UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# Between Asian Girls

## Minor Feminisms and Sideways Critique

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Sharon N. Tran

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Rachel C. Lee, Chair

This dissertation expands existing accounts of the history of Asian racialization in the United States by examining the various discursive, symbolic, and affective economies through which the "Asian girl" has been trafficked. I mobilize the "Asian girl" as a critical framework for attending to an especially vulnerable, young female population and girlification as a particular mode of racialization. I examine the Asian girl queered by militarization, the *kawaii* (cute) Asian girl, the cybernetic/transgenic Asian girl, and the feral Asian girl as critical sites for seriously grappling with material conditions of political constraint and dependency. The project identifies girlish vulnerability as a structure of disavowal/contempt in a historically masculinist minoritarian politics that emphasizes autonomy, sovereignty, and militant resistance and takes forms of vulnerability as a basis theorizing an alternative affective politics. My research draws on the works of Asian/American novelists, poets, and visual artists for how they (re)imagine Asian girls in lateral associations of compoundedness, eroticism, and nascent political solidarity.

As the title, "Between Asian Girls," suggests, this dissertation seeks to recuperate theorizations of female homosociality, famously dismissed by Eve Sedgwick, as overly "intelligible"—thereby too facile for investigation—and at the same time, as politically illegible. I offer a postcolonial, critical race studies intervention to theorizations of female homosociality. Engaging with Asian Americanist scholarship by David Eng, Gayatri Gopinath, Jodi Kim, among others, I trace how histories of racialization, militarism, and imperialism intimately structure relations between Asian girls. This project also redefines the stakes of theorizing homosociality through a focus on the girl, a liminal figure that is heavily sexualized in U.S. culture but is simultaneously not allowed to be sexual. I take up the Asian girl as a critical framework for thinking queerness in terms of minor(itized) bodies, how girlification is a mode of racialization indexed in the construction of figures such as the "Asian sissy" and "China doll." My project is thus in conversation with girl studies and recent queer critique on the child. Responding to Lee Edelman's polemic on the politics of reproductive futurism organized around the child, I follow Kathryn Bond Stockton and J. Jack Halberstam in probing how minor girl "acts" can shift our understanding of the political. Instead of a politics for the child, I take the child and Asian girlification as a point of departure for theorizing *minor feminisms*.

The Asian/American cultural productions I analyze foreground various structuring conditions that inhibit the Asian girl from growing up, in the heteronormative sense, to become an autonomous adult human, and lead her to instead, "grow sideways" (cf. Stockton 2009). I probe how these works stage the Asian girl's queer bonding with other contingent, proximal objects and organisms and provide critical imaginaries for theorizing alternative forms of social and political collectivity. My opening chapter examines how Sarah Bird and Nora Okja Keller deploy the trope of lateral birth in their fiction as a means of critiquing and negotiating histories of gendered militarized violence, while later chapters mine the possibilities of a compound

political subjectivity in depictions of *kawaii* collectivity across different genres from Japanese anime to Chang-rae Lee's novel *On Such a Full Sea*, stinky multispecies assemblages in the speculative fiction of Larissa Lai, and her collaborative ecopoetics with Rita Wong. This dissertation also seeks to further develop and enact a mode of *sideways critique* taken up by some feminist and queer studies scholars (cf. R. Lee 2014). Argumentation typically entails a logic and expectation of verticality, the linear ordering and building up of ideas to some final culmination. In each of my chapters, I perform variations of sideways reading practices that mine the contingent, lateral points of connection between texts for how they can move us sideways toward queer critical terrains.

The dissertation of Sharon N. Tran is approved.

Lowell Gallagher

Ursula K. Heise

Valerie Matsumoto

Rachel C. Lee, Committee Chair

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2017

To my twin—*this could not have been written without you*.

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# VITA

Sharon N. Tran attended Queens College, City University of New York as part of the William E. Macaulay Honors program. In 2008, she was awarded the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and conducted summer research at Wesleyan University. She received a B.A. degree in English from Queens College in June 2010. Later that fall, she entered the English doctoral program at the University of California, Los Angeles.

PROLOGUE

# On Being Nonsingular Double

I have always been a "we." I began this project not fully realizing and perhaps even denying how much it was informed by my own nonsingular subjectivity. I would therefore like to open by offering a few critical reflections: I am a twin. My sister and I certainly share striking physical resemblances but we have also *grown more similar*, developing similar temperaments, interests, and aspirations. As a child, I would often unconsciously slip into first person plural mid-conversation, thinking of myself through and as a "we" (whether my twin was around or not). This still happens, although a lot less frequently. Having a twin was a source of immense comfort especially during my childhood and teenage years—to have someone going through very similar struggles and changes, along with me, who I could always turn to and confide in because I knew that she would understand.

The first time I truly began to view our twinship differently, as a potential obstacle or detriment, was while applying for graduate school. Our mentors at Queens College encouraged us to differentiate (e.g. take different classes, acquire recommendations from different faculty members, diversify our research interests as much as possible) in order to project ourselves as strong *individual* applicants for highly competitive English doctoral programs. The implication was that there would not be space, in these elite graduate programs, for two people who are too similar. And so, I began to worry: Which one of us is the double, the surplus twin? What does it mean to be assessed on and valued for our capacity to individualize? This imperative to individualize was also heightened in specifically gendered and racial ways. As Asian American women, it felt especially urgent to subvert stereotypes of the Oriental as lacking individuality

and creativity (e.g. prone to swarm-like behavior, group-mindedness, and feminized co-dependency).

Our efforts to separate and differentiate have been, to a certain extent, successful. My twin and I were admitted into English doctoral programs on opposite coasts of the U.S. We have developed distinct research projects and scholarly communities even as they sometimes overlap and intersect. I now recognize this dissertation as my way of circling back to interrogate the emphasis and value placed on individuation. Or rather, the negativity often associated with gendered and racialized forms of compoundedness and dependency. Who and where would we be now if we refused to individualize/separate/differentiate? How can this refusal provide the basis for imagining an alternative politics, ethics, and mode of social being?

During the early research stages of this project, I came across an account of two British Sikh twins that gave me a glimpse of a different possible trajectory and lived subjectivity. Now internationally renowned artists, Amrit and Rabindra Singh attended Liverpool University of Chester for a BA (Hons) degree in art. There they confronted various forms of institutional prejudice for (1) their interests in traditional Eastern aesthetics—the decorative, miniature form, which evokes all the taboos of Western contemporary art, and (2) their twinship—their compoundedness and failure to individualize.[1] Amrit and Rabindra's teachers instructed them to develop their own individualities and distinct artistic practices but (unlike my sister and I) they found it impossible to meet this institutional demand and faced severe consequences as a result.[2] The work that they produced individually continued to reflect similarities in style, similarities

[1] "Inspiration," *The Singh Twins*, accessed April 24, 2017, http://www.singhtwins.co.uk/INSPIRATION.html.

[2] Saloni Mathur, "Diasporic Body Double: The Art of the Singh Twins," *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (2006): 35.

that developed organically from their common sources of inspiration, interests, and goals.[3] One of their examiners went so far as to accuse them of copying each other's work and refused to accept a dissertation they submitted as part of a combined degree course on art and religion.[4] The case garnered a lot of public attention and reveals the extent to which the disciplinary art-training program at Liverpool University cannot accommodate compoundedness, relegating Amrit and Rabindra's compound artistic style to plagiarism or cheating. While the two were finally vindicated on this particular case, a number of ongoing issues prevented them from receiving their degree even to this day.[5]

Amrit and Rabindra's experiences at Liverpool University foreground a different *künstlerroman* or narrative of artistic development that challenges Anglo-American notions of artistic genius, which are grounded in Enlightenment ideals of singular authorship and the "cult of the individual": "Being twins, it was wrongly assumed that one of us was always copying the other and that we were not developing independently as artists… Our tutors didn't seem to understand that in being twins, we were being ourselves in a way that was natural to us and that to make a conscious effort to be different from each other would have been totally false to who we were as artists and individuals."[6] Instead of conforming to pressures to become independent, individual artists, Amrit and Rabindra made the political choice to collaborate on most of their paintings and to work under the joint name, "The Singh Twins." Through their act of collaboration, they challenge the primacy placed on singularity and originality (e.g. who is the

[3] "Inspiration."

[4] *The Singh Twins*, dir. David Elliott Thompson, Ariel Fisher, and Tyler Gurd (Orange, CA: Chapman University's Dodge College of Film and Media Arts, supported by the Sikhs Art and Film Festival, 2012), http://vimeo.com/54213718.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Rabindra quoted in Mathur, "Diasporic Body Double," 53.

original creator, who copied who) to affirm their lateral, compounded relationality and mode of artistic development. The two self-consciously perform their twinness (e.g. they dress in identical clothes, work on and exhibit their paintings together) to foreground not only their professional artistic collaboration but also a "collaborative mode of being in the world."[7]

The Singh Twins' story deeply informs this dissertation but I could not ultimately find a way to develop it into a full chapter, perhaps because it felt too narrow, too personal, or too similar to my own story. I have therefore chosen to offer these interconnected stories as an opening to a larger project that explores the myriad aesthetic, affective, and political possibilities that inhere in figurations of Asian female collectivity, where compoundedness, nonsingularity, and doubleness does not simply signify failure.

[7] Bridget Bennett, "Double Acts: Mary Ellen Mark's Twins," *Women: A Cultural Review* 20, no. 2 (2009): 178. Amrit and Rabindra constantly play with notions of compoundedness and singularity in interviews as well as their artwork, sometimes referring to themselves as "The Singh Twins," using plural pronouns, and other times, projecting themselves as one artist, using the singular pronoun "she," which becomes doubled again as they illustrate themselves as doubles of each other in their paintings (Mathur, "Diasporic Body Double," 35).

INTRODUCTION

# Minor Interventions

Reimagining, Recuperating the Oriental Girl

George Saunders' short story, "The Semplica-Girl Diaries" (2015), transports readers to the not-too-distant future where it has become fashionable for American families to decorate their homes with living, human lawn ornaments. Semplica-Girls (SGs), as they are so referred, are dressed in identical white smocks and strung up side-by-side via a "microline" threaded through the brain to form a highly stylized *tableau vivant*.[8] Narrated not from the perspective of the SGs themselves, but rather a white, middle-class suburban father of three, the diary form invites readers to grapple with the complex psychic interiority of a man who aspires to achieve the "good life" for his family, defined in the short story as a yard embellished with SG arrangements. He believes that if he only obtains some SGs, his family will finally be happy and feel "at last in step with peers and time in which living."[9] The diarist-narrator, however, fails to recognize how this vision of the good life both relies on and perpetuates the violent exploitation and trafficking of young Third World women. Compelled by various familial and socioeconomic circumstances to become SGs, these women must undergo a risky, invasive surgical procedure and allow their bodies to be displayed in an especially degrading way for the aesthetic pleasure of American suburbanites. The short story formally distances readers from the SGs and precludes access to their human interiority, thereby reifying their ornamental object-status, as mere corporeal surface to-be-looked-at.

[8] George Saunders, "The Semplica-Girl Diaries," *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/15/the-semplica-girl-diaries.

[9] Ibid. On the "good life" see: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 27-8.

The futuristic world that Saunders conjures is so compelling and haunting because it feels more familiar than foreign. The short story illuminates intersecting geopolitical, social, and economic structures of domination that characterize our contemporary global reality. Third World women forced to enter the global migrant workforce, to travel far away from their families to work (as nannies, nurses, prostitutes, maids, etc.) in order to send money home is, by no means, a new narrative.[10] Saunders imagines how these women are now called upon to perform a different form of labor that entails their literal objectification as suburban lawn ornaments.[11] This speculative, science fictional scenario can be linked to Anglo-American imperial practices of exoticizing and exhibiting brown female bodies. It also does not seem to be a coincidence that the SGs are largely young Asian women hailing from diverse places as the Philippines, Laos, and Bangladesh. As Anne Anlin Cheng observes, the "Oriental woman" has been repeatedly aestheticized as ornament/decoration in literature, art, and Victorian pseudo-ethnography.[12] Afong Moy, likely the first Chinese female immigrant to the United States, was brought over by the Carne Brothers in 1834 as an exotic, touring attraction.[13] Referred to as the

[10] See: Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 2002); and Delia D. Aguilar and Anne E. Lacsamana, eds., *Women and Globalization* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004).

[11] This aesthetic ornamental labor, which is highly visible, significantly differs from historically invisible traditional forms of female domestic and care work. The SGs also evoke historical practices of Negrobilia, of using "lawn jockeys"—statues portraying blacks in demeaning, subservient roles—to "adorn the front porches and lawns of homes throughout the Eastern United States" (John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 282). Saunders' short story thus establishes a link between Third World Asian labor and black labor. Some theorize that "the lawn jockey symbolizes Jocko Graves, a Black youth whose lamp lit the way for George Washington and his troops as they crossed the Delaware" while others suggest that "the first use of lawn jockeys was to signal safe houses along the Underground Railroad" (ibid). Strausbaugh expresses skepticism over both theories, insisting that they betray "more than a hit of wishful revisionist history" (ibid).

[12] Anne Anlin Cheng, "Modernism," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander* Literature, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014), 316.

[13] Ibid. Cheng identifies the exhibition of Afong Moy as following the tradition of Sarah Baartman, the Venus Hottentot. Yet she draws an important distinction between "Baartman who was spectacularized for her naked body,"

"The Chinese Lady," Afong Moy was exhibited with and *as chinoiserie*, her "decadent body" an object among other objects (thick, lavish rugs, elaborate drapes, silk clothes, etc.).[14] This notion of the Oriental woman, as inviting her own aestheticization, is heavily shaped by gendered, racialized stereotypes of her imagined passivity, docility, and malleability. Within this historical context, Saunders' short story can be understood as a reimagining of the Oriental woman as part of an ideal suburban aesthetic. I am particularly interested in how her incorporation into the texture of the (white) middle-class American home seems to be predicated on her *girlification*—the redressing, repackaging of the Oriental woman as girl.

The illustration printed alongside Saunders' short story in *The New Yorker* depicts four SGs swaying high above the scene of a suburban home.[15] Instead of exotic textiles, they are dressed in matching white smocks and Mary Janes, which gesture to the aestheticization of girlish innocence and youthful brown bodies. The illustration (and the short story) exposes the cruelly ironic way in which SGs are fetishized for their girlishness but are simultaneously not allowed to be girls. The depiction of three male yard workers in the background tending to the lawn and surrounding foliage invites a comparison with the SGs in the foreground as also engaged in work, albeit of a different form. SGs have to carefully modulate and suppress human action/liveliness in order to transform themselves into nonhuman objects for display. While Semplica-*Girls* have become the ornamental fixture of suburban America, the short story raises questions about what exactly happens to these "girls" when they inevitably grow up and grow too old. Saunders does not provide a clear answer, but readers can surmise that the SGs'

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and "The Chinese lady" who "was fully and fussily dressed." On Afong Moy as "The Chinese Lady" see also: Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999), 29-30.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Martin Ansin, illustration for George Saunders' "The Semplica-Girl Diaries," *The New Yorker*, October 15, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/15/the-semplica-girl-diaries.

ornamental value will steadily depreciate over time until they are no longer attractive enough to be displayed on suburban lawns.[16]

I open with this extended discussion of Saunders' "Semplica-Girl Diaries" because the short story both resonates with and illuminates the three central intersecting inquiries that drive this dissertation. First, this project explores the various ways the Oriental girl has been aestheticized in U.S. culture and the violence embedded in those processes of aestheticization. I ask: How can examining representations of the Oriental girl productively expand or revise an understanding of the history of Asian racialization in the United States? In his short story, Saunders mobilizes the Oriental girl to critique the perverse aesthetic pleasure suburban America draws from the degradation of young Asian and other Third World women. Yet hope and ethico-political possibility in the story also comes to significantly revolve around the figure of a girl.

After winning a $10,000 scratch ticket lottery, the diarist-narrator immediately blows most of that money on buying an SG arrangement (instead of paying off several maxed out credit cards). The entire family is happy with the newly decorated lawn except for the youngest daughter, Eva, who grows quiet and sullen, insisting: "It's not nice."[17] She can be described as what Sara Ahmed terms, an "affect alien," whose unhappiness over the treatment of SGs renders her alien to her heteronormative family and the larger society of suburban America, disrupting its

[16] Here I draw on Melissa W. Wright's discussion of the depreciation of Mexican female labor-power in the maquiladoras. While the labor-power of Mexican men appreciates in value over time, turning into skill, Wright emphasizes how the labor-power of Mexican women continuously declines in value until she becomes a form of waste and suffers a "corporate death," which can lead to literal biological death ("The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and Maquiladoras," *Public Culture* 11, no. 3 (1999): 127). Their lives are "stilled" or suspended according to the mechanics and time schedules of global capital so that they are essentially deprived of the agency to determine their own progress through time. As Wright observes, the Mexican female laborer benefits the economic system by first, serving as "the standard for recognizing the production of value in people and things" because "[v]alue appreciates in what is not her" and second, by her position as a temporary worker, "incorporat[ing] flexibility into the labor supply through her turnover," which is perceived as inevitable" (127).

[17] Saunders, "Semplica-Girl Diaries."

fantasy of the good life and its "promise of happiness."[18] The diarist-narrator writes: "Eva sensitive. Kindest kid. Biggest heart. Once…found dead bird in yard and placed on swing-set slide, so it could 'see him fambly.' Cried when we threw out old rocking chair, claiming it told her it wanted to live out rest of life in basement."[19] Eva expresses as much empathy for a dead bird and its family as an old piece of furniture. While her affective response can be read as a childish "failure"[20] to distinguish animate and inanimate objects, to properly assign and hierarchize value, this failure is precisely what allows Eva to perceive the pain of the SGs—young women forced to literally remake themselves into lawn ornaments. This connects to the dissertation's second key inquiry: How can girl acts and imaginaries provide a basis for theorizing an alternative minoritarian politics and minor feminisms? By "girl" I do not refer to some fixed or stable entity but rather shifting gendered meanings and connotations of frivolousness, superficiality, irrelevance, smallness, and so on. I mine these ways of acting, perceiving, and inhabiting the world that have been deemed minor for new anti-racist, feminist models of ethico-political relationality.

Engaging with the minor, as a critical practice, is always difficult, full of complications, tensions, and ambivalences. When Eva finally acts, liberating the SGs with the push of a button, she inadvertently plunges her entire family into debt. A corporate representative informs them that they are responsible for the full payment of the debts still remaining on each SG's contract of indentured servitude, a total of $8,600 that will likely cause them to lose their house. Saunders also highlights the ambivalent effects of Eva's unfilial act of care on the SGs themselves, who

[18] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 1-2.

[19] Saunders, "Semplica-Girl Diaries."

[20] I draw here on J. Jack Halberstam's theorization of the critical possibility of failure in relation to queer art and more specifically, children and children's culture. *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011).

have been now reduced to fugitives, with a microline still linking the four of them together. This curious figuration of female collectivity serves as the basis of the dissertation's final inquiry: What are the limits and possibilities of a collective female political subjectivity? I probe how representations of female compoundedness, widely stigmatized in Anglo-American culture as a failure to individualize, separate, differentiate (i.e. become independent), allow us to rethink and challenge conventional modes of political action and assemblage. At the end of the short story the, diarist-narrator contemplates:

> Where are they now? Why did they leave?
>
> Just do not get.
>
> […]
>
> No money, no papers. Who will remove microline? Who will give her job? When going for job, must fix hair so as to hide scars at Insertion Points. When will she ever see her home + family again? Why would she do this? Why would she ruin all, leave our yard? Could have had a nice long run w/ us. What in the world was she seeking? What could she want so much, that would make her pull such desperate stunt?[21]

The pronomial shift from a plural "they" to a singular "she," highlights the difficulty of envisioning a viable and enduring collective female subjectivity. The diarist-narrator assumes that in order to survive, the girls must figure out how to separate themselves immediately. Their physical compoundedness is described as a disability: "[the] microline limits how fast they can walk, since, fleeing in group, they are forced to take baby steps, so one does not get too far behind/ahead of others, hence causing yank on microline, yank that could damage brain of one

[21] Saunders, "Semplica-Girl Diaries."

yanked."[22] Yet we can also imagine compoundedness differently as the condition of possibility in this scenario—after all, the SGs had to form a collective subjectivity in order to escape in the first place. In this mode of thinking, how might their compoundedness facilitate their continued survival and allow them to uncover new ways of moving together *with care*—not "too far behind/ahead" to inhibit injury to others—and towards the realization of a different kind of political movement?[23] This dissertation can ultimately be understood as an attempt to probe the still-percolating revolutionary potential that inheres in figurations of female collectivity.

The Asian/American literary and visual cultural productions that form the archive of this project all feature Asian girl characters in lateral associations of compoundedness, eroticism, and nascent political solidarity. These works call for a transdisciplinary approach that draws on critical concepts from and across multiple disciplines to assemble new structures of knowledge. The dissertation's first key term, "girl," evokes a dependent, not-fully-autonomous figure that directly overlaps with "minor," which marks not only a perceived insignificance, smallness, and inferiority but also a degree of political illegibility—i.e. the girl as a minor, whose age precisely excludes her from political realms and channels of action. I am particularly interested in how both terms intersect in the context of histories of Asian racialization and Asian American political theorizing/organizing. I trace how the historical girlification of Asian/Americans has engendered an oppositional masculinist minoritarian politics invested in rejecting and disavowing Asian girlishness.

[22] Ibid.

[23] A great insight that I must credit to my brilliant advisor, Rachel, is how this notion of not moving "too far behind/ahead" also evokes the ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor in our contemporary global reality. Saunders' short story points to how closing this gap—the redistribution or leveling of global wealth—has become unthinkable, while the degrading labor that the SGs are expected to perform has become, in contrast, more thinkable.

Attending to figurations of the Asian girl serves as my attempt to challenge and expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies, which leads to the dissertation's next key term, "female compoundedness." The various literary and visual cultural productions that I examine foreground the Asian girl's psychic-affective entanglement with other contingent, proximal objects and organisms. This compoundedness manifests as a failure to (1) fully separate to become an independent individual and (2) develop a resistant political subjectivity and agency. Female compoundedness thus strongly resonates and overlaps with "sideways," a critical concept that I borrow from Kathryn Bond Stockton.[24] Instead of growing up, in the heteronormative sense, to become an autonomous adult human, the Asian girl grows sideways, forming unlikely lateral bonds and attachments. I also re-conceptualize sideways as a critical practice that attends to the various structural forces that inhibit vertical growth/thriving and takes seriously conditions of extreme vulnerability, dependency, and political constraint. I read scenes of Asian female compoundedness sideways for how they illuminate alternative models of ethico-political collectivity that significantly prioritize affective ties and obligations over militant resistance.

Finally, "queer" is a key term that flickers intermittently in and out of this project. The slipperiness of this term has much to do with my attempt to think queerness in relation to the girl—a figure with a nascent, not-fully-formed sexual identity or sexual organs. I deploy queer as a way of marking the erotic intimacies and bonds the Asian girl forms that variously defer, deviate, or interfere with normative heterosexual development. In what follows, I will further unpack and contextualize these key terms in the larger critical discourses and fields in which this project intervenes.

[24] See: Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 11. I will expand on Stockton's theory of growing sideways more below.

**Asian Girlification**

The trope of the Oriental girl illuminates multiple intersecting histories and forms of Asian racialization in the United States. Through tracking this trope, I will demonstrate the special salience of "girl" and "girlification" for understanding the formation of Asian/America, as sites of proliferative meanings, tensions, and contradictions. Deeply informed by feminist theories of intersectionality, girlification refers to the multiple systems of domination that operate together to construct Asian/Americans as variously girl-like (e.g. hyper-feminine, inferior, passive, docile, unthreatening). To comment briefly on terminology, I use "Oriental girl" to refer to the range of discourses and aesthetic representations deeply embedded in and engendered by the uneven East-West power relations that Edward Said elaborates in his theory of Orientalism.[25] I use "Asian girl" as a way of marking how I attempt to recuperate girlification and girlishness as generative concepts for Asian Americanist political imagining and critique.

An analysis of girlification must, of course, begin with the stereotype of the Asian/American male sissy. The Chinese American writer-activist, Frank Chin, has forcefully denounced Hollywood's and mainstream media's emasculating representation of Asian/American men: "In no uncertain terms [the movies] taught America that we were lovable for being a race of sissies…living to accommodate the whitemen."[26] From the effeminate, asexual Charlie Chan to the homosexual menace Fu Manchu, the Oriental stereotype is unique in that it is "completely devoid of manhood" and indeed develops out of a history of structurally

[25] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, [1978] 1979).

[26] Frank Chin, "Confessions of the Chinatown Cowboy," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 4, no. 3 (1972): 66.

enforced emasculation.[27] Nineteenth-century U.S. exclusion acts and anti-miscegenation laws severely restricted Asian immigrant access to heteronormative manhood (i.e. nuclear family formation via marriage and reproduction), giving rise to queer "bachelor communities."[28] These male immigrants were also compelled to perform jobs traditionally regarded as "women's work," to serve as restaurant cooks, waiters, tailors, and laundrymen.[29] Chin and other writer-activists called for the total renunciation and eradication of the Oriental sissy stereotype, defining the ideal Asian American political subject in rigidly antithetical terms, as masculine, heterosexual, virile, aggressive, outspoken. The groundbreaking 1974 *Aiiieeeee!* anthology serves as their collaborative attempt to "claim America" through the recuperation of a heroic Asian martial literary tradition[30] and the fashioning of "a recognized style of Asian-American manhood."[31] This cultural nationalist project, however, relies on and promotes the exclusion, denigration, and erasure of the sissy—nonnormative forms of queer, girlish femininity. David L. Eng and other Asian American feminist and queer studies scholars have produced incisive critiques of the *Aiiieeeee!* group's "narrowly defined concept of Asian American identity," which effectively

[27] Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan, "Racist Love," in *Seeing Through Shuck*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Ballantine Books, [1971] 1972), 68.

[28] On queer Chinatown bachelor communities see: David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 17-18; and Michael Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed: A Legal and Historical Perspective of Emasculation Through U.S. Immigration Practices," *The Modern American* 8, no. 1 (2013): 10-11.

[29] Park, "Asian American Masculinity Eclipsed," 11-12.

[30] This Asian heroic tradition includes Chinese and Japanese classic texts such as, *The Art of War*, *Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Chushingura*, which celebrate martial valor, an ethic of revenge, competitive individualism, and aggression (see: King-Kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 237).

[31] Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1974), xxxviii.

"reinscribes a dominant system of compulsory heterosexuality with all its attendant misogyny and homophobia."[32]

Whereas Asian/American men have been represented in mainstream U.S. culture as non/homo-sexual, Asian/American women have been portrayed as excessively, only sexual. This stereotype of the hypersexual Oriental woman develops in relation to and as an effect of projects of U.S. military imperialism in Asia. Conditions of militarized violence compelled Asian women to become prostitutes, hostesses, and war brides in order to survive and American GI interactions with Asian women were largely limited to these forms of sexual encounter.[33] This Asian female stereotype, however, also betrays multiple contradictions, where hypersexuality becomes fused with girlish innocence. Take, for example, a 1990 *Gentleman's Quarterly* article titled "Oriental Girls," in which Tony Rivers describes the "great western male fantasy":

> Her face—round like a child's, …eyes almond-shaped for mystery, black for suffering, wide-spaced for innocence, high cheekbones swelling like bruises, cherry lips. …
>
> When you come home from another hard day on the planet, she comes into existence, removes your clothes, bathes you and walks naked on your back to relax you. …She's fun you see, and so uncomplicated. She doesn't go to assertiveness-training classes, insist on being treated like a person, fret about career moves, wield her orgasm as a non-negotiable demand. …

[32] Eng, *Racial Castration*, 210.

[33] See: Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 17-18.

> She's there when you need shore leave from those angry feminist seas. She's a handy victim of love or a symbol of the rape of third world nations, a real trouper.[34]

Rivers foregrounds how girlish features—e.g. innocence, docility, passivity, eagerness to please—render the Oriental woman the model sex object. She is perpetually a girl because she fails to develop a fully independent, autonomous self, only "com[ing] into existence" to perform sexual-comfort labor for her Western male lover.[35] This passage also illustrates how this sexual fantasy develops in connection to and as part of Orientalist imperial discourses that construct the West as dominant, masculine, and powerful, in contrast to an infantilized, feminized Asia that putatively desires to be dominated.[36] Yet I am most interested in how girlification works to dissociate Asian/American women from "angry feminist[s]," women who demand the right to full personhood, to have a career, and to experience sexual pleasure. The Oriental girl has been constructed as a remedy to feminism, as a way of disciplining white women and other women of color, who seek to challenge sexist societal structures and hierarchies. Discourses on Asian/American women as the model sex object thus operates in a very similar way to model minority discourses, where Asian/American socioeconomic success has been used to discipline

[34] Tony Rivers, "Oriental Girls," *Gentleman's Quarterly,* British ed., October 1990, 158, 161, 163, quoted in Sumi K. Cho, "Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong," *The Journey of Gender, Race, and Justice* 1, no. 1 (1997): 191.

[35] As Aki Uchida observes, while the Oriental Woman has been depicted in apparently contradictory ways, as the docile Lotus Blossom or the diabolical Dragon Lady, both are hypersexualized and primarily defined in relation to men ("The Orientalization of Asian Women in America," *Women's Studies International Forum* 21, no. 2 (1998): 162).

[36] See: Said, *Orientalism*. David Henry Hwang's seminal play *M. Butterfly* (1989) explicitly engages with these gendered imperial stereotypes of the East vs. the West.

other minority groups, to justify the maintenance of the status quo, and to explain away underperformance as an internal-individual problem rather than an external-structural one.[37]

Technologies of global racial capitalism also work to differentiate and exploit Asian/American women for their girlish bodily form. As Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu asserts, global capitalism profits through the "differentiation of specific resources and markets," which enables "the recruitment of a flexible workforce whose difference can be exploited to increase productivity and decrease wages. In the quest for differentiation, the 'oriental girl' is singled out as particularly suited for the 'feminized work' of high-tech production and…sexual stimulation."[38] Her small hands and nimble fingers render the Oriental girl the ideal cyborg/automaton laborer for microelectronics assembly and sex work.[39] Asian/American women thus fulfill capitalism's demand for a flexible workforce and for girlish *bodily flexibility*, which comes to be racialized as nonhuman, as exemplifying a machinic level of precision and efficiency.

Contemporary transnational adoption trends suggest that a different kind of imagined flexibility has come to be attached to the Oriental girl. As David L. Eng observes, the soaring demand for Asian baby girls marks a "striking gendered reversal" in the history of U.S. exclusionary politics, most notably the Page Law of 1875, which largely barred the immigration

[37] See: Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3-5; Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 46-7; and Uchida, "The Orientalization of Asian Women in America," 172.

[38] Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, "Good Politics, Great Porn: Untangling Race, Sex, and Technology in Asian American Cultural Productions," in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, eds. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Routledge, 2003), 268.

[39] On Asian/American women as "real-life cyborgs," see: Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth-century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, eds. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2000), 311, 313.

of Chinese women and girls because of their putative inclination for prostitution and sex work.[40] Historian Yong Chen cites one dramatic case in which "census takers identified a five-year-old girl as a prostitute in their 1870 census."[41] Instead of a threat to white middle-class morality, the Asian girl is now imagined as capable of affectively consolidating the heteronormative nuclear American family. The demand for transnational Asian adoptees, in spite of the large population of black children available for domestic adoption, betrays how the former is perceived as more easily assimilable and malleable to existing power structures.[42] Model minority discourses have no doubt contributed to this demand by engendering a seductive "stereotype of the hard-working, agreeable, and passive Asian girl, ever eager to please" that works "to smooth over political problems, economic disparities, and cultural differences" in transnational multicultural family formation.[43]

Minor, accommodating affects thus animate and link the tropes of the Asian male sissy, the ideal Asian wife/prostitute, and the model Asian daughter. This dissertation interrogates the place and function of these affects within a minoritarian political imaginary. How does the Asian girl, as an exemplar of model minority femininity, complicate a historically masculinist minoritarian politics grounded in militant resistance? What alternative affective and theoretical orientations does the Asian girl offer Asian American studies?

**Minor Girl Acts**

[40] David L. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diaspora," *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (2003): 11-12.

[41] Yong Chen, "Invisible Historical Players: Uncovering the Meanings and Experiences of Children in Early Asian American History," in *Asian American Children: A Historical Handbook and Guide*, ed. Benson Tong (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 31.

[42] David L. Eng, *Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 108-109.

[43] Ibid, 110.

The Asian American Movement (AAM) was less an outgrowth than a response to the limitations of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.[44] Renouncing the civil rights framework, the AAM called attention to anti-Asian racism and emphasized self-determination for Asians in the United States as well as Asia. Asian American activists were deeply inspired by the Black Power Movement, embracing its ideology of radical ethnic nationalism, militant tactics, and political analysis of U.S. racism, capitalism, and imperialism.[45] The Black Panther Party served as a model for Asian American organizations such as the Red Guard, the I Wor Kuen (IWK), the Yellow Brotherhood, among others. These organizations emphasized Yellow Power as a necessary antidote to the silence, passivity, and assimilationist tendencies inculcated by histories of anti-Asian violence, especially the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII.[46] The term "Asian American" was created as a new political, pan-Asian identity in direct opposition to the stereotype of the quiet, timid, obsequious, and perpetually foreign Oriental.[47] Yellow Power is thus grounded in racialized, gendered, and sexualized discourses that glorify a radical, resistant "warrior self."[48]

The enactment of aggressive, heteronormative masculinity by Asian American men (and other men of color) can be understood as an attempt to challenge the conditions of powerlessness

[44] Daryl Joji Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

[45] Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, "Yellow Power: The Formation of Asian-American Nationalism in the Age of Black Power, 1966-1975," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 29.

[46] Amy Uyematsu, "The Emergence of Yellow Power in America," in *Roots: An Asian American Reader*, eds. Amy Tachiki, Eddie Wong, Franklin Odo, and Bruce Wong (Los Angeles: Continental Graphics, 1971), 10-11.

[47] Diane C. Fujino, "Who Studies the Asian American Movement?: A Historiographical Analysis," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 128.

[48] Wendy Ho, *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999), 89-91.

exacerbated and enforced by racial oppression in the United States.[49] As previously mentioned, Frank Chin and his *Aiiieeeee!* cohort developed an "Asian American cultural politics based on…hyper-masculinized representations of men (and women)."[50] They imagine the "warrior self" as a "model for the unified 'Chinaman I,' " which is always "coherent, stable, and known."[51] Chin asserts: "As a rule of style and literary activity, it means the fighter writer uses the literary forms as weapons of war…and does not fuck around wasting time with dandyish expressions of feeling and psychological attitudinizing. The individual is found in the act of war, of not selling out, not in feelings."[52] According to Chin, the Asian American individual becomes consolidated through militant, resistant action, as opposed to emotional expression and bonding, which are implied to be feminine, frivolous, and passive.

But as Wendy Ho observes, Chin's masculinist brand of Yellow Power nationalism, closely resembles mainstream constructions of American nationalism: "[T]he model U.S. citizen has been frequently represented by strong, heroic male figures—the rugged and stoic individualist on the physical or metaphysical frontier of the American West. These fictional and real figures are socially and emotionally independent, self-made individualists, hard-working and endlessly resourceful larger-than-life characters—explorers, pioneer heroes, frontiersmen, cowboys."[53] Ho calls attention to how Asian American cultural nationalists internalized, whether consciously or unconsciously, dominant, white Anglo-American ideologies of heroic masculinity, the same ideologies that spurred and manifested in "the arrogant and brutal

[49] Ibid, 101.

[50] Ibid, 89.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Frank Chin, "This Is Not an Autobiography," *Genre* 18, no. 2 (1985): 112.

[53] Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 89.

massacres of indigenous peoples."[54] In simply reversing white discursive constructions of Asian manhood, cultural nationalists do not go far enough "in questioning traditional definitions of masculinity and writing new masculine (or feminine) endings."[55] Asian American women, in particular, began to critique the limitations of a masculinist politics of militant resistance and Yellow Power.

The Asian American Women's movement developed during the 1970s as a response to the continued marginalization of women in the AAM. Women were often relegated to secondary roles and granted little authority to shape the AAM's political agenda/vision.[56] William Wei notes how "some male activists tried to rationalize this situation by pointing to their own oppression, arguing that they had a 'right' to the sexual services of 'their' women, after years when Asian women were excluded from the country. Moreover, they saw services from women as 'just compensation' for the sacrifices they were making on behalf of the 'people.' "[57] This attitude betrays the patriarchal ideologies that govern both the Asian American community and mainstream U.S. society. If women activists challenged traditional gender roles and power relations, they were perceived as betraying their own ethnic community and creating harmful, internal divisions that would weaken the AAM. Some, however, came to view this "undercurrent

[54] Ibid, 90.

[55] Ibid, 101.

[56] William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993), 76. See also: Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 113-14; Sonia Shah, "Introduction: Slaying the Dragon Lady: Toward an Asian American Feminism," in *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, ed. Sonia Shah (Boston: South End Press, 1997), xvi.

[57] Ibid, 76.

of sexism" as what was truly " 'holding back the Movement' by ignoring a huge reservoir of energy and creativity—Asian American women."[58]

While partly inspired by the 1960s and 70s Anglo-American Women's Liberation Movement, the Asian American Women's Movement also carefully distinguished itself from mainstream feminism, mobilizing a separate, parallel movement. Asian American women activists viewed Anglo-American feminists as elite, white middle-class women whose political agenda did not encompass or adequately address the concerns of largely poor, working-class women of color.[59] The tendency of Anglo-American feminists " 'to polarize the sexes, encourage narcissism, and deprecate individual obligation to others' also alienated Asian American women who identified closely with their ethnic community."[60] In addition to implementing their own forms of feminist organizing, Asian American women began to create cultural productions to affirm their own identity as well as the Asian American community at large.[61]

Writings by Asian American women were among the first to break into the mainstream publishing industry and garner a large mainstream U.S. readership. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) achieved instant, commercial success that generated the demand and indeed, an industry for the publication of more Asian

[58] Ibid, 77.

[59] Ibid, 90.

[60] Ibid, 73.

[61] From the late 1980s and 1990s onward, Asian American feminism would undergo a paradigm shift from an emphasis on sameness (i.e. finding common ground between Asian American women) to difference. Demographic changes to the Asian American population following the influx of new immigrants to the United States, helped to initiate this shift towards recognizing the differences among Asian American women, including hybrid, diasporic, and transnational experiences and subjectivities. Asian American feminist scholars continued efforts to theorize gender from an intersectional approach (i.e. to attend to the multiple intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class), taken up by third-wave feminists. Asian American literature would come to reflect this increasing heterogeneity as well as diasporic and transnational feminist concerns. See: Guiyou Huang, ed., "Feminism and Asian America," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Asian American Literature*, vol. 1. (Westport CT, Greenwood Press: 2008): 257-61. See also: Sonia Shah, ed., *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (Boston: South End Press, 1997).

American women's writing.[62] Some Asian American critics have, however, read the success of these two works as signifying a lack of oppositional force and political edge. Frank Chin has been especially vocal and belligerent in his critique of Kingston and Tan for collaborating with the white mainstream publishing industry and misrepresenting traditional Chinese culture to cater to Western Orientalist fantasies.[63] The two have been singled out, along with other Asian American women writers, as "the 'poster girls' for a more acceptable (feminine) or apolitical version of Asian American identity, acculturation, and assimilation."[64] While Kingston's and Tan's work have been marketed as and even potentially invite an Orientalist reading, Asian American feminist scholars have emphasized the need to rethink and recuperate the political potential of these works. They call for the fashioning of subversive interpretive strategies that do not simply duplicate popular mainstream readings.

Asian American women's writing can offer alternative models of political activism and collectivity beyond the narrow, masculinist brand of cultural nationalism promoted by Chin. In an article commenting on the future direction of her writing shortly after the publication of *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989), Maxine Hong Kingston asserts: "We are addicted to excitement and crisis. We confuse 'pacific' and 'passive,' and are afraid that a world without war is a place where we will die of boredom. A tale about a society in which characters deal with one another nonviolently seems so anomalous that we've hardly begun to invent its tactics, its drama."[65]

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[62] Helena Grice, " 'The beginning is hers': The Political and Literary Legacies of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan," in *China Fictions, English Language: Literary Essays in Diaspora, Memory, Story*, ed. A. Robert Lee (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2008), 37.

[63] See: Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake," in *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 133-56.

[64] Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 98.

[65] Maxine Hong Kingston, "The Novel's Next Step: If Someone Could Create the Global Novel, We'd All Have a Sequel," *Mother Jones* 14, no. 10 (1989): 37.

Kingston suggests that a vested interest in war and militancy, which has indeed fueled the AAM, inhibits the imagining of strategies of and for peace. She calls for the invention of a new pacific literary form and tradition, which can counter the Asian martial tradition championed by cultural nationalists as well as expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies.[66]

Asian American feminists have also challenged Chin's assertion that "dandyish expressions of feeling" do not constitute serious literary or political activity.[67] There has been much scholarship on how the "talk-story" form of Asian American women's writing productively dissembles masculinist "bravado discourses of empowerment" and offers alternative strategies for political organizing.[68] Talk-story refers to a "low" or minor Chinese oral tradition that includes "history, mythology, bedtime stories, and how-to-tales" that have been passed down through generations, thus entailing "multiple retellings, voices, and narratives."[69] Wendy Ho, for instance, argues that talking story facilitates the formation of vital bonds between Asian American women and their allies: "[E]motional and social relations really matter in politics; …serious attention to feeling and connection is the crucial brickwork that builds and sustains a more transformed world."[70] Ho emphasizes how the "dialogic practices of talk-story"

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[66] Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace* (New York: Vintage International, 2003) can be understood as her attempt to forge this new pacific Asian American literary tradition.

[67] Chin, "This is Not an Autobiography," 112.

[68] Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 239. See also: King-Kok Cheung, "Talk Story: Counter-Memory in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*," *Tamkang Review: A Quarterly of Comparative Studies between Chinese and Foreign Literatures* 24, no. 1 (1993): 21-37; Patricia Linton, " 'What Stories the Wind Would Tell': Representation and Appropriation in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*," *MELUS* 19, no. 4 (1994): 37-48; and Gloria Shen, "Born of a Stranger: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Storytelling in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 3-16.

[69] Jeslyn Medoff, "Creating a Recursive Memoir from the Novel Form: Maxine Hong Kingston," revised by Sharon Tran, in *Gale Researcher* (forthcoming). Here I rely on Kingston's definition of talk-story. In response to the critics who have denounced her for failing to get certain Chinese stories "right," Kingston contends that her stories belong to a low, minor tradition that should not be traced back to a purist traditional Chinese "high culture" or past.

[70] Ibid, 106.

can enable more generative and compassionate understandings of differences within the Asian American community and ways of negotiating political alliances.[71] Talk-stories have also engendered a growing community of "readers and writers who preserve and continue women's specific stories and histories into the future."[72]

While Ho emphasizes the importance of Asian American talk-story for generating therapeutic and political dialogue, King-Kok Cheung cautions against the valorization and privileging of speech over silence.[73] Cheung calls attention to the "premium placed on assertiveness" in Anglo-American society and prevailing negative perceptions of silence as "absence."[74] Asian/American reserve has been the subject of particularly intense criticism and even contempt, seen to signify either the devious, "inscrutable" Asian or the timid, submissive "model minority."[75] While Cheung recognizes the importance of speaking out, especially for members of a racial minority that have been historically muzzled in American political and cultural spheres, she contends that the total repudiation of silence "as the converse of speech or as its subordinate can also be oppressively univocal."[76] She emphasizes how the acceptance of "the vocal mandate in America," has blinded some Asian American critics "to the positive cultural and aesthetic manifestations of reticence," to how silence can, too, be articulate.[77]

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[71] Ibid, 238.

[72] Ibid, 57.

[73] On theorizations of silence in Asian American literature see also: Patti Duncan, *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004).

[74] King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* (New York: Cornell UP, 1993), 1.

[75] Ibid, 2.

[76] Ibid, 6-7.

[77] Ibid, 8.

This dissertation builds on and extends this body of Asian American feminist scholarship by identifying how the privileging of a masculinist form of militant resistance and Yellow Power promotes the disavowal of and contempt for girlish dependency, weakness, and vulnerability. The Asian girl is marked by a racial failure to develop a separate, fully autonomous political subjectivity and resisting agency (i.e. the "warrior self" that animates Asian American cultural nationalism). One of the aims of this project is to produce a more nuanced theory of powerlessness and a politics that can more adequately respond to and grapple with powerlessness. This is not to suggest that we should simply acquiesce to or embrace powerlessness, but rather to recognize the limitations of bravado discourses and a politics of resistance. What do we do when resistance is impossible to imagine, much less enact? This dissertation explores how the Asian girl can provide a basis for theorizing an alternative minor(itarian) politics. Instead of a failed subject, how can we understand the Asian girl differently, as contouring a collective or compound subjectivity? How can the girl and minor girl "acts" shift our understanding of the political?

**Female Collectivity and Compoundedness**

> On the boat we could not have known that when we first saw our husbands we would have no idea who they were. That the crowd of men in knit caps and shabby black coats waiting for us would bear no resemblance to the handsome young men in the photographs. That the photographs we had been sent were twenty years old. […] That when we first heard our names being called out across the water one of us would cover her eyes and turn away—*I want to go home*—but the rest of us would lower our heads and smooth

> down the skirts of our kimonos and walk down the gangplank… *This is America*, we would say to ourselves, *there is no need to worry*. And we would be wrong.
>
> - Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011)[78]

Julie Otsuka's novel, *The Buddha in the Attic*, serves as one salient example of the aesthetic-affective depictions of Asian/American female collectivity that this dissertation investigates. Otsuka narrates the story of a group of young Japanese women and girls brought to San Francisco during the early 1900s as "picture brides." By deploying a first-person plural narration style, Otsuka formally conjures a collective female subjectivity. While she takes care to highlight the distinct experiences of these women by intermittently invoking the singular "I," as exemplified in the above epigraph, the plural "we" predominates throughout the novel. Otsuka is less interested in individual character development than the historical fate of an entire group of *issei* (first-generation Japanese) women, bonded by and through their common journey to a strange, unfamiliar land, to become the picture brides of strange, unfamiliar men. She enumerates the various struggles and oppressions these women confront as they come to lead lonely, disparate lives in America and when their lives violently converge once again with the sudden forced removal and incarceration of Japanese/Americans during WWII. While there exists a number of historical, autobiographical, and literary accounts documenting the experiences of Japanese picture brides, *Buddha in the Attic* significantly differs in its attempt to imagine and formally sustain a female homosocial collectivity.[79] This literary work invites us to

[78] Julie Otsuka, *Buddha in the Attic* (New York: Anchor Books, [2011] 2012), 18.

[79] See for example: Yoshiko Uchida, *Picture Bride* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1987); and Eileen Sunada Sarasohn, *Issei Women: Echoes from Another Frontier* (Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1998).

seriously grapple with and probe the political stakes of theorizing Asian/American female homosociality.

As the title, "Between Asian Girls," suggests this dissertation was inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal text, *Between Men* (1985), which examines the representation of male homosociality and homosocial desire in English literature. Sedgwick explains that her interest in male homosocial desire lies in the way the phrase "mark[s] both discrimination and paradoxes."[80] She calls attention to how some male homosocial bonding activities are grounded in and precisely structured by homophobia so that a radical discontinuity characterizes homosocial and homosexual desire between men. Sedgwick more or less dismisses female homosociality because it dose not register similar fraught tensions: "[A]n intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women… The continuum is crisscrossed with deep discontinuities—with much homophobia, with conflicts of race and class—but its intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense."[81] Sedgwick draws on Adrienne Rich's theory of a "lesbian continuum," which proposes that a rejection of compulsory heterosexuality characterizes and unites all forms of female intimacy. In Sedgwick's view, lesbianism, the idea of women loving other women, extends in a highly intelligible and commonsensical way across a continuum of female relations that renders any discontinuities too facile for investigation.

Sharon Marcus responds to Sedgwick's cursory discussion of female homosociality in her aptly titled book, *Between Women* (2007). Marcus notes how feminist scholars such as Esther Newton, Lisa Duggan, Terry Castle, among others, have since mounted compelling critiques of

[80] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 1.

[81] Ibid, 2.

Rich's continuum theory, calling attention to how her theory problematically desexualizes lesbianism and idealizes female-female relations.[82] In her own study, Marcus examines the history and archive of female homosociality in Victorian England, arguing that female-female relations did not necessarily repudiate compulsory heterosexuality and were certainly not devoid of conflict, exploitation, and aggression. She foregrounds how Victorian women possessed an "erotic appetite for femininity," routinely engaging in the (sexual) objectification of other women and sometimes even exhibiting desires to dominate other women.[83] Marcus thus offers a more nuanced analysis of femininity as not just the product of heterosexual male desires but also as something produced *between women*, something that women police and fervently desire between themselves.

Both Sedgwick and Marcus theorize homosociality in a predominantly white, Anglo-centric context. This dissertation extends their work and offers a postcolonial, critical race intervention by specifically examining literary and visual depictions of Asian/American female homosociality. Asian Americanist scholarship betrays deep ambivalences about the political stakes of theorizing Asian/American female homosociality, thereby rendering this an especially important and productive site of analysis. Otsuka's novel, for example, exemplifies the difficulty of imagining Asian/American female homosociality as a resistant political force. Narrating the Japanese picture brides' assimilation to U.S. society, Otsuka writes: "One of us blamed them [white Americans] for everything and wished that they were dead. One of us blamed them for everything and wished that she were dead. Others of us learned to live without thinking of them at all. […] We lost weight and grew thin. We stopped bleeding. We stopped dreaming. We

[82] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 10.

[83] Ibid, 112.

stopped wanting. We simply worked, that was all."[84] Despite their anger and discontent with conditions of social injustice in the U.S., these *issei* women cannot seem to mobilize these feelings towards revolutionary change. They channel all their anger and discontent into work instead, forgetting to desire and dream for a different, better life. It is easy to read Otsuka's novel as offering a critique of early-twentieth-century anti-Asian racism through the depiction of suffering Japanese/American women, which reinforces their victim status rather than their potential as political agents.

The first-person plural narration Otsuka deploys from the perspective of a group of *issei* women should be recognized as a significant formal innovation. Asian/American female homosociality has been popularly aestheticized through the mother-daughter narrative form, as an apolitical domestic, intergenerational, and/or cultural conflict. The emergence and success of Asian American mother-daughter narratives such as *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* stem partly from their convergence with mainstream (white) American feminism's ideological need for matrilineal literature and attempts to theorize the mother-daughter bond during the 1980s and 90s.[85] Sau-Ling Wong identifies "quasi-ethnographic, Orientalist discourse" in Amy Tan's writing that appeals to a predominantly white, middle-class female readership.[86] She describes this readership as a "sugar sisterhood" that finds pleasure in interpreting Tan's mother-daughter stories as an allegory of "a Third World/First World encounter that allows mainstream

[84] Otsuka, *Buddha in the Attic*, 36-7.

[85] See: Helena Grice, *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing* (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2002), 28; and Sau-ling Wong, " 'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," in *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 176.

[86] Wong, "Sugar Sisterhood," 181.

American feminism to construct itself in a flattering, because depoliticized, manner."[87] Extending this critique, Lisa Lowe contends that reading Asian American mother-daughter narratives in terms of an intergenerational conflict between an "original" Asian culture and a new American culture, "privatizes social conflicts and contradictions…by confining them to the 'feminized' domestic sphere of familial relations," obscuring how external forces of racialization, oppression, and marginalization deeply influence and structure familial relations.[88]

Asian Americanist scholars have since worked to recuperate and produce alternative, more subversive interpretations of Asian American mother-daughter narratives. First and foremost, these narratives help to re-center and re-signify Asian American women's "affiliations and alliances with each other rather than simply recovering the heterosexual relationships and identities constructed within patriarchal, capitalist and/or imperialist frames of reference."[89] Helena Grice further examines how Asian American narratives productively challenge and enrich theorizations of the mother-daughter bond grounded in a Western psychoanalytic tradition. Freud delineated the daughter's development as different from the son's, marked by a distinct failure to fully separate from the mother.[90] He posited that the mother's identification with the daughter was similarly strong, infused with narcissistic tendencies that would lead her to

[87] Ibid.

[88] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 76.

[89] Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 82.

[90] Grice, *Negotiating Identities*, 38. See: Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965), 139-67; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Bantam, 1954); and "The Psychology of Women," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. W. J. Sprott (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 144-74.

experience her daughter as an extension of herself.[91] While Freudian psychoanalysis views "separation rather than continuing psychological interdependency as the ultimate goal," Grice argues that Asian American mother-daughter narratives largely refute that notion and "instead identify interconnectedness between women as a mutually affirming objective in itself."[92] In her feminist revision of Freud's male-centered Oedipal narrative, Nancy Chodorow similarly casts the ongoing psychological entanglement between mother and daughter "in positive terms rather than…[an] "unwelcome residual burden."[93] She "go[es] beyond Freud to suggest that as a consequence of the continuing dependence upon the mother 'girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own,' " a greater capacity for empathy.[94] Chodorow's mother-daughter theory is, however, still premised on an Oedipal configuration of the nuclear family.

Grice contends that Asian American mother-daughter narratives enable two important theoretical interventions to feminist matrilineal discourse: (1) Asian American women writers tend to depict familial arrangements that depart from the nuclear family model, where "the grandmother or aunt may undertake a significant part of the childcare," thereby "problemati[zing] notions of a unitary identification with the mother as well as multiplying the images of 'mother.' "[95] (2) The mother in Asian American narratives partly serves as the embodiment of the mother-culture that the daughter struggles with, searches for, and attempts to

[91] Ibid. See: Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)" in *Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction,"* eds. Joseph Sandler, Ethel Spector Person, and Peter Fonagy (London, UK: Karnac Books Ltd, 2012), 1-32.

[92] Ibid, 46. See also: Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 107.

[93] Ibid, 39.

[94] Ibid. See: Nancy J. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

[95] Ibid, 37, 40.

recover, thereby "offering a more culturally-specific discourse of mothering and daughtering" than Chodorow and others.[96] Asian American women's writing provides "an account of the social, historical and trans-cultural forces intervening in and complicating the mother's and daughter's mutual engagement."[97] The matrilineal talk-story form foregrounds subjectivity as "constructed through the links between women" and the acknowledgement of this inter-subjective connection helps to affirm those Asian women whose "identity has, for one reason or another, been obliterated" as well as the marginalized Asian mother-culture.[98]

More recently, erin Khuê Ninh has attempted to recuperate the intergenerational conflict paradigm that Lowe famously dismissed.[99] Ninh contends that explaining the structures of the Asian immigrant family only by way of oppressive external forces problematically disowns Asian American social and cultural institutions of any accountability. She calls for the reconceptualization of the immigrant family as not "alien cultural" but rather "opportunist" and "survivalist," relentlessly adapting to the "demands of thriving in capitalist America" by capitalizing on cultural values such as filial piety.[100] Approaching Asian American literary texts as biopolitical dramas, Ninh reads the Asian immigrant mother as an embodiment of sovereign power, "leverag[ing] guilt or fear, to manufacture in [the Asian American daughter] useful mechanisms of ingratitude or inadequacy" that produce a "disciplined and profitable docile

[96] Ibid, 45.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid, 46, 58.

[99] See: Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 76.

[100] erin Khuê Ninh, *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 22.

body."[101] These affects underpin the logic of filial piety, which maintains that the Asian American daughter owes all her success to her mother's sacrifices so that "whatever she makes or achieves *compounds* her debt—adding interest onto interest, rather than paying against the principle."[102] Socioeconomic mobility thus continues to "bin[d] her further rather than earning her independence."[103] In contrast to Grice then, Ninh foregrounds a dangerous and potentially destructive form of Asian/American female inter-subjectivity, where the daughter is never allowed to fully separate and develop an independent self.

Ninh calls attention to how filial debt bondage exacts extreme psychic costs on Asian American daughters: "Given that obedience is the first term of repayment, there can be no such thing as an economic transaction in the family conducted 'only with money'…children are paid, and may be held into repayment in dominations of selfhood."[104] Asian American children must, especially during the interim in which they cannot legally engage in wage labor, repay material debts with submissive obedience, essentially giving their parents more stock in determining, shaping the self they will become. Ninh thereby offers an explanatory analysis of how the biopolitical mechanisms of the Asian immigrant family work to produce the "assimilationist, individualist, upwardly mobile professional class of the model minority."[105] Some daughters

[101] Ibid, 6.

[102] Ibid, 34.

[103] Ibid, 33.

[104] Ibid, 35.

[105] Ibid, 11.

come to see (social) death as the only way to free themselves from their ever-compounding filial debt, deliberately wasting away their bodies and potential.[106]

Asian Americanist scholarship thus reveals highly ambivalent theorizations of Asian/American female homosociality. Whereas Grice theorizes inter-subjectivity as "a source of power," Ninh analyzes the Asian American mother-daughter bond as exemplifying a violent system of psychic-affective and economic bondage.[107] Both cases, however, reveal an ongoing preoccupation with and prioritization of vertical matrilineal relations.[108] As Lowe argues, the focus on the mother-daughter bond privileges a generational model of culture and identity.[109] Few scholars have taken up Lowe's call to attend to how Asian/America, as "it is imagined, practiced, and continued," "is worked out as much 'horizontally' among communities as it is transmitted 'vertically' in unchanging forms from one generation to the next."[110] Lowe locates

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[106] Ninh offers Evelyn Lau's *Runaway* as a salient example of the extreme psychic burden and costs of filial debt. The book documents the author's two-year journey as a street kid after deciding to leave an apparently comfortable middle-class home—her self-destructive experimentation with sex and drugs, which precipitates her descent into the precarious world of teenage prostitution. Despite all the horrors and violence she encounters on the street, however, Lau maintains that those experiences were "easier on [her] emotionally than living at home," asserting: "There are only slices of hell in my life now, where at home life was one swallowing endless hell shut in a bedroom looking out the window" (Evelyn Lau, *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (Toronto, Canada: Coach House Press, 1995), 12, 252). Ninh urges us to take Lau's shocking declaration seriously and probe the insidious forms of violence enacted within the Asian immigrant household that might make a child feel more free and more at home on the street.

[107] Grice, *Negotiating Identities*, 46.

[108] One notable exception that deeply informs this project is Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005). Gopinath examines representations of queer South Asian female diasporic subjectivity across a range of aesthetic media to theorize forms of community and collectivity that exceed the "heteronormative reproductive logic" that sustains the nation-state as well as diaspora (10). She develops the critical framework of "*queer* diaspora" to "unsettle the ways in which the diaspora shores up the gender and sexual ideologies of dominant nationalism on the one hand, and processes of globalization on the other," thus enabling a useful "dual-pronged critique" (10, emphasis in original). Gopinath defines queer diaspora as "those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries" (11). Drawing on Gopinath's theorization of queer impossible desire, as a generative affective force that exceeds and shifts conditions of possibility, I probe the impossible desires of the Asian girl and how she comes to figured in variously impossible lateral associations of eroticism and nascent political solidarity.

[109] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 63.

[110] Ibid, 64.

dynamic potential in horizontal relations, as the means through which the meanings and parameters of Asian/America can be contested and altered. This dissertation puts Lowe's claim to the test by primarily examining representations of lateral Asian/American female homosocial relations. I ask: What contingencies do horizontal (as opposed to vertical) modes of transmission open up? How can an attention to the lateral enable new forms of knowledge production and reinvigorate feminist, antiracist critique in Asian American studies?

As a novel that simultaneously draws on and challenges the traditional, vertical Asian/American mother-daughter narrative form, *Buddha in the Attic* illuminates some possible answers to the above questions. The novel depicts the conflicted intergenerational relationship between *issei* women and their children but remains primarily focused on the horizontal relations and connections between the Japanese picture brides themselves. Otsuka seeks to consolidate this group formally through an imagined "we" narrator. As many literary scholars have noted, a first-person plural narrator is very difficult to sustain and entails a degree of semantic instability.[111] The "we" narrator in Otsuka's novel is highly stylized, consistently drawing attention to its metafictional status and prompting readers to question any claim about the collective experience of Japanese picture brides. To what extent did these women even develop and maintain a group identity or consciousness with other picture brides? The pronoun "we" has been regarded by U.S. minorities, in particular, as risky and suspicious. Minorities are deeply aware of how the inclusiveness presumed and promoted through articulations of "we," works to mask material differences and exclusions. Who does "we" actually refer to? What are the potential dangers of asserting and attempting to represent a "we"? While Otsuka's novel has been largely well received, some critics contend that the use of first-person plural narration

[111] See: Amit Marcus, "A Contextual View of Narrative Fiction in the First Person Plural," *Narrative* 16, no. 1 (2008): 48; and Uri Margolin, "Telling Our Story: On 'We' Literary Narratives," *Language and Literature* 5, no. 2 (1996): 132.

contributes to the erasure of Japanese/American women's individuality: "[T]he narrative distance resulting from a community portrayal replaces the psychological complexity afforded through a first- or third-person singular voice," to a certain extent, "repeat[ing] the historical dehumanization of Japanese/Americans through internment."[112] "We" narration is thus critiqued for the way it works against psychological depth, which is posited as a requisite for humanizing characters and forming readerly attachments.

I argue that *Buddha in the Attic* can be read differently, as a "we" narrative that experiments with lateral modes of humanization and affective transmission that contest vertical modes (i.e. the development of human interiority and psychological depth). Otsuka's novel privileges human bonds and connection in fashioning a vision of Japanese/American female collectivity. The imagining of a relentlessly plural "we" narrator, despite the lack of any real, material basis for collectivity, can be viewed as a political act in itself. Describing how growing anti-Japanese sentiment during the WWII era seeped into and affected the Japanese American community, Otsuka writes: "Once a week, on Fridays, we put up our hair and went into towns to go shopping, but did not stop to say hello to one another when we met on the street. *They'll think we're exchanging secrets*. We rarely visited each other after dark in J-town because of the curfew. We did not linger long after services at church. *Now whenever I speak to someone, I have to ask myself, 'Is this someone who will betray me?*' "[113] Otsuka foregrounds how fears of incarceration violently disrupted and sundered Japanese/American female homosocial bonds. The "we" narrator can thus be understood as an embodiment of the desire and urgent need for Japanese/American social and political assembling that was historically denied to them. Otsuka

[112] Ruth Maxey, "The Rise of the 'We' Narrator in Modern American Fiction," *European Journal of American Studies* 10, no. 2 (2015): 8.

[113] Otsuka, *Buddha in the Attic*, 98.

writes an impossible "we" narrator that persists against forces of oppression and erasure. The last chapter of the novel shifts to a different "we" narrator, that of the white American community, as they ponder the sudden "disappearance" of the Japanese with varying degrees of guilt, confusion, and ignorance. While various commentators have described this abrupt narrative shift as "disappointing" or "frustrating," these negative affects attest to the success of Otsuka's "we" narrative in fostering an enduring readerly attachment to the *issei* women, a desire to continue following their journey into the incarceration camps and beyond.[114]

*Buddha in the Attic* thus offers a different depiction of Asian/American female collectivity than Saunders' "The Semplica-Girl Diaries." The vision of four SGs running away together, while connected via a precarious microline through the brain, gestures to a still-percolating, not-fully-realized, revolutionary female collectivity. Otsuka conversely imagines a Japanese/American female collectivity that *could not have been* in order to challenge a sense of historical closure, tearing at the seams of history to open up new, critical possibilities. The female collectivity that Otsuka fashions through her novel, for instance, evokes and attempts to counter Orientalist depictions of "picture-brides breeding like rats and producing more unassimilable Japanese."[115] Otsuka confronts the challenge of affirming Asian/American collectivity without perpetuating stereotypes of Asian/American swarm- or drone-like behavior, group-mindedness, and lack of individuality. Both Saunders' and Otsuka's works, along with the

[114] Maxey, "The Rise of the 'We' Narrator," 9.

[115] Emma Gee, "Issei: The First Women," in *Asian Women* (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, University of California Los Angeles, 1975), 9-10, quoted in Uchida, "The Orientalization of Asian Women," 164. Uchida examines the negative Orientalist portrayal of Japanese picture brides in relation to the passage of 1946 War Brides Act, which allowed "U.S. servicemen to bring Japanese and European wives home," noting how the act implied that: "War brides of the Western Man are acceptable, but picture brides of Asians are not" (166). See also: Yuji Ichioka, "Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 355-57.

other cultural productions I examine in this dissertation, grapple with the stakes of sustaining and preserving a "we," a collective or compound female subjectivity.

Sianne Ngai's theory of compoundedness has been especially useful for rethinking Asian/American female homosociality and political collectivity more broadly. Ngai theorizes female homosociality specifically in relation to the psychoanalytic concepts of envy and emulation. Distinguishing emulation from identification, Ngai contends that "emulating someone does not necessarily entail that one wishes to *be* that someone."[116] Just as positive feelings of admiration can motivate one to model oneself after someone, a negative affect like envy can prompt emulation for hostile purposes—"to overtake or eclipse her, even 'dispossess' her by claiming exclusive recognition for the attributes that define her."[117] Ngai analyzes how the film, *Single White Female* (1992), dramatizes the formation of a threatening and unstable compound female subject. Through her envious emulation, Hedy assumes Allie's defining characteristics, rendering her a double, a copy, veritably *non*singular. While the film reveals that female compoundedness cannot be maintained and eventually produces the *single* white female that its title promises, Ngai finds critical potential in envious emulation as the means and basis for a compound political subjectivity.[118] Recognizing that the uneasy transition from a singular to a compound subject is where feminist and ethnic minority group alliances necessarily begin, Ngai contends that envious emulation gestures to the possibility of political collectivity in spite of and through antagonism.[119] Envy can also serve as "a strategic way of *not* identifying" that preserves critical force and agency, which would be lost with total identification with group norms and

[116] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 142.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid, 160.

[119] Ibid, 137.

feelings.[120] Ngai's theory of compoundedness illuminates a potential alternative to traditional Asian American identity politics, which is predicated on a narrow, essentialist notion of identity as well as positive modes of identification.

In this dissertation, I analyze scenes of Asian/American female compoundedness engendered by and through primarily negative feelings and conditions. Challenging popular conceptions of envy as an ugly, petty feeling indicative of a " 'diseased' selfhood" or internal deficiency/lack, Ngai emphasizes how envy can be more productively understood as an "affective *response* to a perceived inequality."[121] I attend, in a similar way, to the variously ugly, disturbing manifestations of Asian/American female compoundedness as both a response to and means of surviving conditions of social injustice and unevenness. How can we reimagine Asian American political subjectivity in radically negative terms? [122] What are the limits and possibilities of negativity as a basis for social and political collectivity?

**Hybrid Girl Creatures, Queer Bonding**

This dissertation also shifts and redefines that stakes of theorizing female homosociality through a focus on the liminal figure of the girl, a figure that is heavily sexualized in U.S. culture but is simultaneously constructed as innocent and not allowed to be sexual. My project thus engages with and intervenes in the field of girls' studies. This field developed during the1990s partly in response to the ongoing marginalization of age, as a significant facet of female identity,

[120] Ibid, 161.

[121] Ibid, 130, 126, emphasis in original.

[122] My project extends Kandice Chuh's call for the reconceptualization of Asian American studies as a "subjectless discourse" (*Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 9-14). Beyond creating the conceptual space for recognizing different possible subjectivities, I am interested in subjectivities constituted through negative affects and relations.

in Women's studies and American feminism, more broadly.[123] Some feminists remain skeptical of the term "girl" and girls' studies because they promote the infantilization of women: "[T]he topic of girls seemingly disrupts feminist discourses on maturity, autonomy, and individualism as defining the subject, and the validation of feminist consciousness through struggles, experience, and knowledge acquired in adulthood."[124] Mary Celeste Kearney discusses how the U.S. Women's Rights Movement (1848-1920) developed a particularly "uneasy relation to female youth, as it narrowed its focus to gaining women the right to vote."[125] Widely held beliefs in nineteenth-century and, to a large extent, contemporary U.S. society that youth are "not mature, rational, and experienced enough to handle the responsibilities of adulthood and thus citizenship," compelled activists to construct women in opposition to youth in order to demonstrate that they deserve equal rights to men.[126] The adult-centered perspective of the Women's Movement would continue to heavily structure postwar feminist activism and scholarship. The few works that did address girls such as Dale Carlson's *Girls Are Equal Too: The Women's Movement for Teenagers* (1973) "emphasiz[e] the growth of girls into assertive, independent women rather than focusing on girl-specific issues."[127]

Girls' studies is not simply concerned with the study of girls, but is a field actively involved in the construction of girlhood as "a separate, exceptional, and/or pivotal phase in

[123] Mary Celeste Kearney, "Coalescing: The Development of Girls' Studies," *NWSA Journal* 21, no. 1 (2009): 11.

[124] Tracy Lemaster, " 'Girl with a Pen': Girls' Studies and Third-Wave Feminism in *A Room of One's Own* and 'Professions for Women,' " *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 2 (2012): 82. See also: Kearney, "Coalescing," 10.

[125] Kearney, "Coalescing," 9.

[126] Ibid, 8-9.

[127] Ibid, 10.

female identity formation."[128] Its proponents recognize "girls as both political subjects who actively engage in and work toward furthering feminist goals in new formulations, and as the subject of politics who provide a critical frame for investigating feminine signification and power."[129] This discourse of "Girl Power" can be traced back to a loosely formed movement during the early 1990s, largely composed of young white, middle-class women, a significant proportion of whom were also queer-identified. Calling themselves "Riot Grrrls," these women reclaimed the term "girl" as a strategic way of "distanc[ing] themselves from the adult patriarchal worlds of status, hierarchies, and standards… With their roots in punk rock music…, Girl Power celebrates the fierce and aggressive potential of girls" and reconstitutes "girl culture" as a positive means of "self-expression through fashion, attitude, and a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach."[130]

In addition to a reaction to the limits of mainstream American feminism, newfound interest in the girl and the rise of Girl Power discourses during the 1990s must be linked to and understood as an effect of U.S. neoliberalism. The turn of the twenty-first century reveals an unprecedented commercial and media focus on girls, the frenzy in producing goods—magazines, clothes, beauty products, toys, music, films, etc.—specifically targeted towards this young female demographic.[131] The girl functions, in many ways, "as an idealized citizen for the neoliberal global economy: a flexible, adaptable, pliant, enthusiastic, intelligent, and energetic

[128] Lemaster, "Girl with a Pen," 96 n6.

[129] Ibid, 78.

[130] Marnina Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia': Constituting the Neoliberal Subject," *NSWA Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 6-7. See also: Kearney, "Coalescing," 15.

[131] Kearney, "Coalescing," 15.

participant in commodity consumption, personal responsibility, and mobile work."[132] While some feminists embrace the commodification of Girl Power as an effective way of "bringing feminism into the lives of young women through music and film and television characters," others remain wary of the way Girl Power has been marketed as a "gentle, non-political, and non-threatening alternative to feminism," whose popularity can be precisely credited to the way it upholds the status quo and, in particular, neoliberal ideologies of individualism and personal responsibility.[133]

Girl Power discourses, which promote the image of "the can-do girl," develop simultaneously alongside crisis discourses, which project the image of "the at-risk girl," who is vulnerable, fragile, voiceless, and lacking in self-esteem.[134] Marnina Gonick emphasizes how both discourses "participate in the production of the neoliberal girl subject with the former representing the idealized form of the self-determining individual and the latter personifying an anxiety about those who are unsuccessful in producing themselves in this way."[135] The neoliberal discourse of Girl Power, which emphasizes success as a personal responsibility and the product of individual effort, leave girls from various working class and minority backgrounds with "few other explanations for their lack of success except their own individual failings."[136] The binary discourses of Girl Power and girls-in-crisis thus work to "direct attention from structural explanations for inequality toward explanations of personal circumstances and personality

[132] Sarah Projansky, *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 11. See also: Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64-96.

[133] Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia,' " 9-10.

[134] Projansky, *Spectacular Girls,* 2. See also: Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia,' " 2.

[135] Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia,' " 2.

[136] Ibid, 17.

traits."[137] Along with scholars such as Gonick, Sarah Projansky, among others, I emphasize the need to produce research that moves beyond the "can-do/at-risk dichotomy."[138] Girl Power discourses recuperate the girl by extending the feminist values and qualities largely, already associated with adult women—e.g. strength, resilience, assertiveness, individualism, autonomy—to a younger female demographic. They thus do little in the way of actually challenging or expanding the meanings of feminism. This dissertation intervenes in girls' studies by attending to structuring conditions of vulnerability, specifically in relation to the Asian girl, and takes forms of vulnerability as a point of departure for theorizing minor feminisms. What might a feminist politics organized around vulnerability (as opposed to power) look like? How can vulnerability illuminate and provide the basis for an alternative feminist ethics?

My project is also in conversation with recent queer critique on the child. Scholars such as Lee Edelman, Kathryn Bond Stockton, and J. Jack Halberstam have elaborated on how the child provides a generative basis for rethinking the modes and stakes of contemporary queer politics. In his polemic, *No Future* (2004), Edelman identifies the child as the embodiment of the all-pervasive politics of "reproductive futurism."[139] He contends that queers must relentlessly reject the sociopolitical order organized around the child in order to realize a radically new queer ethics and politics that embraces negativity, antisociality, and the death drive itself. In response to Edelman, Stockton attempts to recuperate the child and childhood as generative sites for thinking queerness. She calls attention to how children are exceedingly queer, defying or deviating from the heteronormative notion of growing "up" in a linear trajectory towards

[137] Ibid, 2.

[138] See also: Avelardo Valdez, *Mexican American Girls and Gang Violence: Beyond Risk* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[139] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), 2-3.

adulthood, marriage, and reproduction.[140] Stockton coins "growing sideways" to counter the historical pathologization of homosexuality as arrested sexual development, foregrounding multiple other possible modes, temporalities, and orientations of growth.[141] Halberstam similarly turns to children and children's animations as rich sites for theorizing queerness and for developing a queer critique of heteronormative, capitalist models of success, in particular.[142] Children and cartoons made for children revel in failure in ways that invite us to rethink an adult (and scholarly) investment in success.

Queer critique on the child thus tends towards opposite extremes, from Edelman's call for the total renunciation of the child to the largely celebratory and utopian gestures in Stockton's and Halberstam's works. This body of scholarship continues to overlook, to a large extent, how histories and forces of racialization, imperialism, capitalism, and militarization intimately impact and shape childhood. My project fills this gap by examining the various structuring conditions that inhibit the Asian girl from growing up, in the heteronormative sense, to become an autonomous adult human, and lead her to instead, "grow sideways," to form unexpected, unlikely lateral connections and bonds beyond the domestic/familial frameworks through which Asian/American female homosociality has been predominantly theorized.[143] Wendy Ho explains how the recuperation and politicization of the "homeplace" was an important achievement of mother-daughter narratives given the numerous obstacles Asian Americans historically

[140] Stockton, *The Queer Child,* 11.

[141] Stockton, 24.

[142] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 24.

[143] Exceptions are largely historical and sociological studies such as Valerie J. Matsumoto's *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014), which recovers the largely forgotten female homosocial world of young Japanese American women in the United States during the early twentieth-century. She examines how these Nisei girls participated in an extensive network of social clubs, forging enduring friendships and political alliances.

confronted "in establishing, nurturing, and representing their families and communities in the United States as well as in [Asia]."[144] But attending only to the female homosocial bonds constructed within and through the homeplace can promote the overlooking of other female homosocialities vital to the formation and indeed, transformation, of Asian/America.

The Asian girl serves as an icon of gendered, racialized flexibility within the U.S. cultural imaginary—a compliant sex object, obedient daughter, or docile laborer that can be easily assimilated to the U.S. nation-state and existing power structures. I examine how Asian/American writers and artists mine the Asian girl's gendered, racialized flexibility to imagine the alternative queer collectivities she catalyzes beyond heteronormative kinship structures. The literary and visual cultural productions I analyze stage the Asian girl's "queer bonding" with other contingent, proximal objects and organisms. Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young propose a theory of "queer bonds" in response to the recent polarization of proponents for a social versus an anti-social queer theory. They contend that this critical impasse ultimately stems from a false binary, "as if queer social negativity engendered no bonds and queer collectivities did not take shape precisely in relation to some negation or incommensurability within the social."[145] Weiner and Young develop what they call a "more-than-social theory" that apprehends queer bonds as "mark[ing] the simultaneity of 'the social' and a space of sociability outside, to the side of, or in the interstices of 'the social.' "[146] They also importantly attend to how queer bonds "occur not in spite of but *because* of some force of negation."[147] Queer bonding serves as a useful theoretical framework for understanding the nonnormative, not-fully-

[144] Ho, *In Her Mother's House*, 37, 82.

[145] Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young, "Queer Bonds," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 2-3 (2011): 224.

[146] Ibid, 236.

[147] Ibid, emphasis in original.

autonomous collectivities Asian/American girls form in response to and as a means of navigating conditions of extreme political constraint, vulnerability, and dependency. These queer collectivities are often too ambivalent and compromised to be described as resistant, but they are simultaneously not fully determined or delimited by structures of oppression and thus illuminate new ways of "being-with."[148]

Queer bonding also informs the *sideways methodology* that I seek to implement through this dissertation. Weiner and Young emphasize how queer bonds complicate the epistemology of the closet and enable the production of "lateral homoknowledge," a more complex understanding of queerness as not simply the negation or repudiation of heterosexuality.[149] Queer bonds signify a "laterally constituted togetherness that persists in the face of homophobia, sustains us, and allows queer life to go on."[150] This dissertation attends to the Asian girl's queer bonding with variously human and nonhuman others in the effort to both challenge and expand the parameters of Asian/America and Asian Americanist critique.

**Sideways Critique: Towards a Minor Methodology**

Relying on the Asian girl as an organizing trope, this project examines scenes of queer bonding across a range of Asian/American literary and visual cultural productions. I engage with works by Nora Okja Keller, Sarah Bird, Chang-rae Lee, Larissa Lai, Rita Wong, among others, that foreground Asian girls in lateral associations with each other as well as nonhuman animals, plants, and even inorganic matter. These works depict various hybrid Asian girl creatures and

[148] On "being-with" see: José Esteban Muñoz, " 'Gimme Gimme This… Gimme Gimme That': Annihilation and Innovation in the Punk Rock Commons," *Social Text* 31, no. 3 116 (2013): 101.

[149] Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds," 228.

[150] Ibid.

assemblages that complicate a traditional understanding of Asian/America as a human sociopolitical and cultural formation. They provide rich critical imaginaries that can reinvigorate Orientalist critique in Asian American studies. How can we more generatively understand and challenge the knowledge-power structures of Orientalism by de-centering the human? What are the stakes of de-centering the human and what different forms and modes of Asian racialization become visible? I offer historically contextualized analyses of these Asian/American cultural productions by deploying materialist approaches following scholars such as Lisa Lowe, Kandice Chuh, Laura Kang, and Jodi Kim.

By turning to literary and visual culture as a source of theoretical insight and the capacity to render salient still-percolating political collectivities and movements that have yet to be fully realized, I additionally draw on affect and aesthetic theory in the vein of Raymond Williams, Sarah Ahmed, Sianne Ngai, and José Muñoz. In my dissertation, I attend to the Asian girl as not just a lived subjectivity but also an aesthetic construct and preoccupation. The repeated collapse of the Asian girl and aesthetic objects and the aestheticization of the Asian girl as an Oriental ornament or decoration, render the aesthetic an especially crucial site of analysis.[151] I examine a range of Oriental girl aesthetics from *kawaii*, a form of "Japanese cute," to science fictional imaginaries that feature Asian female mutant-clones and transgenic cyborgs.

Through my dissertation, I seek to demonstrate how scenes of queer bonding invite and even compel sideways reading practices. Attending to the queer bonds the Asian girl forms to survive various conditions of violence and oppression means developing a similarly contingent and improvisational methodology that will sometimes move Asian American studies in a surprising lateral direction, to unexpected queer critical terrains. My project, for instance, draws

[151] See: Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 149-52.

Asian American studies into generative conversation with disability studies, ecocriticism, animal studies, among others, while also borrowing theories and methodologies from those fields. I seek to further develop and enact a mode of sideways critique that have been taken up by feminist and queer studies scholars such as Kathryn Bond Stockton and Rachel C. Lee.

As discussed above, Stockton calls attention to how "growing up" is a "limited rendering of human growth," which implies "an end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved."[152] She proposes "growing sideways" as an alternative critical framework that can reorient our conceptualization of growth and aptly captures, for example, how the human brain grows through the lateral extension and connection of neural networks, which continues over the course of an entire lifetime. In *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* (2014), Lee observes how the "rectilinear verticality we expect of growth" is also something we have come to expect of scholarly argumentation.[153] A sideways methodology, which does not move "towards definiteness and closure," can be seen "as an evasion (as in why not simply get to the singular point, why aren't you simply answering the question?)."[154] But as Lee argues, a rectilinear vertical mode of argumentation might, in the end, be the more impoverished and narrow method. Sideways "points to a myriad array of positions, orientations, directionalities, and motile vibrations" that exceed vertical/forward growth, and as a strategy may not move us forward but can still help us circumvent critical impasses against its "rectilinear opposite (backward travel or arrest/stop)."[155] Through my dissertation, I will show how sideways reading practices can be

[152] Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 11.

[153] Rachel C. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 204-41.

[154] Ibid, 240.

[155] Ibid, 241.

more generative, how mining contingent lateral points of connection between texts can enable alternative forms of knowledge production.

The sideways critique I seek to implement is a *minor methodology* that resonates with the rhizomatic reading practice developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their theory of "becoming-minor." Delineating the "rhizome" from trees and their roots, Deleuze and Guattari characterize the rhizome as antigenealogy, nonhierarchical, and acentered.[156] For my purposes, the lateral similarly maps forms of embodiment, relationality, and solidarity that exceed vertical, genealogical paradigms. Deleuze and Guattari champion "becoming-minor" as a subversive, ethical act against the hegemony of the majority.[157] They draw a distinction between "minor" and conventional conceptions of "minority groups," which are molar identities and configurations defined by the majoritarian State.[158] Asian Americans, for example, have been stereotyped as the "model minority" in order to maintain existing power structures that will continue to relegate and confine Asian Americans to a minor status in relation to the heteronormative white majority. Becoming-minor, Deleuze and Guattari contend, entails and engenders processes of deterritorialization, rearranging and transforming social relations.

I am deeply inspired by the revolutionary and critical possibilities Deleuze and Guattari locate in the minor, but I also take issue with their sanguine glorification of the minor. Along with other feminist, postcolonial, and critical race scholars, I argue that their concept of becoming-minor (and other related concepts, e.g. "becoming-woman," "becoming-animal,"

[156] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

[157] Ibid, 291.

[158] Ibid.

"becoming-child," "becoming-molecular," "becoming-imperceptible")[159] fails to adequately address and grapple with the violence of minoritization. Deleuze and Guattari's valorization of the minor as the medium of becoming entraps minoritized bodies in a perpetual state of suspension, never fully forming the subjectivity that had been historically denied to them.[160] My dissertation attends to the minor as a highly difficult and painful space/temporality/form of embodiment. In each of my chapters, I examine the Asian girl's "acts" of queer bonding as a minor (e.g. small, quiet, subtle, slow, politically illegible) response to conditions of violence that manages to illuminate alternative possible worlds and forms of social and political assemblage. Queer bonding gestures to a "becoming with" (as opposed to becoming-minor), the formation of a collective or compound subjectivity.[161]

**Four Lateral Moves**

Each chapter investigates a different trope of the Asian girl and performs variations of a sideways reading practice. Chapter one attends to the Asian girl queered by militarization. I read Sarah Bird's novel, *Above the East China Sea* (2015), alongside Nora Okja Keller's novel, *Fox Girl*, for the complex critiques they produce about U.S. military occupation of Okinawa and South Korea, respectively. Both novels deploy tropes of queer bonding to foreground how militarization intimately structures the psychic-affective economies of vulnerable Asian girl

[159] Ibid, 232-309.

[160] See: Cindi Katz, "Towards Minor Theory," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14, no. 4 (1996): 493-94; Alice Jardine, "Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)," *SubStance* 13, no. 3/4 (1984): 52-53; and Rosi Braidotti *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Guild (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 119-23.

[161] Here I draw on Donna J. Haraway's notion of "becoming with" (*When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3). Haraway critiques and reworks Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "becoming" and "becoming-animal," in particular, as masculinist, betraying a "profound absence of curiosity or respect for and with actual animals, even as innumerable references to diverse animals are invoked to figure the authors' anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project" (27).

populations. In *China Sea*, queer bonding manifests as a form of *lateral haunting*. Bird invites readers to probe what it might mean to encounter a ghost that you do not recognize and arguably belongs to someone else. As I will demonstrate, the novel enables the theorization of an expanded ethico-political collectivity with the dead that culminates in the projected *lateral birth* of a ghost child. Keller deploys a similar trope of lateral birth in *Fox Girl* but in a different form and to a very different effect. Whereas Bird imagines lateral birth as a way of resolving sundered genealogies and histories of gendered militarized violence, Keller forecloses cathartic resolution by contextualizing lateral birth as part of the material sexual reproductive economies of the camptown. I examine how *Fox Girl's* irresolution and noncathartic affects advance a generative sideways critique of the various death worlds that U.S. militarization engenders.

Chapter two engages with figurations of the *kawaii* Asian girl. I approach *kawaii* as a Japanese "cute" aesthetic-affective response to postwar political constraints within the U.S.-Japan alliance. Through an analysis of the anime series, *Madoka Magica* (January 7, 2011 – April 21, 2011), and the migration of *kawaii* aesthetics of other genres, namely literature, I argue that depictions of *kawaii* collectively imagine an alternative to Western individualistic agency. *Madoka Magica* grapples with heightened conditions of precarity engendered by the neoliberalizaiton of Japan, foregrounding through its *kawaii* aesthetics the need for a new form of heroism grounded in female homosocial care. I then turn to explore how an ethics of care can expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies, which has historically privileged a militant, resistance-oriented ethical vision. I read Chang-rae Lee's novel, *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), as an Asian Americanist literary engagement with *kawaii* that invites readers to grapple with the politics and ethics of *desisting* (as opposed to resisting). Through making explicit, vulnerability, emotional liability, and attunement to the other, these animations of girl "acts," I

contend, enable the theorization of a radically new feminist and disabled notion of social and political collectivity.

Chapter three explores the posthuman imaginaries encoded in figurations of the cybernetic/transgenic Asian girl. I examine Larissa Lai's novel, *Salt Fish Girl* (2008), and *sybil unrest* (2013), her long collaborative poem with Rita Wong, for how they formally disassemble and reassemble the Asian girl to foreground the queer ecologies she embodies and inhabits. These works enable the theorization of an expanded Asian Americanist ethico-political collectivity that accommodates and embraces what David Abram terms the "more-than-human."[162] This chapter builds on recent scholarship that attempts to re-imagine Asian/America as a "multispecies formation."[163] I analyze how Lai mobilizes smell in *Salt Fish Girl* to not just critique histories of olfactory discrimination against Asian immigrants but to also fashion speculative, de-colonizing multispecies assemblages. In the novel, stinky odors serve as a catalyst for new assemblages of relation, linking and blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies. Lai and Wong literally enact a form of multispecies assembling through the collaborative ecopoetics of *sybil unrest*. I examine how the poem also complicates the multispecies ethics of relationality envisioned in *Salt Fish Girl* by inviting readers to probe the limits and possibilities of imagining solidarity with nonhuman species we never directly meet or even recognize as species. *sybil unrest* conjures what I call a *minor ecological imaginary* that

[162] See: David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, [1996] 1997).

[163] Karen Cardozo and Banu Subramaniam, "Assembling Asian/American Naturecultures: Orientalism and Invited Invasions," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 3.

enables the theorization of a negative ethics of relation with "not-species"—the apparently small, insignificant, imperceptible, and insensible.[164]

I close by offering a tentative, exploratory analysis of the feral Asian girl marked by (non)becomings. I approach the "feral" as a mode of inhuman embodiment, of monstrous hybridity and liminality that cannot be easily distinguished as human or nonhuman. This turn to the feral inhuman, who fails to fully become or become with the human, is an admittedly paradoxical way of concluding this project. But after discussions of female compoundedness, care ethics, and expanded notions of collectivity, I believe that it is especially important to pause and reflect on the limits of human sociality, the conditions where socializing might be excruciatingly difficult, painful, or counterproductive. I examine the feral poetics of Bhanu Kapil, specifically her trans-genre work, *Ban en Banlieue* (2015), for the inhuman imaginaries it offers Asian American studies. Kapil invites readers to take seriously ferality (i.e. failed, diminished, or banished (non)life) as a point of departure for theorizing an alternative *inhuman ethics of relationality*.

[164] I draw here in Myra J. Hird's theorization of bacteria as "not-species" ("Meeting with the Microcosmos," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 36).

CHAPTER 1

# "She was pregnant, my child in her belly"

Encountering Militarism's Lateral Ghosts

Sarah Bird's novel *Above the East China Sea* (2014) and Nora Okja Keller's novel *Fox Girl* (2004) can be linked by an attempt to narrate the impact of U.S. militarization on an especially vulnerable Asian girl population in Okinawa and South Korea, respectively. Both works offer starkly realist accounts of various forms of gendered violence perpetuated within and through the structures of the military camptown. But the two works also feature supernatural, spectral tropes that directly disrupt and undermine that mode of historical realism. I read this turn to the supernatural and the spectral as an attempt to: (1) *animate* history—to foreground how past militarized violence continues to haunt the present[165] and (2) to *open up* history—to reimagine the past in creative, improvisational ways to illuminate other possible demilitarized futures. I am especially interested in how supernatural, spectral tropes figure into and enhance different forms of queer bonding between Asian girls, as both an effect and means of navigating conditions of gendered militarized violence.

In *China Sea*, queer bonding manifests as a form of *lateral haunting*. The novel features Luz James, a young mixed-race girl who has recently moved to the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa with her master-sergeant mother. Devastated by the loss of her older sister, who died while serving in Afghanistan, Luz desperately seeks some form of spiritual contact with her sister but confronts the ghost of a mysterious Okinawan girl instead. Readers learn that the ghost is Tamiko Kokuba, a conscripted student nurse for the Japanese Imperial Army during WWII. Tamiko is what I call a *lateral ghost*, a ghost that you do not recognize and arguably belongs to

[165] Here I specifically draw on Avery Gordon's theory of haunting in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1997] 2008).

someone else. She is a ghost that you do not (want to) claim but claims you through some oblique sideways connection—Tamiko similarly lost her older sister to the ravages of war. *China Sea* thus invites readers to probe what it means to encounter and take seriously a ghost that is not yours. In her novel *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison famously coined the concept of "rememory" as a form of social haunting: "[W]alking down the road… you [can] bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else."[166] Rememory opens up the radical possibility of bumping into ghosts that do not neatly align with respect to kinship ties or any normative ties for that matter.[167] The spectral sororal bond Bird constructs between Tamiko and Luz enables the theorization of an expanded notion of feminist ethico-political responsibility for and collectivity with the dead.

*China Sea* concludes with the projection of a fantastic lateral birth, where Luz will, at some future time, give birth to Tamiko's unborn child. This transhistorically moved pregnancy simultaneously signals and attempts to compensate for the normative kinship structures sundered by forces of militarization. By promising to extend a genealogy that had been unjustly, untimely ruptured, this trope of lateral birth allows readers a neat, cathartic resolution. Queer bonding via lateral birth similarly animates the critical imaginary of *Fox Girl*. Keller depicts lateral birth as part of the texture of repro-comfort labor exchanges in postwar U.S. military camptowns in the Republic of Korea (ROK) but ultimately deploys this trope to a very different effect. The narrator, Hyun Jin, sinks into a deep depression after the traumatic loss of her unborn child, likely aborted without her knowledge or consent. The militarized logic and structures of the camptown, which violently foreclose normative reproduction, give rise to a form of queer bonding where Hyun Jin comes to believe that her child's ghost is returning to her through her

[166] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage International, [1987] 2004), 43.

[167] While Morrison's concept of "rememory" strongly resonates with my theorization of *lateral haunting*, I maintain that "lateral" is useful for foregrounding memories and ghosts that subvert normative, direct, vertical, generational modes of transmission.

best friend's womb. But unlike *China Sea*, *Fox Girl* relentlessly negates any positive potentiality or resolution projected onto the child. Hyun Jin's desire to hold onto and mother her child emerges as an "impossible desire" within the context of the camptown, exacerbating death for Hyun Jin herself as well as all those around her.[168] Through radically negative forms and affects, Keller advances a sideways critique of the structural violences of militarization that strip camptown women and girls of reproductive liberty.

This chapter is in conversation with recent Asian Americanist scholarship on militarization. Work such as Jodi Kim's *Ends of Empire* (2010), Mimi Thi Nguyen's *The Gift of Freedom* (2012), Vernadette Gonzalez's *Securing Paradise* (2013), Josephine Nock-Hee Park's *Cold War Friendships* (2016), among others, demonstrate the emergence of militarization as a salient critical framework for rethinking dominant structures of knowledge in Asian American studies.[169] I engage with and extend this body of scholarship by specifically attending to conditions and legacies of gendered militarized violence. A focus on the Asian girl queered by militarization also complicates the Marxist materialist approaches traditionally privileged in the field. The girl remains largely illegible within Marxist theoretical frameworks because she does not embody the normative wage laborer. This chapter thus seeks to expand Marxist definitions of labor by exploring the various forms of psychic-affective labor the Asian girl has been called upon to perform across different militarized contexts. I also add to Asian Americanist materialist

[168] Here I draw on Gayatri Gopinath's theorization of impossible desire, which I will elaborate on more below.

[169] See: Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012); Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013); Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016); and Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, eds., *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

critiques of militarization by attending to textures of psychic-affective violence beyond capitalist exploitation.

Finally, this chapter seeks to offer a thicker, transnational account of the haunting legacies of U.S. militarization in Asia and the Pacific by reading *China Sea* alongside *Fox Girl*. I trace how the ghosts of Okinawa haunt South Korea and vice versa towards a *lateral critical genealogy* of gendered militarized violence. The mixed-race camptown children in Keller's novel can be viewed as Luz's ghostly mirror image. Whereas Luz is a military brat, expected to enlist, when she comes of age, as a future soldier to be sacrificed in the name of the U.S. global military empire, Keller's protagonists are marked by death differently. These young girls struggle to navigate the material inequities and violences of the camptown but inevitably fall into a life of teenage military prostitution as subjects abandoned by the U.S. global military empire and allowed to die. A genealogy of militarism's lateral ghosts productively foregrounds conditions of forced and foreclosed reproduction within the camptown that precisely preclude normative, direct, vertical, generational modes of transmission. On a methodological level, this lateral critical genealogy also serves as an attempt to forge creative, contingent connections across time and space to counter histories of gendered militarized violence.

**The Militarization of Okinawa**

*China Sea* opens with the scene of fifteen-year-old Tamiko Kokuba in WWII Okinawa as she struggles to flee the chaos of an American assault on the island. Desperately crawling her way to the top of a cliff, Tamiko determines to commit suicide in order to save herself and her unborn child from an even more violent death at the hands of Japanese or American soldiers. As she jumps, Tamiko prays to the *kami* (spirits) to send someone to help reunite them with the rest

of her family in the next world, especially her beloved older sister, Hatsuko. This opening scene is followed by the depiction of Luz James standing atop the same cliffs in present-day Okinawa contemplating whether or not to jump. The loss of her older sister, Codie, who died while serving in Afghanistan, has pushed Luz to the brink of suicide, where the prospect of having to go on living all alone seems almost worse than death. In the novel, Tamiko's narrative alternates and unfolds alongside Luz's present-day narrative to finally converge by the end. Structured around the sundered relations of these two pairs of sisters, *China Sea* maps a legacy of gendered militarized violence that extends from WWII and continues to be felt in present-day Okinawa.

By interweaving Tamiko and Luz's narratives, Bird links the violence of Japanese WWII military imperialism with postwar U.S. military imperialism in Okinawa. Japan's formal annexation and establishment of Okinawa as a prefecture in 1879 ended centuries of the independent rule of the Ryūkyū kingdom, a once prosperous trading nation in the East China Sea.[170] Okinawa prefecture consists of a chain of 160 Ryūkyū islands, forty of which are inhabited.[171] Although now officially part of Japan, Okinawa was subject to assimilationist and discriminatory colonization policies that betray its ongoing subordinate status vis-à-vis the mainland. The central Japanese government sought to systematically suppress indigenous Ryūkyūan cultural practices by, for example, establishing an imperial education system that strictly forbade Okinawans from using their native language and required them to only use standard Japanese. The colonial status of Okinawa becomes even more apparent during WWII, in particular, the Battle of Okinawa (April 1 – June 22, 1945).

[170] Kozue Akibayashi and Suzuyo Takazato, "Okinawa: Women's Struggle for Demilitarization," in *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, ed. Catherine Lutz (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 247.

[171] Ibid, 244.

In the years leading up to the war, the Japanese government mobilized the people of the Ryūkyū islands with nationalistic propaganda. Many were eager to prove their value to the nation-state in spite of the prejudice they experienced from mainland Japanese as well as the mainland politicians and generals appointed to respectively govern Okinawa and command the island's military units. Like her father and older sister, Tamiko initially buys into the glory of serving the emperor and the idea that Japan is committed to safeguarding the welfare of Okinawans. Only Tamiko's mother perceives the terrible truth—that Okinawa is nothing more than a "shield" for the defense of the mainland, that the Japanese "will sacrifice every person on all the Ryukyu Islands down to the last child to protect their sacred motherland."[172] We know today that the Japanese high command considered Okinawa little more than a disposable pawn in their larger wartime strategy.[173] By militarizing the island, the Japanese government transformed Okinawa into a target that would become the staging ground for the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. The operations of the Japanese Imperial Army were not designed to protect the people of Okinawa even though they were Japanese citizens entitled to protection.[174] The army's primary objective was to inflict heavy casualties on the Americans and to prolong the battle as much as possible to buy time for the battle on the mainland that the government expected to follow.[175] In this grand scale battle of attrition, Okinawa suffered the most losses: human,

[172] Sarah Bird, *Above the East China Sea* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 88. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically.

[173] "Battle of Okinawa: Summary, Fact, Pictures and Casualties," *HistoryNet*, June 12, 2006, http://www.historynet.com/battle-of-okinawa-operation-iceberg.htm.

[174] Akibayashi and Takazato, "Okinawa," 249. The Japanese Imperial Army demonstrated pervasive indifference to Okinawans' lives and safety. The military confiscated food from civilians, used Okinawans as human shields against the Americans, and even outright murdered Okinawans they suspected of being spies for speaking their own native language (see: Wesley Iwao Ueunten, "Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent: The 1970 Koza Uprising in U.S.-Occupied Okinawa," in *Militarized Currents*, eds. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 101).

[175] Ibid.

environmental, and social (many Ryūkyūan historical and cultural sites, artifacts, and documents were irrevocably lost or destroyed during the fighting).

Bird depicts Tamiko as a Himeyuri ("Princess Lily") girl, one of the 219 young female students mobilized to serve as nurses for the Japanese Imperial Army during the Battle of Okinawa.[176] The girls were tasked with providing medical care for Japanese soldiers on the front lines. As American forces pressed closer, the makeshift hospitals were "relocated to a series of caves and tunnels on the southern part of the island."[177] Inside these dark caverns filled with the suffering and stench of the living and the dead, the Himeyuri girls had to perform the nightmarish task of tending to soldiers' wounds without anesthesia and other necessary medical supplies, with sometimes nothing to offer other than their affective bodily presence.[178] In the face of looming defeat, "the military abruptly disbanded the corps of nurses" and "[o]n 18 June, the defenseless girls were ordered out of the caves where Japanese soldiers were hiding, but were forbidden to surrender."[179] Therefore, while the Himeyuri girls diligently cared for the bodies of Japanese soldiers, their bodies were considered less deserving of care, denied protective shelter as well as food and water rations. The girls' imperial education also taught them to view their bodies as not belonging to themselves but rather the emperor in Tokyo, as that which they could not freely surrender to the Americans. As a result, many of the Himeyuri student nurses perished during the firestorm of U.S. bombardment of the island. The Japanese military also coerced surviving girls to commit mass suicide in order to preserve their virginity and by extension, the

[176] "Testimonials from Himeyuri Student Nurses," *Manoa* 13, no. 1, Silence to Light: Japan and the Shadows of War (2001): 142.

[177] Donald Smith, "Dark Caverns Entomb Bitter Memories, Bodies of Okinawan 'Lily Girls,' " *National Geographic*, June 4, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-04/news/mn-9231_1_cave-japanese-nurses.

[178] Ibid.

[179] "Testimonials from Himeyuri Student Nurses," 142.

national honor of Japan. Terrorized by horrific tales of raping and pillaging by American soldiers, some girls threw themselves off cliffs while others killed themselves with the hand grenades given to them by Japanese soldiers.[180] Bird evokes this tragic history through Tamiko's narrative, foregrounding how the costs of war comes to be shouldered in multivalent ways by a young, vulnerable girl population.

Through Luz's narrative, Bird reveals how Okinawans did not experience liberation but rather a double act of colonization under the United States' postwar occupation of the island (1945-1972). The U.S. military took control of Japanese Imperial Army bases and continued to expand and build more bases, oftentimes by expropriating private land from Okinawan civilians.[181] A disposable pawn in Japan's grand Pacific War strategy, Okinawa became a bargaining chip in the nation's postwar rearmament negotiations. Although less than 1% of Japan's total land mass, Okinawa has, since the end of WWII, hosted 74% of the facilities located on Japanese territory that are exclusively used by the U.S. military.[182] While U.S. occupation of mainland Japan ended in 1951 and the nation's official independence acknowledged, the United States continued to occupy Okinawa for two decades longer with absolute authority over island residents.[183] Labeled the "keystone of the Pacific," Okinawa has played a crucial role in U.S. military operations.[184] In the escalating Cold War context, the

[180] Abbie Jones, "Terror in the Caves," *Chicago Tribune* August 13, 1995, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-08-13/features/9508130378_1_teenage-girls-nursing-student-corps.

[181] Ueunten, "Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent," 102.

[182] Christine Ahn, "Okinawa: The Small Island Trying to Block the US Military's 'Pivot to Asia,' " *truthout*, December 30, 2014, http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/28276-okinawa-the-small-island-trying-to-block-the-us-military-s-pivot-to-asia.

[183] Chris Ames, "Crossfire Couples: Marginality and Agency among Okinawan Women in Relationships with U.S. Military Men," in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, eds. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 178.

[184] Akibayashi and Takazato, "Okinawa," 243.

United States fortified its bases on the island to manage and support the wars in Korea during the 1950s and Vietnam during the 1960s.[185] A massive social movement eventually led to the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972 but American bases on the island continue to remain under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. [186]

Hosting one of the largest concentrations of U.S. bases has intimately impacted both the human and nonhuman ecologies of Okinawa. Kozue Akibayashi and Suzuyo Takazato note how "continued control of the island's local economy by Japan and the United States" in the 60-year postwar period has inhibited Okinawan attempts to realize economic independence from U.S.-base related industries and the emergence of alternative Okinawan businesses.[187] In stark contrast to peoples in mainland Japan, who enjoyed a postwar economic boom, Okinawans continued to struggle with famine and poverty as militarization of the island once again took precedence over the welfare of island residents.[188] Okinawa remains one of Japan's most economically depressed prefectures with the highest unemployment rate of 5.7% compared to the national average of 4.0% in 2013.[189] While American troops are putatively stationed in Okinawa for the defense and security of Japan (whose postwar constitution prohibits the maintenance of sovereign armed forces with warring potential), their presence has rendered the lives of Okinawan civilians more

[185] Ibid, 249-50.

[186] Ibid, 178. It has been since revealed that the Japanese and U.S. government also "agreed on a secret pact to allow the entry of nuclear weapons into Okinawa, overriding the no-nuclear-weapons policy that Japan had already adopted (252).

[187] Ibid, 252.

[188] Ibid, 244.

[189] Chika Motomura, "Regional Report-Okinawa," Osaka ATO, approved by Steve Schitzler, March 24, 2014, http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Regional%20Report%20-%20Okinawa_Osaka%20ATO_Japan_3-24-2014.pdf.

precarious, as they are exposed to crimes committed by U.S. military personnel as well as leakages from chemical weapons stored and tested on the island.[190]

Bird depicts Luz as descending from a long genealogy of brave, strong women who have served and helped literally reproduce the U.S. global military empire. Luz's mother "was so genuinely devoted to the U.S. Air Force that she passed it on to her own daughter, believing, truly believing, that it was the most treasured legacy she had" (309). In the novel, Luz comes to realize that this "treasured legacy" of military service is a legacy haunted by death. She observes her older sister, Codie, follow in their mother's footsteps, enlisting in the U.S. Air Force to be ultimately killed in Afghanistan. Codie's death leads Luz to question the legacy she has inherited and the costs of reproducing the ideals and structures of U.S. militarism. Luz probes for the ghost of her brave, dyslexic older sister, who she believes was unjustly sacrificed in the name of the U.S. global military empire, who might have lived if she had only been "given some other options"—taught to recognize her own intelligence and manifold capabilities, encouraged to develop a sense of belonging and purpose beyond the military (32). Yet Luz finds herself drawn into fantastic contact with the ghost of a mysterious Okinawan girl instead, the ghost of someone else's sister. In the following section, I explore this curious displacement of ghosts and the possibilities of *lateral haunting* to conjure an alternative genealogy for Luz to claim.

**(An)Other Sister's Ghost**

Reeling from grief, Luz swims farther and farther out into the East China Sea, begging Codie to give her some sign if she does not want her to drown and die so that they may be reunited. Allowing her body to steadily sink below the water, Luz glimpses what she imagines to be a sign from Codie, nearly too late. As she struggles to rise to the surface, powerful currents

[190] Ahn, "Okinawa."

sweep Luz under and carry her to a cave where she sees the apparition of not Codie, but a young, emaciated Tamiko sprawled on the floor. The figure gestures frantically at Luz to help save her and her newborn infant but as Luz draws closer she only discovers a pile of gleaming white bones. In the novel, this haunting also operates on a corporeal level as Luz experiences the violent pangs of hunger that Tamiko endured during the Battle of Okinawa as well as her death—the terrifying fall off the suicide cliffs to the spiky rocks and waves below. Tamiko's ghost can be understood, as Avery Gordon and other scholars of haunting have argued, as a "repressed or unresolved social violence [that] is making itself known."[191] Yet Bird also stages, in the above scene, how Tamiko's ghost displaces Codie's ghost and I am interested in how this displacement complicates theorizations of haunting.[192] Luz, deeply haunted by Codie's death, comes to be haunted, not by her sister's ghost, but rather, the unfamiliar ghost of *someone else's sister*. How can lateral ghosts provide a basis for theorizing an expanded notion of ethico-political responsibility? What alternative collectivities can lateral haunting engender?

The displacement of Codie's ghost serves to affirm, most explicitly, Luz's ghostly kinship with Tamiko over biological kinship ties. Through haunting, Tamiko actively forges and maintains a bond with Luz. The two come to rely on each other as not a substitute for the sisters they lost, but as a new, other sister that can help them live on, whether as a ghost or a human girl. Bird imagines this fantastic sororal bond as a means of countering legacies of militarized violence. Through her haunting, spectral presence, Tamiko helps mitigate the terrible loneliness that Luz endures in having to live in a world without Codie. In the novel, Tamiko's ghost also

[191] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* xvi. See also: Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 5-6.

[192] The "lateral haunting" in Bird's novel departs from ghosts in the American gothic tradition. As Brogan asserts: "The Gothic generally explores personal, psychical encounters with the taboo. At the most basic level, its ghosts function as plot device—providing crucial information, setting in motion the machinery of revenge or atonement—and, of course, as a source of the pleasurable thrill we derive from the uncanny" (*Cultural Haunting*, 2).

leads Luz to people and communities in Okinawa with whom she can form new relational ties and a sense of belonging. Haunting is typically understood as an expression of the agency of the dead over the living. Luz cannot choose her ghost and Tamiko repeatedly disrupts Luz's life with her ghostly acts and appearances. Yet haunting also illuminates a bond of extreme dependency—Tamiko must haunt Luz in order to survive as a ghost.[193] *China Sea* thus attunes readers to the mutual vulnerabilities and interdependencies of the living and the dead and what it means to ethically encounter a lateral ghost.

The lateral ghost in *China Sea* serves as an embodiment of the unfamiliar, the other, but it differs significantly from Derrida's specter. Theorizing the specter as a figure of unknowable, radical alterity, Derrida insists on the preservation of the specter's otherness, as that which should not be negated or assimilated.[194] For Derrida, an ethical encounter with the specter requires an attitude of absolute openness and hospitality, a welcoming without reserve.[195] Histories of militarization, however, render salient how absolute hospitality can be incredibly dangerous and easily exploited, how hosting a foreign military body without any conditions can destroy local host communities. Along with scholars such as Gordon and Esther Peeren, I argue that Derrida's ethics of absolute hospitality can also promote a renunciation of responsibility to and for the specter.[196] Maintaining the specter's radical alterity, as that which is simply unknowable, can be a way of refusing to seriously engage with the specter. *China Sea* gestures to

[193] Esther Peeren emphasizes how ghosts survive by haunting the living and explores the plight of hapless ghosts who lack the spectral agency to haunt. See: "Afterword: How to Survive as a Living ghost?" in *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 180-84.

[194] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning, and The New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

[195] Ibid.

[196] See: Avery Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity," *borderlands* 10, no. 2 (2011): 2, 5-7; and Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, 19.

how an ethical encounter requires a different kind of attitude, a persistent effort to know and know better that which is not fully knowable.

Tamiko's ghost draws Luz outside the confines of her own private, personal loss to attend to the vast, innumerable losses that Okinawans continue to endure as a result of Japanese and U.S. militarization. Lateral haunting thus challenges a discrete, atomistic sense of the self by compelling one to assume responsibility for someone else's ghost, for adjacent histories and the suffering engendered from uneven, oppressive conditions. In *China Sea*, assuming responsibility means attempting to know a ghost in her own historical and cultural context. With the help of an Okinawan boy named Jake Furasato, Luz learns more about the history of militarized violence in Okinawa and her complicity in that history—all the living and the dead that were displaced so that she could be in Kadena now with her mother. When the U.S. military expropriated civilian lands to build bases during the postwar reconstruction, it drove many villagers from the homes where they had buried their ancestors for generations and destroyed many sacred tombs in the process. Bird foregrounds how this violent separation from ancestral burial grounds constitutes a "huge psychic wound" for Okinawans, which the U.S. and Japanese governments fail to fully understand or acknowledge (239). Both governments have expended little effort and resources to return WWII remains to their families. Volunteer organizations have tried to fill the gap by performing DNA testing of the recovered remains but, as Jake reveals, the process is so expensive that there continues to be "giant warehouses stuffed with bones" (238). In the novel, DNA testing serves as a symbol of Western scientific technology that the U.S. extends to compensate for its acts of militarized violence. Bird reveals how the awesome, reconstructive power of this technology fails to adequately deliver because DNA testing requires too much

funding and labor. Luz realizes that if she turns the bones she found over to the authorities, "the girl will be even more lost than she is now in a cave at the edge of the sea" (239).

Confronting the limits of knowledge and power that Western science promises, Luz learns to embrace indigenous modes of knowing. In an effort to know Tamiko's ghost better, Luz consults a *yuta*, a female spirit medium in indigenous Ryūkyūan culture that can channel and communicate with the dead. The *yuta* gives Luz cryptic messages and invites her to perform bizarre tasks that she cannot fully comprehend, eventually leading her to the Himeyuri Peace Museum, where Luz recognizes the girl from her vision in a faded photograph. The museum, built in 1989, memorializes the death and sacrifices of the Himeyuri student nurses during the Battle of Okinawa.[197] While this official act of memorialization can be viewed as a means of securing social justice for the dead, for a group of forgotten young girls, it can also be a way of banishing their ghosts, of artificially imposing an end to mourning so that Japan, as a nation, can move on.[198] By dramatizing the return of Tamiko's ghost, Bird draws attention to how repressed, unresolved social violence will not remain buried. *China Sea* calls for, not a banishing of the ghost, but an ethical confrontation with the ghost, as an animated force of intense yearning and desire to live on. By opening herself up to unofficial, underground modes of historical and cultural transmission, Luz learns how to help Tamiko's ghost live on. She manages to return Tamiko's bones, just in time, to be buried with her sister, Hatsuko. Readers learn that unlike Tamiko, Hatsuko survived the Battle of Okinawa and has spent all these years searching for her younger sister. Bird eventually reveals that Tamiko might be a distant ancestral relative of Luz's. Yet Luz remains unaware of this fact within the narrative diegesis of the novel, pursuing

[197] "About Himeyuri Peace Museum," Himeyuri Peace Museum, accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.himeyuri.or.jp/EN/establish.html.

[198] On politics of memorialization see: Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 19-49.

Tamiko's ghost not out of some familial obligation/debt but rather a desire to help Tamiko and Hatsuko find peace, reuniting them in death so that they can live on together in the next world.

In the process of healing Tamiko and Hatsuko's sundered bond, Luz forms new bonds that help her heal as well, from the traumatic loss of Codie. As Luz shows up suddenly at Hatsuko's funeral, with just a bag of bones and no real explanation, she is surprised to find herself "accepted so immediately and so completely by a new group" (304). The villagers embrace Luz as a fellow Okinawan sister: "Who among them has not consulted a *yuta*? And then performed whatever task, no matter how outlandish, that she prescribed?" (304). Bird does not stage a welcoming of absolute hospitality, in the Derridean sense, but a welcoming that honors the caring labor Luz performs (e.g. educating herself about the island's militarized history, taking seriously and executing the tasks prescribed by the *yuta*) in order to arrive at an ethical encounter with her Okinawan hosts. *China Sea* ultimately presents a model of social collectivity that transcends normative biological transmission and is instead based on adoptive modes of historical and cultural transmission.

**Living Lateral Ghosts**

While Tamiko is the primary ghost that Luz encounters in the novel, she also draws Luz into contact with other people on the island, who can be described as "living ghosts." These living ghosts arguably represent the most precarious and occluded victims of militarization. They have been consigned to death, steadily and surely dying, but lack the spectral agency to haunt in the ways that the dead can.

In the novel, Tamiko's ghost leads Luz to her biological grandfather, Delmar Vaughn, a former black American GI. Through Vaughn's character, Bird foregrounds the racialized

violence perpetuated within the U.S. military against some of its own members. To escape the racism of the white-dominated U.S. military base, Vaughn and other black GIs built their own community in the "Bush," the black segregated section of the Koza entertainment district. Bird constructs Vaughn as a figure of black resistance, who deserts the military instead of accepting the death sentence it prescribed in ordering him to redeploy and serve on the front lines in Vietnam.[199] The disproportionate redeployment of black soldiers points to the U.S. military's concerted effort to defuse the Black Power and antiwar sentiment coalescing in the Bush.[200] But as Vaughn reveals to Luz, deserting entailed its own peculiar death sentence, as he became virtually imprisoned in Okinawa, unable to leave for fear of being arrested and scapegoated for all the crimes committed by the U.S. military. He has been trapped on the island all this time, steadily dying from exposure to the chemical weapons the U.S. military stored and tested on Okinawa, which also likely killed Luz's adoptive grandfather, Eugene Overholt.

Vaughn proceeds to tell Luz a story about her Okinawan grandmother, Setsuko, that she never knew, that attunes her to how Setsuko was forced to live like a ghost even before she passed away. Luz learns how the Battle of Okinawa rendered many children war orphans

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[199] In her novel Bird also alludes to the Koza riot, a spontaneous, violent protest that erupted on December 20, 1970 against the U.S. military presence on the island (Ibid, 94-7). The riot was sparked by a car accident late that night in which an American serviceman, driving under the influence, hit an Okinawan pedestrian, who was also drunk, as he was crossing a street in Koza. This car accident marks the breaking point of years of mounting tension against the U.S. military's wanton abuses of power and the acquittal of crimes committed by military personnel (MPs) against Okinawan civilians. For over six hours, rioters threw rocks and bottles, setting fire to and overturning American cars. Instead of senseless violence, Ueunten emphasizes how Okinawans were selective about their targets, calling out to participants to explicitly refrain from hurting black soldiers (Ibid, 95-6). During the Koza riot, Okinawans tried to honor the sense of affiliation they felt with black American GIs, who experienced similar forms of racism and exploitation by the U.S. military. Black soldiers, the majority of which came from working-class backgrounds and entered military service because they could not find decent jobs upon graduating high school, were sent on more dangerous missions and died in the combat zone more than their white counterparts. The now largely forgotten Koza riot can thus be viewed as a spontaneous moment of Afro-Asian transpacific solidarity against militarism (See: Yuichiro Onishi, "The Presence of (Black) Liberation in Occupied Okinawa," in *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in 20th-Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 138-82).

[200] Ueunten, "Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent," 112. Ueunten notes how a group of black soldiers called the "Bush Masters" would routinely meet in a bar in the black section of Koza to discuss Black Power Movement literature and movies from the U.S.

available for adoption, including her grandmother. Setsuko was adopted by the Ueharas and worked for them as a kind of servant with the promise that they will allow her to be buried someday in their family tomb. As Bird reveals, however, the adoption of war orphans served as a means of consolidating the postwar Okinawan family, which relies on their eventual disownment as surplus persons: "The reason girls were adopted was to be maids or field hands. Then, if they were pretty enough and the family needed money because Dad gambled or whored around, they'd be sold to a house. All the shame would be loaded onto the girls, so the family would be cleansed when she was sold off as a prostitute" (215). The Ueharas adopt Setsuko to exploit her bodily labor but when that labor can no longer adequately offset the family's expenses/debt, they sell her surplus body to overcome financial ruin. Bird emphasizes how Setsuko's body not only helps consolidate the postwar Okinawan family on a material level, but also on a psychic-affective level. Setsuko's incorporation into the family as a surplus member allows the family to project all the shame of war onto her body, which can be disowned to psychically cleanse the family of the shame of prostituting their Okinawan daughters. In addition to an indictment of the U.S. military then, *China Sea* foregrounds how Okinawans are complicit in the hyper-exploitation of young girls like Setsuko. From her ghostly status in the Uehara family, Setsuko is sold into the ranks of the living dead in the camptown prostitution industry.

The story of Setsuko as a camptown prostitute haunts Luz, who only ever knew her grandmother as a military bride of an American GI. As Grace M. Cho argues, the figure of the camptown prostitute is rendered more ghostly in her transformation into a military bride, as histories of (neo)colonial militarized sexual-comfort labor are repressed in order to consolidate

the heteronormative reproductive politics of the family.[201] *China Sea* grapples with the spectral traces, the disappearance of these histories alongside more easily romanticized histories of Okinawan women who married GI men and of virginal Himeyuri student nurses who sacrificed their lives tending to soldiers in cave hospitals. Bird directs attention to how these militarized histories intersect in salient ways towards a *lateral critical genealogy*. She stages a brief encounter between Tamiko and a *juri* (prostitute) that emerges as one of the most profound moments in the novel. On her way to join her sister at Himeyuri High School, Tamiko boasts about how she will train as a student nurse to serve the emperor. Bird, however, foregrounds through the ghostly figure of the *juri*, a different kind of caretaking/comfort labor that mutually sustains the Japanese military empire. As Tamiko stumbles across a field with rows of crudely constructed huts, where a few mysterious women could be seen staring blankly outward, murmuring in a foreign tongue, the *juri* explains that they are Korean comfort women, "brought here to keep you Princess Lilies pure" (112). Bird calls attention to how the trafficking of Korean comfort women to Okinawa helped to safeguard the virginity of the Himeyuri girls, as deeply imbricated histories of gendered militarized violence.[202]

As Kyle Ikeda observes, comfort women have been rendered nearly invisible in dominant narratives of the Battle of Okinawa. The 1995 "Cornerstone of Peace Memorial" included names of war casualties regardless of nationality but did not include any names of Korean comfort

[201] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22, 89-128. Cho specifically examines Korean camptown prostitutes but her analysis is also applicable to military prostitution in Okinawa.

[202] Himeyuri girls embody, in a very literal way, a history of Japanese imperial reform that specifically targeted and sought to transform female Okinawan students into modern subjects of the Japanese empire through sexual, bodily discipline (e.g. the establishment of separate girls' classrooms/schools to keep girls away from the opposite sex). Valerie H. Barske, "Visualizing Priestesses or Performing Prostitutes?: Ifa Fuyū's Depictions of Okinawan Women, 1913-1943," *Studies on Asia* Series IV, 3, no. 1 (2013): 72.

women.[203] According to Ikeda, approximately 1,000 Korean women were trafficked to Okinawa to serve as military sex slaves for Japanese soldiers.[204] As their ghosts haunt Okinawa, we can understand Luz's grandmother as their postwar counterpart, servicing the U.S. military with her sexual-comfort labor. Setsuko manages to escape the camptown prostitution industry by marrying an American GI, moving from a ghostly limbo to securing a new American life. However, I trace an alternative lateral genealogy of those women and girls who could not escape by turning to an analysis of Nora Okja Keller's novel, *Fox Girl* (2004). The novel transports readers to 1960s South Korea and foregrounds, through its spectral tropes and forms, how U.S. militarization produces camptown prostitutes (or *kijich'on* women) as a population of living ghosts.

**What Korean Camptown Girls cannot Learn**

*Fox Girl* follows the lives of two young girls as they struggle to navigate the precarities and violences of growing up in a camptown in 1960s South Korea. Similar experiences of social marginalization draw the narrator, Hyun Jin, and Sookie together. Hyun Jin is ostracized because of a conspicuous birthmark that disfigures half her face, while Sookie's parentage, as the mixed-race daughter of a camptown prostitute and an unknown American GI, renders her a social

[203] Kyle Ikeda, "Critical 'Sentimentalism' and Conscious Engagement in 'Tree of Butterflies,' " in *Okinawan War Memory: Transgenerational Trauma and the War Fiction of Medoruma Shun* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 103.

[204] Ibid, 106. Ikeda notes how an estimated 500 Okinawan women "were also 'recruited,' deceived and coerced into serving as 'comfort women' " (106). He emphasizes how "the stories of…Okinawan and Japanese 'comfort women' reside in even more occluded spaces than Korean 'comfort women' " because, for many, the differential social and political costs of telling these stories are too high (103-4). Ikeda notes: "very few Japanese 'comfort women,' including those from Okinawa, have publicly demanded redress from the Japanese government in comparison with the number of former 'comfort women' from Korea and other countries in Asia who have done so since the early 1990s" (104). He cites Vincent Diaz's related work on the silence of Chamorro comfort women in Guam, a group whose experiences as military sex slaves "remain not as history but as subaltern memories" because various silencing mechanisms have not allowed these stories to manifest in a more public forum (104). Through an analysis of the war fiction of Okinawan writer, Medoruma Shun, Ikeda suggests that the literary may be the only means of accessing these subaltern memories.

pariah. Keller depicts how familiar coming-of-age moments, for both girls, come to be darkly overshadowed by war. Take, for example, the scene where Sookie's mother, Duk Hee, teaches the girls a lesson on safe sex:

> With a grin, she [Duk Hee] flourished the rubber disk as if about to perform a magic trick and placed it on top of the hot dog. "Pinch the end," she instructed. "And smooth it down." The *kondom* slips over the meat like the pantyhose she wore to the clubs. "There," she said… "Protection."
>
> It looked like a small red soldier standing at attention in his coat and hat. I tried to hide a giggle behind my hand, but when Sookie raised her eyebrows at me, I laughed with mouth open wide. "It looks like it's going to war," I sputtered.
>
> Sookie's mother chuckled. "It is a war," she said, wiggling the tube of meat like a marching soldier.[205]

Hyun Jin fails to draw the connection between Duk Hee's condom demonstration with the American hot-dog soldier and the real conditions of war that intimately structure their lives in the camptown. As Jodi Kim asserts, the "war" that Duk Hee refers to can allude to multiple wars occurring at the time: the "formally ongoing Korea War," which ended in armistice rather than a peace treaty in 1953, and "the U.S. war in Vietnam, where both American soldiers stationed in South Korea and South Koreans themselves were deployed to fight."[206] The war can also refer to the multivalent "layers of gendered racial violence governing th[e] militarized transactions and intimacies" between *kijich'on* women and their American GI clients.[207] Duk Hee teaches the

[205] Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 20. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically.

[206] Jodi Kim, "Militarization," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014), 158.

[207] Ibid.

girls that condoms will provide them with "protection" but this protection is, of course, only limited to threats of venereal disease and unwanted pregnancy. This passage gestures to how *kijich'on* women and their mixed-race children constitute an extremely vulnerable, unprotected population within the context of the U.S.-ROK Cold War security alliance.

In *Sex Among Allies* (1997), Katharine Moon discusses how camptown prostitution figured centrally in international military policy negotiations between the United States and South Korea, becoming a heavily organized and regulated postwar enterprise.[208] The ROK government framed camptown prostitution as a patriotic act, mobilizing women to serve as so-called "personal ambassadors," to perform sexual-comfort labor to convince American troops to stay and protect the nation.[209] Park Chung Hee's military regime (1961-1979) officially sanctioned camptown prostitution as not only necessary for national security but also beneficial for economic growth.[210] American GIs frequently flew to Japan to spend their leave and seek female companionship. Park's regime actively expanded camptown prostitution in the effort to redirect the flow of U.S. dollars to Korea.[211] During the 1960s, camptown prostitution reached its height with more than 30,000 *kijich'on* women servicing 62,000 soldiers stationed in South Korea.[212] But while camptown prostitution helped increase the nation's overall foreign exchange earnings, *kijich'on* women themselves incurred large debts that kept them personally bound to

[208] Katharine Hyung-Sun Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 17-47.

[209] Ibid, 84-126.

[210] Seungsook Moon, "Regulating Desire, Managing the Empire: U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945-1970," in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, eds. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 58.

[211] Ibid, 56.

[212] On how the bodies of *kijich'on* women highlight the contradictions inherent in Korean nationalism and the U.S.-ROK security alliance see: Stella Oh, "From America Town to America: *Fox Girl* and the Ethics of Interracial Relations in South Korea's Camptowns," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 129.

the industry under exploitative and oppressive conditions.[213] Moon calls attention to how the security alliance between the U.S. and the ROK was ultimately maintained at the expense of camptown prostitutes' personal bodily security.[214]

Intersecting forces of Korean nationalism and U.S. militarization work to produce *kijich'on* women as a population of living ghosts, subjecting them to various forms of literal (e.g. venereal disease, sexual violence) and social death. While Korea relies on the bodies of *kijich'on* women as tools to mediate diplomatic relations and to bolster the postwar national economy, *kijich'on* women also haunt Korea as palpable reminders of American military imperialism and sexual domination of the nation.[215] Official government policy praised *kijich'on* women for their patriotic sex work but this policy did little to mitigate the general disparagement and ostracization these women endured in Korean society, which also made it very difficult for them to leave the camptown prostitution industry.

The formative scene about safe sex, discussed above, betrays a significant disparity in Hyun Jin and Sookie's knowledge about sex and militarized violence. Hyun Jin erupts into giggles and ultimately misapprehends Duk Hee's safe sex demonstration, later wearing the condom as a talisman around her neck, which points to her relatively sheltered life as a shopkeeper's daughter. Sookie conversely recognizes the gravity of the lesson that Duk Hee attempts to teach in the context of military prostitution, which she and her mother both depend on to survive. While largely condoning prostitution, the U.S. military considered the spread of venereal disease (VD) to be a threat to soldiers' combat readiness and called for the

[213] K. Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 21-22, 131-37.

[214] Ibid, 152-58.

[215] Oh, "From America Town to America," 131-33.

medicalization and strict policing of sex workers' bodies.[216] Moon emphasizes how the VD prevention system focused entirely on the regulation of *kijich'on* women with no consideration of the disproportionate financial and emotional burden imposed on these women.[217] For example, while "information about military personnel with VD was held in strict confidentiality," camptown prostitutes were required to carry proper identification and wear VD registration cards to work in GI bars/clubs, to submit to routine physical examinations, and be quarantined for treatment if diagnosed with VD.[218] *Kijich'on* women with VD were effectively criminalized and barred from their livelihood. The measures established to regulate camptown prostitution thus betray a greater interest in preserving American soldiers' health and wellbeing than that of *kijich'on* women.

Keller foregrounds the limitations of the kind of sexual protection Duk Hee attempts to teach the girls. Knowledge about the importance of condoms and how to use one proves to be inadequate in protecting Duk Hee herself. Duk Hee inevitably contracts VD and is quarantined in the Monkey House for mandatory medical treatment. *Fox Girl* thus betrays a different pedagogical emphasis and investment than *China Sea*. Bird's novel consistently affirms the power of knowledge to resolve historical injustices and mitigate conditions of militarized violence—learning more about the history and culture of Okinawa empowers Luz to help Tamiko's ghost find peace. In Keller's novel, however, there seems to be nothing that Hyun Jin and Sookie can really learn that will help them alter or escape the violent militarized structures of

[216] S. Moon, "Regulating Desire, Managing Empire," 45-6.

[217] K. Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 131-32.

[218] Ibid, 137. The normalization of the heterosexual entitlement of American soldiers can be also gleaned from regulations concerning veterans' disability claims. While regulations specify that veterans will not "receiv[e] pensions 'for any disability due to the claimant's own willful misconduct or vicious habits,' " veterans are allowed to claim disability benefits for service hours lost to VD treatment (S. Moon, "Regulating Desire, Managing Empire," 47). The dissociation of risky sexual practices from acts of "willful misconduct" and "vicious habits" betrays the extent to which soldiers' hyper-heterosexual masculinity has been normalized.

the camptown. *Fox Girl's* refusal to affirm a form of empowerment through knowledge contributes to the production of a distinctly negative, noncathartic affect, a point that I will elaborate on below.

Keller foregrounds in *Fox Girl* how the camptown, as a site structured to host the U.S. military, disrupts and precludes care for other vulnerable populations. While quarantined in the Monkey House, Duk Hee cannot take care of her own daughter. Hyun Jin tries her best to serve as a surrogate maternal figure for Sookie, saving portions of her meals and sneaking extra food from home to pass along to her starving friend. Yet Keller foregrounds how their friendship, like other intimate relationships in the camptown, come to be commercialized—to be structured by the same exploitative market logic and conditions. Hyun Jin does not give Sookie food freely, demanding that she complete her homework assignments in proper trade. Later, when Sookie asks Hyun Jin to go to the Monkey House with her to find her mother, Hyun Jin only agrees to help after Sookie promises to split the money she will receive from Duk Hee with her. This logic of exchange also structures how the girls eventually come to understand their bodies as the only commodity they can exchange with American men for the things they need and want.[219]

### *Kumiho* Ghost Tales, Hunger, and Impossible Desire

From her straightforward, practical condom demonstration, Duk Hee turns to give the girls a very different kind of lesson that draws on Korean folklore and ghost tales. She asserts that in order to survive in the camptown, Hyun Jin and Sookie must become like the mythic "fox who wraps herself in the skin of a dead girl" (25). Keller alludes to the *kumiho* (literally "nine-tailed fox"), a recurring figure in Korean folktales that is almost always depicted as evil—a creature that assumes the form of a beautiful girl in order to seduce men and consume their

[219] For more on the *kijich'on* body as capital see: Oh, "From America Town to America," 136-39.

liver/heart.[220] *Kumiho* folklore has been predominantly read as cautionary tales about the unruly, dangerous, seductive force of female sexuality, and thus, implicitly uphold traditional Confucian values and patriarchal power structures.[221] By re-narrating the fox girl within the context of postwar U.S. military occupation of Korea, Keller invites readers to understand her abject femininity as produced and reified by forces of militarization. Regulated camptown prostitution became a means for the Korean nation-state to safeguard a chaste, respectable Korean femininity. As Moon asserts, the bodies of poor, lower-class Korean women were essentially sacrificed to host the foreign U.S. military so that the sexual and racial purity of other, higher-class Korean women could be preserved.[222]

Keller recuperates the *kumiho* as a source of mythic power for *kijich'on* women and girls who have been disowned by both the ROK and U.S. governments as disposable, bare life.[223] The *kumiho's* unapologetic predatory attitude and shape-shifting capacities render her a useful model for how to navigate the violent, exploitative conditions of the camptown. Hyun Jin initially resists Duk Hee's exhortation to become like the fox girl because she has always been taught that it is an evil creature, a devourer of men. But Duk Hee helps Hyun Jin see how it ultimately "depends on who tells the story" (26), relating a lesser-known Korean folktale, "The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue."[224] As the story goes, the fox was once the keeper of the jewel of knowledge and

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[220] Charles La Shure, "Kumiho," Encyclopedia Mythica, accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/kumiho.html. Keller does not really engage with the "nine-tailed" aspect of Korean *kumiho* folklore.

[221] For more on Keller's re-narration of Korean fox girl folklore see: Sung-Ae Lee, "Re-Visioning Gendered Folktales in Novels by Mia Yun and Nora Okja Keller," *Asian Ethnology* 68, no. 1 (2009): 131-50.

[222] K. Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 22-27, 39.

[223] On bare life, see: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, [1995] 1998).

[224] For a complete English translation see: In-Sŏb Zŏng, "The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue," in *Folk Tales from Korea* (Elizabeth, NJ and Seoul: Hollym International Corporation, [1952] 1982), 18-20.

one day allowed a young scholar to kiss her so he could have a taste of knowledge. But the scholar became greedy and swallowed the jewel. In this version then, the fox girl borrows a human form to hunt down and simply reclaim the jewel that was stolen from her. Keller suggests that like the fox girl, *kijich'on* women and girls have suffered a deep social injustice and need to be ruthless in reclaiming the countless things, the lives and futures stolen from them through the militarization of the Korean peninsula.

An insatiable hunger animates the fox girl in Keller's novel. This hunger points not only to material conditions of poverty and famine in postwar South Korea but also to a profound desire for an alternative demilitarized life. Keller depicts the fox girl as hungry for more than just food, for something other than the life she happened to be born into. Towards the end of the novel, Sookie relates to Hyun Jin another fox girl tale:

> This fox had good life [with]…plenty trees, grass, wild animals… But this little fox not happy. She…jealous of the humans in the village. She all the time cry: 'I want warm house and clothes and shoes on feet.' […] Little Fox decide she will turn herself human. So she make like a human girl and sat in road until somebody find her. One farmer, he find and take her home and love her like daughter. The fox girl try to live like people but she have secret: animal hunger.
>
> "One night, she cannot stand it. She eat the farmer's pig and chicks and still she hungry. She eat his goat. Still she hungry. She have to eat the farmer. 'But I loved you,' cried the farmer. The fox, she cry, too, and say, 'But I'm hungry.' " (277-78)

Here Keller draws upon the frequently retold Korean folktale, "The Fox-Girl and her Brother."[225] In this tale, the fox eats the true daughter of the household and assumes her form. The parents, who dote on and love the daughter dearly, refuse to heed their son and drive him out of the house when he tries to tell them that his sister is a fox. Years later, the son returns to find that the fox has devoured both of his parents and enlists the help of a Buddhist monk to avenge their deaths. Sung-Ae Lee reads "The Fox-Girl and Her Brother" as a misogynistic tale that punishes the parents for defying the Confucian patriarchal order by privileging their daughter and disowning their son.[226] In her retelling of this popular folktale, however, Keller focuses on the fox, depicting her as neither malevolent nor morally righteous (as in "The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue"), but simply hungry.

Like the Little Fox, Hyun Jin enjoys a relatively stable, comfortable position in the camptown as a shopkeeper's daughter. Duk Hee advises Hyun Jin to be thankful for the life she has been given, a life that other camptown children, like Sookie, can only dream of, but Hyun Jin cannot ignore her hunger for more. She hungrily pursues the truth of her origins to devastating consequences. Hyun Jin discovers that her father, unable to make a baby with his wife, paid Duk Hee to serve as a surrogate and carry his seed. The dark, secret conditions of her birth allow Hyun Jin to finally understand why her father's wife always treated her so coldly and unkindly. As she confronts her father with this newfound knowledge, presumably with the hope that he will choose a family with her over his wife, Hyun Jin finds herself unceremoniously disowned. Keller thus dramatizes the breakdown of attempts to consolidate postwar heteronormative nuclear kinship structures via informal surrogacy and adoption arrangements. Hyun Jin cannot

[225] For a complete English translation see: In-Sŏb Zŏng, "The Fox-Girl and Her Brother," in *Folk Tales from Korea* (Elizabeth, NJ and Seoul: Hollym International Corporation, [1952] 1982), 171-74.

[226] Lee, "Re-Visioning Gendered Folktales," 137.

seamlessly assimilate into her adoptive "host" family in large part because of her disfiguring facial birthmark, which serves as a visceral reminder of her abject *kijich'on* blood and the complicity of Korean nationals in the hyper-exploitation of *kijich'on* women. Like Setsuko in *China Sea*, Hyun Jin's disownment from the postwar Korean nuclear family can be understood as an attempt to disown a national reliance on and pimping out of Korean daughters as surrogate/sexual hosts. *Fox Girl* foregrounds and condemns the predation of Korean nationals along with that of the U.S. military, who profit from extracting the repro-comfort labor of *kijich'on* women and throw them away, cutting of ties of kin and care.

Both Duk Hee and Sookie charge that Hyun Jin is a reckless fox girl whose "animal hunger" heralds destruction (278). Her hungry pursuit of the truth of her origins precipitates her disownment and eventual descent into a life of teenage military prostitution. Later Hyun Jin also develops a fierce hunger to have and raise a baby, which threatens to exacerbate her life and the lives of those around her. While Hyun Jin as the fox girl does emerge, in some ways, as a destructive, devouring force, we can also read her as the embodiment of impossible desire for a radically different life and way of living. Gayatri Gopinath and Kara Keeling have theorized the impossible as a generative affective force that exceeds and unsettles current conditions of possibility.[227] The queer expression of the impossible points to the inequities and injustices of our present global reality and critically attunes us to alternative epistemological and ontological regimes that can allow for a different kind of reality to take shape.

When Hyun Jin learns about the true conditions of her birth, she fantasizes about an alternative life where Duk Hee married her father and they, including her and Sookie would live together as a family in her house. But as Duk Hee points out, this is an impossible fantasy

[227] See: Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 11; and Kara Keeling, "Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ* 15, no. 4 (2009): 566-67.

because Sookie would not be with them if she had married Hyun Jin's father and they wouldn't be living in her current house because it belongs to her adoptive mother. Hyun Jin's fantasy of a family that can encompass her, her father, Duk Hee, and Sookie suggests that she yearns for a life that could not have been and cannot yet be realized. Through Hyun Jin, Keller projects an affective imaginary and desire for a queer, demilitarized future. In her retelling of "The Fox-Girl and Her Brother," which can be viewed as an adoption narrative that goes horribly wrong, Keller suggests that the fox girl cannot conform to a heteronormative nuclear family, gesturing to the need to uncover some alternative queer kinship structure. A queer lateral birth figures centrally in the critical imaginary of both *China Sea* and *Fox Girl*. In the following section, I examine how Bird and Keller mobilize lateral birth as a response to militarized violence but in different form and ultimately to different effect.

**Lateral Birth**

Bird concludes *China Sea* with a short section narrated in the voice of Tamiko's unborn child, who relates the violent conditions of his conception. While desperately searching for her sister amidst the chaos of the American onslaught, Tamiko is raped first by a Japanese imperial soldier, then again by an Okinawan boy, and once more by an American GI. Bird depicts Tamiko's unborn child as the product of rape by three different fathers to foreground and condemn the complicity of Japanese, Okinawan, and American men in the predation of young Okinawan women and girls. Yet Bird also locates hope for a demilitarized future in the figure of this unborn child. Tamiko, who fiercely loves her baby despite how he was conceived, commits suicide in an effort to save them both from an even more traumatic death at the hands of

Japanese or American soldiers and to also defer the birth of her son until he can be born into a better world, not so ravaged by the pain and suffering of war.

In this final section, Bird stages the reunion of Tamiko's spirit with other members of her family in the dreamlike, magical world of the dead. As the spirits fondly reminisce about the past, they also convene to discuss matters of the future, namely, who will be a suitable mother for Tamiko's unborn child. After some debate they eventually conclude that, when the time is right, Luz will fulfill that role very nicely. *China Sea* thus imagines a lateral, transhistorically moved pregnancy as a means of extending a genealogy untimely and unjustly ruptured by forces of militarization. Luz's future birth of Tamiko's child promises to heal past injuries and violences. The novel offers readers cathartic resolution through the projection of a queer family composed of Luz, Jake, and the ghost child of a fellow Okinawan sister. Bird reimagines familial kinship structures towards an expanded notion of social collectivity with and ethico-political responsibility for the dead. Together Luz and Jake will help nurture Tamiko's unborn child to life and give him the life that militarization had violently foreclosed.

Despite its tropes of lateral haunting and lateral birth, *China Sea* culminates in a rather traditional multicultural/multinational family romance. Bird presents family formation via marriage and sexual reproduction as a solution to geopolitical, racial, and gender inequality as well as histories of militarized violence. But how might we understand the multicultural/multinational family differently, as deeply embedded and complicit in perpetuating these structural inequities and violences? How do forces of militarization intimately structure and circumscribe modes of family formation? While *Fox Girl* deploys a similar trope of lateral birth to *China Sea*, the novel completely upends the traditional multicultural/multinational family romance. Keller offers a de-romanticized depiction of lateral birth as part of the repro-comfort

labor exchanges in U.S. military camptowns in postwar Korea. Lateral birth emerges as one of many forms of queer bonding Keller stages between Hyun Jin and Sookie, as both an effect and means of navigating gendered militarized violences in the camptown.

In an earlier scene of queer bonding, Sookie collapses from hunger on her way to school with Hyun Jin. Weak and disoriented, she launches into an ecstatic reverie: "look around, Hyun Jin—at the dust we kick up as we walk. Look how it sparkles as it floats through the air… Like tiny suns full of lights and color. That's me now, Hyun Jin. I'm a tiny dust sun, exploding with colors, and soon I will be blown away. Breath a part of me in, okay?" (58). Sookie's musings about dust serve as a meditation on her own fleeting mortality, how her body will soon return to dust. Yet the scene culminates in her curious plea to Hyun Jin to "[b]reathe a part of [her] in," in a fantasy of an alternative mode of social being. Sookie imagines a way of surviving with and through her friend that might also help Hyun Jin feel less hungry and alone, through consuming her bodily dust particles.

Keller demonstrates how the formation of a compound subjectivity becomes critical in helping both girls survive the trauma of militarized violence. In the novel, Hyun Jin experiences a harrowing initiation into a life of military prostitution when Lobetto, another marginalized, mixed-race camptown child, pimps her out to three American GIs who violently rape and impregnate her. As she struggles to overcome the trauma of her bodily violation, Hyun Jin finds some hope in the idea of a baby. She determines to keep the baby and shower her with the love and care she never received from either of her own mothers—the adoptive mother who refused to acknowledge her and the biological mother who sold her away. That hope is, however, dashed when Hyun Jin suddenly loses the baby. Keller suggests that Lobetto and his mom secretly conspired to abort Hyun Jin's baby because they did not want pregnancy to interfere with her

ability to perform sex work. Other women in the camptown, including Sookie, insist that she is better off without the baby, which would be just another burden, another mouth to feed.

Keller foregrounds how camptown conditions queer Hyun Jin's capacity to imagine herself as a mother: "Immersed in the dark and dank of Lobetto's tent, I felt close to my child. In my half-sleep, I could almost imagine her in there with me—twins in the womb rather than mother and child. Off and on I slept for days and weeks, unsure of the boundaries of time, space, self. In that dimness, I felt I could call her back into my body" (171). Instead of a mother-daughter relation, Hyun Jin imagines that she and her baby are twins who share the same womb. The scene reveals how the trauma of militarized violence inhibits Hyun Jin from growing up, in the heteronormative sense, to become an individualized adult mother to her child, leading her to instead "grow sideways" *with her child*.[228] Hyun Jin develops an expanded notion of subjectivity that transcends the "boundaries of time, space, self" and this compoundedness ultimately helps her overcome the traumatic loss of her child.

During the depths of her depression, Sookie visits Hyun Jin day after day to try to cheer her up. When Hyun Jin realizes that Sookie is pregnant, she becomes convinced that Sookie has breathed in a part of her—the ghost of her unborn baby, which she had been trying to call back into her body all this time: "While I was the one making the wish, Sookie was the one to catch it. She was pregnant, my child in her belly" (185). Hyun Jin's conviction here that Sookie is pregnant with her unborn child exhibits most plainly as mental illness, as a symptom of a traumatized mind incapable of confronting loss. Instead of reading this scene as Hyun Jin suffering from some kind of pathological delusion, it can be more generatively understood as her reparative refashioning of subjectivity in an attempt to reconcile an unbearable loss. Along with James Kyung-Jin Lee and other Asian Americanist scholars of disability, I probe how wounded

[228] On "growing sideways" see: Stockton, *The Queer Child*.

embodiment can delineate and provide "the basis for a new pedagogy and politics of alternative social being."[229] The experience of bodily illness and incapacitation following her violent gang rape and the loss of her child allow Hyun Jin to develop the capacity for a compound subjectivity. The multiple psychic and physical boundary confusions Keller stages between Hyun Jin and Sookie point to the formation of an "alternative social being" within the camptown.

The militarized logic and structures of the camptown, which rigorously police *kijich'on* bodies, also sanction various forms of bodily violation from invasive medical screenings to acts of sexual violence by American GIs. The fantastic lateral birth Keller stages between Hyun Jin and Sookie serves as a figuration of queer female homosociality that disrupts how militarism seeks to police, regulate, and order female bodies in the camptown. After the baby is born, Sookie notes how she even queerly resembles Hyun Jin: "The girl's head was long and lumpy, cone-shaped, with blackened eyes that made it look as if she had been hit repeatedly" (196). Hyun Jin is similarly disfigured by a facial birthmark, which her adoptive mother attributes to the abject *kijich'on* blood that runs within her. Keller depicts their bodies as bearing marks of transgenerational militarized violence. Hyun Jin views the baby, Myu Myu, as a chance to counteract this legacy of militarized violence. She asserts: "This baby is you and me, Sookie. It's our chance to be a family" (187). Instead of the product of some militarized sexual liaison, Hyun Jin imagines the baby as an extension and culmination of her and Sookie's compound subjectivity. This queer imaginary does not concede any biological right or claim to Myu Myu's unknown father, as Hyun Jin emphasizes: "[t]his baby is you and me, Sookie." The syntax here

[229] James Kyung-Jin Lee, "Pathography/Illness Narratives," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014), 458-59. See also: Jennifer C. James and Cynthia Wu, "Editors' Introduction: Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature: Intersections and Interventions," *MELUS* 31, no. 3, Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature (2006): 3-13.

implies that Myu Myu is a mixed-race camptown child just like her and Sookie as well as a compound of the two of them, gesturing to the something more they can become together.

Keller projects the vision of a queer family between Hyun Jin, Sookie, and Myu Myu to ultimately negate that vision, to foreground how violent structures and forces of militarization preclude the realization of that queer family. Unlike *China Sea*, *Fox Girl* refuses to satisfy readerly desires for a neat, cathartic resolution. In the following section, I examine how Keller conjures negative, non-cathartic affects that relentlessly attune readers to the multivalent injuries and losses that cannot be reconciled through multicultural/multinational family formation.

**"Only Americans believe in happy endings"**

Although Hyun Jin is the novel's primary protagonist and narrator, Sookie arguably captures the reader's imagination because of the contradictions and irresolution that surround her character. Keller foregrounds, through Sookie, the irreconcilable psychic-affective costs of militarization. In the camptown, Sookie forms the strongest connection to Hyun Jin, whom she witnessed Duk Hee give birth to and helped to bring into this world. Sookie confesses that when she touched Hyun Jin's baby cheek and found that her hand perfectly covered the birthmark she thought: "it was a sign that you belonged to me, that you were marked for me" (108). Hyun Jin's birthmark, which is stigmatized throughout the novel as a sign of her abject *kijich'on* blood, takes on a different meaning here as a sign of queer kinship and love. This queer maternal love is what leads Sookie to relent and have a baby she never wanted in place of and for Hyun Jin. But unlike Bird, Keller de-romanticizes lateral birth as a form of surrogacy labor that Sookie performs for Hyun Jin within and as part of the militarized reproductive economy of the camptown.

In a mode of stark realism, Keller depicts how Sookie comes to resent the gestating fetus and how pregnancy transforms her body into a fat, helpless, hormonal mess. Throughout her labor, Sookie battles against the baby, screaming " 'Get it out, get it out, I hate this, get it out.' […] Mother and baby rested, then fought again; after a brief skirmish, the baby's body shot out, slick as a fish" (195-96). Sookie's lack of maternal feeling towards the baby points to the way in which surrogacy, as a form of "sexualized care labor," can foster a sense of alienation with one's own body.[230] Keller deploys metaphors of war to describe Sookie's labor to foreground how militarization intimately structures and circumscribes female homosocial relations in the camptown. She points to how the ongoing wars in Korea and Vietnam are also being played out on a microcosmic level between a mother and her baby. Sookie angrily resists Myu Myu's "groping, greedy mouth that constantly strained to latch on to her" because she feels as if the baby is slowly killing, sucking the life out of her (198). Keller depicts how the militarized logic and structures of the camptown engender a violent psychic imaginary, where only one girl can survive at the direct expense of another. Thus, whereas the military has been often idealized as a site of male homosocial bonding, Keller foregrounds how U.S. military occupation of South Korea intimately structures and circumscribes female homosocial relations. In the novel, mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends jealously compete against each other for GI clients and to simply survive.

The desperate, impoverished conditions of the camptown have left Sookie with a similarly impoverished psychic-affective economy. When Hyun Jin implores Sookie to be a family with her and Myu Myu, to help make their little family work, Sookie responds by thrusting the baby back at her, demanding monetary compensation for her labor: "Just give me

[230] On surrogacy as sexualized care work see: Amrita Pande, *Wombs in Labor: Transnational Commercial Surrogacy in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014), and Sayantani DasGupta and Shamita Das Dasgupta, eds., *Globalization and Transnational Surrogacy in India* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014).

what you think she's worth" (199). Sookie's cold actions here betray less financial desperation, than her inability to imagine the possibility of a truly nurturing, dependable familial structure. Forces of militarization have hardened Sookie against trusting others to take care of her or allowing others to depend on her. The reproductive exchange staged here also echoes the informal surrogacy contract between Duk Hee and Hyun Jin's father. Keller thus constructs parallel surrogacy narratives, where Sookie performs outsourced reproductive labor just like her mother before her. This parallel structure thwarts readerly desires for some narrative break and delineates how Hyun Jin and Sookie's relationship cannot transcend a militarized logic and economy of exchange.

Keller also deploys the trope of lateral birth to foreground violent conditions of forced and foreclosed reproduction in the camptown. *Fox Girl* renders salient how *kijich'on* prostitutes do not possess what Dorothy Roberts calls "reproductive liberty," as they produce children that would be severe economic liabilities to the mother or commodities to be exchanged within a highly stratified military-industrial system (e.g. for money, an immigration ticket to the U.S., transnational adoption).[231] Hyun Jin's hunger to have and raise a child emerges as an impossible desire within the context of the camptown. Keller stages how caring for Myu Myu exacerbates death for Hyun Jin and all those around her. In the novel, a Korean American woman named Mrs. Yoon offers Hyun Jin a ticket to the United States, an opportunity to perform sex work for her at Club Foxa Hawai'i. While Hyun Jin cannot bear the thought of leaving Myu Myu behind in Korea, she knows that Yoon would never sponsor a woman with a baby. At this critical moment, Sookie, who also managed to strike a deal to work for Yoon in the U.S., attempts to drown Myu Myu in a sink in order to unburden and free them both to pursue their American

[231] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 4-7.

dreams. Hyun Jin ultimately stops Sookie and finds a way to smuggle Myu Myu to America but not without destructive ramifications. In order to amend her immigration papers to include Myu Myu and to pay for the baby's passage, Hyun Jin steals Lobetto's "America money" (240). Myu Myu thus comes to arrive in America at the direct expense of Lobetto—she is here in place of him and because he is still over there. By the end of the novel, Lobetto remains consigned to a precarious life of pimping and hustling in the camptown, likely never to make it to America or to achieve his dream of reuniting with his GI father.

After arriving in Hawai'i, Hyun Jin struggles to figure out a way to balance taking care of Myu Myu and her contractual sex work obligations at Yoon's club. She drugs Myu Myu with cough syrup so that she will stay asleep while she is away and uses her breaks to check on the baby, despite warnings from the other girls. This tenuous system falls apart when Hyun Jin returns one day to find Myu Myu tangled in a blanket, choking and nearly suffocating to death. Her distracted performance and frequent, extended absences from Club Foxa also leads Yoon to threaten deportation back to Korea. Unlike *China Sea*, which imagines the child as a means of resolving past militarized violences, *Fox Girl* depicts the child as a locus of tension and irresolution that illuminates the necropolitical regimes of militarization. Keller relentlessly foregrounds the impossible possibility of nurturing Myu Myu to life, which comes to be predicated on a violent substitution (of Lobetto) and the exacerbation of various forms of militarized death for others (e.g. leading Hyun Jin to lose her job and face potential deportation). Keller depicts Hyun Jin's desire to hold onto and continue mothering her baby as impossible—reckless and destructive, but also as deeply vital to Hyun Jin's existence. Readers get the sense that she cannot live on without or apart from Myu Myu. The force of Hyun Jin's impossible desire affectively attunes readers to conditions of extreme injustice and vulnerability and the

urgent need to transform these conditions to render possible access to reproductive liberty for *kijich'on* women.

In the novel, Hyun Jin desperately clings onto her baby to the point of complete emotional and physical breakdown. With Yoon's looming threat of deportation, Hyun Jin begs Sookie to flee the sex industry with her and Myu Myu and build a different life elsewhere but Sookie refuses, believing that she will have a better chance of succeeding on her own at Club Foxa. On the run from Yoon, Hyun Jin takes Myu Myu on a journey in search of a distant uncle who might be able to help them. Relying on the contact information her father gave her, she tracks down the uncle to only discover that he left Hawai'i years ago to migrate to California. This revelation completely crushes Hyun Jin: "Eyes rolling up into my head, I dropped to all fours, ear pressed to the earth, and heard the world singing like crickets, with that in-and-out of the tides, of the blood in our veins, of the panting of the fox. Then everything stopped, went dead, and I knew it was all over. I had nowhere else to go. I was run to the ground" (285). The metaphoric images and language in this passage evoke the multivalent forms and processes of dehumanization that Hyun Jin endured over the course of the novel, which have come to transform her into more of a fox and less of a girl. This scene stands out as one of only two temporal ruptures in the novel (the first rupture occurs at the beginning, when an adult Hyun Jin narrates a brief prologue that is followed by the retrospective retelling of her experiences growing up in the camptown and immigration to America, which constitutes the bulk of the novel). On a formal level then, Keller compels readers to contend with the moment where Hyun Jin has been quite literally pushed to her breaking point, experiencing total paralysis and defeat.

*Fox Girl* refuses to offer readers a cathartic resolution through a reaffirmation of the traditional immigrant success narrative, where the Asian immigrant struggles and manages to

persevere against all odds.[232] Through the radically negative, noncathartic depiction of Hyun Jin completely "run to the ground," Keller compels us to interrogate our affective attachment to narratives that place tremendous pressure on the individual to triumph over structural violences and inequalities, which, as *Fox Girl* reveals, simply isn't possible. The novel invites us to read Hyun Jin's immigrant narrative sideways, not in terms of her individual failings, but rather how failure is linked to and conditioned by broader structures and forces of militarization. Keller throws into sharp relief how militarization exceeds the material infrastructures of the U.S. global military-industrial complex (military bases, arms-producing industries, etc.) as well as the temporal parameters of war. Hyun Jin arrives in the U.S. by entering into a system of militarized debt bondage, where she must perform sex work to pay back her employer and sponsor, Mrs. Yoon. The novel also foregrounds the structural continuities and linkages between the camptown prostitution industry in Korea and the sex tourism industry in Hawai'i:[233]

> Yoon's bar was modeled on the Korean Club Foxa. "Same same, only mine's bigger. Better. American," Yoon liked to boast. […] I recognized a song that hit the Korea Foxa just before I left—"Spinning Wheel"—and for a moment I was spinning in time and place, unsure of where I was. I panicked, my heart pumping in time to the music, looking around, expecting to see…uniformed *gomshi* GIs bellying up to the stage with bills in their fists. (263-64)

[232] The Asian immigrant success narrative is linked to and preconditioned on racialized conceptions of Asian bodily resilience that pervade Model Minority (the model, eminently productive Asian body), and Yellow Peril discourses. The Asian coolie has been racialized as having an "impossible biology" that contributes to their economic success and advantage—a body that is less sensitive to pain and capable of subsisting on a meager rice (as opposed to meat) diet. See: Eric Hayot, "Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures: The 'Coolie' in Late Nineteenth-Century America," *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 135-71; and Colleen Lye, "Meat versus Rice," in *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 47-95.

[233] On the link between tourism and militarization in Hawai'i see: Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise*.

The uncanny resonances between Club Foxa Hawai'i and the Korean Club Foxa cause Hyun Jin to momentarily lose her grasp of time and place, to feel as if she could open her eyes and very well find that she never left Korea. The song, "Spinning Wheel," which traumatically transports Hyun Jin back to the camptown, also serves as a figuration of persisting cycles of militarized violence that spin into ever new forms. Apart from the change in clientele, from GI soldiers to a multiethnic, multinational group of elite tourists, Club Foxa Hawai'i is, in Yoon's words, "[s]ame same," closely modeled on its Korean counterpart and worked by the same *kijich'on* women and girls. The novel thus foregrounds a transpacific sex trafficking network, directing attention to how militarization produces a desperate, vulnerable female population that can be easily coerced into entering a system of debt bondage and slave-like labor in exchange for passage to America, for the opportunity to achieve the American dream. It is significant that Hyun Jin, Sookie, and Myu Myu immigrate from Korea to end up in Hawai'i, another colonized Asia-Pacific island of military-strategic importance to the U.S. Through the character of Yoon, Keller also presents readers with a horrific narrative of the American Dream, where socioeconomic mobility is achieved through the exploitation and pimping out of fellow Korean sisters. *Fox Girl* invites readers to attend to militarization as a violent structural force that conditions and intimately circumscribes the multicultural/multinational family that emerges at the end of the novel.

Whereas Bird mobilizes the multicultural/multinational family romance as a means of resolution, Keller introduces points of narrative irresolution and conjures noncathartic affects that upend that family romance. As Sookie explains to her new boyfriend, Fat Danny, "Only Americans believe in happy endings" (278). The final section of the novel flashes forward five years to a time where Hyun Jin seems largely healthy and well again, living with Myu Myu and a

Hawai'ian American woman named Geraldine.[234] It would be easy to read this non-normative, all-female kinship structure as embodying the hope for a queer, demilitarized future, but Keller precisely blocks that kind of cathartic resolution. The queer family at the end of *Fox Girl* emerges as tenuous at best and remains deeply haunted by failure. As Hyun Jin knocks on the door expecting to find her uncle, a strange woman greets her instead. Geraldine's presence thus attunes us to the absence and failure of the extended Asian/American family to adequately support relatives who have recently immigrated to the U.S. We are also given very few details about Geraldine herself apart from her androgynous features, pidgin English, and that she is the "big boss" of a nursery in Hawai'i (283). To what extent can we trust the benevolent hospitality of this American woman towards a Third World woman and her baby?

The novel's critique of the politics of hospitality with respect to the camptown—communities called upon to host the U.S. military, as well as sexual-surrogate hosts inhibits readers from taking for granted Geraldine's apparently benevolent hospitality here. Hyun Jin confesses that she does not feel fully secure in this new kinship structure: "Though Gerry says she's made us family, *hanai*-ing Myu as her granddaughter, I still worry that she might turn on us, throwing us out of this apartment she constructed at the back of hothouse number three" (288). Hyun Jin is deeply aware that Gerry has the power to disown and throw both of them out onto the street where she found them. Therefore, instead of resolution, readers find themselves confronted with troubling irresolution, with questions for which there are no answers. Having escaped the sex tourism industry, how do Hyun Jin and Myu Myu live and provide for

[234] In an interview, Keller reveals that in the original ending she wrote for *Fox Girl*: "One of the girls ends up in jail. One of them never left America Town. The baby was abandoned" (Nora Okja Keller and Young-Oak Lee, "Nora Okja Keller and the Silenced Woman: An Interview," *MELUS* 28, no. 4, Speech and Silence: Ethnic Women Writers (2003): 162). Keller explains that she decided to change that ending because she felt it was "too grim" and she wanted to leave readers with "a sense of moving toward the light, or a sense of hope" (Ibid). I see the noncathartic affects that animate the final section of the novel as having everything to do with Keller's decision to change the original ending to a more hopeful, but palpably unrealistic ending that does not fit with, the otherwise, starkly realist narrative.

themselves now? Does Hyun Jin work for Geraldine in her nursery, and how much is she paid, if at all? Are we supposed to read Geraldine as more than Hyun Jin's employer, as potentially her queer partner and co-parent in raising Myu Myu?[235]

Sookie also haunts the multicultural/multinational family we see at the end of *Fox Girl*. Readers palpably register Sookie's absence and exclusion from the kinship structure between Hyun Jin, Myu Myu, and Geraldine. How are we supposed to feel about the sudden introduction of Geraldine as a surrogate/substitute for Sookie? To what extent can Geraldine compensate for her loss? Should we find hope in the escape and survival of one Korean sister? We can surmise that no good will likely come to Sookie as she continues to toil away in the sex tourism industry. At best she will become like Yoon, exploiting fellow Korean sisters to get ahead, and at worst, she will become like Duk Hee, selling her steadily depreciating body until she is too old, unwanted, and forgotten. *Fox Girl* forecloses cathartic resolution by leaving readers probing for Sookie's ghost, the enigmatic girl who did not escape.

**Attending to Death Worlds, Solidarity with Ghosts**

The spectral imaginaries of *China Sea* and *Fox Girl* productively attune readers to the various death worlds that U.S. militarization produces. While holding out the promise of the proliferation of life under conditions of enhanced security and protection, U.S. projects of military imperialism in Asia and the Pacific exacerbate death for certain populations. By combining stark realism (especially in the depiction of violence towards women) with spectral

[235] One other major question the novel leaves us with is what will become of Myu Myu? As a war adoptee, we have, in a way, already been given her narrative through Hyun Jin, who was similarly adopted into a relatively stable, well-off family in Korea. Hyun Jin's adoption does not, however, allow her to thrive as she continues to fall and fail over the course of the novel and Keller gives readers little cause to believe that Myu Myu's life will turn out any different. As readers, we already know all the terrible, violent conditions surrounding Myu Myu's birth that Hyun Jin struggles to keep secret but once they inevitably unravel, those secrets can potentially destroy her.

tropes, the two novels foreground the dark necropolitical underside of militarism's biopolitics. In *China Sea*, the trope of lateral haunting invites readers to develop an expanded notion of ethico-political responsibility for and solidarity with ghosts that we do not recognize and arguably belong to someone else. The novel also refrains from reinscribing the violent biopolitics of militarization by accounting for and emphasizing the enduring accountability of the living to the dead. As Grace Hong points out, simply incorporating deathly or ghostly subjects into the biopolitical fold remains inadequate because a life-affirming politics invariably legislates the dispersal of death for others.[236] Luz comes to learn and embrace an alternative Okinawan worldview, which rejects any ontological divisions between the living and the dead and maintains that being is always being-with the dead.[237]

A trope of lateral birth links both novels, foregrounding conditions of forced and foreclosed reproduction within the camptown. Whereas Bird deploys lateral birth as a means of resolving sundered genealogies and histories of gendered militarized violence thereby allowing readers cathartic release, Keller animates lateral birth with negative and relentlessly noncathartic affects. *Fox Girl*'s unrealistic ending and irresolution compel readers to attend to the ghosts that haunt Asian/America, all those persons left behind or abandoned like Lobetto, Duk Hee, and Sookie. Both novels thus invite a serious engagement with death and ghostly figures towards the theorization of alternative modes of being, political assemblage, and social justice.

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[236] Grace Kyungwon Hong specifically examines the violent biopolitics of contemporary neoliberalism, which "*affirm[s]* certain modes of racialized, gendered, and sexualized life, particularly through the invitation into reproductive respectability, *so as to* disavow its exacerbated production of premature death" (*Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 7, emphasis in original). This structure of disavowal is useful for understanding the project of U.S. militarization in Asia and the Pacific, as well as elsewhere around the world.

[237] In the novel, Jake introduces Luz to this alternative worldview, asserting: "We live with the dead and the dead live with us. It's not spooky or creepy…; it's just how it is" (152).

The camptown, as Hong argues, serves "as a precursor to the myriad forms of complex sovereignty that…are hallmarks of contemporary neoliberalism," which I will take up in the next chapter.[238] Specifically discussing U.S. military camptowns in South Korea, Hong emphasizes how camptown residents are subject to "a curious excess of state sovereignty, because they are simultaneously under both US and South Korean sovereignty," which "produce[s] a heightened vulnerability to death" as they come to be abandoned by both nation-states.[239] Contemporary neoliberalism obscures heightened conditions and forms vulnerability through its emphasis on individual sovereignty and the logic of individual choice.[240] As Jane Elliott points out, the historical understanding of domination, as "measured by the reduction of the subject's ability to make meaningful choices on his or her own behalf," has heavily contributed to the difficulty of grasping domination under neoliberal governance, as a politics of free-market capitalism and "free" choice.[241] Elliott coins "suffering agency" to describe the ways in which "neoliberal governance operates through rather than against the agency of its subjects," not crushing their capacity for action but rather compelling them to recognize their capacity to act, where "choice is experienced as a curse without simultaneously becoming a farce."[242] Like Elliott, I locate in the

[238] Grace Kyungwon Hong, "Ghosts of Camptown," *MELUS* 39, no. 3 (2014): 50.

[239] Ibid.

[240] The ideology of choice also accounts, in large part, for the ongoing divisions between the two leading feminist movements in South Korea against militarized sexual labor: the *chŏngsindae* (survivors of the Japanese "comfort system") movement (CM) and the *kijich'on* movement (KM) (Katharine Moon, "South Korean Movements against Militarized Sexual Labor," in *Militarized Currents*, eds. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 133-34). CM activists, in the effort to secure redress and reparations from Japan, have constructed Korean comfort women as innocent victims forced to endure a form of military sex slavery under Japanese imperial rule during WWII. The CM has been reluctant to embrace *kijich'on* women because they have been stigmatized and dissociated from *chŏngsindae* survivors as women who willingly engage in military prostitution for financial or geographic mobility. I contend that the situation in South Korea reveals the urgent need to develop new theoretical lexicons for conveying how choice, interest, and agential action can be deeply intertwined with domination towards an expanded, more inclusive Asian/American feminist politics.

[241] Jane Elliott, "Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain," *Social Text* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 85.

literary-aesthetic the potential for a "different imaginative lexicon of political experience," one that allows us to "envisio[n] moments in which agential action and domination have become intertwined with one another."[243]

*Fox Girl*, in particular, foreshadows and foregrounds the forms of suffering agency that contemporary neoliberalism engenders and relies on. Here I admittedly risk a degree of historical anachronism to draw a lateral connection between this chapter and the Asian/American cultural productions in the following chapter, which advance complex critiques of U.S.-directed global neoliberal capitalism specifically, the neoliberal restructuring of Japan. In my brief overview of girl studies in the introduction, I explain how one way neoliberalism disavows vulnerability is through the production of binary discourses and images of the "at-risk" vs. the "can-do" girl. Hyun Jin embodies the at-risk girl, who makes bad choices (e.g. needlessly digging into her past and shameful family secrets, which ultimately gets her disowned, and becoming a teenage mom when she can barely support herself). In contrast, we can read Sookie as the can-do girl, the girl who manages to figure out a way to survive without any assistance from the state or family relations. The logic of neoliberalism invites us to condemn Hyun Jin and praise Sookie's resilience but, as *Fox Girl* throws into sharp relief, what resilience gets you is a life of military prostitution. Keller significantly omits what happens to the can-do girl, the ending of Sookie's story, leaving readers instead with the image of the at-risk girl who still remains profoundly vulnerable. Hyun Jin only survives through pure chance—an unexpected, unlikely encounter with a benevolent American woman.

In this chapter, I examined the sexual repro-comfort labor young Asian women and girls were called upon to perform across different militarized contexts, as they remain uncared for

[242] Ibid, 87, 84.

[243] Ibid, 88.

themselves, precariously abandoned by the state. Beyond a complete stranger's benevolent hospitality, Hyun Jin has no governmental or even familial safety net that she can depend on. Chapter two takes up similar topics of affective labor, heightened vulnerability, and care around figurations of the *kawaii* Asian girl. I trace connections between the historical devaluation of feminized care labor and the marginalization of *care ethics* in a traditionally masculinist minoritarian politics of resistance. The following chapter seeks to recuperate an ethics of care as a generative way of countering and surviving conditions of neoliberal precarity.

CHAPTER 2

# *Kawaii* Magical Girls Save the Day

Animating a Minor Politics of Care

*Sailor Moon* (1992-1997), one of the most influential series in boosting the popularity of Japanese anime in the West, follows the adventures of the Sailor Scouts, a group of super-cute heroines who battle otherworldly monsters and endeavor to save Earth from forces of evil. *Sailor Moon* belongs to the genre of *mahō shōjo* or magical girl anime, which depicts the transformation of apparently ordinary Japanese schoolgirls into extraordinary girls with magical powers. Numerous critics, however, have taken *Sailor Moon* and the *mahō shōjo* genre as a whole to task for offering a compromised brand of feminism that upholds conservative feminine ideals and patriarchal power structures.[244] According to these critics, *mahō shōjo* anime renders feminism soft and easier to consume by presenting Girl Power in a safe, nonthreatening *kawaii* (or cute aesthetic) form.

Sailor Moon's power as the leader of the Sailor Scouts comes to be undermined by her animation as a cute, clumsy crybaby. Each time she comically stumbles or bursts into tears, she appears more *kawaii* to viewers. As Daniel Harris argues, cuteness denotes a not-fully-independent subject that betrays some helpless object-status.[245] Sailor Moon cannot fully stand alone, always needing the help of her fellow Sailor Scouts, friends, and cuddly animal familiars. In the context of Japan's surrender to Allied forces and lingering structural dependence on U.S.

[244] See Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 128-62; and Kumiko Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 1 (2014): 145-46. The Sailor Scouts draw their powers from *kawaii* magical objects in the form of jewelry or makeup and while they use their powers to effect change in the magical realm, they never think to try altering the patriarchal power structures of the real world that continue to circumscribe girls' lives (including their own).

[245] Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (Jackson, TN: Da Capo Press, 2001), 4-5.

economic and military aid enforced by Japan's postwar constitution, Sailor Moon's lack of autonomy easily lends itself to national allegory: while innately gifted with superpowers, Sailor Moon, like Japan, lacks sovereign control, thus disqualifying her as true leader. However Sailor Moon and the *kawaii* political aesthetics she exemplifies and rely upon arguably contour a radically new feminist and disabled notion of social and political collectivity. This form of collectivity evident not only in *Sailor Moon* but in the *mahō shōjo* genre and the travel of *mahō shōjo* to other material spheres is the focus of this chapter.

I attend to *kawaii* as a Japanese aesthetic-affective response to postwar political constraints within the U.S.-Japan alliance. The specific histories and texts under examination foreground precarious conditions of confinement where forceful, militant action would be counterproductive and untimely. I probe how *kawaii* allows for the theorization of a politics and ethics of care as a more prudent means of navigating the heightened conditions of precarity engendered by the expansion of U.S.-directed global neoliberal capitalism. Through an analysis of the anime, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (January 7, 2011 – April 21, 2011) and the migration of *kawaii* aesthetics to other genres, namely literature, I argue that these depictions of *kawaii* collectivity imagine an alternative to Western liberal notions of power/agency and political assemblage grounded in or preconditioned on an ideology of autonomous individualism. Through making explicit vulnerability, emotional liability, and attunement to the other, these animations of girl "acts," invite us to probe both the limits and possibilities of a nonnormate, not-fully-autonomous collective political subjectivity.

First, this chapter historicizes *kawaii* as a gendered postwar aesthetic embedded in histories of military imperialism between the United States and Japan. I examine how a forcefully demilitarized Japan claims and exerts a form of "soft power" through the export of its

*kawaii* cultural industries. In taking seriously the soft power of *kawaii*, I am not endorsing cute consumerism as a feminist tool but rather calling attention to how one effect of the mass commodification of vulnerability via *kawaii* (i.e. the doe eyes of anime girls) is to breed Marxist contempt for the vulnerable.

I probe how *kawaii* allows us to imagine an alternative affective politics of care through an analysis of the *mahō shōjo* series, *Madoka Magica*. The anime grapples with the new forms and feelings of social precarity that erupt from ongoing efforts to neoliberalize Japan. In addition to material structural reform of the country, the government urged "citizens to remake their subjectivity to become strong and independent individuals 'capable of bearing the heavy weight of freedom.' "[246] I contend that *Madoka Magica* helps to illuminate "the heavy weight of freedom,"[247] as the peculiar form of domination that contemporary neoliberalism perpetuates. The anime invites us to re-conceptualize the so-called "free" neoliberal subject as a precariously free-floating subject cut off from various life-sustaining interdependent social relations and networks. *Madoka Magica* foregrounds through its *kawaii* aesthetics the urgent need for a new form of heroism grounded in female homosocial care and collectivity.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine how *kawaii* collectivity relies upon and contours an ethics of care that can help expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies, which has historically privileged a militant, resistance-oriented ethical vision. To what extent does the soft power of *kawaii* necessarily imply a "soft politics" that lacks critical edge? Can *kawaii's* softness allow us to imagine a minor feminist politics not invested in edginess,

[246] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013), 28.

[247] Here I draw on and rework Jane Elliott's notion of "suffering agency." Neoliberal governance does not only dominate by compelling subjects to recognize their freedom to choose between two terrible choices but also by conjuring feelings of precarity—i.e. of floating precariously free without any prospect of stable, long-term employment or any governmental safety nets.

hardness, toughness? To the extent that edginess, hardness, and toughness are qualities precisely associated with militarism, can *kawaii* be understood as a demilitarized aesthetic form or an aesthetic of demilitarization? In an attempt to answer these questions I turn to an analysis of Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), an Asian American novel that engages with *kawaii* and "Asian cuteness" more broadly. *Full Sea* re-imagines heroism through the figure of Fan, a cute girlish Chinese woman, who operates as a vehicle of affective transmission, openness, and connection in the novel. I specifically examine the episode where Fan cares for a disabled group of trafficked Asian girls, which can be viewed as Lee's own uncanny rendering of a *mahō shōjo* team. The novel's depiction of a cloyingly interdependent female homosocial collectivity invites readers to take seriously the following questions: How do we imagine politically acts of care that assume the most minor, passive forms of inaction—i.e. touching, holding, being-with? To the extent that caring entails an agency of desisting (as opposed to resisting), how do we grapple with the politics and ethics of desisting?

### ***Kawaii*** **and Japan's Long Postwar**

*Kawaii*, a Japanese "cute" aesthetic popularly associated with Hello Kitty, anime, and manga, has over the last few decades achieved tremendous global popularity and commercial success. *Kawaii* images and goods can be seen everywhere from mass media and the Internet to shopping malls across the globe. While this phenomenon has prompted a growing body of research on *kawaii*, attempts to explain or evaluate *kawaii's* global impact often continue to be bound up with assumptions of its superficiality, triviality, and frivolousness, assumptions that owe largely to *kawaii's* association with visual commodity culture, the hyperfeminine, the

infantile, as well as its Japanese origins.[248] Christine Yano observes how "the antiglobalization critique of Hello Kitty shades ever subtly into racialized anti-Japanese or anti-Asian sentiment… [I]t is as if McDonald's, Coke, Starbucks, and Disney share an expectation (if not a right) to their global empire in ways that Hello Kitty does not."[249] Along with Yano and other scholars such as Anne Allison and Janice Brown, I probe the serious critical stakes of *kawaii*. I approach *kawaii* as a gendered postwar aesthetic that provides a salient index of violent structural legacies of military imperialism and global racial capitalism.

The rapid, unprecedented expansion of *kawaii* cultural industries in postwar Japan can be understood as a historically specific aesthetic-affective response to the nation's experiences during WWII.[250] As an aesthetic of smallness, weakness, and helplessness, *kawaii* registers the trauma of the atomic bombing, Japan's diminished sense of itself as a military-economic power. This postwar psyche, what contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami calls "the little boy syndrome," after the codename of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, must also be understood as structurally conditioned by the postwar constitution that stipulated Japan's junior status vis-à-vis the United States.[251] Article 9 of the constitution compelled Japan to relinquish its sovereign right to wage war and prohibited the nation from maintaining armed forces with warring potential.[252] The 1951 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty also allowed the United States to

[248] Janice Brown, "Re-framing 'Kawaii': Interrogating Global Anxieties Surrounding the Aesthetic of 'Cute' in Japanese Art and Consumer Products," *The International Journal of the Image* 1, no. 1 (2011): 2.

[249] Christine Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013), 196.

[250] For a longer etymology of *kawaii* see: Kanako Shiokawa, "Cute But Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sex*, ed. John A. Lent (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 95.

[251] See: Dong-Yeon Koh, "Murakami's Little Boy' Syndrome: Victim or Aggressor in Contemporary Japanese and American Arts?" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 393-412. "Little Boy" is the name of the art exhibition Murakami curated at the Japan Society of New York in 2005.

establish military bases throughout the country, thereby formalizing a material structure of dependency that relegated Japan to an impotent boy status.[253]

These postwar conditions and the "structures of feeling" they engendered came to be cohered and expressed via *kawaii* aesthetic forms. Noi Sawaragi emphasizes how the *kawaii* world of anime and manga "bespeak a profound psychological repression"—Japan's desire to forget the trauma of the atomic bombing and its own acts of military imperialism, to remain ever cute, young, and carefree.[254] In anime and manga, Sawaragi observes, war tends to be radically ahistoricized, sublimated into cute mushroom clouds and fantasy/science-fiction, as violence that never actually happened to Japan and violence that Japan never actually committed.[255] Critiquing the colonial legacies of *kawaii*, Murakami observes how "postwar Japanese society developed as a complete protégé of America, with its people encouraged to produce without really having a sense of autonomy."[256] The rampant, shallow appropriation of Western aesthetic ideals and

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[252] Noi Sawaragi, "On the Battlefield of 'Superflat': Subculture and Art in Postwar Japan," trans. Linda Hoaglund, in *Little Boy and the Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society, 2005), 202**.** Japan, however, was allowed to maintain *de facto* armed forces for purposes of self-defense, called the "Japan Self-Defense Forces," which can be viewed as a kind of extension of the national police force. In July 2014, the Japanese government approved a reinterpretation of Article 9 that would allow the country to exercise a form of collective self-defense—the right to take military action if one of its allies were to be attacked. This reinterpretation is supported by the United States but has been met with disapproval by some of Japan's neighbors such as China and South Korea. Some Japanese parties and citizens also consider this reinterpretation to be illegitimate because the Prime Minister circumvented constitutional amendment procedure. See: Linda Sieg and Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan takes Historic Step from Post-War Pacifism, Oks Fighting for Allies," *Reuters*, July 1, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/01/us-japan-defense-idUSKBN0F52S120140701.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Ibid, 204.

[255] See: Sawaragi, "On the Battlefield of 'Superflat,' " 200-201. Sawaragi offers somewhat of a sweeping generalization here. The feminized *kawaii* aesthetics he identifies develop alongside and are indeed co-constitutive of hyper-masculine postwar anime and manga productions that depict war, violence, and unfettered power through machines or some superpower.

[256] Takashi Murakami quoted in Midori Matsui, "Beyond the Pleasure Room to a Chaotic Street: Transformations of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties," in *Little Boy and the Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society, 2005), 227.

trends in the postwar art scene, he contends, points to an extreme form of Japanese cultural dependency.[257]

Following Harry Harootunian, we can understand how "postwar" can also be potentially transformed, through *kawaii*, into a "cultural trope" that refuses temporality, that "condenses the temporality of a duration into an endless spatial scape and present."[258] Harootunian observes how no other nation has dwelled so "long and longingly on the postwar" as Japan.[259] He denounces the way postwar has been so frequently invoked not to recall "the war itself, or…the vast complex history before the war," but rather "the experience of a time when others, notably Americans, prevented Japanese from actually forgetting their continuing status as a defeated nation," forcing them "to live in a space rather than the time of a defeated nation, oppressed by an alien force, groaning in the shadows of an imposed colonialism that had thrown the country and its people outside of history."[260] Harootunian contends that the obsessive repetition of this postwar trope has extended and transformed "physical-military occupation into a mental occupation…as constraining as the real thing."[261] While I take to heart Harootunian's call for Japan to move beyond its postwar state of mind, I maintain the usefulness of the "long postwar" as a framework for thinking the messy temporalities of war. The political aesthetics of *kawaii* helps to illuminate the unresolved tensions around the "post" in postwar and ways of coping with

[257] Takashi Murakami, "What is Kaikai Kiki," *Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.*, accessed March 5, 2015, http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/whatskaikaikiki/message/.

[258] Harry Harootunian, "Japan's Long Postwar: The Trick of Memory and the Ruse of History," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2000): 717. Harootunian draws on Louis Althusser's notion of a "space without places, a time without duration" (719).

[259] Ibid, 716.

[260] Ibid, 718-19.

[261] Ibid, 717.

and surviving conditions of confinement, dependency, and vulnerability marked by exaggerated, uneven relations of power.

In his 2002 article, Douglas McGray contends that while Japan's status as a military-economic power has diminished since its unconditional defeat during WWII and the 1990s financial bubble burst, the nation has accumulated a wealth of "soft power" by capitalizing on its cultural industries.[262] Soft power, as theorized by Joseph Nye, refers to power that operates via attraction and cooptation in contrast to "hard power," which relies on force, coercion, and payment.[263] As an aesthetic that invites its own consumption, *kawaii* can be viewed as an exemplary form through which Japan can claim and exert soft power. More than just a symptom of an infantilized, feminized postwar Japan, *kawaii* renders salient the complex aesthetic negotiation of the country's compulsory disarmament towards the production of a *disarming aesthetic* that seduces and sells spectacularly well.

The power and success of *kawaii* goods in the U.S. and elsewhere, however, hinge on what Koichi Iwabuchi terms *cultural deodorization*. The "cultural odor of a product is…closely associated with the racial and bodily images of a country of origin," so that deodorization entails the self-conscious attempt to evacuate any overt, negative markers of racial otherness/foreignness from cultural products in order to gain entry into desirable consumer markets.[264] The culturally deodorized product serves as the embodiment of the country of origin in its best and least offensive form, and for Japan, that form is *kawaii*—the antithesis of its

[262] Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy: The Magazine of Global Politics, Economics, and Ideas*, May 1, 2002, http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~ikalmar/illustex/japfpmcgray.htm.

[263] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

[264] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002), 28.

WWII image as a military imperial aggressor. *Kawaii's* soft power is thus heavily structured and circumscribed by global racial capitalism.

Taking seriously *kawaii's* soft power, I probe how *kawaii* invites us to re-imagine power within conditions of extreme political constraint (e.g. within the postwar U.S.-Japan alliance), where hard, forceful, militant resistance would actually be counterproductive. I argue that *kawaii* allows us to apprehend how power can assume affectively soft textures and forms as sometimes the only viable and indeed more ethical mode of response. The long postwar that *kawaii* indexes points to the need to theorize alternative temporalities for and means of exerting agency, especially as wartime Japan has transitioned into a neoliberal era of internalized, perpetual war. In the following section, I analyze how the *mahō shōjo* anime, *Madoka Magica*, foregrounds the heightened forms of precarity that neoliberalization engenders and re-imagines agency within and through *kawaii* collectivity.

**Re-imagining *Kawaii* for Precarious Times**

When *Madoka Magica* aired in early January 2011, the anime took Japan by storm, sparking an unexpected flurry of interest and excitement.[265] The anime boasted an impressive production cast that included, for example, director Akiyuki Shinbo (*Sayonara, Zetsubou-Sensei*, *Hidamari Sketch*, *Bakemonogatari*) and writer Gen Urobuchi (*Fate/Zero*, *Psycho-Pass*), but audiences remained skeptical of the *mahō shōjo* form, which felt tired and dated. The height of popularity of *mahō shōjo* anime can be traced to the 1990s and early 2000s, when the breakout

[265] See: Suda, "The Growing Phenomena that is *Madoka Magica*," Anime Afterlife Podcast, April 22, 2011, https://animeafterlifepodcast.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/the-growing-pheonomena-that-is-madoka-magica/; and Justin Wu, "The Madoka Legacy: A Brief Review of *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*," *The Artifice*, September 22, 2013, http://the-artifice.com/puella-magi-madoka-magica/.

success of *Sailor Moon* led to a proliferation of magical girl titles and franchises.[266] Marketed with all the familiar *kawaii* visual tropes of the genre (e.g. adorable young girls in fantasy costumes, cuddly animal familiars), *Madoka Magica* seemed to be just another *mahō shōjo* anime, offering more of the same soft, light entertainment. Viewers, however, quickly found themselves plunged into a dark, violent world that shattered all generic conventions, a world where *mahō shōjo* can lose hope and even die. The brutal decapitation of a *mahō shōjo* in episode three shocked fan communities worldwide, prompting a record-breaking number of discussion posts on online anime forums.[267]

Producer Atsuhiro Iwakami had asked Urobuchi to specifically write a "heavy" magical girl storyline.[268] *Madoka Magica* thus serves as an attempt to challenge popular conceptions of *mahō shōjo* anime as too cutesy, shallow, and frivolous, a minor genre that only children could appreciate.[269] As I will demonstrate, the anime grapples with issues from gendered violence and exploitation to depression and death through its insistently minor *kawaii* aesthetic forms. I contend that *Madoka Magica* also serves as an attempt to radically re-imagine the *mahō shōjo* genre for a postwar era of U.S. neoliberal influence. The anime resonates so powerfully with

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[266] Some examples include *Cardcaptor Sakura* (April 7, 1998-March 21, 20001) and the *Pretty Cure* franchise (2004-present).

[267] This scene of the witch, Charlotte, violently decapitating the *mahō shōjo*, Mami Tomoe, by biting off her head prompted the creation and viral spread of Headless Mami memes. The word "Mamiru" was also coined as an "intransitive verb meaning 'get guillotined like Mami' or 'have a miserable death' " and spread widely among Japanese internet users, not limited to fans of the anime series. See: "Headless Mami," Know Your Meme, accessed July 7, 2016, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/headless-mami.

[268] Gia Manry, "Interview with Atsuhiro Iwakami," *AnimeNewsNetwork*, September 7, 2011, http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interview/2011-09-07/interview-atsuhiro-iwakami.

[269] Male *otaku* have emerged as another growing target audience of *mahō shōjo* anime in recent decades. Series such as *Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha* (Oct. 1, 2004-Dec. 24, 2004) and *Moetan* (July 8, 2007-Sept. 3, 2007) have been specifically created for and marketed to fanboys. Not unlike the genre's other target audience, *otaku* have been charged as childlike and failing to out grow an immature obsession with anime and manga. For a nuanced analysis of the *otaku* fascination with *mahō shōjo* and other like characters see: Saitō Tamaki, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, trans. J. Keith Vincent and Dawn Lawson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [2000] 2011).

contemporary audiences because it foregrounds the heightened feelings and conditions of social precarity engendered by the neoliberal restructuring of Japan. As Anne Allison observes, some troubling trends in twenty-first century Japan include ever-growing populations of short-term, free-floating laborers who can no longer obtain the stable, lifelong employment that was once the hallmark of Japanese-style collective capitalism, of homeless, socially withdrawn youths so consumed with day-to-day survival that they cannot imagine or even hope for a better future, and of elderly persons suffering and dying alone, their putrefied bodies not discovered until weeks after the fact. Allison coins "Precarious Japan" to describe a new era of neoliberal governance marked by radical change, economic insecurity, crumbling social relations and channels of care, and environmental crises.[270] The broadcast of the last two episodes of *Madoka Magica* was interrupted by the devastating Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in March 2011,[271] which resulted in 15,844 official fatalities with an additional 3,394 missing, massive infrastructural damage, and nuclear fallout.[272] Precarity can thus be registered not just through the anime's *kawaii* aesthetic and narrative forms but also at the material, production level.

*Madoka Magica* gestures to how the heroic resistance depicted in conventional *mahō shōjo* anime can no longer be imagined or adequately address the new forms of violence in Precarious Japan. In what follows, I examine how the anime foregrounds these violences formally and narratively, proposing an alternative mode of heroism for surviving neoliberalization, a heroism grounded in female homosocial care and collectivity.

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[270] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 7.

[271] "This Week's *Madoka Magica* Not Aired in 'Self-Restraint,' " *AnimeNewsNetwork*, March 16, 2011, http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-03-16/this-week-madoka-magica-not-aired-in-self-restraint.

[272] Nobuhito Mori and Tomoyuki Takahashi, "Nationwide Post Event Survey and Analysis of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami," *Coastal Engineering Journal* 54, no. 1 (2011): 2.

**Super-cute and Super-deformed**

The *mahō shōjo* genre developed during the 1960s as a celebration of the imagined powers and unique status of the *shōjo*. In Japan's grueling enterprise society, the *shōjo* was "[a]ssumed to bear the least responsibilities and pressures to be socially productive," while the increase in families' disposable incomes during this era of rapid economic growth also transformed her into a powerful consumer.[273] Kumiko Saito argues that early *mahō shōjo* anime such as *Sally the Witch* (1966-1968) and *Secret Akko-chan* (1969-1970) reinforced the idea of adolescence as a magical period, where *shōjo* enjoy special freedoms and transformative powers.[274] But these series also constructed *shōjo*-hood as a temporary, interim period prior to adulthood and the undertaking of domestic housewife responsibilities.[275] By the 1990s, a new subgenre of *mahō shōjo* warrior anime emerged with the production of *Sailor Moon*. These anime re-imagined the *mahō shōjo* as a *kawaii* battle heroine, more powerful than ever before, capable of fighting monsters and forces of evil. Sharon Kinsella identifies a link between these cultural trends and shifting government policies towards women.

In the midst of severe, persisting recession, the Japanese government targeted women as an untapped reservoir of energy, labor, and skills that could be channeled towards economic revitalization.[276] The government sought to reform women into more independent, productive, and active participants in Japan's wage economy and as Kinsella observes, the pervasive images of able, heroic, *genki* (lively) girls in popular culture promoted a similar shift in female gender role and identity. We can thus see how the liberatory language and iconography of female

[273] Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters*,139.

[274] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis," 148.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Sharon Kinsella, *Schoolgirls, Money, and Rebellion in Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 4.

emancipation can be coopted to "serve neoliberal goals of making labor markets more flexible and free."[277] Neoliberal state feminism, as exemplified by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's "womenomics"—"a policy of opening top political and business positions to women"—seeks to primarily recharge the national economy, not to improve conditions of life for Japanese women.[278] The feminist rhetoric that womenomics mobilizes indeed works to obscure how neoliberal capitalism relies on the continued exploitation of women as cheap, part-time, temporary labor. According to the internal affairs ministry, Japanese women constitute 12.47 million of the nation's 18.13 million non-regular employees in 2012.[279] I turn to *Madoka Magica* as a *mahō shōjo* anime that invites us to critically interrogate attachments to neoliberal state feminism grounded in an ideology of individual female emancipation and self-empowerment. When does an attachment to that particular brand of feminism become, in the words of Lauren Berlant, "cruelly optimistic" or simply cruel?[280] What happens to the *shōjo* who cannot reform herself into an independent, able, productive neoliberal subject? How can we imagine alternative (minor) feminisms that more adequately address and respond to the violences of neoliberalization?

*Madoka Magica* offers a different genealogy of the *mahō shōjo* that brutally deconstructs the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the genre. In the anime, the titular character, Madoka,

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[277] Chelsea Szendi Schieder, "Womenomics vs. Women: Neoliberal Cooptation of Feminism in Japan," *Meiji Journal of Political Science and Economics* 3 (2014): 54.

[278] Ibid, 53. While "womenomics" promises to counteract institutionalized sexism and to allow women more power and freedom, Schieder emphasizes how it is a form of "trickle-down feminism" that mirrors "trickle-down economics," and its coincident problems (54). Even if womenomics helps increase female representation in upper-level politics and management, the benefits that individual, elite women gain will not necessarily trickle down to women at the bottom. For more critiques of Japanese neoliberal state feminism and womenomics see: Ayako Kano and Vera Mackie, "Is Shinzo Abe really a feminist?" *East Asia Forum*, November 9, 2013, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/11/09/is-shinzo-abe-really-a-feminist/.

[279] Schieder, "Womenomics vs. Women," 58.

[280] See: Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

and her friend, Sayaka, encounter a mysterious cat-like creature named Kyubey, who offers them a chance to have any one wish granted in exchange for becoming *mahō shōjo*, duty bound to battle witches to save humanity. As they consider whether or not to enter into a contract with Kyubey, a *mahō shōjo* named Mami kindly takes Madoka and Sayaka under her wing to show them what responsibilities and dangers they can expect as *mahō shōjo*. Meanwhile, Homura, also a *mahō shōjo*, attempts to dissuade the two, especially Madoka, from embarking on this precarious path.

A *mahō shōjo* contract is a particularly novel concept in the genre, where girls tend to either uncover their extraordinary magical origins or spontaneously gain magical powers by a stroke of chance/fate. A contract introduces and promotes a neoliberal logic of individual choice, risk, and responsibility—girls can choose whether to accept or reject its terms and should bear the consequences of that choice. In the anime, however, we come to see how the contract's technologies of voluntariness serve to mask material conditions of unfreedom. Kyubey approaches girls in especially vulnerable conditions to coerce them into making a contract. The animal familiar, for example, appears before Mami in the aftermath of a traumatic car accident to offer her deal it knows she cannot refuse—to either die along with her parents or contract herself to become a *mahō shōjo* and live.

The need to specifically contract *mahō shōjo* to battle the witches popping up all over the fictional Japanese city of Mitakihara points to a lack of adequate, formal structures of protection and care. As Takeda Hiroko observes, Japan never developed a comprehensive state welfare system as a result of the prioritization of economic recovery and growth following WWII.[281] In this emerging enterprise society, the family was Japan's "hidden capital," functioning as a de

[281] Hiroko Takeda, "Structural Reform of the Family and the Neoliberalisation of Everyday Life in Japan," *New Political Economy* 13. 2 (2008): 161.

facto welfare system, absorbing socioeconomic risks and providing care that allowed the government to cut back on welfare spending.[282] Takeda emphasizes how Japan managed to achieve high levels of economic growth and stability throughout the 1970s and 80s, in large part, by extracting the unpaid caretaking labor of Japanese housewives.[283] 1990s neoliberal reforms called for more women to enter the workforce but the state has failed to take up the welfare burden that Japanese housewives had previously shouldered.[284] *Madoka Magica* dramatizes a continuation of gendered exploitation as their Japanese daughters, *mahō shōjo*, are now called upon to assume the risks and responsibilities of preserving Japan's (social) security at the expense of their own personal security.

In the anime, Kyubey serves as the embodiment of the violent neoliberal logic and drive to maximize efficiency and results. *Mahō shōjo* in *Madoka Magica* draw their powers from magical objects called "soul gems." Viewers come to learn that Kyubey creates these soul gems by literally cleaving the girls' souls from their bodies to store inside new gemstone containers. The animal familiar rationalizes the dehumanization of the *shōjo* in the interest of re-making her into the most effective weapon against the witches. Kyubey contends that gemstones serve as the safest containers for the girls' souls during the battle and also help to render their bodies less sensitive to physical pain. *Madoka Magica* foregrounds how this process of weaponization both relies on and precipitates the violent alienation of *mahō shōjo* from humanity.

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[282] Ibid, 162.

[283] Ibid.

[284] According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), female participation in Japan's labor force has risen from a rate of 63.0% in 2011 to a rate of 66.0% in 2014 (See: Elena Holodny, "This might be the 'silver lining' for Japan," *Business Insider*, April 9, 2016, http://www.businessinsider.com/japanese-women-entering-workforce-2016-4). As Holodny notes, "Although that 66.0% rate is lower than those of women in northern European countries like Norway (75.9%) and Switzerland (79%), it's higher than other OECD nations, including South Korea (57.0%) and Italy (55.2%)." Japanese women also "make up the majority of Japan's part-time and contract workers and hold fewer upper-level management positions than women in other developed nations."

The final big reveal of the anime is that *mahō shōjo* have not only been contracted to battle witches, but to also degenerate into them. Viewers learn that Kyubey belongs to an emotionless alien species concerned with the depletion of total energy because the universe has reached a state of maximum entropy. This alien species discovers that young human girls have tremendous (re)productive, affective potentiality that can be used to counteract entropy. When a *mahō shōjo* degenerates into a witch, she releases a massive amount of affective energy back into the universe. This science fictional energy crisis can be read as an allegory of the collapse of Japan's financial bubble in 1991, which resulted in a full-blown, protracted recession from which the nation is still struggling to recover. Japanese-style collective capitalism was viewed to have reached a structural impasse, no longer capable of expanding or thriving in the new global economy of U.S.-directed neoliberal capitalism. Kyubey embodies the neoliberal free market principles considered external and alien to Japan during the 1990s, along with the promise of economic revitalization. But as the anime reveals, surplus energy/capital comes to be produced through the targeting of vulnerable, young girls and the invention of a violent system of perpetual war. *Madoka Magica* foregrounds how war has not really ended in Japan, simply assuming a new form. *Mahō shōjo* are compelled to battle witches, who represent not some alien enemy attacking Japan, but a fellow Japanese sister (a former *mahō shōjo*).

The anime suggests that neoliberal Japan is waging war with and against its own youth and conveys the trauma of this internalized war formally through the mutilation of *kawaii* aesthetics.[285] Illustrated with large eyes, a round head, and short, small vulnerable body, *mahō shōjo* serve as a figuration of the quintessential *kawaii* human. We can glean similar *kawaii* forms in the way witches are portrayed in the anime but these forms come to be hyper-

[285] Allison calls attention how an increasing number of youths today are joining the Self-Defense Forces, Japan's military. She asserts that this recent trend points to how a precarious profession in the military has become more preferable to the everyday precarity of irregular, short-term work (*Precarious Japan*, 50-2).

exaggerated and *de*-formed into something palpably nonhuman.[286] The witch Charlotte, for example, is illustrated with a deliberately accentuated, enlarged head on a diminutive, barely defined body that strongly evokes the *chibi* "super-deformed" *kawaii* style.[287] While *chibi* is generally considered a humorous, cutesy style of caricature, *Madoka Magica* attunes us to how *kawaii* can be de-formed to appear *kowai* (scary) and *kawaisō* (poor, pitiful). Sianne Ngai elaborates on how aggressive affects and helpless affects both inhere in *kawaii*, as an aesthetic that calls attention to the violence always implicit in its production.[288] The anime dramatizes how the *mahō shōjo* as *kawaii* human comes to be de-formed under the pressures of neoliberalization, her body stretched and strained into a blobby mass. The relentless extraction of the *mahō shōjo*'s youthful vitality and energy will eventually leave her too exhausted to continue fighting and cause her to degenerate into a witch to be killed by other *mahō shōjo* in an endless, violent cycle. *Madoka Magica* thus critiques how the structures of neoliberal economy and perpetual war operate together to promote the expansion of capital via the gendered exploitation of young women and girls.

The anime foregrounds how *mahō shōjo* must endure not only the real risk of physical, bodily harm and death but also psychic-affective pain. *Mahō shōjo* grow increasingly disillusioned and resentful of having to fight to protect people who do not recognize or appreciate their labors. Moreover, they have to compete against other *mahō shōjo* to battle witches and collect "grief seeds" in order to replenish the magic of their soul gems. By depicting how *mahō shōjo* need mechanisms to literally absorb the grief from their souls in order to keep

[286] The *kawaii* depiction of the witches in *Madoka Magica* is significant because villains in *mahō shōjo* anime tend to be rendered more mature and adult, in keeping with the genre's celebration of the power of the *shōjo*, of youthful innocence and femininity.

[287] "Super-Deformed," *TV Tropes*, accessed February 24, 2015, http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SuperDeformed.

[288] Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 4 (2005): 822-23.

on fighting, the anime calls attention to the terrible burden and labor of affective management imposed on young girls. It also becomes clear that this mode of affective management cannot be sustained and simply does not work because affects cannot be neatly disaggregated and managed in that way. *Mahō shōjo* inevitably become overwhelmed by grief—the grief of perpetual war, of sundered relational ties, and taken-for-granted caretaking labor, which triggers their degeneration into witches. But this process of degeneration is not simply contained within the body of an individual *mahō shōjo*. Her excessive grief spills outward, assuming external, material form as a witch's labyrinth.

The anime conveys the psychic-affective pain of neoliberalization in social, spatial terms. As *mahō shōjo* degenerate into witches, they also withdraw into strange, otherworldly labyrinths, physically and affectively disconnected from human society. We can perceive this disconnection formally through the extremely jarring, dissonant ways the witches' labyrinths are illustrated and animated compared to the rest of the anime. The freelance animation team, Gekidan Inu Curry, was the creative force behind the labyrinths. Through their surreal artwork, cut-out and stop-motion techniques, they construct disorienting *kawaii/kowai* otherworlds where animation itself has been rendered strange—movement becomes stilted, jerky, and spasmodic and can no longer be predictably located in *mahō shōjo*/witch characters, as a seeming object or ornament can suddenly dance and float across the screen. *Madoka Magica* thus renders visible the painful affective ruptures that neoliberalism engenders on the level of animation. The grief that *mahō shōjo*/witches suffer suffuses and animates the entire environment of the labyrinth, confronting viewers with the unsettling realization that these young girls who have been tasked with protecting humanity have themselves been cut off from all forms of human care. In this way, *Madoka Magica* attunes viewers to a new condition of life under neoliberalism, where bodies are

rendered more precarious through the absence of caretaking networks and structures. The anime suggests that a new form of heroism is needed to grapple with heightened material and affective insecurities. In the following section, I elaborate on how this heroism is grounded in an ethics of care.

**Wounded *Amae* and the Magic of Care**

*Mahō shōjo* warrior anime typically affirm the power of *shōjo* characters through heroic acts of resistance against otherworldly monsters and forces of evil. Yet militant, forceful resistance seems ineffectual and even counterproductive in the world of *Madoka Magica*, where the enemy turns out to be not some alien other but a fellow Japanese sister. The anime imagines an ethics of care as an alternative, more urgent form of heroism that can animate conditions of possibility for female homosocial collectivity.

While *mahō shōjo* anime generally follow the adventures of a *mahō shōjo* who acquires her magical powers within the first few episodes, *Madoka Magica* defers *mahō shōjo* transformation so that the protagonist is an ordinary girl for most of the thirteen episode series. Madoka occupies a relatively passive role in the anime, as a quiet observer instead of a *mahō shōjo* warrior. With no magical powers of her own, she cannot really "do" anything to help her *mahō shōjo* friend, Sayaka, as she must patrol the city and battle witches. But Madoka persistently accompanies Sayaka on her missions, lending Sayaka her affective bodily presence so that she will not have to confront danger and possibly, death, alone. Through Madoka, the anime imagines an alternative to heroic resistant action, foregrounding the power that inheres in a form of social affective intelligence. As she quietly observes *mahō shōjo*/witches languishing

in labyrinths of grief, doomed to a terrible, solitary death,[289] Madoka apprehends that what these alienated souls need most is affective care.

*Mahō shōjo* in *Madoka Magica* can be understood as the embodiment of wounded *amae*. In his seminal 1973 thesis, psychiatrist Takeo Doi theorizes *amae* as an affect of dependence that structures both Japanese thought and society. Doi traces *amae* to the kind of helplessness exemplified in an infant-mother relationship, which entails both a desire and expectation to be taken care of.[290] Although his work tends toward a troubling form of Japanese cultural essentialism, the concept of *amae* productively invites us to attend to networks and modes of social dependence.[291] The postwar system of Japanese collective capitalism relied on and operated through *amae*. Anne Allison explains how a "knot of dependencies, labors, and attachments" closely entwined the family with the corporation and allowed Japan to achieve a "super stable society" marked by both rapid economic growth and high levels of job security (at least for male workers) in the 1970s and 80s.[292] In post-bubble Japan, however, that same "corporate familialism" was singled out as an obstacle to economic growth, as cultivating an unhealthy "dependency culture" that inhibited Japanese peoples from developing initiative and entrepreneurship.[293] *Amae* gained negative, frivolous, and infantile connotations, as a putatively

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[289] *Mahō shōjo*/witches in *Madoka Magica* strongly evoke the new forms of social precarity that Allison discusses in *Precarious Japan*. We can read *mahō shōjo*/witches as figurations of *hikikomori*, the growing number of youths who retreat into their rooms for months on end, unable to bear the pressure of social interaction and of being in the world, as well as Japan's neglected, forgotten elderly, who waste away and die solitary deaths.

[290] Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. John Bester (New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1973), 74-5.

[291] While Doi maintains that *amae* is not a uniquely Japanese cultural phenomenon, he asserts: "The fact that the word *amae* exists in Japanese whereas nothing corresponding to it exists in Western languages can be interpreted as meaning that the Japanese are particularly sensitive to *amae* and set great store by it, whereas Westerners are not and do not (Ibid, 68).

[292] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 10-11.

[293] Ibid, 22, 28.

self-indulgent form of dependency on others for things one can do by oneself. Even Doi believed that *amae* had spread too pervasively in the postwar era, contending that the "aim from now on, surely, must be to overcome *amae*."[294] We can understand neoliberalization as Japan's effort to overcome *amae* through structural reforms such as the deregulation of labor policies, the increasing privatization of social services, and the endorsement of an ideology of self-responsibility.[295] *Madoka Magica* helps render salient how *amae* is not overcome, but rather deeply wounded in the process of neoliberalization.

In the anime, the eruption of labyrinths of grief points to the unresolved social tensions around the dismantling of networks and structures of care, to conditions of blocked or frustrated *amae*. While *mahō shōjo* can be read as subjects who fail to remake themselves into strong, independent neoliberal individuals, I contend that *Madoka Magica* invites us to conceptualize *amae* differently, as not signaling failure, pathological dependence, or arrested development, but rather a profound sense of woundedness, of being orphaned with no one to turn to or depend on. The anime redefines heroism in terms of Madoka's ethics of care, her sensitivity to and concern with restoring the flow of *amae*. As Madoka finally contracts herself to Kyubey, she wishes for the elimination of all witches past, present, and future. Her wish ruptures the entire *mahō shōjo*-witch system, allowing for the structural reorganization of the universe. Madoka spreads herself across all space and time, absorbing the grief of all *mahō shōjo* so that they will not have to degenerate into witches and die alone. She dissolves into the universe, becoming an incorporeal, spectral presence who quietly watches over all *mahō shōjo* and whom *mahō shōjo* will join in their afterlife.

[294] Doi, *Anatomy of Dependence*, 84.

[295] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 28.

As the dissolution of the *mahō shōjo*-witch system comes at the price of Madoka's physical dissolution, the anime depicts how an ethics of care entails the sacrifice of bodily integrity/autonomy. But we can also understand an ethics of care as precisely challenging a Western liberal ideology of autonomous individualism, the idea that autonomy is the desired *telos* of human development and a requisite for political agency. Instead of sacrificing her autonomous political body, Madoka can be said to claim a collective political subjectivity. Subverting the normative temporal and subject parameters of a contract, Madoka makes a magical wish contract that radically alters the terms of all other *mahō shōjo* contracts past, present, and future so that they might all be united in each other's care. Madoka thus promotes the transmission and flow of *amae*, but not through the traditional caretaking hierarchies of Japan's postwar "family-corporate system."[296] The anime presents new, lateral arrangements and channels of care through an emergent female homosocial collectivity.

Madoka's wish does not resolve all the conflicts in the anime universe, as *mahō shōjo* still have to fight *akuma* (demons), ongoing violences of neoliberalization that have simply assumed different forms. I contend, however, that Madoka's ethics of care points to ways of navigating and surviving conditions of precarity that can help expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies. The field has historically privileged a masculinist politics of militant resistance, where female homosocial care is often politically illegible as a form of resistant action and considered "synonymous with an acquiescing to injustice and unevenness."[297] Viet Nguyen calls attention to how Asian American studies' vision of itself as a site of "Yellow Power" opposition in academia, stemming from its 1960s civil rights origins, has heavily shaped

[296] Ibid, 22-8.

[297] R. C. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America*, 156.

the field's critical practices.[298] Nguyen critiques Asian Americanist tendencies to idealize and read for resistance at the expense of other more flexible, politically ambivalent strategies. Asian Americanists who have offered more nuanced analyses of flexible modes of accommodation/assimilation tend to emphasize how they serve as strategic means for achieving socioeconomic mobility.[299] In spite of their political ambivalence then, practices of accommodation/assimilation have been recuperated for the way they enable a form of upward movement and forward progress. But what do we do with caring, as a particular mode of accommodation/assimilation that promises neither?

The capacity of care to render intolerable conditions more tolerable through the production of a sense of warmth, comfort, and security seems to promote stasis, taking us nowhere. I probe how we can approach caring differently, as a response to conditions of injustice and unevenness that structurally foreclose any possibility of upward movement or forward progress. Rather than a static form of surrender then, caring, which entails the transmission of affect and fosters affective connections, can point to ways of moving and "growing sideways," to borrow Kathryn Bond Stockton's term, from a structural impasse.[300] In this regard, I argue that an ethics of care can productively *reorient* critical political frameworks of Asian American studies and ethnic studies more broadly.

*Madoka Magica* foregrounds how an austere neoliberal regime suppresses *amae* and engenders a "care deficit" through its *kawaii* visual aesthetics.[301] I examine in the second half of

[298] Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (Oxford UP, 2002), 3-5.

[299] See for example: Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999).

[300] See: Stockton, *The Queer Child.*

[301] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 126.

this chapter how Chang-rae Lee engages with *kawaii* in his novel *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) towards the imagining of a minor Asian Americanist politics of care.

**Characterizing Asian/American Cuteness**

*Full Sea* (2014) transports readers roughly 200 years into the future, when nation-states around the world have fragmented into three different, highly stratified societies: "Charter villages," where the top 1% lives, "production facilities," where a laboring class produces pristine foodstuffs for the elite Charter class, and the "Open Counties," a lawless no-man's land where everyone else must struggle to survive. In the futuristic world that Lee maps, we can see the exaggerated projection of conditions in our present global reality—Oxfam reports that by 2016 the wealthiest 1% will own more than the rest of the world combined, while perpetual war has become a normalized condition of life in certain regions such as the Middle East.[302] *Full Sea* follows the odyssey of Fan, a girlish Chinese woman who ventures beyond the secure confines of the B-Mor production facility to the Open Counties in search of her disappeared boyfriend, Reg. As an epic genre, the odyssey traditionally features a larger-than-life hero on some grandiose quest. By centering his novel on the adventures of an "exquisitely tiny" character, Lee suggests that the fragmented post-national environment of *Full Sea* cannot give rise to any epic heroes that can galvanize people into a resistance force and lead them to overthrow structures of oppression.[303] Lee also undermines Fan's individual agency by deploying a collective narration

[302] Jon Slater, "Richest 1% will own more than all the rest by 2016," *Oxfam*, January 19, 2015, http://www.oxfam.org.uk/blogs/2015/01/richest-1-per-cent-will-own-more-than-all-the-rest-by-2016. See also: Faith Karimi, "Wealthiest 1% will soon own more than rest of us combined, Oxfam says," *CNN*, January 19, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/19/world/wealth-inequality/.

[303] Chang-rae Lee, *On Such a Full* Sea (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 198. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically.

style. He writes *Full Sea* not from Fan's perspective but rather the first-person plural perspective of B-Mor.

Lee constructs B-Mor (the former Baltimore) as a caricature of the China of the U.S. cultural imagination, a society that values safety, security, and stability, where communal bonds are maintained via a collective devotion to work and clan ties: "we have not allowed anyone to shirk his or her duties or to become lazy and dependent. B-Mor works because we work, our sense of purpose, driving us that extra measure, that extra hour" (14-15). Lee juxtaposes this form of Chinese socialism with the individualistic neoliberal risk culture of the Open Counties and Charter Villages, which serve as caricatures of the U.S. The counties can be indeed viewed as the dark underside and product of U.S. neoliberalism, where the dismantling of social welfare programs and governmental safety nets force people to resort to violent and desperate measures to fend for themselves. The fact that many people in the counties are former Charters reveals how a Charter lifestyle, characterized by a relentless pursuit of capital and extravagant expenditure, carries the risk of extreme downward economic mobility as much as the possibility of fantastic prosperity. Through his novel Lee compels readers to question whether we want either type of society—a society characterized by Chinese socialism or U.S. neoliberalism—to endure. *Full Sea* ultimately reframes our global future around the figure of a tiny young woman instead of China or the U.S.

One of the main criticisms of Lee's novel revolves around Fan's lack of interior depth and physical or moral growth, how she remains "ever the same and the same and the same" (152).[304] Instead of reading Fan as a flawed, under-developed literary character, we can

[304] See: Diane Johnson, "Let's Go to Dystopia," *The New Yorker*, June 5, 2014, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/jun/05/chang-rae-lee-dystopia/; and Mark O'Connell, "Our Fan," *The Slate*, January 8, 2014,

understand her as performing a different narrative function altogether. The collective narrator observes that "in terms of character," Fan was "not terribly distinctive," but she "did stand out physically, and not because she was beautiful. She was pleasing enough to look at. She was tiny, was the thing, just 150 centimeters (or not quite five feet tall), and slim besides… At sixteen she had the stature of a girl of eleven or twelve" (3). The narratorial turn from Fan's indistinctive character to an extended description of her cute bodily form, her tininess and neotenous, childlike appearance, points to how Fan's most important function in the novel can be discerned on the surface via surface reading practices.[305] To the extent that an ideology of autonomous individualism inheres in literary character, Lee's refusal to develop Fan's character can be understood as an attempt to formally disrupt and challenge that ideology. I argue that Lee constructs a cute protagonist to contend with the ways in which Asian women have been historically fetishized as girl-like, docile, pliable, and easily handled and to re-imagine heroism in a minor, cute scale towards an alternative affective politics of care.

**Towards a Different Social Ecology**

Fan primarily functions in the novel as a vehicle of affective transmission, openness, and connection that catalyzes new modes of social coalescence. Through Fan, Lee not only imagines a different kind of heroine but also a different social ecology:

> [O]ne of the funny things about Fan, …is that when it mattered most she was an essentially *physical* being, rather than some ornate bundle of notions, wishes,

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http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2014/01/chang_rae_lee_s_dystopian_science_future_novel_on_such_a_full_sea_reviewed.html.

[305] On surface reading see: Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1-21; and Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 371-91.

> dreams. Perhaps that other sort is more often seen to be heroic…but we B-Mors—and maybe now you, too—respond more deeply…to someone's determined gaze, or the way they move across a room, or simply stand there, as Fan did that day at young Joseph's wake, with such solidity that you might think the world and everything in it was for a flash, turning around them. (243-44, emphasis in original)

The first-person plural narrator begins by accentuating Fan's physicality as the basis of a kind of heroism distinct from heroic character, "some ornate bundle of notions, wishes, dreams." The B-Mors invite readers to seriously contemplate, along with them, the heroic potential of actions that manifest as passive inaction—Fan's "determined gaze," her movement across the room, and still standing presence. Yet this bodily choreography comes to be, through the odd pronomial shifts in Lee's narration, depersonalized—not so much Fan's, as "someone's"—and also pluralized, as singularity suddenly gives way to the image of a nonsingular "they" moving and standing together. By the end of the sentence, we find that what "the world and everything in it" turns around is not simply Fan's "*physical* being" with all of its assured "solidity" but rather, her in adjacency to Joseph, standing beside and with him in *solidarity*. The funny thing about Lee's syntactical patterning here and indeed the novel as a whole is that what appears to be about a singular character delivers, in "a flash," a tangible state of non-singularity, of not aloneness.

Instead of a novel "about" Fan, *Full Sea* is animated by a different, lateral prepositional force of "being-with" Fan. Engaging closely with the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, José Muñoz emphasizes the importance of recognizing how being cannot be anything but *being-with* as singularity is always marked by a kind of plurality.[306] For Nancy, Muñoz notes, "the literariness

[306] Muñoz, " 'Gimme Gimme This… Gimme Gimme That,' " 101. See also: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being-Singular Plural* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000).

of literature, …its arbitrary, aleatory, and fragmentary nature" can disrupt a mythical, holistic sense of community and allow for "another sense of being-in-common to reveal itself."[307] Lee's experimentation with a collective narration style in *Full Sea* can be viewed as an attempt to enact this idea of being-with formally. He ultimately fashions a novel that is less the odyssey of some mythic heroine, than the speculative odyssey of all B-Mor inhabitants. Primarily driven by the speculative force and energy of the B-Mors, *Full Sea* stages a collective effort to imagine how to be with Fan and what being-with her might mean for their production facility.

Fan's departure attunes the B-Mors to how they are not wholly secure within their walls. She leaves in search of Reg, a B-Mor inhabitant who had been disappeared because his lack of "C" or cancer genes renders him a valuable experimental medical subject for elite scientists. In leaving after Reg, Fan stirs the B-Mors to question, what Berlant would call their "cruelly optimistic" attachment to the production facility and the modest good life it promises. But before she goes Fan also poisons all the fish in her tank, a shockingly violent act that disrupts a reading of Fan as a cute, caring figure who only yearns to be reunited with her boyfriend and the father of her unborn child. This instance foregrounds the highly contingent and improvisational form of Fan's ethics of care, which cannot be dictated by any singular ideology, even nonviolence. In the novel, rumors that "C" might be linked to fish, precipitate a sharp reduction in sales that threaten to collapse the entire B-Mor economy. We can thus understand how Fan destroys the fish she so "carefully raised" (11) as her own children to solve the B-Mors' problem of oversupply and attune them to the precarious design of their production facility: "As conceived, as constituted, we may in fact be of a design unsustainable. Which is why we needed Fan... For within her was the one promise that could deliver us, the seed of all our futures, Charters' and B-Mors' and even

[307] Ibid, 105, 104. See also: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

the shunned souls out in the counties" (104). Here the collective narrator refers not to Fan's gestating fetus, her female reproductive labor, but rather a different kind of "seed" that she produces through her affective caring labor—a common that can link the three fragmented societies of *Full Sea*.

The novel invites us to theorize the common in terms of an affective politics and ethics of care.[308] We see how caring sometimes impels Fan to act in typically heroic, resistant fashion. On the way to the Charter Village of Seneca, Fan and her companions, Quig and Loreen, encounter the Nickelmans, a wandering circus family that aspires to a sustainable, vegetarian lifestyle: they live under a leafy tree canopy, forage for their own food, and put on acrobatic performances in exchange for any other goods they might need. Through the Nickelmans, Lee seems to depict a possible alternative utopian lifestyle, but this image is shattered with the horrific revelation that the Nickelmans engage in homicidal practices, feeding their adult human guests to their canine companions. Whereas Fan's childlike form and acrobatic flexibility—qualities historically racialized with respect to Asian women—render her an ideal new member for their circus family, the Nickelmans insist that Quig and Loreen have to be excluded because full-sized adults are simply not malleable enough for their familial ecology. Unable to accept these exclusionary boundaries, Fan reacts swiftly and decisively. She slashes one of the Nickelman girls with a fence spike, holding her hostage until the family frees Quig and Loreen. While Lee depicts Fan here as a cute super-heroine (not unlike that of a *mahō shōjo* warrior), single-handedly rescuing two adults, this typically heroic form of resistant action becomes downplayed within the context of the narrative, not afforded much narrative time or development.

[308] Many scholars have theorized *the commons* as a public communal space/locale that renders possible different kinds of political gathering and organizing, but I am more interested in how Lee's novel allows us to theorize *the common* in terms of a "being-in-common" (in the vein of Jean-Luc Nancy).

Fan's heroic resistance against the Nickelmans immediately gives way to compliance as she goes along with Quig and Loreen's plans to traffic her to an elite Charter couple. In the following section I probe the more ambivalent dimensions of Fan's affective politics and ethics of care, where caring assumes the most passive form of inaction. I examine how Lee de-centers resistance to foreground a different kind of agency, an agency of *desisting*. To the extent that resisting entails the consolidation of boundaries, as the very means through which parts become apart, and the dividual becomes the Individual, desisting can illuminate an alternative politics and ethics of social being. In Asian American studies and Ethnic studies more broadly, desisting has been negatively associated with a form of collaboration or compliance, yet *Full Sea* invites readers to seriously grapple with the following questions: When might desisting constitute a more appropriate form of political action? What kinds of collectivities can desisting render possible? The novel compels readers to consider how desisting can serve as a means of ethically negotiating a complex web of affective ties and obligations. Fan arguably allows herself to be trafficked to help Quig acquire a new drill-bit for his medical compound and Loreen obtain a geno-chemo drug for her sick son. The ethical dimension of desisting can be understood here not in terms of the predictable outcome (i.e. the trafficking of Fan) but rather in terms of an intervention that opens up previously unseen or denigrated actions as possible and necessary. As I will demonstrate, affective care via desisting becomes the condition of possibility for female homosocial political collectivity in the novel.

**Fan's Choreography of Care**

The Seneca village episode unfolds against a backdrop of mass panic over the sudden outbreak of bird and swine flu epidemics, which prompted the eradication and indefinite banning

of pets throughout the Charters. Lee depicts how the persisting demand for cute, cuddly companions comes to be satisfied via the trafficking of Asian girls, a population that has been historically racialized as pet-like, nonthreatening, and affectively available. Whereas Fan's physical, acrobatic flexibility appeals to the Nickelmans, Lee suggests that her girl-like docility, as a different racialized and gendered form of Asian malleability, appeals to the Charter couple's respective erotic and affective needs. Seeking a compliant sex object, Mister Leo preys on Fan during her sleep. She only manages to evade his attempted rape because Miss Cathy intervenes and stops him by striking him on the head. Unlike her husband, Miss Cathy does not intend to physically assault Fan but rather "keep" her along with the seven other Asian girls she has rescued (albeit too late) from her husband's sexual predations, as cute companion-pets. Every night Miss Cathy receives one girl to sleep in the tiny child bed next to her adult-sized one, waking up at some point to trade places. Something about lying in the girl's spot helps to soothe Miss Cathy to sleep after her nightly bad dream. Lee alludes to how Miss Cathy has been similarly sexually traumatized by a paternal figure and seeks to enact some kind of rescue fantasy for her younger self, but readers come to see that she delivers Fan and the others from the hands of a sexual predator into a "literally hobbling protective custody" (223).

"The Girls," as they are called by the narrator, are kept in a large locked room. Though of different heights and ages, the Girls dress alike and have surgically altered their eyes to resemble those of anime characters: "Their bizarrely large eyes made them look deeply attentive, like some puppy or doe who craves only your company and succor" (212-13). Engaging with the *kawaii* aesthetics of Japanese anime, Lee renders *kawaii* uncanny by foregrounding structuring conditions of captivity and gendered exploitation. Enlarged anime eyes, surgical alterations requested by the Girls themselves, can be understood as 1) an attempt to prolong their affective

value, their cute girlish appearance and adorability against their growth into adulthood and 2) their immature political need to base their collectivity on some form of somatic homogeneity. While the Sailor Scouts, with the same *kawaii* orb-like eyes and ideal thin female bodies, offer a pleasing visual effect of group coherence, the Girls' sameness evokes disturbing, uncanny affects as Lee foregrounds how prolonged conditions of captivity compelled them to grow sideways and more similar (instead of up and apart). Lack of sunlight has caused the Girls to develop chronically sore joints and fragile bones and to suffer from periodic bouts of intense fatigue: "they were definitely stooped in their posture, slope-shouldered and none very tall, which made them look even more like blood sisters than they already did" (218).

Through this cloyingly interdependent and fragile female homosocial collectivity, Lee foregrounds the need for a different kind of political action, or rather, the need to temper/adjust action in response to particular political climates. While "[a]nother sort of person might have thoughtlessly disrupted their corpus," Fan desists because she recognizes that the Girls cannot handle any major disruption (222). Lee depicts Fan's desisting agency as a talent of being sensitively attuned to the pulse of a neighbor, friend, or proximal organisms. Yet it is easy to see how Fan's acts of care can be misconstrued as passivity or a failure to act. In a Western liberal politics that emphasizes autonomous individualism and militant resistance, Fan's choreography of care—"regularly moving about the room, breaking…to take a cup of tea or use the toilet, and then linger alongside whoever was busy in the kitchen or bathroom"—is politically illegible (222). Social affect theory, however, offers a generative way of re-conceptualizing care in terms of the dynamic potentiality and material effects of affective transmission. Theresa Brennan observes how the modern notion of the individual has promoted the assumption "that emotions

are naturally contained, going no farther than the skin."[309] Pursuing the once common, age-old knowledge of affective transmission, Brennan emphasizes the social dimension of affects, which are not bound within individual organisms but leak and circulate in the atmosphere, as depleting and enhancing energies.[310] We can thus understand how Fan, in "regularly moving about the room," promotes the transmission and circulation of affect. Her caring affects, transmitted to the Girls as she dances around and alongside them, transforms the Girls in material ways, inspiring them to move to a faster tempo: "they seemed to be quicker in rising from bed…while taking their meals with…newly piqued appetites" (219-20). The pace of their collaborative art project also picks up speed: "Six [had] to draw several new scenes a day instead of just one, the girls behind her more focused and engaged sometimes even nudging one another because of their tighter assembly" (220). This sharper focus and tightness of assembly allow the Girls to devise and implement a plan of escape for Fan.

Four and Five ingest expired foods tainted with botulism in hopes that Miss Cathy will send for an ambulance and unlock their room, giving Fan an opportunity to slip away. When a doctor comes to examine the girls, he insists that both need to be hospitalized immediately, otherwise they could die. But Miss Cathy refuses. With the lives of Four and Five hanging in the balance, the collective narrator comments that we would expect Fan to resist but she simply goes along with Miss Cathy's suggestion to have an impromptu mani-pedi party. In this life-and-death crisis, the narrator questions how Fan can possibly waste time having her nails painted: "[W]hat was she intending? What was she waiting for?" (245). While Fan's patience here can be seen as highly irresponsible, I take seriously this minor scene as Lee's critique of the fetishization of resistance, how resistance cannot be summoned in every instance and might not always be the

[309] Theresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004), 2.

[310] Ibid, 6.

appropriate mode of action: "Had they been different souls, Fan might have tried to rally them…, had them ring their keeper and bind her up with the belts of their terry robes... Perhaps someday they would thus act, but for now Fan could see that there was no chance for such an uprising" (244-45). Surmising that the time is not right for resistance, Fan joins the Girls and Miss Cathy in their manicure ministrations to wait for the political mood to change. Lee foregrounds in this scene how *desisting*, deliberately refraining from disrupting or denouncing, can sometimes be the more ethical and indeed only viable course of action.

Instead of viewing Fan's participation in the mani-pedi party as a failure to act, we can understand it differently as an improvisational response and attempt to affectively accommodate fragile minds so used to repressing trauma. Fan perceives that what Miss Cathy and the Girls need most in this moment of crisis is affective bodily care via a familiar grooming ritual. Lee compels readers to take seriously the ritual of manicure and pedicure as not simply a frivolous activity of feminine beautification but one with important therapeutic value.[311] In desisting, Fan demonstrates a recognition of the Girls' affective attachment to Miss Cathy and vice versa. She perceives how Miss Cathy figures less as an antagonist (someone to resist) and more as an unstable older sister, who has been similarly sexually traumatized and needs affective care. By displacing the normatively fast-paced, exciting climatic action with a form of action sized down to inaction—girls huddling together painting each other's nails, Lee invites readers to attend to and imagine politically a form of affective bodily care. This protracted, descriptive scene of affective care, which evokes readerly frustration and impatience, serves as Lee's attempt to stage

[311] Probing the real therapeutic value of feminine beauty and grooming rituals, Miliann Kang recounts the extraordinary story of Phaly Nuon, a survivor of Pol Pot's killing fields who has dedicated her life to helping other Cambodian women reclaim their lives. The three-step healing process she has designed includes teaching these women how to give and receive manicures: "Nuon…engages these women in the exchange of manicures as a way of bringing them back into their bodies, then back into caring and trusting contact with other human bodies, and finally back into their own lives and social worlds" (*The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 253).

formally how resistant political action cannot be called forth at any instance, how political change can be excruciatingly slow and sometimes all one can do is wait and have a mani-pedi party.

Fan eventually leaves Miss Cathy and the Girls because it seems that as a vehicle of affective transmission, openness, and connection, she produces new modes of social coalescence but cannot become settled herself, always on the move to reshape/restructure some other social terrain. The first-person plural narrator describes the changes that occur after Fan's departure: "[The Girls] and Miss Cathy had decided they would spread out into the rest of the house, using their former room however they might like, or not at all, as now Miss Cathy was saying she wanted the house filled, all the time, and forever" (268). While this experiment does not fully pan out, as the Girls retreat to their former quarters, too scared by all the rooms, hallways, and sunlight, Mala asserts that they intend to try again soon. In spreading out, Miss Cathy and the Girls brave potential changes to the composition and structure of their corpus, literally making room for a new kind of political collectivity to emerge.

To close my discussion of *Full Sea* I want to dwell on the shadowy character of Mala, who embodies the all too familiar Third World domestic caretaker. To financially provide for her family in the Open Counties, Mala must deprive them of her affective bodily presence and care. Her affective care indeed becomes re-directed and commodified in the domestic work she performs for Miss Cathy and the Girls. Mala's servant status also excludes her from their homosociality. When Fan asks Miss Cathy if she and Mala both intend to keep her, Miss Cathy coldly retorts: "Mala has nothing to do with anything" (208). Miss Cathy's visceral objection to a proposed sociality between her and Mala can be understood as a desire to preserve class divisions and disavow any intimacy with a Third World Asian female laborer. In a later phone

with Mala, however, Fan learns that Miss Cathy has agreed to let Mala's family come live with her and the Girls. Lee thus gestures to an inchoate global restructuring that can allow for new ways of being-in-common to emerge.

**Towards a Minor Politics of Care**

This chapter began by historically contextualizing *kawaii* as a gendered postwar aesthetic. Now I want to consider how *kawaii* formally and affectively animates a *post*-war imaginary, inviting us to seriously contemplate what a politics *after*-war might look like, a politics that insists on the post-ness of war and eschews militancy in theory as well as praxis. I thus argue for an understanding of postwar as not just a specific historical period but also as an affective political orientation (*post*-war). In brief, *kawaii* allows us to theorize a *soft affective care politics* that can expand the political imaginary of Asian American studies and Ethnic studies more broadly. In addition to being historically invested in a masculinist politics of militant resistance, which can be traced to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, these fields continue to experience material pressure to prove their toughness, edginess, and seriousness in academia. But as I have tried to demonstrate, militant resistance has come to deeply circumscribe what acts count as political.

The privileging of militancy in Asian American studies precludes an attention to vulnerable, weak, and wounded bodies that fall outside of that affective-political imaginary, bodies that do not evoke aggressive affects and cannot be mobilized towards revolution. Yet perhaps what those bodies urgently need is not a revolution at all, but something else: minor acts of care. Militancy also represents a refusal to attend to how the neoliberalization of higher education promotes austerity measures that confine and hobble the field on a material level,

while insisting on the kind of untimely, unrealistic "escape" that both Madoka and Fan refuse. Madoka's commitment to *imagining* escape but *within* the terms of possibility of the *mahō shōjo* wish contract and Fan's sensitive attunement to the Girls' fragile minds and corpus demonstrate that they have not emotionally invested in the vision of the "good life" conjured by Kyubey and Miss Cathy, respectively. In this sense, *kawaii* political aesthetics can be understood as a critique of neoliberal militarism and militancy that also refuses cruel optimism.

Like the *mahō shōjo* warriors in *Madoka Magica*, Fan embodies all the contradictions of a simultaneously can-do and at-risk girl. She emerges, in the novel, as highly capable—e.g. bravely leaving B-Mor on a mission to find her disappeared boyfriend and rescuing her adult companions, Quig and Loreen, from the homicidal Nicklemans. Yet Fan is also always, precariously vulnerable—i.e. as a young pregnant woman traveling alone through unfamiliar territories. As readers, we like to gloss over the various ways Fan is at-risk to focus on her can-do qualities and moments in the novel. It is also tempting to read the moments where Fan fails to act such as the protracted mani-pedi scene with Miss Cathy and the Girls as a mere anomaly to her otherwise can-do character or as a parody of political action. But what does it mean to only remember and affirm Fan's resistant acts, which simultaneously entails the forgetting of her extreme vulnerability? This mode of reading, I contend, betrays a cruelly optimistic attachment to resistance and revolution as a means of resolving conditions of inequality and injustice. I perform a lateral reading of the Seneca Village episode as a way of taking seriously Fan's vulnerability, of ethically desisting from denouncing a young girl for not resisting, tackling, and binding up her adult captor like some magical super-heroine.

The various depictions of *kawaii* collectivity that I examined in this chapter can provide the basis for a new Asian Americanist affective politics. *Madoka Magica* and *Full Sea* both

grapple with a wounded nonnormate, not-fully-autonomous mode of social being and expose, in James Kyung-Jin Lee's terms, the "fiction that doing something…is the ethical priority for Asian Americans."[312] If we refrain from celebrating the exceptionally productive, resistant Asian American political body that is always "doing something," we can allow room for alternative political collectivities to form around and through sickness and vulnerability. What can we in the field gain from desisting, from sitting with the recognition of our complicities and the limits of our scholastic efforts? How might prioritizing an ethics of care over Yellow Power militancy allow Asian American studies to better address and counter the realities of perpetual war in our contemporary neoliberal era? Resistance and revolution operate in the register of war, of overhauling systems of oppression and pulling things up from the roots. In the following chapter, I probe the limits and possibilities of imagining an expanded Asian Americanist ethico-political collectivity that embraces and accommodates nonhuman species. Developing an insistently non-militant politics that eschews violent, warring tactics that rely on the figurative and literal razing of the earth is especially important to those aims. Chapter three examines how figurations of the cybernetic/transgenic Asian girl enable the theorization of alternative forms and ways of claiming agency within and through multispecies assemblages.

[312] J. Lee, "Pathography/Illness Narratives," 459.

CHAPTER 3

# The Smell of Solidarity

Multispecies Assemblages in *Salt Fish Girl* and *sybil unrest*

> [Fan] once told us that she almost preferred being in the tanks than out in the air of B-Mor, that she liked the feeling of having to hold her breath and go against her nature… [S]he would pull her knees to her chest and drift to the bottom and stay there in that crouch until her lungs screamed for forgiveness. She wasn't inviting oblivion or even testing herself but rather summoning a different kind of force that would transform not her but the composition of the realm, make it so the water could not harm her.
>
> - Chang-rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea* (2014)[313]

The above epigraph from *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) describes Fan's attempt to inhabit water in a way that goes against her nature. Fan's aquatic experiment painfully deprives her lungs of air but Chang-rae Lee suggests that going against her human bodily nature is also strangely pleasurable—"she liked the feeling of having to hold her breath." The passage moves through several conventional ways we might apprehend this sort of pleasurable pain while negating them to take us somewhere rather unexpected. Lee emphasizes how Fan "wasn't inviting oblivion," the euphoria that an oxygen-deprived brain chemically induces, or seeking the satisfaction that comes from triumphing over nature, from "testing" her human bodily limits. Fan's vision, Lee suggests, exceeds her individual human composition as she strives to summon a force that would transform the entire "composition of the realm" and render possible a different

[313] C-R. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 6.

kind of affective relationality: "make it so that water could not harm her." Through his girlish Chinese protagonist then, Lee conjures an ecological imaginary that entails a "becoming with" water. As Donna Haraway asserts in *When Species Meet* (2008), "becoming is always becoming *with*—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake."[314]

Lee narrates this process of becoming with in the novel from Fan's first diving attempt, where she nearly drowned, to the fishlike dexterity she gradually attains through strenuous effort. Fan works to develop a nuanced understanding of the vibrant composition of water and how she fits in the "wider ecology," in relation to other aquatic organisms: "she could gauge the…pH and trace salinity simply by how it played between her fingers, how it tingled her cheek; she could tell by how the fish were schooling whether they were hungry or stressed or content."[315] By allowing herself to sink to the bottom of the tank and crouching there, Fan endures water's painful pressure towards an even more radical mode of becoming with. In this passage Lee gestures to how the painful disassembling of the human can provide conditions of possibility for the assembling of alternative ecologies and "more-than-human" political collectivities to which this chapter now turns.[316]

*Full Sea* serves as one example of the recent curious proliferation of Asian/American literary works that position the Oriental girl (or some hybrid girl creature) at the center of ecological narratives and imaginaries. Other examples include: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2008), which I will examine in this chapter, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009), Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), to only name a few. This emergent body of work

[314] Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 244.

[315] Ibid, 171.

[316] I draw on David Abram's notion of "more-than-human" in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997).

serves as an important corollary to posthuman representations of the Oriental. Asian American studies has been primarily concerned with techno-Orientalist discourses and images. Techno-Orientalism can be traced to the 1980s as a means of reconciling Western anxieties over the rapid growth of Japan and the so-called "Asian tiger economies."[317] Traditional Saidian Orientalism, which configured the East "as backwards, anti-progressive, and primitive" could no longer account for the new trends in the global economy, as Japan, in particular, began to outpace the West in terms of technological development and capitalist expansion.[318] Techno-Orientalism provided a means of stabilizing traditional power dynamics and the identity of the West through the construction of Orientals as unfeeling aliens, automatons, cyborgs, and replicants. The "technological efficiency and capitalist expertise" projected onto Oriental bodies came to be attributed to an "affectual absence [that] resonates as an underdeveloped or…retrograde humanism," thereby upholding the moral superiority and humanity of the West.[319]

Asian Americanists have produced nuanced critiques of techno-Orientalism that foreground and affirm the full human status of the "Alien/Asian," to borrow Stephen Hong Sohn's formulation.[320] While necessary and important, these scholarly practices betray an ongoing attachment to and privileging of the exclusionary category of the human. I am interested in Asian/American literary works that challenge narrow humanist critical frameworks and

[317] Stephen Hong Sohn, "Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future," *MELUS* 33, no. 4 (2008): 8. On techno-Orientalism see also: David Morley and Kevin Robins, "Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic," in *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 147-73; and David S. Roh and Betsy Huang, eds., *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2015).

[318] Ibid.

[319] Ibid.

[320] Ibid, 6. Sohn extends "the discursive interventions made by both Laura Hyun Yi Kang and David Palumbo-Liu in employing the 'slash' within the term Asian American," by exploring the various ways "Asia and America stand in an uneasy and unstable relationship with the other" (6). He calls attention to how "the alien stands as a convenient metaphor for the experiences of Asian Americans, which range from the extraterrestrial being who seems to speak in a strange, yet familiar, accented English to the migrant subject excluded from legislative enfranchisement" (6).

approaches towards the fashioning of a more-than-human political subjectivity. These works (re)imagine the Oriental girl in relation to the living environment and various species of flora and fauna that mark a significant departure from the way Oriental has been racialized in connection to machines and cold, lifeless technology. Ecological-oriented representations, of course, do not necessarily signify a more positive, liberatory or resistant alternative to techno-Orientalism.

Women and Third World women of color, in particular, have been historically and popularly depicted as sharing some innate affinity for or bond with nature and as embodiments of "Mother Nature" herself. These depictions have been variously implicated in perpetuating patriarchal imperial discourses as well as a form of gender essentialism in relation to more progressive ecofeminist discourses.[321] Ecofeminism developed during the 1980s as an effort to explore and uncover the linked oppression of women, animals, nature, and various feminized others.[322] The field gained prominence in the early 1990s but was critiqued as essentialist by poststructuralist and other third-wave feminisms and effectively discarded by the end of the decade.[323] Through her comprehensive review of ecofeminist scholarship, Greta Gaard demonstrates how this portrayal of "ecofeminism as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature" is highly reductive and neglects the field's "diversity of arguments and standpoints."[324] This chapter contributes to recent efforts to recuperate ecofeminism by exploring

[321] See for example: Ellen Cronan Rose, "The Good Mother: From Gaia to Gilead," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 77-97. On the nonhuman as an ambiguous category that can serve to legitimate/perpetuate colonial and racist oppression, but that might also offer emancipatory perspectives see: Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[322] Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejected Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): 28.

[323] Ibid, 31.

[324] Ibid. On recuperating ecofeminism see also: Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality," *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 154-179.

how Asian/American writers mobilize the Oriental girl to foreground intersecting human and nonhuman histories of racialization, gendered exploitation, and violence. I specifically examine Larissa Lai's speculative novel, *Salt Fish Girl*, and *sybil unrest* (2013), her collaborative poetry project with Rita Wong for how they formally disassemble and reassemble the Oriental girl to illuminate the queer ecologies she embodies and inhabits. These works productively challenge and redefine the categories of the human and the nonhuman, enabling the theorization of an expanded notion of feminist ethico-political collectivity that accommodates and embraces the more-than-human.

This chapter engages with the growing body of multispecies theory and ethnography as elaborated by Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, Deborah Bird Rose, and Anna Tsing, among others, which can be traced to earlier ecofeminist scholarship on interspecies relations.[325] I explore the critical stakes and possibilities of approaching Asian/America as a "multispecies formation," to borrow Karen Cardozo and Banu Subramaniam's term.[326] Asian/America has been typically thought of as a human-cultural category and political formation.[327] To think Asian/America differently as a multispecies formation means attending to how human histories assemble and continually reassemble in relation to flora and fauna as well as how questions of

[325] On multispecies theory and ethnography see: Thom Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014); Eben Kirksey, ed., *The Multispecies Salon* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014); Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015). On ecofeminist interspecies scholarship see: Beth A. Dixon, "The Feminist Connection between Women and Animals," *Environmental Ethics* 18, no. 2 (1996): 181-94; Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993); Josephine Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993), 167-94; and Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[326] Cardozo and Subramaniam, "Assembling Asian/American Naturecultures," 3. For examples of this scholarship see also: R. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse*; and Lorna Fitzsimmons, Yongsuk Chae, and Bella Adams, eds., *Asian American Literature and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[327] See: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

race, sex, and gender manifest and mutate in this process of multispecies assembling. It also demands for the radical reimagining of Asian American politics and coalitional boundaries. This chapter asks: How can we more generatively understand and challenge the knowledge-power structures of Orientalism by de-centering the human? What different forms and modes of Asian racialization does an ecocritical framework render visible?

Beginning with *Salt Fish Girl*, I analyze how Lai mobilizes smell to fashion speculative multispecies assemblages. The novel foregrounds the racializing force of smell, how Chinese immigrants and certain species of Asian flora and fauna have been stigmatized as exceptionally stinky towards an expanded history of olfactory discrimination. Yet I will demonstrate how Lai also recuperates smell as a potentially decolonizing force, a catalyst for novel assemblages of relation and more-than-human solidarities. I argue that *Salt Fish Girl* enables a productive critique of the way Darwinian evolution has been conflated with the "Great Chain of Being"—the religious hierarchical ordering of all life and matter as determined by God.[328] Nineteenth-century Anglo-American narratives of de-evolution/degeneration, in particular, promote a linear, hierarchical account of evolution. By integrating tropes of reincarnation and writing putatively primitive, anarchic forms into the future, Lai challenges the popular conception that humans embody the pinnacle of evolution, fashioning a more lateral account of evolution that is closer to what Darwin theorized. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, Darwin effected a new concept of life, "a fleeting humanity whose destiny is self-overcoming, a humanity that no longer knows or masters itself, a humanity doomed to undo itself, that does not regulate or order materiality but that becomes other in spite of itself, that returns to those animal forces that enables all of life to

[328] On the "Great Chain of Being" see: Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

ceaselessly become."[329] *Salt Fish Girl* precisely stages the undoing of the human, where evolution entails becoming through lateral kinship with various nonhuman kinds.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to examine the multispecies assembling literally enacted through the collaborative form of *sybil unrest*. I also explore how the poem complicates the multispecies ethics of relationality envisioned in *Salt Fish Girl* by taking the minor—the apparently small, insignificant, imperceptible, and insensible—as a point of departure for ecological imagining. The ecological invites attempts to envision planetary communities and networks composed of human and nonhuman actors as well as violence and change on a grand, planetary scale. I ask: How might the minor provide a generative basis for reimagining the populations, places, scales, and stakes that inform contemporary ecological discourses on conservation, sustainability, environmental justice, and responsibility? What forms of planetary connectedness, sense of shared futurity and survival, does the minor allow us to access? Complicating the conditions of multispecies assembling, *sybil unrest* compels readers to grapple with how to ethically account for and accommodate nonhuman species we never directly meet or even recognize as species. My analysis of *sybil unrest* thus also gestures to the limitations of the feminist ethics of care elaborated in chapter two. To the extent that care is predicated on and grounded in meetings and affective exchanges, what happens when these meetings and exchanges are so minor that they remain beyond human perception? *sybil unrest* suggests that our ecological future cannot be sustained simply with and through a positive ethics of care. I will elaborate on how the poem calls for and enables the theorization of an alternative multispecies ethics of relationality in the minor, negative mode.

**Our More-Than-Human Origins**

[329] Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 24.

*Salt Fish Girl* alternates between the narratives of Nu Wa, the Chinese goddess of creation, and Miranda Ching, a coming-of-age Chinese girl. Nu Wa's narrative unfolds from the beginning of history itself and traces her reincarnation across history from nineteenth-century industrial China to eventually link up with Miranda's twenty-first century, late-capitalist narrative. Set in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, Miranda's narrative depicts a near future where nation-states have fragmented into walled compounds owned and run by mega-corporations and the informal economies of the sprawling "Unregulated Zone," where inhabitants must struggle to survive without corporate guarantees or regulatory measures of any kind. Readers learn that Miranda is, in fact, a reincarnation of Nu Wa so that the novel stages how the mythical Oriental female body comes to be reassembled through futuristic biotechnologies.

The criticism on *Salt Fish Girl* has done much to foreground how Lai rewrites origin stories and troubles the very concept of origins by interweaving creation myths organized around reincarnation and the divine with science fiction tropes of biogenetic engineering and cloning.[330] Lai retells the Chinese creation myth of Nu Wa, the half-woman, half-snake goddess who molds humans from the mud of the Yellow River, as a way of reworking the Book of Genesis. Nu Wa differs, in many ways, from the patriarchal God of Christianity. She creates humans because she is simply bored and lonely and when they rudely smirk at her, Nu Wa punishes them by splitting their tails into two legs. As Hee-Jung Serenity Joo notes, "the humans [Nu Wa] creates are distinctly *not* in her image. Instead, she adapts to them."[331] Watching the humans "giggl[e] and strok[e] one another at the point of damage," Nu Wa grows envious of her own creations: "I

[330] See: Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, "Reproduction, Reincarnation, and Human Cloning: Literary and Racial Forms in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," *Critique* 55 (2014): 47-9; Robyn Morris " 'What does It Mean to Be Human?': Racing Monsters, Clones, and Replicants," *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 33, no. 91 (2004): 81-96; and Sharlee Reimer, "Troubling Origins: Cyborg Politics in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," *Atlantis* 35, no. 1 (2010): 4-14;

[331] Joo, "Reproduction, Reincarnation, and Human Cloning," 48, emphasis in original.

longed to walk amongst them, experience the passion I had invented without having ever felt."[332] The novel thus follows the journey of a divine creator who gives up her divine status in order to join humans and assume a mortal form.

Lai also creatively reassembles Nu Wa's creation myth with a queer retelling of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, "The Little Mermaid." Nu Wa finally decides to exchange her lustrous snake tail for a pair of human legs in order to meet the kind-looking young man she glimpses staring down at her from a boat. When Nu Wa surfaces, however, she finds that the young man she desires is actually a young woman. Lai thus narrates the story of queer desire, of two women of color who struggle to find each other and ways of being together across their many reincarnations. Unlike the genesis text, Nu Wa must seek the help of an enormous green fish with…eyes older than the world" to perform the painful bifurcation of her tail (8). As Sharlee Reimer points out, Lai troubles the notion of origins by suggesting that this primordial fish may have preceded the divine creator, Nu Wa, and the world itself.[333]

In this chapter, I am primarily interested in how Lai rewrites origin stories around primordial fish and the figure of a half-woman, half-snake goddess to foreground how we have always been more-than-human. The novel opens with Nu Wa commanding readers to behold her exquisite body:

> Of course I have lips, a woman's lips, a woman's mouth… Look, I have a woman's eyes, a woman's rope of smooth black hair extending past my waist. A woman's torso. Your gaze slides over breasts and belly. The softest skin, warm and quivering. And below? Forget modesty. Here comes the tail, a thick cord of

[332] Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2008), 3, 6. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically.

[333] Reimer, "Troubling Origins," 8.

> muscle undulating, silver slippery in the early morning light. Lean closer and you see the scales, translucent, glinting pinks and greens and oily cobalt blues.
>
> I know that eye, the eye that registers fear first, and then the desire to consume. What kind of soup would my flesh make? What would you dream after tasting? (2)

In blazon-like fashion, Nu Wa enumerates her different womanly parts: her lips, eyes, long black hair, breasts, belly, and soft skin—parts that have been frequently singled out for poetic celebration. Her status as a woman becomes troubled as she directs our gaze below to a rather unexpected and phallic appendage—a thick, muscular tail. Nu Wa deliberately holds our gaze here, commanding readers to lean in closer and appreciate the beauty of its glinting, silvery scales. By dwelling on Nu Wa's tail, an animal appendage that inspires more fear than poetry, Lai subverts blazon traditions towards the celebration of a more-than-woman body. The blazon has been critiqued for the way it violently dismembers the female body, reducing a woman to her anatomical parts and cataloguing her value on the basis of those parts.[334] Nancy Vickers, however, offers a different way we might read the blazon. She contends that anatomical blazons in sixteenth-century European literature did not celebrate body parts in place of or in relation to a whole, sanctified female subject. The "genre was broadly conceived to be one of radical fragmentation," which was reflected in contemporary readings that interpreted anatomical blazons as "highlighting the part *at the expense of the whole*."[335] Poets sung about the singular parts themselves, their mysterious agency and power over them. As a poetic form not invested in

[334] See for example: Moira P. Baker, " 'The Uncanny Stranger on Display': The Female Body in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Love Poetry," *South Atlantic Review* 56, no. 2 (1991): 7-25.

[335] Nancy Vickers, "Members Only," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 8, emphasis mine.

some *a priori* naturalized wholeness, the blazon arguably lends itself to visions of alternative more-than-human becomings.

The second-person, intersubjective "you" that Lai mobilizes in the above passage directly implicates readers in the predatory consumption of Nu Wa's body. In the shift from the enumeration of her womanly parts to her animal tail, violent erotic desires become confused with gustatory desires to consume her body as food. Nu Wa's tail then draws her into close proximity with organisms who share the very literal concern of being eaten. Lai promotes, through the figure of Nu Wa, an ecofeminist critique that understands the sexual consumption of female flesh as deeply entangled with the consumption of other species of flora and fauna.[336] As Donna Haraway, Heather Paxson, Michael Pollan, and others have demonstrated, the gut lends itself to multispecies thinking as the literal site of encounter and enmeshment with nonhuman others of various kinds.[337] In what follows, I examine how Lai invites a form of multispecies thinking through a rather unexpected site: the olfactory sense and related systems of olfactory organs.

**Smell as a Sideways Mode of Knowing**

Smell has been widely regarded in Western culture as the basest and most primitive of the human senses. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists and philosophers theorized that the sensory power of human nasal organs gradually diminished over the course of human evolution and civilization, to give way to the primacy of sight.[338] In animals, smell was viewed

[336] On the connections between misogyny, masculinity, and practices of meat consumption see: Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, [1990] 2015).

[337] See: Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 285-302**;** Heather Paxson, "Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2008): 15-47; Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007); and Part II: "Edible Companions" of *The Multispecies Salon*, 111-180.

as capable of replacing all other senses, "functioning simultaneously as sight, touch, and taste, and alerting creatures to…dangers more effectively than sound."[339] Darwin postulated that humans lost their acuity of smell as they evolved from animals, so that the "marginalization of smell in human society" seemed to be tied to and indeed necessary for progress; any fixation on the olfactory would signify arrested development or "regression to an earlier, more primitive state."[340] Freud held that smell became displaced by sight "when the human species began to walk upright, removing the nose from the proximity of scent traits and increasing the visual field."[341] As sight came to be embraced as "the pre-eminent sense of reason and civilization," smell was renounced as "the sense of madness and savagery."[342]

The highly elusive nature of smells also explains, in part, why Western scientists have been reluctant to take up the olfactory sense: "[S]o hard to measure, name or recreate, [smells] were…among the least accessible sensory stimuli to the methods of science."[343] In 1752, Carl Linnaeus "proposed a system of smell classification…, grouping smells into seven broad groups based on their appeal."[344] Linnaeus was, however, primarily concerned with the categorization of flora and "recognized that, despite being an important property, 'scent never clearly distinguishes a species.' "[345] Calling attention to the fleeting, transitory quality of smells and their slow

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[338] Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, eds., *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3-4.

[339] Jonathan Reinarz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 13.

[340] Classen, et al., *Aroma*, 89.

[341] Ibid.

[342] Ibid, 4.

[343] Ibid, 88.

[344] Reinarz, *Past Scents*, 15.

method of diffusion, the philosopher-poet Lucretius dismissed the olfactory sense as "inefficient, inconsequential and inept."[346] In the long line of Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant offers perhaps the most famous and fierce denunciation of smell: "To which organic sense do we owe the least and which seems to be the most dispensable? The sense of smell. It does not pay us to cultivate it or to refine it in order to gain enjoyment; this sense can pick up more objects of aversion than of pleasure (especially in crowded places)."[347] While smell might be useful in discerning what things to avoid, Kant emphasizes how humans cannot otherwise accurately discriminate among odors and concludes that no practical benefit or pleasure will come from cultivating this sense.[348] Smell has thus been relegated to the very bottom of the sense hierarchy as incapable of providing the kind of direct, observable, quantifiable, reproducible, and enduring knowledge privileged in Western science and philosophy.

Lyall Watson's study of a largely overlooked set of nasal pits, also known as Jacobson's Organ, gestures to ways smell can be recuperated as enabling a different mode of knowing. Ludwig Levin Jacobson discovered this mysterious anatomical feature in the human nose in 1811.[349] Similar pits can also be discerned in "the nasal passages of possums, anteaters, bats, cats, rabbits, and even a white whale."[350] Watson emphasizes how recent research suggests that Jacobson's Organ forms a vital separate and parallel system to the central olfactory system. Smells that enter through receptors in the nose and throat are processed through the olfactory

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[345] Ibid.

[346] Cited in: Ibid, 9.

[347] Cited in: Classen et al., *Aroma*, 89.

[348] On Kant and smell see also: Reinarz, *Past Scents*, 13-14.

[349] Lyall Watson, *Jacobson's Organ and the Remarkable Nature of Smell* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, [1999] 2000), 25.

[350] Ibid, xiii.

bulbs and cortex of the brain.[351] Jacobson's Organ, however, does not seem to be receptive to ordinary odors, "responding most often to a range of substances which have large molecules, but often no detectable odour."[352] This information also comes to be processed through smaller "accessory bulbs" and more primal areas of the brain "that coordinat[e] mating and other basic emotions."[353] Watson asserts: "With Jacobson's Organ we reinherit the possibility of a powerful and ancient chemical sense: an ability to enter once more into a system of subliminal signalling that continues to give other animals access to a world we thought we had lost as a result of our emphasis on sight instead of smell."[354] He invites readers to take Jacobson's Organ seriously as "mechanisms for operating a true 'sixth sense,' " which can "dramatically widen our physical, psychological and psychic horizon," indeed foregrounding our connections with and drawing us closer to nonhuman animals.[355] Citing Alex Comfort, Watson calls for the rejection of notions of human exceptionalism: "Humans have a set of organs which are traditionally described as non-functional, but which if seen in any other mammal, would be recognised as part of a pheromone system."[356]

Watson suggests that through Jacobson's Organ, humans smell far more than can be consciously perceived or detected by the other five senses, gesturing to an alternative form of pheromonal knowledge.[357] I include this extended discussion of Watson's work not simply as scientific proof of the vitality of the olfactory sense and olfactory organs, but rather for how

[351] Ibid, 9.

[352] Ibid.

[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid, xiv.

[355] Ibid, xiv, xv.

[356] Ibid, 200.

[357] Ibid, 9.

Watson complicates and creatively reassembles the science of smell. In his book, Watson provides extensive information on smell from a range of eclectic sources, including scientific studies and evolutionary biology as well as linguistics and literature. Watson, for example, emphasizes how neurologists have not even come close to understanding what he terms the "Madeleine effect," as depicted in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913). He notes how, in the novel, a "little citrus-smelling madeleine brings back all the rich, sensual background of the village of Combray, where the narrator spent his childhood. It triggers memories more detailed and evocative than vocabulary can ever reach, conjuring multi-sensory, whole-flavoured incidents, heavy with all the erotic sensations of the natural world."[358] Here Watson turns to literature as grounds for theorizing the still unknown, not-fully-realized possibilities of smell. I contend that Watson's account of Jacobson's Organ, which interweaves scientific data with literary imaginaries as well as his own tantalizing conjectures, can be read as a feminist critical engagement with biology.[359] By venturing into speculative realms, Watson unsettles conventional scientific understandings of the biology and function of olfactory organs.

I read *Salt Fish Girl* laterally in relation to Watson's work, as an extension of a feminist critical account of smell. Smell's inaccessibility to the methods of science, so decried by Western scientists and philosophers, can be understood differently, as a function of its *literariness*. As Paul Lai asserts, "we have few words that describe discrete smells. Instead, our language for smell is almost entirely metonymic and metaphorical. An odor 'smells of' or 'smells like'

[358] Ibid, 178.

[359] I am specifically inspired by Elizabeth Wilson's theory of *gut feminism*, a method of "feminist engagement with biology, particularly, a phantastic biology and a biology of the periphery" (*Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 171). In her project she specifically takes contemporary biomedical data about depression outside normative zones of interpretive comfort (i.e. the central nervous system) and instead reads that data through the gut towards the production of alternative knowledge-structures (12-13). Watson's attempt to read data through Jacobson's Organ and peripheral accessory olfactory bulbs can be understood as a similar feminist critical engagement with biology.

something else."[360] Smell thus points to a surplus of knowledge that cannot be fully captured or expressed through language. In her novel, Lai mobilizes smell's literariness towards the speculative assembling of alternative structures of knowledge. Her protagonist, Miranda Ching, is defined by an inescapable, foul durian odor that readers learn is a symptom of an emergent epidemic called the dreaming/drowning disease. When her father sends her to Dr. Flowers for treatment, Miranda begins to work for him as both a medical test subject and as an assistant in his blood lab,[361] where she encounters other patients who exhibit similar smelly afflictions:

> I met a man who smelled of milk and could remember all the famines that had ever been caused by war. I met a girl who smelled of stainless steel and could recite the lives of everyone who had ever died of tuberculosis. I met a woman who reeked of radishes. Hers were fabulous tales that involved the stealing of fruit and young women rescued from tall towers. Her tales were clearly not based in any sort of factual reality, and yet there was a resonance to them that I couldn't quite put my finger on. […] I met a boy who smelled of oranges and could tell of such tragic romances that I wept as I drew his blood. (101-2)

The disease forms arbitrary linkages between specific smells and memories. These memories are largely grounded in historical reality—famine, war, and tuberculosis outbreaks, which engender terrible dreams that eventually drive the infected to commit suicide via drowning. But Lai suggests that the disease also induces "fabulous" memories, "not based in any…factual reality." From fairy tales to tragic romances, the disease promotes the remembering of imagined, literary

[360] Paul Lai, "Stinky Bodies: Mythological Futures and the Olfactory Sense in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," *MELUS* 33, no. 4, Alien/Asian (2008): 182. See also: Classen et al., *Aroma*, 3. On smell and language, Alan Hyde notes: "it has been suggested that the physical location of the sense of smell, in the most primitive, reptilian part of the brain, makes it inaccessible to the language centers of the brain that develop much later" ("Offensive Bodies," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. Jim Drobnick (New York: Berg, 2006), 54).

[361] Miranda serves as an embodiment of hyper-exploited disavowed medical labor in the novel.

narratives alongside real, historical narratives. The woman's Rapunzel-like tales resonate deeply with Miranda, evoking memories of how her own father smuggled durian fruit from the Unregulated Zone and feelings of bodily imprisonment, while the boy's tragic romances move her to tears. This passage points to the affective powers of stories and foreshadows the importance of storytelling to the mobilization of a political revolution, which sometimes relies on the creative reassembling of fact and fiction.

Lai further suggests that the dreaming/drowning disease is a product of industrial genetic engineering practices. Rampant modification of agricultural products has contaminated the soil, causing microbes to mutate and infect humans with diseases once only possible in plants or nonhuman animals. People could catch the disease by walking barefoot on the earth. Lai thus invites readers to view the dreaming/drowning disease as a manifestation of the earth's agency, how the earth attunes humans to the dangerous, unpredictable ramifications of biotechnology. By infecting people with memories that do not belong to them but some larger collectivity across time and space (not unlike the lateral haunting discussed in chapter one), the disease assembles a subjectivity that must grapple with violence that exceeds the scale of the individual human. Rob Nixon has famously coined "slow violence" to describe the ecological violence wrought by climate change, oil spills, deforestation, and war that occurs gradually and often invisibly to human scales of perception.[362] Slow violence inhabits the structures of plant and nonhuman animal memory as palpably felt trauma. I argue that Lai imagines a disease that inflicts human subjects with some of those memory structures to convey the urgency of developing an expanded, more-than-human sense of ethico-political responsibility. What might it mean to remember all the famines caused by war? To dream of the extreme hunger facing earth's human as well as nonhuman populations? If so, would we dare wage any more wars? In the novel, these

[362] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011).

collective memories prove too much for the human psyche to bear, driving many infected persons to drown themselves.

Yet Lai also offers a non-pathological vision of collective memory and subjectivity through the figure of Miranda: "Through all the years of my strange durian odour, it never occurred to me to tell anyone that nothing hurt. And as for the dreams of water, if the truth must be told, they comforted me" (167-68). While Miranda feels totally fine, she worries about her durian odor and watery dreams because patriarchal authority figures such as her father and Dr. Flowers have identified them as symptoms of a disease that need to be treated. Before internalizing their pathological views of her condition, Miranda also embraces the collective memories and subjectivity she shares with Nu Wa: "[I]t seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should remember things that went on before I was born, things that happened in other lifetimes. […] I did not realize that other people did not have these memories. I did not think of myself as a child afflicted by history, unable to escape its delights or torments" (70). Instead of a disease where one comes to be "afflicted by history," Lai suggests that we can view the mutation of collective memory and subjectivity in humans differently, as expanding connections with and across history that can be painful but also potentially pleasurable. I turn now to analyze specific scenes of multispecies assembling in the novel to explore the limits and possibilities of a more-than-human Asian Americanist political subjectivity.

**Assembling with Durian**

Lai stages the queer bonds and bonding between Miranda, a Chinese girl, and durian, a pungent fruit native to Southeast Asia, to foreground a "racializing assemblage" that productively challenges the parameters of Orientalist critique in the field. Drawing on black

feminist scholarship, Alexander Weheliye theorizes racializing assemblages as "a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans."[363] In the novel, Miranda's father blames himself for smuggling a durian from the Unregulated Zone and allowing his wife, Aimee, to eat the non-Saturna approved fruit. He believes that the durian's unknown, dangerous mutations in the wild have contributed somehow to his daughter's unfortunate smelly condition. Lai's construction of the durian as an alien fruit strongly resonates with discourses of Asian immigrants as aliens, perpetual foreigners in Canada and the U.S.[364] The smell of her husband's durian evokes, for Aimee, the childhood memory of another durian she smuggled with her grandmother from Hong Kong. It was the familiar, illicit smell "of something forbidden smuggled on board in a battered suitcase, and mingled with the smell of unwashed underwear" (13). Here Lai invites readers to attend to the historical regulation and treatment of Asian immigrants as deeply entangled with flora.[365] Aimee and her grandmother are illegal immigrants who have smuggled on board, along with them, an illegal durian fruit. Xenophobic disgust, Lai suggests, comes to be attached to a smell that passes and mingles between the women and durian, which can be understood as a racializing assemblage of stinky Oriental fruit and Oriental persons with "unwashed underwear."

*Salt Fish Girl* expands the critical boundaries of Asian American studies to include histories of durian migration to the Americas. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) monitors the importation of plants and plant products to primarily safeguard Canada's food,

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[363] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 4.

[364] See: R. G. Lee, *Orientals*, 1-5.

[365] Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) is another novel that renders salient this entanglement. Ozeki depicts how the Japanese war bride, Momoko Fuller, immigrates to the U.S. with seeds of flora species native to Asia. Momoko plants the seeds in the small garden she tends in Liberty Falls, Ohio, facilitating their dissemination to new places and peoples.

plant, and animal resources.[366] Paul Lai notes how "[f]ruits such as the durian undergo a regime of purification that may include treatment with sulphiting agents and radiation to cleanse them of pests and diseases."[367] Many airlines around the world also prohibit passengers from carrying durian on flights because of its offensive sulphurous odor.[368] These regulatory controls imposed on durian fruit closely parallel and intersect with the historical regulation of Chinese immigrant bodies.

The Chinese have been racialized as exceptionally smelly immigrants who transgress olfactory norms.[369] Jonathan Reinarz notes how "Chinatowns in Vancouver and Victoria were" denounced as "foul-smelling, disease-threatening and dirty."[370] We can see here how "foul-smelling" Chinese bodies and spaces are imagined as having a polluting effect, endangering both public health and hygiene. In *Contagious Divides* (2001), Nayan Shah discusses how Chinese communities became the target of nineteenth-century public health investigations and reforms, with specific attention to San Francisco's Chinatown.[371] Lai evokes these histories in her novel and foregrounds how Miranda's durian odor only becomes a source of familial tension after it is racialized as a marker of Oriental difference and uncleanliness. Miranda's birth initially draws

[366] "Importing Plants and Plant Products," *Canadian Food Inspection Agency*, last modified December 2, 2014, http://www.inspection.gc.ca/plants/plant-pests-invasive-species/imports/primer/eng/1324568450671/1324569734910.

[367] P. Lai, "Stinky Bodies," 178.

[368] See: Songpol Somsri, "Durian: Southeast Asia's King of Fruits," *Chronica Horticulturae* 48, no. 4 (2008): 19. Durian is also forbidden on public transportation in various East Asian countries.

[369] For more on the "smelly immigrant" stereotype see: Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Immigrant Lives and the Politics of Olfaction in the Global City," in *The Smell Culture Reader*, ed. Jim Drobnick (New York: Berg, 2006), 41-52.

[370] Reinarz, *Past Scents*, 100.

[371] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

her parents closer together, rekindling their love and passion for each other. In the heady cloud of durian bliss, the Chings stop tending their lawn and forget to take out the garbage:

> My parents, who once upon a time in their unhappiness had meticulously attended to these things, ceased to notice, or if they noticed they were delighted by the riotous exuberance of life around them and gave no thought to containing it. […] The plum tree scattered its fruit messily over the lawn, where it rotted, giving off a sickly sweet smell that no doubt combined unpleasantly with the sour odour already pouring from the windows of the house. But one or two of the plum stones took root and the following spring little seedlings poked up warm and sleepy past the rapidly springing grass. (18)

Lai establishes a link between the Chings' former unhappiness and the stresses of immigrant model minority performance, as they strived to conform to and meticulously observe social norms of civility (e.g. keeping a clean, well-manicured lawn; eliminating or containing unpleasant odors so as not to disturb one's neighbors). Abandoning these norms not only allows Miranda's parents to recover the happiness and passion they had lost but also the plant life around them to grow more wild and exuberant. Along with the "rapidly springing grass," little plum seedlings are taking root and growing in random places where no one would have thought to plant them. The Chings' familial bliss, however, comes to be shattered when a neighbor complains about the smell and their unsightly lawn, demanding that they clean up their property.

Shame drives Miranda's father to once again heed social norms of civility. He makes it his mission to figure out a way to eradicate Miranda's peculiar durian odor, consulting various doctors and venturing into the Unregulated Zone in search of some remedy against his wife's wishes: "We agreed that we wouldn't make her feel self-conscious about the smell, didn't we?

It's hard enough that she's the only Asian child in her class, and surely she is aware of that. I won't have you working your neurosis out on her" (23). Here Aimee recognizes how the pathologization of certain smells inheres within and perpetuates violent processes of Asian racialization, which her husband (still accepting the terms and logic of social "civility") and her daughter do not fully apprehend. In the novel, Miranda comes to internalize her smell as the cause of her parents' marital discord, shampooing and scrubbing her skin raw in an attempt to get rid of the durian odor.

*Salt Fish Girl* allows us to apprehend a racializing assemblage where a Chinese girl and durian fruit come to be violently constructed as Oriental and rendered abject through the stinky, foreign odors they emit. As Stephanie Oliver argues, the use of smell in Lai's novel provides a generative framework for theorizing racialization beyond the dominant visual-auditory paradigms favored in critical race and postcolonial studies. She asserts that "Miranda's durian odour marks her as a racialized, feminized 'other,' " and examines how her experiences of "olfactory discrimination" come to shape her diasporic subjectivity.[372] I extend Oliver's argument by attending to how Lai reimagines smell as not just a racializing force, but also a potential decolonizing force. In the novel, smell manifests, in Weheliye's terms, as "a surplus, a line of flight…that evades capture, that refuses rest, that testifies to the impossibility of its own existence."[373] Lai foregrounds how Miranda's durian odor escapes and crosses boundaries, blending different entities into new olfactory assemblages: "It crept into people's underwear drawers so that my intimate odour became that of all my family members as well. […] That foul odour of cat pee and pepper not only infused the external fabric of our house, it seeped into the

[372] Stephanie Oliver, "Diffuse Connections: Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," *Canadian Literature* 208 (2011): http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=0000002423608261&Fmt=3&cl ientId=43168&RQT=309&VName=PQD.

[373] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 51-2.

skin of all my family members. It rushed up their nostrils and through their ears. It poured down their throats when they opened their mouths to speak" (16-17). The radical boundary-transgressing quality of Miranda's smell challenges Western Enlightenment notions of the bounded individual on a visceral level.[374] Smell entails direct and often involuntary contact with the thing sensed, as olfactory particulates penetrate the body through its many porous openings. Kinship thus comes to be queerly reconfigured through a shared "intimate odour" that becomes increasingly depersonalized through its circulation as not just Miranda's but also that of her family members, not to mention durian fruit.

Lai's depiction of the durian, in particular, throws into confusion and reassembles the categories of the full human, the not-quite-human, and the nonhuman towards alternative forms of political collectivity. The durian has long been a subject of scientific speculation and curiosity. E. J. H. Corner, a British tropical botanist, asks: "What is the origin of this huge armoured capsule, so fiercely sought after by wild animals, yet so rare as to occur in a mere sprinkling of tropical trees of this large series? It is, at once, a biological success and a curiosity. Why do durians exist?"[375] In 1949, Corner developed the "durian theory" in an attempt to answer these questions and explain how trees have evolved to their modern form. Through observations of the morphological features of tropical trees and plants in Malaysia, Corner postulated that some peculiar features are actually ancestral forms and thus, anachronistic anomalies in modern day forests. While the durian tree has evolved from the "pachycaul form" (thick and stumpy with few branches) to the modern "leptocaul form" (tall with many branches, slender twigs, and willow-like leaves), Corner contends that it continues to retain an atavistic arillate fruit: "The red, fleshy, and often spiny follicle or capsule with large black seeds covered by a red or yellow aril and

[374] Classen, et al., *Aroma*, 4-5.

[375] E. J. H. Corner, "Durian Theory or the Origin of the Modern Tree," *Annals of Botany* 13, no. 52 (1949): 373.

hanging from the edges of the fruit valves, is the primitive fruit of modern flowering plants."[376] He points to various plant families where "this fruit has changed into the dry follicle or capsule with small, often winged, easily detached exarillate seeds"—the more modern, evolved form that facilitates its own migration and seed dispersal.[377] Durian species, whose "big arillate" seed serves as "the chief factor preventing their migration from the tropics," need to rely on animals to transport seeds in their stomach, a dispersal method called "endozoochory."[378] Corner's explanation of why durians exist then, is that they have simply been "unable to evolve [into] a new kind of fruit."[379]

This evolutionary narrative constructs the durian as an atavistic vestige, a primitive fruit that has anachronistically survived to the present with especially limited plant agency (with respect to migration and seed dispersal). Yet agency can be imagined differently, in the collaborative sense, where the durian invites its own consumption, allowing itself to be carried in the stomach of animals to be eventually discharged through the gut and onto new terrain where it can grow a new fruit.[380] In her novel, Lai writes against a narrative of evolutionary failure by speculatively infusing the durian with queer agential properties and generative powers. The durian, for example, emerges as a queerly animate and *hungry* fruit in the scene of Miranda's conception. As Miranda's father invites Aimee to come eat the durian he had procured, its odor operates as a kind of aphrodisiac: "[She] practically wafted up to him and pressed her warm lips

[376] Ibid, 376.

[377] Ibid.

[378] Ibid. On endozoochory and durian fruit see: R. Nyffeler and D. A. Baum, "Phylogenetic Relationships of the Durians (Bombacaceae-Durioneae or / Malvaceae/Helicteroideae/Durioneae) based on Chloroplast and Nuclear Ribosomal DNA Sequences," *Plant Systematics and Evolution* 224, no. 1/2 (2000): 75.

[379] Ibid, 376.

[380] On a cooperative theory of evolution see: Joan Roughgarden, *The Genial Gene: Deconstructing Darwinian Selfishness* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).

to his. He dropped the durian in surprise. As they tumbled to the floor, it tumbled between them, its green spikes biting greedily into their flesh, its pepper-pissy juices mixing with their somewhat more subtly scented ones and the blood of the injuries it inflicted with its green teeth" (14-15). The durian not only catalyzes the couple's spontaneous sex act but also participates in the act as a queer erotic partner. As Paul Lai asserts, instead of "simply an edible object," the durian appears more as a "living organism," greedily biting into the couple's flesh with its spiky green teeth.[381] Here fruit juices intermix with human sexual juices and blood in an erotic multispecies assemblage. Lai continues to blur human-plant-animal boundaries by describing durian elsewhere as "dark reptilian fruits" (87) with "greenish-gold bodies covered in spikes" (221) and "bloodless organs that lay inside…leather-hard shells" (87). Through the durian, Lai imagines wondrous mutations that troubles its consignment to our evolutionary past and ties it instead to our future, to visions of queer fertility and more-than-human political collectivities, which I will discuss below.

**Becoming Salt/Fish/Girl**

In her novel, Lai fashions another multispecies assemblage by mobilizing stinky fishy smells. Lai specifically juxtaposes pungent-smelling salt fish with sweet-smelling breast milk. As the dish that "all good South Chinese children" are weaned on, salt fish gruel comes to supplant "mother's milk" (48):

> The scent calls up all kinds of complicated tensions having to do with love and resentment, the passive-aggressive push-pull emotions of a loving mother who nonetheless eventually wants her breasts to herself, not to be forever on tap to the mewling, sucking creatures that come so strangely from her body and take over

[381] P. Lai, "Stinky Bodies," 179.

> her life. […] Why give away too much of yourself, especially intimate bodily fluids, when you know you'll eventually be abandoned… Give 'em salt fish congee early and you'll forget about 'em sooner and vice versa. (49)

Lai suggests that the smell of salt fish becomes a way of conditioning affective, bodily separation between mother and child. Good children will develop an appetite for salt fish gruel and stop groping for mother's breasts and her milk. While Lai recognizes and affirms the complicated maternal desire to reclaim one's body from one's children, she also points to how Chinese patriarchal ideologies deeply structure mother-daughter relations. From birth, daughters are seen as already about to leave the household, to be eventually married off to another family. Feeding and eating salt fish congee can thus be understood as disciplinary practices to train both mother and daughter to grow apart, to mitigate the pain of future abandonment structurally compelled within and by patriarchal society.

In her reincarnation in nineteenth-century China, Nu Wa relates how her mother "started [her] on salt fish congee early" with looming thoughts of separation on her mind (49). She sends a young, fifteen-year-old Nu Wa on shopping errands to the market in order to secretly meet with a matchmaker and make matrimonial arrangements for her daughter. Yet Lai depicts how the smell of salt fish comes to unexpectedly disrupt all those careful arrangements and engender an alternative queer genealogy. Nu Wa finds herself drawn to the daughter of a dry goods merchant precisely because of her salty, fishy odor. The Salt Fish Girl, as she is so referred in the novel, gradually comes to notice Nu Wa and fall in love with her as well. Both girls make a pact to declare their decision to become spinsters to their families and spend the rest of their lives together. The Salt Fish Girl's father, however, refuses and locks her in the house so that she

cannot see Nu Wa, which marks the beginning of their long, violent, tragic love story.[382] The two girls run away together and come to be separated at various points due to external forces beyond their control as well as their own minor faults and vices.

*Salt Fish Girl* can be read as a novel of queer love that survives across history in search of a time-space where it might be able to flourish. The smell of salt fish helps the two female lovers find each other throughout their many reincarnations, with the futuristic, twenty-first century Pacific Northwest serving as the latest contested terrain for their queer love. While drawing the blood of a female client in Dr. Flowers' lab, Miranda, as the reincarnated Nu Wa, catches "a whiff of a familiar fragrance, briny and sweet" (105). She feels an inexplicable, intimate connection to Evie although she is a complete stranger: "I myself was shocked by this odd glimpse of clarity, this moment of knowing, sharp as a sea breeze, and passing just as quickly" (150). In the novel, Miranda pursues Evie in a kind of sideways fashion, following her evocative bodily scent without fully knowing why and to what end.

While Evie's fishy odor suggests that she is the modern-day reincarnation of the Salt Fish Girl, Lai also reveals other surprising fishy origins and connections. Readers learn that Evie is a biogenetically engineered Asian female clone with fish DNA: "My genes are point zero three percent *Cyprinus carpio*—freshwater carp. I'm a patented new fucking life form" (158). Lai imagines a futuristic world where corporations mobilize biotechnology to clone cheap human labor. From the Salt Fish Girl to her reincarnation as Evie, we can trace the changing conditions of labor under different stages of capitalist development.[383] Readers are first introduced to the

[382] It is important to note that Lai does not construct her queer characters as innocent or morally righteous. Nu Wa, for example, frames the Salt Fish Girl's father for her murder before running away with her lover.

[383] For an analysis of how Lai deploys distinct literary forms to foreground how capitalism racially codes and recodes the body at different stages of development see: Joo, "Reproduction, Reincarnation, and Human Cloning," 49-57.

Salt Fish Girl bartering and exchanging her wares in the market, which exemplifies the phase of nineteenth-century merchant capitalism. She also lives through China's period of twentieth-century capitalist industrialization and comes to work in a factory assembling wind-up toys. As Hee-Jung Serenity Joo notes, this tedious, repetitive industrial labor "literally transform[s] her body," causing the Salt Fish Girl to rapidly lose her eyesight and grow pale and gaunt.[384] Lai suggests that the phase of transnational late capitalism seeks an even more disposable and convenient labor force, which it finds in the novel's critical imaginary of Asian female clones. Human cloning is depicted as a shadowy corporate practice to drive down labor costs and maximize profits but one that is not necessarily illegal. As Evie reveals, it is only illegal to be a clone, thereby rendering her a figuration of hyper-vulnerable, hyper-exploitable racialized female labor in Lai's imagined twenty-first century world. This science fictional scenario evokes how global racial capitalism has produced and exploited the Oriental girl as docile, passive, hardworking and thus, the ideal clone laborer of the near-future.

An expanded multispecies approach that attends to Evie's carp DNA, allows us to trace another genealogy of Asian racialization and labor migration. Karen Cardozo and Banu Subramaniam offer a brief discussion in their article of how Asian carp, "not unlike prior importations of human labor from Asia, …were brought to the American South as 'worker fish' imported to clean up enclosed areas by eating aquatic weeds."[385] But in recent years, Asian carp have been declared an invasive species and singled out as a serious environmental concern in the U.S., erasing how their labor was, at one time, invited and sought after.[386] The combined

[384] Ibid, 52.

[385] Cardozo and Subramaniam, "Assembling Asian/American Naturecultures," 12.

[386] For a comprehensive analysis of so-called invasive species in relation to histories of human immigration to the U.S. see: Peter Coates, *American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species: Strangers on the Land* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

jumping capacity of Asian carp and floods have allowed the species to spread into much of the Midwest and attempts to contain them by building various barriers have largely failed.[387] Discourses around their invasion of the U.S. and the threats they pose to the ecologies of the Mississippi River the Great Lakes region strongly echo nineteenth-century Yellow peril discourses. The U.S. National Wildlife Federation, for example, asserts: "Asian carp are fast-growing, aggressive and adaptable fish that are outcompeting native species for food and habitat."[388] Like Chinese coolie laborers, Asian carp are constructed as *not* native, indelibly foreign, and dangerously competitive. "Asian" thus does not simply operate as a neutral marker of the species' place of origin but is rather racially charged, conspicuously mobilized in public environmental discourses in ways that evoke the specter of the Yellow Peril. The case of Asian carp renders salient how environmental concerns can run up against critical race concerns. Racializing discourse has been deployed to advance environmental agendas but the critique of racialization/racism that Asian American studies has historically championed seems, at the same time, a potentially limited, inadequate response to material threats against the environment. Seriously engaging with these tensions means allowing for the possibility that the field of Asian American studies might be partially, painfully disassembled but it can also open up alternative ways for Asian/America to be reassembled.

As Lai depicts the reincarnation of her two queer lovers across history, she foregrounds how their love becomes rendered even queerer in the novel's imagined twenty-first century near-future, as no longer just the love between two human girls but rather, female mutant-clones who

[387] Josh Mogerman, "Invasion USA: Invaders Have Taken the Mississippi, Are the Great Lakes Next?" *Scientific American*, July 5, 2013, http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/asian-carp-woes/.

[388] "Asian Carp Threat to the Great Lakes," *National Wildlife Federation*, accessed March 23, 2016, https://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Threats-to-Wildlife/Invasive-Species/Asian-Carp.aspx.

are both more-than-human. Lai stages a kind of multispecies assembling through Miranda's erotic coupling with Evie:

> There was something that moved and breathed inside Evie that was cold and sharp and electric, more alive than anything of this earth. The fishiness of her drew me, but I tried not to think about the strangeness of her conception. […] I moved through the cool dark with her, my body a single silver muscle slipping against hers, flailing for oxygen in a fast underwater current, shivering slippery cool wet and tumbling through dark towards a blue point of light in the distance, teeth, lip, nipple, the steel taste of blood, gills gaping open and closed, open and closed, mouth, breath, cool water running suddenly piss hot against velvet inner thighs and the quick shudder silver flash of fish turning above the ice-blue surface of the lake. (161-62)

Drawn to Evie's "fishiness," Miranda also seems to grow more fishlike as she moves towards and with Evie, her body becoming "a single silver muscle." The passage eventually devolves into a de-personalized assemblage of human and nonhuman body parts: teeth, lip, nipple, gills, mouth, and thighs. It is unclear whether these parts belong to Miranda, Evie, or the fish that inhabit the lake, who also become entangled in their spontaneous sex act. The odd syntactical placement of "quick shudder," which first appears to describe the movement of the girls' thighs but then becomes surprisingly attached to a "silver flash of fish" jumping, allows us to read that shudder as a collective orgasm that reverberates across the lake. Here Lai dramatizes an erotic multispecies assembling that echoes the scene where Miranda's parents copulate with durian and amidst its fruit juices. In the novel, this highly contingent and apparently effortless mode of

assembling through sex comes to be juxtaposed with the difficult work of political assembling. Put differently, Lai emphasizes how sex cannot reconcile or resolve all differences.

While Miranda eagerly engages in queer sex with Evie, she confesses her discomfort with "the strangeness of [Evie's] conception." As Miranda learns of Evie's plans to stage a revolution with her clone sisters against the corporations that exploit their labor, she remains reluctant to join their cause and even works against the clones at some point, seduced by the benefits of corporate citizenship. In the following section, I elaborate on how Miranda comes to assemble politically with a collectivity of mutant-clones. I argue that this political affiliation comes to be grounded in the realization of shared conditions and experiences of marginalization and the development of a more-than-human political subjectivity.

**A Sisterhood of Mutant-Clones**

*Salt Fish Girl* can be read as a reassembling of the traditional Asian immigrant narrative, which emphasizes kinship and ties of filiation, towards a narrative that explores the formation of queer political *affiliation*. Lai depicts how Miranda must break filial, daughterly ties to become a political sister to Evie and a larger collectivity of mutant-clones. In the novel, Miranda destroys her career at Dr. Flowers' blood lab, along with all her family's hopes for the future, by helping Evie steal the doctor's car. Lai portrays Miranda's actions ambivalently, as reckless and spurred simply by curiosity and a desire for thrill and excitement. Yet the novel seems ultimately less interested in a politics of filiality, in positing Miranda as either a good or bad daughter, than a politics of affiliation, of forging new, non-given bonds and a sense of solidarity.

Lai emphasizes how the invention of "a nice myth of origins" helped rally the clones into forming a political collectivity to rebel against Pallas, the corporation that created them and

continues to exploit their labor (160). Evie relates a story that circulated up and down the assembly line about how they were cloned from the genes of: "Ai, a Chinese woman who married a Japanese man and was incarcerated in the Rockies during the Second World War. She died of cancer right after the war ended. He died of grief. Their bodies were sold to science. […] But it's all rumour. For all I know one of my co-workers made it up" (160). This origin myth directly invokes the history of the incarceration of Japanese/Americans and Japanese/Canadians during WWII, allowing the clones to connect their experiences of oppression to an especially salient and politically inciting history of injustice against so-called alien others. As a romance of a Chinese woman who was incarcerated for love, this narrative also mobilizes political affects in a call for pan-Asian, interethnic solidarity.[389]

In the novel, Evie introduces Miranda to a group of her clone sisters who have similarly escaped from Pallas and now live in secrecy in a largely uninhabited area of the Unregulated Zone. Unlike Evie, who decided to give herself a new name, the other clones continue to go by their manufacturing model (Sonia 14, 116, 121, 148, 161, 211, and 287) and are collectively referred to as "the Sonias." They live together in the same house along with their children and grow their own food in the form of radishes, cabbage, and durian fruit. Lai thus presents a vision of a sustainable all-female utopia structured around communal living and gardening. The Sonias also serve as a model of feminist grassroots organizing, engaging in subversive activities to expose corporate greed and exploitation of clone labor. They infiltrate the Pallas shoe factories to replace original sole molds with the new molds they have created and inscribed with resistant messages like the examples below:

*What does it mean to be human?*

*How old is history?*

[389] The name "Ai," pronounced as "I," can, depending on the tone, mean "love" in Mandarin.

*The shoemakers have no elves.* (237)

*materials: 10 units*

*labour: 3 units*

*retail price: 169 units*

*profit: 156 units*

*Do you care?* (238)

The first poem draws on the popular Grimm's fairy tale about a poor shoemaker who receives much-needed assistance from little elves who finish his work while he sleeps at night. This retelling calls attention to how the clone laborers in Pallas shoe factories have no such magical helpers and must do all the work themselves, for which they are grossly underpaid, as the second sole message renders salient. The breakdown of the cost of materials and labor in relation to the profit Pallas makes per pair of shoes throws into sharp relief the sheer magnitude of corporate greed and exploitation. Clones are only paid a small fraction of the cost of the materials needed to make each pair of shoes, signaling the degree to which they are not accounted for and simply do not count. Lai's fictional scenario strongly evokes the ongoing labor exploitation by American shoe companies such as Nike and Adidas, which have set up manufacturing plants in China and pay workers "as little as $1.67 an hour making shoes that can sell for up to 100 times as much in the United States."[390] The question posed in the first poem, "*What does it mean to be human?*" not only invites critical reflection on the shifting category of the human and those who have been historically excluded from that category but also on the meaning of humanity itself. Lai redefines humanity in terms of an ethics of feeling. Being human means uncovering a

[390] Alastair Jamieson and Eric Baculinao, "Worsening China Factory Strike Threatens Adidas, Nike Sneakers," *NBC News*, April 23, 2014, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/worsening-china-factory-strike-threatens-adidas-nike-sneakers-n87951.

capacity to care, to be moved towards a revolution that will dismantle these structures of injustice and unevenness. In their cleverness, the Sonias co-opt corporate resources to further their cause. Customers who buy Pallas shoes also inadvertently disseminate their subversive, revolutionary messages in the footprints they track.[391]

Beyond these plots of corporate economic sabotage, the Sonias stage their most radical revolution through their queer reproductive practices. Lai explains how Pallas and other corporations only manufacture female clones in order to maintain strict reproductive control over this laboring population. The Sonias, however, discover the wondrous fertility properties of durian fruit, an unintended effect of corporate biotechnology practices. According to Sonia 14, scientists implanted human genes into fruit in an effort to treat infertility in women but they could not contain the pollen, which migrated and fertilized the fruit of trees bred for other purposes. Biogenetic modifications along with natural mutations gave rise to fruits that allow women to reproduce without the need for insemination. Dr. Flowers, who we learn has been cloning Sonias for decades, condemns this mode of queer reproduction: "You don't know what…monstrosities might have come from these births. Those trees have been interbreeding and mutating for at least three generations since the original work. The fertility those durians provided was neither natural nor controllable. It was too dangerous" (256). This passage evokes racialized discourses and anxieties of Oriental female hyper-sexuality and hyper-fertility[392] in

[391] Lai also foregrounds the failures and extreme costs of revolution. The Sonias had been producing sole molds for a massive infiltration of Pallas shoe factories but someone had snitched and on the day of infiltration, they found themselves ambushed by corporate police. All the molds were confiscated and the Sonias themselves placed in detention or otherwise disappeared. Sonia 14, the oldest and only remaining Sonia, eventually finds the bodies of her sisters brutally dismembered and buried at the edge of the forest.

[392] On imagined hyper-fertility of non-white populations see: Camisha Russell, "The Race Idea in Reproductive Technologies: Beyond Epistemic Scientism and Technological Mastery," *Bioethical Inquiry* 12, no. 4 (2015): 604-5.

relation to the durian, as a promiscuous Oriental fruit.[393] Dr. Flowers' insistence that the Sonias are reproducing uncontrollably and must be prevented from giving birth to monstrous, mutant children strongly recalls how women of color have been historically the target of reproductive regulatory laws and compulsory mass sterilization.[394]

Lai conjures a vision of a more-than-human political collectivity through the Sonias. Together the Sonias form an alternative Garden of Eden, cultivating durian fruit to enhance their fertility and cabbage and radishes to strengthen the fetuses. They rely on earth's resources to literally grow a free society of mutant-clones from the ground up organized around a politics of mutation that celebrates the contingency and unpredictable agency of the earth. The Sonias embody and strive to build a more-than-human, transgenic, feminist political collectivity that reflects what scholars have variously termed an "eco-cosmopolitan" or "chimeralogical" imagination.[395] Miranda's realization that biotechnology and durian fruit rendered possible her own birth leads her to form a queer political affiliation with the Sonias, to recognize herself as a similarly marginalized, exploited mutant-clone. Lai foregrounds how Miranda comes to develop and embrace this expanded more-than-human political subjectivity on a formal level:

> Suddenly the strange movements I had felt of late within my body began to make sense. […] Suddenly I could feel my roundness, my body ripe as a pear about to drop. […] Soft pear, succulent sweet. And ready to rot, already dreaming of the return to earth.

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[393] David Hechler notes how the Tourism Authority of Thailand promoted the following 1987 slogan, "The one fruit of Thailand more delicious than durian…its young women" ("Child Sex Tourism" (1995): https://aboutphilippines.ph/files/child_sex_tourism.pdf). The slogan establishes a link between durian and Thai women as erotic and available for consumption.

[394] On reproductive regulation of women of color see: Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*.

[395] On eco-cosmopolitanism see: Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008), 50-62. On the chimeralogical imagination see: R. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 140-41.

> I thought, we are the new children of the earth, of the earth's revenge. Once we stepped out of mud, now we step out of moist earth, out of DNA both new and old, an imprint of what has gone before, but also a variation. By our difference we mark how ancient the alphabet of our bodies. By our strangeness we write our bodies into the future. (258-59)

Miranda had no reason to think that she might be pregnant from having queer sex with Evie but now remembering the durian she ate at the Sonias' house and knowing its wondrous fertility properties, she can finally comprehend the strange, new changes happening within her body. Lai suggests that Miranda has also come to view her body differently, as more intimately entangled with fruit, as a ripe, soft pear ready to drop and reassemble with the earth. The shift to a collective "we" narration signals how Miranda finally imagines herself as one of the "new children of the earth" about to give birth to a mutant-child of "earth's revenge." Lai's novel thus offers a critical imaginary for thinking eco-cosmopolitanism in relation to queer futurity. In his polemic *No Future* (2004), Lee Edelman has argued that a radical queer politics and ethics of negativity must relentlessly oppose the "reproductive futurism" embodied in the figure of the child.[396] *Salt Fish Girl*, however, offers a way of theorizing a queer politics and ethics that need not entail the total renunciation of the future or the child. The novel gestures to how an expanded more-than-human, ecocritical framework allows us to re-imagine the child in terms of intimate, ongoing processes of multispecies assembling towards alternative visions of queer futurity.

*Salt Fish Girl* concludes with the scene of Miranda giving birth to her and Evie's child, where Lai seeks to write all their queer bodies, of new and ancient DNA, into the future. On the run from corporate police after stabbing Dr. Flowers, Miranda and Evie stumble across a hot

[396] Edelman, *No Future*, 2-3.

spring in the mountains. As they submerge their bodies in the water, their legs fuse together and transform into thick, scaly tails:

> [Evie] stretched her tail through mine and our coils interlocked…and then all of a sudden I found myself breathing these great heaving breaths. My belly heaved and contracted. Blood streamed into the water, staining it. I howled with the pain of womb spasming deeply, and then a dark head emerged six inches below my navel, from an opening in my scaly new flesh. The head had a wrinkled human face. Evie reached under water, guided the thing out, black-haired and bawling, a little baby girl. (269)

Lai depicts how Miranda and Evie tentatively explore their new bodily transformations, learning how to embrace each other with their serpentine tails and how to navigate the sudden onset of labor and childbirth together. The odd description of their baby as having a "human face," suggests that she might have a more-than-human body. This scene thus dramatizes all three characters in the process of literally becoming salt/fish/girl, the multispecies assemblage that the title indexes. Through her novel, Lai presents an alternative evolutionary narrative that seeks to recuperate and imagine primitive forms—the base olfactory sense, durian fruit, reptilian-fish bodies—into the future. Lai challenges narratives that posit the modern erect, bipedal form as the pinnacle of human evolution[397] and invites readers to imagine how we might evolve otherwise, towards a potentially feetless fishy, serpentine form. *Salt Fish Girl* must also be read as distinct from nineteenth-century Anglo-American narratives of de-evolution or degeneration because Lai depicts Miranda's atavistic reptilian-fish body as queerly generative, animated with visions of

[397] This vertical, linear narrative of evolution is perhaps best exemplified by *March of Progress*, the iconic scientific illustration commissioned for the 1965 volume of *Early Man*. See: Cameron Shelley, "Aspects of Visual Argument: A Study of the *March of Progress*," *Informal Logic* 21, no. 2 (2001): 85-96.

queer futurity and liberatory potential.[398] In her novel, Lai narrates a history of female oppression and exploitation around feet, from Chinese practices of foot-binding to the clone laborers imprisoned and forced to assemble shoes in corporate compounds. Lai imagines liberation in terms of the evolution of a new and old body without feet, a more-than-human body that draws us closer to primitive fish and can open us up to novel assemblages of relation. *Salt Fish Girl* disrupts linear narratives of evolution to foreground evolution as a messy, multivalent process of becoming with other organisms. Narratively, Lai relays the (sexual) congress and multiple births of her multispecies character via a lateral and hybrid evocation of Chinese, Western, and Greek classical tales (i.e. the creation myth of Nu Wa, Han Christian Anderson's "The Little Mermaid," and Pallas/Nike from Greek mythology).

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to an analysis of how Lai literally enacts a politics and ethics of multispecies becoming through her collaborative poetry project with Rita Wong, a fellow Chinese Canadian writer. The long poem, *sybil unrest* (2008), is, according to Lai and Wong, "a back and forth conversation conducted by email over the course of several months" in 2003 against the backdrop of "the SARS crisis in Hong Kong and the American invasion of Iraq."[399] As a poem that evolves in unexpected, highly contingent ways through the

[398] See: Virginia Richter, *Literature after Darwin: Human Beasts in Western Fiction, 1859-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Richter examines de-evolution narratives that "negotiate the human-ape relation by simianising the Western body. All at once, it is not a member of the 'lowest races' who is ape-like, but a European man who is literally turned into an ape" (87-8). This echoes the literary interest in de-evolution that Paul Medeiros discusses in his article ("Simian Narratives at the Intersection of Science and Literature," *Modern Language Studies* 23, no. 2 (1993): 59). Kipling's short story, "The Mark of the Beast" (1890), "foregrounds the vulnerability of the Western body," where the touch of a leper, a member of the lowest colonized class, can destabilized the identity of a member of the imperial ruling class (Richter, *Literature after Darwin*, 88). In Arthur Conan Doyle's "The adventures of the Creeping Man" (1905) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Richter notes how "dangers of simianation" are not just "imported from the colonial space" but already "resid[e] within the metropolis" (Ibid, 91).

[399] Larissa Lai and Rita Wong, *sybil unrest* (Vancouver: New Star Books, [2008] 2013), 123. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically.

force of Lai and Wong's creative affectivity, *sybil unrest*, I argue, exudes both the delight and delirium of becoming multiple, becoming multispecies.

**Feminist Forms of Collaboration**

*sybil unrest*, Lai and Wong assert, "began in a renga spirit during the 2003 Hong Kong International Literary Festival" (123). *Renga*, or "linked verse," is a popular pre-modern genre of Japanese collaborative poetry.[400] Working in pairs or small groups, poets would take turns creating stanzas to link up with the preceding stanza to form a long poetic sequence. *sybil unrest* can be understood as Lai and Wong's attempt to adapt and compose a *renga* for our contemporary neoliberal, global capitalist era.[401] The collaborative linked verse form serves as one means through which Lai and Wong seek to enact a politics and ethics of becoming with. *sybil unrest* blurs the boundaries of authorial voice and subjectivity in a way that formally undermines the primacy of authorship, of deciphering which lines specifically belong to Lai or Wong or the both of them. The poem engenders from the creative affective flows between two authorial bodies continuously reassembling in relation to each other.

The open, dynamic form of *sybil unrest* can be described as a kind of assemblage. Each stanza is composed as an unpunctuated, protean unit of fluid, shape-shifting language that invites a poetic response, a rejoining stanza that will take up certain ideas and elements and extend them in playful, provocative ways. In this to-and-fro conversation across an email web interface, the poem sinuously twists, turns, and veers off in surprising directions. A radical contingency can be discerned on the level of form as well as content. The poem is divided into three sections marked

[400] David Landis Barnhill, "Renga: The Literary Embodiment of Impermanence and Nonself," accessed April 9, 2017, https://www.uwosh.edu/facstaff/barnhill/244-japan/Renga.pdf, 1.

[401] It is important to note that traditional Japanese renga has a very strict form with many rules (Ibid, 1-3). In contrast, *sybil unrest* exhibits a much more open, fluid, free verse form.

by the Chinese characters for one, two, and three. While *sybil unrest* opens with stanzas that maintain the same orderly, left-justified form, they gradually assume more spontaneous and varied free verse forms. By the end, Lai and Wong let go of the margin altogether, displaying textual arrangements that cascade across the entire page.

*sybil unrest* interweaves critiques of biopower, technology, global capitalism, and social marginalization (for which Lai is better known)[402] with issues of environmentalism, indigenous sovereignty, food politics, and consumerism (for which Wong has been recognized).[403] Meanings and authorship are, however, repeatedly unsettled through the poem's extreme intertextuality: "[p]hrases and rhythms, sometimes skewed, float in and out of *sybil unrest* from many places" (123). In their acknowledgements, Lai and Wong enumerate an extensive range of scholarly and pop cultural references from Gayatri Spivak and Roy Kiyooka to the American rock band Rage Against the Machine, nursery rhymes, and commercial jingles.

Emily McGiffin describes the form of *sybil unrest* as "demanding—it takes concentration to follow the linguistic and political leaps that are rarely linked by conventional syntax."[404] Even with concentration, meanings flash and flicker, continuously slipping away from the reader through the authors' dizzying semantic wordplay and heavy use of puns. Lai and Wong deploy, throughout the poem, one of the Language poets' (e.g. Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, and Ron Silliman) preferred devices, twisting a well-known quote or common idiom through sound

[402] See for example: Larissa Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, [1995] 2004); and *Automaton Biographies* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009).

[403] See for example: Rita Wong, *Forage* (Gibsons, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2007); and *Undercurrent* (Gibsons, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2015).

[404] Emily McGiffin, Review of *sybil unrest* by Larissa Lai and Rita Wong, *The Goose* 13, no. 2 (2015): 1-2.

or spelling just so much that it takes on surprising new meanings while the old ones continue to resonate.[405] Take, for example, the following stanza:

manned by the world bunk
those 3-piece suited heels gash
& smother earth
skyscrapers spent, flaccid
i m f---'d
the bleak small inherit the dearth
none left
butt the roaches
global swarming encroaches

(3)

Here "world bank" becomes the "world bunk," evoking the image of rich corporate types in three-piece suits and heels in bed with each other. Together they smother mother earth with their violent capitalist practices, heedless of the devastation they leave in their wake. The little, disjointed "i" seems "f---'d" in more ways than one, screwed by the structural inequities of global capitalism that also leaves the "i" feeling flaccid, completely impotent. Lai and Wong revise one of the most well-known biblical verses: "Blessed are the meek: / for they shall inherit the earth" to convey a much bleaker apocalyptic vision, where the small will have nothing to inherit except dearth. "Dearth" here alludes to ongoing conditions of poverty/scarcity as well as the inheritance of a dead, no longer hospitable earth. The "butt" of the joke, the authors suggest,

[405] See: Charles Bernstein, "The Expanded Field of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E," in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, eds. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale (New York: Routledge, 2015), 281-97; and Michael Greer, "Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing or, the Naming of 'Language Poetry,' " *boundary 2* 16, no. 2/3 (1989): 335-55.

is that global capitalism will remake the earth into a place that only roaches can inhabit. In addition to global warming, they portend, "global swarming encroaches." The stanza teases out connections between global capitalism and ecological destruction, which the next stanza extends in rhizomatic fashion.

In the movement from stanza to stanza, meanings become unsettled and multiplied.[406] The lines "couched in no uncertain germs / warfare's new upholstery" (4), which follow the image of encroaching roaches, conjure an alternative apocalyptic vision around acts of biological warfare. Reoriented in this way, we can return and read "world bunk" differently, as a pun on military "bunker," gesturing to how global capitalism and militarism collude to "cache nuclear arms" (4) and violently exploit the earth. The lines "seer sucker / the unstitched garment puckers / the subaltern cannot peek" (6), invite readers to connect the three-piece suits mentioned in the previous stanza to the Third World subaltern laborers who make them. In response to Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Lai and Wong assert that the subaltern cannot even peek as they toil away stitching puckered garments. *sybil unrest* thus compels a kind of reading practice that attends to the lateral movements and oblique connections between stanzas, to how meanings shift, proliferate, and sometimes pirouette into ambiguity. It remains unclear, for example, what the subaltern would even steal a glance of or what readers should be seeing. Are we the "seer sucker"?

*sybil unrest* revels in innuendos, ambiguity, and provocations, eschewing attempts to boil the poem down to a single message or vision. It calls for a sideways reading practice that foregoes the desire and possibility of following all the poem's linguistic and political leaps, of

[406] As Barnhill notes, *renga* is a Buddhist literary tradition. He emphasizes how the *renga* formally embodies the Buddhist notion of "nonself," or "independent co-existence" ("Renga," 4). While each stanza can be said to be a distinct poetic unit from other stanzas, "the meaning of the words are provisional, dependent" on joining stanzas and verse-links (4). Barnhill asserts: "[A] renga sequence as a whole has its own identity as a particular flow of imagery, but it is not a single poem. It is a patterned succession of distinct textual inter-identities" (5).

catching every joke without becoming the butt of one ourselves. In their feminist collaboration, Lai and Wong similarly relinquish complete authorial control, not fully knowing how the poem will evolve and what it will become as they come together. The poem registers the constant back-and-forth negotiation of more-than-one authorial body at play. Tellingly, Lai has stated elsewhere that she finds "the notion of the 'death of the author' particularly annoying" because "it seemed to be widely in play at precisely the moment when many marginalized people were finally beginning to find their voice."[407] *sybil unrest* rejects the death of the author and instead invites us to view the author as minor and multiple. In addition to a compound authorial subjectivity, Lai and Wong fashion, what they call in their acknowledgements, an "unstable, flickering sort of subjectivity" composed of multiple minor "i"s (124).

**A Politics and Ethics of Minor "i"s**

Lai and Wong's collaborative poetry project can be understood as a project to "re-subject," to imagine alternative forms of subjectivity for surviving and claiming agency in our contemporary global neoliberal capitalist era. The multiple minor "i"s that emerge and fade intermittently throughout *sybil unrest* serve as an obvious reworking of the individualized "I"—Enlightenment notions of an autonomous, rational subject capable of knowing and shaping the external world.[408] Lai and Wong also write against the nineteenth-century lyrical "I," which is grounded in a similar humanistic model of subjectivity. Lyric poetry has been conventionally defined as the expression of an individual speaker's highly personal thoughts and feelings, as a

[407] Robyn L. Morris, "Sites of Articulation—An Interview with Larissa Lai," *West Coast Line* 38, no. 2 (2004): 24.

[408] See: Nick Mansfield, "The free and autonomous Individual," in *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 13-24.

singular voice that "speaks out in a single moment of time."[409] *sybil unrest* is conversely composed of multiple voices and in the poem the "i"s cannot always speak out. I am primarily interested in how Lai and Wong mobilize these multiple minor "i"s to conjure a more-than-human political subjectivity, to attune readers to their intimate entanglement with various nonhuman species and worlds.

Revising René Descartes' famous philosophical proposition, "I think, therefore I am," Lai and Wong write: "i think therefore i ham" (79). Instead of consolidating an individualized "I," they render the "I" minor and elide "am" into "ham," destabilizing boundaries between subject and object, between a human "i" eating and the nonhuman piece of meat being eaten. "i ham" foregrounds a literal form of multispecies enmeshment, how we are what we eat and should thus attend to the ways our eating practices ramify beyond an individualized "I." Lai and Wong go on to critique the global environmental impact of meat production and consumption: "laughter's carnivorous appetites / spills hunger greater than the sum / of all its larks" (79). They depict "carnivorous appetites" as directly perpetuating conditions of world hunger. Recent studies call attention to the unsustainable levels of meat consumption in the U.S. and the vast environmental costs of meat production.[410] According to the Livestock, Environment, and Development Initiative, "[l]ivestock production accounts for 18 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, including 9 percent of carbon dioxide and 37 percent of methane gas emissions worldwide."[411]

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[409] Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1979), 23.

[410] See: Bryan Walsh, "The Triple Whopper Environmental Impact of Global Meat Production," *Time*, Dec. 16, 2013, http://science.time.com/2013/12/16/the-triple-whopper-environmental-impact-of-global-meat-production/; and Susanne Stoll-Kleemann and Tim O'Riordan, "The Sustainability Challenges of Our Meat and Dairy Diets," *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* (May-June 2015): http://www.environmentmagazine.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/2015/May-June%202015/meat_abstract.html.

[411] Cassandra Brooks, "Consequences of increased global meat consumption on the global environment – trade in virtual water, energy & nutrients," *Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment*, accessed May 3, 2016,

The minor "i" fades into the background as a de-personalized laughter assumes the subject position, spilling hunger and more unsettling laughs onto the next page:

ha ha ham
engineer a pig, blam
into the body of
a brown-skinned labourer, a synthetic sister
fill the laundromats, restaurants & factories with genetic menageries
secret squirrels, rambutanned rabbits, swollen salmon in st. john's
let class determine diet, choke on corporate canards
feeding the world license by license
one pat(i)ent at a time
ch-ch-ch-changes
only the cells can see
(80)

This rejoining stanza extends the meditation on global food politics in relation to contemporary practices of biogenetic engineering. The joke, "i ham," gains new textures of meaning as Lai and Wong trace ham from a genetically modified pig into the body of a brown-skinned laborer, further complicating and blurring human/nonhuman boundaries. They invite readers to view the pig and laborer as exploited "synthetic sister[s]." The passage moves on to an indictment of how corporate patents on genetically modified seeds have come to heavily govern global food production and supply. Agricultural biotech corporations such as Monsanto sell patented seeds to farmers under licensing agreements that strictly limit the use of their seeds to a single season and

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https://woods.stanford.edu/environmental-venture-projects/consequences-increased-global-meat-consumption-global-environment.

prohibit the saving and replanting of any second-generation seeds.[412] Vandana Shiva emphasizes how these patenting practices augment corporate profits at the direct expense of farmers, entrapping them in a system of perpetual debt bondage, as they must buy new seeds for each planting season. This heightened economic precarity can be gleaned from the sharp increase in farmer suicides in India over the past few decades.[413] Lai and Wong call attention to how seed patents also exacerbate conditions of world hunger by effectively compelling farmers to discard excess seeds, rather than replant them. Instead of "feeding the world," the new imperative under global neoliberal capitalism is to protect patented biotechnologies and corporate profits. In response to these vast structural injustices, Lai and Wong imagine and attempt to enact an alternative *minor* politics.

As previously discussed, Lai and Wong destabilize human boundaries and conceptions of human agency by fashioning a minor flickering subjectivity composed of multiple "i"s. In the following section, I elaborate on how they displace the unmarked, autonomous "I" with the marked and "marketed anatomy" of Asian girls (39). I argue that Lai and Wong mobilize the Asian girl, a quintessentially minor figure, to imagine alternative modes of agency within and through a multispecies assemblage. The final lines of the above stanza, "ch-ch-ch-changes / only

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[412] In the 2013 *Bowman v. Monsanto Co.* case, the agricultural biotech corporation sued the Indiana framer, Vernon Hugh Bowman, for patent infringement when he saved herbicide resistant soybean seeds and attempted to replant them without a license. (*Bowman v. Monsanto Co.*, Supreme Court of the United States, 2012-2013, http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/11-796_c07d.pdf). Bowman disputed these claims under the doctrine of patent exhaustion, contending that Monsanto could not control his use of progeny seeds, which are embodied in the first generation of soybean seeds originally sold and thus, an expected use of the product. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of Monsanto, upholding the corporation's patent rights over the self-replicating technologies it developed, the trait of herbicide resistance, rather than the seed itself (Ibid, 5). The court decided that Bowman could resell the patented soybeans he purchased, consume the beans himself, or use them as animal feed, but he could not "make *additional* patented soybeans without Monsanto's permission" (emphasis in original). Monsanto has also created sterile seeds via a "Terminator technology" to precisely inhibit farmers from saving and replanting their transgenic seeds.

[413] Vandana Shiva, "From Seeds of Suicide to Seeds of Hope: Why are Indian Farmers Committing Suicide and How Can We Stop This Tragedy," *The World Post*, May 25, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vandana-shiva/from-seeds-of-suicide-to_b_192419.html.

the cells can see" (80), gestures to how violence in an age of biotechnology is often perpetuated unseen via the manipulation of genetic, cellular materials. While Shiva calls attention to one major, discernable effect of corporate development and patenting of transgenic seeds (i.e. the alarming increase in farmer suicides in India), there are other minor, less palpable effects (e.g. the gradual loss of biodiversity, slow environmental degradation) that are just as serious. Lai and Wong gesture here to the need to re-imagine politics and agency beyond the scale of the human and instead, at the minor intra-cellular level.[414] If "only the cells can see," then it might suit us well to learn how to "infiltrate as cells" (99). In his essay on *sybil unrest*, Sonnet L'Abbé asserts that the poem "proposes action and resistance as occurring at the moments where the subject literally composes herself – nutritionally, affectively, and narratively – as living material functionally interdependent on and with all other living material on the planet."[415] Below I extend L'Abbé's argument by probing how *sybil unrest* conjures, what I term, a *minor ecological imagination*.

**Asian Sybils and a Minor Ecological Imagination**

The title, *sybil unrest*, serves as both a play on "civil unrest" and an allusion to "sibyls," female oracles of antiquity. While sibyls have been solicited many times throughout classical Greek history for their wisdom and mysterious prophetic powers, they have also been constructed as strange, babbling madwomen. One of the earliest descriptions of a sibyl can be found in the writings of the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus: "The Sibyl with raving mouth utters

[414] "Intra-" as opposed to the common prefix, "inter-" serves as "a reworking of the traditional notions of causality," where intra-action entails an "inherent ontological indeterminacy. This means that 'relata' do not pre-exist relations, but rather that 'relata-within-phenomena' emerge through specific intra-actions" (Hilda Rømer Christensen and Bettina Hauge, "Feminist Materialisms," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 12, no. 1-2 (2012): 5).

[415] Sonnet L'Abbé, " 'Infiltrate as Cells': The Biopolitically Ethical Subject of *sybil unrest*," *Canadian Literature* 210/211 (2011): http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=0000002624256291&Fmt=3&cl ientId=43168&RQT=309&VName=PQD.

solemn, unadorned, unlovely words."[416] The fragment offers a complicated portrait of agency, where the Sibyl never fully emerges as a subject that speaks. Syntactically, agency comes to be concentrated around a single body part, a "raving mouth" that moves and spews words via some peculiar, unruly force. Plutarch provides one potential explanation in his essay where he cites the Heraclitus fragment, "adding 'but [the Sibyl] reaches out over a thousand years with her voice because of the god within her.' "[417] He suggests that the Sibyl's "raving mouth" is animated by the divine force of a god who inhabits her body and speaks through her.

But "raving" also points to how madness can serve as another possible force that animates the Sibyl's mouth.[418] William Harris notes how geo-archaeologists have discovered the "Delphic oracle…to stand over a fissure in the rock formation which allows gasses to escape into the oracular chamber. Toxified by the rising gas, the Sibyl loses control over her conscious mind, perhaps exploring an unconscious level of perception with a social messaging output."[419] While Harris posits that the Sibyl suffered from some form of environmental toxicity, he provocatively suggests that the gasses that seeped into her body also allowed her to access a different level of perception. The Sibyl thus gestures to an alternative mode of embodiment and inhabiting the world that challenges Enlightenment legacies of "possessive individualism," which Ed Cohen links to the production of a modern body that must be anxiously defended. Cohen calls attention to how possessive individualism is predicated on an originary, traumatic "conceptual violence": "To live as body-possessing legal subjects, we must first radically abstract ourselves from the

[416] William Harris, trans., *Heraclitus: The Complete Fragments*, accessed March 29, 2017, http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf.

[417] Ibid.

[418] See: Andrew Benjamin, "Raving Sibyls, signifying Gods: Noise and sense in Heraclitus fragments 92 and 93," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 46, no. 1 (2005): 80.

[419] Harris, *Heraclitus*, np.

lifeworld within which we exist and define ourselves as distinct from the material contexts that make our lives viable."[420] He foregrounds the conditions of loss and alienation that structure the formation of a possessive individual subjectivity, which requires ongoing, "ceaseless…boundary maintenance."[421] Cohen specifically examines how contemporary biomedicine has come to privilege "immunity" as a means of securing bodily boundaries and as the ultimate defense against illness. We can understand the Sibyl as risking illness, against a logic of immunity, to remain affectively connected to the world and open to all the different, possible modes of becoming with.[422] The case of the Sibyl invites us to apprehend toxic exposure as not just disabling, inducing illnesses and sick symptoms from which the body must be anxiously defended, but also potentially enabling, catalyzing unpredictable, wondrous transformations.

The sibylline body serves as an ecstatically open form, constantly assembling in relation to mysterious divine and earthly material forces. I argue that Lai and Wong imagine, through their poem, a sibylline social body as an alternative model of political subjectivity and agency in an era of global neoliberal capitalism. *sybil unrest* concludes with an allusion to Nick Ut's Pulitzer prize-winning photograph of a nine-year-old Vietnamese girl (Phan Thị Kim Phúc) running naked down a road in the aftermath of a napalm attack during the Vietnam War:

the girl in the picture

not

missing exactly

not there

[420] Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 88.

[421] Ibid, 8.

[422] On queer bonding via toxicity see also: Mel Y. Chen, "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 2-3 (2011): 265-86.

napalm naked

the one who speaks is not the girl in the

picture she is every fish the acid river coughs up every eater of

fish every arsenic atom pulsing or poisoning every breath you

take every piggy every burger hamming for the man every mush-

room every murrelet every mycorrhizal mat every lightning strike

in the cameras of the world

(120-21)

Ut's photograph serves as an iconic representation of the atrocities of the Vietnam War, of a nude child queered by militarized violence.[423] In their poem, Lai and Wong encourage readers to view the photograph from a different angle, to focus not on Kim Phúc's nudity, how she is "napalm naked," but rather the extensive devastating effects of napalm on the environment. They emphasize: "the one who speaks is not the girl in the / picture she is every fish the acid river coughs up." Here Kim Phúc, as a raving sybil, projects the coughs of the acid river and every fish—a form of glossolalia in between speech and noise, the human and the nonhuman.[424] Her mouth seems to be animated by some environmental force, the agency of the earth and all its

[423] In September 2016, a media controversy erupted when Facebook decided to censor Ut's photograph of the "Napalm Girl." The controversy revolved around the photograph's status as child pornography—its depiction of a nude child—and as an iconic image of the Vietnam War—its documentation of a moment in history. After widespread criticism from the public and media organizations across the globe, Facebook finally reversed its decision to permit the sharing of Ut's photograph, recognizing its historical importance/value. The discourses around this controversy accentuate the non-place and non-sense of questions about child pornography in the evaluation of a documentary photograph of the Vietnam War. But taking seriously the nudity of the girl in the photograph, as more than mere co-incidence, can provide a productive point of departure for exploring the various ways militarization queers childhood. The vulnerable exposure of Phan Thị Kim Phúc's naked girl body is inextricably tied to and conditioned by the napalm attack that compelled her to tear off the clothes that were burning into her very flesh (see: Associated Press, "Facebook backtracks to allow iconic Vietnam War Photo of child napalm victims," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-tn-facebook-napalm-girl-photo-20160909-snap-story.html). On the story of Phan Thị Kim Phúc see: Denise Chong, *The Girl in the Picture: The Story of Kim Phuc, The Photograph, and the Vietnam War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

[424] Benjamin emphasizes how the Sibyl's oracular pronouncement "brings into consideration both human utterance as well as the sounds made by animals" ("Raving Sibyls," 80).

creatures (as opposed to the divine force of god or madness). Lai and Wong construct a sybilline body that does not attempt to speak *for* the earth in the same tendency as environmental conservationists. The excess affective energy concentrated around the sybil's mouth seems to be instead channeled towards multiple possible becomings with other organisms and the earth itself. The girl, Kim Phúc, becomes syntactically entangled with "every fish" to "every eater of / fish" to "every mush- / room every murrelet every mychorrhizal mat." Through their unpunctuated verse and heavy use of repetition, Lai and Wong capture how the violence of chemical warfare extends beyond the boundaries of the human girl body, Ut's photograph, and even the time-space of the Vietnam War, affecting a much broader ecosystem that includes all those who consume the toxic fish and breathe in the toxic air.

Lai and Wong implicate American corporations in their critique of chemical warfare and link the environmental devastation wrought by napalm with the 1984 Bhopal disaster. On the night of December 2-3, 1984, a pesticide plant operated by the American chemical manufacturing company, Union Carbide, leaked tons of highly toxic methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas and other deadly chemicals to the surrounding, largely poor shantytowns of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.[425] While the exact human death toll remains unknown, estimates vary anywhere from 5,000 to upwards of 20,000 deaths due to the often unseen, belated, and long-term effects of toxic exposure.[426] The Bhopal disaster remains the world's worst industrial gas leak. The Indian government sued Union Carbide and in 1989 the corporation eventually settled, agreeing to pay the amount of $470 million.[427] The plant site, however, has still yet to be cleaned up.[428] In

[425] Roli Varma and Daya R. Varma, "The Bhopal Disaster of 1984," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 25, no. 1 (2005): 38.

[426] Ibid.

[427] R. Varma and D.R. Varma, "The Bhopal Disaster of 1984," 43.

2001, Dow Chemical, the leading manufacturer of napalm for the U.S. government during the Vietnam War, bought Union Carbide.[429] Lai and Wong insist that Dow, as a result, now "belongs to these icons: / Bhopal baby girl face unburied / Naked vietnamese girl / running" (121). They allude here to Pablo Bartholomew's famous photograph of the Bhopal gas disaster girl and link it to Ut's photograph of the so-called "Napalm girl."[430] Dow has continued Union Carbide's tradition of liability evasion, "refus[ing] to provide for long-term health care, income support to the destitute and the disabled, or cleaning up the ongoing contamination."[431] Lai and Wong join other social justice activists in demanding that Dow assume legal responsibility for the protracted effects of toxicity on human and nonhuman ecologies:

bring that dow to market

to court

before thousands of unseen bodies

who lived in the earth

(121)

Gesturing to the inadequacy of Union Carbide's out-of-court settlement over thirty years ago, Lai and Wong call for Dow to stand trial. This passage foregrounds their commitment to not simply environmental justice but what Ursula Heise terms "multispecies justice," a more nuanced theory of justice that takes into account the claims of both human and nonhuman well-being within

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[428] Satinath Sarangi, "Crimes of Bhopal and the Global Campaign for Justice," *Social Justice* 29, no. 3, Global Threats to Security (2002): 47.

[429] Ibid, 49.

[430] Carolyn Erler, "Memory and Erasure: Applying Visual Narrative Power Analysis to the Image War Between Dow Chemical Corporation and the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal," *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education* 27 (2009): 48-9. The identity of the baby girl and the man who buried her remains unknown.

[431] Sarangi, "Crimes of Bhopal," 49.

specific social and cultural contexts.[432] Kim Phúc's naked, napalm blasted body and the blank, lifeless eyes of an anonymous, half-buried Indian baby girl have been forever seared into global memories of the Vietnam War and the Bhopal disaster, respectively, seen by millions across the world. While Lai and Wong affirm the need for justice for these child victims, they underscore the urgency of justice for the "thousands of *unseen* bodies / who lived in the earth."

This move to de-center the Asian girl in order to foreground neglected nonhuman bodies can be seen as politically dangerous given how the Asian girl has been historically marginalized and minoritized—never allowed to be center.[433] I agree that this critique is, to some extent, justified and that Asian Americanists should continue to rigorously interrogate and reflect on what might be lost in the field's recent posthuman ecocritical turn. Yet I maintain that *sybil unrest* provides a useful critical imaginary for rethinking Asian/America as a multispecies formation, in a slightly different vein than *Salt Fish Girl*. Whereas the novel imagines an expanded more-than-human collectivity with legible species of flora and fauna (i.e. durian and carp), *sybil unrest* conjures a *minor ecological imaginary* that invites readers to probe the limits and possibilities of relationality with nonhuman others who are largely illegible and imperceptible as species. In *When Species Meet* (2008), Donna Haraway writes:

> I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly

[432] Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 198-99.

[433] See: Frances Tran, "Animate Impossibilities: On Asian Americanist Critique, Racialization, and the Humanities" (dissertation, CUNY Graduate Center, 2016), 210.

> outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I am an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with* many.[434]

Haraway points to how tiny companions or messmates literally reside within the human body and depend on each other to survive. Despite Haraway's attention here to a vast, imperceptible multitude of nonhuman companions, she remains primarily focused, in her book, on the meetings between humans and dogs—arguably the most companionable of companions, cute, cuddly, and highly charismatic. Myra Hird emphasizes how only attending to "animals 'big like us'…encourages a profoundly myopic humanism" and invites us to take seriously the following question: "who do we invite and who do we overlook when we meet the other in ethical encounters?"[435] In her work, Hird specifically examines the social lives of bacteria, the "unseen majority" that populates the human mouth, gut, skin, and other bodily orifices yet often remain obscured within an imaginative horizon delineated by human-animal relations.[436] My theory of a minor ecological imagination resonates closely with Hird's notion of "microontologies." Microontologies concern "companion species that are not species at all" and recognize that "the vast majority of [microbial] intra-actions that take place on Earth" occur without human recognition, knowledge, or involvement.[437] Hird thus compels us to grapple with what it means to become "companion[s] with not-species" and how to fashion an alternative ecological imaginary not preconditioned on direct or fully knowable intra-actions and exchanges.[438]

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[434] Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3-4, emphasis in original.

[435] Myra J. Hird, "Meeting with the Microcosmos," 36, 38. Other multispecies scholarship on microbial worlds and ontologies include: Stefan Helmreich, *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009)

[436] Ibid, 36.

[437] Ibid, 36-7.

[438] Ibid, 36.

The urgency of developing a more-than-human ethics of relationality in the minor, negative mode can be understood with respect to Kathryn Yusoff's discussion of biodiversity loss. As Yusoff points out, part of the challenge is recognizing the multitude of beings lost, who have never manifested as beings in the first place, at least not in ways sensible to human frames and technologies of perception.[439] There have been numerous attempts by conservationists to bring nonhuman beings into being through positive representational acts. The underlying logic here is that "if we make something more present, we can account for it, register it as a subject and thus extend care to it."[440] Yusoff notes how these conservation practices privilege not only "charismatic megafauna" over the less "visually fit," but also relational ties predicated on care or affinity between human and nonhuman worlds.[441] She calls attention to the limits of these conservation approaches, which stress humanistic modes of relationality—"meetings, reciprocity and relatings"—that do not accommodate the worlds of biodiversity beyond the social—"the nonrelational, the difficult and dead relations."[442] Yusoff identifies violence as an alternative basis for theorizing relationality. She emphasizes how human-nonhuman communities are constituted and bound together by violence as much as care: "Banal violence may call the insensible regimes of biodiversity loss into being and thus go beyond 'our' social worlds into the indeterminacy of the unknown and unnamed worlds of others."[443] Attending to violence (as opposed to care), Yusoff contends, allows us to uncover new, different relations, to become more

[439] Kathryn Yusoff, "Aesthetics of Loss: Biodiversity, Banal Violence and Biotic Subjects," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2011): 579-80.

[440] Ibid, 583.

[441] Ibid.

[442] Ibid, 580, 588.

[443] Ibid, 590.

sensitively attuned to "the scope and impact of harm," and to think of ways in which this violence can be recognized, mitigated, and eschewed.[444]

Yusoff's theorization of violence offers a productive way of understanding how Lai and Wong conjure, through their poem, a more-than-human ethics of relationality in the negative mode. To the extent that Ut's and Bartholomew's iconic photographs promote humanitarian care for Asian girl victims vividly captured in center frame, Lai and Wong encourage readers to develop an expanded sense of relationality by attending to the violence that binds human and nonhuman worlds both within and beyond the frame of the photograph.[445] The unintended target of the so-called "accidental napalm attack"[446] includes not just Kim Phúc but also the living environment of Vietnam.[447] Bartholomew's photograph can be read similarly for the violence exacted against nonhuman bodies—the poisoned soil, the various microorganisms killed and buried along with the Indian baby girl that have yet to be fully recognized or mourned. Lai and Wong thus reimagine the Asian girl, a minor and violently minoritized body, in relation to other violently forgotten, ungrievable nonhuman life.[448]

But violence might also be, in the end, an inadequate and overly exhausted term. In addition to a new aesthetics for apprehending minor, imperceptible worlds of biodiversity loss,

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[444] Ibid, 587.

[445] On conventionalized images of Third World crisis and need see: Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender and History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 179-200.

[446] Ut's photograph has been often called "accidental napalm." See: Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,' " *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no. 1 (2003): 35-66.

[447] On the ecological violence of napalm to Vietnam see: Michael G. Palmer, "The Case of Agent Orange: International Perspectives and an Homage to Victims," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29.1 (2007): 172-95; and David Zierler, *Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists who Changed the Way We Think about the Environment* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[448] On ungrievable life see: Butler, *Precarious Life*.

we need to develop a more expansive and nuanced critical vocabulary for violence. Ecocriticism and the environmental sciences can provide generative insights into the different ways nonhuman species and not-species experience violence that can, in turn, enrich and texture our understanding of various forms, scales, and temporalities of suffering. To return to the durian in *Salt Fish Girl*, what does it mean to think about violence in relation to plants? The contributors to Volume III of *Plant Disease: An Advanced Treatise* explore the various ways plants suffer and die from their afflictions. Editors Ellis Cowling and James Horsfall explain the mission of this five-volume treatise: "[T]he term 'plant pathology' means the study of suffering plants. Study is something man does. Man may suffer when disease hits his crops, but his suffering is secondhand. It is the plant that is sick, not the man. We must seek to understand disease as plants experience it and thus to make this treatise plant- rather than man-centered."[449] While various pathogens can cause diseases in plants, stresses and imbalances in the environment can also contribute to plant suffering.[450] This suffering commonly manifests as *wilting*—the plant becoming limp, drooping, or shriveling through loss or inadequate supply of water.[451] Wilting is used almost exclusively in relation to flora but in what ways do humans and other nonhumans also wilt? How can wilting be understood as another form of "growing sideways"? In my conclusion, I continue exploring different regimes and ontologies of violence with respect to the feral Asian girl—banned life marked by (non)becoming, life that steadily wilts and diminishes without necessarily dying.

[449] Ellis B. Cowling and James G. Horsfall, eds., "Prologue: How Plants Suffer from Disease," in *How Plants Suffer from Disease*, vol. 3 of *Plant Disease: An Advanced Treatise* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 16.

[450] Ibid, 4.

[451] Ibid, 7.

CONCLUSION

# Feral (Non)becomings

Inhuman Socialities and Imaginaries for Asian American Studies

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate how centering the Asian girl can shift and rearrange structures of knowledge in Asian American studies. Chapter one attends to the Asian girl queered by militarization as a way of fashioning a lateral critical genealogy of gendered militarized violence. I analyze various tropes of queer bonding for how they foreground compromised conditions of female homosociality in the camptown and also illuminate alternative possible demilitarized futures. Chapter two examines how figurations of the *kawaii* Asian girl contour a feminist and disabled notion of collectivity grounded in an ethics of care. I argue that animations of *kawaii* collectivity productively challenge the masculinist, militant, resistance-oriented ethical vision historically privileged in Asian American studies, enabling the theorization of an alternative politics organized around care—the recognition of a complex web of affective ties and obligations, of uneven and shared vulnerabilities. Chapter three grapples with the limits of care, as the Asian girl comes to be transported to the center of contemporary ecological narratives and imaginaries. I analyze depictions of the Asian girl as a multispecies assemblage with various nonhuman beings that are extremely difficult to recognize and care for as beings. The chapter demonstrates how rethinking Asian/America as a multispecies formation necessarily entails the rethinking of coalitional politics beyond positive modes of identification and caring affection. In closing, I would like to extend my theorization of a negative ethics of relationality by engaging with notions of the inhuman and inhuman bonding. I ask: How might the feral Asian girl and the inhuman imaginaries that circulate in and around this figure provide a generative point of departure for Asian American studies? What are the

political risks and possibilities of thinking through the inhuman bodies, temporalities, and spaces of Asian/America?

I concluded chapter three with the call for Asian American studies to attend to histories and processes of multispecies assembling between human and nonhuman others as a way of realizing alternative forms of social and political collectivity. The inhuman serves as an important corollary to this argument as a figuration of monstrous hybridity and liminality, as that which cannot be neatly distinguished as human or nonhuman. The inhuman terrifies because it is, at once, too familiar and strange; although it negates and deforms the very foundations of human identity, it is inherent to being human.[452] Humanity is simultaneously undone and defined by this overly proximate, innate relationality with the inhuman, which explains why the inhuman continues to be anxiously disavowed and banished. I am, however, primarily interested in how the inhuman illuminates an alternative ethics of relationality, the possibilities and pleasures that can come with discarding humanity and human social ties[453] as well as the pain and violence that condition meetings with the human.

Mel Y. Chen's account of "the peculiar intimacies and alienations" that toxicity produces serves as one salient example of what an *inhuman ethics of relationality* might look like.[454] She discusses how toxicity, diagnosed as "multiple chemical sensitivity" and "heavy metal poisoning," has profoundly impacted her own health, queerness, and ability to forge bonds.[455]

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[452] See: Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 47.

[453] At the 2017 Association for Asian American Studies conference in Portland, I attended two fantastic conference presentations that explore the topic of Asian anti-sociality—the political possibilities and pleasures of inscrutability and solitude, respectively: Christine Yao's "The Inscrutability of Afong Moy, the First Chinese Woman in the United States" and Summer Lee's "The Moment After: The Aesthetics of Solitude in Mitski's 'Happy' and Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*."

[454] Mel Y. Chen, "Toxic Animacies," 265.

[455] Ibid, 273.

Her body's heightened vulnerability against everyday toxins sometimes renders direct, extended human engagement extremely painful and even unbearable. After an entire day of navigating potential chemical threats, Chen relates how she recoils from her queer human lover—"She comes near me to offer comfort, putting her hand on my arm, and I flinch; I can't look at her and can hardly speak to her," temporarily forming a more intimate and affectionate bond with a couch.[456] Chen suggests that the stress and unpredictable risks of human engagement render a sociality with inanimate things more dependable, comfortable, and indeed vital to her bodily health and reinvigoration. She describes the queer intimacy she develops with the couch—"The couch and I are interabsorbent, interporous, and not only because the couch is made of mammalian skin," noting how the couch only becomes "an unacceptable partner" in "the recovering of [her] human-directed sociality."[457] Along with feminist scholars of new vitalism, Chen calls for the recognition of the "animacy" of nonhuman matter, how agency, sentience, and liveness come to be queered and racialized towards the theorization of "queer-inanimate social lives that exist beyond the fetish, beyond the animate, beyond the pure clash of human body sex."[458]

While it remains important to continue complicating and expanding conceptions of sociality to include nonhuman matter typically regarded as inanimate and not mattering,[459] I am particularly interested in how Chen's anecdote foregrounds an alternative ethics of relationality

[456] Ibid, 277.

[457] Ibid, 278.

[458] Ibid, 280, 282. On new vitalism see: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007); and Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

[459] Chen's theorization of animacy strongly resonates and intersects with Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010).

through her queer human lover. Reflecting on the way she avoids and retreats from her lover during her toxic episode, Chen writes: "She tolerates this because she understands very deeply how I am toxic. What is this relating? Distance in the home becomes the condition of these humans living together, in this moment, humans who are not geared toward continuity or productivity or reproductivity but to stasis, to waiting, until it passes."[460] The recognition of the inhuman capacities conditioned and engendered by toxicity is what allows the lover to love Chen in the way that she urgently needs, via a similar kind of *desisting care* that chapter two elaborates.[461] Whereas Fan desists by lending Miss Cathy and the Girls her much-needed affective bodily presence, Chen's lover desists by evacuating her bodily presence to create the time-space for other forms of queer bonding that may help Chen come back and meet with her again. An inhuman ethics of relationality is thus sensitively attuned to the need to refrain from, guard against, and even reject human sociality in order to uncover and benefit from other life-sustaining socialities.

Inhuman also implies a lack of "human" compassion for the misery and suffering of others, as in "inhumane." Juliana Chang grapples with this particular dimension of the inhuman in her book, *Inhuman Citizenship* (2017). Chang examines Asian American narratives that feature "Asian American characters not only as the objects but also as the vehicles and agents of inhuman suffering."[462] She references, for instance, the infamous scene where the narrator in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* terrorizes a quiet Chinese American girl in the

[460] Ibid, 277.

[461] Karen Barad similarly asserts that confronting "the inhuman—that which most commonly marks humanity's inhumanity as a lack of compassion—may be the very condition of possibility of feeling the suffering of the other, of literally being in touch with the other, of feeling the exchange of e-motion in the binding obligations of entanglements" ("On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am," *differences* 25, no. 5 (2012), 216).

[462] Juliana Chang, *Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 6.

bathroom, bullying, insulting, and physically assaulting her in the attempt to get her to speak, to just say one word. While we can "perceive how the suffering of both girls results from the degradations of gendered racial formation," Chang emphasizes how it is far "more difficult to acknowledge…the enjoyment that is produced by these degradations."[463] Our initial identification with the narrator, her desperation to make the quiet girl prove the possibility of speech and thus the possibility of assimilation for herself, leads us to enjoy the narrator's sadistic treatment of the quiet girl.[464] Eventually "taken aback by our enjoyment," Chang suggests that we "switch our objects of identification," finding new enjoyment through our judgment of and sense of moral superiority over the narrator.[465]

Drawing on the Lacanian concept of "jouissance," as a "violent yet blissful shattering of the self," Chang traces how tropes of the racial inhuman evoke the trauma of jouissance, threatening the boundaries of the human, the normative national subject, and to overwhelm the social order itself.[466] Her project serves as a critical response to a liberal politics and strategy of rehumanization (i.e. the claiming of human status for racial others), which as Chang points out, is "a solution that chillingly resonates with the civilizing aims of colonization."[467] She emphasizes the need to reject the impetus to "prov[e] ourselves human," along with received notions of humanity, theorizing "inhuman citizenship" as a more productive, counter-hegemonic

[463] Ibid.

[464] Ibid, 6-7.

[465] Ibid, 7.

[466] Ibid, 1, 3-4.

[467] Ibid, 13.

ethical practice that accepts, assumes, and revels in the "traumatic enjoyment" of the conditions of the racial inhuman.[468]

In chapter one, I gesture to ways of thinking inhumanity within and through conditions of gendered militarized violence. Sookie's inhumane attempt to drown her baby can be understood in terms of how the militarized structures and logic of the camptown inhibit the formation of compassionate feelings, compelling Sookie to fashion a predatory, indeed *feral* fox girl subjectivity in order to survive. Yet Sookie also clearly takes pleasure in preying on and toying with American GIs, relishing the jouissance of the racial inhuman to the point where she seems to only adorn the disguise, the dead skin of an Oriental girl. Sookie's embrace of inhumanism is what arguably renders her a more enigmatic and captivating character than the narrator, Hyun Jin. She does not become a mother, a kept woman, or legible citizen-subject, only manifesting in Hyun Jin's dreams as a flash of gleaming white teeth in blackness: "Her mouth stretches wide, smiling, as if she is happy to see me. […] And then I notice how pointy her teeth are, how they are fangs, really, and how through the slightly open mouth, they are glistening, as if about to take a bite" (1-2). Feralized through traumatic experiences of militarized violence, Sookie now threatens to turn against Hyun Jin in a feral act, to bite the human she loves most and feels closest to in this world.

"Feral," as one particular mode of inhuman embodiment, will be the focus of this conclusion. Feral is an adjective typically used to describe a nonhuman animal in a wild state, especially after escape from captivity or domestication. The term has also been used to refer to human children who have grown up in the wild or have been "kept in states of isolation, without socialization, language instruction, or education."[469] Kelly Struthers Montfort and Chloë Taylor

[468] Ibid, 13, 4, 1.

explore the usefulness of feral for rethinking feminism in intersection with critical animal studies, in particular.[470] They cite Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's important work, *Zoopolis* (2011), for attending to "the nonhuman feral," a largely neglected, under-theorized category of animal due to animal rights activists' exclusive focus on domesticated and wild animals: "Feral and other 'liminal' animals do not fit neatly into the categories of domesticated or wild; they live among us and have no other home, but they do not choose or otherwise are not fully part of human society."[471] Liminal animals thus share much in common with human denizens who have been compelled, for various reasons, to "live in places where they do not feel belonging and in whose political processes they do not wish to participate."[472] Both have been considered aliens, pests, trespassers, and invaders by the dominant white human population and have been the target of numerous extermination campaigns.

Extending the arguments of *Zoopolis*, Monfort and Taylor call attention to how "women have 'gone feral' " against their historical relegation, "quite literally as domesticated animals for men."[473] The two cite examples of "runaway girls and young women who, like many feral animals, have escaped situations of captivity, domination, and abuse, to live liminal lives in urban spaces" as well as female primatologists who "spend years and even lifetimes living in the jungle with primates, famously bonding with the apes they study and love."[474] They also take Donaldson and Kymlicka to task for their limited "expansionist ethics," which expands critical

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[469] Kelly Struthers Montfort and Chloë Taylor, "Feral Theory: Editors' Introduction," *feral feminisms* 6 (2016): 5.

[470] The two also elaborate on how feral can reinvigorate feminist queer and anticolonial critique (Ibid, 8-9, 11-12).

[471] Ibid, 10. On the feral or hybrid "wolfdog" see: Emma Marris, "Hybrid Aversion: Wolves, Dogs, and the Humans who Love to Keep Them Apart," in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (New York: Routledge, 2017), 64-71.

[472] Ibid, 6.

[473] Ibid.

[474] Ibid, 7.

animal studies to include a previously ignored category of animal but otherwise leaves the hierarchies, theories, and methodologies of the field intact.[475] Monfort and Taylor invite attempts to contemplate what it means to *feralize* feminism. They distinguish "feralize" from Jack Halberstam's notion of "going wild," which they contend entails the fetishization of pristine wilderness or a wild state that can simply no longer be reached as well as a shallow engagement with ecocriticism.[476] Monfort and Taylor emphasize how feralizing feminism means taking seriously nonhuman feral lives and habitats as well as "the un-taming of human life," how humans might learn to live ferally.[477] While ferals cannot be fully subordinated to human control, thereby illuminating liberatory possibilities, ferals are also "often abandoned, desperate, and highly vulnerable," "left to fend for themselves" in precarious, even hostile conditions.[478] Monfort and Taylor contend that, in this way, ferality invites the theorization of a feminist politics and ethics of separatism. Drawing on Marilyn Frye, they insist:

> [F]eminism *always* involves separation of some sort. Separatism need not mean abstaining from sex with men, man-hating, or reverse discrimination; it merely means that people—including male-bodied or identified people—whose consciousness has been raised by feminism inevitably find themselves withdrawing from certain male-dominated and misogynistic relationships, situations, and institutions… Feminists make their time, homes, and bodies less available to certain people than they did before and, for Frye, this is separatism,

[475] Ibid, 10.

[476] Ibid, 9.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Ibid, 5.

> even if, to not starve, one goes on working for men or in male dominated institutions.[479]

The feminist separatism Monfort and Taylor identify as one kind of feminist ferality serves as a useful intervention in ecological studies, which privileges an expanded ethics of relationality, of recognizing and forming connections with human and nonhuman others of all kinds. The feral attunes us to how, in some cases, respecting boundaries and withdrawing may be the more ethical act. Where do we end up as we turn away from and against the human? How might feral (non)becomings illuminate an alternative ethics and politics?

I contend that ferality serves as an especially salient critical concept for Asian American studies, not only because Asian/Americans have been historically feralized (i.e. as perpetual, unassimilable aliens) but also because of pervasive stereotypes and sensationalized accounts of Oriental cruelty towards animals. In *Dangerous Crossings* (2015), Claire Jean Kim examines, for example, the controversy surrounding the 1996 vote "to ban the sale of live animals for food" in San Francisco, a ban that would disproportionately "affect the merchants in Chinatown who sell turtles, frogs, birds, fish, and other animals."[480] Kim elaborates how these "impassioned disputes" foreground competing sets of moral claims—charges of animal cruelty and countercharges of racism or cultural imperialism.[481] She contends that each side has embraced a "single-optic vision," "a way of seeing that foregrounds a particular form of injustice while backgrounding others."[482] Through her project, Kim argues for and implements a practice of "multi-optic vision," "a way of seeing that takes disparate justice claims seriously without

[479] Ibid, 8, emphasis in original.

[480] Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 3.

[481] Ibid, 8.

[482] Ibid, 19.

privileging any one presumptively."[483] This multi-optic vision is grounded in an "ethics of mutual avowal," an open and active acknowledgement of the connections between different taxonomies of power (race, species, nature, culture) and with other struggles, which strongly resonates with Ursula Heise's concept of "multispecies justice."[484] Kim asserts: "If we develop an ethics of mutual avowal in relation to other justice struggles, we not only reduce the chance we will reinscribe other forms of oppression (even inadvertently), but also open ourselves up to new ways of imagining ourselves in relation to others."[485] Attending to the feral Asian girl can be thus understood as an ethical attempt to avow inhuman conditions and struggles. As a way of tentatively exploring the critical possibilities of ferality for Asian American studies, I turn now to the feral poetics of Bhanu Kapil.

**A Feral Poetics**

A British-Indian emigrant to the United States, Kapil is known for her experimental works of prose/poetry, which creatively reassemble different narratives, genres, and aesthetic forms. Common, recurring themes throughout her works include hybridity, immigrant experiences, postcoloniality, violence, monstrosity, and illness/disability.[486] Kapil grapples with ferality most explicitly in *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children* (2009), which was inspired by the story of the famous Bengali wolf girls, Amala and Kamala. The girls were discovered in

[483] Ibid.

[484] Ibid, 20.

[485] Ibid.

[486] See: Bhanu Kapil, *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey Street Press, 2001); *Incubation: A Space for Monsters* (Providence, RI: Leon Works, 2006); and *Schizophrene* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2011)

1920 by an Indian missionary named Reverend Joseph Singh.[487] After killing their wolf family, Singh brought the girls back to the small orphanage he ran in Midnapure, where he and his wife attempted to "teach the girls language, upright movement, and a moral life."[488] Despite Singh's efforts, Amala, about eighteen months old at the time of her capture, died less than a year later from nephritis.[489] Kamala, believed to be approximately eight years old, outlived her sister for a short span: "In nine years, she learned to trust the Singhs, to speak about fifty words, and to care for the orphanage's younger charges" before finally succumbing to TB.[490] Kapil draws on Singh's diary of the girls' progress as her primary source text for *Humanimal*. First published in 1945, the diary serves as a key document in *Wolf-Children and Feral Man*, a large collection of historical case studies of feral children compiled by the Denver anthropologist Robert Zingg.[491] In *Humanimal*, Kapil directly challenges the triumphant developmental progress narrative and civilizing pedagogical imperative that underlie these anthropological accounts.[492]

Sarah Dowling helpfully elaborates how *Humanimal* is a "deliberately retrogressive text" that refuses to "restore the wolf girls to lyric subjectivity."[493] Instead, Kapil mobilizes Kamala's animality as a *lateral* "vector of coalitional identification" that spans colonial and postcolonial

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[487] Bhanu Kapil, *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children* (Berkeley, CA: Kelsey Street Press, 2009), ix.

[488] Ibid, x.

[489] Sarah Dowling, "They Were Girls: Animality and Poetic Voice in Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal*," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2013): 736.

[490] Ibid. Kapil, *Humanimal*, x.

[491] Kapil, *Humanimal*, ix.

[492] Kapil's *Humanimal* can also be read against Arnold Gesell's 1941 "*Wolf Child and Human Child*, a highly romanticized reconstruction of [Kamala's] family life as a rural peasant, her wolf life, and her tenure at the orphanage" (Dowling, "They Were Girls," 736).

[493] Ibid, 738.

temporalities and links "diverse experiences of compromised human embodiment."[494] Dowling asserts: "By using a continuously shifting "I" to render the animality of feral children, of immigrants, and of her own authorial subjectivity, and by rendering these simultaneously, Kapil questions the self-certainty and self-sufficiency that typically characterize the lyric subject, offering in its place the blended voice of a speaker whose coalitional utterance crosses boundaries of time, space and language" as well as species boundaries.[495] Kapil's experimentation with lyric subjectivity strongly resonates with Lai and Wong's endeavor to fashion a more-than-human subjectivity in *sybil unrest* (e.g. through their collaborative renga form and evocation of multiple minor "i"s). Yet *Humanimal* is ultimately more effective in foregrounding shared conditions of bodily vulnerability and how "attempt[s] to create social viability from animality [are] always cruel."[496]

Commenting on Kapil's provocative subtitle, *A Project for Future Children*, Dowling notes how the book "does not take children as symbols of future possibility… Rather than progress toward a human future, Kapil's humanimal children are reduced, feminized. They do not become subjects over time, and they expire before their possibilities can be realized."[497] *Humanimal* thus emerges as a very different project than *Salt Fish Girl*, where Lai seeks to subvert evolutionary progress narratives by rewriting primitive forms (e.g. the base olfactory sense, durian fruit, and reptilian-fish bodies) into the future. Kapil's feral poetics can be conversely characterized by a preoccupation with failure, diminishment, and (non)becoming. What can we learn from grappling with and dwelling in these extremely difficult, impossible,

[494] Ibid, 738, 744.

[495] Ibid, 749.

[496] Ibid, 746.

[497] Ibid, 750.

feral conditions? Where does not becoming human and not becoming with the human leave us? To grasp at some potential answers, I turn to examine Kapil's more oblique engagement with ferality in her latest work, *Ban en Banlieue* (2015).

**On Being Ban(ned)**

Kapil has been incubating "Ban" since 2007 through writings, performances, and collaborations in the United States, the UK, and India.[498] *Ban en Banlieue* traces the elusive, ever shifting forms and meanings of Ban. In the book, Ban emerges as many things but she is most saliently: "[A] girl. A black girl in an era when, in solidarity, Caribbean and Asian Brits self-defined as black. A black (brown) girl encountered in the earliest hours of a race riot, or what will become one by nightfall."[499] Kapil sets Ban's story in a very specific historical context: April 23, 1979 in the largely black Asian suburb of Southall, Middlesex (U.K.), where roughly 2,000 people had gathered to protest a National Front campaign meeting taking place in the town hall.[500] Founded in 1967, the National Front is a far-right political party known for its neo-Nazi ideologies and violent opposition to black immigration.[501] The town council's decision to allow into the very midst of Southall, "a fascist group which aimed to deny black people the freedom to live in peace," shocked and angered local residents.[502] The community planned to stage a

[498] "Ban en Banlieue," *Nightboat Books*, accessed April 25, 2017, http://www.nightboat.org/title/ban-en-banlieue.

[499] Bhanu Kapil, *Ban en Banlieue* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2015), 30. All other quotations from this text will be cited parenthetically. Kapil alludes to the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) of the 1970s and 80s, where "the term 'black' denoted a political allegiance between those of African and Asian origin, without denying the specific cultural differences of each group" (Anandi Ramamurthy, "The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements," *Race & Class* 48, no. 2 (2006): 39).

[500] Evan Smith, "A Bulwark Diminished? The Communist Party, the SWP and Anti-Fascism in the 1970s," *Socialist History* 35 (2009): 72.

[501] Ibid, 61-2.

peaceful demonstration but "2,756 police, including Special Patrol Group units, with horses, dogs, vans, riot shields and a helicopter, were sent in to crush the protest."[503] Clashes between the police and locals escalated into a full-scale riot between 7:30 and 9:00 pm.[504] By the end of the night over three hundred people would be arrested, mostly local and Asian, and one person, Clement Blair Peach, a teacher and anti-racist activist from New Zealand, would be dead.[505] Kapil, however, seems ultimately less interested in the race riot, the event itself, than "what precedes [follows] it" (109, brackets in original).

Ban is not one of the militant Southall youths galvanized by Black Power and the Third World Liberation movement.[506] She does not participate in the riot or even emerge in the central scene of action. Ban is just a black (brown) girl on her way home from school when she hears the sound of breaking glass, which she instinctively apprehends and associates with imminent violence: "Is it coming from the far-off street or is it coming from her home? Knowing that

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[502] Campaign Against Racism and Fascism/Southall Rights, *Southall: The Birth of a Black Community* (London, U.K.: Institution of Race Relations and Southall Rights, 1981), 1.

[503] Ibid, 2.

[504] Smith, "A Bulwark Diminished?" 72.

[505] Ibid, 73.

[506] In the 1970s and 80s Asian youths across a number of English towns and cities developed a militant anti-racist politics to "tackle racial violence, police injustice, immigration controls and other forms of institutional racism" that strongly resonate with the Black Power and Third World Liberation movements in the U.S. (Ramamurthy, "The politics of Britain's AYMs," 39). Of particular relevance here is the Southall Youth Movement (SYM), which broke with the organizing methods of community leaders and elders, in its call for "direct action and to organise in self-defense" (42). Southall youths found the older "integrationist approach," which emphasized negotiation with British social and political organizations, inadequate for counteracting the racism and harassment they confronted on the streets everyday (42). Their slogan, "We shall fight like lions," gestures to their embrace of a feral political identity (42). Ramamurthy importantly notes: "Although Southall's ethnic minority population was predominantly Sikh Indian at the time, the SYM chose not to organise on cultural or religious lines and deliberately called itself the *Southall* Youth Movement to include both Asian and African-Caribbean youth" (42, emphasis in original). The Asian Youth Movements that began to form elsewhere in England also sought "to find an identity that would serve to unify rather than divide. In Britain, racism had forced these young people to see themselves as not simply Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi but as Asian and, politically, black" (43). Ramamurthy asserts that by the end of the 1980s all AYMs ceased to operate actively or reorganized into different groups due to changes in state funding criteria: "Within the context of state funding, an identity based on black resistance gave way to new identities focused on the cultural domain. […] In negotiating a share of the limited resources available, groups were continually identifying and arguing for their group or community's difference and distinctiveness" (56-7).

either way she's done for—she lies down to die" (20). Ban is the "story of a girl on the floor of the world" (24). Kapil obsessively returns to and rewrites this partial scene numerous times throughout the book, struggling to make sense of the violence inflicted on Ban, the violence that inhibits her from progressing and developing beyond this point. Ban lacks a sense of belonging, comfort, and security in the home as well as on the street.

Kapil gestures to Ban's feral inhuman status by way of Giorgio Agamben. She cites the following quote from Agamben's essay, "The Ban and the Wolf" (1995), as a deleted epigraph for a novel about Ban: "What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it—at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured" (12).[507] Agamben elaborates how that which is banned has been reduced to *homo sacer*, a form of "bare life" that can be killed without any legal-juridical consequence or more specifically, life that is considered already dead and is not allowed to exist.[508] He traces how the *wargus* or "wolf-man" emerges, in ancient Germanic law, as one figuration of *homo sacer*: "a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is…in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city."[509] Kapil invites readers to apprehend Ban as a feral inhuman "banned from the city" and forced to live *en banlieue*, in an immigrant suburb in the outskirts of London. She notes how the *banlieues* once served as King Henry VIII's hunting grounds, thus evoking a parallel between and metaphor of the inhabitants as hunted wolves, forcefully subjected to and simultaneously abandoned by sovereign power (41).

[507] See: Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 110.

[508] Ibid, 104-5.

[509] Ibid.

Agamben emphasizes how the " 'estrarity' of the person held in the sovereign ban is more intimate and primary than the extraneousness of the foreigner."[510] Kapil takes care to distinguish Ban from the immigrant, who hails from elsewhere, from a foreign place. Ban is the child of immigrants who, in Juliana Chang's words, "develops not into a fully human citizen-subject but into the inhuman," devastating, in the process, the immigrant myth of "ethnic and national progress."[511] Kapil writes, "as a black person or child born to immigrants in the U.K. of 1971—[Ban's] birth broke something. It inserted something… 'What is born in England but is never English?' What grew a tail?" (21). The challenge that Kapil grapples with is how to narrate Ban's feral inhuman embodiment, as a "life that is never given: an existence," "a birth [that] is not considered a birth" (30). In the following section, I will elaborate how the book's radically disintegrative, failing form serves to illuminate Ban's deeply compromised, precluded life and, as Maureen McLane asserts, "the difficulty, the impossibility of finding a form for Ban."[512]

**Failing Form**

Kapil reveals how she initially approached Ban, aspiring to write a novel, a work of historical fiction. *Ban en Banlieue* serves as a record of all "the errors [Kapil] made as a poet engaging a novel-shaped space" (20). The book appears as a fragmented series of vignettes, reflections, autobiographical snippets, performance notes, and paratext (e.g. unused epigraphs, end notes, a butcher's block appendix) that repeatedly call attention to its failure to become a novel. Kapil confesses: "Although I am interested in errors, perhaps it *is* more accurate to say I

[510] Ibid, 110.

[511] Chang, *Inhuman Citizenship*, 23, 22.

[512] Maureen N. McLane, "Projects, Poetries, Choratopes: On Anne Boyer, Bhanu Kapil, and Juliana Spahr," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June 5, 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/projects-poetries-choratopes-anne-boyer-bhanu-kapil-juliana-spahr/.

wrote a book that failed—and not in the interesting vulnerable way that books sometimes fail—but in this other way—'the way of the species that isn't registered or described; that does not emerge' " (23, emphasis in original). Here Kapil refuses to romanticize the failure of her book, gesturing to how the failure to register, describe, or make a black (brown) girl emerge in the midst of a race riot is anything but romantic. While pondering what would happen to Ban in a historically realist novel, Kapil instead finds herself fixating on "the increment of her failure to orient, to take another step" (32). Ban's inability to move or progress weighs on and indeed comes to determine the failing form of *Ban en Banlieue*. Kapil asserts: "I wanted to write a book that was like lying down" (42).

Ban emerges as that which cannot be written about directly, only laterally, around. Through the multiple inhuman connotations, metaphors, and figures of Ban, Kapil explores and links various forms of banished and abandoned life. Readers learn that "BAN" was the author's childhood nickname (94). In the book, Kapil relates her own memory of April 23, 1979, when her family hid indoors and lay down beneath "hand-sewn quilts shipped from India" because everyone in Southall, in the *banlieue* "knows to board the glass up, draw the curtains and lie down" (37-8). Unlike Ban, however, Kapil and her family were fortunate enough to be able to sell their house and move away. As previously mentioned, *Ban en Banlieue* is dedicated to the anti-racist activist Clement Blair Peach, who was killed during the riot from an immense blow to the head. An internal inquiry conducted by Commander John Cass of the Metropolitan Police's Complaints Investigation Bureau "found that Peach's killer was one of six police officers, with one clear principal suspect, and that three of the six should be prosecuted for attempting to frustrate the investigation."[513] Various police forces collaborated to conceal these findings from

[513] David Renton, "The Killing of Blair Peach," *London Review of Books* 36, no. 1, May 22, 2014, https://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n10/david-renton/the-killing-of-blair-peach.

the world and the Cass report would not be published until 2010.[514] No one has ever been indicted for Peach's murder, illuminating how he was effectively abandoned by the state.

Ban also leads Kapil to Jyoti Singh Pandey or Nirbhaya ("The Fearless One"),[515] a young Indian woman who, while on her way home from watching the movie, *Life of Pi*, was gang raped, gutted with a steel pipe, and thrown off a bus in New Delhi in December 2012: "She lay on the ground for 40 minutes—twitching—making low sounds—then none at all—diminishing before anyone called the police. I thought about those 40 minutes and compared them to the fictive—12 hours—that Ban lay on the ground. What was in the work—as an image—had appeared beyond it—as a scene. […] At that moment, I stopped writing Ban" (25). Jyoti's story helps Kapil expand the "image" of Ban lying on the ground into a fuller "scene." The similarities are striking. Both girls are lying on the floor of the world, barely moving or making any sounds, "diminishing" as they have been for a long time without anyone noticing. Yet Kapil seems most unsettled by the significant differences in temporal frame. The forty minutes that Jyoti lies suffering in tremendous pain and all alone render the 12 fictive hours that Ban lies on the ground simply unthinkable. Kapil's abundant use of hyphens throughout the passage conveys the shaking, faltering movement of her hand as she attempts to write Jyoti's story, which eventually comes to a total pause, the need to stop writing Ban entirely.[516]

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[514] Ibid.

[515] Indian law prohibits the disclosure of the identity of sexual assault victims as a means of protecting them from social stigma (Krupa Shandilya, "Nirbhaya's Body: The Politics of Protest in the Aftermath of the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape," *Gender & History* 27, no. 2 (2015): 468). In lieu of an official name, the media used symbolic names including Nirbhaya ("Fearless"), Amanat ("Treasure"), Jagruti ("Awakening"), among others, to refer to the victim and to honor her courage (469). Jyoti's father eventually gave the press permission to use her official name in hopes that it will inspire other young Indian women to come forward and speak out against sexual violence (468).

[516] Five adult men (Vinay Sharma, Pawan Kumar, Ram Singh, Mukesh Singh, and Akshay Thakur) and a seventeen-year-old boy have been indicted with the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey (Ibid, 468). On September 2013, the Indian High Court sentenced the four adult perpetrators to capital punishment—the fifth, Ram Singh, was found dead, hanging in his cell, while detained at Tihar Jail (468). The teenage boy was sentenced to three years in a reform facility, the maximum sentence for perpetrators under the age of eighteen (468). Krupa Shandilya discusses

Finally, Ban evokes for Kapil the image of an Indian woman who escapes *sati*,[517] the now illegal Hindu practice of burning a widow to death on her husband's funeral pyre:

> I didn't get to the part with Kapil Muni—a section [incarnate], regressed: a woman who—Ban-like—contorted [leaped] out of a sacrificial [bridal] fire and is [was] carried out to sea—the Bay of Bengal—on the backs of tiny pink dolphins. How her burns were sucked and fused by sea creatures: their microscopic mouths. Bronze-copper, supine—mid ocean—she's balanced on the back of a whale. Lightning strikes her body in a pagan tableau and she: opens her milky eyes. Kapil Muni—seated—opens his third-eye as she drifts past Sagar Island—and sends a beam of gold [rose] [blue] light to her. I wanted Ban to receive the energy too, simultaneously here—but would blank out—each time—the section, the time, the body. (10, brackets in original)

Kapil suggests that the Indian woman is "Ban-like" not just because she has been condemned and allowed to die but also because of her diminished, vague agency. It remains unclear whether the woman actively leaps or simply contorts her body out of the flames and into the Bay of Bengal. Kapil further reveals how sea creatures are responsible for carrying her body further out into the ocean, for healing her burns and fusing with her to form a multispecies assemblage

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how Jyoti's body has been claimed and used to advance different, competing political agendas from Western liberal feminism to Hindu nationalism and Leftist critiques of capitalist consumerism. Jyoti's case has engendered mass protests that have compelled the Indian government to implement steps for addressing sexual violence against women, including harsher punishments for sexual offenders and quick legal redress for the victims (468). But Shandilya observes how the legal reforms advocated by mainstream Indian feminists are predicated on a normative subject—the middle-class Hindu woman—and remain inadequate for addressing the rape of lower-class, non-Hindu, rural women who fall outside of that category and struggle with navigating the manifold structural inequalities of the legal system (466-67).

[517] The abolishment of *sati* by the British in 1829 has been regarded as a "positive" effect of colonial rule and watershed moment in the history of female liberation in India. Lata Mani offers a provocative, nuanced account of how the Indian widows being burned and their welfare were actually marginal to colonial debates on *sati*. Women's bodies merely served as the grounds for waging larger debates about what constitutes an authentic Hindu tradition, scriptural interpretation, and the role of the colonial state. See: Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

similar to those discussed in chapter three. The historical realism of figures like Blair Peach and Jyoti proves too painful for thinking and writing Ban so Kapil turns here to Indian mythology and the fantastic. Kapil Muni emerges as some kind of powerful Indian deity or ancestral figure to the author herself, who saves the Indian woman from drowning by sending her a beam of colorful light (100). Kapil yearns to transmit this energy to Ban but repeatedly "blank[s] out." This failure is again captured formally through her stuttering, hyphenated prose/poetry.

Kapil gestures to how Ban exceeds literary representation and form, as that which needs to be instead performed. In the book, she includes notes of her multiple performances of Ban across three different continents. Kapil travelled to the UK to lie down on the sidewalk in the exact spot where she intended to set her novel (16). She also performed Ban when she had lain down, as close as possible, to "the border of Pakistan and India" (31). Kapil performs Ban, over and over, without fully understanding what her performative acts enable and catalyze, if anything at all:

> Imagine that the rough, pink tip of a girl's tongue slips out, extending to the ivy's salt—for nourishment.
>
> What did Ban do that outweighed art? What kind of art did she produce?
>
> Returning to the U.S., I lay down in the mud, removing my clothes and exposing my body with its waist and hips and suitcase of limbs.
>
> (35)

Here Kapil shifts from an imperative to a rhetorical question, inviting readers to imagine Ban licking the earth for nourishment and to seriously contemplate what she produces through that

act of licking: Art or something that outweighs art? *Ban en Banlieue* can be understood as Kapil's attempt to think alongside, approximate, and manifest the kind of art Elizabeth Grosz discusses in *Chaos, Territory, Art* (2008).[518] Working primarily through Deleuze, Grosz develops a theory of art that engenders, not "imaginative becomings"—representations, images, narratives of what is and has been—but "material becomings," where "life folds over itself to embrace its contact with materiality, in which each exchanges some elements or particles with the other to become more and other."[519] Art, Grosz asserts, "enables matter to become expressive, to not just satisfy but also to intensify—to resonate and become more than itself."[520] Her theorization of art with respect to evolution is particularly relevant here: "Art hijacks survival impulses and transforms them through the vagaries and intensifications posed by sexuality, deranging them into a new order, a new practice."[521] Ban extends her tongue to the ivy in an act of survival, in search for nourishment, yet this licking is also palpably erotic and comes to approximate art through the "sexualization of survival."[522] Kapil's performance of Ban is similarly erotic. She lies down in the mud in naked vulnerability, struggling to inhabit the space of inhuman (non)becoming as and with Ban.

Ban, as Kapil explains, is a " 'person left for dead' who—perversely—does not die" and *Ban en Banlieue* serves as her attempt to "make (from this) (from these things): a form" (88). Through her writings and performances of Ban, Kapil foregrounds the violent negation of a life while simultaneously infusing the negated life with a degree of affective intensity that can never

[518] In her endnotes, Kapil identifies Elizabeth Grosz as a key theoretical interlocutor for *Ban en Banlieue* (90, 93).

[519] Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of Earth* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 23.

[520] Ibid, 4.

[521] Ibid, 11.

[522] Ibid.

be fully erased. Describing Ban's inhuman (non)becoming, Kapil writes: "Ban is a mixture of dog shit and bitumen (ash) scraped off the soles of running shoes: Puma, Reebok, Adidas. Looping the city, Ban is a warp of smoke" (30). She is "the depleted, yet still livid mixture of materials that a race riot is made from" (37). *Ban en Banlieue* thus calls for a shift in attention from "larger events, the race riot, for example, with its capacity to be analyzed" to that which is more difficult to register and address: feral inhuman figures and conditions. Unlike Clement Blair Peach, Ban does not die from a fatal blow to the head. She has been indeed deprived of the sovereignty of death, steadily dying on the ground for an unbearable, impossible period of time while simultaneously unable to end her own life like Jyoti Singh Pandey. The feral Asian girl, as a critical framework, can thus attune Asian American studies to previously overlooked or illegible forms/scales/textures of violence and death. Kapil's feral poetics illuminates the peculiar domination that Ban endures as banished life, life that is simultaneously held captive and not allowed to exist.

*Ban en Banlieue* also gestures to ways we can feralize or un-tame Asian Americanist critique. While Kapil dedicates her book to Peach she is ultimately less interested in the anti-racist activist than Ban, the embodiment of the feral inhuman who stutters and lies down, who does not quite rise up or give rise to a race riot (48). Feralizing Asian Americanist critique means attending to and crediting these moments of lying down. Much like the protracted mani-pedi scene in *Full Sea*, lying down can be understood as a vital, reparative response to structural forces of oppression. After all, the truly terrible (neoliberal) narrative would be to condemn a young black (brown) girl for not rising up and banding with other militant Southall youth. *Ban en Banlieue* proposes a feral inhuman ethics of relationality as a more generative alternative to the militant ethical vision historically privileged in Asian American studies. This feral inhuman

ethics calls for Asian Americanists to take seriously the need to lie down as much as the need to rise up. Lying down is a way of resting and reinvigorating the body, mind, and soul, of withdrawing from human social and political interactions to uncover and form other potential life-sustaining solidarities.

**Postscript: Contemporary Vectors of Ban**

Kapil asserts: "Feral events cut through," gesturing to an affective residue or intensity that survives across time (69). The feral event that Ban embodies cuts through in a number of different ways to the contemporary moment. In this postscript, I trace vectors of Ban, how she continues to animate our present as re-mixed, depleted, yet still lived matter. One obvious vector is the French *banlieue* riots of 2005. On October 27, 2005, Bouna, Zyad, Muhittin, and six other teenage boys were on their way home from a soccer match in the poor Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. Police officers demanded that the boys stop and hand over their identification papers. The boys quickly scattered and the police followed in quick pursuit. The officers managed to apprehend six of the boys, "leaving Bouna, Zyad, and Muhittin alone and cornered against an eight-foot wall, topped with barbed wire and large signs warning, 'Caution: the electricity is stronger than you' and 'Stop, don't risk your life.' […] Choosing between the wall and the police, the boys scaled the wall."[523] While searching for an exit out of the electricity substation, one of the boys hit the transformer, which killed Bouna and Zyad instantly. Muhittin only survived due to a power surge that cut electricity to the town. Nicholas Sarkozy, then France's minister of the interior (who would later become the President of France from 2007 to 2012), insisted that no investigation was needed because the police had done nothing wrong.[524] This

[523] Cathy Lisa Schneider, "Police Power and Race Riots in Paris," *Politics & Society* 36, no. 1 (2008): 135.

incident set off riots that continued for the next three weeks, "spread[ing] from suburb to suburb, affecting more than three hundred towns and inspiring sympathy riots in Brussels and Berlin."[525]

The story of Bouna, Zyad, and Muhittin strongly evokes and resonates with Ban. These boys are the children of immigrants from the former French colonies, who have been banished to the *banlieue*.[526] Marie-Theresa Hernández asserts, "The *banlieue* is a place of nowhere. It is where American tourists are told not go," a site of urban decay, racial tension, and violence.[527] The narratives that circulate about the young people in the *banlieue* highlight France's worst fears, that this population has "not assimilated, [is] not a real part of the French nation, do not work, do not study, and only cause trouble."[528] The 2005 riots were widely perceived and narrated as the terrible realization of these fears. The mounting violence spurred the French government to declare a state of emergency and impose a curfew in the *banlieue*, effectively "impelement[ing] a colonial law to deal with the children of its colonies."[529] The media images and reports of "wild youth…burning thousands of cars in the Paris suburbs" serve to eclipse the inhuman conditions that compelled them to riot.[530] Thinking through and alongside Ban, we can understand the profound sense of abandonment that drove Bouna, Zyad, and Muhittin to run away from the police and take their chances in the electricity station, despite all the warning signs of death via electrocution. Cathy Lisa Schneider emphasizes how a long legacy of brutal

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[524] Ibid, 135-36.

[525] Ibid, 136.

[526] Marie-Theresa Hernández, "The French Banlieue Riots of 2005 and their Impact on US Immigration Policy: A Transatlantic Study," *Atlantic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2010): 81.

[527] Ibid.

[528] Ibid.

[529] Ibid, 82.

[530] Ibid.

policing of black and Arab youth has fostered fear, mistrust, and anger towards French police.[531] While many sociologists today continue to promote the exceptionalist myth that "racism does not exist in France," Schneider asserts that "it is precisely this denial of racial and ethnic division that angers young people who face discrimination on a daily basis."[532] Sarkozy's condemnation of the three teenage boys, instead of the police, "only reaffirmed what most banlieue youth already believed (and still do)—that their lives have no value in France."[533]

The 2005 French *banlieue* riots were widely publicized in the United States and elsewhere around the globe. U.S. media outlets speculated about the possibility of riots erupting at home and what the U.S. could learn from France. Hernández traces the common threads that connect many of these reports:

> [The idea] that France had gotten itself into a mess because it had accepted so many immigrants, especially from Arab countries…; that French violence might likely spread like an epidemic; that the United States was still in a position to prevent a disaster by implementing forcible immigration policies; that the consequences could be an America that looked like a combination of the Middle East and Latin America, one that could easily blow up if the *sauvages* (savages, as the *banlieue* youth were described in the French newspaper *Le Monde*) were not pleased with how the US government was responding to their demands.[534]

[531] Schenider, "Police Power," 141-48.

[532] Ibid, 140, 152.

[533] Ibid, 140.

[534] Hernández, "The French Banlieue Riots of 2005," 84.

Hernández notes how U.S. media outlets conflated the 2005 *banlieue* riots with 9/11 narratives, heightening and conjoining national fears of the immigrant and the Arab/Muslim terrorist.[535] While the general narrative "that the French rioters were immigrant…was for the most part incorrect," this narrative still came to heavily impact U.S. immigration policy, culminating in the introduction of House Bill 4437, or "The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act," on December 6, 2005.[536] As one of the most draconian immigration bills in U.S. history, House Bill 4437 "made all undocumented immigrants felons" and "proclaimed anyone who provides services to an undocumented person a potential felon."[537] The bill was passed by the House of Representatives on December 16, 2005 but ultimately did not pass the Senate.[538]

I write this a few months after Donald J. Trump has been inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States and has implemented an immigration ban barring the entry of persons from seven predominantly Muslim countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) for 90 days and the entry of all refugees for 120 days, while banning Syrian refugees indefinitely.[539] Federal judges have blocked Trump's executive order, including the revised immigration ban, which removed Iraq from the original list of targeted countries and

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[535] Ibid, 84-5.

[536] Ibid, 89. See: "Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," *National Conference of State Legislature*, accessed April 12, 2017, http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/summary-of-the-sensenbrenner-immigration-bill.aspx.

[537] Ibid, 80.

[538] Stephen Dinan, "House GOP Taps Author of Controversial 2005 Immigration Bill to Lead Panel," *The Washington Times*, January 14, 2017, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jan/14/house-gop-taps-author-controversial-2005-immigrati/.

[539] Anjali Singhvi and Alicia Parlapiano, "Trump's Immigration Ban: Who Is Barred and Who Is Not," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/31/us/politics/trump-immigration-ban-groups.html?_r=0.

watered down some of the more controversial language and terms.[540] But the immigration ban, which became effective the moment Trump signed the order at 4:42 pm on January 27, 2017, has already thrown U.S. airports into chaos, upended numerous families, and left many refugees stranded.[541] *Ban en Banlieue* enables a mode of thinking that can cut through the biopolitical national security rhetoric of the Trump administration. Are we, as a nation, prepared to ban persons if it means that we will, in the act of banishing, violently negate their life, not allow their life an existence and render them already dead?

[540] Glenn Thrush, "Trump's New Travel Ban Block Migrants from Six Nations, Sparing Iraq," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/politics/travel-ban-muslim-trump.html.

[541] Michael D. Shear, Nicholas Kulish, and Alan Feuer, "Judge Blocks Trump Order on Refugees Amid Chaos and Outcry Worldwide," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/28/us/refugees-detained-at-us-airports-prompting-legal-challenges-to-trumps-immigration-order.html. On impact of Trump's ban on families and refugees see: Charlotte Alter, "President Trump's Immigration Ban Upends Families: 'They Can't Treat Us Like This,' " *Time*, January 29, 2017, http://time.com/4652746/donald-trump-immigration-ban-family-detained/; and David Williams, "Immigration Ban Leaves Children Stranded, Families Split," *CNN*, February 4, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/03/politics/trump-immigration-ban-children-trnd/.

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