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The Rhetoric of Double Allegiance: Imagined Communities in North American Diasporic Chinese Literatures

Deborah L. Madsen

In 2006, the Chinese-Australian writer Hsu-Ming Teo published a piece entitled “These days it's harder to be different” in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (7 December 2006, n.p.). This short essay marked the first anniversary of the Cronulla riots and in it Teo reflects upon the ways in which the nationalist concept of “Australian” has changed under pressure from the government's official policy of multiculturalism. She observes that, in fact, the meanings attributed to “Australian” as an idea and identity category have become increasingly limited: “This may have given a sense of security to many,” she observes, but “No wonder 'un-Australian' is increasingly used as an epithet of abuse.” Teo links the use of national identity as a trope of exclusion to conservative politics in Australia but also, importantly, to the increasingly complex perceptions of the nation as “home.”

The popularity and success of [Pauline] Hanson was not surprising, not because Anglo-Australians are essentially racist but because a significant proportion of Australians had not been feeling “at home” in their own country for a long time but had not been able to articulate these views.

Ironically, this was shared by many migrants. The Germans have a word for it: “heimlich,” literally translated as “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly” (2006, n.p.).

In her 2005 novel, *Behind the Moon*, Teo explores the perception of some Anglo-Australians of failing to belong in an increasingly multicultural society that is riven with conflicts between indigenous and white communities as well as between Anglo-Celtic and Asian migrants. In her brief newspaper article, Teo gestures towards Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* as a challenge to home and belonging as the realm of the familiar and the “not strange.” Freud's 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” figures the “unhomely” experience of home as the haunted house, the place inhabited by death: “The *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. . . . In this case, too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *Heimlich*, familiar” (1919, 245).

The threat to “home” by the irruption of the foreign is kept at bay by the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others. Stories transform place into a semiotic space to which we can subjectively bind ourselves, creating an experience of belonging, of home. But, as Teo suggests, stories exist in a constant struggle to assert diverse, competing views of the world which in turn shape experiences of “home” and the possibilities for belonging. Stories have the power to transform land into homeland but not all stories are benevolent and inclusive; stories can equally exclude, marginalize, and sever the semantic bonds that tie individuals and communities to place and to each other. Exclusion is the risk implicit in the motif that

characterizes much writing about migrant experience that uses the “between worlds” paradigm to describe migration as a physical relocation that involves a cultural bifurcation. The migrant is “here,” in the immigrant nation but is assumed to belong culturally “there” in the emigrant nation. In this essay, I want to address the rhetoric of such “between worlds” stories, a rhetoric that articulates a “neither/nor” motif that denies “homeliness” to non-Anglo (specifically Chinese) migrant communities in Canada, another postcolonial British nation that has embraced multiculturalism as official government policy. However, a group of lesser-known writers, such as Larissa Lai and Fred Wah in Canada, offer an alternative to this either/or rhetoric by writing in a “both/and” mode that emphasizes transnational connection and relationality rather than singular national identities. I will discuss the work of Lai and Wah as examples of stories that are inclusive and that work by multiplying rather than reducing the semantic bonds that tie individuals and communities both to place and to each other.

There is a tendency in contemporary critical work on North American Chinese diasporic writing to assume a celebratory or liberatory tone which, while perhaps accurate in some interpretive situations, is not necessarily the case for all Chinese immigrant writers. All writers, including Chinese Canadian and Chinese American, are at liberty to use styles of rhetoric that exclude rather than include, that depict “unhomeliness” rather than an “at home” experience for immigrant characters. In his editorial introduction to the special issue of *Canadian Literature*: “Asian North America in Transit,” Glenn Deer points to precisely this problematic as he warns: “We must be wary of how critical energy spent on the celebration of multiculturalist diversity can often serve to distract us from ongoing systemic forms of racism” (Deer: n.p.). In what follows, I will argue that the “either/or” rhetoric of nation that characterizes the work of Chinese American and Chinese Canadian writers such as Wayson Choy and Amy Tan works to perpetuate on a discursive level the kinds of exclusion that are contested in the realms of the social and political. Ironically, the very conditions of discrimination that form part of the thematic texture of such literary works are supported by a rhetorical style that promotes the idea that an individual must be either Chinese or Canadian, Chinese or American, but cannot be both. The impossibility of such a choice then gives rise to the “between worlds” theme explored in these texts which focus upon characters who are required to determine and yet cannot decide in which single national context their allegiances and, ultimately, their identities are authentically located. This form of rhetoric then works with rather than against the systemic forms of racism to which Deer refers. I wish also to suggest that this conservative (even reactionary) approach to the complexities of multiculturalism accounts in part for the extraordinary popularity of these writers. The context of racial discrimination is key to understanding the dynamics of diaspora as a network of relationships based on cultural self-identification. The Chineseness that is promoted through networks of diasporic communities, addressed to those who are systematically excluded from full belonging in the hostland, offers the chance to identify with an inclusive transnational cultural group. However, the embracing of difference from the hostland carries within significant risks. “Difference” takes on two dimensions: a difference that is located in an essentialized Chineseness that transcends the discriminatory culture of the “hostland,” on the one hand and, on the other, a difference that is the basis for ongoing racial exclusion. This is the double-edged sword of cultural difference: diaspora can be claimed *by* those who seek a sense of transnational belonging but can also be claimed *for* Chinese immigrants, both as individuals and as whole communities. In a culture where immigrants are systematically marginalized, personal agency in respect to self-definition, is inevitably limited. One of the most powerful, yet mundane, ways in which this imposed difference is expressed is via the question: where are you from? In the preface to his book *Thinking Orientals*, Henry Yu explains that this question inspired his work:

This study has been an attempt to answer why it is that an Asian American in the United States, no matter how long and for how many generations he or she might have been here, will still be regularly asked “Where are you from?” The inquisitors are never satisfied with the answers of Los Angeles, or Vancouver, or Canada. You are seen as an “Oriental” of some sort, and they need to sort you according to some foreign distinction (vi).

An essentialist identification with the racial category “Chinese” works both strategically in transnational terms but, in narrower national terms, becomes a strategy of racial abuse as well. The character of Sekky in Wayson Choy’s novel *The Jade Peony* (1995) reveals his position as a Canadian-born child of Chinese immigrant parents as he recalls being excluded from school ostensibly because he may have tuberculosis but implicitly for racial reasons:

... even if I was born in Vancouver, even if I should salute the Union Jack a hundred million times, even if I had the cleanest hands in all the Dominion of Canada and prayed forever, I would still be Chinese.

Stepmother knew this in her heart and feared for me. All the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born “neither this nor that,” neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* – no brain (135).

Sekky links the perception that he might be diseased or unclean with his “between worlds” status. He could have “the cleanest hands in all the Dominion of Canada” but he would still be perceived as Chinese and therefore as foreign. Moreover, this perception is shared by Anglo-Canadians and Chinese immigrants alike. The foreign-born members of Chinese diaspora are suspected by their parents and families for their “between worlds” condition, as they are by non-Chinese Canadians.

Indeed, this theme of parental suspicion is common to many diasporic narratives, particularly those that address the issue of “paper sons.” This term refers to the historical practice of selling identity papers belonging to those who have been granted permission to reside in Canada or the US but who are either dead or are fictional. Maxine Hong Kingston refers to this practice in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*; the theme is the basis of Faye Myenne Ng’s novel *Bone*. Parents and other relatives are unable to tell children the truth of their ancestry for fear that secrets will be betrayed and the family will be deported. Thus, there opens up a generational division that complicates three primary categories of national identification: Chinese, Canadian (or US), and the “between worlds” category of those who are neither authentically Chinese nor fully Canadian or American.

The “neither/nor” rhetoric that I am exploring is clearly located in these national categories. In literary texts that use this rhetoric, allegiance is located in neither the “national” (the North American hostland) nor to China (the cultural “homeland”) Even the terminology in which this discussion is couched carries profound nationalistic implications. The “homeland” is implicitly posited as the place of birth (rather than place of residence) versus a “hostland” that carries historical associations with “sojourning”: in a Chinese context this evokes the late nineteenth-century system of indentured labor which sent Chinese men to North America (and elsewhere) to work temporarily on such projects as the building of railroads, mining, and forestry. The indenture system assumed that these Chinese men would return to their homes in China, especially because Chinese women were forbidden entry to

North America.¹ The rhetoric of sojourn evokes this exploitative history and inscribes an ongoing denial of full belonging to Chinese immigrants but more fundamentally, this rhetoric promotes the power of the established “hostland” society over first- and second-generation immigrants.

At this point, I need to clarify what I mean by the term “diaspora.” I am not referring simply to immigration, though transnational movement is an obvious pre-condition for diaspora. Rather, I am referring to the formation of a transnational network of community relations that are based on cultural nationalism. This is a network actively promoted and sustained by material social practices. I have written elsewhere about the system of transnational Chinese beauty pageants, which involves the nomination of local winners for participation in events like Miss Chinese Cosmos or Miss Chinese International.² So women from such places as Vancouver, Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong meet in a competition to determine who will best represent a shared image of Chinese femininity on the global stage. Such events promote essentialized images of Chineseness, the images that construct Chinese diaspora as a unified transnational relational network. This is to say that there is nothing “natural” about diasporic identities, which are created, performed, and perpetuated by self-identifying individuals within self-identifying diasporic communities.

Diaspora is an imagined community yet it is no less real because of its constructedness. Membership of diasporic communities requires acceptance of, and some degree of conformity to, the strategically essentialist understanding of cultural identity that I mentioned above. Members of the “diaspora” are constrained to an identity based on “Chineseness,” regardless of whether that individual has ever visited China, engaged in Chinese cultural practices, or speaks Chinese.³ According to scholars such as Ien Ang and Rey Chow, the discursive “glue” that unifies the material practices of diasporic community formation is the powerful racial signifier, blood. Chinese blood or blood descent is what Ang calls, the “degree zero of Chineseness to which the diasporic subject can resort to recover his imaginary connectedness with China, and to substantiate, through the fiction of race, what otherwise would be a culturally empty identity” (2001, 49). An individual may not speak Chinese, may never have been to China, and may not observe Chinese cultural practices, but even in the context of these absences an appeal to the discursive power of “blood” binds the individual to the diasporic community. It is in the complexity of this blood connection that the “neither/nor” construction of diasporic identity is located: Chinese blood or biological descent versus nurture in a society of residence outside China. This accounts for the motif of return that characterizes many diasporic Chinese narratives. In Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*, and other texts, the protagonist returns to a China that is ineluctably foreign, where the perception of belonging neither in China nor in North America is intensified.

Texts written in the mode of “neither/nor” depend fundamentally upon a stark contrast between a China to which characters can potentially return and the West. For example, in *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), Amy Tan's second novel, the protagonist Winnie is advised to tell her history by her friend Helen who counsels: “They'll understand. Maybe they'll be happy to know something about their mother's background. Hard life in China, that's very popular now” (80). “Hard life on China” versus “better life in the West” is the logic that characterizes

¹ However, women were smuggled into North America as part of a highly organized transpacific sex trade. See my essay on the nineteenth-century trade in Chinese women, “Sexing the Sojourner: Imagining Nation/Writing Women in the Global Chinese Diaspora,” *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 1. 2 (2008), pp. 36-49.

² See my essay “Queering Cultural China: Performing Nation through the Feminine Body,” *Textual Practice*, 25.4 (Aug. 2011), pp. 671-687.

³ The autobiographical pieces collected in Wei Djao's *Being Chinese: Voices from the Diaspora* (2003) are instructive in this connection, as are the essays in Ien Ang's 2001 book, *On Not Speaking Chinese*.

this contrast. Texts like Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Wayson Choy's *All That Matters* and *The Jade Peony*, Denise Chong's family history *The Concubine's Children*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Faye Myenne Ng's *Bone*, SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, Liu Hong's *The Magpie Bridge* – the list is seemingly endless – all contrast a “hard life in China” with modern life in the West, very much to the detriment of the former. Yet the China to which the protagonist can return in these texts is a contemporary China that fails signally to conform to the Orientalist imagery constitutive of an imaginary China of departure that is evoked throughout the texts. This imaginary China is distinct in both time and space from contemporary China. Diasporic narratives like those listed above characterize China as it was during the final years of the last imperial dynasty and, rather than China in all its geographical and cultural complexity, South China specifically is invoked. There are historical reasons for this: the late nineteenth-century trade in indentured Chinese labour was centered in the cities of coastal southern China with the result that many North American descendants of these labourers trace their Chinese roots to South China. However, again it is the exploitative history of Chinese sojourning that is referenced.

Thus, the fictional characters of much recent Chinese diasporic literature are dramatized as belonging not to the nation of residence but to a culture of departure that exists only as an Orientalist fantasy. This is a mythical place to which no one could possibly return in any meaningful way and, consequently, diasporic characters find themselves alienated in time and space. In what follows, I discuss the temporal and spatial dynamics of Chinese diasporic fiction; first, by questioning the role of ghostly figures in the representation of diasporic time, then by turning to the workings of diaspora in space.

In Wayson Choy's account of his childhood in Vancouver's Chinatown during the Depression era, *Paper Shadows* (1999), he describes perceptions of himself as “neither this nor that,” neither Chinese nor Canadian. To his Canadian teachers, he is another immigrant, while his teachers at Chinese school “felt the in-between, local-born children were *mo-no juk sum* – brainless bamboo stumps – truly spoiled and utterly stupid” (234). These “in-between” children cannot be fully trusted by their parents to maintain necessary family secrets; they cannot be entrusted with knowledge that might place the family at risk of deportation. Consequently, they are said to know “everything and nothing” (287): everything about Canada, in the view of the Chinese teachers, but nothing about China or the history of Chinese in Canada. This lack of knowledge about the past of the diasporic community, as well as the family and the individual's social and cultural inheritance, produces a crisis of memory simply because in places of objects of remembrance there are unanswered questions. Memoryless, “brainless” *mo-no* characters are, in part, caught in a “neither/nor” condition precisely because they are alienated in historical time. This unspeakable past is, however, articulated in fictional narratives through the trope of the ghost.

It is interesting to recall here Walter Benn Michaels' point concerning ghosts and African-American “re-memory.” In his 1999 essay, “You Who Never Was There: Slavery and the New Historicism – Deconstruction and the Holocaust,” Benn Michaels argues that literary “ghosts are not merely the figures for history as memory, they are the technology for history as memory; to have the history, we have to have the ghosts” (189). Ghosts thus function not simply as specters from the past but as devices that bring into the narrative's present tense events, characters, and experiences that constitute the past, making the past present in the narrative's temporality. But the incursion of the historical past is often represented as an irruption of the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, which disrupts the homeliness of “home.”

In *Paper Shadows*, Choy comments “I had not counted on the will of ghosts; I had not realized that there were ghosts who do not always care for silence, who will not stay

unremembered” (307).⁴ In Choy's autobiography, it is his paternal grandmother, the disgraced First Wife who never left China, who makes her ghostly presence felt. She is the technology that enables Chinese family history to function as personal memory. First Wife's ghostly presence enables a spectral narrative of return, a reassertion of virtual genetic inheritance, as family secrets are resolved through the revelation of Amy Tan's narrative motif of “[h]ard life in China.” In Tan's novels, the ghostly unremembered characters often take the form of the dead or dying mother. In *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the narrative is possessed by the voice of the past which is channeled into the narrative present; in *A Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan uses the trope of reincarnation or previous lives, to effect a similar narrative experience of living the past in the present tense. The effect of bringing the Chinese past into the diasporic present is multifaceted: in these narratives, the present and the past occupy separate plot lines, keeping distinct in time Imperial China and the contemporary West. However, these narratives conclude with a convergence of plots as the protagonist seeks to “return” to China. This return is, of course, a dramatic realization of the impossibility of returning through time because the Imperial China represented in the main plotline is exposed as contemporary China: a time and place which is not spectrally inhabited.

A more complex deployment of the ghost motif is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, subtitled “Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.” Much has been written about Kingston's ghosts, to which I want to add only a comment concerning the way in which her ghosts confirm a “neither/nor” rhetoric of diasporic unbelonging. The ghosts to whom Kingston's subtitle ostensibly refer are the Anglo-Americans who inhabit spaces beyond the Chinese community of the protagonist. These Newsboy Ghosts, Grocery Ghosts, Mail Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, and Garbage Ghosts signify a rupture between, on the one hand, those who are perceived to be Chinese and fully human and, on the other hand, those who constitute an uncanny spectral “America.” Kingston's use of the ghost trope is subversive in that Anglo-Americans are posited as the agents of an *unheimlich*, uncanny, defamiliarization of Maxine's “home” community. However, this Chinese home comprises a secondary axis, that of the People's Republic of China. The “Old China” of the protagonist's mother is inhabited by ghosts like the “Sitting Ghost” that Brave Orchid memorably exorcises from the midwifery school. The story of this exorcism, told relatively early in the “Shaman” chapter, has the effect of lending ontology to the concept of ghosts, an ontological reality that attaches to the American ghosts when they are introduced later. This ontological power inflects the reasons given for Maxine's fear that her parents will fulfil their promises to return the family to China: “I did not want to go where the ghosts took shapes nothing like our own” (p. 99). This fear is realized by her aunt, Moon Orchid in the following chapter “At the Western Palace.” Brought from her refuge in Hong Kong to the United States by Brave Orchid to confront a husband she has not seen for decades, Moon Orchid is overwhelmed by the shapes assumed by these new ghosts and develops an increasingly insane fear of “Mexican Ghosts.” Moon Orchid belongs neither in China, from which she escaped to Hong Kong, nor in the United States. However, for the protagonist Maxine, China and the US form two of the three axes upon which her sense of (non)belonging are constructed: Communist China and the Californian Chinese diaspora are inscribed in the narrative as a double homeland, which complements the historical Imperial China from which her parents escaped to the US.

In the course of the narrative, Kingston's protagonist develops an ambivalent relationship towards these multiple sites of “China” and the proliferating historical moments in which China is located: the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of late Imperial (pre-1911) China; post-1949 Communist China; and her contemporary Chinese diasporic

⁴ I have written about the ghost motif in Wayson Choy's work in “‘Mo No Boy’: The Negative Rhetoric of Nation in the Work of Wayson Choy,” *West Coast Line* 59, 42. 3 (Fall), pp. 100-11.

community. All three times and places represent threat: Maxine fears that a return to Imperial China would result in the selling as slaves of herself and her sisters; Communist China represents the threat of starvation and violent death; but in her contemporary diasporic community she is referred to as “Ho Chi Kuei”, as she explains: this “is what the immigrants call us – Ho Chi Ghosts” (p. 104). Those recently arrived from China (“the immigrants”) call US-born diasporic children “ghosts” to signify their “between worlds” or “neither/nor” status. As I mentioned above, writers like Wayson Choy and Faye Myenne Ng also explore the inter-generational difficulties opened up by a history of imposed secrecy and mysterious inherited customs. Ironically, Maxine explains her unsuccessful attempts to discover the meaning of this term: she knows so little of the Chinese language that she can only guess at the accusations or implications of the term. What remains, however, is the iconic status of the ghost figure or trope. The ghost that signifies ontological stability along with a radical epistemological instability – an inability to understand the significance of those who appear as “ghosts” whether by Moon Orchid, or “the immigrants” or Maxine. In this context, it is important that the conclusion of *The Woman Warrior* returns in time to the Old China of the second century (A.D.) poetess Ts'ai Yen. The narrative makes a case for the importance of cultural translation through the story of Ts'ai Yen's captivity among “barbarians” and her eventual return to Han China. She brings with her the songs she has learned and which have been adapted to Chinese musical instruments. “It translated well” (p. 109), the narrator concludes in the final words of the book. This gesture of cross-cultural belonging contrasts with the story of Ho Chi Ghosts that immediately precedes it, displacing in time – into an unrecoverable mythical time – the possibility of transcending the neither/nor condition of diasporic identity.

A very different use of the ghost motif to engage the relations between the diasporic past and present in the experience of “home” is Larissa Lai's first novel *When Fox Is a Thousand*. In this novel, as in the later *Salt Fish Girl*, Lai works to represent a sense of temporal repetition, of history repeating itself, in *both* China *and* the Gold Mountain of North America. Rather than a “neither/ nor” rhetoric of unbelonging, Lai uses a “both/and” style of representation, where subjectivity is constructed transnationally across time and space. This is not to argue that Lai homogenizes the history of Chinese diaspora, but to point to her construction of the disjunctions that punctuate that history (like the history of “paper sons” mentioned above) as the consequence of erasures that serve the interests of settler-colonial, or more specifically corporate, power. As Rita Wong observes in relation to Lai's second novel, “Far from legitimizing the official history of the nation, *Salt Fish Girl* critiques it by exploring the subjectivities of those who, having been marginalized by the nation's priorities, do not self-identify through the nation's lenses” (p. 113). Unlike those narratives that repeat historical patterns of exclusion through the use of the “between worlds” or “neither/nor” motif, Lai offers a vision of diasporic subjectivity grounded in transnational “lenses.”

The convergence of distinct historical moments is represented in a subtle, nuanced use of descriptive language in this narrative which comprises three distinct historical plot-lines: those narrated by the ninth-century poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi and the Fox, and the third-person narrative of the late twentieth-century character Artemis. While these narratives are juxtaposed, the nature of each narrator signified by a pictorial image at the beginning of the narrative episode, the disjunctive quality of the narrative is unified by subtle imagistic threads that run throughout the novel. The most obvious motif that links the diverse time-frames of the novel is the figure of the fox spirit that gains immortality by possessing the corpses of the newly dead. Early in the novel, the Fox introduces the character of Artemis and then tells of her sporadic possession of the Poetess over the past nine hundred years. The implication is the the Fox will come to “inhabit” Artemis; perhaps that Artemis' body will be the preferred form

in which the Fox enjoys permanent immortality as a shape-shifter after passing her one thousandth birthday.

The narrative relation between the Fox and Artemis is sustained, in part, through the recurring figure of a woman with distinctive hair and facial features. The third-person narrator interrupts the description of Artemis' visit to a bathhouse with Ming in order to remark: "Across the pool, an Asian woman rose from the water. A woman with long black hair with the remains of a blonde dye-job trailing at the ends. Her nose twitched once, giving her away, should Artemis care to notice, which she didn't" (141). This narrative intervention creates dramatic irony: the reader is made aware of the Fox's incarnation in Artemis' world while Artemis remains ignorant of this. When the woman reappears in the bar where Artemis and Claude are drinking after their disastrous canoe trip, the narrator suggests that the figure is familiar but unrecognizable, with her blonde hair and dark roots (169). Finally, when Artemis encounters a strange woman on route to visit her estranged mother, Artemis notices that the woman's long hair is shaved at the back but "[i]n the grown-out ends, there were traces of a blonde bleach-job" (205) but, again, she is unable to recognize where she has seen the woman before. Thus, when this strange woman (yet who is not a complete stranger) presents herself as Artemis's mother, and the deception is quickly revealed, still Artemis is mesmerized by the Fox's "other-worldly" voice and is persuaded to listen to the love story of the Fox and the nun, verbal elements of which echo the preceding dialogue between Artemis and the Fox. It is in the body of the Poetess that the Fox lives with Artemis, bringing together the three plot-lines of the narrative; and, in the concluding paragraph, the Fox brings the reader back to the beginning of the narrative. The Fox's realization that their two souls "have been intertwined since an herbalist and an oil seller made a promise to one another more than a thousand years ago in another country, when they were still neighbors. Since a chance meeting on a hill beneath a temple in the rain" (236). The promise was to marry their unborn children but as the herbalist, the Poetess's father, remarks, "both women gave birth to girls. ... I must be haunted by a fox!" (33). From this beginning, across a span of one thousand years and across the Pacific Ocean, the narrative intertwines the past and the present, China and Canada, into a complex network of relationships.

These relationships are based on a rhetorical logic of "both/and" rather than "neither/nor" where characters are not obliged to choose where and when they "belong" because they are at home everywhere and at all times. This "belongingness" is represented by other ghosts that inhabit the narrative: the presence of Diane's brother Andie after he leaves home "filled every crevice of every room" (45); the ghost of Diane herself lingers in Artemis' apartment weeks after Diane's visit (103); the Fox describes Artemis' restless spirit or "ghost," "how it waits for me at every street corner and sometimes starts out of doorways with famished eyes" (159). Images like this construct a narrative world in which ghosts and the living participate equally, a world where the supernatural is present in all places and times. This is a fictive world where the past and present, China and Canada, Orient and Occident share the same ontological status; a world articulated in terms of belonging rather than unbelonging; where subjectivity is constructed transnationally across time and space.

As I suggested above, diasporic identities are the conscious construction of communities formed in relation to three spatial coordinates: the nation-state of residence or "hostland", the local diasporic community with its dynamic links to a transnational diasporic network of relationships, and the imaginary, originary "homeland." The construction of diasporic subjectivity is, then, necessarily transnational and transhistorical. The diasporic subject is not created out of belonging to a single nation-state identity. Yet the "neither/nor" logic of some diasporic narratives attempt to persuade us otherwise. For example, the opening sequence of SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* is instructive in this connection, engaging Canada's history of indigenous conquest and British imperial dispossession of First Nations

peoples within the context of Chinese immigration. Canada's status as a settler-colonial nation is complicated by the intersection of indigenous and Chinese immigrant experiences, where local, regional, and transnational perspectives are all put into play. The relationship between Wong Gwei Chang and the indigenous-Chinese woman Kelora, a relationship and son that remain unacknowledged, generates the complications of the main narrative plot with possibilities for unwitting incest among Wong Gwei Chang's descendants. The notions of racial hybridity versus racial purity are at the heart of the narrative as it plots four generations of the family and their transnational relations.

Relations between indigenous land and settler space are evoked by Rita Wong, who opens her essay on Larissa Lai's 2002 novel, *Salt Fish Girl*, with the following metaphor: "I live at the West entrance of a haunted house called Canada. Its domestic space is superimposed upon indigenous land that its past and present inhabitants refer to as Turtle Island" (2003/04 109). The image of the colonial settler nation as haunted by the repressions and exclusions of those whose resources and labor form the conditions of its existence (indigenous peoples and migrant laborers from China and elsewhere) powerfully evokes Lai's concern with the political economy of diaspora and colonization. Wong goes on to argue that, in contrast to narratives that look back in time, whether to a mythical China as in *The Jade Peony* or to family migration stories like *Diamond Grill*, in *Salt Fish Girl* Lai looks forward and "projects a futuristic scenario that traces the logic of contemporary capitalist relations" (110). Central to this tracing is the set of locations in which the narrative is set: Nu Wa's nineteenth-century southern China and the City of Hope on the Island of Mist and Forgetfulness (comparable with Vancouver), and Miranda Ching's futuristic landscape of Serendipity which is surrounded by the Unregulated Zone. Within these bounded and guarded geographical places (Serendipity is a walled city), space defined by human occupancy is ambiguous: Miranda's father works in the basement of their house; the grocery store where her parents work after their expulsion from Serendipity is also their domestic space; the shoe factory is a place of work and residence though it functions like a prison, like the walled city writ small. Space like this is, as Wong describes, "constantly subject to the world-in-the-home at the same time that it functions as a home-in-the-unregulated-world" (p. 115).

The redefinition of concepts of "home" underpins a local-global dynamic within which an alternative "both/and" paradigm for diasporic identity can be represented. Fred Wah's prose "biotext" (as he calls it) *Diamond Grill* (1996), like Lai's fiction, illustrates this alternative rhetorical model for transnational, diasporic identity. Wah tells the Canadian migrant history of his father and, indeed, his Eurasian family origins (Chinese and Swedish) as an historical mapping of the emergence of a new "hybrid" migrant identity. The migrant community is a community gradually and partially establishing itself in a "third space" that is neither European nor Canadian nor Chinese but is all these and is also authentically itself at the same time. The epigraph to the book, for example, is taken from Wah's poem *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, where he addresses his father:

You were part Chinese I tell them.
 They look at me. I'm pulling their leg.
 So I'm Chinese too and that's why my name is Wah.
 They don't really believe me. That's o.k.
 When you're not "pure" you just make it up. (n.p.)

Wah gestures towards the "neither/nor" rhetoric of exclusion. But in the first vignette of the book, entitled "At the Diamond Grill, at the end of a," Wah refuses even to complete the title, in a move characteristic of all the vignette titles; the book is "avoiding a place to start – or end" (1). He reflects, "Maps do not have beginnings, just edges. Some frayed and hazy

margin of possibility, absence, gap” (1). The blurring of the temporal and the spatial in the image of his “biotext,” or fictive family history, as a spatially constructed map rather than a linear chronology underlines the expansive inclusiveness of the story he is to tell and rejects the narrow parameters imposed by the rhetoric of “neither/nor.” The sequence of vignettes is located in the café in the days leading to Christmas but from this point in space and time the vignettes range widely to encompass the migration histories of the narrator's grandfathers (one from China, the other from Sweden), his father who was born in Canada but was sent to spend his childhood in China with his step-mother and half-siblings as a “half-ghost,” to his own experiences and those of his children.

The difficult racial politics of the migrations undergone by his father and paternal grandfather are a repeated theme: “Canada couldn't be an investment for them. The 1923 Chinese Act of Exclusion was not repealed until 1947. Even though my dad was born in Medicine Hat, he wasn't allowed to vote until 1948. Nor are any of the other *orientals* in Canada” (108 emphasis in original). But the most bitter vignette is entitled “Chinese head tax paid out land grants to” which includes a mock immigration form that incorporates demeaning Chinese stereotypes and reference to the exploitation of cheap Chinese labour: “This certifies that under the provisions of the Chinese Immigration Act Charley Chim Ching Say Wong Liu Chung a native of The Peach Garden in the Kingdom of Laundry of the age ancient years and whose title official rank profession or occupation is that of a rented muscle who arrived at Gold Mountain on the auspicious day of ...” (128 underlining in original). The politics of exclusion imposes a “neither/nor” condition of experience; where the migrant belongs no longer to China but to Canada only as temporary “rented muscle.”

As a consequence of migration, his father and grandfather experience what the narrator describes as an “unrelentingly foreign world,” in which “place becomes an island in the blood” (23) characterized by “buttons of feeling and colour” (22). But these feelings can be negative as well as positive, like the “gloom” that the narrator fears he has inherited from his Swedish grandparents, or the “cankers of irritation” (27) experienced by new migrants to the New World, from everyday racism to the racial choices he is forced to make in school, to the history of Chinese exclusion. The narrator tells of the teachers' demands that he write down the racial origin of his father – not his nationality – which can be anything “[b]ut not Canadian, there's a difference between a race and a country” (36). This leads the narrator to assert: “Race makes you different, nationality makes you the same. Sameness is purity. Not the same anything when you're half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp” (36). Later, he describes himself and other mixed-race children as “Quite a soup. Heinz 57 Varieties. ... a whole bunch of us who've grown up as resident aliens, living in the hyphen” (57). In this vignette as earlier, he also addresses his own capacity to pass as white and yet this is complicated by the recollection that when he travelled to China the local tour guide laughed at the suggestion that he was Chinese (57). When recounting the racial percentages of the members of his family, he concludes “we have our own little western Canadian multicultural exchange” (83).

The infusion of place with emotion or feeling offers a mode of experience that contrasts with the “neither/nor” condition instantiated by the rhetoric of exclusion. The emotional bond of family transforms place into “home.” Thus, the narrator's father emerges in the text as neither Chinese nor European but, at the same time, he is not left in a stateless limbo; he is both, and in his movement across the Pacific he becomes a transnational subject. In this dynamic and transitional space, two or more nations exist in tension rather than with one privileged over the other. The narrator describes his father awakening, “Dream-knot to Asia, dark and umbilical, early morning on the Pearl Delta, light the grass fire under the rice, ginger taste, garlic residue dampened.” But these recollections of China are linked to western Canada by the following parenthetical image: “Here, on the other side of the world (through

the tunnel all the way to China), in long-johns and slippers, quietly to the basement to stoke the furnace with a couple of shovelfuls of coal and then wash up” (3). Alternative image of transnational connection links the narrator to his father: “through my body his ocean ... part of some same helical sentence we both occupy, the asynchronous grains of sand along a double-helix dream time track” (12). The image of the physic tunnel linking Canada and China, like the image of the son's body as a genetic link to his parents' and grandparents' migrations, offers an alternative spatial imagining of transnational movement as a process of accumulation that nuances the experience of loss.

The belongingness represented by the body and personhood of a transnational individual is imaged by Wah's use of the trope of the hyphen, which is introduced early in the book and is used in the conclusion. The narrator describes moving through the door separating the café kitchen from the dining room with a kick “to the wooden slab that swings between the Occident and Orient to break the hush of the whole cafe ... the rolling gait with which I ride this silence that is a hyphen and the hyphen is the door” (16). The concluding image describes the narrator's father entering the café “and, as he jars it open with a slight body-check, the door clangs and rattles a noisy hyphen between the muffled winter outside and the silence of the warm and waiting kitchen inside” (174). The “silence” associated with the hyphen (and related to the theme of languagelessness in the book) is both a conjoining of cultures, “the Occident and Orient,” and also the inviting warmth of home; the hyphen here is a convergence of inside and outside in the transitional space of the door.

In the work of writers like Larissa Lai and Fred Wah we are presented with a style of rhetoric that refuses the formula of a return to some mythical “homeland” that will resolve issues of authentic national identity. In Lai's fiction and Wah's life writing, China is not located in the mythical time and space created by discourses of Orientalism. Rather than seek a return to some racial and national purity or authenticity located in an imagined originary homeland, Lai and Wah emphasize the temporal and spatial interconnectedness of China and Canada out of which a different kind of home, and “homeliness,” is made. This interconnectedness is represented not only by the processes of transnational movement but also genetically and somatically by the bodies of diasporic subjects. In texts like *When Fox Is a Thousand* and *Diamond Grill* the transnational subject is never static, never caught in space or time: Lai's novel ends with the Fox anticipating future meetings with Artemis; Wah concludes his biotext with the image of his father moving through a door. In contrast, the exclusionary logic of the “neither/nor” traps the diasporic subject in a static location, an “unhomeliness,” beyond historical space and time, in canonical texts like *The Jade Peony*, *The Concubine's Children*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and so many others. The “both/and” rhetoric of transnational belonging used by writers like Lai and Wah, and others, offers an alternative, productive paradigm within which to consider the dynamics of transnational identity formation and the kinds of stories that are told about national belonging and the determinants of diasporic “unhomeliness” (*unheimlichkeit*).

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