and imperial conquest, Lowe sees that they were all in a bloody web of subterfuge and evil—they all had lost and suffered and sinned and a tenuous "we" had been made of them all, together. Perceiving Omar's bare, corporeal vulnerability and recognizing the cry of agony that sliced through them all, Lowe "lifted his weight and released him" (162). Vulnerability expresses itself in the body in ways often unconscious of the person who harbors such strife. Nevertheless, that corporeal vulnerability is at once a demand and a plea, and it reconstitutes the addressee in the asking.

Levinas's notion of the face is revolutionary in that it defines a new sense of ethics based on engaging empathy activated by the desire for violence. Yet his thought teeters on the edge of being consumed by that which it means to destabilize: dehumanization, or what he thinks of as the ability to kill. Butler articulates this impasse through inquiry: "is the face humanizing in each and every instance? And if it is humanizing in some instances, in what form does this humanization occur, and is there also a dehumanization performed in and through the face?" (143). The issue here is that one must first be perceived—recognized to be in the metaphorical

line of people with pained backs—for vulnerability to be acknowledged, empathy incited, and the kill instinct quelled. Butler wonders if Levinasian faces end up becoming "images that, through their frame, produce the paradigmatically human, become the very cultural means through which the paradigmatically human is established" (143). In his monograph *The Problem with Levinas*, Simon Critchley extends Butler's critique into an assessment of the limits of philosophy itself, arguing that the "notion of totality is identical to the notion of philosophy— [that philosophy] is premised on the reduction of multiplicity to totality. Philosophy is based on the sameness of thinking and being that yields the conceivability of the All, of totality" (2). The issue, then, is not with Levinas's thinking per se, but in the very structure by which he operates. Critchley further clarifies, "It's not that Levinas is wrong, but what he's trying to do cannot be done *philosophically*. To try to speak philosophically about an experience of otherness is to always collapse the other into the same" (2).[9] Here again, this is where literature intervenes, or rather, shows itself to have always already paved the epistemological grounds for philosophy. What cannot be done philosophically, in other words, has already been imagined narratively.[10]

Through Levinas's example of a line of people all facing forward and through Butler's notion of framing the image of personhood, both philosophers suggest that perceiving the face of

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[9] In her work *For More Than One Voice*, Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero also highlights the limits of philosophy: "The philosophical tradition does not only ignore the uniqueness of the voice, but it also ignores uniqueness as such, in whatever mode it manifests itself . . . Uniqueness is epistemologically inappropriate" (9). In turn, Bonnie Honig leverages Cavarero's thought in her work on Antigone and tragedy ("Antigone's Two Laws" which she expanded into her book *Antigone, Interrupted*).

[10] I recognize that *The Pagoda* and *Bitter in the Mouth* do not chronologically precede Levinas's work in dates of publication, though Powell's novel does predate Butler's *Precarious Life* as does Truong's short story "Kelly," from which *Bitter in the Mouth* was born. What I mean in this statement is that literature is produced in an imaginative realm that philosophy does not equally access. In that they are not limited to accepted perceptual worlds, stories and storytelling, structurally, are inherently better equipped to perceive conditions and outcomes of possibility than any other study.

the Other occurs at a moment of actual, physical (or visual) proximity and bodily awareness of another person external to your own self. Powell provides a harrowing description of how violent that recognition can be. But I argue Truong offers an extension to how Levinas and Butler position an apprehension of vulnerability. *Bitter in the Mouth* provides the grounds to imagine how the Other—who is not you, who threatens your very life by their existence—also resides internally, within a single psyche, narratively portrayed through Linda's unusual linguistic relation to the world. "Food and taste metaphors were complicated for me," Linda explains, "By complicated I mean that they were of no use to me. They shed their figurative qualities, their diaphanous layers of meaning, and became concrete and explicit. They left me literal and naked" (102). The common use and meaning of words for Linda is nothing more than a masquerade. She cannot use spoken language to make collective meaning with others in a way that does not leave her vulnerable to the involuntary tastes that words trigger. Though there is another facet to how her vulnerable state is rendered. In her "literal and naked," precarious state, Linda "would lose [her] ability to absorb what was happening" wherein her "body would respond to the taste, whether pleasant or unpleasant, with a twitch or a tremor, or an expletive would escape from [her] mouth" (103). She has two warring experiential bodies – one that receives tastes unbidden and one that reacts without control. Linda's synesthesia effectively renders her as Other to herself.[11]

If language is understood to be a public tool for the understanding of private life, then language is critical to the process of self-knowledge in which language is often philosophically

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[11] An internalized doubling is not a new concept in critical race studies, of course. See W.E.B. DuBois's notion of double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

positioned as an arsenal and a gatekeeper of meaning.[12] It follows, then, that releasing language, releasing meaning, is a conscious decision of self-exposure to harm in that *one positions oneself as the unknown* and being unknowing, bereft of meaning. It is an example of the Other within oneself and it opens oneself to fear and anxiety. Linda felt this dynamic as a young girl, even if she did not fully understand it then. Linda describes the intense feeling of precarity she experienced when she started to understand that her relation to words made her into someone other than who she was in her public world. This other version of herself—the version that *wanted* to hear words for their taste, not their meaning, and to revel in the pleasures of their sweet and savory qualities first in her mouth and then through the rest of her body as the words digested—was incommensurate with the process of growing up and engaging her community in the ways expected of her. This other version of Linda threatened her in that it laid her bare to a different world in which she was utterly alone. Linda reflects on her ontological linguistic rupture in the following passage:

> I too had to disregard the meanings of the words if I wanted to enjoy what the words could offer me. At first, the letting go of meaning was a difficult step for me to take, like loosening my fingers from the side of a swimming pool for the very first time. The world suddenly became vast and fluid. Anything could happen to me as I drifted toward the deep end of the pool. But without words, resourceful and revealing, who would know of the dangers that I faced? I would be defenseless. I would drown . . . Maybe our first words all had the same meaning: Save me! A plea that, if answered, reinforced our desire

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[12] While the context of language being the gatekeeper of meaning falls outside of the intention of this chapter, these canonical philosophers of language are useful referents: Wittgenstein (on private realms), Saussure (linguistic sign and signification), Foucault (political use), Fanon and Spivak (language as site of oppression).

to acquire more, to amass a vocabulary that could be our arsenal against the unknown

terrors of life. To let go of meaning was to allow for the possibility that words didn't hold

within them this promise of salvation. Or, because of my misuse of the words, I alone

wouldn't be saved. (74)

To be sure, Linda played with mild attempts to annihilate that other version of herself, within

herself. In middle school, she smoked heavily, dulling her taste senses. In high school, she

dressed in head-to-toe black, slugged around in heavy shitkicker boots and wore heavy dark

makeup to ensure few people would approach her for casual conversation. In college, she had a

lot of sex with partners she did not know well—"sex overrode the incomings entirely. The

multiple and multiplying sensations of the body demanded all of my attention," Linda explains

(154)—and drank heavily. But none of these tactics eliminated the Other within herself. Again

expanding beyond the structural limits of philosophy, Linda's moment of being awakened to the

precariousness of the Other does not follow the procedural map described by Levinas and Butler.

Instead, Linda sees the face of the Other within herself as a reflection through Baby Harper's

eyes. In her final year of high school, after one of their weekly dinner dates, Linda and Baby

Harper have a confessional conversation. Baby Harper tells Linda that he was in love with his

brother-in-law, her adoptive father, Thomas. Linda reveals to Baby Harper that she was molested

and raped as a girl by the yard boy, her cousin Bobby. Sitting together on Baby Harper's divan,

they were on a home-base of safety, even though "[s]pinning around us was more than one circle

of grief. Like the rings of Saturn, the circles weren't solid and were composed of many shattered

things" (117). But on the divan, they could allow themselves to be absolutely bare and

vulnerable to one another, exposing their heaviest secrets. Linda reflects deeply on this exposure

and precarity, noting how their suffering cemented their solidarity with one another: "My great-

uncle said that there was no shame worse than silence . . . He mourned for what had been stolen from me . . . The crime was the taking away of my right to choose. Included in this grief was Baby Harper's right to choose. He lived through my body in many ways" (120). Linda sees how difficult it is for Baby Harper to carry her pain—not because he is not strong enough to endure it, but because seeing her vulnerability and suffering compounds his own. Linda recognizes this because she, too, feels that near-paralyzing grief through him as he mourns his lost love. She sees that "[i]ncluded in his grief were the hidden rooms of his life," those doors revealed and slightly cracked open (121). In reflecting and experiencing each other's pain, they recognize the precarity of the Other and hail its ethical demand. Linda's own Other within herself comes to the fore as Baby Harper sees its "face," reflecting back to Linda her Levinasian self. Too, Baby Harper teaches Linda how to withstand such intense pain, knowing since she first came to his family that her burden of grief would be great enough to break her. "He told me that hurt was bad enough and that I should never add loneliness to it. That's why we get together and dance, he said. I didn't understand until then what my great-uncle had been teaching me since our earliest days together. We got together and moved our bodies because it exorcized our pain" (121). For Linda, that moment of exposure with Baby Harper was ultimately an instance of suffering transformed into strength through empathetic connection to one another.

3.1.3   Framing the Vulnerable

We may all be able to admit to being vulnerable to varying degrees, yet rarely do we have such dramatic encounters like Lowe's near-murdering of Omar or Linda's estranging synesthesia to snap our focus to the precarity of others. The people we come to know and how we come to know other people increasingly is fostered through digital and visually-based platforms (rather than physical platforms). Encountering the Other and being in the position to "see" the "face" of

the other is not only a one-on-one event – it is commonly mediated and distilled through news reports, clickability, and ideologies that garner attention. Our first apprehension of another person is often through an image; this image is always framed, and that framed image of the Other is the central mechanism of humanization and dehumanization. The power of framing does not solely fall in the purview of that mediation, however. Butler explains that the issue with framing is not what image is framed, but rather the viewer's skill at discerning how the frame functions. She argues that "[t]he media's evacuation of the human through the image has to be understood . . . in terms of the broader problem that *normative schemes of intelligibility* establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death" (146, my emphasis). In these laudable and necessary efforts to define and dismantle the racialization of ethnic-minority subjectivities, at times critique has collapsed into framing, which in turn calcifies identities so that they can be judged in their "humanness" and therefore worth.[13]

Butler contends that there are "two distinct forms of normative power" that siphon the intelligibility of framing. The first form "operates through producing a symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene." Perception is narrowed and swayed, as this normative power articulates "something that has already emerged into the realm of appearance [and] needs to be disputed as recognizably human." The second form of normative power "works through radical effacement, so that there never was a human, there never was a life, and no murder has, therefore, ever taken place." It is a type of erasure in which "the public realm of appearance is itself constituted on the basis of the exclusion of that image." Butler argues that it is the critics' task "to establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of

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[13] See Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (2003).

appearance, a sphere in which the trace of the cry has become hyperbolically inflated to

rationalize a gluttonous nationalism, or fully obliterated, where both alternatives turn out to be

the same" (147). We must not only ask who fits in the frame of being human, but we must also

consider how that frame is built and how it conditions both what we are visually exposed to and

our ontological ability to "see the face" of the image, of the Levinasian Other.

    Bitter in the Mouth has been critically lauded for how it brings two common themes in

the contemporary literary studies—race and region—into new light in a remarkably simple way,

as the narrative places its Vietnamese protagonist in the U.S. South. While this juxtaposition may

initially seem one-dimensional (after all, a narrative should not get a gold star just for upsetting

stereotypes), scholarly work on the novel has nonetheless largely focused on said juxtaposition.[14]

As Denise Cruz remarks, "the regional forms of *Bitter in the Mouth* offer a new epistemology of

race and region that compels us to reexamine the primacy of the national in the creation of

politicized identities and communities—manifested in either the US nation-state's imperial or

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[14] See, for example: Jennifer Brandt's "Taste as Emotion: The Synesthetic Body in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*"; Amanda Dykema's "Embodied Knowledges: Synesthesia and the Archive in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*"; and Michele Janette's "'Distorting Overlaps': Identity as Palimpset in *Bitter in the Mouth*." Scholars have been correct to analyze how the novel extends beyond the tidiness of being a case study of American Southern nationalism just as it elides the mythic single-story of South Asian immigrants. Denise Cruz writes, "the novel highlights imperial histories of pain and violence that tie South Vietnam to the US South" and that the national political history weighs on how Linda navigates American institutions (729). It is clear that the political dictates Linda's life, especially in the part of the novel that features Linda's backstory. But the imperial history of pain and violence between the U.S. and Vietnam that Cruz cites is not actually reflected in the novel through Linda's perception of her world. Although Linda's narrative may gesture toward a broader recognition of the historical racial background of imperialism, Linda herself does not engage this trajectory. Truong's refusal to root her story through the context of the U.S. and Vietnam War is, I think, one of the strongest Asian Americanist stances that literature can take in our contemporary moment. Linda's silence on her national origins parallels the portrayal of U.S. imperialism as a mere bitter aftertaste in the novel's structure: although present, it does not drive the novel's narrative arc.

domestic violence, or the rubrics of ethnic cultural nationalism," encouraging readers to "resist the dominant structures of racial visibility and heteronormative affiliations that have determined the terms of national belonging in the US" and in doing so "pointedly questions our ability to represent race and racialized subjectivities at all" (720, 718, 721).[15] This point is crucial, given that in the historical cultural imagination of the United States, ethnicity and race have been perceived through Western codes of Otherness and on the terms of socio-political powers based on whiteness. Scholars have rightly focused on the ways synesthesia reflects a more nuanced analysis of racial and regional politics. Yet I read this scholarly approach to be unintentionally engaging the pitfalls of the framing process that Butler describes.[16]

One of the novel's most powerful counterforces to heteronormative terms of national belonging is its iterations of empathetic humanism – when Linda is seen for her vulnerability and capacity to suffer, not for the way she mismatches the looks of her guardians or how she is perceived by her southern neighbors. A poignant scene about half way through the novel exposes the complicated contours of race dynamics in the fictive rendering of the small town of Boiling Springs. In the following extended excerpt, Linda reflects on her racial place and visibility in her community when she was a girl:

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[15] To readers from the discipline of Asian American studies, this statement may read as obvious as it is generally accepted that Asian American identities are not just politicized, rather they *are political* creations. In their contribution to the recent publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimikawa explain that "Asian American" is a name created through legal and political maneuvering: "it is a sociopolitical identity that does not precede and then simply become available to manipulation by the law but is instead one that is constituted by and through it" (30).

[16] Michele Janette's "Alternative Historical Tetherings" is an important exception to my critique of much of the scholarship that engages *Bitter* to date. In this article, Janette argues that Truong writes against the overdeterminations of the Vietnam War faced by Vietnamese American writers, purposefully denying her narrative arc to be fastened to militaristic destructions or exclusive nationalisms.

I was still taken aback, startled, I suppose, that it was the outside of me that so readily

defined me as not being from here (New Haven, New York, New World) nor there (the

South). How could I explain to them that from the age of seven to eighteen, there was

nothing Asian about me except my body, which I had willed away and few in Boiling

Springs seemed to see anyway.

If Boiling Springs had been a larger town, it wouldn't have been possible. But

Boiling Springs wasn't. The dwindling population there was small and insular enough to

behave as one microorganism. These were the adults of Boiling Springs . . . More

specifically, these were the white men and women of Boiling Springs . . .

There was, of course, a parallel adult world in my hometown that I came into

contact with, but only in passing. These black men and women knew of me too,

especially the women. When DeAnne would take me with her to the Piggly Wiggly or to

Hudson's department store, the women who worked there looked at me with eyes that

always made me feel uncomfortable. These women actually saw me, and what they

wondered about me—why one of my own hadn't taken me in—made their hearts tender.

I learned early on not to meet their eyes, dark and deep as a river. If I saw them, I would

have to see myself. I didn't want a mirror. I wanted a blank slate. (169-170)

While black Southern women saw Linda, she was just a blind spot to almost all other townsfolk

(i.e. the white population of Boiling Springs). This scene is not key because it showcases two

racial minorities visually encountering one another, showing a sort of sliding-scale of color, but

rather because of the recognition of social vulnerability and the attendant capacity to suffer that

occurs in that witnessing: "These women *actually saw* me," Linda says, "their hearts tender" (my

emphasis). Granted, this moment is fleeting, and both Linda and the black women presumably do

not break stride to acknowledge their shared encounter of racial Otherness but rather continue to perform the roles that was normal for their society. Their intimate, silent encounter was a product of their unwilled adjacency, nothing more. And yet this glance, which evokes such tenderness and reciprocal raw self-awareness, is made possible in this particular scene by virtue of both parties being racial minorities. It is their race that promotes a more generous consideration of the subject under the racial stereotype. Truong acknowledges the limitations of interracial revelations as all parties ultimately retreat to normalized racial roles, but this gesture is not a disappearance of race. Instead, I read this scene with an extra dose of generosity as an unburdening of stymied reflections of racialized bodies.

However, there is a catch: Truong also places her reader in the stance of seeing with empathetic, tender hearts, because she does not expose Linda to be an adopted Vietnamese girl until right before this interracial scene. There are slight, covert allusions to Linda's racial difference in the first half of the novel, but the first-time reader is undoubtedly surprised when, at the mid-point in the narrative, Linda's full legal name is revealed: Linh-Dao Nguyen Hammerick. The revelation of Linda's history issues forth a revised understanding of Linda's place within the novel. Linda is not just an adopted girl, she is an immigrant foreigner, displaced and orphaned by traumatic familial and national tragedies. The reader now understands Linda to be an adoptee and a stranger in a multitude of ways: in the home of Thomas and DeAnne, under the surname of Hammerick, in the town of Boiling Springs, in the use of the English language, through the tastes of the U.S. South, and in the country of the United States.

Truong's narrative play in revealing Linda's racial ancestry is a benevolent checkmate to her readers as she exposes their own unconscious assumptions about race as a defining feature of place and belonging. And as Butler reminds us, representation is often dictated by assumptions

of "who counts" in the category of human. She writes, "When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized" (141). And, most importantly for this unique scene of interracial framing, Butler adds, "those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all" (141). Recalling the black townsfolk's "dark and deep as a river" gaze, the reader becomes aware of the empathetic humanism that Truong fosters between the reader and Linda and how the text becomes a self-reflective mirror: readers not only "really see" Linda, but also "really see" themselves.

Baby Harper also sees Linda with the same trueness and tenderness, though through a very different lens than the black townspeople of Boiling Springs. Baby Harper is a solitary, though adoring figure in Linda's life when she was growing up. A "perpetual bachelor," he always lived close-by to his older sister, Linda's grandmother, Iris. As a hobby, Baby Harper takes egregious amounts of photos of things he finds beautiful – his family, primarily, and the natural landscapes around him. Linda recalls Baby Harper milling around every family event with at least two cameras hanging on his neck. Baby Harper documents intimate, un-posed details of the family: an unevenly worn shoe, a mouth open wide in uproarious laughter, eyes creased downward in annoyance, or a naked earlobe missing its pearl earring. "Baby Harper was always there to document us, but because he never allowed anyone to take his place behind the camera nor bothered with a tripod, he was never documented," explains Linda (41). "By excluding himself, he ensured that our official history was a false one. Or, at least, an incomplete one. He never hid that fact from me. My great-uncle always suggested that his photographs weren't to be trusted, that the real points of interest were elsewhere" (41). A meticulous and

thorough cataloguer of his work, Baby Harper has seemingly endless volumes of photo albums, all of which he shares with Linda. Every week after their dinner date they sit down on his luxurious teal green velvet divan and look at the photo books, Baby Harper narrating the context of each captured moment. In this way, Baby Harper ensures that Linda "truly sees" her family, too, teaching her another empathetic iteration of seeing the Other.

Through his photos, Baby Harper bears witness to his family by compiling evidence to attest everyone's frail and flawed humanity and to keep them all honest in what they are. Despite, or perhaps because of, his penchant for the visual, Baby Harper understands that the image of oneself that the world sees, the image that becomes framed, to use Butler's term (whether it be sexuality, race, gender, age, or upbringing) is just a cloak of conditions demanded to be donned to minimize social vulnerability. Linda realizes Baby Harper's deeper insight when, as an adult, she goes through a set of secret albums he sent her, all self-portraits of him beautifully dressed in women's style clothing. Linda remarks, "the existence of these albums disproved my long-held beliefs that Baby Harper disliked being photographed … that he was uncomfortable in his own skin. As it turned out, my great-uncle Harper was uncomfortable only in his day-to-day clothes" (204). When Baby Harper shares that other, truer aspect of himself, he does so to give Linda another frame of perception. He exposes himself in his cross-dressing, consciously deciding to embrace the larger risk of social vulnerability (even if he was confident that Linda would love him all the more for it) in order to subvert the normative power form that made him publicly conscribe to appropriate displays of his body (by wearing acceptable clothes for his age, sex, and region) or erase himself out of the frame by omission (by always keeping himself behind the camera). The moment Linda sees those photos, she revises her frame of Baby Harper and the world at large; and it is in that moment Baby Harper's cross-dressing becomes

not only an act of subversion (in the doing), but also one of agency (in the sharing) and joy (in the receiving).

Through Baby Harper we see how the frame of (de)humanization is akin to the boxes of identity that Butler argues to expose. For Lowe, this entire process occurs internally. He constructs his frame of being a man, husband, and business owner so completely for so many decades he forgets that he buys into the normative power apparatus of gender. After his shop burns down and he is forced to contemplate what his life has become, Lowe slowly perceives the frame he created for himself when he was just a girl. Refocused, Lowe realizes that "[t]here seemed to be no ending whatsoever to the masquerade. The layers just seemed to pile up more or harden" (106). Similar to Linda recognizing the Other within herself as invoked through her synesthesia, Lowe comes to see that, through his masculine self-framing, he also has created his own sense of otherness. When he decides to release his piles of masquerades he too feels adrift in the deep end of unknowingness, unsecure, his vulnerability exposed to all. The night Lowe decides to break his frame of self, "he locked and bolted the door and hid the keys . . . he took off his boots, caked with mud, and the wet socks and left them outside the door. He hung his hat among the others on the peg on the wall. He peeled away that bristly mustache and vowed never to wear the disgusting thing again" (82). Lowe literally sees the face of the Other which is his bared self—the self that was sold as a bride to pay a debt, the self that was raped and held prisoner on a ship, the self that bore a beautiful daughter, the self that threatened his ability to live—for the first time in over forty years. "Piece by piece he undressed, with care and without haste, laying the accoutrements of his masquerade on the dresser . . . That night he carried the face of a person who had suffered a hundred indignities and betrayals" (82). Lowe had always known that his Chinese compatriots were saddened and ashamed of their status amongst the

black and white populations on the island because they were there by the betraying hands of their own people and "[i]t seemed as if nothing could be as bad as that, as bad as being sold to this bondage by your own" (45). But the indignities and betrayals he sees on his exposed face have little to do with the disgraceful, liminal status of his race. Instead, he sees in his face that he has suffered his survival, and then became complacent with it. Eventually, he presents himself to the public shed from his masculine persona in small, incremental details:

> He couldn't pinpoint exactly when he began to discover that he liked things of flowing silk and neat lines, when his appreciation for subtle colors instead of dark solemn ones crept up on him. He did not know when he began growing fussy over the quality and tone of cloth, about the cut of trousers, the cascade of their fall on his thin limbs . . . The black felt hat he wore in the evenings to prevent cold from seeping into his head and giving him pneumonia was now exchanged for a wide brimmed straw with a blue ribbon. He decided that he liked the touch of color, that it added an air of distinction to his sallow face. He no longer soaked his neck with sandalwood, for all of a sudden its pungent bite was no longer odorous, and so he daubed drops of oleander and hibiscus and other scents he'd remembered from Joyce's embrace. (165-66)

This passage does not indicate some return a feminized female form. As Butler contends, the demand "for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance," yet "it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed" (146). Rather, as Lowe sheds his masculine identity, he embraces materials that foreground a life of pleasure (albeit cautioned and sporadic), as opposed to his previous existence comprised solely of suffering. It may seem convenient to read Lowe as adopting a gendered standard of his biological sex, but that would

only play back into a structure of normative power that his newfound pleasure of aesthetics actually undermines. Continuing Butler's argument, we must conscientiously foreground the fact that "reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers" (146). And that, I argue, is precisely what Lowe does in his choice to use feminized aesthetics to expose and challenge the frame of representation that has conditioned his body and being, and, in that subversion, cultivates joy.

3.2 Joy

This chapter has taken its primary direction from Butler's perspective of humanism defined through suffering and vulnerability. She is in part responding to an earlier posited antihumanism rooted in a Nietzschean nihilism. "But are these the only options?" asks Bonnie Honig in her use of Butler's theory. "A humanism of universal or principled suffering versus an antihumanism of death-driven, desiring monstrosity?" (*Antigone, Interrupted* 19). Honig does not suggest that Butler's mortalist humanism is wrong, or even flawed. Rather, she offers another entry approach that compliments Butler's work. The third option is what Honig thinks of as an "agonistic humanism." Honig cites Wittgenstein and Ranciere as situating us to theorize a humanism "that sees in mortality, suffering, sound, and vulnerability resources for some form of enacted universality, but also sees these as no less various in their significations than are the diverse languages that unite and divide us" (*Antigone, Interrupted* 19). While those listed experiences and feelings may be universally accessible to humans, how they are perceived and received are not universal experiences. Once that distinction starts to disintegrate, the goal of humanism to establish basic grounds of ethical conduct is lost. "Moreover," Honig continues, "agonistic humanism is not centered on mortality and suffering; it draws as well on natality and pleasure, power not just powerless, desire not just principle, in quest of a politics that is not

reducible to an ethics nor founded on finitude" (*Antigone, Interrupted* 19). Averting the antihumanist approach that defines itself as a retaliatory opposition to ethics, Honig instead seeks the counter position to mortality. She considers the idea of natality and builds on the concept from the philosophy of Hannah Ardent. Leveraging Ardent's third human condition that is based on natality, commonly referred to as "Arendtian action," Honig counters Butler's position of primarily locating humanist potential in violence, vulnerability, and mourning and argues that "a natal's pleasure-based counter to grief that supplements solidarity forged in sorrow and points in the direction of generative action rather than ruminative reflection or ethical orientation" ("Antigone's Two Laws" 9). Importantly, natality's pleasure is supplemental, not alternative, to grief. The two universal experiences—perhaps the only two experiences that are actually universal, inevitably experienced by every human throughout history—are not just used to define one another in opposition to the other. Rather, I read the two experiences sharing common meaning: "suffer" is a closely related, if not synonymous, term to both "natality" and "mortality." The Proto-Indo-European root of the infinitive verb "to suffer" is *bher*, meaning to bear, to carry. Etymologically, then, "suffer" connotes an enduring of pain, but also a bringing forth, a mortality and a natality. It makes certain sense that we can locate empathetic humanism in both precarity and jubilation.

Joy, laughter, and pleasure are all viable harbingers humanism, complementary to and contingent on suffering. For example, Baby Harper and Linda laugh and dance together, partly for the sheer delight of feeling joy in their bodies, and partly to strengthen themselves to bear their pain. Linda remarks, "I never thought it contradictory that the man who taught me how to do the Watsui, arms swinging, hips thrusting, hair flying, would find pleasure inside of a funeral home. Joy and grief were physical in nature, and Baby Harper was a man capable of appreciating

both" (152). Locating these empathetic qualities of joy and grief in the body, Linda knows that they herald, not oppose, one another, just as she and Baby Harper reflect the Other back to one another through their empathetic gaze. In this view, the story can now be seen not only as one of family, place, and identity, but also as what the first lines of the text proclaim itself to be – a love story. "I fell in love with my great-uncle Harper because he taught me how to dance," Linda confesses in the first lines of the novel. "He said that rhythm was allowing yourself to feel your blood coursing through you. He told me to close my eyes and forget the rest of my body. I did, and we bopped our nonexistent selves up and down and side to side . . . We twisted, mashed-potatoed, and winked at each other whenever we opened our eyes. My great-uncle Harper was my first love. I was seven years old. In his company, I laughed out loud" (3).

Surprisingly, Linda never discloses her synesthesia to Baby Harper. As readers, we never question Baby Harper's faith and devotion to Linda—surely, he would have believed her, supported her struggle, and celebrated her otherworldly transference of senses—but her condition remained unrevealed between them. This is not some burdensome, dark secret Linda keeps against Baby Harper though; rather, he simply did not need to know about it. He perceived and accepted her vulnerability despite not knowing the specifics of her synethesia, and that was enough. As Linda explains, "my great-uncle, the singing-talker, never knew the taste of my name. I never told him because my secret sense wasn't an issue when I was with him. As he would say, I was right as rain when I was with him. When we were together, he was right as rain too" (Truong 114).

As in *Bitter in the Mouth*, *The Pagoda* also ultimately depicts joy through suffering as way of articulating humanism. Lowe seeks his neighbor Joyce to learn how sex can be pleasurable in his body, rewriting how it had been used as a tool of control and power (by Cecil

when he was repeatedly raped), or as payment for a service (through the social stability Miss Sylvie offers through her light skin and money) or to satisfy a debt (to his betrothed in China). Going over to Joyce's house late one evening, Lowe seeks a warm companionship. Knowing that it would cause scandal if Joyce's husband saw Lowe pursuing Joyce, he sneaks through her yard to try to peer into her window. When her guard dogs run out, he sprints to the other side of the yard fence, scraping and bruising himself in his scramble. Alerted to the commotion outside, and somehow half expecting Lowe to be making his way to her anyway, Joyce calls off her dogs and ushers Lowe inside to tend to him: "She uncorked the vial again and began to spread the ointment on the cuts one by one; he savored again the gentle touch" (154). Honoring the pain he had undergone to get to her, which she knows goes much deeper than the surface scratches he acquired in the bushes, she tends his vulnerability with care and affection. Joyce "leaned over him and her breasts rested on his chin, sometimes on his neck . . . she pressed even deeper in those places that produced the sweetest pleasure" (154). Lowe allows himself to be completely exposed to Joyce—she removes his clothes when she settles him to rest and sleep through his pain, confirming that Lowe is biologically female. But his exposure ends up being a comfort to both of them. His secret becomes subversive and joyful with the aptly named Joyce. Knowing that Joyce was only half-surprised when his sex was revealed to her, Lowe asks how she knew his secret. "'I could just tell'," Joyce replies, causing Lowe a moment of panic, wondering if he was as transparent to everyone else as he was to Joyce. Again anticipating his fear, Joyce quickly follows-up:

"But most people would never notice a thing as that," she said.

"No?" He so badly wanted to believe her.

"No," she said, and touched him again with the soft hands. He relaxed.

"It was because of the way you laugh," she said.

"Laugh," he cried, cover his mouth and making a mental note never to laugh again.

"It was such a beautiful shy undercover laugh," she said. "As if you holding something back." She was massaging him again. "And I thought, What could Mr. Lowe be holding back? And I just decided it was that. It wasn't anything in you clothes or you gestures."

(153)

Interestingly, there is no scene in the novel in which Lowe laughs – indeed, the greatest joy he allows himself, the building of the pagoda, is secreted away and carefully guarded, capable as it is of being turned into a poisonous bite of disappointment. But the fact that Joyce recalls and is so considerate of moments of seeing Lowe in merriment suggests that she has been receptive of his vulnerability for decades. In a similar way, the most powerful rendering of humanism based on jubilance in the novel is shown through Lowe's greatest heartache, his fraught relationship with his daughter Liz. Throughout the novel Lowe goes through fits and starts of writing a letter to Liz to confess his history of deception and her true parentage. Only at the end of the story is Lowe able to put steady hand to paper. In the closing pages of the novel, Lowe tells Liz about her own precarity as an infant and how she suffered it. Writing Liz, he explains:

Did I ever tell you you never wanted to live? You took one look at the world and it mashed you. For one whole year, you hung on by just a thread . . . It was the customers that brought you back . . . The men who talked stories to you, though they were black-up with rum. Still they put you on their knees and sang rum songs to you . . . You remember that? How they wrapped your little soft hands in their rough chapped-up ones and clapped? They were the ones brought you back to life those early days when you weren't certain you should stay. Especially if it was just going to be me and you, me and you

solely. But it must have been with those songs that you decided maybe you could laugh.

(243-44)

Working endless hours in the shop when they first arrived on the island, Lowe recognizes the sense of natality and life force in his infant daughter when local townsmen made her giggle and delight. Through Liz, Lowe ensures that the violations and suffering he endured are transformed into something much more powerful than his abuse: the ability and freedom of laughter. The fact that Lowe perceives his daughter being wooed into life through laughter marks this memory as redemptive and situates it within empathetic humanism. Although Lowe cannot fully embrace actual jubilation (he can accept and even revel in pleasure, but he never reaches a state of pure joy), he can recognize it and wish it for his daughter, whom he loves much more than himself.

Ultimately, this chapter has worked to dig into the underbelly of the human condition by articulating an mortalist humanism through expressions of suffering, and its counterpart, joy. Suffering works to embody the subject with agency that rejects structures of logic and Reason, thereby subverting Western notions of humanity. In turn, these subjects are able to open themselves to pleasure and joy in ways that were previously inaccessible. Exploring narrative scenes in which suffering expands the frame of humanity and incites mercy and jubilation, both novels feature protagonists who purposefully corrode and conflate their identities as a way of becoming agents of their subjectivities. Shedding their masquerade of survival, they subvert their suffering of violation and displacement and transform it into vestiges of delight, locating their agency not in reason or knowing, but rather as a form of embodied empathy, in and through their bodies.

Chapter Four, "'Wound Intricately throughout my Sphere': Spatial Subjectivity in

Through the Arc of the Rain Forest," originally appeared in *Racial Ecologies*, edited by

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4   "WOUND INTRICATELY THROUGHOUT MY SPHERE":

SPATIAL SUBJECTIVITY IN *THROUGH THE ARC OF THE RAIN FOREST*

> So, reader, join us as we ramble through these worlds of wonder.
> —Jakob von Uexküll
> *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men*
> (1934)

> The challenge to our civilization, which has come from our knowledge of the cosmic energies that fuel the stars, the movement of light and electrons through matter, the intricate molecular order which is the biological basis of life, must be met by the creation of a moral and political order which will accommodate these forces or we shall be destroyed. It will try our deepest resources of reason and compassion.
> —Heinz Pagels
> *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature*
> (1982)

In the grand narrative of the United States, nature has historically been used as an ideological device of building the nation "from sea to shining sea" to be the home of the God-fearing free and the liberated brave. So when Japanese American author Karen Tei Yamashita published her first novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* in 1990, in which she locates her story in the depths of Brazil and questions the very nature of what is "natural," she radically opened the genre of Asian American literature to question its conventional focus on U.S. nationalism. [1] Often categorized as magical realism, Yamashita's work consciously transnationalizes her critique of capital, corporation, culture, community, technology, and environment as she narratively weaves her fictional world. At the heart of Yamashita's narrative is ecology, in that it can be read as an intimate study of living beings and their environment.

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[1] Yamashita's oeuvre has received much critical attention for disrupting U.S.-centered discourses of American Studies and transnationalism. See Chuh, "Of Hemispheres and Other Spheres: Navigating Karen Tei Yamashita's Literary World."

Bringing together the characters of the novel is the mysterious appearance of the "Matacão," a massive polymer land substance, which egresses from the depths of the earth's core in the Amazon rainforest. Upon its discovery, the Matacão material is soon found to be highly transformable and lucratively manipulated. As described mid-way through the novel, "When the means of molding and shaping this marvelous material was finally discovered, the possibilities were found to be infinite. Matacão plastic could be molded into forms more durable and impenetrable than steel; it was harder than diamonds and, at the same time, could be spread out in thin sheets, as thin as tissue paper with the consistency of silk" (142). The Matacão is quickly made into an industry, not just a material: "In the next few years, Matacão plastic would infiltrate every crevice of modern life—plants, facial and physical remakes and appendages, shoes, clothing, jewelry, toys, cars, every sort of machine from electro-domestic to high-tech, buildings, furniture—in short, the myriad of commercial products with which the civilized world adorns itself" (143). As such, it became "a national monument—no, an international monument" (113), and its immense material capital could only be outweighed by its cultural capital. *Through the Arc* presents the natural in uncertain, unstable terms: as the polymer material, the Matacão is manipulated as an object to promote capitalistic, intellectual, religious, and mythical global pursuits that undergird nationalisms; yet as a *space*, the Matacão is constituted as a series of intermingling relations between humans, organisms, sentient beings, things, and beliefs that engage a subject formation process untethered to the Western yoke of nature and nation. While the term "space" commonly carries connotations of distance, interval, or area, this chapter advocates a more nuanced approach to the noun.[2] Rather than conveying disconnection or

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[2] For the complete etymology and definitional use of "space," see its entry in the Oxford English Dictionary.

blankness as traditionally employed, I argue that that perceived void is actually full of emanant

relational capacities that resist mutative impulses of Western doctrines of subjectivity. "Space" is

not empty, it is emergent. This particular sense of space is what I call "spatial subjectivity,"

which the following sections of this chapter work to elaborate.

I argue that if we perceive nature as a space that both is itself a subject and engenders

subjectivities, rather than as a rhetorical nation-building object, then we can work through covert

mechanisms of oppression in radically productive ways. The concepts of nature and ecology as

framed in Yamashita's work make available a perspective of Others receiving Others

unconditioned to the category of the Western construction of human/Man. In other words, by

removing the human as the central object of analysis, the humane transpires and the

subjectivities of those historically considered less than human comes into sharp focus. My

proposal engages what Asian Americanist Kandice Chuh defines in her book *Imagine Otherwise*

as "subjectless discourse," which works to destabilize the structures in which subjects are only

permitted their subjectivity by "conforming to certain regulatory matrices" such as race or nation

(9). Writing some thirteen years prior to Chuh's publication, Yamashita attends to the mire of

constituting identity via nationalism.[3] The novel provides ample nationalistic rhetoric and tropes

that could easily be used as bases of identity; but rather than situating subjects through national

alignments, Yamashita imagines inter-relational subjectivities brought forth through the Matacão

(which, notably, is itself outside of national jurisdictions).

To clarify how the space of the Matacão engenders subjectivities, I incorporate Estonian

ecologist Jakob von Uexküll's notion of the "Umwelt," defined by theorist Giorgio Agamben as

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[3] While I focus Yamashita's critique of nationalism through her positioning of the natural, it
should be noted that race-based identity formation is tightly wound into constructions of nation.
See Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the U.S.* for further discussion on this matter.

"an infinite variety of [individual] perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together as if in a gigantic musical score" (40). *Through the Arc* exemplifies Uexküll's theory when read as a series of intermingling Umwelten. A subject, then, *is* its sets of relations to other entities, and can not only be human or nonhuman, but can also be space itself—represented in Yamashita's text by the Matacão—thereby engaging my notion of spatial subjectivity. This chapter employs Yamashita's novel to weave together the ecological and social theories that Uexküll and Chuh articulate and demonstrate not only how the merging of these two theories how forms the conceptual foundation of spatial subjectivity, but also how it plays out in fictional form. As a theoretical approach, spatial subjectivity privileges the ways that space constitutes relations between beings, things, and ideas; as an analytical practice, spatial subjectivity incites an acknowledgment of agency that resides in the webs of such relations. When space is understood as both subject and constituter of subjectivities, it disrupts Western ideologies that traditionally locate agency in Man or man-made institutions.

While nationalism certainly can be a method of social solidarity, its cohesive practice is also inherently an exclusionary one, which is what Yamashita narratively works to counter. Western ideologies have historically been promoted through a participation in and allegiance to nationalisms, an understanding of non-Western subject formation is ultimately a theory of liberation beyond the reach and scope of nation-based methodology and meaning. And this alternate understanding of subject formation is what, at its heart, spatial subjectivity seeks to do. Yamashita's novel asks us to extend our conception of the subject beyond the human, destabilizing an anthropocentric worldview. As spatial subjectivity functions outside this worldview, it directly participates in Chuh's call for subjectless discourse, and provides the

analytical opportunity to incorporate Uexküll's Umwelt as a framing device. As it resides at the intersection of critical race and ecological discourses, spatial subjectivity reconceptualizes the very domain of viable subjectivity, promoting a framework of social (and, for that matter, ecological) justice.

4.1   Nationalism and the narrative of the (un)viable subject

In the final pages of *Through the Arc*, the funeral procession of a young Brazilian spiritual leader, Chico Paco, is described. Accidentally caught in an assassin's line of fire, Chico Paco's death is a shock to his followers and the world. They move him from the site of his death, deep in the rainforest, back to his hometown on the northern sea coast of Brazil. The mourners' trek is hundreds of miles; they carry their leader through the manifold ecologies of the variegated country:

> Retracing Chico Paco's steps, the mourners passed hydro-electric plants, where large dams had flooded and displaced entire towns. They passed mining projects tirelessly exhausting the treasures of iron, manganese and bauxite. They passed a gold rush, losing a third of the procession to the greedy furor. They crossed rivers and encountered fishing fleets, nets heavy with their exotic river catch of manatee, *pirarucú*, *piramatuba*, *mapara*. They crowded to the sides of the road to allow passage for trucks and semis bearing timber, Brazil nuts and rubber. They passed burning and charred fields recently cleared and parted for frantic zebu cattle, long horns flailing and stampeding toward new pastures. They passed black-pepper-tree plantations farmed by immigrant Japanese. They passed surveyors and engineers accompanied by excavators, tractors and power saws of every description. They passed the government's five-year plans and ten-year plans, while all the forest's splendid wealth seemed to be rushing away ahead of them. They

passed through the old territorial hideouts of rural guerrillas, trampling over unmarked

graves and forgotten sites of strife and massacre. And when the rains stopped, they knew

they had passed into northeast Brazil's drought-ridden terrain, the sun-baked earth

spreading out from smoldering asphalt, weaving erosion through the landscape. (210)

Yamashita lyrically highlights a brutal double entendre: while the procession mourns the loss of

their spiritual guide, they are confronted with the equally devastating, slow killing of the earth.

Being stripped of its natural resources for the benefit of capital and government, Yamashita

evidences how nations are often built at the expense of the land to which they lay claim. Yet the

travelers of the procession are not shocked at nature's death-in-process, despite their presumed

meditation of death while in transit. Indeed, although the demise of the natural is blatant in the

passage, the mourners care only for their grief and loss—and even that devotion is limited in

many, who cannot resist an opportunity to mine the land for material wealth.

The mourners' apparent blindness to the ravaging of nature/building of nation should not

come as a surprise. After all, nation and nature have long been yoked, almost always at the

expense of the latter. [4] As environmental theorist Christopher Manes contends, "Nature *is* silent

in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking

subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative" (339). This silencing and, as

Yamashita demonstrates, erasure of nature can assume a plethora of guises. For instance, in the

U.S. institute of public education, we are taught the history of mankind, which can also be

projected into a larger history of the world, where (certain categories of) man is at the top of the

hierarchy of the animal kingdom, at the teleological summit of beings of consciousness and

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[4] For the purposes of this chapter, I refer specifically to Western nationalisms. Indigenous nationalisms, such as those of the Pacific and the Americas, often centralize nature and sea/landscapes in their formation of identity and nation.

reason. Asian Americanist and cultural theorist Lisa Lowe extends this frame of the "natural order" further into a more politicized scope: terming the Western anthropocentric epistemological model as "modern humanism," she clarifies the idiom to mean "the secular European tradition of liberal philosophy that narrates political emancipation through citizenship in the state . . . that confers civilization to the human person educated in aesthetic and national culture" (192). The grand narratives of nation and human subject, then, rely on the common internal logic of opposition to nature.[5]

Yamashita is keenly aware of nation-based humanism that Lowe articulates. In her author's note, which precedes and contextualizes the narrative form of the novel, Yamashita remarks that *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* assumes the contours of *novelas*—"Brazilian soap opera[s]"—which "occup[y] the imagination and national psyche of the Brazilian people on prime-time TV." That Yamashita perceives the telenovela as tool of nationalism is explicitly marked by her observational anecdote of the years she lived in Brazil: "In traveling to the most remote towns, one finds that a single television in a church or open plaza will gather the people nightly to define and standardize by example the national dress, music, humor, political state, economic malaise, the national dream, despite the fact that Brazil is immense and variegated." Thus Yamashita initiates the first of numerous brilliant inversions and elisions of the novel: the very structure and recurring narrative motifs of the novel consciously work beyond the boundaries of nationalism through the very conventions that instill and define it. Yamashita reimagines and opens the possibility of geographies of identity and embodiment in the way she

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[5] The concept of being in opposition to nature is exemplified in some of the earliest narratives of the U.S., such as William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* and the novels of James Fenimore Cooper.

weaves the narrative in the style of a Brazilian telenovela. And she does so precisely through her use of the natural, which is later shown to be likewise supernatural – the Matacão.

Yamashita foregrounds her novel with the caution that nationalism can be a tool of oppression, as it constrains identities, regulates citizenship, and sanctions belonging. In this way, nature has also been used as a tool of exclusion: national identity, citizenship, and belonging have historically been available only to a specific category of subjects that are naturally endowed with those rights. It is here that debates about legal subjects and place-based belonging can come to dominate discourses about nature, society, and the environment. Therefore, it is also here that we should heed Judith Butler's warning that "oppression works not merely through overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and *through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects*" (20, my emphasis). The matter of nationalism-as-oppressor is not so much rooted in man's (mis)use of nature, but rather that man and nature are positioned as singular (usually) opposites in the construction of the domain of viable subjects. [6] "For half a millennia," Manes reflects, "'Man' has been the center of conversation in the West. This fictional character has occluded the natural world, leaving it voiceless and subjectless" (350). Environmental Studies, Environmental Ethics, Deep Ecology, Bioregionalism, and other fields dedicated to nature have long recognized of the strangling dangers of a single anthropocentric worldview but in order to deconstruct and reposition "Man," we must also do so with nature, as both notions are often defined in oppositional relation to one another. [7] The need to expand and reframe the process of subject formation is not only espoused

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[6] For more on how "Man" has occluded the natural world, see Manes, 350.

[7] To enter the discourse of environmental studies and its affiliate fields, start with *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm; *The Future of Environmental Criticism* by Lawrence Buell.

in *Through the Arc*, it is also the epistemological spirit of contemporary critical race theory in the field of Asian American Studies.

4.2   Asian American Studies and Subjectless Discourse

In 2003 Kandice Chuh published her highly acclaimed critical text, *Imagine Otherwise*. During a time of critical self-reflection in the field of Asian American studies, Chuh tackled an impasse in the field: how to defend and espouse Asian American subjectivity without reinscribing the methods of oppression and erasure that it works against. Chuh acknowledges that we are at the breaking point in social history in which we must go beyond Western epistemology of who (or what) qualifies as a subject;[8] to go off the grid of the nation-based matrix of viable subjects. This means extending notions of subjectivity to go beyond—and even to dismantle—traditional Western forms. It means engaging what Chuh calls "subjectless discourse," which destabilizes the structures in which subjects are only permitted their subjectivity by "conforming to certain regulatory matrices" (9)—matrices that, as Butler points out, can be subtle and elusive. Chuh articulates how asserting the Asian American subject, or an Asian American subjectivity, only works to reify the power relations that have flattened Asian American agency by conceiving subjects solely within the framework that limits, marginalizes, and constrains them. As Nhi Lieu reflects in her review of *Imagine Otherwise*, "Chuh brilliantly takes apart assumptions about 'Asian America' in order to further a 'subjectless analysis' that challenges Asian American representation as uniform, stable, monolithic, and essentialist" (492). To date, social critics have been working diligently against the machinery of Western subjectivity. Now, social criticism must forego the aspects of subjectivity that the Western

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[8] Chuh's study is directed specifically toward Asian Americans and people of Asian ancestry. However, I believe we can adopt some tenants of her thesis and method to consider minority discourse more generally.

epistemological machine creates, as asserting that particular subjectivity only serves to reify the machine. Chuh's call is not one for simple negation and erasure of the subject (after all, the very act of writing renders moot that desire or possibility); instead, Chuh "unravels the limits of an identity-based paradigm as the foundational basis for Asian American studies and suggests that 'critique' replace the subject as the object of inquiry" (Lieu 492), arguing that the subject as an analytic be replaced with critique:

> Subjectlessness as a discursive ground for Asian American studies can, I think, help to identify and trace the shifting positionalities and complicated terrains of U.S. American culture and politics articulated to *a globalized frame*, by opening up the field to account for practices of subjectivity that might not be immediately visible within, for example, a nation-based representational grid, or one that emphasizes racialization to the occlusion of other processes of subjectification. (Chuh 11)

Working toward social justice, Asian American criticism has actually constructed the Asian American subject as an "epistemological object" (9). In other words, if the traditional Eurocentric ways of knowing (epistemology) are simply recycled, even in "new" contexts such as critical race or transnational studies, then the outcome of what is known (object) will always be the same; the architecture of hegemony remains intact. With this acknowledgement, Chuh calls for a critique of epistemology and the desire for specific representations of subjectivity. To be clear, Chuh does not suggest a negation of agency or an erasure of the subject (after all, the very act of writing renders moot that desire of possibility). Rather, she insists that by "emphasizing the internal instability of 'Asian American,' identity of and as the other—the marginal, the marginalized—is encouraged to collapse" (9), allowing for a construction of Asian American identity not based in the binary logic of the (often hegemonic) subject and the (often

marginalized) object. In this distinction, Chuh's theory harmonizes with environmental theories that counter anthropocentric worldviews, as the limiting subject/object framework parallels the Man/nature episteme. Of course, allying nature and subject-formation is understandably precarious ground for minority scholars, as nature, territory, and nation are so easily a triumvirate of hegemonic authority.[9] Just recall, for example, this chapter's opening paragraph reference "sea to shining sea" from Katherine Lee Bates' 1893 poem "America the Beautiful," which identifies the land of America to be a "Thoroughfare of freedom beat / Across the wilderness," ruled by "pilgrim[s]," "heroes," and "patriot[s]" "Who more than self their country loved." Not only is man meant to rule over nature, it is only natural that he does so. It is in this sense of naturalization as a form of identity that the nation becomes a method of exclusion and covert prohibition for peoples who do not resemble the type of man described, for example, by Bates. Yet despite these qualifiers, I maintain that there is a liberatory potential in relating nature and subjectless conceptions of agency.

While environmental studies at large have attended to the manifold ways humans have subjugated nature in their consistent pursuit of nation and its conscriptive powers, I approach the interweavings of ecology and subjectivity more ideologically. My focus is not seated in ecocriticism; rather, I consider how a space of emergent, though not always fathomable connections, engender subject-formation. I align with Chuh's discernment that "the inadequacy of nation as conceptual parameter for understanding the complexities of subject-formation" is not only "a question of accuracy," but also a "specifically ideological" issue (88). I participate in Chuh's project of subjectless discourse, by way of reimagining how nature, space, and

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[9] While not the focus of this chapter, it should be noted that territory and nation can be mutually inclusive. Chuh in particular stresses that "[t]erritoriality literalizes nation, lending to it a palpability that contributes to its sense of inevitability" (86).

subjectivity functions in Yamashita's novel. However, while Chuh organizes her critique of Asian American studies by providing literary analyses that are not organized by an identity-based analytical category,[10] I suggest that it may still be useful to attend the subject/object framework, if and only if we can radically revise the construction and qualification of "subjects" and "objects."

"Space" again intervenes here as a productive response to Chuh's call for subjectlessness as *Through the Arc* imagines manifold spaces articulated as various capacities for relations, upending traditional philosophical distinctions between subject and object. For instance, recall the first part of this chapter's title: "wound intricately throughout my sphere." This phrase is uttered by the omniscient narrator of the novel, who is embodied by a small animated orb that tangibly spins inches in front of the main character's, Kazumasa Ishimaru, forehead. Kazumasa's ball turns out to be made of the same material as the Matacão but is also an intelligent nonhuman being endowed with consciousness and memory, guiding the reader through Yamashita's tale with first person perspective and authority. It is telling, I think, that the novel's narrator is a ball. While "sphere" as a noun often connotes an empty three-dimensional circular area, Kazumasa's ball challenges its assumed state of vacancy because of its otherworldly sentience: it positions itself as a self-aware miniature of the Earth, homogenously connected to the Matacão and its infinite emerging capacities; it defies any established framework of subjectivity. Kazumasa's ball's agency is manifested through omniscient intelligence, critical consciousness, and exists more intricately in nature than what humans can comprehend, exceeding the four dimensions of

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[10] Instead, *critique* of the subject is Chuh's focus, rather than the subject itself (or, oftentimes, reinscribed object). For example, Chuh organizes her study of Asian American texts by analyzing fluxuating categories of citizenship (chapter 1) and assessing how transnationality underpins racialization, which is itself a technology of hegemonic power (chapter 2).

humanity even if we don't quite have the biological, semiotic, or narrative ability to describe it. Kazumasa's ball is revealed as the most knowing and affective character of the novel, shepherding the reader through the complicated relational web of everything and everyone engaging the Matacão. Spatial subjectivity, then, emerges as a potential to not only indelibly reinscribe the agency of nature, but also to challenge the Western forging of the figure of all-powerful Man in whom epistemology is self-reflexive and stationed as an absolute. Chuh limns out how "knowledge" is used as a device to ensure hegemony and limit agency, which is a crucial aspect of how agency is viciously guarded for those who count as legitimate makers of meaning. She contends, "Those from whom information flows are sedimented into objects of (area) study, whereas those from whom knowledge flows are coetaneously empowered with the subjective authority to evaluate that information" (90). By locating intelligence and design in nature and tracing other (human and non-human) beings' subjectivities through their relation to natural space, we transpose the genesis of subjectivity to the biosphere, so that human ontology is but one node of sentience amongst a vast, ever-changing sea of other subjectivities.

4.3   The Umwelt and Spatial Subjectivity

Let us return to ecologist-turned-biosemotician Jackob von Uexküll to more deeply investigate how the space of the Matacão engenders its own subjectivity and constitutes the subjectivities of other beings. Specifically, we focus on Uexküll's notion of the "Umwelt,"[11] which he defines as the *individual* ecology of a living being that is comprised only by its

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[11] In German, Umwelt translates more directly as "environment" or "surroundings." It should be noted that Uexkull's use of "Umwelt" predates Martin Heidegger's famous notion of the term. Publishing most of his work between the early 1890's through the late 1930's, it is widely known in the fields of biosemiotics and theoretical biology that Uexkull also directly influenced philosophers such as Ernst Cassirer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gilles Deleuze, in addition to Heidegger; see Kull 12. Likewise, however, Uexkull dedicated many of his works to Immanuel Kant; see Buchanan 19-21.

interactions with its local environment that hold significance to that specific being. Uexküll often refers to the Umwelt as a "subjective-self-world," or, more endearingly, a being's "soap bubble" of existence. As Uexküll's understanding of subjects aptly situates subjectivity beyond the anthropocentric worldview, his theory of meaning poises us to reread nature, nation, and the space that links both. Classical science holds "the" worldview of a single world in which all living organisms and species are contained, systematically ordered in hierarchy from the simplest, most basic of species up to the higher forms. Uexküll, however, does not ascribe to this single world theory. In *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men*—his eloquent "picture book of invisible worlds"—Uexküll explains the detriment that attends such a single-sighted register of life. "We are easily deluded into assuming that the relationship between a foreign subject and the objects in his world exists on the same spatial and temporal plane as our own relations with the objects in our human world," Uexküll posits, presupposing the grounds of current-day environmentalism. "This fallacy," he continues, "is fed by a belief in the existence of a single world, into which all living creatures are pigeonholed. This gives rise to the widespread conviction that there is only one space and one time for all living things" (*A Stroll* 327). Instead, Uexküll contends that there are infinite perceptual worlds, in which each living being (all of which Uexküll regards as subjects) is the master of its own subjective-self-world. The Umwelt proves the possibility that there is no objectively fixed realm of existence—the natural world is neither a singular entity, nor an empty receptacle for various life forms. Although the Umwelt is still based on a binary construction of subjects and objects (between actors and their stimuli), the category of viable subjects is expanded beyond humankind, and the understanding of world is multiplied infinitely.

Importantly, though, while these perceptual worlds—these "Umwelten"—are

uncommunicating and exclusive of one another, so that "all animals, from the simplest to the most complex, are fitted into their unique worlds with equal completeness" (*A Stroll* 324), all are linked together as if in some purposeful, enormous musical score. To illustrate this expanded sense in which Umwelten participate, I turn to the presence of a fig on a tree. Although a single fig exists on a tree, which itself is amongst other flora of a particular location, the fig has different relations depending on the being with which it interacts. In addition to there being the fig-of-the-growing-tree, there is also the fig-of-the-harvesting-human, the fig-of-the-snacking-bird, and the fig-of-the-spawning-wasp. In this way, there are multiple, intermingling Umwelten all in one place (the tree), created by a single subject (the fig fruit). The final example of the Umwelt of the fig and the wasp is of special note, in that it demonstrates a harmonic composition in nature—what Uexküll alludes to as nature's "unknowing intelligence" and I suggest is the inherent "spirit" of spatial subjectivity—in which all Umwelten are interweaved. The symbiotic relationship between fig trees and wasps has long been celebrated by environmental biologists as perfect co-evolution.[12] The fig, being an inflorescence plant, contains its flowers and seeds within the flesh of the fruit. Its pollination, therefore, has to be specially delivered into its core. By some magic evolutionary design, female wasps have determined the inner florets of a fig fruit to be their nesting sites. After the wasp has selected her ideal fig, she squeezes through the apex of the fig, most oftentimes losing her antennae and wings in the process, and navigates her way to the florets, where she deposits her eggs. As she crawls around inside the fig, she sheds the pollen she collected from the other fig trees she visited while searching for her chosen fruit. The fig fruit and the female wasp are unknowing of one another, yet the apex of the fruit is just large

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[12] For an engaging overview of the fig/wasp relationship, see Katie Kline's post on the Ecological Society of America's blog, *EcoTone*, where she also has linked documentary video clips of the duo.

enough to admit the determined wasp, and in kind the wasp is specially equipped to sense a fig fruit that is not only the specific species of Ficus (fig tree) her species of wasp is designed for, but also to determine which fruit is uninhabited and unripe. Fig seeds now pollinated and wasp eggs laid, the female's job is done, and the fruit's acids are induced to consume the female's carcass and, thereby, ripening the fruit. Her eggs hatch, the newly-born male and female wasps mate, then the males carve passages out of the fig for the females to take flight to search for their own fig (though the males never make it: they spend their entire life inside the flesh of a fig fruit). The fig fruits, ripened by its consumption of the wasp carcasses, are now edible for animals and birds to eat; the pollinated seeds of the fig travel in the belly of the critter until it defecates somewhere else, its excretion the perfect vessel and fertilizer for the seeds to take root. The fig and the wasp are unaware of the other as a subject (the fig uses the wasp as its object and the wasp uses the fig as its object in their respective Umwelten) yet are clearly intelligently designed to enable a grand plan for the survival of nature. This unknowing intelligence is precisely what Uexküll refers to when he describes the compositional harmony of nature:

> This force of Nature we have called conformity with 'plan' because we are able to follow it with our apperception only when it combines the manifold details into one whole by means of rules. Higher rules, which unite things separated even by time, are in general called plans, without any reference to whether they depend on human purposes or not . . . we have before us a coarse-meshed tissue, which can be comprehended only from a standpoint higher than those afforded us by individual, community, or species. This all-embracing interweaving cannot be referred to any particular formative impetus. Here at last we see the action of life as such, working in conformity with plan. (*Theoretical Biology* 175-76, 258)

To be clear, spatial subjectivity employs Uexküll's Umwelt theory, but the two are not the same. Where the Umwelt incites agency through the aspects of an environment that carry significance to the subject (think: only the species of wasp that is designed for a particular species of fig tree can squeeze herself inside the fruit to pollinate and ripen it) and forms its subjective-self-world, spatial subjectivity names the subject formation process that occurs within Umwelten and fosters the unknowing intelligence of harmonic relations.

Likewise in the *Rain Forest*, the Matacão is not only as a specific geographic place, but more dynamically has agency in itself, in that it emanates multiple relations to and amongst other object-beings. The narrative that develops around the presence, use, and eventual failing of the Matacão plastic shows intricate systems of connectivity: spirituality, technology, media, capitalism, material production, and social consumption are all overlaid through an international cast of characters who travel to the Matacão and end up convening into a community, as they recognize that each person and being has their own relation with the baffling, magical polymer substance. The Matacão stimulates each of the novel's characters in very different ways, though all are equally and fatefully tied to its emergence. The ways that each character is tied to the Matacão and the ways that each character's storyline consistently works toward interconnection substantiate the method of spatial subjectivity that Uexküll articulates. In addition to Kazumasa and his attendant sentient floating orb, there is a host of other equally magical characters. J.B. Tweep, a three-armed American CEO who figuratively embodies neoliberal corporation, holds Kazumasa hostage for his satellite's ability to geo-locate other sites of Matacão surfacings. The "native" character, Mané Pena, capitalizing on his perceived indigenous authenticity, becomes an expert in the healing science of "featherology," and his position as the local father-figure to newly arrived Matacão-opportunists. He mentors Batista Djapan, who begrudgingly supports his

partner Tania Aparecida as she builds an empire through international pigeon-carrier communications, in which the Matacão serves as one of their global bases. Lastly there is the aforementioned Chico Paco, a spiritual pilgrim to the Matacão, who constantly promotes being in transit, even through his death.

Scholars have critically approached the Matacão in differing and dynamic ways. Aimee Bhang examines the terrain of the novel as a mutant and speculative space of historically disavowed empire and present day capitalist hubris. Alternatively, in her 2004 essay "Local Rock and Global Plastic," Ursula Heise situates the Matacão as "primarily a destination," in that "the reader follows all the other characters [except for the native-born Mané Pena] on their journeys from far-flung places of origin to the rainforest" (142). What both Bhang and Heise highlight are the interdependencies of globalism and nationalism through the valence of the "natural" world. By fruition, fortitude, or force, all the novel's characters seek the Matacão in an effort to settle and conquer it (either materially or ideologically) – recalling again that master narrative of nature's subjugation to nation. In many ways, although never a nation-state, the Matacão assumes the tropes of a nation. It is quickly settled into a distinct territory, mapped out and claimed by numerous peoples and groups for various rights spanning from capital gain to religious sanctity. And "Territoriality," Chuh articulates, "literalizes nation, lending to it a palpability that contributes to its sense of inevitability" (86). The region of the Matacão is settled and developed for habitation and production; it becomes the site of pilgrimages and religion; it instigates a new system of jurisprudence and legality; it is sanctioned with its own higher education system: it is a place that becomes a home, a livelihood, and instigates a common sense of belonging. Yet Yamashita refuses to allow this burgeoning sense of nation to be the representational grid that designates subjectivity. Instead, it is the overlaid relations between the

various beings and the natural—indeed, the relations that the space of the Matacão enables—that promote subjectivities.

Perceiving the Matacão through its various Umwelten not only requires an inversion of traditional demarcations of subject and object, it more importantly creates the space for an ontological reimagining of the formations of subjectivity itself, among which I contend we privilege spatial subjectivity. To be clear, Uexküll's theory of the Umwelt is an important way to use spatial subjectivity as a critique that incorporates senses of spirit, but the two theories are not the same. Where the Umwelt gives agency through the aspects of an environment that carry significance to the subject (think: only the species of wasp that is designed for a particular species of fig tree can squeeze herself inside the fruit to pollinate and ripen it) and forms its subjective-self-world, spatial subjectivity names the agency of the spirit that attends Umwelten and fosters the unknowing quality of harmonic relations.

If we recall how Chuh challenges the constructedness of Asian American difference while maintaining our alternative-approach theoretical example of the Umwelt, then we can start to see the liberatory potential of spatial subjectivity for historically disenfranchised groups. Yet I would be remiss to not explain a very distinct departure spatial subjectivity takes from subjectless discourse. Chuh approaches the concept of "space" through a critique of the territorialization of nation, where she investigates how a "naturally distinct 'here' and 'there'" is promulgated through a "spatialized logic" that "posit[s] the naturalness of the relationship between the native-born and the nation" (87, 86). In other words, Chuh articulates space as a cartography of ideological difference mapped on to physical places which all materializes in very real political practices of Othering. In many ways, then, I am working the flip side of the coin: rather than interrogating space as a vacuum or as a tool of binary logic, I suggest that space can

also be approached relationally as a non-national grid of subject formation that does not have to hinge upon Western epistemology. The Matacão, for example, was initially imagined through the news media to be a site of inexplicable healing properties. Mané Pena, a longtime resident farmer on the land through which the Matacão emerged, is interviewed by a national news station during the initial fascination of the strange polymer substance. His interview quickly devolves to focus on his quirky fixation with a special feather he discovered on his property, which he claims has restorative, healing powers. His claim then cemented by the reporter who attests that the feather eliminated the pain in her shoulder, Mané's feather becomes the public symbol of the magical phenomenon of the Matacão. Viewers across the world see Mané's interview and are further drawn into the mythos of the Matacão. Kazumasa's maid, Lourdes, watches the interview on TV and reflects, "There's something about *that place*, that Matacão, Seu Kazumasa. I just know it. That old man and his magic feather. It's the Matacão" (24, my emphasis). And Lourdes is not the only one who is enchanted. Chico Paco's invalid best friend and soulmate, Gilberto, walks again after his grandmother, Dona Maria Creuza, "had promised Saint George that if her prayers [to heal Gilberto's legs] were granted, she herself would walk barefooted to the Matacão and erect a small shrine in his honor" (27). Chico Paco voyages to the Matacão in place of the elderly Maria, already sure that the Matacão "was a divine place. It was the only possible reason why the feather could have even been discovered by Mané Pena" (24). All the main characters in the novel attend the Matacão based on the innate belief that the space is an epicenter of connection – tapping into the sacred layers of the world, connecting disparate strangers to a promise of something unknowable, but also in doing so making them available to receive one another. The promise of connection to something sacred and even magical operates entirely outside the domain of Western scientific logic; rather, its proof is anecdotal, experiential,

and even rumor-based. No single scientific method alone can discern the enigmatic, subject-forming spatial properties of the Matacão.

Articulating spatial subjectivity through the notion of the Umwelt as an ecological philosophy is one way that we can reimagine space unsieved by Western, identity-based systems of knowledge. Uexküll's son, student, and biographer, Thure von Uexküll, further reveals his father's "theory of meaning" beyond the structure of dualistic thinking:

> Reality, to which all is subjected and from which everything is deduced, is not to be found "outside," in infinite space, which has neither beginning nor end, and which is filled with a nebulous cloud of elementary particles; nor is it to be found "inside" within ourselves and the indistinct, distorted images of this external world created by our mind. Reality manifests itself in those worlds . . . These "subjective-self-world bubbles" [Umwelten] . . . are the elements of reality which form themselves into a synthesis of all subjects and their subjective-self-worlds at the same time undergoing constant changes in *Natur*—which lies beyond and behind the nature conceived of by physicists, chemists, and microbiologists . . . (280-81)

Although in many ways Uexküll seems unable to completely do away with hierarchal logic (as previously mentioned, despite his radical revision of environment, the Umwelt still hinges on a subject and its objects/stimuli), he maintains faith in his non-scientific understanding of that sense of something other "which lies beyond and behind" Western knowledge. In their signals toward something "beyond" the domain of Eurocentric epistemology, I see Uexküll and Chuh making room for the concept of spatial subjectivity, and they are not alone in their gesture toward the subjectivity of space. Yamashita ponders a similar system of connectivity in her

epigraph to *Through the Arc*, in which she notes, "I have heard Brazilian children say that whatever passes through the arc of a rainbow becomes its opposite. But what is the opposite of a bird? Or for that matter, a human being? What then, in the great rain forest, where, in its season, the rain never ceases and the rainbows are myriad?" Calling out the childish simplicity and static capacity of binary design, Yamashita challenges her reader from the start of the novel to openly receive the other possible forms of being – of sentience, connectivity, making meaning, living, and ultimately, of humanity – that she offers in her narrative catalogue. Yamashita hails her reader to suspend their propensity toward disbelief, for a time, to instead privilege reception of the Other.

Just as Yamashita protests the outposts of binary logic, Uexküll approaches ecology through the multiplicity of subjectivities. In this way, both Yamashita and Uexküll align with Lowe's appeal (which clearly resounds with Chuh's) to "imagine a much more complicated set of stories about the emergence of the now, in which what is foreclosed as unknowable is forever saturating the 'what-can-be-known.' We are left with the project of visualizing, mourning, and thinking 'other humanities' within the received genealogy of 'the human'" (208). Although writing some seventy years apart from one another, Yamashita and Uexküll both seem to tap into a common quintessential tenor, a particular sense of spirit, in their work.

4.4   Spirit and Memory

Uexküll's attunement to the intricate networks of nature came from his deep belief in their intelligent plan of survival, where that plan (what Uexküll calls *Natur*) "lies beyond and behind the nature" conceived by man and Western thought. While *Natur* is simply the German word for "nature," yet it holds a distinct extra-anthropocentric value for Uexküll. While it may not resonate with strict scientific discourse, Uexküll was never afraid to admit that there is

something more—something other—of *Natur* that cannot be empirically qualified and scholastically conquered. And this "something other" is sentient, and is almost soulfully described to conduct the elaborate interworkings of nature, that is, its own being. Or rather, nature simultaneously conforms to plan as *Natur* is itself plan. One of the reasons classic science struggles with Uexküll's horizontal, rhizomatic[13] understanding of nature is because it is never unchanging long enough to be linguistically smashed into the already-existing vertical structure of evolutionary hierarchy. Uexküll refuses the teleology of evolution. Countering the contemporary more popular thought of Darwin,[14] Uexküll always imagined nature as an intricate horizontal web network of all life forms, equally privileged in agency, if not biological complexity. Here again, taking Uexküll's theory of meaning a few steps further, we can see spatial subjectivity to be both the web strands and the ether between them: the relations and the thing that engenders those relations.

Environmental scholar Daniel Berthold-Bond describes how nature has been flattened into a barren, background object, stripped of its life force, and in doing so lends us the connective language that situates how both spatial subjectivity and the Umwelt (as a method of spatial subjectivity) might be seen to evoke the sentience of nature. "With very few exceptions," Berthold-Bond contends, "this dominant tradition [of Western thought] has taken it to be self-evidently true that the boundaries of ethical life entirely coincide with the sphere of the human world, with the nonhuman environment existing as utterly 'other,' on the outside of the circle,

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[13] Although phenomenological philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari provide the most well known theoretical use of "rhizome," the term is etymologically rooted in botany; see their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[14] For more on Uexküll's academic genealogy and divergence from contemporary scientific theories, see Buchanan's *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexkill, Heidegger, Merleu-Ponty, and Deleuze*, 9-12.

without rights, without moral standing" (8). As such, "Nature becomes something like the 'negative space' [. . . where] morality is an affair of humans in their relations with other humans, pure and simple; and nature, correspondingly, is a mere [. . .] *morally empty* space" (Berthold-Bond 9). Berthold-Bond pinpoints how nature has been pushed into the margins of epistemology, forced into the category of what Butler terms the "domain of unviable (un)subjects" (20). That Uexküll insists on the language of nature as a great symphonic composition[15] marks his commitment to counter his contemporary colleagues' push to privilege Man as the keeper of world(s) and positions him as an early champion of deep ecology thought.

Undoubtedly, Uexküll would have mourned Berthold-Bond's articulation of the objectification of nature if he had lived long enough to read it. My intention here is to put morality—what I prefer to interpretatively distinguish as what I have been calling "spirit"—back into nature. I have shown that *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* illuminates nature as a space and subject carrying infinite relations with other beings; I here hope to reinforce this stance by articulating how Yamashita engenders the spatial subjectivity of nature through an applique of spirit and creative use of narrative form. Thus, spatial subjectivity emerges as a potential to not only indelibly reinscribe the agency of nature, but also to challenge the Western forging of the figure of all-powerful Man in whom epistemology is self-reflexive and stationed as an absolute. Chuh limns out how "knowledge" is used as a device to ensure hegemony and limit agency, which is a crucial aspect of how agency is viciously guarded for those who count as legitimate makers of meaning. She contends, "Those from whom information flows are sedimented into

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[15] While "musical score" and "composition" are often used to express the overall intelligent interweaving of nature, Uexkull also refers to "chime," "rhythm," "melody," "harmony," and "symphony" to describe the relations of organisms; see "Theory of Meaning." For a list and definitions of the musical terms Uexkull uses throughout his oeuvre, see Buchanan 26-27.

objects of (area) study, whereas those from whom knowledge flows are coetaneously empowered with the subjective authority to evaluate that information" (90). By locating intelligence and design in nature and tracing other (human and non-human) beings' subjectivities through their relation to natural space, we transpose the genesis of subjectivity to the spirit of the biosphere, so that human ontology is but one node of sentience amongst a vast, ever-changing sea of other subjective-self-worlds.

"These different worlds," Uexküll explains of Umwelten, "present to all nature lovers new lands of such wealth and beauty that a walk through them is well worth while, even though they unfold not to the physical but only to the spiritual eye" (*A Stroll* 320). Uexküll's Umwelt theory rests on perception: not only in the primary sense of each being perceiving its own subjective-self-world, but also in the secondary sense of us, as readers and learners, to see these worlds that are not our (individual or society) own with an alternative sensory faculty beyond the ocular—to revise our perception to acknowledge a creative and biological gesture towards a beyond. This revision is a massive undertaking in that it deviates from canonized conceptions of "being," and consequently largely lacks the language to articulate such recension. As Manes keenly qualifies, "we must contemplate not only learning a new ethics, but a new language free from the directionalities of humanism" (342). At first glance, this call may seem to be an insurmountable project, but the works of Yamshita, Chuh, and Uexküll show it to be an ongoing, open invitation, as they have already proposed a matrix of alternative approaches to subject formation. In the first paragraph of his most well-known monograph, Uexküll reminds us that we must be willing to look beyond the systems of what is known, as these systems instigate a blindness to Otherly beauty: "Many a zoologist and physiologist, clinging to the doctrine that all living beings are mere machines, denies their existence and thus boards up the gates to other

worlds so that no single ray of light shines forth from all the radiance that is shed over them. But let us who are not committed to the machine theory consider the nature of machines" (*A Stroll* 319). Yamashita, too, points to the brilliance of such other worlds in the aforementioned epigraph, when she proposes the possibility of infinite beings when something is transformed as it passes "through the arc of the rainbow . . . in the great rain forest" where "rainbows are myriad." Likewise, Chuh grounds her theory of subjectless discourse in critiquing the Western machinery of justified belief. In this way, Uexküll reverberates through Yamashita and Chuh: "So, reader, join us as we ramble through these worlds of wonder" (*A Stroll* 320). When all three writers are considered in a light reflected by one another, they illuminate the need to consider spirit as an inherent dynamic of subjects that come into being relationally, as the ethers of spatial subjectivity.

"Spirit" as a term historically has been religionized, institutionalized, and anthropomorphized. In various contexts it has been given a plethora of definitions, each suited for the aims of establishing some definite known thing, or system of knowing. Being aware and cautious of such appropriations, I believe we can also perceive spirit more materially in spatial subjectivity by focusing on the relational network of nature and recognizing that spirit is at once the subjectivity created by space and the agency of that space. When nature is reframed through specificity of subject, "[a] new world comes into being," leaving subjectivity open to alternative articulations of language and knowing (Uexküll *A Stroll* 319). This is what Kazumasa's ball does for the reader, the Matacão does for the biosphere, and Chuh does for critical race studies. Through this analysis, we come to a deeper understanding of spirit as the refusal of any known absolutes: it hinges on change and instability, it is enlivened through an unknowing yet intelligent web of relations. In Yamashita's imagining, this web permeates not only individual

beings, but also throughout man-made social systems of thought that, sharing the same genesis as Frankenstein's monster, are often considered to be self-sustaining and -perpetuating things unto themselves. In *Through the Arc*, capitalism, environmentalism, and globalism are non-opposing, interconnected forces of which there is no singular master manipulator. In a playful inversion of Berthold-Bond's reading of nature as a morally empty space, Yamashita ignores the moral declinations in which these social systems are usually couched, espousing a neutral space of subject formation that operates outside the Western ideas of judgment and knowing. In the novel, spirit materializes as a system of fractal returns. The earth's mantle manipulates non-biodegradable waste to form the Matacão; copper-colored butterflies thrive in their seemingly unnatural environment of an old rusted junkyard in the forest; even the forest itself has a symbiotic relational manipulation, as it reconsumes vestiges of civilization. In Yamashita's narrative world—which, of course, is not too different from the world we find ourselves in today—a series of changing relations, individual yet interconnected, wax and wane and are reconstituted into new formations of society and environment.

Ultimately, spatial subjectivity harkens infinite new imaginations of agency for all beings. The narrative framing of Kazumasa's ball provides an ontological revision of subjectivity of and on this biosphere. The figure of Kazumasa's ball hails a consideration of how spatial subjectivity is wound not only throughout all Earth's life forms, but all life forces—Earthly and not—by its very sentient presence. As the novel progresses and the reader is introduced to the emergence of the Matacão, it is understood from the opening paragraphs that the ball's existence has already cycled through extinction. "By a strange quirk of fate," Kazumasa's ball explains, "I was brought back by a memory . . . I could have been reincarnated, if such things are possible, into the severed head of that dead chicken or some other useless object . . . Instead, brought back

by a memory, I have become a memory, and as such, am commissioned to become for you a memory" (Yamashita 3). Kazumasa's ball disrupts all sense of stable narrative: the novel is relayed as a memory, told by a memory that is now the reader's memory, which is called forth at an indistinct future time, when presumably our current sense of the world is long lapsed and forgotten. Kazumasa's ball an embodiment of spirit connected to biosphere as "the voice that emerges from the depths of geology" (Heise 147). But, just like Uexküll's notion of *Natur*, it is also brought forth from spirit, from the unknowable ethers of spatial subjectivity. Kazumasa's ball recalls the moment it was incarnated and tied to Kazumasa by acknowledging that alchemistic spirit. Playing with other children on the beach of his hometown on the west coast of Japan, "Kazumasa felt the Divine Wind ripple through his hair and scatter with the clouds over the ocean's mercuric mantle . . . Suddenly, an enormous crack of thunder echoed across the shore, and a flying mass of fire plowed into the waves, scattering debris in every direction . . . A tiny piece of debris had plummeted toward him and knocked him unconscious . . . there, close to Kazumasa's face, a small object buzzed," and "Kazumasa was never again in life alone" (Yamashita 3-5). From the start of the novel, then, spirit, Divine Wind, and memory overlay and produce each other. Memory is return just as spirit is return, yet it is memory beyond the scope of human qualified time or nationalized place.

　　To return to the end of the novel, the funeral procession of Chico Paco finally restores his body to his birthplace. Importantly, there is nothing nationalistic in laying the people's leader to rest, exemplifying again how Yamashita divorces nature from nation. There are no politicians, gurus, or entrepreneurs awaiting his burial. There is no mention of a cemetery or monument to mark his existence on earth. Rather, Chico Paco's mother brings him back to the shores and sand dunes of his youth, to the designations of beauty and peace he was equipped to perceive: "As she

caught the sight of the dunes laced in the undulating shades of orange and purple and the white

tips of the waves beyond, Chico Paco's mother thought sadly that her son should never have left

this place, but she said out loud, 'This is the way he always wanted it. He wanted to be buried

here, near the sound of the waves'" (210). Chico Paco's man-made legacies no longer matter:

Chicolandia, the amusement park built on the Matacão to honor his sweetheart Gilberto, pales

against "the undulating shades of orange and purple," the radio waves of his evangelizing

eponymous Radio Chico are muted against "the sound of the waves."

It is only at the end of the novel that the reader sees that Yamashita had been alerting us

to the otherly, uknown intelligence of spirit all along. Less than half way through the text,

Yamashita spatializes the simultaneity of spirit-as-returns as she pitches it through the ultimate

humanly binary logic of existence: "The Matacão became a stage for life and death" (102). Yet

life and death, Yamashita reminds us, are not opposites, but rather a continuous, spiralic cycle of

return—indeed, it is precisely this sense of return that so strongly embodies spirit in the novel.

The final section of the novel is titled "The Return," though each individual chapter's title is a

cognate of death: "Typhus," "Rain of Feathers," "Bacteria," "The Tropical Tilt." To wit, the

most perfect organism imagined by Yamashita is the ecosystem of olden time, still intrinsic

throughout the forest: "The old forest has returned once again, secreting its digestive juices,

slowly breaking everything into edible absorbent components, pursuing the lost perfection of an

organism in which digestion and excretion were once one and the same" (212). And even though

that "lost perfection" "will never be the same again," it is the gesture toward the return to that

state of transformative ambiguity that resonates so deeply in the text, and which ultimately

underpins the meaning of spatial subjectivity. Yamashita shows what Uexküll proposed in

biological sciences nearly a century ago, and what Chuh articulates in social theory today:

subjectivity is not the exclusive domain of the human; rather, humanity is a participant of the

space of subjectivity.

5   CODA: PUBLIC PRAXIS

> Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres,
> yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living
> in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent
> on one another, physically vulnerable to one another?
> – Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*
> (2004)

On October 27, 2018, during a morning Shabbat service at the Tree of Life synagogue in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, eleven people were shot and killed and seven more critically injured by

a single domestic, white nationalist terrorist. An American male in his late 40s was arrested and

charged on multiple counts of federal, capital, and state crimes, although he pled not guilty

because he was protecting his "people" from being "slaughtered" by the immigrant "invaders

that kill our people" – invaders whom, of course, the synagogue aided.[1] The massacre in

Pittsburgh was tragic, but it also fell into a terrifying normative pattern – the U.S. has seen

multiple iterations of this brand of white nationalism and domestic terrorism in recent years.[2]

Oftentimes, this is where our national memory stops for such terrifying events. But what should

be equally noted in our memory is the response of mourning and support by other local faith-

based organizations and churches for the Tree of Life congregation. At the inter-faith community

vigil for the victims, Wasi Mohamed, the Executive Director of the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh

and Emgage Pennsylvania (a nonprofit organization for Muslim advocacy), gave his condolences

to the survivors of the attack, foregrounding in his remarks the prophetic traditions of both Islam

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[1] For more on Robert Bowers (the shooter) and his xenophobic and anti-semitic posts on social media, see "Pittsburgh Shooting Suspect Described as Man Who Kept to Himself" in *The Wall Street Journal*.
[2] Other religious sites that recently have been subject to terrorism include the Oak Creek, Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting in 2012 and the Charleston, South Carolina Emanuel AME Church shooting in 2015.

and Judaism which share a deep reverence for compassion and insistence to meet hate with love, tolerance, and fellowship (Garza). But his message was not just sentiment. Mohamed also delivered action: the Muslim community started a funding page on LaunchGood.com and had raised over $70,000 for the Jewish community in less than two days to help shoulder their burden (ultimately, U.S. Muslims raised nearly $250,00 for the victims' families), and he went even further than fiscal support to offer physical care to their Jewish "brothers and sisters." Mohamed explained:

> And this is sincere. We're not gonna stop because this [LaunchGood.com campaign] is a high number. We just want to know what you need. If it's more money, let us know. If it's people outside your next service, let us know, we'll be there. If you need organizers on the ground, [we] will provide them . . . If you need food for the families or you need somebody to come to the grocery store because you don't feel safe in this city, we'll be there.

Offering every form of support they were able, the Muslim community responded to the Tree of Life massacre as an act of Islamic faith. Tarek El-Messidi, the founding director of CelebrateMercy (a Muslim nonprofit) which partnered with Mohamed's organizations, remarked "We wish to respond to evil with good, as our faith instructs us, and send *a powerful message of compassion through action*" (my emphasis). This encounter of Others receiving Others—perhaps more than any other anecdotal reference or literary analysis this project has considered—delivers the clearest rendition of the idea of empathetic humanism that I have sought to trace through these chapters. This story of solidarity and alliance not only reminds us that empathetic humanism is already being evoked in meaningful and deliberate ways all around us, but it also

stands testament to the power and necessity of combining abstract principles (such as compassion and love) with action – to put, in other words, empathetic humanism in praxis.

How does a humanities scholar navigate this terrain? My project has explored modes and methods of being and belonging that focus on iterations of empathetic humanism that minority communities in particular successfully employ. Literature is a useful device for thinking through these parameters of non-Western subjectivities because it enables a deep intellectual engagement with notions of humanism while providing a critical distance that insulates the reader from the lived experience of the story line. But if a purpose of literature, or for that matter, of the humanities itself, is to cultivate cultural understanding through intellectual work, then it stands to reason that the humanities should also be the primary tool to issue a counter-stance against hegemonic systems of exclusion. Literature can imagine and offer a form of counter-narrative, but it cannot act, at least not on its own. The question then becomes: How can traditionally researched and written literary studies, such as the one I have presented here in this dissertation, be put into praxis for the public good? And further, what is the best way to implement and disseminate such publicly-oriented research?

5.1 Public Digital Humanities

Through my dissertation project and the work I do with local Atlanta communities, I have learned how vulnerable communities are often sequestered to the margins through an oxymoronic structure of being the object of study in the humanities. But I have also found that the study of literature equips me to better engage with disenfranchised groups, as it tunes my intellectual and pedagogical approach to what is always intense mental and emotional labor. In other words, I employ my literary and critical studies to calibrate how I collaborate and work with non-academic partners. While I believe it is imperative for scholars to seriously consider

their place in and partnership with the public, the methodological approach must be followed-through with collaborative execution of work that is, from its outset, made available to and usable by the community it engages. Here, the digital intervenes as the most capacious and sturdy vehicle for this work.

By virtue of its delivery platform, digital work always has the capacity to be public work – and, in the cases of my projects, community-engaged research almost always yields digital deliverables. But it has not always been oriented for the public. As an academic field, digital humanities has quickly gone from being a coined term (2004, *A Companion to Digital Humanities*), to a field of study (2006, NEH's Digital Humanities Initiative), to tenure-track requirements and area specialty (present day). As archives became digitized and extended to the public domain, tools were developed to access and assess digital material, and born-digital objects and events demanded scholarly attention. Digital scholarship swept through the humanities with great expectations and even greater skepticism. The greatest challenges we face are not only to maintain the hallmarks of traditional humanistic scholarship (interpretation, explication, and theorization), but moreover to embrace the challenge of adapting those traditions into digital technologies, ontologies, and disseminations. Make no mistake: digital humanities has democratized scholarship and we are all better for it. But we must remember that while the content, delivery, and analytical methodologies necessarily change to adapt to digital innovations, the purpose of scholarship does not: discovery is still the beating heart of humanities – digital and analog alike. So why not expand its realm? "Doing" digital humanities is not only about access; its scope should not be limited to creating a digitized version of traditional scholarship for the traditional academic audiences. As Sheila Brennan argues in *Digital Humanities Debates 2016*, "Doing any type of public digital humanities work requires an

intentional decision from the beginning of the project that identifies, invites in, and addresses

audiences needs in the design, as well as in the approach and content."[3] Digital work has the

ability to catalyze participatory scholarship, binding scholars and community members.

Although only a small percent of humanities scholars presently incorporate digital

technology into their academic work, research on the human condition will surely continue to be

increasingly yoked to digital methodologies and ways of thinking. And for good reason. Digital

humanities puts the concept of what is "human" under pressure; it forces a reckoning of how the

humanities might make humans more humane in that digital humanities has the capacity to frame

problems and inquiries beyond modes of living to lived outcomes. This is what digital

humanities must do that analog humanities often does not: in order to engage a meaningful and

sustainable project, we necessarily have to step outside our silos of research and invite

collaborators with other skill sets—community advocates, computer scientists, language

translators, geographers, archivists, software developers, and more—to make our goal stand on

its own as all are integral to the creative research process. This is in part due to the fact that

digital humanities itself refuses static methodologies or rigidly-defined metrics of outcome.

Inherently collaborative, transdisciplinary, and interactive, digital humanities has the potential to

put resources and actionable information in the hands of people who live the analytics of

disenfranchisement.

Public digital humanities, then, can be both democratizing in its scope and participatory

in its usability when the public community is the cornerstone of the work. But as Judith Butler

cautions in *Precarious Lives*, it is important to remember that "when we are speaking about the

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[3] It should be noted, though, that the community should always define itself – it is not the scholar's place to drop in and try to create or invent what the community is or what it needs for betterment. For more, see Steven Lubar's blog post, "Seven Rules for Public Humanists."

'subject' we are not always speaking about an individual: we are speaking about a model for agency and intelligibility, one that is very often based on notions of sovereign power" (45). A distinct balance must be struck, then, so that the community does not collapse into a singularity under the weight of research and academic partnership. With this imperative in mind, the following sections outline three of the community-based projects I have engaged during my doctoral program that have been guided by the theories of empathetic humanism I work through in my dissertation. All of the projects I lead through my Innovation Fellowship at GSU use digital platforms and technologies as the basis for curating and disseminating our collaborative work with our community partners (with the slight exception of the Urban Migration grant project, as it keeps all participants completely anonymous). In the following sections, I will explain these partnerships and reference some of the digital tools used in these community-partnered projects to illustrate how digitally imagined and shared projects can benefit all participants, researchers, and stakeholders.

5.2   Cosmopolitanism: Objects of Refuge

To be a refugee means to be stripped of a home, country, and tangible objects that construct a history. Individuals fleeing war and violence take only what they can carry. Oftentimes they take nothing but their lives, the clothes on their back, and their story. Refugee stories are often formulated to obtain the United Nations's political designation of "refugee" and the requisite protections that offers – a restrictive narrative formula that is further transposed on migrants fleeing their homeland without the official state-sanctioned paperwork designating a refugee status. Objective facts and accuracy of an individual's experience are supplanted by the compulsory elements of a narrative that will win protection from a bureaucratic institution. This demands a story of persecution and victimization – perpetuating the power differential inherent

in the dominant nation's relationships to the migrant. Thus, the history of refugee migration, whether through the transmuted stories told or the absence of artifacts to provide evidence to an individual's experience, is largely told by the powerful.

As cosmopolitan scholars argue, a strong push back against nationalism is more important now than ever as "Migrants across the face of the earth – hundreds of millions of them – are often ground zero of nationalist resurgence, and often symbolize the foreign Other that threatens the imagined community of the nation, built as it is on the logic of insider/outsider, us/them" (Friedman 199). Extreme intensification of global migration requires us to do the work of counter-posing fear-based exclusion and nativism. The autobiographies of Obama and Higsashide both work toward that counter-narrative goal and even offer fuel for efforts of advocacy and redress. To be a migrant subject with all that that involves is to necessarily reference and invoke the border and, crucially, the legitimacy of the state (or other institution) to establish and police that border. It means the migrant subject is only ever granted conditional agency that is relative to the singular event of border crossing. The migrant subject is forever marked and indelibly stamped with the moniker other/outsider in a way that essentializes and legitimizes a powerful sedentary/nomadic dimension. As it privileges the subject-position of migrants and substantiates a recognition of a universal obligation to the Other, cosmopolitanism provides a productive sight line for revising migrant subjectivity. Does this cosmopolitical model of humanism—belonging to the world, rooting in homeland, grasping agency through being in transit—not most accurately embody liberatory transnationalism today? Of all the things, ideas, products, histories, and peoples that move across, between, and through real and imagined borders that define the nation, are not the subject-positions born from migrant journeys at once the most important and most consequential?

In spring 2018, I teamed with a GSU faculty member who teaches at Perimeter College, the community college branch of the university, in Clarkston, a small city adjacent to Atlanta that is one of the largest refugee resettlement communities in the United States. Because of the Clarkston campus, GSU has one of the highest refugee student populations in higher education. Refugee students at Perimeter College have long been expressing their desires to share their histories and stories of emigration. Theirs are not stories of perpetual victimhood; rather, they are predominantly stories of struggle, resilience, accomplishment, persistence, and compassion. The guiding inquiry for this project became seated in the following question: How can refugee students construct a history, an archive, and a story of their own – not the prototypical story of persecution necessarily crafted to obtain asylum, but the story of their individual migration history?

Consulting with refugee students, we devised our project plan to interview refugee students, map their migration paths, and use 3D photogrammetry and scanning tools to digitize and preserve an object they brought with them on their journey. Through this methodology, students establish an interactive and shareable archive—a history—of their migration. In summer 2018 we piloted the project with three refugee students affiliated with Perimeter College: Obie Njoku from Nigeria, Kpor Shee from Burma, and Duha Ghazla from Syria. We interviewed each student about their homeland and life in the metro Atlanta area, asking them to tell us about their migration through the lens of the object they brought with them in transit as a way to counter-pose the master narrative of victimization. Titling the project "Objects of Refuge," its framework and intention is now conceived as a new kind of archive, a collection to serve as a public memory reconstituted by those whose lived experiences are the testimony to the global migration crisis.

Going forward, the project team will continue to conduct interviews with refugee students, build 3D digital objects through photogrammetry and scanning, and create an active, accessible website (built on the preservation cornerstone of the Library Special Collections archive), all of which will be used to further community outreach, refugee student advocacy, and interpersonal scholarly engagement for both students and teachers. We will use the Omeka web publishing platform to organize, display, store and share the media-rich archive exhibit and OHMS (Oral History Metadata Synchronizer) software to tag and categorize audio and transcription files into searchable and accessible segments. The resulting archive seeks to restore documented historicity to a group without one, but also serve as a pedagogical tool in humanities and social science classrooms to teach primary research methods, archival practices, and digital literacy.

As refugees' stories are perpetually displaced and distorted, an archive that safeguards these narratives in their fullest interactive expression humanizes their migratory experience. Refugees bring with them heritage, memory, languages, and contributions to their new communities that tend to be subordinated by the immediacy of assimilating into the dominant culture of their new countries. Given our current global migratory crisis, the need for preserving their cosmopolitan narratives has never been more dire.

5.3 Suffering: Urban Migration Study

Urbanization is a genuine planetary challenge. In the coming decade, the United Nations projects that several billion more people will be living in the world's cities compared to 2019. Many of these newcomers are migrants. But migrants *already* experience housing precarity and face severe problems in accessing housing. How cities and countries address these issues will impact community relations, economy, politics, and the environment. In light of this

socio-urban context, I joined the chair of GSU's Geosciences department in Fall 2017 to help research and manage her international study on the living conditions and well-being of urban migrants in the Atlanta area (alongside our partner research teams in Hong Kong and Pretoria). Responding to the UN's New Urban Agenda, our project is one of the first to add internationally comparative data on migrant housing precarity. Our project was developed based on the belief that effective intervention needs reliable data on the experiences of migrants and the range of stakeholders who are involved. With the goal of increasing local and community capacity to sustain the development of positive housing options for migrants through global engagement of stakeholders, our project engages local stakeholders in each of the three cities to frame options for better policy on migrant housing.

To build primary and internationally comparative knowledge on migrant housing precarity, the research teams in Hong Kong, Pretoria, and Atlanta are interviewing approximately 120 newcomers living in each urban center. In the interviews, we specifically ask the participants about the conditions of their current residence, how they find housing and what obstacles they have gone through to secure livable spaces for themselves and their families, what kind of relationships they have with their neighbors, how they create local ties to the community, how much of their income is devoted to their housing and how much they send back home to family they may have left behind, and how they feel about where they live and the direction of their lives (empowered, secure, ambivalent, disappointed, skeptical, scared, angry, etc.). I cannot disclose specific details from the interviews with the study's participants due to strict anonymity clauses built into the grant funding agreement and the IRB approval. However, this narrative data will be used to calculate an Index of Migrant Housing for neighborhoods in these cities by combining migrant experiential data with statistical information which we will leverage to create

detailed, interactive digital maps that draw attention to the comparative experiences of migrants in Pretoria, Atlanta, and Hong Kong.

In addition to the data we collect through our interviews, we also argue that migrants should be incorporated into accounts of how precarity pervades the economic, social, and political dimensions of daily urban life. Precarity, and its regulation, is recognized as an important structural relation in cities. As Butler suggests in her 2012 essay, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation," "every political effort to manage populations involves a tactical distribution of precarity . . . that depends on dominant norms regarding whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable . . . and thus less worthy of protection and sustenance" (148). Analyses of precarity should consider how underlying power works intersectionally through social, spatial, and temporal relations of migrant daily life, and avoid rendering a totalizing account stressing only sovereign, disciplinary, or bio- powers. Recalling Butler's cautionary argument in *Precarious Life* about the balance that must be forged between the (dominant) group and the (minority) individual when articulating the conditions of precarity from Chapter One, it is useful to re-cite her stance in the context of urban migration:

> When we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class. And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings – distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law, a community defined by shared features. Indeed, we must be able to use that language to secure legal protections and entitlements. But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about. Although this language may well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology, it does not do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us

from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not

our own, irreversibly, if not fatally. (24-5)

To be clear, empirical evidence suggests that while precarity is recognized as a structural relation

across cities, it is migrants that disproportionately experience precarity.[4] That is, precarity, often

accompanied by prejudice, appears at certain times and in certain places to be exacted against

individuals and groups with particular ascribed characteristics of, for example, mobility,

immobility, and sociolegality. Financial debts from passage, bondage, the need to use pay day

loans and participate in the parasitic economy, burdens of remitting, and low expectations of any

rights or protections in the workplace increase migrant precarity and often instigates suffering.

Thus a large part of our work is to define these common experiences and hardships that migrants

go through without allowing those metrics to become the identity of migrants themselves. While

we can argue this distinction easily enough through writing, we have also (and more importantly)

been careful to demonstrate to the study's participants that we recognize and honor their agencies

as individuals. In this, I have leaned on my literary studies to consider the complexity of the idea

of a person's worth and how to manifest that idea through action. The value of someone's time

and efforts can be acknowledged monetarily, but their dignity cannot. To this point, we pay the

participants a modest sum for their time and contribution of narrative data. But we also offer a

hot meal, brought in from a local restaurant owned by migrants that serves food common to the

participants' homelands (halaal, posole rojo, masa, etc.), and make sure that the table they eat at

has a tablecloth, comfortable chairs, and centerpiece flowers.

    Ultimately, migrants' role in constituting the social fabric of a larger community suggests

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[4] See Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt's "Caught in the Work-Citizenship Matrix" and Bridget Anderson's "Migration, Immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers."

they exert multiple forms of agency on social processes and challenge any theory of knowledge

that separates migrants as agents in their own right. Similar to the protagonists of *The Pagoda*

and *Bitter in the Mouth*, migrants are not merely the sum of their suffering. Migrants are not

simply passive subjects being shunted from pillar to post at the behest of capital or the state.

Rather, we have learned ways that migrants create minoritarian spaces in Atlanta through small

initiatives like maintaining circuits of migration (sometimes by enabling family to join them in

the U.S., but more often by taking trips back home to visit loved ones) or working toward a

collective dream or goal. Suffering hardships and prioritizing these initiatives, migrants redefine

and expand the frame of humanity to assert their dignity. And through that dignity, joy often

surfaces.

5.4   Spatial Subjectivity: Counter-mapping Post-incarceration

In early 2018, I met three previously incarcerated citizens at an Atlanta community

meeting. They were at the meeting to discuss their experience of taking English classes while in

prison and how the critical thinking skills they developed through their courses transformed how

they perceived the carceral space they were in and the contingencies of their time. Since this

initial meeting, we have formed a partnership and expanded our team to consider the

intersections of spatial thinking, digital mapping, and incarceration. Although this collaboration

does not strictly evoke the sense of spatial subjectivity I argue for in Chapter Four (there are far

too many restrictions based on social and criminal hierarchies and juridical power dynamics in

the U.S. carceral system and physical prison structures for space to function as both a subject and

a subject-formation process), the theorization of how space and subjectivity inform one another

has been crucial to his public-facing collaborative project.

From the manipulation of space to confine, exclude, and discipline to the geographies of inequality fueling the prison industrial complex, mass-incarceration is a deeply spatial practice. Community-led projects reveal how critical approaches to mapping can be used to counter dominant narratives about mass-incarceration, or what Peluso terms "counter- mapping." Reflecting on an ongoing Atlanta-based collaboration between ATLMaps (a community-focused geospatial visualization platform, which I manage), Common Good Atlanta (a college-in-prison higher education program), and Inner-city Muslim Action Network (a community organization), I teamed with two GSU colleagues and Common Good Atlanta alumni to ask what kinds of stories maps can tell about the experiences of (post-) incarceration. From this inquiry and through our collaboration, we wrote an article on mapping methodologies geared for returning citizens and successful reentry. In our article, we highlight three specific "story-projects" to showcase the potential of collaborative mapping to: 1) *expose* transcarceral practices; 2) *educate* others about the situated experiences of incarceration and reentry; and 3) *engage* seemingly disparate communities that shape and are connected through transcarceral experience.

Our piece is a reflection on an ongoing collaboration that has produced numerous community-based mapping projects about post-incarceration: Common Good Atlanta (CGA) alumni have developed a Community-sourced Reentry Resource guide and shared it as a data layer on ATLMaps; content curators have published corresponding resource-, demographic-, and narrative-focused data layers of the carceral system; and ATLMaps members have designed a "Storytelling through Mapping" workshop series that is being presented to CGA students at various state incarceration facilities. Our work encompasses statistics of failure, such as how certain neighborhoods are disproportionately targeted for incarceration or are cut off from reentry services, but also stories of reclamation.

A unique spatial awareness is curated in our "Storytelling through Mapping" workshop with CGA students at state incarceration facilities. Just as Yamashita depicts series of intermingling connected networks of relationality in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, CGA students' revelations about the relationship between prison architecture and emotion as well as their debates about the constructed geopolitical boundaries of Atlanta as a city provide rich alternative worldviews. For example, the topic of gentrification is often brought up s by CGA students in our workshop as we discuss how maps tell stories. The men in the classroom immediately relate how the prohibition of particular acts and behaviors are spatially conditioned and shift depending on who occupies, owns, and governs said spaces: prosecutions vary depending on county, city, and state boundaries; private property lines demarcate where bodily presence (versus behavioral act) is considered a trespassing crime. With keen insight and perspective, the workshop participants demonstrate how the practice of counter-mapping situates returning citizens as essential partners in the vitality of the city, neighborhood, and community of which they are members. Similarly, in his piece on education in and beyond prisons, current inmate and CGA student David Evans argues that education has the potential to re-spatialize prison spaces from "negative place[s]" to what he feels is a more "positive" environment (7). Evans explains: "I'm often struck by the juxtaposition when I leave class and a guard yells at me and calls me 'inmate' with disdain in their voice. In class, I'm a human being; outside of class, I'm Frankenstein" (8). Evans further speaks of classrooms as creating "humanizing" bubbles within a dehumanizing institution, highlighting the transformative capacities of education in prisons when presented as a basic human right rather than rehabilitation.

Teaming with CGA and the Atlanta branch of the Inner-city Muslim Action Network has shown that collaborative critical mapping not only is about exposing problems associated with mass-incarceration; but also, the critical engagement with and production of maps enables incarcerated students and returning citizens to locate knowledge and power in themselves and perceive their personal stake and social responsibility to care about and for the communities to which they return. And in this way, spatial subjectivity is reformulated for incarcerated and returning citizens. Mapping can be a celebratory pursuit, as it foregrounds participatory alliances and imagines possibilities for future community growth.

Working in concert with these educators, advocates, and returning citizens has taught us that maps can be useful tools for exposing unequal power relations and systemic injustice at multiple scales, provided that they do not reproduce the very systems of oppression they are intended to disrupt. We argue that, in addition to exposing the injustices and disparities produced through mass-incarceration, community-based counter-mapping can be employed to push against the boundaries of carceral power, creating new spaces and opportunities for public engagement and education beyond reformative models. Ultimately, our work seeks to illuminate how the power to think geospatially is a democratizing force, in which local community residents and returning citizens are not only mutually inclusive, but also are co-beneficiaries.

5.5   A Closing Remark

I partner with communities that have been systematically dehumanized by legal processes, political rhetoric, and social discourses. Working with these communities, I have come to understand how the theoretical work on empathetic humanism my dissertation engages through literary analyses can actually work in "real life," fueled by academic studies. The community projects I have been a part of have ultimately taught me what it means to be a

humanist. At heart, humanists have an obligation to people and communities, not the machinery of institutions. Humanists are charged with being both guardian and dissenter, advocate and critic, for and of society. Humanists are trained to locate and analyze social values. But values, and therefore the humanist position, can easily become codified and bureaucratized. In a recent special issue of the *Publication of the Modern Language Association*, Cathy Davidson confesses, "Our wealthiest institutions are not always the ones leading creative innovation. More to the point, at some institutions of higher education, the definition of innovation does not include equality and actually exacerbates inequality" (708). My responsive goal is to foster collaborations that spring-load its team members for active, responsible citizenship. I work to cultivate in my teams a sustained commitment to mindfulness and careful scrutiny that privileges a pedagogy of compassionate discernment: how to recognize glamour parading as beauty, biography lording over identity, or novelty usurping nuance. After all, as Davidson concludes, "If higher education does not serve the public good, higher education does not deserve public benefit" (708). The work of humanists may be severely underappreciated, yet the need for humanistic work feels particularly dire in these opening months of 2019. Perhaps we would all do well to be guided by the understanding that the pedagogical and programmatic research of how to train and sustain humanists—both academic and not—in the 21st Century may well be the most crucial contribution of American universities from here forward.

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