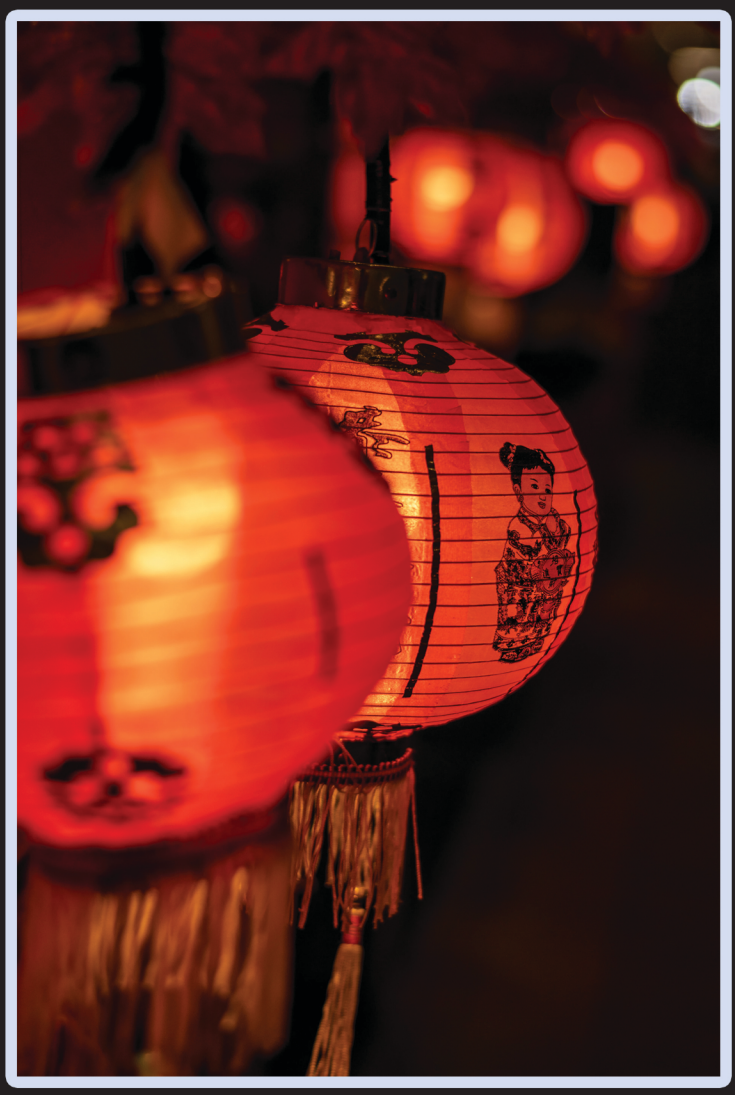
JAST

JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES OF TURKEY



NUMBER 56

FALL 2021

ASIAN AMERICAN ISSUE

Journal of American Studies of Turkey

A semiannual publication of the American Studies Association of Turkey, Journal of American Studies of Turkey is an international journal. It operates with a blind peer referee system. It publishes transdisciplinary work in English by scholars of any nationality on American literature, history, art, music, film, popular culture, institutions, politics, economics, geography, and related subjects. Contributors need not be members of the American Studies Association of Turkey.

Articles which cross conventional borders between academic disciplines are particularly welcome, as are comparative studies of American and other cultures. The journal also publishes notes, comments, book and film reviews. Details about the submission of manuscripts are provided on the back (inside) cover of this issue.

The American Studies Association of Turkey disclaims responsibility for statements, whether of fact or opinion, made by contributors.

The American Studies Association of Turkey was founded in 1988 to promote American Studies in Turkey and where possible to assist Turkish and non-Turkish scholars working in the field. It also aims to further research and publication in Turkish-American comparative studies. Enquiries concerning applications for membership should be addressed to the Office of the Secretary, American Studies Association of Turkey, Cinnah Caddesi 20, TAD Binası Kat 4 Oda 48, Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey.

Journal of American Studies of Turkey (JAST) yaygın süreli bir yayın olup, 6 ayda bir İngilizce olarak yayımlanmaktadır.

Yayın sahibi : Türkiye Amerikan Etüdleri Derneği adına Bergüzar Meldan TANRISAL

Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü : Defne ERSİN TUTAN

Cover Photo/Kapak Fotoğrafı: Glenn Villas on Unsplash; Used through Unsplash License

Journal of American Studies of Turkey is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography, TÜBİTAK/ULAKBİM TR Dizin, and the Classificazione ANVUR delle riviste scientifiche (Italy). It also appears in the Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and the MLA Directory of Periodicals.

Publisher:
On behalf of the American Studies Association.
President, Meldan Tanrısal
Editor in Chief:
Defne Ersin Tutan
Address of ASAT:
Cinnah Caddesi No:20, Oda 48,
Kavaklıdere, Ankara, Turkey
Printed by
Başkent Klişe ve Matbaacılık Bayındır Sokak 30/E
Kızılay- Ankara Tel: 0312 431 54 90
Date: November 2021

Yayın Sahibi:
Türkiye Amerikan Etüdleri Derneği Adına,
Meldan Tanrısal
Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü:
Defne Ersin Tutan
Yayın İdare Adresi:
Cinnah Caddesi, No: 20, Oda 48,
Kavaklıdere, Ankara
Basıldığı Yer ve Matbaa:
Başkent Klişe ve Matbaacılık Bayındır Sokak 30/E
Kızılay- Ankara Tel: 0312 431 54 90
Basım Tarihi: Kasım 2021

ISSN 1300-6606

List of Contributors

NADIA ABDELHADI

Nadia Abdelhadi is a PhD student in Intersectionality Studies. She is currently enrolled at the Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem, Algeria, where she teaches American contemporary literature.

YASMINA DJAFRI

Yasmina Djafri is an Associate Professor of Literatures in English at the Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem, Algeria, where she teaches British literature and stylistics. She has a particular interest in Francophone literature and has worked on notable Algerian writers such as Assia Djebar and Malika Mokkedem. She is also interested in discovering all kinds of literary texts produced by female writers whatever their origin.

FATMA EREN

Fatma Eren is a PhD candidate in the Department of American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University, where she currently works as a Research Assistant. She earned her BA from the same department in 2013, and in 2018, received her MA with a thesis entitled "Stigmatized Faces and Identities in Cecile Pineda's *Face* and Ariel Dorfman's *Mascara*." Her research interests include identity studies and immigration experiences in contemporary Vietnamese American fiction.

NİLSEN GÖKÇEN

Nilsen Gökçen received her BA and MA from Ege University in 1984 and 1990 respectively, and her PhD from Kent State University, English Department in 1994. She has been teaching a variety of areas including ethnicity and race, animal studies, women's literature, and contemporary American novel at Dokuz Eylül University, American Culture and Literature Department. Since 1995, where she currently works as an Associate Professor. Her book entitled *Encountering the Animal: Explorations in American Literature* came out in 2015.

CAROLE MARTIN

Carole Martin is currently employed at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, where she started her doctorate in American Literary History as a member of the Graduate School of Language and Literature, Class of Literature. Her dissertation project focuses on contemporary Vietnamese American literature. Previously, she completed her BA and MA in English and Anthropology at the Universities of Basel and Vienna. Her main research interests lie in the interdisciplinary fields of refugee studies, transnational migration, and postcolonial theory.

GÜL VARLI KARAARSLAN

Gül Varlı Karaarslan graduated from the Department of American Culture and Literature at Başkent University, where she has been working as a Research Assistant since 2014. She completed an MS degree at the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at Ankara University and an MA degree in British Cultural Studies at Hacettepe University. She is currently pursuing her PhD degree in American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University. Her main areas of interest are women's literature, modern drama and food and gender studies.

Journal of American Studies of Turkey
Number 56 (Fall 2021)
Table of Contents

JAST, 2021; 56:1 - 2

ORCID# 0000-0002-9863-3636

Editorial: A Glance at the Asian American Experience

Defne Ersin Tutan

In a news piece published as recently as October 18, 2021, entitled "Inside the N.Y.C. Neighborhood with the Fastest Growing Asian Population," Nicole Hong reports that "Long Island City, [...], is a microcosm of a sweeping demographic shift: a booming Asian population that has become the fastest growing racial group in the country and in New York. The nearly 11,000 Asians who live in the neighborhood make up about 34% of its population." Accordingly, "the surge in Asian residents" is not only transforming neighborhoods but also reshaping the "housing market, small businesses and political representation" (Hong). With its positive overtones, which, after decades, if not centuries, of injustice and misrepresentation come as a surprise, the news piece seems to be attesting to the changing attitudes towards Asian Americans, though it is too little too late.

Starting in mid-19th century with the arrival of Chinese immigrants as contracted laborers, counteracted shortly thereafter by the Chinese Exclusion Act, the history of Asian immigrants in the United States is a story of exclusion, discrimination, wrongful treatment, and despair. Yet, at the same time, it is one of determination, unyielding hard work, discipline, and humility. From the dehumanized status of "yellow peril," Asian Americans have risen to that of the "highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States," according to a 2012 extensive survey by the Pew Research Center ("The Rise of Asian Americans"). The Report also states that "[t]hey are more satisfied than the general public with their lives, finances and the direction of the country, and they place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success" ("The Rise of Asian Americans"). Moreover, "[l]ooking forward, arrivals from Asia are projected to comprise a greater share of all immigrants, becoming the largest foreign-born group by 2055" (Hanna and Batalova).

Such a minuscule reminiscence of the Asian American experience is drastically deficient in reflecting either the diversity of the Asian American communities or their invaluable contributions to the making of the American culture and identity. So is this Issue! What we set out to endeavor and what we have come to achieve tell two different stories, running parallel with the experiences of the community it sheds a light on. Our humble hope is that, by presenting insight into the lives and literatures of Japanese, Vietnamese, German-Panamian-Chinese, Bengali, and Korean Americans, the Issue will lure readers, as well as scholars, into the exceptional experiences represented, and stimulate further research in the field, to be included in future issues of *JAST*.

In the meantime, and as much as ever, Emma Lazarus's verse, engraved at the base of Lady Liberty, holds true – for diverse communities in the United States, as well as for diverse scholars in American Studies, as *JAST* aims to remain the bearer of light:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door! (Lazarus, 184)

Works Cited

Hanna, Mary and Jeanne Batalova. "Immigrants from Asia in the United States." March 10, 2021. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrants-asia-united-states-2020. Accessed 15 Oct. 2021.

Hong, Nicole. "Inside the N.Y.C. Neighborhood with the Fastest Growing Asian Population." *New York Times*. Published Oct. 18, 2021. Updated Oct. 19, 2021. https://www. nytimes.com/2021/10/18/nyregion/long-island-city-asian-population.html?search ResultPosition=1. Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.

Lazarus, Emma. "The New Colossus." Ed. David Lehman. *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

"The Rise of Asian Americans." Pew Research Center. June 19, 2012. https://www.pew research. org /social-trends/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/. Accessed 11 Oct. 2021.

***JAST*, 2021; 56: 3 - 22**
Submitted: 21.05.2021
Accepted: 24.09.2021
ORCID# 0000-0002-2919-5716
ORCID# 0000-0001-5384-853X

The Buddha in the Attic (2011) by Julie Otsuka: An Intersectional Reading

Yasmina Djafri and Nadia Abdelhadi

Abstract

While this article is not another lament on the murkiness of intersectionality, neither theoretically nor analytically, it is a contention that the interplay of various identity markers undeniably contributes to sketch a unique painful woman experience that deserves considerable reflection. In this respect, Julie Otsuka's fictional work; *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), could be read through an intersectional lens that opens ground for the interrogation of a gendered corrupted past, a past that holds *the lot* of racial immigration. This article, accordingly, operates on the historiographic nuance of this fictional work, whereby Julie Otsuka's ventures to excavate forgotten stories of former Japanese immigrant women during the Second World War. With the reliance on an unconventional narrative structure; reported from the perspective of the first plural personal pronoun 'we'-referred to as the 'choral narrator'- Julie Otsuka employs a narrative mode which helps individual subjectivities collide very subtly to celebrate a collective consciousness that desperately seeks recognition and identification. Throughout the narrative process, Otsuka re-imagines, extrapolates, even manipulates and selects elements of history by accentuating the painful experiences of these diasporic subjects as Japanese immigrant women struggling to find their place in America, regardless of the disillusionment that emanates from the consequences of the odd junctions of their lives, delineating the contours of oppression, discrimination and other forms of social inequality and personal malaise. Based on the postulate that

Otsuka appropriates the stories of former Japanese immigrant women as she mourns their lives in America and commemorates their resistance, two main issues are at the core of this debate: how is it that Otsuka highlights the particular interplay that oscillates between gender, race, and immigration in the lives of her women ancestors? And, how would her resort to the past help her understand the present of the diasporic subjects in contemporaneity?

Keywords: Identity, Intersectionality, Japanese Women, Immigration

Julie Otsuka'nın *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) Romanı: Kesişimsel Bir Okuma

Öz

Bu makale kesimşimselliğin anlaşılması güç doğasından yakınmak veya bu durumun teorik veya analitik bir analizini yapmak yerine, kesişimselliğin bir kadının kendine özgü üzücü tecrübesinin anlatımına farklı kimlik öğelerinin etkileşimi üzerinden sağladığı katkı üzerine düşünmeye değer bir tartışma sunar. Bu bağlamda, Julie Otsuka'nın *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) romanı, kadın tecrübesi özelinde ırksal göçün beraberinde getirdiği hasara uğramış geçmişin sorgulanabilmesi için kesişimsel bir bakış açısından okunabilir. Bu çalışma, bu kurmaca eserin tarihsel detaylarını Julie Otsuka'nın İkinci Dünya Savaşı esnasında Japon Amerikalı kadın göçmenlerin hikayelerini ortaya çıkarma girişimleri üzerinden analiz eder. Eserin "koro anlatıcı" olarak geçen birinci çoğul kişinin bakış açısına dayandırılan alışılmadık yapısı, Julie Otsuka'nın, çaresizce tanınma ve özdeşleşme bekleyen ortak bilinci kutlamak adına bireysel öznellikleri çarpıştırmasına yardım eder. Otsuka, anlatım sürecinde Amerika'da kendilerine bir yer bulmak için mücadele veren Japon göçmen kadınlar olan diasporik öznelerinin üzücü tecribelerine vurgu yaparak, baskı, ayrımcılık veya diğer sosyal eşitsizlik ve kişisel sorunlarla şekillenen yaşam tecrübeleri sonucunda yaşadıkları aydınlanmalara bakmaksızın tarihsel öğeleri zihninde yeniden canlandırır, tahminler yürütür, hatta bazılarını seçer ve onlara amacı doğrultusunda yeni anlamlar yükler. Otsuka'nın Amerikada'ki yaşam mücadelelerini ve dirençlerini andığı Japon göçmen kadınların hikayelerini uyarladığı varsayımına dayanan bu tartışmanın temelinde iki soru yatar: Otsuka kadın atalarının

hayatlarında cinsiyet, ırk ve göç tecrübeleri arasındaki etkileşimi nasıl yansıtır? Otsuka'nın geçmişe yeniden bakışı diasporik öznelerinin şimdiki hayatlarını anlamaya nasıl yardımcı olur?

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Kesişimsellik, Japon Kadınları, Göç

> *It is through recollection that we actively appropriate the past. But this appropriation is always an interpretation of the past, a selective and imaginative retelling of it from the outlook of the present. The past is a tribute to the very meaning of the present.*
>
> *Lara 1998, 43*

Introduction

In her fictional work *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), the Japanese American Julie Otsuka ventures to re-fashion the history of a group of forgotten Japanese women seemingly prejudiced by the vicissitudes of an alien culture, which promised them a better life than the one they were deemed to live in their homeland, namely Japan. Otsuka's writings, notably *When the Emperor was Divine* and *The Buddha in the Attic*, seem to fall with a category of committed works of literature which not only do aim at memorializing (Leonte 2017) a tarnished history but also at accentuating the historiographic intention behind. Otsuka is neither obsessed by the accuracy of the historical facts she recounts nor is she interested in verifying the authenticity of the stories she retells, she is rather promoting a *literature of resistance*. The latter favours "the fabulation upon factual elements being implemented into and within a fictional account that leads to multifold/ multi-interpretative comprehension, enabling the readers to make up their own finality through the open-closure endings" (Larbi 16). Otsuka re-imagines the corrupted gendered past of the groups of anonymous women who travelled from Japan to America during the last century seeking solace, seeking happiness, seeking love: their husbands to be.

Known as the history of picture bride practice in the past century, Japanese young women were highly encouraged to embark in long-distance marriage arrangements where the principal protagonist,

notably the Japanese groom, was not present. On the basis of a mere photograph, these brides-to-be received long letters which portrayed an over embellished ideal life in America, where the husbands to be pointed at all the markers of a successful life of the immigrant[1] there, they wrote "I bought a beautiful house…I own a farm. I operate a hotel. I am the president of a large bank. I left Japan several years ago to start my own business and provide you for well" (Otsuka 10). Only then, these young women would officially immigrate to America to marry their male counterparts there and save them from debauchery, highly apprehended by the Japanese culture. Besides, because the American government did not allow interracial marriages, the Japanese government supported the practice hoping to preserve the Japanese family unity. However, this same practice entailed once more that ideal patriarchal principles were being achieved to the detriment of young innocent women's hopes (Tanaka 2002). The concept of marriage was denied its privacy, it was rather reduced to a mere contract, which involved arrangement and convenience and occulted individual will. Otsuka's narrative presents no single protagonist; it rather renders all characters equally important stressing their common painful fate. They are women who share their sufferings in a spirit of solidarity and sisterhood.

In an unorthodox narrative structure, the text echoes the voices of a group of nameless women who do not long for identification (Jobert 2015), for they consider their fate as one. The polyphonic tone of the text makes it appeal to any reader[2], notably any female reader whose life is impregnated by the burden of oppression. Otsuka tells the stories of these women under a forceful choral "we" to make their experiences collide and sound very similar despite the singularities which could demarcate every individual woman's experience,

> The story of the Picture brides is given greater political and rhetorical power through its collective narration- its specificities requiring a special narrative voice- and also because it has been rendered fictionally, this produces an artistic, dramatic work with a wider reach than the many historical sources upon which it is based." (Maxey 9)

The focal point of the present discussion revolves around the junctions of complexity that the interplay of gender and race engendered in the midst of the immigration experience in the past and that is still operating on the lives of the diasporic community. Urged by

the historiographic intention to correct the prejudices of the past, we hypothesize that Otsuka resorts to highlight the various intersections of pain and oppression her Japanese female ancestors have lived. In view of that, reading *The Buddha in the Attic* through the lenses of Intersectionality could help decipher the gendered corrupted past of the Japanese immigrant women.

Our reflection will progress as follows: first, we will be exposing the background and the specificities of this relatively recent approach, namely "Intersectionality," which took at its charge the claim that the interplay of various identity markers does hamper human lives at many levels. This said, we will be attempting then to point at the murkiness of "Intersectionality" both theoretically and analytically, and most importantly, we will be advocating rather its usefulness as a methodological tool to highlight the distinctiveness of each individual experience, mainly a female one. Secondly, we will be discussing the historiographic interest of the author behind excavating Japanese women stories of the past. Finally, we will be pointing at the unconventional structure of *The Buddha in the Attic* in terms of stages of complexity showing how these minority groups of women have lived and negotiated every single experience since they first came to America highly excited to end up deeply disillusioned.

From Social Identity to Intersectionality

As a recent social construct, the current idea of "identity" is rather a complicated one. Even though one knows how to use the word more or less correctly in everyday discourse, it proves quite complex to give an accurate definition of the wide range of its various meanings, for the fundamental paradox in the concept of identity is inherent to the term itself. Given the intense interest in identity across a broad spectrum of disciplines such as psychology, politics, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, scholars have all endeavoured to provide an answer to the question, "Who am I?"; a question raised both at the individual and the collective levels, at least once in one's existence. Considered almost infinitely negotiable, the attempts to elucidate this inquiry have just proved how multifaceted and complicated the issue is[3].

We argue below that we can refer to one of the most popular and useful sociological understandings of identity with particular

emphasis on the role that social groups play in shaping how individuals perceive and view themselves. From the Latin root "idem," meaning "the same," the term implies both similarity and difference, thus, the word "identity," as used today, has two distinct but entangled meanings and much of the force and interest of the concept evolve principally on the implicit question related to the extent to which these meanings intertwine. It is important to draw attention to the necessity to distinguish between "individual" and "social" identities, as the two differ at levels of categorization, which equally are two major components of the self.[4] When seen as individual, identity is something unique to each one of us and it is what differentiates one person from another through personal self-descriptions that concern specific individual characteristics and are expressed as adjectives and abstract categories (e.g. skills, traits, tastes, interests and bodily characteristics). However, when perceived from a social lens, identity becomes a category referring to a group of people designated by at least one label that is commonly used either by the individuals themselves, or by others, or both in terms of shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories, notably in instances such as: "American," "French," "Catholic," "women," or "men."

It is then necessary to acknowledge that identity is multi-layered and that the interaction of race and gender, as two of its major constituents among other markers, represent the main debate that has instigated the present research. Besides, it is in an attempt to understand how the overlapping of a race, ethnicity and gender shapes the ebbs and flows of a person's perception of the self, the Japanese immigrant women in our case, that we have pondered on an in-depth investigation of this relatively recent analytical tool named Intersectionality.

In its most rigorous and inclusive expressions, Intersectionality has been described as a concept, paradigm, approach, tool, pathway and theory and while some criticise its framework as not sufficiently empirical, others see it as suitable with great analytical potential. The term was originally used in order to address the marginalization of black women and became an axiom of Black feminist theory with tremendous popularity moving across time and beyond geographic and national boundaries. Indeed, its wide application has fostered scholarly disputes leading eventually to valuable insights into the intricate workings of multiple forms of social inequalities not only at the heart

of the legal system, but also at the level of critical inquiry including the field of literary criticism.

First mooted in academic circles in the late 1980s by the American legal scholar W. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept was later popularized among female social justice discourse by Patricia Hill Collins as, "an analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women" (299). The term Intersectionality caught on like wildfire and came to be regarded as "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far" (Mc Call 2005). In other words, Intersectionality was to be deployed to understand and explain, resist and remedy those injuries resulting, most often than not, from the unequal distribution of power. In fact, issues like race, gender and class were once regarded as separate from each other. Now, these "axes of identity," in addition to other elements such as ethnicity, nation, age, and sexuality intersect and permeate a person's life to become integral to individuals' roles in society (Andersen and Collins 2006; Arrighi 2001; Collins 1993; Cyrus 1999; Ore 2000; Rothman 2005; Weber 2004)[5]. The race-class- gender matrix is also referred to as the intersectional paradigm, the interlocking systems of oppression or multiple axes of inequality (Berger, T. and K. Guidroz 2009). Regarded as revolutionary in terms of interdisciplinary and global engagement, "Intersectionality" has become something of a "buzz word" (Davis 1992) overlapping the multidimensionality of social identity, for as Lorde (1984) puts it in Sister Outsider *"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives"* (142).

Crenshaw was convinced that black women were stigmatised at two levels, notably at the level of their gender and race. In other words, she seems to contend that the specific discrimination they were subjected to results from the coalition between a gender-based intolerance and a race-based prejudice that eventually put them in a space which would neither attenuate the spread inequalities nor dismantle the existing hierarchies. The central idea of Intersectionality is that various forms of oppression, commonly known as the "Big Three"; namely, race, gender and class, as a rejection of the "single axis framework",[6] do interact with one another in multiple complex

ways moving across time, touching different disciplines and gaining popularity behind its boundaries.

Intersectionality theory came to serve theoretical and political purposes in several ways. First, the race/gender binary served to emphasize the dynamic aspect of identity construction. Otherwise said, by implicating the simultaneity of race and gender, Crenshaw as well as Intersectionality followers, participated in shedding light on intra-groups differences. In this case, race and gender, were not, according to Crenshaw, given sufficient consideration by liberal critiques of identity politics (Nash 2017). Second, the image of subordination through race and gender coalition reached its peak of eloquence with Crenshaw because of the discontent with the essentialism emanating from feminist and anti-racist scholars (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). It was time then to break with that long-lasting tradition and give voice to the voiceless. [7]

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the theory is "never done, nor exhausted... it is always already an analysis-in-progress" (Carbado, D.W., Crenshaw, W.K., Mays, M.M., and Thomlinson, B. 304). Crenshaw (1989) describes the concept as "provisional one way" to approach inequality. Her work has gained sufficient popularity to the extent that Intersectionality has become synonymous of oppression, "its vagueness and its open-endedness may be the very secret of its success" (qtd. in Davis 69). Paradoxically, the puzzling features tethered to Intersectionality may betray the concept itself. Reflecting on the concept's trajectory, Crenshaw confesses that her theory, which had a wide reach by now, was "over-and underused," and that "she can't even recognize it in the literature anymore" (interview qtd. in Berger and Guidroz 76, 65).

Collins (1990) in her turn sees that Intersectionality's triad, race, gender and class, forms the basis of what she terms as "matrix of domination"[8] which is reinforced by what A. Lorde terms the "mythical norm," which is defined in America as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing" (Lorde 174).

Despite the controversy that remains over the character, limitations and implications around questions pertaining to its origins, methodologies, efficacy, and relation to identity and identity politics and to black feminism (Viviane M. May 2012, Collins and Bilge 2016 and Carastathis 2016).[9] Intersectionality theory and thus an intersectional approach can be used as a tool for analysing those hidden forms of discrimination which originate from identity intersections that still persist in a contemporary America which proclaims its global spirit.

The present paper originality probably lies in Otsuka's attempt to relocate the axes of Intersectionality. Originally depicted in black women lives' experiences, scholars have long pondered on the hampering power of the intersectional paradigm in the latter lives, neglecting other communities' levels of inequality. By reflecting on the stories of Japanese American women of the past, Otsuka is appropriating the intersectional experiment to another underprivileged ethnic community, notably the Japanese immigrant women. Additionally, she seems to confirm the worries of many Intersectionality promoters who advocated that a black woman experience, for instance, could not be replicated to any other woman experience whatever her origin; every single experience is unique.

The Historiographic Intention: A Need for Visibility

Interestingly enough, the title "The Buddha in the Attic" could be read as a subtle replica of the famous feminist essay by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) "The Mad Woman in the Attic"[10] (Monteiro 2017). However, while mainstream feminists of previous decades fought to rehabilitate the woman of the 19th century offering her deserved status and save her from the attic of male history, Otsuka's plea targets those minority ethnic groups who were compelled to renounce their culture in order to be accepted by the Other, notably Americans. Japanese immigrant women could not celebrate their Buddha, emblem of their legacy, and had no choice but to join the "amnesia of history" in Marni's terms (2011). Upon their internment in American camps, the Japanese's trace started to vanish. They were first missed by the Whites to finally end up forgotten in the attic of history, Otsuka reports:

> AT THE END of summer, the first rumors of the trains begin to reach us from afar. They were ancient, people say. Relics

> from a distant era … IN AUTUMN there is no Buddhist harvest festival on Main Street. No Chrysanthemum Feast. No parade of bobbing paper lanterns at dusk. No children in long-sleeved cotton kimonos singing and dancing to the wild beating of the drums until late in the night. Because the Japanese are gone, that's all. (Otsuka 126-7)

Forced to assimilate and embrace the White Americans' mode of life, the Japanese immigrant women's cultural legacy was relegated to an anonymous past which only memory could save. In this respect, Otsuka makes of her novel, a "work of memorialization" to use Maxey's terms, where there is an urge to come to an end with the past and heal its wounds. By commemorating and monumentalizing the past of her female characters, Otsuka not only did celebrate the memory of her ancestors, but she also defied the rigid univocal version of Japanese women history in America.

Though born American, Otsuka is very careful at highlighting the "woman question" as undoubtedly related to the "race problem", hinting probably to the impediment of ethnicity and gender in realizing the self even in a contemporary America where supposedly the word race is *anachronistic* in Hollinger's[11] terms. She strives to resurrect those forgotten women's lives, for she feels the urge to restore their dignity and correct fallacies advanced by white dominant discourses. She is tormented by their prevailing invisibility, "You now belong to the invisible world" (Otsuka 26). In this respect, Maxey states "[*The Buddha in the Attic*] reflects a community in its sheer volume and renders the invisible visible to mainstream America" (9).

Hence, it is in an attempt to subvert the White authoritarian male dominant voice that has fashioned the official history of America that Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic* seems to be directed. In the early parts of the narrative the women's voice wonders: "*Does anyone even know I am here?*" (30). Therefore, Otsuka's call melts with that of her ancestors in an outburst of rage and incomprehension. Visibility operates as the central vector of the whole text. In an interview with Josephine Reed, Otsuka explains,

> I've been travelling the country for years and speaking to many young people about the camps, but a lot of them have not heard about the camps still. I think it's not something that's included in

> most American history books, and so some of them are surprised […] They'll say, "This is a work of fiction, right? It didn't really happen." I'll have to explain that, yes, it is a work of fiction, but it is based on a very big and often omitted historical truth. (qtd. in Sikadir 29)

Admittedly, Otsuka is traumatised by the unfairness of the past and its distorted legacy. She seems obsessed by the noble role her fiction would play to restore dignity to the memory of her history and culture.

The Unconventional Narrative Structure:

A Call for Diasporic Identity

Actually, in no way is Otsuka original nor is she singular in defying traditional structures of fiction writing by using a forceful plural pronoun "we", for quite a few postmodern writers resorted to similar strategies before her[12]. However, her choice of this particular narrative structure could appear interesting in that it allows her make individual subjectivities hide discreetly behind a female group voice and contribute into demarcate racial hierarchy principles which have regulated their societies. Japanese women are regarded all alike despite their disparateness. Otsuka seems to insist on their sameness; they are all members of the same ethnic group and they all share the same similar experience of immigration, "On the boat we were mostly virgins. We had long black hair and flat wide feet and we were not very tall...On the boat we wore the same old kimonos we'd been wearing for years" (Otsuka 3).

Certainly, Otsuka's use of the plural ambiguous "We," the *narrative trouble* in Butler's words, is not devoid of ethnic sense of belonging though many scholars advanced the opposite claiming that ethnic interests are necessarily achieved at the expense of aesthetic quality (Munros 2018). Interestingly, Otsuka challenges preconceived views, mainly promoted by mainstream writers, by conflating the aesthetic to the ethnic and in this way responds back to the hegemonic discourses,

> [some *we* fictional narratives] employ the first-person plural in ways that defamiliarize perception and provoke readers to

> reconsider their automatized preconceptions of this collective label, such as which characters (or groups of people) are subsumed under it, what types of qualities they share […], what separates the 'we' group from other groups, to what extent the properties of one group overlap with those of another, and according to what criteria moving from one group to another is possible. (Marcus 3 in Munros 71)

Thus, in her deliberate distortion of the narrative perspective, Otsuka seems to point at three main levels of oppression, namely the disappointment of the first sexual experience, the frustration with their Americanized children and their disenchantment with their immigration experience.

On Japanese Women as Objects: The Gender Lure

It is more precisely the eight chapters' division of the novel which interests us as a marker of originality in terms of intersectional orientation. Japanese women life path seems to obey a manipulated chronological progression, an oxymoron as it were, in that Otsuka maps the different chapters' content in terms of levels of excitement and disillusionment. The linearity of the narrative is measured in degrees of pain and resistance. An interesting tension between silence and speech (Leonta 2017) is maintained all along the first four chapters. "*Come, Japanese!*", "*First Night*," "*Whites*" and "*Babies*" point at the Japanese women eagerness to reach America and realize their dreams, their own version of the American Dream, despite the deep hidden fears they carried out in their hearts confirming hence a latent disappointment which would never quit them, " A FEW OF US on the boat never did get used to being with a man, and if there had been a way of going to America without marrying one, we would have figured it out" (Otsuka 18). They were young and fresh women, full of hope and they expected handsome and loving husbands in America. However, their first most painful encounter with the unknown is accentuated through the description of their unforgettable sexual experiences, which are sketched bitterly all over the narrative. Their husbands' toughness is mostly associated with the recurrent use of "They took us," which appears to intensify the feeling of objectification women felt at the time,

> They took us with apologies for their rough, callused hands, and we knew at once that they were farmers and not bankers … They

> took us drunkenly. They took us roughly, recklessly, and with no mind for our pain. *I thought my uterus was about to explode*… They took us forever, and we knew we would be sore for weeks. (Otsuka 20-22)

Upon their early meetings with their white counterparts, those women felt doubly discriminated. They were obliged to fight for every single thing. Their voice sounds stronger than before as they refer to the Whites as "They," othering them in their turn,

> They did not want us as neighbours in their valleys. They did not want us as friend … ONE OF US blamed them for everything and wished that they were dead … We threw ourselves into our work and became obsessed with the thought of pulling one more creed … We forgot about Buddha. We forgot about God. We developed a coldness inside us that still has not thwarted. *I fear my soul has died*. (Otsuka 35-7)

This said, the bitter sexual experiences of the Japanese women are but one facet of their disillusioned lives. As they gave birth to their first kids, they innocently believed that they would preserve a part of their Japanese belonging in America. They were far from imagining that the Japanese heritage was to be lost progressively.

> *On Americanised Children: Neither Japanese nor American but Both*

In the fourth chapter of the narrative, the Japanese women gave birth to Masaji, Yukiko, Misuzu, Hiroko and many others thinking that they would save them for once from the tormented life they were living , "We gave birth to babies that were so beautiful we could not believe they were ours. We gave birth to babies that were American citizens and, in whose names, we could finally lease land" (Otsuka 58). Yet, soon they realized that the birth of a new generation of Japanese worsened their own situation and confirmed their eternal "subaltern" status. Though the following chapters of the narrative namely, "The Children," "Traitors," "The Last Day," and "A Disappearance," continue to be told from the women's perspectives, it seems that the echo of the stories aims at reaching the whole community of Japanese immigrants, be they women or men.

In "The Children" chapter, the Japanese women stories resonate a lack of control over their Americanized children's lives. Reared in the

midst of the White's culture, they spoke like them, they clothed like them, they have changed their names like them, "ONE BY ONE all the old words we had taught them began to disappear from their heads. They forgot the names of colors … THEY GAVE THEMSELVES new names we had not chosen for them and could barely pronounce. One called herself Doris. One called herself Peggy. Many called themselves George" (Otsuka 72-3). Fostering the deep incomprehension between the parents and the new generation, Otsuka strengthens the sense of loss Japanese women had experienced at this particular turning point of their lives. Their children, supposedly symbol of their legacy, are threatened by the dangers of the double standard life the immigration experience has forced them. Worst, Otsuka seems to insist that despite their willingness to bear adopted by the Americans, they would never be accepted as fully Americans, for "they knew that whatever they did they would never really fit in. [*They]'re just a bunch of Buddhaheads*" (Otsuka 77).

Accordingly, the rest of the three last chapters present an awful climax of the Japanese immigrant women's lives in America as the disappointment reaches its peak in the internment camps, where Japanese men are compelled to join after the Pearl Harbor Attack. The mercilessness of the American government stresses the lack of agency Japanese immigrants in general and Japanese immigrant women in particular had on their lives and confirms once more that the intersection of their gender and race hindered their lives of immigrants in America, "One of us left a rice ranch in Willows carrying a tiny Buddhist shrine in her pocket and telling everyone that things would turn out all right in the end" (Otsuka 107). The Japanese women's lives in America proved once more that a woman's life, whatever her origin is premised on continual sacrifices, leading minority groups, in general, to continually negotiate their existence.

On Appropriating the Immigration Experience: The Japanese as a Model Minority Group

In her attempt to foreground the singularities of the immigration experience of her Japanese women ancestors, Otsuka compares them to other ethnic minorities and stresses their uniqueness, what Pandey (2006) refers to as the "demand of a recognition of difference,"

We had all the virtues of *the Chinese*—we were hardworking,

> we were patient, we were unfailingly polite—but none of their vices—we didn't gamble or smoke opium, we didn't brawl, we never spat. We were faster than *the Filipinos* and less arrogant than *the Hindus*. We were more disciplined than *the Koreans*. We were soberer than *the Mexicans*. We were cheaper to feed than *the Okies and Arkies***,** both the light and the dark. (Otsuka 29, emphasis added)

Interestingly enough, by reflecting on non-Black women experiences of different origins, Otsuka is inviting us to interrogate various levels of pain and oppression through these women's lives, which have been obscured in the attic of history enforcing their invisibility. She therefore relocates the interplay of gender, race and immigration far from the confines of Black ethnic group and deports it to Asian women's experiences in the diaspora, notably Japanese women. One could advance that her appropriation of the immigration experience is probably the most pertinent example of the uniqueness of each Intersectionality experience on the one hand and the confirmation that a Black woman experience is not to be replicable to another minority woman experience on the other hand.

Conclusion

While the text under study, namely *The Buddha in The Attic*, refuses an official commemoration of history, a history fashioned by Americans notably and offers instead a genuine version of history as seen by the Other, Japanese in this case, it is nonetheless an interrogative puzzling space of reflection that strives to fight forgetfulness. Besides, having proposed an intersectional innovative reading to the narrative has allowed reveal, we contend, how the interplay of gender, race and immigration in former Japanese women's lives has served correct a distorted history of a minority ethnic group in America, construe the necessity for diasporic identities to celebrate their cultural legacy, and most importantly demystify the status of diasporic subjects under the shadow of globalization. Otherwise said, having stepped back in the past to mourn her ancestors' sufferings and put to the fore their various intersecting levels of oppression could be interpreted as a vital initiative from the part of Otsuka to point at the confusing status of Japanese

American women of today, notably hers. We argue then that not only Otsuka's appropriation of the immigration experience of former Japanese women does help her render the invisible trauma visible but it also sheds light on the potential richness of an intersectional approach to correct historical fallacies, still underexplored in literary texts to our sense.

Notes

[1] See Gasztold, B. (2018) "Domesticity and Immigrant Women's Labour in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*" for further details on the conditions of Japanese working immigrants in America.

[2] See Mie Hirara, "'Our Stories depicted by Julie Otsuka: *When the Emperor was Divine* and *The Buddha in the Attic,*" 2. http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/lt/rb/634/634pdf/yousi.pdf

[3] One of the most influential theories on identity derives from the work of psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s. Erikson is known for his model of identity development and gained much notoriety for having coined the phrase "identity crisis." In 1981, Tajfel and Turner defined social identity as involving the knowledge that one is a member of a group, one's feelings about group membership, and knowledge of the group's rank or status compared to other groups. These divergent views led to the birth of Identity theory and Social Identity Theory.

[4] The self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The self-concept is formed and regulated as individuals grow based on the knowledge these same individuals have about themselves that is why it is multidimensional. A number of behavioural scientists, representing a variety of schools see the self-concept of the self as not only a useful explanatory construct but a necessary one. Included among these stand: W. James (1910), Cooley (1902), R. Burns (1897), G. Mead (1934), Sullivan (1953) and Lecky (1945).

[5] Quoted in Berger. M.T and Guidroz.K (Eds), *The Intersectional Approach. Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender*, University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2009.

[6] Crenshaw (1989) advances, "a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law… is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist Politics….Black women are theoretically erased, [and] this [single axis] framework imports its own theoretical limitations that undermine efforts to broaden feminist and antiracist analyses" (139).

[7] Women of the 1960s and 1970s were involved in various social movements. Many were involved in civil rights movement, feminisim, and gay liberation. The 1970s represented a time of social progress, and a call for change with a critique of the exclusivity of second-wave feminist scholarship. However, though second-wave feminists of the 1960s were mainly interested in breaking down certain conventions related to women's role in society in relation to issues like marriage, equal pay, the division of labor, and education, women of color of the 1970s often felt marginalizedfrom second-wave feminist politics. Black experiences have been overlooked and ignored from social and human history, which led Black feminist scholarship claim more visibility to those who were socially devalued (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1995; Lorde 1984; King 1993).

[8] Other elements such as age, sexuality, and religion might be included as they do intertwine to engender different forms of marginalization.

[9] See Jennifer, C. Nash (2017) "Intersectionality and Its Discontents" for further details.

[10] "The Madwoman in the Attic" is a revolutionary substantial essay written by two of the most committed agents of first wave feminism, namely Gilbert, S. and Gubar, S. in 1979. Relying on the analysis of early works of literature by forgotten women of past centuries, the scholars unveiled disguised manifestations of women rebellion through literature succeeding then to recuperate their genius from the attic of history often overshadowed by male stream canonical writers.

[11] David A. Hollinger, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1997, is Preston Hotchkis Professor of American History at the University of California, Berkeley. He has written extensively on the history of American science, religion in America, and the changing

role of racial and ethnic factors in the country's history. His two most recent books are "Post ethnic America" (1995) and "Science, Jews, and Secular Culture" (1996).

[12] Many male writers like Faulkner, Conrad, and Eugenides had already used "We" as a strategy to echo a group voice, notably male group, however Otsuka remains to our sense more innovative in that she succeeded to maintain it through the whole narrative to point at the a-typicality of her women characters' immigrant experiences.

Works Cited

Berger, Michele Tracy and Guidroz, Kathleen (Eds), *The Intersectional Approach. Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender*, University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2009.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, (1990) 1999.

Carbado, W. Devon, Crenshaw, W. Kimberlé, Mays, M.Vickie, and Thomlinson, Barbara. "Intersectionality Mapping The Movements of a Theory" *Du Bois Review*, 10:2, 303-312, 2013.

Collins, H. Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerement* (2nd Ed.). NY: Routledge, (1990) 2000.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine*. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 139–68, 1989.

--- . "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, and Violence Against Women of Colour" *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1300, 1991.

Davis, Kathy. "Toward a Feminist Rhetoric: The Gilligan-Debate Revisited', *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(2): 219—3, (1992)2008.

Gasztold, B. "Domesticity and Immigrant Women's Labour in Julie Otsuka The Buddah in the Attic". *KULTURA POPULARNA* NR 4(58), 2018.

Harara, Mie. "'Our' Stories depicted by Julie Otsuka: When the Emperor was Divine and *The Buddha in the Attic,*" 2. http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/lt/rb/634/ 634pdf/yousi.pdf

Jobert, Manuel. "Odd Pronominal Narratives. The Singular Voice of the First-Person Plural in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics*, edited by Violeta Sotirova, Bloomsbury, pp. 537-551, 2015.

Lara, P. Maria. *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*. Polity Press, 1998.

Larbi, Nariman. The Literature of Exhausted Possibility: The Entanglement of "Post-Modern Fiction *Arab World English Journal for Translation and Literature." Studies*, 3(2) 14-21. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/Vol3no2.2, 2019.

Leonte, Eva. *Enacting Silence of the Subaltern Women: Julie Otsuka and the Japanese Picture Brides*. Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for Master in Literature, Stockholm University, 2017.

Lorde, Audre. "Learning from the 60s." *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde.* Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, (1984) 2007.

Marni, Gauthier. "Truth-telling Fiction in a Post-9/11 World: Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*." *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 151-182, 2011.

Maxey, Ruth. "The Rise of the 'We' Narrator in Modern American Fiction". *European Journal of American Studies* 10(2). https://ejas.revues.org/11068, 2017.

McCall, Leslie. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30.3. pp 1771–800, 2005.

Monteiro, R. Flavia. "Voices that Matter: The Attic Echoes through the House." 11 and 13 th Women Worlds Congress (Anais Electronicos), Florianopolis, ISSBN 2179-510 X, 2017.

Munos, Delphine. "'We' Narration in Chang-Rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* and Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*: 'Unnaturally' Asian American?" Special Issue on Experimental Literature and

Narrative Theory. Ed. Brian Richardson. *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* (4.1): 66-81, 2018.

Nash, C. Jennifer. "Intersectionality and Its Discontents" *American Quarterly*. vol. 69, no. 1, pp 117-29, 2017.

Otsuka, Julie. *The Buddha in the Attic*. Penguin Books, England, (2011) 2012.

Pandey, Gyanendra. "The Subaltern as Subaltern Citizen." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 46, pp. 4735-4741, 2006.

Sikadir, Sihem. *Gender, Race and Identity in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) and Julie Otsuka The Buddha in the Attic (2011)*, dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the Requirements for Master degree in English, Mouloud Maameri University, Tizi Ozou, Algeria, 2017.

Tanaka, Kei. *Japanese Picture Marriage in 1900-1924 California Construction of Japanese Race and Gender*. A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School-New Brunswick Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. 2002.

***JAST*, 2021; 56:23 - 44**
Submitted: 31.03.2021
Accepted: 10.09.2021
ORCID# 0000-0002-0351-8732

"Fruit of Violence": The Subaltern Refugee and the Intersection of Oppressions in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

Fatma Eren

Abstract

This article examines Ocean Vuong's semi-autobiographical novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by focusing on how the oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality overlap for the Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in America. Among many difficulties, many Vietnamese lives are marked by the intergenerational transmission of emotional pain, and it deterred parents from forming a healthy relationship with their offsprings. As a queer, second-generation Vietnamese American writer, Vuong is raised in a toxic household since he is subjected to physical and emotional abuse of his war traumatized mother. *On Earth*, written in epistolary form, offers a glimpse into the many-layered anxieties, insecurities of Vuong's family and reveals how the legacy of the Vietnam War still pervades their life in all spheres in America. His narrative, "as a line of communication," is a significant step towards liberating the women in his family from the subaltern status. Speaking from the terrain of otherness and rejecting castration by the forces that victimized his mother and grandmother, Vuong also proves that it is possible to transform the resentment he harbors into something fruitful, and anger can be instrumental in reconciliation and healing.

Keywords: The Vietnam War, Ocean Vuong, Vietnamese American, Trauma, the Subaltern

"Şiddetin Meyvesi": Ocean Vuong'un *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* Adlı Romanında Madun Mülteci ve Toplumsal Baskılar

Öz

Bu makale, Ocean Vuong'un yarı-otobiyografik *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* romanını, Amerika'daki ırk, toplumsal cinsiyet, sınıf ve cinsellik baskılarının Vietnamlı sığınmacılar ve göçmenlerin yaşamlarındaki yansımalarına odaklanarak inceler. Vietnamlı hayatların çoğu duygusal travmaların ya da kolektif keder duygusunun nesiller arasında aktarımıyla şekillenmiş ve bu durum ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla sağlıklı bir ilişki kurmalarını engellemiştir. Queer kimliğiyle bilinen ikinci nesil Vietnamlı Amerikalı yazar Vuong, savaşın travmatik etkilerinden kurtulamamış annesinin hem fiziksel hem de duygusal şiddetine maruz kaldığı bir evde büyümüştür. Mektup formunda yazılan *On Earth*, Vuong'un ailesinin çok katmanlı kaygıları ve güvensizliklerini ele alarak Vietnam Savaşı'nın aile bireylerinin Amerika'daki hayatını hala etkilediğini gösterir. Vuong'un "bir iletişim kanalı" olarak kaleme aldığı romanı, ailesindeki kadınları madun konumundan kurtarmak için önemli bir adımdır. Bir öteki olarak, annesi ve anneannesini mağdur eden güçlerin boyunduruğunu reddeden Vuong, kırgınlıkların nihayetinde yararlı deneyimlere dönüşebileceğini ve öfkenin uzlaşma ya da iyileşme aracı olabileceğini kanıtlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vietnam Savaşı, Ocean Vuong, Vietnamlı Amerikalı, Travma, Madun

We're beginning to understand that a male-dominant culture tries to addict males to dominance in order to perpetuate itself, and to persuade men to risk their lives in wars that have nothing to do with their own self-interest.

Gloria Steinem

In his debut novel *On Earth We are Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), which is based on one of his poems of the same name, Ocean Vuong tackles fundamental issues such as war, immigration, queerness, race,

class, and trauma in the context of the Vietnamese experience in America. Born in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in 1988, Vietnam, Ocean Vuong is a second-generation Vietnamese American poet and novelist who immigrated to the United States with his family in 1990 when he was only two. He lived in Hartford, Connecticut, and was raised by his war traumatized mother who suffered from PTSD, and his schizophrenic grandmother, a former sex worker in Vietnam.

On the novel's multilayered narrative content, Emma Brockes comments that "[i]t might have been the Opioid Novel, or the Vietnam Novel, or the Exploitative World of the Nail Salon novel. It might have been the Gay Adolescent Love novel or the Violent Childhood novel, all themes that are touched upon lightly while still assuming a fully weighted presence in the narrative" ("Ocean Vuong"). Written in epistolary form, Vuong's narrative consists of beautifully crafted letters to his illiterate mother, whose psychological disturbances related to the Vietnam War and life in the U.S. profoundly impact his psyche. As Tolentino notes, it is "both an immigrant novel and a work of autofiction" (Ocean Vuong's Life Sentences"). Combined with the autobiographic elements in the novel, Vuong's work is a product of his resentment and anger against American society, which he thinks "fucked" him "up" (*On Earth* 119). When the cost of the unsaid things finds permanent place itself on the individual's conscience, it becomes imperative, for Vuong, to give voice to that unspoken yet disturbing past.

Commenting on his book, Vuong states that he examines "American failure," arguing that "American masculinity is a failure in itself in which no one thrives" ("Ocean Vuong Explores the Coming-of-Age of Queerness"). Generally speaking, beginning from the 1960s, the "crisis" American men have experienced and the rage that they felt as a result of this "failure" can sometimes be discerned in the tone of a harsh father who beats his son for being "soft" or "weak." The act of beating corresponds to exposing the "tough" masculinity that resides in his son. However, "[t]he defeat in Vietnam battered U.S. masculinity" (Espiritu, "The We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose Syndrome" 334). Without knowing where to direct his released rigor, the son, as emphasized by Gloria Steinem in the quote that begins this essay, engages in a dominance effort so as to legitimize his hegemony. Vietnamese women, in this specific work by Vuong, Rose and Grandma Lan, are the ones who are severely affected by this random male rage as the "subaltern" refugee women who are stripped of their rights to "speak"

(Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak? 28). While Vuong's mother, Rose expresses her distress and trauma with unintentional violence towards her son, Little Dog, Grandma Lan, a schizophrenic, tries to survive by telling stories to exorcize her painful memories haunting her. Little Dog, who is at the center of all this tragedy, is a product of a dysfunctional family as his childhood is largely shaped by anxiety, alienation and fear due to intergenerational trauma.

Through Little Dog's family story in *On Earth We are Briefly Gorgeous*, this article analyzes the intersecting oppressions by focusing on Vietnamese refugees' disadvantageous social positions related to the American patriarchy, heterosexuality, racism, and class division. The novel's central themes, such as poverty, violence, race, trauma, and deteriorating mental health, all boil down to being Vietnamese in America. Growing up in a predominantly black and Puerto Rican neighborhood in Hartford, Connecticut, Ocean Vuong is among those few Vietnamese refugee/immigrant children who succeeded after enduring racism and oppression as a minority. However, his experience, as can be seen in his semi-autobiographical novel, was coupled with his mother's emotional abuse, overwhelmed by the lingering effects of the war. The study argues that despite the intersection of oppressions stemming from the hierarchical social categories inherent in American society, Vuong proves that there is a possibility of drawing a survival narrative even if he does not intend to offer an exclusive representation of his community. Moreover, his narrative, "as a line of communication" is a significant step towards deconstructing the subaltern status of the women in his family (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310).

On the other hand, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall draws attention to the evolving nature of diasporic identities saying they "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). Hall's insistence on the recognition of "heterogeneity and diversity" to explore displacement experience provides an avenue for Vuong toward agency as his struggle to recover "the past" through his writing ensures a move away from tragic mode (225). He is disowning the victim trope for its potential of denying a proper negotiation of the forces that placed the Vietnamese in their current state. Purposefully bespeaking Vietnamese ethnic culture, roots, and history, Vuong chooses to "empower" his community ("Amanpour and Company," 00:02:06).

Drawing on the failures of the white, heterosexual and patriarchal men of America, Vuong self-consciously affirms his otherness as a queer writer of color, speaking from the terrain of otherness and rejecting castration by the forces that victimized his mother and grandmother. As he comes to witness the wounds on her mother's psyche, however, he starts to forgive her and accompanies her to overcome the social and cultural barriers that increase her emotional tension. He puts, "[a]ll this time I told myself we were born from war—but I was wrong, Ma. We were born from beauty. Let no one mistake us for the fruit of violence—but that violence, having passed through the fruit, failed to spoil it" (231). In his interview with Amanpour and Company, Vuong emphasizes the critical role of writing in his life saying, "writing helped me understand that although you can technically be a victim, . . . whether you will live in victimhood or not is up to you. We can't change what happens to us; we can change how we live in order to have a successful life" (00:12:44-00:13:10). Through his writing, he tries to transform the resentment he harbors into something fruitful, proving that anger can be hopeful and instrumental in reconciliation and healing.

The Vietnamese American Experience and Intergenerational Trauma

In December 2018, *The Atlantic* magazine announced that Vietnam war refugees in America were under threat of deportation for the Trump administration declared that "Vietnamese immigrants who arrived in the country before the establishment of diplomatic ties between the United States and Vietnam are subject to standard immigration law" (Dunst and Calamur). To put it simply, the US was engaging in an effort to repeal a 2008 bilateral agreement between Vietnam and the United States that would mean deporting Vietnamese refugees and immigrants who came to the United States before 1995. Despite his growing fame as a writer and academic, Vuong is highly uncomfortable with the current developments regarding his people. On the government's step towards identifying Vietnamese refugees and immigrants as "violent-crime aliens," Vuong voices his objection by saying that "[t]hose are my people! We come from a troubled history, and with such trauma come problems. It's unfair to penalize a community for an affliction exacerbated by this country's participation in the Vietnam conflict" (González). Saying this, Vuong points to the intervention of

the US in Vietnam that precipitated the Southeast Asian refugee diaspora.

During the time, the conflict in the Southeast Asia sparked heated debates beyond the Pacific Ocean within the context of the ideological conflict between the United States and Soviet Union. When American institutions engaged in an effort to prove their "superiority" to that of Soviet institutions through "masculine power, diplomatic and military assertiveness, . . . and patriotism" (Winter 331) the debates took another dimension and un/support turned into a test of American men's manhood in the US which included the elderly, young, men and women depending on their stance on the war. With the support of baby boomer parents who were raised with traditional definitions of manhood, the government's post war policies led American men to construct "a masculinity based on martial virtues" (Kimmel 196). This incongruous correlation in wartime, specifically for white, middle-class, heterosexual men, drove many of them to engage in an aggressive willingness to support the war which ultimately resulted in the US involvement in Vietnam.

However, in 1975, the fall of Saigon marked not only the end of Vietnam War but it also started the Vietnamese refugee flow into the United States that would last for nearly three decades. Under various evacuation programs, the U.S. seemingly saved thousands of Vietnamese lives in a war that it shares a great responsibility for its acceleration and exile. During the 2000s, the group became one of the largest Asian American immigrant groups after the Chinese and Filipinos (Zhou and Bankston 1). On the other hand, Yen Le Espiritu underlines, the images of the soldiers' which depict seemingly benevolent attitude toward "Vietnamese evacuees" in those years or the complacent look on Vietnamese people's faces in the pictures obscures the critical reality: "the majority of Americans did not welcome the refugees' arrival" (*Body Counts* 34). They were critical, however, in terms of "recuperate[ing] the veterans' and thus U.S. failure of masculinity" (104). Serving as "a visible reminder of the war" (144), Vietnamese in the U.S. are associated with the war, which culminates an "American's racialized understanding of 'Vietnam' and its people" (145).

Vuong depicts the reflections of the US government's contrived benevolence with including his mother's cautious warning into his narrative: "'Remember,'" you said each morning before we stepped out in

cold Connecticut air, "'don't draw attention to yourself. You're already Vietnamese'" (*On Earth* 219). From the preceding lines, one can state that the Vietnamese experience in America has a social and systematic aspect that is based on discrimination and hostility even towards a Vietnamese child. Deciphering his mother's words for the reader, Vuong states that his "goal is to be invisible" ("Amanpour and Company" 00:03:59-00:04:00). He continues, saying "that's very strange for a mother to tell the child to disappear, go out and you go on go out there and disappear. . . . If you stay out of the limelight you can get by do your work make a living quietly" (04:03-04:15). His anger dissolves as he writes because he notices his mother's effort to protect him with a motherly instinct.

The caution of Little Dog's mother discloses not only the awareness of the probable psychological and physical damage but also the low self-esteem and an acceptance of socially assigned inferiority by the colonized women. "Caught in the relay between 'benevolent' colonial interventions and national liberation struggles" the subaltern, to use Spivak's term, "cannot speak" (Didur and Heffernan 3). As Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in America, they are always under threat either by the US government or Americans themselves. As seen in his mother's warning, even nearly four decades after the war, American people are still not ready to adopt racially tolerant behavior towards these people. The supposedly inclusive settlement policies, which Aguilar-San Juan refers to as "'calculated kindness'" is to announce Vietnamese success in America "'a triumph for democracy,'" and it does not impede "prejudice and racial lumping" towards Vietnamese Americans in their everyday life (44). The conditions they lived within all walks of life made Vietnamese targets of racial stereotypes. Accordingly, "[l]ike a child being torn between two divorcing (or married) parents, the subaltern are silenced even when attempting to speak" (Maggio 425).

Internalized racism takes a heavy toll on not only first but also second-generation Vietnamese. Little Dog's experiences of discriminatory behavior extend to his early childhood years. For instance, he is physically bullied by his peers at school bus who force him to speak English. Unable to handle the situation as a child, he submits and fulfills their demands. He could reflect his helpless situation only by ceaselessly stomping his feet in the seat. At this point, looking at the red lights in the soles of his shoes, Little Dog resembles his feet

to "world's smallest ambulances" which were "going nowhere" (25). The scene is significant in terms of displaying the extent of destruction on a child's psyche. When he says it to his mother, she forces him to resolve it on his own, arguing that he has English to protect himself. In other words, beginning from his childhood, Little Dog is preached to be resilient to handle insecurity targeting his small body. His mother responds to incident by saying "[y]ou have to be a real boy and be strong" (26).

Stuart Hall explains the immigrant/migrant subject's inclination to affirm his/her status as the Other by his idea of otherness as "an inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226). Through various channels of power and representation, the Western regimes drive the individual to acknowledge his/her socially imposed subordination (226). It is safe to assume that Vuong's mother identifies strength as an attribute of rugged American masculinity and believes that physical strength would enable his son to overcome the oppression. After that day, she forces Little Dog to drink a large glass of "American" milk every day, hoping that he will grow taller (27). In their familial struggle to fight against oppression, his mother desperately builds her hope on the strength that white fluid; the milk will deliver.

> "Drink," you said, your lips pouted with pride. "This is American milk so you're gonna grow a lot. No doubt about it."
>
> I drank so much of that cold milk it grew tasteless on my numbed tongue. Each morning, after that, we'd repeat this ritual; the milk poured with a thick white braid, I'd drink it down, gulping, making sure you could see, both of us hoping the whiteness vanishing into me would make more of a yellow boy. (27)

Rose's illiteracy also plays a determinative role in her internalizing racial oppression combined with limited opportunities in the public sphere. Working in a manicure salon, Rose, as a mixed-raced, refugee woman exemplifies the public space reserved for the subaltern minorities. She has to endure low-quality jobs that confine her and her family to a low socioeconomic status. In this sense, their disadvantage in the work domain curbs Vietnamese's access to ideal living standards and constitutes a site where gender and race oppression intersect. These social inequalities are also transmitted through various channels,

mainly, social interactions as it is clearly illustrated in manicure salon scenes in one of which Little Dog elaborates on the meanings of "sorry." The word "sorry"

> [n]o longer merely apologizes, but insists, reminds: *I'm here, right here, beneath you*. It is the lowering of oneself so that the client feels right, superior, and charitable. In the nail salon, one's definition of *sorry* is deranged into a new word entirely, one that's charged and reused as both power and defacement at once. Being sorry pays, . . . (even) when one has no fault, is worth every self-deprecating syllable the mouth allows. Because the mouth must eat. (original emphasis, 91-92)

Accepting their subordination becomes a strategy for finding a place in the social hierarchy as the Other: "The subaltern can speak as long as they speak in a "language" that is already recognized by the dominant culture of the West" (Maggio 431). In other words, their sociocultural adjustment and, indeed, their ideological surrender regulate their lives within White hegemony structures. As Kibria notes, financial insecurity becomes an undesired aspect of Vietnamese families' lives (74). While economic deprivation shapes Vietnamese American self-perception, their prevailing treatment as gender and racial inferiors also leads them to accept inferior social positions and the superiority of the white.

Moreover, the supermarket scene where Rose uses bodily gestures to tell the butcher that she wants to buy "oxtail" illustrates how the subaltern refugee is marginalized due to her lack of English. Vuong says, [b]ut he [the butcher] only laughed, his hand over his mouth at first, then louder, booming" (*On Earth* 30). Being embarrassed, they give up and buy bread and mayonnaise instead. From that point onward, Little Dog, as a child, who does not know the meaning of "oxtail" in English at the time, becomes the guardian angel of his family, devoting himself to improve their lives, to the extent that he, as the only English-speaking member of his family, calls his mother's boss as a child to reduce her working hours, and he succeeds.

Speaking of the language barrier, Little Dog refers to his mother's education life in Vietnam that is cut short by the napalm bombs destroying her school building during an airstrike when she is only five. Coming to the US, Rose and Grandma Lan's incompetence, or

possibly their disinclination to learn English indicates another fraught dimension of the adaptation process connected with the war memories. Her inadequacy in learning English partly results from the trauma that somehow discourages her to make an effort to learn it. Despite her relatively fair skin being Amerasian, Rose cannot fit in as Little Dog writes, "[o]ne does not 'pass' in America, it seems, without English" (52). He constantly tries to overcome the challenges they, especially his mother, come across in their daily life due to being a stranger to language. Neumann explains Little Dog's being "his mother's representative" as the transformation of the English language into an institution cementing the acculturation of Little Dog's family into American ways of living (290). Learning English becomes a kind of shield that protects Little Dog and his family from intersecting oppressions of race and social class.

In this vein, color/ism has an extensive place in Vuong's narrative. "When we arrived in America in 1990, color was one of the first things we knew of yet knew nothing about" (51). With an effort to reveal the impact of color on his family, Little Dog traces his mother's suffering into her childhood. Rose is the daughter of a white American serviceman who is sent as a naval destroyer to Vietnam. Leaving her arranged marriage when she is seventeen, Granma Lan tries to survive in Vietnam doing sex work. However, for Rose, being a product of mixed-race constitutes a disadvantage in Vietnam since as "a half-white child in Go Cong, which meant the children called her ghost-girl, called Lan a traitor and a whore for sleeping with the enemy" (61). She is bullied violently by her Vietnamese peers who cut her red-brown hair in the street, throwing buffalo shit on her "to make her brown again, as if to be born lighter was a wrong that could be reversed" (61). Her light skin, however, does not enable her to fully integrate to larger society in America without learning language. The in-betweenness of her Vietnamese American identity causes immense distress on her already low self-esteem and psychological distress, which is also reflected in her using physical force on Little Dog.

Aside from the challenges of the assimilation process and racism, the Vietnamese people suffered from "nightmares, depression, antisocial behavior, and posttraumatic stress disorders" that still trouble Americans and Vietnamese Americans today (Zhou and Bankston 4). The cumulative trauma of Little Dog's mother manifests itself in the form of toxic femininity. Inserting the scenes of violence by her mother

throughout his narrative, Little Dog poetically writes about his mother's throwing lego box at his head, chasing him with the kitchen knife, locking him in the basement, beating him for finding the house messy "after overtime at the clock factory" (Vuong, *On Earth* 101). In one of those instances, she takes Little Dog to McDonalds as a gesture of apology. At this point, Little Dog's exposure to violence can be interpreted as a release of traumatic memory which is hard to be suppressed and rotates throughout generations. The feeling of nonbelonging either to her country Vietnam or the US, also intensifies her feelings of frustration, powerlessness and anger.

Initially unaware, Little Dog exemplifies the impact of persistent war memories on his mother's psyche as he recalls a memory in which his mother has a breakdown after he, as a child, intending to prank his mother screamed "boom" behind her back. Emphasizing his naivety as a child, he says, "I was an American boy parroting what I saw on TV. I didn't know that the war was still inside you" (4). In another instance, he finds his mother at a late hour of the night in kitchen, checking her tips to buy "'a secret bunker'" for her fear of a possible terrorist attack when President Bush declared war on Iraq in 2003 (86). Yen Le Espiritu explains it by stating "[f]or the children of survivors and witnesses of the Vietnam War, these [kinds of] episodes confirm that the war is ever-present for their parents, whether they speak about it or not" (*Body Counts* 148). Although she survives, Rose is haunted by the trauma, and she exerts her hidden injuries, usually through violence. Furthermore, her mental distress sometimes drives Rose to show schizophrenia signs which is apparent when she hastily sets off to save her sister Mai from her abusive husband though Mai has moved to Florida five years ago. As a way to cope with her emotional pain, she unconsciously detaches from reality, confusing the past and the present.

Little Dog's psyche is also shaped by war trauma, escape, her racial ambiguity and poverty in the US. The misery of his primary caretakers shatters his hopes and sense of self: "I'm dragged into a hole, darker than the night around it, by two women. Only when one of them screams do I know who I am" (*On Earth* 67). His despair evidently indicates the transmission of "intergenerational tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions of Vietnamese American lives." (Espiritu, *Body Counts* 165). Out of desperation, he runs away from home at ten, as an attempt to defend himself as a child. Not knowing where to go, he

climbs a tree until his grandma finds and persuades him to return home. To comfort her grandchild, Little Dog, she pours out unarticulated yet bitter truth about herself and her daughter: "'Your mom. . . . She pain. She hurt. But she . . . love[s] you, Little Dog. But she sick. Sick like me. In the brains'" (Vuong, *On Earth* 122).

On the other hand, his grandmother's way of expressing trauma occurs though storytelling. Periodically, she asks Little Dog to pluck the white hairs from her head, and in those moments, she tries to recover from her sorrow, pain, and losses telling her grandchild, "Help me, Little Dog . . . Help me stay young, get this snow off of my life—get it all off my life" (Vuong, *On Earth* 23). Turning it into a ritual, Little Dog listens to the confessions and stories from her grandma's fragmented memory related to her years in Vietnam "[b]ecause denial, fabrication—storytelling—was her way of staying one step ahead of her life, how could any of us tell her she was wrong?" (197).

Upon her escape from her husband, who is thirty-four years older than her, Lan comes to Saigon, with her daughter from her first marriage. To feed her daughter, Lan begins engaging in sex work with the US soldiers. Falling in love with Paul, a US navy serviceman, she marries him two months after meeting him in a bar. Little Dog specifically notes that he was not her client, but her romantic partner. Thinking that Paul is his biological grandfather, Little Dog confronts the disturbing truth when he is nine. He learns that his grandmother was already four months pregnant with his mother when they met: "The father, the real one, was just another American john—faceless, nameless, less" (55). Until he learns the truth about Paul, Little Dog is consoling himself with the thought that he has a tangible connection to the US relying on Paul's physical presence in his life. He abruptly tumbles to the fact that he has actually never had a genetic/hereditary linkage to America. He says, "[u]p to that point I thought I had, if nothing else, a tether to this country, a grandfather, one with a face, an identity, a man who could read and write, one who called me on my birthdays, whom I was a part of, whose American name ran inside my blood (55). Although he later comes to the resolution that one does not necessarily share a blood line to call someone "grandpa" as a child, Little Dog feels like losing the thin string that provides him with a partial psychological comfort in identifying his individuality, family and nation.

At this point, Vuong's diaspora experience, to put it in Hall's terms, can be explained through "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through not despite, difference; by hybridity" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 235). Despite knowing that Paul chose his family in America over Grandma Lan in Vietnam, his search for belonging through Paul symbolizes Vuong's desire to negotiate identity as a displaced person and get in touch with his "'lost origins'" (Hall 236). On the other hand, Hall's concept of "hybridity" as a position within "the centre" and "sufficiently outside it" provides a "double consciousness," space for Vuong to exercise his agency through writing and deal with his feeling estrangement as an insider/outsider (qtd. in Voicu 172).

To Little Dog, Grandma Lan and Rose are survivors but they are "already weighted with ghosts" (13). To put it another way, they are overwhelmingly burdened with the unspoken memories of life and war in Vietnam. In his interview with Nyugen, Vuong conveys that her storytelling "becomes an architecture for remembering and preserving, and ultimately, an act of inheritance" ("Falling Better"). Her ghost stories turn out to be the history Vuong, and Little Dog in the novel, is looking for because

> [s]he's telling a ghost story, but all of a sudden, now there are bombs, now there are gunshots, now there's a house on fire. Now, where did your mother come from? What did I do when I met your mother's father? Where do your aunts come from? There was this village over here, and over there, there was this girl. All of a sudden, we're back into that world, these blank walls of Hartford became this sort of time capsule. ("Falling Better")

Through her turbulent mind, Grandma Lan proves that there exists "different ways of knowing and writing the history" for Vuong (Espiritu, *Body Counts* 20). As Spivak puts it, "[w]hen a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road toward hegemony" (*A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 319). Writing about trauma, with the help of transmission of memory and history, guides Vuong to carve out a space for themselves as the subaltern. In doing so, he transforms the silence and suffering of the subaltern refugee woman into an emancipatory experience.

Masculinity and Gender Role Reversals

In one of his interviews, Ocean Vuong bitterly talks about his uncle who, a few years older than him, commits suicide after being exposed to insulting expressions in the nail salon where he works. The expressions include, "[w]hat a shame, he would be … He's so young, what a waste…This is someone…I'm sorry" ("Failing Better"). As this tragic event demonstrates, the adjustment process turns out to be a sour experience for Asian men in the US, and in this particular case, for his toxic father who eventually ends up writing to Little Dog from prison.

Espiritu declares that the history of Asian American men in the US is marked by systematic racism, primarily based on their effeminized manhood (*Men's Lives* 17). Being recruited to work in feminized occupations as cooks, laundrymen or domestic service before WWII, Chinese and Japanese men were the first victims of their Asian communities since they were excluded from white male privilege. Their association with domestic labor and the internment of Japanese Americans during the WWII, led the forthcoming Filipino and Korean men similarly to be positioned as disadvantaged groups. As Espiritu maintains, "in the economic hierarchy" they were treated as members of "an inferior race" (18). She explains their subordinate status saying, "not all men benefit equally from patriarchy. . . [and white] men share unequally in the fruits of this domination" (19).

The internment experience, further, symbolized a permanent change in terms of the gender roles for present and future Asian immigrant families in the US. Though leaving the camps behind, the Japanese men lost "the status and authority" on their family members and eventually had to exchange their breadwinner roles with Asian women (Espiritu, *Men's Lives* 20). The involuntary deprivation of power caused some Issei men to resort to domestic violence towards their children and wives who were providing financial support for their families. When it comes to the 1970s, the socioeconomic state of America created discontent in Americans against Vietnamese refugees, whom they felt would bring "an added drain on already over-burdened public assistance rolls" (Montero 625). Moreover, due to their lack of portable or "transferrable skills" they constituted "another largely disadvantaged group" in America (Espiritu, *Men's Lives* 22). Their status did not change in the 1980s, 90s, or 2000s and had its reflections in the form of desperation, hopelessness, and violence in families. Their insuffi-

ciency in skills and education came to mean low-skill and low-wage occupations for Asian American men who, again involuntarily, had to leave their already disadvantaged jobs to Asian American women. As Espiritu argues, "[t]his is due in part to the decline of male-occupied manufacturing jobs and the concurrent growth of female-intensive industries in the United States, particularly in service, microelectronics, and apparel manufacturing" (*Men's Lives* 22).

The clear shift in gender roles and thereby Asian American men and women's authority and power corresponded to "a source of tension and change in the relations of Vietnamese American men and women" (Kibria 109). Growing weary of their negative socioeconomic conditions at the time, Vietnamese men started to fight with the feeling of inferiority not only in social hierarchy but also in terms of their degraded position in the family. In this regard, the notion of gender expectation lost its validity for Asian communities when women compulsorily started to take their position in the public sphere. In America, where the idea of hegemonic masculinity is intricately grounded in material success, it is seen that Asian men direct their nervousness and tension, arising from failure, toward their family members, particularly their spouses. In this sense, the experience of Vietnamese men implicates the intersections of racism, class and gender, as was the case with other Asian men in previous years.

Coming from a war-torn territory with his war-traumatized family members, Little Dog's father apparently goes through a crisis of masculinity due to the prevailing "feeling of emasculation [among the Asian American men] in America" (Espiritu, *Men's Lives* 19). His lack of qualification and education prevents him from having a proper job in the US and makes it difficult for him to integrate into American society. He exerts his feeling of entrapment through violence towards his wife, Rose. The disappointment and frustration probably increase after they have came to US as Little Dog recalls, "I remember walking with you [his mother] to the grocery store, my father's wages in your hands. How, by then, he had beaten you only twice—which meant there was still hope it would be the last" (Vuong, *On Earth* 221). It is evident that downward mobility and limited access to the economic sources constitute tension among Vietnamese couples, making their family life in America more complicated (Kibria 109). Little Dog recounts his witnessing his mother's abuse in the hands of the father for the first time saying that "[s]till a toddler, the boy laughs, believing they are dancing

. . . it was not until the blood ran from his mother's nose . . . that he started to scream" (Vuong, *On Earth* 115). His mother is saved by his grandmother and people from the neighborhood.

Vuong explains his father's entrapment and anger stating, "the society and the culture have created a space where he can no longer perform [his masculinity] in it" ("Failing Better"). The US' government's military involvement in Vietnam seemingly saved many lives, yet it relegated South East Asian men, women and children to the outside of American dream. Asian men's failure to achieve it due to various forms of oppression came to indicate something beyond an individual defeat; a deficiency for attaining much-praised white heterosexual masculinity as an ultimate/ideal model. Not detailing his father's depression, Little Dog mentions his father's happiness when his son is born; "'[m]y son will be the leader of Vietnam' he shouted" but then as he continues "in two years, Vietnam—which, thirteen years after the war and still in shambles—would grow so dire that we would flee the very ground he stood on" (Vuong, *On Earth* 21). After coming to the US, his insecurities are coupled with the tension of his decreasing power in the US, seem to push him to the margins of society as Little Dog briefly mentions a letter by his father, sent from prison. As a result, he defines his father's presence over absence, putting that "[i]n my Hartford, . . . fathers were phantoms, dipping in and out of their children's lives, like my own father" (213).

In this vein, the financial hardships of Vietnamese families in America are a major issue in Vuong's book as exemplified from their poor conditions. Among the low-paid occupations, his mother finds a job in a nail saloon where long working hours and dreary conditions symbolize the subaltern refugee experience in America. As a child, Little Dog is highly aware of the restricted opportunities offered for his people: "A new immigrant, within two years, will come to know that the salon is, in the end, a place where dreams become the calcified knowledge of what it means to be awake in American bones—with or without citizenship—aching, toxic, and underpaid" (80-81). Besides the responsibilities of being a single mother, Rose's physical and emotional exhaustion greatly contributes to her depression. The employees, however, benefited from their desperate situation, being well aware of the scarcity of their options. Their "gender logic" in the words of Espiritu, "was informed by the patriarchal and racist beliefs that women can afford to work for less, do not mind dead-end jobs, and are more

suited physiologically to certain kinds of detailed" (*Men's Lives* 22). It seems that their idea preserves its validity up to 2000s. In 2006, *Nails* magazine announces that "Vietnamese now make up 80 percent of the California's licensed manicurists, and about 45 percent of manicurists nationwide" (qtd. in Bates).

When he is fourteen, Little Dog also starts to work in a tobacco farm outside Hartford where he mostly works with other disadvantaged groups such as Latinos. While he offers glimpses of their poverty throughout the narrative, through some examples such as their having to eat only eggs for the whole week since they cannot afford rent, a conversation with Trevor, his white American lover in the tobacco farm, summarizes the discrepancy in conditions of a White and Vietnamese teenager in America. While for Trevor, the topics of their conversation consists of "his guns, of school, how he might drop out, how the Colt factory in Windsor might be hiring again . . . the next game out on Xbox, his old man, his old man's drinking," on Little Dog's side, the talk is going over "you, [his mother] about your nightmares, your loosening mind" as Trevor's face troubled as he listened" (Vuong, *On Earth* 99). For the Vietnamese, Little Dog, his mother's deteriorating mental health in the face of war and ethnicity related struggles are at the center of his life.

Moreover, Little Dog recounts his first queer love story through his romantic relationship with Trevor who is a poor white American boy. Living with his alcoholic and dysfunctional father whose tendency to use medication eventually makes him a heroin addict, Trevor is also an addict of OxyContin, developing it as a cure for his psychological problems. During their first sexual intercourse, Little Dog blames himself for "taint[ing]" Trevor with his "faggotry" (203). He later finds consolation in their love, owning and acceptance of his feelings towards Trevor. Trevor, on the other hand, denies his sexual orientation and distances himself from his queer experience. Little Dog explains his attitude saying, "Trevor, being who he was, raised in the fabric and muscle of American masculinity" (203). In a way, they both attempt to cure their wounded manhood stemming from their low socioeconomic status and dysfunctional families. However, Trevor's internalization of the supremacy of White heterosexuality and Little Dog's internalization of the emasculated position of Asian American men in American society influence the course of their relationship. While Trevor asserts his masculinity through his sexual domination, Little Dog acts more

submissively (Hadley). Trevor sees homosexuality as a disease and thinks that he "will be good in a few years" (Vuong, *On Earth* 188). Five years after leaving his dead-end relationship and toxic household in Hartford, Little Dog learns that Trevor has died from a drug overdose.

In this regard, Vuong's work can be examined as a reflection of the traumatic consequences of the systematic exclusion of South East Asian groups from the mainstream. Through his work, he reveals the entrapment of refugee people in low socioeconomic status, including his family, by negotiating their many layered anxieties and insecurities. Being deprived of the privileges socially constructed hegemonic masculinity particularly in terms of economic sufficiency, Asian men had to live through their failure in achieving it, taking on their frustration on their families. On the other hand, in the face of fragile nature of hegemonic masculinities, Vuong finds "his queerness as a source of strength in the way he thinks about the world" ("Be Bold"). Exposing their sex scenes explicitly, Vuong attempts to normalize being a queer as opposed to the homophobic groups which seek to disempower and frighten queer lives. At this point, Vuong's way of tackling his homosexual identity as a Vietnamese American appears as an effort to subvert the power assigned to white heterosexual patriarchy. As is the case in Trevor, the denial of same-sex attraction does not prevent one from falling short of the narrow scope of ideal American manhood or guarantee of being a participant in it. Considering Vuong's apparent success in literary world, however, an alternative model of manhood does not necessarily end up in failure.

Conclusion

In *Body Counts,* Espiritu underscores that there should be "a necessary retelling of their [Vietnamese] history, lest it be further forgotten by the American public and/or the next generation of Vietnamese Americans" (79). Viewed from this perspective, it is safe to assume that the past continues to haunt Vuong until teh present day. However, as a member of postwar generation, he does not give up feeding on those painful memories to create a powerful narrative in which he reveals the devastating impacts of the Vietnamese War, particularly on Vietnamese women and children. From a multigenerational aspect, Vuong exposes

underlying psychological processes regarding the Vietnamese women's struggles against the war trauma and his own struggle as a queer Vietnamese man in America. Without exploiting the victim trope, very much associated with the Vietnamese American experience, he proves that recovery is possible despite the stereotypical representation of Vietnamese Americans as victims at the mercy of the U.S. benevolence.

For the Vietnamese refugees and immigrants, the war continued as they have to resist race, gender, and economic disparities in America. As a second-generation Vietnamese member, Vuong manages to communicate the transmission of war memories and these systematic oppressions aiming at Vietnamese presence in America. The overlapping oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality do not deter Vuong from presenting a decisive stance against "damaged American fathers" (24).

Against all forces impairing Vietnamese experience in America, he survives while his psyche is shaped by war trauma, poverty, and various forms of oppression. Not concealing his deep resentment against his toxic mother, Vuong opts to write with an attempt to reconcile. As he says, "[y]ou're a mother, Ma. You're also a monster. But so am I—which is why I can't turn away from you" (*On Earth* 14). On the one hand, Vuong opens his narrative writing that "Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you—even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are" (3). On the other hand, in his interview, he says, "[i]t was an attempt to see if language can really be a bridge, as it is often aspired to be" ("Inside the Book," 00:00:23-00:00.31). Taking these quotes into consideration, one can state that Vuong tries to bridge this "gap" since writing enables him to put his intergenerational trauma for possibly a cathartic effect. Moreover, as one of "the fruit[s] of violence" he resists to "spoil."

Works Cited

Aguilar-San Juan, Karin. *Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America*. U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Bates, Karen Grigsby. "Nailing The American Dream, With Polish." *Npr*, June 14, 2012, www.npr.org/2012/06/14/154852394/with-polish-vietnamese-immigrant-community-thrives.

Didur, J. and Teresa Heffernan. "Revisiting the Subaltern in the New Empire." *Cultural Studies,* vol. 17, number 1, 2003, pp. 1-15, DOI:10.1080/095023803200005078.

Dunst Charles and Krishnadev Calamur. "Trump Moves to Deport Vietnam War Refugees." *The Atlantic*, Dec. 21, 2018,www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/12/donald-trump-deport-vietnam-war-refugees/577993/

Espiritu, Yen Le. *Body Counts*: *The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*. U of California P, 2014.

---. "All Men Are *Not* Created Equal: Asian Men in the U.S. History." *Men's Lives*, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, Allyn and Bacon, 2010.

---. "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon.'" *American Quarterly*, vol. 58, number 2, June 2006, pp. 329-352, *Project Muse*, doi.org/10.1353/aq.2006.0042.

Gupta, Ruchira. *The Essential Gloria Steinem Reader: As If Women Matter.* Rupa Publications, 2014.

Hadley, Tessa. "*On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong review – portrait of the artist as a teenager." *The Guardian*, 14 June 2019.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* edited by Jonathan Rutherford. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp.222-37.

Kelly, Gail Paradise. *Vietnam to America*. Routledge, 2019.

Kibria, Nazlı. *Family Tightrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton UP, 1993.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2012.

Maggio, J. "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?': Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 32, no. 4, Sage Publications, Inc., 2007, pp. 419–43, www.jstor.org/stable/40645229.

Montero, Darrell. "Vietnamese Refugees in America: Toward a Theory of Spontaneous International Migration." *The International Migration Review*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1979, www.jstor.org/stable/2545179.

Neumann, Birgit. "'Our mother tongue, then, is no mother at all – but an orphan': The Mother Tongue and Translation in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*." *Anglica*, vol. 138, no. 2, 2020, pp. 277-298, doi.org/10.1515/ang-2020-0023.

"Ocean Vuong on War, Sexuality and Asian-American Identity." *YouTube*, uploaded by Amanpour and Company, 24 December, 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OZIwsk9cAM

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Harvard UP, 1999.

---. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Macmillan, 1988, pp. 24-28.

Tolentino, Jia. "Ocean Vuong's Life Sentences." *The New Yorker*, June 3, 2019.

Voicu, Cristina-Georgiana. "Crossing Borders of Hybridity Beyond Marginality and Identity." *Cultures in/of Transition,* vol. 1, no.1, 2011, www.researchgate.net/publication/292507320_Crossing_borders_of_hybridity_beyond_marginality_and_identity.

Vuong, Ocean. "Be Bold: A Profile of Ocean Vuong." Interview by Roberto Gonzalez. *FEATURE,*6.12.19, www.pw.org/content/be_bold_a_profile_of_ocean_vuong?article_page=1.

---. "Ocean Vuong Explores the Coming-of-Age of Queerness." Interview by Mitchell Kuga. *GQ*, June 24, 2019, www.gq.com/story/ocean-vuong-interview.

---. “Failing Better: A Conversation with Ocean Vuong.” Interview by Viet Thanh Nguyen. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 24, 2019, lareviewofbooks.org/article/failing-better-a-conversation-with-ocean-vuong/.

---. *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous.* Penguin P, 2019.

---. “Ocean Vuong: ‘As a child I would ask: What’s napalm?’” Interview by Emma Brockes. *The Guardian*, 9 June 2019, www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jun/09/ocean-vuong-on-earth-we-are-briefly-gorgeous-interview.

---. “Inside the Book: Ocean Vuong (*On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous).” Youtube*, uploaded by Penguin Random House, June 4, 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNIo8E1ZKPM&t=24s.

Winter Thomas. “Vietnam War.” *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Edited by Bret E. Carroll. Sage Publications, 2003.

Zhou, Min and Carl L. Bankston, III. “Stradling Two Social Worlds: The Experience of Vietnamese Refugee Children in the United States.” *Research Gate*, Jan. 2000, www.researchgate.net/publication/234604776_Straddling_Two_Social_Worlds_The_Experience_of_Vietnamese_Refugee_Children_in_the_United_States_Urban_Diversity_Series_No_111.

***JAST*, 2021; 56:45 - 66**
Submitted: 27.08.2021
Accepted: 20.09.2021
ORCID# 0000-0001-6868-4566

Aging, Abandonment and Friendship in a Cruel World: Human-Canine Bonding in Sigrid Nunez's *The Friend*

Nilsen Gökçen

Abstract

German-Panamanian-Chinese-American writer Sigrid Nunez's seventh book *The Friend* (2018) is a hybrid narrative, a composite of memoir, meditation, novel, fiction and metafiction, on human and non-human animal companionship. It amalgamates issues that have become trademarks of Nunez's fiction such as loss and grief with the companionship of non-human animals and humans. The book thematically blurs the boundaries between humans and non-human animals and fundamentally challenges and questions Western ways of thinking about human-animal dualistic hierarchy, according to which animals are associated with instincts rather than reason, with teh body rather than the mind, and with nature rather than culture. While the human world the novel presents is filled with vile gossip, competition, senseless brutality and bloodshed, the animals set an example of loyalty and friendship; with their superior mental and bodily capacities, animals in *The Friend* are portrayed, rather than dumb creatures, as wise kin of humans still persisting in goodness though wrongfully exiled from human privileges. Thus in her intricately knitted narrative, Nunez offers the companionship of non-human animals as the only saving grace in human life.

Keywords: Sigrid Nunez, *The Friend*, (Human) Animal Studies, Friendship with Animals, Violence

Acımasız bir Dünyada Yaşlanmak, Terk Edilmek ve Dostluk: Sigrid Nunez'in *Dost* Romanında İnsan Köpek Bağı

Öz

Alman-Panamalı-Çinli-Amerikalı Sigrid Nunez'in yedinci kitabı olan *Dost* (2018), insan ve insan-dışı-hayvan ilişkilerine odaklanan ve içinde anı, meditasyon, roman, kurmaca ve üstkurmaca öğeleri barındıran melez bir anlatıdır. Kitap, Nunez'le özdeşleşmiş olan kayıp ve yas gibi temalarla insan-hayvan ilişkilerini birlikte harmanlar. Tematik olarak insan ve hayvan arasındaki sınırları bulanıklaştırarak hayvanı içgüdüyle, bedenle ve doğayla, insanı ise akılla ve kültürle özdeşleştiren Batı düşüncesinin insan-hayvan hiyerarşik ikiliğine radikal karşı duruş içerir. Bu düşüncenin aksine, kitapta insan dünyası her türlü kötülüğün ve şiddetin gerçekleştiği alanken hayvanların dünyası dostluk ve sadakatle doludur. Ayrıca, *Dost*'ta hayvanlar, üstün akli ve bedensel kapasiteleriyle, aptal ve duyarsız yaratıklar olarak değil, insana tanınan ayrıcalıklardan haksız biçimde yoksun bırakılmalarına karşın iyi kalmakta ısrar eden bilge aile bireyleri olarak resmedilirler. Bu durumda hayvanların dostluğu, insanı kendi dünyasının kötülüklerinden koruyabilecek tek kurtarıcı olarak ortaya çıkar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sigrid Nunez, *Dost*, (İnsan) Hayvan Çalışmaları, Hayvan Dostluğu, Şiddet

Introduction

The Friend (2018) is German-Panamanian-Chinese-American writer Sigrid Nunez's seventh novel, which brought her international acclaim along with the National Book Award. Nunez (b. 1951) was born to a German mother and a Panamanian-Chinese father and spent a working class childhood in a housing project on Staten Island along with poor families of other ethnic groups. Her father held a regular job in a hospital kitchen and worked in various Chinese restaurants on weekends. She earned her BA in English at Barnard College and MFA from Columbia University, after which she worked for *The New York Times Review of Books*. Her multicultural background enabled her to write on a wide variety of subjects from family to identity, pandemics

to the Vietnam War, and grief and loss to friendships with humans and animals. In addition to her novels, she also wrote a biography of Susan Sontag, *Sempre Susan: A Memoir of Susan Sontag*. Her most autobiographical debut novel *A Feather on the Breath of God* (1995) reflects the coming-of-age of a young girl based on Nunez's own experiences. *For Rouenna* (2001) revisits the Vietnam War, from the fresh and unusual perspective of a young nurse, as experienced by a woman. It also introduces some of the themes that will resurface in *The Friend*: suicide, loss, and friendship. In *The Last of Her Kind* (2005) Nunez explores the sixties in an unlikely friendship between two Barnard roommates from different social classes and upbringings. *Salvation City* (2010) is another coming-of-age novel of a boy orphaned by a flu epidemic and the turns his life takes after being adopted by a pastor in a small town in Indiana. Not only does Nunez touch on the issue of epidemic that has become a life-altering reality for her readers now, but also points towards the clash between secularism and religious fundamentalism, a divide that American people, along with the rest of the world, feel ever more deeply. Nunez's last novel *What Are You Going Through* (2020), in which a woman accompanies an acquaintance with terminal cancer, revisits some earlier topics she had dealt with in *For Rouenna*, *The Last of Her Kind*, and *The Friend*.

The Friend is a hybrid narrative form, a composite of memoir, meditation, novel, fiction and metafiction, on human and non-human animal companionship. It amalgamates issues that have become trademarks of Nunez's fiction such as loss and grief with the companionship of non-human animals[1] and humans. The novel explores the possibility of love and redemption in a world of unimaginable yet real atrocities. In a complex and often digressive plot, Nunez tells the story of a middle-aged writing instructor's attempts at finding meaning in a world after losing her mentor/lover and long-time friend, a well-known and successful author, to his unforeseen suicide.

One of her recurring presences, animals have been interwoven in Nunez's fiction such as in *For Rouenna*, in which the narrator mentions having a cat, and in *Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury* (1998), the biography of Leonard and Virginia Woolf's adopted pet marmoset, who suffers from the consequences of war and exile as much as humans. A dog appears in Nunez's debut novel *A Feather on the Breath of God* significantly referring to the memories of the narrator's Panamanian-Chinese father who, after ten years of stay, has to leave his dog in

China when he leaves for the United States. Although the narrator considers her father more of a mystery about whom she knows very little, she knows that behind his nostalgia for China lies his profound longing for and guilt of leaving behind this dog who understands that he is abandoned, an issue that Nunez takes up in *The Friend*. The narrator is sure that his memory of the dog howling behind him never left him. When a dog appears in Nunez's fiction again in *The Friend*, he occupies the center so much so that it is this "dog-centric world" that draws animal lovers and Animal Studies scholars to the novel (Johnson 47).

Human-Animal Studies or Animal Studies is a response to the age-old speciesism that has dominated Western thinking from its Judeo-Christian roots to the present. Though the Enlightenment shattered the theocentric conception of the world, it replaced it with an anthropocentric universe where non-humans deserved little or no consideration. From the religious argument that denied possession of soul to animals, the Enlightenment shifted the focus to the exclusive possession of reason by humans, an argument that later evolved into the exclusive human ability for language. Especially Descartes and his designation of animals as automata contributed greatly to the perception of animals as unworthy of ethical consideration. There have been individuals from Western thought and religion such as St. Francis of Assisi, Henry Salt, and Jeremy Bentham, who strongly disagreed with such a view of animals, but it was with the publication of *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer in 1975 that a much greater interest in animals as deserving of ethical consideration and legal rights began to be voiced. Thinkers and writers from a wide array of disciplines from ethology to psychology, from evolutionary biology to ethics, and from literature to linguistics have contributed to the field, illuminating the neglected intelligence, capacities and functions of animals.[2] As such, each new study has helped break down human superiority and the barriers that have separated humans from non-human animals. Animal Studies has given impetus to literature about animals. In older works literary scholars excavated and brought animals, so far beyond critical interest, to critical attention as more and more new works explicitly dealing with human and animal relationships have been published.

Animal Studies is also closely related to studies on race and gender, for many of cruel practices on non-white people and discrimination against women are made possible by animalizing them.[3] The theoreticians speaking from the intersections among these discrimina-

tory practices and discourses call attention to the fact that if it were not for the conceptualization of animals as lesser forms of life, hierarchies based on race would not be so easily convincing. While non-white races are often animalized, they are further shown to be unclean in their dealings with animals. For example, Asians are often stereotyped for eating animals considered unclean and/or inedible in the West—such as dogs, a point that Nunez subtly challenges in *A Feather* with the strong connection between her narrator's father and his dog in China.

In *The Friend*, the narrator, with the unexpected suicide of her mentor, finds herself having to take care of his dog Apollo, who becomes her companion in mourning, quest for meaning, and strength to stay alive. The friendship that she develops with this aging dog becomes the center of the narrator's life from which she explores the role of friendship and literature in a world dominated by atrocities and violence exerted by humans on all forms of life. This essay argues that in this intricately knitted narrative, which offers the companionship of non-human animals as the only saving grace in human life, Nunez successfully blurs the boundaries between humans and non-human animals and fundamentally challenges and questions Western ways of thinking about human-animal dualistic hierarchy, according to which animals are associated with instincts rather than reason, with the body rather than teh mind, and with nature rather than culture. While the human world the novel presents is filled with vile gossip, competition, senseless brutality and bloodshed, the animals set an example of loyalty and friendship; with their superior mental and bodily capacities, animals in *The Friend* are portrayed, rather than dumb creatures, as wise kin of humans still persisting in goodness though wrongfully exiled from human privileges. At the end, the reader asks, between animals and humans, who actually is the more rational being and where else any human can find true companionship if not with animals.

Companion Animals: Haven in A Cruel World

The narrator's personal loss, suffering, and trauma are juxtaposed with those in a world where such experiences have become daily realities. The novel opens with the trauma that some Cambodian women refugees experience: for no apparent biological reason they suddenly go blind. The narrator notes that "[b]efore fleeing their homeland,

they had witnessed the atrocities for which the Khmer Rouge, which had been in power from 1975 to 1979, was well known" (Nunez 1).[4] The human world the narrator describes is often filled with unspeakably horrid forms of violence so much so that victims refuse to see, hear or speak more of it. Scattered throughout the book are many other examples of violence from recent human history fictionally documented in the film *Lilya 4-Ever* and by studies on and interviews with survivors of human trafficking. The Cambodian women who "had seen family members murdered in front of them … suffered from blurred or partial vision, their eyes troubled by shadows and pains" (1). The narrator comments, "the women's minds, forced to take in so much horror and unable to take more, had managed to turn out the lights" (2). She is also invited by a friend of hers to offer a writing workshop for survivors of human trafficking, and as preparation her friend asks her to watch *Lilya 4-Ever*, a movie based on a true story about a sixteen-year-old girl in the Soviet Union abandoned initially by her mother and abused and forced into prostitution by everyone she cares for and loves. Finally, a young Swedish boy with whom she falls in love promises her happiness, only to become the last and final blow in her life. In Sweden where she goes with the hopes of reuniting with her boyfriend, she is met by a man who sells her into prostitution. None of the clients "allows either her obvious youth or the obvious fact that she is acting against her will to interfere with his lust," the narrator comments; "[o]n the contrary, everyone behaves as if sex slavery is what Lilya has been put on this earth for" (65). As the narrator witnesses from the accounts of real victims of human trafficking in her writing workshop, the actual experiences of women surpass the rendition of Lilya's story on the screen. As one of the Moldovan prostitutes who were shown the film says after the movie: fictionalized violence is often "*[n]ot brutal enough*" (66; emphasis original). Many of these survivors cannot even be called women because they are mostly teenagers such as "[the] fourteen-year-old … rescued … from a house where she'd been kept chained to a cot in the basement" (63). Like the Cambodian women who shut their eyes to the world so full of violence, "this girl is unable to speak," for no biological reason. Such psychosomatic symptoms may include "mutism, blindness, paralysis" (64).

The most startling aspect of such redundant and surplus brutality is the part the civilized Western world plays in it. "For people who have themselves been victims of inequality and exploitation," the

narrator's friend comments, "there might be some understanding for the way they mistreat one another. There might even be forgiveness. … But the depraved behavior of all those privileged members of the prosperous Nordic welfare state—this is rather harder to accept" (67). Eventually, the film director cannot offer any other consolation than his belief that "God took care of Lilya," holding no human responsible for taking care of the "Lilyas of the world" and leaving those who cannot share such belief without any consolation (66-67).

Human cruelty is most widely practiced on animals; in fact it is the Ur cruelty that probably opened the possibilities of other forms of brutality on more vulnerable humans. The scope of the novel limits cruelty to animals with pets, which demonstrates most strikingly the kind and extent of pain humans are capable of inflicting on their companion species. Among others, she mentions a cat abandoned because of her owner's allergic reaction and moved from one place to another until "it was no longer the same creature. It was a mess—a mess no one was willing to live with and so the original owner had to put it down" (45).

The excessive violence and downright malice of the human world is juxtaposed with the stories of animal friendship, undercutting Western beliefs designating nature as a place red in tooth and claw and human civilization as a safe and peaceful haven. The references to the world of dogs demonstrate a world of devotion and love. Hachiko, Fido, and the Greyfriars Bobby are such examples. The first waiting for his dead master every day at the train station for nearly ten years, and the second and the third waiting for theirs, respectively, at the bus-stop and at his grave, for fourteen years. These animal stories clearly show that animals possess the traits often thought to characterize humans. The narrator quotes earlier in her narrative the result of some scientific research: "The only animal that commits suicide is also the only animal that weeps" (15). Reminiscent of Bentham's famous answer to Descartes' designation of animals as automata with no souls: *"*The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk? but, *Can they suffer?* Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?*"* (emphasis added), the narrator reminds her reader, maybe they do not weep or commit suicide like humans, "But they can and do fall to pieces. They can and do have their hearts broken. They can and do lose their minds" (45).

In the novel, Apollo provides entry into the world of animals. The narrator had stopped having animals, but Apollo comes to her care as her mentor's wish when she is still grappling with his shocking suicide. He was living the most tranquil time of his life domestically and medically. Also, he recently had a new jump-start in his writing career after a painful period of writer's block. Thus, his suicide becomes a mystery the narrator tries desperately to comprehend throughout the narrative. The mentor adds to the mystery by leaving no explanation, note, or letter, behind. Thus she hopelessly tries to bring together signs scattered through a long time, words smuggled into more engaging issues. Once for example, he said, "*I think I'd prefer a novella of a life*," to which his listeners responded as a mere joke (6; emphasis original). She also remembers that suicide had been one of his frequently visited topics: for example, he referred to Ted Bundy's work in a suicide prevention call center. She also realizes the incidence of suicides or suicidal tendencies among artists and especially writers: Woolf, Flaubert, O'Connor, Hemingway …

For the narrator Apollo is from the start a chance to reconnect with him and to make some sense of her mentor-friend's suicide. She ruminates when she first brings Apollo to her apartment: "Having your dog is like having a part of you here" (39). Like the relationship between the narrator and her mentor, between Apollo and the narrator a multifaceted relationship begins, one that transforms both. It starts out as a forced and stressful one, for the narrator's contract does not allow dogs, let alone a huge harlequin Dane, in her too-tiny apartment. She brings him home not knowing what will happen with the building management because other alternatives are either not possible like kennels, or not thinkable like euthanasia—which most people refer to euphemistically, as "put to sleep." In time, Apollo not only becomes a catalyst for the narrator to evaluate her relationship with her lost friend, authorship, teaching, and aging, but also a mystery for its own sake to be solved, just like the mystery behind the suicide of her friend. In a way, Apollo's mystery replaces the mystery behind the suicide of her mentor. As she tries to unravel Apollo's history and emotions, she hopes to unravel major mysteries of her mentor's and her own life. She closely observes his behavior in order to find some evidence to explain his past during and before her mentor.

In their unusual relationship, the binaries separating humans and animals gradually dissipate as the two become mentally and bodily con-

nected. Western thought has traditionally deprived animals of traits of language, thinking and even sentience. From the biblical Genesis story on, only human beings, often exclusively the male gender, are believed to be made in the image of God and in possession of redeemable souls, rendering the rest of creation hierarchically lower than humans.[5] The same narrative gives the privilege of naming animals to Adam, an act that Nunez also refers to as the first sign of domination.[6] This understanding is cemented by Western philosophy, especially by Descartes according to whom animals are simply machines with no reasoning capacity,[7] not even capacity for feeling pain. Fed both by decrees of monotheistic religions and Western philosophy's dualistic mindset, Western science has found little ethical obstacle in the way of experimenting on animals and, more recently, taking full advantage of them in factory farms. Such a separation between humans and animals has given way to a culture that has continually uprooted and enslaved animals, turning them into spectacles for human entertainment in zoos and circuses.

The narrator's relationship with Apollo challenges patterns of Western dualistic thinking by destabilizing the human/mind and animal/body binaries. Not surprisingly, initially she occupies the reason and mind part of these binaries. Not only is she a human but also one that engages in highly intellectual endeavor of writing. Yet with Apollo she discovers that she can communicate with her body. Succumbing herself to his intimate embrace and paying close attention to him, she seeks a gateway into Apollo's emotions, initially remaining behind a screen of mist. The narrator notes, "Mostly he ignores me. He might as well live here alone" (39). As opposed to Wife Three's promises, he crawls on the narrator's bed and becomes her bedfellow. Waking up one night, she "can make out his big bright eyes and juicy black plum of a nose. I lie still, on my back, in the pungent fog of his breath. ... Every few seconds a drop from his tongue splashes my face. Finally he places one of his massive paws, the size of a man's fist, in the center of my chest and lets it rest there: a heavy weight" (42). The two bodies share senses of touch, smell, body warmth and a large number of microorganisms. From that night on, this nightly ritual is repeated between the two with Apollo snuggling, nudging, and sniffing the narrator as she remains motionless for his exploration: "[F]or a few minutes I become an object of intense fascination" (42).

This equalizing bodily sharing is what Haraway calls "lateral communications" between "kin and kind," taking place in the "oth-

er worlding" that she defiantly calls "natureculture" (*When Species Meet*, 10, 20). She maintains that humans and animals are products of the same history of natural events and disasters, climate changes, human and animal mass migratory movements, colonialism, scientific developments and enhancements. They share not only history but also a huge portion of their biology, with only a tiny portion of DNA separating humans from their closest non-human kin. As the epidemics and pandemics in history demonstrate, with non-human animals, humans also share a considerable amount of microorganisms in their daily contact, which is in fact comparable to sexually transmitted and shared microorganisms between two lovers. Both are in fact forms of intimacy. According to Haraway this "embodied communication" between the narrator and Apollo

> is more like a dance than a word: the flow of entangled, meaningful bodies in time—whether jerky and nervous or flaming and flowing, whether both partners move in harmony or are painfully out of synch or something else altogether—is communication about relationship, the relationship itself, and the means of reshaping relationship and so its enacters. ("Encounters," 111)

Haraway explains that the word species comes from the Latin *specere*, which has "tones of 'to look' and 'to behold'" ("Encounters" 100). Since, "[i]n logic, species refers to a mental impression or idea," she suggests, "*thinking and seeing* are clones," concluding that "[s]pecies is about the dance linking kin and kind" (100; emphasis added). The word *respecere,* (respect) derives from the same root. Thus, she announces:

> To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the *polis:* where and when species meet. To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where, who, and what are, are precisely what are at stake. … Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on Earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention. (102)

When the narrator actually *sees* Apollo, she simultaneously begins to *think* about him. Reciprocated by Apollo, these acts connect them into a "world of becoming." She becomes attentive to the smallest

details about him. She notices the transformation that he goes through with her while she herself is transformed in their relationship. For example, she believes Apollo *was* in fact trained to stay off the bed in his former homes, but he became *the* Apollo she has, sharing her bed, her mourning, and her grief. In this relationship they are connected with a strong bond as two living bodies that mourn the death of their mutual friend. As such, they can communicate without recourse to words. The narrator often says that she does not want to speak to anyone about her friend, about what they shared and what they talked about, about what he meant to her. These are beyond the power of words for her, a sentiment she seems to share with an animal that lacks—or, has no need for—words. Just as he becomes a different dog with her, she, as a writer who has mastery over words, experiences a transformation realizing the shortcomings of words when two bodies are profoundly bonded. For each body, the other is what remains from their mutual friend that they will never touch, smell, or embrace. There are certainly no words to express this feeling but the shared world of the senses.

In the past, her mentor had also, albeit shortly, opened a phase of corporeal becoming with the narrator through sexual intimacy. One day he announces that "we should fuck. … Because … we should *find that out about each other*" (21; emphasis original). To him bodily knowledge is a requirement to complete the circle of intellectually shared knowledge between the two. She remembers that in the mentor's life, mental and bodily experiences always completed rather than excluding each other. Sexuality and flânerie are always inseparable parts of his writing. He often declares to his friends "*If I can't walk, I can't write*" (3; emphasis original). Likewise, sexual life that, in his case, verges on "womanizing" is part of his writing. "The intensity of your romantic life was not merely helpful but essential to your work, you said," remembers the narrator about her friend. "You … never wrote better than during those periods when you were having lots of good sex, you said. With you, the beginning of an affair often coincided with a spell of productivity" (30). The mentor's approach to corporeal knowledge as an aspect of discovery about another embodied being places it alongside and equal to theoretical and scientific knowledge. His persistence on his bodily activities as his motivation for his writing subverts the dynamics of the Western tradition that regards mental and cerebral activities higher than, and independent from those of the body. This tradition has long depended on binaries between culture and

nature, the soul or the spirit and the body, man and woman, and human and nonhuman animal. From this perspective, activities pertaining to culture fall into the domain of the human, namely man, who has a claim to possession of reason and soul as opposed to spiritless animals and their domain, nature. The body is the animal side of the humans, from whose servitude they should try to liberate themselves. It is what prevents humans from rising to the heights of culture, reason, and the spirit, in other words, the heights of God. Nunez, however, depicts a character who, not only is enmeshed equally in cultural production or creativity and bodily pleasures—or even sins—but also *needs* his bodily satisfactions to feed his creative, intellectual, and godlike side.

The distinction between Apollo and the mentor—and body and mind—further disappears when Apollo proves to be an avid listener of literature. Reading aloud one night what she has written to herself, the narrator finds that Apollo wakes up from his sleep and approaches her desk. When she finishes, poking her with his nose barking very quietly, he communicates that "[h]e wants me to keep reading" (131-132). She then picks up *Letters to a Young Poet* by "Rilke, who loved dogs and looked hard at them and shared a boundless communion with them" (137). The next day Apollo himself chooses his book for her to read to him. The narrator thinks someone, perhaps her mentor, might have read to Apollo. Although Wife Three declares not having seen him reading to Apollo at least when she was present, the possibility that it might have actually happened brings the three companions together. Finally turning the tables on human/non-human animal hierarchy, she attributes to Apollo not only mental capacity but also even scientifically supported superior senses that humans lack. "[M]aybe Apollo is a canine genius who has figured out about me and books," she ponders. It is possible, she thinks, with his "phenomenal nose," he can smell not only cancer and mental states of humans—as studies have shown—but also "predict a looming fit of the blues?" (139). Compared to Apollo, all human knowledge and understanding pale: "we humans don't know how the half of how dogs' brains work," she admits. Her final declaration challenges the treatment of animals as objects of scientific study and topples over Western hierarchies of knowledge, which place humans as the knower and animals as the known: "They may well, in their mute, unfathomable way, know us better than we know them" (139).

Apollo and the mentor merge further because they are both abandoned and left behind. He first met Apollo as he was "Standing

on an overhang, silhouetted against the sky. … A harlequin Great Dane. … [P]urebred though it was, it might have been *abandoned*" (25; emphasis added). Why would anyone abandon a dog so beautiful, well-trained and well-behaved? This is the mystery Apollo will never reveal. He looked clean and well-fed, but without a collar and a tag. The vet tells the narrator that the likelihood of his running away from his former home is very weak, and the lack of anyone reporting him missing further weakens this theory. Maybe he was stolen, but according to the vet, there are more disturbing and hard-to-face possibilities "happen[ing] more often than you might think, said the vet" (50): Loss of jobs, inability to afford vet bills and pet supplies may be reasons as well as simply finding life easier after a dog is stolen. Also if the original owner dies, it is very likely for a dog like Apollo to be thrown out by those who have inherited him. In fact these stories are not at all unfamiliar, for she knows that dogs and cats are the first victims of economic collapse and loss of jobs, of changes of place, deaths of human companions, or changes of mind. She remembers that her sister and her husband bought a house in the country, the former owners of which had "an ancient mutt. *A part of the family* since he was a pup, they introduced him. When my sister and her husband went to move in, they were met by the dog, left behind, alone in the empty house" (50; emphases added).

Who but humans would leave "a part of the family" behind? Especially in the face of the tales of devotion from dogs like Hachiko, Fido and the Greyfriars Bobby, such tales sound all the more cruel. If these dogs' world is what humans have left behind in their progress towards civilization, then it was already paradise that they left. Obviously the price for possession of reason and (self-) consciousness has been too high for human beings: They have lost their friends and family and earned an unfathomable form of cruelty and a senseless violence.

As an aging man, the mentor finds himself abandoned and pushed to the periphery of life. His relationships with women were not the same because his body was changing into an older man's less desirable body. After he turns fifty, with the weight that he had gained temporarily, in a hotel mirror, he sees "[n]othing *too* hideous for middle-aged man" but certainly, "not a body to turn any woman on." He feels as if "A power has been taken away, it can never be given back again … a kind of castration" (31). His last conquest was of a nineteen and a half year-old woman, but he realizes with dismay it is not his

body that she desired but "narcissism, the thrill of bringing an older man in a position of authority to his knees" (29). Caught in what he calls "slow-mo castration" of aging, unable to perform as he used to, and seeing that his body is not desirable by young women any more, he loses his major stimulus for writing, the other defining characteristic that makes him what and who he is. Nunez depicts that in the fast changing culture, which invests almost everything in youth and beauty, every aging person feels abandoned. This is tragically true for the mentor, from whom aging was reclaiming all the advantages with which youth had bountifully endowed him: beauty, energy, virility, and power to influence. For "[a] man who once could have had any woman he wanted. Who had groupies hanging on his every word and believing he could win the Nobel Prize," aging is so much harder (120). The narrator remembers that her mentor had greatly admired J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, a book with similar themes of change and abandonment, a book "that you read with your skin" (32). Like David Lurie, the protagonist of *Disgrace*, who was sure to have any woman return his attentions, after fifty, the mentor becomes an undesired part of the sexual relationships that he had so cherished. The two are further correlated because both feel redundant and useless like abandoned dogs.

For a man like the mentor, who is exiled from one of the most significant parts of his being, the remaining place to look for satisfaction and meaning is teaching. However, as a teacher, especially as a teacher of writing, recently, he finds himself becoming totally useless. Before his suicide, he had been complaining to his friends about the radical decline in the intellectual capacities of students, in the prestige of the writer, the carelessness of the world of publishing, and the death of books and literature. Under the circumstances "the biggest mystery of all was why everyone and their grandmother was turning to authorship as just the ticket to glory" (115). The narrator's own students also demonstrate the same lack of appreciation for what is called great works of literature that Apollo surprisingly preferred to listen to. Her students complained about having to read other people's work rather than have others read their writing and to read out-of-print books that obviously failed instead of those by "more successful writers" (142). They judge literature by its success in the market and by how much they can identify with it. Their standards include such criteria as wanting "someone to die" in a book. They expect from a book like Anne Frank's diary to make them laugh and have a satisfying ending. In short, they treat

books as if they are produced for easy consumption. "People talking about a book as if it were just another thing, like a dish, or a product like an electronic device or a pair of shoes, to be rated for consumer satisfaction—that was just the goddamn trouble, you said. Even those aspiring writers your students seemed never to judge a book on *how well it fulfilled the author's intentions* but solely on whether it was the kind of book that *they liked*" (118; emphases added). The mentor, however, had been told "Never assume your reader isn't as intelligent as you are." He wrote for such a reader, an "intellectually curious" person with "the habit of reading who loved books as much as you did. Who loved fiction" (116). Yet, with new technology and the internet any self-appointed critic can voice his/her opinions directly to living writers. Misreadings and misunderstandings, praises or condemnations for wrong reasons and downright banality seem to have a louder voice than the voice of truly attentive readers. This is the dilemma of the writer with an old-fashioned training like the friend: Instead of being happy that his/her books are read among the millions that are published, he "honestly would just as soon a reader like that ignore your book and go read something else" (117). Surrounded by such "ubiquity of careless reading," writers become demoralized and come to the conclusion that large readership is assigned only to bad literature.

His students' and reading public's lack of interest in fact reflects the diminishing value of literature. For the narrator as well as the mentor, fiction also has lost its once-grand function of affecting people and societies in a "meaningful" way. Once books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were thought to be responsible for great changes in history and social fabric. In the contemporary literary scene, however, no reader would even imagine assigning such a place to any book "no matter how brilliantly written or full of ideas" (115). Ironically, that one's effort and self-torture of months, years and sometimes decades will not cause even a ripple in the world is demoralizing especially for the young authors with the highest capacity. The narrator's classmate who started with a lot of promise gave up writing because she came to the conclusion that her book would not be missed among the overwhelming number of novels published. While literature has lost its transformative power over readers, its only value is measurable by its effect on the economy. Once the calling of the divinely inspired, writing now has merely an economic value.

The literature of this new age has lost its magic, its luster, its mystery and creative touch. The Nobel winner Svetlana Alexievich, for example, believes that the writers should withdraw to let ordinary people speak, those who experience horrific things in life. "Her goal as a writer, she says, is to give these people words. … We need *documentary* fiction, stories cut from ordinary, individual life. No invention. No authorial point of view" (190-91; emphasis original). To such a perspective on literature, which denies any role to imagination, the narrator says, "I myself am inclined to agree with people like Doris Lessing, who thought imagination does the better job of getting at the truth" (193). The new world of writing has become a totally alien place for old timers like the narrator and her mentor. "In our graphomaniac age," a world pervaded by technology and visibility, everybody with enough self-confidence can write and self-publish, "just like everyone poops. The rise of self-publishing was a catastrophe, you said. It was the death of literature. Which meant the death of culture" (60-61). In the traditional understanding, writing was so difficult that an author was not only lonely but also constantly frustrated and humiliated because as Philip Roth put it, "*You fail two-thirds of the time*. … Garrison Keillor was right, you said: When everyone's a writer, no one is. … *To write and have something published is less and less something special. Why not me, too? everyone asks*" (60-61; emphases original). The narrator mentions, for example, "A 'rent-burdened' woman worrying how she's going to survive in New York City decides to try writing a novel ('and that's going well')" in America at a time when "Thirty-two million adult Americans can't read. The potential audience for poetry has shrunk by two-thirds since 1992" (111). With the help of technology and social media platforms, all it takes is courage to self-expose to write a novel. People treat writing mistakenly as a search for "self-expression, community, connection," which, the friend satirically thinks, "would more likely be found elsewhere. Collective singing and dancing. Quilting bees" (60).

As the mentor predicted, the death of literature is in fact the death of culture. Likewise, the narrator sees the problem of the banalization of literature as a cultural phenomenon, a result of self-righteousness, intolerance towards weaknesses and flaws, "in a writer's character … not blatant racism or misogyny. I'm talking about any tiny sign of insensitivity or bias, any proof of psychological trouble, neurosis, narcissism, obsessiveness, bad habits— any eccentricity" (193). This

is a culture of "the persecuting spirit" Hawthorne warned his readers of, a culture that wallows in a frenzy of purification, a puritanical trait of the moral majority that is always ready to condemn and punish. This is the world of writing and teaching that the mentor wanted to leave because he was "so at odds with the culture and its themes of the moment" (194).

Unable to attract women and unable to find intellectually satisfying human companionship, the mentor puts an end to his life. Facing the same demoralizing banality and brutality every day, the narrator likewise feels the weakening of her bonds with life. Apollo becomes the bond that reconnects her to life. Nunez's novel points towards the companionship of animals as the place of friendship and true home for humans. As such the novel subverts the culture/nature binary and hierarchy, for the cultural world that the novel unfolds has none of the glamor and beauty of the masterpieces that have made humanity proud, but rather an atmosphere of self-righteousness and hubris. From this world, animal companionship is in fact where many great figures of both literature and philosophy found themselves. The depth and strength of the relationship between the mentor and Apollo is not known; however, many references to dogs and other animals in writers' lives in *The Friend* testify to the fact that animals provided writers the warmth and safety of friendship they probably failed to find among fellow humans. Among others, J. R. Ackerley and his dog Queenie are given the biggest coverage in *The Friend*. Ackerley, "a middle-aged bachelor with a formidable history of promiscuity who'd given up hope of ever finding a partner," memorialized her as Tulip in his book, *My Dog Tulip* (71). The narrator describes the relationship as "intimate," and rightfully so because she also notes, in the book one finds "[m]ore than you want to know about what goes in or comes out of a dog's vagina, bladder, and anus. … Ackerley himself admitted that he sometimes touched a sympathetic hand to the burning vulva the frustrated dog kept thrusting at him" (78). The relationship is complex and involves beating and striking because he cannot bring himself to get her spayed while she is tormented by her sexual frustration. Despite the downside that Tulip suffers, the narrator says, "to me, it seemed that Ackerley had experienced to the fullest, the kind of mutual unconditional love that everyone craves but most people never know" (80).

Conclusion

Nunez gives Rilke a large portion of her novel as a writer fully dedicated to writing and as a man with great sensibilities to animals. Fictionalizing his experience of "seeing a dying dog give its mistress a look full of reproach," he lets his narrator speak: "*He was convinced I could have prevented it. It was now clear that he had always overrated me. And there was no time left to explain it to him. He continued to gaze at me, surprised and solitary, until it was over*" (92-93; emphasis original). Maybe dogs think of their human companions as God, but the next reference from Rilke provides the possibility that it is animals, not necessarily humans, that are touched by the divine. "[He] once found in the imploring look of an ugly heavily pregnant stray that he encountered outside a café in Spain *everything that probes beyond the solitary soul and goes God knows where—into the future or into that which passeth understanding*. He fed her the lump of sugar from his coffee, which he later wrote, was like reading mass together" (137; emphasis original). Rilke's sentiments place animals way above the sphere of ordinary life of mortals into that of gods.

Apollo, who is named after a Greek god, is the center of Nunez's novel. He becomes the narrator's new mentor, lover, and friend. With Apollo, she sees the merging of her dead mentor and her new companion as he brings her old friend to her. Together they mourn the death of her mentor and discover a communion of two bodies and souls. With Apollo she reaches down in herself to the memories of innocence in which state "[a]nimals live and die," a state that "we humans pass through and leave behind, unable to return" (92). Yet she believes "we must all retain, throughout our whole lives, a powerful memory of those early moments of life, a time when we were *as much animal as human*" (92; emphasis added). These memories are there, she believes, "if we could just cry out loud." If a person could reach down to those memories, they could see that "the intensity of the pity you feel for an animal has to do with how it evokes pity for yourself." (91-92). Then no one would confuse admiration and envy; no one would consume as food the animals whose powers they admire in order to obtain those powers. Remember the Chinese and their dog-eating habits. Then anyone could see that when one suffers—like the Cambodian women, like Lilya, like animals—from the brutality of other humans, the whole world suffers. Having lost this sense of interconnectedness has led to an unbearably brutal world where empathy is lost. Reflecting on the shared history

of humans and animals, she visits scenes of humans' mistreatments and animals' unconditional loyalty and love. What she lets the reader see is the great divide that separates humans and animals; yet it is not the divide created by humans and putting them in a hierarchically higher position. Rather, it is the divide between a world of love and trust versus a world devoid of those. Once one knows how to look at animals and enjoy their friendship, as the narrator does, animals show the falsity of the constructed human privileges. In the face of animals, all human "hubristic fantasy" falls apart. Not only does Apollo help the narrator overcome obstacles and teach her the value of unwavering loyalty, with his huge body he breaks down prejudices and borders that separate humans from animals. With Apollo, she observes a fact that she has long known, that the arguments of human superiority and prerogative become revealed to be stories that we tell ourselves: Possessing a redeemable soul, having reason, ability to speak a language. Apollo's ways of knowing and feeling surpass any ordinary human's; he expresses himself as long as he has a sympathetic soul to understand his language. From the world of writing and culture, where she, like her mentor before, feels irrelevant, Nunez's narrator enters into the "magicked" world of Apollo with whom she allows her to lose herself in the mystery of his being. Towards the end of the novel, referring to Rilke's famous definition of love as "*two solitudes that protect and border and greet each other*" she asks, "What are we, Apollo and I, if not two solitudes that protect and border and greet each other?" (146). How can anyone call what they have anything other than love?

Notes

[1] "Animals" and "non-human animals" are used interchangeably throughout this article.

[2] One of the most engaging documents on animal intelligence is Sue Savage Rumbough's *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind* (New Jersey, John Wiley and Sons, 2004). For the roots of human ethical behavior, see, Alisdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, Open Court Publishing House, 1999). Likewise Marc Bekoff's *Wild Justice* (Chicago and London, U of Chicago P, 2009) demonstrates the prevalence of ethics in the animal world.

[3] Two outstanding works that trace the ties between racism and cruelty to animals are Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Philadelphia, New Society Publishers, 1988), and *Eternal Treblinka* by Charles Patterson (New York, Lantern Books, 2002).

Carol J. Adams brilliantly analyzes the connection between women and animals through parallels between pornography and meat consumption in her *Sexual Politics of Meat* (New York, Continuum, 1990) and *Pornography of Meat* (New York, Continuum, 2003). Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan's *Animals and Women*: *Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham, Duke UP, 1995) and *Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* (New York, Columbia UP, 2007) explore the women-animal connection along the lines of care tradition. Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Chicago, U of Indiana P, 2003) and *When Species Meet* (Minnesota, U of Minnesota P, 2008) underline the complex biological, historical and social interconnectedness between animals and women.

[4] Subsequent parenthetical references to this work will include only page numbers.

[5] For one of the best readings of the Genesis story and Western philosophy's treatment of animals see, Jacques Derrida, "The Animal that Therefore I Am" *(Critical Inquiry* 28.2 [2002]: 369-418.)

[6] Nunez turns this meaning of naming as domination on its head by providing a name for only one of her characters, Apollo, and leaving the rest without names.

[7] Descartes made this infamous announcement as a response to the ethical dilemma caused by the practice of vivisection.

The argument on animals' lack of reasoning finally gave way to their lack of language after what has come to be known as the linguistic turn, which has been challenged by philosophers of counter-linguistic turn, who argue that language, far from being a privilege, is a prison that humans have confined themselves in. For a comprehensive analysis of animals and philosophers, see Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals*, (New York, Columbia UP, 2012).

Works Cited

Adams, Carol J. *Sexual Politics of Meat*. New York: Continuum, 1990.

---. *Pornography of Meat*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

Adams, Carol J. and Josephine Donovan (eds). *Animals and Women*: *Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995

---. *Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007

Bekoff, Marc. *Wild Justice*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2009.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Animal That Therefore I am" *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 369-418. Reprinted in Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.1-51.

Haraway, Donna. "*The Companion Species Manifesto*. Chicago: U of Indiana P, 2003

---. Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons, Philosophers, and Biologists" *Configurations* 14.1-2 (2006): 94-114.

---. *When Species Meet*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

Johnson, Michelle. Review of *The Friend*, by Sigrid Nunez. *World Literature Today*, Winter 2019, 47.

MacIntyre, Alisdair. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago: Open Court Publising House, 1999.

Nunez, Sigrid. *The Friend*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2018.

Patterson, Charles. *Eternal Treblinka*. New York: Lantern Books, 2002.

Savage-Rumbough, Sue. *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2004

Spiegel, Marjorie. *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988.

Weil, Kari. *Thinking Animals*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012.

***JAST*, 2021; 56:67 - 90**
Submitted: 13.08.2021
Accepted: 23.10.2021
ORCID# 0000-0002-1014-8207

Towards and Across Third Cultures: South Asian American Transnationalisms and Rhizomatic Subjectivities in Jhumpa Lahiri's Oeuvre

Carole Martin

Abstract

Physically and/or figuratively, Bengali American writer Jhumpa Lahiri's hybrid protagonists transcend national borders and form dynamic subjectivities that resist simplified assumptions about transnational migration. However, while some characters like to either accentuate their ancestral South Asian heritage or endorse their assimilation to the United States, others rejoice in embracing third cultures or embarking on unexpected journeys without fixed points, thereby questioning the restrictive container of the nation-state as the dominant category for examining society. Sustained by Homi K. Bhabha's and Stuart Hall's theoretical approaches to cultural identity and influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomatic thinking, I will focus on Lahiri's autobiography and her fiction in English that portrays characters who, overexerted by the constraints of the two cultures wanting to claim them, find refuge in a third culture or defy the nation-state completely by considering themselves citizens of the world, or nomads.

Keywords: South Asian American Literature, Transnationalism, Hybridity, Diaspora, Rhizome

Üçüncü Kültürler Arasında, Üçüncü Kültürlere Doğru: Jhumpa Lahiri'nin Eserlerinde Güney Asyalı Amerikalı Ulusötesicilik ve Rizomatik Öznellikler

Öz

Bengalli Amerikalı yazar Jhumpa Lahiri'nin melez ana karakterleri fiziksel veya mecazi anlamda ulusal sınırları aşar ve ulusötesi göçe dair basitleştirilmiş varsayımlara direnen dinamik öznellikler oluştururlar. Lahiri'nin bazı karakterleri atalarından gelen Güney Asyalı kimliğini vurgular veya Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde asimile olmayı uygun bulurken, diğerleri benimsedikleri üçüncü kültürler sayesinde sabit bir noktada durmaksızın, toplumu kontrolü altında tutan baskıcı ulus-devletinin kısıtlayıcı sınırlarını sorgulamayı mümkün kılan beklenmedik yolculuklara koyulurlar. Bu makale, Homi K. Bhabha ve Stuart Hall'un kültürel kimliğe yönelik teorik yaklaşımlarından ve Gilles Deleuze ve Félix Guattari'nin rizomatik düşüncesinden faydalanarak Lahiri'nin İngilizce otobiyografisinde ve kurmacalarında yer alan, üzerinde iki farklı kültürün hak iddia ettiği, bu kültürlerin dayattıkları kısıtlamalar yüzünden yorgun düşen, ancak sonunda bir üçüncü kültüre sığınan, kendilerini dünya vatandaşları veya göçebeler olarak görmeye başlayan ve ulus-devletine tamamen karşı çıkan karakterlerine odaklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Asyalı Amerikalı Edebiyatı, Ulusötesicilik, Melezlik, Diaspora, Rizom

Roots, routes, or rhizomes? Throughout her work written in English, Bengali American writer Jhumpa Lahiri's hybrid protagonists transcend national borders—physically and/or figuratively—and form dynamic subjectivities that resist simplified assumptions about transnational migration. However, while some characters like to either accentuate their ancestral South Asian heritage or endorse their assimilation to the United States, others rejoice in embracing third cultures or embarking on unexpected journeys without fixed points, thereby questioning the restrictive container of the nation-state as the dominant category for examining society. To capture complex migratory experi-

ences that challenge essentializing concepts of cultural identity based on roots, scholars of different disciplines have turned to notions of transnationalism and diaspora that apply rhizomatic ideas by shifting the focus to routes without discarding the notion of roots. In this article, I will concentrate on Lahiri's autobiography and her fiction written in English that portrays characters who, overexerted by the constraints of the two cultures wanting to claim them, find refuge in a third culture or defy the nation-state completely by considering themselves citizens of the world, or nomads, in order to propose that transnational frameworks that continue to rely on binary oppositions—even if they highlight spaces in-between cultures—cannot always be sufficient for discussing these South Asian American individuals' negotiations of their hybrid identities.

Make Rhizomes, Not Roots: Theoretical Considerations

Before delving into the textual analysis of Lahiri's autographical and fictional work, some pivotal terms crucial for the discussion of literary productions that are examining transnational migration need to be considered. Making use of the term 'hybridity,' influential postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes how individuals in cross-cultural confrontations are situated within a space in-between cultures, which he calls 'third space' (36–39). Against propositions contending that there are distinctive and authentic cultures, he argues that

> [i]t is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space [the third space] of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (Bhabha 37)

Thus, the location of culture is positioned in this third space, a hybrid and changing space in which new actions, practices, and identifications can evolve to unsettle reductive contemplations of culture.

Bhabha's viewpoints comply with a poststructuralist shift from considering identities as fixed entities to seeing them as dynamic and in perpetual flux. In this context, cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines two takes on the notion of 'cultural identity': "[t]he first position defines

'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (393). This perspective, although important for postcolonial struggles, sees identity as static, whereas the second one acknowledges how identities are usually not as fixed and instead subjects to change: "[c]ultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (394). In this understanding, identities are not determined by their roots but instead always in production, in process, and in need to be considered in their specific contexts (392). Referring to diaspora experiences, Hall advocates for "a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (402) and sees diaspora identities as "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (402). Thus, this second definition that stresses 'becoming' emerges as crucial for the discussion of hybrid, diasporic identities.

Hall's thinking was, as Kobena Mercer suggests, heavily impacted by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), which "reconceptualiz[es] diaspora not as a tragic loss of organic *roots* but as a polycentric network of cross-cultural *routes* that give black culture its transnational dynamism" (Mercer 8). Examining hybrid diaspora models, Michel Bruneau notes how Anglo-American authors discussing the Black diaspora like

> Hall and Gilroy . . . refer to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and to the image of the rhizome as opposed to that of the root—i.e. to a world of dissemination and hybridisation, as opposed to a world of filiation and heritage. There is no hard core of identity . . . but a variety of formations. This hybrid diaspora rejects all reference to the nation and to nationalist ideologies. (Bruneau 37)

Based on the botanical rhizome, denoting plant systems with a subterranean stem and aerial offshoots, the notion of the philosophical 'rhizome' was introduced by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari to propose a horizontal, postmodern view on knowledge organization opposing hierarchically structured paradigms that rely on the model of the tree, or 'arborescence.' "Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots!" (Deleuze and Guat-

tari 4), they request, and remark that "[a] rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (25), creating a flexible metaphor fruitful for reflections on hybrid identities. Questioning fixed rootedness and the notion of a center or single point of origin, the rhizome destabilizes hierarchies and emphasizes deterritorialization and movement. Among its characteristics are the principles of connection, heterogeneity (7), and multiplicity (8). Whereas the tree is structured by filiation, the rhizome is an anti-genealogical (21) concept and organized through relations, or alliance (25); "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature" (21). Despite their preference of routes and open-ended rhizomes, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that roots and rhizomes can also coexist: "there are very diverse map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblages, with variable coefficients of deterritorialization. There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome" (15). Through this web of alliance, new roots can be spread that do not originate from one's ancestral culture. In the consideration of diaspora identities, the rhizome can serve as liberating model because to consider identities as rhizomatic allows individuals to move beyond the constraining roots of both their ancestral and their newly adopted cultures.

Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the nomad, identified as antipole to sedentariness and the state accordingly, sheds light on such individuals who are characterized by absolute movement in smooth, and thus open-ended spaces: "[t]he life of the nomad is the intermezzo" (380). Nomads, just like migrants, are located in-between, but their in-betweenness is even more autonomous and not positioned between merely two points, distinguishing the nomad from the migrant—albeit they might mix—as follows:

> [t]he nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory. (Deleuze and Guattari 380).

Considering some of Lahiri's characters, who defy being claimed by either home- or hostland, the figure of the nomad moving

in a multidirectional, open-ended rhizome system offers suitable outlooks.

However, Deleuze and Guattari's take on nomadism, and mobility generally, has been criticized (e.g., Marder) as romanticizing view of the transformative power of opposing the state and sedentariness. By idealizing mobility and neglecting imposed mobility, privileged individuals jovially travelling the world and refugees violently forced to leave their homes are seemingly put into the same category. The nomad thus also encourages a link to cosmopolitanism, which has similarly been judged for its elitist class-bias. Whereas transnationalism questions the category of the nation-state by merely transcending and blurring national boundaries, cosmopolitanism rejects the ideology of the nation-state altogether and instead offers "a new moral and ethnic standpoint suitable for 21st-century global life" (Roudometof 113) to include each and every one as 'citizen of the world,' which resonates with the nomad's open-ended movement. Despite the class-based criticism of these concepts, they are well-suited for the rhizomatic subjectivities that Lahiri presents in her work; an intersectional analysis of her South Asian American characters reveals how their race—and, in many instances, their gender—might complicate their routes, yet their (usually) advantageous class position can facilitate comparatively free movements.

Wandering the World: Autobiographical Correlations

Some of the experiences that Lahiri's fictional characters recount throughout her oeuvre recur in her linguistic autobiography *In Altre Parole* (2015), in which she details her fascination for the Italian language and her negotiation of her hybrid identity. Mirroring its transnational contents, the Bloomsbury edition *In Other Words* presents the original Italian text next to the English translation by Ann Goldstein. Although the genre clearly distinguishes this work from Lahiri's other literary productions, the topics she discusses remain the same: "[t]he themes, ultimately, are unchanged: identity, alienation, belonging. But the wrapping, the contents, the body and soul are transfigured" (*In Other Words* 211). The metaphors Lahiri introduces can become useful in the exploration of hybridity and the relationship between roots and routes.

Lahiri[1] chronicles her engagement with the Italian language and culture, a challenging journey in which each step on the way becomes crucial for her to come to terms with her in-between identity. In 1994, when she is in her mid-twenties, she first travels to Italy and is immediately allured by the language, feeling an instant desire to get to know it better; it is "[l]ove at first sight" (*In Other Words* 15). Back in the U.S., she starts taking elementary courses and returns to Italy six years later, only to realize that she needs more opportunities for dialogue. Her longing to improve her Italian is vigorous as she feels "tortured" (29) and "incomplete" (29) without it, thus she resolves to keep on studying in New York with a private teacher. Still, when she takes part in a literary festival in Rome, she fails to properly converse in Italian despite her preparations. The birth of her daughter puts a temporary halt to her active efforts to improve her Italian, but when she is invited to promote her short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* in Italy after its publication in 2008, she finds a new teacher to continue her courtship of the language. However, she is discouraged again when she still does not manage to use it fluently; hence, she finds another private teacher, with whom "[her] strange devotion to the language seems more a vocation than a folly" (33). Her lessons become her favorite activity and she ventures to take a bold next step by moving to Italy with her husband and their two children in 2012. Six months before their departure, Lahiri stops reading in English, making her a "divided person" (37) as she is about to finish writing her novel *The Lowland* in English while only reading in Italian. Once in Rome, despite facing many difficulties, her linguistic journey succeeds on more solid paths as she automatically starts writing her diary in Italian, and, after a while, she even crafts pieces of prose in Italian. Her very first complete story written in Italian, "Lo Scambio"/"The Exchange," in which a woman sets out to live in an unknown city, features as a chapter in *In Other Words*. As stated in the afterword, Lahiri has to return to the U.S. by the end of 2014, but today's readers know that this will not mark the end of her relationship with Italian: more than two decades after first getting in touch with the language, her first novel in Italian, *Dove Mi Trovo* (2018), is published.

In Other Words goes beyond delivering insight into the author's physical life journeys and getting to know a foreign language; what makes the work unique for the discussion of transnational and diasporic identities is how Lahiri sees her hybridity as the reason for her fascination for Italian and captivatingly depicts her relationships with

the three languages as well as their significance in shaping her identity. Moreover, in doing so, she provides compelling images to visualize the workings of spaces in-between cultures. The unresolved conflict between her two first languages—Bengali, the mother, and English, the stepmother—illustrates the ambivalence of inhabiting a hybrid space: "[t]hose two languages of mine didn't get along. They were incompatible adversaries, intolerant of each other. I thought they had nothing in common except me, so that I felt like a contradiction in terms myself" (*In Other Words* 149). Lahiri sees her refuge in Italian as a reaction to her inability to properly access either her Bengali or her American roots:

> Because of my divided identity, or perhaps by disposition, I consider myself an incomplete person, in some way deficient. Maybe there is a linguistic reason—the lack of a language to identify with. As a girl in America, I tried to speak Bengali perfectly, without a foreign accent, to satisfy my parents, and above all to feel that I was completely their daughter. But it was impossible. On the other hand, I wanted to be considered an American, yet, despite the fact that I speak English perfectly, that was impossible, too. I was suspended rather than rooted. I had two sides, neither well defined. The anxiety I felt, and still feel, comes from a sense of inadequacy, of being a disappointment.
>
> Here in Italy, where I'm very comfortable, I feel more imperfect than ever. Every day, when I speak, when I write in Italian, I meet with imperfection. . . It betrays me; it reveals that I am not rooted in this language. (111/13)

Lahiri's three languages become proxies for the three cultural systems framing her identity. Before the arrival of Italian, she does not find peace in the third space that unfolds between her ancestral culture and her American environment and is struck by her fruitless endeavors of reaching perfection, of not meeting expectations on either end. On the surface, it can be argued that by becoming a critically acclaimed writer in the English language narrating the South Asian American immigration experience, she has nevertheless managed to reconcile the two forces trying to absorb her and taken her hybridity as opportunity. However, as Lahiri explains in *In Other Words*, she needed to take her liberation one step further: her contentment is reached via escape to Italian, a language that is in not rooted in her heritage and has no claims on her—"no family, cultural, social pressure. No necessity" (153)—

thus focusing on routes rather than roots.

In order to picture her linguistic journey, Lahiri envisions a triangle, each corner marking an actor affecting the production of her dynamic identity without any of them taking full control:

> The arrival of Italian, the third point of my linguistic journey, creates a triangle. It creates a shape rather than a straight line. A triangle is a complex structure, a dynamic figure. The third point changes the dynamic of that quarrelsome old couple [English and Bengali]. I am the child of those unhappy points, but the third does not come from them. It comes from my desire, my labor. It comes from me.
>
> I think that studying Italian is a flight from the long clash in my life between English and Bengali. A rejection of both the mother and the stepmother. An independent path. (*In Other Words* 153)

The metaphor of the triangle offers an enriched understanding of hybridity; Lahiri not only deconstructs the binary opposition of Bengali and American by moving between two cultures but by expanding her third space towards a third polarity. The first and second poles, although she never reaches their foundations completely, are rooted, whereas the third is specifically different and flexible, an additional layer she fashioned herself—her own "independent path," her own route.

Lahiri frequently relies on imagery defending a 'routes rather than roots' angle; in several instances in her autobiography, structures like bridges or paths are employed as metaphors emphasizing the ever-changing, multidirectional nature of identity quests in which the journey is the reward: "It [the autobiography] recounts an uprooting, a state of disorientation, a discovery. It recounts a journey that is at times exiting, at times exhausting. An absurd journey, given that the traveler never reaches her destination" (*In Other Words* 213). Nevertheless, the narrator's ultimate stance towards the tension between roots and routes remains ambiguous. Occasionally, Lahiri entrusts in roots; for example, when she returns to the U.S. after her very first trip across the Atlantic, she considers herself to be in a linguistic exile from Italian by not being in Italy: "[e]very language belongs to a specific place. It can migrate, it can spread. But usually it's tied to a geographical territory, a country" (19). This passage considers languages to be terri-

torially bound to certain nation-states, an assessment that transnational approaches to migration negate. This passage also indicates that Lahiri, the narrator of *In Other Words*, as well as her characters in other works, frequently do not unconditionally eliminate national borders despite transcending them.

However, Lahiri later contradicts this viewpoint when she re-evaluates the notion of exile:

> [t]hose who don't belong to any specific place can't, in fact, return anywhere. The concepts of exile and return imply a point of origin, a homeland. Without a homeland and without a true mother tongue, I wander the world, even at my desk. In the end I realize that it wasn't a true exile: far from it. I am exiled even from the definition of exile".(*In Other Words* 133)

She describes herself as a nomad-like wanderer going from point to point, moving in a rhizomatic web of relations and celebrating the unpredictable intermezzo. Thus, it can be argued that "she keeps moving along her nomadic trajectory and encourages the reader to, likewise, always seek new ways of thinking with the world and inhabit it in a rhizomic way" (Austin 185). Nonetheless, despite her insistence on the apparent open-endedness of her route, it should not be neglected that eventually, *In Other Words* is a love story dedicated to a specific language—Italian—that acknowledges how the first two languages—Bengali and American—remain important; Lahiri enjoys the autonomous in-between, but these three cornerstones are more than mere relays. This distinguishes her from the Deleuzian nomad, for whom "[t]he water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay" (Deleuze and Guattari 380). By using a triangle, naming its points, and highlighting the dynamics of the structure, Lahiri manages to embrace routes without denying the relevance of points along the way, which are not all rooted, but fixed to the extent that they are clearly identifiable.

What further deserves contemplation when investigating the interplay between roots and routes as presented in the autobiography is Lahiri's identity as a writer, which she recognizes as crucial for the negotiation of her identity: "[b]efore I became a writer, I lacked a clear, precise identity" (*In Other Words* 83). Her self-acquired identity as a writer explains her incessant focus on language: "I'm a writer: I iden-

tify myself completely with language, I work with it" (143). Lahiri's identity as a writer supports her acquisition of a new language—whilst she feels rooted as a writer, her different layers of languages and cultures are less stable. Nevertheless, her identity as a writer is not a totalitarian root because it is interconnected with her languages and cultures, meaning that their change also causes a change in Lahiri's identity as a writer.

This proposition is strengthened by the above-mentioned short story "Lo scambio"/"The Exchange," featured within the book, in which the parallels between Lahiri and the protagonist are unmistakable. A woman, a translator by profession, moves to a new city and loses her sweater. When it turns up again, she does not recognize it; it does not feel comfortable anymore, making her question her decision of leaving for another place: "[t]he translator felt disconcerted, empty. She had come to that city looking for another version of herself, a transfiguration. But she understood that her identity was insidious, a root that she would never be able to pull up, a prison in which she would be trapped" (*In Other Words* 79), seemingly representing a view on identity with only little flexibility. The next day, however, the translator rediscovers hope when she realizes that the sweater really was hers, it had just mysteriously changed shape, and yet she starts to prefer it that way because "[n]ow, when she put it on, she, too, was another" (81). After finishing this short story, Lahiri comprehends that the sweater is language. The metaphor of the sweater as language implies that a layer to identity susceptible to change can in turn also change the base of identity. In Lahiri's case, as she openly identifies as a writer, it suggests that Italian, which she had tried to study for years just like the narrator had already owned the sweater before her trip, suddenly takes on new forms when she arrives in Italy and ends up changing her identity as a writer, too, drawing a rhizomatic image in which everything is interconnected. Lahiri has "object[ed] [herself], as a writer, to a metamorphosis" (161); her Italian grows and transforms until she is even able to compose stories in it, pivotal for her life as a writer. Her acquisition of a new language thus destabilizes the idea of an insidious, root-based identity after all; although Lahiri has become an individual moving in a rhizomatic space, she is no Deleuzian nomad in a strict sense.

Ultimately, Lahiri's position towards roots versus routes remains ambivalent. Although her preference of routes is apparent, the amount to which she relies on roots cannot be ascertained. Her for-

mulation of a Bengali-English-Italian triangle seems to demonstrate that frequently, her reasoning is still guided by ethnic and/or linguistic categories. Besides, her overarching identity as a writer, although produced by herself over time and in continuous transformation, has developed a root-like status despite not belonging to any national territory. Eventually, Lahiri does not deny roots but focuses on routes and her designations of identity cannot be captured by transnational or diasporic approaches that foreground a hybrid space between two polarities rather than three or more. Bhabha's model might be adapted to fit these circumstances, but Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome seems to be better equipped to envision the involved dynamics, which is adequate for the discussion of Lahiri's flexible identity that springs from different sources.

No Claims: Third Culture Triangles

The goal of this article is not to compare Lahiri's autobiography and other accounts with her literary work to attest any supposed factual origins for her stories or to risk committing intentional fallacies. Rather, the images she uses to approach her hybrid identity—especially the triangle—can serve as additional tools for analysis when considering her fiction because in the same manner as narrator-Lahiri seeks refuge with Italian to help her stabilize her identity, some of her characters have escaped to other third cultures in order to come to terms with their hybridity. This phenomenon is most frequently encountered with second-generation immigrants who feel torn between their parents' Bengali culture and their everyday American environment. Whilst some reconcile their two spheres of influence over time by moving comfortably in a hybrid third space, others want to expand it by departing to a completely different, new culture; "double displacements result in feelings of unbelonging in both spaces, and hence we often find in Lahiri a tendency to allow her second-generation subjects to explore a 'third space' and culture quite different from what they've known as 'home'" (Dutt-Ballerstadt 173). In this section, some examples will be considered through the lens of Lahiri's triangle introduced in *In Other Words*.

Moushumi, Gogol's (ex-)wife in the novel *The Namesake* (2003), has always rebelled against her parents' expectations and found solace in the French language and culture, with which she could engage without pressure:

> At Brown her rebellion had been academic. At her parents' insistence, she'd majored in chemistry, for they were hopeful she would follow in her father's footsteps. Without telling them, she'd pursued a double major in French. Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge—she approached French, unlike things American or Indian, without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever. (*Namesake* 214)

Similar to Lahiri's flight to Italian, Moushumi flees to French, which emerges as the dynamic third point of her triangle. For some time after college, she moves to Paris and undergoes a social and personal metamorphosis: "in that new city, she was transformed into the kind of girl she had once envied" (215). Gogol is jealous of Moushumi's experiences in a country other than the United States or India: "Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt. He admires her, even resents her a little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life" (233). In this passage, the lack of "guilt" and "misgiving" is emphasized once again, expressing the liberating nature of third cultures. Moushumi pursues a PhD in French literature to write a dissertation on francophone Algerian poets, indicating that her dynamic third pole is hybrid by itself. Her love for reading persists; whereas Lahiri as the narrator of *In Other Words* relies on her identity as a writer as the base for her other alternative selves, Moushumi's identity as a bookworm underpins her other layers, but it is similarly enmeshed with them in a rhizomatic web since her reading has changed, too.

While Moushumi's example almost flawlessly fits into the triangle paradigm proposed in *In Other Words*, Hema's escape to a third culture in the three short stories making up the second part of *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) does not properly correspond with the acquisition of a third language. After her breakup with a married American man and before her arranged marriage to Navin, Hema enjoys a period of comfortable solitude in Italy. Referring to Moushumi and Hema, Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt claims that their flights are "a rebellion that is provoked by their position of being ethnic Bengali and women within the Indian patriarchal framework" (170). Although Moushumi's escape resembles a rebellion, Hema's is of a more impermanent nature as she merely wishes to have some time by herself before flying to India to at-

tend her marriage—it is more of a break than a rebellion. Furthermore, what distinguishes her from Moushumi is that her knowledge of the local language, Italian, is only broken, and she feels more like a guest than an actual resident in Rome. She is, however, diligently acquainted with the region's ancient history, which is what drew her to the country in the first place. This tension between familiarity and distance reminds her of her relationship to Calcutta:

> [l]ike Calcutta, which she'd visited throughout childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all—a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay. She knew the ancient language of Rome, its rulers and writers, its history from founding to collapse. But she was a tourist in everyday Italy. ("Going Ashore" 299)

Hema's immersion into a third culture is at once more constraining and more flexible than narrator-Lahiri's or Moushumi's; because Hema fell in love with Latin, which has been "an addiction" (299) ever since she was a teenager, she cannot claim a living culture, though at the same time, her endeavors are less territorially bound. She enjoys being a visitor in Italy, but her greatest passion is concentrating on her work as a professor in classical studies—for which she could technically reside anywhere else in the world, even if Rome is an advantageous standpoint to make trips to historic sites and access local libraries. However, another problem that arises from Latin's limited use is that Hema's engagement with a third culture remains a lonely commitment that manages to ensure stability in her job, but not to rhizomatically interconnect with other aspects of her life. Hema, who has always been keen on keeping her independence, tries to convince herself that she fancies her solitary routines, and yet "what constantly re-surfaces in the text is her anxiety that the alchemizing and stabilizing process inherent in her self-confessed 'addiction' to reading Latin should be restricted to her professional life only" (Munos 117). Narrator-Lahiri, in comparison, emphasizes the importance of friends in her efforts to improve her Italian and create a dialogue, while Moushumi enjoys being a popular socialite in Paris.

Nevertheless, neither Moushumi's nor Hema's flights to a third culture detangle them from their uneasy relationships towards their hybridity. Both have found temporary solace in their additional, independently chosen third culture, but their wish for an uncomplicat-

ed family life makes them return to their Bengali roots by entering arranged marriages. Moushumi's marriage, however, ends in divorce because she cheats on Gogol—an alternate way of regaining freedom, as Min Hyoung Song suggests: "[w]hen she [Moushumi] plunges into bodily pleasures, she comes as close to a feeling of freedom as any she has ever known" (361). Hema's future is not painted too brightly, either; marrying Navin is a recourse to roots to which she does not feel connected. In this respect, Sudha—protagonist of "Only Goodness" in *Unaccustomed Earth*—has found more happiness in her third culture, but her situation differs significantly. Sudha's parents emigrated to London before settling in the U.S. and Sudha was born there, facilitating her move on a legal level because of her British passport. Moreover, her competence in English assists her on a practical level. On an emotional level, going to London is also a return to her geographical roots and makes her feel closer to her parents, whose life together had started there, giving Sudha "an instinctive connection to London, a sense of belonging though she barely knew her way around" ("Only Goodness" 144). The distance from her parents and the resulting absence of not necessarily cultural, but familial constraints are additional factors for Sudha's success in London. Furthermore, London is the place where she meets her British husband Roger, who enjoyed a privileged upbringing in English boarding schools all over the world and was born in India. These preconditions make him more appropriate as interracial marriage partner in the eyes of Sudha's parents: "[i]t helped that he'd been born in India, that he was English and not American" (152). Her third point is much more fixed than narrator-Lahiri's, Moushumi's, or Hema's due to these favorable circumstances and Sudha becomes virtually assimilated to her third culture, settling down in England and adopting a British accent. However, her family and the contact to the U.S. keep important positions in Sudha's life, a life that has been marked by rhizomatic routes but also by planting new roots, which is why the image of the triangle is fitting for the discussion of her hybrid, trinational identity.

The third points these second-generation women choose to complete their third culture triangles with are based on individual nation-states; Moushumi moves to France to engage with French culture, Hema to Italy to follow her interest in classical studies, and Sudha escapes to England. Supported by their privileged class status, they are free in their choice to move to Europe. In Paris, Rome, and London,

they are considered foreigners, which is exactly what they seek: a new culture that has no claims on them, meaning that "[these] second-generation women approach their *intentional foreignness* as liberation" (Dutt-Ballerstadt 170) in their third cultures, whereas their unbelonging to the U.S. and India had always been a source of anxiety.

Nevertheless, although they move in rhizomatic spaces in-between and emphasize routes and new roots instead of predetermined roots, these women's decentered subjectivities eventually continue to be directed towards certain nation-states. By focusing on transcending and blurring national borders without getting rid of them, their migratory experiences remain transnational, but they evade and thus question transnational frameworks that are built around two polarities. At this point, Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome emerges as helpful to describe how different components of their multi-layered identities are linked in a web of alliances. Although their intermezzo spaces evolve rhizomatically, the metaphor still does not hold completely as certain points remain important anchors in these women's lives and could be called "knots of arborescence in rhizomes" (Deleuze and Guattari 20) forming "rhizome-root assemblages" (15). Thus, just like narrator-Lahiri, they are not truly Deleuzian nomads despite their temporary nomadism and partly rhizomatic identities, which distinguishes them from the characters considered in the subsequent subsection, whose nomadic sensibilities are more palpable.

Forging Rootless Paths: Nomadic Subjectivities

Whereas Moushumi, Hema, and Sudha turn to a third culture, others find comfort as global citizens in the world, or as individuals who neither identify with national nor transnational categories. Instead of resulting in the celebration of a space in-between two or more cultures, their becoming or negotiation of their diaspora identities necessitates movements beyond this space, and sometimes beyond roots altogether. Most of these characters can be found in Lahiri's latest novel written in English, *The Lowland* (2013), in which "Lahiri switches her attention away from roots and the accompanying debate on hybridity and authenticity in favor of the stems of the plant, and especially the kind that grows without having one central root according to which others are situated in a hierarchical relation" (Austin 175). As Kaushik's example in *Unaccustomed Earth* shows, some of these issues

sporadically surface in her earlier work.

After graduating from college, Kaushik sets off on a journey to Central America and, more by chance than by choice, he starts travelling the world as a photojournalist, a job that "allow[s] him permanently to avoid the United States" ("Going Ashore" 305). Kaushik's circumvention of this country and his restless wandering in the world arise from his unusual upbringing marked by transnational relocation and the death of his mother in the U.S. For the first nine years of his life, Kaushik grows up in Boston, but then his parents decide to move to Mumbai. Seven years later, his mother is dying from cancer and, "not wanting to be suffocated by the attention" ("Once in a Lifetime" 250) she would receive from her relatives in India, the family returns to the U.S. Thus, both Kaushik's home- and hostland are marked by a void; he inherits the loss of his ancestral culture from his parents as a young boy in the U.S. and experiences it himself as a teenager when leaving India. Similarly, he lacks belonging to the U.S. without his mother, who after her death remains "an un-dead presence which, like the motherland, can be imagined as disowning finitude through her everlasting impact on her offspring" (Munos 19). Without a home to return to, Kaushik's movement becomes a necessity, "a willingness—and . . . perhaps this was also a need—to disappear at any moment" ("Going Ashore" 317). As a consequence, his "hyper mobility seems to render the very idea of home obsolete, since Kaushik's endless travel rejects the possibility of becoming familiar with the places he visits" (Stoican, "Traumatic Effects" 92). In that way, he can truly be understood as a Deleuzian nomad: the places he visits become mere relays on his trajectory to which he rarely looks back to since to keep on moving rhizomatically has become his only purpose. Nevertheless, his origins have a permanent traumatic effect on him, making him, despite his incessant need for mobility, yearn to reconcile his roots by retrieving them instead of escaping them via routes. This paradox, "an inability to balance the need for the stability provided by structures of attachment (family, places, relationship) with the impulse to preserve a sense of detachment meant to avoid the trauma of another loss" (94), obstructs his bond to Hema. Hema shares his hybridity and through her, he seemingly wishes to conjure ties to his host- and homeland simultaneously, but he is unable to form true attachment because of the loss of his mother, his motherland, and his host country.

Bela, considered "a nomad" (*Lowland* 301) by her father, is an-

other nomadic figure in Lahiri's work whose restlessness can be traced back to the absence of a mother. However, she is not the same type of nomad as Kaushik; she does not travel between countries, but between American States by working as a moving farm worker. Having "forged a rootless path" (273) by never getting close to any place through personal relationships, she lives without stability—"without insurance, without heed for her future. Without a fixed address" (271). Patrycja Austin convincingly sketches the natural imagery employed in *The Lowland* to underscore characters' nomadic sensibilities, which she sees to be completely realized in Bela: "Bela lives in what Deleuze and Guattari term a smooth space; her choices are independent and free, not subjected to norms and regulations, barriers or constrictions of any kind, political or economic" (184), allowing her to move freely without looking back. Nevertheless, similar to Kaushik's struggles, Bela's wandering can be seen as a result of her inability to find her place in the world as a motherless and hybrid South Asian American individual. Her mother Gauri left the family when she was a teenager and despite longing to create an alternative lifestyle free of familial bonds, Bela admits that "[s]he remains in constant communication with her [Gauri]. Everything in Bela's life has been a reaction. I am who I am, she would say, I live as I do because of you" (*Lowland* 316), attesting the mother's presence through absence that has determined Bela's restless path.

Another issue that betrays Bela's independent nomadism is that she knows at least one point of stability in her life: her father Subhash. However, this anchor turns out to be one formed through alliance rather than direct filiation when, towards the end of the novel, she finds out that he is not her biological father, demonstrating that "antigenealogical connotations of the rhizome . . . characterize Subhash and Bela's relationship" (Stoican, "Cultural Dissolution" 39). After his brother's tragic murder in India, Subhash—due to a heightened sense of familial responsibility–marries Udayan's pregnant widow Gauri and brings her to his home in the U.S. to raise the child as his own. By telling Bela about her true origins, Subhash releases her from the shackles of ignorance about her past that have, despite her practice of coping by moving, held her prisoner: "[s]he taught herself to ignore it, to walk away. And yet the hole remained her hollow point of origin, the cold crosshairs of her existence" (*Lowland* 328). The knowledge of her heritage liberates her and puts a halt to her wandering; Bela, pregnant at the time, decides to move back in with Subhash to form an alternative

family—by exploring a new kind of rootedness and by becoming a mother herself, she manages to fill the void created by Gauri. Bela's travels have helped her escape uneasy truths, but it was her eventual accomplishment of planting new roots that made her come to peace with them.

Her mother Gauri's life has similarly been marked by displacement and constant, nomadic-like movement, which is unusual in Lahiri's work for a first-generation woman migrant. Her parents die when she is still young, removing her from her parental home at an early age. She moves to Udayan's home upon their marriage and, marrying Subhash after her first husband's murder, she becomes transnational by crossing national borders to make a new life in the U.S., where she leaves her newly-formed family to become a professor instead of a mother. As an academic, she travels as a privileged cosmopolitan throughout the world to attend conferences and through the rhizomatic structures of the internet, whose "[c]itizens . . . dwell free from hierarchy" (*Lowland* 336), she manages to keep ties to India. On a more emotional level, but occasionally also physically, her captivation with German philosophy and language forms a third culture triangle. As has been discussed in regard to Moushumi, Hema, and Sudha, Gauri's escape to a third culture can be interpreted as a continuous craving for certain roots, even if those are new ones found through routes. Furthermore, the losses of Udayan and Bela accompany her throughout her life, diminishing Gauri's nomadic subjectivity since there are certain points in her life that she has not truly left behind. Nevertheless, in the discussion of her identity, Gauri evokes images of the rhizome by referring to multiplicity, independence, and continuous becoming:

> [H]er role had changed at so many other points in the past. From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. With the exception of losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps.
>
> She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end. (291)

Rather than emphasizing her genealogical filiations or transnational dislocations, Gauri focuses on the multiple layers of her identity,

her "alternative versions" caused by her changing roles in interpersonal relationships. Eventually, because these relationships—except for her short-lived bond to Udayan—are unsuccessful, she is left by herself and her incessant movement is revealed to be a flight instead of a liberating nomadic preference.

Subhash, as the third protagonist of *The Lowland*, shares certain nomadic sensibilities with Bela and Gauri. In Calcutta, he stands in his brother Udayan's shadow, thus when he arrives in the U.S., he sees it as an opportunity to grow far away from his parents; "[his] free-willed uprooting reveals the character's transcendent urge" (Stoican, "Cultural Dissolution" 36). Applying plant imagery, Subhash's and Udayan's differing life paths are mirrored very early in the novel in a passage on mangrove trees: "if the propagules dropped at low tide they reproduced alongside the parents, spearing themselves in brackish marsh. But at high water they drifted from their source of origin, for up to a year, before maturing in a suitable environment" (*Lowland* 14–15)—Subhash chose to leave his homeland in order to mature in the U.S. He develops a transnational rather than a rhizomatic identity in his initial years of immigration as he oscillates between assimilation and connections to the homeland. In this respect, Austin argues that because of his continuous ties to India and through viewing his identity as fixed, "[he] epitomizes what Deleuze and Guattari would call an immigrant, but not a nomad" (183). Subhash is indeed not a true Deleuzian nomad, but Austin's assertion that he relies on static identifications for all of his life is misleading; instead, as the novel progresses over decades, Subhash's becoming takes on more rhizomatic features depending less on nation-states or transnational in-betweenness.

This development starts when he realizes upon visiting Calcutta in his later life that without the people that he held dear there, "[t]he rest of the city, alive, importunate, held no meaning to him" (268). His brother as well as his father are dead by that point, his mother is in a deranged mental state and barely recognizes her son. After her eventual death, Subhash keeps the parental home, but he does not return anymore and is certain that he will never live there (308). Similarly, he starts feeling alienated from Rhode Island in his sixties; he has lived there most of his life, but as the town is changing, he suddenly gets the feeling of "still [being] a visitor" (308). He rediscovers stability through marrying Elise, a widowed Portuguese American woman, and through their union becomes part of another transnational family. On

their honeymoon in Ireland, when he ponders his late-found happiness, "[h]e is awash with the gratitude of his advancing years, for the timeless splendors of the earth, for the opportunity to behold them" (402). With a certain degree of cosmopolitan subjectivity, Subhash is at peace with the world and his hybridity. Although his remaining years will primarily be outlived in Rhode Island, where he has sprouted new roots, Subhash is not drawn to the U.S. specifically, but rather to the alliances he made there, and will also be able to travel the world because of his convenient economic circumstances. This exposes how roots evolving in rhizomatic webs—although they might continue to spread arborescently—are independent from genealogy. Furthermore, his Bengali heritage has been detached from specific people as well as geographical locations and yet it persists through memory. Thus, over the course of his life, "Subhash's transcultural development transgresses a dual model based on an opposition between entrapping roots and freeing rhizomes" (Stoican, "Cultural Dissolution" 41) and "[his] rhizomatic profile blends his Indian inheritance with the aerial roots that he develops in the American setting" (41). Subhash is not rootless but has nevertheless become a rhizomatic individual moving beyond and across fixed polarities.

Hence, Kaushik and the main protagonists of *The Lowland* take the ambivalence of hybridity to another level by their rhizomatic and occasionally nomadic explorations beyond spaces in-between specific nation-states. As Subhash's and Gauri's examples show, this sort of becoming is not exclusive to the second generation, suggesting the shortcomings of argumentations based on generational differences only. Although nomadic subjectivities or sensibilities are exceptions across Lahiri's complete works, they have become prevalent in her more recent fiction in English and in her autobiography. However, Lahiri refrains from idealizing the figure of the nomad; discussing the characters in *The Lowland*, Adriana Elena Stoican concludes that "nomadism/incessant mobility does not necessarily entail a beneficial status, as suggested by the protagonists' endless wavering between rooted structures and fluid escapes" ("Cultural Dissolution" 42). This can also be applied to Kaushik and illustrates how these characters, even though they seemingly prioritize rhizomatic routes, keep on seeking roots. Because of this tension, and because many individuals' journeys resemble escapes rather than goal-oriented solutions, nomadism cannot assure fruitful negotiations of their hybrid identities, suggesting that Deleuze and Guattari are indeed romanticizing persistent movement and trans-

formation.

Concluding Remarks: Rhizome-Root Assemblages?

Whereas a lot of Lahiri's earlier literary productions explore diasporic spaces in-between the Indian and the American cultures, other examples examined in this article, dispersed across her autobiographical and fictional work, disclose that transnational frameworks that continue to rely on binary oppositions—even if they highlight spaces in-between cultures—cannot always be sufficient for discussing these South Asian American individuals' negotiations of their dynamic identities. This has become the rule rather than the exception in Lahiri's later writing, asserting that she "no longer feel[s] bound to restore a lost country to [her] parents" (*In Other Words* 221). To picture these extended hybrid subjectivities and heterogenous route systems, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome provides a fruitful metaphor. Nevertheless, despite Lahiri's characters' nomadic and rhizomatic sensibilities denying or partly denying the importance of nation-states for the making of identities, roots—which cannot only be formed through filiation but also through alliance—continue to be important. Thus, to capture multiple layers of identity simultaneously, the conceptualization of "rhizome-root assemblages" (Deleuze and Guattari 15) based on host- and homeland as opposing roots connected by a rhizomatic tissue might prove to be productive for discussions of hybridity and alternative manifestations of transnationalisms. Furthermore, the open-ended nature of the rhizome would permit the potential extension of the model to include third cultures or other rooting "knots of arborescence" (20). However, it should be noted that not all of her characters share (narrator-)Lahiri's contentment in pursuing a rhizomatic trajectory. Moreover, they are more privileged in freely choosing their paths—for example, due to their favorable class status—than individuals whose mobility or immobility is less self-determined or achievable.

Notes

[1] In this section, I will refer to Lahiri as the narrator of *In Other Words* rather than as the author of the book.

Works Cited

Austin, Patrycja. "High Walls in *The Lowland*: Nomadic Sensibility in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel." *Assimilation: A Good or Bad Word?*, edited by Michal Peprník, Palacký University Olomouc, 2016, pp. 171-86.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Bruneau, Michel. "Diasporas, Transnational Spaces and Communities." *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, edited by Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, Amsterdam UP, 2010, pp. 35-49.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1980. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Dutt-Ballerstadt, Reshmi. "Gendered (Be)Longing: First- and Second-Generation Migrants in the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri." *Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies*, edited by Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung, Lexington Books, 2012, pp. 157-80.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Dove Mi Trovo*. Guanda, 2018.

---. "Going Ashore." *Unaccustomed Earth*, Bloomsbury, 2008, pp. 294-333.

---. *In Other Words*. 2015. Translated by Ann Goldstein, Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

---. "Once in a Lifetime." *Unaccustomed Earth*, Bloomsbury, 2008, pp. 223-51.

---. "Only Goodness." *Unaccustomed Earth*, Bloomsbury, 2008, pp. 128-73.

---. *The Lowland*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

---. *The Namesake*. Fourth Estate, 2003.

---. *Unaccustomed Earth*. Bloomsbury, 2008.

Marder, Michael. "Anti-Nomad." *Deleuze Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2016, pp. 496-503.

Munos, Delphine. *After Melancholia: A Reappraisal of Second-Generation Diasporic Subjectivity in the Work of Jhumpa Lahiri*. Rodopi, 2013.

Roudometof, Victor. "Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization." *Current Sociology*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2005, pp. 113-35.

Song, Min Hyoung. "The Children of 1965: Allegory, Postmodernism, and *The Namesake*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2007, pp. 345-70.

Stoican, Adriana Elena. "Cultural Dissolution and Re(Birth) in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*." *University of Bucharest Review: Literary & Cultural Studies Series*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, pp. 33-44.

---. "Traumatic Effects of Transnational Relocation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*." *University of Bucharest Review: Literary and Cultural Studies Series*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2014, pp. 86-96.

***JAST*, 2021; 56:91 - 116**
Submitted: 24.03.2021
Accepted: 07.09.2021
ORCID# 0000-0001-6484-3136

K is for Korean: Manifestations of Culinary Identity and Masculinity in Contemporary Korean American Chef Memoirs

Gül Varlı Karaarslan

Abstract

While with the waves of K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Beauty products, Korean culture has gained popularity in the U.S., Korean culinary culture does not seem to have a substantial benefit from this visibility since Korean American culinary identity follows a different path. Over the 19th and 20th centuries, Korean American chefs contributed to American foodscape with the traditional food they had prepared at local restaurants, and cookbooks. In the 21st century, the rise of the foodie culture provides a fresh flow through which Korean American chefs have gained visibility in their restaurants, TV shows, and other culinary platforms. Meanwhile, Korean American chefs heva started to publish memoirs as a reflection of their culinary identity. The memoirs provide a broader perspective on transformation of Korean American culinary culture and culinary identity. The chefs, although their approaches to memoir as a genre differ from one another, adopt food memoirs as an expressive medium to reflect not only what they encounter behind the doors of the industrial kitchens but also their requiem for a sense of cultural belonging, individual expression, and culinary subjectivity. Within this framework, this paper concentrates on memoirs written by contemporary Korean American chefs including Roy Choi's *L.A. Son: My Life, My City, My Food* (2013), Edward Lee's *Buttermilk Graffiti* (2018), and David Chang's *Eat a Peach* (2020). The article aims to answer how the contemporary chefs construct their culinary subjectivity in relation to the Korean American culinary culture and the U.S. culinary framework. This work also tries to intrigue how Korean American chefs envision contemporary chef

identity with a specific focus on its intersections with ethnicity and culinary masculinity.

Keywords: Korean American Chefs, Korean American Cuisine, Culinary Identity, Culinary Masculinity, Multicultural Kitchen

Kore'nin K'si: Çağdaş Koreli Amerikalı Şeflerin Anı Kitaplarında Mutfak Kimliği ve Erkekliğin Dışavurumları

Öz

Kore pop müziği, Kore dizileri ve Kore güzellik ürünlerinin yaygınlaşmasıyla, Kore kültürü Amerika'da görünürlük kazanırken, Kore yemekleri bu görünürlükten üst düzeyde fayda sağlamış görünmemektedir. Bunun asıl nedeni, Kore yemek kültürünün kendine has bir çizgide ilerlemesidir. 19. ve 20. yüzyıllarda, Koreli şefler daha çok yerel restoranlarda hazırladıkları geleneksel yemekler ve yemek kitaplarıyla Amerikan yemek kültürüne katkıda bulunmuşlardır. 21. yüzyılda ise yemek kültürüne ivme sağlayan hareketlilikle beraber Koreli şefler, yemekleri, restoranlarıyla TV programları gibi farklı yemek odaklı mecralarda görünürlük kazanmışlardır. Bu süreç içerisinde, Koreli Amerikalı şefler bireysel mutfak kimliklerini yansıttıkları anı kitapları yazmaya başlamıştır. Anı kitaplarında şefler, Koreli Amerikalı mutfak kültürünün ve yemek kimliğinin dönüşümüne farklı bir çerçeveden bakmışlardır. Bir tür olarak anı kitaplarına yaklaşımları farklılık gösterse de şefler yemek odaklı anı kitaplarını yalnızca endüstriyel mutfak kapılarının ardında yaşananları değil, aynı zamanda kültürel aidiyeti, bireyselliğin dışa vurumunu ve mutfak kimliklerini yansıttıkları bir araç olarak görmüşlerdir. Bu makale çağdaş Koreli Amerikalı şefler olan; Roy Choi'nin L.A. *Son: My Life, My City, My Food* (2013), Edward Lee'nin *Buttermilk Graffiti* (2018), ve David Chang'in *Eat a Peach* (2020) başlıklı anı kitaplarına odaklanmıştır. Bu makale, çağdaş şeflerin mutfak kimliğini, Koreli Amerikalı yemek kültürü ve Amerikan yemek kültürü bağlamında nasıl kurduğunu incelemeyi amaçlar. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, Koreli Amerikalı şeflerin çağdaş şef kimliğini ve bu kimliğin etnik kimlik ve mutfaktaki erkeklikle ilişkilerini nasıl tahayyül ettiklerini irdeler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Koreli Amerikalı Şefler, Koreli Amerikalı Yemek Kültürü, Mutfak Kimliği, Mutfaktaki Erkeklik, Çokkültürlü Mutfak

Introduction

Food memoirs have been one of the central foci of cultural studies recently and received considerable critical attention. In his essay, Arley Avaikan basically defines contemporary food memoirs as narratives that are "more systematically autobiographical, chronicling the authors' lives through cooking and eating" (279). With a similar attitude, Barbara Frey Waxman interprets food memoirs as personal narratives that connect food to "cultural identity, ethnic community, family and cross-cultural experiences" (363). Accordingly, in the contemporary period, Korean American chefs have published memoirs through which they manifest their subjective experience of cooking in relation to Korean culinary culture. The memoirs exhibit the significance of food as a multilayered cultural agent in ethnic communities. Food, more than a basic ailment, functions as a bridge and enables immigrants to preserve a sense of identity and at the same time providing a smooth interaction with the new land and culture. Anita Mannur emphasizes the significance of food as a cultural agent in diaspora cultures. She interprets food: "[…] as a central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, becomes one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is imagined and reinterpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging" ("Food Matters" 8). Accordingly, Korean chefs' memoirs can be explored as rich sites through which chefs find an alternative space for self-expression and present ethnic and gendered aspects of their culinary identities. Yet, each chef's definition of memoir differs from one another like their cooking philosophy and practice.

Born in Korea and grown up in Los Angeles, Roy Choi is one of the most influential Korean American chefs. Choi was aspired to write a memoir to compile his coming-of-age story intertwined with Korean American identity and Los Angeles foodscape. His cookbook-memoir *L.A. Son: My Life, My City, My Food* (2013), starts with the following statement: "I had to write this book. To tell the story of my journey from immigrant to latchkey kid to lowrider to misfit to gambler to a chef answering his calling" (Choi 1). In the memoir, Choi discovers the

central position of food and taste in his life starting from his childhood. This connection has not been lost even through the years of identity confusion, he experienced during his youth years. Choi, in line with the food memoir tradition, narrates his maturing up as a successful chef and finding self-expression through his food. He defines his culinary identity in relation to L.A.; as the city that provides him with the grounds for his culinary identity.

Another Korean American chef, Edward Lee, identifies the Southern and Korean culinary cultures as two components that dominantly define his culinary identity. However, different from Choi's identification with the city, Edward Lee defines his culinary identity by enriching his subjective culinary experience with elements from multicultural American culinary culture. Accordingly, his memoir, *Buttermilk Graffiti* (2018) reflects his culinary philosophy. The chef narrates and records his culinary journeys across the U.S. through which he discovers the alternative culinary histories of chefs on the margins of the American culinary scene. The work is a robust example reflecting the generic hybridity of the memoir genre as Lee blends characteristics of food and travel memoirs. In fact, his cookbook, *Smoke and Pickles* (2013), sets the foundations of Lee's narrative style. The chef introduces his culinary portfolio by narrating his childhood stories as frameworks to present the recipes in each chapter. Likewise, his memoir, has a hybrid structure that compiles multicultural recipes from regional restaurants and distinctive chefs whose names are unheard in the popular American culinary scene. The places Lee discovers range from authentic Uyghur restaurants to family-owned German eateries in the American hinterlands. Each chapter starts with Lee's journey notes that include detailed descriptions of places, food, and cooking philosophies end with recipes corresponding to the theme. The memoir contributes to the acknowledgement of the gastrogeographical diversity of culinary culture in the American landscape.

David Chang, pointed as "the ambassador of Korean cuisine" (Chung 1), recently published a memoir, *Eat a Peach* (2020), which provides a broad spectrum of Chang's personal journey of becoming a celebrity chef and a successful food entrepreneur. Initially, rather than a memoir, Chang started to write a manual for young chefs, which would include leadership and entrepreneurial strategies to start up a business in food sector (Chang vii). However, upon completing his manuscript, his editors announced that his work displays the character-

istics of a memoir that challenged Chang's understanding of the genre: "I was deathly allergic to the word memoir when I started writing this book, adamant that the details of my life don't explain me or Momofuku" (Chang 253). As his memoir draws to a close, Chang believes young chefs may benefit from his memoir as a guidebook. Compared to previous chefs, Chang's memoir does not include recipes that are thematically connected to the stories in each chapter. With such a stylistic twist, the work differs from the food memoir tradition. The chef makes use of generic hybridity of the genre and combines his personal memories with tips for success. The memoir stylistically reflects how Chang fashions his culinary identity from a multidimensional perspective, as a food enthusiast, a high-end chef, and a restaurateur.

In their memoirs, Roy Choi, Edward Lee and David Chang prefer to make use of variant generic aspects of the memoir as a genre and enrich their personal journey with guidelines, recipes, business tips, travel notes as well as pictures and recipes. The generic hybridity of the chef memoirs contributes to the definition of hybrid and multicultural aspects of contemporary chef identities. In the memoirs, the chefs define the contemporary cosmopolitan chef identity in relation to the Korean American culinary culture that at the same time reflects the generational differences.

Korean American Culinary Culture

In the course of history, Asian American cuisine has intertwined with mainstream American cuisine. Among other immigrant culinary cultures, Chinese restaurants, with its historical legacy dating back to 1850s (McLean 3), have long defined the boundaries of what Asian American cuisine means in the United States. Likewise, Japanese restaurants also contribute to the definition of Asian American cuisine with their establishments in the early twentieth century (McLean 14). Eventually, Asian American cuisine has adapted and become part of the mainstream food culture in the U.S. and even more, American interpretation of Asian food has influenced the global understanding of Asian food:

> Over the past couple of decades, American-style Chinese and Japanese food has become a transnational phenomenon, ironically infiltrating the Asian market (its "origin") and catering

> mostly to foreign ex-pats and locals interested in trying American interpretations of Asian food. (Arnold and Tunç 8)

Different from the earlier integrations of Asian cuisines into the mainstream culinary culture, the popularity of Korean cuisine is rising during the 21st century. There are several factors that have contributed to gradual and relatively late integration. To begin with, compared to Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese counterparts, Korean restaurants could not integrate with the mainstream food culture and expand its boundaries nationwide although Korean cuisine was part of the culinary culture in Hawaii, where the first wave of Korean immigrants settled (Chung 1), and in the Koreatowns in Los Angeles which inhabited one third of the Korean population (McLean 24). One of the major reasons for this was culinary nationalism. Food was encoded as a traditional and national aspect of Korean culture for the first generation of immigrants and symbolized the cultural legacy of the homeland. Therefore, Korean immigrants tended to conserve the cultural legacy by keeping loyal to its authentic form in Korea.

The notion of preserving the culture through food has its reflections on Korean American culinary identity as Young highlights; "Authenticity is the Holy Grail for both the producers and consumers of Korean cuisine in the US. The first and most important criterion for vetting a Korean restaurant or a Korean cookbook seems to be authenticity" (114). As a result, Korean restaurants do not intend to target the mainstream culture and remained more local and traditional. Different from Chinese or Japanese restaurants, the Korean restaurants are modestly decorated with ethnic ornaments, offering Korean menus and serving authentic Korean flavors to Korean families (Chung 2). This conservative attitude also manifests itself in the cookbooks that Korean chefs scripted compiling traditional recipes from Korean culinary tradition. In his article concentrating upon the notion of authenticity in Korean American culinary culture, Young evaluates how Korean American have chefs present Korean American food in bilingual cookbooks. The cookbooks first appeared to supply recipes of comfort food to the first-generation Korean Americans and offer "more authentic cooking methods" to preserve and pass the Korean culinary tradition (115). On the other hand, Young touches upon the fact that although the chefs claimed authenticity, the books are "far from being authentically Korean or traditionally Korean" (115). In fact, the food and techniques used inevitably reflect the hybridity of Korean American food

with adaptations of ingredients, cooking methods and visual presentations (122) rather than the Korean traditions as they claim.

As stated by Young, the insistence on the authenticity has been one of the major aspects of Korean American culinary culture that is also visible in Korean American cookbooks. In the 21st century, the chefs started to pursue a new culinary identity through which they can reflect their personal experience as members of the second or third generation Korean American community. In the memoirs, all the three chefs refer to authenticity in relation to the contemporary, cosmopolitan Korean American culinary identity. In *Buttermilk Graffiti*, Edward Lee contributes to discussions of authenticity by defining it as a political agency that hampers culinary progress. Lee observes that the insistence of authenticity draws definite boundaries among culinary cultures in the contemporary U.S. culinary palette. However, this type of restrictions does not reflect the hybridity culinary experience in the United States. Lee believes the word authenticity implies an exclusion of minority cultures:

> The words authenticity and tradition are bandied about a lot in the food world. Authenticity, which we often use when defending our narrow culinary views, can be a hindrance, a means of exclusion, a distortion of history. Whenever a cookbook exhibits the tagline "Authentic recipes from the American South," I always ask myself, What South are you talking about? Pre-colonial South? Plantation South? Post-colonial? Post–civil rights movement? Paula Deen's South? The immigrant South? All are part of the complicated history of the South. None can claim a true authenticity. (*BG* 141)

Rather than authenticity that may implicitly suggest discrimination and exclusion of the oppressed groups, Lee prefers to use tradition that stands for the cultural legacy upon which one constructs his/her identity and values passing on these traditions to forthcoming generations as part of family culture. In his own words:

> I always feel conflicted by the notion of authenticity. I am here in Paterson for some version of Peruvian food that is authentic, but what does that mean? In many ways, the food of immigrants is not authentic but frozen in time, reflecting the culinary moment when the wave of immigrants left their homes. This is the food of nos-

> talgia. It gives an immigrant population a connection to its home country. (*BG* 3421)

As Lee suggests, in Korean American culture, food has been treated as a strong symbol representing tradition and encapsulating time and place. Therefore, its stability is significant. However, although the insistence on authenticity makes a call for nostalgia, it is a fact that food evolves (Lee, *Buttermilk Graffiti* 621) and adapts in accordance with the immigrant culture. Therefore, the insistence on authenticity hampers the progress. Likewise, Rae Oum Young emphasizes that the insistence on authenticity singularizes the immigrant experience since "authenticity is a subjective experience that is defined by a relationship between a person (or a group of people) and a style of cooking and eating, rather than a quality that is fixed and embedded in foods" (114). Since the notion of authenticity does not encompass the Korean American experience and culinary culture, the chefs started to look for it.

David Chang narrates how he was challenged by the Asian food community with the arguments of authenticity upon opening his first restaurant Momofuku in 2004. Chang, together with his partner, initially aimed to develop a distinctive menu mixing elements from Korean, Mexican, Japanese cuisines, and Asian dining out culture. They believed that would be a way to reflect their culinary experience as members of minority cultures. However, Chang's food was criticized for not being loyal to Asian food traditions by well-known members of Asian American food community:"'The noodles are awful. Nothing like real ramen or any noodles I've had in Asia. If you think you're making Japanese food, I'm sorry, you're sorely mistaken. Actually, I have to ask you: have you ever even been to Japan? How can you charge people for this?' She couldn't stand the loud music or the uncomfortable stools or the unfriendly service, either" (Chang 53-54). In fact, Chang expresses that the woman's view represents customers' reactions Momofuku received during the first few months. What caused this reaction was the culinary philosophy behind the kitchen. Chang believed the food should reflect his personal experience as a Korean American man growing up in America and fuse it with Korean and Asian culture. Chang is not the only chef who is severely blamed for not preserving Asian culinary traditions. Like him, Asian chefs frequently received direct criticism for not serving "authentic" Asian food. Another Korean American chef, Tory Miller had a similar experience upon starting a new Korean-inspired restaurant. Born in Korea and later adopted by

German-American parents, Miller did not, in fact, grow up in a Korean American house where Korean culinary traditions were performed. As Miller expresses, he did not have any connection to Asian food while growing up:

> 'Since I look Asian, people think I can cook all this food like it's in my blood,' he says, 'but I didn't grow up eating this food.' […] 'The Asians come here and judge me all the time,' he continues. 'They tell me it's not authentic. But that's not what I am doing. I am doing my version of Korean food' (Lee*, Buttermilk Graffiti* 4088).

As Miller expresses although he did not have any direct experience with Korean or Asian culinary culture, due to "Asian-look," the community demands him to perform in an assigned role that does not comply with his personal culinary experience. Although it does not reflect his culinary identity, he is expected to build his culinary identity on his racial background and cook traditional and local Asian food.

In the late 20th century, fusion cuisine, as the new food movement, had a great impact on the transformation of the Asian American culinary culture along with other ethnic cuisines. Chef Norman Van Aken, in his foundational article, "Fusion" (1988), contemplates on fusion cuisine as follows:

> I am a chef. My interest and my intent is on diving deeply back down in time to salvage the golden treasures and vibrant calypso flavors of old Key West and fusing them with a contemporary sensibility and an individual personality. The foundation must be the bedrock honesty of Conch, Black, Spanish and Cuban regional cooking. Like myself, other chefs across the globe are finding that there is a combined power in what (to borrow from the jazz vernacular) I now call ... "fusion cooking" (1).

In the article, Van Aken evaluates the restaurants of the time and defines fusion cuisine the hybrid food that successfully reflects the spirit of the time. In its basic definition, fusion cuisine reflects the chefs' tendency to cook by mixing or fusing different ingredients, methods, and styles from variant culinary cultural roots. While some Asian American chefs favored the notion of fusion cuisine and initiated upscale Asian restaurants targeting "young urban professional in metropolitan cities (Lio and Bott 193), others are not eager to define

their culinary identity under this title due to the politics that define racial identity. Anita Mannur, in her exploration of TV celebrity food shows, explains the implicit messages that fusion food carries in relation to politics of cultural and racial identity. She asserts that fusion cuisine exhibits a pattern that "melts the difference into a coherent whole" ("Model Minorities" 74) in contrast with the American ideal of democratic representation. She furthers her argument by questioning whether fusion cuisine has a tendency towards assimilation of cultural aspects of Asian or immigrant cuisine while making it appealing for the mainstream palate ("Model Minorities" 72-74). Likewise, in the contemporary memoirs, the chefs broach extended discussions that challenge the notion of fusion cuisine. There are several aspects explaining why some chefs do not identify with the fusion philosophy. In agreement with Mannur's view, Edward Lee believes that fusion, as a word, implies a tendency to eliminate distinctive aspects of Asian American cuisine. As Lee puts forward: "I can't stand the word 'fusion,' not only because it is dated, but also because it implies culinary racism, suggesting that foods from Eastern cultures are so radically different that they need to be artificially introduced or 'fused' with Western cuisines to give them legitimacy" (Lee, *Smoke and Pickles* 9). From a similar perspective, David Chang also rejects the philosophy of fusion cuisine as it connotes culinary racism. Chang maintains the idea that fusion cuisine implies cultural appropriation through which the white standards are prioritized. He believes that it reflects the culinary racism in the kitchen as

> minority chefs in America find cultural appropriation so upsetting is that we feel obliged to uphold these arbitrary prescriptions, while white chefs do whatever they want. We're following the rules and they're not. Most of the time, they didn't even bother to learn the rules. I decided that I should just start playing the same game. (252)

As Chang evaluates, white chefs have the liberty to fuse or not to fuse any ingredient or style they favor. On the other hand, recognized with their ethnic background, chefs from minority groups are expected to be integrated in fusion cuisine. Moreover, the fusion erodes the distinctive qualities of the ethnic food making it suitable for the American palate and therefore restricts the chef's culinary subjectivity.

The chefs' rejection of fusion cuisine does not necessarily

mean that they resist culinary progress that requires adaptation. The chefs construct their culinary subjectivity to evaluate their immigrant experience and to express contemporary Korean American identity. Concentrating on the connection between immigrant identity and food, Lori Kido Lopez suggests that food is interpreted as "a safe bridge" in the process of social integration, however; each generation has their own way of connection with the food (151). Likewise, in the 21st century, different from the 20th century Korean American chefs who claimed authenticity in their cookbooks, Korean American chefs from second or third generation have written memoirs, that contribute to the debates on culinary adaptation. For instance, David Chang promotes experimenting with style, ingredients, and taste rather than insisting to preserve the authentic Korean culinary culture. As Chang observes ethnic communities in the U.S. interact both with the mainstream culture and other ethnic groups and such an interaction necessitates a personal adaptation which is at the same time reflected through adaptation of food culture (59). The changing position of the immigrant identity can also be traced in the culinary world with the transformation of the food. Chang strongly supports that the evolution of ethnic food is inevitable since the culinary progress projects the changing immigrant experience. In fact, one may claim that food adaptation is part of the personal adaptation process in the memoirs since the chefs come over self-estrangement through the food which is the thematic core of their narrative. Therefore, the food they serve on the table reflects the cosmopolitan, male, Korean American experience. One may also observe that while looking for self-expression in the challenging times of their life, the chefs resort in food as an expressive medium through which they present their personal adaptation to American culture. The chefs belonged to America as much as their family belong to Korea. While narrating his childhood, Chang presents the diversity of culinary cultures he is accustomed to:

> As a kid, I was embarrassed by the smell of our kitchen and the look of our Korean food, so when Sherri Chang wasn't around, I mostly sustained myself with mozzarella sticks, chicken fingers, Hungry-Man dinners, microwave burritos, quesadillas, and Ichiran ramen and Shin ramyun. Latchkey kid fare, which was all right by me. (6)

As is observed, Chang identifies with neither Korean nor white American culinary culture, and he develops a multicultural understand-

ing. Korean American food reflects, in that sense, Korean American identity and intersects with other ethnic identities. For instance, growing up in the South, Edward Lee couples elements of Korean culinary culture with the Southern cuisine that portray his personal experience of America while Choi, as a chef growing up in L.A., blends elements of Mexican and Korean cuisine. Lee, further comments on his experience of American culinary diversity through his visits to various ethnic American restaurants as follows:

> I feel at home here. This is America. Maybe not the white-picket-fence version we are used to seeing, but the one that exists in every town just beneath the surface, embodied by the diversity in the labor economy. I'll bet the kitchen here is a fascinating place. I'll bet it is an uneasy collaboration at times, bound together by the necessities of food and culture and commerce. I'm glad to have found some good soul food. (Lee, *Buttermilk Graffiti* 2061)

In his memoir, Edward Lee expresses that what defines American culinary culture is the diversity of the culinary culture that is performed in the culinary fringes, which encompass the kitchens at the margins, borders, streets, and American hinterlands. Lee regards food adaptation as a fundamental notion in the modern age that represents the regional diversity of American foodscape. He adopts the term "culinary vernacular" to define the regional restaurants that represent the local variance of American cuisine and thus frequently remains undiscovered.

As an alternative to cultural and political messages that the authentic Korean cuisine and fusion cuisine carry, Asian hipster cuisine or street cuisine raises as a self-defining movement through which Asian American chefs manifest their culinary identity. In their article, Shoon Lio and Megan Boot evaluate the Asian American hipster and street cuisine and how chefs have built altered and redefined the Asian chef image and traditional restaurants. As the critics put forward "Asian hipster restaurants constitute the foodscapes where chefs perform the roles of culinary and cultural rebels and artists, and also define a certain authenticity based on the personal experiences and narratives that have shaped these chefs" (208). The critics express that the hipster/street cuisine offered an alternative representation of the chefs' cosmopolitan identities and through this alternative, Asian American chefs have achieved individual expression, social visibility, and economic cred-

ibility. Korean American chefs have also found an alternative voice through hipster/street cuisine to present their culinary journey**.** David Chang is identified as the forefather of the hipster cuisine (Lio and Boot 196). Engaged in food business, Chang recognizes that ethnic cuisines are regarded as substitutes for the traditional French culinary culture that dominates New York restaurants. Chang underlines that as opposed to this class-based layering of food culture, in Asia, eating out does not necessitate being member of an upper–class. He emphasizes the contraction between Asian food culture and high-end restaurant culture that follows the French tradition in the U.S. in the following lines:

> Common day, street food being served in Asia, eating food at cheap prices is part of life in contrast to expensive food culture at high-end restaurants in New York. A comparison of food culture of New York and Asia. While dining out is for the privileged in New York, in Asian cities like Beijing and Japanese cities, the food is foundational part of life and city. But in Asia? Man, it was the polar opposite. From the grocery stands and yakitori joints in Japan to the stalls along the hutongs of Beijing, enjoying food was foundational. (Chang 34)

As Chang expresses, in the mainstream culture, ethnic food is labeled as plain, cheap food. Since it does not cost much, the taste has not been regarded as a priority. In contrast to this idea, in his cross-national food experience, Chang recognizes that eating quality food at a reasonable price does not have to be expensive and good food does not have to be exclusively prepared for an economically privileged minority. The chef narrates his observation as a culinary apprentice in Tokyo as follows: "I was scrounging to make ends meet, but I could still eat like a king. That was the real epiphany. I could eat extraordinarily well in places that weren't punishingly expensive" (Chang 37). The simplicity of food philosophy in has Japan, shaped Chang's philosophy of food as a restaurateur. He aims to challenge the established restaurant culture by opening a ramen shop in New York aspired by the emerging ramen culture in Tokyo: "I wanted to shock people who thought ramen was nothing more than a cheap and dirty means to fill their belly. That was the big idea: leave everyone walking out the door of Momofuku happy and surprised and glad to have spent their money" (Chang 54). As is seen, Chang's initial aim while opening his first restaurant was to adapt the Asian food culture into mainstream American culinary cul-

ture by providing reasonably priced qualified food. At the same time, by redefining the meaning of "ramen," as delicious, he alters the dominant understanding that stereotypically categorizes it as "cheap and dirty."

Altering the position of food enables Chang to find self-expression in the American culinary scene. In parallel to his food philosophy, Chang's restaurant philosophy depends upon self-expression. The chef manifests that he lacked a sense of belonging and self-expression while previously working at mainstream restaurants:

> And so, I may have only whispered it at first, but I definitely said it: "I think the underground in food can become overground." It had happened before in music, art, fashion, in Europe and Asia. Why not food? Why not here? I couldn't relate to the people I was cooking for. (Chang 34)

Chang's foundational idea was to claim a space for underground/street food culture within the mainstream American culinary scene. He claimed for such a space since it would provide him the necessary grounds to express his American experience through food. Moreover, Chang's restaurants can also be read as performative stages where he attempts to create a counter-narrative for street food culture. With such a motivation, Chang opened his first restaurant Momofuku Noodle Bar in 2004 where he set the foundations of his cooking philosophy and quickly got public attention. As an extension of his culinary identity and the end-product of his culinary journey, his restaurant would nourish from multiple culinary cultures that manifest his culinary identity.

Like Chang, Roy Choi also expresses that although he worked at popular high-end restaurants as a chef, he was unable to find his own voice and self-expression at the American culinary stage. At the beginning of his career, he targeted to work for a classical high-end restaurant established on French culinary culture, rather than defining his culinary identity as a typical "Asian chef" cooking "Asian food." However, Choi recognized that this is also another type of political self-limitation. Therefore, in the flow of his career, he has preferred to apply techniques and discover tastes from other ethnic cuisines in the States. Due to unemployment and economic turmoil of the 2008, taking a break in his career provided Choi to develop his culinary philosophy. He discovered that a combination of Korean and Mexican

culinary culture would define his culinary identity. Eventually, together with a friend, they developed and experimented with the idea of Korean BBQ in a taco. The chef finds a meaning out of his culinary journey by combining elements from his gastrogeographical memory connected to L.A., the city he grew up in. He expresses how he recollects his culinary identity from his memory:

> As I chopped and layered ingredients, visions of Silver Garden, Pershing Square, my childhood refrigerator, cruising in Whittier, Grove Street, transient life, the desert bubbled up and started flowing through me like a tidal wave. I was possessed. Sohnmaash. [. . .] There it was. Los Angeles on a plate. Maybe it wasn't everyone's L.A., but it was mine. It was Koreatown to Melrose to Alvarado to Venice to Crenshaw crumpled into one flavor and bundled. [. . .] It began to taste Indonesian, look Mexican, feel Korean. It spoke to hipsters, comforted families, filled eager bellies. It breathed L.A. All the way. (Choi 296-98)

In the given excerpt, Choi gives a spectrum of places and tastes in his memory that enable him to create his culinary identity. As it is evident, Choi's understanding of food is not a sole product of Korean cuisine. While developing his culinary identity, Choi nourishes from different ethnic culinary cultures. Mexican culture, an inseparable part of his life, not surprisingly, becomes a significant anchor in his culinary identity. He combines the distinctive tastes that landmarks his childhood, belonging to Korean and Asian American cuisines in Koreatown which makes L.A. the city that define the chef's cosmopolitan identity. As a result, his food is neither Mexican, nor Korean, it represents the streets of Los Angeles. In other words, Choi's food embracing his elements from different cultures defines his culinary identity. Accompanying their food and cooking styles, the restaurants contribute to representation of Korean American culinary identity. For instance, Choi alters the established norms of the high-end restaurant culture, by changing the position of street food culture from within. Since the chef does not feel that his culinary identity belongs to the mainstream French line of restaurant culture, Choi opens his first van restaurant, KOGI in 2008. By turning a van into a restaurant interacting with the street, Choi claims a space for the street culture that can be recognized by the mainstream culture and society. One may also regard the restaurant, as a solid entity that represents Choi's personal transformation. He challenges the mainstream culinary culture with the van restaurant

that serves hybrid combination of Korean-BBQ in tacos, celebrates the street culture, and reinforces the chef's cosmopolitan identity.

In the same manner, David Chang attempts to find his culinary voice at the American culinary stage through his food adaptations from multicultural culinary cultures. Following Momofuku Noodle Bar, David Chang opens various restaurants namely, Momofuku Ssäm Bar (2006), Momofuku Ko (2008), and Momofuku Milk Bar (2009) where he experiments with multicultural culinary cultures including Japanese, Korean, Italian. Along with challenging the American palate with uncommon tastes, Chang also challenges the mainstream restaurant culture with an attempt to deconstruct the stereotypes associated with Asian American identity and culinary culture. Established in 2015, with the fried chicken joint, FUKU, Chang, as a restaurateur, attempts to take political action through opening a restaurant. The chef has aimed to use the restaurant as a political sight to combat racist remarks. Chang has intended to design every single detail in this attempt and urged his customers to rethink about the racial discrimination and stereotypical Asian American representations. Even the name of the restaurant, FUKU, is deliberately chosen for its resemblance to everyday slang as a rebellious stance. The restaurant protests the white hegemony in the food sector that sets the norms. In Chang's words: "The name came easily: Fuku. A riff on Momofuku and a phonetic fuck-you to everybody who took us for granted, mocked us, or made us feel lesser for how we ate" (200). Along with the name, the decoration of the restaurant also contributes to the sight of this protest. FUKU's walls are decorated with framed posters of Asian American characters including "Oddjob from *Goldfinger,* Gogo Yubari from *Kill Bill*, Uli from *Die Hard*, Lo-Pan from *Big Trouble in Little China*, Chong Ki from *Bloodsport and Mickey Rooney's buck-toothed Mr. Yunioshi from Breakfast at Tiffany's*" (200). Chang defines this strategy as an attempt to urge his customers to stop and question: "All the ugly stereotypical Asian sidekicks and villains from cinematic history—the painful, humiliating images that somehow continued to go unchecked in American culture" (200). Besides the posters, with word plays, Chang wants to alter the Asian American representation in mainstream culture: "Here's what we do: we print the word Dericious! all over the sandwich wrappers. I want white people to see it and feel completely uncomfortable saying it out loud. We are gonna reclaim all this shit." (200). However, unlike the chef expects, the customers have enjoyed the atmosphere with ignorance:

> 'Dericious!' they kept saying to each other, laughing like little kids. They kept at it, their pitch lowering to martial arts master sotto voce: 'SO. DE-RI-SHUS.' I freaked out. I'd hoped to weaponize the racism I'd experienced as an Asian American person. I'd hoped non-Asian people would be too scared to utter the words on our wrappers or laugh at the pictures on the wall. But they weren't scared at all. (203)

As Chang recognizes that the messages have been misunderstood by the customers, he decides to change the restaurant's theme. FUKU challenges the mainstream Asian American representations and transforms the restaurant into a performative sight of protest to reclaim Asian American culinary identity. Although Chang does not hesitate to experiment with elements from Asian American cuisine, he admits that it was not easy for him to reclaim his Korean American culinary roots in definition of his culinary identity. As the chef explains, he embraces his Korean legacy in the later years of his career:

> I spent a good portion of my career avoiding the perception that I was messing with Korean food. For many years at Momofuku, we buried any sign of Koreanness under other influences and disguises. While cooking has enabled me to fight battles and explore subjects that I'm too scared to approach in real life, I couldn't overcome the shame and anxiety I'd felt about Korean food since I was a kid. I've slowly become more comfortable exploring my heritage. (Chang 250-51)

The chef's connection to Korean food mirrors the definition of his culinary subjectivity. As Chang expresses, the food becomes the text through which the chefs find self-expression. They present their life philosophy along with food; therefore, one can also read how their philosophy of food evolves while the identity transforms. Eventually, food for Chang becomes a space where he discovers his cosmopolitan identity as a Korean American chef.

Korean American Chef Identity and Culinary Masculinity

In the 21st century, the popular foodie culture has demanded the chefs to become more visible social figures apart from their domineering role in the restaurant kitchens. N. Pascual Soler believes that

the gourmet trend with blooming cookery programs, food documentaries, movies, and blogs led to chefs' becoming the center of attention (4). Accordingly, culinary masculinity, in a broader sense, is produced through "gendered figures of the masculine professional chef and feminine domestic cook" (Cairns 294). As the chef image evolves, male chefs have been exposed to a gendered chef identity built upon ideals of traditional masculinity that are fierce competition and aggressiveness. Likewise, the food shows, and food media portray male chefs in line with the traditional depiction, as machos in the kitchen. In other words, the definition of culinary masculinity has been traditionally defined in accordance with the values of white, heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic practices do not only configure white heterosexual men's lives, but also shape minority masculinities. Jeffery Sobal underlines that "hegemonic masculinity provides a comparison point those individuals may elect to adopt or reject in specific places, times and relationships" (147). Contemplating upon minority masculinities, Jachinson Chan points out that although they are excluded from the hegemonic concept of masculinity, men from minorities still may desire to be part of this privileged group:

> Men of color, who are excluded from the hegemonic model of masculinity, may unwittingly buy into this notion of complicity. Despite exclusions based on race, men of color can still benefit from patriarchal dividends, and they may demonstrate a longing for inclusion to a hegemonic masculine identity. The seduction of a hegemonic masculinity can be a powerful force that lures men of color from a place of complicity to an aggressive pursuit of being a part of an elite group. (10)

Confirming the practices of ideal masculinity, the chefs define the kitchen as a separate professional place dominated by dynamics of male competition and profit-making. Accordingly, Korean chefs' practices of cooking and the notion of being a chef exemplify Chan's ideas on benefitting from the power of male bonding. Though they are marginalized as members of a minority group, they benefit from the privileges of their gendered identity. For instance, they have the chance to practice cooking in a multicultural kitchen which provides a new transcultural space for self-enterprise and networking. This can be exemplified through Chang's memoir as he makes frequent visits to Europe to meet famous European chefs. They create special occasions to practice cooking, share, and learn from one another. Though this is

not presented as a male activity, the chefs Chang refers to are pioneering European male chefs. This private network, providing the male with social and economic benefits, can be read as a practice of male privilege in the food business.

Though their approach to food and cooking differ from one another, all three chefs define the culinary identity by centering cooking as a professional journey in their narratives. In Choi's and Chang's memoirs, one can observe that the Korean American chefs have initially adapted heteronormative codes in their connection to the kitchen. They regard cooking as a profession that is separate from home kitchen. Traditionally, the domestic kitchen is a female sphere where cooking means womanly caring (DeVault 118). For instance, while chefs define their culinary identity, the focus is on how they mastered cooking and developed entrepreneurial skills. On the other hand, they do not touch upon domestic cooking or family responsibilities concerning nourishment. They do not offer any alternative practice that challenge or alter the norms of hegemonic masculinity in their personal lives like sharing the unpaid domestic work or cooking at home. In their memoirs, the chefs do not try to alter or challenge the traditional connection of male chefs to the industrial kitchen. Their established marriages with children are referred to in the works with thanks to their spouses "being patient and supportive" while they are taking successful steps in their culinary careers. For instance, Roy Choi separates his domestic role as a father and a husband from his culinary identity at the beginning of his work. Although he dedicates the memoir to his family, he prefers to keep his family life separate:

> I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO MY AMAZING WIFE AND DAUGHTER, JEAN AND KAELYN, WHO I DON'T WRITE ABOUT MUCH IN THIS BOOK BECAUSE THE MOMENTS WE SHARE TOGETHER ARE OUR OWN. (3)

Like Choi, male chefs in their memoirs define the boundaries of the chef's identity within the food business and concentrate on either being a chef or cooking at the restaurant kitchen. However, since contemporary chefs are influential social figures, the chefs' being more vocal about their domestic roles like home cooking might encourage alternative moods of masculinity by providing practical models in lieu of the heteronormative roles. Like many chefs, Chang adapts the popular crude chef image. The macho/crude chef image is portrayed by the media as a type with certain characteristics. Chang has great respect for

Anthony Bourdain, who has been an influential figure in configuration of this popular image. For Chang, Bourdain portrays

> the life of the cook was a life of adventure, looting, pillaging and rock-and-rolling through life with a carefree disregard for all conventional morality. It looked pretty damn good to me on the other side of the line. It's awkward to think about how much I enjoyed reading his stories and the many others—mostly told by men—that glamorized the crude. (Chang 229)

Among the many images imposed by media, Bourdain has been registered as a seminal figure drawing the blueprint of the crude chef image. While the crude chef is often portrayed as an aggressive and strict figure who orders and controls his staff, the restaurant kitchen is also compared to a military base. Although they manifest their anxieties emerging mainly from their ethnic background in the earlier years of their lives, neither Chang nor Choi questions the military system and the hierarchical relations that comply with the crude chef image in the industrial kitchen. Another reason for chefs to perform the crude chef without questioning its merits could be related to the construction of traditional masculinity in Korean culture. As John Lie asserts, military culture had a central position in defining Korean masculinity, at the end of the military training, men "learned to obey orders, live by the clock, smoke and drink and lead a homosocial existence" (79). Accordingly, the top-to-bottom power relations associated with military structure also represent the order in the kitchen. The chef as the power holder has a limitless power over the staff who obeys him by merely saying "yes chef". Therefore, through their position in the kitchen, chefs not only do get satisfied from being the ultimate authority but also guaranteed a privileged male status. In fact, Chang and Choi admit that they have adapted to "the macho chef" type, since they felt "powerful" while practicing this role. Roy Choi narrates how satisfied he felt practicing the crude chef image in the early years of his career:

> Damn, I felt so strong and powerful. Like a king stepping on his villagers, just because he could. Finally, he brought the right cuts, and I grabbed them while glaring ferociously. Over the next few hours I threw shit around, yelled at everyone, and basically acted out every single cliché of the out-of-control macho chef. (233)

As is clearly stated in the quotation, Choi's image of a chef is a tough, quick-tempered, intolerant crude chef controlling his staff by yelling and aggressively throwing things around when things are out of his control. David Chang also admits how often he has lost his temper in the restaurant kitchen upon subjectively observing that the staff does not take their tasks seriously. In his memoir, Chang honestly regrets identifying with the crude chef image. He expresses that the quick-tempered male chef image is widely accepted and practiced in the kitchen culture. In fact, he admits that his "out of control" position in the kitchen is his way of reflecting his personal rage as a member of immigrant community against the world: "This all leads me to question whether kitchen custom created my personal brand of rage. I think the job—the fear, the stress, the habits I'd learned, the culture—unlocked what was already roiling inside me" (72-73). Practicing the crude chef, neither made Chang nor his staff happy. His emotional climaxes in the kitchen blocked effective communication and constructive kitchen culture that could support people working in the kitchen.

Furthermore, Chang criticizes himself for treating mercilessly towards the people that work for him at the restaurant kitchen. The chef adopts a different narrative technique and uses strike through to model his previous perspective and the inexperienced culinary persona. Following his self-manifestation as a self-centered, perfectionist, intolerant chef, he gives voice to his mature self. This time, he elaborates on his past actions with the insight he has gained through his culinary career. For instance, the chef narrates how easily he has lost his control upon the maintenance man strolling into the kitchen with his whispers:

> "interrupting our serious self-important world with his joyful obliviousness. I stormed toward him like a drill instructor. I can't actually recall anything about what came next. I was literally out of my mind. My staff tells me I screamed at the man. Threatened him. They said I had been slicing something on a cutting board and was now gesticulating wildly with the knife. (164)

By using such a strategy, Chang compares his destructive culinary persona and how he gained insight about himself during his culinary career. As so, he models an alternative chef image that might replace the crude.

Korean chefs admit that they realize the significance of the

staff's mutual growth, gender equality and ecological consciousness in the later stages of their career. Choi presents how he gained insight and a progressive vision as follows: "it wasn't the pot throwing and the bullying that made a chef a chef. Even on Grove Street, respect came from working hard, supporting your crew, showing love and leadership, and having their back" (Choi 233). Through drawing a constructive image of a chef, Choi contributes to the alternative chef image who cares constructive work ethics as opposed to the crude. Chang also emphasizes that rather than applying the imposed norms intoxicating the kitchen staff, the chefs have the potential to transform the restaurant kitchen as a space for communal healing. In his words: "I believe our industry can still be a place of healing—a refuge where people nurture one another physically and spiritually—but only if we make it so" (Chang 229). As so, Chang's personal endeavor to become a more constructive chef and concerns of racial justice enable him to construct a more progressive chef image who questions the culinary culture within the context of gender justice. For instance, upon redundancy of a chef due to one of his employee's sharing an inappropriate photo of a female coworker, Chang shares his first reaction as follows:

> My gut reaction was to think that the punishment was harsh. A suspension, I could understand. But firing a chef over a nude photo that someone else took? I knew that the chef was extraordinarily busy. I imagined him working on the line when this employee showed him the photo on his phone. [. . .] Did he really need to be fired? I continued to turn it over and over in my mind. What was I not getting? (224)

Chang does not deny the existence of misogyny and sexual harassment in the industrial kitchens. He demands that it is the chefs who should neither deny nor tolerate racial or gendered injustice in the kitchen. In the following lines Chang narrates how he recognizes the similar traits that shape racism and sexism:

> As self-centered as that approach may sound, it helped me understand what I was missing. What if a cook had been spreading around some racist meme he'd made of an Asian co-worker? What if my chef ignored it and I found out about it later? I imagined the years of insecurity and humiliation flooding over me, and the sense of betrayal I'd feel after my staff had let it slide. How would I have reacted? I would have lost it. It had been so

> easy for me to imagine the male chef's perspective, but it took more effort to empathize with the woman. (224)

By opening the discussion for gender justice in the culinary culture his memoir, Chang proposes to alter the traditional kitchen norms and promotes to be more vocal about gender justice in the industrial kitchens.

Edward Lee also portrays an alternative chef image with his ecological concerns. The ecological approach correlates masculinity with ecological issues and demands deconstruction of human species' relation with other species and environment in a constructive way. (Hultman and Pulé 478). At another level, ecological masculinities propose an alternative in which men are portrayed as part of the ecological system as opposed to the hegemonic "industrial/breadwinner" masculinity (Hultman and Pulé 477). In accordance with this idea, Lee's concerns of the visibility of local ethnic cuisines provokes him to question ecological justice and enables him to gain ecological consciousness. In his cookbook as well as his memoir, Edward Lee, regards cooking as the final step before presenting the food on the table. He looks for agricultural justice concerning the animals and plants lives before they come to the kitchen table. Rather than industrial ones, Lee advocates agricultural acts and encourages eating clean food from local and clean farms. In his cookbook, Lee regards Berry's much-quoted words: "Eating is an agricultural act" (1) as an influential motto that had a great influence on his career and kitchen (Lee, *Smoke and Pickles* 99). In parallel with W. Berry, Lee believes that it is the chef's responsibility to find clean food supplies with the philosophy of "farm to table" movement elaborating upon the ecological, moral, and political concerns about the food presented on the table every day (99). Farm-to-table movement defines the eco-conscious market that brings the food prepared in the restaurant kitchen directly from the farms, rather than distributors, stores or food chains and the local production is supported with this philosophy. Lee's attempt can be read as a manifestation of an ecological culinary identity that reacts against the industrial perspective that gives right to destroy other life forms into the hands of white male. Accordingly, ecological concerns of the chef encourage the reader to gain an ethnical perspective and raise consciousness about ecological justice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chefs from minority groups have started to gain visibility in media and gourmet culture that establishes a platform for them to subvert the traditional representations of culinary culture, culinary masculinity, and form a progressive Korean American culinary identity. Ethnic food stands as a significant cultural agency for the long-silenced immigrant cultures as opposed to the assimilating over voice of the mainstream culinary culture. Accordingly, all three chefs address minority/ethnic food as a dominant agent that contributes to the contemporary American culinary culture and represent the culinary transformation from Korean American perspective. Their cuisine reflects multiculturalism in American foodscape with variations of culinary blending. As well as being an expressive medium, cooking evolves to be a performative act through which chefs may unite people and influence the society as artists. The chefs, as celebrity figures, possess the power to vocalize social issues and support racial equality and gender justice. Therefore, the memoirs might also be read as reflections of progressive culinary masculinity as an inseparable part of chefs' culinary identity. Although the chefs portray themselves within the boundaries of traditional understanding of a male chef as hardworking, competitive, and tough, the works also have signals of a more progressive chef image concerned about mutual growth, gender equality and ecological justice. The memoirs reveal performative reflection of subjectivity through food as part of the chef's role in the 21st century.

Works Cited

Aken, Norman Van. "Fusion." *Norman Van Aken*, 27 Dec. 2018, normanvanaken.com/.

Arnold, Bruce Makoto, and Tanfer Emin Tunç. "Introduction: Chinese and Japanese Restaurants in the United States." *Chop Suey and Sushi from Sea to Shining Sea: Chinese and Japanese Restaurants in the United States*. edited by Bruce Makoto Arnold and Tanfer Emin Tunç. U of Arkansas P, 2018, pp. 3–14.

Avakian, Arlene. "Cooking Up Lives: Feminist Food Memoirs." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2014, pp. 277–303. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.40.2.277.

Berry, Wendell. "The Pleasures of Eating". *Center for Ecoliteracy,* June 2009, www.ecoliteracy.org/article/wendell-berry-pleasures-eating.

Cairns, Kate, et al. "Caring About Food: Doing Gender in the Foodie Kitchen." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2010, pp. 591–615. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25741206.

Chan, Jachinson. *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*. Routledge, 2020.

Chung, Juliet. "The New Hot Cuisine: Korean: Why its Flairs are Cropping up Everywhere from Haute Cuisine to Fast Food". Wall Street Journal. 07 Mar. 2009. pp 1-5. PROQUEST.

Chang, David, and Gabe Ulla. *Eat a Peach: A Memoir*. Kindle Ed., Clarkson Potter, 2020.

Choi, Roy, Tien Nguyen, and Natasha Phan. *L.A. Son:* My *Life, My City, My Food*. Kindle Ed., Anthony Bourdain/Ecco, 2015.

Hultman, Martin, and Paul Pulé. "Ecological Masculinities: A Response to the Manthropocene Question." *Routledge international Handbook of Masculinity Studies.* edited by Lucas Gottzén, Ulf Mellstörm and Tamara Shefer. Routledge, 2020. pp.477-88.

Lee, Edward. *Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover Americas New Melting-Pot Cuisine*. Artisan, Kindle ed., Artisan 2018.

---. *Smoke and Pickles: Recipes and Stories from a New Southern Kitchen*. Kindle ed., Artisan, 2013.

Lie, John. *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea*. U of California P, 2015.

Lio, Shoon, and Megan Bott. "From Asian Fusion to Asian Hipster Cuisine:" *Chop Suey and Sushi from Sea to Shining Sea*. edited by Bruce Makoto Arnold and Tanfer EminTunç. U of Arkansas P, 2018, pp. 191–210.

Lopez, Lori Kido. "Asian American Food Writing as Racial Branding: Rewriting the Search for Authenticity." *Global Asian American Popular Culture.* Kindle ed. NYU P., 2016, pp. 151-64.

Mannur, Anita. "Food Matters." *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. Temple UP, 2009.

---. "Model Minorities Can Cook." *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture.* edited by Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime and Tasha G. Oren. New York UP, 2005.

Mclean, Alice L. *Asian American Food Culture.* Greenwood, 2015.

Sobal, Jeffery. "Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity." *Food and Foodways*, vol. 13, no. 1-2, 2005, pp. 135–158. doi:10.1080/07409710590915409.

Soler, Nieves Pascular. "Food in Autobiographies Written by Men." *Food and Masculinity in Contemporary Autobiographies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 1–28.

Waxman, Barbara Frey. "Food Memoirs: What They Are, Why They Are Popular, and Why They Belong in the Literature Classroom." *College English*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2008, pp. 363–383. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25472276.

Young, Rae Oum. "Authenticity and Representation: Cuisines and Identities in Korean American Diaspora." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2005, pp. 109–125., doi:10.1080/13688790500134380.

Submission Guidelines:

The Editorial Board welcomes the submission of articles, interviews, and book reviews for publication in JAST. Articles should be approximately 6000-8000 words in length, and book reviews should not exceed 800 words. Articles should be consistent with the objectives and scope of the journal. All accepted submissions are subject to stylistic editing prior to publication.

Article manuscripts should be submitted as 2 separate documents: the first should be a title page with the submission's title, subtitle (if any), the author's name, affiliation, full postal address, telephone number, e-mail address, and acknowledgements (if any). The second, the **anonymous manuscript**, should be arranged in the following order of presentation: title, an abstract (of approximately 150 words), keywords (4 to 6 words), the main body of the text, endnotes (if any), works cited, and appendices (if any). The text should be organized under appropriate subheadings whenever possible.

The most recent MLA manual style should be strictly observed.

Book reviews should include a brief description of the subjects covered in the book; an evaluation of the book's strength and weaknesses; and the kind(s) of audience(s) to whom the book might appeal. The heading of the review should include: the book's title, author(s) or editor(s), publication city, publisher, publication date, and number of pages.

Manuscripts should be prepared in Microsoft Word, in Times New Roman 12-point font, and be double-spaced (including any notes and the works cited). They can be e-mailed directly to editors

Defne Ersin Tutan: defneersintutan@gmail.com and

Selen Aktari Sevgi: saktari@baskent.edu.tr

Ethical Conduct in Publication:

1. All submissions should be original and should contribute in a tangible way to their field(s) of study.
2. Authors who borrow from the works and ideas of others must document the source, in accordance with the latest MLA style, even when paraphrasing. All forms of plagiarism are unacceptable and any violation will result in the automatic rejection of the manuscript.
3. Authors are responsible for obtaining the copyrights for any copyrighted material included in their article.
4. No manuscript will be considered for publication if it is currently under consideration by another journal or press, or if it has been published, or is soon to be published, elsewhere. If the manuscript is accepted, the Editorial Board expects that its appearance in JAST will precede publication of the article, or any significant part thereof, in another work.
5. Authors are required to comply with our double-blind peer review process and all referee/editor evaluations.
6. Referees are expected to judge the work of others fully, fairly, and in an unbiased and informed way. A referee who has a conflict of interest or personal/professional issue with the author, topic, or critical stance of a work so as to be unable to judge its merits without prejudice must decline to serve as a reviewer.
7. A referee should discharge his/her tasks in a timely manner and should decline an invitation to review if s/he cannot meet the deadline. Undue delay in submitting a review or a revised manuscript will prompt editorial action ranging from the reassignment of the manuscript to another reviewer to its outright rejection.
8. Referees are expected to maintain confidentiality throughout the entire peer review process.

For more information on ethical standards, please see:
https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Staffing-Salaries-and-Other-Professional-Issues/Statement-of-Professional-Ethics/Read-the-Statement-Online

Journal of American Studies of Turkey
Number 56 (Fall 2021)

Table of Contents