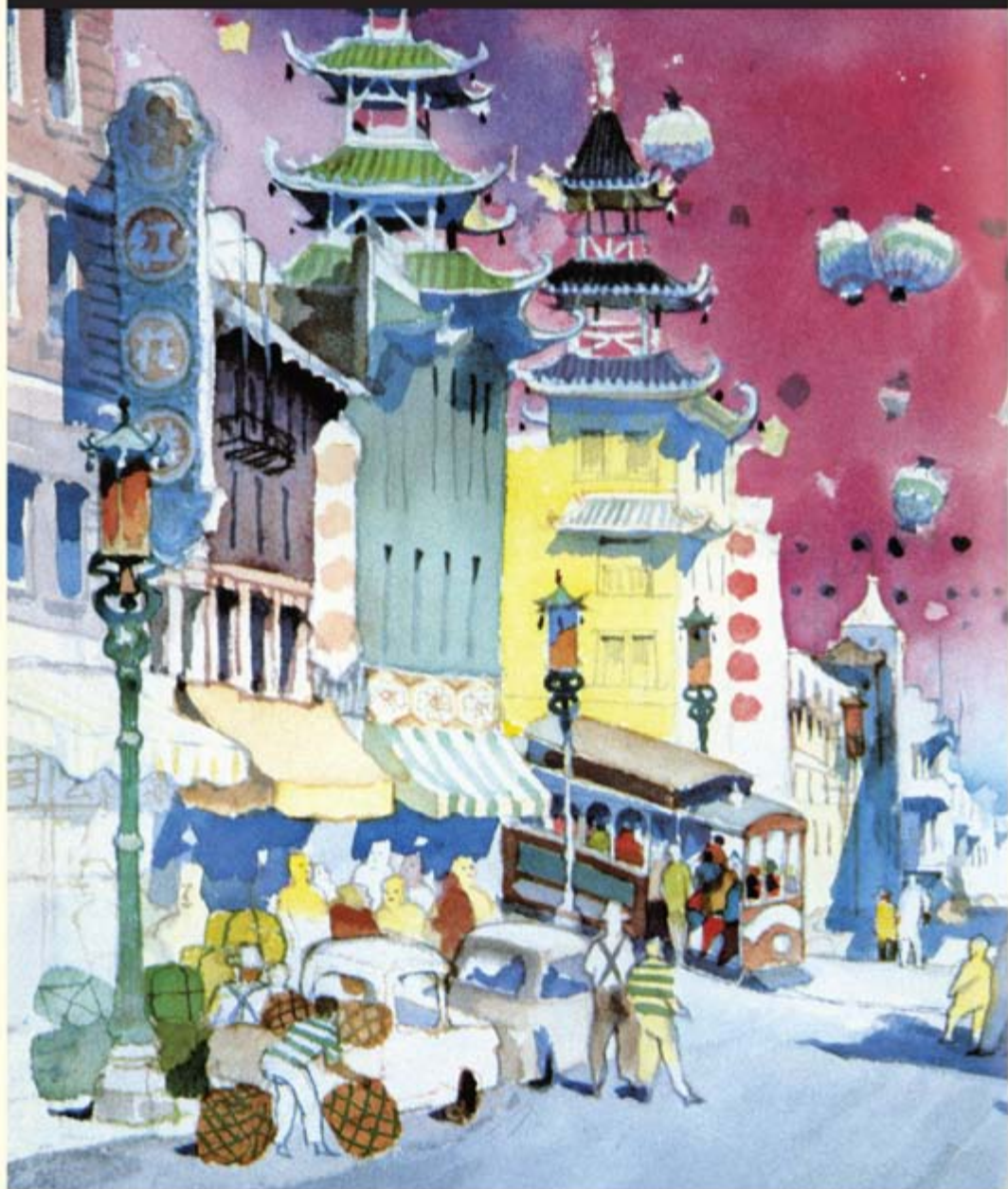


CITIES of OTHERS

XIAOJING ZHOU

REIMAGINING
URBAN SPACES in
ASIAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE



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Cities of Others: Reimagining Urban Spaces in Asian American Literature by Xiaojing Zhou

Cities of Others

Reimagining Urban Spaces in Asian American Literature

XIAOJING ZHOU

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To my sisters and brother

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CITIES OF OTHERS

INTRODUCTION

Contested Urban Space

The city is the emblematic space for the encounter with the stranger, the other, the different.

—KIAN TAJBAKSHI

Cities have long been key sites for the spatialization of power projects—whether political, religious, or economic.

—SASKIA SASSEN

THE CITY AS “THE EMBLEMATIC SPACE FOR THE ENCOUNTER WITH the stranger, the other, the different” and as a “key [site] for the spatialization of power projects” is a contested space and a space open to change. As such, it is a site embedded with possibilities for an inclusive democracy and a site for the emergence of new subjects, communities, and creative works. The democratic possibilities of the city are in part reflected in the election of a Chinese American as the mayor of San Francisco. January 11, 2011, was a landmark day in the city’s history. As an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* states: “A new era in San Francisco politics began today when Edwin M. Lee was appointed and sworn in as mayor, the first Chinese American to hold the post” (Coté, “Ed Lee”). Appointed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors to serve out the remaining year of Mayor Gavin Newsom’s term after Newsom was sworn in as lieutenant governor, Lee became the city’s forty-third mayor. For Asian Americans, Lee’s appointment has profound implications beyond the political establishment. “This is a big step we’re making as a city,” says Supervisor Eric Mar, one of four Asian Americans serving on the eleven-member board. For others, the symbolic meanings of Lee’s mayoral post are particularly significant for Asian Americans nationwide: “With Lee serving as the city’s 43rd mayor,” says Don Nakanishi, director emeritus of the Asian American Studies Center of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), “San Francisco is now the largest [city] in the country

with an Asian-American leader” (Hindery, “Edwin Lee”). Yet Lee refuses to be an “ethnic politician,” representing only Asian Americans. He vowed to be a mayor for all San Franciscans, including the city’s most disenfranchised groups: “I was a progressive before progressive was a political faction in this town. I present myself to you as a mayor for everyone” (qtd. in Coté, “Ed Lee”). This apparently neutral statement has momentous implications precisely because of Lee’s Chinese American identity and its connection to the history and now the stewardship of the city.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, San Francisco was a site of institutionalized exclusion of racial minorities, including the Chinese, and a site of their struggles for equality. Even before the nationwide Chinese Exclusion period of 1882–1943, numerous laws were implemented in San Francisco to exclude the Chinese. In 1854, when Chan Young, a Chinese immigrant, applied for citizenship in the federal district court in San Francisco, he was denied on the grounds of race. In 1878, new California state laws empowered cities and counties to confine the Chinese within specific areas or to throw them out completely. Other discriminatory laws targeted at the Chinese also banned them from attending public schools and from being hired by state, county, or municipal governments for public work.¹ Lee is keenly aware of the history and reality of racial discrimination in the city. When he was elected to his own term on November 8, 2011, he stated that his election to the mayor’s office “marked the closure of dark chapters in the city’s history when Chinese and other immigrants were persecuted” (Coté and S. Lee). In fact, Lee’s decision to run for mayor was due at least in part to the possibilities of achieving greater equality for all citizens and residents of the city. He was strongly urged to enter the mayor’s race by prominent figures such as Rose Pak, a consultant at the San Francisco Chinese Chamber of Commerce, who considers herself “a community advocate” but is known as a “Chinatown power broker,” and Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., who served as the forty-first mayor of San Francisco, the first African American to do so. While Brown’s remarks about Lee that “[h]e’s the people’s choice” and “[h]e always was the people’s choice” (qtd. in Coté and S. Lee) indicate Lee’s popularity, Pak’s words suggest the challenges Chinese and other Asian Americans face in obtaining the mayor’s position. As she says: “I happen to know the city fairly well. And I happen to know if Ed Lee did not seize that opportunity, it might be years or decades before we have such an opportune time to have a Chinese American get there” (qtd. in Coté and Riley).

The connection between Lee’s political career and San Francisco’s Chi-

natown and other Asian American communities in the city can be traced back decades before his election to the mayor's office. In many ways, his involvement in the civil rights and housing rights struggles of Chinatown and other communities in the city helped prepare Lee as a public servant. In the late 1970s, Lee was a student activist fighting against the demolition of the International Hotel (also known as the I-Hotel) in the city's Chinatown-Manilatown section and against the eviction of its elderly Chinese and Filipino residents. When he was a law student-intern at the Asian Law Caucus in 1978, Lee represented residents of the Ping Yuen public housing complex in Chinatown, who, fed up with unsafe and unsanitary conditions, staged the first tenant rent strike against the San Francisco Housing Authority. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, Law School, Lee went on to "forge a distinguished career as a civil rights attorney, often representing low-income tenants," and, in 1989, he "represented Asian and female firefighters who joined others in successfully suing the city for discrimination at the Fire Department" (Coté and Wildermuth). His active participation in the struggles for equity for the disadvantaged have helped bring progressive social changes to the city, even as Lee himself was transformed by those struggles from the son of marginalized immigrants from China to the mayor of San Francisco. If Lee's relationship with Chinatown and other Asian American communities in the city during his law school years was formative, his relationship with the city could be considered transformative.

Lee's mutually (trans)formative relationship with Chinatown and the city is indicative of the dynamics and possibilities of urban space, where the identities of ethnic enclaves or segregated ghettos and the city are mutually constitutive in a process of becomings. Philip Ethington argues in his study *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* that "the public' of the public city was itself a constantly reconstructed sphere of action" (412). The changing residents of the city are a major catalyst of change in urban politics as shown in nineteenth-century American cities: "As industrialization produced the great cities during the second half of the nineteenth century, masses of immigrants and workers pushed aside the middle and upper classes to enjoy the benefits of urban machine politics" (xiii). But being "white" by law, the masses of immigrants and workers who enjoyed "the benefits of urban machine politics" also used the political machine to exclude "nonwhites" from participating in democracy.² As Malcolm Cross and Michael Keith, editors of the anthology *Racism, the City, and the State*, contend, an examination of the urban context in

the process of racialization in the United States demonstrates that “the city provides the institutional framework for racial segregation, a key process whereby racialization has been reproduced and sustained” (frontispiece). Although it is in part produced by racial segregation, Chinatown resists being defined as simply a product of dominant racial ideologies and practices. Its spatial and symbolic relationship to the American nation-space embodied by the “American” city has been fiercely contested by European Americans and Asian Americans since the nineteenth century. Asian Americans’ resistance to racial exclusion is well captured in Asian American city literature, which reimagines and re-represents American urban space where racialized Others remain “outsiders” or invisible. How to inhabit the segregated urban space otherwise with irreducible and transformative difference is a major concern of this study of Asian American city literature.

MUTUALLY CONSTITUTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES

To better understand Asian American writers’ strategies for portraying the impact of racial exclusion on Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in the city, it is necessary to recognize the ways in which American urban space as the nation-space and its excluded Others are mutually constitutive and transformative. A lived and constructed space in the “heart” of the metropolises of the United States, Chinatown is irreducible to a passive product of racial segregation. It plays an active, and even a subversive and interventional, role in the social and spatial formations and contestations of identities, citizenship, and the nation-state. As Henri Lefebvre contends, “Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies” (“Reflections” 341).

During the period of Chinese Exclusion, portrayals of Chinatown in mainstream America helped justify segregation laws that determined where the Chinese were allowed to live or open a business in the city.³ According to the legal historian Charles J. McClain, white Americans’ calls for the relocation of San Francisco’s Chinatown to “another less desirable part of the city” began to appear in newspaper editorials as early as 1854 and intensified in the 1870s and 1880s (223). In 1870, the Anti-Coolie Association militantly petitioned the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, “demanding that something be done about the Chinese quarter of the city, described as being crowded and contaminated with disease.” Ultimately, the petitioners wanted the board to “provide some means of removing the Chinese beyond the city limits” (McClain 44). White Americans’ concerted efforts to drive

the Chinese out of the city continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. On May 31, 1900, the San Francisco newspaper *Morning Call* published an article calling for the elimination of Chinatown from the city: “In no city in the civilized world is there a slum more foul or more menacing than that which now threatens us with the Asiatic plague. Chinatown occupies the very heart of San Francisco. . . . The only way to get rid of that menace is to eradicate Chinatown from the city” (qtd. in McClain 44). As documented by Jean Pfaelzer in her well-researched study *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (2007), such epistemological violence in constructing the abject identity of Chinatown provoked physical violence aimed at driving the Chinese out.

Given this context, the persistent presence of Chinatowns in the metropolises of the United States testifies to the spatial significance of Chinese resistance to exclusion. Located geographically in the centers of cities, Chinatowns are crucial sites for Chinese communities to build networks beyond the borders of segregated urban neighborhoods. Pfaelzer in her discussion of the strategic struggles by Chinese Americans against racial discrimination observes, “The fear of Chinese lawsuits, their ability to tie up city and country coffers in extended litigation, was profound” (250). Against attacks on multiple fronts aimed at relocating Chinatowns or driving them out of cities, towns, and the U.S. nation-space, the Chinese stood their ground and demanded constitutional and civil rights through the federal courts. As Sucheng Chan, McClain, and Pfaelzer have shown, the “thousands of legal actions by the Chinese countered the ‘foreignness’ of anti-Chinese legislation” (Pfaelzer 249). Despite their well-organized protests and fight for equal rights in a series of municipal, state, and federal court cases, Chinese residents in the cities were eventually subjected to new city ordinances—early forms of segregation laws—that restricted their movement in the city and confined their businesses and residence to designated areas, thus institutionalizing their spatially reinforced exclusion from the resources and the social, cultural life of the city.⁴ However, the spatialization of Chinese immigrants’ and Chinese Americans’ racial position in the United States by law becomes naturalized along with the social construction of abject Otherness of the Chinese. The remarks of the Chicago school sociologist Walter C. Reckless about Chinatowns in American cities are a salient example of such naturalization of spatially reinforced racial segregation: “The relationship of Chinatown to the commercialized vice areas of American cities is too well known to need elaboration. It is only fair to say, however, that the assumption of the

usual parasitic activities by the Chinese in the Western World is probably to be explained by their natural segregation at the center of cities, as well as by their uncertain economic and social status” (qtd. in J. Lin 8). Regarding Chinatown as “natural segregation” of the Chinese displaces the social production of this racialized, segregated neighborhood onto ethnic “traits” of the Chinese, thus turning the effect of racism into its cause.

Yet, with its spatially asserted difference in the heart of the American city, Chinatown bears witness not only to racial segregation in the United States but also to historical changes at home and abroad. The historian Mary Ting Yi Lui points out that during the early Cold War period in the United States “transnational, cultural, and political discourses recast Chinese Americans and Chinatowns as model ethnic minorities and communities” (“Rehabilitating Chinatown” 83). Operating as part of the U.S. Cold War “cultural diplomacy” in promoting the image of the United States as an inclusive democracy of cultural pluralism, Lui observes, official and mainstream media depicted Chinatown in cities such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle “as an example of the nation’s ethnic and racial diversity” (91). Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), set in San Francisco’s Chinatown, became a best seller, whose “autobiographical narration of personal triumph over racial bigotry . . . fits alongside the many Chinese American success stories found in USIS [U.S. Information Service] publications” (Lui, “Rehabilitating Chinatown” 94). In fact, the U.S. State Department published translations of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in several Asian languages and sent Wong “on a four-months’ grant to speak to a wide variety of audiences in Asian countries” (J. S. Wong vii, viii). Christopher Douglas argues persuasively in his provocative essay “Reading Ethnography: The Cold War Social Science of Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth-Chinese Daughter* and *Brown v. Board of Education*” that “a fundamental transformation in the social sciences in the early twentieth century, signaled by anthropology’s paradigm shift from race to ethnicity,” made it possible for Wong’s autobiographical narrative to be read as ethnography and “put to strategic use in the Cold War” (106). Despite the apparent upward mobility in the success story of the narrator as a Chinese American, her career as a pottery maker is spatially confined within a Chinatown portrayed as a culturally “foreign” neighborhood. As Douglas contends, a refashioning of the racial “Otherness” of the Chinese is embedded in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* promoted as a model-minority story, “but one with irreducible qualities that make the Chinese American community ever different from white norms of U.S. citizenry” (107).⁵ In model-minority

ethnographies such as Wong's autobiographical narrative, Chinatown serves both to showcase and to contain ethnic difference in the American city. Lui further notes that "[t]hough refashioned as spaces created out of voluntary ethnic association as opposed to racial segregation, popular fears of Chinatowns as ethnic ghettos breeding economic poverty or ethnic and racial separatism that could foster political unrest uncomfortably persisted. Ethnic difference, reduced to goods or aesthetics made for Chinese and white consumption, remained accepted and encouraged by cultural producers as examples of US cosmopolitanism" ("Rehabilitating Chinatown" 98).

It is precisely the simultaneous disavowal and reinforcement of racial inequality in discourses on commoditized cultural diversity that render both Chinatown and the "American" city contested spaces. The complexity and ambivalence of Chinatown in its relation to the city underlie the debates in Asian American studies over its identities as a segregated ghetto or dynamic ethnic enclave. Elaine H. Kim contends in her groundbreaking study *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982): "Chinatown life was largely organized around the needs of these womanless, childless men who had been segregated from participation in the mainstream of American life by race discrimination" (91). Asian American sociologists have called into question the portrayal of Chinatown as a segregated ghetto of the "bachelor society" resulting from racial exclusion. Historian Yong Chen argues in his study *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943* (2000) that to "view Chinatown simply as a segregated urban ethnic enclave created by a hostile environment" would hinder "our ability to see the internal vitality of Chinatown" (47). He contends: "Racial prejudice affected but never totally dictated the lives of the immigrants. Chinatown's longevity most clearly underscores its defiance of anti-Chinese forces that persistently tried but failed to eradicate or dislocate this large visible Chinese community from the heart of the city" (47). Chen emphasizes that San Francisco's Chinatown is "a social and cultural center" and "a Pacific Rim community" (48, 7). In a similar vein, sociologist Min Zhou notes that "New York City's Chinatown emerged as a direct result of the anti-Chinese campaign on the West Coast and the Chinese Exclusion Act" (6). But she emphasizes that New York City's Chinatown has undergone profound changes and calls for more attention to "the bright face of this dynamic community" as an "urban enclave" where there are "signs of prosperity, hope, and solidarity everywhere" (8, 6, 8).

However, the "bright face" of Chinatown as a dynamic ethnic urban enclave is in turn challenged by other scholars of Asian American studies.

Yoonmee Chang in her book *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave* (2010) argues that “[b]y recasting the ghetto as an ethnic enclave, by recasting a space of structurally imposed class inequality as a cultural community, the structural pressures of race and class that create racialized ghettos recede from view and are replaced by culture, by the idea that Asian American ghettos are voluntarily formed cultural communities” (2–3). Yet cultural Otherness has been a central component in the racialization of Chinatown by the dominant media. Exploring the impact of transnational geopolitics on New York City’s Chinatown after 9/11 and after the 2008 financial collapse, historian John Kuo Wei Tchen in a recent essay states, “Chinatown in the American imagination and lived reality has been a gilded, segregated ghetto” (“New York after Chinatown” 27). Even though “with the effective repeal of racial exclusionary immigration laws and the gradual desegregation of New York housing, Chinese immigrant communities spread into all five boroughs and the tristate suburbs,” Tchen notes, New York Chinatown continues to play “the recurring scapegoating role of ‘dirty’ Chinatown”—a “staged role in New York’s political culture” (27, 39). These insightful and provocative analyses of the images and functions of Chinatown, however, focus largely on the construction and refashioning of this ethnic neighborhood in the city by the state or the dominant media, ideologies, and discourses.

With attention to the interactive effects between an internally diverse Chinatown and the changing American metropolis shaped by both domestic and international socioeconomic forces, sociologist Peter Kwong offers a more complex, protean picture of New York City’s Chinatown. Countering the stereotypes of Chinatown as a self-isolated, static community of “docile, apolitical, and uncommunicative” cultural aliens, Kwong shows with abundant evidence that the Chinese “have tried repeatedly to break out” of the isolation of Chinatown, resulting from racial discrimination and exclusion.” In so doing they “have proved themselves active and militant opponents of racial and political oppressions” (*Chinatown* 148). During the 1960s, new political ideologies “penetrated deeply into Chinese communities,” as civil rights “activists’ activities, social-welfare agencies, unions, and political parties slowly eroded the power of the traditional order,” even though “they have not yet displaced the hegemony of the Chinatown business and political elite” (Kwong, *New Chinatown* 7). The impact of the civil rights era continues to transform Chinatown as shown by the demonstration of “20,000 residents of New York’s Chinatown” against police brutality” in 1978 (8).

While Kwong has called critical attention to the mutually transformative relation between Chinatown and the larger American urban environment, little attention in literary studies has been given to the impact of Chinatown and other ethnic communities, including those of postcolonial exiles and diasporans, on the cultural, economic, and political landscape of the American city, whose identity is subsequently thrown into crisis.

Bruce Harvey in his book *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830–1865* points out that “[t]he nation as a whole . . . defined itself through hierarchical, racial taxonomies of foreign regions (the Orient, Latin America, Polynesia, and Africa)” (5). Such spatialized discursive construction of intertwined racial and national identities also characterizes nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature, popular newspapers, and anthropological writings that define the identity of the city by portraying Chinatown as a self-contained yet pollutant ethnic ghetto, an exotic foreign terrain that does not belong to the American city. Newspaper reports, travel writings, and short stories by European Americans construct a Chinatown whose abject foreignness threatens to contaminate the American city that embodies the nation-space. Posited this way, the American city, then, becomes a battleground where the boundaries of race and nation-state are drawn and policed, as well as transgressed and redefined. Asian American city literature produces an interventional American cityscape, one in which Chinatown and the city in the United States are mutually constitutive and transformative and immigrants, migrants, and diasporans from the global South are changing the cultural and political landscapes of cities in the United States.

Cities of Others: Reimagining Urban Spaces in Asian American Literature is an in-depth study of eight Asian American writers’ representations of urban space in American metropolises, from the late nineteenth century to the present.⁶ One of the key discoveries of this study is that there is a wide range of distinctively spatial strategies in Asian American city literature since its emergence in the nineteenth century. These strategies not only reveal the impact of spatially reinforced social isolation, cultural marginalization, and political exclusion on Asian Americans’ identity formation and subject constitution, but they also demonstrate the possibilities of resistance and intervention through everyday practices that reinhabit ethnic enclaves and the American city otherwise. Rather than merely segregated spaces divided by differences of race, gender, culture, and class, and contained by national borders, Chinatowns and other urban spaces emerge as dynamic spaces by and

through which collective, personal, and political identities are constituted.

Those strategies and their effects, however, are often overlooked by critics of Asian American literature, who tend to focus on space conceived in terms of national territories, or in association with the nation-state and transnational border crossings.⁷ Still less has been written about Asian Americans' representations of the American city and its relation to segregated ghettos and the global South. Although critics such as David Palumbo-Liu and Lisa Lowe have adopted broader critical approaches to space as a manufactured environment, and particular places whose identities and meanings are constructed through discourses, representations, and social relations in their respective studies of Asian American literary texts, much remains unexplored with regard to the writers' spatially enacted narrative strategies and their effects.⁸ So far, no comprehensive treatment of these strategies and effects in Asian American literature has been conducted in literary studies.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON (URBAN) SPACE

Building on existing scholarship in Asian American criticism, *Cities of Others* pursues an interdisciplinary line of inquiry by drawing on established and emergent concepts about space, particularly urban space, developed in both the humanities and the social sciences. While the term *space* in this study includes places, it has broader meanings beyond those bounded by specific locations. Sociologist Rob Shields's explanation of the meanings and implications of *space* can help clarify the concepts of space and the spatial used in this study. Shields refers to space as "one of the 'unsaid' dimensions of epistemological and ontological structures' (Sack 1980)"; hence "to question 'space' is to question one of the axes along which reality is conventionally defined." He uses the term "*social spatialisation*" to designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the built environment)." This term "allows us to name an object of study which encompasses both the cultural logic of the spatial and its expression and elaboration in language and more concrete actions, constructions and institutional arrangements" (*Places* 31). Other theoretical perspectives on space, especially urban space, have further broadened the conceptual and critical framework of my inquiry.

Rather than treat space as a stable, passive container, a background, or a stage, *Cities of Others* highlights the fact that space is an "actor" in shaping

the formation and transformation of the social, cultural, and political, even as it is produced and redefined in this process of mutually constitutive and transformative becoming. Scholars on space such as geographer Doreen Massey, sociologist Saskia Sassen, and philosopher Elizabeth Grosz have convincingly argued that space is not simply a product of social relations; it in fact plays an active role in constructing the social. Rather than merely an outcome of social relations, space makes possible different kinds of social relations and interactions. “And precisely because it is the product of relations,” Massey explains, “relations which are active practices, material and embedded, practices which have to be carried out, space is always in a process of becoming” (“Spaces of Politics” 283). Understood as “the very product of multiplicity and thus a source of dislocation, of radical openness,” space, then, has a dynamic relationship with “politics as a genuinely open process” (287). A rethinking of the relation between space and politics, Massey adds, will lead to “a greater concern not just with ‘difference,’ but the nature of the constitution of difference, and the constitution of identity” (288). A similar notion of space underlies Sassen’s analyses of global cities in which “a new geography of centrality and marginality” emerges as a result of economic globalization (“Whose City Is It?” 71). Moreover, Sassen argues, “[t]he other side of the global city” constitutes “a sort of new frontier zone where an enormous mix of people converge,” making “possible the emergence of new types of political subjects arising out of conditions of often acute disadvantage” (“Reading the City” 15–16). Apart from highlighting the ways in which “Otherness,” group identities, and social positions are constructed spatially, Massey’s and Sassen’s respective arguments about the politics of space offer new approaches to social formation and social change in spatial terms.

Grosz’s theories about space further advance our understanding of difference as transformative of identities, of social relations, and even of seemingly static space. Instead of dismissing binary categories as fixed, opposing attributes, Grosz explores in them the possibilities of a complex mutually constitutive and transformative process of becoming. Rereading Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the French philosopher Henri Bergson, Grosz points out the vital roles of difference in social, cultural change, which can mobilize “a constellation of transformations, an event that imperceptibly affects everything” (*Nick of Time* 26). Moreover, Grosz argues that space “is emergence and eruption, oriented not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action” (*Architecture* 116). As

such, space can be “transformed according to the subject’s affective and instrumental relations with it” (Grosz, *Space* 122). From these perspectives, the possibilities of mutual transformation are embedded in the process of immigrants’ and minorities’ self-inventions and resistance to assimilation and exclusion, a process that is uncontainable to the margins but is transformative of American identity and culture.

To fully recognize the significance of the multiple ways in which Asian American writers deploy spatially bounded or mobilized narrative strategies, it is necessary to engage with theories about urban space in literary and cultural studies as well. A mutually constitutive relation between space and the subject is also embedded in the relation between the urban environment and the raced, gendered body. These relations underlie the theoretical perspectives on the city developed by literary and cultural critics such as Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau, as well as by feminist critics like Grosz and Judith Walkowitz, among others. Benjamin’s study of modern urban literature in relation to the emergence of new urban spaces such as the arcades in Paris, which gave rise to the *flâneur*—the bourgeois city stroller and spectator—and to new genres of writing, including journalism and detective fiction, reveals an intricate connection between the production of space and the formation of identity and subjectivity. The fact that commercialized urban spaces in the nineteenth century became the sites of fieldwork for the *flâneur* figure, “who goes botanizing on the asphalt” (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 36), suggests the constitutive role of space in identity and subjectivity formation. Most relevant to *Cities of Others* is Benjamin’s examination of the voyeuristic gaze of the *flâneur*, whose participatory observation in the city streets or the Parisian arcades as the writer, the poet, or the journalist parallels the “fieldwork” of the anthropologist or the ethnographer, a mode of production of knowledge about the “Other.” As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson states in her essay “The *Flâneur* on and off the Streets of Paris”: “*Flânerie* presupposes an urban epistemology” (30). Against the “potential unmanageability of the crowd” with increasing diversity resulting from demographic changes in postrevolutionary Paris, Ferguson contends, “[t]he *flâneur* domesticates the potentially disruptive urban environment” by reducing diversity to “a marvelous show” (31). Significantly, Ferguson considers *flânerie* a unique, privileged mode of knowledge production, a form of gendered power. “Like the narrator and like the detective,” the *flâneur* “is associated with knowledge” (31). While the “connection with authorship is telling in its exclusions” of women and the working class, *flânerie* is “key to

urban control” (27, 32). Exploring further the mode of knowledge production underlying the connection between the *flâneur* and the journalist, and an affinity between the *flâneur*-journalist and social investigation, David Frisby in his essay “The *Flâneur* in Social Theory” contends that Benjamin “provides us with an analytic of *flânerie* that reveals potential affinities between this activity and the sociologist’s investigation of the social world” as shown in the significance of the city in works of sociologists such as Georg Simmel, Robert E. Park, Siegfried Kracauer, and others (Frisby 83, 89).

Rather than “urban control” or disciplinary knowledge about the “Other,” Shields in his essay “Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin’s Notes on *Flânerie*” relates the *flâneur* to the loss of control, to displacement, and situates *flânerie* in the context of nineteenth-century colonial empire. He observes that “[w]hile *flânerie* is an individual practice, it is part of a social process of inhabiting and appropriating urban space” (65). A “public and other-directed” practice in the metropolis, *flânerie* reveals “a changing ‘social spatialisation’ . . . of everyday social and economic relations” in nineteenth-century Paris, where “social encounters with strangers and foreigners . . . impinged on the life world of Europeans” (Shields 65, 67). However, Shields notes that Benjamin’s study of the *flâneur* leaves out “the popular European fascination not just with commodities but with distant cultures experienced through rubbing shoulders with foreigners.” (68). Drawing on Simmel’s (1950) sociological concept of “the Stranger” as an outsider who settles in the European city “as an insider who nonetheless maintains an outside status because of their [*sic*] difference,” Shields considers “the Stranger” “a counterpart” to the *flâneur*, an “urban native,” who “personifies the ideal-type of the citizen” (68, 61, 64). The encounters between “the Stranger” and the “urban native” are unsettling to both “foreigners” and citizens. As Shields contends: “The metropolis is a space in which both outsiders and insiders are ‘dis-placed.’ Neither are properly at home in the commodified spaces of the imperial metropolis” (68). In this case, Otherness is not comfortably reduced to spectacles by the *flâneur*’s gaze. Rather than being “domesticated,” the presence of the “outsiders” in the European metropolis disturbs the established social relations and homogeneous cultural and national identities.⁹ But social change required by the presence of the “outsiders,” Shields notes, “is elided in the escape” of the *flâneur* “into the fantasy world of the emporium” (77–78). Thus the “European encounter with the Other is postponed, as it has continued to be through the twentieth century” (Shields 78). *Flânerie* as a potential counter-discourse to “urban control” underlying Shields’s perspective on the mutual

displacement of “outsiders” and “insiders” in the city is theorized by de Certeau in his examination of the politics of the everyday practice of space. In his study of the city, de Certeau proposes a rethinking of resistance to oppressive, dominant systems in terms of strategies of everyday-life activities, including walking the street, which can “privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements,” making interventions or alternative articulations emerge (98).

Further departing from Benjamin’s perspective on the relationship between the cityscape and the urban spectator, Grosz and Walkowitz in their respective writings call critical attention to the difference of the gendered body in the urban space. Grosz points out the mutually constitutive and transformative relation between the body and the urban environment. She argues that the city is “the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed.” Moreover, “the body must be considered active in the production and transformation of the city” (*Space* 108). Grosz’s argument alerts us to the implications and effects when the raced, gendered body is understood not as a passive reflection of innate identity attributes but rather as an active element in constituting, contesting, and transforming the environment of the city. Walkowitz’s study “City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London” offers a compelling example. Walkowitz contends that crossing “divided spaces of the metropolis” to “experience the city as a whole” establishes the privileged *flâneur*’s “right to the city—a right not traditionally available to, often not even part of, the imaginative repertoire of the less advantaged” (414–15). Yet “the public landscape of the privileged urban flâneur” of the late nineteenth century “had become an unstable construct” challenged by “social forces” to be reworked and reconstructed (412). “No figure was more equivocal, yet more crucial to the structured public landscape of the male flâneur, than the woman in public,” who was “presumed to be both endangered and a source of danger to those men who congregated in the streets” (414). Walkowitz’s approach to “the permeable and transgressed border between classes and sexes” (415) in Victorian London is applicable to racially segregated areas in American cities.

What happens, then, when *flânerie*—strolling and observation in the city street as a mode of knowledge production, identity construction, and enactment of the right to the city—is carried out by those whose body is marked not only by the differences of gender and class but also by the “Otherness” of race and ethnicity? What palimpsest histories are recovered, what marginalized places are foregrounded, what invisible lives emerge to transform both

the ethnic enclaves and the cities they inhabit? These are some of the central questions I explore in my examination of the poetics and politics of space in Asian American urban literature. By drawing on interdisciplinary critical theories like those referred to above, and on existing Asian American scholarship on urban space, my study seeks to overcome disciplinary oversights and blind spots and to explore neglected yet significant aspects of familiar and understudied Asian American writings about Chinatown and the city. In so doing, my investigation seeks to offer perspectives that not only are alternative to but also contest predominant representations of the American city, in which Asian Americans are conspicuously absent as explorers of the urban space, as participants in the polis of the city, or as visionaries and agents of change in redefining not just ethnic enclaves but also the American cityscapes and nation-space.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Cities of Others consists of eight chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 1, “‘The Woman about Town’: Transgressing Raced and Gendered Boundaries in Sui Sin Far’s Writings,” examines the ways that Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton appropriates and reinvents the *flâneur* figure and the conventions of journalism and missionary ethnography of her time to produce counter-narratives about Chinatown and the city. Her writings about American urban space undermine stereotypical representations of Chinatown as an abject “foreign” terrain within the “American” city. I borrow the phrase “The Woman about Town” from the series title of five pieces of journalism by Sui Sin Far that appeared in the *Gall’s Daily News Letter* when she was working as a full-time reporter in Kingston, Jamaica, from December 1896 to June 1897.¹⁰ Given her position as a female reporter, columnist, and fiction writer who crisscrossed the city looking for stories, the phrase is a proper yet unsettling definition for Eaton, whose role as a reporter and writer on the urban scene alters the gaze of the *flâneur* and intervenes in the male-dominated traditions of journalism and urban literature. But “The Woman about Town” meant something quite different for Eaton in North American cities, where she volunteered as a Sunday school English teacher and worked as a journalist in Chinatowns. Drawing on theories about the agency of the gendered and racially marked body in the public space, I examine the subversive strategies of Sui Sin Far’s representation of white and Chinese women as “the woman about town,”

whose *flânerie* mobilizes a counter-discourse on Chinatown and the city.

Chapter 2, “Claiming Right to the City: Lin Yutang’s *Chinatown Family*,” further explores the relationship between the raced, gendered body in American urban space as portrayed in Lin’s 1948 novel about Chinese Americans in New York City and its Chinatown. My reading expands on the predominant interpretations of this novel as a “model minority” narrative of assimilation, which overlooks the social critique and the characters’ resistance to exclusion embedded in the subversive, interventional spatial strategies Lin employs. I argue that Lin’s narrative strategies allow his characters to reinhabit the city through everyday activities that resist racial segregation, claim Chinese immigrants’ right to the city, and facilitate the formations of Chinese American identity and subjectivity. In so doing, Lin, like Sui Sin Far, at once undermines and reinvents the privileged white male *flâneur* figure of urban exploration and dismantles both the myth of a self-enclosed Chinatown and the myth of an American city capable of assimilating immigrants while remaining intact from the presence of its heterogeneous populations.

Chapter 3, “‘Our Inside Story’ of Chinatown: Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone*,” examines Ng’s strategies for making visible in American urban space the hidden history of racial exclusion and exploitation. I argue that Ng’s narrative leads the reader through Chinatown streets, alleys, stores, restaurants, crammed apartments, and the public square as it traverses the lives of the “paper son” Leon and his family, to reveal the family’s “secrets” entangled with the United States’ national history of racial exclusion and exploitation. By historicizing the public and private spaces of Chinatown lives in San Francisco, *Bone* at once engages with and departs from representations of Chinatown either by European Americans or by Asian Americans like Sui Sin Far or Lin Yutang. Drawing on theories about the social production of space and the everyday practice of what de Certeau might call “spatial vernacular,” my reading examines Ng’s narrative strategies that highlight not only the “social production of the built environment,” or the ways in which “built environments both represent and condition economies, societies, and cultures” (King 1), but also the psychological effects of spatialized social positions of race, class, and gender.

The meanings and functions of San Francisco’s Chinatown are radically destabilized in the writings of Frank Chin examined in chapter 4, “Chinatown as an Embattled Pedagogical Space: Frank Chin’s Short Story Cycle and *Donald Duk*.” Chinatown in Chin’s writings means many things—a segregated ethnic ghetto, a dying community, a spectacle on display, a commod-

itized tourist spot, a site of resistance to assimilation, a counter-pedagogical space, and a dynamic multicultural neighborhood of the American city. While it is all of the above, Chinatown in Chin's writings is first and foremost an embattled space for the formation of Chinese American subjectivity and for the construction not only of Chinese American but of American identities. It is embattled, because Chinatown is not just a product of the social; it is a site where "the social is constructed," as Massey contends in arguing for the significance of space (*For Space* 13). Understood from this perspective, Chinatown is a site where "the white national ideal" is constructed and "sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others," to borrow Anne Anlin Cheng's words about "[r]acialization in America" (10). While highlighting the mutually constitutive and transformative relationship between Chinatown and Chinese American subjectivity, between the identities of Chinatown and the American city as embedded in Chin's stories and his novel *Donald Duk*, I argue that Chin represents Chinatown as a counter-pedagogical space in redefining this historically, spatially, and discursively produced ethnic ghetto, transforming it into a transnational, multicultural American urban neighborhood.

Chapter 5, "Inhabiting the City as Exiles: Bienvenido N. Santos's *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*," explores different modes of dislocation and exile that Filipinos and Filipino Americans experience. My reading of Santos's novel highlights their exile, displacement, and transnational belonging in the United States, especially their collective and personal irrecoverable loss resulting from the Spanish and American colonial legacies. I contend that Santos's treatment of loss in the novel generates what David L. Eng and David Kazanjian call the politics of melancholic mourning, which establishes "an active and open relationship with history" and induces "actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living." Alternative knowledge, perspectives, and possibilities of intervention and transformation are embedded in the politics of loss, in investigating "the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of *how* loss is apprehended and history is named—how that apprehension and naming produce the phenomenon of 'what remains'" ("Mourning Remains" 1, 5–6). Understood in these terms, loss in Santos's novel assumes agency, operating as a politics and aesthetics of mourning, making visible the deprivation of "homeless" working-class Filipino "old-timers," and confronting erased, forgotten, or palimpsest colonial histories and their legacies in the formation of Filipino San Francisco. Against historical amnesia, Santos inscribes loss

as integral to the Filipino/American experience, allowing that irrecoverable loss to haunt American urban space.

How to inhabit the American city otherwise than as assimilated subordinate Others or as nameless “aliens” lost in the margins of society, forever longing for a home far away, is a central theme explored in chapter 6, “The City as a ‘Contact Zone’: Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*.” For Alexander, the “radical migrancy” that marks the experience of “creatures of postcoloniality” who border nation-states and linguistic boundaries can compel “an exhilarating art, an art that takes as its birthright both dislocation and the radical challenge of reconceiving American space” (*Shock of Arrival* 161, 158). I borrow the concept of “contact zone” from Mary Louise Pratt as employed in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, which calls critical attention to the “interactive dimensions” of those encounters and “how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other” within “radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7). In *Manhattan Music* the city is a protean “contact zone” constituted by people from around the world and by the diasporic communities and their connections to other parts of the world. Alexander re-represents the city as “American space” by allowing her female Asian Indian characters to inhabit the city through border crossings, transformative encounters, subversive memories, and artistic as well as social activism. Drawing on postcolonial and feminist theories, I highlight the relationship between the raced, gendered body and the metropolitan space in the subject formation of South Asian women immigrants and diasporans, whose actual and symbolic crossings of streets in New York City mobilize a transformative process of both the postcolonial female subject and the American city.

Chapter 7, “‘The Living Voice of the City’: Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” further explores Asian Americans’ struggles to claim belonging in the city and to inhabit the city with their irreducible difference as equal citizens. Unlike the earlier writings about the spatialized racial position of Asian immigrants, migrants, and Asian Americans in the American city discussed so far, Lee’s *Native Speaker* seeks to claim a rightful place in the city not just for one ethnic or racial group but for all immigrants and minority Americans, particularly the “countless unheard nobodies” (83). Moreover, its claim of belonging goes beyond the mobility and freedom of those considered racial and cultural “Others” to live where they wish to; it demands their equal participation in the political system of the city. *Native Speaker* raises questions about apparently conflicting claims of national and transnational

belongings among Asian Americans and calls for new ways of inhabiting the city, which insist on equal participation politically and otherwise of “these various platoons of Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese, Haitians, Colombians, Nigerians,” who are changing the landscape of the American city and nation-space (83). I examine the ways in which the Korean American narrator’s *flânerie* and his observations of the political dramas and everyday scenes in the streets of the metropolis play a crucial role in articulating the novel’s thematic concerns.

Further pursuing Asian American writers’ enactment of the politics of space in the era of economic restructuring and globalization, chapter 8, “Mapping the Global City and ‘the Other Scene’ of Globalization: Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*,” examines the effects of Yamashita’s magical realist strategies for mapping the cityscape of Los Angeles on a global scale, especially the city’s relationship to the global South. Maps and mapping, the late geographer J. B. Harley convincingly argued, are not simply scientific depictions of geography. They are epistemological, political, and pedagogical tools for claiming territories and for legitimizing plunder, conquest, and divisions between peoples and nations (281). The major characters in *Tropic of Orange* offer alternative interpretations of the official map and insist on inscribing power relations along with layers of histories of the city, the Americas, and other parts of the world, as well as the everyday experience of the displaced, the marginalized, and the homeless in Los Angeles as a global city intricately bound up with the global South. By mapping the global South—the “other scene” of globalization (Spivak’s phrase in “Globalcities” 74)—in the global city, Yamashita registers not only large-scale social injustice but also powerful resistance uncontainable by spatial segregation or border control. The cityscape of L.A., then, manifests not just the “spatialization of global power projects”; it is a “new frontier zone” for a new politics of resistance (Sassen, “Reading the City” 15, 16). Employing magical realism to disrupt linearity of time and to dislodge space from bounded territories, *Tropic of Orange* marks a new departure in Asian American literature in both thematic concerns and narrative strategies, compelling a new mode of interdisciplinary approach, which my study seeks to advance by engaging with discourses and debates on globalization, as well as Asian American criticism.

In “Conclusion: The I-Hotel and Other Places,” I seek to further extend the conceptual and critical framework for reading Asian American city literature and for “thinking radical democracy spatially” (Massey’s phrase in “Thinking” 283). Given the diverse, heterogeneous histories, experience,

and narrative strategies of Asian American writers, it is especially necessary to keep “our critical geographical imagination” open to “redefinition and expansion in new directions,” to borrow the phrases of Patricia Yaeger (15). I contend that to renew “our intellectual apparatus” in order to expand “our ethical and imaginative engagements,” as Yaeger urges in her introduction to the special topic on cities for a 2007 issue of *PMLA* (15), more critical attention must be given to city literature by minority American writers. Asian American writings about urban space offer incisive theorizing perspectives on metropolises, global cities, transnational ethnic enclaves, and inner-city ghettos. As a way of overcoming the thematic and methodological limitations in my reading of Asian American city literature, I include Yamashita’s *I Hotel* (2010) and lê thi diem thúy’s *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2004). My brief discussion of these two novels is also intended to call critical attention to the politics and poetics of space embedded in their respective narrative strategies in order to further open up the conceptual and historical frameworks for studying urban literature. If Yamashita’s novel shows how the I-Hotel became a catalytic site of grassroots community activism for human rights and housing rights, for racial and spatial justice, and thus demonstrates the transformative agency of the marginalized Others in shaping the history and geography of the city, thúy’s novel testifies to the legacy of U.S. imperialism and the social, cultural marginalization of Vietnam War refugees in American society. By depicting the trauma of the refugees, who bear witness to the destruction visited by the U.S. military on Viet Nam and in whose memories its disappeared forests, landscapes, and way of life exist, thúy, like Yamashita, embeds in the urban geography of the United States the “visions and voices” of those who are transforming the cultural and political geography of the American city and nation-space.

1 “THE WOMAN ABOUT TOWN”

Transgressing Raced and Gendered Boundaries in Sui Sin Far’s Writings

Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.
For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics.

—MICHEL DE CERTEAU

[B]oth the external and internal design and layout of the City
symbolize male power and authority and men’s legitimate occupation
of these spaces.

—LINDA MCDOWELL

IN DECEMBER 1896, AFTER SPENDING SIX MONTHS IN THE THUNDER Bay District by Lake Superior in Ontario, Canada, as a correspondent for the *Montreal Daily Star*, Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton replaced her sister Winnifred Eaton as a full-time reporter in Kingston, Jamaica, for *Gall’s Daily News Letter*. She stayed there for half a year as a socially and culturally engaged journalist, covering an electoral campaign, legislative council proceedings, and other social events, discussing issues such as womanhood and women’s rights, and writing reports on the prison, orphanages, charity schools, the market scenes, and department stores, as well as short stories, reviews, and a children’s column. The wide range of topics in her writings for the Jamaican paper reflects the freedom of spatial mobility Eaton enjoyed in Jamaica, where she was identified as white, not Eurasian or “the half Chinese writer,” as she was in North America.¹ Among her writings published in the *Gall’s Daily News Letter* are four articles, all titled “The Woman about Town”—a term that refers to Eaton herself, the journalist.² As a female reporter, columnist, and fiction writer who goes about town, looking for stories to write, “the woman about town” is indeed a proper, yet

unsettling, definition for Eaton, or any other female journalist of her time, whose role as a reporter and writer on the urban scene alters the gaze of the *flâneur* and intervenes in the male-dominant traditions of journalism and urban literature.

But the term “the woman about town” meant something quite different for Eaton in North American cities, where she volunteered as a Sunday school English teacher in Chinatowns and worked as a journalist and fiction writer whose topics were often about lives in Chinatowns. In North America, Eaton did not use the term “the woman about town” to refer to herself in her publications about Chinatown lives; rather, against the widespread anti-Chinese movement and sentiment of her time, she chose a Chinese name, “Sui Sin Far,” for her essays and short stories published in newspapers, popular magazines, and major literary journals in the United States.³ Nevertheless, Sui Sin Far remains “the woman about town” in her missionary and journalist work in Canadian and American Chinatowns. Moreover, “the woman about town” appears in Sui Sin Far’s journalist reports and short stories as embodied by female narrators or characters. This figure, like the *flâneuse*, enacts Sui Sin Far’s spatial and visual strategies in her portrayal of Chinatown lives. When the female figure in the streets is marked by both gender and race, and when the urban space in which she moves about is divided by the differences not only of class and gender but also of race and ethnicity, “the woman about town” in Sui Sin Far’s stories mobilizes multiple subversions and interventions.

However, critics tend to overlook the spatiality in the narrative strategies of Sui Sin Far though they offer insightful readings of her essays and stories that challenge racist and sexist representations of Chinatowns and undermine the ideology of racial purity.⁴ For example, editors Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks in their introduction to *Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and Other Writings* by Sui Sin Far, single out three significant aspects of Sui Sin Far’s stories:

First, they present portraits of turn-of-the-century North American Chinatowns, not in the mode of the “yellow peril” or zealous missionary literature of her era but with well-intentioned and sincere empathy. Second, the stories give voice and protagonist roles to Chinese and Chinese North American women and children, thus breaking the stereotypes of silence, invisibility, and “bachelor societies” that have ignored small but present female populations. Finally, in a period when miscegenation was illegal in nearly half the United States, Sui

Sin Far's stories are the first to introduce the plight of the child of Asian and white parents. (6)

These insights highlight the significance of Chinatowns in Sui Sin Far's writings. But with an emphasis on the thematic and the sociohistorical, Ling and White-Parks overlook Sui Sin Far's subversive spatial strategies for re-representing raced, gendered space, especially for portraying a mutually constitutive and transformative relation between space and subject.

Although critics such as Elizabeth Ammons, Dominika Ferens, and White-Parks have examined the aesthetics and narrative form of Sui Sin Far's writings, the spatiality of identity and subject formation is not a major concern in their discussions. Ammons and White-Parks explore Sui Sin Far's employment of devices such as irony, voice, and trickster play, while Ferens investigates the ways in which Sui Sin Far subversively appropriates and revises the tradition of missionary ethnographies. In *Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (1995), White-Parks devotes a whole chapter to Sui's "Pacific Coast Chinatown stories" and provides detailed important historical and cultural contexts for the stereotypes of Chinatowns. Her reading highlights the fact that "Sui Sin Far clearly challenged the images of Chinatowns as moral 'swamps' depicted by such authors as [Frank] Norris and [Olive] Dibert," not only by breaking "stereotypes about Chinatowns as bachelor societies of 'alien others'" but also by depicting "communities vibrant with women, children, and family life" (124, 120). Although spatiality of identity construction is embedded in her observation of Sui Sin Far's journalistic portrayals of Los Angeles's Chinatown, White-Parks emphasizes Sui Sin Far's use of voice and tone that are "allied with the communities about which she writes" (121). Thus White-Parks, like other critics, does not devote enough attention to Sui Sin Far's spatial strategies, which, I would argue, are largely shaped by the period's dominant discourses on Chinatown.⁵

Most characteristic of Sui Sin Far's spatial strategies is her employment of the female characters' spatial mobility and their observations of street scenes, particularly those of Chinatown, which at once evoke and undermine mainstream representations of Chinatown by the white male gaze of the journalist, the ethnographer, and the photographer who sauntered idly as the *flâneur* in the streets of Chinatown, seeking sensational stories or exotic sights. Freedom of movement in the metropolises and the privilege to observe and write about urban scenes constitute the gendered, raced, and classed identity of the *flâneur* of Sui Sin Far's era. Slumming in Chinatown

became a popular way for white men to gather materials for travel sketches, photographs, fiction, and journalist reports on Chinatown. The thematic concerns and spatial strategies of Sui Sin Far's stories constitute a counter-discourse in response to European Americans' portrayals of Chinatown as a piece of China, a place of vice, filth, and crimes, as well as an enigmatic, seductive, and dangerous tourist spot. The dominant discourses construct Chinatown as everything that America is not. As Yong Chen contends: "For many white tourists, Chinatown satisfied not only their curiosity about the unfamiliar but also their need to rediscover their superiority. For them Chinatown stood as a site of comparison: one between progress and stagnation, between vices and morality, between dirtiness and hygiene, and between paganism and Christianity" (98–99). Mutually exclusive identities of race and culture like these are spatially produced and reinforced.

SPATIALITY OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Nayan Shah in his well-researched, provocative study *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (2001) provides ample evidence showing that "[t]he cartography of Chinatown that was developed in government investigations, newspaper reports, and travelogues both established 'knowledge' of the Chinese race and aided in the making and remaking of Chinatown" (18). Shah notes that the "three key spatial elements" that characterize the production of Chinatown as a racialized space are "dens, density, and the labyrinth": "The enclosed and inhuman spaces of dens were where the Chinese lived. High density was the condition in which they lived. And the labyrinth was the unnavigable maze that characterized both the subterranean passageways within the buildings and the streets and alleys aboveground" (18). Spatialized identity construction as such turns Chinatown into a racially marked place of filth, disease, and backwardness and naturalizes socially produced poverty, undesirability, and segregation as the inevitable results of innate racial traits of the Chinese.

Embedded in the implied correlate between the identities of Chinatown and the Chinese residents, and underlying the contrast between the Chinese "race" and American citizens, are mutually constitutive relations between space and body, between the built environments and their inhabitants. These relations, however, are mutually transformative as well. Their implications and effects render Chinatown open to change and irreducible to the uniform, homogeneous, and discrete identity constructed by the popular media of

white America. In other words, if the characteristics of Chinatown as a lived space are defined by its residents, then those characteristics can be redefined and transformed in part at least by the people who live there, as well as by alternative ways of seeing and representing Chinatown and its relationship to the larger society. Elizabeth Grosz has compellingly argued for an alternative to the conventional view of space as a fixed background or container. She contends: “[S]pace is open to how people live it. Space is the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation” (*Architecture* 9). This unstable, dynamic relationship between space and its inhabitants underlies the representations of Chinatown lives by Sui Sin Far and other Asian American writers.

At once a product and medium of identity construction, a segregated urban ghetto, an ethnic enclave, and a transnational, multicultural community, Chinatown has been a contested terrain in writings by Asian Americans, among whom Sui Sin Far is a literary forerunner in challenging spatially policed boundaries of race, class, gender, culture, and sexuality in American cities. To better understand the significance of the narrative strategies that Sui Sin Far employs to undermine the predominant stereotypical portrayals of Chinatown, it is necessary to briefly examine the spatiality—spatial organizations of social relations and their effects—of identity construction in the dominant discourses of her time.

With their privilege of mobility in the city, white American male writers as the *flâneur* played a central role in producing the “knowledge” of Chinatown and the Chinese. The commodification of writings about the urban scene in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States helped popularize stereotypes of Chinatown, which were often featured in travel sketches, newspapers, magazines, journals, and photographs. Charles W. Stoddard in his book about San Francisco’s Chinatown, *A Bit of Old China* (1912), depicts with sensuous ambience the uncanny experience of strolling through Chinatown: “The air is laden with the fumes of smoking sandalwood and strange odors of the East; and the streets, swarming with coolies, resound with the echoes of an unknown tongue. There is hardly room for us to pass; we pick our way, and are sometimes curiously regarded by slanted-eyed pagans” (qtd. in Chen 98–99). Apart from the alienating smells of the East, the crowdedness of Chinatown streets with strange-looking heathens who gaze upon tourists with curiosity enhances the unsettling foreignness of Chinatown. The racially marked bodies of the Chinese, then, become part of the Chinatown space and its foreign identity. Through a deceptively descriptive style and the authenticity of actually strolling in the street, this

white *flâneur* inscribes the Chinatown space and bodies with racial meanings by rendering the Chinese cultural and bodily differences as deviant from the “American” norm. As is characteristic of Orientalist representations, the construction of Chinatown as “a bit of Old China” “in the heart of a Western metropolis” requires a particular kind of aesthetics that elides the historical and sociopolitical forces underlying the formation of Chinatown, thus isolating it from the American city.⁶ Arnold Genthe’s photographs of San Francisco’s Chinatown collected in *Pictures of Old Chinatown* (1913), with text by the journalist Will Irwin, are salient examples of inscribing “Chineseness” on aestheticized Chinatown spaces and bodies by the white male gaze.⁷ Irwin writes in his interpretive text accompanying Genthe’s photographs: “From every doorway flashed out a group, an arrangement, which suggested the Flemish masters. . . . Perfectly conceived in coloring and line, you saw a balcony, a woman in softly gaudy robes, a window whose blackness suggested mystery” (in Genthe, *Pictures* 12). The white male gaze as such reduces Chinatown and the Chinese to commodified objects and provides an aesthetic framework for visual mastery of the Chinatown scenes severed from the American urban space.

While some middle-class white men, particularly members of the San Francisco Bohemian Club and the California Camera Club, such as Genthe and Irwin, found Chinatown a pleasurable place for a thrilling and aesthetic experience, many white San Franciscans regarded this “foreign” place and community with fear and anxiety, especially after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and when cholera and smallpox epidemics struck San Francisco in the mid- and late nineteenth century, followed by an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1903.⁸ The intersections of racial formation and the fear of an impending epidemic catastrophe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Shah contends, created “a new articulation of space and race” that made Chinatown “a singular and separate place that henceforth could be targeted in official inspections and popular commentary” (24–25). The production of fear reinforces the boundaries of the raced body and space.

Discourses on medicine and social morality played a significant part in the networks of racial identity and knowledge production. In 1878, when anti-Chinese sentiments in the United States became a formidable political force, Dr. Mary Priscilla Sawtelle published an editorial article, “The Foul, Contagious Diseases: A Phase of the Chinese Question; How the Chinese Women Are Infusing a Poison into the Anglo-Saxon Blood,” in the *Medico-*

Literary Journal, arguing that “our nation is threatened with destruction” by “the Chinese courtesans.” Compared with the destructive influence of these women, she asserts, “Chinese cheap labor pales into insignificance” (1). Sawtelle’s medical background lends authority to her naturalizing the raced Chinese female body as a source of contagious diseases infecting the white body, which she equates with “our nation,” and corrupting white American morality. As Donna Haraway argues, in the construction of race through discourses on the body: “[W]here race was, sex was also. And where race and sex were, [there were] worries about hygiene, decadence, health” (338).

It is worth noting, moreover, that in Sawtelle’s argument against the Chinese women’s lethal contamination of the American national body, she inscribes the threat of Chinese immigrant’s racial Otherness and inassimilable foreignness in spatial terms: “In the very heart of San Francisco there is a Chinese empire. . . . Several streets are devoted to mercantile and manufacturing pursuit, while the alleys are lined with the tenements of the Chinese courtesans” (4). Sawtelle’s article offers a salient example of the predominant stereotypical representations of Chinatown by white Americans, in which Chinatown is turned into what Shah calls a “perverse geography” that “provided a schema of the dangers of Chinatown and Chinese residents to middle-class white society in San Francisco and beyond” (79). Inscribed as “a Chinese empire,” Chinatown, then, is neither simply a passive outcome of socioeconomic and political systems nor the end result of discursive identity construction; it becomes constructive material “evidence” of the supposedly innate racial attributes of the “Chinese race,” justifying racial segregation and exclusion. Like the Chinese body, Chinatown functions as an apparently stable site for simultaneous construction and naturalization of racial identities and social positions and for surveillance, containment, and exclusion of the Chinese from U.S. citizenship and the nation-space.⁹

Yet, being part of the city spatially and in the vicinity of the busy commercial district and white neighborhoods, San Francisco’s Chinatown was often depicted as a dangerous masculine place where white women were reputed to be lost mysteriously or become corrupted in opium dens by Chinese men beyond any hope of returning to the outside world. Frank Norris in his short story “The Third Circle” (1897) tells of the sinister disappearance of a young white woman, Miss Ten Eck, in San Francisco’s Chinatown. As the title suggests, Norris relies heavily on spatial metaphors in portraying Chinatown’s hidden vices: “There are more things in San Francisco’s Chinatown than are dreamed of in Heaven and earth. In reality there are three parts of

Chinatown—the part the guides show you, the part the guides don't show you, and the part that no one ever hears of" (1). Norris suggests that it is into this underground third circle of opium dens and slave girls that Miss Ten Eck vanished.

The raced, gendered, and sexualized space of Chinatown's "third circle" also informs the works of Norris's associates, Genthe and Irwin, "whose art," Emma J. Teng notes, "was intimately associated with their *flâneurie*—their observations of and participation in the city's street life," particularly their slumming in Chinatown ("Artifacts" 59). Genthe evokes "The Third Circle" in his memoir, while portraying life and culture in San Francisco's Chinatown in terms of a spatialized social hierarchy racialized as characteristically Chinese within a self-sustained architectural structure of a Chinatown theater: "The [theater] building itself was a study in ways Chinese. In it were housed all the strata of life to be found in the district. Above the theater, on the second story, lived the manager and stage director. . . . On the third flight down were the opium dens where the smokers in various stages drew their dreams from the long pipes. It was this retreat which was immortalized by Frank Norris in his story, *The Third Circle*" (qtd. in Teng, "Artifacts" 63–64). In her discussion of this passage, Teng notes that "[w]hat Genthe does here is reinscribe Norris's trope as physical space: metaphorical circles become architectural structures—three stories segregating classes of people and activities. For Genthe, a building serves as a microcosmic articulation of socioeconomic relations in Chinatown society" ("Artifacts" 65).

Moreover, the self-contained architecture of the theater suggests the self-enclosure of the Chinatown community isolated from the American city. Hence Chinatown's apparently discrete and stagnant Chinese culture simultaneously constructs an opposing American national and cultural identity of progress and enlightenment coded as the norm equated with whites and things European. Spatial metaphors that depict Chinatown as an embodiment of cultural and racial homogeneity also underlie Irwin's interpretive essays on Genthe's old Chinatown photographs. Evoking "The Third Circle," Irwin asserts that Genthe's photographs capture Chinatown's mystery and inscrutability: "These pretty and painted playthings . . . furnished a glimpse into Frank Norris's Third Circle, the underworld. We shall never quite understand the Chinese, I suppose; and not the least comprehensible thing about them is the paradox of their ideas and emotions" (in Genthe, *Old Chinatown* 112–13). Paradoxically, the inscrutable Chinese appear completely knowable to Norris, Genthe, and Irwin, whose white male gaze masters and

domesticates the Otherness of the Chinese they encounter. By assuming an anthropological authority of detached observation and interpretation of Chinatown, Irwin, like Genthe and Norris, among others, produces the knowledge of a separate Chinese society and culture, apart from and undisturbed by things American. The Chinese, then, may be “with us, but not of us.”¹⁰

Similar representations also characterize portrayals of New York City’s Chinatown in mainstream media. Apart from constructing it as a site for encountering the unknown, Mary Ting Yi Lui notes: “Tourist guidebooks and sensational newspaper and social reform reports frequently linked Chinatown’s topography to the various vice activities in the area. Doyers Street for example was described in the 1904 tourist guidebook, *New York’s Chinatown: Ancient Peking Seen at “Old Bowery” Gate*, as ‘the crookedest in [the] city, making half a dozen turns in its short stretch from Chatham Square to Pell St.’ Crooked streets, though a common feature of lower Manhattan, came to reflect the immorality and hidden criminal nature of the neighborhood and its residents” (Lui, *Chinatown* 39–40). Although the journalist Louis J. Beck claimed to offer a “fair and just” view in his book on New York City’s Chinatown, he depicted this neighborhood as a “self-contained environment where all material, cultural, and spiritual needs could be met by the Chinese residents themselves. . . . The life of the community was . . . set apart from the rest of the city.” Portrayed as such, “Chinatown, then,” says Lui, “was in New York, but not of it” (*Chinatown* 25, 32).

Underlying those spatially confined identities of Chinatowns and the Chinese residents is the controlling gaze of the *flâneur*, the all-seeing and knowing male subject of the privileged white journalist, photographer, or tourist who enjoys the freedom of strolling about town across divided urban spaces. Yet the descriptive details of the seemingly transparent alien Chinatown space and the Chinese body turn the *flâneur* into merely a passive recipient and a discerning observer of a given environment; thus the *flâneur*’s role in simultaneously constructing the identities of Chinatown and white America is elided, or rather becomes hidden. At the same time, the subjectivity and identity of the white male observer and narrator are constituted by the power of his gaze and superior social position and by the racial inferiority of the Chinese, who are rendered mute objects, part of the Chinatown space that is at once mysterious and transparent to the white male gaze. Or, when the Chinese were portrayed in writings like Norris’s story as more than objectified curiosities that made up Chinatown streets, they were morally decrepit seducers who victimized white women.

These dominant views of Chinatowns and their narrative strategies provide a useful context for our understanding of the significance of Sui Sin Far's writings about Chinatown, especially the ways that Sui Sin Far restores the humanity and subjectivity of the Chinese and re-represents Chinatown as an American urban neighborhood. Moreover, given the contradictory functions of the storied Chinatown and its inhabitants, which are "*socially peripheral*" yet "*symbolically central*" in the formation of the body politic of the U.S. nation-state, Sui Sin Far's representation of Chinatown as part of the American city unsettles American identity, which is supposed to be racially "white" and culturally Eurocentric.¹¹

A FLÂNEUSE IN LOS ANGELES'S CHINATOWN

Sui Sin Far in her counter-narratives of Chinatown lives appropriates and revises the *flâneur* figure and the conventions of journalism and ethnography of her time. Employing the white subject's privileged gaze and freedom of spatial mobility to simultaneously subvert racial stereotypes of Chinatown, she undermines the authority of participatory observation as a reliable method of obtaining knowledge of the Other. Rather than seek to master, control, or domesticate the Other or Otherness, as is characteristic of "the panopticism" of urban spectatorship in nineteenth-century American urban literature (Brand 184–85), Sui Sin Far's *flânerie* undermines the street epistemology of the colonizing white male gaze, partly from the white woman's perspective and partly from the perspective of the Chinese. "Who is entitled to look at and represent whom is a charged question in a racially stratified society," states Ferens in her insightful analysis of Sui Sin Far's Chinatown stories and their reception by white readers (80). Ferens calls critical attention to Sui Sin Far's ambivalent subject position and her complex revisionist appropriation of the conventions of ethnography and white middle-class Christian values (57). She observes that Christian missions in Chinatown were in part mobilized and justified by the normative discourse whose "rhetoric of lack associated with Chinese culture was an insidious one that Edith [Eaton] had trouble rejecting outright since it was the imagined lack in the world's spiritual economy that moved white Canadians to charity and goodwill toward the 'heathen.'" Nevertheless, Ferens contends that Eaton "often wrote against the rhetoric of lack in Chinese culture" (52). In so doing, I would argue, Sui Sin Far at once reiterates and displaces middle-class "American," "Christian" values onto Chinese immigrants, but not without

dismantling the normative discourse's assumptions about American identity and the Chinese alien Other.

Given the anthropological authority that white male journalists and fiction writers who sauntered Chinatown streets as *flâneurs* assume in representing Chinatown, the ethnographic tendency in Sui Sin Far's reports on Chinatown could be considered a strategy of counter-narrative. In 1903, Sui Sin Far spent several months in Los Angeles, working as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Express*. Her position as a journalist enabled her to write and publish interventional narratives about Chinatown. Appropriating the method of journalist investigation and ethnographic participatory observation, Sui Sin Far employs the conventions of *flânerie* to resee and reexperience Chinatown anew.

In reports such as "Chinese in Business Here" for the *Los Angeles Express*, Sui Sin Far takes her readers on a tour of Chinatown. Instead of dark alleys or opium dens, she leads the reader through Chinatown streets, while commenting on and explaining what is seen:

If one will visit the stores, and other places of business of the Chinese of Los Angeles, he will gain a clearer idea of the industry and ingenuity of the people than the most learned books and treatises on the Chinese. . . . I have passed many a pleasant half hour or longer in the Chinese stores, taking a cup of tea, here and there and a pinch of instruction in between whiles. . . . Many of the poorest business man work at their trade or profession in the streets of Chinatown and sit with their tools, materials or compounds around hem as if they were in a workshop. (*Mrs. Spring* 208)¹²

As readers follow the speaker's perambulation, observation, and reflection, a different Chinatown emerges. Contrary to the predominant portrayals of Chinatown as a dangerous place for women, particularly white women, and a place saturated with "strange odors of the East," Chinatown as experienced on the female journalist's *flânerie* is a pleasant, lively place where women like Sui Sin Far (who looked white and dressed American) can stroll the streets freely and safely.

By performing the tourist, the journalist, and the ethnographer doing "fieldwork" on her walks in Chinatown, Sui Sin Far turns Chinatown into a contested urban space. Her enactment of a counter-discourse against the dominant "epistemology of the street" produced by tourist guidebooks, travel writings, and popular newspaper reports from white America can be

better understood in terms of de Certeau's theory on the politics of walking the city streets, in which he contends that "[w]alking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" (99). Drawing on de Certeau's theories on the practice of everyday life in the urban space, Benjamin Rossiter and Katherine Gibson, in their essay "Walking and Performing 'the City': A Melbourne Chronicle," argue that "[t]he practice of walking and the reflection on urban walks contribute to a counter-discourse of the urban" (439). They emphasize "the enabling potentialities of re-presenting the city from the street—from the perspective of the walker and the street inhabitant" (440). Particularly relevant to my investigation in what Sui Sin Far achieves in her writing through walking the streets of Chinatown as a journalist and ethnographer is Rossiter and Gibson's application of de Certeau's concept of walking as a "pedestrian speech act"—an interventional gesture that reinvents stories of the city and transforms the urban space (de Certeau 98). For Rossiter and Gibson, the "speech act of walking creates stories, invents spaces, and opens up the city through its capacity to produce 'anti-texts' within the text" (440). Moreover, by allowing the city to "speak," Rossiter and Gibson suggest that the centrality of the urban stroller's subjectivity gives away to the sensual perception of his or her body and to other bodies in the streets, leading to the constitution of multiple "urban subjectivities." With this shift, "[t]he body is introduced as a sensual being—smelling, remembering, rhythmically moving—jostling with other bodies and in the process constituting active, perhaps multiple, urban subjectivities. The walker becomes lost, allows the city—street signs, bars, cafes, billboards, passers-by—to 'speak' to her as does a bird call in the wild or a twig crackling under foot in a forest" (440). While the emphasis on the walker's sensual experience and her immersion in her surroundings undermines the controlling gaze of the privileged male subject, the replacement of the female "sensual being" with the constructive male gaze, however, casts the walker as merely a passive, receptive vessel of a given environment. Hence the active role that the urban stroller plays in constructing or defining the urban spaces becomes hidden. So, too, are the subject positions underlying the selection and organization of the sights, smells, and stories that the city is allowed to tell through the walker's sensual experience as a mode of knowledge production.

Sui Sin Far's Chinatown reports indicate that it is not simply the act of walking but also, and more importantly, the identity and subject position of the *flâneuse* that enable the subversive potentials of re-representing the

urban spaces. As the examples referred to earlier show, much of the apparent authenticity of the “yellow peril” images of Chinatown and its foreignness was based on white male writers’ sensory experiences as they strolled down Chinatown streets, smelling “strange odors of the East,” hearing “echoes of an unknown tongue,” and seeing “slanted-eyed pagans” crowding the streets (Stoddard 2, qtd. in Chen 99). Sui Sin Far’s walk in Chinatown produces a different place, undermining the stereotypes of Chinatown and the Chinese from her perspective as a Eurasian female journalist and from the perspectives of Chinatown’s residents.

To allow Chinatown and its residents to speak from their perspectives, it was not enough for Sui Sin Far to describe and interpret what she observed on her walks. Several of her reports on Los Angeles’s Chinatown are based on her journalist investigations and interviews with residents. For example, in “Chinatown Needs a School,” Sui Sin Far incorporates Chinatown residents’ perspectives in her story: “Mrs. Sing, the most prominent Chinese woman in Los Angeles . . . says I was misinformed as to her visit to San Francisco. . . . Mrs. Sing’s great hope is that before long a government school will be established in Chinatown for the Chinese boys and girls who are above the age of 10 or 12. There is a crying need for such a school” (202–3).¹³ While arguing for a public school in Chinatown and for the admission of Chinese children into American schools, Sui Sin Far shows that Chinese immigrants and their American-born children integrated Chinese and European American cultures in their homes as well as in the public spaces of Chinatown, where in juxtaposition to a missionary English school and “several Christian Chinese families,” “three joss houses [stood] conspicuous” (“In Los Angeles’ Chinatown” 199). Appropriating the *flâneur’s* gaze and the ethnographer’s participatory observation, she highlights the fact that Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans live a bicultural life. “Mrs. Sing’s house is furnished tastefully in a semi-eastern, semi-western style,” observes Sui Sin Far (“Chinatown Needs a School,” 203). “Americanized” with “a liberal education” from a mission school in Baltimore, Mrs. Sing remains “loyal to her own country and people,” and she and her husband, a man of “ability and character” and “one of the best known merchants in Los Angeles’ Chinatown,” have always worked “for the good of the Chinese with whom they come in contact” (203, 202, 203). This detailed description of a Chinese American family and their home’s interior design counters the dominant gaze of white America, which criminalized the Chinese body and Chinatown space. Even though her appropriation and revision of the *flâneur’s* gaze and strolling in

the urban spaces seem to be confined to Chinatown, they contest the boundaries that separate Chinatown and its communities from white America.¹⁴

However, limited by the speaker's position as an outsider of Chinatown and by the generic conventions of journalist reportage and ethnographic "fieldwork" of her time, Sui Sin Far's portrayal of the mutual transformation of the Chinatown community and American identity in her newspaper reports remains superficial. As she shows through her observations in the streets, schoolrooms, and a Chinatown household, the coexistence of Chinese and European American cultures is restricted to cultural practices contained in Chinatown. At the same time, Chinese immigrants' acculturation seems to be smooth and unproblematic, and the bilingual and bicultural American-born Chinese Americans such as the Sing children are happy and content in Chinatown. But in her fiction Su Sin Far is able to explore in depth the complex mutually transformative process and effects of encounters between Chinese immigrants and white Americans.

In her short stories set in Chinatown, she at once appropriates and undermines the authority of participatory observation as a reliable method of obtaining knowledge of the Other. Embedded in the contested epistemological and ethnical questions concerning modes of knowing is not only an implicit subversion of the *flâneur* figure as a neutral spectator and interpreter of the urban scene but also a disruption of the raced hierarchical relationship between the observer and the observed. Moreover, by exposing the harms that white female English teachers and Christian missionaries can bring to Chinese families in Chinatown, Sui Sin Far calls critical attention to the ways that race complicates the gendered and classed *flâneur* figure in urban literature.

Critics of literature and photography of urban exploration often emphasize the classed and gendered privilege of visual observation. John Urry in his essay "City Life and the Senses" examines the social and cultural conditions that have contributed to placing the visual "at the top" of the "hierarchy of sense within Western culture over the past few centuries" (389). The assumed superiority of the visual, Urry suggests, resides in its potential for the seeing subject to possess and control what is seen. "The visual sense enables people to take possession, not only of other people, but also of diverse environments. It enables the world to be controlled at a distance, combining detachment and mastery" (389–90). Such a possessive and controlling gaze, Urry notes, is the privilege of the upper and middle classes, who have the power to mediate urban spatial organizations in such a way as to reinforce social hierarchy

and regulate social interactions (390–91). Other critics contend that such visual privilege and power characterize the male gaze. Elizabeth Wilson, for example, in her essay “The Invisible *Flâneur*,” included in the volume *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (1995), notes that the *flâneur*, “as a man who takes visual possession of the city,” “has emerged in postmodern feminist discourse as the embodiment of the ‘male gaze’” (65). Exploring further the implications of the classed and gendered gaze of the *flâneur*, Judith Walkowitz states, “The fact and fantasy of urban exploration had long been an informing feature of nineteenth-century bourgeois male subjectivity” (410). Moreover, Walkowitz suggests that while the bourgeois male subject is in part constituted by the urban investigation as a way of knowing and mastery of the urban scene, he plays a significant role in constructing the urban geography and communities. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, “urban explorers adapted the language of imperialism” and “emulated the privileged gaze of anthropology” that “transformed the unexplored territory of the London poor into an alien place” and represented “the poor as a race apart, outside the national community” (412–13).

However, Walkowitz argues that the presence of women in urban public spaces disturbs the cityscape constructed by the male gaze. “No figure was more equivocal, yet more crucial to the structured public landscape of the male *flâneur*, than the woman in public.” She adds: “In the mental map of urban spectators, they lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning. As symbols of conspicuous display or of lower-class and sexual disorder, they occupied a multivalent symbolic position in this imaginary landscape” (414). The “public symbol of female vice” and “embodiment of the corporeal smells and animal passions that the rational bourgeois male had repudiated and that the virtuous woman, the spiritualized ‘angel in the house,’ had suppressed,” Walkowitz contends, “the prostitute established a stark contrast to domesticated feminine virtue as well as to male bourgeois identity” (414). Yet these apparently polarizing identities are unsettled by the prostitute as “the permeable and transgressed border between classes and sexes” and “as the carrier of physical and moral pollution” (415).

Unlike the prostitute—“the quintessential female figure of the urban scene” (Walkowitz 414)—white women in Chinatown, as portrayed in stories like Norris’s “The Third Circle” and in the dominant media, embody innocence, vulnerability, and the victimization of Chinese vices. Their presence in Chinatown reinforces the raced and gendered threat of the “Chinese

quarters” to white America. In contrast to white female prostitutes in the city or white male tourists in Chinatown, white women in Sui Sin Far’s stories occupy an ambivalent position as English teachers and Christian missionaries in Chinatown—white *flâneuses*, who are both “makers” and “bearers of meaning.” Their racial and class identity enables them to enjoy in part at least the privilege and authority of the bourgeois white male, while their observations undermine the mastery of the male gaze and their interactions with Chinese men challenge the boundaries of race, gender, and class. It is precisely by employing this ambivalent position of white middle-class women that Sui Sin Far calls into question the authority of the white gaze and anthropological participatory observation, which produce normative knowledge that reinforces the polarizing identities of Chinatown and the American city.

One of her short stories set in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, “A Chinese Boy-Girl,” offers a salient example of Sui Sin Far’s strategies for engaging the dominant discourses to disrupt their production of knowledge about both the Chinatown community and white America. The story opens with a description of Chinatown’s location in Los Angeles, as part of the neighborhoods of the city’s Plaza, where multiple, heterogeneous cultures and peoples meet and interact. Like the camera eye, the narrator’s gaze moves from a panoramic view to close-ups, portraying Chinatown as spatially and culturally connected and open to the city: “The persons of mixed nationalities loung[ed] on the benches. . . . The Italians who ran the peanut and fruit stands at the corners were doing no business to speak of. The Chinese merchants’ stores in front of the Plaza looked as quiet and respectable and drowsy as such stores always do” (155). Contrary to the spatially, architecturally, and culturally self-enclosed Chinatown images in the dominant media, Chinatown and the Chinese are depicted as an integral part of the city’s geography and demography of “mixed nationalities” through Sui Sin Far’s appropriation of the *flâneur*’s controlling gaze over the urban scene.

Having thus spatially established Chinatown as part of the city, she tactfully leads the reader into Chinatown and to the story’s major characters—Miss Mason, the young, white American teacher, and Ku Yum, the “little girl,” who is Miss Mason’s bright but naughty student. As time goes by, Miss Mason is troubled by Ku Yum’s repeated absence from school, and other girls report that Ku Yum “is running around with the boys” (156). The situation continues for a year until Miss Mason becomes convinced that “some steps would have to be taken to discipline the child,” who after school “simply ran

wild on the streets of Chinatown, with boys for companions.” Miss Mason discovers that Ku Yum’s mother has passed away, and the girl’s father shrugs off her concerns about his daughter’s inappropriate behavior and playmates, intensifying her sense of urgency. She contacts the president of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, “the matron of the Rescue Home,” about Ku Yum’s case (157). However, no sooner has Miss Mason accomplished her task than she begins to wonder whether it is right “to deprive a father of the society of his child, and a child of the love and care of a parent” (158). Meanwhile, as a result of her efforts, the state superior court decrees that Ku Yum be removed from her father’s custody and placed in a home for Chinese girls in San Francisco. But Ku Yum is nowhere to be found by those authorized to take her to the shelter, and Miss Mason becomes alienated in Chinatown. “Where formerly the teacher had met with smiles and pleased greetings, she now beheld averted faces and downcast eyes, and her school had within a week dwindled from twenty-four scholars to four” (158). Eventually, Ku Yum comes to Miss Mason one evening, while the latter is walking home through Chinatown after visiting a sick student. Because of Ku Yum’s plea, Miss Mason meets with the father and finds out from him that Ku Yum is actually a boy, the only one of his five sons to have survived. To prevent the jealous evil spirit from taking away his only son, the father dresses him as a girl. Rather than dismiss the father’s fear as superstition, Miss Mason realizes her own mistake, as her parting words to Ku Yum indicate: “Your father, by passing you off as a girl, thought to keep an evil spirit away from you; but just by that means he brought another, and one which nearly took you from him too” (160).

That Miss Mason almost has Ku Yum taken away from his father points to both the blind spot of her perspective and the power of her social position as a white woman. Although she has taught in Chinatown for a year, Miss Mason remains an outsider; she is unaware of Ku Yum’s cross-dressing—which is known to Ku Yum’s playmates and the Chinatown community. Without intimate interactions with the Chinatown residents, Miss Mason’s participatory observation proves to be inadequate in knowing the Other. And her patronizing sense of duty enhanced by her assumption of the father’s lack of parenting responsibilities compounds her blindness. The implied mutually informative relationship between Miss Mason’s subject position and her interpretive gaze undermines the privileged visual sense and its mastery of the urban scenes and, with it, the knowledge about the Other, as well as the authority in the interpretive power of the white male journalist, the

photographer, and the ethnographic fiction writer portraying Chinatown. It is worth noting that this subversion is implied in Miss Mason's insight gained through her recognition of her blindness, and her recognition, moreover, is made possible through her friendship with Ku Yum and her willingness to meet with Ku Yum's father and to be open to his perspective. Hence Sui Sin Far challenges the privileged visual sense and the mastery of knowledge of the racialized Other by simultaneously appropriating and undermining the bourgeois male privilege of authority, autonomy, and subject position as "maker of meaning" for her white female character, Miss Mason.

Unlike most of Sui Sin Far's white male contemporaries writing about Chinatown, Miss Mason does not assume an anthropological knowledge of Chinese culture, nor does she maintain certainty about the righteousness of her own judgment and actions. Even her subject position as the observer is unsettled in the story. Rather than merely objects of her voyeuristic gaze, the Chinese look back and observe her. When the court order regarding Ku Yum is issued, Miss Mason notices that as she walks around Chinatown, she beholds "averted faces and downcast eyes" instead of smiles or "pleased greetings" as before. Apart from indicating her alienation from the Chinese community as a result of her actions, Miss Mason's experience in the Chinatown streets suggests that she is being observed and judged. Her privileged, yet unstable and vulnerable, subject position enables her to learn about the Chinese she encounters, not by detached observation, but through direct interactions and through recognizing her own misassumptions.

DISRUPTING THE GAZE OF WHITE AMERICA

By refusing to privilege the white gaze, Sui Sin Far is able to portray white Americans and Chinatown through the eyes of Chinese immigrants in stories such as "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" and "The Wisdom of the New." In both stories, middle-class white women embody what is desirable for Chinese immigrants, particularly educated Chinese young men of the merchant class, who seem to have successfully adapted to American culture. Instead of being morally corrupted and physically violated by Chinese men in Chinatown as portrayed in the popular media, white women in these stories are Chinese men's friends and confidants, offering them support, advice, and moral guidance. Such representation of gendered interracial friendship, though it reiterates to a certain degree white superiority embodied by white women, counters dominant narratives about the degradation of white wom-

anhood by lascivious Chinese men who use opium to lure white women. Representations of white women's victimization by Chinese men not only perpetuate the "yellow peril" myth, but they also reinforce raced and gendered hierarchy. Sui Sin Far's re-representation of white women in her stories, then, undermines both racism against Chinese men and sexism against white women. However, while undermining the stereotypes of white women as the weaker vessel of morality and in critiquing Chinese patriarchy, Sui Sin Far contrasts progressive American women with conventional backward Chinese women, thus reinforcing another gendered and raced stereotype.

Moreover, Sui Sin Far highlights the privileged social position of white women and its impact on Chinese immigrants, suggesting that acculturation entails subject formation shaped by competing ideologies inscribed on raced, gendered bodies and spaces. I would argue that the gendered interracial relationship and the implications of white women's mobility in Chinatown and their intimate interactions with Chinese immigrants render Sui Sin Far's stories such as "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" and "The Wisdom of the New" much more complex and subversive than mere descriptions of Chinatown life. The white "woman about town" plays a central role in the politics of gendered interracial relationships, facilitating or impeding Chinese immigrants' process of acculturation, as shown in both stories. But in "The Wisdom of the New" a counter-narrative emerges as an undercurrent below the main narrative. To explore this undercurrent demands an interpretation that resists conformity with the gaze that inscribes dominant ideologies of race, gender, and culture on the raced, gendered body and space. It is from an apparently passive background that this counter-narrative emerges to render Sui Sin Far's stories more complex, ambivalent, and subversive than their central narratives would suggest. Read as a subversive, interventional narrative against racism and sexism, "The Wisdom of the New" is a path breaker in exploring the intersections of gender and race. It deals with the impact of gendered interracial relationships on Chinese immigrants' acculturation as depicted in "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," but with a more complex portrayal of the gendered and raced subjectivity of its major characters, particularly Pau Lin. Confined to a life of subordination to her husband, Pau Lin is jealous of her husband's white American friend, Adah Charlton, the niece of Mrs. Dean, a Sunday school teacher in Chinatown, who takes Wou Sankwei under her wing shortly after his arrival in San Francisco at age nineteen and remains a motherly figure and close friend to him. White women in this story, as in "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," help facilitate the

assimilation of immigrant Chinese young men like Sankwei but, in doing so, contribute to the alienation of the young men's wives. Hence Americanization, or rather assimilation, is a privilege for Chinese men, particularly those of the merchant class, whose spatial and social mobility is gendered and classed. While Sankwei sees no need for his wife to learn English or American culture, he is determined to send their son, Yen, to an American school against the strong disapproval of his wife. Jealous of her husband's affection for Adah and unable to adapt to American culture because of the inequality of race and gender, which has shaped her thinking and feeling to an extreme, Pau Lin kills her son to prevent him from becoming "American." The narrator comments on Adah's initial ignorance of Pau Lin's feelings about her, revealing white women's privilege while also highlighting the intersections of gender and race underlying Pau Lin's jealousy: "Secure in the difference of race, in the love of many friends, and in the happiness of her chosen work, no suspicion whatever crossed her mind that the woman [Pau Lin] whose husband was her aunt's protégé tasted everything bitter because of her" ("The Wisdom of the New" 51). But other narrative details suggest that jealousy is not the only reason Pau Lin's resists her son's Western education. In fact, Pau Lin finds support for her resistance among her Chinese female neighbors, who help confirm her fear of losing her son to white America.

Sui Sin Far employs the architectural characteristics of Chinatown apartment buildings for multiple purposes, including establishing a network of communication for Pau Lin. The balconies of the surrounding apartments become a social space for exchanging information among Chinese women, whose opinions of white America reinforce Pau Lin's fear for her son. Sien Tau, leaning over her balcony, says to Pau Lin: "You did perfectly right. . . . Had I again a son to rear, I should see to it that he followed not after the white people" (48). The narrator reveals that Sien Tau's son has married a white woman, and their children behave like strangers to their grandmother. Another Chinese woman, Lae Choo, echoes Sien Tau's words: "In this country, she is most happy who has no child." Then she goes on to deplore Lew Wing's young daughter's "bold and free" ways with white men. Pau Lin joins in "at another balcony door," saying, "One needs not to be born here to be made a fool of" (48). Their conversation moves from the harms white Americans have brought to Chinese families to the violence resulting from missionary practice in China. Their complaints reveal their resentment about the loss of respect for the Chinese and their culture and suggest a connection between the degradation of the Chinese and the colonialist Christian

missions in both China and Chinatown. The exchanges among immigrant Chinese women on the balconies help validate Pau Lin's view of the deplorable "wisdom of the new" that may "contaminate" her son (52).

Below the balconies, the Chinatown street scenes seem to mock the Chinese women's parochialism. In fact, the balcony provides Pau Lin with a bird's-eye view of Chinatown's streets, whose scenes simultaneously serve as evidence of what she deplors about things American and offer a point of view that challenges the Chinese women's bemoaning of the "contamination" of Chinese values by American culture. As she gazes "below her curiously," Pau Lin is fascinated by what she sees:

The American Chinatown held a strange fascination for the girl from the seacoast village. Streaming along the street was a motley throng made up of all nationalities. . . . There went by a stalwart Chief of the Six Companies engaged in earnest confab with a yellow-robed priest from the joss house. A Chinese dressed in the latest American style and a very blonde woman, laughing immoderately, were entering a Chinese restaurant together. Above all the hubbub of voices was heard the clang of electric cars and the jarring of heavy wheels over cobblestones. (49)

The visual details and their implications of this motley "American Chinatown" made up of diverse racially and ethnically marked bodies, however, suggest an inevitable, irresistible cultural hybridization in process that counters the reification of either Chinese or Western culture. The presence of electric cars running through Chinatown renders it resolutely part of the American city.

Critics, however, tend to overlook this undercurrent of counter-narrative embedded in the spatial and bodily images of Chinatown in "The Wisdom of the New." Xiao-huang Yin, in discussing "the subtlety of Sui's writing," refers to the passage quoted above as an example of how Sui Sin Far uses "background" to indicate "the cultural shock a newly arrived Chinese woman is experiencing" (92, 91, 92). Yin further observes that the "minute description provides details that existed nowhere else in popular American fiction, and the detailed web of facts about daily life that she provided created a realistic environment in which her characters could interact" (92). But rather than a passive background or environment, the Chinatown neighborhood and its everyday activities constitute a counter-discourse, one that engages with the story's central conflict and ambivalence as noted by Ferens in her discussion

of the story. Ferens states that “the story deplors the parochialism that hampers cross-cultural contacts.” Yet it is “a deeply ambivalent story that cannot be reduced to one reading.” According to Ferens: “The fundamental problem it raises is that the two cultural groups are limited or limit themselves to just looking at each other. This leads to the reification of cultural difference and, subsequently, to a struggle for dominance fought over the body of a child” (107). Given the sociohistorical context of this story, the struggle of immigrant Chinese women to keep their children from Americanization seems to be more a matter of resistance to assimilation and to losing their children to the dominant culture than “a struggle for dominance.” Underlying their fear and resistance, as well as the hegemony of white America, is the denial of racial and cultural hybridity, which is already taking place in Chinatown. Pau Lin’s observation of the “American Chinatown” as “a motley throng made up of all nationalities” (49) subverts precisely the reification of cultural difference and resists the dominance of any supposedly discrete ethnic or national culture. Sui Sin Far’s depiction of the heterogeneous American Chinatown through the gaze of Pau Lin offers an alternative perspective to the reification of either culture or race and renders Chinatown an “American” urban space of multiplicity and hybridity, open to change.

Sui Sin Far produces such an undercurrent counter-narrative in the story by using the vantage point of the balcony and the organizing power of the visual sense to depict a “detailed web of facts about daily life” in Chinatown “that existed nowhere else in popular American fiction,” as Yin notes. No less remarkable about Sui Sin Far’s narrative strategies is her positioning of Chinese merchant wives like Pau Lin and her neighbors as the urban spectators on the balconies. Critics of urban literature have pointed out the significance of the spatial relationship between the balcony and the street. For Walter Benjamin, the balcony vantage point in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s short piece “The Cousin’s Corner Window” enables the cousin/observer to frame and examine the scenes below according to the “principles of the art of seeing”: “His attitude toward the crowd is, rather, one of superiority, inspired as it is by his observation post at the window of an apartment building. From this vantage point he scrutinizes the throng. . . . His opera glasses enable him to pick out individual genre scenes” (Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 173). Such a voyeuristic gaze gives the spectator the power not only to select what to see but also to control *how* to see, thus reducing the “throng” below to framed objects of artistic gaze. Exploring the privilege of the voyeuristic gaze from the balcony, Urry offers another perspective on the functions of

the balcony in nineteenth-century urban life and literature: “More generally, the upper class mainly sought to gaze upon the other, while standing on their balconies. The balcony took on special significance in nineteenth-century life and literature as the place from which one could gaze but not be touched, could participate in the crowd yet be separate from it” (392). Both Benjamin’s and Urry’s remarks about the balcony observer’s superiority over the crowd below suggest that the spatial relationship between the observer and the observed in part constitutes the subjectivity of the former. Moreover, the observer on the balcony is not a passive recipient of what is already there down in the street; he or she selects, organizes, and interprets the sights, thus producing the identity and knowledge of the objects of his or her gaze.

Sui Sin Far disrupts this controlling voyeuristic gaze and undermines its mastery by placing socially marginalized characters—Pau Lin and other Chinese merchants’ wives—as the observers from the balconies. While the balcony vantage point reflects Pau Lin’s middle-class status and distances her from the crowd in the streets, this spatial relationship of her voyeuristic gaze at the strange “throng” of everyday life activities below reflects her gendered social isolation and cultural alienation. What she beholds below her balcony is beyond her control and at once fascinating and unsettling. Those in the heterogeneous crowd in the American Chinatown streets are interacting with, rather than simply looking at, one another. And these daily-life Chinatown sights of unlikely intermingling—such as a fat Chinese barber “laughing hilariously at a drunken white man who had fallen into a gutter,” “a stalwart Chief of the Six Companies engaged in earnest confab with a yellow-robed priest from the joss house,” and an interracial couple, who consist of a Chinese man “dressed in the latest American style and a very blonde woman, . . . entering a Chinese restaurant together”—are depicted as part of the urban American scene of modernity, “the hubbub of voices” of a heterogeneous crowd mixed with “the clang of electric cars and the jarring of heavy wheels over cobblestones” (“The Wisdom of the New” 49). This scene of everyday practice in the urban space, then, reveals less “the inner world” of the story’s Chinese female characters than their sense of alienation and a real world irreducible to the gaze of a single point of view or a unitary subject position. The apparently incongruous blending of variegated and multifarious bodies in the American Chinatown street disturbs both the traditional Chinese woman’s gaze and the gaze of the white male *flâneur* who portrays Chinatown as a self-enclosed foreign terrain ridden with filth, disease, and crimes innate to the peculiar Chinese “race.”

But in stories like “The Wisdom of the New” it is white women like Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton who tutor Chinese young men how to be Chinese American, and it is white women like them who have the privilege of mobility in and out of Chinatown as “the woman about town.” As Mrs. Dean says to Adah, “to become American” while remaining Chinese “in a sense” is precisely “what we teach these Chinese boys” (54). Empowered by her race and class, and motivated by her Christian compassion, Mrs. Dean has devoted herself “earnestly and whole-heartedly to the betterment of the condition and the uplifting of the young workingmen of Chinese race who came to America.” With her colonialist condescension and good intentions, Mrs. Dean assumes that bettering conditions and uplifting Chinese workingmen in the United States depend on their understanding of “the Western people,” thereby disavowing racial inequality and eliding social change. She tells Adah that the “appeal and need” of the Chinese immigrants “was for closer acquaintance with the knowledge of the Western people, and *that* she had undertaken to give them, as far as she was able” (52). For white women like Mrs. Dean, Chinatown becomes a site of assimilation as a way of “uplifting” the heathen Chinese, who have become a white women’s “burden.” While for Chinese men assimilative Americanization seems to automatically lead to economic upward mobility, the dominant stereotype of the racialized inability and unwillingness of the Chinese immigrants to adapt to American culture is displaced onto Chinese women.

White women’s privilege is in part reflected in their freedom of walking and interacting with Chinese men in the street. When Chinatown is celebrating the “Harvest Moon Festival,” Mrs. Dean serves as tour guide for her niece: “Mrs. Dean, familiar with the Chinese people and the mazes of Chinatown, led her around fearlessly, pointing out this and that object of interest and explaining to her its meaning” (54). Mrs. Dean’s authority in knowing the Chinese people and culture enhances her privilege and courage (“fearlessly” walking through “the mazes of Chinatown”) in crossing the divided spaces in the city. Even though the narrator mentions that everybody in Chinatown—“men, women, and children”—seems to be out of doors for the festival celebration, Mrs. Dean and Adah meet and talk with only Chinese men, including Sankwei, in the street. The socialization of Pau Lin is limited to the circle of Chinese merchants’ wives and confined to the domestic space. Crossing the boundaries of race and gender and socializing in the public space of Chinatown seem to be the privilege of white women

and Chinese men, while middle-class Chinese women like Pau Lin remain on their balconies as voyeurs of street life.

Sui Sin Far breaks away from this pattern of raced and gendered relationships and redefines the racialized identity of Chinatown in her other stories, such as “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” “Her Chinese Husband,” “Pat and Pan,” “Its Wavering Image,” “Mrs. Spring Fragrance,” and “The Inferior Woman.” Rather than tourists, Sunday school teachers, or patronizing visitors in Chinatown, white women in those stories are residents of the neighborhood, living with the Chinese as families or neighbors. Chinese women, instead of white women, are the subject of gaze and enjoy mobility in and outside of Chinatown in stories such as “Mrs. Spring Fragrance,” and “The Inferior Woman.”¹⁵ If space is “a product of relations,” thus “always in process,” as Massey contends (*For Space* 11), and if space must be understood as “a moment of becoming,” as “emergence and eruption, oriented not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action,” as Grosz argues (*Architecture* 119, 115), then the lived space of Chinatown and its identity are constantly altered by both Chinese immigrants’ and white women’s transgressions of the boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality in everyday practices. Such transformative transgressions are uncontainable to Chinatown, as “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman” demonstrate.

A CHINESE AMERICAN FLÂNEUSE ABOUT TOWN

The mutually constitutive becomings of the lived space and its inhabitants are embedded in Sui Sin Far’s narrative strategies for “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and its sequel, “The Inferior Woman.” In contrast to the subordinate, dependent, and conventional immigrant Chinese women in stories such as “The Wisdom of the New” and “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” Mrs. Spring Fragrance is independent and resolutely Chinese American and is becoming an author. Most important, Mrs. Spring Fragrance is “the woman about town,” a new kind of *flâneuse*, whose mobility in urban and suburban spaces reinscribes raced and gendered spaces, reasserts Chinese women’s identity and subjectivity, and makes available materials for her writing.

“Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman” undermine precisely what their titles evoke—titillating glimpses into the exotic, strange, mysterious, and inscrutable “Chinese” attributes and sensational stories of

the Chinese slave girls and prostitutes often found in European Americans' portrayals of Chinatown. As Ferens points out, readers who expect "a narrative of strange goings-on in Chinatown" will find these two stories "disconcerting." "The most Chinese thing anyone does here is to fold a fan. The Spring Fragrances lead well-regulated, respectable lives. They read the paper, celebrate a wedding anniversary, and take walks in the park" (Ferens 103-4). The Spring Fragrances and their Chinese and white neighbors are middle-class Americans. Mr. Spring Fragrance, whose business name is Sing Yook, is a young curio merchant. "Though conservatively Chinese in many respects, he was at the same time what is called by the Westerners, 'Americanized.' Mrs. Spring Fragrance was even more 'Americanized'" ("Mrs. Spring Fragrance" 17). Countering the seemingly innate subordinate and submissive image of Chinese women, Mrs. Spring Fragrance has an equal relationship with her husband and her white American friends. She travels by herself between Seattle and San Francisco, visiting both Chinese and American friends and attending parties, picnics, theaters, and public lectures (20-21). She also loves reading American poetry and even aspires to write "a book about Americans for her Chinese women friends" ("The Inferior Woman" 28). A most subversive and disconcerting aspect of these stories is the reversed subjective positions of the Chinese and white Americans, as indicated by Mrs. Spring Fragrance's relationship with the subject of her book-in-progress—the "interesting," "mysterious," and "inscrutable" Americans ("The Inferior Woman" 28, 33). Instead of a mute "bearer of meaning" without autonomy, Mrs. Spring Fragrance seeks to become a "maker of meaning," to again borrow Walkowitz's phrases (414). But rather than reduce Americans to merely the object of her gaze or analysis, Mrs. Spring Fragrance, to the delight of her American friends, makes them participants in her book project.

Such equal relationships between Chinese and white Americans are at once reflected and made possible by the spatial location and organization of their dwellings. Instead of Chinatown, the Spring Fragrances and their neighbors live in the suburbs. To the right of their house is a Chinese American family, the Chin Yuens, and on the left, an Irish American family, the Carmans. This spatial arrangement is also crucial for the plots and narrative developments of both "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman." The Spring Fragrances and their next-door neighbors on both sides are good friends, and their everyday interactions are at the centers of both stories. While the first story focuses on Mrs. Spring Fragrance's role in helping her close friend Laura, the Chin Yuens' daughter, marry the man she

loves, the second story deals with Mrs. Spring Fragrance's involvement in the happiness of the Carmans—their son Will's marriage to Alice Winthrop, the woman he loves. On the surface these stories are like conventional situation comedies, ending with star-crossed lovers happily married. Their subversion and provocation reside in the stories' undercurrent themes—cultural hybridity, interracial friendship, and transgression of the boundaries of race, gender, and class.

The two stories of love and marriage are the means by which Sui Sin Far reveals the Chinese Americans' bicultural life and interactions with European Americans, particularly those of Mrs. Spring Fragrance, which facilitate the becomings of both herself and her Chinese and European American neighbors. Sui Sin Far's descriptions of the Chin Yuens and Laura's sweetheart in the first story show that unlike their parents, second-generation Chinese Americans are bicultural in their appearances and attitudes. Laura's Chinese name is "Mai Gwi Far (a rose)," but nearly "everybody called her Laura, even her parents and Chinese friends." Laura's sweetheart, Kai Tzu, is American-born, and despite his Chinese name and its implied insistence on his Chinese identity, he is "as ruddy and stalwart as any young Westerner," is "noted amongst baseball players as one of the finest pitchers on the Coast," and can "also sing, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes,' to Laura's piano accompaniment" ("Mrs. Spring Fragrance" 17). Only Mrs. Spring Fragrance knows of their love for each other, because Laura's apparently Americanized parents, in following an old Chinese tradition, betrothed their daughter "at age fifteen, to the eldest son of the Chinese Government school-teacher in San Francisco" (17–18). As it turns out, the schoolteacher's son, Man You, is in love with Ah Oi, who has "the reputation of being the prettiest Chinese girl in San Francisco and the naughtiest" (20). However, as a result of Mrs. Spring Fragrance's mediation during her long, multipurposed visit to San Francisco, Man You and Ah Oi are married by an American priest in San Jose, hence enabling Laura to marry Kai Tzu. The situation forces Laura's traditional Chinese parents to change their belief in the ideals of their Chinese ancestors.

A "woman about town," Mrs. Fragrance breaks away from conventional *flânerie*. Rather than simply observe the scenes in the streets, she inhabits the urban space as an active, social urbanite. Her activities in San Francisco reveal a Chinese American woman's lively social life beyond the city's Chinatown. Through Mrs. Spring Fragrance's movement about town, Sui Sin Far portrays Chinatown as part of San Francisco by refusing to draw any spatial boundaries between the ethnic ghetto and the rest of the city. "Mrs.

Spring Fragrance, in San Francisco on a visit to her cousin, the wife of the herb doctor of Clay Street, was having a good time. . . . There was much to see and hear, including more than a dozen babies who had been born in the families of her friends since she last visited the city of the Golden Gate” (“Mrs. Spring Fragrance” 20). In fact, the word *Chinatown* does not appear in the story even though Clay Street runs through San Francisco’s Chinatown and the theater parties given in Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s honor most likely take place in Chinatown. Spatial divides between Chinatown and the city are further eliminated when Mrs. Spring Fragrance invites Ah Oi to “a tête-à-tête picnic” (20) in Golden Gate Park, and the two have a wonderful time contriving against the arranged marriage between Laura and Man You. Sui Sin Far allows Chinese women not only to break away from oppressive Chinese traditions but also to unapologetically claim right to the city’s public spaces, as well as those in Chinatown, by inhabiting them through everyday activities.

Sui Sin Far’s refusal to spatially confine the Chinese to Chinatown inevitably entails crossing racial boundaries. In a letter home, Mrs. Spring Fragrance tells her husband: “I am enjoying a most agreeable visit, and American friends, as also our own, strive benevolently for the accomplishment of my pleasure. Mrs. Samuel Smith, an American lady, known to my cousin, asked for my accompaniment to a magniloquent lecture the other evening” (21). Friendly interracial interaction, however, does not eliminate racial inequality, which Sui Sin Far tactfully reveals through Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s advice to her husband not to dwell on being charged one dollar for a shave that white American men pay only fifteen cents for or to be overly outraged when his brother, on a visit, is detained by the U.S. government (21). Such advice seems to suggest accommodation of racial inequality even though it tactfully exposes it. But by showing racial inequality as an everyday life reality, Sui Sin Far renders the friendship between Chinese and white Americans more subversive of racial hierarchy. The social life Mrs. Spring Fragrance enjoys with white Americans and her apparently frequent visits to Golden Gate Park may be unrealistic portrayals, but they point to the possibilities of racial equity, while refusing to accept racism as an unchangeable fact. Social change could begin with imagining alternatives to social reality shaped by racism and sexism. Resistance to gender discrimination and to racial exclusion and containment can be enacted through the politics of everyday life. It is precisely through everyday activities that Sui Sin Far reinscribes the gendered, racially marked topography of San Francisco and Chinatown as her female Chinese character crosses the divided spaces. As Mrs.

Spring Fragrance's letter to her husband describes: "[T]he Golden Gate Park is most enchanting, and the seals on the rock at the Cliff House extremely entertaining and amiable. There is much feasting and merrymaking under the lanterns in honor of your Stupid Thorn" (21). Scenes and activities of Chinese culture merge into San Francisco's cityscape in this depiction that disrupts the portrayal of the "Chinese quarters" as a "foreign" terrain of vice and strange spectacles.

Sui Sin Far also challenges spatially maintained boundaries of gender in Chinatown through Mrs. Spring Fragrance's mobility in her social life. Chinatown's historically and discursively constructed masculine space of the "bachelor society," "slave girls," and "opium dens" is reinhabited and reinscribed by Mrs. Spring Fragrance's frequent visits with friends and by numerous dinners and parties held for her. According to John Kuo Wei Tchen, Chinese women in the United States during the exclusion period were limited to three primary roles—"a merchant's wife, a house servant, or a prostitute." While merchants' wives, abiding "by traditional customs," "were seldom seen in the streets of Chinatown," servant girls and prostitutes "were closely guarded and highly valued commodities" ("Women and Children" 96). These subordinate and subjugated positions of Chinese women within the Chinatown patriarchal community seem to explain the predominant portrayals of Chinatown as a male-dominant space. Lui, however, calls into question such seemingly realistic representations. She notes that contemporary scholars often comment on "Chinatown's overwhelmingly male 'bachelor' population, emphasizing the absence of Chinese women in the neighborhood. Descriptions of the few Chinese women who did reside in the area, as wives or servants in merchant families, were accompanied by extensive commentaries on their trapped and invisible existence based on Chinese social practices that forbid women to walk the streets" (*Chinatown* 37). Lui points out gender bias in representations of Chinatown as a "predominantly masculine space" (38). In different ways, both Tchen and Lui call critical attention to Chinatown as a space that is not only raced but also gendered in terms of how men and women inhabit it.

Feminist writers and scholars have shown that predominantly masculine spaces, whether public or private, reflect unequal gender relations. Grosz's perspective on women's relationship to the domestic space indicates that immigrant Chinese women's alienation at home and in American society as portrayed in Sui Sin Far's stories is in part the result of women's inferior social status. "The containment of women within a dwelling that they did

not build, nor was even built for them,” Grosz argues, “can only amount to a homelessness within the very home itself: it becomes the space of duty, of endless and infinitely repeatable chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of the affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense and erasure of the self, the space of domestic violence and abuse, the space that harms as much as it isolates women” (*Space* 122). Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s active social life in San Francisco contests women’s subordination to men and disrupts women’s isolation and containment within the private space. An autonomous female subjectivity emerges along with Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s spatial mobility—her freedom to travel by herself, to walk the streets, to attend public events, and to visit parks. In fact, the transformative agency of female subjectivity operates as the driving force of the development of the plots and characters of both “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman.”

Sui Sin Far allows Mrs. Spring Fragrance even more spatial mobility and subsequently a more complex interventional role in “The Inferior Woman.” While her book project mobilizes the plot, Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s middle-class status, her apparently equal relationship with her husband, and her freedom of movement in public make her aspiration to write the book possible. Both the idea and the subject of the book come to her as she is walking in a Seattle park (28). Not burdened by domestic duties or confined to her house, Mrs. Spring Fragrance has the leisure to enjoy the city’s park, to think, and to develop ambitions such as writing a book about Americans. Her mobility in the public space also makes it possible for her to have unexpected encounters and to discover interesting topics for her book. As she turns down a bypath she sees her Irish American neighbor’s son, Will Carman, coming toward her, with a girl by his side. Mrs. Spring Fragrance realizes that the girl is “the Inferior Woman” with whom Will is in love (28–29). A good friend of the Carmans, Mrs. Spring Fragrance has heard Mrs. Carman disapprove of Will’s love for “the Inferior Woman” because of her working-class status. Living next door to the Carmans, Mrs. Spring Fragrance has the opportunity to observe Will, offer him encouraging advice, and intervene on his behalf. This relationship with her white American neighbors makes available the content of her book.

In addition, the architectural design of the Spring Fragrances’ house and its spatial relation to the Carmans’ house are instrumental in Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s becoming a writer on European Americans. The veranda of the Spring Fragrances’ house functions as an observation station and a site of

communication. They regularly retire to the veranda to talk, and Will often happens to pass by. On one of these occasions, the sight of Will prompts the couple's discussion of Mrs. Spring Fragrance's desire to write a book. "Will Carman has failed to snare his bird," says Mr. Spring Fragrance to his wife, who "sighed" sympathetically. Then she says with great enthusiasm: "Ah, these Americans! These mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans! Had I the divine right of learning I would put them into an immortal book!" (33). Encouraged by her husband that "it is not necessary to acquire the 'divine right of learning' in order to accomplish things," Mrs. Spring Fragrance decides to begin the project without delay, and her first subject will be "The Inferior Woman of America." While ironically evoking the stereotypical attributes of the Chinese represented in mainstream American media, her remarks about these "mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans" undermine the predominant normative image of white Americans as well. Moreover, Mrs. Spring Fragrance does not assume the authority to know the subject of her book. Instead, she wants to investigate it and asks her husband for advice on becoming informed about the Inferior Woman. He recommends an American method: "It is the way in America, when a person is to be illustrated, for the illustrator to interview the person's friends. Perhaps, my dear, you had better confer with the Superior Woman" (34). With her parasol and folding fan in hand, Mrs. Spring Fragrance acts upon the advice right away, telling her husband, "I am going out for a walk" (35).

While walking about town, gathering information about the "interesting and mysterious Americans" (28) through observation and interviews for her book, Mrs. Spring Fragrance at once evokes and undermines the *flâneur* figure and his raced and gendered white male privilege and controlling gaze in the urban space. Rather than assume the authority of the knowing subject or relying on observation as a primary method of knowledge production, she investigates her book's topic by eavesdropping on and meeting with the Superior Woman to learn about the Inferior Woman, all the while taking notes and verifying them with her "informant." Her dual approach of participatory observation and interviewing of the American "native informant" seems to parallel the cultural anthropologist's "fieldwork." Ferens's insightful discussion of "The Inferior Woman" sheds light on Sui Sin Far's parodist and revisionist appropriation of the ethnographic tradition of her era: "Like the true scientist who aims to be nonintrusive, Mrs. Spring Fragrance contrives to listen without being heard. Although she intends to interview her 'native informants,' the college-educated Superior Woman and her mother, she first

takes the opportunity to eavesdrop on their conversation through an open window. . . . With her notebook and pink parasol, Mrs. Spring Fragrance comes across as a comical version of the cultural anthropologist in the field" (105). But Sui Sin Far only appropriates to a certain extent the anthropologist's "scientific" method as shown through her protagonist. Instead of relying on a sustained subject-object relationship, Mrs. Spring Fragrance's investigation involves "partnership, exchange, and the participation of the 'native informant' in the production of the ethnographic text" (106). Mrs. Spring Fragrance translates her notes for her informants' correction. Such a "participant" process, to "tirelessly 'question,' 'inquire,' 'interview,' and 'confer' with Anglo-Americans," Ferens emphasizes, is where Sui Sin Far "differs most from turn-of-the-century ethnographers, both lay and academic" in her own writings (106).

Apart from her middle-class position and her friendships with white women, the spatial mobility of the female Chinese protagonist is indispensable to her method of involving her "informants" as partners in the production of her book and to her becoming a writer. Her spatial mobility, as in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," actually mobilizes the plot development, leading to the resolution of the conflict. Not only can Mrs. Spring Fragrance take walks by herself to the local park, but she can also walk by herself to the houses of her white women friends to gather information for her book. Unlike the cultural anthropologist, who assumes a neutral position with his or her subject, Mrs. Spring Fragrance intends to intervene in the life of the Inferior Woman, Alice Winthrop. Her note taking of a conversation between the Superior Woman, Ethel Evebrook, and her mother about Alice becomes authentic evidence and convincing argument for Alice's worthiness for Will when Mrs. Spring Fragrance pays Mrs. Carman a special visit to tell her about her "book about Americans." Unlike the cultural anthropologist, who is already established as a writing subject, Mrs. Spring Fragrance is a housewife who is in the process of becoming a writer on Americans, a process that requires the Americans to believe in and cooperate with her. Hence her spatial mobility and her investigative method are central to her becoming the writing subject. In seeking to become a Chinese American writer on Americans, Mrs. Spring Fragrance brings positive changes in the attitudes and lives of white Americans even as she herself is undergoing the transformation from an immigrant and a merchant's wife to an author. Herein lies the ultimate difference between her writing on Americans and her contemporary ethnographies on exotic or primitive peoples and their cultures.

Rather than produce knowledge of the Other, or reinforce the boundaries between “them” and “us” as turn-of-the-century ethnographic fiction does, Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s book-in-progress challenges the boundaries of race, gender, class, and culture without erasing their respective differences. This challenge is enacted by a new female subject unlike any of the Chinese characters, male or female, in Sui Sin Far’s other stories. A most subversive aspect of Sui Sin Far’s poetics of space is embedded in Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s spatial mobility, which actualizes her agency in intervening in raced, gendered, classed stereotypes and in the lives of both her Chinese and white American friends. As a biracial child who received objectifying gazes from the Chinese and experienced verbal and physical violence from white children while walking in the street, as an Eurasian woman who often hears respectable white Americans’ humiliating remarks about the Chinese, and as a reporter on and Sunday school teacher in Chinatowns, Sui Sin Far knows well spatially produced and enforced boundaries of race, gender, class, and culture.¹⁶

In seeking to subvert racist, sexist, and classist identities, Sui Sin Far employs future-oriented narrative strategies for reimagining spatialized social relations in “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman.” While both stories suggest that a new subject such as Mrs. Spring Fragrance can emerge from new social relations of gender, race, and class, the spatial mobility of a Chinese woman in American cities enacts multiple subversions. De Certeau’s notion of the politics enacted through walking may shed light on the significance of Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s walks to parks, restaurants, and theaters and to her white American friends’ houses. As he contends: “If it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements” (de Certeau 98). Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s walks make heterogeneous, inclusive spaces emerge, and masculine, segregated spaces recede, while actualizing the possibilities of female agency, hybrid cultural identity, and interracial friendship.

Like white women’s walks in Chinatown as portrayed in Sui Sin Far’s other stories, which privilege, transform, or abandon those spatial elements that construct Chinatown as a deviant, pollutant space of foreign terrain, Mrs. Spring Fragrance’s walks privilege women’s autonomy and rights to public spaces and challenge, transform, or abandon spaces divided by differences

of race, gender, class, and culture. By allowing her Chinese female characters to inhabit American urban space, Sui Sin Far re-represents the raced and gendered body as part of the American cityscape, of which Chinatown is an integral part with irreducible, transformative difference. Her spatially oriented narrative strategies for reinscribing the raced and gendered body's relation to the urban space anticipate other Asian American writers' renegotiations of the excluded and marginalized Others' relation to the American cityscape and the nation-space of the United States decades later.

2 CLAIMING RIGHT TO THE CITY

Lin Yutang's *Chinatown Family*

One of the most powerful ways in which social space can be conceptualised is as constituted out of social relations, social interactions, and for that reason always and everywhere an expression and a medium of power.

—DOREEN MASSEY

Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power.

—MICHEL FOUCAULT

PUBLISHED IN 1948, *CHINATOWN FAMILY* BY LIN YUTANG IS THE first novel about Chinese American lives in New York City and its Chinatown during the 1930s.¹ Unlike the predominant merchant-class Chinese immigrant families in Sui Sin Far's journalist reports and short stories, and in contrast to the upper-class Chinese American family in Pardee Lowe's autobiography set in San Francisco's Chinatown, *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), the family in Lin's novel, the Fongs, is working-class and "illegal" according to the United States' Chinese exclusion laws.² The 1875 Page Law barring the entry of Chinese, Japanese, and "Mongolian" contract laborers and women for the purpose of prostitution was an effective measure for restricting immigration of Chinese women to the United States, as Sucheng Chan contends in her essay "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870–1943." Chan shows with abundant evidence that "[g]iven the widely held view that all Chinese women were prostitutes, laws against the latter affected other groups of Chinese women who sought admission into the country as well" (95). Najia Aarim-Heriot further demonstrates that "[f]rom 1876 to 1882, the number of Chinese women entering the United States declined by 68 percent from the previous seven-year period—from 4,142 to 1,338" (178). The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended the immigration of Chi-

nese laborers and declared Chinese ineligible for citizenship, was renewed in 1892 and extended indefinitely in 1902 until its repeal in 1943 (Takaki, *Strangers* 111). In addition, antimiscegenation laws in several states implemented since the late nineteenth century, and the 1922 Cable Act stipulating that American women citizens would lose their U.S. citizenship if they married aliens ineligible for citizenship (repealed in 1931), made it extremely difficult, if not entirely impossible, for working-class Chinese immigrants to have families in the United States (Yung, “Chronology” 426). When the 1924 Immigration Quota Act extended immigration exclusion to all Asians (except Hawaiians and Filipinos), it allowed entry of alien wives of Chinese merchants only (Peffer).

Chinatown Family alludes to those exclusionary laws and their underlying racism. The family’s patriarch, Tom Fong, Sr., who comes to the United States during the gold rush, is driven out of the West Coast by anti-Chinese violence and becomes a laundryman in New York City. Forbidden by law to have a family in the United States, Fong goes back to China every five or six years to be with his wife and to father a child. The Chinese Exclusion Act is still in effect when, with the help of his second son, Frederick, an insurance agent, who entered the United States by jumping ship while working as a seaman at age sixteen, Fong eventually has enough money to bring his wife and their two youngest children to New York City during the 1930s (*Chinatown Family* 7).³ Lin situates the Fongs’ family union in New York in the context of U.S. exclusionary laws through an ironic, yet seemingly matter-of-fact, statement by the narrator: “There were those immigration officials, and there were immigration laws, laws made, it seemed, especially to keep Chinese out of America, or to let in as few as possible” (9). Hence, to live as a family, the Fongs have to circumvent the law: “A laundryman certainly could not bring his family into the country legally. But a merchant could if the children were not yet twenty-one years old. And Uncle Chan was a merchant, with a fine busy grocery store in Chinatown.” He “was glad to help to bring his sister and her children over.” So “to satisfy the law,” Uncle Chan made his brother-in-law Tom Fong legally a joint owner of the grocery store. “Thus in the somewhat blinking eyes of the law, Tom Fong became a merchant” (10).

Given the historical context of Chinese exclusionary laws, Lin’s choice of a working-class Chinese American family for his book set in New York City during the 1930s challenges not only the exclusion of the Chinese from immigration and U.S. citizenship but also the criminalization of the Chinese in the U.S. nation-space.⁴ Chen Lok Chua in his introduction to the 2008

edition of *Chinatown Family* points out the significance of the novel's title and its implications:

Lin Yutang's calling his novel *Chinatown Family* during the early twentieth century could have been viewed as an act of mischief or even subversion. It was at least done tongue in cheek, for the paterfamilias in Lin's *Chinatown Family*, an otherwise very innocuous Tom Fong, is not only a Chinese man but a laundryman to boot! And in the early twentieth century, the mighty machinery of the U.S. Immigration Service was geared precisely to preventing Chinese laborers such as Fong from having a family on American soil. In fact, in the 1930s, which is when the action of Lin's *Chinatown Family* takes place, Fong's family was downright illegal in America. (xiii)

By situating *Chinatown Family* within its historical context, Chen draws critical attention to the ways that the novel exposes the violation of Chinese immigrants' human rights through legalized discrimination on grounds of race, class, and national origins. "The subtextual question in Lin's portrait of his Chinatown family," Chen contends, "is whether social and human units such as this should be discriminated against and even criminalized" (xv). Chen's remarks about *Chinatown Family* point to the novel's subversive possibilities, which have often been overlooked by critics.

However, by emphasizing cultural conflicts in terms of "acculturation and assimilation" in Chinese immigrants' pursuit of the American Dream, Chen's reading of the novel scants the spatial strategies Lin employs in critiquing the exploitation and social exclusion of the Chinese in the United States and in portraying the formation of Chinese American subjects. In his 1981 article "Two Chinese Versions of the American Dream: The Golden Mountain in Lin Yutang and Maxine Hong Kingston" Chen contends that Lin "depicts a conflict between the materialistic dream that motivated the immigrants and the Confucian ideal of the family" through "the perspectives of several ways of thought: Christianity, individualistic materialism, Confucianism, and Taoism" (61). This reading that interprets the Fongs' modest upward mobility in terms of their successful adaptation to the dominant culture while maintaining the Confucian ideals of the family unwittingly reiterates the myth of cultural assimilation that elides structural inequalities. Adopting a similar approach, Katherine Karle reads *Chinatown Family* as "a story of Chinese immigrants, a comparison of two cultures, and a *Bildungsroman*," with an emphasis on the novel's structural and thematic "balance" between "yin and

yang” and between “traditional Chinese philosophy and attitudes” and “new world ‘American’ concepts” (93, 95, 97). Such emphasis on Chinese culture as a resource for overcoming racial exclusion and exploitation unwittingly absolves the necessity of structural redress of racial inequality. The ideology of cultural assimilation promoted by Edward E. Park, a theorist of the Chicago school of sociology, seems to underlie both the novel’s immigrant narrative and Chen’s and Karle’s ethnocentric approach to the novel.⁵ Critics such as Elaine H. Kim, Robert G. Lee, David Palumbo-Liu, Christopher Douglas, and Yoonmee Chang, among others, have pointed out the pitfall of the “ethnographic imperative” (Y. Chang’s phrase, *Writing* 8) in Asian American writings that highlight Asian Americans’ upward mobility at the expense of eliding structural inequality.⁶

Although other critics have rightly pointed out the novel’s problematic representation of the Chinese immigrant family’s upward mobility, their examinations tend to focus on Lin’s depiction of the characters as stereotypes, hence overlooking the social critique and the subversive, interventional possibilities embedded in the novel. E. H. Kim, for instance, observes that the characters in the novel “are modeled after familiar stereotypes of docile, grateful Chinese who can accept brutality, injustice, and hardship cheerfully” (*Asian American Literature* 104). Moreover, Kim argues that despite their experience of racism, the characters perpetuate the myths of the American Dream and freedom: “All of the characters in *Chinatown Family* call America ‘a good country’ where opportunities abound and where one can do whatever one pleases without government interference” (105). In a similar vein, Xiao-huang Yin contends that *Chinatown Family* “reinforced Western stereotypes of China and the Chinese” by suggesting that “the Chinese were able to succeed and get along with people everywhere because they knew how to follow Taoist teachings and avoid confrontations” (171–72). Drawing on Taoist wisdom to survive racist violence and to avoid direct confrontation of social injustice is precisely what a new generation of Asian American writers and critics find deplorable. Frank Chin, Jeffery Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong, the editors of one of the earliest Asian American anthologies, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), condemn *Chinatown Family* as a “euphemized portrait of Chinatown” that caters to “the white reading audience” who “has been steeped in the saccharine patronage of Chinatown culture” (Chin et al., introduction 16). Their denunciation of Lin’s depiction of Chinatown in the novel as a discursive production catering to “the white read-

ing audience” actually alerts critical attention to the spatially constituted racial position and cultural identity underlying the narrative strategies of *Chinatown Family*.

Yet the spatiality of identity construction and subject formation in *Chinatown Family* remains overlooked in critical analyses of the novel, even though recent scholarship on Lin’s work has advanced beyond largely ethnographical readings of assimilative immigrant narratives of upward mobility through adherence to hard work and family values and by overcoming cultural conflicts. While continuing to explore the implications of Chinese immigrants’ assimilation as portrayed in *Chinatown Family*, Palumbo-Liu shifts critical attention from Lin’s depiction of stereotypical Chinese culture to the formation of the Chinese American subject through the “model minority” discourse.⁷ In his analysis of the assimilation process of Tom Fong, Jr., Palumbo-Liu highlights the pedagogical relationship between Tom and his white English teacher, Miss Cartwright, who embodies the norm and ideal of the desirability of being American (*Asian/American* 157). As described in the novel: “[Tom] had never believed it possible that there were such Americans. Miss Cartwright spoke with a kind of angelic sweetness. . . . Her accent was feminine, clear, softly vibrant, and seemed to Tom divine” (61). This raced and gendered pedagogical relationship evokes the relationship between Chinese male immigrants and white female missionary patrons and Sunday school teachers in several short stories by Sui Sin Far. The function of this relationship, however, becomes more complex when its impact on white America is taken into account. As Palumbo-Liu observes:

Cartwright not only inculcates in Tom the desire to be Americanized; he revives in her the same impulse. In fact, there is an aspect of envy in the excitement that is generated in Miss Cartwright over Tom’s learning experience. . . . Thus this episode reveals at once the interrelationship between sexuality, race, and culture, and the complex impetus for learning to be American and its therapeutic effect on America: the “model minority” serves both as a model for other minorities to follow in the process toward Americanization and as a secondary modeling system for whites. (*Asian/American* 157)

The effort Tom puts into the learning of English as an “indispensable part of learning to be American,” Palumbo-Liu notes, “signals an ethical and moral strength now lacking in the ‘west,’ which has become complacent and spoiled” (157).

Richard Jean So, in his article “Collaboration and Translation: Lin Yutang and the Archive of Asian American Literature” (2010), reiterates the pedagogical function of Tom’s assimilation by situating Lin’s portrayal of the Chinese immigrant experience within both the Chinese and American sociohistorical and cultural contexts. So contends that Tom Fong, Jr., represents a model of “the incorporation of Chinese subjects into US liberal democracy” through “his experience of America as a kind of political pedagogy, and the classroom appropriately becomes the site of his assimilation” (54). He notes that Tom’s wrestling with the language of the Declaration of Independence led to his comprehension and absorption of “the text’s significance” when his history teacher, Mr. Watson, rendered the meaning of the text “sentence by sentence, into plain colloquial English” (54). By linking Tom’s study of the Declaration of Independence to Lin’s earlier socially engaged intellectual work in Shanghai, which in part motivated his translation of the Declaration of Independence into colloquial Chinese, So argues that “Tom is the utopian afterlife of Lin’s Republican Chinaman” (54). Moreover, when he is called upon by Mr. Watson to present to the class what the Declaration of Independence says, Tom explicates the text in plain English so successfully, to the surprise of his classmates and the satisfaction of his teacher, that he embodies the “model minority,” reinforcing the myth of the American Dream in terms of American ideals detached from the reality of structurally produced social and racial inequality.⁸

Both Palumbo-Liu’s and So’s examinations of the pedagogical functions of Tom’s assimilation help advance critical studies of *Chinatown Family* and other Asian American literary texts. Their emphasis on the formation of the subject through language and discourse, however, leaves the spatial formation of Chinese American identity and subjectivity in the novel unexamined. Although their readings of *Chinatown Family* offer provocative insights into the significance of Lin’s problematic representation of Chinese American experience, they overlook the characters’ spatially enacted resistance and subversion in the novel.

Recent scholarship on urban space explores “not only what has increasingly been called the ‘social production of the built environment’ but also, how built environments both represent and condition economies, societies, and cultures,” as sociologist Anthony D. King observes. King explains: “[T]he built environment is more than a mere representation of social order (i.e. a reflector), or simply a mere environment in which social action takes place. Rather, physical and spatial urban forms actually constitute as well as rep-

resent much of social and cultural existence: society is to a very large extent constituted through the buildings and spaces that it creates” (1). If the spatial is where the social and the cultural are constituted, then identity and subject formations are also shaped by the spatial. As Grosz argues, “[T]he city is both a mode for the regulation and administration of subjects but also an urban space in turn reinscribed by the particularities of its occupation and use” (*Space* 109). Hence possibilities of resistance and intervention are embedded in the mutually constitutive and transformative relationship between the urban space and the embodied subject: “[T]he city is . . . the place where the body is representationally reexplored, transformed, contested, reinscribed. In turn, the body (as cultural product) transforms, reinscribes the urban landscape according to its changing (demographic) needs, extending the limits of the city” (*Space* 108–9). From this perspective, the spatiality of identity construction and subject formation must be investigated to better understand not only the ways the dominant ideology constitutes its subjects through discourses and spatially constituted social relations but also the possibilities of resistance and intervention through the subject’s relationship to and activities in the social space, which is in part constituted by the gendered, racially marked body and space.

Chinatown Family’s most distinctive subversion, I would argue, lies in Lin’s explicit employment of urban topography through the characters’ everyday practices to resist the exclusion and segregation of the Chinese, to explore the formations of Chinese American identity and subjectivity, and to claim Chinese Americans’ right to the city. In so doing, Lin, like Sui Sin Far, at once undermines and reinvents the privileged white male *flâneur* figure of urban observation and urban exploration and dismantles the myth of Chinatown as a self-closed, morally decrepit, “foreign” terrain in American cities. While resonating with the spatially mobilized subject formation embedded in Sui Sin Far’s stories such as “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman,” Lin’s spatially oriented narrative strategies are more overtly deployed in representing the characters’ identity formations. The spatial mobility of the Fongs in the city facilitates their becoming American, shapes their subjectivity, and maps out the connections between Chinatown and the city as the Fongs seek to participate in the life of the city and to become part of the Chinese American community. In fact, the Fongs and the Chinese American community in New York City claim their right to the city by inhabiting public spaces through sightseeing and travel and by using parades in the streets to assert their belonging and their political agendas.

De Certeau's theory on the spatial practices of everyday life can shed light on the subversive and interventional effects of Lin's portrayals of the streets of New York City and Chinatown. While discussing how the mechanisms and technical procedures of power transform "a human multiplicity into a 'disciplinary' society," de Certeau asks: "But what spatial practices correspond, in the area where discipline is manipulated, to these apparatuses that produce a disciplinary space?" De Certeau's question points to the ways that "spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life." By investigating "these multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised," de Certeau develops "a theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city" (96). This concept of subversive possibilities embedded in everyday practices of lived space sheds light on Lin's deployment of urban topography through the living and working environment of the Fongs and their everyday activities.

RESISTANCE TO SPATIAL CONFINEMENT AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Much of the sociopolitical valence of *Chinatown Family* resides in Lin's representations of how space is inhabited in New York City. The location of the Fongs' laundry reflects the subordinate, marginal social position of the Chinese laundrymen in American society.⁹ When Mrs. Fong and Tom and Eva finally arrive at "TOM FONG HAND LAUNDRY"—the family business and home in New York City—they are dismayed. "The little rathole of a shop on a cross street near the corner of Third Avenue was a great disappointment to Tom and Eva and even mother." The family business in America is nothing like what Tom had expected it to be. He "had had visions of a spic-and-span shop, all American style, crowded with hundreds of American customers, all talking the gibberish that was English" (15). It is in this "little rathole of a shop" that Tom Fong, Sr., and his eldest son, Loy, or "Daiko" (big brother), have been laboring for decades. "Father and son ironed and ironed and ironed deep into the night, silently and contentedly, in the room and a half in the basement of the house in a crosstown street in the Eighties" (10). Even though Tom Fong, Sr., and Loy do not seem to have any complaints about their work, Lin tactfully exposes their humiliation and exploitation through the eyes of Tom: "Tom watched his father and Daiko at work in their shirt sleeves, ironing shirts, undershirts, towels, sheets, girls' dresses, workmen's blue denims, and ladies' silk pajamas" (61). The laundry items indicate the

class, gender, and racial backgrounds of their customers. For men to make a living out of washing and ironing the clothes not only of rich people and other workmen but also of women in a male-dominant society constitutes a humiliation marked by the inequality of race and class. Even the less privileged whites in American society—white women and workmen—can enjoy the privilege of having their laundry done for a cheap price by Chinamen.

Tom's experience and observation of the spatially confined working conditions of the family laundry serve to critique the inequality of race and class. In summer evenings the basement becomes suffocating: "[N]o breath of fresh air reached that little room. Tom saw his father and Daiko covered with perspiration, the heat from the pressing irons accumulating until they had to open the door. They had to keep the window shut to guard against the dust from the streets" (61). Through the closed window Tom "saw the legs of men, women, and children passing by on the sidewalk," and "[e]arnestly he wished some day that they could come up from the basement and own a shop on the street level" (60). This spatially confined underground condition of the Fongs' laundry shop at once reflects and reinforces the Chinese laundrymen's subordinate, marginal social status, against which the Fong family struggles.

Lin employs visual and spatial strategies to reveal and resist Chinese immigrants' social isolation and cultural marginalization in the city by placing the Fongs' home on the third floor above their shop, near Third Avenue on Manhattan's East Side. He allows Mrs. Fong to be the subject of gaze who interprets the scene in the streets and reveals how she feels about where she lives as she watches everyday life activities from her apartment window:

Often Mrs. Fong went to the window to survey the strange scene below and to watch Americans, men and women and children. . . . Only a stone's throw away was Third Avenue, which was dark, noisy, and familiar. There was something about the darkness and familiarity and busyness of the avenue that she liked. She had never wanted to live in a deserted street, which meant that one was living in reduced circumstances. She has always wanted to live in a busy, prosperous thoroughfare, with lots of noise and people, and to be on the same footing with all the struggling millions. Third Avenue seemed to be just that. (35-36)

Unlike the Chinese merchants' wives in Sui Sin Far's short stories, who feel alienated from the street scene they observe from their balconies, Mrs. Fong wants to be part of it, on equal terms. Her longing to participate in

city life and her desire never “to live in a deserted street, which meant that one was living in reduced circumstances” challenge the myth of Chinatown’s self-containment and critiques its segregation, while highlighting the racial inequality implicated in the spatially managed hierarchy of race and class, to which the Fongs’ “rathole”-like basement laundry shop—the fruit of more than thirty years’ labor in the United States—testifies.

Yet Third Avenue seems to hold open possibilities of New York City for Mrs. Fong and her family. Living within a stone’s throw of Third Avenue, and among European immigrants, Mrs. Fong is able to observe the everyday hustle and bustle of the city on the thoroughfare, to feel its energetic activities around her, and to begin imagining her American Dream: “All this rumble, this intense activity of people going somewhere, gave her a sense of excitement and of being in the midst of things. Where there were plenty of people in a city such as New York, she was sure there was money to be made. . . . As she sat before the window, the conviction grew in her mind that there was plenty of money to be made in New York, and she was going to make it” (36). Mrs. Fong’s gaze serves multiple functions. Apart from depicting the urban environment of her everyday life, it reveals the impact of the city on the formation of a Chinese immigrant subject. Seeing the bustling commerce and crowds on Third Avenue, Mrs. Fong believes that she “needed only to wash the block, and perhaps, in the not impossible future, cook to feed the block” to make a lot of money (36). Conditioned as Mrs. Fong is by her gendered and raced social status, however, her American Dream is still limited to the subordinate service and nurture of others—to “wash the block” and “cook to feed the block.” Moreover, despite her ability to help expand the family’s business through hard work and good service, her dream of making enough money to open a restaurant in Chinatown is eventually materialized only as a result of her husband’s sudden death in a car accident. The conditions for the Fongs’ upward mobility from owning a tiny basement laundry shop near Eighty-Fourth Street to owning a small restaurant on the street level in Chinatown raise questions about, rather than reinforce, the myth of America as a country “where opportunities abound and where one can do whatever one pleases without government interference,” to quote E. H. Kim again (*Asian American Literature* 105). Nevertheless, Mrs. Fong’s belief that “there was plenty of money to be made in New York,” though it echoes a typical myth about America, asserts an immigrant Chinese woman’s subjective agency and undermines the stereotype of mute, obedient Chinese women

who resist anything “American” out of fear or jealousy as portrayed in some of Sui Sin Far’s stories.

The agency embedded in Mrs. Fong’s gaze of the American urban scene also serves to return the gaze of white America and to reconstruct idealized American identity. While observing from her window the mixed, diverse European Americans of “all nationalities” in her neighborhood, Mrs. Fong asserts her sense of dignity and comments on the “disgrace even in this street of anonymous neighbors” (36). Her gaze simultaneously constructs and undermines American identity coded in moral superiority:

Mother Fong surveyed it all. Clearly, there were face and disgrace. From the Idle Hour Tavern at the corner she saw drunken men, filthy and besotted, emerge staggering to stand or crouch on the sidewalk in various stages of intoxication. The young girls in the streets were prettily dressed, walking head up at a pace that sent their golden hair flopping up and down around the nape. It was the characteristically American gait. Before the third house, where the sloppy woman lived, a group of small children were playing. They looked filthy, and she was sure they were the children of the woman who looked like a drudge. (36–37)

Even though Mrs. Fong’s sense of “face”—dignity and respectability—seems characteristically Chinese, the encoding of morality and immorality on bodily types and hygiene in her gaze reinforces gender norms and racial hierarchy, yet not without subversive effect.

Mrs. Fong’s observations of her white neighbors also serve to demonstrate her eligibility for American “cultural citizenship.” Nayan Shah, among others, has shown with compelling evidence that by the early twentieth century cleanliness in the United States had become a sign of civic virtue, a technique for disciplining cultural citizenship.¹⁰ “The management of space and the care of the body were perceived to be an index of American cultural citizenship and civic belonging,” observes Shah. “The American system of cultural citizenship combined class discourses of respectability and middle-class tastes with heteronormative discourses of adult male responsibility [and] female domestic caretaking” (Shah 204). Mrs. Fong’s commentary gaze on European Americans at once evokes and undermines the norms of cultural citizenship embodied by middle-class whites. Tidiness and cleanliness correlate with the blond girls whose gait is “characteristically American,”

whereas laziness and filth are associated with the “sloppy” woman “who looked like a drudge.” Similar attributes of disgrace are also visible in the filthy and drunken men staggering in the street or emerging from the tavern. These European immigrants and white Americans, then, are far from being superior to the Chinese as portrayed in the popular newspapers and official discourses. The moral code of bodily care and conduct that structures Mrs. Fong’s gaze is subversive to white supremacy, though it in part reinforces the normative discourse on morality, hygiene, and bodily appearances. The interpretive and constitutive gaze of Mrs. Fong as a female Chinese immigrant also conveys her own culturally shaped sense of responsibility and normative standard of hygiene. Nevertheless, Mrs. Fong’s observation of both desirable and disgraceful white Americans undermines the binary opposites of racialized identities—white American citizens who exemplify cleanliness, morality, and progress versus Chinese aliens who embody filth, moral decrepitude, and backwardness.

The diverse, racially marked, gendered bodies with their encoded values and meanings constitute part of the urban environment that shapes Mrs. Fong’s and her children’s adaptation to American culture. As Shah contends, bodily care identified with middle-class respectability and domesticity is “perceived to cultivate citizen-subjects capable of undertaking the responsibilities of American citizenship” (205). Eager to prove their capability for American cultural citizenship, Mother Fong is determined to “discipline” the bodies of Tom and Eva for “surveillance” in the public space. She makes sure that Tom and Eva are scrubbed clean and dressed like Americans when they go out. In her eyes, “American clothes for boys and girls were pretty, and they looked well on Tom and Eva” (37). She admires American girls’ ringlets and has her Italian daughter-in-law, Flora, wife of her eldest son, Loy, make Eva’s hair the same way. As for Tom, he must remember to have his hair cut every two weeks “at the Lexington Avenue barber shop,” “a sacred and inviolable institution.” “His head was cropped clean and close at the back, and a small wisp of hair always fell across one side of his forehead” (37). Mother Fong is pleased with Tom’s new gentlemanly appearance. The bodily care Eva and Tom receive demonstrates their conformity to American culture, as well as Mother Fong’s desire to be respected and accepted by white America. The environment of the American city is constitutive and reflective of the body inscribed with values and identities. As sociologist Bryan S. Turner theorizes: “[T]he body is a site of enormous symbolic work and symbolic production. Its deformities are stigmatic and stigmatizing, while at the same

time its perfections, culturally defined, are objects of praise and admiration. . . . [T]he body is both an environment we practise on and also practise with. We labour on, in and with bodies. . . . [O]ur body maintenance creates social bonds, expresses social relations and reaffirms or denies them" (191). Mrs. Fong's efforts in producing and maintaining the Americanized looks of Tom and Eva express her desire to create a social bond with mainstream America by distancing her family from the stigmatized bodily appearances in the street observed from her apartment window.

However, the Americanization of Tom's and Eva's irreducibly raced bodies demonstrates more than the assimilation of Chinese immigrants; it asserts resistance to the exclusion of the Chinese from the American body politic and undermines its racial homogeneity. Cognizant of the meanings inscribed on the body in the public space, Mrs. Fong regularly dresses up her two younger children at four o'clock in the afternoon, "Tom with his hair parted and his neck scrubbed, and Eva with her pretty ringlets and a clean cotton dress." Then she orders them to go out of the house somewhere, no matter where, as if Tom and Eva are to be "walking signboards of Tom Fong's Hand Laundry." For "Mother Fong reasoned that people would not send their laundry to a place where the children looked as filthy as those in the third house opposite" (37). But more often than not she wants her children to "march" to Central Park, the East River, or anywhere they want far away from the area of their shop, where people would recognize them not as the laundryman's children but always as Chinese, no matter how American their hair styles or clothes might be. "We are Chinese," says Mrs. Fong to Tom and Eva as she is dressing them up for the city's public space, "and you do not want to disgrace China" (37). Chinese immigrants' Americanized "body maintenance," then, expresses multiple social bonds—identifications with the middle class, American culture, and Chinese ethnicity. If the body "is both an environment we practise on and also practise with," as Turner contends, the Americanized "alien" body of the Chinese, though it may signify assimilation, introduces a subversive difference into the environment it inhabits.

By inhabiting the city otherwise than as prescribed by racial exclusion and segregation, the Fongs resist their spatially reinforced confinement to the margins of American society. Grosz's argument that the body as "cultural product" can in turn transform and reinscribe the urban environment and unsettle binarized identities suggests that Tom's and Eva's Americanized appearances in the city's public space signify more than conformity to the dominant culture. The "Americanized" yet racially marked body of the

Chinese in the city streets and Central Park alters the white American body politic in the urban space, reconstituting the urban environment. When the body is understood as the “primary sociocultural product,” Grosz contends, “[i]t involves a double displacement, an alteration or realignment of a number of conceptual schemes that have thus far been used to think bodies: on the one hand, it involves problematizing a whole series of binary oppositions and dichotomous categories” (*Architecture* 30). Furthermore, Grosz argues: “[M]inorities . . . aren’t ‘imprisoned’ in or by space, because space (unless we are talking about a literal prison) is never fixed or contained . . . because space is open to how people live it. Space is the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation. The more one disinvests one’s own body from that space, the less able one is to effectively inhabit that space as one’s own” (*Architecture* 9). Inhabiting the city as equal citizens is precisely what Mrs. Fong encourages her children to do.

For the Fongs, deliberately going out dressed up as Americans to occupy and experience the public spaces in the city enacts what de Certeau calls the politics of “everyday practices, of lived space” (96). By regularly urging her children to go to Central Park and to explore the city, Mrs. Fong encourages them to participate in city life, to experience being part of the American urban populace, and to refuse the confinement of their basement shop, their small apartment, and even their neighborhood. Their everyday practices in inhabiting the city resist the social isolation and spatial containment of working-class Chinese immigrants like Tom Fong, Sr., who spends most of his time doing laundry in the basement. When he goes out at all, Chinatown is the only place Tom Fong, Sr., visits. Having experienced racism almost on a daily basis, he is aware that as a Chinaman and laundryman to boot, he is unwanted, despised, and marginal in the country and city where he has made his home. “Tom Fong had been so used to being called a Chink that it did not really hurt” (122). He walks with his head bending down, looking at the pavement when he has to go out onto the street. The public space of the city remained hostile or at least unfriendly to him until suddenly the American attitude changed toward the Chinese when China fought against Japanese invasion in 1937. “Tom Fong no longer stooped and looked at the pavement as he walked the streets. He held his chin level and met the eyes of the people who passed, and he knew that they were admiring his people for fighting” (123).

In contrast to her husband’s submission to the marginal, abject identity of the Chinese in the United States and in the city, Mrs. Fong wants her children

to walk the streets with pride to claim right to the city. "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered," de Certeau contends (97). For de Certeau, walking "is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language)" (97–98). If walking in the city can spatially act out the place by appropriating the topographical system, then the body and its movement are constitutive of the place it acts out, just as the pedestrians act out the place of Third Avenue. But, given their racially marked yet Americanized bodies, Tom and Eva act out a different place, one that undermines racial and cultural homogeneity, by regularly walking the streets, visiting places where Chinese Americans like their father would never go. Hence their walking, in a way, transforms the urban environment, claims their belonging, and inhabits the American urban space "on the same footing with all the struggling millions" (36).

Inhabiting the city through *flânerie* and activities in public spaces for Chinese immigrants, then, also functions as a transformative process of their identity and subjectivity formation. What Eva sees on her walks and at school has exposed her to alternative ways of being a female. At twelve, one year younger than Tom, Eva is a well-disciplined, proper Chinese girl. Unlike her inquisitive and assertive brother, who constantly asks questions and refuses to accept easy answers, Eva often "said nothing and seemed to accept everything." She is constantly reminded by her mother that she is "a girl, a nu-tsai." Eva understands that the term *nu-tsai* (literally "female material") defines what she can become and how she is supposed to behave as a girl: "In Eva's mind it meant vaguely that a girl had to be put in her place" (50). By learning the proper good manners of a girl the female subject is disciplined to assume the subordinate roles of wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. Eva seems to have accepted the role of a *nu-tsai*, but underneath her quiet manner something has disturbed her sense of female propriety. When she is outside her home, something awakens in Eva: "On the streets and at school, she saw hustling, bustling, boisterous, screaming, yelling, scuffling, ball-batting children, girls as well as boys. . . . American girls yelled at the top of their voices, and how proud and straight they stood! How fast they walked, with free swaying strides! . . . On the park playground, she saw how the grown-up girls . . . stood in bloomers, arms akimbo, legs wide apart, beautiful, strong, unafraid" (51). Eva's access to the city's streets, parks, and public school enables her to witness different ways of being a female, ways that challenge

the role of being a traditional Chinese *nu-tsai* prescribed by patriarchy at home. Significantly, Eva perceives liberating possibilities of being a female through an urban environment that offers her different models and alternative ways of being and thinking, which are unavailable at home. By the time she reaches seventeen, Eva has become “independent and self-confident.” “She walked straight and unafraid like American girls and with the American gait” (133). It is worth noting, however, that the formation of Eva as a confident female is supposed to be the result of her Americanization, which is equated with freedom, progress, independence, and individuality, eliding gender inequality in the United States and indirectly casting Chinese society as the opposite. Nevertheless, Eva’s development indicates the significance of mobility in the public space for women’s subject formation. Unlike several of the young immigrant women who are mostly confined to the domestic space in Sui Sin Far’s stories of an earlier era, Eva has much more mobility in the city, in part because of her age and her brother Tom, who is tireless in his eagerness to explore the city and who likes to invite Eva to walk with him. But Tom often ventures into the city by himself, and what he perceives on his walks defers from what Eva experiences. Both the act and effect of their walking in the city are gendered, producing different stories about their respective subject formations. These stories resist the exclusion of Chinese Americans and claim their right to the city even as they in part reiterate the assimilation myth.

URBAN EXPLORATION AND THE SUBJECT FORMATION OF TOM FONG, JR.

Much of the novel’s narrative is devoted to Tom’s exploration of the city, which is central to his coming of age and to his becoming someone other than a laundryman like his father or a shop owner in Chinatown like his uncle. *Flânerie* plays a crucial role in Tom’s formation as a Chinese American. Given his cultural background and social position as a Chinese immigrant forbidden by law to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, Tom, an urban explorer in New York City, reinvents the *flâneur* figure in Western urban literature, intervening in the privileged, bourgeois, white male gaze. Benjamin’s study of the relationship between the observer and the observed in the city and of the intricate connections among the economic, technical, and literary developments as a phenomenon of modernity provides a useful framework for understanding the role of urban exploration in the formation of Tom’s

subjectivity. In his analysis of modern literary genres in relation to the development of capitalism and technology, Benjamin suggests that commercial arcades—glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors with shops and departments on both sides, extending through whole blocks of buildings—emerged in Paris during the 1820s and 1830s, giving rise to the figure of the *flâneur* and new genres of writings (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*). “Strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades,” observes Benjamin. “As *flâneurs*, the intelligentsia came into the market-place.” Subsequently, new topics and new modes of writing appeared: “Once a writer had entered the marketplace, he looked around as in a diorama. A special literary genre has preserved his first attempts at orienting himself. It is a panorama literature. . . . In this literature, the modest-looking, paperbound, pocket-size volumes called ‘physiologies’ had pride of place. They investigated types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace” (*Charles Baudelaire* 36, 170, 35). Visual mastery of the cityscape and urban crowd is key to this new genre of city literature. Scenes and people in the streets become objects of study by the *flâneur*-writer, who categorizes types of people and constructs their identities according to their appearances through seemingly scientific observations and apparently realistic descriptions. The *flâneur*-writer’s relationship to the urban space also characterizes that of the participant-observer journalist and the cultural sociologist doing fieldwork.

Similar to the method of observation and the subject position of the *flâneur* “who goes botanizing on the asphalt” in the city (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 36), observation of life in the city was a primary research method of the Chicago school of sociology, on which Robert E. Park had a formative impact, especially during the 1920s and 1930s. Before he eventually joined the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1914, Park worked as a reporter and as an editor on newspapers in Minneapolis, Detroit, New York, and Chicago between 1891 and 1898.¹¹ He attributed his interest in sociology to his journalist fieldwork in the city: “I have actually covered more ground, tramping about in cities in different parts of the world, than any other living man. Out of all this I gained, among other things, a conception of the city, the community, and the region, not as a geographical phenomenon merely but as a kind of social organism” (“Autobiographical Note” viii). According to his “earliest conception of a sociologist,” Park adds, “he was to be a kind of super-reporter, like the men who write for *Fortune*” (viii–ix). In his seminal article “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environ-

ment,” published in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1915), Park proposes the notion of “the city [as] a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be most conveniently and profitably studied” (612). Like the *flâneur*, the reporter and the Parkian sociologist assume the authoritative position of knowledge production. As an “institutionalised voyeur,” the historian Fred Matthews points out, “[t]he city beat reporter from the first fulfilled the role of informal and intuitive sociologist, acting as eyes, ears, and moral censor for the audience removed by size and distance from the direct exercise of their traditional communal roles” (qtd. in Lal 18). Detached from life in the street, the “institutionalised voyeur” maintains his distance from and his authority over what he observes. The writer, journalist, or sociologist as the *flâneur*—the urban stroller and spectator—then, is the privileged subject of observation, analysis, and interpretation, who assumes mastery and authority over the cityscape, including bodies marked by differences of gender, class, race, and culture. Moreover, underlying Park’s notion of the sociologist as a “super-reporter” and Benjamin’s discussion of the *flâneur* in urban literature is a simultaneous, mutually constitutive relation between the institutionalized voyeur’s subjectivity and the urban space, including the crowds in the streets.

But unlike the fieldwork of the urban sociologist or the reporter on the beat, the writings of the *flâneur*-writer are as much about the self as about the city. The subjectivity of the *flâneur*-writer and the cityscape are mutually informing and constitutive in writings about the city. Benjamin in his study *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* contends that “[w]ith Baudelaire, Paris for the first time became the subject of lyrical poetry.”¹² Yet it is not only Paris but also the poet’s sense of his social alienation that the poet’s gaze reflects. As Benjamin states: “[Baudelaire’s] gaze which falls upon the city is rather the gaze of alienated man. It is the gaze of the *flâneur* . . . [who] still stood at the margin, of the great city as of the bourgeois class. . . . In neither of them was he at home. He sought his asylum in the crowd. . . . The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the *flâneur*” (*Charles Baudelaire* 170). Paradoxically, the *flâneur* who stands “at the margin of the great city” finds himself at home among the urban crowd:

For the perfect *flâneur* . . . it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow. . . . To be away from home, yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world,

yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial [!!] [exclamation marks in the original] natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. . . . We might also liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself . . . which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 443)

As a detached, participant, invisible observer, the perfect *flâneur* enjoys the pleasure of voyeurism, of knowing through seeing without being seen. Embedded in Benjamin's definition of the *flâneur* is the privilege of the bourgeois male subject, whose voyeuristic gaze is supposed to be neutral and inclusive. Indeed, "to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world" and to represent "all the elements of life" is a gendered, classed, and raced privilege in cities, where women and racial minorities encounter violence in the streets, where people like Tom Fong, Sr., lower their gazes and look at the pavement as they walk the streets outside of Chinatown. The freedom of movement, the sense of belonging everywhere, and the power of interpretation constitute the *flâneur* as a privileged, authoritative masculine subject who produces meanings and constructs identities through seemingly realistic representations.

Critics of urban literature and urban studies have pointed out that freedom of movement in the city and its subsequent cosmopolitan experience are a privilege of class and gender. Richard Sennett emphasizes the *flâneur's* privilege of both gender and class. For Sennett, Walkowitz notes, "[c]osmopolitanism, 'the experience of diversity in the city as opposed to relatively confined localism,' . . . was a bourgeois male pleasure. It established a right to the city—a right not traditionally available to, often not even part of, the imaginative repertoire of the less advantaged" (410–11). From a feminist perspective, Elizabeth Wilson highlights the gendered privilege of the *flâneur*: "[T]he *flâneur* as a man of pleasure, . . . who takes visual possession of the city, . . . has emerged in postmodern feminist discourse as the embodiment of the 'male gaze.' He represents men's visual and voyeuristic mastery over women. According to this view, the *flâneur's* freedom to wander at will through the city is essentially a masculine freedom" (65). Likewise, Walkowitz contends that "to stroll across the divided spaces of the metropolis, whether it was London, Paris, or New York, to experience the city as a

whole” belonged to the “privileged urban spectator” who acts as “*flâneur*” (410). Rather than accept this privilege as out of reach, however, Lin uses the everyday spatial practices of his disenfranchised Chinese immigrant characters, particularly Tom Fong, Jr., as a strategy to claim their right to the city. Given Tom’s gender and age—thirteen when he arrives in New York City and turning eighteen by the end of the novel—he more than any other member of his family enjoys the freedom of urban exploration.

Assuming the subject position of the urban spectator, Tom appropriates and disrupts the gaze of the privileged, bourgeois, white *flâneur*. As a recent immigrant from a small town in China, and as a helping hand who spends much time in a basement laundry where he can see from a closed window only the legs of passersby, Tom finds Third Avenue a different world. It is a favorable place in which to become immersed, to indulge all his senses, and to experience the vastness of the city: “Third Avenue was a universe. From Seventieth Street to Ninetieth, bounded by Second Avenue on one side and Lexington on the other, the district was a universe for Tom’s exploration. He reconnoitered it, played and worked and walked in it, tasted it, smelled it, swam in it like a whirling planet until he could recognize the very air he breathed. . . . Third Avenue was longer than the longest street in his home town, and the El seemed to cross its orbit and swim out of his ken into infinity” (38). Unlike the urban crowds of Paris for Baudelaire and his contemporary *flâneurs*, the urban crowds of New York for Tom are not to be studied or categorized as types; rather, they are part of the vast, diverse, interconnected, and open topography of the city, which enlarges his world. The gaze of Tom as an urban spectator and explorer does not assume mastery over what is seen; nor does vision dominate over other senses.

But Lin’s seemingly neutral portrayal of this urban “universe” that shapes the coming-of-age of Tom, Jr., strategically evokes and includes Chinese laundrymen like Tom Fong, Sr., and his family through kaleidoscopic panoramas of the Third Avenue district: “It was a little universe in itself in which . . . men toiled and sweated, and women scrubbed and cooked. . . . It teemed with life, and on summer nights it was wet with the perspiration of humanity” (39). This depiction of a working-class neighborhood calls to mind the Fongs’ toiling and sweating in the basement laundry shop, which is part of this “little universe” teeming with life and “wet with the perspiration of humanity.” By emphasizing the common humanity and struggles of all the residents in the Third Avenue district, Lin implicitly includes Tom and his family on the same footing, thus resisting their legally defined foreign

status and broadening the environment for the subject formation of Tom as a Chinese American, unlike his father, who regarded “himself as an exile condemned to iron and iron until one day he should be able to retire to his own country” (46). The urban environment that Tom experiences contests the one in which Tom Fong, Sr., is confined to a lifetime of toil and sweat in the basement and one in which he cannot be, or imagine becoming, otherwise than an abject Chinaman and laundryman. To become otherwise, Tom Fong, Jr., must resist the spatially reinforced social exclusion to which Chinese Americans like his father are subjected; he must inhabit the city rather than accept confinement to the basement laundry or to a social life only in Chinatown. Part of this resistance begins with seeing the city, not as an American national territory in which Chinese immigrants are kept by law as perpetual foreigners, but as a “little universe” of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and common humanity, to which Tom and all the struggling millions belong.

But since “space is fundamental in any exercise of power,” as Foucault contends (252), Tom has to learn how to deal with racial discrimination and violence in the streets in order to insist on claiming his belongingness and learning about the city through walking across boundaries divided by race and class. His right to the city is challenged when his racially marked body in the streets is singled out for insult and exclusion. On his way to deliver laundry he is called names, insulted, and attacked by a gang of white boys playing on the streets. One of them tells Tom: “This street is ours. We don’t want furriners slinking around here” (66). When he returns home with a torn-up laundry bag and his face bruised and smeared, Frederick advises him that the only way to deal with the white boys’ insults and violence is to fight back. But their mother refuses to allow Tom to disgrace himself and his family by fighting in the streets. Loy offers a different strategy: “You can avoid them. Don’t go through that street again.” The father agrees with the mother and Loy, saying: “If it’s a bad street, you don’t go through it. Isn’t it simple? The Americans do it one way. We Chinese do it another way. That’s how we get along. That’s how the Chinese get along anywhere. In my days, it was much tougher for us out on the West Coast.” The father’s remarks prompt Tom to confront him about the anti-Chinese violence he experienced: “Father, I was told they robbed, killed, stole, and beat up the Chinese workers.” In responding, Tom Fong, Sr., emphasizes the importance of survival: “Yes, it was tough. But I survived, didn’t I?” (67). The father’s statement about the reasons why “the Chinese get along anywhere” is ostensibly “passive” and problematic because of its absence of critique or protest against racism. However, by

emphasizing the tactics of surviving racially motivated violence, the father indirectly exposes the myth of the freedom of equality in America. In fact, Chinese immigrants' residence and movement in the city were restricted not only by housing regulations but also by racial violence.¹³ E. H. Kim has noted that "Chinese residents of San Francisco and New York Chinatown were virtually sealed within the physical boundaries of their enclaves, not only by housing restrictions but also because those who ventured beyond those boundaries were susceptible to attack by white hoodlums. Chinese men found their social activities limited and circumscribed by the invisible walls around the ethnic ghettos within which they were contained" (*Asian American Literature* 100). The senior Fong's stories about white Americans' violent driving out of the Chinese from the West Coast put both Tom's experience of racial harassment in the street and his urban exploration in the historical context of racism and the anti-Chinese movement in the United States. Against the spatial exclusion and containment of the Chinese, Tom's urban exploration defiantly claims right to the city.

For Tom, walking to various places outside the realm of Third Avenue is a way of experiencing the city as a whole, an experience that shapes his subject formation and broadens his knowledge as it expands the "little universe" of the Third Avenue district. When he delivers laundry parcels to addresses on Lexington and Park Avenues, "[f]or the first time Tom penetrated these imposing apartment buildings and came into contact with a new class of beings—doormen, service-elevator men, janitors, maids, rich men's wives, and bachelor girls" (3). Apart from acquiring a sense of spatially maintained social stratification in the city as he crosses boundaries of residential areas divided by race and class, Tom learns about other forms of life by going to the Bronx Zoo, the Botanical Garden, and the public library, where he "read and read" for answers to the mysteries of life (92). Tom's overcoming confinement to his family's "rathole" laundry-apartment or to Chinatown by walking to experience the city's cosmopolitanism, multiplicity, and diversity, including the variations of the urban topography, plays a central role in his development during his adolescent years. "As Tom and Eva grew older, they began to take longer walks" (96). Their walks lead them to open spaces where they have panoramic views of the city from different locations (96–97). Rather than assume mastery over the cityscape, these panoramic views broaden their experience of the urban space, enlarging their world beyond the city limits. Signs of modernity in the cityscape have a profound impact on Tom's formation. While traversing the topography of New York as a port city, con-

sisting of islands, Tom is fascinated by the modern technology of bridges, which deepens his interest in science and machinery. What enchants Tom most on his first night in New York City is the El—"the Interborough Rapid Transit Elevated Railroad, with its lurching trains moving swiftly past his corner, carrying passengers seated at their windows" (19). Drawn "by mysterious power like his early fascination with the El," Tom sometimes "walked alone to the head of the Queensboro Bridge," whose technology surpasses architectural wonders of ancient civilizations: "The bridge leaped some sixty feet above him, a mass of black crossed steel trusses, supported by heavy black stone towers that might vie with kings' tombs and medieval châteaux in their size and height. . . . The steel tower rising solid into the clouds must have been a hundred and twenty feet high from the ground" (97). Tom is so stirred by the magnificent structure and immense capacity of the bridge that he is hungry for knowledge beyond what he can obtain through experience. "The bridge contained a mystery, a secret of human knowledge in a vast realm that he did not understand. There were so many things he wanted to study and understand, and he hated it that there were things he did not understand. The bridge itself became a symbol of the power of the age of machines and what makes the wheels of modern civilization turn" (97–98). The wonder of science and technology engenders in Tom the desire to study science at college to become an engineer (98). The modern cityscape for Tom becomes a virtual classroom for his education in becoming American.

However, that modern science and technology are instrumental in Tom's *Bildung* and assimilation process evokes Park's theory of ethnic assimilation, which elides structural inequalities of race. For Park, group identity and racial isolation are merely the results of culturally shaped sentiments, customs, and habits. And assimilation is a matter of immigrants' adaption to the host culture as modeled on European immigrants' experience in the United States.¹⁴ He states that "the ease and rapidity with which aliens, under existing conditions in the United States, have been able to assimilate themselves to the customs and manners of American life have enabled this country to swallow and digest every sort of normal human difference, except the purely external ones, like the color of the skin" ("Racial Assimilation" 206). Hence, he adds, "the chief obstacle to the assimilation of the Negro and the Oriental are not mental but physical traits" (208). Decontextualized from institutionalized racial ideologies and practices, Park's theory of four-stage "patterns of cultural assimilation and integration" was assumed "to be universally applicable to all 'newcomers' into the modern city," as

the cultural critic Robert G. Lee observes (158). About Park's assimilation narrative, Lee points out: "This was a narrative of modernization drawn from studies of the historical experiences of European immigrant groups in American cities. The ethnic component of cultural identity was identified with the Old World" (159). Modernity equated with progress is embodied by American cities like New York, which functions as a pedagogical space for the assimilation of Tom, as well as Eva and their mother. Thus, rather than alienation, estrangement, or marginalization of the self, Tom's gaze of New York City reveals its stimulating impact on a young immigrant from China, a laundryman's son, whose aspiration for a career in engineering is inspired by the sights of modernity in the city.

Given the historical contexts of Chinese exclusion laws and racial segregation, however, Tom's relationship to the city entails much more than an assimilative function. Inhabiting the city otherwise than as a "Chinaman" like his father, Tom is able to imagine something other than owning a small business as his only possible chance of upward mobility. Significantly, Tom's becoming—his subject formation and identity transformation—is enabled by his movement in the city as a way of inhabiting the urban space and claiming belonging, which refuses to accept the spatially contained social position of "Chinamen" as racially marked "foreigners" in the United States. In fact, Tom renegotiates Chinese immigrants' relationship to the city's public spaces and redefines his identity through urban exploration, which also reinforces his connection to New York City's Chinatown. Contrary to Park's notion that ethnic culture will inevitably give way to dominant American culture in the immigrant's assimilation process, Tom's reclaiming his Chinese heritage is part of his formation as Chinese American.¹⁵ Tom's Chinese girlfriend, Elsie Tsai, a college student from Shanghai, whom Tom met in Chinatown, helps him develop language skills in Mandarin. Elsie has been invited by the Chinese American Association to teach Mandarin at the Chinese language school in Chinatown. Tom is learning Mandarin from Elsie, and, in exchange, he teaches Elsie English. He combines exploration of the city with language lessons from Elsie. Walking about the city to know it in its geographic totality, and to discover its beauty, is a way of becoming part of the city by participating in its ebb and flow of activities. Moreover, Tom's mobility in the city seems to open up the possibilities for what he can become. In response to Elsie's question about what he would like to study in college, Tom says: "It must be science for me. Perhaps I shall take engineering. Look at those bridges, aren't they the most inspiring things in the

world?” (149). The more and longer walks he takes, the more confident Tom becomes in pursuing his dream.

As an urban spectator and explorer who is a teenager, a recent immigrant from China, and a foreigner by U.S. law, Tom offers an alternative way of seeing and knowing the city to that of the privileged bourgeois *flâneur*. His exploration in the city enacts a different spatial relationship to the urban space, which redefines the social position of the “Chinaman” in the United States. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson in their essay “City Publics” identify some major themes in Western urban literature by examining “the relationships between conventional notions of the public realm—formal and institutional—alongside more informal, everyday practices through which the public is negotiated” (369). They state that “[t]he open, civilizing and democratic possibilities of cities have always fascinated urbanists.” But writings about Western cities produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries vary greatly in their respective portrayals of the “social consequences of urbanization,” as they point out. For sociologist Georg Simmel, Bridge and Watson note, “[t]he industrial capitalist city became a place of suspicion, competition, and retreat into self” as a result of “the pressure of capitalist markets,” which reduced “all social encounters to the equivalent of exchange value.”¹⁶ For other scholars, “the size, density, and heterogeneity of cities” lead to “a form of alienation or anomie” (“City Publics” 369). Rather than feel alienated or resort to self-withdrawal against urban violence, commercialism, and indifference, Tom is drawn out and enchanted by the city. Even though he by no means has the “command of money economy,” he experiences “ease of movement and stimulation” in moving through different places of the city partly because of his gender and age and partly because of the open possibilities of the city—possibilities that Tom enacts by claiming right to the city through everyday practices of walking the streets; visiting parks, cinemas, and libraries; going sightseeing in different areas of the city; and riding the subways, buses, and boats for fun and exploration. Acting as a *flâneur* and a *flâneuse*, Tom and Elsie explore the city through what becomes for them a regular dating activity. Urban exploration facilitates Tom’s becoming Chinese American by inhabiting the city through dating activities with Elsie: “Sometimes in the quiet of a Sunday morning they prowled together through the dark shadows of Wall Street. Sometimes they sat on the wharves looking at the incoming ships. They took boat rides, which Elsie enjoyed better. They took Fifth Avenue bus rides, going back and forth” (151). An urban explorer who enjoys looking around in the streets and at the bridges and who

delights in being in the midst of the urban crowds and activities, Tom at once evokes and departs from Benjamin's *flâneur* figure whose voyeuristic gaze focuses on "types" of people in the streets, while remaining the analytical subject of other people's identity construction. Such an authoritative subject position of the white bourgeois male, however, is unavailable to Tom.

Given his social position as a resident alien and the son of a laundryman who has been laboring day and night in the basement for decades, Tom is particularly attracted to the freedom, equality, and self-transformative discoveries of traveling in the open public space stated in Whitman's "Song of the Open Road." He carries a copy of *Leaves of Grass* in his pocket on his walk with Elsie to the Manhattan Bridge. When they sit down to rest in a square on the other side of the bridge after roaming the streets, Tom opens the book to "Song of the Open Road" and reads aloud excerpts from it as a way of teaching Elsie English (149). Whitman's open "public road" ("Song" 299), which includes everyone and everything, constructs an open space that rejects discrimination. Tom and Elsie are implicated among all travelers on equal footing on this open road, where traveling means overcoming limits and boundaries, achieving freedom and autonomy. This open public road enlarges the traveler even as the traveler shapes the road by his travel ("Song" 300). Travel as such on the open road also leads to self-transformation and discovery of the world. Tom, who is eager to explore the unknown and who knows what it is like to be confined to working over ten hours a day in a basement laundry shop, finds the possibilities of travel as articulated in Whitman's poem particularly inspiring. The promise of equality, freedom, and never tiring discoveries of travel on the open public road underlies Tom's exploration of the city, which shapes his subjectivity and his becoming Chinese American.¹⁷ Spatial mobility in *Chinatown Family*, moreover, serves more functions than the characters' respective becomings. Lin's spatial strategies include remapping the topography of New York City and its Chinatown so as to redefine their spatialized opposing identities.

REINHABITING CHINATOWN AND NEW YORK CITY

Although travel in the city also enables Mrs. Fong to overcome her social isolation and to expedite her becoming Chinese American, it has other significant effects as well. Lin tactfully describes Mrs. Fong's routes from home to Chinatown in such detail that Chinatown's spatial and cultural connections to other areas of the city are highlighted to contest the stereo-

types of Chinatown as a self-enclosed foreign terrain of vice and organized crimes. Linked by the El—“the artery of this great cluster of life” of New York City—the Fongs’ home is only twenty minutes away from Chinatown. “Mother Fong’s first stories consisted of trips from her home a few blocks to the Eighty-fourth Street station, up the staircase, onto the El train, and off at Chatham Square to go into Mott Street” (40). As the narrative follows Mother Fong into Chinatown, its description of the topography of this neighborhood at once evokes and disrupts the spatially bounded representations of Chinatown in mainstream American media that naturalize and justify racial segregation in terms of supposedly innate, dark, clannish Chinese cultural traits. As described by Gwen Kinkead in her book *Chinatown: A Portrait of a Closed Society* (1992), the ethnically marked streets and architecture of New York City’s Chinatown reveal “a remarkably self-contained neighborhood” where each gang organization is “affiliated with a ‘standing army’” (4).

Lin redirects the readers’ gaze and reinscribes Chinatown’s identity by appropriating the strategy of topographical description to make visible what has been repressed or erased in mainstream American representations. Lin’s mapping of Chinatown starts from Mott Street. But what immediately enter the picture are the city hall and an old Spanish church: “Bounded by the Bowery and Canal Street, Mott Street, starting humbly beneath the shadow of the imposing Municipal Building, ran a distance of a block and a half [and] hit an old Spanish church. . . . Within the small area of two blocks were crowded Chinese medicine shops, printers’ shops, dry-goods, stores and some thirty restaurants whose brilliant neon signs blazed at night and which were jammed with customers on Saturdays and Sundays” (40). Instead of Chinese architectural buildings of criminal organizations as spotlighted in Kinkead’s book, the municipal building, an old Spanish church, and a Christian home for the unemployed dot the streets that run through Chinatown. These visual details render Chinatown part of the city’s administrative, political system and depict its diverse cultures, populations, and built environment.

As a mode of knowledge production and identity construction, Lin’s mapping of the Chinatown topography produces counter-knowledge about the Chinese community and its lived space. Having established the neighborhood’s location in relation to the city, and its diverse cultures and populations, Lin’s description focuses on the ways the Chinese inhabit the space. Here the small area of two blocks provides the Chinese community with everyday services, supplies, and the luxury of feasts. This is where Tom Fong, Sr., and Loy can have a hearty meal before returning to their laundry

shop to continue working deep into the night. On weekends, Chinese living and working in other parts of the city gather in this neighborhood to socialize and relax: “On these days all the New York Chinese community poured into the narrow streets to see friends and talk business and eat a hearty meal” (40). Here working-class Chinese can enjoy the pleasure of city life, standing “on the sidewalks to ease their eyes and rest their spirits” and losing themselves “in sights and smells that recalled old China after a week of toil” (40). Portrayed as a dynamic neighborhood of commerce and urban life in New York City, Chinatown is a site of communal gatherings, as well as a site of cross-cultural, interracial interactions.

Countering the criminalization of Chinatown in terms of “yellow peril” discourse such as Kinkead’s book, Mary Ting Yi Lui observes that the Chinese-owned businesses in New York City’s Chinatown actually operated “as sites of cultural, social, and economic exchange” and “became an important part of urban neighborhood street life.” According to the historical documents Lui examines, including cases in the city’s courts: “New York’s streets continued to hold open possibilities for varying forms of social interaction among men, women, and children of different socioeconomic classes and ethnic and racial groups. As a result geographical, racial and gender boundaries could be renegotiated in these daily contacts between Chinese proprietors and workers and their non-Chinese neighbors” (*Chinatown* 73). These are precisely the kinds of open possibilities that Lin explores through the Fongs’ experiences in Chinatown and other parts of the city. The interracial marriage between eldest son Loy Fong and Flora Maggio, an Italian American, is one example of the possibilities resulting from such contacts. Flora’s father, Giuseppe Maggio, used to sell apples, roasted peanuts in shells, and hot-roasted chestnuts on a small pushcart at the corner of Mott and Bayard Streets. “Bearded old Maggio had taken his stand there as long as people could remember, and sometimes Flora, sometimes her mother came to relieve him.” Sundays in Chinatown are good days for the Maggios’ business as well. Loy “used to buy peanuts from the old man, and he would stand at the corner on the chance that Flora would come” (45). The street corner in Chinatown becomes a romantic meeting place for Flora and Loy, who are married before long.

Lin’s depiction of Chinatown’s topography suggests that the possibilities of renegotiating the boundaries of race and gender in daily contacts reside in part in the plurality and diversity of urban space that is shaped by the activities of the heterogeneous urban populations. As the narrative detours

that branch off the route of Mother Fong's walk in Chinatown indicate:

A short way on Mott Street on the north side of Canal Street was Flora's house, in the Italian section. The Italians penetrated Mott Street on the south side into the core of Chinatown, and the Chinese branched out into Canal Street on the north and across Chatham Square into Oliver Street, Catherine Street, and East Broadway up to the very shadow of the Manhattan Bridge.

So Flora's home was there, and Uncle Chan's shop was there, and Yiko [Frederick] had taken a room by himself overlooking Canal Street. If the Third Avenue El was like a single planet's orbit, Canal Street was more like the Milky Way, a corridor of constantly throttled yet moving traffic. On a white sign above a third floor window one could see the English words, Frederick A. T. Fong, Insurance Agent. (41)

The spatial merging of Italian and Chinese neighborhoods reflects and facilitates the daily interracial, intercultural contacts among the racially diverse residents. At the same time Chinatown is branching out into Canal Street and beyond, contributing to the dynamic economic power and teeming street life of Lower Manhattan. The business sign in English at the window of Frederick Fong shows that businesses in Chinatown are owned not only by the Chinese. This depiction of Chinatown's topography renders it impossible to isolate the neighborhood spatially or economically or to homogenize its cultures and residents.

New York City's Chinatown plays a significant role in the process of the Fongs' becoming Chinese Americans. China's resistance to the invasion by Japan in 1937 is a turning point in the Chinese image and social position in the United States. When the Sino-Japanese War breaks out, Chinatown becomes "a seething cauldron of demonstrations and patriotic activities" (121). Frederick, who knows everybody in Chinatown, gets himself appointed to a committee and spearheads a campaign to raise funds for the Chinese soldiers, and the rest of his family are involved in the mobilization of the Chinese American communities in the city (124). Lin situates the fervent patriotism and transnational subjectivity of Chinese Americans in the contexts of imperialism, colonialism, and racism:

The overseas Chinese had been hounded out of the West Coast, murdered and robbed and driven out of Mexico, out of Australia, out of New Zealand, out of Africa, and their own government could never afford them protection. When

China wanted to isolate herself from the white man, the white man knocked at her gate with gunboats. When America wanted to isolate herself from yellow labor, she simply shut the gate. It was this long suppressed feeling of unequal treatment, of being kicked about and called Chink, that caused the overseas Chinese to pour millions of dollars into China when there was hope of doing something to make China strong. Tom Fong felt it, and every laundryman abroad felt it. (122–23)

For the first time, Tom Fong, Sr., can hold his head up as he walks the streets and travels on the El. Americans begin to smile at him in the public spaces. “He felt as he had never felt before. It was as if somebody had put a flower in his buttonhole, had taken notice of him. Tom Fong, whom no one had noticed before” (123). The American public perception of the Chinese alters the public space for Chinese Americans, whose actions during the Japanese invasion of China at the dawn of World War II brought about social changes to both Chinatown and the city.

Chinese women’s role in the public space is one of the most significant of these changes. The female members of the Fongs, along with other Chinese American women, begin to participate in the affairs of the public sphere. Following the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Women’s Patriotic Society “sprang into activity,” and the YWCA Chinatown branch, which “had failed to arouse the women’s interest,” came to life (211). “For the first time, the wives of Chinatown did not go home to cook supper for their husbands” (211). An effective network among women in Chinatown and other parts of the city begins to emerge. Someone living among the wealthy Chinese uptown organizes a Chinese Women’s Committee for War Relief, and a branch opens in Chinatown. Elsie Tsai is on the Women’s Committee, and Tom discovers the committee while passing through Mott Street (128). Tom then tells Eva about it, and Eva, with perfect English and good knowledge of written Chinese, soon becomes a valuable member of the committee. As the work of the Women’s Committee in Chinatown, in cooperation with the Chinese Women’s Committee for War Relief uptown, begins to multiply, and more Chinese women from Manhattan and Brooklyn begin to join, Flora and Mother Fong also become involved. “Almost every afternoon a member of the family went to Chinatown” (133). As an active participant in the committee’s work, Mother Fong is no longer a by-standing spectator of city life from her apartment window, watching activities in the streets as an outsider. Her involvement in the committee’s work expands her circle

of acquaintances beyond Chinatown as the committee reaches out to the over three hundred Chinese wives and mothers in New York City through the “personal touch” of making house calls (211, 134). Chinese women’s organized activities are transforming the masculine space of Chinatown, where community leadership and participants in various events organized by business, social, and political associations have been predominantly male.¹⁸

As their actions are bringing about changes in the gender dynamics of Chinatown and Chinese American organizations in the city, Chinese women together with the Chinese American community transform the city’s public space as they take their cause to the streets through parades during World War II. Susan G. Davis’s insightful examination of a range of different kinds of parades in nineteenth-century Philadelphia offers a useful theoretical framework for a better understanding of the significance of Lin’s detailed descriptions of the Chinese community’s parades in New York City. In *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*, Davis argues that as a popular mode of communication and expression, parades are an effective, though limited, way for conveying messages and claiming power, while performing social relations in the streets (6, 16). “Parades are public dramas of social relations, and in them performers define who can be a social actor and what subjects and ideas are available for communication and consideration. . . . Street performances, then, are both shaped by the field of power relations in which they take place, and are attempts to act on and influence those relations. In the nineteenth-century city, parades were used to define what society was or might be” (6). What images are selected to be part of a parade and how they are performed not only define the messages communicated in the streets but also propose new social relations, as well as reflect or challenge existing ones. Parades, then, are street dramas in which group identities are asserted, consolidated, or reinvented, while particular agendas are publicized.¹⁹ In *Chinatown Family*, such multiple functions underlie the Chinese American community’s use of the parades of “Double Ten,” the “October tenth festival celebrating the founding of the Chinese Republic,” as a way of raising funds for the Chinese war relief (134).

The change in Chinese women’s social status within the Chinese American community is reflected in the ways the Double Ten parade of 1937 is performed. This year the celebration parade is organized to raise funds for war relief, and it is to be “the biggest Chinatown had ever known” (134). Long before the day arrives, Chinese women of the upper-middle class living uptown and the working class downtown are busy, preparing for the street

collections that will take place during the parade. Given their central role in the fund-raising campaign, Chinese women are positioned prominently right behind the brass band that leads the parade's procession. The streets "were jammed," and Mother Fong, Flora, Eva, and Elsie all join the women's group in the parade (139).

While spotlighting women's prominent position in the parade, Lin's description of the different components of the parade draws the reader's attention to the multiple, diverse groups that make up the parade—a spectacular display of Chinese American identities and cultures. Just as they have been working side by side in raising funds and in preparing for the parade, Chinese women uptown (such as Mrs. Yang, Elsie's adoptive mother) and downtown (such as Mother Fong) are walking shoulder to shoulder, forming a gendered solidarity across class and geographic boundaries. The sight of middle-aged Chinese women like Mother Fong and Mrs. Yang marching at the head of the parade, preceding Chinese men, asserts a new gender relation, disrupting women's subordinate position and confinement to domestic chores at home. At the same time, another kind of identity and social relation is communicated through the rest of the groups included in the parade. Lin tactfully juxtaposes characteristically Americanized cultural clubs such as the Chinese Athletic Club and the Chinese Boy Scouts with traditional Chinese cultural groups such as the Cantonese Dramatic Club, Chinese musicians, stilt walkers, a pantomime group in masks, and a lion dance. This scene of motley procession conveys a plural, hybrid Chinese American identity, which counters the "foreign" stereotype of the Chinese in the United States. The parade dramatizes a transnational Chinese American identity that embraces both China and the United States politically, economically, and culturally, thus challenging mutually exclusive identities of Chinese versus American. The parade, then, serves to contest the exclusion and marginalization of the Chinese, reinscribing the public space with bodily and cultural differences and reinhabiting New York City by engaging with the city public.

Chinese Americans' parades in the city have the function of what S. G. Davis might call the rhetoric of popular vernacular in the street drama, through which political agendas can be communicated without literacy. By using "the streets as a medium for potent collective expression," to borrow Davis's phrase (16), the Chinese American community is not only conveying to the city at large their connection to China but also soliciting support from fellow Americans. However, the city streets as a public space in the United States were not always available or even safe for the Chinese to assert

their agendas. Floyd Cheung has noted that the right to the city streets was the privilege of whites, who asserted their domination by stating their anti-Chinese message through parades. “While the Anti-Chinese League used parades to mark the space of the city streets” in Tucson, in the Arizona Territory, in the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants of “the Chee Kung Tong paraded during initiation rituals to mark the space inside its meeting hall” (42). Confined to the margins of the European American society, the Chinese immigrants’ parade of rituals “transformed their lodge into the center of a world fit for descendants of ‘the Middle Kingdom,’ as they called China.” But only within this imagined world and “a walled city” could the Chinese “assert a side of themselves that may have been impolitic for them to assert in the city streets of Tucson or Tombstone” (F. Cheung 42). Given the historical context of the impending world war in which China and the United States were allies, the Chinese Americans’ public display of patriotism toward China, then, does not conflict with their American identity or jeopardize American interests. This situation opens up the public space for Chinese Americans to assert their hybrid, transnational Chinese American identity by staging a street drama, which is irreducible to a passive object of the public gaze. It is a political act with pragmatic objectives; it is a call to action.

Given the Chinese exclusion laws and Chinese Americans’ political and cultural marginalization in the United States, and the stereotypes of Chinatown in mainstream American media, the parade in *Chinatown Family* enacts multiple contestations, apart from raising funds for the Chinese soldiers. The route of the parade contests the socio-spatial segregation of the Chinese and foregrounds the interconnections between Chinatown and the city’s other neighborhoods, as the march begins on Bowery, moves down Mott Street, and goes through Park, Bayard, Pell, and Mulberry Streets, then turns onto Canal leading toward city hall before returning to Chinatown via Bowery. While the political agenda of the parade is embedded in the display of the Chinese national flag and in the parade’s route between Chinatown and the city hall square, the Chinese community’s ethnic and national pride is in part conveyed through Mother Fong, who acts as a participant observer. While marching side by side with Flora, Elsie, and Mrs. Yang in the parade, Mother Fong looks around: “Chinese flags of red and blue with a white star flaunted from every shop and tenement. On all sides, the windows and balconies were jammed with onlookers. . . . Mother Fong was greatly moved. Little could she have guessed when she arrived five years ago that she would be marching with her American daughter-in-law, here in Chinatown, behind

a brass band” (140–41). At once the observer and the observed, Mother Fong remains the subject of gaze even as she takes part in the spectacle. Lin strategically spotlights through Mother Fong’s perspective the significant change in social relations of gender and race, particularly the implications of Flora’s participation with her Chinese mother-in-law in the parade. A new social relation is proposed through the scenes of the street drama staged by the parade, which performs possibilities of gender and race equality, enacting the democratic potential of the city.

Claiming their belongingness to the city and striving for equal participation in democracy are part of the message that the Chinese American community expresses through the parade. However, as S. G. Davis points out, parades as a mode of conveying messages, claiming power, and proposing political agendas are not a fully participatory form of democracy, though they have democratic potential: “Limits [are] hedged in the popular uses of public space for communication” (16). Nevertheless, the political implications of the Chinese American community’s use of the city streets and public square to redefine Chinese and American identities, to influence American public opinion and action, cannot be overestimated, especially in the context of the Chinese immigrants’ experience of mob violence, physical attacks, and verbal insults in the United States as documented by Jean Pfaelzer in *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans*. Like Chinatown and the nation-space, the city streets are a contested space. Different groups have contended for the right to the public space as a medium for asserting their agendas. S. G. Davis points out that “in the decades before the Civil War,” parades were “dominated by white men who often acted on and enforced their understanding that street theatricality was their exclusive domain” (156). When other groups claimed their right to the street for publicizing their concerns, they were perceived as a threat to the established social order of race and gender: “Because parades communicated group presence, conviction, and solidarity, whites found black street parades threatening; hence, when blacks tried to claim the right to street parades, they were ridiculed and threatened by mob violence. . . . Women’s participation in street parades and other public manifestations elicited scorn, scandal, and near riot” (156–57).

From this perspective, how space is inhabited is not simply a passive reflection of existing social relations; it is instrumental in facilitating social change. Thus, by inhabiting the city’s streets through the presence of their racially marked and gendered bodies, and by insisting on proudly performing their multiple, heterogeneous, and protean identities in the public space,

Chinese Americans resist Eurocentric cultural domination and propose alternative ways for imagining otherwise than homogeneous, mutually exclusive identities of culture and nation. In so doing, they are expanding the possibilities of street performance for communication, while actualizing the democratic potential of the city though only to a limited extent.

The participation of the Fongs in the parade and their close ties to the Chinese American community in Chinatown shape the formation of their Chinese American identity and subjectivity. By becoming active members of the Chinese American community, and by making Chinatown the center of their social life, the Fongs have developed a strong sense of their Chinese national and ethnic pride in their process of becoming Americans. Rather than depend only on street parades to assert their belongingness and to communicate their concerns, the Chinese American community engages with the municipal government. On behalf of the community, Frederick Fong meets with Mayor Fiorello La Guardia at city hall and accompanies him to Chinatown to give a speech at the end of the Double Ten parade. Although the themes of both the parade and the mayor's speech focus on American support of China's resistance to Japanese invasion, the mayor's presence in Chinatown further signifies that the Chinese American community is part of the city and the United States. Chinatown's relation to the city and the changes in Chinese women's social position and in the American public perception of the Chinese are shaped by the Sino-Japanese War, suggesting that Chinatown and the city will continue to be contested spaces, open to historical, socioeconomic forces and to the agency of Chinese Americans and other residents of the neighborhood. Some of those changes are embedded in the narrative about the Fong family. The death of Tom Fong, Sr., in a car accident makes it possible for the Fongs to realize their dream of opening a restaurant in Chinatown. While the upward mobility of the laundryman's family leads to their moving to live in Chinatown, the future of Tom and Eva lies most likely outside of this ethnic ghetto and enclave. As younger generations of Chinese Americans like Tom and Eva and Eurasians like the son of Loy and Flora begin to inhabit other parts of the city or the suburbs in the United States, they will become part of the forces that transform American Chinatowns, cities, and the nation-space.

But without structural, systematic changes to address racial inequality created by laws, policies, and institutionalized knowledge production that perpetuate racial stereotypes and justify racialized group positions in the United States, those anticipated spatially reflected social transforma-

tions since the Civil Rights Movement could not have taken place. The Fongs' upward mobility into the middle class of small business owners and professionals in science and technology, while remaining invisible in the American political system, reinforces the model minority myth. Robert G. Lee has succinctly stated what is at stake: "The construction of the model minority was based on the political silence of Asian America" (151). Despite its spatially mobilized narrative strategies for resistance to the exclusion of Chinese Americans from the American nation-space and mainstream culture, Lin Yutang's portrayal of the Chinese immigrants' experience in New York enacts a mode of what Palumbo-Liu calls "model minority narratives," which "constitute a specific model of assimilation." As Palumbo-Liu contends: "In much the same way that the model minority myth worked to place the responsibility for the minority subject's success or failure squarely within his or her personal "capabilities," so the logic of model minority discourse argues that an inward adjustment is necessary for the suture of the ethnic subject into an optimal position within the dominant culture. In both cases the sociopolitical apparatuses that perpetuate material differences remain unchallenged and sometimes even fortified" (*Asian/American* 397). The immigrant characters' process of becoming American in *Chinatown Family* fails to challenge the "sociopolitical apparatuses that perpetuate material differences." After all, the Chinese Americans' claiming right to the city in the novel is limited to inhabiting the urban space without becoming equal participants politically and culturally in the city or the nation. The limitation and detriment of the cultural assimilation of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans as a "model minority" are particularly discernable when New York City's Chinatown in "this era of expanding neo-liberal globalism" is "made out as the viral source of bad products—a sort of 'ground zero' of counterfeiting" in the "dramatic rhetoric" of Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire CEO-mayor of New York City, who sanctioned the police raids on Chinatown to "clean up Canal Street" (Tchen, "New York after Chinatown" 39, 31).

As socially, discursively produced and lived spaces, the New York cityscape and Chinatown in Lin's novel are at once material and constructed, real and imagined, depicting Chinese Americans' social position partly as a historical reality and partly as an imagined possibility. Both the flaws of the "model minority" narrative and the strengths of spatially enacted subject formation and resistance to exclusion in *Chinatown Family* anticipate the continuing challenges and possibilities in Asian Americans'

struggle for equal participation in democracy, as later writings about American urban space by other Asian American writers demonstrate.

3 “OUR INSIDE STORY” OF CHINATOWN

Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone*

Chinatowns are at once the deviant space ghettoized by the dominant configurations of social space and the resistant locality that signifies the internalization of “others” within the national space.

— LISA LOWE

[San Francisco’s Chinatown] is a place of novel sensations of sight, of sound and of smell. The first impression when one leaves the noisy adjoining American thoroughfare is that one’s hearing is dulled, for the Orientals throng by without a sound of foot falls. . . . Then your curiosity is aroused to speculate on the character of this tangle of dwelling places.

— ROBERT HOWE FLETCHER

ALTHOUGH FAE MYENNE NG’S NOVEL *BONE*, SET IN SAN FRANCISCO, like *Chinatown Family*, portrays the lives of a working-class Chinese immigrant family in an American metropolis, the two could not be more different in almost every aspect of their representations of lives in Chinatown and the city. If *Chinatown Family* exemplifies the “model minority” myth, despite its subversive claims of right to the city for Chinese Americans, *Bone* counters the myth, disrupting the assimilation mode of the immigrant narrative structured by a chronology of progress. Rather than claim right to the city by inhabiting its public spaces through *flânerie* and other forms of urban exploration and boundary crossings, the characters in *Bone* live, work, and socialize almost completely in Chinatown even though they also look for opportunities to start a new life in other neighborhoods in the city. Published in 1993, almost a half century later than *Chinatown Family*, *Bone* continues

to confront the lingering effects of U.S. exclusionary laws on working-class Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, including the psychological impact of spatialized social positions of race and class on the major characters. Ng's representation of how the cityscape and Chinatown spaces are inhabited simultaneously exposes and critiques not only the ways that lived spaces reflect racialized social relations in the United States but also the ways that the segregated space of Chinatown reinforces the social, economic, and political exclusion and marginalization of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. Countering the tourist's gaze of exotic scenes of Chinatown, Ng consciously and frequently employs strategies of spatially bounded narrative through the characters' activities in, observations of, and relationships to multiple and different spaces in telling the "inside story" of Chinatown.

Chinatown in *Bone* marks spatialized racial positions and labor exploitation in the American city. Ng's depiction of working-class Chinese immigrants, "paper sons," old "bachelors," and sweatshop workers exposes a dark chapter in American history, and its continuing impact, which is in part spatially maintained and reproduced.¹ Grounded in the politics and poetics of space, Ng's representation of lives in San Francisco's Chinatown resists the pitfall of what Yoonmee Chang calls the "culturalization of class" (*Writing* 43). In fact, the spatial inscriptions of social inequality in her narrative strategies enable Ng to portray the complexities of the major characters without falling into the trap of "culturalism," of which Y. Chang claims that her character Leon is guilty. According to Y. Chang, Leon's attitude and practice of culturalism derail the attempt of the narrator, Leila, "to construct a critique of Chinatown's class inequality" (119). But by highlighting in great detail the ways that public and private spaces of Chinatown are inhabited, Leila's narrative effectively portrays Chinatown's inside stories of raced and gendered exploitation. In other words, Ng's narrative strategies of spatial inscriptions do not need to rely on a uniform perspective of the characters on their experience, as Y. Chang seems to suggest is necessary, in order to construct "a narration of the racialized class inequalities of Chinatown life" (117). Thus social critique in the novel is spatially enacted, rather than voiced by all the major characters' critical interpretations of their experience of racial exclusion and exploitation. As Frederick Luis Aldama rightly notes, embedded in Ng's Chinatown stories is a "symbolic representation of an ideological spatial apartheid" in the American city (90, qtd. in R. G. Davis, "Backdairé" 87).

Bone captures the multiplicities and contradictions of Chinatown as both a social, discursive construct and a lived space through a variety of narrative

strategies of spatial inscriptions that link Chinatown to Angel Island and to other parts of San Francisco. Ng's spatially oriented narrative leads the reader through Chinatown streets, alleys, stores, sweatshops, the public square, and private space, as it traverses the lives of the paper-son Leon and his family, revealing the family's "secrets" that are entangled with what Juliana Chang calls "an encrypted secret at the level of the US nation-state: the hyperexploitation of racialized labor" (113). By historicizing the public and private spaces of Chinatown lives, *Bone* at once engages with and departs from representations of Chinatown either by European Americans like Kinkead, Norris, and Genthe or by Chinese Americans such as Sui Sin Far and Lin Yutang, among others.²

As the quotation from *Bone* in this chapter's title indicates, Ng seeks to write Chinatown residents' "inside story," one that is "entirely different" from and unavailable to outsiders, whose knowledge of Chinatown derives from appearances, from apparently exotic and transparent sights (*Bone* 145). In evoking Genthe's snapshot representations of San Francisco's old Chinatown, through the front cover of *Bone* and through narrative, she draws critical attention to the ways that *Bone* reinscribes and reinhabits Chinatown otherwise. The 1993 front cover design of *Bone* features one of Genthe's photographs of Chinatown, portraying two Chinese girls dressed in their holiday attire, walking in the street. When this same photograph by Genthe reappears in the narrative, Leila, as the narrator, draws the reader's attention to everyday life in Chinatown, thus countering the Orientalist exoticization of Chinatown images by Genthe and Irwin: "At Tao-Tao's, Leon and Mah and Mason and I sat under my favorite Genthe photo of two little girls walking down an alley; they're holding hands, looking back. I had other favorites: the grocer with the beckoning smile, the shoe cobbler, the balloon peddler" (*Bone* 191).³ While Leila's references to these snapshots express her emotional attachment to her sisters and to Chinatown, they evoke the predominant Orientalist representations of San Francisco's Chinatown as constructed through the gaze of the white male, which reduces Chinatown residents to spectacles. Framed as part of the decontextualized street scenes of a "foreign" terrain frozen in time, the two little Chinese girls become exotic sights of Chinatown—a spectacle for pleasurable consumption by privileged white Americans.⁴ But the Chinese girls' looking back at the photographer, the *flâneur* who possesses the right to pursue "pedestrian connoisseurship" (Shields, "Fancy Footwork" 61), returns the white male gaze with subversive curiosity, calling attention to the intrusive camera and raising questions

about its power of “authentic” representation of the Other. Even though the girls remain silent, their returning gaze asserts a measure of subjective agency that undermines their objectification by the privileged white male. However, as a photograph frozen in time, detached from history, the image of the girls remains part of a street scene of Chinatown, at once constituted by and constituting the Othered space that naturalizes the segregation of the Chinese community from the normative white American body politic and nation-space. Ng alters the racially marked unequal relationship between the spectator and the Chinatown space, by directing the reader’s gaze through Leila to various places of Chinatown off the tourist path, thus remapping the topography of this neighborhood and reinscribing its lived spaces.

TRAVERSING CHINATOWN’S “INSIDE STORY”

Much of the narrative in *Bone* takes place in motion, as it follows the characters’ movements in and outside of Chinatown, making visible not only the remnants of American history but also the lingering impact of the Chinese exclusionary laws and the continuing marginalization of working-class Chinese Americans in American society. In a way, space in *Bone* serves as a narrator; it bears witness to raced and gendered class inequality. Leila’s walk through Chinatown in search of her stepfather, Leon, a paper son, links Chinatown to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, which from 1910 to 1940 was the location of the U.S. immigration station for processing, controlling immigration mostly from China and other Asian countries during the “Asiatic” exclusion period (1882–1943). As a resident of Chinatown and the stepdaughter of a paper son, Leila is able to lead the reader into this ghettoized neighborhood’s living quarters inaccessible to tourists or European American *flâneurs* or *flâneuses*. Moreover, Leila refuses to be a “native informant” like the Chinatown-resident narrator in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Rather, Ng’s narrator leads the reader inside Chinatown alleys and other lived spaces not to display ethnic cultural traditions or practices but to expose and critique the legacy of racial exclusion and exploitation.

Leila’s first stop at the “old-man hotel on Clay Street, the San Fran,” reveals Chinese working-class immigrants’ deprivation of family life as a result of the U.S. exclusionary laws against Chinese laborers (4). The San Fran was, and still is, the home for the “bachelors,” who were unable to bring their wives to the United States or were unable to marry because of poverty and the miscegenation law that forbade marriage between whites and people of

color. Grandpa Leong, who sponsored Leon as his paper son, lived at the San Fran until his death. Leon used to live there when he was a bachelor, going out to sea every forty days, working as a “coolie” on the ships. And after Leila’s younger half sister, Ona, who is closest to Leon, commits suicide, Leon moves out of the family’s apartment in Salmon Alley and checks himself into his old room at the hotel. Leila’s observation of the San Fran reveals that this “old-man hotel” is like a low-cost student dormitory: “There’s a toilet and bath on each floor and the lobby’s used as a common room. No kitchen” (4). The lack of privacy and the absence of the basic facilities of a home in this private space suggest more than poverty. This racially marked and gendered “old-man hotel” in Chinatown is a spatial form of what David L. Eng calls the “racial castration” of Asian Americans.⁵ It reflects the material reality of Chinese Americans’ racial position as the subjugated Other within the nation-space of the United States. It is a space of deprivation and homelessness of racialized laborers in the American city

Leila’s description of Leon’s room at the San Fran drives home this status of working-class Chinese Americans in contrast to the wealth and power of white America. While observing Leon’s room, Leila directs the reader’s gaze to the various abandoned projects of Leon as a “junk inventor”: “An electric sink. Cookie-tin clocks. Clock lamps” (5). As her gaze moves to Leon’s other possessions of collected objects and beyond them to Coit Tower outside the window, it enhances the impoverished life in this cluttered space:

Without Leon, the room looked dingier. There are an old-man smell, and junk all over. . . .

Leon was a collector, too. Stacks of takeout containers, a pile of aluminum tins. Plastic bags filled with packs of ketchup and sugar. White cans with red letters, government-issue vegetables: sliced beets, waxy green beans, squash. His nightstand was a red restaurant stool cluttered with towers of Styrofoam cups, stacks of restaurant napkins, and a cup of assorted fast-food straws. . . . There were several tin cans. . . . Beyond these tins, I could see Coit Tower. (5)

This dingy space cluttered with junk in an old men’s hotel in Chinatown correlates with the racial position, economic exploitation, and social exclusion of Chinese immigrant laborers, exposing the intersection of race, class, and gender. Ng enhances racially marked class inequity through Leila’s gaze that juxtaposes Leon’s junky tins with Coit Tower, one of San Francisco’s most rec-

ognizable landmarks. This 210-foot art deco tower was built in Pioneer Park in North Beach, adjacent to Chinatown, to fulfill the bequest of a wealthy San Francisco resident, Lillie Hitchcock Coit, who left one-third of her fortune to be used to beautify the city she loved. Crowning Telegraph Hill, with sweeping views of San Francisco Bay, Fisherman's Wharf, Alcatraz Island, and other landmarks of San Francisco, Coit Tower is a spatial statement of the wealth and power of white America. Coit Tower's monumentalized visibility enhances the invisibility of the inside story of Chinatown, which Leon's cramped, shabby room of impoverished, marginalized existence epitomizes.

Seen from the window of Leon's room at the San Fran, Coit Tower seems particularly alluring, embodying the American Dream that appears so close yet is so far out of reach for the paper-son Chinese immigrant, who after fifty years' hard labor still lives in poverty and whose legitimacy of citizenship still needs to be proven by authentic papers: "[T]he laws that excluded him now held him captive" (57). The exclusionary laws not only criminalize those whom they target but also trap them as cheap labor. Leon's papers in his old suitcase contain numerous rejection letters stating "We don't want you," and some papers suggest that Leon was once a "houseboy" (58, 59). For Leila, "these letters should prove to the people at the social security office that this country was his place, too," because "Leon had paid; Leon had earned his rights" (58). But Leon's right to place in this country is limited to "coolie" labor and to living in Chinatown. The photographs in his suitcase show Leon at work, doing the only jobs usually available to "Chinamen": "in front of the laundry presser, the extractor; sharpening knives in the kitchen; making beds in the captain's room" (59). Leon always worked overtime, as Leila remarks: "Out at sea, I knew that Leon hardly slept. He worked double shifts—one night slipped into another, tied together by a few hours' sleep. He told me it wasn't time he was spending, it was sweat. He said life was work and death the dream" (181). On land, between voyages, Leila continues: "[H]e worked odd jobs in the hopes of finding something good enough to let his [shipping] card go. He was the fry cook at Wa-jin's, the barbecue chef at Golden Dragon, a janitor in the financial district, a busboy, the night porter at the Oasis. He took a welding class and then worked the graveyard shift with Bethlehem Steel in Alameda." And "[a]ll the while, Leon kept his eye open for new opportunities," which never materialized (160–61). Yet the seductive power of the American Dream seems to help keep alive Leon's hope for a better life, as the objects of his various attempts at inventions suggest. It appears that Leon chooses the same room at the San Fran for its alluring

view of Coit Tower, which embodies the enchanting and elusive American Dream for him. Ng deftly employs the spatial juxtaposition of Coit Tower and Leon's room at the San Fran through Leila's gaze to point to the unequal social positions structured by race. Excluded from U.S. citizenship and its rights and privileges, a male Chinese immigrant laborer like Leon has no chance to obtain the kind of wealth and esteem that a white woman like Lillie Hitchcock Coit has secured.

Ng further indicates the connection between the deprived lives of Chinese immigrants like Leon and the history of Chinese exclusion through Leila's observation of a group of "old guys" trying to help another old man who was sitting "all alone and lost" in the lobby of the San Fran, as well as her observations of other old bachelors in other places of Chinatown (7). Leila's walking to places frequented by Leon enacts what de Certeau calls "a space of enunciation," which has "a triple 'enunciative' function": "[I]t is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian . . . ; it is a spatial acting-out of the place . . . ; and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions" (98, 97–98). Leila's movement about Chinatown weaves together topographically the past and the present of Chinatown and Chinese American working-class paper sons and bachelors, thus inscribing the Chinatown space with Chinese American histories unavailable in the official history of the U.S. nation-state, invisible in the dominant narrative of assimilation, progress, and the American Dream as embedded in *Chinatown Family*. Moreover, the spatially bounded narrative mobilized by Leila's search for Leon is also "a spatial acting-out of the place" of Chinatown as a changing, dynamic neighborhood, a closely connected community, and a repository of layers of histories inscribed by both the built environment and those who inhabit it:

At Uncle's Cafe, every single table is an old-man table. Old men telling jokes and laughing, but no old Leon. The register lady shook her head at me. No Leon, she said. So I continued, turning onto Waverly Place, the two-block alley famous in the old days as barbers' row, Leon still calls it Fifteen-Cent Alley, after the old-time price of a haircut. Now Waverly Place has everything: there's the First Chinese Baptist Church, the Jeng Sen Buddhism Taoism Association, the Bing-Kong Tong Free Masons, the Four Seas Restaurant and the Pot Sticker, several travel agencies and beauty salons, but only one barber shop. (7–8)

Different spaces in Chinatown emerge as the reader follows Leila's walk and gaze, suggesting various stories and different economic statuses among the residents. But the social exclusion from mainstream America and the deprived, impoverished lives of paper sons and old bachelors continue to be the tenure of the spatial enunciation. As Leila observes, the clusters of old men at Portsmouth Square "looked like scraps of dark remnant fabric," and a closer look reveals the shabbiness of these "scraps" of "remnant fabric"—"tattered collars, missing buttons, safety-pinned seams, patch pockets full of fists" (8).

These gendered and classed bodies constitute part of a public space of Chinatown and San Francisco, inscribing the legacy of racial exclusion and exploitation on American urban space. Possessing no space of his own and escaping the isolating and confining room at the San Fran, Leon, like other old bachelors, inhabits various public spaces in Chinatown, particularly Portsmouth Square, as a sort of living room. J. Chang's insightful argument sheds light on Leon's constant absence from the domestic space. Even though Leon is married, J. Chang observes, "his lifestyle and network are structured by the homosociality of bachelor society" and his "continued life as a 'bachelor' even after marriage and reproduction calls into question the developmental paradigm of national history and modernity, in which the racialized subject presumably moves from a premodern deviance to a modern normativity" (119). But Chinese immigrant laborers were deprived of the rights to a "normative" family life, which is a means of incorporating immigrants into the national body politic.

Obstructing working-class Chinese immigrants' formation of families in the United States and subsequently hindering the creation of a generation of American-born Chinese Americans through legislation was an effective way of barring Chinese immigrants from citizenship and excluding them from participating in mainstream American society. Susan Koshy's study *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (2004) sheds light on the so-called bachelor society and other effects of the racial exclusion of Asian Americans through antimiscegenation laws: "Unlike other forms of miscegenation regulation, antimiscegenation laws directed at Asian Americans were shaped by a need to police the sexuality of a primarily male immigrant labor force; the laws worked to impede their incorporation into America through marriage or through the creation of a subsequent generation of American-born citizens" (6–7). Leon's relationship to both the domestic and social spaces in Chinatown is shaped by the U.S. exclusionary laws on the basis

of race, class, and national origins. So, too, are the lives of Leon's associates, whom Leila refers to as "Chinatown drift-about. Spitters. Sitters. Flea men in the Square" (13). The way Leon and other old bachelors—"those fleabags at Portsmouth Square," as Leila calls them (16)—inhabit the public space within the borders of Chinatown is symptomatic of the legacy of institutionalized racism, which is spatially implemented and maintained.

Ng situates Leon's life in a larger historical and social context by employing a spatially bounded and mobilized narrative, which historicizes and reinscribes the "deviant" space of Chinatown through Leila's gaze. At once evoking and contravening in the *flânerie* of the tourist or of the white *flâneur*, Leila's walking around Chinatown in search of Leon organizes spatial elements—Uncle's Cafe, a grocery store, a restaurant, the diverse commercial alley, Waverly Place, the two-block alley famous as "barbers' row," and Portsmouth Square—in such a way that the stories about Leon's life and the lives of other paper sons and old bachelors, as well as everyday life in Chinatown, both past and present, unfold en route. At Portsmouth Square, Leila runs into Leon's paper-son friend, You Thin Toy, who met Leon on the same ship bound for America. "On the long voyage, they coached each other on their paper histories" in order to pass the interrogation at the Angel Island immigration station (9).⁶ You Thin Toy directs Leila to the Universal, where she finds Leon helping out in the kitchen of his friend's relatives' café. After Leon leaves the Universal with Leila, their encounters in the Chinatown streets propel the narrative about Leon's life and interweave it with the lives of Leila's family and other Chinatown residents. While these encounters help piece together Leon's life, they also offer a glimpse into the lives of other working-class Chinese Americans in Chinatown. As Leila and Leon are "walking past the red iron gates of the West Ping Projects," a low-income housing project complex on Pacific Avenue, they are stopped by Jimmy Lowe, one of Leon's "shipping buddies," who no longer needs to go out to sea because he now has a janitorial job at the Fairmont Hotel (9, 160). Stuck in minimal-pay jobs, Jimmy Lowe keeps dreaming of obtaining wealth and a better life and is constantly scheming for quick money. Leon shares his hopes and dream for opportunities to change his life of poverty, constant toil, and absence from his family. "He and Jimmy Lowe put in a bid for a takeout place in Vallejo. They even had a name for it; The Phoenix Walk-Away" (161). But the business fails. This is just one of Leon's numerous failed attempts to achieve a version of the American Dream, which forever eludes him and other poor bachelors like Grandpa Leong.

Ng embeds the continuing effects of spatially reinforced racialized labor exploitation of Chinese Americans, by inscribing histories and everyday life reality in the ways various spaces of Chinatown are inhabited. The funeral house where Grandpa Leong is prepared for burial is laden with remote and recent histories, as implied in its condition and multiple functions: “The funeral house where Grandpa Leong was prepared was as makeshift as his coffin. Its storefront windows faced Portsmouth Square, and the heavy sheets that were hung to shut out the light looked like old rubber mats they used on the floor of fish stores” (82–83). Leon tells Leila that this is the poor single man’s funeral house, as “men with families went to Cathay House on Powell or to the Green Street Mortuary” (83). Later Leila learns that “the funeral parlor doubled as Shing Kee Grocery’s warehouse, and that they only leased it out for funerals.” “The space went on to house other things: Everybody’s Bookstore, Master Kung’s Northern-style Martial Arts Club, and the Chinese Educational Services” (83). Even after decades of hard labor in the United States, Grandpa Leong dies a poor bachelor. His poverty is accentuated by the shabbiness and multifunctions of the funeral house, where apparently a failed fish store used to be. That this space is used as both a funeral parlor and a grocery’s warehouse, and later becomes a place for still other purposes, makes visible overcrowding as a prominent feature of the living conditions of disenfranchised Chinatown residents. The spaces they inhabit bear witness to the lingering effects of Chinese exclusion and demonstrate the ways in which ethnically marked racial and class inequality and social marginalization are spatially reinforced.

STORIED STREETS OF CHINATOWN AND SAN FRANCISCO

Ironically evoking and contrasting the spatialized myth of the American Dream—“the streets are paved with gold”—Ng inscribes the streets in Chinatown and other parts of the city with memories and stories of Chinese immigrants’ losses and broken American Dreams through Leila’s routes in and out of Chinatown. As she drives up Broadway, passing Grant, Stockton, and Powell and the Edith Eaton (Sui Sin Far) school, where she works, Leila points out that five days a week she passes “this spot,” next to the Nam Ping Yuen (meaning “southern peaceful courtyard” in Chinese), “the last of the four housing projects built in Chinatown.” For Leila and her family this “southern peaceful courtyard” is actually “a bad-luck place, a spooked spot.” Her younger half sister, Ona, committed suicide by jumping off the M floor

of the Nam Ping Yuen building (14). Not far from this part of Chinatown is Pacific Avenue, which marks another loss. This street is where Leila's family's business, the L. L. Grocery, failed, for many reasons. "Salesmen cheated Leon, smooth-talked Mah. Kids stole candy and cigarettes." Leila sneaked baseball cards to the boys she liked. Their "only steady customers were oldtimers who came by and sat on a stool by the door and read the newspaper for free" (162). And every week, half of Leon's paycheck from the Bethlehem Steel factory goes into the store. Before long, Leon has to sell the store at a loss. What is significant about Leila's memories of this failed business are the details about how the whole family used to work overtime to keep the store going. These details provide a counterpoint to the success stories of the "model minority," as exemplified in *Chinatown Family* by the Fongs' progress through endurance, tenacity, and hard work, all of which Leila's family members possess and practice only to find themselves stuck where they started and in a worse situation—they are deep in debt, and Leon loses his job when Bethlehem Steel relocates.

Moreover, by locating the L. L. Grocery across the street from the Mobil station, Ng tactfully uses the "space of enunciation" to imply the unspoken conditions for the lack of social upward mobility for Chinese immigrants like Leila's parents: unequal opportunities and lack of access to material resources, resulting from structural and ideological barriers created by racial inequality. Leila's account of the family's everyday activities reveals a life of endless toil behind the storefront on the street of Chinatown:

L. L. Grocery was on Pacific Avenue, near Powell, across from the Mobil station. Leon opened the store in the mornings while Mah sewed at the factory. Mah watched the store from four to nine, while Leon worked his graveyard shift as the steelyard. We practically lived at the grocery. I remember after school and weekends, there: dusting the shelves and stocking canned goods and taking trips to the wholesaler on Stockton for paper supplies. We helped count loaves of Kilpatrick's bread as they were delivered. We rotated the milk in the refrigerator. . . .

We helped watch the store for the hour and a half between English School's letting out and Chinese School's beginning; it was enough time for Mah to do the dinner shopping. After Chinese School, we sat at the counter by the register doing our homework while Mah cooked dinner in the back room. (161–62)

Both Leon and Leila's mother work at the store between their respective jobs. The store has become a living space for Leila's family. How they inhabit the store space reveals the hardships of Leila's family, particularly the mother, who works as cheap labor in a sweatshop, at the store, and at home, where she carries the extra burden of taking care of the family. For her, there is no place for leisure; both the sweatshop and the family store are places of toil.

The L. L. Grocery is Mah's dream for a better life, a way out of Chinatown's sweatshops. Leila's walk to bring lunch to her mother at one of the sweatshops leads the reader off the beaten paths of the tourist route into another inside story in a space of gendered and raced exploitation, where Leila's mother works. The work environment of the shop is dehumanizing, and the low wage paid per piece coerces the women to work fast and for long hours. Leila's observation offers a glimpse into this raced and gendered space of hard labor by Chinese women: "Walking into the factory felt like walking into the cable-car barn. Every machine was running at high speed: the Singers zoomed, the button machines clicked. The shop vibrated like a big engine. Everything blended: oil and metal and the eye-stinging heat of the presses. The ladies pushed their endurance, long hours and then longer nights, as they strained to slip one more seam under the stamping needle" (177). When Leila brings lunch to her mother, she is "too busy even to look up" and too pressured by the work to have an appetite (178). Like the other sewing ladies, she even has her sewing materials delivered to the family's apartment so that she can work overtime at home to earn a few more dollars. For Leila's mother, home is another place of continuing the sweatshop work: "Mah sat down at her Singer with the dinner rice still in her mouth. When we pulled down the Murphy bed, she was still there, sewing. The hot lamp made all the stitches blur together; the street noises stopped long before she did. And in the morning, long before any of us awoke, she was already there, at work" (34). Leila has "watched the years of working in the sweatshops change her body." For Mah, "[w]ork was her whole life, and every forward stitch marked time passing" (63). Mah's racially marked and gendered body becomes a machinelike productive body, whose productivity and availability for exploitation are spatially reinforced in Chinatown.

The segregated space of Chinatown and its spatial organization make the raced and gendered cheap-labor pool readily available. Leila's family's apartment is located on Salmon Alley, above the sweatshop where the mother works. Such spatial relation between sweatshop and home renders

Chinatown a space of productive cheap labor. These apparently typical ethnic characteristics of Chinatown are structured by larger raced and gendered social relations of labor and capital in the United States, which affect the ways Leila's family and other Chinatown residents inhabit both public and private spaces. One of Leila's descriptions of her experience living in the apartment on Salmon Alley further demonstrates that social relations structure not only social space but private space as well. The night before Ona's funeral, Leila finds comfort in the familiar sounds of Salmon Alley, which reveal a crowded living space with little privacy: "I hear all the old alley sounds—Old Mr. Lim's cough coming through the wall. Mrs. Lim going for his medicine. . . . Hearing those old sounds soothed me. They made Salmon Alley comfortable again. I felt cocoon-safe in the old sounds, in the homey feeling of time standing still" (129). Leila's affective descriptions of this normalized living environment with its lack of privacy and crowded housing unveil yet another episode of Chinatown's inside story of spatialized social inequality. It is worth noting, moreover, that the spatial organization of Chinatown, where sweatshops and apartments are located in the same alley, participates in constituting the subjectivity of the residents, who are so conditioned to accept or take for granted the crowded living environment as apparently inevitable or "normal" that it even becomes "comfortable" and "homey," as it does for residents like Leila. Ng strategically embeds the social production of both the public and domestic spaces of Chinatown in narrative details such as those described above. In a provocative reading of *Bone*, Lisa Lowe points out the connections between Chinatown's spatial organization and the larger social relations of production in the United States: "The buildings and streets, the relations between spaces, and the relations between human individuals and work, to leisure, to life and death are all material testimonies to the means through which U.S. society has organized Chinatown space to enhance production and to reproduce the necessary relations of production" (*Immigrant Acts* 120–21). Structured in this way, the Chinatown space at once reflects and reinforces the subordinate social status and racialized, gendered labor exploitation of a segregated ethnic community.

But Chinatown's multiplicity and diversity are irreducible to a single function or fixed identity defined by relations of production or by racialized social hierarchy. The everyday life activities in Chinatown made visible through Leila's observations indicate that Chinatown is a dynamic ethnic enclave with networks of commerce, service, and support systems. The ways the Chinese residents inhabit Chinatown defy any simple definitions. For instance, the

building that houses the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Benevolent Association serves multiple functions for the Chinatown community. Work, service, and recreational activities are taking place there simultaneously. Nevertheless, the visual details of seedy elements in the place, and the sweatshop located here as well, imply that the ways these Chinatown spaces are inhabited reflect the residents' social status defined by larger social relations, rather than the inevitable outcome of any innate ethnic traits or cultural preferences, as representations of Chinatown by white Americans often suggest. Again, Leila's gaze organizes what is to be seen here, and her experience of this place connects it to other places of Chinatown:

Friday after school, I walked down to the five-story building at 41 Waverly Place. The narrow staircase squeaked. I stepped aside on the first landing to let some Italian guys carrying white carnation wreaths pass. On the second floor, the number of the machines and the odor of hot steamed linen made my nostrils feel prickly; these sensations brought back memories of working in Tommie Hom's sweatshop, helping Mah turn linen pockets. Ironing the interfacing for the culottes. The time I sewed my finger. The awful exactness of the puncture point where the needle broke nail and skin. An exacting pain.

A racket of mah-jongg sounds, plastic tiles slapping and the trilling laughter of winners filled the third floor. The fourth smelled of sweat. Sharp intakes of breath, sudden slaps, guys grunting. Master Choy. White Crane Gung-Fu Club.
(75)

The building used simultaneously for different purposes is characteristically a Chinatown space. So is the office of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Benevolent Association, which Leila visits. As Leila describes: "The office was like many other Chinatown family-association offices: family and business mixed up. To the right, a long counter; to the left, the reception area, made up of two hand-me-down sofas. . . . There were Boy Scout plaques on the wall, high school wrestling trophies on the end tables, and stacks of newspapers everywhere. . . . The windows were dirty, the floral curtains a dusty blur. Xerox boxes were stacked dangerously high for this earthquake climate" (75).

These "mixed up" spaces of multiple, diverse functions evoke other places in Chinatown—the sweatshop and the apartments on Salmon Alley, the funeral parlor, and Leon's dingy, cluttered room at the San Fran. L. Lowe in her reading of this space of heterogeneity emphasizes its different mode of spatial organization of multiple functions: "[T]he collective space of the

Benevolent Association is not organized toward production as its sole end; work is not the privileged referent of its production of space. The Benevolent Association is a space of multiple functions, in which activities are simultaneous, not hierarchized or temporalized. Its condensed simultaneity of spaces ultimately comments on that organization of other social spaces that relegates Chinatown to the periphery serving the dominant center” (*Immigrant Acts* 124). Lowe seems to suggest that the “condensed simultaneity of spaces” in this building offers a preferable alternative model of nonhierarchized organization to that of the dominant social spaces, which consigns Chinatown to a subordinate status on the margins of society. But Leila’s observation of and experience in these “mixed up” spaces suggest a poor working and socializing environment, which reflects the effects of structured inequality alongside dynamic cultures of Chinatown. Even though the organization of the collective space of Chinatown does not seem to prioritize “the relation of production” that “organizes the ‘private’ space of Leila’s home as a work space,” as Lowe observes (124), the “condensed simultaneity of spaces” actually evokes the racialized and gendered productive spatial organization of Salmon Alley, where a sweatshop is located on the same spot where the Chinese sewing ladies live. Such “condensed spaces,” or rather overcrowded housing, are saturated with indications of gendered and raced exploitation, exclusion, and marginalization, as Leila’s gaze on the shabbiness and clutter of the Hoy Sun Ning Yung Benevolent Association suggests and as the painful memories of Leila’s sweatshop experience insinuate.

If the spatial is inseparable from the social and historical, Ng’s representation of Chinatown’s complex spaces enacts what Edward W. Soja calls “critical human geography,” which entails “the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical *and the spatial*, their inseparability and often problematic interdependence” (“Thirdspace” 260, 261). The simultaneous and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial also suggests that although Chinatown can be transformed by a different inhabitation of its residents, its spatiality and social status are interwoven with larger social and historical conditions beyond Chinatown.

Ng captures this complexity of Chinatown through her characters’ physical and psychological experience of its space in relation to American society at large. Feeling confined by Chinatown’s limited opportunities for upward mobility, and worn out by the endless toil of sweatshop work, Leila’s mother considered the possibilities of starting anew outside of Chinatown. “She tried out her idea on me [Leila] first. What if they went into business together,

she and Leon? Full time. Outside of Chinatown. What if they really put all their effort into something? She wanted Leon to quit shipping. She said she was ready to quit the sewing shops" (163). But "Leon was paranoid about everything outside Chinatown" (112). "You don't know," he said to his wife. "You're inside Chinatown; it's safe. You don't know. Outside, it's different" (181). When Leon eventually tries something outside of Chinatown by going into partnership with Luciano Ong, he is cheated and goes bankrupt. Ironically, this business, the Ong & Leong laundry—"the first real thing that looked promising"—is but a typical "Chinamen's" business and is located in another abject neighborhood of the city outside of Chinatown (34). Leila's traversing of the routes to the laundry reveals another space produced by hierarchical social relations: "The Ong & Leong laundry was on McAllister Street, on the seedy edge of the Tenderloin. To get there, we took the number 30 Stockton bus downtown and then transferred to the 38 Geary and got off on Polk and walked two blocks past massage parlors and all-male strip joints and the Mitchell Brothers' famous theatre" (166–67).

This topography between Chinatown and the Tenderloin mapped out by the Leongs' route of travel to work makes visible another seedy side of the city concealed by dominant landmarks and prominent neighborhoods in the area. Like Chinatown, the Tenderloin is a dense downtown neighborhood in the vicinity of the commercial and cultural districts of San Francisco, with Union Square and the shopping district to the northeast and the Civic Center and the office and museum district to the southwest. It spreads to the southern slope of Nob Hill, an affluent district, home to many of the city's upper-class families and a large young urban professional population, as well as a growing Chinese immigrant population from a slowly expanding Chinatown. The Leongs' travel route between home and work enacts another "space of enunciation," which "implies *relations* among differentiated positions," to quote again de Certeau's words (98). Rather than claim right to the city, the route the Leongs take to the laundry indicates that the historically and socially determined economic status of working-class Chinese Americans like Leon and Mah confines their daily movement in the city to the abject neighborhoods and to spaces of toil.

Both Leon and Mah spend almost their entire lives in Chinatown, with the exception of Leon's work voyages and Mah's one trip back to Hong Kong for consolation after Ona's death. Their movement outside of Chinatown is limited to going from Chinatown to another squalid part of the city to work in the basement laundry. Unlike the movement that allows Mother Fong

and her two young children in New York City to experience the metropolis, to claim right to the city, and to propel their acculturation as portrayed in *Chinatown Family*, the work-related travel of the Leongs in the city reduces members of the family to exploited labor. As with the other family business, the L. L. Grocery, the Ong & Leong laundry obliges every family member to work overtime. Trapped in the spatially reinforced racialized exploitation, Leila's family becomes a productive unit of cheap labor:

Leon taught us how to twist the sheets like rope, so they wouldn't knot up while washing, and how to lift them out of the machine without straining our backs. We used both arms to carry them to the extractor, a wild spinning contraption that whined like Dr. Joe's drill. We learned to work the press, a two-girl job. Ona and I held opposite corners of the damp sheet and slipped the edges under the hot rollers. After the edges caught, we ran around to the other end where the sheet slid out, stiff and hot and dry. We folded them by the hotel-loads, corner touching corner, until each package was as tight and perfect as a new deck of cards.

It was hot down there. The humid air was chalky with starch and soap and bleach. The steam and chlorine odor clung to us. Once I smelled it on myself and was surprised with the clear memory of Leon coming home. (167)

This family laundry in the basement and its wretched working conditions evoke the family basement hand-laundry in *Chinatown Family*. But contrary to the progress the Fongs make in their social upward mobility, Leila's family is stuck in a cycle of exploitation and poverty, as suggested by the connection between Leila's smell of the laundry on herself and her memory of the smell on Leon when he returned home from his voyage. After decades of hard labor, Leon remains a laundryman, and like him his daughters work multiple jobs and overtime hours. As Leila reveals, she and her sisters all helped out at the laundry almost all the time: "I was taking education classes at San Francisco State University and working full time as a receptionist in the campus Career Center. Ona took classes at City College and worked the five-to-ten evening shift at Chinatown Bazaar. Nina's just graduated from Galileo High and hadn't decided what she wanted to do yet, so she clocked in the most hours at the laundry and hated every minute of it" (167-68). Then the situation goes from bad to worse when the business fails because their bookkeeping partner has cheated them: "We hadn't been paid for the five months of work we'd put in, and all our savings were gone" (171). The

failed Ong & Leong laundry shatters Mah and Leon's dream for a better opportunity outside of Chinatown and further limits the opportunities of Leila's family to Chinatown, where they feel "safe" yet trapped.

DESIRE TO ESCAPE CHINATOWN—A "CLUTTERED"
SPACE OF "BARE LIFE"

Ng's treatment of the characters' ambivalent and apparently contradictory feelings about Chinatown demonstrates that the interwoven complexity of the spatial with the social and the historical inevitably entails the psychological as well. Recognizing the psychological impact of the segregated, marginalized, and abject space of Chinatown on the Chinatown residents helps situate Ona's suicide in a larger social context, rather than interpret it as "a Chinese suicide" from the characters' limited perspectives, as Y. Chang has argued against (*Writing* 118). Scholars from different disciplines have explored the ways in which the spatial is constitutive of the subject. Palumbo-Liu contends that "the production of Asian American social subjectivity must be seen as *taking place*—that is, as emerging within a specific set of variously produced symbolic and actual spaces" (*Asian/American* 259). Mark Rakatansky in his essay "Spatial Narratives" contends that the organization of space plays a significant role in regulating, managing, and constituting the subject. "The hierarchy and degree of definition of spaces, their relative size and location, and the subarchitectural apparatuses of each space (furniture, appliances, media devices)—all these are defined by and give definition to the social and psychological narratives that influence the behaviors (encouraged, allowed, discouraged, or forbidden) associated with each space" (199). For Leila and her family, the lived spaces in Chinatown, either public or private, embody hardship, poverty, and cycles of exploitation, even though Chinatown, particularly its places like the San Fran and Salmon Alley, mean something else to them as well. Experienced as a place of endless hard work, poverty, and painful memories, Chinatown becomes a place from which each member of Leila's family wants to escape.

That space influences the behaviors of those who inhabit it, and in part constitutes their subjectivities, underlies the ways that Leon constantly disappears in or from Chinatown. Leon's apparently impulsive, restless movement about Chinatown and out to sea, which punctuates the narrative throughout the novel, is symptomatic of the effects of the spatially reinforced social, economic, and political exclusion of working-class Chinese immigrants.

Leila recalls the numerous times when she “came home to find Leon gone, signed onto some voyage without telling us” (128). Chapter 1 begins with Leila’s search for Leon in Chinatown, and chapter 6 opens with “Leon lost. Leon found” (62). J. Chang, in her insightful reading of *Bone*, convincingly argues that the constant absence of Leon from the domestic space can be understood in terms of the pattern in which “his lifestyle and network are structured by the homosociality of bachelor society” conditioned by the U.S. laws of exclusion on the basis on race and class (119). However, Leon does not want to wander around Chinatown, or stay at the San Fran, or hang out with his buddies. “He admitted to Ona that he didn’t really like living at the hotel or hanging around the union hall and the Square” (158). His restless movement and his need to leave Chinatown—working on ships is the only choice he has for escaping—is conditioned not only by the social life of the “bachelor society” but also by his sense of confinement and stagnation within the borders of Chinatown. As Rakatansky observes, spaces are organized and designed in such ways that “their relative size and location” and their “subarchitectural apparatuses” are imbued with “the social and psychological narratives that influence the behaviors . . . associated with each space” (199). Leon, who is defined by his illegitimate identity as a paper son and held captive as a “coolie” by the U.S. laws of exclusion, has little freedom of choice in where to live, work, or socialize. Going out to sea becomes a way of escaping the sense of being trapped in Chinatown and escaping the depressing realities of his broken American dreams. The open space of the ocean seems to offer Leon a sense of belonging to a wider world outside the borders of Chinatown. For the movement on the ocean gives him the illusion of going forward and keeps his hope alive. Mah, feeling trapped in Chinatown herself, understands Leon’s need. As she once explained: “[I]t was the movement on the ocean that drew him out, made him restless on land. Staying on land too long made Leon feel like he was turning to stone. The ocean was his whole world: complete. A rush of wind and water. The salt taste like endless crying.” But Leila wonders, “What opens for him in the hollow and still center of the ocean?” (128). Leila’s question offers a counterpoint to Mah’s perspective and highlights the illusive nature of Leon’s escape. As Leila observes, on the ships, Leon is nothing but a “coolie,” and “all the time he was away,” she “imagined him as the captain in peaked hat, not a shirtless laundryman with a towel around his neck” (156). Nevertheless, Leila intimates that “escape” is “[w]hat Leon searched for, what Ona needed” (150). The sense of being stuck in Chinatown drove Leon to sea and led Ona to suicide.

Ona's conundrum seems to have resulted from her hopeless love for Osvaldo, son of the untrustworthy partner Luciano Ong of the failed Ong & Leong laundry, but it is intricately related to the history of U.S. exclusionary laws against the Chinese, which structured the lives of the Leongs and affected them psychologically. This interwoven complexity of the historical, the social, the spatial, and the psychological underlying Ona's suicide renders it incomprehensible and unexplainable to the police. As Leila states, "[The police officer] didn't get it. He was looking at the typical stuff. He was looking at now. Maybe I could have said something about how Ona felt stuck. In the family, in Chinatown. Ona was the middle girl and she felt stuck in the middle of all the trouble." For Leila, her family's trouble is connected to Angel Island, to Grandpa Leong, whose "bones weren't at rest" because they were lost, and Leon could not have them shipped back to China as he had promised as his paper son (139). Ona's feeling of being "stuck" in "the family, in Chinatown" is intertwined with her sense of her identity defined by Chinatown. As Leila reveals, Ona tells her "about how she felt outside Chinatown" and how "[s]he never felt comfortable, even with the Chinese crowd that Osvaldo hung around with; she never felt like she fit in" (173). Feeling out of place outside of Chinatown, Ona "didn't have an out" (173). She was more stuck than Leila and their younger sister, Nina. Leila's "out" is her fiancé, Mason, who works as a mechanic in a car shop in the Mission district. Nina's "out" is "a part-time job at Kentucky Fried Chicken on Bay" in Berkeley (173).

However, neither Nina nor Leila can escape the psychological effects of Chinatown even when they are outside the segregated space. Nina "hated Chinatown" and was planning on getting out permanently (172). She "blamed" her family and Salmon Alley, the "whole place," for Ona's death. She believes that "the problem was a combination of us together, cooped up on Salmon Alley." Telling her parents that she had an abortion "was her way out" (51). When she eventually moves to New York City, Nina works as a flight attendant, but she decides to quit because "flying made her feel like Leon" (25). But rather than look for work in New York City, she "took a job taking tours to China even though she'd never been to China" (26). Nina's orientation toward China after she moves to New York City to escape Chinatown suggests her sense of alienation in the American society outside of Chinatown. Nevertheless, the city outside of Chinatown seems to offer a kind of escape for both Nina and Leila. When Leila meets with Nina in New York City, they avoid eating dinner in Chinatown because "it was too

depressing.” The food is good, “but the life’s hard down there,” said Nina. “I always feel like I should rush through a rice plate and then rush home to sew culottes or assemble radio parts or something.” Leila feels the same way: “At Chinatown places, you can only talk about the bare issues. In American restaurants, the atmosphere helps me forget. . . . I wanted to forget about Mah and Leon” (26). But at an “American” restaurant with Nina, Leila feels displaced: “The place was called The Santa Fe and it was done in peach and cactus green. I looked down at the black plates on the pale tablecloth and thought, Ink. I felt strange. I didn’t know this tablecloth, this linen, these candles. Everything seemed foreign. It felt like we should be different people” (26–27). Leila’s sense of estrangement reveals that she is used to the socially and historically produced, yet naturalized, phenomenon of the Chinese body inhabiting cramped, cluttered, and noisy Chinatown spaces where the aesthetic pleasures of everyday life such as matching colors and utensils are a luxury beyond the residents’ concerns about the “bare issues.”

Leila’s feeling about everything “foreign” at the Santa Fe highlights the spatially reinforced class difference marked by the difference of race, while indicating its impact on the subjectivity of Chinatown residents. For Leila, Chinatown, Salmon Alley, and home are places of toil and worry, where she, her family, and other residents are stuck. Working as “the community relations specialist” for her school, Leila has the opportunity to witness the hardships of recent working-class Chinese immigrants, whose experience is similar to that of her own family: “Both parents work. Swing shift. Graveyard. Seamstress. Dishwasher. Janitor. Waiter. One job bleeds into another. They have enough worries, and they don’t like me coming in and telling them they have one more” (16). Not only are those recent immigrants’ multiple low-income jobs similar to Mah’s and Leon’s. So, too, is their cramped home in Chinatown similar to that of Leon’s room at the San Fran and Mah’s apartment in Salmon Alley: “Being inside their cramped apartments depresses me. I’m reminded that we’ve lived like that, too. The sewing machine next to the television, the rice bowls stacked on the table, the rolled-up blankets pushed to one side of the sofa. Cardboard boxes everywhere, rearranged and used as stools or tables or homework desks. . . . Cluttered rooms. Bare lives” (17). While those recent immigrants’ “cluttered rooms” and “bare lives” in Chinatown evoke the lives of Leila’s family, the repeated pattern of toil and poverty in working-class Chinese immigrants’ lives in Chinatown points to the role the segregated space plays in maintaining racial and class inequality.

Such spatially reflected and reinforced differences of race and class

are evident in other spaces within Chinatown, thus situating the “inside story” of a Chinatown family historically and socially beyond the borders of a ghettoized ethnic enclave. As the cultural geographer, Peter Jackson stresses the importance of investigating the ways that raced and gendered divisions of labor are “constituted geographically and historically” and how the “intersections of race, class, and gender are played out across space and over time” (184). The spatially enacted inside stories of Chinatown in *Bone* present precisely such a geography of the intersections of race, class, and gender in the American city and the nation-space, where Angel Island and San Francisco’s Chinatown are part of the geography of racial and class divisions. Moreover, Leila’s references to the photographs of San Francisco’s old Chinatown by Genthe, and to Chinatown as a spectacle for tourists, indicate that Chinatown is also produced through representations within the visual field saturated with ideologies of race, gender, class, and nation.

Ng’s representation of Chinatown in *Bone* as a lived space with intertwining complexities of the social, the historical, and the psychological overcomes the tendency to reinforce “the ‘spectacular’ face of Chinatown life” that S. C. Wong points out is found in the “rehabilitative representations of Chinatown” by Chinese American writers such as Amy Tang (“Ethnic Subject” 254, 255). In her provocative essay “Ethnic Subject, Ethnic Sign, and the Difficulty of Rehabilitative Representation: Chinatown in Some Works of Chinese American Fiction,” Wong identifies the challenges in re-representing a Chinatown world that has been objectified as a spectacle by the Orientalizing gaze of white America: “How does one affirm the Chinese Americanness of Chinatown, how does one acknowledge the fact that its inhabitants are no longer in China and that they are developing a valid new culture, how does one accept departures from what is commonly seen as authentic Chinese traditions, without falling into the trap of exoticization and playing into an ahistorical essentialism?” Wong emphasizes that “[t]hese are questions with which critics reading representations of Chinatown must grapple.” And “[t]hey are also questions confronting every writer who attempts a rehabilitative representation of Chinatown” (254). She singles out Ng’s story about of life in Chinatown as “a promising viable mode of rehabilitative representation” (259). For Ng’s story represents “a Chinatown world that decidedly does not revolve around the white man’s actual or anticipated reactions” even though “her characters are aware of how whites see them.” Thus Ng depicts the immigrant parents as “ordinary people who want a decent life” and “make numerous gradual, minute adjustments to their environment,” rather than as

“symbols of either hopeless cultural stagnation or unrelentingly purposeful cultural transmission” (261). This reading of *Bone* rightly emphasizes Ng’s representation of Chinatown as “habitation,” which disrupts the stereotypical “spectacular face” of Chinatown life (256, 254). Wong’s identification of the challenges in Chinese Americans’ “rehabilitative representations” of Chinatown draws critical attention to the fact that Chinatown is produced not solely by social relations or by different ways of inhabitation; it is produced by representations as well.

An entirely different Chinatown—one that differs significantly from the Chinatowns as portrayed respectively by Genthe, Sui Sin Far, and Lin Yutang—emerges in *Bone*. Ng’s strategic representation of the spatiality in Chinatown residents’ everyday lives simultaneously highlights and critiques the structural inequality of race, gender, and class, which counters the privileged white male gaze that Orientalizes Chinatown and elides socially produced racial segregation. With a focus on the history of Chinese exclusionary laws and their continuing impact on working-class Chinese Americans and Chinatown life, it undermines the myth of assimilation as a matter of the chronology of, or individual capacity for, acculturation as implied in some of the short stories about merchant-class Chinese immigrants by Sui Sin Far. Its subversion of the “model minority” myth dismantles the myth of individualized social upward mobility that promotes hard work and good family values as the foundation for success, as embedded in *Chinatown Family*. Ng’s “inside” stories of Chinatown demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationship of the social and the spatial. Moreover, by portraying the ways that the Chinese American racial position and American identity are spatially constructed, Ng points to both the limitations and the possibilities embedded in the mutually constitutive relation between space and subject.

These bound up relationships suggest that to inhabit Chinatown otherwise than as a segregated ghetto that at once reflects and reinforces the dominant racial and social relations entails imagining Chinatown and its relationship to the American society otherwise as well. A task as such entails rearticulating Chinese American subjectivity and American identity spatially, which is not a major thematic concern of *Bone* but is explored by other Asian American writers who seek to reimagine and reinhabit the American urban space otherwise than as a segregated, exclusionary nation-space.

4 CHINATOWN AS AN EMBATTLED PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

Frank Chin's Short Story Cycle and *Donald Duk*

[A]ll battles over space and place are battles over spatialised social power, and it is the nature, sources and structured inequalities of that power which must be central to analysis and to position-taking. Moreover, that power in and over the construction of space and place is at the same time material and imaginative, the two not simply mapping on to each other but intersecting and cross-cutting in complex ways.

—DOREEN MASSEY

“I can't believe I have raised a little white racist. He doesn't think Chinatown is America.”

—FRANK CHIN

CHINATOWN IN FRANK CHIN'S WRITINGS IS AN EMBATTLED PEDAGOGICAL space for the formation of Chinese American identity and subject. Embattled, for it is at once the product and instrument of social power, a contested space of competing ideologies, discourses, and representations, which construct identities and constitute subjects. As such, the identity and function of Chinatown are multiple, unstable, and protean. Hence Chinatown as represented in Chin's writings is not simply a segregated ethnic ghetto produced by the legalized racial segregation and exclusion of the Chinese in the United States; nor is it merely an exotic tourist spot or a site of resistance to assimilation. While it is all of the above, Chinatown in Chin's writings is first and foremost a battleground for the constitution of Chinese American subjectivity and for the construction not only of Chinese American but also of American identity, whose hybridity and heterogeneity are rendered particularly subversive by Chin's representation of Chinatown

as part of the American city. Moreover, Chinatown is a “battleground” as such because it is not just an end product of the social; it is a site where “the social is constructed,” to once more quote Massey’s words in arguing for the significance of space (*For Space* 13). Understood from this perspective, Chinatown is a site where “the white national ideal” is constructed and “sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others,” as Anne Anlin Cheng points out in her analysis of racialization in America (10). To redefine the identity of Chinatown constructed by the dominant discourses, then, will inevitably unsettle the American “national ideal” embodied by whites. But since identity construction and subject formation are embedded in the spatialization of social relations and racial positions, redefining Chinatown entails rearticulating ethnic identities, reconstituting assimilated subjects, and reimagining and reinhabiting segregated American urban space. This mutually constitutive and transformative relationship underlies Chin’s writings about Chinatown as part of the “American” city.

Critics, however, tend to overlook these relationships and their implications underlying Chin’s representations of Chinatown. E. H. Kim, for example, observes that “Chin’s Chinatown is a barren, corrupt, and declining place where mothers and fathers are dying of wasting diseases, and their children are crippled, weary, and stifled by boredom. . . . The community itself is likened to a funeral parlor, an obsolete carnival, or a pathetic minstrel show” (*Asian American Literature* 182). Ironically, Kim further notes, “Chin’s attempt to present an unexoticized picture of Chinatown has resulted in a depiction of it as repulsive, decaying, and filled with subhuman creatures” (183). Hence to gain “acceptance” as “American” and to “affirm [their] own manhood,” Kim contends, the young Chinese American male characters in Chin’s short stories must “leave Chinatown and everything it stands for behind” (181). Chinatown in Chin’s fiction, then, embodies everything that “America” is not, and the Chinese remain “quaint foreigners” (181). Isolated from the social relations that produced it and from the impact of dominant racial ideology and cultural assimilation on Chinese Americans, Chinatown in his writings seems to reinforce the very stereotypes of the Chinese that Chin seeks to undermine.

Likewise, S. C. Wong argues that Chin’s portrayals of Chinatown reproduce “the dominant code that defines Chinatown as spectacle.” She adds, “In Chin’s fictional world, if Chinatown is habitation, it is so only for shadowy elderly immigrants wasting away in obscurity, immobilized by their incurable Chineseness” (“Ethnic Subject” 256). Even though Chinatown is “home”

to Chin and portrayed as such in his writings, Wong observes, it is “a stagnating enclave of dying men and women, locked up in cramped quarters.” Thus “[h]ome is the place where he does not want to be: his ancestors are to be disowned rather than sought out and claimed” (*Reading* 146). Wong uses Chin’s work to demonstrate the difficulties for Chinese American writers who attempt “rehabilitative representations of Chinatown” (“Ethnic Subject” 255). Although Chin, a “fifth-generation Chinese American, son of a prominent Chinatown leader, sees himself as a warrior whose mission is to restore Chinese America to historical accuracy, hence its rightful dignity,” and even though Chin’s satirical portrayal of Chinese American characters “expresses bitter exasperation toward Chinatown’s complicity in self-Orientalization,” Wong concludes, Chin nevertheless “becomes a doomed sign-stealer whose emphases continue to be governed by the racist gaze” (“Ethnic Subject” 255, 256).

Although both Kim and Wong offer insightful readings of some characteristics of Chin’s depictions of Chinatown, their focus on the “controlling” effects of “the dominant code” and the “racist gaze” on Chin’s portrayals of a “repulsive” and “decaying” Chinatown obscures the ways that Chin’s stories reveal that Chinatown is simultaneously an outcome of racial segregation and cultural assimilation, as well as a product of representations and social interactions. In fact, Chinatown in Chin’s writings is not only instrumental in reinforcing the social exclusion and cultural marginalization of the Chinese but also operative in constructing the American norms and constituting Chinese American subjects, assimilated or resistant. Hence by overlooking these effects and functions of Chinatown, Kim’s and Wong’s readings scant the complexity of Chin’s critical and interventional representations of Chinatown (both people and space). In other words, the deplorable, stultifying, and dying Chinatown community and environment, and the young Chinese Americans’ desire to move away, as portrayed in Chin’s fiction, are the effects of the spatially implemented racial segregation and institutionalized exclusion of the Chinese from American society and culture, rather than signs of “incurable Chineseness.”

I would argue that Chin’s complex, critical, interventional, and problematic representations of the Chinatown space and community can be better understood when his stories collected in *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R. R. Co.* (1988) are read as a cycle and when Chinatown in these stories and in Chin’s novel *Donald Duk* is understood as an embattled ground for the construction of Chinese American identity and subjectivity through the

lens of Homi K. Bhabha's theories on postcolonial discourse. In theorizing strategies for undermining the effects of colonial discourse in identity construction, Bhabha proposes that effective subversion entails a "shift from the *identification* of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (*Location of Culture* 67). A shift away from identifying negative or positive images of Chinatown and Chinese Americans in Chin's fiction can open up more possibilities for understanding the stereotypical images in Chin's portrayals, which seem to reinforce dominant ideologies of normative identities of race and gender.

Chin employs the short story cycle to reclaim "colonized" Chinatown by exposing the impact of racial segregation and stereotypes on the identity construction of Chinatown and its residents and on the subject formation of Chinese Americans. With reoccurring characters and themes, and their intricate connections to one another and to Chinatown, *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R. R. Co.* demonstrates characteristics of the short story cycle, which enable Chin to depict multiple characters and perspectives in the "*processes of subjectification*" within specific sociohistorical and cultural contexts. While the shifting focus on a number of characters in different stories allows multiple subjectivities and different perspectives to emerge, their interconnectedness through four generations of one family reveals the changes in the characters and their relationships, as well as the tensions between competing ideologies that shape the formation of the Chinatown community and Chinese American subjects.

Forrest L. Ingram's observations of the characteristics of the short story cycle can shed light on the effects of Chin's employment of this genre.¹ In his seminal book *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre* (1971), Ingram points out the dynamic, shifting relationship between the parts of a story cycle and its overall pattern, which is unstable, being constantly altered by the unfolding of individual stories. "Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some short story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle moves forward in its typical pattern of recurrent development. Shifting internal relationships, of course, continually alter the originally perceived pattern of the whole cycle" (13). Susan Garland Mann succinctly summarizes this relationship as the essential characteristic of the short story cycle—the "simultaneous self-sufficiency and interdependence" of the individual stories that make up the whole (17, qtd. in Brada-Williams

452). While the self-sufficiency of each story within the cycle contributes to the cycle's capaciousness in representing multiple, conflicting, and even opposing perspectives embodied by a range of characters in different stories within the cycle, the "interdependence" among the stories and between the individual components and the whole cycle renders both the individual stories and the cycle as a whole open-ended. In other words, even though each story in the cycle may be "self-sufficient," the "interdependence" among the stories within the cycle makes it *insufficient* to interpret a single story, or a number of stories, in isolation from the rest, as a complete representation of the whole community being depicted or of the author's position on the issues explored in the story. I contend that reading Chin's collection *The Chinaman* as a cycle can reveal the multiple facets of the Chinatown community and space as a site of competing ideologies for constructing Chinese/American identity and constituting Chinese American subjectivity. This approach can also shed light on the significance of Chinatown as an embattled pedagogical space as portrayed in *Donald Duk*.

RETURNING TO CHINATOWN TO "RAISE THE DEAD"

The Chinaman's opening story, "Railroad Standard Time," is like a manifesto that indicates the purpose of the stories in this collection. It states the author/narrator's position regarding his racial identity; critiques Asian Americans' writings about Chinatown life, which he labels "food pornography"; and declares his return home—Chinatown in Oakland and San Francisco—"to raise the dead" (5). The "dead" in this and other stories within this cycle refers to the grandfather's generation of Chinese Americans and evokes the forgotten Chinese Americans (mostly men) and their history made invisible by the dominant culture of white America, not simply through what Bhabha might call "its regime of 'truth'"—discourses and representations in the official and popular media—but also through assimilation of Chinese Americans as a subordinate "model minority" whose complicity with the racial hierarchy helps perpetuate their stereotypes and subordinate racial position. Hence the narrator's return home to raise the dead is a metaphor for Chin's return to Chinatown to reclaim Chinese American history, culture, and subjectivity. Given that Chin's collection was published in 1988, the narrator's actual and symbolic return to Chinatown seems to reflect the multicultural movement's theme of reclaiming ethnic identities. But rather than simply retrieve what has been lost, Chin's strategies for the reclaiming

are a complex process of simultaneously exposing and critiquing the impact of assimilation on Chinese American subjectivity, while seeking to reinvent Chinese American identity and subjectivity, particularly Chinese American manhood, through interlocking stories.

The narrator, Dirigible, and his family members in “Railroad Standard Time” reappear in the rest of the stories, serving as the connecting points for the characters and reoccurring themes in the other stories within this cycle. “Railroad Standard Time” begins with the adult Dirigible’s memory of receiving his grandfather’s railroad watch from his mother when he was twelve. But when Dirigible asks her “what her father’s name had been,” the mother becomes cold and stiff, unable to answer the question except to say “faintly” in English that it was a “Chinese name” (2). While the watch links the young narrator to an older generation of Chinese Americans and evokes the history of Chinese Americans’ building of the transcontinental railroad in the American West, the moment of bequeathing the “railroad relic / family heirloom” (2) reveals that the link is tenuous, if not completely broken. For second-generation Chinese Americans, such as the narrator’s parents, are the “weak link” as a result of assimilation by the dominant culture of white America and due to the invisibility of Chinese Americans in American history and culture, except as stereotypes of the “model minority” or the “yellow peril.”

Dirigible himself and his parents embody the effects and productivity of the stereotype that Bhabha defines as the “major discursive strategy” of colonialism, “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (*Location of Culture* 66). The narrative by Dirigible about his childhood reveals that American popular culture and racist stereotypes shape his coming-of-age experience in crowded and segregated Chinatown, where cartoons and Hollywood films serve as the residents’ virtual escape from Chinatown and offer illusory access to mainstream American society: “To us a cartoon is a desperate situation. Of the movies, cartoons were the high art of our claustrophobia. They understood us living too close to each other” (“Railroad” 4). For Dirigible and other Chinese Americans, their identity and subjectivity are shaped by their confinement to Chinatown, where, as Dirigible says, “Cartoons were our nursery rhymes.” Cartoons were “school,” serving the pedagogical function of schooling “rows and rows of Chinamans, learning English in a hurry from Daffy Duck” (“Railroad” 4). The day he was told to “stay home from Chinese school one day a week”

to read to his paralyzed father, Wai-mun, and teach him English, Dirigible “stayed away from cartoons” but “went to a matinee in a white neighborhood looking for the MOVIE ABOUT ME and was the only Chinaman in the house” (4). The image he finds of himself in the movie, however, is a typical stereotype of Asians—the sinister foreigner Mr. Moto, played by the Austrian American actor Peter Lorre in Hollywood crime films. In the absence of alternative images of Asian men, and with the repeated representations of Lorre’s popular yellow-face performance as the inscrutable Mr. Moto, Dirigible is interpolated by this stereotype and begins to imitate Lorre: “I liked the way Peter Lorre ran along non-stop routine hysterical. I came back home with Peter Lorre” (4). He even reads Edgar Allan Poe to his father in the voice of Lorre (5). Dirigible’s behavior exposes only a fragment of the effects of stereotypical representations in the dominant media as a means for constituting the assimilated, or rather colonized, Asian American subject. As Dirigible suggests, when Chinese Americans “ate in the dark” of movie theaters and imitated the cartoon characters: “[W]e looked like people singing hymns in church. We learned to talk like everybody in America. . . . We learned to run, to be cheerful losers, to take a sudden pie in the face, talk American with a lot of giggles” (4).

Interpolated and constituted by racist ideologies through repetitive, ubiquitous stereotypes, Chinese Americans like Dirigible become complicit in perpetuating the knowledge of their abject alien Otherness inscribed on the Chinese body and Chinatown space. “I hate my novel about a Chinatown mother like mine dying, now that Ma’s dead,” says Dirigible (3). “I hated after reading *Father and Glorious Descendant, Fifth Chinese Daughter, The House That Tai Ming Built*. Books scribbled up by a sad legion of snobby autobiographical Chinatown saps all on their own. Christians who never heard of each other, hardworking people who sweat out the exact same Chinatown book, the same cunning ‘Confucius says’ joke, just like me” (3).² At once self-deprecating and vengeful, Dirigible’s description of the “Chinatown book” as a mode of “food pornography” simultaneously reiterates and subverts the stereotypes of inscrutable, yet completely knowable, Chinese culture as a pleasurable object of consumption: “Part cookbook, memories of Mother in the kitchen slicing meat paper-thin with a cleaver. Mumbo jumbo about spices and steaming. The secret of Chinatown rice. The hands come down toward the food. The food crawls with culture. The thousand-year-old living Chinese meat makes dinner a safari into the unknown, a blood ritual. Food pornography” (3). Chin’s sarcastic and furious parody of the autobiographi-

cal Chinatown books as food pornography draws critical attention to a mode of model minority narratives, which elide the institutional exclusion of the Chinese and reiterate the myth of assimilation, while producing an Orientalist Chinatown and docile knowledge of the alien Other for pleasurable consumption by white America.

The Chinatown that emerges from food-pornography model minority narratives is a de-historicized, self-contained ethnic space and community. In discussing a mode of self-Orientalizing writings by Asian Americans, S. C. Wong offers provocative insights in her analyses of the characteristics of food pornography as practices that make “a living by exploiting the ‘exotic’ aspects of one’s ethnic foodways” (*Reading* 55). As Wong contends: “In cultural terms it [food pornography] translates to reifying perceived cultural differences and exaggerating one’s otherness in order to gain a foothold in a white-dominated social system.” Lured by “treats”—“they will become more like whites”—American-born Asian “food pornographers seem to take pride in their apartness from the mainstream.” “They seem to be acknowledging and proclaiming, not playing down, their difference. Nevertheless, what they in fact do is to wrench cultural practices out of their context and display them for gain to the curious gaze of ‘outsiders’” (*Reading* 55–56). Moreover, a problematic generational gap created apparently by *cultural difference* between immigrant parents and American-born children is embedded in the food-pornography narratives: “If immigrants tend to assimilate ‘foreign matter’ into their own systems and the American-born tend to assimilate to mainstream norms, conceding their own ‘foreignness,’ food pornographers (of whatever nativity) are the ones who capitalize on their ‘foreignness,’” which is “selective and staged, ingratiating rather than threatening.” Thus Asian immigrants’ apparently unassimilable “foreignness” is “domesticated, ‘detoxed,’ depoliticized, made safe for recreational consumption” (*Reading* 56).

Racialized social power relations and subject positions underlie this mode of food-pornography writings about Chinatown life, which Chin denounces. In his parodic critique of the self-detrimental effect of writings by food pornographers, Chin emphasizes the coerced complicity of Asian Americans, as suggested by his ironic metaphor of insects flying to light: “We always come to fake art and write the Chinatown book like bugs come to fly in the light. I hate my book now that ma’s dead, but I’ll keep it. I know she’s not the woman I wrote up like my mother, and dead, in a book that was like everybody else’s Chinatown book. Part word map of Chinatown San Francisco,

shop to shop down Grant Avenue. Food again” (3). Chin situates this mode of Chinatown literature in the context of the impact of racist stereotypes produced by Hollywood films on the Chinatown community and Chinese American authors. He interlaces the pedagogical function of Hollywood films for identity construction and subject formation with the characteristics of food-pornography Chinatown books. For instance, in juxtaposition to his memories of watching Hollywood films as a major pastime of his education, and reading Poe to his father in the voice of Lorre, Dirigible observes: “The old men in the Chinatown books are all fixtures for Chinese ceremonies. All the same. Loyal filial children kowtow to the old and whiff food laid out for the dead. The dead eat the same as the living but without the sauces. White food” (5). While the older generation of Chinese Americans seems to remain hopelessly “foreign” as depicted in food-pornography Chinatown books, Dirigible and his parents’ generation have internalized racist stereotypes. “My mother and aunts said nothing about the men of the family except they were weak” (5).

Chinatown books as food pornography, then, are productive effects of stereotypes, a mode of narratives that Palumbo-Liu might call “model minority discourse” that is at once symptomatic and constitutive of the model minority subject and “a specific model of assimilation” (*Asian/American* 398, 397). Palumbo-Liu’s perspective on the relationship between model minority narratives and the subject formation, particularly the logic, functions, and effects of model minority narratives, as I referred to in chapter 2 on *Chinatown Family*, can shed light on Chin’s Chinatown stories. Eliding the structural inequality and institutionalized exclusion of the Chinese from equal participation in American society is precisely one of the problematic characteristics of food-pornography Chinatown books, which Chin parodies and critiques in his Chinatown stories. Moreover, Chin’s stories also seek to reclaim, reimagine, and reinvent Chinese American culture and subject by inhabiting Chinatown otherwise than as a self-enclosed foreign society, a spectacle for tourists, or a segregated ethnic ghetto.

Returning to Chinatown “to raise the dead”—the erased, repressed, Orientalized Chinese American history, culture, and subjectivity—is a central component of Chin’s project of reclaiming Chinatown. The adult Dirigible’s reference to his journalist report on “race riots” in Seattle before he gets on the road to California alludes to the Civil Rights Movement and provides a larger social context for the narrator’s return to what he refers to as “my Chinatown in Oakland and Frisco, to raise the dead” (5). Countering the

“domesticated, ‘detoxed,’ depoliticized” food-pornography narratives made “safe” for pleasurable consumption by white America, Dirigible’s rhetoric is deliberately outrageous and flagrant: “Ride with me, Grandfather, this is your grandson the ragmouth, called Tampax, the burned scarred boy, called Barbecue” (5). As with the motif of Grandfather’s railroad watch, Dirigible evokes Chinese American history omitted in food-pornography Chinatown books and links Chinatown to the building of the transcontinental railroad in the nineteenth century, by noting that as he drives past “what’s left of Oakland’s dark wooden Chinatown,” the streets run “parallel all the time in line with the tracks of the Western Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads” (7). By juxtaposing Chinatown streets with the tracks of railroads, the narrator indicates that Chinatown is part of the historical formation of the United States. As Chin states in his 1972 essay “Confessions of the Chinatown Cowboy”: “The railroads created a detention camp and called it ‘Chinatown.’ These details of that creation have been conveniently forgotten or euphemized into a state of sweet confusion. The men who lived through the creation are dying out, unheard and ignored. When they die, no one will know it was not us that created a game preserve for Chinese and called it ‘Chinatown’” (60). Chinatown in Chin’s writings, then, is an embattled site where the resistance, intervention, and reconstruction of Chinese American culture and subject are enacted.³ Thus “Railroad Standard Time,” as the collection’s opening story, provides the context, purpose, and overarching themes for the stories within this cycle.

While continuing to reiterate the themes of returning to Chinatown to “raise the dead,” the cycle’s second story, “The Eat and Run Midnight People,” articulates the rebirth of a masculine Chinese American subject as embodied by the rebellious “Chinamen” on the move with ravenous appetites and hyper-heterosexual potency. At the same time, the story gestures toward an alternative mode of self-representation to that of Chinatown food pornography. However, Chin’s belligerent rhetoric of masculine prowess and male domination undermines what he seeks to subvert. Critics such as Eileen Chia-Ching Fung and Wenying Xu rightly point out that Chin constructs an aggressive masculinity in terms of insatiable hunger and food consumption that parallel normative heterosexual appetite and potency in “The Eat and Run Midnight People.”⁴ Fung contends that in this story “food becomes a discourse of masculine culture which reinscribes male aggression and domination” (266). Further developing Fung’s critique of Chin’s assertion of masculinity in terms of “gustatory prowess” and “aggressive potency,” Xu

argues that “Chin transcodes the cowboy ethos of guns, horses, and solitude to bizarre food matters, bottomless stomachs, and indiscriminate appetite, and he encodes this new Asian American masculinity with a mighty power residing within the physiology of its male body rather than in weaponry” (55, 54). Moreover, while noting the limits of Chin’s strategy for “challenging the hegemonic codes of masculinity,” Xu recognizes that “Chin’s transcoding of masculine prowess via food and appetite nevertheless subverts the white masculinity in its self-deprecating and ironic tones” (55, 54–55). Wong’s reading of this story provides another critical perspective on Chin’s allusion to mobility on the train and to normative masculinity as embodied by the white Lone Ranger in Hollywood western films. In her discussion of “the politics of mobility” in canonical American and Asian American literature, Wong observes: “It remains for Frank Chin to bring out the intoxicatingly destructive aspects of mechanized locomotion, the sexual violence implied in the male imagery of continental penetration, and the intense contradictions involved in creating a Chinese American mobility myth around the symbol of the railroad” (*Reading* 146). Eng further notes that “Chin’s failure to consider how heterosexuality and whiteness work in unison to limit Chinese American male subjectivity replaces one patriarchal lineage with another” (*Racial Castration* 98).

Building on the aforementioned critical perspectives, I seek to explore the possibilities of an alternative approach in part by examining what has been overlooked in those readings of the story. Following “Railroad Standard Time,” “The Eat and Run Midnight People” reads like a second part of the “manifesto” stated in the opening story. It picks up the motif of going home to Chinatown to reclaim Chinese American history and identity, as the narrator asserts: “Ride with me, Grandfather. Going home, Grandfather, highballing the gate down straight rail to Oakland” (“Eat and Run” 8). This symbolic movement back home to Chinatown, though it fortifies the conventional patriarchal lineage, asserts a reversed subject position in opposition to the flight of a younger generation of Chinese Americans from Chinatown, such as that of Dirigible’s father and the adult Dirigible as referred to in other stories within this cycle.

Speaking as the “first Chinaman to brake on the Southern Pacific line” to “Grandfather,” the narrator evokes both the history of Chinese labor in building the transcontinental railroad and its elision. The history of the exploitation of racialized labor and the subjugation of Chinese Americans is rendered absent in Hollywood films and invisible in food-pornography

Chinatown autobiographies (“Eat and Run” 15). Against these erasures, the narrator alludes to the history of legalized Chinese exclusion through images of lonely old men and through references to the rarity of children and mothers: “[C]hildren, you’ll hear laughter like distant dynamite rollicking in our iron lungs, blink like sleepy dogs whose fur old men lose their fingers in, and hear us coming from way back then, when there were rare children in the town and the few mothers crooned the few fathers home out of the mountains where they slept giving rocks, snow and iron a Chinaman soul. . . . Listen, children. Ride with me, Grandfather” (“Eat and Run” 9). By assuming the position of a father in sharp contrast to his own mute, paralyzed father, Dirigible fills the gap between Grandfather and grandchildren and recovers the mother’s lost memory of her father. This father figure is bringing Grandfather home to Chinatown, and he promises him: “I will sing of us to your great-grandchildren, write them home of how fathers come passing through now and then, ghostly giants roaring iron on the mainline past their backyard” (“Eat and Run” 8). Serving as a bridge between grandfathers and their grand- and great-grandchildren, this father seeks to reclaim Chinese American history and male subjectivity through songs and words, albeit reiterating patriarchal masculinity.

While the narrator’s, or rather Chin’s, singing of “Chinamen” is deliberately rancorous in asserting a normative masculinity in terms of a voracious appetite and an aggressive heterosexual prowess, it suggests a counter-narrative to Orientalist discourse of Chinatown food pornography. “I won’t be likable anymore,” states the narrator in the opening story. “I hate my novel about a Chinatown mother like mine dying” (“Railroad” 3). By comparing the Chinese Americans in the story with the rebels in the Chinese classic *Water Margin*, also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Chin sets them apart from assimilated “hardworking” “Christians” who “sweat out the exact same Chinatown book, the same cunning ‘Confucius says’ joke,” and the “[m]umbo jumbo about spices and steaming” and the “secret of Chinatown rice” (“Railroad” 3). Moreover, this identification with the outlaws in China also suggests a deliberate rejection of the outlaws of rugged American individualism as embodied by the white Lone Ranger and cowboys in Hollywood western films. As Chin’s pugnacious and combative rhetoric on being “Chinamen” who are “the badasses of China” suggests: “[B]eing a Chinaman’s okay if you love having been outlaw-born and raised to eat and run in your mother country like a virus staying a step ahead of a cure and can live that way, fine. And that is us! Eat and run midnight people, outward

bound. Chinaman from the Cantonese, yeah, I tell her, we were the badasses of China, the barbarians. . . . Rebel yellers and hardcore cooks” (“Eat and Run” 11). Chin’s association of a group of hungry Cantonese outlaw rebels with “hardcore cooks” who dispense with fancy culinary practices suggests a departure from the masculine individualist outlaws in the American West and signals a strategy of intervention through parody and difference that disrupts the reproduction of racial, ethnic stereotypes by the dominant media and food-pornography Chinatown books.

A shift of subject position is implied in the relationship between Chin’s devouring rebel “hardcore cooks” and what they consume: “We eat toejam, bugs, leaves, seeds, birds, bird nests, treebark, trunks, fungus, rot, roots, and smut” (“Eat and Run” 11). This unsettling hunger and ferocious capacity for devouring anything edible simultaneously evokes and undermines the self-Orientalization of food pornographers, whose cultural difference, as Wong has noted, “is highly selective and staged, ingratiating rather than threatening” (*Reading* 56). Parallel to the uncontainable, dangerous, “virus”-like “eat and run” Chinamen, what those outlaw Chinamen eat refuses to be just another version of “detoxed,” “domesticated,” safe Oriental cuisine, or rather “ethnic culture” for pleasurable consumption by white America. From this perspective, Chin’s sarcastic reiteration that “[o]ur culture is our cuisine” could be interpreted as what Anita Mannur calls “a way to undermine the racialized ideologies that culinary discourse is so often seen to buttress” (7). Moreover, the limitations of Chin’s masculine rhetoric indicate that dismantling racial stereotypes constructed in culinary terms entails reconstructing subjugated Chinese American subjectivity.⁵

Thus reclaiming Chinese American subjectivity is a central component of the narrator’s return to Chinatown to raise the dead. However, the reclaiming in the following stories is simultaneously a process of demonstrating what is lost to the Chinatown community and what is dead and dying in Chinatown as a result of the racial exclusion, social segregation, and cultural assimilation of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. It is precisely by confronting the effects of institutional racism that Chin enacts his return to Chinatown to “raise the dead.” The stories in the cycle demonstrate that “raising the dead” in Chinatown entails confronting the impact of cultural assimilation and spatially implemented and maintained racial positions, as well as normative American identity. Take, for example, the fourth story in the cycle, “The Only Real Day,” which shows the changing environment of Chinatown as a result of the assimilative transformation of Chinese aliens to Chinese Americans in

the post–World War II era. It represents San Francisco’s Chinatown as home, where Yuen, who “still felt uncomfortable, without allies in the streets” of Oakland even after living there for twenty years, can feel a sense of belonging and have a social life on his day off—“the only real day”—from his job as a dishwasher at a restaurant owned by Dirigible’s parents (“Only Real Day” 65). San Francisco’s Chinatown is a refuge for Yuen. There he can spend time with friends, stroll the streets at ease, and sit in Portsmouth Square to read newspapers without being made to feel like an oddity as in other public spaces outside of Chinatown, even though the square at the edge of Chinatown is inscribed with white privilege—“a bronze plaque marking the location of the birth of the first white child in San Francisco”—which highlights the deprivation of Chinese “bachelors” like Yuen as a result of Chinese exclusionary laws (52). Still, Chinatown is where Yuen can feel at home. Once a week, he boards the train from Oakland to San Francisco and braces himself against the alienating atmosphere of the stares and snickering of the conductor and the other passengers, by gathering himself “into his own arms and lean[ing] back into his seat to think about the room in San Francisco” (44). The “room” in San Francisco’s Chinatown is a fish store, where Yuen and his bachelor friends gather to play mah-jongg. Surrounded by friends in this enclosed tiny multifunctional space, they talk loudly, “shouting when they laughed, throwing the sound of their voices loud against the spongy atmosphere of fish pumps and warm-water aquariums.” “Yuen enjoyed the room when it was loud and blunt” (42). This is the social life for Yuen and his fellow bachelors who are deprived of a family life and access to the larger society by the U.S. exclusionary laws and racial segregation.

However, despite the warm, relaxed atmosphere, the group’s conversation topics reveal their sadness, their abject status, and a growing estrangement from other Chinese Americans like Dirigible’s parents and Jimmy Chan, who are eagerly assimilated to white America as members of a subordinate model minority and who serve to sustain racial hierarchy in their practices and desires. Jimmy, for instance, “goes out with *lo fan* women . . . blonde ones with blue eyelids too” (43). But that is as close as he can get to white America. Even though Jimmy can date white women because of his money, he “can’t make himself white!” says Huie, one of Yuen’s bachelor friends (46). Unlike Jimmy, Yuen does not “even like talking to” white women, or speaking “their language,” for as he knows, “They don’t think I’m anything anyway.” Of the white waitresses working in the same restaurant where he works, Yuen says, “They change their clothes and smoke in their slippers right

outside my door in the hallway, and don't care I live there" (42–43). While both Hui'e's and Yuen's remarks reveal that Jimmy's relationship with white women is an illusory access to white America, Jimmy believes he must do whatever he can to become a naturalized citizen even if that means refusing to help other Chinese like Yuen and acting like a "professional Chinese"—an assimilated model minority, whose Otherness is "domesticated" through cultural assimilation, a required condition for citizenship (69). As Jimmy tells Yuen: "You could have avoided all your trouble if you had realized that the *lo fan* like the Chinese as novelties. Toys. Look at me. I eat, dress, act, and talk like a fool. I smell like rotten flower shop. And the *lo fan* can't get into my restaurant fast enough. They all call me Jimmy. I'm becoming an American citizen, not because I want to be like them, but because it's good business" (69). Cultural assimilation operates like model minority narratives by placing upward mobility and eligibility for U.S. citizenship in the minority subject's "capacity" for complying with the dominant norms, thus eliding the institutionalized structural inequality between white Americans and Chinese "aliens."

Jimmy's attitude, behavior, and relationship with other Chinese immigrants in Chinatown reveal the coercive effects of state power, suggesting that U.S. citizenship has the functions of dividing the Chinese American community and disciplining Chinese "aliens" into national subjects who acquiesce to the existing social relations shaped by racial hierarchy. In fact, Jimmy—a "professional Chinese" and naturalized U.S.-citizen-to-be—reflects the profound changes taking place in Chinatown as a result of the repeal of the exclusionary laws in 1943 and due to the post–World War II cultural assimilation of the Chinese promoted by the state and the dominant media, as well as to Cold War politics.⁶ Chin reveals these changes in Chinatown, including the division that the U.S. government's policies created between Yuen's generation of working-class immigrants barred by law from U.S. citizenship and a younger generation of Chinese Americans like Jimmy. When one of Yuen's bachelor friends, Hui'e's brother, receives a letter from "American Immigration," he takes it to Jimmy, "who reads government stuff well," and Jimmy tells him that "the Immigration wanted to know how he came into the country and wanted to know if he was sending money to Communists or not" (48). But the brother's papers were burned during the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco. Rather than offer any help or sympathy, Jimmy laughs at him and says that "there was nothing he could do" and that Hui'e's brother "would have to wait and see if he would be sent back to China

or not” (49). Driven to despair and as a gesture of protest, Hui’s brother commits suicide. So, too, does Yuen after he receives a similar letter from the government and is refused help by Jimmy, who says that Yuen is “just another Chinaman that’s all Chinese and in trouble” and that helping Chinese like Yuen will jeopardize his chance of becoming a “citizen” (69). Thus citizenship as a technique of state power in regulating and disciplining national subjects also works to divide the racialized Chinatown community into “aliens” and hyphenated Americans, who are almost, but not quite, American like whites.

This division simultaneously reveals the continuing impact that Chinese exclusionary laws and the new “witch hunt” for Communists has on working-class immigrants like Yuen and exposes the insecure and subordinate citizen status of Chinese Americans. Chin highlights the vulnerability and coerced complicity of assimilated Chinese Americans through Jimmy’s response to Yuen’s request for help and advice. “I can’t help with letters from the government,” says Jimmy to Yuen, who asks him to write a letter to the government on his behalf to say that he is “all right” (69). “I can’t tamper with the government. I’m going to be naturalized next year” (67). Besides, he warns Yuen: “You can’t hide from them. They even have Chinese working for them, so you can’t hide” (68). Even though Jimmy realizes that nowadays “the only Chinese that get ahead are those who are professional Christian Chinese,” or those who “cater to that palate,” and despite his having become one of those Chinese, his status is still insecure. To protect his own chance at becoming an American citizen, he has to refuse to help other Chinese like Yuen: “But helping you would be bad for me. So I write a letter for you. I get investigated, and then I get a letter. I don’t want to be investigated. I want to become a citizen next year” (69). While “professional Chinese” like Jimmy are apparently getting ahead in their social status as assimilated Chinese Americans, “Chinamen” like Yuen and his bachelor friends remain “aliens” and are becoming isolated even in Chinatown. As Dirigible’s mother, Rose, warns Yuen when he tells her he will go to Chinatown to ask Jimmy for help: “Chinatown’s not like that anymore. You can’t hide there like you used to. Everything’s orderly and businesslike now” (62). Nevertheless, Yuen counters Rose’s perspective, saying: “How do you know Chinatown? . . . I know Chinatown. Not everybody talks about the Chinese like the *lo fan* and you” (62). For Yuen and his generation of Chinese immigrants, San Francisco’s Chinatown is home and a center of Chinese culture. However, both the Chinatown space and community are changing as Chinatown is becoming a popular tourist spot and Chinese Americans like Jimmy are distancing

themselves from “Chinamen” like Yuen in their yearning to be white and to be accepted by white America. Subsequently, members of the younger generation of Chinese Americans like Dirigible are deprived of Chinese culture. Hence Chinatown in this story is portrayed prominently as an embattled site for the constitution of Chinese American subjects.

Against this background, the friendship between Yuen and Dirigible in the story is especially significant. It offers a glimpse of hope for an alternative mode of becoming Chinese American, which resists assimilation to the dominant norms of white America. Furthermore, the interactions between Yuen, the lonely, aging bachelor, and the boy Dirigible, who can hardly speak Cantonese and often repeats his mother’s words that “Yuen had no right,” highlight the continuing impact of the institutional exclusion of the Chinese and the hegemonic effect of racial hierarchy. Unable to bring his family to live with him because of exclusionary laws and the exploitation of racialized labor, Yuen has been living like a bachelor in the United States. While waiting in Hong Kong for decades for Yuen to bring them to the United States, Yuen’s wife passes away and their son, whom Yuen has not seen for more than twenty years, becomes a stranger to him. Although Dirigible’s attachment to him is particularly comforting to Yuen, it also reminds him of his absent family. For Dirigible, Yuen is like a grandfather, playing the father role that Dirigible’s father neglects and is unable to fulfill, being paralyzed and obsessed with white America and longing to “play a Japanese general or Chinese sissy sidekick who dies in the movies ever again” in Hollywood films (57). Dirigible spends much time with Yuen, who lives upstairs in the same building of his family’s restaurant and residence. He walks Yuen to the train station once a week when Yuen goes to San Francisco to spend his day off. The most meaningful time Dirigible spends with Yuen is when Yuen takes him to San Francisco’s Chinatown, buys him Chinese comic books, and introduces him to “the tale of the 108 outlaw heroes of legendary Leongsahn Marsh”—rebels against an oppressive and corrupt government—and their code of honorable conduct (66). In the Chinatown streets, next to “*lo fan* white tourists with bright neckties and cameras pointing into windows and playing with bamboo flutes or toy dragons inside the curio shops,” Yuen shows Dirigible a different Chinese culture that operates as a counter-discourse for constructing Chinese American identity and subjectivity (66). A community to which Yuen feels a sense of belonging also emerges from their walk down the streets and alleys of Chinatown. As they pass by the old buildings, Yuen points at places and tells Dirigible what community

organizations used to be there and where music could be heard at night. When they walk by men sitting next to magazine stands, Yuen shakes hands with them (70). But this is Yuen's last visit to Chinatown before his suicide. And the Chinatown community that Yuen knows seems to be on the verge of disappearing as Yuen's generation dies out, as members of Jimmy Chan's generation become "professional Chinese," and as Dirigible's generation is alienated from Chinese language and culture, ignorant of their grandfathers' experience and Chinese American history.

Within this context, Yuen's death signifies another effect of the institutionalized racism disavowed by model minority narratives. Like the experience of the "paper son" Leon and other working-class Chinese Americans in San Francisco's Chinatown as portrayed in *Bone*, Yuen's life and death contravene what Eng calls "a dominant version of U.S. national history that denies a legacy of institutionalized racism and uneven processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialization even as it constitutes the nation-state as a political sphere of abstract equality and an economic bastion of equal opportunity" (*Racial Castration* 180). In his provocative analysis of Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), a novel about the "bachelor society" in New York City's Chinatown, Eng argues that Ben Loy's "hysterical impotence" is symptomatic of the racial segregation of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans (*Racial Castration* 180). The paralysis of Dirigible's father in Chin's story can be considered another hysterical symptom of the effects of racism, which incapacitates Wai-mun as a husband and father. Yuen's death highlights the subsequent absence of Chinese American role models for Dirigible's generation. Dirigible's paralyzed father epitomizes the lack of such role models. Even though Wai-mun has become mute and paralyzed from the neck down, he is still obsessed with white women and longs to play the role of evil and subordinate Asians in Hollywood films ("Only Real Day" 57). Dirigible in this story is about nine or ten years old and has become attached to Yuen. Hence Yuen's suicide for Dirigible means that he "had given up the boy also." Dirigible's tears are "not all for Yuen, but for himself, because Yuen had been his" (78). Dirigible has lost Yuen because Yuen is outlawed by the U.S. government, isolated in Chinatown, and estranged from assimilated "professional Chinese."

The absence of the father figure—the male role model, the embodiment of authority, guidance, and the integrity of the normative family or community—reoccurs in the rest of the stories within the cycle. The significance of the absent or disabled and emasculated father in Chin's stories can be

better understood in the contexts of both patriarchy and racial hierarchy. E. H. Kim, in her insightful discussions of Chin's short stories and his play *Chickencoop Chinaman*, observes that "Chin's young male protagonists must leave Chinatown because there are no examples of 'manhood' there for them to follow" (*Asian American Literature* 186). This situation is certainly true, as Chin indicates in story after story. Yet it is not just the lack of exemplary "manhood" but also the stagnant life resulting from limited opportunities and the spatially maintained cultural exclusion and social marginalization of the Chinatown community that drives Chinese American young men like Dirigible to leave Chinatown. Dirigible's eventual "flight" from Chinatown, like the deaths in Chinatown as depicted in the stories within this cycle, is part of the impact of the racial segregation and cultural assimilation of Chinese Americans.

CHINATOWN AS A COLONIZED SPACE

Chin foregrounds the correlation between the lack of male role models and the "colonization" of Chinatown through Dirigible's observation of the Chinese New Year parade in the sixth short story, "Give the Enemy Sweet Sissies and Women to Infatuate Him, and Jades and Silks to Blind Him with Greed." Set in the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown, this story at once highlights and critiques the reduction of Chinatown—both its people and their culture—to a spectacle for the white gaze by the complicity of assimilated Chinese Americans. Moving back and forth between the spectacle and the spectators, Chin portrays the New Year's celebration from two opposing perspectives—that of white Americans as embodied by Mrs. Hasman, whom the adult Dirigible is dating, and that of Dirigible as a critical participant-spectator, who offers a counterpoint to Mrs. Hasman's perspective. Chin interlaces the dialogues between Mrs. Hasman and Dirigible with Dirigible's interior monologues and observations of the Chinese New Year parade in such a way so as to reveal the correlation between the objectification of Chinese culture for pleasurable consumption by white America and the symbolic death of the father figure in Chinatown.

The dialogue between Mrs. Hasman, who used to be Dirigible's grade school teacher, and the adult Dirigible takes place in the midst of the "grand spectacle of the New Year's celebration" in the rain ("Give the Enemy" 92–93). As the dialogue continues, Mrs. Hasman's voice grows increasingly disembodied as it becomes more typical of the condescending, Oriental-

izing voice of white authority and superiority, whose impact on Chinese Americans like Dirigible's father is embedded in the increasingly intertwined voices, including the narrator's, and their respective perspectives:

"Do you like that?" she asked. "I love it."

"I don't like crowds!" he shouted.

"Why? They're so happy! What do you have against them?"

"Nothing! I don't have anything against them. They're just stupid. They don't look happy. How do you know they're happy?"

"They wouldn't be out here in the rain if they weren't happy, silly!" . . .

He did and didn't tell her his father had been paralyzed from the neck down since he was nine and he read the news to the man for a half-hour every evening, for years, until he recovered and fulfilled his ambition of playing evil Jap generals and Chinese who die and seeing Tempest Storm strip live.

"You know the Chinese, I've heard, have a way of being alone, you know, uncrowded, I mean, oblivious, you know? . . ." The only Chinaman to crave the part of Charlie Chan's Number One Son. Now he seems about to get it. He's off in Hollywood, a chosen ageless Oriental and might as well be dead and gone to Heaven, for all he is to his Chinatown home. Dear old Dad. (93)

Apart from using Dirigible's responses to challenge Mrs. Hasman's assumptions about Chinese Americans, who seem to be transparent to the knowing white subject's gaze, Chin employs interior monologues by Dirigible to link the "racist love" embedded in Mrs. Hasman's remarks to the racial stereotypes of the assimilated subordinate "model minority" produced by Hollywood and their impact on Chinese Americans like Dirigible's father, who "might as well be dead" "to his Chinatown home," as Dirigible says to himself (93). Chin tactfully juxtaposes the epitome of the assimilated subordinate "model minority"—Charlie Chan and his sons—and its interpolative impact on Dirigible's father, with Mrs. Hasman's seemingly harmless love of the Chinatown spectacle just like "flowers and grass in a field" (93).

In contrast to Mrs. Hasman's enjoyment of the display of Chinese culture in the street, Dirigible feels deprived of agency and silenced by the crowd: "Shouts were drawn out of his mouth, shouts and sounds and expressions on his face were drawn out of him" (94). Chin describes this impact on Dirigible in spatial terms: "He felt himself being invaded, ransacked, and looted" (94). In so doing, Chin draws the reader's attention to Dirigible's identification of himself with the Chinatown community and space, while

suggesting a correlation between the “colonization” of the Chinese American subject and the spectacle of Chinatown, whose celebration of the Chinese New Year has become “colorfully meaningless sensations” (94). As a result, Dirigible becomes invisible to the people in the street, who are there to see the spectacle. As S. C. Wong notes in her discussion of the different meanings of Chinatown: “The gaze of cultural voyeurs effectively ‘disappears’ the people: every Chinese in its sights is reduced to a specimen of Otherness devoid of individuality and interiority” (“Ethnic Subject” 253).

But Dirigible himself is like a *flâneur*, observing the crowd, assuming a critical distance between himself and the crowd:

The people rushing past him down the slight hill toward the undulating swarm of old ladies in black coats, of tourists and children with white faces chilled to jello—he saw them too, not looking at him—rushing crippled by the mud to mass on the fringes of the parade route and glint green and blue and red out of their wet clothes like bluebottle flies and crickets quietly buzzing a delicate insect violence over sweets made him, in his stillness, feel invisible. . . . The faces weren’t seeing him with meaningful eyes as they looked at him. (95)

The spectators of the Chinese New Year’s celebration parade themselves become a spectacle from the perspective of the “invisible” Dirigible. By comparing the clusters of spectators following the parade to “bluebottle flies and crickets quietly buzzing a delicate insect violence over sweets,” Dirigible exposes and critiques the objectifying consuming pleasure of the largely white tourists in gazing upon the parade.

The critical gaze of Dirigible and his racial identity mark his fundamental difference from the middle-class European or white American *flâneur*. According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* “not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but can very well possess itself of abstract knowledge . . . as something experienced and lived through.” “This felt knowledge” in the streets, however, does nothing other than “forming a backdrop to the dreaming idler” (*Arcades Project* 399). Underlying this individualized “felt knowledge” of the *flâneur*’s pleasurable intoxication in street scenes is the affirmation of the privilege of the middle-class male as the subject of knowledge, desire, and experience. Bridge and Watson have noted the gendered and classed privilege embedded in the invisibility and spectatorship of the *flâneur*. As the “iconic figure of male bourgeois identity in public,” the *flâneur* “is able to move through the city, observing the diversity of the city without

having to connect to it” and without being touched “by the events that he witnessed” (Bridge and Watson, introduction 339). Being a “Chinaman,” as Mrs. Hasman jokingly calls him (103), Dirigible cannot assume the detachment of the white middle-class *flâneur*. His invisibility to and violation by the gawking crowd are largely the result of the objectification of Chinese Americans and their culture by the tourists’ gaze. Being part of this “overplayed” Chinatown, Dirigible—Mrs. Hasman’s “Chinaman’s chance,” as she refers to him—feels like the white woman’s “precious toy” (96, 95). But he himself willingly complies with his role in maintaining an unequal interracial relationship as a “professional Chinese,” as his father and Jimmy Chan do.

Thus, despite the adult Dirigible’s impassioned claim to return to Chinatown to “raise the dead,” the dead—Chinese Americans like Grandfather and Yuen and his bachelor friends—remain obsolete and Chinatown life stagnant as depicted in this and other stories such as “A Chinese Lady Dies” and “Yes, Young Daddy” included in this cycle. It seems that for Dirigible, or rather Chin, to “raise the dead” in Chinatown he must expose the actual and symbolic death of Chinatown resulting from what Bhabha calls “the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (*Location of Culture* 67). The eighth and last story, “The Sons of Chan,” indicates the difficulty, if not impossibility, for assimilated “professional” Chinese Americans like Dirigible’s father to reclaim “colonized” Chinatown. Narrated in the voice of Dirigible’s father as the Number One Son of Charlie Chan, the story evokes the history of Earl Derr Biggers’s creation of the popular detective character after he “read about a Chinese detective named Chang Apana” in Hawaii (132).⁷ Chin situates the construction of Charlie Chan as the embodiment of assimilated Chinese Americans in the context of American missionaries’ colonizing effects in Hawaii, which becomes “Chinatown on a large scale” where “every colored boy and girl danced to the whiteman’s crazy tune, sang his songs, talked his language, did his work, believed in his God” (132). The white man’s creation of a “Chinaman”—“a son, in almost His image”—led to the “death” of “Chinamen” as shown by the younger generation of Chinese Americans having “forsaken” their “Chinaman fathers for white,” says Charlie Chan’s Number One Son (134).

Apart from the effect of constituting assimilated Chinese American subjectivity, the image of the amiable family man Charlie Chan, lieutenant of detectives of the Honolulu Police Department, “father of eleven children, husband of one wife,” disavows the institutionalized racial exclusion of the

Chinese. As the narrator suggests: "In the twenties when Charlie Chan came into being, the Chinese in American pop culture was a sex joke. America was laughing off her fears of Chinese reproduction in America in energetic song and dance. . . . By 1923 the laws made America proof against Chinese women and Chinese reproduction. No Chinese woman could enter the country legally. No American-born Chinaman woman could marry a man from China without fear of losing her American citizenship and immediate deportation" (135–36). These references to the U.S. exclusionary laws against the Chinese undermine the myth of Chinese Americans' assimilation as embodied by Charlie Chan and provide a historical context for the actual and symbolic deaths in Chinatown: "Our men began to die. They died fast and heavy through the forties. I heard them go. With the national average of around thirty Chinamans [*sic*] for every yellow woman . . . that was a lot of death. A lot of loneliness. A lot of grief. A lot of walkin in the streets in year-round rain-or-shine funerals" (136). Chin reinscribes the Chinatown streets with memories and histories effaced by decorations and "meaningless colorful sensations" of the Chinese New Year's celebration for tourists and erased by food-pornography Chinatown books. Thus to evoke the dead, to acknowledge the deaths in Chinatown resulting from racial exclusion and segregation as well as cultural assimilation, is in a way to "raise the dead."

Yet the impact of the dominant culture on Chinese American subjectivity still looms large in this last story of the cycle. Although the narrator vows to be "a hero of [his] people," to end the "living nightmare of being Charlie Chan's Number One Son" by killing Charlie Chan, he is obsessed with Tempest Storm, a white American stripper and burlesque star, and chases after her all the way to Las Vegas in the hope of kissing her in her dressing room (34). At the same time, Charlie Chan's sons multiply from the forty-four *Charlie Chan* Hollywood films in American media, as embodied by Keye Luke, who later plays "a blind Chinese priest on TV" in the series *Kung Fu*; Victor Sen Yung, later "a Chinese cook making people laugh on TV" as Hop Sing in *Bonanza*; and Benson Fong, who "owns a chain of sweet'n'sour joints in Los Angeles and gets killed on TV" (157, 158, 159). In the end, Charlie Chan's Number One Son could not but fail in his conflicting desires to immolate the archetype of the subordinate model minority Charlie Chan and to be recognized and accepted by a white erotic cultural icon, Tempest Storm, in Las Vegas: "I have nothing but failure to report from Las Vegas. Charlie Chan's Number One Son remembers a lot of failure. I am a legendary failure in America" (165). As in the other stories within this cycle, the narra-

tor's intention to reclaim Chinatown remains wishful thinking and becomes a prolonged battle cry, as suggested by his conversation with an old friend he runs into in Las Vegas: "We are the Secret Sons of Charlie Chan hunting our father down, the society of assassins known as the Midnight Friends of Justice, known for the holiness of the death we bring, for ours is a happy holy war to the last Charlie Chan" (141). Trapped in their subjugated subjectivity as assimilated Chinese Americans subordinate to white America and complicit in maintaining the existing racial hierarchy, the narrator and other Charlie Chan "sons" fail to "hunt" their "father down." With their epitomic stereotype at large, and their remaining its "products," the "sons of Chan" still have to "kill" their father created in the image of the white man, before their "legendary" "return to Chinatown" can be materialized.

The failure of Charlie Chan's Number One Son suggests that the "battle" over Chinatown must begin with Chinese Americans' "colonized" subjectivity. In other words, to reclaim Chinatown, Chin must reimagine the Chinese American beyond the binary of the colonizer versus the colonized and beyond the patriarchal norms of masculine domination in terms of heterosexual prowess. Embedded in Chin's impasse in returning to Chinatown to "raise the dead" is a mutually constitutive relationship between space and subject. If space is not simply a passive outcome of social relations but rather instrumental in shaping social relations and constituting subjects, Chinatown must be reimaged and reinvented otherwise than as a segregated ethnic ghetto or a commoditized spectacle so that a new Chinese American subjectivity can emerge.

But as an interlinked cycle the eight stories of *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R. R. Co.*, though each has its major characters and thematic concerns, are bound by Dirigible's overarching project of returning to Chinatown to "raise the dead" and to counter food-pornography Chinatown books. Rocío G. Davis's contention about the generic attributes of Asian American short story cycles can shed light on both the potentials and limits of what Frank Chin seeks to achieve in his short story cycle. In her study *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short-Story Cycles* (2001), Davis argues that the structural characteristics of the short story cycle make this genre "an especially pertinent vehicle for the distinctive characteristics of ethnic fiction in general." The cycle's structural capacity for the paradoxical relationship between "cohesion and fragmentation" makes it possible for writers to explore "the unique cultural identity experienced individually and shared by a group of people" (17). It is precisely the "paradoxical relation-

ship” between the structural and thematic “cohesion and fragmentation” of Chin’s short story cycle that renders the loneliness, isolation, and longing of the individual characters particularly intense and the decay and death of Chinatown legible. Given the cycle’s cohesive purpose of returning to Chinatown to “raise the dead” and to expose the impact of racial exclusion and cultural assimilation disavowed by food-pornography Chinatown books, the stories within the cycle are oriented toward the past—the silenced, erased, and forgotten past of Chinatown and Chinese Americans—and preoccupied with the conditions that led to the decay and death of Chinatown.

Hence an alternative becoming, the future—the still yet to be, the reinvention and transformation of what has been—must be imagined otherwise than as the past and present outside of the generic structure of the short story cycle. Chin’s novel *Donald Duk*, which appeared three years after the publication of *The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R. R. Co.*, is an attempt at reinventing Chinese American culture and identity and reclaiming Chinese American subjectivity by inhabiting Chinatown otherwise.

DONALD DUK: CHINATOWN AS A COUNTER-PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

Set in the post–Civil Rights Movement era, San Francisco’s Chinatown in *Donald Duk* is a vibrant urban space inhabited by a dynamic community of Chinese Americans who revitalize and reinvent Chinese cultural traditions and undermine normative American identity in their everyday practice of hybrid, multicultures. Rather than merely victims of racial segregation and cultural assimilation like the Chinese Americans in Chin’s short story cycle, the Chinatown community and individuals in *Donald Duk* demonstrate the possibilities of becoming otherwise and inhabiting Chinatown otherwise than as a segregated ghetto or merely a tourist spot in the city. However, Chinatown continues to be an embattled site for the construction of Chinese American identity and subjectivity, and the impact of Chinese Exclusion and racial hierarchy continues to affect the identity and subjectivity formation of a younger generation of Chinese Americans like the title character.

Nevertheless, in this Chinatown, “professional” Chinese Americans like Jimmy Chan and Dirigible’s father as portrayed in Chin’s short story cycle are replaced by father-figure role models such as King Duk, an esteemed actor in Cantonese opera, a prominent community leader and owner of a restaurant in Chinatown, and a master chef in both Eastern and Western cuisines. In fact, cultural hybridity and multiplicity in this coming-of-age novel are

part of Chin's strategy for combating institutionalized racial ideologies that shape the subject formation of a younger generation of Chinese Americans like Donald Duk, the twelve-year-old protagonist, who "doesn't think Chinatown is America" (*Donald Duk* 89). "He [Donald] doesn't like Chinatown. But he lives here" (3). He is embarrassed by his dad's "awful Chinatown accent." And "[e]verything Chinese in his life seems awful" (8). "His own name is driving him crazy! Looking Chinese is driving him crazy!" (2). Chin strategically organizes the narrative in such a way to show that Donald's self-loathing and aversion to Chinatown are the result of the institutionalized production of knowledge about normative American identity and undesirable Otherness. At the private school he goes to, Donald "avoids the other Chinese" and "the Chinese seem to avoid him." "This school is a place where the Chinese are comfortable hating Chinese" (2). Chin suggests that these Chinese American youths' self-hatred in part results from what they learn in the classroom. Donald's teacher of California history proudly reads aloud in class from a book authored by his professor of history at Berkeley: "The Chinese in America were made passive and nonassertive by centuries of Confucian thought and Zen mysticism. They were totally unprepared for the violently individualistic and democratic Americans" (2). Yet "[a]ll his teachers are making a big deal about Chinese stuff in their classes because of Chinese New Year coming on soon" (2). Such an apparently inclusive embrace of Chinese cultural traditions reified as a spectacle of the Chinese New Year's celebration at school works hand in hand with the history teacher's explanation of the disavowed structural exclusion and marginalization of the Chinese in American history, culture, and political systems in terms of their ethnic cultural difference. Underlying these institutionalized pedagogical practices is a form of what Étienne Balibar calls "differentialist racism," whose "dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences" (21). This form of racism articulates the "hidden causes" for racialized social relations "around stigmata of otherness" (Balibar 19, 21). Its impact on Chinese American subjectivity is evident in Donald Duk's feelings about the abject Otherness of the Chinese. For Donald, Chinese New Year is his "worst time of year," when he is asked "stupid questions about the funny things Chinese believe in," the "funny things Chinese do," and the "funny things Chinese eat" (Chin, *Donald Duk* 3).

Cast as deviant from the normative American identity embodied by whites, Chinatown and the Chinese body become apparently stable sites

for constructing and sustaining a standard, dominant white national ideal and its Others. These binarized identities reproduced at school operate to constitute the subjectivity of a younger generation of Chinese Americans like Donald Duk, whose coming-of-age entails “a painful negotiation [that] must be undertaken, at some point if not continually, with the demands of that social ideality, the reality of that always-insisted-on difference,” which is a condition of what Cheng calls the effects of racialization—the “deep-seated, intangible, psychical complications for people living within a ruling episteme that privileges that which they can never be” (7). To reclaim Chinatown and Chinese American subjectivity, then, Chin must confront and dismantle this “ruling episteme” that operates through institutionalized knowledge production. I would argue that while the private school that Donald attends exemplifies “an institutionalized space of learning” (Eng’s phrase in *Racial Castration* 72), which constitutes racialized national subjects through the “ruling episteme,” Chinatown functions as a counter-pedagogical space for the formation of Chinese American subjects. Yet, to function as such, the identity of Chinatown itself must be recuperated and reconstructed. In fact, Donald’s activities in Chinatown mobilize a dual process of reconstituting both Chinatown’s identity and the protagonist’s subjectivity. While *flânerie* in part helps mobilize Donald’s subject formation, it is insufficient for Donald, as for other Asian Americans or diasporans, to reclaim the neighborhood as a dynamic, multicultural, transnational urban space in America. Like other writers such as Lin and Ng, Chin portrays Chinatown as part of the American city from multiple perspectives and through different ways of inhabiting the neighborhood and cityscape, including culinary practices that counter the self-Orientalization of food-pornography narratives.

However, Chin’s multicultural Chinatown is a masculine space dominated by images of normative heterosexual masculinity, a space for the formation of the privileged male subject. Critics have rightly pointed out that Chin’s interventional strategies are limited by heterosexual masculine norms that continue to haunt the counter-representations of Chinese American history, culture, and subject in *Donald Duk*. In an insightful analysis of Chin’s treatment of Donald Duk’s “fractured psyche,” understood “as a melancholic form of racialized subjectivity,” Eng contends: “While Chin rescues his young narrator from a future of self-loathing and racialized self-hate and anger, this psychic recovery is purchased only through its concomitant and committed relationship to heterosexuality. In limiting Donald’s racial pride to the development of a normative heterosexuality, Asian American women and

gay men are left out of Chin's vision" (*Racial Castration* 97).

Critics who examine Chin's construction of Chinese American subjectivity in *Donald Duk* through culinary practice and discourse also point out that Chin's privileging of a normative masculinity excludes female agency. In a provocative article titled "'To Eat the Flesh of His Dead Mother': Hunger, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*," Fung argues that "Chin manipulates cultural signs of culinary productivity to define a cultural nationalist hero who, consequently, also signifies a 'rebirth' of an Asian American masculinity." Banished from the participant role in this formative "culinary productivity," women were "excluded from labor and left out of the social network of economic systems" and subsequently "become commodities that can be desired and consumed." "In fact," Fung adds, "Chin's text reveals a nationalist investment in patriarchal and heteronormative practices within the social institution of family" (264). In a similar vein, Xu in her study *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (2008) contends that the marginalization of women is "one of the necessary conditions for Chin's restoration of Chinese American male dignity" through masculinized culinary discourse and practice in *Donald Duk* (50).⁸ Likewise, Jennifer Ann Ho in an essay on *Donald Duk* notes that Chin's characterizations of the female characters in the novel are "caricatures." Ho observes: "In a novel that privileges history making, cooking, storytelling, and warfare, Chin's female characters are resolutely excluded from these domains. They do not cook, tell stories, or struggle. Their relationships to food are material or peripheral" (47).

While these critical perspectives shed new light on the heterosexual masculine domination in Chin's representation of apparently "normal" Chinese American male subjects, they overlook the mutually constitutive relationship between the Chinatown space and Donald's subject formation and identity transformation. Although Eng recognizes the significance of the Chinatown space for the formation of Donald's identity and subjectivity, he contends: "Chin ultimately suggests that it is only on the level of the unconscious that Donald can oppose conscious mainstream views on the Chinese as 'chickendick'" (*Racial Castration* 77). For "in the world of Chin's Chinatown there are no alternative images of self with which Donald can easily identify" (74). This is true to a certain extent. I would argue that, like Donald's sequence of dreams, relearning about Chinatown and discovering its "American characteristics" through its residents and community network is a central component of Donald's subject formation. Under the impact of

institutionalized learning and the dominant culture in which the Chinese are either absent or portrayed as “passive and nonassertive,” “helpless,” and odd, Donald himself is complicit in sustaining the abject alien identity of Chinatown (*Donald Duk* 2, 3).⁹ His self-loathing results from the “ruling episteme.” Thus Donald’s subject formation entails discovering role models in Chinatown and learning what his father has been trying to teach him—“Chinatown is America” (89). As Viet Thanh Nguyen convincingly argues, *Donald Duk* is “about the education of its title character into accepting the fundamentally American character of his identity, his family, and his environment.” Chin’s novel “accomplishes this education through a crucial double move”: “it simultaneously remasculinizes the male body and transforms the space in which that body is situated” (98). Nguyen further observes that the transformation of the Chinatown space takes place through Donald’s dream work. “Chinatown becomes for him an American space after he dreams that he visits the Chinese-populated American West” (98). I would contend that the transformation of the Chinatown space takes place mostly along with Donald’s formative encounters and in Chinatown.

Building on and departing from the critical insights as cited above, my reading of *Donald Duk* pursues a different line of inquiry. I explore the mutually constitutive and transformative relationship between space and subject, with a focus on the open possibilities of space embedded in the politics of Chinese Americans’ everyday practices of inhabiting Chinatown. Grosz’s argument about space as “the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation” provides a useful theoretical framework for my reading of the significance of Chinatown space in Donald’s subject formation. By emphasizing that the “more one disinvests one’s own body from that space, the less able one is to effectively inhabit that space as one’s own,” Grosz highlights the importance of inhabiting contested spaces through everyday practices that have transformative possibilities (*Architecture* 9). To learn that “Chinatown is America,” Donald must learn how to inhabit the Chinatown space as his own, as both Chinese and American. His movement in Chinatown leads to his (trans)formative encounters with Chinese Americans, mobilizes the transformation of Chinatown’s identity, and intervenes in his inferiority complex. If “a fraught network of ongoing psychological negotiation instigated and institutionalized by racism” runs underneath “the reductionist, threatening diagnosis of ‘inferiority complex’ or ‘white preference,’” as Cheng argues (7), then Chinatown as a counter-pedagogical space against institutionalized spaces of learning such as the private school that Donald attends offers a network of cultural

practices and symbolic meanings that redefine Chinatown and recuperate Donald's racialized subjectivity.

Among Chinese Americans' interventional cultural practices, eating and cooking are an integral part of the everyday activities that constitute Chinatown as a counter-pedagogical space. However, critics on culinary discourses in Asian American fiction tend to overlook the complexity of food, cooking, and eating in Chin's writing. Mannur, in her provocative study *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2010), states: "Within his expansive literary oeuvre, culinary writing—what he [Chin] dubs 'food pornography'—occupies a curiously abject position. Chin's militations against food writing stem from a desire to banish from Asian American rhetoric any evocation of the culinary—as psychic or real sites. His targets, most typically women authors, are those who deliberately use a culinary idiom to anchor depictions of racialized life for Asian Americans" (15). Mannur's contention scants Chin's elaborate descriptions of foodways in *Donald Duk*. In fact, both the significance of culinary activities in *Donald Duk* and Chin's critique of food pornography as a mode of self-Orientalizing model minority narrative about Chinatown life can be better understood in the light of Mannur's cogent argument that "the use of food is more than an a priori affirmation of palatable difference; it is also a way to undermine the racialized ideologies that culinary discourse is so often seen to buttress" (7). The "ruling episteme" that privileges whites and the dominant culture and its impact on Asian American subjectivity is discernable in Donald's relationship to food. Even when he is eating in his father's Chinese restaurant in Chinatown, Donald asks for "what he thinks is pure American food": "Steak. Chops" (8). Situated in this context, Chin's deployment of multicultural foodways in Chinatown undermines precisely "the racialized ideologies" that food-pornography Chinatown books often buttress. Moreover, Chin highlights multicultural cuisines in Chinatown to subvert the norm of "pure American food."

Multicultural culinary activities in Chinatown, then, are part of a counter-episteme that renders Chinatown a counter-pedagogical space for the subject formation of Donald Duk. While King Duk is considered "one of the best seven" chefs in Chinatown, he can cook anything Donald's white American classmate and friend, Arnold Azalea, asks for, be it American steaks, French bouillabaisse, Spanish paella, or Italian cioppino (7–8). He can also make multicultural dishes creatively by mixing culinary practices in ways never before imagined even as he is practicing Chinese traditions, as when he cooks a meatless dinner for the family on the first night of the Chinese New

Year: “Now Dad cooks up meatless originals mixing the common items of many cuisines into things wonderful, strange and tasty. Fettucini Alfredo with shark’s fin. Poached fish in sauces made with fruit and vegetables. Olives on toast that taste like rare thousand-dollar caviar. Chocolate, bananas, yellow chili peppers, red chili oil and coconut milk go into one sauce over shredded chicken and crabmeat to be eaten rolled up in hot rice-paper pancakes with shredded lettuce, green onions and a dab of plum sauce” (64). King Duk’s mixing of “the common items of many cuisines into things wonderful, strange and tasty” dismantles the divide between “pure American food” and the “funny things Chinese eat,” which reinforces the racial hierarchy underlying the normative American identity that defines the abject Otherness of the Chinese.

However, Fung in her reading of this novel observes that King Duk’s multicultural culinary practice demonstrates that “[f]ood has become the fetishized object of a masculine desire” and that “Chin’s political agenda for creating an acceptable male identity in both Chinese and Western cultures is thus translated into the multicultural meals that Donald consumes” (266). For Fung, King Duk’s “wonderful, strange and tasty” cuisine “is an eroticized and fetishized representation of multiculturalism.” According to this interpretation, the multicultural identity that Donald has yet to learn to accept as part of Chinatown and America becomes the manifestation of both the “salad bowl” and the “melting pot” theory, which “legitimizes the possibility of the American dream in which different cultures can retain and combine their individual ‘flavors’ without being subsumed by a dominant culture” (266). Fung’s reading of King Duk’s multicultural culinary practice as an example of Chin’s “political agenda for creating an acceptable male identity in both Chinese and Western cultures” in *Donald Duk* overlooks the complex subversive aspects of culinary activities in the novel.

Eating and cooking at King Duk’s restaurant is a community-building practice, which at once redefines and reinvents Chinese/American identities. In keeping with Chinese traditions and with the help of Uncle Donald Duk, among others, King Duk is cooking a meatless meal for an extended family of three hundred people, including friends and neighbors who live in Chinatown and all the members of Uncle Donald Duk’s guest opera troupe and their families (66). While a few adults are helping in the kitchen, children at each of the thirty banquet tables are serving the food. Everybody feels at home in King Duk’s restaurant and is there to enjoy a traditional Chinese meal that breaks away from tradition. Culinary invention for King

Duk means revitalization of lost Chinese traditions. Over “a bank of five hot woks” he shouts: “Family-style tonight means the family lets me cook the stuff that no Chinese, no one on this earth has seen in a Chinese family dinner before. And yet, like Confucius himself, I will restore ways that have become abandoned and recover knowledge that has been lost” (63). Eating and cooking, then, serve a pedagogical function in recuperating cultural practices and alternative knowledge, which reinvent traditional Chinese culture and undermine the normative American identity embodied by whites and couched in the proper family sanctioned by church and state.

Cultural critics often regard foodways as modes of signifying regional, ethnic, or national identities. As Linda Brown and Kay Mussell note in their introduction to *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity* (1984): “Foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (5, qtd. in S. C. Wong, *Reading*, 65). Embedded in these rituals that perform group identities through foodways are social relations that at once reflect and constitute the racialized power structure in the United States. Sidney Mintz in “Eating America,” included in *Food in the USA: A Reader* (2002), contextualizes the assimilative characteristics of dominant foodways in the United States in relation to the history of Europeans’ conquest of North America, arguing that U.S. foodways act as a normative marker, creating assimilation pressure on immigrants, especially on immigrants’ children (26–27). In a similar vein, Janet Siskind in her essay in the same volume calls critical attention to the construction of a “homogeneous imaginary community” through the family-centered Thanksgiving dinner as a “ritual” of performing American identity and constituting national subjects. She notes: “Thanksgiving celebrates and obfuscates the destruction of community, constructing the family and nation as the only bastions against a Hobbesian world, and making the appearance of proper family relations, as demonstrated by full observance of the feast, the requirement and proof of national identity” (47). As Carole Counihan succinctly summarizes in “Introduction: Food and the Nation” in *Food in the USA*: “[F]oodways—beliefs and behaviors surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food—reveal race-ethnic, class, gender, and national identity and power” (1).

Understood from those perspectives, foodways in *Donald Duk* serve multiple functions, including resistance to assimilation and reinvention of

both ethnic and American identities. King Duk's restaurant is a place of community bonding through communal cooking and eating and of performing traditional Chinese rituals of expressing appreciation for one's ancestors and showing love for children. As one dinner guest, Larry Louie, the Chinese Fred Astaire in Chinatown, remarks: "It's like a gypsy caravan settling down for the night" (62). Another guest, Mr. Yin, "the five-in-the-morning tai chi teacher and afternoon flamenco guitarist," echoes Larry by alluding to the community of rebels in *Water Margin*: "I was going to say it looks like a gang of Chinese outlaws plundering a mansion" (62). King Duk's restaurant becomes a gathering place of a motley diasporic Chinese community, where ethnic culture is revitalized through maintaining and reinventing traditions, including ethnic food ways and knowledge that "have become abandoned" (63). Reclaiming ethnic culture through reinvention and communal cooking and eating in King Duk's restaurant performs a hybrid group identity beyond national borders.

Critics of culinary narratives such as Mannur have noted that ethnic food serves as a tangible connection to "home," providing an "intellectual and emotional anchor" for the diasporic ethnic subjects (Mannur 2). Drawing on East Indian American cultural critic Ketu Katrak's autobiographical essay "Food and Belonging: At 'Home' and in 'Alien-Kitchens,'" Mannur observes that "culinary narratives, suffused with nostalgia, often manage immigrant memories and imagined returns to the 'homeland'" (27). Those imagined "returns" to the "homeland" outside U.S. borders entail an alternative belonging to assimilation into the dominant norms of white America. While the "family-style" dinner in King Duk's restaurant on the Chinese New Year may enact precisely such an imagined return to the "homeland," its multiple, heterogeneous, and hybrid ingredients, dishes, and their varied combinations make it impossible to trace the dinner to a single ethnic cultural origin or homeland. Ho in her discussion of food and consumption in *Donald Duk* rightly contends that food "is the medium for Chin's themes of restoration, recovery, and recuperation of Chinese American history and cultural practices" (29). But her interpretation of Chin's use of "recurring images of dried food reconstituted and transformed through cooking as a symbol for . . . the recovery of lost knowledge"—"the Chinese contribution to American history in the 19th century West" (29–30)—overlooks the transformation of both the normative American national identity and the traditional Chinese culture through multicultural foodways. Like its guests the Chinese Astaire, Larry Louie, and the tai chi teacher and flamenco guitarist, Mr. Yin, the "traditional

family-style” dinner at King Duk’s restaurant is Chinese American, altering what being either Chinese or American means.

In fact, the multicultural characteristics of this community-bonding dinner signify a Chinese American identity that is always in the process of being reinvented. The community gathering for this dinner also serves as an educational occasion for Donald Duk, who considers cultural identities discrete. “You have your Spanish flamenco guitar in your hand while, inside this gaudy Chinese restaurant, you talk about Chinese outlaws,” says Donald to Mr. Yin, adding: “Don’t you think that is a little strange?” The Chinese Astaire replies: “Gypsy caravan. Chinese outlaws. Same thing. Same theme. Robin Hood, Spanish gypsies, Jesse James all the same” (62). This comparison, like the Chinese American attributes of King Duk’s cuisine and the identity of the Chinese Astaire, unsettles the East versus West dichotomy underlying Donald’s question and assumption that “everybody’s gotta give up the old and become American.” “If all these Chinese were more American,” says Donald, “I wouldn’t have all my problems” (42). King Duk’s contravening remarks also point out an alternative model of being American: “I think Donald Duk may be the very last American-born Chinese American boy to believe you have to give up being Chinese to be an American. . . . These new immigrants prove that. . . . Instead of giving anything up, they add on. They’re including America in everything else they know” (42). King Duk himself insists on being both Chinese and American against the wishes of his parents, who do not want to be Chinese and have left Chinatown. At age fourteen, he ran away from home and slipped into China to apprentice himself to Uncle Donald, a legendary Cantonese opera star. According to Donald: “Dad can play Chinese, he can eat Chinese and go gah-gah over Chinese, but no matter what, he is white. He can leave Chinatown. He can leave the Chinese. He can go home to hear the spaces between the trees and never come back. All he has to do is cross the street” (47). Unlike working-class “paper son” Chinese Americans such as Leon in *Bone* and Yuen in “The Only Real Day,” whose lives are confined to Chinatown, King Duk, a middle-class American-born U.S. citizen in the 1990s, does not have to live in Chinatown. Contrary to the choice of Dirigible’s father, who leaves Chinatown for Hollywood to play the roles of the subordinate “model minority” and threatening “yellow peril,” King Duk goes to China to learn a community-based traditional theater art and returns to Chinatown to inhabit the space as Chinese American.

Inhabiting Chinatown as a multicultural American urban space and as irreducibly Chinese American is precisely what Donald eventually learns to

do through his activities in Chinatown and by learning about Chinese American history, which enables him “to dream against the dominant historical reality and narratives that configure the Chinese American male laborer as passive or absent” (Eng, *Racial Castration* 77). Donald’s visit to Larry Louie’s dance studio to learn to tap dance like Fred Astaire, his American idol, actually gives him an opportunity to learn about Chinatown’s past and to be exposed to Latin American culture, which has become part of Chinatown’s history and everyday life. Larry’s dance studio itself inscribes the Chinatown space as irreducibly American. Looking over “Clay Street and a Chinatown alley,” a sign in gold letters printed on Larry’s large windows reads:

Larry Louie
 “The Chinese Fred Astaire”
 DANCE INSTRUCTOR
 Group—Private
 Tap—Jazz—Modern
 Latin—Flamenco (50)

Infused with African American and Latin cultures, this sign reflects part of Chinatown’s history, which intertwines with Larry’s life and career and American culture. As Donald goes up the stairs to the studio, he sees photographs of a young Larry on both sides of the walls. Many of those pictures show Larry dancing in the spotlight at nightclubs, including the famous Forbidden City during World War II, when San Francisco’s Chinatown was a popular spot of social life for American soldiers on their way to or back from the battlefields of the Pacific theater.¹⁰ “There are [also] pictures of him posing with a movie camera and an all-Chinese camera crew. There is a picture of him in a bit in a Frank Sinatra movie. A picture of him in an old episode of the *Ironsides* TV police show” (51). But Larry “does not really want to be Fred Astaire” or any other white American cultural icon (52). And he is particularly interested in flamenco, which, Larry tells Donald, “used to be all around Chinatown”: “The Patio Andaluz. The Sinaloa Club. Carmen Amaya—Queen of the Gypsies, they called her—danced there. The Casa Columbus. Oh, there used to be flamenco guitarists and dancers and singers all over residential Chinatown” (52). Actually, Larry is working with his old friend, Mr. Yin, in restoring part of this culture in Chinatown. “I’m wearing my flamenco boots,” says Larry to Donald. “My friend, Mr. Yin is in town with the Cantonese opera. He is also a fine flamenco guitarist. He used to

play for La Florita and myself thirty years ago. . . . So, while he is gracing Chinatown with his presence, we have been reviving Los Chinos Gitanos” (52).

Larry, the Chinese Astaire, and Mr. Yin, the Cantonese opera musician, are doing what is unthinkable for Donald in Chinatown. The flamenco, with its heterogeneous, multicultural influences, including that of the gypsies (“gitanos”), like King Duk’s multicultural cuisine, challenges the purity of either American or Chinese culture, which Donald is taught at school to dichotomize. By identifying Chinese in diasporas with the gypsies (“Los Chinos Gitanos”)—“an oppressed minority race” that refuses to give up its cultural identity (53)—Larry, Mr. Yin, and their associates in Chinatown are reinventing a diasporic identity and culture, which not only resists assimilation but also defies ethnic and national boundaries. In fact, the Cantonese opera troupe has reinvented its traditional theater art. Its costumes and props have incorporated “the American cowboy hat, bullwhip and sixgun,” and its “orchestra now includes the Hawaiian twangy guitar, European violin and saxophone,” altering both Cantonese and European traditional cultures and making it impossible to separate ethnic minority cultures from mainstream American culture (53).¹¹ Even though he still does not understand why a Cantonese opera musician plays Spanish gypsy guitar and why Larry, the Chinese Astaire, dances flamenco for fun, Donald is drawn to the unfamiliar music of flamenco, and “the woman clapping and shouting things in Spanish” confuses him and makes “Larry Louie’s flamenco look dangerous, unpredictable and something Donald wants to do” (54). The feeling of the flamenco guitar sound that is “always dark and lowdown” stays with him. “Wherever Donald Duk is tired and cold, that’s where the sound gets inside him and trembles” (54).

As Donald is learning from Larry and Mr. Yin about Chinatown as part of America and about Chinese and American cultures as hybrid, heterogeneous, and protean, he is compelled to confront his self-loathing, which alienates him from his “Chinese” body and the Chinatown space. While walking with Larry, La Florita, and Mr. Yin to his father’s restaurant for dinner, Donald realizes that he fails to recognize that Mr. Yin is actually his “tai chi instructor at the White Crane Club” (55). When Larry says at the studio that Mr. Yin is with the Cantonese opera, Donald does not bother to look at him, thinking everything Chinese is “awful.” Yet Mr. Yin, like King Duk, defies the boundaries that construct “Chineseness” as a stigma of the Otherness that constitutes the normative American identity. He tells Donald: “I collect musicianship and the musical instruments of the world like your

father collects the great cooking and cuisines of the world” (56). Like King Duk and Larry Louie, Mr. Yin inhabits Chinatown as resolutely American and irreducibly Chinese through everyday practice.

Given that Donald’s alienation from the Chinese and Chinatown results from the “ruling episteme that privileges that which” he and the other Chinese “can never be,” to borrow Cheng’s words again (7), the transformation of “funny” Chinese food and things and of “foreign” Chinatown into subversively multicultural American identities entails much more than Donald’s subject formation. In fact, Donald’s experience of the rituals of celebrating the Chinese New Year in the Chinatown streets counters white America’s Orientalist Othering of the Chinese New Year’s celebration into a spectacle, as promoted at Donald’s school. Donald and his family are part of the crowds in the streets, whose activities inhabit Chinatown as a neighborhood and community in the heart of San Francisco: “The sun rises in the east. Just west of Chinatown are two of San Francisco’s famous hills. Much of the morning Chinatown sits cool in the dissolving pool of fog and shadows of Nob Hill and Russian Hill. This morning as the rush hour passes and the traffic settles to a pleasant roar, the streets of Chinatown are crowded. But the people out walking this morning are not shopping” (40–41). Contrary to the dead or decaying Chinatown as represented in Chin’s short stories, this Chinatown is hopping with vitality. Rather than displaying gaudy decorations for tourists, the Chinatown residents are carrying out traditional activities of family and community bonding in the streets, inhabiting this American urban neighborhood as if it were a village in China. And yet the narrative description that maps Chinatown’s location in the vicinity of San Francisco’s two landmark neighborhoods, Nob Hill and Russian Hill, inscribes Chinatown as an integral part of the city. Similarly, that the people shopping in the fish markets in Chinatown in the early morning are “[r]estaurant owners, cooks and chefs from all over San Francisco” indicates that Chinatown is a business center of the city (40). By insisting on Chinatown’s spatially asserted ethnic difference in the heart of the American city, along with its openness and connection to other parts of the city, Chin refuses the marginalization of the ethnically inscribed neighborhood and redefines the identity of the American city.

For Donald, his activities in Chinatown become a way of learning about Chinese American history and cultures, which, like his dreams, provide him with alternative knowledge unavailable at school.¹² On his way to breakfast with his family and the opera people, Donald learns from Uncle Donald Duk that the crowds in the Chinatown streets on New Year’s Day “are doing what

our great-grandparents did, back in the days of the gold rush and railroads”: “They are getting together clubs, family associations. People from the same country form an association. They are making tongs” (41). To the Chinatown community, the Chinese New Year means something entirely different from what Donald’s teachers at the private school assume and from what tourists are looking for—firecrackers and spectacle. This understanding makes it hard for Donald to continue to “hate” the Chinese New Year as he claims (56). As he is beginning to recognize that “Chinatown is America” and to come to terms with his Chinese American identity in such a way that he can walk the Chinatown streets without looking scared and sad, Donald discovers a wealth of Chinese culture in a book-and-magazine store, where he never bothered to look before. When he steps into the store, he finds himself facing “a wall of softbound multi-volume sets of comic books telling the stories of *The Three Kingdoms*, and *The Water Margin*, *Monkey’s Journey to the West*, *The Seven Women Generals of the Yang Family* and other heroic tales with bows and arrows, swords and slings, spears and horses.” “Donald Duk slides open the box reading *Characters in Water Margin Playing Cards. Made in Shanghai, China*” (118). Here, to his surprise, he sees the figure who appears in his dreams about Chinese immigrants’ building the railroad in the American West. From the old man with a bullwhip who appears from the back of the store, he learns that the figure is Soong Gong, also known as “Timely Rain,” the leader of the 108 outlaws in *Water Margin*. Donald also learns from the female storekeeper that the old man is actually the “real Charlie Chan,” a former “detective sergeant of the Honolulu Police Department” also known as “Sergeant Chang Apana,” “famous for keeping the peace on Hotel Street in the twenties” (119–20). This formidable Chinese American who is actually the real Charlie Chan at once evokes and subverts the Hollywood Charlie Chan. Moreover, the legendary 108 outlaws of the Chinese dismantled the passive, helpless, and odd image of the Chinese and Chinese Americans disseminated at Donald’s school. Having made these discoveries in the store, Donald visits the Chinatown branch of the public library with his friend Arnold, to research the history of Chinese Americans in the building of the railroad, which is erased from his history textbook and remains absent in his history class.

As Donald is undergoing a profound change in his self-image, along with his newly acquired knowledge of Chinese culture and Chinese American history, as well as a different perspective on what constitutes American culture, his perception of Chinatown alters. So does what he sees and how he feels in

the Chinatown streets. No longer alienated from the Chinatown space, Donald is able to notice more. His gaze constructs an American Chinatown with the lingering effects of Chinese exclusion, cultural assimilation, resistance, and marginalization embedded in the images in the streets:

The first thing Donald Duk sees as he steps out of his building is the Chinatown Fiddler, already the saddest man in Chinatown. . . . The fiddler's monkey is tied to a lamppost and watches and screeches at the Fiddler faking and crazing up a kung fu set at the center of a small circle of tourists. Donald Duk passes a Chinatown bar and lounge where the Chinatown Frank Sinatra sings, "I did it my-eeee wayyy." . . .

Again this year, the carnival rides—every spoke, every curve, every rise and fall outlined in neon light—are tucked into the dinky Portsmouth Square, in the shadow of Chinatown and Nob Hill in the morning and the tall buildings of the financial district, the TransAmerica Pyramid, the Holiday Inn sawhorse in the afternoon. . . . A cement pagoda building with two Chinese restaurants, a Chinese shrine supply store full of Kwan Kungs, Kwan Yins . . . next door to the portrait studio of "the Chinese Richard Avedon," portrait photographer who never heard of Richard Avedon till "the Chinese Marilyn Monroe" of 1966 told him. (133)

Donald's gaze locates Chinatown in the heart of San Francisco, depicting it as integral to the cityscape and American culture. Rather than indicate a "melting pot" or "salad bowl" America, the coexistence of heterogeneous images reveals the legacies of Chinese Exclusion as suggested by the Chinatown Fiddler and the effect of cultural assimilation and marginalization of Chinese Americans as shown by the presence of "the Chinatown Frank Sinatra," "the Chinese Richard Avedon," and "the Chinese Marilyn Monroe," whose own images are absent (except, more often than not, as demeaning stereotypes) in mainstream American culture. The structurally produced unequal racial positions underlying the relationship between the Chinatown Fiddler as a spectacle and the Chinatown tourists as the spectators are also spatially implicated through the juxtapositions of Chinatown with landmarks of wealth and power of white America—Nob Hill, the financial district, the TransAmerica building, and the Holiday Inn. Yet signs of Chinese Americans' resistance to assimilation are also visible in the pagoda building, the Buddhist church building, and the Chinese shrine supply store full of iconic figures from Buddhism and Chinese classics and folklore. In contrast to "the

proselytizing visionary Buddhist church,” however, a “Chinatown kid” is proselytizing Christianity in the street, carrying “a Christian Holy Bible with gilt-edged pages” and going “from group to crowd” (134). Those juxtaposed images and scenes suggest that Chinatown remains an embattled site for the constitution of Chinese American subjectivity.

As Donald walks home at night through Chinatown, he encounters a group of people who demonstrate an alternative model of inhabiting Chinatown that is drastically different from that practiced by those who aspire to be white Americans. King Duk and other Chinatown residents, including the Crawdad Man and his son, the Frog Twin sisters, and the Cantonese opera troupe members, are taking fifty-pound sacks of rice from King Duk’s restaurant to leave at the door of every apartment on a block. Donald finds out from Uncle Donald that his father is keeping up a Chinatown tradition started by a gambler in Oakland, “Big Jim Chin,” who “used to leave hundred-pound sacks of rice at every door in Chinatown” (137). Significantly, this gesture of philanthropy is community-based and carried out by teamwork. King Duk drives the loaded van, and when he parks in front of an apartment staircase, the “opera people form a human chain up the three flights of stairs.” King Duk, Uncle Donald, the Fong-Fong sisters, and the Crawdad Man and his son pass sacks of rice out of the van to “the chain of opera people” (138). Those helping with the giving are bonding as a community while participating in community building, which, shaped by the American social environment and Chinatown’s spatial confinement, breaks down the traditional boundaries of family and clan. Chinese Americans have invented a Chinese New Year’s tradition in Chinatown, as Uncle Donald proclaims: “It’s everybody’s birthday, today. The sixth day of the first month of the new year” (137). Although Donald is still too young to carry a fifty-pound sack of rice, he joins the group, sitting in the van and receiving an education about Chinese Americans and Chinatown unavailable at school.

The impact of Chinatown as a counter-pedagogical space for constructing Chinese American identity and for constituting Chinese American subjectivity is not limited to the transformation of individuals like Donald, nor is it confined within the space of Chinatown. In his history class, Donald challenges Mr. Meanwright’s statements about the Chinese in the United States, calling into question the authoritative, institutionalized production of knowledge about normative American identity and its Other. Donald’s friend Arnold supports Donald’s challenge with evidence collected from their research (150–51). To further undermine the stereotypes of the Chinese

reproduced in the institutional space of learning, King Duk appears in the classroom as Kwan Kung, the god of war and literature, to give a “free demonstration of the fine art of Cantonese opera courtesy of Duk Lau Opera,” which is “[n]ow appearing at the Sun Sing Theater in the heart of Chinatown” (152). These interventions in the stereotyping of the Chinese and Chinese Americans in the classroom simultaneously undermine “official” American history and its subsequent construction of the norm of American identity embodied by whites. The same logic applies to the mutually constitutive and transformative identities of Chinatown and the American nation-space. By showing that Chinatown, with all of its irreducible heterogeneity and unsettling hybridity and multiplicity, is “American,” *Donald Duk* refutes the myth of cultural purity, subverting the “ruling episteme” of racialized cultural hierarchy, as it re-represents both Chinese and American identities. Donald’s observation at the popular Uncle’s Café in Chinatown inscribes precisely such refutation, resistance, and transformation in process:

Uncle’s Café is a Chinatown coffeeshop [*sic*] peculiar to San Francisco. . . . Here the apple pie may be part of a meal of *wonton* and *chow fun* with roast pork and applesauce, and duck legs and chicken feet during *deem sum* lunchtime, with a strawberry milkshake. . . . Donald Duk likes the place. He can usually get lost here, studying the art students, the young white actors and cab drivers, who are the only whites and who have kept Uncle’s Café, early in the morning, a secret among themselves and make themselves a part of Uncle’s atmosphere, crammed hip to hip, knee to knee, elbow to elbow over a tiny table in a booth. The others are older and very old Chinese and with their families. (145)

Donald’s feeling at home in this motley crowd at Uncle’s signals that he has undergone significant changes in his perceptions about himself, Chinatown, and American identity. If the “pattern of social relations being expressed” can be found in food that is coded with “different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries,” as Mary Douglas argues in her essay “Deciphering a Meal” (61, qtd. in S. C. Wong, *Reading* 67), then the multicultural cuisines and diverse consumers at Uncle’s Café redefine the racially inscribed segregated Chinatown in the “American” city. Far from a self-enclosed “foreign” enclave, or merely a segregated ethnic ghetto, or a tourist spot, Chinatown is at once a dynamic multicultural ethnic enclave and an integral part of the American cityscape and urban life. By refusing to give up their ethnic identity and by inhabiting Chinatown as part

of America, Chinese Americans are reinventing the mutually constituted identities of the foreign Chinatown and the American nation-space.

The subversive and interventional scene at Uncle's Café takes on more political valence in the context of the post-September 11 world and of the attack on multiculturalism as voiced by Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). While Huntington's theory about the "clash of civilizations" "has been used to explain why the attacks on September 11th 2001 took place and also how the United States should respond," the thrust of Huntington's theory, Palumbo-Liu points out, aims at "the real enemy" within (Huntington's phrase, 304)—namely, immigrants from non-European countries who resist assimilation ("Multiculturalism" 109, 119). Huntington in his book claims: "Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies" (304). For Huntington, American national identity defined by Western civilization is being "attacked" "in the name of multiculturalism":

Historically American national identity has been defined culturally by the heritage of Western civilization and politically by the principles of the American Creed on which Americans overwhelmingly agree: liberty, democracy, individualism, equality before the law, constitutionalism, private property. In the late twentieth century both components of American identity have come under concentrated and sustained onslaught from a small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists. In the name of multiculturalism they have attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings. (305)

Frank Chin's portrayals of Chinatown as "America" and of Chinatown's multicultural practices as characteristics of a motley American body politic enact precisely such an erosion of "Western civilization" as the defining attribute of American identity.

Palumbo-Liu, in his provocative article "Multiculturalism Now: Civilization, National Identity, and Difference before and after September 11th," states that "new kinds of multiculturalism might be needed to address our new historical situation" (118). He proposes a "*progressive humanism*," one

that is “realist and historical materialist” and predicated on a “multiculturalism” that must “be international in scope” and that “widen[s] its boundaries outside that of any particular nation, and even beyond diaspora studies, to an international frame” (126–27). This requires that “when thinking multiculturally,” we each “think of subnational, national, and regional cultures beyond our borders and even continents, and how those cultures have been produced historically, ideologically, materially, and in interaction with each other.” It is then that “we will have made some small move away from the mystification of civilizations, on both sides” (“Multiculturalism” 127). Palumbo-Liu’s proposal urges us to explore the ways that Chinatown and the city as produced and contested spaces in the construction of American national identity might operate as viable vectors for mobilizing such a move within and across national borders.

Chinatown in Chin’s writings demonstrates that while space is produced by social relations and social interactions, it also shapes the formation of those relations and interactions in ways that mediate the constitution of identities, subjectivities, and cultures. As Anthony D. King contends, “[P]hysical and spatial urban forms actually constitute as well as represent much of social and cultural existence” (1). These mutually constitutive relations between the spatial and the social, cultural, and ideological underlie the embattled, hybrid, protean, and multicultural American Chinatown in Chin’s writings. If Chinatown as represented in Chin’s work demonstrates “the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation,” which as Grosz argues is a characteristic of space (*Architecture* 9), it is then always in a process of becoming, of being transformed by those who inhabit it, even as it shapes their identities and subjectivities. The mutually constitutive relationship between space and subject, between environment and embodied identity, renders Chinatown an open and transformative space whose heterogeneity not only resists assimilation but also reinscribes the American cityscape and nation-space and reconstitutes the American body politic. Transformation and intervention as such are possible precisely because Chinatown is an open, contested space of practiced difference, multiplicity, and hybridity irreducible to a passive social or discursive product. Rather than merely a background, Chinatown is a counter-pedagogical space, a dynamic multicultural community invented through everyday practices of inhabitation that redefine the American city.

5 INHABITING THE CITY AS EXILES

Bienvenido N. Santos's *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*

I think I am forever an exile.

—CARLOS BULOSAN

“GET LOST, David, get lost. Learn to know the city like the bruises that still hurt. At least that section of this so-called golden city by the bay that was still open to you.”

—BIENVENIDO N. SANTOS

PUBLISHED IN 1987, BIENVENIDO N. SANTOS'S NOVEL *WHAT THE Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*, though it is set in the same city and about the same time as *Bone* and *Donald Duk*, departs from their respective thematic concerns despite some shared concerns about racial exclusion and exploitation. Rather than seek to claim belonging to America, *What the Hell For* depicts the exile, displacement, and transnational belongings of Filipinos and Filipino Americans in the United States, especially their irrecoverable collective and personal loss resulting from the Spanish and American colonial legacies. Counterpoised to its narrator's assertion of emotional attachment to San Francisco as embedded in the book's title, “the Philippines is in the heart” seems the predominant ethos of the novel, which highlights Filipinos' and Filipino Americans' sense of exile as a postcolonial condition and as a structural and psychological phenomenon of their racial position in the United States. However, Filipino Americans, like Chinese Americans, have made San Francisco their home. As narrator David Dante Tolosa states: “They have found this city, their city now, nurturing them like a mother sitting on the hills.” Nevertheless, from this home in the United States, David adds: “[A]gainst our will we look back to that home faraway now lost in the late mists of evening and the long years. Pray that life give

us another chance for each loss we suffer as we walk and live on these sullen streets among rusting wharves, smelly canneries and loud fish markets far from the vineyards spilling with bubbly wine” (192). While an exilic sensibility of living with an enduring sense of displacement and loss permeates Santos’s novel, both the promise and the disillusion of the American Dream underlie David’s prayer for his fellow Filipinos living in San Francisco and other parts of California.

Irrecoverable loss as a multidimensional experience is a central trope of Santos’s narrative strategy for capturing the complexity, ambivalence, and contradictions of the experience of Filipinos in the United States and Filipino Americans, deployed in confronting the impact of Spanish and American colonialism on the formation of Filipino American subjects. Santos’s treatment of loss in the novel generates what David L. Eng and David Kazanjian call the politics of melancholic mourning, which establishes “an active and open relationship with history” and induces “actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living” (“Mourning Remains” 1). At the same time, such an active engagement with the past through melancholic mourning of loss “opens up the present and orients it toward unknown futures” (5–6). Alternative knowledge, perspectives, and possibilities of intervention and transformation are embedded in the politics of loss, in investigating “the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of *how* loss is apprehended and history is named—how that apprehension and naming produce the phenomenon of ‘what remains’” (1, 5–6). Understood in these terms, loss in Santos’s novel cannot be reduced simply to a theme; it operates as a politics and aesthetics of mourning and serves multiple functions, such as exposing the cost of Filipino Americans’ achievement of apparently the “ultimate” American Dream of material wealth (Santos, *What* 34), making visible the deprivation of “homeless” working-class Filipino “old-timers” and confronting erased, forgotten, palimpsest colonial histories and their legacies in the formation of Filipino San Francisco.

From this perspective, exile can be interpreted as a sustained form of loss, a historically and socially created condition, and a structurally exclusive inclusion, as well as an emotional or psychological state. Loss, then, is not only a condition of Filipino diaspora and exile but also a politics and aesthetics for representing and reimagining postcolonial Filipino/American identity and for enabling Filipinos to inhabit American cities such as San Francisco otherwise than as “unknown civilians” of colonized nationals of the United States or as “nameless” “little brown men and women” (*What* 192,

191). Functioning in this manner, loss in the experience of Filipinos and Filipino Americans produces social critique and keeps the specter of colonial legacy alive, undermining the ideology of “American exceptionalism”—“its exemplary status as the apotheosis of the nation-form itself and as a model for the rest of the world,” as the American studies scholar Amy Kaplan defines it (*Anarchy* 16).¹ Thus Santos’s treatment of loss at once exposes and counters what Lisa Lowe calls “the violence of forgetting” that haunts “every narrative articulation of freedom” which elides racial inequality underlying “[c]olonial labor relations on the plantations in the Americas” (“Intimacies” 206). Those colonial labor relations, Lowe points out, “were the conditions of possibility for European philosophy to think the universality of human freedom.” However, “much freedom for colonized peoples was precisely foreclosed within that philosophy” (206, 193). This contradiction and “the violence of forgetting” are constitutive of the exceptionalism of the United States, which “insists on the disappearance of race in the name of freedom and progress,” as Eng observes (“End(s) of Race” 1480). The aesthetics and politics of loss in Santos’s novel enact an affective mode of inscribing what is erased or repressed by narratives of “American exceptionalism” and by immigrant narratives of assimilation.

Critical readings of *What the Hell For*, however, tend to overlook its complex politics of loss. For Epifanio San Juan, Jr., “Santos’ imagination is attuned to an easy purchase on the hurts, alienation, and defeatism of *pensionados*, expatriated ilustrados, petit bourgeois males marooned during World War II in the East Coast and Midwest, and other third-wave derelicts” (*Temptation* 120).² Santos’s fictional works, including *What the Hell For*, San Juan adds, “derive their value from being rooted in a distinctive historical epoch of Filipino dispossession.” But “[a]s symptomatic testimonies of the deracinated neocolonized subject, they function as arenas for ideological neutralization and compromise” (*Temptation* 121). Rather than consider Santos’s work Orientalist as San Juan suggests, N. V. M Gonzalez and Oscar V. Campomanes in their essay “Filipino American Literature” (1997) state that *What the Hell For* “could be the quintessential Filipino American novel to date” because it captures the ways that American consumer culture has become a major source of the Filipino American characters’ “aspirations and agonies” (70).

Shifting away from the particularities of Filipino American experience, Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu in his essay “On Loss: Anticipating a Future for Asian American Studies” (2006) examines loss in Santos’s novel “as a foundational social, political, and legal term for Asian American identity” (19). He

contends that Santos's treatment of loss in terms of Filipino generational relations and differences in the United States offers new possibilities for reconceptualizing Asian American identity beyond ethnic boundaries and national belonging. For Shiu, "The historical particularisms of Santos's work enable a project which attempts to understand the future possibilities of the Asian American grouping across national, generational, and political lines while decoupling the connection between psychological pain and political possibilities" (18). But it is precisely the psychological pain of loss, exile, and displacement in the experience of Filipinos in the United States and Filipino Americans that generates new political and creative possibilities, as Santos's novel demonstrates. Shiu raises the provocative question, "How can loss be put to a more productive or effective use, thinking of an affirmative future without investing in a reiteration or survival of the present racial context?" (19), yet his insistence on reading loss in Santos's novel as a reflection of Filipino Americans' generational gap and as an overarching foundational term for Asian American identity reduces the significant differences of Filipino American experience and identity from those of other Asian Americans. Moreover, such reduction unwittingly reinforces the "invisibility" of American imperialism and colonialism in the Philippines, as well as Filipinos in American history and culture. As a result, a fundamental distinction of Filipino American literature shaped by Philippine-U.S. (post)colonial relations and Spanish colonialism is elided. Critics such as Rocío G. Davis and Victor Bascara, among others, emphasize the impact of the "American colonial legacy" on "the fundamental difference between" Filipino American writing and writings of "other Asian American groups" (R. G. Davis, introduction 6). In an essay on Santos's short stories, "Up from Benevolent Assimilation: At Home with the Manongs of Bienvenido Santos" (2004), Bascara compellingly argues that it "should not be possible to read Filipino American literature without understanding that 'Filipino American' is a concept at the intersection of the immigrant and the colonized, and at the overlap of the waning of territorial empire and the waxing of neocolonialism" (61).

What the Hell For demonstrates this "fundamental difference" of Filipino American literature through Santos's treatment of loss. At the same time, by at once evoking and countering Tony Bennett's signature song (also famously rendered by Frank Sinatra) "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," Santos's novel also draws the reader's attention to the markedly different feelings about "home" between Filipino Americans and European Americans. While San Francisco is the true home to which the European American "I" returns to

bask in its golden sunshine that “shines for me,”³ the city is a place of exile for Filipinos and Filipino Americans, who involuntarily “look back to that home faraway now lost in the late mists of evening and the long years” (Santos, *What* 192). The affective contrast here reflects the difference of racial positions, particularly the status of the Philippines as a sort of “colonial possession” of the United States, and the Filipinos as an inclusively excluded people in the U.S. nation-space, barred from citizenship.⁴

Exile as a characteristic condition of Filipinos in the United States and Filipino Americans, then, articulates a mode of postcolonial experience of loss and exclusion in a racialized and imperialist nation-state. Kaplan in her seminal work on American imperialism, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002), argues that “[t]he idea of the nation as home . . . is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’” (1). When Carlos Bulosan states “I think I am forever an exile,” he is articulating an experiential affect and social status of Filipinos shaped by U.S. colonial policies abroad and racial exclusion at home (*Sound* 198). Likewise, Santos’s treatment of loss as a postcolonial condition of exile makes visible what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling,” which, as Eng explains eloquently in his provocative essay “The End(s) of Race,” are “those emergent social forms” that are “ephemeral and difficult to grasp or to name,” but they “invoke one important way by which hauntings are transmitted and received as an affective mood, communicating a sense of the ghostly as well as its political and aesthetic effects” (1486).⁵ The politics and aesthetics of exile allow the “ghost” of colonial empire to haunt the U.S. nation-space, bringing “the irruptions of race into a privileged narrative of European modernity and progress,” to borrow Eng’s words (1486).

Critics such as Campomanes and San Juan, among others, have compellingly argued for situating Filipino American experience and literature in the historical specificities of the U.S. imperialist conquest of and colonialist rule in the Philippines and in relation to Filipino resistance to subjugation. “Among the various Asian countries of origin,” Campomanes emphasizes, “the Philippines holds the sole distinction of being drawn into a truly colonial and neo-colonial relation with the United States, and for this reason it has been absorbed almost totally into the vacuum of American innocence.” Quoting San Juan, Campomanes situates Filipino migration and immigration to the United States in that historical context, particularly “the founding

moment of colonialism, ‘a primal loss suffered through the Filipino-American War (1899–1902) and the resistance ordeal of the revolutionary forces of the First Philippine Republic up to 1911 that opened the way for the large-scale transport of cheap Filipino labor to Hawaii and California [and inaugurated] this long, tortuous exodus from the periphery to the metropolis’” (San Juan, “Mapping” 117). Campomanes argues that “while rooted in the earlier period of Spanish rule, the specter of ‘invisibility’ for Filipinos is specific to the immediate and long-term consequences of American colonialism” (“Filipinos” 52–53). The invisibility of Filipinos in American history and culture is at once symptomatic and constitutive of the invisibility of American imperialism and colonialism. Kaplan points out in a letter of October 10, 1989, to Campomanes: “The invisibility of the Philippines in American history has everything to do with the invisibility of American imperialism to itself” (qtd. in Campomanes, “Filipinos” 53).⁶ Thus Campomanes’s argument for reading Filipino American writing as “a literature of exile and emergence rather than a literature of immigration and settlement” seeks to confront larger historical, epistemological, and ethical issues by calling critical attention to what has been silenced and erased in dominant discourses on American history and culture (“Filipinos” 51).⁷

San Juan makes a similar argument in his earlier writings on Filipino American literature and advances it further with abundant historical evidence and rigorous analysis in his study *The Philippine Temptation: Dialectics of Philippines-U.S. Literary Relations* (1996).⁸ Breaking away from the model of using the narrative of immigration and settlement as a framework for understanding Filipino American experience and literature, San Juan argues for an alternative approach that links the violence of the U.S. imperialist conquest of the Philippines and the subsequent U.S. annexation of this former colony of Spain to the racist ideology underlying colonialism at home and abroad. He notes that the same month—February 1899—in which the Philippine-American War began and “the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty that formalized the annexation of Spain’s former colonies” also saw the publication of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden,” which resonates strongly with the “Manifest Destiny” of U.S. expansion in the Americas and the Pacific (*Temptation* 3). San Juan, like Campomanes, intervenes in the silence and invisibility of U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the dominant model of immigrant narratives of assimilation and success in the United States as the “promised land” of freedom, equality, and opportunity for all.

It is against historical amnesia, against the invisibility of Filipinos in

American history and of American imperialism and colonialism, that Santos represents loss as integral to exile in the Filipino American experience and inscribes that loss in multiple sites of Filipino San Francisco. Drawing on critical theories on loss, I explore exile as a historical, social, and psychological condition and as a critical position, which not only insists on engaging the past but also urges a reimagining of Filipino/American identity, one that unsettles the U.S. national boundaries that keep the Philippines as an “unincorporated territory” of the United States and Filipinos as U.S. “nationals” but not citizens.⁹ Santos foregrounds the historical particularities of Filipino/American identity and experience at the beginning of *What the Hell For* through the narrator, a Filipino writer and magazine editor who is stranded in San Francisco on his way home because of martial law in the Philippines. Born “on the outskirts of the American naval base near Subic Bay in the Philippines,” and an “oriental with broad hints of Malay-Indonesian, perhaps Chinese, strain, a kind of racial chopsuey . . . flavored with Spanish wine,” David Dante Tolosa embodies the convergences of multiple histories, including Spanish colonialism and American imperialism in the formation of Filipino/American identity (*What* 1).¹⁰ The American military presence in the Philippines has had an indelible impact on David’s life. He was orphaned as a teenager when his mother passed away; his father had deserted him and his mother when he was five. His father worked at the American naval base before leaving for the states shortly after the outbreak of World War II. Another Filipino man later lived with his mother briefly and also disappeared from her life when he joined the U.S. Navy (2). According to the sociologist Yen Le Espiritu, “After the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain in 1898, its Navy began actively recruiting Filipinos primarily as stewards and mess boys. . . . Besides serving as recruiting stations, these military bases—centers of wealth amid local poverty—exposed the local populace to U.S. money, culture, and standards of living, generating a strong incentive for enlistment” (28–29). But racial discrimination structured Filipino enlistees’ positions in the U.S. Navy. “Barred from admission to other ratings, Filipino enlistees performed the work of domestics, preparing and serving the officers’ meals and caring for the officers’ galley, wardroom, and living spaces. . . . Even when they passed the relevant qualifying examinations, few Filipinos were allowed to transfer to other ratings. . . . In 1970, of the 16,669 Filipinos in the U.S. Navy, 80 percent were in the steward rating” (Espiritu 29–30). David’s reference to his father’s temporary work at the U.S. naval base links that experience to the father’s departure to and disappear-

ance in the states, thus foregrounding the connection between the loss of his father and American imperial and colonial interventions in the Philippines. Both the loss and the conditions leading to it resonate throughout the novel with Filipinos' "homeless" and exilic status in the United States. David's search for his lost father accompanies his exploration of San Francisco, thus serving as an overarching theme that links disparate Filipino communities scattered in the city and the Bay Area.

An established writer and editor in the Philippines and a founding editor of an intended new magazine for Filipinos in the states, which a group of wealthy professional Filipino immigrants apparently want to finance, David is strategically positioned as an inside outsider in the U.S. nation-space and in different Filipino American communities. While his position enables and obliges him to move about San Francisco like a *flâneur*-journalist, to come in contact with people and observe their lives in the city's drastically different neighborhoods divided by race and class, loss provides the thematic and experiential link among the disparate lives and events. His exilic inside-outsider's position also creates a necessary distance for David to critically and sympathetically examine the lives of three generations of Filipinos in the United States and Filipino Americans and their collective and individual loss that brings back the past to haunt the present. At the same time, David's search for his lost father in San Francisco accompanies his movement about town and inscribes Filipinos' irrecoverable loss on the American urban space, rendering it a site of postcolonial exilic and transnational belongings.

"THE NEW BREED" OF FILIPINO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR LOSS

Seeking to learn about "the new breed" of professional Filipinos who have come to the United States since the 1960s, David reveals the class difference among Filipinos in the United States and exposes their postcolonial loss, hurt, and yearning even in the privileged living quarters of successful Filipino Americans. The socioeconomic position of wealthy Filipino American professionals in medicine and business is spatially reflected in the locations of their houses in exclusive residential districts such as Diamond Heights, far away from Little Manila in the Chinatown section of the city.¹¹ The Diamond Heights mansion of Dr. Pacifico Sotto, a urologist, and his wife, Imelda Sotto, a pediatrician, epitomizes what David refers to as the achievement of the "ultimate dream of wealth and luxury and ease" by "the new breed of Filipino immigrants," including "the members of the Board" who are financing the

intended new magazine (34, 24–25). As chairman of the board, Dr. Sotto wants David to stay at his house so that he can be better informed of the progress of the magazine in the making. This arrangement gives David the opportunity to observe the lifestyle of the Sottos and their associates, who seem to be distancing themselves from Filipino culture. When he is invited to the Sottos' luau party to be introduced to the board members, David wonders "why a group of Filipinos away from home should prefer a Hawaiian party to something more native to the Philippines" (7). Following the advice of Professor Art Jaimes, who used to be David's teacher in the Philippines and is now a tenured full professor at San Francisco City College, David wears a traditional formal Filipino shirt to the party. But to his surprise, he is "the only one in a *barong*" at the party. Everyone else is "dressed in Hawaiian costume" (8). So, too, are the waiters and barmen. David feels "self-conscious" all evening and finds himself "a stranger in the wrong attire" that "clashed with the music" (8–9).

Yet his outsider's position and perspective reveal a sense of profound loss and longing beneath the glistening luxury of wealth and pretense of these successful Filipinos who have made it in the states. To David, the "pure Hawaiian" soft music that "seeped through some secret crannies in the mansion" with "voices and strings" is "a smattering of bitters, mostly wailing, long drawn out" (8). It makes him think of "little hurt children looking for their wayward mothers," but "this was adult pain and joy, hope in the midst of island despair" (8). Santos captures the contradictions and ambivalence in Filipino Americans' experience of loss and being "lost" through David's response to the music, which subtly alludes to the Spanish and American colonial legacy that haunts Filipinos in diasporas. The pain of loss and yearning in the Hawaiian music evokes the annexation of Hawaii by the United States in 1898 at the beginning of the Spanish-American War, which led to the annexation of the Philippines along with Puerto Rico and Guam by the United States in December 1898 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Santos disperses the mixed feelings of hurt and pain, despair and hope, loss and longing resulting from colonization by Spain and the United States onto the display at the Sottos' residence through David's observation: "It was everywhere. In the indoor gardens with fountains . . . bamboo dancers in petrified grace, armed Ifugao warriors in mock belligerence, and Igorot women with exposed breasts, brown and wooden" (8–9). The presence of these tropical lives and Pacific indigenous peoples and cultures as artifacts paradoxically enhances their absence and loss in the midst of Filipinos' newly

achieved American wealth and commoditized Hawaiian culture for pleasurable consumption: “There was a long table in another room where food of all kinds lay tastefully arranged, most of it imbedded inside cut-out pineapples of all sizes. . . . Suckling pigs, the way Hawaiians roast their pigs at luaus, lay prostrate on banana leaves” (10). Such lavish consumption of island cultures produces a historical amnesia that helps sustain what Campomanes calls a U.S. “national ‘historical unconscious’ that both sanctions imperial practices within and without the American hemisphere while also claiming exception to Old World antecedents” (“New Formations” 537).

Santos highlights the wealthy Filipino immigrants’ apparently willful amnesia of Filipino history and culture through David’s alienation and resentment at the party from the perspective of exile. “I had never felt so alien among my own countrymen,” David says to himself (9). And he felt the urge to belt “an impassioned rendition of *Bayang Magiliw* or recite ‘I am a Filipino’” (9). In contrast to the mute commodity of Filipino culture as part of the Sottos’ household decor, David’s assertion of Filipino identity evokes the histories of Spanish and American colonial conquests in the Philippines and Filipinos’ struggles for independence. “*Bayang Magiliw*” (“Land of the Morning”), also known as “*Lupang Hinirang*” (“Chosen Land”), the national anthem of the Philippines, was first played during the proclamation of Philippine independence from Spanish colonial rule on June 12, 1898, delivered by Filipino revolutionary forces under General Emilio Aguinaldo, who fought against American occupation in the subsequent Philippine-American War (1899–1902). Similarly, “I Am a Filipino,” an impassioned prose poem, evokes the long history of Filipino resistance to colonization by foreign powers. David’s “mourning” of the loss of Filipino history and culture in the Filipinos’ pursuit of the “ultimate dream of wealth and luxury and ease” in the United States insists on actively engaging with the Filipino past of struggles against colonization, which seems to be erased by the dazzling American prosperity of the Sottos and their friends, whose conversations always orient toward profit making, expensive cars, and private jets (102–3). These conversations along with the Sottos’ display of wealth seem to make racial hierarchy and the legacies of colonialism and resistance disappear. But Santos animates the spectral past, rendering it ghostly and haunting through David’s “melancholic mourning.”

Apart from embedding in the extravagant lifestyle of the apparently assimilated Filipino doctors the collective loss of Filipino history and cultures as a consequence of colonial legacies, Santos reveals Filipinos’ personal

loss as part of the exilic condition of postcolonial immigration, displacement, assimilation, and alienation. Despite their ostentatious prosperity, the wealthy new breed of professional Filipino immigrants such as those in the Sottos' circle privately experience loss in different ways. By confronting those personal losses, Santos establishes a broader range of connections between the past and the present and between the Philippines and the United States in the formation of Filipino American identity and community. The case of Dr. Augusto Tablizo, Jr., a member of the board for the new magazine, exemplifies the dilemma and inevitable loss in Filipino postcolonial diasporas. Dr. Tablizo is well known as having been an exceptionally bright student who excelled in all subjects, especially history, in his hometown of Alcala, in Luzon. Everybody there expected him to become a lawyer or the mayor of Alcala and later the governor of Luzon. But he chooses to become a medical doctor and emigrates to the United States. His wife, Dolores Siao, a registered nurse, and their newborn daughter, Karen, are able to join him before long (155–56). Dr. Tablizo's emigration to the United States is another symptom of the legacies of U.S.-Philippine colonial relations. Critics such as Gonzalez, Campomanes, and Allan Punzalan Isaac have pointed out the impact of the United States' colonial imposition of American education and culture in the Philippines. The Americanization of the Philippines began with its annexation by the United States and the subsequent suppression of Filipino resistance to American colonial rule. "When the American conquest of the Philippines came to a close and a new era began," Gonzalez and Campomanes state, "the colonial administration—the second in Philippine history—fielded a thousand teachers upon five hundred towns and villages throughout the archipelago" (66). Significantly, Isaac notes, "U.S. educational policy for insular nationals" such as Filipinos "was generally patterned after Booker T. Washington's vocational program in Tuskegee and Hampton for African Americans and Native Americans" (9).¹² Like the Sottos and their guests, Dr. Tablizo and his wife are products of an education system steeped in American colonial tutelage.

In a way, Dr. Tablizo's parents have lost their only child, just as the Philippines has lost its talents and productive force, to the United States in part because of the impact of American colonial rule. Santos portrays this loss through the experience of the senior Mr. Tablizo and his wife, Pepang, who sold their family land to put their son through medical school only to lose him to the United States. "As soon as he had established a prosperous practice and acquired a beautiful home" in San Francisco, Dr. Tablizo asked his

parents to move to the United States to live with his family. His mother does not care where she lives as long as she is with her husband. But his father does not want to live in the United States (156). He refuses to leave home even after his wife passes away. Finally, he agrees to come for a visit. Once in San Francisco, Tablizo, Sr., finds the environment alienating and feels even lonelier. He cannot communicate with his granddaughter, who finds his accent odd and his English impossible to understand (157–58). He “suffered silently the frequent parties on weekends” (158). It becomes evident to his son that he feels “like a guest, an intruder” in spite of all his efforts to make him feel at home (159). Even when his granddaughter has become close to him, he never stops asking his son to send him back to Alcala (165). “That’s where I belong” and “I want to go home already,” he keeps saying, until one morning he fails to wake up. The doctors find “nothing wrong with him.” Mr. Tablizo’s unexpected death “deeply affected” his family and their friends, including the Sottos, who “were disturbed by the way he died—it seemed, for no reason.” But David believes that the “old man died of a broken heart,” as “Filipinos do,” for his beloved home from which he had been exiled (166). By indicating displacement and longing for home in the Philippines as the cause of the elder Mr. Tablizo’s death, Santos refuses to offer redemption for either the personal or collective loss related to the American colonial legacy, hence ultimately making colonialism irredeemable. Moreover, Mr. Tablizo’s exile in the luxury home of his devoted son offers an alternative perspective on values and belonging to the materialistic American outlook and way of life. Uprooted, inassimilable, and uncontainable within national boundaries, the exile then can occupy the inside-outsider status as a critical position where alternative and subversive perspectives become available.

Embedded in postcolonial exile and irredeemable loss are an uncompromising position, critical insights, and interventional possibilities. Santos inscribes exile and irrecoverable loss also in the Sottos’ mansion—apparently an epitome of the achievement of the “American Dream”—which, haunted by the past, becomes a space of exile, isolation, displacement, and different perspectives that undermine the deceptive glamour of wealth and the myth of America as the “promised land” of freedom and equality. In this privileged, extravagant space that is like a “portion of Malacañang Palace transported to San Francisco” (104), David discovers soon after he moves into the guest living quarters that a young Filipino and his mother keep house for the Sottos. They both look extremely miserable despite having an abundance and variety of first-rate food, luxurious living conditions, and a car at their dis-

posal (20). The Sottos have brought to their San Francisco mansion from the Philippines poor, underprivileged Filipinos as servants along with Filipino indigenous artifacts and ornate mahogany furniture made by “the Bilibid prisoners in Manila” (104). The son speaks heavily accented English, and the mother speaks Tagalog. They are doubly displaced by their exile from home—by their subordination to the Sottos and by their circumstances that isolate them from other Filipinos and from Filipino Americans. They assert their resentment through a pronounced sullenness that makes David feel “like an intruder in their presence” (20). However, they are “nowhere in sight” at the Sottos’ parties or luncheons, where the “professional” waiters who serve the guests are mostly “white Americans,” wearing “white uniforms with the names of the catering firm embroidered on their breast pockets” (101). The Filipino housekeepers’ “invisible” presence of servitude in exile exposes and critiques class difference among Filipinos and Filipino Americans. Paradoxically, the presence of white American waiters renders the absence of white American colleagues or guests even more noticeable, suggesting racial segregation and cultural marginalization in the social life of even successful Filipino immigrants and Filipino Americans. In a way, they, too, are in exile because of their racial status and despite their professional success and material wealth.

In their dream mansion, the Sottos live a lonely and troubled life burdened and disturbed by the past. Dr. Sotto intimates to David that he does not know why he feels “so damned alone” when he has so many friends and moves in “an international circle.” But there is no one he can really talk to or likes (42). And he and his wife, a successful and beloved pediatrician, have become estranged from each other. They have even “grown afraid of each other” (45). They were sweethearts in medical school and got married before emigrating to the United States. As soon as they passed the medical board examination they left the Philippines for San Francisco in the 1960s, leaving behind their only daughter, Estela, whom they visit regularly for a couple of months each year (41). But none of their friends know about the child until she is finally brought to San Francisco. David finds out that Estela “looked like a freak who needed twenty-four-hour care” (77). As he describes her sitting in her wheelchair: “Estela could not hold her head still, nor her arms and hands which twitched in various contortions as involuntary as they were awkward. She was dribbling at the mouth and making strange sounds” (108). But the Sottos discover that the scene of the city from the window at night has a magical effect on their daughter. Her moaning stops and her contor-

tions cease at the sight of the lights blazing below in the distance. She seems to become happy, “looking down at the city below, making those sounds and those movements with her hands and her legs and her body as though beating to the rhythm of a melody the city was sending up to her.” “[S]he was responding. A great happiness suffused her whole being.” She then sleeps soundly (111). Estela’s strange fascination with the blazing city below appears to confirm Dr. Sotto’s own perspective on the view. “Beautiful, isn’t it?” he says to David (76). Seen from any window of the Sottos’ mansion on Diamond Heights, the city “lay like a sheet of sparkling jewels” (182).

The Sottos’ view of the beautiful city, however, is proven to be an illusion by both Estela and David, whose perspectives critically undermine the idealized image of the United States embodied by the apparent splendor of the city. Assuming it will help Estela to have a better view of the city, Dr. Sotto buys a huge telescope and positions it as closely as possible to the window. When he is asked to try the telescope first, David finds the close-up view of the city “almost frightening in its nearness as if the lights could burn you to death or entangle you among endless wires and vapor lamps” (177). The realistic view of the city seems to frighten Estela when she is coaxed by her parents to look through the telescope: “Estela peered for a few seconds, then she reared backwards with a violence that caught us all by surprise, it gave me goose pimples. . . . After a while, they asked Estela to try the telescope again. She gave out a long low moan and shook her head. Never was a ‘no’ more emphatic and frightening. Estela was actually crying” (178). With their wealth and professional success, the Sottos are far removed from the inner city and the working-class Filipino communities who inhabit the city. The dreamlike city seen from Diamond Heights parallels the “unreality” of the lifestyle of the Sottos and their circle of friends. An invalid imprisoned by her deformed body, Estela is unable to articulate that she can see “more than what was given to the naked eyes to see” (1). Her deformed body in constant convulsion in a way embodies the colonial legacies—the “primal loss,” the trauma, and the deprivation of Filipinos—and shows what the Sottos have left behind and lost, while living an ultimate dream life in their dream mansion with a dream view of the city. The presence of Estela alters the apparently perfect life of the Sottos, shadowing their mansion with loss. The painful presence of Estela’s tortured body is like an open wound of the past that cannot be healed, bearing witness to irrecoverable loss resulting from both the legacy and the amnesia of American colonialism in the Philippines.

Like Estela, David undermines the Sottos' grandiose residence and the enchanting sight of San Francisco "in all its jeweled splendor" (110) from different perspectives gained by exploring the city on foot, particularly Filipino San Francisco. As he remarks:

There was always the view of the city from my window. A blazing city, to use the doctor's term. Later when I learned more of the city, I saw the people who inhabited it, Filipinos among them, the every old and the very young, the lost and never found, their exposed lives beyond the blazing view. Candle-lit lives or what one saw under a dust- and dirt-coated bulb or what one sensed in total darkness. There were those that carried this darkness as they walked the streets of the city or sat on park benches wondering why no birds came, only stray dogs that littered the streets with their shit. (32)

David's encounters in the city enable him to see beneath the glamour of wealth that Filipinos like the Sottos have obtained and to depict the "golden city" in a different light. After walking the streets of San Francisco in search of materials for the new magazine and for his lost father, David comes to realize: "[The] beautiful [guest room in the Sottos' mansion isn't] any good for anything except for writing my heart out, for crying quietly, for God's sake, while I gazed down the hills and valleys of your blazing city and saw old men waiting to die a long way from home; and angry young brown boys and girls who curse their parents and spit on their images, confused and secretly frightened" (34). A complex, diverse Filipino San Francisco emerges from David's accounts of his exploration of the city, showing both the formations and disintegration of diasporic families, communities, and identities, which although shaped by the (post)colonial U.S.-Philippine relationship, demonstrate unexpected possibilities, as well as challenges, of inhabiting the city as exiles and becoming otherwise than assimilated, subordinated, undesirable American nationals.

INSCRIBING LOSS AND THE LOST IN THE CITY

While urging himself to explore the city, David alludes to racial segregation in San Francisco, which provides a social context for Filipinos' exilic condition in the United States. "GET LOST, David, get lost. Learn to know the city like the bruises that still hurt. At least that section of this so-called golden city by the bay that was still open to you" (134). His search for stories for the

new magazine leads David to various parts of the city and into the lives of people, mostly Filipinos, including the “old-timers” and their grandchildren. Hence, rather than driven by claiming right to the city like the characters’ urban exploration in *Chinatown Family*, David’s exploration of San Francisco inscribes Filipino exile as a form of inclusive exclusion of racialized minorities and as a form of mourning that opens the present to the past and brings repressed history to disrupt the normalized inferior, subordinate position of Filipinos.

In an insightful reading of *What the Hell For*, Palumbo-Liu discerns a connection between the narrative structure and scattered nature of Filipino diasporas. As he notes: “[T]he entire narrative is filled with discontinuities and alienations, which each in their own way comment on the impossibility of constituting diasporic ‘culture.’ Instead we find David moving between and within discrete, isolated spaces. . . . The thematic of discontinuity and sterility, the inability (and even lack of desire) to continue a tradition in diaspora as well as the inability to ‘take root’ in this new space, is carried throughout the novel, which ends on a note of existential angst” (*Asian/American* 351). It is precisely by exploring various forms of displacement in Filipino diasporas that Santos enacts the politics of Filipino exilic condition that insists on engaging with historical legacies of colonialism that continue to shape Filipinos’ experience and social status in the United States and haunt the urban space and nation-space of the United States with the specter of its imperialism abroad. What seems to link the disparate lives of Filipino exiles and Filipino Americans in the United States is a “melancholic mourning” of loss that disturbs the present with the past and calls for a reimagining of Filipino/American identity, one that confronts the impact of Spanish and American (post)colonial legacies on both Filipinos and Americans.

Filipino diasporic communities’ apparent “inability to ‘take root’ in this new space” of the American city is in part the result of what Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., refers to as “the coerced incorporation of Filipinos into the nation, underwritten by the violence of conquest, empire building, white supremacy, and global capital” (1). Incorporated with a status of exclusionary inclusion in the U.S. nation-state as a colonized people, Filipinos—even though they are supposed to be U.S. “nationals”—occupy a unique position that exposes “U.S. colonial racialization” (Isaac 7). Isaac’s examination of the formation of Filipino America and American national identity shaped by the intertwining of U.S imperialism abroad and racial ideology at home offers an illuminating context for the exilic condition of Filipinos in Santos’s novel. In

his study *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (2006), Isaac points out that racial formation in the United States and the countries or territories it has colonized is mutually informing and constitutive. Drawing on historical documents, he argues that “policy surrounding the colonies, later client states, informs and is informed by internal debates about race, gender, class, and ethnicity. . . . By extending its borders to incorporate tropical lands and peoples through its neocolonial adventures, the U.S. nation-state created an ‘American Tropics’ as part of its national identity” (4–5). Along with Puerto Ricans, Chamorros, and Samoans, Filipinos “were given the status of U.S. nationals” (Isaac 7). However, according to historian Hyung-chan Kim, even though the United States Supreme Court’s ruling on the case of *Emil J. Repke v. United States* on December 2, 1901 acknowledged that “the Philippine Islands were a territory of the United States,” the Court “rejected the commonly accepted notion that the Constitution follows the flag.” Thus Filipinos “were subject to American laws without their constitutional protection.” This means that Filipinos “could not become U.S. citizens, although they had to obey American laws. They were called ‘nationals’” (*A Legal History* 100, 101). Moreover, Isaac notes, “while Filipinos faced legal and violent extralegal disciplinary measures to regulate their sexual, racial, and class mobility in the United States, they were not officially excluded until flag independence after World War II” (7).

Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, first published in 1943, articulates with indignation Filipinos’ experience of spatially reinforced exclusion in the United States. As the narrator protests: “[I]n many ways it was a crime to be a Filipino in California. I came to know that the public streets were not free to my people: we were stopped each time these vigilant patrolmen saw us driving a car. We were suspect each time we were seen with a white woman” (121). Even though Santos’s *What the Hell For* is set in the 1970s, David can still feel the lingering impact of racial exclusion, as he says at the beginning of the novel: “Wherever I go in this country I carry my passport. I feel threatened without it here in San Francisco where we, who are obviously Asians, have to be ready at all times to prove who we are and what our intentions are, at least, for the day” (2). Espiritu eloquently argues in her study *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (2003) that “[w]hile it is true that Filipinos have been kept apart from ‘America,’ it is also true that they have been at times forcibly included in it—as infantilized ‘little brown brothers,’ colonized nationals, segregated navy stewards, ‘cheapened’ labor, and subordinate citizens” (46–47). Hence,

rather than “outright exclusion,” Espiritu contends, “*differential inclusion*” more accurately characterizes Filipinos’ encounter with the United States (47). Understood within these historical and social contexts, Filipinos’ exilic yearning for home in the Philippines as portrayed in Santos’s novel is not only an effect of colonial diasporas or racial exclusion but also a resistance to assimilation that renders Filipino cultures invisible and Filipinos subordinate in the United States.

A subversive politics of mourning irrecoverable loss, then, underlies the affective and psychological experience of exile that Santos seeks to capture through David and his encounters in search of his father and Filipino America in San Francisco. As David states, the articles in his magazine would include “interesting studies into the psyche of the Filipino, his peculiar predicament as exile arising from cultural and historical accidents” (33). Traces of Spanish and American colonial legacy follow David as he visits “the public library and the Philippine consulate library in San Francisco” for information about the Philippines and Filipinos in the United States and as he takes “long walks trying to find out where Filipinos usually gathered, through the so-called Little Manila section in Chinatown and similar places” (23). The marginalization of Filipinos in American culture is reflected in the lack of any books written by Filipinos in translation or in English in the United States. As David finds at a public library in San Francisco: “A half shelf contained less than a dozen Philippine titles, most of them printed at the turn of the century. None of my favorite authors among Filipinos writing in English had their works on that tiny shelf. It appeared on this evidence that Philippine literature in English did not exist in America, hardly, anyway, judging from the token samples I had seen in other libraries in the United States” (52). The librarian, apparently a Filipina, is apologetic about “the library’s lack of contemporary books on the Philippines and by Filipinos” (52). Actually, she “knew quite a few Filipino writers in English who were now residing in the United States” (52). But those writers too are absent from the shelf. Symptomatic of colonial “cultural genocide,” the highlighted invisibility of contemporary writings on the Philippines and by Filipinos in the library paradoxically makes the absence present, thus turning Filipinos’ collective loss as a colonial legacy into a vector of social critique, through which repressed history intrudes on the present, disturbing the norm of Eurocentric cultural hegemony and white supremacy.

Santos enacts the politics of mourning through David’s encounters, which are also haunted by intriguing, elusive traces of the presence of David’s

lost father, whose absence evokes the American imperial interventions in the Philippines and their lingering impact. One of those encounters takes place when David stumbles upon a poetry workshop in a public library. The teacher of the workshop is a white woman who speaks heavily accented English. Attracted to her, David stays to talk to her when the workshop is over. To his surprise, the woman treats him like an old friend, or rather like a child. She offers to take David home, and when told that his home is “thousands of miles away, across the Pacific,” she decides to take him to her home, saying that David looks “like an orphan” (54). Seeking connection with fellow exiles, David asks about the woman’s “true home” and is told that her “original home is a little town near Paris,” indicating that San Francisco is her home now and she is not in exile (54). Santos tactfully enhances some of the consequences of American colonial endeavors in the Philippines through David’s dialogue with the woman, which reveals that David does not write in his own language. “I have been speaking and writing in English ever since I learned to speak and write,” says David. And he adds: “I can write letters in our language, but I’m not sure about my spelling. I can’t write creatively in our national language. I have to use English” (55). He also tells her that he “was born in a U.S. Naval Base in the Philippines” because his “mother was there” and his father “worked at the U.S. Naval Base,” suggesting a connection between the U.S. military presence in the Philippines and his inability to write in his own language or the Philippine national language, Tagalog/Pilipino. Even though as early as 1937, President Manuel L. Quezon proclaimed Tagalog as the national language of the Philippines, and the teaching of this language at all high schools and normal schools began in 1940, David is still unable to write it. His severed relationship with his national language is part of the American and also the Spanish colonial legacies.

Underlying David’s loss of the Filipino national language are histories of the violence of colonial conquest. In 1901, the year the president of the first Philippine Republic, Emilio Aguinaldo, leader of the “insurrection,” or rather the Philippine-American War, was captured, “the U.S. transport ship *Thomas* arrived in Manila Bay carrying five hundred young American teachers whose mission was to ‘educate, uplift, and civilize’ the Filipinos” (Carbó iii). Nick Carbó in his introduction to *Returning a Borrowed Tongue* (1995), a collection of poems by Filipino and Filipino American writers, emphasizes that imposing the English language as the official language and the American educational system was a crucial part of U.S. colonization of the Philippines “in the guise of the policy of Benevolent Assimilation” (iii).

Under the American colonial administration, as under Spanish colonial rule, indigenous languages were suppressed and forbidden in the classroom “because of their presumed inferiority.” As a result, English became the “preferred” and most widely used language in every aspect of Filipino life, especially for the educated, and American popular culture replaced indigenous cultures (iii). David’s relationship with English and Tagalog/Pilipino is shaped by what Dylan Rodríguez calls “cultural genocide” in his essay “‘A Million Deaths?’: Genocide and the ‘Filipino American’ Condition of Possibility” (152). Rodríguez draws critical attention to “the impact of a white supremacist genocide in the archipelago—including and beyond its formal military aspects,” noting that there is “a historical subject that dies, breaks, disappears, and emerges in and through this genocidal encounter with the United States” (161). Out of those losses, new critical possibilities emerge. As Rodríguez contends, “Here we find a potentially radical point of departure for Filipino-American studies, a critical rupturing from its relative normalization of identity, relation, and place (here an imagined Filipino America) that is permanently troubled by the power of modernity’s civilizing conquest” (161). Santos undermines the normalization of the racialized inferiority of Filipinos and their historically, socially shaped condition of exile, through David’s interaction with the white woman, who never gives her name to David or asks for his. David remains “a nameless entity to her” throughout the duration of their encounter (56).

David’s relationship with the white woman at once evokes and disrupts the norm of idealized white American women as depicted in Asian American writings such as Sui Sin Far’s short stories and Lin Yutang’s *Chinatown Family*, among others. Upon hearing that David speaks a dialect different from the Filipino national language, the woman leads him into her bedroom and asks him to write the names of Filipino dialects on the blackboard in the room. When David suggests that he would rather talk with her instead, he is ordered to return to his “assignments” (56). David’s observation and comments render the white woman’s assumed motherly authority over David particularly condescending. As soon as he enters the woman’s apartment, he finds that it “smelled like stale bread” (54). Rather than show cleanliness and tidiness as markers of the civic virtues of U.S. citizenship, the woman’s bedroom is messy, unkempt, and “cluttered with odds and ends,” and the bed “unmade” (55). These visual details simultaneously highlight the white woman’s privileged position and expose the myth of white superiority.

And yet this private space bears witness to Filipinos' loss—loss of indigenous languages, cultures, homeland, individuality, and manhood. The white woman confesses to David: “You’re not the first Filipino I’ve brought home. You see, I knew a Filipino once. He looked like you. I thought he had come back to me. Same smile. Same lost look in the eyes” (57). David immediately thinks of his father, but he is disappointed to hear that the other Filipino is the same age he is or even younger. While the lost look of these displaced Filipino men wandering in San Francisco alludes to the postcolonial predicament of Filipinos, it ironically contrasts the at-home ease of belongingness enjoyed by the white woman, an immigrant herself, whose heavy accent apparently poses no obstacle to her authority in running the poetry workshop or in participating actively in American culture. Her interaction with David reflects the structural, institutionalized racial hierarchy underlying the unequal social positions of immigrants from France as whites and Filipino U.S. nationals as nonwhites. Rather than show any interest in David’s “orphan-like” situation, the white woman’s curiosity about dialects of the Philippine archipelago is self-centered, devoid of any historical awareness. “It was one of the dullest moments in my life,” says David. “But not to her. We went on and on about dialects and I wondered how the night was going to end.” Finally, the white woman said, “Now I’m wiser than before we met.” David “took her statement to mean the class was dismissed.” As he runs away from the woman’s bedroom as fast as he can, David realizes: “She never asked for my name. She didn’t give me her name or her old Filipino boy friend’s” (57). Even in the private space of the white woman’s bedroom, David remains a “nameless entity” (56). His loss of individuality and manhood here is related to his other losses, including the loss of his father, resulting from the U.S.-Philippine (post)colonial relationship, which continues to structure the social status of Filipinos in the United States and the relationship between Filipino America and white America.

The silence about American imperial intervention in the Philippines in the white woman’s conversation with David, like the absence of contemporary writings on the Philippines and by Filipinos in American public libraries, is at once symptomatic and constitutive of the invisibility of American imperialism and colonialism in the Philippines. As Espiritu points out, “Whereas U.S. invasion, annexation, and subjugation of the Philippines have left indelible and physical marks on the country and its people, these violent acts have been largely erased from American public memory or obscured by

public myths about U.S. benevolence and the ‘civilizing mission’ in the Philippines” (26). By asking through David, “What the hell was going on?” (57), Santos urges the reader to confront the silence and absence that structure the unequal relationship between David and the white woman and mediate their interactions. Paradoxically, the silence and absence make visible the loss in the palimpsest history of the Philippines, which intrudes the present and the spaces David traverses in search of Filipino San Francisco and his lost father, whose absence is emblematic of indelible legacies of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.

Moreover, by emphasizing a connection between Filipinos’ namelessness and their “homeless” exilic situation through David’s encounter with the white female poet, Santos exposes what Lisa Lowe terms “the ‘economy of affirmation and forgetting’ that structures and formalizes humanism.” Lowe explains that “[t]his economy civilizes and develops freedoms for ‘man’ in modern Europe, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that reconstituted as uncivilized and unfree” (“Intimacies” 206). An epistemological violence and the “violence of forgetting” underlie the construction of racial hierarchies and the racialized distribution of “freedom.” As Lowe argues:

The “overcoming” of internal contradiction resolves in *freedom* within the modern Western political sphere through displacement and elision of the coeval conditions of slavery and indentureship in the Americas. In this sense modern humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom.

The affirmation of the desire for freedom is so inhabited by the forgetting of its conditions of possibility, that every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting. (206)

It is precisely against “the violence of forgetting” that Santos insists on confronting the irrecoverable loss through the narrator’s exile and search for his father. David is haunted by the “ghosts” of his lost father, and his encounters in the city render the spaces he traverses a palimpsest of the specter of colonialism. Thus the absence of the father, like the absence of writings by contemporary Filipino authors in the public library, makes the loss of Filipinos by “elision,” “burial,” and “the violence of forgetting” legible in the unequal social positions of the white woman and Filipinos like David. In so doing, Santos inscribes American urban space with colonial legacies.

INHABITING THE CITY AS EXILES

While Filipinos' collective and personal loss haunts the public and private spaces David visits, his encounters reveal that in struggling against their predicament as exiles, Filipinos in and around the city of San Francisco have formed new diasporic communities of transnational belongings, which resist cultural assimilation and historical amnesia and testify to Filipinos' (post)colonial racial exclusion and "*differential inclusion*" in the United States.¹³ Of the Filipino gatherings listed in a local "Philippine newspaper published fortnightly," he goes to as many as possible (23). David discovers that different Filipino organizations hold meetings as frequently as three times a week, and these meetings have become a "lifestyle" of "Pinoy" in California to socialize among Filipinos because of their loneliness in the United States.¹⁴ More important, such gatherings are a way to have one's voice heard, to share memories, and to build communities. One of the meetings David attends is held in the basement of St. Joseph's Catholic Church by "an organization of civic-minded and religiously inclined Filipino-Americans as they called themselves, which had been allocated a Federal grant for the purpose of helping out needy but deserving young Filipino college students" (112). The purpose of the meeting is to decide on the criteria for selecting qualified candidates and for allocating the money. For the "old-timers," the meeting is also a time to socialize. For more recent immigrants, it is a time to share memories of home and to perform and experience Filipino heritage by speaking Pilipino. After introducing himself in English as a member of the association, a middle-aged man "launched into a flowery speech in Pilipino" (113). His Filipino is music to the ears of the old-timers, who applaud eagerly whenever the speaker pauses dramatically. Even though David has not been away from the homeland for long, he, too, is "entranced." He watches with delight "the oldtimers as they took in the speaker's performance with such child-like enthusiasm" (114). For a moment, they are transported back to the homeland from which they are exiled for various reasons. However, their memories and sentiments of home in the Philippines are not shared by a younger generation of American-born Filipinos at the meeting. They are impatient with the speaker; one of them, who speaks "pure American" English, interrupts him (114). The old-timers are outraged, finding the behavior un-Filipino. The subsequent heated exchanges demonstrate the estrangement between generations of Filipinos, a reoccurring theme in Santos's novel.

For the younger generation of Filipino Americans, the invisibility of Filipino cultures along with the sociopolitical marginalization of Filipinos in the United States results in the loss of connection to their heritage. This loss in part underlies the apparently inevitable “generation gap.” Santos suggests that the seemingly inevitable generation gap is in part a colonialist pedagogical effect. In response to an old-timer’s accusative question, “Young man, are you a Filipino?” the young Filipino rebuts: “You bet we are Filipinos. Born here. Not in the steaming jungles where our ancestors are supposed to have come from, who speak that language that eats up so much precious time” (115). By identifying his Filipino ancestors with the “steaming jungle” and relating Filipino, the Tagalog-based national language of the Philippines, to those ancestors born in the “jungle,” the young Filipino’s remarks evoke the colonial “civilizing” mission of “the white man’s burden” as part of the American “benevolent assimilation” of Filipinos, showing the lingering effect of what Rodríguez calls Filipinos’ “genocidal encounter with the United States” beyond the American military conquest and colonial rule in the Philippines (161). But against cultural genocide and historical amnesia, Santos imbues David’s encounters with pathos of exile and sustains its affective, psychological, and political valence through David’s observations. In the midst of the uproar following the young man’s disruption of the speech, David seeks out the “Filipino orator to ask him what he thought of the scene.” When David “finally located him, sitting alone in a corner, he looked quite confused and disoriented.” As David approaches: “He raised his eyes towards me and, for a flitting moment, I thought I saw my father’s eyes. He had been crying silently.” “How beautifully you talked,” says David “in Pilipino” (116). Resisting the erasure of historical amnesia and American colonial cultural hegemony, Filipinos in exile refuse to come to terms with the collective and personal loss resulting from American colonial legacies. Exilic mourning of the loss keeps the past present and the loss felt, visible, and disruptive of the normalization of racial subjugation and the cultural assimilation of Filipinos in the United States.

Santos’s depiction of the exilic status and experience of Filipinos in San Francisco, particularly those of the old-timers, who are mostly working-class, and migrant workers, also has the function of exposing the “disenfranchisement of Filipinos as colonial and radicalized labor,” to borrow Isaac’s phrase (124). David’s observations of encounters with the old-timers offer another perspective on the difference of class among Filipinos in the United States and their heterogeneous community shaped by distinctive waves of Filipino

migration or immigration to the United States. While the dramatic increase in immigration from the Philippines to the United States since 1965 may be the result of the 1965 Immigration Act, which abolished the national-origin basis for immigration quotas, Espiritu convincingly argues that Filipino migration patterns to the United States and other countries must be understood in the context of the enduring American colonial legacy. “By its tariff regulations and the subsequent ‘free trade’ between the two countries, the United States fostered this export-import policy and kept the Philippines an unindustrialized export economy—a condition that depleted the country’s economic resources and propelled the eventual migration of many Filipinos” (Espiritu 25). Most of the old-timers belong to the first wave of Filipino labor migration. Racialized labor exploitation along with legalized racial exclusion made many old-timers “homeless” and impoverished bachelors in old age, exiled from home in American cities.

“Homelessness” as a structurally produced social condition in part underlies Filipinos’ “exile” in the United States. Tiongson points out that the prominently displayed sign “Positively no Filipinos allowed,” “on doors of hotels and other business establishments throughout California in the 1920s and 1930s,” demonstrates Filipinos’ racialization as U.S. “nationals and aliens through state-sanctioned practices and policies” (1). Pursuing further the implications of the sign, Espiritu contends that it “exemplifies” Filipinos’ predicament of “enforced homelessness” as colonized nationals in the U.S. nation-space: “Restrictive naturalization and immigration laws, discriminatory housing policies, unfair labor practices, violent physical encounters, and racist and anti-immigrant discourses have all colluded to keep Filipinos outside the nation, that is, to keep them *homeless*” (46). Santos captures this “homeless” condition of Filipinos living in San Francisco, the “so-called golden city” (134), through a complex sense of exile and loss that saturates David’s observation of Filipino old-timers at the bus depot and in Little Manila.

As an exile in search of his father and Filipino San Francisco, David enacts the politics of mourning by simultaneously exposing and resisting historical amnesia, while tracing a history of loss in the Filipino experience. Roaming in the streets of San Francisco, David often thinks of his lost father: “My father must have walked these streets. Does he still walk them now?” (4). Emblematic of Filipinos’ collective loss, David’s exile and his lost father are a thematic thread that links the discreet spaces David visits. Driven by “a need to find someone, a familiar face from home, an old acquaintance,

perhaps my father,” David lingers at the city’s bus depot (88). There sitting in the waiting room, waiting “for nobody and nothing in particular,” he sees old Pinoys who look like discarded goods after usage: “There were the usual Filipinos who looked so old and wasted, they looked unreal to me, as if they had left their true and healthy bodies somewhere for use only on rare and special occasions. They dragged their feet when they walked, shuffling from one phone booth to another, looking for coins in the slots. That look on their faces as they came away empty-handed one saw only on the faces of those who had just learned that they had lost everything in the world” (87). These old Pinoys have lost not only “their true and healthy bodies somewhere for use” in hard labor but also their dignity and have become “homeless.” The waiting room of the bus depot is like a sort of living room for them. “Some of the old Pinoys . . . stood behind the men and women who were watching the small TV sets attached to their seats. The Pinoys bent their bodies forward to better see and hear. When someone left with a portion of a quarter’s worth of TV program still on, they rushed to the vacated seat, pushing one another for the chance to watch the show for free” (87). The sight of those impoverished homeless Pinoys makes David feel “like crying and wishing he were back home in the Philippines.” Then it dawns on him that he “probably looked like them now, much younger but just as ragged and lost.” He realizes that even the way he is dressed has somehow blended him with the scene; he has “become one of the faceless crowd” of “ragged and lost” Filipinos in the United States (87). David’s identification with those old, homeless Pinoys reiterates Filipinos’ shared condition of exile, introducing a postcolonial dimension of homelessness in the American urban space and city literature.

The “faceless crowd” of impoverished homeless Filipino “bachelors” calls to mind the poor old bachelors of Chinatown as depicted in *Bone*, evoking the exploitation of Asian males as racialized cheap labor and the history of racial exclusion and segregation. But the old Pinoys’ homelessness is not just the effect of racial exploitation and exclusion; it is a condition created by the legacy of American imperial conquest and colonial rule in the Philippines. As David’s identification of himself and his father with the Pinoy old-timers in the United States indicates: “I have seen the likes of these Pinoy old timers in many other bus depots in California, New York, and Illinois. Often I thought of myself as one of them, a bum, grown old and decrepit, aimlessly wandering in the United States. Would this happen to me if I stayed on? Did any of them know my father? Had he become one of them? How would I recognize him?” (87–88). By relating David’s exile and his lost father’s likely

similar situation to that of the homeless Pinoy old-timers, Santos links the exilic condition of Filipino migrant workers and exiles to American imperial and colonial legacies that shape Filipinos' "*differential inclusion*" in the U.S. nation-space, to borrow again Espiritu's phrase (47). Santos makes visible the effect of such differential inclusion of Filipinos as a colonized people by inscribing loss on the old Pinoys' "decrepit" bodies and the space they inhabit. As he links the deprivation of the old men at the bus depots on both the East and West Coasts and the Midwest to that of other old Pinoys in San Francisco's Little Manila through David, he further dismantles the myth of "America" as the "land of opportunity, dripping with milk and honey—and gold sown like stars," the myth that finds its way into "an old Filipino song," as the old-timer Tingting (Cesar Pilapil) remembers (127). There "around the 800 block on Kearny" in the "so-called Little Manila" marked by the difference of race and class, an "old building called the International Club housed many of the aging and destitute Filipinos" (88), whose exploited labor played a crucial part in the building of the American nation and whose subordinate "differential inclusion is intimately connected to the 'possessive investment in whiteness,'" to cite Espiritu's words again (48).¹⁵ A spatial manifestation of social relations and racial position, Little Manila reflects and sustains Filipinos' differential inclusion in the U.S. nation-space.¹⁶

Yet Pinoy old-timers are not just colonized nationals or cheap laborers. They are historical subjects, who against subjugation and hostility build communities, resist cultural assimilation, and keep the past present against coerced historical amnesia. Their presence in the heart of San Francisco bears witness to racial segregation in the United States and to the consequences of U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the Philippines. The ways in which they inhabit that space, however, contest the homogenizing racial ideologies that exclude and marginalize them. Rather than merely conducive to "the 'possessive investment in whiteness,'" Filipinos undermine the normalized superiority of whiteness through the politics of their everyday activities. Next to a Filipino restaurant on Kearney, David finds a barbershop bearing the name of the owner, Dino, who also works as a travel agent (149). But this barbershop is not only a place of business but also a socializing space for poor, homeless Filipino old-timers who after decades of low-wage labor can only afford to live at the low-cost International Hotel, whose crowded living conditions force the old-timers to wander around the streets and "flock" to Dino's (150). Dino's barbershop shows signs of poverty as well. It has one barber's chair, and a row of "broken-down chairs" sits "against the wall facing

the mirrors.” But it is where a community of Filipino old-timers has formed. It provides information for the old-timers and offers them a space to socialize, to remember the past, and to keep Filipino culture alive. “Calendars of all sizes hung on one wall, each bearing the day of the week. . . . A corner shelf contained old magazines and newspapers: local Filipino papers, the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Travel and Holiday Magazines*” (150). David sees two old-timers playing checkers in a corner. There are no customers except one retired old-timer. But on weekends, the barbershop becomes full and lively:

The oldtimers came to play the musical instruments they brought with them. The barbershop became alive: loud talk, laughter, musical instruments being tuned, a smattering of sounds, jarring. When everything was ready, a full blown orchestra played a repertoire of haunting melodies from the old country. Pinoy bystanders sang the lyrics. Now and then someone from a group of newly arrived tourists attracted to the barbershop by the native airs, would give an impromptu solo. Sentimental Filipino listeners hearing the native songs sung and played wiped their tears and joined in. A regular festival, with a nostalgic air that turned eyes misty. (151)

In a way this barbershop in Little Manila for the Filipino old-timers is like the fish store in Chinatown for the Chinese “bachelors” as depicted in Frank Chin’s short story “The Only Real Day.” It is a refuge for companionship, for a sense of being at home with others. But rather than a private socializing space for a circle of friends behind closed doors like the fish store, Dino’s barbershop is a space open to the public to observe or participate in asserting Filipino identity, performing Filipino culture, and reliving memories of home in the Philippines. This “regular festival” taking place here is entirely different from commodified ethnic festivals that are performed for tourists as Chin portrays and deplors in his short stories. The regular gathering of Filipino old-timers to sing “native songs” and play “haunting melodies from the old country” is less a celebration of ethnic culture than a mourning of a lost culture and home, a loss that is entangled with the colonial history of the Philippines. Their regular cultural practice transforms Dino’s barbershop into an alternative space of belonging, of remembering, and of being Filipino without compromise, without subjugation or pretense. Rather than merely indulgence in nostalgia, the old-timers’ musical gathering could be understood as a form of ritual, which according to the political anthropologist

and urbanist Leo C. Coleman, “transforms space and time, and marks the physical world with its traces, its temporary occupations producing powerful sites of return, memory, and concern” (2). Indeed, the old-timers’ ritual of Filipino musical performance renders Dino’s barbershop into a socializing space of memories and mourning, which counters the Sottos’ socializing space of assimilation and amnesia.

The historical significance and the Filipinos’ sense of loss underlying the “native” musical gatherings at Dino’s can be better understood in relation to the picture of Philippine national hero José Rizal (1861–1896) and his most famous poem posted on a wall in the barbershop. This picture captures the moment when Rizal is on his way to face his execution by a Spanish firing squad. Underneath his picture is his last poem, “Mi Último Adiós” (“My Final Farewell”). David is struck by the sight, which sticks in his memory: “There was a picture of José Rizal on a wall in the barbershop. It showed the Philippine hero about to pick up his hat that the wind had blown to the ground, on his way to meet the firing squad. Underneath the picture was the *Ultimo Adios* in Spanish” (151). Written in prison on the eve of his execution on December 30, 1896, Rizal’s poem is an ode to his beloved yet “lost” country—“Pearl of the Orient Sea, our Eden lost”—for whose independence and dignity Rizal gave up his life.¹⁷ A most prominent advocate for reform in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial era, Rizal is regarded as one of the foremost of Filipino patriots. While Rizal’s emotionally charged final farewell to his country resonates with the Filipino old-timers’ feelings and condition of exile from their native land, the image of Rizal and his poem evoke the palimpsest history of Filipinos’ struggles for independence.

Placed in the barbershop that functions as a socializing space for Filipino old-timers in San Francisco’s Little Manila, and incorporated into the narrative through David’s memory in juxtaposition to remarks by Dino about the old-timers’ poverty and homelessness, Rizal’s picture and poem seem to have other significant implications as well. Immediately following his memory of Rizal’s picture and poem in Dino’s barbershop, David recalls what Dino says about the old-timers: “[T]hese oldtimers often roamed around the city, lingering at the post office and the bus depot or wherever they found phone booths. They would stick their fingers into the slots hoping to get dimes and quarters from the phone machine” (151). These exploited, impoverished, homeless, working-class Filipino old-timers haunt and are haunted by the ghostly legacies of American imperialism and colonialism. Their loss entails more than the loss of homeland; they themselves are “lost.” They

have become “unknown civilians” in the United States, as one old-timer, Cesar Pilapil (a.k.a. Tingting), says to David (148). Their loss is part of what San Juan calls “a primal loss” resulting from the Philippine-American War that crushed the resistance of the revolutionary forces of the first Philippine Republic, leading to the large-scale transport of cheap Filipino labor to California and to Filipino diasporas (“Mapping” 117). These old-timers are what Bascara calls “the pivotal figures for neocolonialism because they live, as accidental immigrants, through the transition from colonialism to neocolonialism” (63). Hence their presence in the novel critically exposes the exploitation of racialized labor as a colonial legacy and a form of neocolonial practice underlying the transnational migration of labor.

Understood in these contexts, Razil’s picture and poem also highlight the invisibility of Filipinos’ resistance to American imperial power and colonial rule in the Philippines, thus marking the loss of loss, a past effaced by colonization through “benevolent assimilation,” while highlighting Filipino agency in resisting Spanish colonialism. Moreover, even as they make visible that erasure and the loss of the Philippines’ national hero along with his “adored land” without “shame” or “stain” to the Spanish,¹⁸ Razil’s picture and poem “induce actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living,” as Eng and Kazanjian have said about the effect of bringing “the past to memory” through the melancholic mourning of loss (“Mourning Remains” 1). By animating the past in the Philippines, particularly the colonial specters, into the present of Filipinos’ experience in the American city through working-class Filipinos’ exilic longing and mourning for what has been lost, Razil’s picture and poem at Dino’s barbershop in Little Manila establishes a connection between the U.S. nation-state and the American empire, thus providing a historical and social context for the exile status of Filipinos in the United States.

A similar effect is produced by the old-timers’ regular musical gatherings at Dino’s to relive an era, to reexperience, or rather “mourn,” what they have lost so as to refuse to come to terms with their loss. Dino’s barbershop becomes what Judith Butler in her discussion on the politics of loss and mourning calls “a place where belonging now takes place in and through a common sense of loss.” For communities as such, Butler adds, “[l]oss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community” (468). The Filipino old-timers refuse to put their loss to rest, and their performance

of “native songs” and “haunting melodies from the old country,” along with the display of Razi’s picture and poem, transforms Dino’s barbershop into a communal space of living memories that haunt the American urban space. As their performance induces tears from Filipino Americans and Filipino tourists in the city, it enacts “a politics of mourning,” to borrow Eng and Kazanjian’s phrase again (“Mourning Remains” 2). Rather than a fixation on the past, such “continuous engagement with loss and its remains” has the effect of generating “sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future” (“Mourning Remains” 4). It is precisely those possibilities embedded in mourning as an active engagement with the past and an openness to the future that render the reoccurring theme of exile as a sustained form of mourning in Santos’s novel most provocative and compelling.

RECLAIMING IRRECOVERABLE LOSS

David’s experience of teaching at San Francisco City College demonstrates the possibilities of intervention by dealing with loss as an active open engagement with the Philippine palimpsest history and a reimagining of the future. While suggesting the limitations of *flânerie* as an interventional strategy for inhabiting the city in exile with difference as diasporans or equal citizens, the students’ activities evoke the Third World students’ strikes at San Francisco State and the University of California, Berkeley, between 1968 and 1969, which played a pivotal role in the establishment of ethnic studies in U.S. higher education.¹⁹ Given his accomplishments as a writer and teacher in the Philippines and through Professor Jaime’s influence, David is invited to teach a course called “Special Study in the Humanities: The Philippines.” This opportunity enables David to address the invisibility of Filipino history and culture in American society and to confront what he refers to as the “so-called generation gap” between American-born Filipinos and their immigrant parents (99). David’s first encounter with his class and his students, who are almost all Filipinos, reveals the younger-generation Filipino Americans’ alienation from the Philippines. “A wall, almost palpable, lay between us like a transparent glass through which I could see them, indifferent, noisy, inattentive, as if I were not there” (97). When he tries to reach them by playing “Philippine songs,” his students think these are “weepy,” “corny,” “backward,” and “old fashioned,” and the Philippine national anthem “didn’t mean anything to them” (99). Their alienation is symptomatic of the

effect of the “benevolent assimilation” of Filipinos in both the Philippines and the United States, registering the lingering effect of the “primal loss,” or rather what Butler calls “the loss of loss itself” (467).

To enable his students to recognize and grapple with their loss, David makes the impact of Spanish and American colonization on Filipinos an overarching theme for the course materials. He often visits the library of the Philippine consulate to collect teaching materials for his class. But even there David finds books on Philippine culture “very scant” and better-known important Filipino writers missing (139). But he makes use of what he can find and takes extensive notes, which include a list of goals for the class such as “to catalogue and immortalize through the teaching process (the printed word) the Filipino dream—what is it?” and “to keep in mind what our true identity is, the wealth of our culture, pride in our heritage” (85–86). David’s uncertainty about “the Filipino dream” evokes the Americanized “ultimate dream” of wealth and comfort, which successful professional Filipino Americans like the Sottos seem to have achieved but which forever eludes the Pinoy old-timers. A profound sense of loss is embedded in the Filipinos’ pursuit of the Americanized materialistic dream in contrast to Razil’s dreams for the Philippines as expressed in his “Mi Último Adiós” (“My Final Farewell”): “My dreams, when scarcely a lad adolescent, / . . . / Were to see you, gem of the sea of the Orient, / . . . / Without frown, without wrinkles and of shame without stain.”²⁰ By confronting the loss, David disturbs the mutually sustaining historical amnesia and the normalized superiority of the dominant American culture, thus proposing alternative “Filipino” dreams.

The campus-wide presentation of Filipino culture and history that David’s class gives at the end of the semester suggests that recognizing Filipinos’ primal and subsequent losses and investigating the sociohistorical conditions that produced them can be a culturally, politically transformative process for individuals and communities. Such transformation is evident in David’s students, who initiate a presentation program on the Philippines and Filipinos and invite everyone, including “all school officials and the faculty,” to the presentation (169). Refusing to be “unknown civilians” in American society like those impoverished “homeless” Pinoy old-timers at bus depots or those assimilated wealthy professionals of Filipino immigrants, the students want the whole college community to know who they are by learning about the Philippines and its peoples and cultures. On the night of the event David is surprised and pleased to find

that “the auditorium was filling up with students and faculty, and outsiders, Filipinos and Americans” (170). Given the invisibility of Filipino cultures in mainstream America, the students’ public performance of their ethnic identity and cultures as part of their academic learning is a form of activism, which evokes the emergence of ethnic studies and multicultural movements that were to transform, even if only partially, the curricula and the institutionalized space of American higher education and, by extension, the American urban space and the U.S. nation-space. If space is understood not as “a container, a passive receptacle whose form is given by its content” but rather as “a moment of becoming, of opening up and proliferation, a passage from one space to another, a space of change, which changes with time,” as Grosz has argued compellingly (*Architecture* 119), then the students are altering the privileged institutional space of learning by inhabiting it as equal participants of cultural productions. Wearing traditional and ethnic Filipino costumes in performing indigenous songs and dances, they reclaim their collective and personal losses and redefine Filipino and American identities. Their becoming Filipino American entails the becoming of the space they inhabit. An unpredictable future, one that refuses to maintain the status quo along with the invisibility of Filipinos as equal participants in American democracy, is embedded in this process of becomings.

Moreover, this transformative process of becomings is mobilized by the students’ opening up of the space they inhabit, not only to rearticulate excluded, violated differences, but also to reenact the repressed and forgotten past. Significantly, their performance includes empowering references to Filipino history, particularly the history of Filipinos’ struggle for independence from colonialism. One student, whose skit parodies David’s teaching, “starts with the famous K K K of the days of Bonifacio and the Philippine revolution” by explaining the meanings of the acronym in the Tagalog-based national language, Pilipino (173). “K K K” is the acronym of a Philippine revolutionary society, *Kataas-taasan, Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan*, also known as the *Katipunan* (Highest and Most Honorable Society of the Children of the Nation), whose primary goal was to gain independence from Spain.²¹ However, it is worth noting that the Philippine-American War is left out of the history of the Philippines in David’s class. Under the Cold War circumstances of the 1970s, given David’s (and Santos’s) precarious status in the United States, it would be easier to condemn Spanish rather than American colonialism in the Philippines. This elision that renders invisible American imperial conquest and colonial rule

in the Philippines is itself symptomatic of the continuing effect of the United States' colonial legacy.

Santos seems to displace this continuing effect of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines onto Filipino diasporas and exilic experience as a sustained form of mourning loss resulting from Spanish and American colonial legacies. The students' presentation ends with the pathos of exile and articulates Filipinos' transnational belonging that resists assimilation and historical amnesia and insists on the link between the past and the present, between the Philippines and the United States. The audience is invited to join the entire cast in singing "Bayan Ko," "My Country," one of the most popular patriotic songs in the Philippines (176). David reveals the popularity of this song among Filipinos in the United States, suggesting their widespread sense and status of exile: "I had sung the same lyrics with other homesick Filipinos many times when we met together to celebrate a holiday—in the mid-West, in New York, in San Francisco. The year was 1975, three years after martial law had been declared in my country. Always I sang the song with my heart in my throat, thinking, how long, God, how long would martial law keep me here wandering in exile" (176). Singing this unofficial national anthem of the Philippines among the American audience, David is overcome by heartache. "An overwhelming sense of self-pity and sadness filled me. Before the song was finished, I was choking on the words, unable to continue." As he wipes away his tears, he notices Professor Jaime also crying (176). Exile as a sustained form of mourning keeps alive memories of the past and asserts an alternative identity to homogeneous national belonging bounded by national borders and sanctioned by citizenship.

As a characteristic aspect of Filipinos' exilic condition, mourning that acknowledges disavowed, erased, or forgotten loss engages with palimpsest history, keeping an open relationship with the past for alternative interpretations and for reimagining the future. David's lost father, who remains "ghostly" throughout the novel, embodies the specters of the past and the irrecoverable losses of the Philippines and Filipinos resulting from the U.S. imperial interventions and neocolonial rule in the Philippines. At the same time, Filipinos' condition of exile as a structurally produced social relation and racial position, not just an emotional or psychological state, is also embodied by the lost father, whose ghostly traces often emerge and elude David's encounters with the Pinoy old-timers and the homeless in the city. Haunted by the loss of his father, David urges himself to "get lost in the streets of the golden city" in search of him: "Remember your father, you came here

to find him, did you not? Admit it, do not deny your heart. Find him then. It won't be easy, but it will give purpose to your life. He could be closer to you than you think. But where, where do I find him" (167). His search through telephone directories and death records at the city clerk's office yields nothing (167, 168). He associates his father with old Pinoy laborers by assuming that he could be among the old-timers "in some heavily populated Filipino community in California or the mid-West, in New York or perhaps, even a small town." "Father, father where are you?" he asks (168).

Exploring the city in search of his father and Filipino San Francisco, David has come to know the city from those who inhabit it as the displaced, the exiled, the homeless, and the lost. The perspectives he obtains from his encounters with Filipino old-timers and the homeless in the city contravene in the alluringly beautiful city of lights seen from the Sottos' mansion on Diamond Heights. In this "golden city," David feels most comforted by a homeless white woman, Judy, who lives in a "condemned building" with other vagabonds and "transients" in the city. The significance of Judy for David, as for the recurring themes of exile and loss in the novel, resides in her exile, her "homeless" status of living on the margins of society in the heart of the city and, more important, in her embodiment of open wounds. David describes her naked body as covered with "warts, open sores, never quite bleeding but always on the verge, so livid, so awake" to touch." "And you dare not say except think in your own simple faith, that these could be cured, there's a remedy, a salve, an unguent, a quack doctor's saliva, a miracle of faith for what ails this body that could be so beautiful, because deep in your heart you know there is no cure, neither science nor quackery nor miracle would help. . . . It could be these sore spots are self-renewing like the seasons in this bewildering city" (132). With "self-renewing" open wounds impossible to heal, Judy's body bears witness to invisible, unacknowledged violence and violation. Her condition evokes what the Philippines and Filipinos have suffered under Spanish and American colonial rule and suggests a parallel to their irrecoverable loss and predicament of exile.

In a way, Judy's body with its self-renewing open sores is like Estela's incurably deformed body and David's lost father, who has become allegorical by the end of the novel. The night that David loses hope about the new magazine being an anchor for his stay in San Francisco, he returns to the condemned building to be with Judy and dreams of his father there lying beside her among the homeless. But his lost-and-found father turns out to be an ambivalent figure, who embodies irretrievable loss resulting from American

and Spanish colonialism, as David's dialogue with him in the dream suggests:

"Is it really you, Father, have I found you at last?"

"You have found me."

"No, I have not. I'm still looking for my father."

"I'm your son, Father, I have found you!"

"Father!" (190)

The ambivalence about the father-son relationship suggests the repeated pattern of exile (both father and son find themselves comforted by the homeless in a "condemned space" in the city and both have been away from home for a long time) and the inescapable sense of loss of both father and son—"How can I handle loss?" as one asks the other to teach him (190)—reflect Filipinos' collective experience of postcolonial diasporas. Critics such as Leonard Casper and Rocío G. Davis consider this scene as implying the intertwined nature of past and present and as moving beyond the past. Casper maintains that David "is convinced that he can never know himself fully until he knows his father." So this father-son dialogue suggests that "David should stop looking for himself in the *there* and then" (68). In a similar vein, Davis contends that one, particularly the immigrant, "must look to the past to find a touchstone for identity, one cannot live there always and must forge on ahead" ("Bienvenido" 144). While I concur that this scene confronts the entanglement of the past, present, and future, what this entanglement means for David and other Filipinos needs to be explored further. A sense of irrecoverable loss underlies the reversed father-son roles, which suggest that David's father is forever lost. He appears in the narrative only to disappear; David finds him only to lose him again. That David has found his father, who acknowledges being David's father and yet claims to have found his father in David, compels David to recognize his loss as irrecoverable. Yet there is something to be learned from this loss, as both father and son ask each to teach the other.

It is precisely the irrecoverableness of Filipinos' collective and personal loss that renders the emergence of a new identity, a new political agency possible, and reimagining the future necessary. This is the kind of loss that Butler calls "the loss of loss itself": "[S]omewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one's way as a spectral agency, one for whom a full 'recovery' is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, para-

doxically, the condition of a new political agency” (467). The paradox of the irrecoverable loss as “the condition of a new political agency” and mourning of this loss as a necessary condition for “rewriting the past and reimagining the future” (Eng and Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains” 4) underlies the exilic sensibility and narrative strategy of Santos’s novel. In fact, *What the Hell For* enacts the possibilities that emerge from the paradox. When David finally confronts the impossibility of finding his forever-lost father, he faces the ultimate question: “How can I handle loss?” (190). This question refuses historical amnesia and shifts David’s, and by extension other Filipinos’, focus on recovery of a lost and irrecoverable past to the future that is inescapable from the past, but only by confronting this loss can departures from the colonial past begin. In other words, only by being “permanently troubled” by the atrocities and injustices of colonial conquest can “a critical rupture from” normative identity and racial relations emerge, to borrow Rodriguez’s words (161).

How to “handle loss” as exiles in the American city is a central question the novel poses for the characters and for readers, a question that demands an active engagement with the past, while compelling intervention in personal and collective amnesia of colonial violence and its legacies. It seems that Santos highlights the necessity for keeping irrecoverable loss always present and rivetingly felt as a condition for rupture from colonial tutelage, and for imagining and becoming otherwise, by ending the novel with David’s return to the Sottos to say good-bye to Estela. Estela’s deformed, tortured body, like David’s forever-lost father, embodies irredeemable loss that is both personal and collective, at once real and allegorical, suggesting the “violence of forgetting” and disturbing the normality of the present. The possibilities of confronting loss are embedded in Estela’s condition. Like David’s ghostly father, Estela’s incurable body embodies irremediable loss that continues to haunt the present with the past. However, Estela is able to see what is lost to her parents, not despite but because of her condition, which seems to remind the Sottos of their homeland and its history of colonization, as David’s evocation of Estela in his farewell words to Diamond Heights suggests at the end of the novel:

Look close Estela, under the stars; see us little brown men and women, walking the streets of the city as they wind and turn and climb upward, without warning about sudden corners and dark alleys on the downward bend. . . .

We have left native land but our hearts are still there, not here, Estela, not in this golden city by the bay. . . . And like you, Estela, we carry our own deformities as nobly as we can, but unlike you, we hide them well. (191)

David suggests that Estela's disfigured and impaired body makes visible "our" hidden "deformities"—deformities resulting from the violence and violation of colonialism, as alluded to by David's ironic reference to the defacement of Filipinos as "little brown men and women" in colonial discourse, a defacement that shapes the exile status of both the rich and poor Filipinos in the United States.

Nevertheless, to name those deformities of colonial legacies and to mourn their subsequent losses is to critique colonialism and to become otherwise than as colonized or assimilated "little brown men and women" against the "violence of forgetting" (to borrow Lisa Lowe's words again). Herein resides the politics of mourning and the political agency of loss, which entail the possibilities of rewriting the past and reimagining the future. As David's remarks about Filipinos' loss and future at the end of the novel suggest: "There is fear in our hearts as we listen for tremors under our feet and against our will we look back to that home faraway now lost in the late mists of evening and the long years. Pray that life give us another chance for each loss we suffer as we walk and live on these sullen streets" (192). The answers to the questions of how to "handle loss" and how to inhabit the American city as exiles are in part already embedded in Santos's portrayal of the Filipino diasporic communities, including the emergent multiracial and multiethnic community formed by David's students. By refusing to "get over" the past or forget the faraway "old country" and by making known the "nameless," "unknown civilians" whose "cheapened labor" helped build this nation in which they have become "homeless," the exiles in Santos's novel do much more than disrupt the immigrant narrative of assimilation that perpetuates the myth of "America" as the "land of opportunity" for all. The aesthetics and politics of mourning irretrievable loss in *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco* open up avenues of egress from the legacies of imperialism and colonialism and build bridges by which to arrive at new possibilities, as Filipinos continue to inhabit the American urban space and the U.S. nation-space as postcolonial diasporans, exiles, and Filipino Americans.

6 THE CITY AS A "CONTACT ZONE"

Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*

[O]ur histories are lived out in public places.

—MEENA ALEXANDER

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

—EDWARD SAID

A POSTCOLONIAL DIASPORAN WHO HAD LIVED ON DIFFERENT continents before immigrating to the United States with her Jewish American husband, Meena Alexander has crossed multiple borders and occupies hyphenated positions as a "Third World woman poet," a South Asian American writer and critic, and a professor who lives in New York City and teaches at Bard College and the City University of New York (Alexander, *Fault Lines* 193). Her works demonstrate the characteristics of what Edward Said calls "exilic" writings "born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism," which now have "shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies . . . whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages" (332). Like other Asian American writers such as Sui Sin Far, Lin Yutang, Fae Myenne Ng, and Frank Chin, among others, Alexander seeks to claim a place in America for those who are excluded and marginalized. "I write on paper to reclaim ground," she states. "Even in Manhattan, where so little ground is visible. Marginality compels me to it, a territorial thing. And I ponder how these poems have come into being, how Manhattan, with its

crowded streets and subways, frames the landscapes of my Indian imagination" (*Shock of Arrival* 16).

Published in 1997 and set in New York City in the 1990s, *Manhattan Music* addresses the increasingly urgent issues of the dislocation of migrants, immigrants, and diasporans in Western metropolises, as well as the subsequent unsettling of national, racial, and ethnic boundaries. For Alexander, as for other Asian American writers discussed so far in this volume, the American urban space as nation-space is a site of contested ideologies and belongings as well as a site of transformative becomings. Writing from postcolonial and "hyphenated positions," Alexander further expands on the politics and poetics of space in Asian American city literature, in which "the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture," to borrow Bhabha's words about the agency of "cultural difference" ("Narrating the Nation" 2).

New York City in Alexander's writings is a "threshold city," a space of mutually transformative becomings of both the city and its new inhabitants (Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation* 180). A "remaking" of America is embedded in these becomings. As Alexander states: "The racial lines of black and white have been complicated by the layers of immigrants who have entered and are remaking this country. And we are part and parcel of a world of complex, often fluid allegiances" (*Shock* 66). At the same time, Alexander emphasizes, "reinvention of the self is a fierce necessity" (*Poetics* 52). While taking "as her right the inner city of Manhattan, making up poems about the hellhole of the subway line, the burnt-out blocks so close to home on the Upper West Side," she renders "news of the world" in the metropolis (*Fault Lines* 193–94). For Alexander, writing diasporas entails claiming and reinventing America and transforming the self—a process that at once resists cultural assimilation, challenges racial segregation, and intervenes in the marginalization of immigrants of color.

As an immigrant woman of color, Alexander is keenly aware that for her to claim right to the city, she must confront the social and cultural marginalization of people of color in American society. This marginalization in part underlines her experience of alienation and the verbal and physical violence that is inflicted upon people of color in the streets of cities in the United States. Reflecting on her early experience of living in New York City as a recent immigrant, Alexander writes in her memoir *Fault Lines* (1993): "I knew I was in a great city, in one of the greatest cities of the world." And she "wondered what it might mean to make an art, kinky, screwy, edgy, co-

equal to the city.” Yet she felt herself “a looker-on, a watcher.” “Neither Jew nor WASP, I had no way into the story that Woody Allen and Diane Keaton were playing out” (160).¹ Her sense of marginality in the city is marked by an awareness of her racial and gendered identity as a woman of color, whose body becomes “grotesque in the new world” (*Fault Lines* 161). While walking with her Eurasian son in a street in Minneapolis close to the university campus where her husband used to teach, she was yelled at by a white man—“You black bitch”—for no discernible reason except that she “had almost brushed his motorcycle” as she walked by. The white man’s intense hate and fury shook her “to the core.” But she did not tell her husband about the incident, not just to spare him the pain but also because, as she says, “there was no way he could become me, enter my skin” to experience that assault in public space (*Fault Lines* 169).

Alexander relates her experience of verbal attack in the street of an American city to those of other people of color in the United States, thus highlighting the fact that racial inequality is embedded in the ways “our histories are lived out in public places” (*Shock* 6). She notes that her encounter of racial hatred in the public space is part of the collective experience of racial minorities in the United States, such as “the Indians who have lived through racist stonings and murder in Jersey City, who live in fear of the Dot-Buster skinheads,” or “the Indian women who are forced to give up their saris and wear western clothes lest they lose their jobs, or the Asian children in the city schools, or the black youths who strayed into Bensonhurst, or the brown youths, or the Asian youths who pack our city streets” (*Fault Lines* 169). By confronting the politics of the raced and gendered body in the American urban space, Alexander suggests that for immigrants of color and other racial minorities to claim a place in the United States, they must refuse to be confined to segregated spaces or to their respective ethnic ghettos. As she asks: “How shall we mark out space? How shall we cross the street?” (*Fault Lines* 174). These questions point to the politics and poetics of space in redefining the place of immigrants of color, diasporans from former colonies, and racial minorities in the United States.

Embedded in the everyday life in the streets of the city are possibilities of challenging and disrupting the spatially reinforced social relations underlying Eurocentric American identity. In her book *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996), Alexander raises questions about Asian American artists’ and writers’ relationship to the everyday lived space in America as the “new world”—an idealized place and racialized nation-

state. "What does it mean to find one's place in America? What does finding a place mean for an Asian-American artist who bears within him or herself the marks of radical migrancy?" (161). The "shock of arrival" in the United States for Asian immigrants, migrants, and Asian Americans is characterized by racial discrimination that marks their body for exclusion, humiliation, and violence. Even after the racial prerequisite for U.S. citizenship was removed in 1952 from the Naturalization Law, and despite the fact that she had lived in this country for fifteen years and obtained "an American passport," Alexander says that she still feared "coming across men in army camouflage, toting rifles to kill deer, all the xenophobia of America sitting squarely on them, or bikers on Route 23 with big signs pasted to their machines: '500 Years after Columbus, Keep out Foreign Scum!'" (*Shock* 65). Walking home in Queens, one of Alexander's students of Muslim faith was harassed by a group of skinheads in a car, who called her "Hindu" and threw eggs at her. Thus exiled in the city where her home is, the South Asian American young woman "had to figure out how to live her life" in the American city, and "[h]ow to walk the streets, how to enter public space" (*Shock* 64). "Finding a place in America," then, for South Asian postcolonial diasporans, as for other Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, is in a way "claiming America" as home and claiming right to the city. But claiming America, or rather finding "one's place in America," for Asian immigrants, postcolonial diasporans, and Asian Americans, Alexander argues, necessarily entails not only "invent[ing] our place" but also radically re-envisioning "the idea of America" (*Shock* 199, 161). A subversive and innovative process of "re-envisioning" the American urban space as a site for inventing both "our place" and "the idea of America" underlies Alexander's narrative strategies for *Manhattan Music*.

Alexander re-represents New York City as "American space" by allowing her female Asian Indian characters to inhabit the city through "unquiet border crossings," transformative encounters, subversive memories and performance arts, and social activism. The central role that female characters play in her novel in redefining the American urban space undermines male domination in the cityscape and resolutely breaks away from the masculine urban space as portrayed in Frank Chin's writings. A world of multiplicity and heterogeneity that is in part the legacy of colonialism and imperialism emerges from *Manhattan Music*, as does the "intrigue" of New York City. Threads of Alexander's major concerns that emerge in her memoir, essays, and poems converge in *Manhattan Music*, where the city is a "contact zone" of multiple, heterogeneous assemblages of peoples and cultures in which

the female protagonist, Sandhya Rosenblum, an immigrant from India, has “changed beyond recognition,” to borrow Alexander’s phrase in reflecting on South Asians’ postcolonial diasporas (*Poetics* 136). For Alexander’s female characters, New York City in the 1990s is drastically different from the city of predominantly Eurocentric culture and body politic in the 1930s as depicted by Lin Yutang. Unlike the assimilative acculturation of immigrant characters in *Chinatown Family*, which is mobilized through *flânerie* in New York as a city of modernity and through interactions with white America, the transformation of the characters in *Manhattan Music*, especially Draupadi Dinkins and Sandhya Rosenblum, results from their encounters with postcolonial migrants and diasporic communities that constitute the city as a “contact zone” of mutual transformations of those who inhabit the city and the city itself.

I borrow the concept of “contact zone” from Mary Louise Pratt as employed in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2000). Pratt uses the term “contact zone” to “refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Moreover, Pratt states: “The term ‘contact’ foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other” (7). The “spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” under conditions of “radical inequality” in the “contact zone,” parallels the situation of the American metropolis where refugees, immigrants of color, and (post)colonial diasporans from around the world gather and interact with unequal power relations. By calling critical attention to the “interactive dimensions” of those encounters and “how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other,” Pratt acknowledges the agency of the “colonized” and their “anti-conquest” practices within “radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7). A similar agency underlies the antiassimilation practices of immigrants, exiles, and racial minorities as portrayed in the writings about Chinatown and the city by Asian American writers such as Sui Sin Far, Lin Yutang, and Frank Chin. But more often than not, it is the relations between white Americans and Asian immigrants that are central in the interactive dimensions of the

encounters that constitute the subject formation of becoming American. Alexander's *Manhattan Music* offers an alternative model of the constitutive and transformative relations between (post)colonial diasporans and people of color in New York City.

While not enough critical attention has been given to the urban environment as depicted in *Manhattan Music*, critics usually focus on the generic characteristics of the novel in their readings. For example, Lavina Dhingra Shankar, Anupama Jain, and Parvinder Mehta have offered insightful readings of *Manhattan Music* as a *Bildungsroman*, with a focus on the dislocation and development of Sandhya Rosenblum as the protagonist. This approach leaves underexamined the significance of the urban space in the transformation of Sandhya, as well as other characters, especially Draupadi Dinkins, who plays a central role in the novel. At the same time, the ways that postcolonial diasporans, refugees, immigrants, and minority Americans are redefining the American urban space are overlooked. By foregrounding the city as a "contact zone," my reading explores alternative ways of becoming to the assimilationist model and highlights the agency of marginalized Others in reinventing the idea of America by inhabiting the "American space" through transformative, interventional activities in the city.

In *Manhattan Music* the city is a protean "contact zone" constituted by people from around the world and by the diasporic communities and their connections to other parts of the world. Thus the city as "American space" can also be understood as "a moment of becoming, of opening up and proliferation, a passage from one space to another, a space of change," to borrow Grosz's notions of space (*Architecture* 119). Given the transnational movements of the characters and their connections to multiple places of home outside the United States, the "American space" in *Manhattan Music* is reconceptualized and redefined by the diverse, heterogeneous diasporic communities that inhabit the city otherwise than as assimilated, subordinate, marginalized immigrants or as perpetual, undesirable "foreigners." The relations and interactions among people from these diasporic communities in Alexander's novel are central to the transformations of the major characters in the novel, particularly the female characters—Draupadi Dinkins, Sandhya Rosenblum, and Sakhi Karunakaran—into new subjects who participate in changing the American space. Contrary to assimilation and unlike acculturation, these characters' respective self-reinventions are transformative becomings—a process mobilized by encounters in which "the outside is active in the production of an inside," as Grosz states in theorizing the

effects of becoming (*Architecture* 68). Grosz's concept of "becoming" offers an alternative to the mutually exclusive and hierarchical categories of the assimilative versus the unassimilative and citizens versus aliens in defining racialized groups of immigrants and Americans in the United States. Grosz argues that "[b]ecoming is what enables a trait, a line, an orientation, an event to be released from the system . . . or object that may have the effect of transforming the whole, making it no longer function singularly: it is an encounter between bodies that releases something from each and, in the process, releases or makes real a virtuality, a series of enabling and transforming possibilities" (*Architecture* 69). It is precisely "a series of enabling and transforming possibilities" resulting from "an encounter" that underlies the major characters' respective becomings in New York City as a "contact zone." Their becomings entail transforming possibilities for the self, the community, and the "American space" they inhabit.

CONVERGING "INTIMACIES OF THE CONTINENTS" IN THE CITY

Alexander reinscribes the "American space" by strategically opening *Manhattan Music* with a chapter titled "Overture: Monsoon Flood (Draupadi)," which situates New York City in the history of colonialism through Draupadi, a performance and mixed-media artist and civil rights activist in the city. Born on the Fourth of July in Gingee, New York, "a stone's throw from the Hudson," to the only daughter of Suhasini of Trinidad and Tobago, not knowing which bit of blood came from what island side, Draupadi has a family history that connects Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in the United States to the colonial practice of cross-continental transportation of African and Asian laborers to the New World (*Manhattan Music* 87).² According to Sucheng Chan,

The coolie trade had begun in response to the termination of the African slave trade and of slavery as a form of labor in European colonies and former colonies. Owners of plantations that had depended on slave labor now had to look mainly to two new sources of human muscle power: Indians and Chinese. The global division of coerced labor followed the geographic boundaries of the European empires. Indians were taken mainly to regions within the British Empire, although in the last decades of the nineteenth century Britain allowed France to import Indian laborers into the island of Réunion, a French "sugar island" in the southwestern Indian Ocean. (*This Bittersweet Soil* 21)

Draupadi alludes to this history of colonialism as she states: “My ancestors were scattered from British sailing ships, dark bits of ground pepper flung onto plantations in Trinidad, Fiji. Bonded laborers from India scratching the dirt of the New World. Men used hard, and women, too, cane leaves cutting into their wrists. Papa and Mama migrated to America, settled in Gingee by the Hudson where Mama gave birth to me” (4). After being raped by a merchant, Draupadi’s great-grandmother escaped India with an illegitimate child “on board a ship and offered her services in the New World Columbus found.” “They took her on as a bonded laborer to work in the cane fields, took away her name, gave her a number” (87). Draupadi’s father is “Indian with Japanese blood in him and a dash of white.” His mother was “part-black from Kentucky, with a streak of a native nation.” Her grandpa “changed his name from *Dineshwaran* to *Dinkins*, thinking it sounded easier on the ear” (87–88).

Such mixed heritage of Asians, Africans, whites, and indigenous people in the Americas evokes what Lisa Lowe calls “the intimacies of four continents,” referring to the “political economic logics through which men and women from Africa and Asia were forcibly transported to the Americas, who with native, mixed, and creole peoples constituted slave societies, the profits of which gave rise to bourgeois republican states in Europe and North America” (“Intimacies” 193). As Lowe’s research indicates: “[B]etween 1451 and 1870, 11,569,000 African slaves were brought to the New World and that after the sixteenth century, out of eighty million native peoples in the Americas, there remained only ten million. Between 1834 and 1918, half a million Asian immigrants made their way to the British West Indies, in the context of possibly another million going to Latin America, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia.” (“Intimacies” 204). By alluding to this transnational migration of racialized labor within the world system of colonialism and capitalism through Draupadi’s family genealogy and through the depiction of different diasporas, displacement, and dislocation in the novel, Alexander re-envisages the “American space” with histories and peoples erased in the transcendentalist landscape of the “American sublime” and invisible in the New York of Woody Allen’s films. With her mixed-racial identity, Draupadi embodies one of the multiple trajectories of diasporas that converge in New York City, altering its body politic and constituting its changing environment, while new arrivals like Draupadi herself, from a small town in New York State, and new immigrants like Sandhya and her cousin Sakhi are themselves transformed by their experience in the city even as they are altering its body politic and cultural landscape.

Draupadi embodies both the constituent attributes and the transformative forces of the multiracial, multicultural urban environment of New York City for the formation of the subject and the transformation of urban citizenship in a postcolonial metropolis. Before becoming a multimedia and performance artist in the city, Draupadi lives with her parents in Ginge, a small town on the Hudson, in Columbia County, New York, where Draupadi is the only Indian girl in her high school and the only Japanese American she sees is a “crazy guy,” Yasunari, who was interned during World War II and is now insane and homeless (91). Draupadi’s family owns a soda shop in town, but they are in exile because of racial discrimination. Still, they hold their ground, refusing to be driven out. As her father, Himanshu Dinkins often mutters in her ear when Draupadi is growing up: “No more. Bonded laborers we shall be no more.” He tells Draupadi, “Born in America, there’s nothing you can’t be,” and adds, “Make yourself up, child” (90). Yet the skinheads call him “Dinkoo,” pile up trash in his backyard, break the window of his shop, and defile the place with garbage and spent condoms, “trying to drive him out of Ginge” (90). As she watches her father picking up “the tawdry bits in his bare hands . . . to clean out his shop front” and sees “the helpless rage” in his eyes while her mother, Maya, is bandaging his hands, Draupadi swears that never, never will she “follow her father into his line of work” and that she will “leave Ginge” (91, 53).

Even before leaving Ginge for New York City to become otherwise than an unfulfilled housewife like her mother, or the “undesirable” silent Other like her father, “quiet as a mouse, clearing up all the trash from behind the Soda Shop,” Draupadi transgresses the racial boundaries in defiance (91). She has a date with a white classmate, Jimmy O’Flaherty. When Jimmy’s father finds out, he warns Draupadi’s father: “Keep your girl away from my lad, Dinkins. Don’t want none of that Paki stuff. Jimmy’s going in the Air Force, hear?” (92). Bullied into complicity, Himanshu Dinkins asks his wife to discipline their daughter by whipping her with a wet sari on her thighs. At the same time, Jimmy will not look at or speak to Draupadi at school. “To survive the darkness,” Draupadi “fled the clapboard house in Ginge, the Soda Shop, the railroad tracks,” which mark the spatially reinforced segregation of race and class (93). Her flight from a small town to the School of Visual Arts in New York City leads to a simultaneous departure and return—departure from her parents’ confined, unfulfilled life and marginal social status and a return to the family history of racial subjugation and resistance to servitude, as well as a return to her Indian cultural heritage.

Alexander strategically allows Draupadi to become a multimedia performance artist whose work demands inhabiting the public space through the presence of her art and her racially marked and gendered body. Arriving in New York City “at the height of the brouhaha about identity,” Draupadi falls right in, with “the fragments of her past, real and imagined, swarming into her art” (53). She reads canonical American writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and is deeply moved by what Emerson says about art and living in the present moment (53). However, before long she finds the canonical works of American high Romanticism unsatisfactory and puts them away “in favor of a more apocalyptic literature, one that wedded the ferocious indignities of racism in America to the possibilities of a radical liberation” (54). Through her reading on the cult of the Draupadi dancers in Tamil Nadu, she discovers the mythic heroine Draupadi, whose exile is depicted in the Sanskrit epic of ancient India, the *Mahabharata*, and Peter Brook’s production of the *Mahabharata* staged at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)—a landmark theater in the city—inspires her (52). She feels a kinship with the mythic heroine whose exile and resilience remind Draupadi of her great-grandmother, who arrived in Trinidad as a bonded laborer and worked in the sugarcane fields. Great-grandma is her “bond with India.” “India owed her and she would draw what she wished from that world, rework the language, pack it with lore” (52). Yet rather than seek to reclaim an “authentic” version of Indian culture, Draupadi wants to create an art of amalgamation by drawing not only on the Indian epic and the Indian part of the family history but also on American cultures and her family’s American identity and experience. “Syncretism was part of her being and it might work for her, overcoming the barriers she felt she had faced since childhood” (52). By seeking to counter cultural and racial purity as a subversion to racial and cultural hierarchies in her art, Draupadi employs syncretism to produce an art of “pariahs,” which links “the ferocious indignities of racism in America to the possibilities of a radical liberation” (54).

Multiple border crossings and affiliations with people of color beyond racial, ethnic, and national boundaries are embedded in the plural form *pariahs*. While explaining the title of her poem “Art of Pariahs,” written in response to a series of racial incidents in New York City, in which blacks suffered physical violence, “small retaliations” followed, and an Indian child was “caught in the middle,” Alexander says that the word *pariah* was adopted into English from her mother tongue, Malayalam, adding that she thinks of this poem as “laying bare the underbelly of multiculturalism.” “I

imagine Draupadi of the ‘Mahabharata’ entering my kitchen in New York City and the longing to be freed of the limitations of skin colour and race, sing in the poem” (“Diasporic Writing” 33–34). The “art of pariahs” could be understood as a diasporic art in which different worlds, peoples, and cultures merge, not to be assimilated into the homogenizing “melting pot,” but rather to give rise to syncretic transformative cultures and peoples who will inhabit the American metropolis with their irreducible and transformative difference. Hence “longing to be freed of the limitations of skin colour and race” for Alexander is not to promote “color-blind” multiculturalism but to seek “possibilities of radical liberation” by simultaneously confronting and intervening in “the ferocious indignities of racism in America” through imagining otherwise, becoming otherwise against the racial “violations visited on us” (*Poetics* 91).

The performance art of Draupadi enacts the politics of becoming otherwise, of inhabiting the American urban space otherwise than as quiet, invisible, unwelcome Others like her parents, by staging her multiracial and multicultural family histories mixed with memories and inventions, thus creating an art of “pariahs” in a diasporic world, one that mobilizes the agency of border crossings for transforming the “American space.” At the Museum of Natural History, Draupadi performs a piece called “Women of Color Whirling through the World,” which includes her great-grandmother, also named Draupadi, and, on her mother’s side, Grandfather Hari, who “became part of the revolt on the good ship *Komagata Maru* docked outside Vancouver.” It also includes his brother, Draupadi’s grand-uncle, Kishan, “a member of the Ghaddar party,” who “threw bombs at Lord Chelmsford in Bombay, then landed up in a San Francisco jail” (93). While these narratives of her Indian ancestors’ rebellion for human rights and social equality outside the United States decenter America as the privileged site of struggle for freedom and rights, Draupadi reimagines and reinvents the American space by “trying to people the North American continent” with her Asian, Chicana, African, and Native American ancestors in the making of American history:

Great-uncle Chander, earthing himself in the Imperial Valley, took for his wife a Mexican beauty who sported tight black skirts. . . . There was Great-aunt Ethelamma who, rumor had it, worked the coat rack in Café Society and saw Lady Day. . . . Ethelamma’s daughter Simi passed food to the Black Panthers and sprayed her hair with chemicals to turn it kinky. Another daughter,

Dakshini, lived out her days with a medicine woman on Hunter Mountain, learning those ancient ways. Vijay, a cousin three times removed, rode with the cowboys in Montana; his brother Varun hid out with the Weathermen in Greenwich Village, hands stinking of chemicals.³ (93)

By putting on stage the experience of her ancestors who were “outcasts” or “pariahs” of racialized social hierarchies, and allowing them to inhabit the American landscape as subjects of history and social change rather than merely victims of racism and sexism, Draupadi reclaims the agency of pariahs for transforming “the ferocious indignities of racism in America” into “the possibilities of a radical liberation,” as she is inspired to accomplish while studying at the School of Visual Arts in New York City (54).

Draupadi’s encounters with diasporans in New York City compel her to further expand her conceptual and artistic visions of the American space with more complex border crossings that highlight the dynamic relationship between body and space in the construction and rearticulation of identities. “[P]arts of the globe, places she had no experience of, flowed in her” when she met Rashid el Obeid, an Egyptian scholar who came to the city as a post-doc fellow at Columbia University and worked “as a doorman at Westbeth” in between jobs (54). Also, Anthony, her black friend from South Africa, whom she meets at the Poet’s Café, urges her to “[d]ream up a performance piece” that “involves crossing borders.” “Set it by a riverbank. Imagine us all, black, white, yellow, brown, stripped down, leaping into water” (118). Draupadi creates and performs precisely such a multiracial piece at the Poet’s Café with her three “soul sisters . . . one Black, one Anglo, one Hispanic-Asian,” who are “all exiles” (119). Refusing marginalization, segregation, and confinement to the domestic space or to ethnic ghettos, Draupadi and her “soul sisters,” who begin their performance with “swaying, arms linked, singing,” not only claim their rights to the city but also inscribe the public space with their bodies, which at once enhance and embrace the differences of race and gender through performance that disrupts racial hierarchy. As Draupadi states: “I performed for them all. For Simon Escobar and Juan and the woman from the Literacy Program in the Bronx; for the Fifth Avenue matron and her gigolo; for Anthony and the group of kids from the barrio who were turning themselves into a ‘Postmodern Unit for the Propagation of Poetry in our Streets’” (119). Performance as such in the city’s public space is a corporeal discursive practice that in a way (re)constitutes both the identities of the city and its inhabitants.

The significance of Alexander's spatial-corporeal strategies for representing life in New York City and for reinvisioning the American space can be better understood in light of Grosz's theories about the mutually constitutive relationship between cities and bodies. Grosz argues that "[c]ities have always represented and projected images and fantasies of bodies, whether individual, collective, or political" (*Architecture* 49). Hence "cities are loci that produce, regulate, and structure bodies." However, this relation is "immensely complicated through various relations of intrication, specification, interpolation, and inscription that produce 'identities' for both cities in their particularity and populations in their heterogeneity" (*Architecture* 49–50). While fully aware of the ways language, discourses, representations, and laws are "constitutive ingredients" of the gendered and racialized body, Alexander is cognizant of the complexities of the corporeal in the body politic. As she contends: "It would be a terrible error . . . to think that our capacity for words can lose us our bodies. Bodies banned, beaten, jailed, twisted, in childbirth, bodies that are the sites of pleasure, of ecstasy. Female bodies that can babble, break into prophetic speech, rant" ("Unquiet Borders" 263). Her corporeal feminist writing voices the everyday reality of the subjugated, muted, racialized body of the "brown woman" in the American city. When a "brown skinned woman" crosses a border and arrives in New York City, she may find herself "working in a sweat shop in the lower east side, her rhythm of poetry beaten to the tracking needle, silks spinning out of her skin, English syllables edgy, forced, *brajhasha* flowering only in dreams." And when crossing the streets in Manhattan, she "might find fingers pointing": "Look, a brown woman! The shame, the torment, the turning, beseeching others. Stumbling, falling, the body splintering into a thousand shards. The body split open" ("Unquiet Borders" 262). While evoking Frantz Fanon's discussion in *Black Skin, White Masks* on the construction of the black male body as "threat," Alexander seeks to rearticulate the racialized, gendered, and subjugated body. "So who will put together a body torn by border crossing, skin marked by barbed wires, bandages hastily knotted, the body of a pariah woman?" she asks ("Unquiet Borders" 263). Draupadi's performance art as an art of the "pariahs" reconstitutes "the body of a pariah woman" and allows it to "rant," restoring its agency of resistance and intervention. As Draupadi finds even while performing her song at the Poet's Café: "[I was] doing a double take in my head, figuring out how I could use that song for the show at Lincoln Center I was trying out for" (120). Given the centrality of Lincoln Center for performing arts in the public life and in defining American cul-

ture, the performance by Draupadi, a multiracial, brown-skinned woman, signifies another border crossing that would further transform “the ferocious indignities of racism in America” into “the possibilities of a radical liberation” (54).

In pursuing the possibilities for “a radical liberation,” Draupadi herself is undergoing profound changes as she crosses multiple borders in her encounters with exiles and diasporans in New York City. Her transformations, as well as those of Indian immigrants such as Sandhya and Sakhi in the novel, reflect Alexander’s own experience in the city. In her essay “Diasporic Writing: Recasting Kinship in a Fragmented World,” Alexander states: “The questions of identity that face me as an Indian woman, living and working in New York City, a dense, compacted, racist metropolis, where immigrants from all over the world have poured in, are inseparable from an intimate violence that has entered my probing into the bonds that link inner and outer realms, self and world” (33). Like Alexander, Draupadi is forming new bonds with immigrants, exiles, and other Americans in the city, and together they are reshaping American cultures and space, even as the immigrants and exiles themselves are transformed by the new environments of the American city.

“HOME” AS “AN IMAGINATIVE, POLITICALLY CHARGED SPACE”

While the transformative becomings of the characters in *Manhattan Music* entail reimagining and redefining the space they inhabit in the city, their becomings raise questions about the meanings of “home.” For women and people of color in the United States, “home” is a politically charged concept and space, especially for working-class Asian immigrants and Asian Americans who are deprived of a home or made “homeless” as portrayed in *Bone* and *What the Hell For*. While the racially marked and gendered status of exile and homelessness are also dealt with in *Manhattan Music*, this status generates more than social critique; it serves as a condition for reimagining and redefining “home” understood “not as a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space, but instead as an imaginative, politically charged space,” to borrow the words of the cultural critic Chandra Talpade Mohanty (353). In her discussion on the meanings of home for racial minorities in the United States, particularly for Asians and women of color, Mohanty argues that “home” must be understood “as an imaginative, politically charged space where the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in

shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation.” “Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively,” she writes, “to create a strategic space I could call ‘home’” (353). This concept of home entails “a vision of radical transformation” of both the self and the American space, which Alexander enacts in *Manhattan Music*, especially through the experience of Sandhya Rosenblum and Draupadi’s family.

Sandhya, an immigrant from India now living in New York City, has undergone radical changes as she crosses multiple borders of race, class, ethnicity, and nationality. She has immigrated to the United States with her Jewish American husband, Stephen Rosenblum, whom she met in India. Contrary to the enlightening, transformative, and assimilative impact of white America on the Chinese immigrants in New York City as portrayed in *Chinatown Family*, Sandhya’s interactions with white Americans are alienating. By marrying Stephen, Sandhya has crossed a border into white America, where she is “lost,” feeling alienated in both the private and public spaces and confined to a domestic life devoted to the conventional duties of wifehood and motherhood, which she wanted to escape by seeking an education in India and by marrying Stephen (34). Contrary to her expectations, she finds her life in the United States empty and is dependent on her husband for almost everything, while he is away from home all day working in Connecticut. “She felt an odd bitterness fill her at the lot she had chosen, her life as a woman thrusting her almost into the very role her mother would have picked for her” through an arranged marriage in India (23). She resents her dependence on her husband. “Something in her needed to slip free” (9).

Sandhya’s sense of being trapped by her husband results from both her gendered subordinate role as a dependent wife and care-giving mother and her displacement due to her racial identity. Not long after arriving in New York, Sandhya begins to feel distanced from her husband in their everyday life in part because their racial difference is marked by unequal social positions. When they are visiting Stephen’s sister, Muriel, Sandhya notices that Muriel’s housemaid from Trinidad has the same skin color as hers (8). While Muriel tells her to “never forget” what she has married into—“the land of opportunities” (8)—Sandhya finds it otherwise on her visit to Ellis Island with Stephen, whose idea of the visit is prompted by the renovation of the immigration facilities on the island. Stephen cannot “resist a sense of pride in the fact that the broken fixtures from the contagious hospital, where one of his great-grandmother’s sisters had been interned, were tucked neatly

behind plexiglass” (35). In contrast to Stephen’s connection to Ellis Island as the gateway to “the land of opportunities,” Sandhya identifies with the sense of displacement and exclusion experienced by earlier immigrants from Asia in “the room with anti-Asian images, ‘Jap Go Home’ and the like,” along with “the Asian Exclusion Act written up in big type next to the letters THIS LAND IS NOT YOUR LAND” (37). Stephen finds Sandhya “staring at,” without really seeing, “an enlarged image of a Moroccan” or perhaps an “Algerian in djellaba and turban, eyes moist with the light blown into the lens, a young man, brought into Ellis Island.” It is at that moment that Stephen feels for “the first time in their years together her sense of lostness” (37). But he cannot imagine any role for Sandhya in the public sphere except “volunteer work, with the Hadassah” or at “the soup kitchen at the Presbyterian Church,” even though he tells her that she has “choices” and that the “whole of New York City lies ahead” of her” (37). Sandhya finds elusive “the freedom he seemed to offer” when they first met in India, “locked as she was into a world she felt she had not chosen” (38).

However, Sandhya refuses the limiting choices Stephen has suggested. She longs to be free, to experience the city life outside the prescribed conventional roles for women confined to the domestic space and beyond the boundaries of her in-laws’ middle-class Jewish family circle. “There was a longing in her to go out, into the streets of Manhattan, saunter freely on the sidewalks, past the stalls of fruits and vegetables, past the scrawny lime trees” (39). Once in the streets by herself, she feels awkward surrounded by unfamiliar sights and sounds. But like the characters’ movement in Chinatown or the city in writings by Sui Sin Far, Lin Yutang, Fae Myenne Ng, Frank Chin, and Bienvenido N. Santos, Sandhya’s strolling in the streets makes visible what is rendered invisible or stereotypical by the white gaze. The *flânerie* of Sandhya in Manhattan inscribes the American space with signs of diasporas—intermingling people—blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Sandhya finds tangible connections here even though she feels inadequate in her interactions in this public space imbued with diversity. When she sees a Chinese with “kind eyes,” looking out “from the door of the take-out restaurant,” Sandhya decides that, if need be, she “might take shelter under the bright signs that advertised rice, pork, beans, the Chino-Latino quick cuisine [that is] a favorite in her neighborhood” (39). A Latina woman in a pink dress standing right there beside her looks like her mother. While “buying a cauliflower from the sidewalk, she tried to bargain in Spanish but found herself unequal to the task” (39). Before long Sandhya finds out that

the challenges she faces in the American city are much more difficult than communicating with people who speak a different language.

In going out to experience the city, Sandhya crosses contested borders of public spaces in the American city where, as Alexander states, “our histories are lived out” (*Shock* 6). When Sandhya goes shopping with her cousin Sakhi, who is wearing a sari, they are insulted and threatened by a group of white teenagers, who throw stones at them and yell “Paki” and “Hindu” (135). Sakhi is shocked and outraged by the stoning, but, to her surprise, Sandhya looks ashamed, “as if it were her fault that the teenagers, cruising by in a red car, had cast stones at her” (133). Sandhya begs her cousin not to tell her husband about the incident because it “will hurt him so much” (133). “This was the world Stephen had brought her to, but he himself was oddly absent from it, and Sandhya felt that there was no way she could draw on his experience to help her live her life” (39). Where is Sandhya’s home, then? Sakhi wonders. “Home” means a place where people “take you in.” No one in Tiruvella, India, where Sandhya is from, will turn her away. But doesn’t marriage mean “setting up a new home?” questions Sakhi (127). According to Sakhi’s husband, Ravi: “[I]f only Sandhya had married an Indian, living in America would be easier on her. . . . In her present state it was as if she were cast out by the community. Where could she make a place for herself?” (133). Sakhi’s and Ravi’s perspectives highlight Sandhya’s displacement, resulting from border crossings over the boundaries of nation and race as a woman of color in the United States. As Stella Oh points out in her discussion of Alexander’s treatment of dislocation and violence against South Asians in the United States: “Racist remarks and violence are public exhibitions of social dominance that display who is accepted into the space of American society” (28).⁴ How to inhabit the American city as home is for Asian immigrants and migrants a profoundly political question that underlies Alexander’s narrative strategy.

For Alexander, reimagining “home” and the “American space” necessarily entails a “recasting of bonds that must now work within the ethnic and cultural complexities of a diasporic world.” She argues that “it is in the imaginative space created quite precisely by the ‘gaps between places’ that the struggle for selfhood and with it, the necessary reworking of kinship, occurs” (“Diasporic Writing” 21). Alexander strategically redefines the American space through her characters like Sandhya, Sakhi, and Draupadi, who refuse to be contained within a comfortable domestic space or an ethnic enclave. The city for Alexander, as for Sandhya and other characters in the novel, is much more than a contested space to be redefined. It is a “contact zone”

where subjects are not only “constituted in and by their relations to each other” (Pratt 7) but also transformed by their encounters with one another and with people from different parts of the world, as well as by their environment, which they help constitute and change with their presence and actions. As a result, the American city becomes part of the diasporic world, a space of heterogeneity and multiplicity where refugees, diasporans, and immigrants are being transformed by their encounters.

THE CITY AS A “CONTACT ZONE”
FOR RADICAL TRANSFORMATION

Sandhya’s radical transformation is brought about by her encounters with Draupadi, Rashid el Obeid, and a community of women of color in New York City. Draupadi introduces Sandhya to a different New York City in which “parts of the globe . . . flowed into her,” altering her sense of self and her relationship to the city (54). While the city as a “contact zone” brings about profound changes in Sandhya and other characters such as Draupadi and Sakhi, the city itself is being changed by immigrants and diasporans like them and Rashid, who actively participate in the social events and cultural activities of the city. By the time Sandhya meets Draupadi through her cousin Jay, the “emptiness” and “gnawing hunger” in her has grown into “a desperation,” which Stephen does not know about and cannot touch (42). Draupadi enters Sandhya’s life like “part of a whirlwind that was to blow through the brittle order she was struggling to create for herself” (49). Meeting Draupadi is a pivotal moment in Sandhya’s process of subject formation, which is shaped by her relations and interactions with other “foreigners,” immigrants, and exiles in New York.

Draupadi takes Sandhya into a different part of Manhattan, where the latter is exposed to poverty, displacement, and homelessness marked by the differences of race and gender, as well as by traces of postcolonial diasporas. Unlike the Fongs’ sightseeing in New York City, whose cityscape imbued with the wonders of modern technology is supposed to precipitate the immigrants’ assimilation as depicted in *Chinatown Family*, Sandhya’s *flânerie* in the city leads to her discovery of unexpected connections to other people of color who are dislocated, displaced, or exiled. On her way back from shopping with Draupadi, Sandhya is fascinated by a black musician in a side street, a man “with a saxophone making music with his mouth, dark skin ballooning, precious music afloat” (57). This figure of exile and his music of

dislocation seem a prelude to what Sandhya is to discover next. Draupadi leads Sandhya on through the side street, off upper Broadway, to an old residential hotel for the poor, where she stayed when she came to New York City many years ago to attend the arts school at Columbia. This building is now being dismantled “as part of a neighborhood gentrification scheme” (57). Following Draupadi’s pointing hand, Sandhya sees an old black woman kneeling on the sidewalk, her body covered by rags soiled from overuse and her “torn skirt” “held together with a pin.” Beside her are a few paper bags, “some stuffed with fragments of clothing and food, much of it picked off garbage heaps” (57). This homeless female figure embodies the conditions of exile and displacement that Alexander writes about in her prose poem “Hotel Alexandria,” which she considers her “first American poem” and which her audience call her “Broadway poem on 103rd Street”—a poem that “contains ‘news’ of the world” (“Diasporic Writing” 22). The poem is a meditation on being displaced and exiled, based on a scene in the street Alexander observed from the window of a room she rented on 103rd Street. As the building for the poor was being demolished, the “poverty stricken families, the drunkards, the addicts who lived there were all being evicted.” Alexander finds that the “pain of homelessness brought out in the rocking figure of the old bag lady was something [she] could not escape from,” feeling herself “a woman dispossessed in this crowded city, the great metropolis of North America” (“Diasporic Writing” 22). When she depicts again the homeless woman of color in *Manhattan Music* through Sandhya’s experience, this figure of exile evokes a diasporic world beyond the personal experience of exile. As the old woman rocks her body back and forth, keening sounds rise from her mouth in a language “Sandhya felt she could almost understand.” She wonders, “[W]as she: African-American, Somali, Ethiopian, Indian, who could tell?” (57–58).

The strategically deliberate ambivalence of the old woman’s identity, along with the presence of the black musician, evokes diasporas of the transnational migration of labor, resulting from colonialism. When Sandhya returns to the site the next day, the homeless woman is gone, but she finds another sight of postcolonial diasporas and displacement. There, on the same spot where the old black woman was, someone’s home is being taken apart. Two men are taking bits of broken furniture to the sidewalk. Nearby, in front of a packing crate, stands an old Haitian peddler, who has laid out a few of his belongings for sale. As Sandhya approaches him, she is attracted by two paintings, “one of a marketplace, the other a sugarcane field, both peopled

with children.” “Sandhya touched the rim of the sugarcane field, struck by the turquoise sky, then found her gaze held by a tiny black doll made of string” (58). When the Haitian man puts out his hands to untie the doll for Sandhya, she notices “the dark lines on his palms,” which look “as if they had been cut in with a knife” (58). Both the homeless old black woman and this displaced Haitian peddler, who apparently used to work in the sugarcane fields of Haiti, Sandhya later learns, are connected to Draupadi’s family genealogy, which begins with her great-grandmother’s flight from India with an illegitimate child by rape, on board a ship going to “the New World” “as a bonded laborer to work in the cane fields” (87). The radically unequal power relations between the colonized and the colonizer that shaped their condition for migration to the New World underlie the homelessness and displacement of people like the black street musician, the old homeless black woman, and the Haitian peddler selling his belongings on the sidewalk of New York City. These figures of diasporas alter the cityscape of New York as emblematic of modernity and progress as depicted in *Chinatown Family*, where people of color, except the Chinese, are invisible. Subsequently, Alexander situates Sandhya’s transformation in a “contact zone” that defies national borders and refutes the ideology of Eurocentric cultural assimilation.

Sandhya’s friendship with Draupadi leads to border crossings over the boundaries of class intersected by race and gender. These crossings are made possible in New York City, where the caste system that shaped Sandhya’s relationships with others is disrupted. The rupture opens up new possibilities of belonging and becoming otherwise than what is defined by dominant social norms. A profound change in Sandhya begins with her encounter with Rashid el Obeid through Draupadi and her cousin Jay. Jay met Rashid and became friends with him in Berlin, where they stayed before coming to the United States. An Egyptian scholar, who came to New York on a postdoc fellowship at Columbia and is now teaching postcolonial literature at the university, Rashid represents another vector of postcolonial diasporas. He and Sandhya are attracted to each other and begin to have a love affair. He is enamored of “her taut, dark beauty” and deeply “moved” by something “about her” (59, 76). She is enticed by his eloquence, erudition, and belief in a multilingual and multicultural society. He wants to write a book on postcolonial identity and finds New York City “the perfect location” for it, arguing that “varied languages altered the structure of consciousness” and “made one better equipped for life in a world of multiple anchorages such as New York presented” (68). Rashid’s ideas about postcolonial identity and his

argument against Stephen's belief in a monolingual society "excited her in a way she could not have explained." "She felt Rashid was enormously learned, pressured from within by the multiple speeches that jostled in him" (69). When they are together alone, they enjoy sharing similar childhood memories and hearing each singing in a language the other does not understand but delights in. "Both . . . were foreigners in America, they would cradle each other. He would cast her afloat on the Nile and with her, he would sail on the Ganges" (76). Sandhya also finds liberation of her sexuality through Rashid, who becomes a refuge and an escape for her. When she was with him, she "let herself slip, sank her bewildered consciousness into what she felt was his strength," and despite "how little she really knew him, she longed to dive into his past, be stung into newness by him" (142). Rashid's singing in Arabic about another land and its "sights and sounds" promises to "release her" (143). Her love affair with Rashid, however, cannot substitute for independence, nor does it enable her to claim a place in America. Sandhya eventually realizes that she has to break up with Rashid in order to "get back to" herself, as she tells Draupadi (201). Her decision to end her love affair with Rashid is a turning point in her struggle for selfhood, which subsequently leads her to find a diasporic community and to participate in the social events of the city.

Nevertheless, Sandhya's relationship with Rashid serves a larger function than precipitating her becoming otherwise than a wife or mother. It expands the geographic and demographic map of New York City as a "contact zone" haunted by the aftermaths of colonialism. Her dates with Rashid in Brooklyn expose Sandhya and the reader to different sights of displaced peoples, such as the Sudanese refugee from Eritrea, who "had spent four years in the squalor of the camps on the outskirts of Khartoum" and whose cries can be heard in the streets of Brooklyn (83). Sandhya's relationship with Rashid also leads to a diasporic community in New York City, one that evokes British and French colonialism in the Middle East and its aftermaths that continue to haunt both the colonized and the colonizers. Rashid's childhood friend from Egypt, Zahir, is scheming with conspirators to "procure vats of chemicals" and a truck to transport them to New York City (153). Rashid considers them "[m]oral desperadoes," who are not unlike "the militia in the Midwest" of the United States, who stock up "guns, ammunition, food," wanting "to wipe out people who are different" (153). He explains to Sandhya that immigrants from previously colonized countries are like "the monster in *Frankenstein*," who is "made of bits and pieces of flesh" but "needs electricity to live." Post-colonial diasporans and immigrants "are like that," says Rashid. "Our spiri-

tual flesh scooped up from here and there. All our memories sizzling. But we need another. Another for the electricity. So we can live.” Yet the doctor Frankenstein, “terrified of a new race of bits-and-pieces creatures, monsters peopling his world,” refused the monster “a mate, refused him love.” Then the monster “turned on” the doctor. However, Rashid insists, as he does to Zahir: “Better to have all the little bits than to cleanse, blow up, destroy. For that’s the other option, isn’t it? A hatred of all the parts of flesh that form us, wanting the pure blue, the perfect slate” (154). While Rashid’s explanation may seem simplistic, his position, however, highlights an overarching theme in *Manhattan Music*—refusing the ideology of racial, cultural purity underlying the subjugation, exclusion, and marginalization of people of color in the colonized territories and the United States. This refusal entails transformative border crossings that redefine ethnic, national, and American identity, reinscribing the American space with hybrid, heterogeneous cultures and diverse peoples as agents of contestations, interventions, and social change.

Rather than remain silent, invisible “foreigners” in the margins of American society, Rashid and other immigrants and diasporans inhabit the public spaces through social activism. Because of her relationship with Rashid, Sandhya further broadens her experience in the city. She attends Rashid’s public antiwar speech given during the United States–led United Nations military intervention in Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Standing “on the platform under the spotlights” in an auditorium on Forty-Second Street, Rashid speaks about “the firing of missiles, the contravention of international law” and asks the audience to think about the “cries of Iraqi children, young men from Oregon and Texas torn from their pillow” (195, 196). He invites the audience to consider how “we” would “manage in this city we love” if “Manhattan were being bombed by an imaginary nation thousands of miles away” (196). He links the destructive violence of the war in the desert to that of other regions beyond the borders of Iraq, by evoking the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II and by alluding to the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 (197). Rashid’s words remind Sandhya of the violence of political struggle underlying the ethnic conflicts in India, which in her mind becomes blurred with what is happening in Iraq: “Tear gas wafts down from the streets of Delhi, Hyderabad, Basra, Baghdad” (196). For Sandhya, Rashid’s voice stirs in her scenes of violence in other parts of the world: “I saw her blood, the Muslim woman who lived in the Bangle-Sellers Lane behind Charminar. After the *rath yatra* they took her out and raped her in the graveyard. ‘We will show

you,' they cried, 'you and all your sisters, foreigners in Hindustan'" (195). She hears the "Arabic from the lyrics Rashid learned from his mother, a burial song, a woman with a swanlike neck, exiled in life, returned to her native soil in death." She hears "voices from the streets of Bosnia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, strange countries bruised as plums might be in a gunny sack." She also hears other cries of pain mixed with "exhalations of delight" as "smoke is inhaled from burning cities where tanks rumble." These voices and sounds form "a ceaseless cacophony, struggling to become speech: the homeless voices of Sandhya Maria Rosenblum" (193).

Sandhya's experience of dislocation in the cosmopolitan "contact zone" transports her to other locations and realities, which situate her "homelessness" in a larger context beyond national borders. Rajini Srikanth, in her insightful discussion of Alexander's writings, points out that Alexander insists on "the necessity for a global awareness—for a sensibility that is acutely troubled both by what happens on the streets of the city in which one lives and behind barbed wires in the refugee camps of a war-torn country like Bosnia" (86). Such an unsettling global awareness disrupts the normative pattern of acculturation or assimilation that characterizes conventional immigrant narratives.

For Sandhya, attending Rashid's antiwar speech is another way of border crossing by allowing her relationship with Rashid to move out of the private space to the public space, where she is exposed to voices from multiple perspectives and locations uncontainable within ethnic or national boundaries. In so doing, she is learning to situate her personal experience of dislocation in a larger context of transnational histories and migrations. That experience also shows her the possibilities of claiming a place in America by inhabiting the city as an active participant in public affairs, rather than as a passive observer in the margins of society or as an outsider who lives where she does not belong because of her racial or ethnic difference. Sandhya is discovering that "becoming American" is becoming otherwise than what she used to be or is supposed to be according to patriarchal conventions or racial hierarchy; it is becoming hybrid and multiple through unexpected connections to peoples and communities beyond family lineage, ethnicity, or nationality. She asks Draupadi, after attending Rashid's public speech: "Tell me, do you think to be American I have to hear all these voices? I mean is it part of being here, in this world?" And she adds: "I used to sit on a bench in Central Park wondering what it would be like to belong here. Dying to belong" (200). Historically characterized as "the least assimilable of all the Asian immi-

grants” to the United States, Sandhya and other South Asians learn that *how* to belong in “this world” is both intensely personal and irreducibly political.⁵

Disrupting the assimilative ideology underlying the exclusion and marginalization of immigrants of color, Draupadi suggests to Sandhya an alternative way of claiming belonging by crossing boundaries to find connections to and inspirations in African America. She introduces Sandhya to Billie Holiday and plays “Strange Fruit” for her, relating Holiday and the African American experience to the experience of her family in the “New World” and to the colonial conquest in India. For Draupadi, listening to Holiday feels as if the singer’s voice “were crying through all of us.” She identifies with Holiday and African Americans, telling Sandhya that she is from the “South,” too, not the Southern United States but southern India, where as she explains: “The first white people we saw were Portuguese who burned all the church records and conducted an Inquisition, stabbing, hanging, burning Indian bodies. So the souls might be saved” (201). Further suggesting the connection between South Asian Americans and African Americans, Draupadi tells Sandhya that her mother used to hum “Strange Fruit” while ironing, a song she learned from her sister Sugatha, “the rebel of the family, who sneaked into Café Society” in New York City to hear Holiday, who was born Eleanora Fagan but “made up her own name” (201). Reinventing the self against racial and patriarchal oppressions is embedded in Draupadi’s response to Sandhya’s question about belonging.

Significantly, the immigrants’ self-reinvention in *Manhattan Music* at once evokes and breaks away from the models of self-transformation in terms of cultural assimilation in immigrant narratives such as *Chinatown Family*. Sandhya’s cousin Sakhi embodies a mode of self-reinvention that resists the assimilative model and demonstrates another way of claiming belonging in America, while insisting on maintaining her Indian identity. While her husband, Ravi, has “coarsened” and “grown duller,” consumed by his work in a middle-management position at AT&T, Sakhi herself has changed “in a way that she could not have predicted” (130). Her encounter with Draupadi through her cousin Jay enables her to learn more about colonialism and racism from perspectives made available in reading a book Draupadi sends her, by Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1492–1585), a conquistador. Galvanized by the stark racial prejudice in Díaz’s book, Sakhi considers devoting herself “to antiracist, antisexist work, as she put it” (136). She becomes a social worker and is further changed by her interactions with people from various backgrounds. “Day by day, Sakhi’s caseload as a social

worker was increasing—more calls for help with children forcibly kept out of school, married women being beaten up” (127). With “so many others to be accounted for, their pain, their need to be taken care of, what she might have thought of as her self had altered radically, even perniciously some might argue, in the search for a greater good” (130). At the same time, she begins to have a sense of belonging in America. Although she rarely fails to enjoy New York City “on her infrequent visits” there, she prefers to live in a quieter place like East Brunswick, New Jersey, where she has made her home (131). She feels “nothing of the guilt so many of her compatriots bore in switching passports, as if they were mortgaging one world for another.” Even though she has decided to live and die here in America, Sakhi remains resolutely “Indian” and “would live and die that way.” “No one could change her skin” or deny Sakhi her Indian heritage. Yet in “responding to what this life, this ceaseless metamorphosis of spirit, required, Sakhi had become an American” (132).

In becoming an American while remaining Indian, Sakhi resists assimilation as conformity and subordination to racial hierarchy and claims a place for herself and others like her in America. Subsequently, “America” as embodied by white Americans and constructed through Eurocentric American culture is altered. This mutual transformation is also embedded in Sandhya’s process of becoming that is shaped by her encounters with other postcolonial diasporans and new Americans like Sakhi. To help her dislocated cousin find a “home,” Sakhi introduces Sandhya to a diasporic community of women in New York City, during Sandhya’s stay with her to recuperate after a suicide attempt following her breakup with Rashid. Going back to Manhattan, “a different city for her now that she was under her cousin’s wing,” is another formative encounter in Sandhya’s process of becoming. “As she sat in the large, ill-ventilated room at Columbia University, among many Indian women, Sandhya felt she had entered a country where she needed neither passport nor green card, nor any other signs of belonging” (211). She listens intently to two women’s stories of being exiled, made homeless, and now remaking themselves and their lives in the city. One of the speakers is an old woman from Lahore, the capital of Pakistan’s Punjab province, “brought to New York as an *ayah* two decades ago” and “cast out onto the streets when she could no longer work.” “The woman had roamed the streets, sleeping on park benches. . . . Finally, through a kindly passerby, she had found a shelter” (211–12). Now she is “learning to remake [her] life,” as she says to the group of women, who have become part of her “fam-

ily” in the city of immigrants and migrants from around the world (212). Sandhya is moved by the woman’s story, and she “wished she could run up to the woman, to touch her on the forehead, feel all over her face” (212). Following the testimonies at the meeting, the women also discuss how they will participate in the Diwali celebrations—the Festival of Lights, a five-day Hindu festival—in New York City. They agree to accept Draupadi Dinkins’s offer to contribute to the festival even though Draupadi “didn’t have a direct link with India.” After all, “they were all part of the diaspora” (213). Then the women debate on “discrimination in the workplace, with two women lawyers, a woman from the hospital worker’s union, and a fourth woman from a telephone company” (213). Sandhya is learning from the women in the group how to reimagine “home,” to recast “bonds that must now work within the ethnic and cultural complexities of a diasporic world,” as Alexander states in her meditation on diasporas (“Diasporic Writing” 21). She is also learning from them how to claim belonging to the city through social activism in the public space.

Her encounter with this diasporic community of women helps Sandhya further develop her agency in self-reinvention. As she tells Draupadi, who invites her to accept multiple roles in her play to be performed at the festival: “I don’t want to speak your words. I have to find my own.” And she adds, “I have to find my own way” (222). Her decision to return by herself to New York City to her husband and daughter, to a new beginning, marks a profound change in her sense of self and her relationship to the city. Alexander embeds her change in the way Sandhya reenters New York City as home, as where she belongs:

Sandhya took the train, switched to the subway at Penn Station. The route flowed into her so simply she was amazed. Right by 125th Street she got off the subway and found herself running, down to the river. . . . On and on she ran till finally she stumbled over asphalt, rocks, stones, a bit of broken fencing.

She was racing into America from the dark vessel of her past and she could hear it singing in her, ready to break free, the load of her womanhood,

With a sense of autonomy and freedom, Sandhya is able to participate in the Diwali celebrations on her own terms, rather than simply accept the role of an immigrant woman assigned by Draupadi in her play. But before joining the multiethnic, multiracial community and her husband and daughter at the festival taking place at the South Street Seaport, Sandhya is compelled to go

to Central Park, where she used to sit for hours as an outsider, feeling exiled. She is not ready yet for the festival, though she can imagine the square in the seaport seething and “voices in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Gujarati, English, all calling out” (226). She needs to return to that place where she used to feel displacement, only now to wander around in the park to experience an intimate relationship with the place, a new relationship that marks the beginning of a new self and new life. As she stares at her own reflection in the water of the lake, she whispers her name, “as if she were naming another being.” Uttered at this juncture in her life, her name reclaims its meaning in Sanskrit, signifying “those threshold hours, before the sun rose or set, fragile zones of change before the clashing absolutes of light and dark took hold” (227). No longer fearful or alienated, Sandhya feels there is “a place for her here, though what it might be she could never have spelled out.” But she knows “she would live out her life in America” (228). Central Park—a commons of the city—is her park now. So is New York City. “Then, slipping sandals onto feet still damp with lake water, Sandhya Rosenblum walked quickly into the waiting city” (228). Unlike the *flâneur* or *flâneuse* who strolls the streets as a spectator of city life, Sandhya walks the streets to claim her place in the city.

Equally significant as Sandhya’s walk “into the waiting city” to claim belonging is the Diwali Festival’s location—the South Street Seaport, a popular neighborhood of cultural events and commerce along Lower Manhattan’s waterfront. At once a center of social life and a gateway to the harbor, the location evokes the crossings of waters by immigrants, refugees, and exiles, as well as the subsequent mixings of peoples and cultures. By staging the Hindu festival celebrations there, the Asian Indian diasporic communities are simultaneously claiming their belonging and transforming the cultural scenes of the city, as well as ethnic and national identities. Such transformations in the city as a “contact zone” are embedded in Ravi’s proud statement about the plans for the Diwali celebrations: “Both national anthems will be played. . . . And the flags of both nations, the Star-Spangled Banner on the right and the Indian Tricolor with the charka on the left. They will blow together in the breeze” (217). The significance of these cultural and national signs of coexistence on an equal footing in New York City can be better understood in the historical contexts of colonialism, South Asians’ nationalist struggle for independence, and the exclusion of Asian immigrants by U.S. laws.⁶ Draupadi’s performance for the festival adds a multifaceted historical dimension to the cultural events and links South Asians’ postcolonial diaspora to the exile of the mythic Draupadi in the Indian epic, the

Mahabharata. The performance interweaves into the mythic story the lives of “her great-grandmother coming over to Trinidad as a bonded laborer, her grandmother scrubbing kitchens in Port of Spain, her mother in upstate New York, chopping onions” (218). This reworking that combines the mythic with the autobiographical introduces into the hybrid, multicultural events transnational histories of colonialism, patriarchy, and global migrations of peoples and cultures. While evoking the “intimacies of the continent” (to borrow again Low’s phrase) in terms of colonial subjugation, exploitation, and transportation of colonized peoples as cheap labor around the world, Draupadi’s multimedia performance, like the Diwali Festival in Lower Manhattan, enacts radical transformations of the “American space,” where Indians and other Asians were excluded by law, and where Sandhya and Sakhi are stoned by young white men in public.

Unlike the musical gatherings of the Filipino American “old-timers” in Santos’s novel, which are confined to the barbershop in Little Manila, the Diwali Festival is strategically staged at the South Street Seaport. Its spatial visibility in New York City highlights a central concern of Alexander’s novel—claiming a place in America with ethnic difference, cultural heterogeneity, and multiple national affiliations as an intervention in the centrality of Europe and North America in the construction of American history and culture, which subsequently erase or marginalize the presence and agency of people of color, particularly Asians in the United States. Such claiming of a place in America by inhabiting the public space of New York City with racially marked bodies and cultural difference is particularly significant in the context of the aftermath of 9/11.⁷ Alexander addresses the backlash against South Asians and other “brown people” in her poems such as “Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers” collected in her 2004 collection *Raw Silk* and in the chapter “Lyric in a Time of Violence” added to the new edition of *Fault Lines (Poetics 196)*. In contrast to the joyful public celebration of a South Asian festival, the South Asian woman in “Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers” is so fearful of being targeted by violence because of her difference that she “plucked” her “sari off” herself and “crushed it into a ball.” With her “black hair” and “sun dark skin” and fear of retaliation against her gendered and racially, ethnically marked body, she has to hide her cultural difference in the city’s public space (*Raw Silk* 14). Alexander confronts both physical and psychological violence in her writings about being in the city as a woman of color. “The questions of identity that face me as an Indian woman, living and working in New York City, a dense, compacted, racist

metropolis, where immigrants from all over the world have poured in,” she emphasizes, “are inseparable from an intimate violence that has entered my probing into the bonds that link inner and outer realms, self and world” (“Diasporic Writing” 33). Against racially and ethnically motivated violence, Alexander through her writings seeks to reinvent the American space and to claim a place for those who are made “homeless.” Situated in this context, the hybrid, multicultural performances in the public spaces of New York City as depicted in *Manhattan Music* could be better understood in terms of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “radical multiculturalism,” which “thinks of ‘culture’ as the name of a complex strategic situation in a particular society—residual moving into the dominant as emergent” (*Critique* 334). Such “radical multiculturalism” spatialized as part of the transformative “contact zone” in *Manhattan Music* decenters white America in the becomings of both the American city and its inhabitants from around the world.

The politics and poetics of space in *Manhattan Music* are characterized by a resolute refusal to allow Asian diasporic and immigrant characters to be confined spatially, socially, and culturally to ethnic ghettos or enclaves in the margins of American society. This refusal entails claiming right to the city by inhabiting the public space with difference, by crossing boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, and class to become otherwise than voiceless, subjugated Others through encounters. The becomings of the characters in the novel are bound up with the becoming of the city, which is being transformed by their presence and activities. Such transformation is a process in which “the outside is active in the production of an inside,” to evoke again Grosz’s concept of becoming (*Architecture* 68). The respective becomings of Draupadi, Sandhya, and Sakhi are enabling the transforming possibilities of the “American space,” even as they themselves are being transformed by their encounters in the city. Exile and displacement for Alexander, as for her major characters in the novel, compel reimagining and reinhabiting the city as an open, inclusive space of a diasporic world, against the exclusive ideology and practice of the U.S. nation-state on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

7 "THE LIVING VOICE OF THE CITY"

Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*

"Space" is constantly disconnected by new arrivals, constantly waiting to be determined (and therefore always undetermined) by the construction of new relations.

—DOREEN MASSEY

[I]t is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation.

—HOMI K. BHABHA

SET IN NEW YORK CITY IN THE 1990S, CHANG-RAE LEE'S NOVEL *Native Speaker* marks a literary turning point in Asian Americans' struggles to claim belonging in the United States. Published in 1995, three years after the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the novel is in part a response to the interconnected problems of poverty and racial injustice in American inner cities, by investigating the complex social, cultural, and political conditions underlying the problems.¹ At the same time, the novel explores the possibilities for profound social change, resulting from increasingly diverse populations in American cities, particularly in metropolises like New York. The fundamental question *Native Speaker* raises of "who can rightfully live here and be counted" is inseparable from questions of *how* the nation-space and urban space are imagined, conceptualized, and inhabited (274).² From this perspective, *Native Speaker* seems to have much in common with *Manhattan Music* in its insistence on recognizing the changes in the United States brought about by its diversity of peoples and cultures and in the novel's proposal for a radical reenvisioning of "the idea of America," to quote Meena Alexander's words (*Shock of Arrival* 161). However, rather than reenvision the idea of America largely through artistic and cultural activism as *Manhattan Music* does, *Native Speaker* probes into the possibilities and limits of the existing

political system for reimagining and reinhabiting the American city as a more inclusive democracy.

Against the homogenizing exclusionary notion of “AMERICA FOR AMERICANS” as asserted by “native” white Americans in the novel, Lee calls into question the meanings of both “America” and “Americans” by depicting New York as a city of refugees and immigrants: “In the street the shouting is in a language we hardly know. The strangest chorale” (331, 344). Despite the state’s policing of national borders and surveillance of the nation-space, “illegals” keep coming and “are of all nationalities . . . Koreans . . . Asians, West Indians, various Africans, and ‘most whatever else you can think of,’” in the words of “the regional director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service” (329). The crowds in the streets of New York City reflect the changing cityscape and its “living voice.” As the novel’s Korean American protagonist and narrator, Henry Park, observes: “They are all here, the shades of skin I know, all the mouths of bad teeth, the speaking that is too loud, the cooking smells, body smells, the English, and then the phrases of English, their grunts of it to get by” (344). These heterogeneous sights, voices, and smells in the American metropolis escape the state’s surveillance and control over the “American” body politic, disrupting the homogeneous American identity embodied by European Americans.

In fact, the scenes in the city streets as observed by Henry constitute a counter-discourse to the exclusionary concept of racialized American identity and citizenship. From the perspective of marginalized minorities, the novel argues for change in the political establishment by “the living voice of the city, which must always be renewed” (304). Yet throughout the novel the political machine continues to exclude those marked as visibly “foreign,” indicating that one’s racial identity remains crucial to one’s status as a citizen. *Native Speaker* confronts these and other related problems, challenges, and possibilities for both the city and its marginalized minorities, those “brown and yellow” “nobodies,” through two major characters—John Kwang, a Korean American and New York City councilman, and Henry Park, an employee of an intelligence firm specializing in ethnic coverage. As a “spy of identity” and “culture” working undercover as a journalist (206), Henry’s observations reveal significant cultural, economic, and, to a lesser degree, political transformations taking place largely as a result of profound demographic changes in the city and the country.

In no place are those changes more visible than in the streets of New York City, as depicted through the gaze of Henry. Street scenes play a central role

throughout the novel, showing that space is “the sphere” where “multiple trajectories” meet, “co-exist, affect each other,” and possibly “come into conflict,” as Massey argues in her essay “Spaces of Politics” (283). In other words, social, economic, cultural, and political changes are embedded in the lived spaces of New York City, which are at once outcomes and (trans)formative sites of social relations and social interactions. “And precisely because it is the product of relations, relations which are active practices, material and embedded, practices which have to be carried out,” Massey argues, “space is always in a process of becoming” (283). Understood as such, the multiplicity, diversity, and difference in the urban space are also a source of disruption and destabilization, a source of a “radical openness” and of a “politics as a genuinely open process.” Hence Massey proposes a reconceptualization of “both politics and space” (287–88). Lee captures this dynamic relationship between the spatial and the political in *Native Speaker*. His portrayal of the streets and neighborhoods of New York shows the city undergoing irreversible changes as part of an ongoing process, which demands a reimagining of the possibilities of New York as a city of inclusive democracy.

However, these changes as depicted in the novel are by no means equated with linear social progress. Instead, they reveal deeply entrenched racial inequality, class divisions, and the underlying dominant racial ideologies affecting individuals and groups, particularly immigrants of color and minority Americans. Nevertheless, the visible changes in the streets and neighborhoods of New York are destabilizing existing racial relations, challenging the political establishment, and altering the identity of the city, which is in the process of becoming otherwise than as defined by a black-and-white America. New York City as portrayed in *Native Speaker* in terms of protean multiplicity, diversity, and inassimilable differences is a “space of the in-between,” to borrow the phrase and concept from Grosz. In theorizing the possibilities and politics of space in *Architecture from the Outside*, Grosz contends: “The space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural, and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity” (91). The spatially reflected and embedded protean multiplicity, diversity, and inassimilable difference of the body politic in New York City disrupt the cohesion of normative American identity constructed by racial exclusion and hierarchy and call for reimagining and reinhabiting the city as a “space

of the in-between” with a political system open to change by new arrivals. Thus a counter-discourse to normative American identity emerges from everyday sights, voices, and activities, including political campaigns, in the street through the *flânerie* of narrator Henry Park, a journalist in disguise, a private eye spying on ethnic “Others,” as well as on American culture and the city. Rather than remain a passive background for the unfolding of the narrative, public spaces and urban masses in *Native Speaker* play an active role in representing the city as a locus for social, cultural, and political transformations, as “the place around identities, between identities” where “becoming” and “openness to futurity” challenge the political establishment to change through inclusive and equal participatory citizenship for those on the margins of society.

The significance of Lee’s spatial strategies, however, is often overlooked in readings of *Native Speaker*, though critics have offered illuminating insights into the complex problems of Asian Americans’ racial identity and subject formation as reflected in the novel’s generic characteristics and characterization.³ For instance, Tina Chen in her provocative analysis of the generic significance of the novel points out that Lee deliberately reworks “the genre of the spy story, altering it to accommodate the exigencies of a spy whose racially determined invisibility signals not license but a debilitating erasure of self and power” (153). Chen emphasizes that Henry’s apparently professional invisibility and silence are in fact the impact of “a culture legacy” from generations of “minority subject formation” shaped by Asian Americans’ racial status in the United States (165, 183). Min Hyoung Song further investigates the connection between the novel’s generic convention and the protagonist’s subject formation by reading *Native Speaker* as a “political bildungsroman,” which interrogates “the ways in which the nation disciplines its raced subjects by binding them to the nation” (*Strange Future* 174, 173).⁴ Drawing on critical theories of “historical trauma,” Song extends the investigation of Korean American subject formation as portrayed in *Native Speaker* by examining the experience of Korean Americans and their social status in the United States from the perspective of diasporas (176–96). In a similar vein, but with a focus on John Kwang, the Korean American councilman in the novel, Betsy Huang’s reading of *Native Speaker* sheds more light on the “cultural legacy” of silence as a form of “cultural consent,” which helps sustain the dominant discourses on racialized American citizenship and perpetuates the exclusion of Asian Americans from participatory citizenship (263).

For other Asian American critics such as Daniel Kim, a possible solution to the problem of Asian American political invisibility and silence resides in the novel's "political desire," one "that would stitch together the concerns of 'brown and yellow . . . unheard nobodies'" (D. Kim 258). But this "political desire" remains an unrealized "political dream," a "political fantasy" in part because Lee's representation of Kwang's political vision fails to transcend "the black-white binary" (D. Kim 236). Nevertheless, Kim notes, "the political longing" that the novel "seeks to engender," the longing "for a highly visible . . . Asian American political leadership, and for a multiracial politics of identification" is not "buried along with the fictional campaign of a fictional figure." Herein lies what is "most to be valued about *Native Speaker*": the political desire, or rather "the politics that it might make us want" (D. Kim 250). D. Kim's contention about the "political fantasy" and "political desire" is reiterated by Jodi Kim in her article "From Mee-gook to Gook: The Cold War and Racialized Undocumented Capital in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*." With a focus on the historical context of Cold War politics and capitalist logic, J. Kim's reading calls critical attention to the connection between the criminalization of the "undocumented" capital of Kwang's community "money club" and the challenge Kwang and his supporters pose to the political establishment" (127). She concludes by echoing D. Kim's contention that "*Native Speaker* gives literary representation" to "a liberal Asian American fantasy," "only to 'underscore its [very] status as fantasy'" (J. Kim 133–34, brackets in the original; D. Kim 245). Moreover, like D. Kim, she ends her discussion of *Native Speaker* by pointing out that the novel "gestures toward an unrealized social formation freed from the constitutive fictions of American nationalist ontology, leaving its readers longing for an alternative to this putative Cold War victory" (J. Kim 135).

My reading of *Native Speaker* picks up where those critics leave off. With attention to Lee's spatially enacted strategies, I pursue further the multiple roles of Henry as the protagonist, the narrator, and a spy who resembles the journalist *flâneur*—an "institutionalized voyeur" of the urban space and crowd. Rather than concentrate mainly on Lee's subversive appropriation of generic conventions, or his employment of lyricism in engendering the politics of longing, I turn to the city, to its streets, its neighborhoods, and other public spaces and their inhabitants for a counter-discourse that operates like an undercurrent running alongside and against the ideological and political forces that derail Kwang's political career. This counter-discourse constituted by everyday living spaces and the heterogeneous urban masses

engenders “political desire,” keeps hope alive for alternatives, and mobilizes political longing for social change. I argue that Lee’s representation of the city and its urban masses in the streets of New York through Henry’s “detection” activates this counter-discourse, which reveals and disrupts the “cultural legacy of silence,” the coerced “cultural consent,” and the invisibility of the “brown and yellow . . . countless unheard nobodies” who gather in New York City (84), while suggesting that “in-between” identities, uncontainable by mutually exclusive categories, are being formed.

“THE UNEASY COALITION OF OUR COLORS”

Lee employs and reinvents the *flâneur* figure through Henry Park, who works as a spy for a private intelligence firm with an “ethnic coverage,” which was established in the mid-seventies “when another influx of newcomers was arriving” (18). Henry’s last assignment—John Kwang, who is poised to run for mayor—obliges Henry to go around the neighborhoods of the city and spend much time observing scenes, including political campaigns, in the streets like a reporter on the beat. But his identity as a marginalized racial minority sets Henry apart from the conventional *flâneur*—a privileged, detached, and authoritative voyeur, whose gaze is supposed to be neutral and universal, representing “all the elements of life,” as Benjamin says of the “perfect flâneur”—“a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito” and “a mirror as vast as the crowd itself” (*Arcades Project* 443). Unlike the “perfect flâneur” who has the pleasure to feel himself “everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world” (443), Henry is in the margins of American society with a borderline identity and undesirable alien attributes. In the words of his Anglo-American wife, Lelia Boswell, a speech therapist, Henry is virtually an “illegal alien,” a “Yellow peril: neo-American,” and a “[f]alse speaker of language,” among other things (5, 6). Henry is invisible because he is an Asian American, whose coerced conciliatory social behavior reinforces his invisibility and abject “foreignness.”⁵ As he says with sarcasm, reflecting on the attributes of his identity as a spy and a Korean American: “It’s the prerogative of moles, after all, which only certain American lifetimes can teach. I am the obedient, soft-spoken son. . . . I will duly retreat to the position of the good volunteer, the invisible underling. I have always known that moment of disappearance, and the even uglier truth is that I have long treasured it. That always honorable-seeming absence. It appears

I can go anywhere I wish” (202). Rather than see the world at its center, like the “perfect flâneur,” Henry observes the urban crowds from the perspectives of those who are subject to surveillance, and those with whom he can in some way identify: “Foreign workers, immigrants, first-generationals, neo-Americans” who are the objects of investigation by the intelligence firm Glimmer & Co., Henry’s employer (17). Yet by reappropriating the mobility and gaze of the *flâneur* as a participatory observer in the metropolis through Henry, Lee puts recent immigrants, “neo-Americans,” and other minority Americans at the center of cultural and political scenes unfolding in the city’s public spaces.

Lee strategically reveals the characteristics of Kwang’s constituencies, and their political and economic position in the larger picture of the city’s spatially reflected social power structure, through Henry’s trip from Manhattan to Flushing to meet Kwang for the first time. The detailed route Henry maps suggests the symbolically marginal yet politically and ethnically central location of Kwang’s political base:

I went to him this way:

Take the uptown number 2 train to Times Square. Get off. Switch, by descending the stairs to the very bottom of the station, to the number 7 trains, those shabby heaving brick-colored cars that seem to scratch and bore beneath the East River out of Manhattan before breaking ground again in Queens. They rise up on the elevated track, snaking their way northeast to the farthest end of the country. The last stop, mine. (82)

As he is arriving in Queens on the train, Henry looks at the streets and directs the reader’s attention to the apparently “provincial pace” of life in Flushing and the predominantly working-class and ethnically diverse population living there:

Main Street, Flushing.

I like the provincial pace of the local train. I could see the play of human movements on the streets below the track. . . .

The people were thin, even when they looked almost fat they were thin, drawn as they were about their necks and faces. . . . They were of all kinds, these streaming and working and dealing, these various platoons of Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese, Haitians, Colombians, Nigerians, these brown and yellow whatever, whoevers, countless unheard nobodies, each offering to the mar-

ketplace their gross of kimchee, lichee, plantain, black bean, soy milk, coconut milk, ginger, grouper, ahi, yellow curry, cuchifrito, jalapeño. . . .

John Kwang's people. (82–83)

Henry's structuring gaze on the visual details enhances the connection between the working-class status and the racial identity of the people in the streets of Flushing, a most diverse ethnic enclave of New York City. It is worth noting that while these "platoons" of "brown and yellow" people have visibly become part of the labor force and the economic fabric of the city, they remain "unheard nobodies." That these tired, undernourished, hardworking, and struggling immigrants and new Americans are Kwang's supporters indicates that Kwang is not part of the political establishment but rather an outsider, representing those who don't have a political voice and don't have much economic or social capital. As Henry observes, "native whites" appeared uninterested in him, and African Americans "didn't seem to trust him." Although he was a Democrat, "he drew little" from that political machinery with strong "unionized workers and tradespeople, white ethnic old New York" (143). "Instead, he had made his the party of livery drivers and nannies and wok cooks and seamstresses and delivery boys, and his wealthiest patrons were the armies of small-business owners through whose coffers passed all of Queens, by the nickel and dime" (143). What distinguishes Kwang further from other politicians is that he seeks and receives support from more recent immigrants beyond his "power base" of Korean communities and beyond his strong constituency in the Chinese communities (142).

Henry's walking in the streets of Flushing in the first few days of his arrival there reveal another aspect of "John Kwang's people," whose enthusiasm about their councilman is contagious, and Kwang's popularity among them is palpable and ubiquitous in public spaces: "Those first days I walked the streets of Flushing, I saw his name everywhere on stickers and posters of very other shop and car along Kissena, Roosevelt, and Main. Downtown, near a subway entrance, sat a semipermanent wooden booth decorated with bunting and pennants and flags manned by neatly dressed youth volunteers in paper hats" (83). Henry's gaze directs the reader to the visibility of Kwang's political campaign in the streets of Flushing. His name is on flyers, pamphlets, buttons, key chains, and lapel pins passed out by the volunteers. As Henry continues to stroll the streets, looking around like a detective or a reporter, his gaze not only captures Kwang's popularity in Flushing, but it also indicates why Kwang seems to be loved by his supporters. He finds

framed portraits of Kwang “often hung in a kind of sacred paper altar that mom-and-pop businesses tape up on the wall beside the cash register,” along with “a son’s Ivy League diploma, a tattered letter of U.S. citizenship from the county clerk of Queens” (83). Pictures of Kwang are proudly displayed on the walls of restaurants, showing him standing “arm in arm with the owners, the captured mood always joyous, celebratory” (83–84). These visual details of where Kwang’s pictures are on display register the new citizens’ pride, success, hope, and belief in the American Dream and in their chances of upward mobility and participation in democracy as American citizens, as embodied by Councilman Kwang, with whom they can identify.

Working undercover in Kwang’s office enables Henry to observe as an insider the ways Kwang and his staff recruit and expand his unique constituencies in the neighborhoods of Queens. Every day the staff members, including Henry, carry out Kwang’s “daily order”: “[D]o the good duty, go out into the street, go into the stores, stop them in the alleys. Just get in a word. In ten different languages you say *Kwang is like you. You will be an American*” (143). They pass around flyers with Kwang’s picture and life story, which resonates with the immigrants. They hand out envelopes with a dollar bill attached to each, to be returned with requested information about “their name and address and family and occupation” (143). The streets and other public spaces of Queens seem to have become a political platform for Kwang not simply because of his proactive individualized way of reaching out to “these various platoons of Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese, Haitians, Colombians, Nigerians” but, more importantly, because of the desire and longing of these “countless unheard nobodies” for participatory citizenship as an American like Kwang. Henry’s observation of Kwang’s performance in the political theater of the urban neighborhoods also reveals that Kwang seems on his way to become more than a representative from Queens. Rather than be content with his position as a councilman, Kwang demonstrates the ambition to run for mayor of New York. His “political machinery was just beginning to market him in the other quarters of the city” (84). His staffers are capitalizing on the fact that since his election as councilman, “Queens had seen a drop in violent crime” and the “latest school test scores were up.” Sherrie Chin-Watt, his PR and media manager, schedules his public appearances “where the viewership wanted him, even outside of Queens” (84).

Kwang’s social interactions in public are arranged in places where various group identities and social positions are spatially embedded. Kwang is seen “talking with Hispanic youths at a boys’ club in Washington Heights,

amongst the revelers in black tie at a plush Manhattan hotel party, playing miniature golf with union bosses in Staten Island, walking the streets with black church leaders in Bedford-Stuyvesant” (84). These meetings are prearranged and rehearsed by Kwang’s staff. Much deliberation goes into the visual implications of the spatial composition that construct a particular image of Councilman Kwang as a politician for improvement in public education, for “ethnic fellowship” (87), and with the prospect of a political future in Manhattan. All this is revealed through Henry’s observation of how, with other staff members of Kwang’s office and Henry himself, Sherrie practices a walk-through of the designed routes of Kwang’s public appearances for the media. She chooses the middle of a sidewalk with “a tidy storefront and an elementary school playground” as the immediate background against the Manhattan skyline. She selects the front of a Turk-owned deli as another PR spot for Kwang (87). Such public performances in the streets are intended to demonstrate that Kwang is a politician for all, not just a spokesperson for Asian Americans. This staging of his political profile, however, is more visually symbolic than substantive, based on arrangements of the composition of racially marked crowds around him in public spaces for the intended effects of “visuals,” as his staffers call them (84). Underlying Henry’s observation as a private eye is a critical distance that exposes the superficiality of Kwang’s vision of “ethnic fellowship,” one that is constructed more through PR and media than grounded in grassroots networks of multiethnic political mobilization.

When Henry shifts his gaze away from the staged public performance of Kwang for the camera, to the street where reporters and news cameras are absent, disturbing reality emerges to pose serious challenges for Kwang. A “rowdy assemblage of twenty or so Peruvians who worked for Korean greengrocers” showed up outside Kwang’s new storefront office, “protesting low wages and poor working conditions” with “their tall skinny drums and guitars and handmade placards that read: ‘Koreans Unfair’” (84). Their protest only results in Henry’s noncommittal reassurance that Kwang “believed in fairness in pay and hard work” and “had some influence with the Korean businesspeople,” but he “could only do so much.” “What he could do was speak to the grocers in his next address before their business association” (84). Such a tactful promise silences the Peruvians, who “seemed to accept this, if somewhat somberly” (84).

While the Peruvians’ protest may be easily silenced, protests by African Americans against Korean grocers are getting louder and “spreading from

Brooklyn to other parts of the city, to black neighborhoods in the Bronx and even in [Kwang's] home borough, in the Williamsburg section, and then also in upper Manhattan" (180). What seems more disturbing than the boycotts is Mayor De Roos's handling of the situation, "particularly the first riot in Brownsville, where a mostly black crowd, watched over by a handful of police, looted and arsoned a Korean-owned grocery" (180). Henry indicates that the police inaction is largely the result of the mayor's manipulation of racial identity politics. The police commissioner, Roy Chillingsworth, is a friend of De Roos and was hired by him. Before coming to New York, Chillingsworth "worked in New Orleans and Dade County, Florida," where he "had a reputation for being tough on drug dealers and gangs and illegal immigrants," and he is black (180). At once subordinate to and complicit in the racial hierarchy of power, Chillingsworth's position in a way resembles that of Henry and his fellow ethnic spooks of Dennis Hoagland's intelligence firm, each of whom is assigned to engage his or her "own kind, more or less" (17). Kwang's remark to Henry further points to the disturbing, apparently new race relations among minorities: "It's a race war everyone can live with. Blacks and Koreans somehow seem meant for trouble in America" (181).

The discontent of Peruvians and African Americans about Korean store owners highlights spatially structured intersections of race, class, and citizenship in interracial relations in the American city. These apparently minority "racial conflicts" reveal not only the intractable inequality of race, class, and citizen status but also the tenaciousness of mutually reinforcing ideological and structural hierarchies. Particularly worth noting is the invisibility of white Americans in the "racial strife" in the inner-city ethnic enclaves and segregated ghettos. Yet their absence is a privilege produced by the same spatially reinforced racialized structure of power and inequality that shapes the apparently "ethnic" conflicts between Korean store owners and other people of color.⁶ Moreover, for some white Americans, their privileged absence becomes grounds for assuming moral superiority, willful innocence, and neutral concern underlying their "liberal reaction" exemplified by Mayor De Roos, who initially shows "fascination and disdain, but then relief" (181).

Meanwhile, decontextualized, fragmented representations of the boycotts in mainstream media portray those incidents as a black-Korean problem, a new phenomenon of "racial conflict," largely resulting from the influx of recent immigrants who are not native speakers of English. The press is covering multiple boycotts, and the TV news stations make images for their "11 P.M. drama": "Vandalism. Street-filling crowds of chanting blacks. Heavily

armed Koreans. Fires in the night” (192). Kwang finds himself caught in a situation where his “sympathy for either side was a bias for one.” “He couldn’t even speak out against the obvious violence and destruction, after black groups had insisted they were ‘demonstrations’ against the callousness of Korean merchants and the unjust acquittal of the Korean storeowner who’d shot and killed Saranda Harlans” (192–93). Henry directs the reader’s gaze to the way reporters on the street take liberty with Koreans: “A reporter cornered some grocer in an apron, or a woman in the door of her shop, both of them looking drawn and weary. The lighting was too harsh. The Koreans stood there, uneasy, trying to explain difficult notions in a broken English. Spliced into the news stories, sound-bited, they always came off as brutal, heartless. Like human walls” (193). Their voice unheard, their image rendered alien, their stereotype reproduced in the silence and silencing of their difficult utterances, the Koreans look “foreign,” helpless, and their helplessness appears to be their own fault—the inadequacy of their broken English, their cultural Otherness. Underlying such representations of black-Korean “racial strife” are misleading implications that “this country had difference that ails rather than strengthens and enriches,” as Kwang says to Henry (274). He adds: “You can see what can happen from this, how the public may begin viewing anything outside mainstream experience and culture to be threatening or dangerous. There is a closing going, Henry, slowly but steadily, a narrowing of who can rightfully live here and be counted” (274). Kwang’s words convey the urgency for a political vision beyond the foreigner-citizen and black-white binaries, which help sustain the exclusion of Asian Americans and other racial minorities from full citizenship.

The son of a Korean grocer in New York City, Henry himself is familiar with how racial stereotypes are produced within racialized and classed power structures of domination and subordination, of privilege and disenfranchisement. This inequality is also spatially reinforced by the organization of urban space marked by differences of race and class. As Henry sarcastically comments on his identity shaped by the American sociocultural environment: “I have always ventured only where I was invited or otherwise welcomed. . . . An assimilist, a lackey. A duteous foreign-faced boy. I have already been whatever you can say or imagine, every version of the newcomer who is always fearing and bitter and sad” (160). Relying on his “double agency,” to borrow Tina Chen’s phrase, as a spy of “ethnic coverage” and as a Korean American, Henry carries out his “detection” like a double-edged sword of exposure and critique, revealing different forms of silence and silencing, as well as complicit-

ity and resistance in various public spaces of the city. At the same time, his detection as an “institutionalized voyeur” of the urban space situates both the promise and downfall of Kwang’s political career in “the crucible of a larger narrative,” rather than “a singular mode” (206). As Henry says, “I no longer can simply flash a light inside a character, paint a figure like Kwang with a momentary language,” but “I know the greater truths reside in our necessary fictions spanning human event and time” (206). New York City is “the crucible of a larger narrative” that includes the longings, desires, and struggles of the “countless unheard nobodies,” as well as the “uneasy coalition of our colors” captured through critical, reflective, and interpretive observations of Henry as a spy of identity and culture and a participatory spectator of the urban crowd (260).

New arrivals such as “John Kwang’s people” have “disconnected” the American urban space and the nation-space from a homogeneous national identity traceable to a single cultural or geographic origin, thus disrupting the genealogy of Eurocentric American identity. Yet the new race relations between Korean store owners and their Peruvian employees, between Korean Americans and African Americans are produced in part by the changing urban space where new immigrants and African Americans and Latinos seem to be stuck. Henry’s observation of the cityscape and of the “uneasy coalition of our colors” that Kwang seeks to build despite the “racial strife” between racial minorities suggests that even though space may be open to change by those who inhabit it, it does not automatically lead to more social equality or political inclusion. In fact, spatial organization produced by unequal social relations can help sustain the very racial disparities that shape the lived spaces of the city.

“THE MOST AWFUL AND SAD OPERA” IN THE CITY’S
 “GHETTO RETAIL SPACE”

As Henry’s observation moves away from scenes of black-Korean conflict as reported by mainstream media to the streets of Queens and other neighborhoods of New York City, it reveals that the apparently racial-minority conflict results from spatially produced and maintained social relations shaped by the inequalities of race and class in the unique urban environment of the American city.⁷ While riding with Kwang in a car on a boulevard flanked on both sides by rows of Korean stores, Henry finds out that Kwang himself used to run a wholesale shop on the street “long before all of it became Korean

in the 1980s" (182). Selling and leasing "only high-end equipment" for dry-cleaning and commercial washers, Kwang was able to expand quickly "from the little neighborhood business, the street-front store, for he had mastered enough language to deal with non-Korean suppliers and distributors in other cities and Europe" (182). Unlike those Korean immigrants such as Henry's father who came to the United States as adults with a college education but little English, Kwang was still a child when he arrived. He worked as a houseboy and learned English in a Catholic orphanage. With the advantage of mastery of English and a business unconfined to ethnic enclaves in urban ghettos, Kwang "existed outside the intimate community of his family and church and the street where he conducted his commerce." "He wasn't bound to 600 square feet of ghetto retail space like [Henry's] father, who more or less duplicated the same basic store in various parts of the city" (182-83).

Located in the "ghetto retail space," Korean small businesses are where poor working-class African Americans live and shop. Henry's observations of the interactions between Korean business owners and African American customers suggest that the black-Korean strife is largely the effect of spatially reinforced, racially marked socioeconomic conditions and prejudices. One incident Henry encounters at the street-side display of a Korean wristwatch and handbag store gives the reader a glimpse into the complexities of the everyday interactions between black customers and Korean shopkeepers and how these encounters are irreducible to a "singular mode" of "truth." The customer arguing with the owner of the store bought a watch there, but it has stopped working. He refuses the store owner's offer of a new one and demands a full refund because the owner is "so rude and hard to understand (intentionally, he thought)" (184). The owner, Mr. Baeh, explains that "he only gave exchanges, no refunds" and points at "the sign that said so by the door." Besides, he tells Kwang in Korean, "this man bought the watch many months ago," and "he is being generous enough in offering him another one." Then he adds, "*You know how these blacks are, always expecting special treatment*" (184). Kwang, however, "let the statement pass." He introduces himself to the man and asks if he has bought other items at the store. After speaking with Kwang inside the store, Mr. Baeh offers the customer a new, better watch, plus a pair of earrings for his wife free of charge. But the store owner does not hide his displeasure. Henry notes that as he and Kwang are leaving, Mr. Baeh "wouldn't look back out at us" (187). Although the customer is appeased, the hard feelings, misunderstandings, and prejudices remain. While staying outside with the customer, Henry learns from their

conversation that the man, also named Henry, “was a salesman at the big discount office furniture store off 108th Street” (184). He keeps shopping at the store because it is easy to stop there on Friday to buy something for his hardworking wife, a registered nurse, who enjoys the nice, inexpensive jewelry from the store. But he feels reluctant to buy the earrings that he thinks his wife would like because the store owner, “that man in there, he can be cold” (185). While what Henry has learned about the African American customer counters the racial stereotypes of blacks, which Mr. Baeh has adopted, he finds it impossible to explain the Korean store owner’s situation to the African American customer in “a momentary language” (206).

Instead, Henry, as the narrator and participatory spectator of urban scenes, turns to his father’s stores and other small businesses run by recent immigrants of ethnic minorities in other parts of the city, for a better perspective on the black-Korean relation “through the crucible of a larger narrative.” Henry’s father, not unlike Mr. Baeh, “ran his store with an iron attitude,” regarding his customers of mixed ethnic and class backgrounds “as adversaries” (185). “He disliked the petty complaints about the prices, especially from the customers in Manhattan.” Even though he “hated explaining to them why his prices were higher than at other stores,” he always did (185). Having worked in his father’s store in Manhattan, Henry knows what it is like to be forced to pretend, to keep silent, and to remain invisible because he looks “foreign,” “un-American,” economically vulnerable, and socially marginal. If he keeps speaking Korean—“the language of our work”—in the store, he realizes, “the customers didn’t seem to see me.” “I wasn’t here. They didn’t look at me. I was a comely shadow who didn’t threaten them” (53). One day he catches “a rich old woman” “whispering to her friend right behind [him], ‘Oriental Jews.’” But he never shows his feelings or says anything sarcastic in English as he wants to. His father prevents him from being “rude” to the woman even though she took a bite of an apple and “then put it back with its copper-mouthed wound facing down.” Nudging Henry back to his work, his father says, “She’s a steady customer” (54). They have to swallow their pride and endure insults silently so as not to lose a regular customer, who can always shop elsewhere.

Black customers who are stuck in the inner-city neighborhoods have to shop at stores like his father’s. But his father treats them differently. “He never bothered to explain his prices to them. He didn’t follow them around the aisles like some storekeepers do, but he always let them know there wasn’t going to be any funny business” (185). When young black customers come

into his store, he does not attempt to hide his suspicion. "At certain stores there were at least two or three incidents a day. Shoplifting, accusations of shoplifting, complaints and arguments. Always arguments (186). Constant arguments are heard at his father's store, such as those between "a woman in a dirty coat" and Henry's father "in his white apron, sleeves rolled up." As Henry describes the scene: "It's like the most awful and sad opera, the strong music of his English, then her black English; her colorful, almost elevated, mocking of him, and his grim explosions. They fight like lovers, scared, knowing. Their song circular and vicious. For she always comes back the next day, and so does he." They both are stuck in the neighborhood of "retail ghetto space." "He can't afford a store anywhere else but where she lives, and she has no other place to buy a good apple or a fresh loaf of bread" (186). While ethnic ghettos are produced by social relations, they are instrumental in sustaining or reproducing those relations.

Henry's father's prejudice against blacks is reinforced after years of working in stores confined to the inner-city ghettos. "To him, a black face meant inconvenience, or trouble, or the threat of death. . . . He personally knew several merchants who had been killed in their stores, all by blacks, and he knew of others who had shot or killed someone trying to rob them" (186). He himself has been robbed and beaten up, an experience too humiliating for him to speak of. For a while though, he makes efforts to establish a good relationship with blacks by hiring "a few black men to haul and clean the produce" at one of his first stores on 173rd Street, off Jerome, in the Bronx (186). But none of their employment lasted because, according to him, they "either came to work late or never and when they did often passed off fruit and candy and six-packs of beer to their friends" (186-87). Eventually, Henry's father replaces the black workers with "Puerto Ricans and Peruvians." "The 'Spanish' ones were harder working," said he, "because they didn't speak English too well, just like us" (187). Taking advantage of the vulnerability of new and non-English-speaking immigrants like himself, Henry's father follows "a kind of rule of thumb" to hire workers who "couldn't speak English, even blacks from Haiti or Ethiopia, because he figured they were new to the land and understood that no one would help them for nothing" (187). He also exploits recent immigrants from Korea like Mr. Yoon and Mr. Kim, who have college degrees but speak little English, know "no one in the country," and have a family to support, just as he did before he became successful (54). Henry comments with sarcasm: "My father like all successful immigrants before him gently and not so gently exploited his own" (54). In so

doing, Henry's father and others like him—whom Henry describes as “those who knew better, us near natives, us earlier Americans” (55)—are wittingly or unwillingly practicing the same ideology that keeps them subordinate and marginal in the power structure of hierarchies of race, class, and citizenship, which shape their everyday interactions with blacks.

But for immigrants like Henry's father and others, including Mr. Baeh, who are preoccupied with survival in the new country and whose opportunities are bound to a few hundred square feet of “ghetto retail space,” where “respect (and honor and kindness) is a matter of margins” (188), rights and equality are not part of their vocabulary. Henry observes that when Mr. Baeh gave away that new watch for free, he would stay open late that night, “maybe for no more of a chance than” possibly making “a few bucks on one of his gun-metal rings or satin scarves or T-shirts.” “The other merchants on the block would do the same. The Vietnamese deli, the West Indian takeout. Here is the great secret, the great mystery to an immigrant's success, the dwindle of irredeemable hours beneath the cheap tube lights. Pass them like a machine. Believe only in chronology. This will be your coin-small salvation” (188). These scenes, like the quarrels and arguments in the Korean stores, are part of “the most awful and sad opera” in the American city. They offer a glimpse into what James Kyung-Jin Lee calls the “deep gap in American life between spaces of privilege and spaces of poverty” (187). To disrupt such circular, vicious everyday strife in the urban ghetto requires structural changes in the racially marked socioeconomic conditions that give rise to it, changes that entail inhabiting the urban space otherwise. The “awful and sad opera” at Korean American stores in the ghetto retail spaces of the city suggests that unequal social relations and their instrumental spatial organization must change in order for racial minorities and newcomers to claim a rightful place in the city as equal citizens.

“WHO CAN RIGHTFULLY LIVE HERE AND BE COUNTED”

Kwang embodies the possibilities of inhabiting the city otherwise than remaining one of the “countless unheard nobodies” toiling in the margins of American society. As a city councilman running for mayor, Kwang has become a public figure, one who refuses Asian Americans' racialized identity as cultural aliens and social outsiders in America. Against the stereotypes of Asians and countering Mayor De Ross's familiar tactics to marginalize him, isolate him, and antagonize Hispanics, blacks, and the white middle class

against him, Kwang emerges through Henry's observation as an American never imagined by the "urban throng" (36–37, 304). More important, Henry's detection suggests that Kwang's political career, albeit short-lived, represents something larger than one individual's ambition. From the public square, Kwang, as part of the American "vernacular," speaks "not simply in new accents or notes but in the ancient untold music of a newcomer's heart, sonorous with longing and hope" (304). In other words, Kwang represents not just a "liberal fantasy" but, more importantly, the "longing and hope" of those countless newcomers who have been invisible and unheard in the political arena and whose identities must be imagined otherwise than as what has been prescribed by the dominant culture.

For Henry and other Asian Americans like his parents, a Korean American politician such as John Kwang is inconceivable. As Henry confesses:

Before I knew of him, I had never even conceived of someone like him. A Korean man, of his age, as part of the vernacular. Not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family. He displayed an ambition I didn't recognize, or more, one I hadn't yet envisioned as something a Korean man would find significant or worthy of energy and devotion; he didn't seem afraid like my mother and father, who were always wary of those who would try to shame us or mistreat us. (139)

Henry sees in Kwang a resistance to the "cultural consent" of Asian Americans like his parents whose fear and silence help reinforce their racial position as the "model minority," embodying the immigrant success myth of assimilation yet remaining "foreign" culturally, invisible and marginal politically. Despite his father's material success, which eventually enabled his family to move into a big house and rich neighborhood, Henry's parents never felt comfortable or had a sense of belonging there, acting, as Henry observes, "as if the town were just barely tolerating our presence." By inhabiting the neighborhood of their home as if they were undesirable outsiders, Henry's parents and other Asian Americans like them become "silent partners of the bordering WASPs and Jews" (53). In contrast, Kwang claims belonging by actively participating in democracy, seeking to bring change in the political establishment through a new model of a multiracial, multiethnic coalition of diverse "new comers" to the "promised land," which has been constructed into a nation-state where, Liam Corley notes, "dominance has been

accorded to declarative and arbitrary national symbols that exclude or ignore marginal, migrant voices, which in turn leads to a despotic and imagined homogeneity" (69). Corley further contends: "Kwang's vision of New York is truer to the city than the protests of the (presumably) white Americans who want to claim it and America exclusively as their own. As a symbol for the country, New York is a site of contestation and cultural pluralism." The city is also "an undeniably transitional space between the domestic and the foreign" (68). But for Kwang, as for Henry and other Asian Americans, immigrants, refugees, and migrants of color, what matters is who is allowed to live in this city or country as equal citizens.

The significance of Kwang, in spite of his flaws, his vanity, deceptions, hypocrisy, and failure, resides in what he stands for and who he represents symbolically and in practice, especially in terms of the exigent question he poses: "who can rightfully live here and be counted" (274). Much of what Kwang means to immigrants, Asian Americans, and other minority Americans is conveyed through Henry's observations as both a spy and a Korean American. Hence the reader can see Kwang through multiple lenses without losing sight that what matters most about him is his defiance of the subordinate, marginal racial position of Asian Americans and his "people"—those "brown and yellow . . . countless nobodies" who are changing the American urban space and whose presence demands reckoning. While preparing a preliminary report on Kwang to Hoagland and his associates at the intelligence firm, Henry reveals that Kwang was a refugee of the Korean War, which "obliterated" his family and twice erased his home village from the map when he was a boy. He "stole away to America as the houseboy of a retiring two-star general" (211). When he saved enough to leave the general's house in Ohio, he went to New York City, where he worked in a Chinatown noodle shop and was robbed and beaten nearly to death in the street (211). Eventually, he was taken to a Catholic orphanage, where he learned to read, write, and speak English—"his new home language" (211). It was then that he began to "think of America as a part of him, maybe even his." This sense of identity, of belonging, for Henry, "was the crucial leap of his character, deep flaw or not, the leap of his identity no one in our work would find valuable but me" (211).

Moreover, what "America" means and *how* to claim America as part of him and "maybe even his" are equally, if not more, important questions that Kwang raises as a Korean American politician, a position inconceivable to people like Henry and his parents. For Kwang, "America" means the country where freedom and equality are fought for by people mobilizing at the grass-

roots level, pushing the political, legal systems of the country to change. He learns about racial segregation, the power of the Civil Rights Movement, and the fact that America was a polarized “black-and-white world,” through his personal experience in the public spaces of American cities. Unlike blacks, Mexicans, or even Filipinos, Kwang, a light-skinned East Asian, could sit where he wished on buses and drink “from whatever fountain was nearest” in Louisiana and Texas. When in Fort Worth, he is told that “the Colored in the sign” for public washrooms “meant black and Mexican” and possibly dark-skinned “Orientals” from the Philippines (195). In New York City, he watches “the crowds and demonstrations” in the streets and feels “welcomed by the parades of young black men and women,” one of whom invites him to join them. Inspired by the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement and moved by “the black power in the streets,” especially by the feeling that he is included as part of something larger, Kwang realizes “*this is America!*” (195). However, for him the civil rights era is “a bright memory of a time that has gone.” Rather than “living in the glow of civil rights furor,” people should vote for and demand “what they need for their children.” He contends: “[T]he landscape is changing. Soon there will be more brown and yellow than black and white. And yet the politics, especially minority politics, remain cast in terms that barely acknowledge us. It’s an old syntax” (196).

Kwang seeks to change the “old syntax” through his political campaign largely supported by those who are unheard and invisible in mainstream America. Henry articulates forcefully in spatial terms the vision and conviction embedded in Kwang’s political ambition in running for mayor:

Manhattan was going to be the next stage, the next phase of his life. He wasn’t going to be just another ethnic pol from the outer boroughs, content and provincial; he was going to be somebody who counted, who would stand up like a first citizen of these lands in every quarter of the city, in Flushing and Brownsville and Spanish Harlem and Clinton. He would be the one to bring all the various peoples to the steps of Gracie Mansion, bear them with him not as trophies, or the subdued, but as the living voice of the city, which must always be renewed. (303–4)

For Kwang, Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor of New York City, is a symbolic place where those who have been excluded from equal participation in democracy should be represented. He has spoken in public “with fire and light in his eyes” about what it would mean for minority

Americans to finally arrive at the “steps of Gracie Mansion” as “the living voice of the city, which must always be renewed.” This claiming of belonging, and claiming “America” by demanding equal participatory citizenship in democracy for “various peoples,” renders Kwang distinctive as a minority politician. His passionate, sentimental public speeches, which sometimes entail “singing whole love songs to the cynical crowds” and telling “tall stories of courage and honor,” delivered “without savvy,” without apologies, mesmerized and even “almost embarrassed the urban throng,” who “had never imagined a man like him, an American like him,” but “no one ever left” (304).

When speaking in public like this as an American, one “never imagined” by “the urban throng,” Kwang is making the “living voice of the city” heard. As Henry shifts his observation of the impact of Kwang’s animated public speeches to people like himself, he articulates more clearly the attributes of “the living voice of the city” and its challenge to the “old syntax” that barely acknowledges Asian Americans and recent immigrants and refugees as part of America. Henry’s lyrical language enacts an inclusivity and openness, which suggest an expansive vision of American democracy and the political longing of newcomers:

He was how I imagined a Korean would be, at least one living in any renown.
He would stride the daises and the stages with his voice strong and clear,
unafraid to speak the language like a Puritan and like a Chinaman and like
every boat person in between. I found him most moving and beautiful in those
moments. And whenever I hear the strains of a different English, I will still
shatter a little inside. Within every echo from a city storefront or window, I
can hear the old laments of my mother and my father. . . . They speak to me, as
John Kwang could always, not simply in new accents or notes but in the ancient
untold music of a newcomer’s heart, sonorous with longing and hope. (304)

By linking a Korean like Kwang to “a Puritan,” “a Chinaman,” and “every boat person in between,” Henry highlights the fact that the United States is a country of immigrants and refugees. In doing so, he undermines the constructed hierarchical identity binaries such as “us” versus “them,” American citizens versus immigrants/foreigners/illegals. Moreover, embedded in this inclusive living voice are possibilities of social change and the politics of longing and hope embodied by Kwang. For the municipal government of New York City to represent the “living voice of the city,” it must be inclusive, it must adapt to its changing body politic, and it must allow the newcom-

ers' longing and hope to be heard in the "new accents and notes" of their speeches.

This vision of the American city, or rather American democracy, may seem too idealistic or simply a "liberal fantasy" in the contexts of the "ethnic coverage" of Hoagland's intelligence firm, of the state surveillance of the racially marked "illegal" suspects, and of the nativist racism asserted among angry protesters who surround Kwang's house. The irrecoverable failure of Kwang's political career appears to indicate the illusoriness of what he is seeking to achieve. The stereotypes of Asians cast in the "model minority" myth bound up with the "yellow peril" threat apparently underlie Kwang's rise and fall in American politics. The angry crowd of protesters outside of Kwang's house seems to demonstrate the impossibility for Asian Americans like Kwang with a "wide immigrant face" to have equal participation in American democracy. Kwang's political ambition looks even more impossible with Henry's discovery of the intrigue that ruins Kwang's political career. Henry finds out that Hoagland secretly collaborates with government agents from the Immigration and Naturalization Service and bribes Kwang's most trusted assistant, Eduardo Fermin, whose family members are recent working-class immigrants from the Dominican Republic, to spy on Kwang's supporters, particularly those belonging to the *ggeh*, or "community money club," a resource for those in need of financial help (328). Through the *ggeh*, Henry notes that Kwang "was merely giving to them just the start, like other people get an inheritance, a hope chest of what they would work hard for in the rest of their lives" (334). However, the membership list of the *ggeh* leads to Kwang's arrest and the deportation of about three dozen "illegals" on the list (329–30). At the same time, the people who are now demanding Kwang's ouster are "angry white people and brown people and black people, and now even some yellow" (331). One group of mostly white young men blame immigrants and refugees for taking away their jobs, chanting that "they want to kick every last one of them back to where they came from" and they should "let them drown in the ocean with 'Smuggler Kwang.'" Next to them, the spray-painted words "AMERICA FOR AMERICANS" (331) highlight the questions *Native Speaker* raises—Who are Americans? Who can be an American? Who can "rightfully live here and be counted"? These questions are rendered especially exigent by the "rest of the throng" who are "hoping and waiting for Kwang to come back" (332). Henry is among them, and their numbers seem to hold back the rowdy protesters who keep shouting out, "How many of you swam here?" (332).

It is precisely because of, not despite, the apparently prevailing forces of exclusionary American identity and citizenship that “the longing and hope” in the “newcomer’s heart” must not give way along with Kwang’s diminished political profile. Even though his political career has failed irrecoverably, what Councilman Kwang stands for remains strong among those who are rallying in front of his house to show their support and to hold on to the hope he embodies. As a participant-spectator of the urban crowd, Henry reveals what he and others like him are waiting to see, as well as what he dreads to witness in Kwang upon his return home after being taken in to be interrogated by federal agents in Manhattan:

What I dread most is that feeling that might come out in him on the return, the expression of self-loss and self-doubt. . . . For so long he was effortlessly Korean, effortlessly American. Now I don’t want him ever to lower his eyes. I don’t want to witness the submissive dip of his brow or the bend of his knee before me or anyone else. . . . I am here for the hope of his identity, which may also be mine, who he has been on a public scale when the rest of us wanted only security in the tiny dollar-shops and churches of our lives. (328)

The contentment of Henry’s parents with material success enhances the profound significance of Kwang as an alternative model for being Asian American. As Henry notes of his mother: “She would never have understood why [Kwang] needed more than the money he made. . . . What did he want from this country? Didn’t he know he could only get so far with his face so different and broad? He should have had ambition for only his little family” (333). The ambition of Henry’s father is owning “a handful of vegetable stores that would eventually run themselves, making him enough money that he could live in a majestic white house in Westchester and call himself a rich man” (333). In contrast, Kwang’s Korean American identity “on a public scale” points to the possibilities of becoming otherwise. As an ambitious politician who seeks to represent all immigrants and Americans, particularly the unheard nobodies, Kwang breaks away from the “model minority” stereotype underlying the conventional immigrant narrative of cultural assimilation and economic upward mobility as exemplified in the Fongs’ becoming American as depicted in *Chinatown Family*. In finding “hope” in Kwang’s identity, Henry articulates a politics of longing, which refuses to accept the subordinate, marginal position of the “model minority,” the perpetual “foreigner,” the “cultural alien,” always remaining conveniently invisible and

silent, and easily morphing into the “yellow peril” threat. Agency for change is embedded in the politics of hope and longing for equal participatory citizenship on a public scale beyond urban ghettos, beyond ethnic enclaves.

The nativist, homogenous notions of “America” and “Americans” are called into question by what Henry discovers in his work undercover at Kwang’s office and by his *flânerie* in the street, which demonstrate that dramatic changes in the body politic of “America” are inevitable. While updating the list of contributing funds and information about the contributors of the *ggeh*, Henry finds that the money comes from a variety of churches and individuals with a wide range of diverse backgrounds. The notes accompanying the money are written “in pidgin English and Spanish and Mandarin and then languages [he has] never seen” (278). Working every night at updating the list, Henry realizes he has “steadily become a compiler of lives.” He is “writing a new book of the land.” (279). At the same time, his observations of everyday life in the streets show that the newcomers of various ethnic and national backgrounds are here to stay and are altering the landscape of America as well as the faces of Americans:

The Korean noodle shop is near 41st and Parsons. . . . The restaurant is part of a whole block of Korean businesses lodged in converted row apartments dating from the fifties, when the population was still Italian and Irish and Jewish. Now the signs are all in Korean. The only English words in the windows are SALE and DISCOUNT and SHOPLIFTERS BEWARE. (315)

Another cabbie is dead, shot in the back of the head. . . .

The man is the fifth or sixth driver murdered in the last two months. The cabbies are threatening a one-day strike of all New York. . . . The reporter speaks to several drivers at the company garages, and though all of them are concerned and scared there’s nobody who can speak for the driver as a group, who even wants to, they’re too different from one another, they’re recently arrived Latvians and Jamaicans, Pakistanis, Hmong. (246)

These scenes provide a larger context for the list of Kwang’s “community money club,” which offers a glimpse into profound demographic changes on a large scale, changes that challenge the “old syntax” in American politics that barely acknowledge the “brown and yellow” populace who are not only transforming the cultural and economic landscape of the urban space

but also reshaping social relations and pushing the political establishment to change. Rather than remaining quiet, the multiethnic New York cabbies, despite their differences and lack of mastery of English, are working together in demanding “more police protection” and “swift justice” (246).

Those immigrant cab drivers and countless others including Kwang’s supporters are in a way “writing a new book of the land” through their actions and voices in pidgin English, Spanish, and foreign languages. The mix of their voices are “rich with disparate melodies”—“those notes of who we” Americans are and of “our truest world,” to borrow Henry’s, or rather Lee’s, words in describing how Mitt, the Eurasian child of Henry and Lelia, appreciates the differences in his parents and grandfather (240). To claim these inassimilable, coexisting, and transformative differences as markers of America and Americans is not only to claim one’s belonging with irreducible difference and equality but also to claim America as heterogeneous and open to change. Even though Kwang is exiled from the political scene of New York City, the conditions, aspirations, and hope and longing that give rise to his political career are still present and continue to generate changes that redefine American identity and the nation-space.

“THIS RESPLENDENT PLACE”

In addition to scenes of demographic changes and their economic, cultural, and sociopolitical impact on the American city, the multitudinous accents and mixed sounds of different languages heard in the street and other public spaces of the city also mark a profound transformation taking place in the United States. In many ways Lee indicates through Henry’s observations that multilingual, disparate melodies in people’s everyday interactions are becoming part of a new American “vernacular,” every speaker of which is a “native speaker.” Various versions of this new “vernacular” can be heard in other American cities as well, pronouncing the arrivals of newcomers from around the world, as Henry notes of El Paso, where he meets Lelia for the first time at a party. When they step outside to chat, Henry hears people speaking Spanish, English, and “then something else that Lelia said was called *mixup*.” As he describes: “Its music was sonorous, rambling, some of the turns unexpected and lovely. Everywhere you heard versions” (12). These mixed sounds of multilingual, interlingual, and hybrid speeches mark “our truest world, rich with disparate melodies”—“those notes of who we” Americans are, to quote again Henry’s words (240).

The ways in which Henry responds to accented notes and disparate melodies in the speeches of immigrants, refugees, and “neo-Americans” reflect his own profound changes as well. When he first meets Kwang, he finds himself listening for both. “For despite how well [Kwang] spoke, how perfectly he moved through the sounds of his words, [Henry] kept listening for the errant tone, the flag, the minor mistake that would tell of his original race” (179). He identifies a kind of “mysterious dubbing” in Kwang’s speech, just as in his own, which carefully imitates the “standard” English in which his “real speech,” his “truer talk and voice” are trapped and unheard (179). By the end of the novel, Henry’s relationship with English has changed along with his altered sense of his Korean American identity. His vastly different responses to spoken English inflected with foreign accents mark his transformation, as revealed by the moment when he and Lelia sit at their apartment’s open window, looking down on an intersection in New York City:

On the far corner is the all-night Korean deli; two workers, a Korean and a Hispanic, are sitting on crates and smoking cigarettes outside. There is no traffic, and when the wind is right, their voices filter up to us. We listen to the earnest attempts of their talk, the bits of their stilted English. I know I would have ridiculed them when I was young. I would cringe and grow ashamed and angry at those funny tones of my father and his workers, all that Konglish, Spanglish, Jive. Just talk right, I wanted to yell, just talk right for once in your sorry lives. But now, I think I would give most anything to hear my father’s talk again, the crash and bang and stop of his language, always hurtling by. I will listen for him forever in the streets of this city. (377)

The interaction between the Korean and Hispanic workers, along with Henry’s personal transformation, suggest that a new American identity, one that refuses mutually exclusive categories of ethnic and American attributes, is in the process of becoming.

An indication that America and Americans are becoming otherwise than being defined by the “old syntax” of a “black-and-white world” is also embedded in the changes taking place in Henry’s Anglo-American wife and in her English class. At the beginning of the novel, Lelia takes her privileged racial position for granted and her normative American identity as a matter of course. She listens to nonwhite English speakers such as Henry for their racial identities, their “deviation” from the “norm”—assuming herself the normative “native” speaker of English, “the standard-bearer” (12). By the end

of the novel, Lelia is no longer the “native” speaker or “the standard-bearer.” In her class made up of children of multiethnic and multiracial backgrounds, Henry observes that “she calls out each one as best she can, taking care of every last pitch and accent,” speaking “a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are” (349). This multifarious, inclusive “we” resists assimilation and unsettles the normative hierarchical binary identity constructs, which contain Asian Americans, “illegal aliens,” and “brown and yellow” nobodies in the margins of American society. Henry’s reflection on the children in Lelia’s English class, particularly two Laotian boys named Ouboume and Bouhoauime, articulates more clearly a perspective on difference, which counters both the assimilative and exclusionary models of American citizenship:

As I look at the boys I keep thinking of Romulus and Remus, wayward children, what they might say now about their magnificent city of Rome and its citizenry. At their height, the Romans lived among all their conquered, the outer peoples brought to the city as ambassadors, lovers, soldiers, slaves. And these carried with them their native spice and fabric, rites, contagion. Then language. Ancient Rome was the first true Babel. New York City must be the second. No doubt the last will be Los Angeles. Still, to enter this resplendent place, the new ones must learn the primary Latin. Quell the old tongue, loosen the lips. Listen, the hawk and cry of the American city. (237)

By urging the reader to heed to “the hawk and cry of the American city” through Henry, Lee calls the reader’s attention to “the living voice of the city,” which continues to challenge the political establishment and American identity even though Kwang’s ambition to bring it to city hall has failed. The identities of New York City and its rightful inhabitants must be reimaged, rearticulated precisely because of the exploitation, subjugation, and marginalization of those who are regarded or defined as “aliens.” Regardless of his U.S. citizenship, when John Kwang becomes associated with “illegal aliens,” the multiethnic protesters gathering outside his house are demanding to “kick him back with them” and calling him “every ugly Asian name” Henry has ever heard (341).

The streets and neighborhoods of New York City are sites of contested identities and rights of belonging. Lee captures the newcomers’ struggle to belong in the contested urban space through Henry’s *flânerie* in this “city of words”: “In the street the shouting is in a language we hardly know.

The strangest chorale. . . . The constant cry is that you belong here, or you make yourself belong, or you must go” (344). This constant cry evokes both Kwang’s political ambition and the state’s swift, efficient deportation of the “illegals” on the list of the *ggeh*. The vulnerable status of those deported and the “brown and yellow” countless nobodies who form part of the city’s labor force and economic, cultural landscapes, yet remain in the margins of American society, renders particularly exigent the fundamental question *Native Speaker* raises of “who can rightfully live here and be counted” (274). This question resonates with the one the historian Mae M. Ngai confronts in her groundbreaking study *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2004): “[W]hat is it about the nation’s sovereign space that produces a different kind of illegal alien and a different valuation of the claims that he or she can make on society? Unauthorized entry, the most common form of illegal immigration since the 1920s, remains vexing for both state and society. Undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcome: they are woven into the economic fabric of the nation, but as labor that is cheap and disposable” (2). Despite significant revisions in the U.S. immigration laws, Ngai points out, “race and illegal status remain closely related” (2). Ngai proposes that “illegal aliens” can be understood as “a caste, unambiguously situated outside the boundaries of formal membership and social legitimacy.” This status of illegal aliens is bound up with the “sovereign” nation-space in which they are marginalized “by their position in the lower strata of the workforce and even more so by their exclusion from the polity” (2). *Native Speaker* confronts this problem and a more complex related issue by exposing the fact that Asian Americans continue to be marginalized and excluded as “outsiders” from American society even though they are U.S. citizens and some ethnic groups have been here for generations. But the same logic of the construction of an exclusionary nation-space in terms of a normative body politic operates as a contested, yet persistent, dominant ideology in *Native Speaker*, which ultimately expels Kwang from both the political sphere and the nation-space. The realtor’s remarks upon Henry’s return by the end of the novel to Kwang’s now empty house spotlights the plight of Asian Americans’ status as perpetual foreigners in the United States. When asked who used to live here, “Foreigners,” she says. “They went back to their country” (347). The normative identities of the foreigner and the nation-space are bound up in ways that help sustain unequal social positions of those who are visibly “foreign” with “wide immigrant” faces. For Asian Americans and other marginalized minorities to claim right to the

city, *Native Speaker* suggests, the identities of the city as the nation-space and its citizenship must be reconceptualized, reimagined, and re-represented.

The urban space of New York City in *Native Speaker* helps structure the emergent, changing social relations. Rather than serve merely as a background, it plays an active role as a larger, illuminating narrative for Henry's subjective formation and Kwang's political rise and fall. The ways in which the neighborhoods of New York are inhabited do not simply reflect existing social relations, but they also actively reshape social relations and the body politic of the city. "This way of thinking about space," Massey points out, "conceptualizes it in immediate connection to questions of the constitution of difference, a non-essentialist politics of interrelationships, and an imagined openness of future" ("Spaces of Politics" 285). Such attributes of the spatial are embedded in Lee's portrayal of the changing cityscape through Henry, whose strolling in the streets of New York City foregrounds the transformative differences brought by new arrivals, among whom are John Kwang's people:

I love these streets lined with big American sedans and livery cars and vans. I love the early morning storefronts opening up one by one, shopkeepers talking as they crank their awnings down. I love how the Spanish disco thumps out from windows, and how the people propped halfway out still jiggle and dance in the sill and frame. I follow the strolling Saturday families of brightly wrapped Hindus and then the black-clad Hasidim, and step into all the old churches that were once German and then Korean and are now Vietnamese.
(346)

The changing scenes of these dynamic, amalgamate cultures and the body politic depicted as an integral part of the city—"a resplendent place" of hybrid, variegated, heterogeneous, changing cultures and citizenry—destabilize and throw into crisis the normative American identity embodied by whites. This conglomerate, protean cityscape can be understood as a "space of the in-between" that "lacks a fundamental identity, lacks a form, a givenness, a nature." "Yet it is that which facilitates, allows into being, all identities. . . . It is itself a strange becoming" (Grosz, *Architecture* 90).

An openness to the future is embedded in the public spaces of the city, whose heterogeneous body politic constitutes a site of resistance, a source of change, including the possibilities of change in the political establishment. As Bhabha contends, "[I]t is to the city that the migrants, the minorities,

the diasporic come to change the history of the nation” (“DissemiNation” 319–20). *Native Speaker* represents not just a “liberal Asian American fantasy,” or the coercive, disciplinary power of U.S. citizenship, or a political longing for alternatives. While its portrayal of a Korean American councilman running for mayor suggests what should and could have been, its representation of the transformations in both its protagonist and the city also indicate what is still to come. The result is the emergence of what Bhabha calls “[c]ounter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities.” In the totalizing construction of essentialist national identity, “the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One” (“DissemiNation” 300). Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s theories about the role of literature in the formation of the modern nation-states as “imagined communities,” Bhabha explores the possibilities of narration in which “the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture” (“Narrating the Nation” 4). Lee’s representation of New York City demonstrates the interventional possibilities for inhabiting the city not as a closed nation-space but rather as “a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal, and the emergent,” to quote again from Bhabha (“DissemiNation” 300).

A politics of inhabiting the city otherwise than as “a closed nation-space” is enacted through the “in-between”—the locus of transformation—of both the city and its residents, whose becoming is reshaping social relations and American identity. Such re-visioning of “America” and its inhabitants in terms of “multiculturalism” may appear illusory or no more than fictional. But an agency of change is embedded in the refusal to accept the “real” as is. In fact, resistance to assimilation and exclusion by the dominate ideologies that induced the “cultural consent” of racial minorities is enacted through this refusal. James Kyung-Jin Lee in his study *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism* has eloquently argued for multiple forms of resistance in literary texts and critical readings. He contends that “we reconstruct stories of failure not to consolidate resigned defeat, but to alter our frames of recognition in a ceaseless dialect.” “Multiculturalism, to this extent,” need serve not as “the fantasy of exit from social confrontation, but as one level in which power wrought can be given back to those who have waited so long for the expansion of social wealth, the debt that has yet to be repaid”

(187–88). Thus he calls for a more inclusive approach to literary texts that relinquishes “neither racial identity nor common humanity, but transform[s] both.” By heeding “all stories,” he contends, we would be in a better position to “map out a collective journey down that difficult, indefinite road” (188). Min Hyoung Song in his provocative study *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* further points out what is at stake with regard to whether “the current flowering of Asian American literature can build a resistance” to interpellation or assimilation by the dominant ideologies. “If not,” he states, “there will be one less site for the imagination of more desirable futures than the futures that seem to be waiting for us now” (198). Full recognition of the importance of resistance in *Native Speaker* requires critical attention to the politics of space in Chang-rae Lee’s narrative strategies, which enact the politics of longing through subversive transformations in the protagonist, the body politic, and the cultural, economic landscapes of a hybrid, transnational New York City to contest racialized citizenship in an exclusionary nation-space.

8 MAPPING THE GLOBAL CITY AND "THE OTHER SCENE" OF GLOBALIZATION

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

Today's global cities are in part the spaces of postcolonialism and indeed contain conditions for the formation of a postcolonialist discourse.

—SASKIA SASSEN

What we are facing in this realm of the world economy is a global spatial reorganisation: a remaking of spaces and of places. It is a restructuring and reterritorialisation of social power.

—DOREEN MASSEY

KAREN TEI YAMASHITA'S THIRD NOVEL, *TROPIC OF ORANGE* (1997), marks a significant departure in Asian American literature in terms of the thematic concerns, narrative strategies, and geographic locations. More than the other novels discussed in preceding chapters, *Tropic of Orange* exemplifies both the "unprecedented spatial turn" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 261) and the "transnational turn" (Fishkin 17) in the humanities and social sciences, including postcolonial studies, environmental studies, American studies, and Asian American studies. With its narrative moving between Mexico and Los Angeles, and its symbolic battle between the dominant power of the global North embodied by SUPERNAFTA (NAFTA / North American Free Trade Agreement) and the global South embodied by Arcangel, also known as El Gran Mojado (Big Wetback), *Tropic of Orange* has attracted much critical attention to its treatment of globalization and related issues.¹

Critical readings of *Tropic* often focus on its critical engagement with NAFTA, the United States–Mexico border, subject formation, and the envi-

ronment. Molly Wallace in her essay “Tropics of Globalization: Reading the New North America” (2001) points out the contradictions underlying the advocacy of NAFTA for a “‘North American’ free trade zone.” Those contradictions are shown in “the ‘flows’ of capital and commodities across national borders,” on the one hand, and, on the other, the U.S. “militarization of the border, evinced in such anti-immigration policies as ‘Operation Gatekeeper’ (San Diego) and ‘Operation Hold the Line’ (El Paso)” (150).² Wallace contends that Yamashita’s novel “explicitly interrogates the cultural, economic and political borders of the territorial nation-state” in a globalizing world and “offers a critique not only of the politics of NAFTA and of globalization, but of the politics of the discourses surrounding these phenomena” (148–49). By foregrounding issues of “postnational longings,” Wallace argues, *Tropic* highlights the “gap between the economic and the cultural” erased by discourses such as Arjun Appadurai’s study *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), which examines globalization largely as a cultural phenomenon (151). Significantly, Wallace notes that “Yamashita’s depiction of Los Angeles suggests that parts of the ‘North’ may be becoming the ‘South’” (153). However, with a focus on the politics of NAFTA and on reading against Appadurai’s problematic perspective on cultural globalization, Wallace leaves the possibilities of parts of the “North” “becoming the ‘South’” unexplored. Thus the connection between the formation of the “South” in Los Angeles and the legacy of colonialism is underexamined in her article, though she rightly notes that Yamashita’s linking of “the history of colonialism to the politics of contemporary transnationalism” exposes the colonial legacy embedded in the contradictions and ambivalence of the United States / Mexico borders, which Appadurai’s notion of “unproblematically ‘free’ ‘free trade zone’ elides” (155).

Critics in Asian American studies read *Tropic* in contexts broader than NAFTA. Drawing on chaos and quantum theories, and with a focus on the epistemology of cartography, Ruth Y. Hsu in her essay “The Cartography of Justice and Truthful Refractions Found in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*” (2006) contends that *Tropic* reveals and denounces “the devastating and persistent effects of the modern era of European colonialism on non-Western peoples.” Moreover, its representation of the connections among the characters across space and time constructs knowledge from the characters’ multiple perspectives and displaces “the West’s self-congratulatory and narcissistic history of itself” (80). Exploring further the global perspective in *Tropic*, Sue-Im Lee in her article “‘We Are Not the World’: Global

Village, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*" (2007) investigates the conceptual critique embedded in the novel. With a focus on the debates on universalism, she argues that *Tropic* calls into question "global village universalism" by exposing the vast "material inequalities that obstruct the binding of the First World and Third World into one subject position" (510, 506). However, Lee points out that the novel also dramatizes the "interdependence that binds the North and the South" and offers an alternative model of "global collectivity," one that serves as "the foundation for the political articulations of "Third World labor and the urban homeless" (512, 503, 522). In so doing, Yamashita "unmistakably asserts the work of the romantic universalism—the transformative power of its imaginary and unrealistic vision, as well as its inspirational power as the ringing reminder of the ever-luring horizon of universal human rights" (522). With a focus on the legacy of colonialism, Jinqi Ling reads *Tropic* as "a project of decolonization in social, spatial, and psychological senses" (113). He proposes "a transnational perspective that situates the question of affect . . . at the center of the reading of this text," with an emphasis on the fact that "decolonization needs to take place in the mental domain of the socially disfranchised," who "need to identify and dissolve the lines that separate them" (145). By emphasizing the desires and consciousness of the politically and economically disadvantaged racial minorities in the process of "decolonization," Ling's reading seems to unwittingly de-emphasize the effects of both national and transnational systemic operations of power, which *Tropic* exposes, critiques, and challenges through its disenfranchised characters, who form part of the global South within and beyond national borders. Nevertheless, Ling's reading, like those discussed above, makes a significant contribution to broadening the historical, geographic, and conceptual framework of Asian American literary studies.³

Critics of environmental studies and ecocriticism further extend the transnational critical scope of *Tropic* by investigating Yamashita's treatment of environmental issues in relation to globalization.⁴ Julie Sze in her two essays "'Not by Politics Alone': Gender and Environmental Justice in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*" (2002) and "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice" (2002) reads the novel as an example of the ways in which cultural studies, including literary studies, can "broaden the emerging academic field of environmental justice studies by enhancing our understanding of the experience of living with the effects of environmental racism" and connect "environmental justice

with other intellectual and activist fields” (“From Environmental Justice” 163). Moreover, she calls critical attention to the connections between the urban environment of Los Angeles and globalization, especially “the gender politics of environmental justice” and “the role of raced and classed people in the postindustrial city that functions as a nodal point in global movement of people and goods” (“Not by Politics Alone” 40). Expanding further the connection between globalization and environmental (in)justice, Elizabeth Ammons’s ecocritical reading of *Tropic* makes it compellingly clear that the transnational movement of people and goods at once reflects and reinforces the inequalities of race and class between the global South and North. Ammons’s analysis of the novel indicates that the urban ecology of Los Angeles is intertwined with economic globalization and that environmental injustice is inseparable from social injustice (151–52). Even though *Tropic* “excoriates the devastation of globalization,” Ammons adds, “it does not prophesy doom.” In fact, by tapping “spiritual power to transform the world,” and by speaking about “the power of people to reimagine and then save the world,” *Tropic* “offers a vision of progressive political activism” (154, 155). Ammons’s reading rightly highlights an overarching theme of the novel—progressive political activism, whose significance is often overlooked by critics who focus on the problems of globalization, NAFTA, colonialism, and the United States–Mexico border.

However, the multiple forms and vectors of activism of people of color in *Tropic* need to be explored in greater depth along with spatialized politics and Yamashita’s poetics of space, which feature prominently in the novel. It is equally important to note that the “progressive political activism” in the novel is initiated and mobilized by those who are part of the global South within and outside the borders of the United States. Their activism, moreover, entails epistemological and ideological challenges that call into question the seemingly natural or normal urban landscape, living environments, racialized and gendered divisions of labor, and the flows of capital, commodities, and resources across national borders. Those challenges link the operations and effects of economic globalization to colonialism and to the multiracial, multiethnic ghettos of Los Angeles. In seeking social, spatial, and environmental justice, the activist characters of color in the novel produce counter-memories and form a new political alliance across boundaries of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. This transnational, and interracial, interethnic coalition of people of color, who embody the global South, is made possible and visible in part through Yamashita’s narrative strategies

and as a result of the characteristics of Los Angeles as a global city.

Building on existing critical views on Yamashita's novel and drawing on interdisciplinary critical theories, particularly those developed in human geography, postcolonial studies, and environmental studies, my reading of *Tropic* explores the ways Yamashita weaves multiple interconnections between the local and the global and enacts the political and epistemological challenges from the global South through innovative narrative strategies of magical realism characterized by a politics and poetics of space. Embedded in the narrative throughout the novel are two opposing yet interrelated forms of spatiality—spatial relations, practices, effects, and imaginations. Space as an effect and instrument of power in dividing, policing, and controlling the urban landscape and national borders is exposed and contested by the characters, who offer an alternative mode of spatial practice and imagination, one that not only demonstrates the entanglement of vastly separated places and peoples but also enables interracial community networks and transnational grassroots resistance to exploitation, subjugation, and exclusion. Yamashita organizes the narrative around seven major characters—Rafaela Cortés (Mexican), Bobby Ngu (Singaporean Chinese American), Gabriel Balboa (Chicano), Emi (Japanese American), Buzzworm (African American), Manzanar Murakami (Japanese American), and Arcangel (Native American and mestizo). The novel consists of forty-nine chapters, divided by seven days of the week, and each day includes seven chapters, each chapter focusing on one of the seven characters. The narrative develops through these seven characters, who function respectively like “hyperlinks”—the connecting points of the novel's narrative structure and the vectors of its development, which moves between the North and South across the United States–Mexico border. At the same time, the geographic and historical connections of the narrative extend from north and south to east and west, as the narration unfolds from character to character and as the setting shifts between nations.

The links of these characters to multiple locations bring into Los Angeles the convergence of multiple histories, and the effects of economic globalization and urban renewal, from the perspectives of those who are not just victims of those processes but activists and community leaders resisting subjugation and fighting for social equity. The gatherings of working-class migrants, immigrants, and “illegals” of color in the ethnic ghettos of Los Angeles constitute new multiracial, multiethnic, transnational communities, which are part of the global South. But while this global South in the city is a complex effect of racial segregation, globalization, and the legacies

of colonialism, it is also a new site of political activism. Thus by crossing national borders and traversing the urban geography of Los Angeles with her characters, Yamashita contests the dominant discourses on globalization and global cities in which migrant workers, refugees, immigrants, the homeless, and minority Americans like them remain marginal and invisible.

THE GLOBAL CITY AND “THE OTHER SCENE OF GLOBALIZATION”

Writings about the global city more often than not emphasize its economic and political power, its appetite for consuming resources, and its capacity for absorbing diverse cultures. Saskia Sassen defines global cities in terms of global economic restructuring since the early 1980s, which is characterized by “a spatially dispersed, yet globally integrated organization of economic activity” (*Global City* 3). Significantly, Sassen notes that the operations of the global city have also restructured “the urban social and economic order” (4). Such effects of economic globalization on the urban geography of global cities are well captured by the political geographer Edward W. Soja in his analysis of the “postmodern geography” of Los Angeles. In *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), Soja refers to Los Angeles as “the place where it all seems to ‘come together’”: “One can find in Los Angeles not only the high technology industrial complexes of the Silicon Valley and the erratic sunbelt economy of Houston, but also the far-reaching industrial decline and bankrupt urban neighborhoods of rust-belted Detroit or Cleveland. There is a Boston in Los Angeles, a Lower Manhattan and a South Bronx, a São Paulo and a Singapore” (221, 193). Embedded in this cityscape of Los Angeles are interconnected social spaces produced by power. For the urban theorist Mike Davis, the “urban restructuring processes” of Los Angeles created “a ‘Cannibal City,’ a fountainhead of ‘ecocide’ that continues insatiably to devour natural and human landscapes” (qtd. in Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 259).⁵ This devouring “Cannibal City” epitomizes Sassen’s characterization of global cities in terms of “spatializations of global power projects” (Sassen, “Reading the City” 15). Seen from these perspectives, the topography of Los Angeles is a map of power, in which the poor and the displaced are victims, whose agency is rendered invisible.

But when taking into account the differences of race and gender in her analysis of global cities, Sassen offers insights more relevant to my reading of *Tropic*. In her essay “Analytic Borderlands: Race, Gender, and Representation in the New City” (1996), Sassen notes that while “Third World women

working in Export Processing Zones are not empowered” by economic globalization, the status of “illegal’ immigrants” shows that “national boundaries have the effect of creating and criminalizing difference” (200). Although gendered and raced exploitation of labor and the criminalization of difference by discriminatory laws regarding “national boundaries” have been major topics in Asian American writings since the early twentieth century, as discussed in the previous chapters, Sassen offers a useful perspective by pointing out that global cities are sites of “many politics” and resistance. As she proposes:

[W]e can think of cities as a new frontier charged with conflict between two opposites; charged with the possibilities of fundamental transformation in the West. The global city is, perhaps, the premier arena for these battles. . . . But today’s battles lack clear boundaries and fields: there are many sites, many fronts, many forms, many politics. They are battles being fought in neighborhoods, schools, court rooms, public squares. They are fought around curriculums, rights, identity. Their sites of resistance are streets, parks, culture, the body. (“Analytic Borderlands” 197)

Sassen’s attention to battles fought in neighborhoods and public squares and her identification of “streets, parks, culture, the body” as sites of resistance are particularly relevant to the spatial politics and poetics of *Tropic*.

However, Sassen’s focus on global cities in the West marginalizes other sites and scenes that are also central to economic globalization and to the emergence of multiple forms of many politics and resistance. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out the limitations of understanding globalization as urbanization in her incisive article “Globalcities: Terror and Its Consequences.” As she argues: “Globalization as urbanization is yet another example of assuming the most visible violence to be violence as such, an inability to perceive (or ruse not to perceive) the invisible power lines that make and unmake the visible. . . . The other scene still requires archaeology, genealogy” (74). Massey in her article “Politicising Space and Place” also calls critical attention to “the other scene” of globalization. She contends that economic globalization has led to “a global spatial reorganisation: a remaking of spaces and of places.” As a result, Massey contends, “new spaces are created (of global trade, of new squatter settlements in Mexico City) while others (the spaces of small-scale agriculture perhaps) are destroyed; some

'identities' come under threat (the hybrid-Mayan cultures of Chiapas) while those who already have more strength within this shifting power-geometry can wall themselves more tightly in (I think of Fortress Europe)" ("Politicising Space and Place" 120). Likewise, Howard Winant in his book *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* argues: "[G]lobalization is a racialized social structure. . . . It is a system of transnational social stratification under which corporations and states based in the global North dominate the global South" (131).

From the perspective of the global South, Vandana Shiva in her provocative essay "War against Nature and the People of the South" offers a closer look at the other scene of globalization, by investigating the ways that transnational agribusinesses have brought destruction to peasant agriculture and local biodiversity in India. She argues that globalization is "a planned project of exclusion that siphons the resources and knowledge of the poor of the South into the global marketplace, stripping people of their life-support systems, livelihoods, and lifestyles" (91). Moreover, Soja's examination of postmodern metropolises indicates that "the other scene of globalization" is not only inseparable from the global city; it is transforming its geography. Using Los Angeles as an example of the social and spatial restructuring of urban space by globalization, Soja contends that it can be metaphorically described as "'the city turned inside-out,' as in the urbanization of the suburbs and the rise of the Outer City." But he argues that "it also represents 'the city turned outside-in,' a globalization of the Inner City that brings all the world's peripheries into the center, drawing in what was once considered 'elsewhere' to its own symbolic zone" (*Postmetropolis* 250). The aggregation of "the world's peripheries" in Los Angeles brings "the other scene" of globalization into the global city, giving rise to the formations of new transnational political subjects and constituting what might be called "the other scene" of the global city.

Tropic represents precisely the convergence of "the other scene of globalization" and the other scene of the global city, particularly its resistance and challenges from an emergent multiethnic, transnational global South in multiple sites within and outside of the global city and across the boundaries of race and beyond national borders. The magical surrealist narrative strategies Yamashita employs enact, through the major characters, a kind of "genealogy" of places, which disrupt the urban geography mapped by global capital and local corporate and nation-state powers.

THE OTHER SCENE OF THE GLOBAL CITY

Yamashita strategically begins the first chapter of *Tropic* with Rafaela Cortés in the countryside on the Tropic of Cancer, not far from Mazatlán, Mexico. This setting in a place apparently peripheral to the global economy decenters the global city as the strategic command site of transnational corporate powers and locates a geographic divide in the South as a site for alternative perspectives on globalization and the local-global connections. As the narrative moves from Rafaela in Mexico to her husband, Bobby Ngu, in Los Angeles, it constructs one of the multiple trajectories of border crossings that converge in Los Angeles. By following Rafaela, Bobby, and other major characters from the South to the North, and from the East to the West, *Tropic* portrays transnational migrations in ways that unsettle the map of global capital constituted by what Jenny Sharpe calls “a cartography of corporate globalization” consisting of global cities. In her examination of the connection between the “African diaspora” and “today’s global culture,” Sharpe argues that “[a]ny theory of diaspora that follows a cartography of corporate globalization risks reproducing its structures of power and knowledge” (263). Yamashita’s organization of narrative through characters who are part of the global South undermines the structure of power underlying the cartography of corporate globalization, thus offering alternative knowledge about the changing geography and the other scene of the global city, which is intertwined with the other scene of globalization.

As an indigenous Mexican born in Culiacán, thirty miles north of Mazatlán, and a custodian in Los Angeles, who for the time being is working as a housekeeper for the Chicano journalist Gabriel Balboa on his property located on the Tropic of Cancer, Rafaela is one of the migrant workers from the South who are displaced by the effects of economic globalization, particularly NAFTA. According to Massey, “[f]ree trade’ with a neighbor that boasts one of the world’s largest grain surpluses” will make it impossible for Mexico to maintain its rural population, of which “about three-and-a-half million households grow corn.” “Estimates of the possible consequent displacement of people from the Mexican countryside range from 700,000 upwards to a figure of many millions.” These displaced Mexican peasants “will go to cities, to Mexico City, to the *maquiladora*-land of the north, or if they can get across the border and California does not throw them out again, to Los Angeles” (“Space/Power” 103). Displaced by NAFTA, Rafaela, like countless others, has to cross the border to find work in California.

But the United States–Mexico border is controlled with modern technology and military force against “illegals” from the South. The policed border along California is “a fourteen mile zone,” “[a]ll lit up” (*Tropic* 203).⁶ It is particularly difficult for women and “the poor Indian types.” “Rafaela got lucky.” For in those places along the border, “everybody knows, every woman don’t get raped, she don’t pass.” And the indigenous Mexicans who “don’t know the language, don’t know the ropes” get robbed by the “border rats” (202). Even when they manage to cross over the border, they may still be unable to make it. On the United States side, “the migra arrests 1,000 per night” and “[p]uts the chivos under thermal imaging.” “It’s high technology with a revolving door. If you lucky, Border Patrol chases you down. Puts you in a wagon and dumps you back. But maybe you gonna be one of them gets shot” (203). Rafaela’s and Gabriel’s own respective crossings of the United States–Mexico border are marked by spatialized difference of class and gender. “About the time Gabriel was buying a piece of the Tropic of Cancer” to have his dream vacation home built there, “Rafaela was crossing the border North,” where she becomes abject cheap labor as a custodian and lives in Los Angeles’s Koreatown (6).

However, in becoming part of the global South in Los Angeles, Rafaela has also become part of its resistance to subjugation.⁷ While this global city is where Rafaela is exploited as cheap labor, it is also a transformative site that mobilizes her becoming otherwise. She refuses to accept her social status marked by stark inequalities of race, class, and gender. During the eight years of her life in Los Angeles, she learns English, earns a degree at the local community college, marries Bobby, raises their son, and helps Bobby start their janitorial business. And she joins Justice for Janitors for “solidarity” and “protection,” as she explains to Bobby (17), and becomes an activist fighting against the exploitation of people like herself and Bobby (6). Increasingly galvanized by racial discrimination, particularly discrimination against working-class immigrants of color, Rafaela refuses to be content with the material things that Bobby thinks would make her happy. She wants equality and dignity. The required course on cultural politics she takes at the community college helps her gain “consciousness about what’s it to be a minority.” And she comes to know the Chicano journalist Gabriel, who befriends her and encourages her to “keep up the good work” (161). She writes papers titled “*Maquiladoras & Migrants. Undocumented, Illegal & Alien: Immigrants vs. Immigration.*” And her papers discuss topics such as “*globalization of capital,*” “[c]apitalization of poverty,” “[i]nternationalization of the labor force,”

and “[e]xploitation and political expediency” and other big-word concepts that Bobby, who does not have a chance to attend college, cannot grasp (162).

Yamashita’s portrayal of Bobby Ngu accomplishes much more than undermining the myth of assimilation or subverting the “model minority” stereotype of Asians in the United States. It shows a new category of immigrants, refugees, or “illegals” who are “casualties” of economic globalization. A Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnamese name, speaking Spanish fluently like “some kind of Chicano street talk,” and living in Los Angeles’s Koreatown, Bobby Ngu, whose real name is Li Kwan Yu, embodies the diasporic and ethnic characteristics of the global South communities in Los Angeles (8). Life in Singapore was much better for Bobby before transnational capital and labor drove his father’s bicycle factory out of business. When an American bicycle company set up a factory with new machines and paid fifty cents more, workers “all went over there.” “Pretty soon, American company’s selling all over. Exporting. Bicycles go to Hong Kong. Go to Thailand. To India. To Japan. To Taiwan. Bobby’s dad losing business. Can’t compete” (18). Bobby’s mother passes away soon after. Hopeless about the future, Bobby’s father urges Bobby to go to America to “start out something new” for “a future,” but he was unable to help Bobby get there (15). Being only twelve, Bobby and his eight-year-old brother begin going to the camp for Vietnam War refugees. They blend in easily among the many orphans there and eventually come to the United States as Vietnamese refugees. Once in the United States they are sent to school “with the Mexicans and the centroamericanos.” “That’s why Bobby gets a latinoamericano education. Gets in good with the vatos locos [crazy dudes]. A taste of la vida loca [crazy life]” (204). While Bobby’s immigrant story offers a glimpse into the impact of economic globalization, which is linked to U.S. imperial intervention in Vietnam, his life in Los Angeles reveals an emergent “underclass” multiethnic, multiracial community in the ghettos of the global city.

In the United States, Bobby, like Rafaela, is stuck with unskilled minimum-wage jobs and confined to living in Koreatown, an impoverished, high-crime neighborhood in South-Central Los Angeles. The situation of Bobby’s life and neighborhood reveals another aspect of the other side of globalization. Koreatown is one of the most diverse and poorest communities in Los Angeles. Its population of more than two hundred thousand comprises people from around the world, including Korea, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala,

Nicaragua, and Peru. Of the residents in Koreatown, more than 70 percent were born in another country, with about 50 percent originally from Latin America and 20 percent from Korea; 25 percent are white, and 5 percent are African Americans. Approximately 70 percent of those living in Koreatown are working poor, earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line.⁸ Bobby is representative of the residents in his neighborhood. He works like a machine, and his work, though marginal, helps maintain the operations of corporations and the state. During the day, he works in the mailroom “at a big-time newspaper,” sorting mail nonstop. At night, he and his wife work for their janitorial business, cleaning buildings that “still got defense contracts.” Bobby has gotten clearance for himself and his wife to go around everywhere in the buildings to do the cleaning—dumping the stuff that’s shredded, wiping, scrubbing the urinals, and mopping down the floors (16). Their invisible, devalued, and exploited work, like that of countless immigrant, migrant, and “illegal” workers, is indispensable for all walks of life in the city and for maintaining the lifestyle of the rich: “Ever since he’s been here, never stopped working. Always working. Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. Cooking hamburgers. Painting walls. Laying brick. Cutting hedges. Mowing lawn. Digging ditches. Sweeping trash. . . . Fixing up. Cleaning up. Keeping up” (79).

Such endless underpaid work has deprived Bobby and others like him of their humanity and individuality, turning them into machines. But there are numerous displaced people in the city looking for this kind of work or any work available. Bobby gets wrong-number calls every night in Spanish, from people looking for work (79). They are part of “the other scene” of globalization, displaced peoples from the global South, who have crossed the borders into Los Angeles along with what Bobby witnessed at the United States–Mexico border between San Ysidro, San Diego, and Tijuana: “Gifts from NAFTA. Oranges, bananas, corn, lettuce, . . . live-in domestics, living domestics, gardeners, dishwashers, waiters, masons, ditch diggers, migrants, pickers, packers, braceros, refugees, centroamericanos, wetbacks, wops, undocumented, illegals, aliens” (162–63). These working-class people from the South are reduced to desired, subjugated, and indispensable labor in the North, and their presence in global cities such as Los Angeles is criminalized by the United States’ national boundaries. The neighborhoods in which they live at once reflect and help maintain their social status in the United States. Yet their neighborhoods in the inner-city ghettos are also sites for the formation of new multiethnic and multiracial communities.

Yamashita strategically locates Bobby's house in Koreatown at the edge of Pico-Union in South-Central—ground zero of the 1992 Los Angeles riots—to reveal other aspects of the connections between the inner-city ethnic ghettos of Los Angeles to globalization through Bobby and Rafaela's neighbors.⁹ One of Bobby and Rafaela's next-door neighbors is Celia Oh, a Korean-born Brazilian immigrant. In expressing her regret that Rafaela has taken their son with her to Mexico, Celia refers to the government's raids on households of "illegals," which result in the separation of families: "[E]very time there's a raid somewhere, folks get split up. Get deported to the border while the babies get left behind. Her mother's been taking care of a baby like that. Cries for its momma who can't get back to this side" (78). Moreover, those who live in their neighborhood are vulnerable to social unrest resulting from racial discrimination and poverty. Celia's father's photo shop was burned down, and her brother was shot dead during the 1992 riots.¹⁰ "Bobby found him on the street" and dragged the body home (78). Since then, Celia has been working and living down "in the garment district twenty-four hours," rebuilding not just her own life but "L.A. with a sewing machine" (78). By portraying the lives and work of these immigrants of color and their neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Yamashita foregrounds the invisible lines that reinforce the boundaries of race and class in the nation-space and urban geography reshaped by economic globalization.

CONTESTING THE MAPS, REMAPPING THE CITY

Yamashita strategically situates the conditions of Bobby's neighborhood in the formations of the urban space, formations that are entangled with regional and transnational histories and socioeconomic restructuring. She portrays those formations from the perspectives of Buzzworm and Manzanar, who subsequently become subjects of knowledge production through their respective modes of contesting the official maps and remapping the urban space. As Massey contends, "Reformulating the way in which we imagine space/spatiality can be itself 'political'" ("Spaces of Politics" 292). Buzzworm and Manzanar denaturalize the apparently normal or inevitable formations of Los Angeles's urban geography, showing what Soja calls "the spatial turn" in "a new cultural politics," one characterized by an emergent "shared consciousness" of the politics of space, particularly "the interrelations of space, knowledge, and power," and "how the social production of human spatiality, from the global to the most local scales, is an active part of the creation and

maintenance of inequality and injustice, of economic exploitation, cultural domination, and individual oppression" (*Postmetropolis* 281). Recognition of such interrelations of the spatial, social, and epistemological in constructing unequal social positions, Soja contends, can mobilize a "collective struggle to 'take greater control over the "making of geography"—the social production of human spatiality.'" And "it is this shared consciousness and practice of an explicitly spatial politics that can provide an additional bonding force for combining those separate channels of resistance and struggle that for so long have fragmented modernist equality politics" (*Postmetropolis* 281). *Tropic* enacts precisely such an explicitly spatial politics that underlies the multiracial and transnational struggles for equality. In fact, the active roles of Buzzworm and Manzanar in the "making of geography" provide a critical conceptual framework for the geography of race and class and for the political implications of the "uprising" by the homeless in claiming a space as their home, which takes place later in the novel.

An African American and a Vietnam War veteran going on forty-five, Buzzworm has experienced environmental injustice since childhood and has witnessed some dramatic geographic and demographic changes in South-Central Los Angeles, where he has been living all his life. He was born and raised near the corner of Jefferson and Normandie, not far from the starting point of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Although *Tropic* does not explicitly deal with issues related to the riots as *Native Speaker* does, it confronts through its characters, especially Buzzworm, the social conditions that gave rise to the riots. Its portrayal of the friendships and close relationships among the African American, Asian American, and Latino characters counters the representations of the riots in mainstream media that render the protests against racial injustice into conflicts between African Americans and Korean Americans. Buzzworm exposes the ways the dominant power structure produces and maintains inequality through spatial control. His experience of the urban environment highlights the deprivations of those living in his neighborhood, where there are no trees, no flowers, no "major supermarkets, department stores, pharmacies, medical and dental clinics, hospitals, banks, factories, and industry" (176). Buzzworm makes clear that social inequality is in part spatially produced and maintained: "In this city, you have to risk your life; go farther, and pay more to be poor" (176). When he was growing up, Buzzworm "never noticed trees": "No trees to mention. Bushes, dried-up lawns, weeds, asphalt, and concrete. Consequently, no shade this side of town" (31). Even as a child, Buzzworm learns: "Poor people don't get to

have no shade. That's what porches are for" (32). Later he also learns that the freeway divides and isolates his neighborhood (33).

In this neglected neighborhood, Buzzworm has become a well-known figure of community service. He walks the hood every day, making contact with people, including his Korean and Chicano friends and strangers. He is always ready to help whenever needed. Almost "everyone on the street got his calling card with something jotted down on the back: rehab number, free clinic, legal service, shelter, soup kitchen, hot line": "He was walking social services" (26). Buzzworm's walks enact a counter-discourse that exposes another aspect of the other scene of globalization.

Walking around his neighborhood like a *flâneur*, Buzzworm's gaze reveals changes brought by immigrants from Latin America.¹¹ As he notes: "Hood'd changed. Now it was *La X. La equis la equis noventa y siete punto nueve!* Everybody was listening to the Mexican station. Doing banda and stepping to the quebradita." But "[s]ome wanted to pit black against brown, but looked like one side got the crack, other got the weapons" (102). Buzzworm counters this divide by making friends with his Latino/a neighbors and listening to the Mexican station. Yet his efforts cannot stop the violence in the street or prevent the homeless youths from joining gangs. One of Buzzworm's friends, Margarita, a street peddler, left El Salvador with her sons to "escape the *mano blanca* death squad," but now they are "gangbanging in L.A. with the *Mara Salvatrucha*" (84). Margarita and her sons, like Bobby and Rafaela, have become part of the global South in the inner-city ghetto of Los Angeles. As a neighborhood of the local and global South, Buzzworm's living environment is a site of social exposure, critique, and struggle for equality, as well as a site of alternative knowledge about spatialized disparities of wealth, access, and resources. Buzzworm plays an active role in not only community service but also community activism, through intervention in the production of knowledge about his neighborhood and its relations to other parts of the city.

In seeking to bring public attention and improvement of living conditions to neglected neighborhoods and lives, Buzzworm has become a new kind of *flâneur* as the community contact of Gabriel Balboa, serving as his eyes and ears, as well as a reminder of his social conscience, for keeping "a handle on the nitty-gritty" and "getting into the grimy crevices of the street and pulling out the real stories" (39). Unlike the conventional *flâneur* who remains an observer of the urban crowd and the cityscape, Buzzworm walks the streets for action as well as information. Gabriel, who does "the local news and sometimes the East L.A. metro beat," is inspired by "Rubén Salazar, the

Mexican American reporter who was killed at the Silver Dollar during the so-called 'East L.A. uprising' in the early seventies." For him, doing investigative journalism on social issues regarding inner-city ethnic ghettos is a way of continuing the tradition Salazar started and a way of keeping himself on track by remembering his roots in the barrios of Los Angeles (39). He finds an ideal partner in Buzzworm for his stories about "the grimy crevices of the street." Some of the serious issues Buzzworm urges Gabriel to write about are the homeless and the impoverished in the city. As he states: "It's a wake-up call, Balboa. All these people living in their cars. The cars living in garages. The garages living inside guarded walls. You dump the people outta the cars, and you left with things living inside things. Meantime people going through the garbage at McDonald's looking for a crust of bread and leftover fries" (43). Rather than merely an "informant," Gabriel finds Buzzworm "a taskmaster more demanding than any editor." He realizes that Buzzworm "has a stake" in his stories, "deeper and hungrier than that of the most competitive reporter," for he "wanted desperately to see in print the stories of the life surrounding him, to see the wretched truth, the dignity despite the indignity" (43). As he keeps reminding Gabriel about Los Angeles: "Drugs's hardcore. Homelessness's hardcore. Forty-two thousand citywide. Hundred-fifty countywide. . . . It's all part of the same system" (92).

Buzzworm's perspective on the cityscape reveals how poverty and homelessness are created by master plans for urban renewal, exposing spatialized inequalities in the city and spatially produced and maintained disparities. Observing from his own neighborhood the transformation of the landscape of Los Angeles, Buzzworm reveals that the area designated as gang territories on the official map of Los Angeles is actually a product of a master plan of urbanization and gentrification. The homes of the poor working-class are replaced by new landmarks such as the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Union Station, the Bank of America, Arco Towers, and the freeway. While those changes inflated the value of real estate in certain areas, they ruined the small businesses and degraded the living environment of people like Buzzworm and his neighbors. Buzzworm's depiction of the cityscape undermines the apparently inevitable negative impact of urban restructuring on his neighborhood, which those in power design: "Make sure it took five years to clear out the houses. Make sure the houses left to be broken into and tagged. Let the houses be there for everyone to see. Use for illegal purposes. Pass drugs. House homeless. Make sure the ramp took another five years. Slow down the foot traffic and the flow. Break down the overpass crossing the freeway.

Make it impossible for people to pass. Stop people from using the shops that used to be convenient” (83). This urban restructuring produced new segregated neighborhoods, which are what Min Hyung Song in his study *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* calls “a negative space—defined by economic poverty, ethnic and racial diversity, and a noticeable separation from the other equally managed, incorporated, wealthier, and more homogeneous grids of Southern California” (28–29). But Buzzworm notes that “negative space” like his neighborhood appears on the official map as territory of the Crips and the Bloods, suggesting an apparently natural correlation between poverty and crimes of the place and the people who live there (81). His observation of the transformation of Los Angeles’s cityscape indicates that the official map of the city is “a socially constructed” and “manipulated form of knowledge,” to borrow the words of the geographer J. B. Harley (277). In his incisive essay “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” Harley argues that maps are an instrument of power for multiple purposes. Maps are “an undergirding medium of state power,” and their functions include “the control of space” and facilitating “the geographical expansion of social systems.” “As a means of surveillance they involve both ‘the collation of information relevant to state control of the conduct of its subject population’ and ‘the direct supervision of that conduct’” (280).

Understood as such, the map that identifies Buzzworm’s neighborhood as “gang territories,” then, is not merely a depiction of the urban space; it is instrumental in the production, control, and surveillance of the space by corporate or state power. Moreover, maps are “ideological instruments in the sense that they project a preferred reading of the material world, with prevailing social relations mirrored in the depiction of physical space,” as Peter Jackson contends in his book *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (186). However, Jackson argues that “resistance is always possible” in reading the map against the “the dominant order” (186). Buzzworm enacts precisely such resistance in his reading of the official map. He challenges the implied meanings of the map of his neighborhood drawn by authorities and offers a subversive interpretation of the racially marked spatial organization of the Los Angeles cityscape divided by class. As he examines the map “showing the territorial standing of Crips versus Bloods,” which Balboa has torn out of Mike Davis’s book about Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*, for him to study, Buzzworm questions the meaning of “territory” produced by the map and offers an alternative interpretation of the geography of race and class in the city (80–81):

Even if it were true, whose territory was it anyway? Might as well show which police departments covered which beats; which local, state and federal politicians claimed which constituents; which kind of colored people (brown, black, yellow) lived where; which churches/temples served which people; which schools got which kids; which taxpayers were registered to vote; which houses were owned or rented; which businesses were self-employed; which corner liquor stores served which people. . . . If someone could put down all the layers of the real map, maybe he could get the real picture. (81)

For Buzzworm, “all the layers of the real map” must include other “silences” or rather omissions such as the disappeared “Mexican rancheros” and, before them, “the Chumash and the Yangna” Native Americans (82). Buzzworm’s critical interpretation of the official map actually remaps the transformed urban space by making visible what has been eliminated from the official map of Los Angeles and from the corporate cartography of globalization. Harley has called critical attention to the “silences’ on maps” and “the influence of their hidden political messages.” He contends that like “literature or the spoken word,” maps “exert a social influence through their omissions as much as by the features they depict and emphasise” (290). Buzzworm’s counter-mapping of his neighborhood enacts a form of activism of resistance and intervention in the production of spatialized inequality, knowledge, and identity. Like Bobby and Rafaela’s experience, Buzzworm’s perspective on the changing geography of Los Angeles intervenes in the discourses on globalization, whose emphasis on transnational cultural flow and global economic restructuring diminishes the continuing significance of race and the emergence of a global South in the global city. Embedded in Buzzworm’s remapping of Los Angeles’s cityscape is a subject of resistance and alternative knowledge. In fact, Buzzworm, like Rafaela, embodies the agency for resistance and intervention of the marginalized in the dominant discourses on and operations of globalization.

Exploring further the epistemological, political, and pedagogical functions of maps, and the possibilities of resistance and intervention in denaturalizing seemingly normal urban geography, Yamashita employs magical realism to reveal through Manzanar “layers of the real map” of Los Angeles, whose shifting grids are intertwined with colonization and globalization. Rejecting the limitation of realistic representations of time and space, magical realism enables Yamashita to overcome the limited perspectives of *flânerie* on the urban space. In a way, Manzanar could be considered a

postmodern *flâneur* whose observation station on the freeway and whose planetary magical realist views are conducive to the unique geography of Los Angeles as a global city, where freeways dominate its everyday transportation. The “first sansei born in captivity,” Manzanar renames himself after “his birthplace, Manzanar Concentration Camp in the Owens Valley,” not far from Los Angeles (108). Although he is a skilled surgeon, he has left his practice to become a homeless person and a conductor of freeway traffic from an overpass bridge. “The Japanese American community had apologized profusely for this blight on their image as the Model Minority” (36–37). They have tried time and again in vain to remove him from the freeway, even offering him “a small lacquer bridge in the Japanese garden in Little Tokyo” (37). Manzanar refuses to be confined to Little Tokyo or to the surgeon’s job. In his self-chosen dislocation and homeless status, Manzanar embodies resistance to historical amnesia about the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and undermines the model minority myth about Asian Americans, while making visible the presence of the homeless. Moreover, his magical realist mapping of the urban geography of Los Angeles encompasses multilayered histories and spaces, showing the intertwining of social, cultural, and ecological systems in the formation of the Los Angeles cityscape, which is linked to other histories and places beyond national borders. Like Buzzworm, Manzanar at once contests and reconstructs the meanings of maps and remaps the urban space: “*There are maps and there are maps and there are maps*. The uncanny thing was that he could see all of them at one, filter some, pick them out like transparent windows and place them even delicately and consecutively in a complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic” (56). Magical realism enables Manzanar to read maps and remap the urban space on varying and encompassing scales.

Manzanar’s “complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic” weaves geological formations with the formations of race and class, as well as environmental degradation, into the history of Los Angeles’s urbanization. David Harvey in his book *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* considers the “long history of urbanization . . . one of the most significant of all the processes of environmental modification that have occurred throughout recent world history.” He alerts us to the fact that “[i]n the last century that process has become explosive, creating a set of global ecological conditions that have never been seen before” (186). Yamashita embeds implied connections between the polluted environment and the dependence on technology in the everyday lives and operations of the city in Manzanar’s

magical realist observation of the layers of maps that constitute Los Angeles: “There was the complex and normally silent web of faults—cracking like mud flats baking under a desert sun. . . . Yet, below the surface, there was the man-made grid of civil utilities: Southern California pipelines of natural gas; the unnatural waterways of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the great dank tunnels of sewage; the cascades of poisonous effluents surging from rain-washed streets into the Santa Monica Bay” (57). Interwoven in these grids of invisible infrastructures and systems that constitute Los Angeles—“the greatest leisure world ever devised” (206)—are not only the destruction of the ecosystems or the degradation of the environment. The distribution of wealth and divisions of race are part of the complex layers that Manzanar discerns: “the prehistoric grid of plant and fauna and human behavior, . . . the historic grid of land usage and property, the great overlays of transport—sidewalks, bicycle paths, roads, freeways, systems of transit both ground and air, a thousand natural and man-made divisions, variations both dynamic and stagnant, patterns and connections by every conceivable definition from the distribution of wealth to race, from patterns of climate to the curious blueprint of the skies” (57). Underlying the complex layers of grids in Manzanar’s mapping of urbanization is a critique of the notion of civilization and progress measured by the development of and dependence on technology.

Rather than simply present and critique the phenomena of the impact of economic globalization from the perspectives of the South, *Tropic* challenges its underlying values and ideologies. Yamashita effectively links environmental and social issues from the local to the global through Manzanar’s magical realist vistas. From his “podium” on the freeway overpass, Manzanar watches as “[m]an’s most consistent quest for continuing technology in all its treaded ramifications jammed every inch of street, driveway, highway, and freeway.” And he witnesses how a car crash caused by a driver eating a segment of a drugged poisonous orange imported from south of the border results in “the greatest jam session the world had ever known” (207). The strange encampment of the homeless who have occupied the cars abandoned on the freeway under surveillance by the Los Angeles Police Department’s choppers reminds him of his “childhood in the desert between Lone Pine and Independence, the stubble of manzanita and the snow-covered Sierras against azure skies” (170–71). Then the great Pacific encroaches on this vision of his past life. Places unfold “from one hemisphere to the other”: “from the southernmost tip of Chile to the

Galapagos, skirting the tiny waist of land at Panama, up Baja to Big Sur to Vancouver, around the Aleutians to the Bering Strait.” As Manzanar’s gaze moves from west to east and across the Pacific rim, what is revealed is the magnitude of environmental degradation, resulting in part from industrialization and urbanization in the name of “progress”: “The inky waves with their moonlit spume stuttering against the shore seemed to speak this very truth—garbage jettisoned back prohibiting further progress” (171). When Manzanar looks toward “the southern continent and the central Americas,” his hemispheric perspective links environmental destruction to colonial conquests: “Now human civilization covered everything in layers, generations of building upon building upon building the residue, burial sites, and garbage that defined people after people for centuries. Manzanar saw it, but darkly, before it would shift irrevocably, crush itself into every pocket and crevice, filling a northern vacuum with its cultural conflicts, political disruption, romantic language, with its one hundred years of solitude and its tropical sadness” (171). While paying homage to Gabriel García Márquez by evoking *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Yamashita’s employment of magical realism enables Manzanar’s fantastic gaze to depict the magnitude of environmental degradation uncontainable by national borders and to link this phenomenon to the legacy of colonialism. The intertwining of environmental destruction and colonial plunder underlies Mary Louise Pratt’s contention that the “planetary projects” of global empire building by colonial powers were facilitated by “the systematic surface mapping of the globe” that “correlates with an expanding search for commercially exploitable resources, markets, and lands to colonize” (30).

As Manzanar’s vistas shift back to the history of urbanization in California, they allude to the colonialist westward movement of settlers in the United States driven by a similar expanding search for exploitable resources and lands to colonize:

These were the first infrastructures built by migrant and immigrant labor that created the initial grid on which everything else began to fill in. Steam locomotives cut a cloud of black smoke through the heart of the West. Yankee pirates arrived with cotton linens, left with smuggled cowhides and tallow. And the water was eventually carved away from the north, trickled, then flooded, into this desert valley. And after that nothing could stop the growing congregation of humanity in this corner of the world, and a new grid spread itself with particular domination. (238)

Then as now, empire and nation building depended on exploited immigrant and migrant labor. Environmental transformation and destruction followed the movement of “civilization”—Manifest Destiny—and the process of urbanization. As the “new grid”—the freeway system—continues to “spread itself with particular domination,” another of Manzanar’s grids stretches over the infrastructures: “his map of labor” (238). Every day Manzanar sees people in vehicles “scatter across the city this way and that, divvying themselves up into the garment district, the entertainment industry, the tourist business, the military machine, the service sector, the automotive industry, the education industry, federal, county, and city employees, union workers, domestics, and day labor” (238–39). While each person is defined by work in the city, those who apparently are “illegal” migrant workers from south of the border seem defiant of that definition. “Every day Manzanar had watched the daily hires hugging their knees on the backs of pickup trucks, looking backward into traffic, eyes fixed, challenging the pretensions of other workers inside cars that they imagined defined their existence” (239). Their presence and defiance are part of the challenge of the global South in the city.

Manzanar’s remapping of the cityscape, like Buzzworm’s, constitutes more than a counter-discourse to the official map. It shows a new political alliance among the homeless, displaced, exploited, and marginalized across racial, ethnic, and national boundaries, resulting in part from the changing human geography of the city, especially when the homeless have occupied a mile-long line of abandoned cars on Harbor Freeway and established an alternative community. In this space named “FreeZone,” new community activist organizations have emerged, including a group called LAPD—Los Angeles Poverty Department—and the Homeless performance group. Buzzworm has “headquarters set up semipermanently in the gold Mercedes” (187). With the assistance of Gabriel’s girlfriend and Manzanar’s granddaughter, Emi, who is reporting on the occupation for *NewsNow*, Buzzworm has started a TV program in the FreeZone, showing “[a]spirations of the lowest bum on skid row”;¹² “[l]ifestyles of the poor and forgotten,” including “an urban garden on the Fast Lane” as “a solution in self-sufficiency” (192); the special *Homeless Vets: From the Jungles to the Streets* (181); and a “homeless choir numbering near 500 featuring three homeless tenors” with Manzanar as the conductor (193). But the program is not limited to the homeless. They have invited street peddlers to “tell their side of the poison orange mess” (193). In addition, the FreeZone community is making demands on the government for improvement of its living conditions. This “uprising” by the poor

and forgotten in Los Angeles converges with Arcangel's coming to the city to challenge NAFTA. Such convergence becomes a part of multiracial, transnational urban resistance in the global city.

Yamashita employs magical realism to indicate the expansion of the global South and the impact of its agency of resistance on the global city, whose spatial structure is altered by challenges from the global South. Buzzworm notices that Manzanar's overpass has expanded and Harbor Freeway is growing. In fact, the entire space is pushing out from Pico-Union and South-Central (190–91). Some of the broadest boulevards are turned into one-way alleys, streets have become unrecognizable, and cars are squeezed together so closely that they cannot move. The whole transportation system is disabled; everybody in Los Angeles is walking. "So people were finally getting out, close to the ground, seeing the city like he [Buzzworm] did" (220). Meanwhile Manzanar begins to "sense a new kind of grid," one defined by "himself and others like him." "He found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor. On a distant overpass, he could make out the odd mirror of his figure, waving a baton. And beyond that, another homeless person had also taken up the baton. And across the city, on overpasses and street corners, from balconies and park benches, people held branches and pencils, toothbrushes and carrot sticks, and conducted" (239). At the same time, a strange and wonderful music like "a kind of choral babel" arises and converges with "the repetitive chorus of the homeless encampment waft[ing] gently above the smoking cinders of quenched fires" resulting from the car crash on the freeway that has destroyed the dwellings of the homeless nearby. This spatially bounded yet uncontained articulation of the homeless expands exponentially as the migration from the South led by Arcangel is moving closer to the city. As Manzanar perceives with appreciation: "The entire City of Angels seemed to have opened its singular voice to herald a naked old man and little boy with an orange followed by a motley parade approaching from the south. Once again, the grid was changing" (239). Arcangel's arrival in Los Angeles brings "the other scene of globalization" with its five hundred-year history of colonialism and its "curse" (49) to contest SUPERNAFTA at the Pacific Rim Auditorium in the global city now crippled by the actions of the homeless from the FreeZone—"the urban front line," as Buzzworm calls it (217).

The parade of the multitudes from the South headed by Arcangel into Los Angeles swells the ranks of the rising homeless, rendering the impact of their claim to spatial justice even more unsettling. Once again, Manzanar

sees the grid of the Los Angeles map changing: “[The FreeZone is] becoming the entire city and bigger than a tiny island or a puny country the size of San Bernardino. And the approaching parade was dragging in the entire midriff . . . of the hemisphere” (240). But the mighty military machine of the nation-state of the North is set in motion to suppress the converging forces of the global South. “On cue, the thunder of a hundred helicopters announced their appearance on the downtown horizon, strafing the freeway along its dotted lines, bombing the valley with tear gas and smoke. The coordinated might of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Coast and National Guards, federal, state, and local police forces of the most militaristic of nations looked down as it had in the past on tiny islands and puny countries the size of San Bernardino and descended in a single storm” (240). Yet, despite the intimidating military machine of the nation-state that controls the borders and is crushing the uprising, “the rising tide of that migration from the South—not foreign to the ravages of war—never stopped, clamored forward, joined the war in L.A. with both wooden and real weapons, capital, and plunder” (240). As Manzanar witnesses, “The entire city had sprouted grassroots conductors of every sort” (256). This picture of the cityscape of Los Angeles captures in a way what Sassen calls “[s]treet-level politics” in the global city, which “make[s] possible the formation of new types of political subjects arising out of conditions of often acute disadvantage” (“Reading the City” 25, 16). However, the global city, though it is a site of resistance from the global South, is not the crucial site for Arcangel’s political subjectivity, which emerges with European colonization in the Americas and “the other scene of globalization.”

THE OTHER SCENE OF GLOBALIZATION

A composite figure who has been “traveling” for “five hundred years” (145) and whose “voice was often a jumble of unknown dialects, guttural and whining, Latin mixed with every aboriginal, colonial, slave, or immigrant tongue,” Arcangel represents the voices of the colonized and the mestizos in Latin America and embodies the consequences of the discovery and conquest of the “New World” (47). Well-known as “El Gran Mojado”—“Big Wetback,” representing the “illegals,” the “undocumented” border crossers—Arcangel enacts resistance to subjugation by (neo)colonial and imperial powers of the global North through his challenge to SUPERNAFTA to fight. Thus Yamashita strategically connects the legacy of colonialism to the impact

of globalization in Latin America through Arcangel's identity and action. Traveling north from South America to the United States as a "performance artist," Arcangel plays the role of an activist against (neo)colonialism through his art in the street, on the market square, and in other public or private spaces, while his performances and encounters along the way reveal a range of "the other scene of globalization." In fact, Arcangel maps the geography of discovery and conquest of the "New World" in his performance as the Mayan prophet Chilam Quetzal "on the steps of the opera house" in Montevideo, predicting the "doomsday" that has come in "fifty-two-year cycles" since Christopher Columbus "*discovered San Salvador, Cuba, Haiti, / and the Dominican Republic in 1492!*" (48–49). As he continues with his listing and a calculation litany of dooms—" [*t*] *he great curse*" following "*[t]he great discovery*"—in the Western Hemisphere, his naming of the conquistadors and the places they discovered in the Americas maps the routes of colonialism and embeds intricate links between colonization and globalization (50). While moving farther north, the routes of colonization begin to evoke the routes of border crossings driven by globalization. "In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano discovered North Carolina and the New York harbor, and later, in 1528, he discovered the site of the Panama Canal. . . . In 1513, Vasco Núñez de Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo discovered the islands of California" (50–51). These "discovered" places mark the routes of transportations of poisoned oranges, baby organs for transplants, and wet nurses, among other things, along with migrations of racialized labor across national borders as depicted in the novel.

Resonating with Manzanar's planetary vistas, Arcangel's hemispheric mapping at once alludes to and counters what Pratt calls the "planetary projects" of European colonization, which include "the mapping of the world's coastlines for the building of "the 'Empire of Europe'" (29–30). Against the colonial, imperial power of conquest, Arcangel proclaims "*[t]he doom of discovery*" and "*[t]he doom of conquest*" as his mapping moves from South to North America, producing counter-knowledge about colonialism and economic globalization from the perspectives of the South (51). The connections between colonialism and the impact of NAFTA on the South become clearer when Arcangel reaches Mazatlán and the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico. Stopping to eat at La Cantina de Miseria y Hambre, Arcangel finds that Mexican beers have disappeared and that only American beers are available. As he looks around, he sees that "all the hungry and miserable people in the cantina" are "all eating hamburgers, Fritos, catsup, and

drinking American beers.” He is the only one who has asked for “the favor of cooking his raw cactus leaves” to eat with “nopales” (131). When he has a chance to perform for the crowd in the marketplace, Arcangel reminds his audience of their history of subjugation and resistance in relation to SUPER-NAFTA, who “*is only concerned with the / commerce of money and things*” (133). He transforms himself into “a motley personage: part superhero, part professional wrestler, part Subcomandante Marcos,” wearing a “camouflaged nylon” ski mask, a “blue cape with the magic image of Guadalupe in an aura of gold feathers and blood roses, leopard bicycle tights, and blue boots” (132). Claudia Sadowski-Smith in her study *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* offers an insightful reading of Arcangel’s masked appearance. She contends that by wearing a mask, Arcangel reminds his audience of Mexican traditions of “masked superheroes,” including “Zorro and the 1940s’ El Santo, who set the style for a generation of masked wrestlers,” and also “the ski-masked ‘*hombres sin rostros*’ (men without faces) of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), especially their most well-known representative of national liberation, Subcomandante Marcos.” In so doing, Sadowski-Smith writes, Arcangel “continues the progressive tenets of Mexican revolution into the contemporary time period” (66). According to Massey, the Zapatistas are militant in their protest against NAFTA: “The state of Chiapas in southern Mexico is among the vulnerable areas, and the leader of the Zapatistas whose guerrilla uprising exploded on the day that NAFTA was inaugurated has argued that it is ‘the death warrant for the indigenous people of Mexico’” (“Space/Power” 103). Moreover, Arcangel urges his Mexican audience to see the connection between the history of imperialism and their illegalized status as “*wetbacks*” by the “new” United States–Mexico border as redrawn in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War. He inspires his audience by reminding them also that his struggle is for all of them and that “*El Gran Mojado derives his great strength / from the noble hearts of his people!*” (133).

Evidence of the complex intertwining impact of colonization and globalization on Latin America expands in scope and depth with Arcangel’s travels farther north. So, too, do the traditions of struggle for independence and equality in Latin America. When he meets Rodriguez, the bricklayer, on Gabriel’s property, Arcangel finds that Rodriguez’s youngest son ran away to be a soldier and “died in an ambush” (144). His death reminds Arcangel of the many soldiers, mostly in their teens, who died “in his arms” (144). Arcangel’s reflections on these young men suggest that they are victims

of ideologies and politics related to colonialism and economic globalization. They “foolishly believed” in “*revolution, / illegitimate uprisings, / coup d'états, / communist takeovers, / nationalization of the private sector,*” as well as “*cultural assimilation, development, and / progress*” (144–45). But these beliefs led to destructive violence and (neo)colonial powers’ plunder of Latin America’s resources and exploitation of its labor. Arcangel’s visions illustrate “*Juan Valdez picking Colombian coffee / and Chico Mendes tapping Brazilian rubber / . . . / Haitian farmers pruning and slashing cane, / . . . / Indians, who mined tin in the Cerro Rico / . . . / Venezuelan and Mexican drivers*” shipping local resources and products “far away” (146). Arcangel analyzes the implications and consequences of those scenes of exploitation and plunder by evoking the words of Eduardo Galeano, the Uruguayan journalist and writer, author of *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (*Open Veins of Latin America*; 1971). Apparently modeled on Galeano’s writings that combine fiction, history, journalism, and political analysis, Arcangel’s “political poetry” (149) exposes the ideological and material impact of economic globalization:

Everyone was so busy, full of industry. But Eduardo Galeano had himself explained to Arcangel that

*this industry was like an airplane.
It landed and left with everything—
raw materials,
exotic culture, and
human brains—
everything.* (146)

In exchange, “*they got progress, / technology, / loans, and loaded guns*” (146–47).

Subsequently, colonialism and economic globalization have also resulted in drug wars in Latin America. Arcangel has helped the gravedigger José Palacios bury hundreds of nameless dead in “the war over an innocent indigenous plant,” which Rodríguez notes, “all goes north to the gringos” (147). Rodríguez’s first son was shot dead in his car because of his involvement in drug trafficking. He used to “brag” to his dad: “Drugs have come to kill our poverty and marry our politics. It’s a very powerful marriage. Join the honeymoon while it lasts.” Rodríguez knows that his son “was not a bad boy”; “he was only foolish—another stupid hero of a narco-corrido,” and

he “didn’t want to be poor anymore” (147–48). Arcangel situates Mexicans’ poverty and the problems of the “narco-corrido” in the context of Mexico’s “IMF [International Monetary Fund] debts,” “a twenty-eight billion dollar trade deficit,” and the devalued peso, resulting in part from NAFTA (148). In contrast to the drug wars, he evokes Mexican revolutionary wars led by prominent figures such as Emiliano Zapata, whose name has been reinvented by indigenous peoples who are staging a revolution “from the mountains of Chiapas at the border of Guatemala” (148–49). From various locales south of the United States–Mexico border, Arcangel offers intimate glimpses into the other scene of globalization unavailable in the global city.

Like Buzzworm’s remapping of his neighborhood, and similar to Manzanar’s mapping of the formations of urban geography, Arcangel’s observations of the impact of colonization and globalization in Latin America function as social exposure and critique, as well as intervention in the production of space, knowledge, and identity. To resist the domination of Eurocentric cultures and American assimilation, Arcangel constantly alludes to pre-Columbian cultures in Latin America in his performances and political poetry. But his evocation of indigenous cultures and histories is connected to European colonization in Latin America, thus operating as a form of counter-memory that subverts the dominant master narrative of history. In one of his political poems, he undermines “[t]he myth of Columbus” and “[t]he myth of discovery” (182) by evoking the indigenous myth about a moth and relating it to the absorption and transformation of indigenous cultures and to the dispossession of indigenous peoples’ land by European colonizers (182–83). Significantly, Arcangel writes this poem on the back of his Ultimate Wrestling Championship flyer for Rafaela’s son, Sol, to keep as they are riding on a bus north toward the United States–Mexico border. While the poem alludes to the magnificent indigenous cultures of Latin America and to the impact of European colonialism, the flyer records Arcangel’s symbolic wrestling in resistance to the dominant powers of the North embodied by SUPERNAFTA, thus linking colonialism to economic globalization from the perspective of the South. Rafaela is entrusted with this collective memory and spirit for Sol and countless others on their way north to Los Angeles with Arcangel.

In fact, Rafaela herself enacts the heroic traditions of Latin American women’s resistance to subjugation and struggle for human rights and dignity. After she intersects the smuggling of illegally farmed children’s organs to the North by Hernando, the son of Gabriel’s neighbor Doña Maria in Mexico,

she is followed by him on her way back to Los Angeles. When Hernando, the “villain,” catches her, Rafaela is forced into a fierce battle, in which she is transformed into a powerful serpent and Hernando into a black jaguar. As they are locked in a violent fight, scenes of battles pass as memories: “massacred men and women, their bloated and twisted bodies black with blood, stacked in ruined buildings and floating in canals; one million more decaying with smallpox.” “And there was the passage of 5,000 women of Cochibamba resisting with tin guns an entire army of Spaniards.” There was also the passage of “one hundred mothers pacing day after day the Plaza de Mayo with the photos of their disappeared children,” fighting for all mothers and children as human rights activists (221). Rafaela’s battle with “the villain” also evokes the (neo)colonialist plunder of resources and environmental destruction in Latin America: “But that was only the human massacre; what of the ravaged thousands of birds once cultivated to garnish the trees of a plumed potentate, the bleeding silver treasure of Cerro Rico de Potosí, the exhausted gold of Ouro Preto, the scorched land that followed the sweet stuff called white gold and the crude stuff called black gold, and the coffee, cacao and bananas, and the human slavery that dug and slashed and pushed and jammed it all out and away, forever” (222). These evocations reenact women’s agency of resistance and intervention embodied by Rafaela. They resonate with Arcangel’s mapping of the impact of colonization and globalization in Latin America, which demonstrates that “environmental issues [are] not only focal in the European conquest and colonization of the globe, but [are] inherent in the very ideologies of imperialism and racism on which such invasion and colonialism depended,” as the postcolonial theorist Helen Tiffin contends in her book *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire* (xv). Such intertwining of the environment and the empire in the operations of colonialism and imperialism is embedded in Arcangel’s observation of the impact of economic globalization on Latin America.

As Arcangel is approaching the United States–Mexico border, he mobilizes a mass movement of resistance from the South, dragging with them the emblematic places and images of Latin America. Rafaela notices that while the same scenes of the Tropic of Cancer are following them, “the road seemed to have accumulated more than simple traffic, as a “growing crowd of people walked along the shoulder” (184). Some are bearing signs that read “*El Gran Mojado! Hero of the People!*” And behind them are Mexico’s national shrine, the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the monumental public plaza—the great Zócalo of Mexico City—which used to be

part of the ceremonial center of the Aztec empire's capital, Tenochtitlán, now "swelling with its multitudes, slipping like a single beast across the landscape" (184). As he is getting close to the border with the multitudes of the South, Arcangel looks across the northern horizon and sees "all 2,000 miles of the frontier" stretching "across from Tijuana on the Pacific," cutting through Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (198–99). His gaze maps the geography of the relatively recent "discovery and conquest" of Mexican territories by the United States and "the New World Border," which waits with the advanced technology of surveillance, with wretched migrants, "colonias of destitute skirmishing at its hard line," smugglers, dark-skinned mestizos, "steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars, / INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] detention centers, border patrols, rape, / robbery, and death" (199). This "New World Border" not only has altered the geography of national territories, but it also has created new categories of people, who are deported as "illegals" to the other side of the border. Arcangel evokes the border's history of migrations of labor back and forth, including its recent history: "the deportation of 400,000 Mexican / citizens in 1932, / coaxing back of 2.2 million / braceros in 1942 / only to exile the same 2.2 million / wetbacks in 1953" (199). Defiant of the categorization and criminalization by the border, Arcangel claims to be "Cristobal Colón" (Christopher Columbus), born on October 12, 1492, in the New World, when he is interrogated at the United States–Mexican border. He is crossing the border with "a great flood" of migrant workers behind him, entering the United States "with nothing in their hands," "nothing but their hats to shade their foreheads, / the sweat on their backs" (200). Those migrants, however are not merely docile cheap laborers; they are bringing transformative forces from the South, with "the seeds in their pockets, / the children in their wombs, / the songs in their throats" (200). Headed by El Gran Mojado, along with "all the people who do the work of machines," agricultural products, "the rain forests," and "pre-Columbian treasures," with the collective memories of the violence of European colonization in the Americas, including "40,000 Aztecs slain" and "25 million dead Indians," and with "the spirit of ideologies" of great thinkers and writers of Latin America such as Simón Bolívar, Che Guevara, and Pablo Neruda, among others, the migrant workers are crossing the border to become "the great undocumented foment" of the South, bringing with them the agency of social change and cultural transformation from the global South, which is becoming part of the global city in the North (201, 202).

By mapping the global South in and beyond the global city, Yamashita registers large-scale social injustice and powerful resistance and intervention uncontainable by spatial segregation or national border control. The global city as portrayed in *Tropic* is not just a strategic “command” site of the global power projects; it is a site for a new politics of transnational, multiracial struggles for social and environmental justice. Published five years after the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, which are alluded to in its narrative, *Tropic* offers an encompassing socio-ecological perspective on the spatially produced and reinforced social divisions in the global city, while linking Asian Americans’ experience to that of other racial minorities and situating them in the local and global socio-ecological webs of globalization entangled with the legacies of colonialism. Yamashita employs magical realism to highlight the ways in which discernable or invisible lines at once connect and divide peoples, nations, and the environments as indicated by Bobby and Rafaela’s situation at the end of the novel. Even though Bobby can see Rafaela at the Pacific Rim Auditorium, she is still on the other side of the border. Both of them are entangled in and kept apart by the mysterious line coming out of the single orange from the tree on Gabriel’s property. While trying to embrace Rafaela, who is within sight but unreachable, Bobby asks: “What are these goddamn lines anyway? What do they connect? What do they divide?” (270). These questions evoke Manzanar’s map that shows “a thousand natural and man-made divisions . . . and connections by every conceivable definition from the distribution of wealth to race” (57).

The magical realist narrative of *Tropic* performs an ethical and political activism that is similar to what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin call “an advocacy function both in relation to the real world(s) it inhabits and to the imaginary spaces it opens up for contemplation of how the real world might be transformed” (introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 13). The advocacy for transformation embedded in *Tropic of Orange* entails both social and environmental justice beyond ethnic boundaries and national borders without overlooking the power of the nation-state in excluding, disciplining, and criminalizing racialized Others. Underlying this complex transformation is a necessary reimaging of the relationship between Asian Americans and other minority Americans, which has been shaped by racial hierarchy, including racialized U.S. citizenship, as depicted in *Native Speaker*. Soja’s insight into the impact of deeply entrenched racism on interracial relationships in Los Angeles offers a glimpse into the stark reality: “Los Angeles was built on a bedrock of racism and radical segregation. Its history is marked by a continu-

ous sequence of public and private sector partnerships which, at least since the Mexican conquest, have directly or indirectly induced the most violent interracial conflagrations that have occurred in any US city” (*Thirdspace* 299–300). Yamashita writes against this reality by imagining otherwise, by allowing her characters to inhabit the city otherwise than as prescribed by the dominant racial ideologies and practices. If *Native Speaker* portrays both the aspirations and impossibilities for a multiracial coalition in transforming the political establishment for a more inclusive democracy, *Tropic of Orange* shows the spirit and possibilities for such a coalition in the streets and the public squares across national boundaries. In so doing, it offers conceptual and historical perspectives from the global South for rearticulating the identities of racialized Others, for mobilizing their agency, for reimagining and reinhabiting not just the nation-space, or the global city, but divided and yet inseparable worlds.

CONCLUSION

The I-Hotel and Other Places

RECENT SCHOLARLY WORK ON THE CITY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY transnational, and much attention has been devoted to over-urbanization in the global South. Mike Davis in his 2006 book *Planet of Slums* alerts the reader to the alarming speed of unprecedented urbanization in the world. “In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population of more than one million; today there are 400, and by 2015 there will be at least 550. . . . Cities, indeed, have absorbed nearly two-thirds of the global population explosion since 1950, and are currently growing by a million babies and migrants each week” (1–2). While a large part of this urban population explosion is related to late-capitalist industrialization and globalization, 95 percent of this increase in urban population will occur in “developing countries, whose populations will double to nearly 4 billion over the next generation” (2). Apart from devastating environmental degradation and myriad other problems, Davis points out that economic globalization and massive displacements and migrations of rural populations to urban areas have resulted in the unemployment or underemployment of “one billion workers representing one-third of the world’s labor force, most of them in the South” (Central Intelligence Agency 80, qtd. in M. Davis, *Planet of Slums* 199). Moreover, while “there is no official scenario for the reincorporation of this vast mass of surplus labor into the mainstream of the world economy,” Davis states, the “criminalized segments of the urban poor” in the “feral, failed cities’ of the Third World—especially their slum outskirts—will be the distinctive battlespace of the twenty-first century” (205).

Ten years before the publication of *Planet of Slums*, Massey in her 1997 essay “Space/Power, Identity/Difference: Tensions in the City” called critical attention to a similar trend in global urbanization: “By the year 2000, on current estimates, one half of the world’s population will live, not just in cities, but in mega-cities. . . . Most of the mega-cities of the new millennium will be in ‘the Third World.’ By the year 2000, it is projected, only three of the

world's twenty biggest cities will be in the current industrialized countries of 'the First World'" (100). Massey argues that this phenomenon urges an expansion, if not a shift, in scholarly attention that has been devoted mostly to cities in the global North: "When so much of our intellectual, and even political, discourse is of the excitements and desperations of Los Angeles and New York, Paris and London it is salutary to bear in mind the relative unimportance of these places, in quantitative terms, in the context of world-wide twenty-first-century city life" ("Space/Power" 100).

Literary scholars have also responded to the challenges posed by the crises of global urbanization. Patricia Yaeger in her "Introduction: Dreaming of Infrastructure" in a special topic on cities for the 2007 *PMLA*, argues that literature emerging from cities other than those in the global North calls for new conceptual frameworks and more expansive critical approaches. "To analyze the literature emerging from quasi-colonized, overpopulated, densely inhabited cities," she contends, "we must go beyond the usual suspects: theorists like Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, or even Henri Lefebvre, who have taught us so much about European and American alienation, crowding, flâneurie, and absolute space" (12). Significantly, Yaeger looks to philosophers and political scientists from Africa such as Achille Mbembe and to South Asian postcolonial theorists such as Dipesh Chakrabarty for "another cache of ideas," including "Mbembe's concept of 'superfluity' (describing the wealth created and the workers thrown away or depleted by the gold mines that crisscross Johannesburg)" and "Chakrabarty's epistemic insistence on 'European provincialism,'" which "add key concepts to a new metropolitan arsenal" (12–13). With an emphasis on everyday lived spaces of the metropolis, Yaeger proposes "a new practicum for looking at city literature, including (1) the fact of overurbanization, (2) the predicament of decaying or absent infrastructure, (3) the unevenness of shelter (which along with food, energy, health care, and water make up the mythos and ethos of the nurturing city), and (4) the importance of inventing counterpublics, or communal alternatives to the official, bureaucratized polis" (13).

Asian American city literature addresses in different ways the issues Yaeger identifies above for producing a "metropoetics" that "will enable us to rethink the urban imaginary in the light of contemporary urban crises" (13). But Asian American writings about urban space tackle a wider range of issues beyond those of "contemporary urban crises." Moreover, embedded in Asian American writings about the city are provocative theoretical perspectives on American urban space that reinvent the privileged white

middle-class *flâneur/flâneuse* and produce a counter-episteme of the street, thus opening up new possibilities for critical investigation of the American city that is at once an exclusionary nation-space, a segregated space, and a site of encounters and resistance, as well as a space of multiplicity and becomings.

The premise of Yaeger's contention is especially provocative and relevant to the central concerns of my examination of Asian American city literature. Of particular significance is Yaeger's argument for expanding "our intellectual apparatus" and "our ethical and imaginative engagements with others" beyond the familiar terrains. As she explains: "My premise is that our intellectual apparatus . . . is inadequate for describing the pleasures and pounding of most urban lives, or the fact that many city dwellers survive despite all odds. How can our ethical and imaginative engagements with others around the world be worked into our scholarly infrastructures? How do we create taxonomies for cities and citizens that are at once off the grid and overly taxonomized?" (Yaeger 15). To renew and expand "our intellectual apparatus" in order to extend "our ethical and imaginative engagements," to make "our scholarly infrastructures" open to urban spaces and urban residents who are "off the grid" of cityscapes, or invisible on city maps, literary scholars need to overcome their disciplinary oversights and blind spots by making use of interdisciplinary approaches. For the same reasons, more critical attention needs to be devoted to urban literature written by ethnic American writers, which offers refreshing, incisive theorizing perspectives on metropolises, global cities, and transnational ethnic enclaves and ghettos, as writings about Chinatown and the city by Asian Americans demonstrate. Rather than a "metropoetics," a broader poetics of space characterizes Asian American city literature. In its critique of legally sanctioned, ideologically justified racial segregation and the spatial construction of racialized American national identity and citizenship, Asian American urban literature produces a counter-discourse of spatial inscriptions of identities, which naturalize racial exclusion and segregation. At the same time, it explores spatially constitutive formations of subjectivity and the possibilities embedded in the urban environment for interethnic, multiracial "counterpublics" and "communal alternatives" for advancing social and environmental justice. Underlying the poetics of space as such is an openness to change—to personal, collective, and social transformations through encounters, transgressions, resistance, and activism.

Asian American city literature urges us to constantly investigate the relationship between space and power underlying what Soja calls "the inherent

spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography” (*Thirdspace* 1). In his study *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja contends:

[T]he spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today. Whether we are . . . seeking ways to act politically to deal with the growing problems of poverty, racism, sexual discrimination, and environmental degradation; or trying to understand the multiplying geopolitical conflicts around the globe, we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities. Perhaps more than ever before, a strategic awareness of this collectively created spatiality and its social consequences has become a vital part of making both theoretical and practical sense of our contemporary life-worlds at all scales, from the most intimate to the most global. (1)

Thus, he adds, it “becomes more urgent than ever to keep our contemporary consciousness of spatiality—our critical geographical imagination—creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions; and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope” (1–2).

Given the diverse, heterogeneous histories, experience, and narrative strategies of Asian Americans, it is particularly necessary to keep “our critical geographical imagination” open to “redefinition and expansion in new directions.” As a way of resisting a narrowing of the conceptual and critical frameworks for reading Asian American urban literature, I turn to *I Hotel* (2010) by Karen Tei Yamashita and *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2004) by lê thi diem thúy to draw out their respective implications for further opening up the conceptual and historical frameworks for studying Asian American urban literature.

As its title indicates, *I Hotel* alludes to both the actual and symbolic site of the International Hotel (or I-Hotel as it was more commonly known) at 848 Kearny Street in the Manilatown-Chinatown section of San Francisco. Located between Chinatown and the financial district, it was the last remnant of the ten-block Manilatown neighborhood, as well as a residential hotel for low-income migrant workers and mostly elderly Chinese and Filipino Americans. It also housed offices and community projects of Asian American activist organizations such as the Asian Community Center and the

Chinatown Cooperative Garment Factory. The I-Hotel became a crucible of the politics of space in the city during the late 1960s and through the 1970s.¹ Its transformations illustrate the active, multiple, protean characteristics of space shaped by social relations and interactions and altered by different ways of inhabitation.

Rebuilt in 1907 after the 1906 earthquake and fire, the I-Hotel underwent dramatic changes from “a luxury accommodation in the city’s center that catered to visiting dignitaries” to a refuge that “housed the first Filipino community” between the 1920s and mid-1960s (Habal 9–10). The predominantly Filipino demographic characteristics of the hotel and its location reflect racial segregation in the city and the neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. As historian Estella Habal observes, following the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), “Filipinos began coming to America as subjects of their new colonial ruler” and found “a segregated society” where their residence and movement in the city streets were restricted to certain areas (9–10). They could not find housing outside the Chinatown area, and signs saying “No Filipinos or Dogs Allowed” were common” (18). Yet Filipinos made Manilatown a home “partly as an act of survival and partly as an act of defiance” (19). With the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 that abolished the national-origin quotas and substituted hemispheric quotas, and as a result of an easing of segregation, a growing number of Filipino immigrant families began to find housing in “San Francisco’s mainly white working-class” areas and the “largely Latino Mission District rather than in Chinatown or Manilatown.” Meanwhile, the predominantly male community of “Filipino pioneers continued to live at the I-Hotel because of its cheap rent and the culture of the surrounding Filipino businesses” (20). By 1968, when the hotel tenants were served eviction notices, the residents were mostly elderly Chinese and Filipino bachelors, “retired farm workers,” migrant cannery workers, and “domestic and service workers who could not afford to live anywhere else” (21). But the identity and the functions of the I-Hotel were transformed by the anti-eviction and Asian American grassroots movement.

Located in a dynamic ethnic enclave in the heart of San Francisco, the I-Hotel became a pivotal site for the city’s “counterpublic” for housing rights, as well as for Asian American community activism and ethnic culture development. The 1968 eviction notices sparked a grassroots community activism that spread through the city and the Bay Area and brought about profound changes in the meanings and functions of the I-Hotel. The ten-

ants marched to protest against the eviction, and a news conference was held at Tino's Barber Shop (Habal xv). Soon, Filipino American and other Asian American students from San Francisco State University (SFSU) and the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), were actively involved in the anti-eviction movement. According to Habal, a member of the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino* (Union of Democratic Filipinos), which collaborated with I-Hotel tenants in their resistance, the anti-eviction movement "eventually expanded to include an extraordinarily broad range of constituencies throughout San Francisco and the Bay Area, including civil rights activists, labor unions, religious leaders, the antiwar movement, and the growing gay community" (3). The I-Hotel became a catalytic site of grassroots community activism for human rights and housing rights, for racial and spatial justice, demonstrating the transformative agency of those who had been marginalized in society, in shaping the history and geography of the city. Above all, the I-Hotel became a pivotal site of the resistance and transformation of Asian American communities and a historical site that marked the emergence of the Asian American, or Yellow Power, movement.

The anti-eviction movement coincided and became intertwined with the Asian American movement, which had remarkable interethnic, interracial, and international characteristics and a commitment to community service and activism for progressive social, cultural, and institutional transformation. Between 1968 and 1969, African American, Asian American, Chicano, and Native American students at SFSC and UCB organized campus coalitions known as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). "The concept 'Third World' provided a common basis of unity for the TWLF student activists. The term identified parallel colonial and racial experiences of minorities throughout US history."² It linked racial minorities' experience to the history of colonialism and its legacies in Third World countries. The students also connected racial minorities' demands for racial justice and political power in the United States to the "movements of independence and self-determination" in Third World countries. The TWLF led student strikes and demanded institutional changes in education, including curriculum reform, expanding admission for minority students, and opening new positions for minority faculty. These changes led to the establishment of the first ethnic studies programs at SFSU and UCB.³

The intersecting and intertwining of those multifaceted movements shed light on the unique narrative structure and thematic concerns of *I-Hotel*. The meanings, possibilities, and legacies of the I-Hotel are embedded in

the novel's poetics of space. By the time the eviction took place in 1977, the I-Hotel had been transformed into a multiethnic community center, a dynamic space of political and cultural activities, and a locus of community service. As Habal observes, "With a community arts center, a Filipino American newspaper, a radical bookstore, two Chinese community centers, and above all, the International Hotel Tenant Association (IHTA), the hotel was the place where activists organized themselves and developed long-lasting ties to their communities" (3). Even after the eviction in 1977 and the demolition of the I-Hotel building in 1979, the Asian American community continued its struggle effectively: "No commercial project could be built on the site without a significant housing component because of pressure from the Filipino and Chinese communities and other city activists" (Habal 4). Eventually, in 2005 a new International Hotel was built "on the corner of Jackson Street with the same address as the old hotel: 848 Kearny Street" as "low-income housing for the elderly and disabled" (Habal 5). It has been reclaimed and reinhabited by the Filipino community as a historic site, a space of social network, and a cultural hub. Located on its ground floor, the International Hotel Manilatown Center in partnership with the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, founded in 1994, is devoted to preserving "the history of San Francisco's Filipino community" and to honoring "the tenants who fought the battle to save the International Hotel" through "educational programs, exhibits, and cultural performances" (Habal 5). In addition, the International Hotel Manilatown Center also documents the history of Filipinos in the United States, along with the anti-eviction movement, in its educational programs. The Asian American communities and their supporters in the city have reclaimed the I-Hotel as a site of counterpublics against the spatial assertion of corporate powers and transnational capital as embodied by high-rise office buildings such as the Transamerica Pyramid two blocks away from the I-Hotel.⁴ The diverse, multiple constituencies of the city as participants in the anti-eviction struggle made the profound, long-lasting impact of the I-Hotel movement possible. This joint struggle for rights to affordable housing and for spatial justice has left an indelible mark on the cityscape with a communal space of difference and multiplicity, which is inhabited as an inclusive, open commons.⁵

The history, or rather the continual becomings, of the I-Hotel demonstrates that space "is emergence and eruption, oriented not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action," to revisit Grosz's theory about space (*Architecture* 116). Moreover, the dynamic attri-

butes of space are mobilized by those who inhabit it. As Grosz contends, space can be “transformed according to the subject’s affective and instrumental relations with it” (*Space* 122). The I-Hotel’s process of becoming underlines the importance of what Massey calls “thinking radical democracy spatially” in reading urban literature.⁶ In her essay “Space/Power,” Massey argues that by “thinking through the active interlinkages” between “identity/difference, spatiality, and power,” it may be possible “to explore some of the potential dimensions of a democratic politics of spatiality” (105). Such attributes and possibilities of space, as well as the multiple, intersecting, and intertwining movements related to the anti-eviction struggle, underlie the encompassing narrative structure, multiple voices, and variegated techniques Yamashita employs in *I Hotel*.

As a pivotal, catalytic space of resistance, political activities, artistic creativity, and community in the Asian American movement, the I-Hotel functions effectively as the organizing principle of Yamashita’s 605-page novel. The novel is structured like “an international hotel with many rooms” (*I Hotel* 605). Spanning the period from 1968 to 1977, *I Hotel* is divided into ten novellas, one for each year, with a variation of actual and symbolic spaces. Each novella consists of multiple chapters and a diverse cast of characters, including students, professors, workers, writers, artists, revolutionaries, and agitators, whose actions take place in various locations, some of which are outside the United States. Thus these ten novellas are themselves open spaces of multiple vectors of histories and events that intersect, converge in, or emerge with the multifaceted Asian American movement. Moreover, each novella / hotel room has a particular thematic focus and employs a different set of narrative techniques, including storytelling, pastiche, quotations, monologues, letters, and cinema vérité, among others respectively, which capture distinct voices and reflect the diverse, heterogeneous Asian American histories, experiences, cultures, and ideological persuasions. At the same time, these different narratives resonate and expand on the meanings of the I-Hotel and subsequently link the eviction movement to the experience of other racial minorities and to larger histories. For example, the narratives of “1973: Int’l Hotel” link the I-Hotel resistance to the Modocs’ resistance against removal to a reservation in 1872–73, to Native Americans’ occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, and to Japanese Americans’ protest and resistance at the Tule Lake concentration camp during World War II. Unifying these different locations and histories are stories of minority Americans’ displacement and resistance.

Through such intersecting and interconnected histories, locations, characters, and voices, *I Hotel* in a way creates multiple archives of the Asian American experience situated in the larger contexts of the American experience and Third World national liberation movements. Its spatially oriented narratives at once recuperate, reinvent, and preserve individual and collective memories, Asian American histories and spaces, which intervene in the making of American history and geography. The closing lines of *I Hotel* are articulated in the collective voice of “we” at a moment when the I-Hotel eviction is to take place, eloquently asserting the significance of both the anti-eviction resistance at the I-Hotel and the book *I Hotel*:

We’ve given our lives to this old place, but tonight we know our imminent failure. . . . But as we tumble into the gravesite left by its demolition, perhaps our memory may flutter skyward, the City exploding and swirling away from our center—Manilatown, Chinatown, Japantown—spinning away with phallic impressions of Pyramid and Coit, spanning bridges of Wharf, Bay, and Golden Gate, . . . away and away and away. America. America.

And in time we may remember, collecting every little memory, all the bits and pieces, into a larger memory, rebuilding a great layered and labyrinthine, now imagined, international hotel of many rooms, the urban experiment of a homeless community built to house the needs of temporary lives. And for what? . . . To haunt a disappearing landscape. To forever embed this geography with our visions and voice. (605)

Even though the old I-Hotel is to be demolished, and the Asian American activists are going away from the ethnic enclaves—“the center” of their movement—the legacy of their struggles will spread throughout the city and beyond to intervene, rather than become invisible or irrelevant, in the larger landscape of America dominated by buildings of power that define the city skyline. As the speaker envisions, in time “we may” collect “all the bits and pieces into a larger memory” and rebuild “a great layered and labyrinthine” reimagined “international hotel of many rooms.” *I Hotel* itself is an imagined space as such, one that not only houses “the needs of temporary lives” but also haunts disappeared landscapes beyond the cityscape. In so doing, it forever embeds the geographies of displacement, homelessness, and resistance with the visions and voices of those who refuse to be removed, subjugated, or made invisible in the American landscape and cityscape.

In keeping with the ethical imagination of Yamashita's reimagined "international hotel of many rooms," I conclude with *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* to further open up this study to bring into "a larger memory" the voices of Southeast Asian refugees, whose experience compels us to expand our "intellectual apparatus" and extend our "ethical and imaginative engagements," to borrow Yaeger's phrases again. Set in different locations on the periphery of San Diego, and shifting between Vietnam, a refugee camp in Singapore, and the United States, *The Gangster* is indeed "off the grid" and outside the "taxonomies for cities and citizens" (Yaeger 15). But the experience of its characters highlights and complicates the predicaments of "exile," "diasporas," "displacement," and "homelessness" and enhances "the importance of inventing counterpublics, or communal alternatives to the official, bureaucratized polis" (Yaeger 13), precisely because of the lack of spatial and social conditions for such communities to be established as portrayed in the novel. The opening of *The Gangster* succinctly captures the constant relocations of Vietnam War refugees:

Linda Vista, with its rows of yellow houses, is where we eventually washed to shore. Before Linda Vista, we lived in the Green Apartment on Thirtieth and Adams, in Normal Heights. Before the Green Apartment, we lived in the Red Apartment on Forty-ninth and Orange, in East San Diego. Before the Red Apartment we weren't a family like we are a family now. We were in separate places, waiting for each other. Ma was standing on a beach in Vietnam while Ba and I were in California with four men who had escaped with us on the same boat. (3)⁷

The multiple locations and fragmented memories of the nameless places of their temporary dwelling reflect the Vietnam War refugees' plights of forced escape from their homeland, the disintegration of their families, and their further multilayered dislocations once they arrive in the United States.

Those conditions make it extremely hard, if not entirely impossible, for the newly arrived refugees to establish community networks.⁸ During the two years before her mother joins them, the narrator and her father "would go for walks around the neighborhood and stop to look at the window displays" when they couldn't sleep at night (111). Or they would visit the supermarket. While their *flânerie*, or rather aimless wandering, reflects their homelessness and loneliness, it is regarded as "strange" behavior as reported in the "Neighborhood News":

A Vietnamese man and a young girl were seen wandering the aisles of the Safeway Supermarket on University Avenue between the hours of midnight and 1 a.m.

According to the store manager, their behavior was “strange” but not in any way threatening. When asked to clarify, the manger explained, “Everything seemed to interest them. I mean, everything, from the TV dinners to the 10-pound bags of dog food.”

. . . They made no purchases and left shortly before 1 a.m., after the child, who was perhaps his daughter, lay down in the spice aisle while the man was absorbed with the different varieties of salt available.

They were last seen walking east toward Orange Street. The man was carrying the girl. (110)

The spectatorship, or *flânerie*, of the refugees in the supermarket past midnight produces no claim of right to a place in America, unlike that of the Chinese immigrants in *Chinatown Family*. Nor does it constitute a counter-discourse, as do the everyday activities of the immigrants or diasporans in the streets and other public spaces as portrayed in *Bone*, *Donald Duk*, *Manhattan Music*, and *Native Speaker*. Rather, the refugees become the object of the normative gaze of white America.

However, the Vietnam War refugees' wandering in the neighborhood and the supermarket inscribes their alienation, isolation, homelessness, and loss—irrecoverable personal and collective loss of family members by death or permanent separation, loss of homeland and a way of life that has vanished along with erased forests, villages, cities, and other landscapes in Vietnam. When the narrator's mother ponders on her life reduced to a status in the United States she could never have imagined in Vietnam, she thinks of the lost landscape of her homeland, wondering “what the forests were like before the American planes had come, flying low, raining something onto the trees that left them bare and dying.” “She remembered her father had once described to her the smiling broadness of leaves, jungles thick in the tangle of rich soil” (81). Their homelessness results not just from dislocations and alienation in the United States but also from the destruction of their home and homeland by the massive bombing of the U.S. military. The displaced Vietnamese father and daughter wandering the streets and supermarket aisles at night like ghosts of the war haunt American neighborhoods, untouched by the atrocities that U.S. military might inflicted on Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

The refugees themselves are haunted by their experiences of the war and by their losses. As the narrator's mother says to her daughter: "[W]ar is a bird with a broken wing flying over the countryside, trailing blood and burying crops in sorrow. . . . War has no beginning and no end. It crosses oceans like a splintered boat filled with people singing a sad song" (87). Moreover, their losses are exacerbated by racial discrimination and poverty, which are reflected in the environment of their everyday life in the United States. Lê embeds their experience of racial inequality in the girl narrator's perception of racially marked differences in residential areas and at school: "We live in a yellow house on Westinghouse Street. . . . Facing our row of houses, across a field of brown dirt, sits another row of yellow houses" (88). These rows of bungalows are abandoned navy housing built in the 1940s in San Diego. Since the 1980s, they have been used to "house Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees from the Vietnam War" (88). In contrast to "brown dirt," the new navy housing has lawns. The narrator links the difference in housing to the gaps in material, social, cultural, and academic capital between the refugees and their American neighbors: "There's new Navy Housing on Linda Vista Road, the long street that takes you out of here. We see the Navy people watering their lawns, their children riding pink tricycles up and down the culs-de-sac. . . . At school their kids are Most Popular, Most Beautiful, Most Likely to Succeed. Though there are more Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian kids at the school, in the yearbook we are not the most of anything" (88–89). When the narrator finally has a family life restored with the arrival of her mother, the family is evicted out of their home because the houses on their block "had a new owner who wanted to tear everything down and build better housing for the community" (96). They are thrown out and fenced out of their house and dispossessed again of a place they have made a home. Standing "on the edge of the chain-link fence" with her parents, watching a wrecking ball dance through their house, the narrator feels her whole fragile world crushed and buried (99). Unlike the elderly Chinese and Filipino tenants at the I-Hotel who had the strong, sustained support of community networks in the city, the Vietnamese refugee family has no organizations, no activists around to fight for their right to affordable housing. But the agency of protest resides in the narrator's telling the story of the Vietnamese War refugees displaced in American urban and suburban neighborhoods. As the narrator states: "There is not a trace of blood anywhere except here, in my throat, where I am telling you all this" (99).

Studies of urban literature seeking to expand the “ethical and imaginative engagements” with those “off the grid” of metropolises and outside of global cities in the North must include stories like the one this voice tells. In a way, *The Gangster* enacts what *I Hotel* seeks to accomplish: “To haunt a disappearing landscape. To forever embed this geography with our visions and voice” (605). Inclusion of the voices and experiences of Vietnam War refugees and refugees of other wars in the study of American urban space and city literature will enrich the growth of “a larger memory” in “rebuilding “a great layered and labyrinthine,” a new “imagined, international hotel of many rooms” as “the urban experiment of a homeless community built to house the needs of temporary lives,” to borrow again Yamashita’s words from *I Hotel* (605). As a result, critical readings of city literature can help open up urban space for the invisible, unheard, marginalized Others, including war refugees, to enter to inhabit and transform the “American space” with their geographies, voices, and visions.

Asian American city literature such as *I Hotel* and the other works examined in this study explore the possibilities of what Massey calls “radical democracy spatially” (“Thinking” 283). Against their collective experience of exclusion, segregation, confinement, and displacement in the U.S. nation-space, Asian American writers seek to inhabit the city otherwise by re-visioning America and rearticulating the politics of everyday practice. By refusing to accept spatially produced or reinforced racial, social, and environmental injustice, they actively participate in the making of a larger history and geography beyond segregated ghettos and the American city. Urban space in Asian American city literature is intricately local and global and irreducibly historical even as it is emergent and always open to change. Its writers’ many politics and variegated poetics of space demand a range of critical approaches to meet the challenges of this literature as well as those of the alarming urbanization of the planet—our divided and increasingly interdependent world.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- Epigraphs: Tajbakhsh xiv; Sassen, "Reading the City" 16.
1. These references are from the chapter "The Laws" in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, 153. I refer to other sources later in this chapter.
 2. The rules for granting U.S. citizenship provided by the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited naturalization to immigrants who were "free white persons." Race as a prerequisite for U.S. citizenship was not removed until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952.
 3. The period from 1882 to 1943 is usually referred to as "an age of exclusion" in the United States, beginning with the 1882 Chinese exclusion law, which was repealed in 1943. This period also saw the passages of numerous exclusionary laws targeted at the Chinese and other Asians. See *Entry Denied*, edited by Sucheng Chan.
 4. For excellent studies of the anti-Chinese city ordinances in California and Chinese immigrants' challenge to segregation laws, see P. M. Ong and McClain, particularly chaps. 2 and 9 in McClain.
 5. For a larger social and cultural context for *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, see C. Douglas, *Genealogy* and "Reading Ethnography."
 6. A study of Asian Americans' relationship to space in the United States cannot but include Japanese Americans, particularly the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps. But the magnitude of this subject is too complex to be included here, and my next book project focuses on Japanese American internment.
 7. For example, Kandice Chuh in her book *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* urges Asian Americanists "to rethink the spatial imagination organizing Asian American discourse." Her argument for rethinking "the spatial" focuses on "the imagined and practical relationship between nationness and territoriality that forms a cornerstone of the modern nation-state's operation" (86). In a similar vein, Rachel C. Lee's study *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* investigates "America" the nation-state from a gendered and ethnic-racial transnational perspective. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's close analyses of Asian American writers' portrayals of Chinatown and treatment of mobility are situated in racialized ghettos, ethnic enclaves, and the U.S. nation-space. I engage with Wong's readings, among others when relevant, in my examination of particular texts in this study.
 8. See L. Lowe's reading of Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, 120–27; and Palumbo-Liu, "Demarcations and Fissures: Reconstructing Space," chap. 8 in *Asian/American Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*.

9. While Shields suggests that the transformative potentials in the *fl,neur*'s encounter with the Stranger remain unrealized, I explore the transformative possibilities of the *fl,neuse*'s encounters with "foreigners" and the encounter of "the Stranger" as the *fl,neur* in the American metropolises.
10. I am indebted to Dominika Ferens for calling my attention to Sui Sin Far's publications under the title "The Woman about Town." Ferens also generously sent me copies of her transcription of these pieces as they appeared in the *Gall's Daily News Letter*.

1. "THE WOMAN ABOUT TOWN"

Epigraphs: de Certeau 115; McDowell 145.

1. Sui Sin Far used the term "Eurasian" and "half Chinese" for herself. See, e.g., Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" and "Sui Sin Far, the Half Chinese Writer, Tells of Her Career," in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and Other Writings*, 218–30, 288–89. For insightful analyses of Sui Sin Far's destabilizing representations of race, gender, and sexuality, see Cutter, "Empire and the Mind of the Child" and "Smuggling across the Borders."
2. The four pieces are titled "The Woman about Town, Dec. 14, 1896"; "The Woman about Town, Dec. 29, 1896"; "The Woman about Town, Dec. 30, 1896"; and "The Woman about Town, Jan. 4, 1897."
3. While working as a journalist for the *Montreal Star*, Sui Sin Far used her English name, Edith Eaton. Annette White-Parks also notes some practical reasons for Sui Sin Far to pass as white in North America and Jamaica (101, 33, 34–35). I use "Sui Sin Far" in this study to underline the choice Eaton made in acknowledging her Chinese heritage against the anti-Chinese environment of her time. I do not use "Sui" because it means "water" in Chinese. "Sui Sin Far" (Cantonese pronunciation) means literally "water fairy flower"—or narcissus in English.
4. By "spatiality," I refer to the actual and symbolic effects resulting from the ways lived spaces—both public and private—are organized, practiced, and represented. While the term includes what Edward W. Soja calls "inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography" (*Thirdspace* 1), my use of it throughout this study comes closest to the definition of *spatiality* in the *Oxford Dictionary of Geography*: "The effect that space has on actions, interactions, entities, concepts, and theories. Physical spatiality can also be metaphorical. It is used to show social power." *Oxford Dictionary of Geography*, <http://www.answers.com/topic/spatiality-1>.
5. See, e.g., Ling, "The Eaton Sisters," in *Between Worlds*; Shih; and Cutter, "Empire and the Mind of the Child" and "Smuggling across the Borders."
6. These quoted phrases are from Genthe, *As I Remember* 32.
7. For an excellent study of visual representations of San Francisco's Chinatown by both European Americans and Chinese Americans, see A. W. Lee.
8. See Shah.
9. For more information about U.S. discrimination laws against Asians, see H. Kim, *Asian American Literature*.

- 10 This quotation is from an anthropologist's review of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) published in *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*. See Ferens 50.
- 11 The quoted phrases are borrowed from Stallybrass and White 5.
- 12 All citations of Sui Sin Far's writing are from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and Other Writings*, edited and introduced by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. Subsequent references to this text are given parenthetically with page numbers.
- 13 According to sociologist Tomás Almaguer, Chinese children were included in the 1863 and 1864 California state legislation that prohibited "the entry of 'non-whites' into public schools." The state's educational laws "formally institutionalized a policy" of segregated schools in 1870. "This law remained in effect for the Chinese until 1929, . . . eight years after such segregation was rescinded for Indians and thirty-one years after blacks were no longer required to attend segregated public schools" (163).
- 14 Ferens, in her book *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*, rightly notes Sui Sin Far's problematic "compromise" and subversive representation of middle-class Chinese immigrant families.
- 15 For provocative analyses of biracial identities and interracial relations in Sui Sin Far's stories, see Ferens; Ling; White-Parks; Yin; Cutter, "Smuggling across the Borders"; R. C. Lee, "Journalistic Presentations of Asian Americans and Literary Responses"; and Teng, "Artifacts" and "Miscegenation and the Critique of Patriarchy."
- 16 See Sui Sin Far's autobiographical essay, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and Other Writings*.

2. CLAIMING RIGHT TO THE CITY

- Epigraphs: Massey, "Thinking" 284; Foucault 252.
- 1 Richard Jean So's archival research shows that in 1947 Pearl Buck and Richard Walsh, editor in chief of the John Day Publishing House, asked Lin to write "a new kind of a novel—a 'Chinese-American' novel that dealt exclusively with the 'experiences of the Chinese in America'" (So 40–41).
 - 2 According to Sucheng Chan, "The Chinese exclusion laws consisted of the original 1882 law, an 1884 amendment to it, two acts passed in 1888, the 1892 Geary Law, the 1893 McCreary amendment to the Geary Law, a 1902 law, and a 1904 law" (*Entry Denied* 109).
 - 3 Lin Yutang, *Chinatown Family*, introduced and edited by Chen Lok Chua. Subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically with page numbers only.
 - 4 Lin and his family, despite their privileged upper-class background, experienced racial discrimination in the United States. See Chen, introduction xiv–xv.
 - 5 See Park, *Race and Culture*, especially his essay "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups," 204–20. For critiques of Park's notions of assimilation, see Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*; C. Douglas, *Genealogy*; and J. Lin.
 - 6 These critics' perspectives as articulated in their respective works are referred to in various places in the chapters of this study.
 - 7 For the emergence of the "model minority" discourse in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, see E. H. Kim, *Asian American Literature* 178.
 - 8 In a way, the model minority narrative of *Chinatown Family* was influenced by Lin's

- social position in the elite class and by his white American friends' views of the "Chinese American novel." According to So, Lin and his family received help from Pearl Buck, whom Lin befriended in 1933 in Shanghai, and from Richard Walsh when they immigrated to the United States in 1935.
- 9 According to Paul Man Ong, in his thesis "The Chinese and the Laundry Laws: The Use and Control of Urban Space," Chinese washhouses in towns and cities of the late nineteenth-century United States became "targets for harsh regulations," which preceded zoning—the use of laws and "police power to separate incompatible land-uses" emerged in the twentieth century (3). For well-researched studies of city ordinances created to restrict the freedom of movement and the living space of the Chinese in U.S. cities, as well as Chinese Americans' fight for equality, see McClain and E. Lee.
 - 10 See, e.g., Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity"; and A. Ong.
 - 11 After working as a journalist from 1887 to 1898, Park went to Harvard to study psychology and philosophy and later went to Germany to further pursue his graduate studies in philosophy and sociology. He worked on race issues at Tuskegee Institute at the invitation of Booker T. Washington before eventually joining the faculty of the University of Chicago. For a well-researched study of Park's development as a sociologist, see Lal.
 - 12 Although the *flâneur*, according to Elizabeth Wilson, is usually identified as "an archetypal occupant and observer of the public sphere in the rapidly changing and growing great cities of nineteenth-century Europe," particularly Paris, other critics have argued for a seventeenth-century English literary tradition of the urban traveler in London and its influence on the French and American *flâneur* (Wilson 61). For a study of the *flâneur* in American literature and its relation to the English and French traditions of *flânerie*, see Brand.
 - 13 Frank Chin, a most vociferous critic and writer, attributes the apparent passivity of Asian Americans to their vulnerable position in the United States. See Chin, "Backtalk."
 - 14 For a provocative study of the central concepts and methodologies of Park's sociological theories and their impact on ethnographical writings by minority American writers, including Asian American writers, see C. Douglas, *Genealogy*.
 - 15 See Park's theorization of the "progressive and irreversible" (150) cycle of race relations in his chapter "Our Racial Frontier on the Pacific," in *Race and Culture*, 138–51.
 - 16 Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Metropolis: Centre and Symbol of Our Times*, ed. Philip Kasinitz. The citations in the text are from Bridge and Watson, "City Publics" 369.
 - 17 For a critique of the "myths of mobility" in American literature and a provocative analysis of spatial mobility in Asian American literature, see S. C. Wong, *Reading*.
 - 18 For an in-depth study of the transformation of Chinese women in the United States during World War II, see Yung, *Unbound Feet*, chap. 5.
 - 19 I am indebted to Floyd Cheung for calling my attention to S. G. Davis's book in his provocative essay "Performing Exclusion and Resistance."

3. "OUR INSIDE STORY" OF CHINATOWN

Epigraphs: L. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 122; Fletcher 3.

- 1 During the Chinese Exclusion period, Chinese immigrants who were forced to circumvent the law by using false documents in their applications were called "paper sons," "paper

- daughters,” or “paper wives.” Tom Fung, Jr., Eva, and Mama Fung in *Chinatown Family*, and Leon in *Bone*, are such examples.
- 2 For examples of problematic ethnographical representations of San Francisco’s Chinatown, which enact the “model minority” myth, see P. Lowe, *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), and J. S. Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945). For insightful analyses of these two books, see E. H. Kim, *Asian American Literature* 66–72; S. C. Wong, *Reading*, 63–70; Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* 138–46; and C. Douglas, *Genealogy* 103–14.
 - 3 Further references to *Bone* are given parenthetically without the title.
 - 4 For a well-researched study of the history of San Francisco’s Chinatown through representations of artistic works from 1850 to 1950, see A. W. Lee.
 - 5 See Eng, *Racial Castration*.
 - 6 See Erika Lee’s discussion of the fundamental difference between Angel Island and Ellis Island in *At America’s Gates*.

4. CHINATOWN AS AN EMBATTLED PEDAGOGICAL SPACE

- Epigraphs: Massey, “Politicising Space and Place” 120; Chin, *Donald Duk* 89.
- 1 For an in-depth study of the characteristics of the short story cycle in Asian American and Asian Canadian writings, see R. G. Davis, *Transcultural Reinventions*. Davis’s book, however, does not include Chin’s work.
 - 2 For an informative discussion of these and other writings about Chinatown, see E. H. Kim, *Asian American Literature*, particularly chaps. 4 and 6.
 - 3 For similar rhetoric, see also Chin, “Don’t Pen Us Up in Chinatown.”
 - 4 Fung’s article focuses on Chin’s novel *Donald Duk*. For an insightful and in-depth analysis of “The Eat and Run Midnight People,” particularly the sexual politics embedded in the discourse on food, see Xu 54–61.
 - 5 Chin enacts an extended culinary discourse as an alternative mode to “food pornography” in his novel *Donald Duk*, which I discuss later in this chapter.
 - 6 For well-researched analyses of the construction of the model minority during the Cold War era, see R. G. Lee, chap. 5; Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, chap. 5; and Lui, “Rehabilitating Chinatown.”
 - 7 For a well-researched study of the Charlie Chan character in Hollywood films in relation to racial politics in American history and culture, see Y. Huang.
 - 8 For detailed critical analyses of Chin’s intertextual appropriation of a warrior Chinese model of masculinity from the Chinese classic *Water Margin*, see Fung and Xu.
 - 9 Subsequent citations from Chin’s *Donald Duk* are given parenthetically with page numbers only.
 - 10 For more information about the popular Asian American Forbidden City nightclub in downtown San Francisco in the 1930s and 1940s, see A. W. Lee, chap. 6.
 - 11 The multicultural Cantonese opera also articulates an aggressive masculinity associated with violence as embedded in “the American cowboy hat, bullwhip and sixgun” (53). Since much critical attention has been devoted to Chin’s reiteration of an aggressive masculinity, my reading focuses on an important, yet less discussed, aspect of Chin’s narrative strategy in the novel.

- 12 For an insightful psychoanalytical reading of *Donald Duk*, particularly Donald's dream sequence, see Eng, *Racial Castration* 69–103.

5. INHABITING THE CITY AS EXILES

Epigraphs: Bulosan, *Sound* 198; Santos, *What the Hell For* 134.

- 1 According to Kaplan, similar arguments about American exceptionalism are made by Anders Stephanson in *Manifest Destiny* and Nikhil Pal Singh in "Culture/Wars."
- 2 *Pensionados* were government-sponsored Filipino students, who were sent to study at universities in the United States and were entitled to assume important roles in the government when they returned to the Philippines. Santos himself was a *pensionados*. According to Erika Lee and Judy Yung, the U.S. government established a "pensionado" program in the hope that the "pensionados would return to the Philippines to complete the process of Americanization in the islands and to take up leadership positions in the Philippines." See E. Lee and Yung, 275–76.
- 3 For the complete lyrics of the song "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," see <http://www.romantic-lyrics.com/li94.shtml> (accessed June 5, 2011).
- 4 For an in-depth study of the geopolitical construction of the Philippines as an "unincorporated" territory of the United States, see Isaac.
- 5 For Williams's discussion of "structures of feeling," see his *Marxism and Literature*, 131–32.
- 6 For Kaplan's works on U.S. imperialism, see Kaplan, *Anarchy*; and Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures*.
- 7 For more information about the Philippine-American War and the subsequent U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines, see Miller and Lynch.
- 8 See, for instance, San Juan, "Mapping" and "Cult of Ethnicity."
- 9 For more specific legal information and critical analysis of the legalized colonial status of the Philippines as an "unincorporated territory" of the United States, see Isaac; and H. Kim, *A Legal History*.
- 10 Subsequent references to *What the Hell For* are given parenthetically without the title.
- 11 For an in-depth study of the post-1965 generation of Filipino immigrants in Daly City, outside of San Francisco, see Vergara.
- 12 Isaac references May 92.
- 13 Rick Bonus in his groundbreaking study *Locating Filipino Americans* (2000) calls critical attention to the fact that rather than play the role of "assimilating" immigrants into mainstream America, community newspapers for many Filipino Americans are sites of ethnic community building and "rich and vibrant sources of empowerment" (162).
- 14 *Pinoy* is a slang term for Filipinos, and *Pinay* is the feminine counterpart. According to Benito M. Vergara, Jr., the term was used by Filipino labor immigrants in the United States and also began to appear in print in the Philippines during the 1920s and 1930s. This term captures the transnational dimension of the Filipino identity. See Vergara 15–16.
- 15 The phrase "possessive investment in whiteness" is quoted from Lipsitz 1998.
- 16 For a well-researched book on San Francisco's Manilatown and its relationship to Filipino migrant workers and Filipino American community activism, see Habal.

- 17 The complete text of “Mi Último Adiós” in English is available at <http://www.philippines-travel-guide.com/mi-ultimo-adios.html> (accessed June 20, 2011).
- 18 Razil, “Mi Último Adiós,” online.
- 19 For Filipino American students’ activism in the protest against the demolition of the I-Hotel, see Habal. I examine the historical and political implications of the I-Hotel in the concluding chapter.
- 20 “Mi Último Adiós,” online.
- 21 For an informative account of the historical conditions that gave rise to the Philippine Revolution, see San Juan, *Crisis in the Philippines*.

6. THE CITY AS A “CONTACT ZONE”

Epigraphs: Alexander, *Shock of Arrival* 6; Said 7.

- 1 Alexander is referring to Allen’s film *Annie Hall*.
- 2 Subsequent parenthetical references to *Manhattan Music* are given without the book title.
- 3 The “Weathermen in Greenwich Village” refers to the Weather Underground, an American radical left group responsible for the bombing of a Greenwich Village townhouse on March 6, 1970.
- 4 Oh situates Alexander’s reference to racially motivated violence in an increase in anti-Indian violence in Jersey City during the late 1980s, including the murder of Navroze Mody by four white teenagers. See Oh 28, 19.
- 5 See E. Lee and Yung 149.
- 6 For well-documented research in the history and experience of South Asian immigrants in the United States, see E. Lee and Yung, chap. 4.
- 7 For a collection of compelling testimonies, essays, and reflections on the aftermath of 9/11 and on the formation of post-9/11 alliances, see *Asian American Literary Review*, “Special Issue: Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of Sept. 11” (2011).

7. “THE LIVING VOICE OF THE CITY”

Epigraphs: Massey, “Spatial Disruptions” 222; Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 319–20.

- 1 Following the verdict that exonerated officers of the Los Angeles Police Department in the beating of Rodney King, an African American, which was videotaped by George Holiday, who lived near the scene, a series of riots broke out on April 29, 1992, in South-Central Los Angeles and lasted for six days. It is worth noting that the looting, arson, assault, and killings during the riots took place in an inner-city neighborhood whose residents were mostly racial minorities and immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Korean American stores in the neighborhood suffered heavy property damage. For well-researched and cogently argued analyses of the apparently “black-Korean” conflict, particularly the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, see Cho; E. H. Kim, “Home”; and K. Cheung, “(Mis)interpretations.” While some scholars define the riots as a “race riot,” others consider them an “urban uprising.” For multiple perspectives on the complex conditions for civil unrest, see Gooding-Williams.

- 2 Subsequent parenthetical references to *Native Speaker* are given without the title.
- 3 Rachel C. Lee offers a different perspective on John Kwang as a figure who “presumes and burnishes the ideal self-image of the US nation-state as a kind of heteroglossic utopia” (“Reading” 349).
- 4 R. C. Lee in her essay on *Native Speaker* also emphasizes the effect of the “disciplinary power” and “authority surveillance” on the subject formation of Asian Americans (“Reading” 345).
- 5 For a discussion on the ways in which Henry’s job as a spy functions as the novel’s “guiding metaphor” for the ethnic immigrant’s “stance as a watchful outsider in American society,” see Engles (27).
- 6 The conflicts between black customers and Korean store owners in the novel evoke largely African American boycotts of stores owned by Korean immigrants in New York and other cities and allude to the 1992 riots in Los Angeles. For a well-researched study of these conflicts and *Native Speaker*, see Song, *Strange Future*.
- 7 There are numerous studies on the formations of the inner-city geographies and political economy of New York City and Los Angeles, particularly the socioeconomic conditions that gave rise to blacks’ boycotts of Korean stores and the conditions that led to the 1992 riots in Los Angeles. See, e.g., C. J. Kim; Song; Gooding-Williams; E. T. Chang and Leong; and P. M. Ong, Bonacich, and L. Cheng.

8. MAPPING THE GLOBAL CITY AND “THE OTHER SCENE” OF GLOBALIZATION

Epigraphs: Sassen, “Analytic Borderlands” 190; Massey, “Politicising Space and Place” 120.

- 1 For example, Rachel Adams considers *Tropic* representative of “the larger shift from post-modernism to globalism as a dominant conceptual and thematic force in contemporary American fiction” (251). Min Hyung Song notes that in addition to representing “American literary globalism,” “*Tropic of Orange*, published just a few years after the 1992 Los Angeles riots, has also become the prime example of the transnationalization of Asian American literature’s intrinsic interethnic creative impulse . . . and thus an illustration of a literary form that is at once transnational and locally contingent” (“Becoming Planetary” 558).
- 2 For in-depth discussions of NAFTA, see Henrikson and F. Mayer.
- 3 As early as 1999, Rachel C. Lee in her book *The Americas of Asian American Literature* examines the ways that Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* “thoroughly displaces the East-West dichotomy” and undermines the U.S.-centered definition of Asian American literature (107).
- 4 For instance, the critics Ursula K. Heise and Caroline Rody both employ an ecological concept in examining the local-global connections in Yamashita’s work, with Heise focusing on *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and Rody on both *Tropic of Orange* and *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*.
- 5 See M. Davis, *Ecology of Fear*.
- 6 Subsequent parenthetical references to Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* are given without the title.

- 7 Soja in *Postmetropolis* offers a well-researched discussion of a number of post-1992 community-based multiracial coalitions of the working poor for “spatial justice” and “environmental justice” with regard to housing and the geographic distribution of hazardous materials.
- 8 The statistics on Koreatown in Los Angeles are from *Koreatown on the Edge: Immigrant Dreams and Realities in One of Los Angeles’ Poorest Communities*, a 2005 report by the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates in association with the sociologist Edward J. Park, a professor of Asian American studies and American studies at Loyola Marymount University. For the transformation of the black ghetto of South-Central Los Angeles as a result of the influx of Latino populations, see Soja, *Postmetropolis*. Soja also discusses the growing presence of Asians in the city and the situation of Los Angeles’s most densely populated barrios, where at least a million Mexican and Central American immigrants have clustered in overcrowded buildings since the 1970s.
- 9 See Gooding-Williams; and Song, *Strange Future*.
- 10 See chapter 7, endnote 1.
- 11 For a focused study on the profound impact of Latino immigrants on cities in the United States, see M. Davis, *Magical Urbanism*.
- 12 Skid Row refers to the fifty blocks nestled between Main, Third, and Alameda Streets in downtown Los Angeles. According to Angela Blakely, a staff reporter on the Safer Cities Initiative, for the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism of the University of Southern California, “Skid Row is home to over 4,000 homeless men and women—a number that has risen in the past two decades and continues to rise.” General Jeff, founder of Issues and Solutions—an organization to help people in Skid Row—and also a resident representative for Skid Row serving on the Board of Directors for the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council, refers to South-Central as a “direct pipeline” for Skid Row. Ground zero of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, South-Central was considered “the breeding ground for poverty, drugs, and crime.” Its population has a majority of blacks, a fairly large number of Latinos, and some Asians. See Angela Blakely’s report “L.A. Riots: Little Change for South Central’s Pipeline to Skid Row.” Blakely’s piece is part of a special Neon Tommy series on revisiting the upheaval twenty years ago surrounding the Rodney King trial. For Soja’s discussion of Skid Row in relation to the changing ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles, see *Postmetropolis*, 252–55.

CONCLUSION

- 1 For a documentary about the anti-eviction struggle, see Curtis Choy’s *The Fall of the I-Hotel*.
- 2 This reference is from the Asian American Movement Fortieth Anniversary collection from the archives of the Asian Community Center (once located on Kearny Street in San Francisco). *Asian American Movement 1968* (blog), <http://aam1968.blogspot.com/2008/01/third-world-student-strikes-at-sfsu-ucb.html> (accessed December 14, 2012).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 For an insightful analysis of the complex involvement of foreign and domestic capital and the state in the restructuring of “Asian/American space,” including the urban renewal of San Francisco, the overdevelopment of New York City’s Chinatown, and a new kind of ethnic

- enclave in Monterey Park, California, see Palumbo-Liu's *Asian/American Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, especially chap. 8.
- 5 For a provocative discussion of the effects and implications of the I-Hotel, especially the process of creating an archive of Asian American history through collective efforts, see Palumbo-Liu, "Embedded Lives."
 - 6 See Massey's article "Thinking Radical Democracy Spatially."
 - 7 Subsequent parenthetical references to *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* are given without the title.
 - 8 I do not mean to suggest that Vietnam War refugees are unable to form communities. For an example of the grassroots community-based transformative agency of Vietnamese Americans in a New Orleans neighborhood and their fight for environmental justice, see S. Leo Chiang's 2009 documentary *A Village Called Versailles*. See also *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America* (2009) by Karin Aguilar-San Juan. Aguilar-San Juan shows that places like Little Saigons are sites for community building and for defining Vietnamese American identity.

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