

Asian American Literature: Discourses and Pedagogies
6 (2015) 33-44

“Chinese don’t drink coffee!”: Coffee and Class Liminality in Elaine Mar’s

Paper Daughter

by *Christian Aguiar*

“Coffee breaks, cab rides, green rooms. Real growth often happens outside where we intend it to, in the interstitial spaces – what Dr. Seuss calls ‘the waiting place.’” --- Bruce Mau

In Elaine Mar’s critically understudied memoir *Paper Daughter*, narrator Elaine’s mother insists that, despite her husband’s heavy consumption of the drink to stay awake in the kitchen where they work, “Chinese don’t drink coffee!” The mother’s insistence on what kinds of consumption are appropriate for her family forms one of the key insights of Roxanne Rashedi’s (2011) article in this publication, “Disordered Eating, Agency, and Social Class: Elaine Mar’s *Paper Daughter*.” Ordering how, what, and when her daughter consumes is both one of the only control mechanisms available to Elaine’s mother and one of the few areas for potential independence available to Elaine. Rashedi’s article, with its insights into the dynamics of consumption in the text, remains one of the only scholarly explorations of this important work of literature, and consequently one of the only guides for teaching the work. In the following pages, I suggest that the dynamics of consumption present in *Paper Daughter* might be used as a vehicle to explore a crucial element of working class experience, that of liminality. I suggest some ways we can reframe our thinking on liminality and interstitiality by looking at the foodservice spaces in this text. By looking at the way food is prepared and served in the text – and by looking at the way the workers who prepare and serve the food experience liminality - we gain important new insights into interstitial spaces, class liminality, and the dynamic spaces of consumption in *Paper Daughter*.

First, a few words on liminality. Liminality is used to refer to people and spaces on the edge, those in between, and those in transition. The concept, and its closely related though more static cousin interstitiality, has a wide range of applications across biology, engineering, architecture, cultural studies, and critical pedagogy. The concept itself, you could say, exists at the edge of, and in between, many different fields. It allows thinkers to talk about the spaces in between well-defined areas of knowledge. The American legal scholar Anne Shea, for

Christian Aguiar teaches composition at Northern Virginia Community College, Prince George’s Community College, and University of the District of Columbia Community College. He is a recent graduate of the MA program in English at Georgetown University.

ISSN: 2154-2171

example, suggests that the “interstitial space” occupied by migrant farmworkers – workers who are neither fully-integrated citizens nor fully-excluded aliens – represents a “space” of political productivity (132). Canadian poet Lorri Neilsen, meanwhile, points to the productive liminality of literature. Neilsen suggests that fiction constitutes a liminal or interstitial space inasmuch as it “[does] not call for an answer in the same way our conventional notions of knowledge seeks an answer” (209). She pushes this further still, writing that “[k]nowledge, like fiction itself, is liminal space...It is always a waiting space, a green room, Derrida’s *différance*, a journey” (208). For Nielsen, liminality represents not just the area between defined fields of knowledge – biology, say, or our total combined knowledge about the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic – but the entirety of knowledge. Everything we know, she suggests, is constantly in transition, even knowledge itself. Bruce Mau, meanwhile, highlights the productivity of social spaces that, because they are in between more permanent spaces with more permanent social rules, allow for freer interaction. “Coffee breaks, cab rides, [and] green rooms” provide spaces for people to think differently.

The interstitial – a term closely related to liminality, but one which seems to rely less on the (often, problematically, “upward”) mobility of the subject and more on their semi-permanent in-betweenness – has been rigorously theorized in the fields of postcolonial and ethnic studies. The interstitial can be embodied in the functional spaces of building design: the stairwell, the utility closet, the so-called penthouse on the roof of a building where HVAC units are kept. Homi K Bhaba offers the following reading of the stairwell as interstitial space:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

In terms of racial and ethnic identity, then, the interstitial exists where two clearly defined categories meet – or perhaps fail to meet. The idea of racial or ethnic interstitiality, as Leslie Bow has written, helps us map out the “third race,” those “individuals and communities who [do] not fit into a cultural and legal system predicated on the binary distinction between black and white” (1). Given the rigorous racial binary imposed by white

supremacy, the idea of the interstitial can help us make sense of the kinds of identities available to those who are neither black nor white. As Bow's work shows, it is a powerful theoretical tool.

Bhabha's and Bow's considerations of ethno-racial intersitituality offer a clear stepping-off point for thinking about working class liminality. While the interstitial has not been widely considered as an approach to working class experience, the figure of the class liminal has. The class liminal, the socially mobile person who has moved from one socio-economic class to another, is a common enough figure to warrant some attention. Alison Cook-Sather and Zanny Alter, for example, have suggested that being a class liminal can be "productive" due to the symbolical separation from the social order it engenders. This separation offers "the potential to challenge and disrupt established norms," but also the danger of being "never secure" precisely because one is never able to attain a stable class position (38). In other words, "upwardly" mobile people from the working and poverty classes, because they have both an outsider's and an insider's view to both class categories, know things others don't. Their liminality gives them access to a different type of knowledge. Other thinkers – most notably, my colleague Robyn Russo – have put considerable thought into what it looks like when working-class students enter middle-class (classroom) spaces. Russo suggests this experience of liminality offers a valuable position for those seeking to "gain agency in a society which would rather make them invisible" (115). Russo emphasizes the way socially mobile working class students, who are often portrayed as stuck between the cultures they came up in and those they've moved into, get a unique view of both cultures unavailable to those who don't exist in-between. This dual perspective has clear parallels in Bhabha's formulation of liminality. The demand that working-class people claim one class identity or another, though, has striking parallels with Bow's analysis of a "third race" that must be made to fit the established racial binary.

While there are many different ways to define the liminal,¹ it's important to underscore that it has been defined primarily in a negative sense. These definitions, in other words, rely not so much on what the liminal is as on what it isn't. The liminal space is distinct in these definitions not because it marks out an entirely new or particularly hard-

1 There are, of course, other possible meanings. The liminal or interstitial space is, in the most basic sense, a space in between, and as such is infinitely interpretable. I think I've hinted at it already, but the very idea of the interstitial is a sort of in-between idea. As far as I can tell, it originates in architecture, where an interstitial space is a space where electrical, HVAC, plumbing and other spaces can be placed in between floors. From there, like so many good ideas, it's ended up in English departments.

to-define space, but rather because it marks a space the conventional framework is not prepared to deal with. The liminal or interstitial exists as a thought-category, as an epistemological space, precisely because it offers a way to refer to what doesn't fit into other categories. In class terms, the conventional is the normative middle and upper class; working and poverty-class cultures, then, become liminal when brought into contact with the cultures of these other, conventional social classes. Just as the notion of the color line or binary offers no "middle space," the notion of a series of clearly delineated socio-economic categories offers no clear category for those who exist in between. A person who was raised in poverty but attended Harvard – a person such as the narrator Elaine – does not clearly fit into any single class category. That person is a class liminal.

In *Paper Daughter*, Elaine's experience of the city of Denver is primarily structured through her experience of liminality. Born in Hong Kong, itself a quintessentially liminal space, Elaine becomes the sole linguistic and cultural interpreter of America for her parents.² This role, one she does not take on by choice, constitutes an isolated in-between position defined not so much by what is inside of it as by what is outside of it. Mar writes:

I was the American voice of the family, the connection between our basement room and the outside world. I'd accepted a hollow name, an empty construct, and created an identity with it in four short years. 'Elaine' was adored by teachers, got A's in everything except penmanship, and watched *The Brady Bunch* faithfully every day after school. I didn't ask for these challenges, yet I responded and excelled.
(160)

Elaine reads her experience of liminality as both a social construct and a spatial position. Her in-betweenness is a matter of language as well as a matter of living in her aunt's basement. Linguistically the narrator is forced to occupy the "empty construct" of her American name, to fill it with an identity created from scratch, a striking example of the productivity Russo finds in liminal class identities. The narrator must reshape her identity using the resources at hand, in this case an English name and *The Brady Bunch*. In between two linguistic and cultural worlds, Elaine forges an identity that fits neatly into neither. Importantly, she

2 In teaching this text, it might be useful to provide students with background into Hong Kong's historical position in between China and the British Empire. Thinking about this can provide another rich entry-point for students into the idea of liminality, as well as a way to link an American-centered text into wider discourses of colonialism and diaspora.

doesn't do so willingly – she doesn't “ask for” the role – but she does learn to excel at it.

In addition to the liminal social position Elaine articulates here, she also occupies spaces that are clearly interstitial. I'm thinking of space quite literally here: her family lives in the basement of a successful aunt's house, next to the laundry room and the children's play area. While Elaine defines her social position in terms of academic success, linguistic and cultural code switching, and the consumption of middle-class values through television, the spatial contours of her existence are not so easily defined. On the one hand, there is the limited space of the basement room she shares with her parents and little brother in her aunt's house, a space that is defined in the text as more strongly “Chinese” than any other except, perhaps, the social club. This room provides a retreat from the uncertain cultural spaces of Denver for the narrator's mother, but is primarily a space of discipline for Elaine. It is also, crucially, not a space the family owns: ““This isn't our house,”” the narrator's mother reminds her. ““That isn't your room. Those aren't your toys. Nothing belongs to us here”” (94). When confronted with her daughter's taunting English and seemingly easy code switching, Elaine's mom retreats into silence (refusal to use any language, Chinese, English or otherwise), what the narrator calls “subversive anger,” and finally, into the basement room (160).

Compared to her mother's tiny spatial territory, the world Elaine has access to is huge. It encompasses no less than everything outside of the house, excluding “our parents but not our neighbors...my mother but not passersby at the supermarket” (161). Elaine's particular interstitial space is bordered on one side, then, by her parents' basement room and on the other by something like the rest of America. The difference is huge, and it helps the narrator gain a sense of power and control:

After months of walking by rote, clinging to mother's directions, I became aware that my neighborhood's existence was immutable. The same houses would always lie along the same streets. The same streets would always lead to the same destinations. In permanence there was safety, in safety, magic. I knew I could never get lost in this little world of Jasmine Street. (104)

Able to move more freely through the streets of the neighborhood than her mother, the narrator comes to understand the stability this outside world might offer her. She comes to understand this only when she disobeys her mother's instructions.

Mar's position here parallels that of the narrator of Jade Snow Wong's memoir *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, as described by Elaine H. Kim in her trailblazing study of Asian-American literatures: “[her] solution is to utilize her familiarity as an American-born Chinese with the non-Chinese

world to gain status and strength in the eyes of her Chinese family and community while at the same time using her Chinese background in such a way as to win as much acceptance as possible from non-Chinese Americans” (66). If, following Kim, we read Elaine’s navigation of multiple spaces as a choice like Jade’s, we uncover some of the agency available to her even in her liminality. Such a reading also highlights the ways that class liminality intersects with ethnic and linguistic liminality. Elaine puts her ethnic and linguistic liminality to work with her white American school friends as well as with her family. Crucially, she does this not solely by translating or moving between cultures, but by moving between spaces, some strongly marked as Chinese and subject to her mother’s control, others marked more strongly as American and subject to limited familial control.

While ethnic, linguistic and class liminality share much in common, I want to pay particular attention to the way class liminality functions through the interstitial spaces of food preparation and consumption areas. As a former cook, it seems important to me that Mau, Nielsen, and Russo all use foodservice spaces to illustrate their notions of liminality.³ Mau draws our attention to the coffee break, which he sees as the place where “real growth” happens in meetings, at conferences, and at work. There, free from the rigid social conventions of officially productive spaces, people can be more creative. Russo too turns to coffee and argues insightfully that we can find the class liminal in the gap between “the Starbucks, dispensing \$6 fair-trade espresso concoctions...[and] the Sheetz gas station...offer[ing] 99-cent, bucket-sized Styrofoam cups of slightly-singed, no-name coffee” (112). Russo’s example is especially insightful because it relies on a contrast between consumption options: the Starbucks espresso concoction, which costs the same as an hour of minimum wage work in much of the country, exemplifies middle-class consumption, while the gas station bucket of coffee offers a working-class alternative. Liminality for Russo exists in between Starbucks and Sheetz, on the highway interchange where the consumer has to choose, where the divided loyalties of the socially mobile working-class individual have to be negotiated. Russo takes great care in exploring the class dimensions of coffee service, while Mau takes none; neither, however, walks around to the other side of the counter to consider what it means to work in an in-

3 The preparation and service of food also provides a point of critical intersection between working-class and Asian American literatures. The latter, as Jennifer Ann Ho notes, has often been characterized by a tense relationship between the consumption of food as “a critical medium for compliance with and resistance to Americanization” and the necessity of resisting stereotypical associations of Asian American subjects with “foods, its preparation, consumption and service” (3).

between space. In focusing on consumption, neither pays much attention to service or production.

Elaine does. She works at the restaurant Casey's Palace with her family, and she defines the service corridor – the place where bus boys dump dirty dishes and grab fresh table settings, and waitresses stack up dinner rolls - as the “limbo between kitchen and dining room” (175). The dish corridor is the space in the restaurant where front-of-the-house and back-of-the-house meet. This small, two-sided area functions as a boundary area for distinctions of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Mar describes the space as

limbo between kitchen and dining room, separated from customers by plywood panels painted a sticky-looking brown. We taped work schedules and copies of lunch and dinner menus on the wait staff side of the wall. The waitresses added horoscopes and comics clipped from the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News. Lighter patches of brown, where tape had pulled off, dotted the wall like heat rash. (175)

The corridor wall serves as a boundary not just between those wealthy enough to be served in the restaurant and those who serve them, but also between wait staff (female, white, working class) and kitchen staff (male and female, Chinese or Chinese-American, working class). This boundary, while clearly demarcated, remains permeable and negotiable. Mar’s pronoun usage here seems intentionally vague: does the “we” mean that Elaine has included herself with the wait staff, or does it mean that the kitchen staff has claimed space on the wait staff’s side of the boundary? The reader can't say for sure, and that's important: asking these questions begins to open up the experience of liminality Mar offers her reader.

The productivity of such interstitial spaces emerges from uncertainty. Elaine imagines herself, because she regularly talks with the wait staff, as more closely connected to the front-of-the-house staff than her family is. She feels more entitled to use their space. Because the corridor belongs to no one in particular, it is a space where Elaine can envision herself the equal of the “seemingly endless procession of all-American boys” who bus tables in the dining room (178). Out on the floor, in the front of the house, Elaine would be entering into their space; in the kitchen where she washes dishes, they would be entering into hers, or her family’s. In the service corridor, though, neither enters into a space marked solely for the other’s use. This un-marked status makes the corridor incredibly productive in precisely the way theorists anticipate. Able to interact in the service corridor on equal footing with the same middle-class white boys who taunt her at school, Elaine can ask questions

about their treatment of her, why it changes based on where they are, and what power she might have to influence the dynamic. In becoming “surrogate brothers” to her at the restaurant, but not at school, these busboys expose the ways they are immune to the struggles of the other workers, destined always to “quit working for us to attend one or another of the state universities” (179). Through these boys, Elaine gains insight into the way her social position shifts based on the space she is in: in the restaurant, a space marked more clearly as working class, she can command the respect of her middle class peers. However, once she enters the public school, an institution coded as conventional, and thus as middle or upper class, she loses that respect. While useful, this binary reading of classed spaces doesn’t explain why Elaine gains the respect of her peers, but her parents don’t. It is Elaine’s liminal position within the space of the restaurant, her social in-betweenness, that makes it possible for her to become friends with the busboys. Elaine’s parents don’t enjoy the same ability to move freely between back and front, worker and student, English and Chinese. The restaurant, where this liminal position opens new doors, becomes her “preferred home,” the one place where she doesn’t “feel like the solitary mediator between two worlds” (180). These passages, incredibly productive in the text, also repay close readings in class. They allow the dynamics of class liminality to unfold in their full complexity, moving beyond simple binary constructions.

This complexity is not – cannot be – a matter of class alone, but also one of race, ethnicity, and gender. As John Russo and Sherry Linkon have noted, class can never be considered as a discrete, distinct, isolatable social category apart from other categories such as these. It is crucial then that we “[make] sense of the complex mosaic of class, race, gender and ethnicity,” rather than treat each category as a separate unit or lens of analysis (13). The bus boys at the restaurant are not merely middle class to Elaine, but also “all-American.” Elaine’s exclusion from social circles at school is most certainly a matter of class, predicated in large part on her inability to buy expensive clothes, go on vacations, or participate in the same activities as her more affluent peers. But the narrator’s position at the edge of her school’s social hierarchy is characterized by cultural liminality, not just class liminality:

I had a niche: I was never an insider, but I wasn’t completely isolated, either. I sat on the fringes, politely sniffing the popular girls’ bottles of Love’s Baby Soft perfume and listening to debates on the merits of Shaun Cassidy versus Parker Stevenson. I knew that these moments, more than any words on my spelling list, defined the true American language. Communication relied on cultural cues I was only beginning to understand. (185)

Here, the narrator unpacks the complex apparatus of exclusion. While it is tempting to read the passage above primarily for its sense of class alienation, the conspicuous consumption of perfume Elaine is unable to take part in, for example, or the worship of middle-class idols – there are clear indications that it’s not just about that. The narrator uses “language” to describe what she’s lacking, or rather what she’s learning. This harkens back to earlier moments in the text where she has been excluded due to her language (“I wasn’t able to communicate in English, so everybody thought I was stupid”) while suggesting the incompleteness of linguistic assimilation (65). Elaine has navigated successive waves of racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic marginalization; she has learned to speak English in addition to her family’s Guangdonghua; she has learned, too, to speak languages of work, music, and dress. Yet she still remains liminal.

This suggests the degree to which the experience of an autobiographical narrator like Elaine might be read as both exceptional and anomalous. From the first line of the author’s note, where Mar notes that “my family’s language cannot be written,” (x) to the last line of the novel, where she claims that, “[l]ike my grandfather, I’d immigrated with no way to send for my family,” Mar positions her autobiographical narrator as to some degree anomalous and exceptional (292). This is no doubt representative of the state of exception in which all nonwhite, nonblack individuals might be tentatively placed within the American racial binary, but it also seems to represent one peculiar to the narrator of this text. She grows up in Denver, a city with a tiny Chinese-American community; she is isolated from that community by various decisions of her parents; she is isolated from other working-class people by her parents’ choice to live in a middle-class suburb; her meteoric rise from that suburb to Harvard further isolates her not just from her parents, but from her friends, her peers, from every community she has known. This narrative is exceptional not in that it represents events that do not or cannot occur, but rather in that it participates in narratives of exceptionalism. Elaine’s experience of her own liminality is tightly connected to this exceptional position. Yet this position is also anomalous in the sense in which Leslie Bow uses it to describe Asian Americans in the segregated south, who had to live within the confines of a system not designed to accommodate them. “What is unaccommodated,” Bow writes, “becomes a site of contested interpretation” (4). Elaine’s narrative as a whole becomes just such a site of contestation and uncertainty – in a word, of liminality.

Elaine’s experience is not the only experience of life in interstitial space explored in *Paper Daughter*. By looking at how workers like Elaine’s

father, her family, and the waitresses variously use interstitial spaces, we can approach them from a different angle and gain a different set of insights. This is an important shift to make. By centering discussions of interstitial spaces on their often middle-class “consumers,” theorists have tended to ignore the workers who make them possible. It is great to think about how productive professors are at a conference coffee break; it is crucial, however, that we also think about the caterers behind the table who serve the coffee, those who work in these interstitial spaces and make them possible. This is in keeping with the mission of working class studies, which demands that we pay attention to the workers whose labor, paradoxically, constructs the very world from which it is excluded. This is not simply a matter of workers creating spaces; after all, working class people have created every space in the world. It's a matter also of seeing how working class people are able to use these spaces to be productive. This means considering how her experience at Casey's Palace helps Elaine understand the different identities available to her, as well as thinking about how her mother, father, aunt, and the waitresses experience and make use of their own liminality.

Elaine's encounter with the food her family prepares at Casey's Palace provides a great opportunity to perform such a reading. We can do this by reading this encounter from three perspectives: Elaine's, her family's, and that of the wait staff. Mar constructs Elaine's consumption of customer leftovers as violating a particularly strong family taboo:

My family never ate the same food as the customers, and I was curious. Whenever I asked my parents about the menu items, they told me that the dishes were no good – crazy *gui* food. I never questioned their judgment, only wondered why people would pay money for bad food. Here was my opportunity to find out. (177)

Elaine tries the food, of course. Her family continues to choose not to eat the food they make and in the process to construct the food as radically other, as *gui*, as foreign. Elaine's decision to consume the food represents a break with her family's policy, yet it is very much in keeping with the consumption patterns of the other workers, who pick food off customers' plates before bringing it out. When Elaine eats the food herself, she is joining in an important act of symbolic resistance with the front-of-the-house workers, even though that act distances her from her family. By eating the customer's food, Elaine is aligning herself with the front of the house staff, an action that helps build a sense of class solidarity: “The waitresses and my family couldn't afford to buy these luxury items for ourselves, so we became vultures, bottom feeders” (178). For the waitresses, consuming the tastier leftovers or picking choice bits off of

customers' plates before serving them is a way to assert their own right to consume such luxuries. This is made possible by their employment in an essentially liminal position, where they serve things they themselves couldn't afford to eat to people with greater socio-economic privilege.

The back of the house has its own acts of resistance, as anyone who's worked in a kitchen knows. Elaine's father, the cook, eats food meant for the *gui* too; he just does it before it passes through the service corridor to become *gui* food. Elaine recalls "when we served surf-'n'-turf my father parceled out the shell of the lobster tail, heavily dipped in butter" (177). Her father, while he doesn't follow the same Harvard-bound trajectory of class mobility as the narrator, nonetheless occupies a liminal class position. Working as a cook places him, his wife, his sister and his brother-in-law in constant, if indirect, contact with middle-class consumers from whom they have to try to earn a living. The kitchen staff's consumption of the food is an act of survival, of resistance, and of pleasure. In eating the tail shell and whatever meat comes off with it, they are eating food meant for the customers, the intended consumers. In doing so, they challenge the intended social order. More importantly, they are nourishing themselves collectively. The father parcels out lobster tail to the kitchen staff, and they eat it together, building a sense of unity.

This kind of position, markedly different as it is from the work in manufacturing and industry that has come to define white, male, working-class experience, is much more typical of contemporary working-class experience.⁴ And this position is, almost by definition, a liminal one. It requires the worker be constantly present for coffee breaks, on the other side of the table, helping lubricate middle-class work. In Elaine's father's case, it means that, much to his wife's chagrin, he starts drinking coffee. Even if, as her mom insists, "Chinese don't drink coffee," Elaine's father gulps it down in large quantities to stay awake in the kitchen. By paying close attention to the spaces of foodservice in Mar's memoir, scholars and students alike can begin to explore the way these spaces complicate existing notions of what it means to be working class. Close readings of the passages in Casey's Palace, including but not limited to those explored in this essay, reveal the enormous complexity of Elaine's experiences as a young woman trapped between well-worn American identity categories. Neither "all-American" like her white boy coworkers, nor as comfortably Chinese as her mother, unable to engage in the middle-class consumption

4 While his notion of the "precariat" is often frustrating, Standing provides a useful sense of some contemporary shifts in working-class labor, including the move away from industrial/manufacturing ("blue collar") work towards service industry and "pink collar" work. See also Kim V. England, "Suburban Pink Collar Ghettos: The Spatial Entrapment of Women" (1993).

patterns of her peers but on a path to Harvard, Elaine's experience traces a complex trajectory across, around, and in between supposedly clear identities.

As working-class work in the United States continues its long shift from the factory to the service industry, it is important that we consider the way service workplaces like Casey's Palace function.⁵ This means seeing coffee breaks not just as a place where office workers talk shop or business people make side deals, but where work of a different kind occurs. By thinking of liminal spaces not just as productive spaces people pass through on their way from one place to another, but also as productive spaces to work and live in, we can begin to change the way we think about working-class labor in the contemporary moment. While upwardly mobile "scholarship girl" narratives like that of Mar's *Paper Daughter* will no doubt continue to occupy some of the most explicitly in-between positions on the class hierarchy, it's important that we look at these narratives in more complex ways. While it is certainly not the only contemporary narrative of social mobility to explore the possibility that "upward" movement might not always be a positive thing, *Paper Daughter's* exploration of the experience of multiple liminalities on the path to social mobility makes it distinct. It allows students the opportunity to re-think the bootstraps narrative and its uncomplicatedly positive outlook on social mobility. It does so by offering rich grounds for considering liminal spaces as spaces that must be constructed, maintained, and serviced by working-class people.⁶

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. Web. Accessed 18 May 2015.

Bow, Leslie. *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Print.

5 When I presented a version of this paper at the 2015 *Passages* conference at Georgetown University, Ricardo Ortiz suggested considering this shift within the long and complex histories of Asian-American working class labor. In this vein, the long and complicated history of Asian American work in service industries might shed additional light on the ways this "shift" to non-industrial labor doesn't represent a shift for all working-class people and communities, but only for some. The history of Asian-American literature is full of stories about work in the service industries.

6 I would like to thank Pam Fox for comments on an earlier draft of this paper; Stephanie Lim for her many insights; and my friends in Pam's Class Fictions course for their feedback.

- Cook-Sather, Alison and Zanny Alter. "What Is and What Can Be: How a Liminal Position Can Change Learning in Higher Education." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*: 42.1 (2011): 37-53. Web. Accessed 12 October 2014.
- Ho, Jennifer Ann. *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Kim, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Context*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982. Print.
- Mar, M. Elaine. *Paper Daughter*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.
- Mau, Bruce. "An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth." *Manifesto Project*. Accessed 13 October 2014. Web. Accessed 4 October 2014.
- Neilsen, Lorri. "Learning from the Liminal: Fiction as Knowledge." *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 48.3 (2002): 206-214. Web. Accessed 4 October 2014.
- Rashedi, Roxanne. "Disordered Eating, Agency, and Social Class: Elaine Mar's *Paper Daughter*." *Asian American Literature: Discourses & Pedagogies* 2 (2011): 38-44. Web. Accessed 1 October 2014.
- Russo, John and Sherry Lee Linkon. "Introduction: What's New About New Working-Class Studies?" In *New-Working Class Studies*, ed. John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. Print.
- Russo, Robyn. "Conclusion: The View from Breezewood." In *Broken Boot-Straps: Representing and Teaching the Class Liminal in the Contemporary American School*. Thesis of Georgetown University 2005. *Dissertations and Theses*. Web. Accessed 8 September 2014.
- Shea, Anne. "'Don't Let Them Make You Feel Like You Did a Crime': Immigration Law, Labor Rights, and Farmworker Testimony." *MELUS* 28.1 (2003): 123-144. Web. Accessed 30 September 2014.
- Standing, Guy. *The Precariat: A Dangerous New Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. Print.