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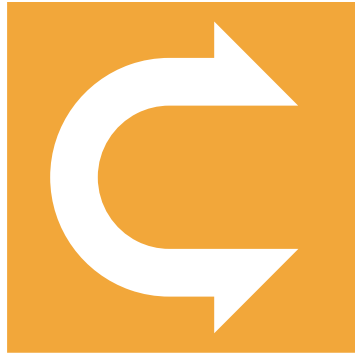
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## **Queer Mongering: The Violence of Asian American Fear on Queer Modalities**

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# Queer Mongering: The Violence of Asian American Fear on Queer Modalities

Florence Ho

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## **Abstract**

Asian America has historically been susceptible to white supremacist national manipulation, by way of fear mongering. Recruitments of Asian America to fulfill nationalist agendas often result in enactments of violence towards the wellbeing and affectiveness of queer modalities. This further ostracizes, invalidates, and commits acts of violence upon different queer modalities: bodies, griefs, existences, acts, and desires, as well as positions such modalities as an unconsenting site for political battles. Set in the Bay Area during the 1940's to 1990's, this paper examines a fictional novel, lesbian Asian American activist circles, and University of California Berkeley (UCB) hiring practices. These cases serve to illustrate ways in which unconsenting queer subjects are forced to succumb to battles of national politics and demonstrate processes that further enact violence and halt efforts towards collective liberation.

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## A Note On Language

The use of language is a powerful tool. In 1962, linguist J.L. Austin coined the term “performativity” to categorize a type of speech that performs, creates, and speaks something into action. In other words, language does not simply exist as a neutral descriptor of our world, but rather, actively shapes realities<sup>8</sup>. The performative language used in this paper has gone through many editorial iterations and has morphed into something more technical and conventional, rather than radical. Therefore, the language in this paper has lost some of its potential to reflect, validate, and reinforce radical trains of thought. However, despite its language, I remain strong in my belief in the argument of this paper. This note serves to encourage all to be critical of the edited language in this paper. Please refer to the footnotes for details of which words have lost their radical potential.

## Introduction

### 1. Fear Mongering and State Manipulation

Fear mongering is a practice used to over-exaggerate the presence of a threat in order to evoke and instill fear. Instances of these tactics throughout U.S. history include the fearful propaganda and rhetoric surrounding the War on Drugs, racializing terrorism (post 9/11), or racializing immigration and border control, with each of these political instances being highly critiqueable in integrity, authenticity, and morality. As an example, the rhetoric of “immigrants coming to take over available jobs” weaponizes the scarcity mindset into evoking a fear-based response within working class peoples of employment opportunities being precarious. This type of fear, mongered by the nation-state, has been substantially present in Asian America (defined as the diaspora of Asian people living in America, despite where they are born), negatively impacting its relationship with queer bodies, grief, existences, acts, and desires. In the eyes of the nation-state, these queer modalities are dangerous as they are disruptive and deviatory in nature and therefore, remain unprotected. “Queer” in this sense, is defined *not* in reference to stabilized identities and labels (such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary, or other LGBT+ identities), but rather, defined as a method of destabilization, as a disruption of normality, as a resistance of categorization, and as a questioning of power distribution. In other words, queer theory has been utilized to denote something in which “upends or destabilizes a structure, order, or practice from within, defamiliarizing previously stable objects and experiences”<sup>23</sup>. This term can also be used to denote marginalized existences living in the shadows (this is where “queer” can overlap with LGBT+ identities, but would be in reference to the marginalized and non-normative sexualities and genders of LGBT folks, and not in reference to their actual identities). In this sense, “queer” has aligned itself in the orbital sphere of radical and disruptive political projects, rather than used as a simple adjective to describe certain *types* of people. The traveling of queerness beyond identitarian politics is important because it disrupts the deeply ingrained and naturalized idea of identities being a fixed and stable notion, rather than a constructed phenomenon. Theorists such as Cathy Cohen, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Jasbir Puar aim to destabilize the notion of a fixed identity, and the fluid, borderless, and

disruptive nature of queerness serves as the means to do so. This proposed foundation in which queer theory rests upon aims to serve as a way to “include more people that can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, [and] modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright”<sup>6</sup> allowing people to exist within uncharted pathways, or in other words, allows for the cultivation of a queer assemblage<sup>20</sup>. For the purposes of this paper, the term “queer” will never be used interchangeably with “LGBT+”; it will always refer to the process described above—of non-normative, invalidated, marginalized feelings, thoughts, emotions, affect, and existences. “LGBT+” will refer to the community as well as the individuals that self-identify with this community.

*Queer*<sub>1</sub>, with its definition holding radical potential, has often been internalized as an inherent danger. This tendency can be traced throughout the history of Asian America, seen through the analysis of familial dynamics (on a micro and mezzo level), migrational patterns (told through a zine article), and court cases (specifically Merle Woo suing UC Berkeley twice throughout 1982-1989). Although race in of itself is disruptive and deviatory in nature as well (in the context of White supremacy), the nation temporarily sets race aside when Asian America becomes a useful pawn in furthering nationalist projects such as the stabilization of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. With further interrogation of the nuances behind this internalized belief of *queerness* as dangerous within Asian America and the manipulation of the state, the idea of fear consistently emerges as a continuous thread underlying all examples, resulting in and explaining patterns of *anti-queerness* throughout Asian America.

The presence of such fear can be traced throughout the history of Asian America: from violent labor exploitation in Californian gold mines, lynchings during the Chinese Exclusion Act, threats against safety and citizenship during the Cold War era, and the rise of organizations such as Asians Against Affirmative Action. Different Asian ethnicities experience differing fears at varying points of time, though connected with similar threads of commonalities (the thread being fear towards the violent power of the nation-state). The presence of this fear is conceptualized as often future-oriented, while looking back to the traumatic historical pasts, such as Japanese American incarceration camps<sub>2</sub>, resulting in arising fears of potential future traumatic events. This fear of the violent power of the nation-state makes Asian America, as a homogenized whole and concept, easily fall victim to manipulation by the White U.S. nation-state.

What is helpful here in the conceptualization of such manipulation and enforcement of power is Sara Ahmed’s<sup>2</sup> idea of “strange bodies”. Ahmed’s theory explains that any body can occupy the role of a strange body at any given time, with the word “strange” depicting the exact strangeness that it implies: the sore thumb that sticks out, or the ways in which an individual’s body sticks out. This idea is meant to call attention to a non-static, ever-shifting border that floats amongst, between, and within bodies, for one can be considered a strange body in one setting, and not in another setting. This idea of strange bodies serves a constructed hat that fits different heads at the

same time, varying based on what other bodies are present, and what other power dynamics are at play. For example, a White woman might fall under the category of an unassimilable strange body in a room consisting of White men, but would not qualify under the same strange body in a room consisting of Black people. In this first scenario, the White man would hold more power in the room, whereas the White woman would hold more power in the latter example. This helps to situate the ways in which Asian America shifts in and out of the strange body role, allowing for recruitment into nationalist agendas seem like an effortless and normalized shift, resulting in this process' undetectability. This slippery shift has been observed by many different theorists in the past, including Puar, who coined the term "homonationalism" in order to articulate the process of LGBT+ recruitment into White U.S. nationalist agendas and enacting violence upon and positioning terrorist corporealities as 'the other<sub>3</sub>'. Again, please note that throughout the duration of this paper, "LGBT+" refers to the collection of minority gender and sexual identities, and is not synonymous with "queer".

In terms of Asian American recruitment into the advancement of nationalist projects, a prime modern-day example is affirmative action. Anti-affirmative action sentiments within Asian American communities often claim that it discriminates against Asian students, however further interrogation reveals that this is not rooted in truth. As comedian Hasan Minhaj explains in his Netflix show, *The Patriot Act*, affirmative action started in 1961 as a government initiative to aid racial minorities throughout the process of college admissions, in hopes of leveling out the playing field. The fundamental idea behind affirmative action was to give students of color a boost in the evaluation of their college applications, in order to account for the socioeconomic disparities many communities of color face. However, many wondered if this resulted in specific racial quotas, and in 1978, a White man by the name of Alan Bakke sued the University of California Davis (UCD) for unfairly rejecting qualifying White applicants in place of accepting more unqualified students of color. This resulted in the Supreme Court ruling that racial quotas were unconstitutional. Following this Supreme Court ruling, in 1980, University of California Berkeley (UCB) terminated the allowance of automatic admissions for select racial minority individuals, alternatively resorting to a holistic method, where one's race is taken into consideration in the overall evaluation of the candidate. Since then, certain Asian American groups such as the Asian American Coalition for Education (AACE), in addition to White populations, have spoken out against affirmative action, claiming that it unfairly aids certain minorities (Black and Brown communities) over others (light-skinned, middle-class Asian communities).

In 2013, conservative activist Edward Blum, encouraged and funded Abigail Fisher's (a White student's) class action lawsuit against the University of Texas at Austin, claiming that her rightful spot was lost to under-qualifying Black and Latine students. This case was dismissed, which led Blum to the realization that he miscast his lead due to her Whiteness. Blum now actively recruits Asian American students to spearhead his several ongoing campaigns against

Affirmative Action, knowing that he would be able to leverage race in court<sup>27</sup>. Blum has historically been conservative in his political leaning, and by comparing his political standing with his ‘activism’, it can be concluded that racial justice is not the core of his concern. Instead, Blum has been noted to weaponize Asian American fear (of the potential disalignment to model minority protections) to mask anti-Blackness and anti-Brownness as justice for Asian Americans<sup>27</sup>. On Blum’s website, Asian American individuals can submit themselves to serve as plaintiffs in potential law cases if they were denied admission to their desired university. This resulted in adequate preparation for Blum’s case of *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard University*, a recent case that was brought to the level of the Supreme Court. In this case, Asian Americans (under the guidance of Blum) sued over unfair racial discrimination in the admissions process. A quick look at the statistics of Harvard’s 2021 admitted students blatantly displays the falseness of this claim. In 2021, 22.2% of Harvard’s admitted class self-identified as Asian<sup>27</sup>, whereas 6.1% of the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau<sup>26</sup> self-identified as Asian. This statistical comparison reveals that Asian Americans are overrepresented in Harvard’s admitted class, demonstrating that the SFFA is suing for reasons other than racial discrimination. And as Venkataramanujam (2018) predicts, may be due to the leveraging of race for another shot at getting into their dream school.

Furthermore, if Blum and the participating Asian American plaintiffs truly cared about equity, their focus could be on legacy admissions (giving applicants an advantage because their parents previously attended the school, and in many cases, donated large funds post-graduation) instead. Dubbed “White affirmative action” or “affirmative action for the wealthy”, legacy students took up 15.5% of Harvard’s class of 2019, and they typically take up 10-20% of the incoming class in the overall Ivy League Universities<sup>27</sup>. The reality of Blum and recruited Asian American plaintiffs leveraging race and targeting affirmative action instead of legacy admissions highlights the ways in which current power structures seemingly force the hand of Asian America to play as pawns in nationalist projects: in this case, the nationalist project being to bar Black and Brown students access to higher education. This recruitment was made easy by the presence of fear within Asian America at the time, who felt as though losing access to prestigious higher education universities would result in the loss of security. And due to the scarcity mindset that capitalism ingrained into society, not being admitted to a particular university is perceived to mean one less spot for an Asian American student and one more spot for a Black or Brown student, as if it is an equal tradeoff of “one in, one out”.

Returning to the idea of Asian American fear, this evidenced idea of mongering has ultimately resulted in aversive consequences towards people of other minority races and ethnicities, further deepening the divide between marginalized populations. The idea that fear allows for an easy recruitment of Asian America into nationalist agendas, and as a result, enacting violence upon and positioning Black and Brown bodies as the opposition, is a popular and ongoing topic of study. However, this paper will shift focus towards the ways in which this process of recruitment

is still happening, but with the opposition being *queer* modalities instead of Black and Brown bodies. In other words, this paper focuses on the ways in which nationalist recruitments of Asian America result in enactments of violence towards the performativity and affect of *queerness* and *queer* modalities. I argue that these acts further ostracize, invalidate, and commit acts of violence upon *queer* bodies, griefs, existences, acts, and desires, as well as positioning such *queer* modalities as an unconsenting site for political battles.

## 2. Objects of Analysis: An Overview

We begin the interrogation of this process of Asian American harm of *queer* modalities with the story of Lily Hu, a fictional character, constructed by Malinda Lo in the novel *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*. Throughout specific scenes in this novel, Lo demonstrates the ways in which national fear of communism and anti-Asian sentiment resulted in a paralleling of parental fear within the Hu family. This fear is then mapped onto Lily's body through the use of bodily and border violence, constructions of ungrievable and unrecognizable *queer* grief, acts of displacement, faulty logic, and hypocrisy. A common thread amongst "border" studies scholars such as, but not limited to, Nira Yuval-Davis, Eithne Luibheid, and Étienne Balibar, is the idea in which borders extend beyond a geographical line, but that it involves the structures, institutions, laws, and policing that regulate and uphold the constructed reality of a border, thus resulting in issues such as bodily violence and physical displacement. In other words, anything that creates an effect of policing bodies and mobilities is a border. Theorist Sara Ahmed thus expands on this idea and interrogates the ways in which skin constitutes as a bodily border as well, dictating the boundaries between the outside world and our inner bodily systems, or the self from the not-self. In this sense, the bodily violence Lily experiences marks a border of separation between her, as the deserving recipient of such violence, and the one who inflicts said violence. Additionally, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed conceptualizes the idea of grief in terms of queerness: that when grief is rendered unrecognizable or unworthy of grieving, it has been queered, due to historical and theoretical conceptualizations of the intersections between queerness and grief<sup>1</sup>—this will be further expanded upon later. This form of *queer* grief haunts Lily in the aftermath of her encounters with her parents, and further violence is enacted upon the emotionality of her grief.

Parental fear, border violence, *queer* displacement, and *queer* grief is observed again in an Uproot zine entry, a zine comprised of predominantly Bay Area *queer* voices on topics of migration, immigration, displacement, and diaspora. The entry, titled *How I Got Here, Across State and Gender Borders*, was written by a trans San Franciscan by the name of Daria. Detailing the geographical and emotional displacement of their family tree, they<sub>4</sub> describe the ways in which their familial racial trauma, displacement, and border wounds were projected onto their trans body as further forms of displacement and bordering, regenerating the process of violence, but transforming it into targeted gender violence. This process has resulted in the shattering of heteronormative self-conceptions and self-identifications within themselves and their familial



dynamics. They must now grapple with the reconciliation of their various emotions, desires, identities, and conceptualizations of themselves.

The interrogation of the process in which Asian American nationalist recruitments act in direct opposition to *queer* modalities pivots into the year of 1982, year of great significance for the Asian American community. It was a year that held substantial grief, oppression, violence, and needless to say, pain. Following and comparing the three separate stories of activist Lily Chin (not to be confused with Lily Hu)<sup>5</sup>, journalist Helen Zia, and professor Merle Woo, it allows for the interrogation of the ways in which different forms of *queerness* have been delegitimized and discounted in Asian American activist circles and throughout UC Berkeley's growing-conservative trends in their Asian American Studies department. The idea of *queer* grief is found in the traces of Lily Chin's grief, after the murder of her son, Vincent Chin, as her grief is delegitimized by the nation-state via denials of the role of racial violence. Additionally, Helen Zia, an activist and journalist covering the murder of Vincent Chin, kept her *queer* desires and lesbianism silent as she feared the effect of it on the outcome of the trial and the validity of her news reports. In stark contrast, Merle Woo, a lecturer at UC Berkeley who was open about her lesbianism, was fired twice for her radical outspokenness on her LGBT identity, her deviatory sexuality, the radical potential of *queerness*, socialism, and critiques of UCB's Asian American Studies. Helen Zia and Merle Woo serve to illustrate the ways in which 1982, thought of to be a unifying year for Asian Americans, is in actuality, a year filled with hidden skeletons in the (literal) closet, as their stories reveal the ways in which *queerness*, even when applicable to its own ingroup members of LGBT+ Asian Americans or *queer* Asian American feelings, were silenced for the sake of "unity."

Through close examinations of the nuances, emotionalities, and interconnectedness of these examples, it can be seen that the steady and consistent presence of fear within Asian America, engendered by the hand of the state, has resulted in homogenized Asian America falling victim to manipulation by the White U.S. nation-state. Consequently, this process produces adverse impacts on the individuals experiencing *queerness* in their lives.

## **A Million Lies to Survive**

In January 2021, author Malinda Lo published *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, a story about sapphic love that takes place in San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1950s, amidst McCarthyism, the Red-Scare, and the Lavender-Scare. Main character Lily Hu and her love interest, Kathleen Miller, develop a beautiful love that serves as the core focus of this book. Through the use of fictional constructions of narratives and characters, and situated in the historical context of homosexual nightlife in the mid-1900s San Francisco, Malinda Lo was able to create a scenario that serves as a very distilled example of how nationalism and the results of anti-Asian rhetoric and fears manifests and maps onto queer modalities. Through creative constructions of familial dynamics, the blatant interventions of the U.S. government in said familial dynamics, and the development of navigating one's social life as a young teenage sapphic girl, Lo constructs a world that points towards the ways in which queer modalities, specifically queer bodies, feelings, and griefs, serve as a political battleground and an unwilling subject of physical violence.

In the novel, Lily Hu's father, Joseph, works as a doctor who is beloved in Chinatown. His patients often consist of mutual friends within his community, including Lily's friends: Shirley, Will, as well as Shirley's love interest, Calvin. One day, Calvin invites Shirley and Lily to a picnic with his friends, who belonged to a group of people called the Man Ts'ing (otherwise known as the Min Ching or Chinese American Democratic Youth League), who were thought of to be a collective of young Communist sympathies who had a mission of recruitment. This group was looked down upon by the white American public, and viewed as dangerous, because of the rampant anti-communist discourse at the time in the United States. In October of 1950, the People's Republic of China entered into the Korean War backing North Korea (Soviet-funded and representing communism), while the United States backed South Korea (representing capitalism), which further propelled Cold War tensions that translated into anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States. Many Chinese Americans at the time, all too vividly remembering the Japanese incarceration camps that happened not too long ago, scrambled to prove their allegiance to the United States, along with its anti-communist agendas, out of fear that they might be targeted or incarcerated next<sup>24</sup>. Many rushed to enlist, others talked frequently about their family members serving in the armed forces, store clerks posted anti-communist signs, and New York's *Chinese Nationalist Daily* even published a list of four anti-communist and pro- Nationalist Government of Free China talking points to encourage Chinese Americans to clarify that their loyalties lay within white U.S. interests.

It is these historical fears that set the tonal background within this novel; that the fears amongst Chinese Americans being perceived as anti-American and the violence that would ensue, resulted in a collective desire for the protection of a construct that would provide security, conceptualized as the model minority myth. This myth is thought of to provide national protection under the guise of proximity to whiteness and racial escapism via channels of elitism

and class. In other words, there is a desire for this myth to place those who fall under its parameters to protect them in the same ways white individuals are protected.

These fears and desires for protection are shown through Lily's parents' reactions to her joining Calvin for the Man Ts'ing picnic. When the FBI was suspicious of Calvin's potential involvement with the Man Ts'ing, they launched an investigation and came to Lily's father first, who was Calvin's doctor, asking him for a confession. When he refused to tell them what they wanted to hear, they asked him for a *false* confession, and threatened to take his citizenship documentation away if he did not comply. Still, he refused to lie. Because of his refusal to comply, immigration authorities were now suspicious of *his* involvement with communist sympathizers as well, or at the very least, complacency with their existences. Therefore, when Lily and Shirley accepted Calvin's invitation to attend a picnic with his Man Ts'ing friends (not knowing who the Man Ts'ing were), it reflected ever-the-more poorly on the Hu family. Lily's parents had a strict conversation with her about not associating herself with the Man Ts'ing, who her parents believed would recruit young, innocent, and clueless girls like her. However, throughout the duration of this conversation, her parents never mentioned the loss of her father's citizenship documentation. It was later that her mother pulled her aside to inform her that her father's legal status had now become more precarious than ever before. She explained to Lily that the immigration officers "aren't looking for the truth. They're looking for scapegoats. Your father should know this. He should have just told them what they wanted. Now he's protecting a boy he barely even knows—all because he refuses to tell them what they want. And that has put your father in danger, which means it's put you and me and your brothers in danger"<sup>16</sup>. Lily objects, stating that none of this makes sense due to her father's *legal* citizenship status and having served as a pro-America captain in the army. Her mother continues to explain that in the eyes of the U.S. government, none of that matters. It does not matter that her father immigrated legally; it only matters that he is an immigrant from a country, especially one that has chosen to enter a war against the United States. It does not matter that Lily has family in China that she has never met; it only matters that she has family in China. It does not matter that Lily attended the picnic not knowing who the Man Ts'ing were; it only matters that she was associated with them. Her mother ended her mini-lecture with a brief warning, telling Lily that "we need to. . . make sure we show we're a proper American family—because we are. That means you study hard, and you don't have anything to do with the Man Ts'ing"<sup>16</sup>. These direct words referencing education, and inherently class, call upon the desired safety of the model minority corporeality (paralleling Puar's idea of terrorist corporealities<sup>20</sup>), or in other words, the ways in which conforming to a model minority stereotype would help the Hu family survive.

In Puar's articulation of homonationalism, she simultaneously critiques the ways in which all Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Arabic, and Islamic bodies are homogenized in dominant society into a singular view in which she calls terrorist corporealities, with its name calling upon the histories and fears of terrorism and rise of Islamophobia

post-9-11. The aim of this term is to represent the homogenized view in which most, if not all, brown bodies are viewed as terrorists, evoking fear, and “justifying” violence in the eyes of the state (2007). In the same way Puar describes brown bodies as being homogenized into terrorist corporealities, ‘model minority corporealities’ serve to homogenize the Asian American diaspora in service of East Asian subjects, overrepresenting the ways in which highly-educated, middle-class, light-skinned, unopinionated, and domesticated subjects dominate the national discourse, overdetermining the ways Asian America is constructed as a national subject. Within the construction of model minority corporealities, it also encapsulates other racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjects, insofar as one is to pledge allegiance in upholding a capitalist heteronormative nation state. Model minority corporealities are constructed to highlight white-certified achievements of Asian America, a prime example being the *New York Times*’ front-page article written by a UC Berkeley professor in January of 1966 detailing the “success story” of a Japanese-American family<sup>19</sup>. In the modern day, we see model minority corporealities perpetuated in the expectations that Asian Americans achieve at the top of their grade levels, work up the socioeconomic ladder, remain dispassionate and subservient, and enjoy their success in quiet and undisruptive ways. However, the effects of such constructions of model minority corporealities conceal the ways in which others within Asian America, especially Southeast Asian Americans, remain ever-the-more vulnerable and unprotected; which, with the former subject having such narrow confines, the latter subject would clearly constitute a large part of Asian America. In modern day comparisons, Southeast Asian Americans have one of the highest highschool dropout rates in the nation, with 34% of Laotians and 40% of Cambodians having not obtained a high school diploma<sup>28</sup>. Cambodians and the Vietnamese were also one of the top four most arrested racial groups in the 1990s Bay Area, with most Southeast Asian American communities having frequent run-ins with the police force, leading to the coining of the term Southeast-Asian-prison-to-deportation- pipeline<sup>28</sup>. These statistics serve to highlight the ways in which the “American Dream” is inaccessible to most Asian Americans, and stands in stark contrast to the perception of general Asian America as the model minority. However, this illusionment is the goal of the nation-state’s creation of the model minority myth: to harbor the erasure of the unworthy subject, creating a false sense of fair and accessible success, one that would be provided via free-market capitalism, and thus proving to the world that the United States and its capitalist beliefs stand strong above other economic structures.

Part of the construction of model minority corporealities is not only to erase the ways in which the model minority myth has failed Asian Americans, but also to reinforce a universal pledge of allegiance in upholding the institution of heteronormativity, with compliance to hetero-scripts followed up by a false promise of national protection, as this promise rarely stands to be true. Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as “the institutions [and] structures of understanding practical orientations” that make heterosexuality unmarked, or marked as natural, or “representative of a moral accomplishment”<sup>6</sup>. They denounce the common misconception that the term heteronormativity equates to heterosexuality-as-a-default, and emphasize the ways in

which heteronormativity is a social and political project that serves as a “fundamental motor of social organizations in the United States”<sup>6</sup>. In understanding that the project of heteronormativity serves as the basis of all societal and structural configurations, it stands to reason that it is also implied and reinforced throughout the construction of model minority corporealities, as the model minority myth is a societal and structural configuration of proximity to power. If heteronormativity serves as the *basis* of all societal and structural configurations, and the model minority myth *is* a societal structural configuration, heteronormativity is thus a basis on which the model minority myth stands. This heteronormative basis is highlighted in the next few scenes described below.

A few chapters after Lily attended the Man Ts’ing picnic and found out that her father had lost his citizenship documentation, Lily and her love interest, Kath, both underage seventeen-year-olds, attended the Telegraph Club together, a club frequented by sapphic women. The club often featured a fictional famous male impersonator (drag king) by the name of Tommy Andrews (named after real-life Tommy Vasu, who owned Tommy’s 299, San Francisco’s first lesbian bar that operated from 1948 to 1952, forcedly being shut down after a raid). Police raids were common amongst gay and lesbian bars and clubs at the time, as the queer scene in 1940s America and on was rife with controversy, to say the least. Police raids of gay and lesbian bars and clubs in San Francisco started around the 40s, lasting until 1951, where there was a brief period of rest, between 1951-1955, due to the *Stoumen v. Reilly* case, which legalized public assembly of homosexuals in California State. Then, from 1955 and on, police raids became common again, but this time being bound by legal precedent, they operated under the disguise of ‘trying to catch drug circles involving unconsenting teen girls’ and the ‘sex trafficking of minors’. Blaming the sexually perverse and linking legible and material queer acts and existences (i.e. cross-dressing) with these drug and sex trafficking instances resulted in a surge of attempts to crack down on the influx of homosexuals in San Francisco. This historical context informs the backstory of the Telegraph Club and the characters who frequent it, and it is during this period of political unrest and turmoil and the precarious state of gay nightlife that the Telegraph Club is situated<sup>16</sup>.

The Telegraph Club kept its queer culture under wraps, disguising itself as a regular bar, though everyone who frequented there knew better. One night, a night in which Lily and Kath were both in attendance, the police conducted a raid at the Telegraph Club, arresting all participants who could not flee fast enough. As Lily and Kath begin running out of the club, Kath realizes that she left her real and fake ID in the bar and runs back to grab it, fearing that if it falls into the hands of the police, she would be in even bigger trouble. Kath tells Lily to run without her, and Lily complies, luckily escaping, but unbeknownst to her, Kath was caught and arrested, but later detained, due to her being a minor. Lily finds out through the gossiping grapevine a few days later, and heartbreakingly, neither of them would hear from each other or truly know what happened to the other until an entire year later.

Meanwhile, Lily returns home and wakes up the next morning still flustered, and her mother is convinced that she is sick. Her mother took care of her, getting her water, and warming up her hands, eyes brimming with concern for her daughter. Grappling with the intense guilt Lily felt for leaving Kath, for not being able to reach Kath's telephone line, and for almost getting caught, Lily felt as though she had to tell her mother the truth. It was the only way she felt she could make concrete a memory and love so easily wiped away by a few media stories and hushed feelings, this easily-invalidated status constituting as a form of queer grief<sup>2</sup>. After taking in her mother's care and memorizing her worried but loving eyes for the last time, Lily thought to herself "*you will never look at me like this again*",<sup>16</sup> braced herself from that thought, and proceeded to tell her mother the truth. Her mother yells, threatens, and slaps her, and fearing further emotional and physical violence, Lily runs away. For the next few days, she stays with Lara, the girlfriend of the owner of the Telegraph Club, who has been grappling with her own set of issues post-raid and post-arrest of her loved ones. Lily knew she couldn't live there forever and eventually, with the encouragement of her aunt who came looking for her, Lily returned home. The following morning was filled with tense silence and the avoidance of gazes, which was then followed by yelling, accusations, and rumors once Lily's grandparents and brothers left the house. Lily's parents told her that she was not to go to school that day, but was to pack up all her belongings and move to Pasadena to live with her aunt, a (futile) attempt to displace her from the queer subculture she had grown to find comfort in, mimicking the cultural and geographical displacement when her parents immigrated to the United States. The parents proceed by accusing Kath of brainwashing Lily, of indoctrinating her mind with these horrid thoughts, claiming that Lily does not know any better and that she cannot be around Kath anymore. Her mother also brings up her fears about the father's deportation, insinuating that Lily would be to blame if he was to be deported. The following scene showcases the moment in which Lily comes to realize the faulty logic of her parents:

"We looked the other way when you went to that Man Ts'ing picnic. We know you didn't mean anything by it, but this—this can't be excused. You're already on the record as sympathizing with the Man Ts'ing. If word gets out that you've been *voluntarily* in the company of homosexuals—"

Her mother looked anguished. Her arms were barricaded across her stomach as she leaned forward to make her point, deep lines grooved in her forehead. "Your father still doesn't have his papers back. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

With a twist in her gut, Lily did understand. Being linked to the Man Ts'ing was bad, but if she never had anything to do with them again, it could be overlooked. Adding in the corrupting influence of homosexuals made it exponentially worse, and not only for her, but also potentially for her father.

Her behavior could further endanger him with the immigration authorities because it reflected poorly on him. She looked at him. He inhaled so deeply on his cigarette that a good inch of the paper burned away at once, and dark shadows pulled at the skin beneath his eyes. He still wouldn't look at her.

"Tell us you'll accept that you've made a mistake and we'll help you," her mother said.

Her mother was practically begging her to lie, and the temptation to give in was strong. It would be so much easier, and she didn't want to endanger her father. But something stubborn in her balked at what her mother was asking for.

She loved Kath.

It was crystal clear to her now, and it was exhilarating and illuminating and it turned everything upside down, because there was no way to resolve her love for Kath with the demands that her mother was making. If she lied, she would betray Kath, and she refused to do that. But even if she could live with lying, would it make any difference in her father's situation? If he hadn't gotten his papers back, it was probably because *he* refused to lie about Calvin, not because Wallace Lai had seen her leaving the Telegraph Club. And if her father wouldn't lie, why should she? (pp. 321-322)

This excerpt shows a distilled example of the ways in which Lily's parents' racialized fears mapped onto their daughter's queerness in ways that reproduced compounded trauma and fear. The fictional component of this novel allowed Lo the space to create an example of that much precision, and to explore and highlight the exact essences of nationalism and anti-Asianness that directly translates into anti-queer violence and oppression. Through the author's syntactical use of hyphens and the repetition of words within a single sentence (e.g. "this–this cannot be excused"), it showcases the uncertainty and fear that her mother holds towards the situation at hand. Thus, the violent and dangerous essences that McCarthyism, the Red Scare, and the Lavender Scare entail become clear in this example, playing a direct role in fostering fear within the Asian American community. Additionally, the only two times in the novel that the author mentions the loss of their father's citizenship papers were cleverly juxtaposed against one another: the first being when Lily unknowingly attended a Man Ts'ing (communist sympathizers) picnic, and the second being when she was discovered to have attended the Telegraph Club (LGBT+ people at the time were thought of to be associated with communism). Both of these scenes involve links to communism, and also were the only two times citizenship papers were directly mentioned. By juxtaposing the only mentions of the loss of the citizenship papers with fears of communist ties, Lo draws a clear relationship between these conditions, and the historicization of such situations makes explicit that this relationship fosters fear amongst the Chinese American community, which thus led to further displacement of Lily's queer body, feelings, and existence.

The desire of Lily's parents (and other immigrant Chinese American parents) to circumvent further trauma, beyond what they've already experienced thus far, requires them to pledge their allegiance to the United States of America, and inherently, pledge their allegiance to upholding the institution of heteronormativity. As mentioned before, Berlant and Warner conceptualize heteronormativity as a fundamental social organizer that serves as the basis of social and political institutions<sup>6</sup>, and it is loyalty to such an institution if Lily's parents are to circumvent further displacement. As a result, Lily's mother resorts to violence (as shown when she slaps Lily), and actively begs her to denounce her lesbianism to show that they are "a proper American family"<sup>16</sup> under the guise that such properness will bring about protection, but more accurately so, as a direct result of her mother's emotionality of the fear of non-normative queer countercultures, which threatens their perceived safety, and more importantly, which would never fall under national protection. In other words, her mother's behavioral and material reaction directly results from the feelings of fear that she experiences interoceptionally. The violence that the mother taps into to reckon with the fear she is experiencing results in the negotiating and positioning of borders on Lily's flesh and skin, as Ahmed explains,<sup>3</sup> and her corporeality (that was seen leaving the Telegraph Club) as an unwilling subject for violence. Additionally, the mother's begging and denial can be interpreted as her processing historical, political, and racial trauma vicariously through her daughter's life, thus positioning Lily's queer feelings and material performances as a political battleground, with the players constituted as the factors of her mother's own mind.

Additionally, Lily's parents' reaction, Kath's own circumstances, along with the state's role of police raids, tore Lily and Kath apart, ripping their love in half, with no information on the other. Knowing that their love hid in the shadows caused Lily to confess to her mother, and the paradoxical irony is that her confession is exactly what sparked the material episode between Lily and her parents. However, it is this material episode that serves as proof that their love was real. It is the silence and shadowy nature of their love, along with the invalidation around the pain of her loss that queers Lily's grief, and by creating an angry, violent, and material reaction within her parents, Lily successfully erodes the silence and in doing so, validates her unrecognized grief.

Theorist Sara Ahmed<sup>2</sup> describes queer grief in a way that borrows from theorist and philosopher Judith Butler. Butler argues that a heterosexual subject in heterosexual culture has to have given up on the possibility of queer love in order to stay a part of heterosexual culture, and though this loss of possibility is left perpetually (and melancholically) ungrieved, as it is never recognized nor acknowledged, it is in that unrecognizability that it becomes queer. Ahmed builds off of Butler's argument in the excerpt below:

Simply put, queer lives have to be recognised as lives in order to be grieved. In a way, it is not that queer lives exist as 'ungrievable loss', but that queer losses



cannot 'be admitted' as forms of loss in the first place, as queer lives are not recognised as lives 'to be lost'. (p. 156)

In Ahmed's articulation of queer grief, she explains the ways in which the illegitimization of loss is central to queer grief, referencing the historical ways in which gay male mourners were "not recognised as mourners in hospitals, by families, [nor] in law courts".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, sapphic heartbreaks are deemed as unmournable grief as well because sapphic love was never recognized as viable from the start, as found in the case of Lily and Kath. They were displaced from one another, with the space between them denied, and it is in that unrecognizable and easily-erased loss that queers Lily's grief. Because of the understanding that her grief was queer and could easily be erased with hushed feelings and forced silence, Lily was driven to tell her mother the truth as a means of preserving the validity of her grief. Her mother's angry reaction would create a legible material episode consisting of a harsh exchange of words and a violent slap that serves to validate the reality and existence of Lily's love and therefore, grief (which is simply "love with nowhere to go", as goes the common therapy maxim). But due to Lily's attempts to make legible her love and grief, it came with other material consequences, such as the physical displacement of having to physically move cities.

In furthering the idea of Lily's displacement, it becomes important to consider Lily's parents' experiences of trauma and displacement as an inherently queer consequence, as the queerness of displacement raises questions about proximity and access to modes of power, while destabilizing, or queering, the idea of *home*. The construction of borders and the development of the concept of immigration has resulted in the Hu family's active displacement from what they would consider *home*. The word *home*, as opposed to *house*, carries connotations of love, belonging, security, familiarity, and safety. Lily's parents' *home* lies in the familiarity of their native Chinese cultures, whereas their *house* is physically located in San Francisco, California. Their trauma of being displaced away from home was then mimicked and reproduced onto Lily's body through their tactical displacement of their daughter, displacing Lily from her *home* of San Francisco and Kath, which both denoted connotations of familiarity, love, and safety. Displacing Lily would result in the cutting of her ties with certain parts of home that she found and cultivated with Kath, which was the main intention behind her parents' decision to displace her, whether this intention was conscious or not. This intergenerational mimicking of displacement highlights the ways in which Lily's parents' racialized trauma of displacement has manifested itself and mapped onto the contours of Lily's skin, body, feelings, and grief as further bordered and displaced trauma. The further displacement of parts of her parents' trauma onto Lily results in the projection of familial violence, as it is too much to hold alone within the confines and borders of a single individual's body. This idea of violence being too much to hold within the confines of a single body and mind, and the idea of queerness speaking to proximity to power will be expanded on more later on in the story of Daria.

The transference of displacement trauma in the novel is direct a result of the parents' fear of a loss of national protection (or rather, the perceived loss of a mythical protection that the model minority myth and heteronormative conformity would provide), but when parsed apart, it is revealed that such fear erodes the parents' ability to understand that Lily's queerness is not the threat. Despite the obvious fact that the problem lies within the state sanctioned violence, even within the eyes of the state, Lily would likely not be viewed as a threat. The raid of the Telegraph Club was conducted in 1955, and timeline-wise, takes place after the case of *Stoumen v. Reilly*, which mentioned earlier, set a precedent in 1951 allowing for the legal public assembly of homosexuals. In 1955, when raids began again, police could not overtly target the public assembly of homosexuals, and therefore, again as mentioned earlier, raids fell under the disguise of "saving" the young minor girls who were thought to be recruited by the sexually perverse into sex clubs, drug circles, and the "homosexual lifestyle". This excuse and disguise aimed to appropriate the popular, ever-rising, and effective argument and rhetoric of child protectionism.<sup>6</sup> Because the raid was conducted in 1955, Lily (being a young minor female that the state is claiming to "save") would likely be viewed as a victim, as one in need of protection, as though she has been recruited and corrupted by the sexually perverse. Therefore, though risks still lie in terms of voluntary association with homosexual establishments (and therefore, communism), Lily's situation is less threatening to her father's national status than if she was a consenting homosexual adult who frequented the Telegraph Club. None of this context was understood by her parents, because state-produced fear aims to inhibit the critical questioning of the nuances and complexities of the state's logic. Thus, failure to understand developing logic behind police raids in 1955 and beyond, along with fundamental misunderstandings of queer counterculture resulted in unnecessary violence towards Lily that did not bring about any form of protection or safety, but instead, further catalyzed racialized, bordered, sexualized, and queered trauma.

Although the parents were unable to understand the nuances of the state's manipulations, they were still able to understand that the state was not "looking for the truth, [but was] looking for scapegoats", as Lily's mother explained to her.<sup>16</sup> Lily's father understood this as well, and because of this, his hypocritical actions shone through. The author's juxtaposition of the two scenes involving talk of his citizenship documentation highlights the stark contrast in his responses. The first time around, when immigration officers came to question him about his patient, Calvin, and his potential ties with communism, Dr. Hu refused to lie to the immigration officers, protecting his patient's confidentiality, but as a result, changed his national status. He did this for the sake of his morals and for his loyalty to his honest work. In this first scenario, despite his citizenship documentation being *directly* threatened, he chose to stand his ground against immigration and law enforcement. This reaction is juxtaposed to the second time in the novel that his citizenship documentation was mentioned: after Lily was caught leaving the Telegraph Club. This time around, he did not choose to not stand his ground and in doing so, abandoned all ethics, morals, and principles as opposed to the first situation, where his hands were seemingly more bound. He asked his own daughter to lie, something in which *he* originally

refused to do before, and as Lily noted at the end of the excerpt, was the reason *she* ultimately chose not to lie. Her father actively chose the side of the state, and though these decisions are fraught with fear, it is important to acknowledge that *both* decisions were fraught with fear, and yet he made different decisions per situation. He abandoned his daughter when choosing to side with the law enforcement's crackdown on the sexually perverse, resulting in violence, displacement, and the queering of grief onto his own daughter. It may be valuable to muse upon the author's deliberate decision to write the character of the father this way, and consider how his hypocrisy extends beyond the fictional realm and into the reality of fear and decision making within Asian America in the modern day.

Such hypocrisy and evolution of displacement is not unique to constructed fictional realms; it is also traced throughout several real-life testimonial zine entries, such as the ones found in *Uproot*. *Uproot* is a zine comprised of predominantly Bay Area queer voices on topics of migration, immigration, displacement, and diaspora, and in 2012, there was an entry titled "How I Got Here, Across State and Gender Borders". It follows the familial migration story of a trans person, Daria, whose grandfather, Li Djan Hoon, was the first to cross the border of China into Russia, alone, leaving his wife and children behind, looking for work. He was detained and incarcerated and forced to work in a Siberian labor camp, and then "pardoned" with internal exile in Kazakhstan. His ties were forcibly cut from his family in China, and eventually, he remarried and had a daughter in Russia, but this new wife soon abandoned the family. This new daughter, inheriting Chinese ties from her father's side, is the author's mother, and is depicted as being born already carrying border wounds on her body, as she was born severed from all ties to her Chinese family and heritage. Additionally, growing up low-income, she is described to have married a white Russian man as an economic tactic for survival, and had a child, Daria, who serves as the author of this zine entry. When the Soviet Union fell in the mid-nineties, Daria, their mother, and their white Russian father, went into hiding for six months before fleeing to the United States on U.S. tourist visas. The author recounts that their family was able to survive in the United States because of their light-skin privilege, their father's whiteness, and his high education. The author also describes their parents as having found community and comfort in the Russian Orthodox Church, in hopes of alleviating the trauma and safeguarding them from further displacement, while remaining unaware of the damage of the church's heteronormative roots. Daria, on the other hand, being trans, instantaneously experienced the anti-transness in both the church and within their family. They began to realize that their mother, having been born in the torn margins of borders, had unleashed, projected, and displaced her fear onto her child, masking it as concern. The evolution of such displacement then emerged as gendered violence, as Daria explains below:

Most of that pain and trauma from our exiles, flights, and migrations never healed. We carry it inside us. When it's too much to bear alone, we displace it, reproduce it back onto one another's bodies as intimate violence. . .

By looking back on our paths to getting here I can connect the emergence of transphobia inside my family to our histories of state and border violence.

Daria describes their mother as fearful of the racialized trauma, cultural disconnection, economic disparity, and lack of assimilational ability that her child may face as being trans, but as Daria states, they are afraid as well, as they worry “how [they] will connect with [their] family if transphobia creates an impassable border between [them]” and how they will “travel safely to the city [they were] born, and walk through its streets intact” (Daria 2012). The author’s acknowledgement of their mother’s experiences of violence that informs Daria’s own experiences of violence legitimizes the role of fear within all cases. This translation demonstrates the ways in which fear is present in both the mother’s conceptualization of racialized and displaced trauma and Daria’s conceptualization of gendered and bordered trauma. Daria’s analysis speaks to how their mother’s fear of not being able to circumvent further displacement drives her conceptualization and behavior towards Daria’s transness, and through that, showcases how such fear has the capacity to shift into gendered displacement, physical (in)safety, and complications of familial connections. Daria explains that if their family was to have a conversation about queerness and transness, they envision that their parents would accuse transness of being a force of assimilation (as if they are not assimilating themselves) that threatens to sever Daria’s remaining ties to their Russian culture (Daria 2012). The parents’ narrow and linear conceptualization of what could potentially happen showcases their true fear: that the last thin thread of ties to any remaining familiarity and culture will be lost. The presence of fear remains as a consistent crux in this family, but the object and subject of the fear continues to evolve, and as a result, is shown to have been produced and reproduced through generations of racialized, classed, and bordered trauma, transforming itself along the way into forms of gendered and disparate bordered trauma.

To better understand bordering, I call upon how it is understood in border studies, which is defined as anything (beyond a simple physical geographic division) that calls upon histories of power divisions to police bodies, mobilities, and existences (Balibar 2002). As border studies scholar Étienne Balibar defines it, borders are *overdetermined*, in the sense that they operate as a world-configurer, overdetermining the ways in which the world is composed, through “sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized [ways of] geopolitical divisions” (2002, p. 79). He also argues that borders are *polysemic* in nature, meaning that they create different effects in relation to different bodies and situations. Lastly, he argues that borders are institutionalized and are not situated within a geographic division, but rather are situated in the political power of places in which selective control is applied to goods, peoples, microbes, viruses, cultures, and more (e.g. health or security checks, passports, etc.). In other words, borders are a form of institutionalized power that serve as a way to police people through ever-shifting constructs of citizenship, immigration, housing, city lines, gerrymandering, skin, self versus not-self, nature versus man-made dichotomy<sup>7</sup>, etc., which largely dictates the way the world is configured, despite having such limited reasoning.

In this sense, borders are shapeshifters by nature, overdetermining the shape of society and concerning itself with the shaping of bodies, mobilities, existences, institutions, and worlds. Additionally, considering the polysemic nature of borders, the violence of borders impacts each family member differently: it manifested as racialized and economic violence in Daria's mother's life, forcing conformity upon her as a way of survival, whereas it manifested itself as gendered and cultural violence in Daria's life, forcing upon the burden of reconciliation as emotional work upon Daria's body. Daria's mother *could* potentially be read as assimilating, as Daria could be read as transgressing, with the former thought of to be born out of fear and the latter thought of to be born out of self-perseverance. Both assimilation and transgression are often viewed by different people as "good" or "bad" things; with assimilation oftentimes being viewed by radical communities as the "cheap way out", and transgression being viewed as "the only way to be revolutionary", especially within modern-day LGBTQ+ discourses. However, Ahmed proposes an alternative view on this dichotomy, stating that it is important to "avoid positing assimilation or transgression as choices" (2004, p. 151). She explains that "what might feel necessary for some, could be impossible for others. Assimilation and transgression are not choices that are available to individuals, but are effects of how subjects can and cannot inhabit social norms and ideals" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 153). In this sense, these so-called "choices" that individuals are presented with have weight to them, in the sense that they are not free choices to be made at will, but that each have varying costs and consequences that pre-determines the decision *for* the individual. For Daria's mother, assimilation presents as a survival tactic, with the "decision" to assimilate presenting itself as a lack of privilege and option to not assimilate. For Daria, transgression may offer a more emotionally-reconciling path towards self liberation and self perseverance. The mother's wrongful conceptualization of Daria's transgressiveness, if we are even to call it that (for it might not be how Daria conceptualizes their own existence and experiences), and desire for her child to assimilate, results in the lack of understanding and allowance of Daria's personal choices, especially when juxtaposed to the mother's own way of survival. The mother's lack of allowance for differing individual responses to different forms of violence and displacement results in an overwhelming desire for her child to be safe in the same way that the mother has chosen to be safe, which further isolates queer bodies and existences in violent and political ways.

Additionally, queerness also calls into question proximities to power, and displacement is oftentimes a material and physical manifestation of a moving away from proximity to power. Losing access to modes of power typically imbues violence, and the extreme racial and border violence that was inscribed onto the contours of Daria's mother's body and mind was too much to hold within her single body and mind, causing her to displace and outsource the violence she was experiencing onto Daria, resulting in further displacements of them both in regards to power, the privilege of choice, and the space to heal.

In both of these examples of *The Last Night at the Telegraph Club* and *How I Got Here, Across State and Gender Borders*, familial fear and trauma has been internalized and passed down through generations, manifesting itself as anti-queer violence. The result of this pipeline

leads to further isolation and cultural disconnect in more ways than one: in overdetermining the contours of Lily's experiences of love, in limiting Lily's access to familiarity and safety, in invalidating Lily's queer grief, in displacing violence onto Lily's body, in inhibiting Daria's ability to connect with their family and homeland, in stripping Daria of their right to choice, and in imposing the labor of healing onto Daria.

These effects are not lost on the state however, for the purpose of harboring those fears in the first place is to not only control racialized and classed existences and migration, but to also regulate gendered and sexualized modes of being. The result of such policing is a deepening divide between oppressed groups, allowing for white nationalism to remain in power. This constructed divide further ostracizes queer individuals (such as Lily and Daria) from safety, forcing queer (Asian) bodies to serve as the battleground for this violent political negotiation between Asian America, queerness, and the state.

## 1982

1982 is a year that held a lot of grief and loss for the Asian American community. On June 23, 1982, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man, was beaten to death by two White newly-laid-off autoworkers. Because of the Japanese auto industry boom, led by companies such as Toyota and Honda, many White autoworkers in the United States were laid off due to the increasing number of imports. Many of them attributed the lack of job security and decline in job opportunities to Japanese immigrants, as a 1982 New York Times poll and 1993 Law Review Journal reveals.<sup>8</sup> Because "Asians" have been homogenized, laid-off White autoworkers often placed blame on *all* Asian individuals, regardless of if they were of Japanese descent. Vincent Chin, despite being Chinese, was simply perceived as Asian and thus, was phenotypically enough to trigger the two White newly-laid-off autoworkers to violently beat him to death with a bat. This murder and hate crime was thought of to be a unifying factor for the Asian American community, with a 2022 National Public Radio (NPR) article claiming that this had "galvanized Asian Americans across the entire country to fight for civil rights [and is] a battle that continues today".<sup>200</sup> Born from this is the common perception that this year was the year in which Asian America had begun to unify, push back, and speak out.

Vincent Chin's mother, Lily Chin, was considered to be a strong and leading activist during this time and was hailed by certain Asian Americans as the "Asian Rosa Parks".<sup>29</sup> Her activism arose from her substantial and inconceivable amounts of grief throughout the aftermath of her son's death, one that was difficult to navigate even with the support of an entire community. Helen Zia, the leading activist and journalist throughout Vincent Chin's case, became close friends with Lily Chin and on June 9th, 2002, after Lily passed away due to a medical illness, Zia delivered the eulogy at her funeral. During the eulogy, Zia reflects on her warm and courageous spirit, and discusses the ways in which Lily's bold activism has encouraged the Asian American community to speak out, sparking an intimate form of unity, and even describing her as "the moral conscience of this national campaign".<sup>29</sup> In an article she wrote as

tribute to Lily Chin and her activism, she recalls their first encounter of hearing her sobs from across the restaurant they both occupied. Lily and others were in a meeting in the back of the room discussing further legal options after the judge pardoned the murderers with a simple probation and fine. Zia understood that “it would have been far easier for Mrs. Chin to suffer privately than to bare her raw feelings over and over again [but] she relived the details of her son’s terrible tragedy hundreds of times, telling the story to strangers, to reporters, to television cameras, and to Phil Donahue on national TV — each time reliving the pain, all in the pursuit of that elusive thing called justice”.<sup>29</sup>

Lily’s deliberate act of speaking out and choosing not to stay silent erodes national order, positioning her as going against the expected and desired docility of Asian America. This deliberate act breaks the model minority contract and expectation, and through the breaking of this contract, Lily Chin enacts a *queer* disruption of the nation through her activism. However, due to this disruption, which brought about visibility, she received strong pushback from the White conservative public claiming that the murderous beating of Vincent Chin had nothing to do with race. And because the court ruling allowed his murderers to get out on bail and walk away freely, it painted Vincent Chin’s death to seem unimportant, as though his life was not recognized as a substantial loss nor worthy of justice, even if said justice is through the exploitative, racist, and oppressive system of the prison industrial complex that serves as modern day slavery. The public pushback, along with the court’s ruling, belittled Lily’s grief and rendered it illegitimate in the eyes of the nation. Recalling the way Ahmed articulates *queer* grief as illegitimized, unrecognized, and perpetually lost, Lily’s grief is *queered* by the reaction of the nation-state and general White public. By ignoring the racial dynamics and national hate that served as the cause of her son’s death, it is then trivialized by the courts and by public perception, in order to reach into Lily’s heart and invalidate (and in doing so, *queering*) the grief she feels over the loss of her son. The contestation of the legitimacy and validity of her grief, his death, and the reverberating pain that the Asian American community feels, positions *queer* grief to serve as a national political battleground and topic of debate during those following years. Efforts to render Lily’s *queer* grief unjustifiable, and constantly contesting it from every angle, prevents it from ever being able to be processed or grieved. In Lily’s case, it forces either the ignorance of the racism that had occurred, or the rehashment and retraumatization of reliving the instance every time the story was retold. And as Zia informed us, Lily chose the latter of reliving her trauma for the sake of justice, or more accurately so, for the sake of materializing and calcifying her grief the way Lily Hu did with Kath. For sparking material reactions and episodes serve as a method of validation. And, as shown through both Lily Chin and Hu, retraumatization, pain, and physical violence is often the product of validating *queer* grief.

However, retraumatization, pain, and physical violence are not only consequences of *queer* grief, as it is observed in all other forms of delegitimization of *queer* modalities. The desire to

avoid retraumatization, pain, and physical violence often leads to LGBT+ individuals to remain silent and hidden about their loves, desires, feelings. Lily Chin's close friend, Helen Zia, as mentioned before, cared deeply about the reputability of her journalism and fearing the way her lesbianism may have soiled her reputability, ultimately made the decision to hide her lesbianism from the world and even herself for many years to come. Through the interrogation of hidden *queer* existences such as Zia's, it is clear that despite the year of 1982 seeming like a year of unity for Asian Americans, the truth is that this year of "unity" is fraught with *anti-queer* undertones, resulting in the ostracization of LGBT+ individuals even within the Asian American community. Years after the trials, Zia frequently spoke about having been afraid that her lesbianism would jeopardize the integrity of her articles and soil her name in journalism. She deeply understood the fragility of this case as well as the public's perception, and was careful to not contribute negatively to the discourse with speculation about her sexual orientation. Years later, she revealed to *The Gonzaga Bulletin* about the "extreme homophobia in communities of color".<sup>200</sup> She admitted that in a collective of African and Asian Americans at Princeton University, she would be interrogated about her sexuality due to the fact that she was a feminist and supported women. She was told that if she was a lesbian, they "would want nothing to do with [her] because there are no homosexuals in the Asian American community and [she] would ruin the work of the movement".<sup>200</sup> The treatment of Zia within activists of color circles that she was a part of reveals how the homophobia within communities of color, especially within the Asian American community in which Zia was a part of, is due to the fear that it would jeopardize their progress towards "equality". In other words, the deep internalization of capitalism's scarcity mentality is blatant in these activist circles; that equality would come to *either* Asian American communities *or* LGBT+ communities, and not that the work of liberation is intertwined with and dependent on liberation from *all* minority struggles. The perspective of saving oneself rather than working together and risking selective success is a deeply capitalistic perspective. But it is exactly this capitalist perspective that lies at the crux of nationalism, for it serves to pit communities against each other to circumvent the power available in numbers. The failure to recognize that this process is the weakness that is exploited by the state in order to recruit Asian America into nationalist agendas, results in the stifling of *queer* feelings and the enshrouding of *queer* existences.

Standing in stark contrast to Zia, who denied herself and the world of her lesbianism, Merle Woo serves as an opportunity to interrogate the opposite. Woo was a lecturer at UCB who loudly and publicly spoke about her lesbianism, along with her beliefs in socialism and unions. She also stood in strong support of Affirmative Action. As mentioned before, affirmative action is a breeding ground for Asian American recruitment and manipulation into nationalist agendas. This process of fighting against Affirmative Action has been ongoing since 1961, with UCB and UCLA being the main UC campuses targeted by lawsuits, likely due to their prestigious status. Supporters of affirmative action within the Asian American community were seen as radicals, even within the academic field of Asian American Studies (AAS), especially the AAS at UCB,



as there was a noticeable trend of UCB's AAS losing touch with its radical roots due to shifts in leadership. UCB's conservative shift mirrors the growing conservative trend in the 80's that has been steadily rising in the background tones of Asian America. This rising conservatism's flame was fanned by a myriad of factors: Reagan's 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which was originally intended to tighten immigration control, but also simultaneously ended up legalizing the citizenship of many South Asian immigrants who already resided in the U.S.; further Cold War tensions and the subsequent fear that arose in the Asian American community due to the conflict between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States, with the PRC wanting the United States to terminate weapons sales to capitalist Taiwan (1981-1983); and the increasing adherence to anglo-religions such as Christianity as a survival tactic due to the perceived security and kinship that would be provided by churches.

Woo stood in stark contrast to this growing conservatism and openly spoke about her lesbianism, socialist beliefs, and support for affirmative action. She was then fired from UCB's AAS and her defense team claimed that this was because of her radicalism and outspokenness on issues that no longer seemed to align with UCB's AAS, making her too radical for the now-conservative-leaning department. Woo explained that when she was first hired, she was "told explicitly that AAS was working towards a Third World College",<sup>16</sup> calling upon the history of the Third World Liberation Front, a movement that created Ethnic Studies as we know it today.<sup>10</sup> However, "when AAS began to escalate its pattern toward conservatism and academic 'respectability'",<sup>16</sup> grassroots programs were eliminated, Woo was removed from their board, Cantonese and Tagalog courses was dropped, Ethnic Studies was discussed to potentially dissolve into the Division of Letters and Science, and three female part-time lecturers were fired despite having taught there for seven years. Woo, along with students who wanted to challenge these changes, brought their concerns to AAS Ladder Rank Faculty but was met with ignorance, leading to a two-day teach-in boycott of the AAS Department. In addition to Woo's activism and lesbianism, she also directly "analyze[d] and criticise[d] the patterns in AAS" during her lectures through the perspective "that racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class exploitation are all interconnected"; she claims that "for these views [she was] discriminated against" and ultimately, fired twice.<sup>16</sup>

Woo garnered support from a plethora of people, stretching from residents of other cities such as Seattle, other universities such as University of California Santa Barbara and the University of Hawai'i, county and municipal employees, Black Panther members, and UCB students, and UCB's Afro-American Studies and Native American Studies faculty, with many issuing statements of support and critique of UCB's AAS hiring practices.

The AAS department at UCB's escalating conservative alignment is a direct result of White conservative nationalism. The recruitment of Asian America into nationalist agendas via the false promise of the American Dream and constructions of model minority corporealities during

this time is reflected in the shifts of values and perspectives within higher education, the UC school system, and UCB's AAS department. Woo's radicalism that she carried into her work threatened UCB's AAS' chances at academic respectability. Association with lesbianism, socialism, and radical activism would diverge their intended conservative path towards academic respectability. UCB's AAS department's draw towards this path directly ties into the model minority myth because academic respectability and higher education were often channels in which model minority protections were enacted and privileges shone through. Woo and her team claimed that her radicalism threatened this image and as a result, she was fired, as a way to displace her from the site of their conformity, as she became a threat to their path towards conformity. Woo's displacement is a direct result of AAS attempts to distance her from her proximity to power as a professor in a reputable university in order to limit her influence on students. Woo's desire to disrupt AAS patterns through her radical beliefs and activism, resulting in her displacement is an inherently *queer* act, as it attempts to interrogate and change the dynamics of UCB's AAS' ability to assimilate, as well as their placement in national discourse. In other words, Woo's attempts to undermine UCB's AAS in straying from their radical roots was an attempt in pulling them back into the *queer* temporality of remembering their historical origins. But nevertheless, Woo's *queer* attempts, acts, and subsequent displacement, become a highly contested political battleground which resulted in her firing.

The ways in which Helen Zia's and Merle Woo's stories contain traces of fragmentation, invalidation, and disunity, reveal how the idea of 1982 being a unifying year for Asia America was hanging on by a thin thread of illusion, easily shattered by the simple *queering* of any modality. Following and comparing the three separate stories of activist Lily Chin, journalist Helen Zia, and professor Merle Woo, it allows for the interrogation of the ways in which different forms of *queerness* have been delegitimized and discounted in Asian American activist circles and throughout UC Berkeley's growing-conservative trends in their Asian American Studies department. Lily Chin's *queerness* lay in her grief, a potentially fleeting emotion that is not thought of in society as a definitive identifier ascribed to an individual. However, *queer* desires on the other hand, as was the case for Zia and Woo, acts as a definitive identifier ascribing meaning to who Zia and Woo are as individuals. The effects of this process impacted Zia and Woo differently because as aforementioned, Zia was closeted at the time, with the intention being to keep her detectable *queerness* from becoming detected. In comparison, Woo was not closeted at the time, and opened herself up for contestment from the university as a result of her *queer* desires, beliefs, acts, and stances.

Legible *queerness*, such as the case of Zia and Woo, more easily brings up feelings of fear, as compared to illegible *queerness*, as it is easier to pinpoint and target. Specifically, it brings about the fear that the scarceness of a capitalistic society would limit the amount of equality to go around. It becomes an either-or situation, with Asian Americans wanting to ensure their own equality over the ones of the LGBT+ community. This is not the basis in which unity

should lie, nor is it the basis in which *liberation* is achieved. The inability to understand the importance of liberation over equality erodes the illusion of a united Asian America, and as a result, makes the community all-the-more vulnerable to state manipulation, resulting in anti-affirmative action stances, conservative changes in UCB's AAS trends, ostracization of LGBT+ individuals even within the Asian American community, and the overall positioning of *queer* modalities as an unwilling site for violence and political battles.

### **And What of Love?**

Throughout this thesis, I allude to the different ways in which the role of the state has struck fear deep within the heart of Asian America, through the perpetual violence and subsequent trauma that has reverberated throughout generations on a global scale, both for Asian Americans and Asian migrants. Throughout the examples of Lily Hu, Daria and their family, Lily Chin, Helen Zia, and Merle Woo, the fear of violence, loss, pain, trauma, and displacement has been found in each one of their stories, arising as an occurring pattern operating in the background of and contributing to *queer* violence, manipulated by the hand of the state. Historical contextualizations of the rise and evolution of Asian American fear paints a picture of how Asian America fell susceptible to nationalist agendas. Through the nation-state's construction and manipulation of Asian America to reflect the characteristics of White nationalist power distributions, the process forced *queer* bodies, griefs, existences, acts, and desires to pay the violent price.

Despite these politics so blatantly threatening the future of *queer* modalities, popular critiques that have entered discursive spaces in media are centered on the opposite. These popular critiques have arisen from POC communities towards the LGBT+ community, as well as gender/sexuality/queer studies, critiquing the ways in which they are White-centric and often do not account for the role of race in their safe spaces and analyses. However, it becomes important to simultaneously interrogate the inverse relationship: that POC communities and race/ethnic studies often do not account for considerations of gender, sexuality, and queerness within their safe spaces and analyses, as blatantly shown through Zia's lived experiences. Oftentimes, when the latter critique is voiced, there arises an instantaneous snap-back defense pointing to the idea that POC communities have internalized the homophobia and *anti-queer* understandings due to White colonialism, and underlying this defense lies the implication that patience must be extended towards POC communities as these communities reconsider and reconfigure current understandings. The premise of this defense relies on individual efforts to understand past traumas and historical oppressions that result in such homophobia and for LGBT+ folks to find compassion within oneself to have patience. While there is truth and value in understanding and forgiving, at what point is the line drawn between collective and individual responsibility? Both to heal on a micro level but also to understand the power of collective strength in the unity of all marginalized experiences? Again, echoing the words of Berlant and Warner, it is important

to reemphasize the idea that individual acts of freewill is not the answer in dismantling the entire institution of heteronormativity<sup>100</sup>. However, revisiting the question that Lily Hu's story raises, what do we make of a shift in focus away from dismantling an institution, and recentered upon the fostering of love within interpersonal relationships? How then does the role of the individual become central to this new framing?

Herein lies the radical power of love. Acts of free will allows for individuals to assume the responsibility to love, rather than fear, condemn, or despise. Thinkers and researchers bell hooks and Brené Brown speak about the ways in which love is a growing and living notion that must be nurtured and cultivated through actions. It is not as simple as whether someone loves another or not. Love occurs in an "indefinable space between people, a space that will never be fully known or understood by us"<sup>7</sup> and is cultivated "when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness, and affection"<sup>7</sup>. Brown's understanding of love was built off hooks' idea of love being found in acts, that when the idea of love shifts away from being a feeling and into that of being an action, then "anyone using the word in this manner [would] automatically assume accountability and responsibility"<sup>7</sup>. In this sense, individual acts of free will would become central to loving, and it is in that loving that can either vitalize or disassemble interpersonal and individual performances of and safety in *queer* modalities.

hooks goes on to describe the ways in which love cannot coexist with fear. She warns that "so many of us are imprisoned by fear [and] we can move forward toward a love ethic only by. . . cultivating awareness [which requires that we] give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn"<sup>13</sup>. This directly calls into question Asian American fear and the necessity to cultivate awareness of the tactics of state manipulation. hooks goes on to explain that people who experienced violence are more likely to act violent towards others, "if there is no caring intervention"<sup>13</sup>. This directly builds off the idea of cultivating awareness despite fear and puts the direct responsibility on the individual to not reproduce cycles of violence.

As a hypothetical, what would happen if Lily Hu's parents (from Last Night at the Telegraph Club) were to show her love in the moments of her grief over the loss of Kath? What if they were to lovingly validate her grief in a way that erodes the unrecognizability of *queer* grief? What if her father was to unpack his hypocrisy and reanalyze his intentions behind the decisions he made? Perhaps then Lily would not go searching for validation of her grief through channels of violence that were enacted towards her. The Hu family's configuration, as well as world formations are rooted in the foundation of heteronormativity and violence, and it is in these ruins that *queer* love may be perceived as unsustainable. How can *queer* love thrive in a space that was created for its destruction? How can *queer* resiliency persist when the environment surrounding its existence is betting on its downfall? Can individual acts of free will become a useful tool in combating this cynicism and violence? No longer solely focusing

on institutional and structural change, but additionally, also focusing on fostering love within interpersonal relationships, with the hope that is cultivated serving as the basis in which fosters the sustainability of *queer* love. This idea of fostering interpersonal love, specifically between and within *queer* and othered subjects, is pertinent, even within pop culture discourse: in Hasan Minhaj’s television show mentioned earlier, Minhaj ends the episode on Affirmative Action with the following:

“For those in the Asian community who keep insisting, “we just want equality”, “we’re American citizens”, “treat us like Americans”, fine! But if you are willing to act like racism isn’t a thing, team up with lawyers, and then take it to the courts when you don’t get your way, you’re right, you truly are an American; you just happen to be the worst kind.”<sup>27</sup>

Echoing his words, for those in the Asian community who keep insisting upon an elusive and obstructive idea of “equality”, fine! But acting as though the violence of forcing unconsenting *queer* subjects to succumb to national political battles are not processes that halt efforts towards collective liberation, then you truly are an American; you just happen to be the most unloving kind.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> A note on language and terminology: as per request of the editor, the term “queer” has been italicized throughout the main paper to serve as a consistent reminder that it is being used in relation to queer theory. Please note that in order to retain its radical potential, this term is not typically italicized in gender, ethnic, cultural, disability, and critical refugee studies (please see works of authors such as Cathy Cohen, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Ocean Vuong, and more for proof of this). For a more expanded explanation on the term “queer”, please see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s chapter “Queer and Now” in *Tendencies*; Siobhan B. Somerville’s entry “Queer” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Third Edition*; Chandan Reddy’s entry “Queer” in *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality*; Gloria Anzaldúa’s chapter “To(o) Queer the Writer – Loca, escritora y chicana” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*; and Berlant and Warner’s chapter “Sex in Public” in *Publics and Counterpublics*. Furthermore on language and terminology, the capitalization of “White” in reference to white people is highly contested. A radical train of thought would argue for “white” to be in lowercase, while “Black” and “Brown” remain capitalized, in order to redistribute power. However, as per request of the editor, “white” throughout the main paper is capitalized in order to retain consistency.

<sup>2</sup> The term “Japanese internment camps” have been highly critiqued by Japanese American activists, who call for the use of the phrase “Japanese incarceration camps” instead, in order to align itself with historical and modern conceptualizations and critiques of the carceral state, highlighting the atrocious realities of what occurred within these camps. Please see Lane Ryo Hirabayashi’s entry “Incarceration” in *Keywords for Asian American Studies* for an extended

explanation of why “incarceration” is more appropriate than “internment”. For a shortened explanation, please see the following online article: <https://densho.org/terminology/#incarceration>

<sup>3</sup> In 2007, Jasbir Puar coined the term “homonationalism”, with its feminist counterpart, femonationalism (coined by Farris in 2017), and its disability counterpart, ablenationalism (coined by Mitchell and Snyder in 2015), soon following suit. Homonationalism was meant to articulate a critique towards the ways in which LGBT+ communities within the U.S. are recruited to play as a pawn in nationalist agendas that aim to posit racialized countries overseas and terrorist corporealities as the ones who provoke anxiety, “trouble the nation’s perimeters, [and are] generative of fear and danger” (Puar, 2007, p. 131), something that LGBT+ communities in the U.S. are accused of doing outside of homonationalist recruitments. In Puar’s book, it is the case of terrorist corporealities that serve as the racialized bodies who provoke anxiety. Thus, a homonationalist critique would interrogate, for example, the ways in which the U.S. justifies the violence in Iraq due to their perceived overall intolerance of homosexuality. Similarly, in femonationalist critiques, it points towards the ways in which white women are being recruited into nationalist agendas and positions racialized bodies overseas as the ‘other’, such as when white feminists claim the need to “save” Muslim women from the patriarchal oppression of wearing a hijab. The dynamic of these ingroup and outgroup statuses (i.e. the LGBT+ community, women, etc) is fluid, never static, and always shifting, as one group can easily shift from ingroup to outgroup at a moment’s notice.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that though Daria explicitly identifies as trans in the zine, they do not state their pronouns, and therefore, I will be referring to them with they/them pronouns for the remainder of this paper.

<sup>5</sup> Lily Chin (activist and mother of Vincent Chin) should not be confused with Lily Hu (the character from the novel), though the re-use of the name Lily in the novel could be interpreted as a symbolic tribute to the Vincent Chin case by author Malinda Lo.

<sup>6</sup> There is a popular and ever growing tactic of rhetoric and argument that involves the idea of child protectionism: the idea that children need saving, guarding, and protection. This is commonly seen in conservative discourse about how homosexuals are indoctrinating kids, or how the refusal to teach abstinence in sex education is encouraging kids down a sinful path. Please see page 188 in “Save Our Children/Let Us Marry: Gays Appropriate Rhetoric of Child Protectionism” in *Radical History Review*, as McCreery explains more about the origins of this tactic, as well as the use of it in modern-day gay rights activism.

<sup>7</sup> Please see the work of Karen Dobkins and Debra Lindsey for more information on the problematization of the man-made versus nature dichotomy.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about white autoworkers blaming the homogenous Asian diaspora for the loss of auto jobs, please see the New York Times Article, “Resentment Of Japanese Is Growing, Poll Shows” (1982), as well as Robert S. Chang’s “Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space” in *California Law Review*.

<sup>9</sup> It has been repeatedly argued across many fields that incarceration parallels slavery and has since been dubbed “modern-day slavery”. Contemporary Asian American movements such as “Stop Asian Hate” have been critiqued for strengthening the carceral state and have been called upon by community members to shift away from tactics that increase policing and surveillance. Please see Angela Davis’ book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* for more information on the prison industrial complex and how prisons function as a form of modern-day slavery.

<sup>10</sup> The Third World Liberation Front was a student union in San Francisco State College and University of California, Berkeley that went on strike for students of color, with the strike turning dangerously violent when police became involved. They demanded various action items, one of which created Ethnic Studies as we know it today. Please see NPR’s *Code Switch* podcast episode “On Strike! Blow It Up!” for more information.

<sup>11</sup> The title of this conclusion translates to “I cannot share what was not given to me”, and it comes from a song titled *La de la Mala Suerte* by Jesse & Joy, a band whose songs have provided me with immeasurable hope in the moments where I’ve felt as though queer love, being something that the world is not built for and actively seeks to destroy, will erupt from the inside out, destroying everything and everyone I have ever known and loved. It seems only fitting that a piece of their hope is embedded in this paper.

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