

TRANSNATIONAL ALLEGORY, DOMESTIC COSMOPOLITANISM: TOWARDS A COSMOFEMININE SPACE IN SHIRLEY LIM'S *JOSS AND GOLD*

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We never change for change sake but for added security, added advantage.

—Shirley Lim, *Joss and Gold* 259

█ In stories of Orientalist encounters between white men and Asian women, narratives of victimology are consistently resurrected, against the downward spiral of a beguiling and self-sacrificing Asian female Other who clings to meager love extended by unworthy, unfaithful white men. Dramatising the disturbance a selfish white man creates in Southeast Asia, that is, amidst newly-independent Malaysia's multiracial and multicultural crises, Shirley Geok-lin Lim's debut novel *Joss and Gold* (2001) is 'a provocative alternative to the Madame Butterfly myth' (Geok 267). The novel insinuates transformative powers of allegorical fiction that mediate our readings of the historical past and traditions. Instead of appropriating tropes of Orientalist encounters as gimmicky demonstrations of the white man's romantic idealisation, the novel presents an interracial relationship, through a one-night affair leading to pregnancy, as a learning experience for cultivating the inner confidence and cosmopolitan independence of the female protagonist, Li An, who refuses to buy entry into the Western world. This article argues that *Joss and Gold* is a powerful work of deterritorialised, transnational allegory. Lim's charting of an allegorical journey of female characters—the protagonist Li An, her friend Ellen, and her ex-mother-in-law Grandma Yeh—from hegemonic Malaysia in the 1960s to metropolitan Singapore in the 1980s, problematises nationalist and Orientalist discourses that have relegated women to Manichean spaces of ethnic/national, victimiser/victimised and public/private.

Juxtapositions between Li An's past life in Malaysia and her present life in Singapore open up possibilities of envisioning a 'cosmofeminine' pace—a form of 'domestic cosmopolitanism'—which bridges a feminist ethics of care with a 'vernacular' cosmopolitan existence of minoritised women, for whom the global life is less a reward than one of the necessities imposed by the 'disjunctures of modern globalisation' (Hall and Werbner 347).

Within the allegorical frame of the novel, I first introduce Lim's writing position from the perspective of 'deterritorialisation' and argue that her creolised cultural upbringing and nomadic life experiences inform the shifting borderlines and escape routes in her work. I then investigate the novel's parody of hegemonic politics in Malaysia in the 1960s and its confinement of women to dispossessed positions of displacement at home. In the third part, I concentrate on analysing Li An's belonging in Singapore in relation to domestic cosmopolitanism. I claim that difference and change are at the core of cosmopolitanism, and that the incorporation of feminist ethics of care into cosmopolitan scholarship charts a belonging that negotiates difference and effects change, as the epigraph to this article delineates, for gradual security and advantage instead of systematic transformation. The novel's configuration of a cosmofeminine space provides imaginative solutions for women who are marginalised by nationalist and gendered hegemony to become cosmopolitan subjects actively engaging with a globalising modernity while obtaining recognition, autonomy, and solidarity through the maintenance of important affective networks.

LIM AND 'DETERRITORIALISATION'

In an interview, Lim deems herself 'homeless' and her works enunciate a sense of 'deterritorialisation,' which is localised in and shaped by her lived experiences as a Malaysian, an American citizen, and a diasporic Chinese woman (Quayum, 'Interview' 5). 'Deterritorialisation' is a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe the adoption of German, a majority language, by Kafka, a minority Czech-Jewish writer, to enunciate his politics of desire (16). According to Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature 'begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualise until afterwards' (28): a minor literature destabilises ready-made literary content and forms, propels diverse contents by constantly inventing new expressions, and produces rhizomatic potentialities through a nonsignifying process of ruptures and metamorphosis. As a main characteristic of minor literature, deterritorialisation connects individual desires with political immediacy and endows the writer from the margins with the greater possibility of enunciating another 'community,' 'consciousness,' and 'sensibility' (17). The landscape of subjectivity constituted by deterritorialisation is an 'empirical transcendental site of becoming' (Braidotti 5). As Rosi Braidotti maintains, Deleuzian philosophy encourages a subject that functions as a 'relay-point' for many sets of intensive intersections with multiple others (75). Not being burdened by being One, the subject can envisage forms of 'resistance and political agency that are multi-layered and complex' (Braidotti 75).

Deterritorialisation provides a perspective from which to interpret Lim's creolised cultural upbringing and her works as occupying a deterritorialised space wherein enunciations of desires, power relations, and escape routes are capable of revolutionary expressions. Born in Malacca to a Hokkien-Peranakan family and British-educated, Lim takes up an interstitial position along axes of ethnicity, language, and culture. Lim recollects the familial culture she imperceptibly receives in childhood: 'My Chinese life in Malaysia up to 1969 was a pomegranate,

thickly seeded' (*White* 63). The 'seed' of a pomegranate, pronounced as 'zi [children/progeny]' in Chinese, is a symbol of collective values, its kernels standing for fertility and its crimson colour a signifier of prosperity. Western values of individuality, signified by the singularity of each seed inside the pomegranate that can sprout into a tree, comprise the 'corruption' that Lim actively seeks in order to 'escape that other familial/gender/native culture that violently hammered out only one shape for self' (*White* 65). Lim also claims that corruption, 'as a will to break out, to rupture, to break down, to decay, and thus to change,' is inherent in every culture in which we are not only 'mimic people' born to be pushed and shaped, but also 'agents' and powerful subjects to push back and to struggle against such shaping (*White* 65). Critiquing the assumption that English is an imperialistic language only for the colonisers, she asserts, 'claiming English as my own was my first step out of the iron cage and into a voice, and who is to say it is not my language and not my voice?' (*Writing* 6).

Lim's critical thinking disrupts dualistic oppositions and enables her to construct flexible positions. The 'corruption' of English that she explains embodies Françoise Lionnet's concept of linguistic *métissage* by which a dominant language is appropriated and taken possession of as the writer's own agential vehicle for expressing 'a hybrid, heteroglot universe' (13). This process might undermine the linguistic and cultural independence of postcolonial Malaysia, but it also legitimises forms of 'transculturation' and cultural mongrelisation whereby cultural hybrids such as Lim can creatively incorporate Western aesthetic tools into their own 'cosmology or *Weltanschauung* [worldview]' (Lionnet 11). Lim interrogates these creolised aesthetics through a repoliticisation of the allegorical form—once a negative genre that fixes 'third-world literature' into the 'nightmare of history' whereby the 'telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself' (Jameson 85-86). She creates parodies of hegemonic politics and their confinement of the female protagonist, whose cultural background is similar to Lim's, to dispossessed positions of displacement at home.

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Her literary gesture signals what Stephen Slemon analyses as the function of allegorical writing by postcolonial writers, such as J. M. Coetzee and Wilson Harris, to present history and the past as both a discursive practice and a code of recognition that is fragmented and open to imaginative revision (159-64). With respect to postcolonial literature, allegory constitutes a valuable expression to conduct a 'counter-discourse,' to disrupt colonial and Eurocentric assumptions about history, and to contest monolithic traditions with cross-cultural pluralism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 11). Moreover, as Sneja Gunew argues, the parables and allegories in Lim's works articulate a new cosmopolitanism that displaces the old universalism and colonialism for a new sense of the world inflected by 'local details' ('Multilingual' 18). In *Joss and Gold*, Lim localises the process of deterritorialisation in the historically specific struggles and situated agency of Asian women. The transnational and cross-cultural vignettes in the novel transgress its Orientalist pretexts to recognise the silenced voices of women in history and the possibilities for them to unsettle repressive boundaries. Her strategic deployment of allegory imagines a domestic-cosmopolitan subject from within a continuum of cultural and gender differences.

DISPLACEMENT AT HOME

An Orientalist encounter serves as a fuse to ignite the conundrum of polemical politics as *Joss and Gold* traverses a temporal and spatial triad—‘Crossing,’ ‘Landing’ and ‘Circling.’ ‘Crossing’ takes place in late 1960s multiracial Kuala Lumpur where Li An marries Henry Yeh, a science student from a *towkay* [Chinese businessman] family, and undergoes a one-night affair with Chester Brookfield, an American Peace Corps volunteer, who leaves without knowing of her pregnancy. ‘Circling’ is set in 1980 in New York, where Chester is living with his professional-minded wife Meryl who opts for childlessness and persuades him to have a vasectomy. ‘Landing’ occurs in 1981 in metropolitan Singapore where Li An becomes a strong-willed and successful career woman, raising her daughter Suyin with Ellen and Grandma Yeh, and Chester pleads to visit his illegitimate daughter. The dialogical hook between fiction and politicised reality occurs with Lim’s description of the riot between Chinese and Malaysian communities in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May, 1969, which coincides with Li An and Chester’s one-night affair. The interracial scandal is also a turning point for Li An’s allegorical disassociation from racialised and gendered constructions of nationhood that profess essentialised ethnicity as the ultimate definition of identity.

Presenting a criticism of Malaysian communal politics, Lim problematises a nationalist approach to ethnicity and its power on women. The creolised cultural upbringing of the protagonist Li An and her friend Ellen transgresses gender and ethnic norms, and is marginalised by nationalist and masculinist politics in spaces of displacement and exclusion. Li An and Ellen are Chinese-Malaysians growing up under the postcolonial British educational system and are acquainted with values of individualism and democracy. They perceive themselves more from an individualist perspective than as being submissive to patriarchal or nationalist agendas. In a Chinese-Malaysian patriarchal context, the bold, free ways of Li An are associated with an abnormality and embarrassment that is both unconventional and tantalising in the eyes of her dull, science-absorbed Chinese boyfriend, Henry, who later becomes her husband. Henry’s gaze detects her ‘unwomanly’ traits—immense zeal for English literature, smoking, wearing tight jeans, riding motorbikes, and readiness to contradict—as conducive to a ‘reputation’ not as bad as, but still comparable to that of ‘a loose woman’ (12), conspicuous and immediately subject to teasing by men (10).

For Li An, a proclivity for English literature and Western cultural values is employed as a resourceful counter-measure to escape patriarchal custody. She is desperate to avoid the fate of her mother who silently endures ‘good-wifely’ suffering inflicted by her stepfather, who commands every atom of her body towards childbearing, housework, cooking, and dutifulness to his family. Meanwhile, she is mesmerised by the seemingly Westernised, affluent lifestyle maintained by her mother-in-law Auntie Yeh [also known as Grandma Yeh], who differs from Li An’s mother with her meticulous tastes for designer clothes, English literacy, and self-contained composure. Nonetheless, Auntie Yeh imposes judgements about feminine respectability based on a perceived reproductive duty, stating that ‘A woman marries for children. She cannot be safe otherwise’ (53). Li An’s uncertainty about gender roles, epitomised in an ambivalent oscillation between her protest against domestic obligations and the emulation of commodified femininity, reflects both the confusion of a newly-graduated English major over choices of life paths and the search for empowerment by women amid the post-independence nation’s political and cultural precariousness.

Westernised sophistication embodied in the ‘great’ works of Wordsworth, Lawrence, and Jane Austen fulfils Li An’s yearning for respect and an ‘enviable position’ in society (5). Her assumption that all English lecturers seem ‘glamorous and witty’ renders English a signifier of colonial power and English literature the embodiment of a more ‘civilised’ West (4). When she expresses to Henry a flimsy desire to go to America, complaining about boredom in Malaysia, she also reveals a sense of unbelonging and her envy of Henry’s secure agency derived from being a man and a scientist doing socially-valued important work. As a university tutor, Li An feels that her investment in English is not appreciated by ‘unyielding’ students ‘who looked at her reproachfully, as if she had stolen something from them’ (4). The Princeton-educated Chester charms Li An with the ‘music’ of English words, the richness of experiences in a democratic country, and his idealistic persistence in teaching carpentry art against Malaysia’s cultural tensions. Chester immediately fulfils Li An’s desire for a missing Western part. More importantly, they are thrown together, according to Li An, because they are ‘unmoored’ and ‘uncaptured’ loose ends drifting among the busy, directed lives of other people (63).

This sense of not belonging, though mitigated by her being offered a position of English tutor at the university, further dissolves into chaotic displacement over socially-inscribed concepts of ethnicity. While Henry persuades Li An that her American plan is selfish compared to building Malaysia’s nationhood towards multiculturalism, their envisaging of democratic accommodation where there are ‘no more Malays, Chinese, Indian, but all one people’ (35) is shattered by the dismal political reality. In *Joss and Gold*, Lim tackles the gendered and ethnicised complications of the most volatile period of Malaysian history when the nation was ‘locked in a socially/culturally fractured/fragmented state, with races denying the country’s composite/mosaic reality,’ in ways resembling ‘colonial hegemony’ (Quayum, ‘Nation’ 18). The narrative makes central this hyper-ethnicised historical and social politics, which is deployed by nationalist discourses to obscure internal heterogeneities within ethnicities. By portraying more localised, English-educated *peranakan* Chinese such as Li An and Ellen, whose political outlook favours integration and a Malaysian identity rather than a ‘pure’ Chinese one, the novel exposes self-serving hegemonic claims.

Internalised perceptions of totalising ethnicity are problematised in most of the characters’ responses to interracial relationships and their understandings of Malaysian identity. Nationalist tensions underscore heartrending moments peppering the narrative, of Li An’s friends Gina and Paroo’s ill-fated love, Chester’s taunt of Li An’s passion for poetry, and the characterisation of the 1969 multiracial riot. A daughter of a Confucian family, Gina discloses an identity predicament with her contradictory attitudes towards being Chinese. By turns traditional and modern, she flaunts the stereotype of Chinese braininess and Chinese history, yet nonetheless remains constant in her derision of the crude, money-minded ambitions of other Chinese students. Equally frustrated is her Indian boyfriend Paroo, whose mother attempts to arrange for him to marry a nice Indian girl. Disapproved of by their Chinese and Punjabi communities, the despairing lovebirds protest by attempting to commit suicide, resulting in Gina’s death. Their tragedy arguably complicates and reveals the precarious positions of the Chinese and Indian ethnicities under the hegemony of race in Malaysia. By the 1960s, dominant Malay elites gave priority to the political rights, religion, and language of the Malays, while other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and the Indians were excluded in many ways. The Chinese, in particular, were stereotyped as being rich and exploitative of indigenous people and held paradoxically accountable for national economic backwardness (Tan 141). Gina’s identity confusion attests to her internalisation of essentialised ‘Chineseness’ and the

ethnic insecurity regarding who she is. Her death, as Li An considers, results from an inability to rise above the fixation on race and to imagine herself as non-Chinese.

Abdullah, Chester's Malay roommate who writes for a fundamentalist newspaper demanding special rights for Malays, opines on Gina and Paroo by expounding a theory of ethnic and cultural exclusivity: 'Indian and Chinese cannot mix, too many differences—food, custom, language. To be husband and wife must share same religion, same race, same history. Malay and Chinese also cannot mix, like oil and water' (46). Abdullah's viewpoint, riven with nationalist activism expelling difference and otherness, is juxtaposed with Chester's search for authenticity that ironically essentialises and precludes cultural contact. When Li An shows Chester her beloved literature collections, Chester, casually reads aloud a poem by A. E. Housman, exaggerating the rhythm, lifting his eyebrows and mocking her: 'What's he got to do with Malaysia? . . . You've got your own culture. That's what you should be teaching' (33). He then asserts racialised assumptions of cultural genuineness: 'Malay is the only real culture in this country . . . It's the original thing . . . The Chinese aren't really Malaysian, are they?' (33-34). The question invokes vehement disagreement from Li An:

You can't make judgements based on who or what is "original" . . . Everything in Malaysia is champor-champor, mixed, rojak. A little Malay, a little Chinese, a little Indian, a little English. Malaysian means rojak, and if mixed right, it will be delicious. (35)

Despite her wish for an inclusive multiethnic and multicultural society, Li An feels vulnerable and shaken in such an exclusive political climate. She reluctantly complies with Malay dominance. For instance, when she first invites Chester for dinner, she instructs the maid to make a 'Malay meal,' which she deems as the 'most Malaysian food' to serve the American guest (31). The 'truth' advocated by Abdullah and Malay activists of 'We/Our country. They/No country' (82) and the branding of English as the 'bastard language' (56) annihilate her sense of existence. As she writes in her diary on election day, 'Malay rights, Chinese rights. No one talk about Malaysian rights. I am a Malaysian. I don't exist' (75). Aggravated displacement leads to her breach of normative gender and cultural rules, culminating in a one-night affair with Chester, connecting the narrative with historical reality. Racial tensions between politically-dominant Malays and economically-dominant Chinese built up the intercommunal enmity that exploded in the 1969 conflict in Kuala Lumpur.

Lim allegorises here the role of women as ideological reproducers of the nation. Li An's assumption of sexual agency metaphorically coincides with the Malaysian nation's revolution. The affair, as a wilful pursuit of pleasure, allegorises Li An's connection with a global landscape and promotes disruptive liminality. As Nira Yuval-Davis points out, 'Women often come to symbolise the national collectivity, its roots, its spirits, its national project' (*Gender* 627). Women can also signify ethnic and cultural boundaries that are often constituted by the sexual behaviour of female bodies (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 10). The affair also allegorises the ex-colonised nation's breaking of the Self/Other borderline to converse with otherness. Nonetheless, the conversation fails and 'a new colonialism in the name of nationalism' is established (Lim, *Writing* 27). Li An invests in her bodily betrayal the interracial promises that she believes are more real than the nation's killings and conflicts. As an irresponsible Chester proclaims his plan to return to America and growls that white people have no place in the East, the authority of masculinity prevents interracial possibilities and resurrects ethnic demarcations. Li An is disillusioned, remorsefully remembering that after all she is Malaysian and Chester is American.

The birth of a Eurasian daughter Suyin results in Li An being ostracised by friends and relatives. Her plight points to the political weight imposed on her private interaction with the white man. Lim holds that for Asian women who are depoliticised from traditional masculine roles, the 'personal' constitutes their political domain and sex is often the field in which the political is waged (*Writing* 13). Private encounters with the male Other are articulations of the political, gestures of assuming agency, and for Li An, a flagrant challenge to hegemonic authorities. Female sexuality, in its transgressive act of 'touching,' produces risks of shame and trauma. As Henry denies the child and divorces her, Li An emigrates to Singapore with Ellen and Grandma Yeh for 'big city tolerance and anonymity' (21).

DOMESTIC COSMOPOLITANISM

Interrogating symbolic meanings invested in bodies of ex-colonial women of color, Ania Spyra puts forward the question, 'is cosmopolitanism not for women?' She argues that in its empowering or limiting ways, at the core of cosmopolitanism is the freedom to move and change (7), yet the heavy inscription of nationalist and communitarian discourses have made it difficult for women to be included in the cosmopolitan ideal (6-7). In Singapore, Li An reconstructs her subject self from the interracial scandal and becomes a competent corporate editor-in-chief maneuvering through sites of familial responsibility and career fulfillment. I interpret her Singaporean agency and self-positioning as allegorising 'domestic cosmopolitanism,' which, in the same vein as recent assertions regarding vernacular and rooted forms of cosmopolitanism, is an oxymoron connecting seemingly contradictory spheres of private/local engagement with public/transnational reaching out. I argue that domestic cosmopolitanism contextualises feminist ethics of care within the 'situated' cosmopolitan existence of subaltern and underprivileged women. The notion of a feminist ethics of care, with its gender sensitivity and caring practices such as mothering, friendship, nursing, and citizenship, has brought into focus 'an ethos of relatedness' (Bowden 184) that is also the key feature of cosmopolitanism. The novel is interventionist in symbolising domestic cosmopolitanism as an effectual strategy to free female bodies from repressive boundaries and hegemonic containment towards relationality and openness to otherness.

Li An's dispossessed situation in Malaysia evinces the material limitations that a patriarchal and nationalist society exerts on women, and the unequal distributions of access that women and men have to afford actions of change. The failure of appreciation for Li An's unconventionality and autonomy on the part of Henry and male authorities, whose wives are infallibly good companions, nurses, and elementary school teachers 'who cooked well and smiled a lot' (10), demonstrates the lack of a social space for nourishing female roles beyond traditionally defined domestic spheres. Li An's compliance in the relationship with Henry, embodied in his making all the decisions such as a whimsical trip to Bangkok and the arrangements for a German fellowship while she subdues herself to obey and be 'towed' anywhere, evinces a gendered dichotomy of the public/private divide and associated rhetorics. Victoria A. Goddard distinguishes this divide as such: associated with the feminine, biological, and personal, the private is the space of 'natural,'

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unchanging, and ‘universal’ human practices and sentiments whereas the public, representing the masculine, cultural, and political, is the sphere of work and polity, agency and change, of the struggle *par excellence*, and thus stands for rational-instrumental mentality which men are seen to embody (18). Li An’s marriage reflects how this dichotomy has been deployed as a self-serving device by patriarchal and nationalist authorities to confine women to certain categories of social life while defining ‘good’ femininity, as Carol Gilligan notes, in moral ideals and traits, such as helping and pleasing others, that mark women as deficient (*Different* 18). In other words, rigid conceptualisations of the divide have led to its dual role as both an ‘explanation’ of women’s subordinate position and as an ‘ideology’ to hold that position in place (Davidoff 165).

If Li An’s predicament in Malaysia—exemplified by her lack of agency over her job, marriage, and political desire—exhibits her helplessness over such gendered processes, her life in Singapore achieves a disruption of the public/private divide towards empowerment afforded by a cosmofeminine space. Grandma Yeh explains to Suyin that the reason why they live in Singapore is that they feel ‘safe’ there. Characterised by city-driven economics, rationality, and materialism, Singapore in 1981 was in a high gear of state planning and rapid changes without overt nationalist discourses. Promoted from a part-time copy editor to editor-in-chief for the weekly bulletin of a research-oriented company, Li An writes review articles that facilitate investments for corporate investors and shareholders. The job gives play to her English language skills to wield words and meanings, though no longer for overflowing feelings but for the ‘Singaporean reflex,’ which according to her is a positive desire to be superior. Old bundles of poetry by Wordsworth and Auden are suddenly ‘too noisy with feelings’ (211), and the hardest poem she considers having learned is real-life practices. The security reassured by her hard-won managerial position and economical affluence manifests advantages of class mobility spurred by the global division of labour and Singapore’s social system of meritocracy. While career independence and wealth are not the whole story, they do offer basic access to autonomy and agency. When invited to a school reunion where Li An meets her millionaire schoolmates, ex-husband Henry, and Henry’s indulgent wife, she acknowledges that she could have become one of those dripping with gold and silver, driving a Mercedes, and carrying a Gucci bag, but that she wants security, she wants it ‘on her terms’ (175).

Here I want to draw attention to the merging of the commitments to care and responsibility with those to independence and mobility in the character of Li An. The subjectivity portrayed here connects what Braidotti terms the ‘willful agency required of politics’ with the respect due to the ‘affective,’ ‘libidinal,’ and ‘unconscious’ structures of the subject (39). Bereft of a male custodian, motherhood for Li An is an individual source of power ‘put[ting] women in contact with their bodies and their children’ (Rich 13), instead of being a patriarchal institution widening the public/private schism. She describes the bond with Suyin as ‘uncanny,’ a lasting physical sensation of the infant’s tugging and humming on her swollen breasts, the infant’s mass, hair, and powdered sweetness bringing fear, pleasure, and relief that she would never be ‘unburdened’ or ‘alone’ (181). Motherhood accompanies Li An through the pain of Orientalist encounters to cultivate an intense and reciprocal familial relationship with Suyin, Ellen, and Grandma Yeh.

Ellen and Grandma Yeh play an essential role in helping Li An to restructure both family life and career. Unlike friends and relatives in Malaysia who call her ‘evil’ and sneer with gossip and distant eyes, Ellen and Grandma Yeh extend care, understanding, and solidarity. Ellen, protective and ‘unshakably confident,’ is quicker to make decisions and take chances. It is she who takes on the role of supervisor, decides to move to Singapore, and drags Li An out of feeling

like an abandoned victim. Despite being a work-oriented school principal practising a too-busy-to-marry principle, Ellen is grateful and contented to share the parental tasks of rearing Suyin. The sisterhood between Li An and Ellen is one based on shared strength and mutual care, not only because both women are too independent to get stuck in self-pity, but because they secure belonging in fusing career attentiveness with familial responsibilities without being limited to either category. These characters demonstrate that the boundaries between the private and the public are porous, and that they are mutually imbricated, ideological constructs constantly redefined in changing localities. The female agency that Lim creates suggests that, rather than completely substantiating or transferring loyalties between fields to create an alternative ethic to male oligarchical order, we can bring the values of the private and the public to communicate and strategise, and thus strengthen the freedom of navigating multiple sites.

The compact space Li An carves out with Suyin, Ellen, and Grandma Yeh can be interpreted from the 'feminist political project of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, *Situated* 178) constructed on an ethics of care, a moral principle explicated by scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Peta Bowden, and Virginia Held. Gilligan observes that universalist models of morality are male-oriented models based on principles of justice and reason, which neglect female models of morality structured on emotions of care, trust, and responsibility (*Different* 19). Her feminist ethics of care grounds our understandings of people and communities in relationality, in how their 'voice' and 'relationship' are interconnected and joined in resistance against patriarchal injustice and self-silencing (Gilligan, *Joining* 175). Critics of Gilligan highlight the danger of slipping into conservatism via her theory, in that by encouraging self-sacrifice and servility in the guise of care, gender inequality could be perpetuated (Bowden 8). However, these critics have overlooked the revolutionary potential of Gilligan's claim. An ethics of care rejects the relegation of values of intimacy and emotion to the private sphere and to women, and in doing so it unsettles the very foundation of patriarchy, which is the public/private split, and establishes caring relations as capable of structuring wider contexts of political and social life and the 'global community' (Held 119).

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A feminist ethics of care is valuable in shedding light on the realisation of a 'cosmofeminine space' in which the intimate can be thought under its sign without restricting intimacy to the domestic sphere (Pollock et al. 584). It is also from a dynamic relationship between feminist projects of belonging and cosmopolitan histories and practices that we can construe *Joss and Gold* as a novel that is politically charged. The cosmofeminine space enables us to read Li An's new position as a demonstration of how the intimate is not only a screen for globalisation or an antidote to nationalism, but also part of the cosmopolitan, a realisation of a 'situated universalism' (Pollock et al. 584-85). Singapore provides more accommodating living and cultural spaces to validate Li An's hybrid cultural agency compared to a hegemonic Malaysia. As 'an Anglo-Chinese detour, a metamorphic metropolis of old British imperial might and new Chinese puritanical capital' (163), Singapore has Anglo-Chinese [British subjects with Chinese ancestry] as the norm and there is a huge push for Chinese identity and Mandarin. This might be regarded as cultural essentialism of another kind, though it works to Li An's advantage

and is mediated to a substantial extent by class mobility. With Suyin being occasionally mocked as a *bui doi* [child of the dust] or a *con lai* [a mixed animal] (170), Li An regards herself a 'spectator' for whom the past is too glaring a reminder to opt for any definite national identity.

For Li An, a single mother and divorcée, exhausted by her past and thus compelled to move, mobility and hybrid agency are less a utopia of linguistic and cultural freedom than the pragmatic responses to make the best of given situations. For her, cosmopolitanism relies more on resilient and inventive strategies for survival, for the maintenance of dignity and a limited, but important, autonomy (Clifford 366-67). Her cosmopolitan existence is better understood from the perspective of what recent scholarship investigates as 'vernacular,' 'rooted' and situated forms of cosmopolitanism. In *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism* (2008), Pnina Werbner explicates the 'situatedness' of cosmopolitanism: 'cosmopolitanism is as much a local engagement *within* postcolonial states—with cultural pluralism, global rights movements, ideas about democracy, and the right to dissent—as *beyond* their borders' (2, *my italics*). Essays in the anthology raise questions as to how far the conceptual boundaries of cosmopolitanism can go till it ceases being a useful analytic tool. Such approaches bring to light enforced forms of 'cosmopolitanism from below,' of the underprivileged, marginalised, and minority cosmopolitan existences that are hidden by the unequal global power structures and embedded homogenising discourses.

Situated cosmopolitanism facilitates the theoretical link between feminism and 'mainstream [malestream]' critiques of cosmopolitanism, since its emphases on locality and minority confront universalist and masculinist agendas that have endorsed 'habitual negligence' in political thought about what is still assumed to be merely women's business—the 'private,' 'domestic,' or intimate (Stiven 90). Because of its long-term wariness of universalism, ethnocentrism, and imperialism, and an internal differentiation and plurality, '[f]eminism has learned to wrestle with problems and attendant possibilities while struggling to keep the situated rather than the universal subject in the foreground' (Pollock et al. 583-84). A feminist reading of Li An's cosmopolitan stance is a prominent and politicised move, given that she has made a reward—agential power brought by motherhood, friendship, family life, and career success—out of an 'enforced' diasporic experience. In negotiating national borderlines and cultural differences with an ethics of care, Li An has thus overthrown some of the burdens of hegemonic culture. Pin-Chia Feng observes that there is a gendered pattern of identification in the novel between men who practise ethnic and cultural monologism and women who view identity as 'fluid and migratory' (119). This fluidity is presented in the narrative's allegorical deliberation as a connection of situated cosmopolitanism and feminist ethics of care in a mutually reinforcing process of 'rooted' collectivities.

There is a scene towards the end of the novel that chimes with the book's title *Joss and Gold*: Ellen accompanies her mother to do tomb grooming and ancestor offerings for the Chinese Ching Ming festival. Although too preoccupied with a plentiful present to believe in ancestral worship, Ellen is burning joss sticks and gold-paper money shaped in a pyramid so that the dead will have enough gold ingots to spend. This surprising scene reveals that the novel is also about a reinstatement of the roles that the past, ancestors, family ties, and maternal inheritance play in shaping the female characters' futures, as embodied by Suyin's inheritance of Grandma Yeh's amulet after she passes away. Transitions between the old and the new, the past and the present implicated in the novel enunciate a cosmopolitan openness such as that articulated by Stuart Hall. Hall remarks that he is a cosmopolitan in the sense of never being tied to identifications with the notion of nation and nationhood as the ultimate political process,

but as one who achieves openness among many attachments and identifications rooted in historical particularities, none of which are ‘self-sufficient’ or ‘complete’ (Hall and Werbner 349-50). By letting go of nationalist and communitarian allegiances and reattaching to other empowering lines of promise, both affective and rational, Li An embodies actually existing cosmopolitanism not as an ideal attachment, but a reality of ‘(re) attachment,’ ‘multiple attachment,’ or ‘attachment at a distance’ (Robbins 3). Li An and Ellen’s cosmopolitan existence also represents the everyday translational life of culture’s in-betweens, which reflects Mica Nava’s affective conceptualisation of cosmopolitanism as ‘a structure of feelings’—the visceral, domestic, and gendered cosmopolitan disposition of inclusivity—through ‘imaginaries of identification and desire, rather than being associated with travels to foreign territories’ (42). The domestic cosmopolitanism allegorised in the novel is both an unavoidable choice to survive and a productive process conjoining material and imaginary spaces of identifications between the local and the transnational, the private and the public, the past and the present.

CONCLUSION

Practising a form of domestic cosmopolitanism enables Li An to reverse the power scheme, such that she changes from victim to controller. The novel’s ending parodies an abundance of fathers, contrasting a female ethics of care with male individualistic selfishness. Henry and Chester are driven by self-interest instead of any chivalrous responsibility to own up to the past: Henry approaches Suyin because her inheritance from Grandma Yeh makes them business partners; whereas the inability to have a child transforms Chester’s reaction to Li An and Suyin from shunning panic to sudden curiosity. However, in granting permission for them to meet Suyin, Li An extends forgiveness and understanding and makes peace with her Malaysian past. Domestic cosmopolitanism allegorised in *Joss and Gold* enlarges the scope of creative remaking and reimagining of transnational female agency, of being able to shake off assigned symbolic roles. It is in this sense of an imaginative reconceptualisation of established hegemonic assumptions about otherness that we can read the novel as a transnational allegory of ‘deterritorialisation.’ Cosmopolitanism, after all, is about the viewing of one category from the perspective of the Other to the extent of undoing and unlearning preconstituted knowledges, which if capable of inscription, are also capable of reinscription and transformation.

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