

TRANSFORMATIVE RACIAL MELANCHOLIA:
DEPATHOLOGISING IDENTITY IN ASIAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S CONTEMPORARY NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relatively new literary field of Asian American literature, and highlights the theme of identity in relation to the recent theories regarding racial melancholia. It takes Freudian psychoanalysis as its starting premise to argue for ‘transformative racial melancholia’ in hybridised Asian American subjects for whom a condition of loss is experienced in the combined processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialisation. I examine several novels by contemporary Asian American women and argue that these texts explore both racial and gender melancholia as conditions of loss. However, I suggest, these novels also demonstrate the process of depathologising melancholia within Asian American subjects and the restoration of a healthy psyche. A positive sense of identity within melancholic conditions is elicited when a healthy psyche is established. My thesis interrogates the way a constructive sense of identity is made available through avenues of intersubjective connectivity and social relations provided by the tropes of memory, history, gender performativity, and political agency. In examining and identifying these intergenerational links, I make a case for the subversion of the early concept of melancholia as individual pathology suffered by the solipsistic victim. My argument emphasises the way livability is generated in sharing, writing, and voicing melancholic losses within a larger collective communality. To this end, communication and language feature as key tools through which to convert losses into gains. To surmise, my thesis puts forward my argument regarding transformation within social interconnectivity that aids in making melancholia productive through the intersubjective management of losses.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled ‘Transfromative Racial Melancholia: Depathologising Identity in Asian American Women’s Contemporary Novels’ submitted to the University of York, UK is a record of an original research work done by me under the supervision of Dr Jane Elliott, Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York.

Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

This work has not performed the basis for the award of any Degree or diploma/ associateship/fellowship and similar project if any. No part of this thesis has been submitted for publication in advance of submission of the thesis for examination.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved mother, Ann Tan Siew Cheng, who is and continues to be the dearest, strongest, and most vital presence in my life. Her unflagging support, diligent encouragement, and unrelenting belief in me have been most crucial to the completion of this thesis. As a pillar of strength, she is the person who I hold dearest to my heart. For this and more, I dedicate this piece of achievement –its successful completion which you envisioned even before I did– to you dearest Mummy.

INTRODUCTION

Identity Matters: Asian Americans and Loss

Identity matters are at the forefront of my argument regarding Asian American transformation of racial melancholia in literary novels. As this literary project puts forward, positive Asian American identity is asserted through the collective affirmation of multiple subjectivities via performative agency that engenders transformative energies and makes losses in identity productive. By interrogating the ways in which literature delineates the positive affirmation of identity, I address matters of loss and melancholic depression in novels that inform readers about the psychic internalisation of loss that is managed via intergenerational modes. Current scholarship on Asian American literary novels points to how suffering is inherent within the psychic incorporation of melancholic loss. This internalisation of loss posits loss as permanent damage, and signals a pathological reaction to prescribed ascriptions of Asian Americans as, on the one hand, ‘yellow perils’ and, on the other hand, ‘model minority’. The racial inferiority experienced by characters in Asian American novels is said to demonstrate the overwhelming extent to which racial melancholia contributes to a sense of pathological identity. In contrast, I argue that Asian American novels offer ways in which racial melancholia is a productive everyday condition to be managed for the formation of positive identity.

As illustrated in novels, the racialisation of Asian American subjects due to their racialised subjectivity is made complex by gender ascriptions attached to their Asian identity. Asian Orientalist identity is typically regarded as feminine compared to the Western Occident which is cast as male superior. Such ready associations arise from a history of United States power relations dictating the colonial and military might of first world nations. As these novels demonstrate, Western America personifies white authority contrasted to Asian regions which are read as non-white and subordinate. As exemplified by characters within the novels, Asian immigrants to America are consigned to the external social periphery given that they are branded as feminine and weak. Even as they are cast as ‘yellow perils’, Asian immigrants within America are simultaneously treated as a ‘model minority’ that other minority races such as Africans and Hispanic should imitate. In both these stereotypical tropings of Asian American subjects, their minority status is highlighted. I study the way Asian American novels evidence and trace the development of Asian American identity via positive identification within their racial and ethnic status in white America.

As literary representations in novels illustrate, Asian American identity and the concept of loss are frequently allied given that novels speak of the diasporic background, racialisation, and abject treatment of Asians in America. Both lost identity and losses in identity, therefore, permeate the literary works by and about America’s Asian diaspora. Displacement from their ancestral homeland, internment, and pressures for cultural assimilation are some of the factors influencing the way racial identity becomes a source of melancholic loss. Not just subject to skin discrimination, America’s Asian immigrants also experience a sense of loss in their cultural heritage, classed ethnicity, and inherited identity that testify to losses in

language, property, social status and geographical homeland. As these novels show, the splitting of families and physical displacement of Asians when entering white America convey a sense of loss. The social exclusion of racialised others signals the ready loss conferred upon those who do not match up against America's white standards.

Conversely, I argue that Asian American novels present significant ways in which identity losses are managed in the identification process within intergenerational relations and across ethnic Asian groups. In this way, social identification with generations of family and other Asian peoples plays an important role in affirming positive identity. In the face of losses, social gains are achieved that help to build, nurture, and strengthen individual and group identity. The transformation of racial melancholia from permanent loss to an everyday productive situation speaks of melancholia as part of a healthy identity. Rather than interminably pathological (Cheng 8), racial melancholia is a form of interracial conflict managed through intersubjective modes. Transgenerational and pan-ethnic identification effect the acknowledgement and collective sharing of loss that strengthens rather than corrodes identity.

Before going on with a further discussion of transformative racial melancholia in the literary novels written by Asian American authors, it would be useful to look briefly at the various etymologies of the concept of racism as these inform the literary representations of raced subjects. Racism is both a mental attitude and an organisational system. It is an indoctrinated belief as well as an imposed structural system which is maintained socially. Racist ideology, thus, is both a product of a propagated mentality of racist attitudes and an implemented social structure. Racism's material basis as a social reality in organisational structures supplements how racism is not just opinionated prejudice based on readily established structural, institutional and cultural

codes of belief (Wellman 4). As Wellman argues, racism is a cultural and structural phenomenon which supports a societal hierarchy in which a coterie of advantaged people maintains their position of power and authority (58). Wellman avers that the prevalence of a racist ideology in which white elites are advantaged at the expense of minority groups is indicative of the structural process of racism whereby the economies, lifestyles, and livelihoods of white classes are prioritised and privileged. And so, losses incurred by racial subjects relegated to the peripheral realms of social, economic, and cultural politics are the product of racial ideology as a belief system and a structural phenomenon sustained to defend white privilege in social, economic and class imbalances.

Thus, in light of the process of America's racialisation, my thesis examines ways of mitigating the pathological aspect of racial identity via transformative energies channeled through intersubjective relationships. I stress how literature emphasises the transformative effects of social communication and communal agency. My thesis is, thus, interested in exploring and examining the ways in which individual pathological identity is attenuated and alleviated. Pathology associated with racial identity arises from the psychic internalisation of losses attached to minority groups whose prescribed ascriptions as racialised others have been conferred upon them. Because race, gender, and ethnicity are intimately intertwined within an interlocking grid of social structure, gender and ethnicity serve as two more pathological sources that inform the way identity operates as a differential marker. Claims for and against hegemonic superiority and submissive inferiority are held in close contention as pathological meanings are inscribed onto identity. In short, the social, ideological and economic advantages enjoyed by a white (race), male (gender), dominant group are made prominent in stark contrast with the

disadvantages of racially melancholic subjects. Along this line, Asian-ness functions as both an identity trope and a melancholic index of racial ostracisation.

Consequently, I argue that Asian American identity is simultaneously embraced and assigned to Asian subjects as transformative positive energy is gathered to manage lost identity and losses in identity.

By studying Asian American novels, I explore literary representations of the ways in which the Asian diaspora in America deal with their ascriptions of pathologised racial identity. I show the way Asian American novels illustrate the process of transformative racial melancholia in depathologised, hybridised identity. The novels that I examine exhibit the way characters enact transformative melancholia via the means of intergenerationally-supported transmitted memory, the telling of alternative histories, female performativity, and political agency. Novels thus demonstrate the process of transformative racial melancholia happening for literary characters who break the silence of the past.

I use the term ‘Asian Americans’ to encompass Asian authors living within the United States of America as well as those living in the North American nation of Canada. My use of ‘America’ thus comprises the bodies of literary work produced by the United States of America as well as the Canadian nation lying within North America. I explore various novels by Asian American authors born in U.S. as well as in Canada, and examine how they translate life’s experiences and struggles in historical acts of exclusion as well as in everyday processes of marginalisation and segregation. I also explore the literary representations of America’s extraterritorial relations with Asian countries, such as the Philippines, to show the way these inform the literary authors’ portrayals of America’s treatment of peoples from an Asian background. In short, the social dynamics and political relations between Asiatic

regions and the U.S. influence the way race relations in literature are depicted. I also extend my literary examination of Asian American racialised treatment to the culturally-specific, ethnically-rooted stories that transmit memory and help in the intergenerational sharing of history for depathologising identity. In addition to the intergenerational transformation of racial melancholia in novels, I argue that the pan-ethnic mobilisation of communal action helps build positive social gains within a position of loss.

My thesis is thus divided into four chapters that explore various literary modes to achieve transformative racial melancholia. Chapter one addresses two novels by Maxine Kingston and Amy Tan, and presents the way their novels demonstrate the binary workings of memory in the mother-daughter paradigm; chapter two examines two novels by Joy Kogawa and Hak Kyung Cha, and the way they illuminate the writing of alternative histories within shared cultural and experiential history; chapter three studies two other novels by Jessica Hagedorn and Fay Ng to explore the role of performative agency in ascriptions of female gender, femininity and sexuality; and finally chapter four examines all three novels written by Susan Choi to delineate the way that they present political agency as a means to positive affirmation of identity in the identity politics of race. The importance of social support and intersubjective communication are underscored in the process of transforming racial melancholia. In arguing for transformative racial melancholia, I show how gains are achieved within intergenerational links forged through relationships. In short, I emphasise how human relationships within communal circles and transgenerational ties play a central role in making racial melancholia productive.

i) Melancholic Loss in Immigration, Assimilation and Racialisation

I employ a psychoanalytical framework to describe the way in which racial identity is received and experienced by Asian Americans. I adopt Anne Cheng's theory of 'racial melancholia' (12) to describe the losses experienced by literary characters in Asian American novels. Such a psychodynamic model is useful for examining salient ways to read and transform the psychic as well as material losses sustained by Asian American racialised subjects within the novels. As Asian American texts illustrate, the cumulative processes of immigration, assimilation and racialisation result in palpable losses such as loss of territory, home, sense of belonging, language, class and social status, and limited civil rights. As exemplified by literary characters, these material losses translate into psychic loss when loss is psychically internalised by the ego. Psychic internalisation entails the formation of a new structure of identity in which melancholic loss consumes an impoverished ego. As novels demonstrate, further legislative and military action such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese internment and relocation, Korean War, and America's colonisation of Philippines further contribute to losses. Taking into account Asian American hybridity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity (Lowe 60), I shall discuss the way literary novels delineate the transformation of racial melancholia within communities that speak of both an ethnic and pan-ethnic fraternity within a historical setting unique to a particular group of Asian peoples.

As minority subjects who arrive in America as alien immigrants, Asian Americans undergo the historical process of immigration and encounter subsequent pressures to assimilate within white America. As exemplified by literary characters in Asian American novels, Asian Americans also deal with everyday manifestations of white America's prevalent racial ideology whereby assumptions, beliefs, and

prejudice against non-white others are based on racial stereotyping and systemic functional coherences that keep the white race in a dominant position of economic, social and class power. Yet, the experiences of immigration, assimilation and racialisation are different for various ethnic Asian peoples. In this thesis, I shall deal with the literary representations of four of six main Asian American groups. These are the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Filipinos.¹ While the Chinese were the first to be subjected to strict immigration laws (given the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1888), the Japanese were segregated in the historic acts of internment in relocation camps in America during the Second World War. Compared to the rest of the ethnic groups, on account of their status as U.S. colonial wards, Filipinos are the only people to be classed inclusively as American ‘nationals’ rather than alien citizens. The rest of the groups – Chinese, Japanese and Koreans– are seen as ‘alien citizens’ subjected to the process of America’s brute racialisation.

The aim of this literary project, thus, is to argue for the way that Asian American novels put forward significant ways of restoring health to the individual psyche via transformative racial melancholia. The literary presentations of transformative melancholia are manifested in the productive losses enacted by literary characters in these novels. As individual identity is nurtured by the characters in novels, positive group formations and social identifications amongst pan-ethnic Asian groups are also intergenerationally constructed. By examining literature, I focus on the way Asian American literary characters empower themselves and subsequent generations of racially-marked subjects by eliminating debilitating meanings attached to identity and channeling positive energy for moving forward within their racially melancholic positions.

¹ The other two largest Asian American groups are the Vietnamese and Indians. See S. Chan.

I study the way Asian American novels demonstrate the strengthening of intersubjective bonds in female communities and in male-female relationships explored in father-daughter ties, white-male and Asian-female, and Asian-male and white-female contact. Therefore, even as the literary novels delineate the historical processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialisation as ways that generate melancholia, I propose that losses are converted into transformative racial melancholia in which to reap social gains. Hence, I argue that Asian American novels trope productive living via intergenerational connections that provide transformative energy for positive identity.

ii) The Existing Case for Racial Melancholia as Pathologised Identity

As much critical scholarship on Asian American novels has pointed out, race operates as an index of pathologised identity for Asian American literary characters. The pathologisation of racial identity is due to the various losses suffered by the Asian diaspora in America. Split identity (dual personalities), schizoid personality (lack of interest in social relationships and tendency towards a solitary lifestyle), schizophrenia (breakdown of thought processes) are some of the pathological consequences of losses that are addressed by scholars such as Cheng (2001), Palumbo-Liu (1999) and Sheng-mei Ma (1998). Altogether, as novels will demonstrate, these psychic disorders give rise to mental depression which serves as a telling symptom of the ego's internalisation of losses.

The theory of pathologised identity has far reaching roots that can be traced back to Freud's early theory of melancholia. In his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Freud explains that melancholia is the unhealthy reaction to loss whereby ego becomes impoverished. Melancholia is the term Freud uses to

describe the condition of internalised loss whereby the individual fails to ‘let go’ of and ‘get over’ loss. Melancholic loss, thus, denotes holding on to loss and being stuck. A state of individually experienced, private suffering results from such incorporation of loss whereby a new structure of identity is formed. According to Freud, melancholic loss causes an impoverished ego whereby the self is permanently stuck in loss, unable to disavow loss completely and so what remains is a diseased ego. In light of both lost identity and identity loss, further losses within a people’s history are sustained by the melancholic subject within the community. With America’s process of racialisation, immigration, and assimilation whereby Asians are classed as alien outsiders, the status of ‘racial other’ conferred upon Asian Americans act as a source of melancholia. Failed, or partially successful, attempts at assimilation speak of the melancholic status of Asian Americans, and provide an additional insight into the structural and cultural marginalisation of Asian peoples in white America.

Freud, in his early essay, thus distinguishes between ‘normal’ mourning and ‘pathological’ melancholia as two very different responses to loss. With mourning, a semblance of existing identity remains. With melancholia, the ego is supplanted by loss. Exhibiting similar symptoms, both mourning and melancholia are diagnosed through signs of ‘profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity’ (Freud ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, 244). However, as a debilitating process that points to an inability to carry on with normal functioning in life, melancholia signifies the unfinished process of suffering. Where mourning refers to the process of moving on from loss through an eventual acceptance of loss, melancholia marks the way loss becomes a parasitic component of identity.

Adopting Freud's conceptualisation of melancholia as pathological, Anne Cheng avers how America's racialisation is a source of melancholia. In *Melancholy of Race*, Cheng reads race as a melancholic construct and states that racialisation pronounces the loss of an ideal whiteness that is symptomatic of Asian Americans' melancholic constitution. Here, Cheng cites America as a nation where (white) race is measured as a deciding marker of success. In Cheng's analysis of Asian American literary novels and films, she cites whiteness as a determiner of social mobility, economic stronghold, and other work-related achievements in America. To exist as a non-white subject within a predominantly white America thus denotes losses sustained both within a material reality and the mental psyche.

As literary representations in novels portray, loss that is internalised and incorporated into the psychical ego reflects the tangible, palpable losses to identity that are derived from the extrinsic process of racialisation. As such, psychic damage due to the incorporation of a lost ideal whiteness both feeds and is fed by the material reality of cultural and economic disadvantages corollary to racialisation. Novels show how the social exclusion yet retention of non-white subjects within the social, economic and cultural demography of white America speak of the melancholic levels of American society. Characters in literary fiction trope America's ambivalent relationship with its citizen others to demonstrate the extent to which America can neither live with nor be without its non-white subjects. As novels will be shown to delineate, the simultaneous exclusion and retention of racialised others in America subsumes the racial identity politics that governs the idea of what it means to be an American citizen in white America.

I am thus interested in the ways in which the work of depathologisation is enabled in literary works via various possible tools and concepts with which to

transform melancholic loss so as to reinstate a healthy psyche. Various intersubjective means towards positive transformation are suggested by the novels I explore, which build upon the strengths of communal relations argued for by Eng and Han in their work on depathologised melancholia (363). The Asian American novels I explore present transformative melancholia by exploring the transmission of memories in the mother-daughter dyad, hybridised Asian American identity, the cultural and experiential history of various ethnic Asian groups, performative agency, and communally taken political agency. In addition, the forms of the novels themselves interact with the transformative process, as the novels extend the conventions and composition of what normally makes up a novel.

iii) The Project of Depathologising Racial Melancholia in Intersubjective Connections

Freud puts forward a more positive theory of melancholia in his later essay 'The Ego and the Id' by stating that melancholia is an immanent constitution that is both inseparable and undetachable from the ego. Here, he argues how melancholia helps to build the ego's character. Freud writes that melancholia constitutes an inevitable part of ego formation as it makes a useful contribution to the ego's 'character' (28). Freud, thus, retracts the distinctions that he makes between pathological melancholia and normal mourning in 'Mourning and Melancholia'. Written six years later, Freud's 'The Ego and the Id' indicates his later view of melancholia as no longer pathological. By positioning melancholia as an indispensable tool to a healthy ego, Freud effectively suggests a continuum of mourning and melancholia.

In light of Freud's theory of 'healthy' melancholia, David Eng and Shinhee Han further the case for a fluid relationship between mourning and melancholia in their argument regarding depathologised melancholia. In their theory of depathologised melancholia, Eng and Han suggest that damage may be rethought as intrapsychic displacement of a fundamentally intersubjective conflict (Eng and Kazanjian 363). They propose that racial melancholia as *conflict* rather than *damage* opens up the possibility for the reparation of injuries and wounds. Hence, in overturning the view of melancholia as enduringly pathological and irreparable, Eng and Han open a productive space for the reclamation of a 'whole' (Eng and Kazanjian 363) identity via intersubjective ties to resolve the losses in split identity. Along with this more positive reading of melancholia, Eng and Han examine the processes of assimilation and immigration as additional causes of melancholia. They contend that positive inflections of melancholia are possible in communal rebuilding and group identities. To this end, they aver that the social support offered within group dynamics is able to recast intrapsychic loss into positive, intersubjective social gains.

It is in keeping with this premise of intersubjective communal rebuilding that I posit my argument regarding the transformation of racial melancholia. Examining the process of making loss productive through transformative social contacts and intersubjective bridges, I look specifically at the intergenerational links between mother and daughter and father and daughter; a shared cultural and experiential history of a diverse range of ethnic Asian peoples; the dual workings of Oriental femininity; and the workings of a communally-driven agency in political activism. My thesis, hence, explores these transformative means as they are shown to unfold in literary novels. Such diverse ways gleaned from literary representations restore a

healthy psyche and serve to aid intrapsychic strengthening and intersubjective modes of communal conditioning. As the novels illustrate, the psychoanalytical lens used to read race posits racial melancholia as an everyday condition which may be read as normal, instead of pathological. The novels show that depathologised identity is available in open spaces in which communal rebuilding takes place through losses. The form of the novel themselves interacts with this transformative process, as the novels defy conventional rules by blurring categories between novel and non-novelistic traditions.

iv) Transformative Racial Melancholia: Making Loss Productive

In his essay ‘Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through’ (1914), Freud presents the psychological act of ‘working through’ to necessitate a therapeutic effect. He posits that the process of ‘working through’ is necessary for curing and treating pathogenic signs and feelings of loss. Freud’s psychoanalytic process of healing in ‘working through’ assumes that a ready solution is available and attainable. This process points to a resolution of the problem of loss. Freud’s ‘working through’ encompasses both the workings of memory and the repetitive acting out of losses to identify areas of resistance that prevent the ego from resolving loss. Since this process points to how loss may be healed and how finite mourning may replace pathological melancholia, ‘working through’ loss instantiates the way the two reactions to loss –conscious mourning and unconscious melancholia– are separate and distinct products of loss. Freud, thus, underscores a curative treatment in his process of ‘working through’ whereby overcoming loss is both desired and necessary.

Departing from Freud's early theory, I argue that melancholia is an everyday condition of loss that does not need resolution as much as it needs to be managed. I argue that Asian American novels usefully recast melancholia as an inevitable part of one's character. Subsequently, a productive response to loss results just as much as mourning is performed in the aftermath of loss. Rather than viewing melancholia as a pathological disease that spawns a debilitated psyche, literary authors show that melancholia is a means through which to attain positive affirmation of identity. I argue that the novels situate melancholia and mourning along a continuum in which both these processes are treated as similar yet different responses to loss. In this way, the novels depict the attainment of health through a continued position of melancholic loss in which the building of the ego transpires. The novels present loss not as something to be overcome but, rather, as a tool involved in the constitution of a healthy psyche. As the novels illustrate, melancholic losses are empowering to both individuals and the community as they aid in the positive construction of subjectivity via interrelationships.

In view of psychoanalytical working through losses, I wish to clarify that the Asian American novels I examine do not rule out the possibility of complete mourning to the point that the individual is no longer affected by loss. Successful working through losses is not completely elusive. However, the process of getting over loss and recovering from loss is idealistic given the constant reminders of loss that pervade and impinge upon everyday life. I argue that the novels, instead, show that victims of loss are never 'cured' as encounters with loss are both continual and continuous. The lingering presence of loss threatens to compromise psychic health, yet significantly it affects and leads to the formation of a healthy notion of identity.

The extent to which loss becomes either debilitating or productive in Asian American novels is also dependent upon the characters' coping resources. The novels exhibit the subscription of the process of self-sustenance and life survival skills. They show that victims of loss act upon certain self-preservation instincts to carry on with life, even if repressed or latent. For this reason, transforming –rather than working through– loss is significant to the restoration and reclamation of a healthy psyche. Characters in the novels demonstrate the ways in which they equip themselves with coping strategies and mechanisms for managing everyday losses for the affirmation of identity.

Rather than viewing loss as a disease and treating the victim of loss as a diseased patient, Asian American novels show that everyday losses are made productive via the reframing of loss as a condition that creates opportunities for building identity. In other words, instead of viewing melancholia as a symptom of a debilitating disease, the novels portray the way melancholic losses are redefined and converted into positive gains. In short, the novels display transformative racial melancholia as working with intersubjective bonds which serve as important social ties that help to improve a sense of well-being within identity.

The novels illustrate that the process of transforming racial melancholia is not an act of curing losses. To cure loss would mean to navigate completely away from loss as the remains of loss become undetectable and untraceable. Rather, novels show that transformative racial melancholia is a process that subsumes the way losses are ever-present. In transforming losses, the novels attest to both the continuous existence and enduring presence of losses. In effect, the act of transforming losses entails acknowledging, avowing and building from losses. Transformative melancholia, I argue, entails the productive conversion of personal

losses into social gains. Some of these gains include intergenerational transference of shared history, intersubjective parent-child bonding, and communal agency facilitated by group cohesion. Literary characters, thus, illustrate the way sharing burdens, wounds, and injury in a collective communality transforms their private experience of personal loss. In this way, they convert intrapsychic solipsism in suffering into communally experienced, acknowledged, and supported loss. Negative losses are, hence, reframed as positive gains via the transformation of a melancholic psyche in intersubjective relations forged from a position of loss. As novels evidence, this transformation occurs as more than a mere attitudinal shift from negativity to positivity. Transformation, crucially, engenders material realities for creating viable legitimacy and livability from within a position of identity loss and lost identity.

In affirming positive identity, literary texts build on the psychic and social gains to be accumulated via cultural and historical remembering. Thus, novels portray the way memories, although painful, of lost identity and losses in identity serve as empowering tools. As literary characters attest, individual and collective memories function as valuable memorials of loss encountered and gains achieved. Novels depict how memories serve to bear testimony to the transformative losses in everyday intersubjective conflict in the processes of racialisation, immigration and assimilation. Thus, they include within their narratives pertinent works of memory to point to the ways remembering and forgetting in written and spoken tales overturn intersubjective conflict through transformative bonds that strengthen individual subjectivity.

In addition, I propose that the idea of transformative melancholia denotes a higher level of positive energy compared to the act of ‘negotiating’ melancholia.

Negotiation connotes a failed attempt and concession made in choosing between pathological melancholia and healthy mourning. Negotiating, thus, entails making compromises that do not help ego formation. By contrast, positive transformation generates productive energy that is not merely a defense mechanism that involves making compromises. Transformative racial melancholia is premised on a theory of a continuum existing between mourning and melancholia. It points to how resolution of loss is neither achieved nor guaranteed, much less a desired outcome. Along this line, I build on the ‘productive gap’ (Eng and Kazanjian 364) suggested by Eng and Han which is used to gain leverage from loss. Rather than curing or making compromises with losses, transforming melancholia makes loss productive by turning loss into an intrinsic part of the psyche and an inherent component of a healthy identity.

Transforming is, thus, a step up from negotiation between or with losses as transformation functions as more than a defense mechanism. As literary authors show, the transformation of loss involves generating inclusive conditions to achieve desired livability. Novels evidence how transformative racial melancholia comprises the positive act of managing losses by reframing losses as gains. As these novels reveal, the gains elicited from a shared community of racialised subjects encompass psychic gains in the melancholic identity of literary characters. Furthermore, transformative racial melancholia is illustrated as acts which involve responses to loss rather than reactions to loss. As novels delineate, this ‘*response-ability*’ is very different from the impulsive reaction to losses. Transformative racial melancholia is, hence, characterised by the productive response to losses.

Furthermore, literary characters demonstrate the assumption of responsibility with which to challenge the passivity of a ‘victim consciousness’ paradigm.

Responsibility taken facilitates the building of positive individual identity and communal group identities. As demonstrated in the novels, transformative melancholia works against the social practice of victim culture and in tandem with communal rebuilding. Victim consciousness serves as a negative script that positions sufferers of loss as both diseased and reactive. Along this line, novels show that pathological reaction to loss involves the psychic internalisation of loss that causes the individual's inability to cope with everyday life. In this way, literary characters are also shown to suffer a downward spiral of loss that emerges as responsibility is yielded.

Yet, novels demonstrate that there are viable ways of managing loss so that melancholic identity does not reach a lethally destructive stage. Transformative racial melancholia entails a proactive mechanism deployed from within a position of melancholic loss. As Asian American novels suggest, the process of transformative racial melancholia works with melancholia rather than against losses to convert losses into positive gains. Thus, literary novels delineate the way melancholic identity is effectively depathologised via intergenerational ties that assist in the intersubjective affirmation of identity in a group dynamic. By featuring intersubjective relations, Asian America novels posit the ways in which racially melancholic subjects rise above their losses to attain an improved sense of individual and social well-being. In doing so, novels delineate how literary characters voice their losses along generational lines. Intergenerational voicing transmits yet transforms losses by forging communal loss in social communication. In this way, novels demonstrate and evidence the workings of transformative racial melancholia in social interconnectivity.

Furthermore, an intersubjective response to loss attends to the urgent need to depathologise racial identity for the restoration of communal and individual psychic health. In other words, Asian American novels depict ways in which intersubjective connections and social support are both central for mobilising psychic health in transformative melancholia. Social ties that are forged via intergenerational transmission of history and memory facilitate the process of restoring healthy psyche by means of a positive identity. Hence, literary characters demonstrate management of loss for healthy identity, and away from loss as a condition that consumes identity.

v) The Role of Language: Voicing as a Transformative Tool

In the novels I example, voicing through language is used to break the silence imposed by a white dominant hegemony. The previously obfuscated history of Asian Americans is reclaimed in this way. Novels, thus, rewrite a previously unwritten tale of Asian American life by tracing the life-stories and experiences of literary characters. Where history textbooks, formal institutions, and polemical discourses erase stories of the racial minority, Asian American novels validate the experiential reality of the Asian abject body through active voicing. Both the voice of the literary author and the voices of literary characters manifest in novels to challenge the erasure of Asian voiced subjectivity. Language, hence, serves as an important medium for relaying and articulating the life-stories of Asian Americans.

As literary novels show, the grammatical and analytical tools rendered in a great array of languages aid Asian American literary characters in expressing their formerly subjugated voices. Literary characters are endowed with a myriad of communicative tongues by which to express themselves. Some of these languages

include the English language of America, the Asian mother tongue, and the language of the colonisers/oppressors/occupiers. Other tools of communication which are used as a language medium include visual images (pictures, photos, diagrams, maps) and math (codes and symbols). Limitations, however, are also imposed in the way that these literary characters show limited proficiency in any one language. The linguistic mechanisms of the language of an American host nation, combined with their native tongue, serve to express and trace the melancholic losses faced by literary characters as they continue to be treated as racialised abject bodies in white America.

In these novels, language therefore counteracts and precipitates loss. Various forms of loss as regards the use of language may be linked back to melancholia. Sources of melancholic losses in language include loss of language, losses in silence, and losses within the translation of language. Yet, as these novels delineate, language is also used to transform loss by aiding in the confrontation of painful experiences. In this way, language helps to affirm identity through the telling of losses. In other words, language aids in sharing the experience of loss in the very telling. Sharing is carried out in two main ways. Firstly, communication through story-telling engages with the collective histories and memories of a people as it gives verbal expression to these experiences. Secondly, communication in writing similarly works to speak about and of these losses sustained to identity. Oral voices are also transliterated into the written form in what is commonly known as ‘oraliture’². Hence, language facilitates the sharing of experiences of loss and, as such, transforms loss from injury to intersubjective gains.

² ‘Oraliture’, a term I borrow from Glissant, entails the mimicking of oral features in literature. See Praeger.

As novels further demonstrate, the Chinese cultural tradition of talk-story taps into the intimate transmission of life-stories between mothers and daughters. In short, oral story-telling is transliterated into novels that use this vernacular tradition to strengthen mother-daughter intergenerational ties. And so, talk-story carried out by literary characters demonstrates the transformative use of language for intersubjective sharing between first generation immigrant mother and second generation daughter. Language, thus, is shown to transform racial melancholia by shifting emphasis away from melancholia as individual pathology to losses as communal experiences of daily conflict managed in intersubjectivity.

In addition to talk-story, transformative language is also deployed when Asian American subjects are interpolated into American history. As the novels of Susan Choi illustrate, the inclusion of Asian American subjective presence in traditionally white American histories shows the use of language by literary authors to transform Asian absence and erasure. The modification of America's historical records to include Asian American subjects is a powerful demonstration of language as a transformative tool. As novels delineate, language is used to interject into dominant strands of (his) stories in which Asian subjective presence is expunged.

Language and scripting are also heavily intertwined with each other. For in the tales about losses, a transformative lens is used to read memories of the past. This lens constitutes the positive scripting of losses to facilitate transformation. Such a connection between language and scripting engages positive identification within an intergenerational family. In other words, a positive sense of individual and group identity is forged by using language to script experiences of loss in a constructive manner. Transformation of losses through sharing and positive scripting is effected in both words and action. The call to transformation, subsequently, works with

positive yet realistic conversion of losses into gains. Scripting does not refute losses; rather, scripting acknowledges the transformative potential of losses. Losses are reframed to depathologise individual and collective identities. Language, thus, facilitates positive and constructive bridging of intergenerational contacts. Scripting, hence, uses language to instill confidence in identity, whilst formulating social gains via shared stories.

Voicing is an act of creativity employed in both oral story-telling and novel writing. The voicing process asserts ownership of lived experiences within the stories shared and tales told. Ownership of stories is important to create and affirm subjectivity. Voice, in this regard, becomes both instrument and agent. Voicing creates subjective agency through the ability rendered to the subject to speak of actual experiences encountered. Voicing is creative in that the human imagination is tapped as a faculty to augment the historical tales expounded by literary characters. Novels, thus, delineate salient ways to supplement the historical events contended by literary characters. Internment, relocation, war, and social marginalisation are both facts and experiences. Vocalised via language as a tool to provide accounts of factual report yet also creative narrative, both history and literature are transmitted in the process of articulating stories about losses and gains,

In novels, the use of the creative imagination to assemble the past, present and future thematises the important connection between voicing and memory. The imagination is used to fill gaps that exist in memories of the past. The construction of the past to create subjective reality is done by memory. Memory includes a purposeful selection of items to remember which comprise the mind's impression of lived experiences. Connecting the disjointed memories of life within the acts of oral story-telling and novel writing heighten awareness and recognition of reality from an

experiential stance. Even as the voicing of fragmented memory in vernacular and writing practices are distinctive, they enact a transmission of stories that uses language to reify the past. In assembling pieces of the past together, literary characters make sense of present and future as well. Voicing via language reconstructs subjective experience by weaving together both remembered and forgotten fragments.

vi) Postmemory: Remembering as a Transformative Tool

The process of remembering serves as a vehicle for transformative racial melancholia. In this light, memory is instrumental to the workings of intergenerational transformation. Marianne Hirsch, writing on intergenerational links, coins the term ‘postmemory’ to highlight ‘the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right’ (‘The Generation’ 103). Writing on the transmission of trauma within first and second generation Holocaust victims, Hirsch elucidates in her essay ‘Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory’ that ‘children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma [...] “remember” [the experiences of their parents] only as narratives and images with which they grew up’ (9). Hirsch’s concept of postmemory offers an argument regarding the family as a space for the transmission of traumatic loss. It, thus, uses memory as a platform to argue for the transmission of losses in the family.

Along with Hirsch’s line of argument, I propose that a positive process of transformation simultaneously transpires in the transmission of memories between parents and children. I argue that the transformation of intergenerational losses takes

place alongside the transmission of loss that is remembered by second generations in the relayed stories told them by their parents. In other words, the scope provided by Hirsch's theory of postmemory presents a potent space for the intergenerational and transgenerational transformation of melancholia. With intergenerational lines of communication, intersubjective connection opens up transformative racial melancholia within and across generations.

By building on Jan and Aleida Aussman's work on the 'living connection' between proximate generations, Marianne Hirsch thus highlights the space of the family as a powerful site for open lines of transmission of trauma ('The Generation' 112). Within this notion of family interconnectivity, I argue that a living connection with parents and grandparents enables a transformation of loss via lines of communication available for attaining productive gains from within a position of loss. The intergenerational as well as transgenerational transformation of melancholia amongst filial and affiliative relations produces the acts of making experiences of loss productive.

Consequently, photos and stories that tell younger generations about parents' experiences of loss function as a means of productive 'remembering and forgetting' in which intergenerational relations sharpen transformative interconnectivity. Intergenerational links provide a positive avenue for active resistance against losses. Literary characters, rather than letting loss define them, reap the social gains in intergenerational connectivity that forges open communication with which to make loss productive. Transformative racial melancholia, thus, is tapped within and across generations as experiences of loss unite the family.

Remembering across generations plays an imperative role to highlight inherited memories of the past in intersubjective relationships. Memory's dual works of remembering and forgetting point to the selective will of memory operating in the collective transformation of loss. Remembering is, thus, interrelated to forgetting. Just as remembering necessitates forgetting, forgetting necessitates remembering. In short, forgetting takes place prior to and after remembering. Willful forgetting to push out painful experiences precedes the purposeful remembering of these experiences, which is followed up by forgetting. The cyclical workings of memory testify to the ambivalent pain experienced in loss, yet gains achieved in shared remembering and forgetting. The transmitted remembrances of generations are operative to the transformative melancholia exhibited by literary characters.

Subsequently, transformation of loss is effected by daughters who engage with postmemory to remember mothers' tales of the past. Daughters recollect a memory of their mothers' alternative history rooted in subjective reality. This intergenerational link speaks of transmitted memory within intersubjective bonds fostered between female generations. Father-daughter connection plays an extended role in Asian American transformation of losses. In other words, postmemory between first generation fathers and their second generation daughters further delineate the transference of history and memories of internment and war. In mother-daughter and father-daughter ties, there is a redemptive quality to transforming identity through a renewal act that taps into the powers of both memory and postmemory. Hence, intergenerational remembering and forgetting facilitates transmission of both history and memory, which are employed to make loss productive in intersubjectivity.

vii) Transformative Loss and the Asian American Novelistic Tradition

Novels function as more than mere literary fiction by delineating the extent to which they manage restrictive losses by stretching literary boundaries. Through the writing of experiential history, novels challenge the novelistic tradition dictated by dominant anglocentric hegemony. Asian American novels, thus, delineate the process of transformative melancholia in their capacity as more than literary narratives. With novels' engagement in a dialogic interaction with other literary works, novels function in positive ways to engage holistically with the experiences of loss in both literature and history.

And so, loss management in the form of the novels themselves is unfolded as literary characters of these novels occupy positions of loss. In other words, Asian American novels extend the limits of what constitutes a novel by incorporating and subsuming non-novelistic categories such as the memoir, auto/biography, and the graphic experimental form within their textual body. In this way, Asian American novels also function as history books that trace both personally experienced and historical accounts of the past to promote the positive reclamation of identity. Hence, novels encompass a body of fictional writing that employs a variety of print by incorporating prose and verse, innovative images (in transposed pictures, maps, and diagrams), chronological and non-chronological timelines, and the creative imagination to supplement facts of life within subjective experiential history.

Novels demonstrate the concept of racial identity as double loss experienced by Asian American women as the subordinate gender. This double silencing imposed upon the raced (non-white) and gendered (feminine) body of the Asian American woman is challenged in the practice of story-telling and the literary act of

novel-writing. Oral story-telling between mothers and daughters is thematised in these novels through written prose that operates as oraliture to transmit the oral, cultural tradition of disseminating life stories. The ‘her stories’ of a female generation (of mothers and daughters) feature as active challenges to the history dictated by a white dominant male hegemony.

Given my thesis places a great emphasis on intergenerational relationships, I begin the first chapter of my literary project by exploring the intimate ties between mother and daughter in the literary novels of *Woman Warrior* and *Bonesetter’s Daughter*. I then explore the writing of alternative histories in the novels of *Dictee*, *Obasan*, and *Dogeaters*. In studying these novels, my literary analyses extend to include the relationship between fathers and daughters whose everyday lives are affected and informed by racial melancholia. In the more recent novels of *Bone*, *Foreign Student*, *American Woman*, and *Person of Interest*, I examine an all-encompassing concept of human intersubjectivity used to build positive identity. By examining the intersubjective social connections of literary characters, I show that these novels assert viable and legitimate subjectivity of the Asian American subject. In addition to parent-child relationships, pan-ethnic ties are examined as a site to make losses productive. Transformative loss, hence, is troped in novels that portray intersubjective social ties as strengthening individual and group identity.

Before launching into a discussion proper of the novels themselves, it is important to address the historical contexts in which they were written. In addition to informing readers about the processes of Asian American immigration, assimilation and racialisation, the historical background against which the novels are set speaks tellingly of the responses to the difficult and often challenging life conditions encountered by Asian American immigrants. Maxine Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*:

Memoirs of a Girlhood Amongst Ghosts (1976) interweaves the generational experience of Asian immigration by featuring the immigrant narrative of mother and daughter in tales of their Chinese American lives in talking-stories. Emerging in the wake of the 1965 appeal to Chinese Exclusion Laws, and with the significant relaxing of immigration laws against Asian brides, women and children into America, Kingston's *Woman Warrior* traces the pressures of assimilation and the process of racialisation faced by first-generation Asians and their children in white America.

Kingston's *Woman Warrior* foregrounds the lives of Asian women³ into America and the predicaments and experiences Chinese women faced, thus marking a literary boom amidst growing publicity of Asian American livelihoods. Along this line, Amy Tan's novels about Asian mother-daughter relationship in America, through tales about Chinese first-generation mothers and her second-generation daughters in novels such as *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) and *Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), continue a literary tradition in which generational relationships between women are foregrounded against a backdrop of the historical processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialisation in America. The novels *Bone* and *Dictee*, by second-generation writer Chinese American Ng and first-generation Korean American Cha respectively, are likewise set against a historical backdrop of Angel Island's immigration regulations, America's history of paper sons, and San Francisco's sexual racialisation of Chinese women (within *Bone*); and the disruptive Korean War, the Japanese and French occupation of Korea, as well as Korean immigration into America (within *Dictee*).

³ Although Kingston's *Chinamen* was written to be simultaneously published and featured alongside *Woman Warrior* as two volumes of her first literary works, Kingston's publishers released *Woman Warrior* before *Chinamen* to avoid the woman's narrative from being overshadowed by tales about the male Asian experience in America.

Kingston's text arguably initiated the first wave of Asian American women's writings, even as other Asian American novels were in circulation⁴ prior to Kingston's canonical autobiographical fiction of *Woman Warrior*. With texts by a number of contemporary Asian American women novelists – some who were playwrights, poets and multimedia artists too – writers of Chinese American descent and other ethnic Asian Americans such as Fay Myenne Ng, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Jessica Taranhata Hagedorn and Susan Choi continue to extend the literary repertoire of Asian American novels in the educational curriculum, media and the institutional stage. These writers similarly use their historical background –their life and times– to delineate stories about racialised Asian subjects in America. Following Kingston's narrative being deeply rooted in historical life events, Ng's *Bone*, Cha's *Dictee*, Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, Choi's *Foreign Student, American Woman*, and *A Person of Interest* work historical life contexts into their novels through the chronicling and revisioning of specific yet related histories of loss within their fiction.

The family narrative about three sisters in *Bone* and the autobiographical-cum-experimental novel *Dictee*, which mixes history with memory to recuperate and reclaim unspoken *her* stories, operate closely with historical facts to trace and map out a narrative about the experiential dimension of life stories. Building on Cha's experimental and historical autobiography *Dictee*, first-generation Filipina American writer Hagedorn similarly continues to delineate the process of racialisation against a historical backdrop of the cultural assimilation of two worlds – the Asian East and American West. Writer Hagedorn experiments with the novel in her eclectic piece of work *Dogeaters* and draws on the increasing transnationality, intergenerational

⁴ Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), for instance, gained its due publicity and increased readership only in the aftermath of Kingston's success with *Woman Warrior*. It was acknowledged in wider critical circles once Kingston had awakened America's consciousness to the Asian American experience with *Woman Warrior*'s commercial and literary success. See Chua 33-59.

intersubjectivity and globalisation of cultures by exploring relations between Filipinas, Filipina Americans, and white Americans during the years of the Marcos' rule. Asian Canadian writer Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, also, highlights the increasingly diverse yet related experiences of historical loss and lost history of Japanese Canadians who were subjected to racialisation in the internment and relocation experience during the Second World War. In addition to all these works, Choi's novels – appearing at the turn of the last century and start of this century – both extend and develop the Asian American novel by revisioning history and defying expectations of Asian American mother-daughter dominance within female generational writing. In all, America's process of racialisation of its Asian diaspora provides rich and fertile ground for Asian American writing as literary sites for the reclamation of stories and the transformation of losses.

By examining novels that span over three decades and are written by a range of Asian American women writers including Asian Canadian writer Joy Kogawa, I offer a useful overview of the advancing literary techniques and thematic developments in Asian American novels to address the identity politics of race in America. Starting from Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, I trace the evolution of Asian American novels to Kingston's contemporary successors in Tan, Cha, Kogawa, Ng, Hagedorn, and Choi. Building on the idea of depathologised identity within their works, I argue that their novels display transformative identity through the troping of memory, history, oriental femininity and political agency.

All in all, the literary site of the novel offers a useful, and important, means to examine and address the condition and state of racial melancholia. Intersubjective connectivity narrated by Asian American novels feature as a salient response to make losses productive in the wake of lost identity and an identity of loss. Even as,

and precisely because, Asian American novels narrate stories of lost identity and identity loss, in which melancholia is linked closely to losses within Asian racial and ethnic heritage, the novels plot a revisionist project for resignifying racial melancholia as transformative gains in depathologised identity. I, thus, argue that the novels invite and present constructive readings of racial losses experienced by Asian American subjects.

CHAPTER 1

Voices of Memory and Hybridised Identities in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

Today, the prolific presence and increasing emergence of formerly repressed voices of not just Black American women writers (Shockley) and Chicana American women writers (Mohanty et al.) but Asian American writers as well is evidence of the resistance launched on American's home turf to combat the cultural destruction and appropriation of female bodies that have been simultaneously racialised and colonised. In this context, acts of voicing become an important element in striving to achieve self-affirmation, in working towards the project of cultural reconstruction for establishing collective identification within specific group memberships which aim to connect persons to a shared cultural tradition previously disregarded by dominant hegemonic, neo-colonial, and racially-discriminating forces. Social and psychic emancipation strived towards within subsequent decolonisation in contemporary times come amidst urgent calls to meet the needs of racial subjects who experience internal colonisation in the continuous process of racialisation in America.

In examining the ways in which the Chinese diaspora in America forge a sense of a hybridised identity in the wake America's on-going process of racialisation, I argue for transformative racial melancholia in voices of memory as explored in the mother-daughter dyad and the multiple subjectivities embraced. The

idea of hybridised identity supersedes the idea of Asian(-)American hyphenated identity in which the use of the hyphen is a linguistic marker of the pathological splitting of Asian American identity (Palumbo Liu 301). I argue that the healthy hybridisation of the various facets of identity –racial, cultural, gender and national– is a process that supports my theory of transformative melancholia in which pathological meanings of identity are detached from the label of Asian American. By looking at first-generation immigrants from China, and their second-generation children who are born and bred in the States, I shall trace the way in which the opening of two-way tracks of mother-daughter communication transmits ancestral heritage, racial identity and cultural traditions through the narration of personal and shared experiences of Asian American life.

Historically, the processes and acts of immigration and assimilation point to the fraught and problematic entry and sub-inclusion of Chinese Americans into the national body and social fabric of America. With restrictive immigration laws and exclusion acts such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barring Chinese immigrants and placing severe limitations on those already in America, anti-Chinese sentiment reached its height (Chan viii). Such instances of the controlled entry of immigrants on the basis of race signals America's racist ideology, and points to racial identity as a negative differential function. Such discrimination produced the need for secrets and 'lies' as a defense mechanism to survive in a remote land where probing 'rude American eyes' (*WW* 138) search and examine both the papers and the subjectivity of Chinese immigrants. In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator Maxine (as she is known but not explicitly named in the narrative)¹ tells of the secrets and lies which become necessary as a counter-measure in dealing with the

¹ I have chosen to call the unnamed narrator Maxine in accordance with the way in which the novel functions as Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography.

palpable losses within racial, class and social demotion. In the novel, Maxine confesses that ‘The Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence’ (*WW* 13). Chinese immigrants thus put up psychic borders to guard their secrets and guard against further injuries, even as they let boundaries slide in attempts to assimilate into America. While the relaxing of policies at immigration borders was carried out, the process of racialisation persisted, wherein the shared communality of this experience and the open communication between generations facilitated a call to psychic health. As this chapter discusses, Maxine Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* demonstrate various permutations of immigrant life and cultural assimilation in the light of America’s racialisation.

I shall refer specifically to the way in which the oral stories of the first-generation mothers are conveyed to their daughters, and how the Chinese cultural practice of ‘talking-story’ enables their daughters to transcend the geographical and cultural schisms produced in their status as Chinese Americans. Consequently, the ways in which mothers and daughters go about positioning themselves along white America’s racial gradient speak of a process of border shuttling or moving across boundaries, in which the physical and psychic boundaries of racial exclusion are traversed and simultaneously transcended. This mediation of demarcated borders mutes differences and points up flux and inter-linking continuity in Chinese American identity which, I argue, is composed of multiple subjectivities positioned along a diachronic continuum, instead of segregated into separate categories. As I shall demonstrate, this focus on mediated difference offers a constructive reading of Chinese American identity as *hybridised* rather than hyphenated or of dual personalities (Sue 37); these latter terms pathologised identity through an either/or

splitting of subjectivity. In contrast, the hybrid model of subjectivity effectively produces a rethinking of the psychic pathologies of mixed racial and national identity to encourage the reconceptualisation and articulation of Chinese American identity as a unified blending of subjectivities which, I argue, is performed within the intergenerational spaces of communal self-determination in the mother-daughter dyad.

I turn to the concept of racial melancholia as a condition experienced by the racially-marked bodies of Chinese Americans, in which the racial prejudice they face is often regarded as a source of loss and a symptom of a pathologised identity. Cast in Freudian terms, ego impoverishment results whereby the melancholic subject is unable to get over the loss suffered, hence foreclosing the path to psychic health. This loss is felt as a 'double loss' in the figure of the American-born daughter who, as Asian American scholar Anne Anlin Cheng argues, is the 'repeater of her mother's grief' (Cheng 2001, 87). The ancestral, cultural and territorial losses suffered directly by the mother, now removed from her birth-country of China, are passed down to her daughter; as the recipient of indirect losses, from which her mother's first-hand experience is the source, the daughter becomes the receiver of her mother's transmissible loss, one doubly removed from the proximity of her racial and cultural heritage, and so, doubly affected by melancholia. With the added injuries of social and cultural segregation, due to America's racialisation, the resulting accumulative racial melancholia has been argued, along the lines of Freud's theory on melancholia, to produce an intra-psychic condition which speaks of the permanent disenfranchisement of the racially-bject body.

My argument marks a departure from this emphasis placed on the permanent injuries to the psyche of the raced subject. Rather than subscribing to the view of the

melancholic subject as stuck in grief without any means of reaching for and attaining a healthy resolution to their loss, I argue for an approach which highlights the enabling aspects of identity by exploring ways in which suffering becomes productive through intergenerational links. In the mother's transmission of her disavowed loss, transindividual mediation of loss is initiated. I model this mother-daughter intersubjective connection after Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytical concept of endocryptic identification whereby the child inherits the parent's 'psychic crypt' (Abraham and Torok 140) – a crypt which holds both the histories of loss and lost histories of the immigrant mother. In tracing this fluidity in the parent-child relationship, I examine how the open lines of communication challenge the notion of individually-born damage suffered to the psyche. In doing so, my argument calls attention to the transformative gains achieved in the filial ties of matrilineal kinship and in the female cultural tradition of talk-story. I develop this reading by examining the interpersonal connection revived between Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters, for whom the multiple subjectivities of being simultaneously Chinese, American and female provide grounds for the acknowledgement of their hybridised identity. The title of this chapter, hence, signals the challenges posed in charting a reading of race through a psychoanalytical lens in order to delve into the voices of memory of racialised subjects.

By adapting Freud's early theory of melancholia which contributed to pathological readings of racial identity in Asian American novels, I put forward a revised reading of melancholia as situated alongside mourning within a fluid continuum. The distinct yet related characteristics between melancholia and

mourning are highlighted in this continuum² in which melancholia, as a reaction to loss, is just as much needed for healthy ego formation as mourning. Melancholia is neither converted into mourning nor reversed as a condition of loss. Rather, the pathological meanings attached to melancholia are attenuated in my argument of depathologised melancholia so that melancholia is cast as a transformative rather than pathological force that shapes identity. And so, I argue that melancholia is closer to the healthy process of mourning than first conceptualised. By implementing this revised notion of melancholia as everyday loss that can be effectively managed, I argue that loss is made productive in the intersubjective connections between mother and daughters.

Transformative racial melancholia is a term which I employ to reference the transformative energies with which subjects manage lost identity. It also points to the transformative gains of social interconnectivity within female links and intergenerational bonds which place a focus on racial melancholia as an intergenerationally experienced and intersubjectively managed condition. Such revision to the theory of racial melancholia posits individual loss as manageable and as productive opportunities for identity building. In this way, Asian American subjectivity is recast within a positive and constructive site in which a healthy sense of identity is shaped by a position of loss. Earlier ideas of melancholia encouraged a reading of Kingston and Tan's texts as expressing melancholia as an inability. Amongst others, Anne Cheng reads *Woman Warrior* as Kingston's hypochondriacal response to her childhood (Cheng 2001, 65-102). Likewise, much critical work on Amy Tan's novels centres on Tan's depiction of American-born daughters' loss of their Chinese language and Chinese heritage by arguing that these losses are

² My theory of transformative racial melancholia is developed by building on Eng and Han's suggestion of a continuum between melancholia and mourning. See Eng and Han 2002, 352.

crippling (Heung; Gavioli; Shen). In contrast, this chapter will put forward a revised notion of melancholia in keeping with the theory of depathologised melancholia as suggested by Eng and Han, in order to move away from popular interpretations of Kingston and Tan's novels that earlier ideas of melancholia encouraged. I propose that the productive gap, suggested by Eng and Han, channels a transformative energy which converts loss into gains through the intersubjective support provided and tapped within mother-daughter relationship. Social support is garnered in the use of the cultural and traditional aid of story-telling which bridges mother-daughter ties. The narrative act of Chinese 'talking-story' and novel-writing involve the dual workings of memory –the acts of remembering and forgetting. They also involve the creative faculty of the imagination to fill the gaps of episodes and moments which are excluded, deleted and not relayed through the mother's memory.

In view of the importance of cultural assertion in the search and formation of identity, both individual and collective memory assume a crucial role in the project of cultural recovery embarked on by Asian American women writers. In other words, the recovery of culture that is contiguous with the positive transformation of identity involves a complex pattern of remembering and forgetting. Kingston notes the significance of memory to identity when herself stating that memory 'haunts you [and] is the foundation for the rest of the personality' (Rabinowitz 178). Memory's relationship to the past is what triggers a revisiting of an embedded heritage and provokes the awakening of the 'spectral inheritance' (Cheng 2001, 84) or 'unknown phantom' (Abraham and Torok 148) residing in the secrets kept by one's parents – 'secrets' (*WW* 141) that although encrypted are decoded and become accessible in the child's attempts to 'translate' them (*WW* 186 and *BSD* 287), and thus demystify the codified secrets belonging to parents which are transmitted along the

generational line. And so, ethnic narratives function as ‘act[s] of cultural recovery’ (Singh et al. 19) which rescript psychological paradigms of self in the cultural tradition of talk-story. Mother-daughter stories accomplish this through the specific use of memory, especially transmitted memory, as a key instrument in foregrounding an emergent embedded ethnicity and in helping to reclaim a previously obfuscated past. Such a strategic device employed to reconstruct a sense of cultural, ethnic, and racial identities in the wake of their erasure by dominant culture also bespeaks a psychic emancipation crucial for legitimising Asian American identity and subjectivity amidst the process of racialisation in America.³ Thus, the role of memory as a salient weapon for oppositional strategy⁴, to resist definitions of repression as it links up to cultural identity and to challenge the psychical confinements imposed by dominant cultural power, is integral to Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, both which delve into the personal memories of the mother who transmits familial, cultural, ethnic and racial heritage to her daughter.

Kingston’s *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, published in 1976, is arguably Asian American studies’ foundational text from which a proliferation of literary works and critical scholarship has taken its cue. As a predecessor to the plethora of contemporary novels produced in its wake, *Woman Warrior* acts as a forerunner in establishing the central theme of identity as a distinguishing trope of Asian American literature. This text prominently features the mother-daughter pair, a motif that has fast become a characteristic topos in the works

³ Chela Sandoval argues and posits how psychic emancipation is a vital goal which is strived for by groups of people who have been historically oppressed by totalizing hegemonies. See Sandoval 3.

⁴ If we consider, along with Fanon, how decolonisation entails ‘an ongoing project of resistance struggles’ (Lowe 107), the role of memory as an imperative means for enacting what Chandra Mohanty calls ‘dynamic oppositional agency’ (Mohanty et al. 13) becomes increasingly pertinent.

of Kingston's contemporaries and successors, not least writer Amy Tan who, as I argue, engages in a dialogic interaction with Kingston's text via her novel *Bonesetter's Daughter*, published in 1993. I have chosen to examine Tan's *Bonesetter's Daughter* instead of her more celebrated novel *Joy Luck Club* (1989) as the narrative act of story-telling is enacted and cemented in the mother-daughter book writing that is a centre-piece of *Bonesetter's Daughter*. Whilst *Joy Luck Club* also narrates the stories between mothers and daughters, *Bonesetter's Daughter* extends the idea of Chinese talk-story by transliterating this vernacular tradition within Ruth and LuLing's acts of memoir and book writing. The process of writing serves as a potent means of recording personal past experiences and transmitting them along to the next generation. The title *Bonesetter's Daughter* clearly puts an emphasis on the role of the daughter as the inheritor of her mother's story-telling tradition. When daughter Ruth follows in her mother's footsteps by sharing stories through Chinese talk-story, the novel suggests how Ruth continues her mother's talk-story in her progress as a book-doctor to a writer. Parallels may be drawn between LuLing's creative memoir writing and her ancestors' medicinal practice of bonesetting. With LuLing passing down her written memoirs to Ruth, Ruth is prescribed this powerful tool of remedial inscription, which she uses when becoming the narrator of her own life-story. In other words, Ruth moves on from revising the words of others to translating her mother's Chinese journals and picking up the pen to talk-story about her life. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* continues the method of relaying stories by fore-fronting the daughter's tales of her struggles between autonomy and assimilation, between interdependence and independence, and between past and present as Ruth seeks to understand her mother's past.

Although nearly two decades separate the publications of *The Woman Warrior* from *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, I have chosen to pair these two novels in this chapter in view of their close thematic connections and visible mother-daughter strand which thread together the different chapters of the novels. Functioning as a key mother-daughter narrative and a seminal text which reflected a watershed period, that of the rising interest in the mother-daughter dyad at the height of what was fast becoming known as the second and third wave of feminism in America, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* catered to and met the needs of a growing feminist literati – both mainstream and Asian American (Grice 35-36). In its treatment of gender identity and the genesis of the self, Kingston's novel, at the time of its publication, reflected mainstream feminism's increasing interest in the mother-daughter dyad. Although Tan's novel appears much later than Kingston's, I argue that *Bonesetter's Daughter* speaks to and with *The Woman Warrior* in an intense engagement and conversational dialogue on racial melancholy experienced by mothers and daughters via the cultural tradition of talk-story presented by both these novels. Employing both memory and imagination, whose intricate link I shall go on to explore in this chapter, Kingston and Tan's mother-daughter narratives work with both facts and fiction to address what it means to remember a propos racist immigration laws and the U.S. Exclusion Acts, emerging class differences between Chinese immigrant mothers and American-born daughters, and the increasing awareness of a hybridised Chinese American identity.⁵ And so, this chapter aims to show how these texts examine and question the desirability of memory within the 'decolonising' context

⁵ See Palumbo-Liu's treatise on Chinese daughters' 'hybridised' identity when discussing mother-daughter relations in the light of the 'Mother represent[ing] the Chinese sojourner who retains an identification with China [and the] Daughter is the racially and culturally hybrid Asian American who is equally, but differently, drawn to identify with the idealization of one part of her racial identity.' (6) My discussion on Asian American hybridised identity stems from this basis in which matrilineal heritage is instructive to the daughter's multiple identities as Chinese, American and female.

by tracing the way memory acts as a marker of loss and, by contrast, of recovery. In short, this chapter examines and dissects the inherent complexities within the mother-daughter bond as explored in the Chinese mother's memories of the past and her American-born daughter's use of imaginative powers to fill the gaps of a lost memory. The resistance of Chinese American women to hegemonic forms is propounded by the fact that part of what is recovered from Chinese culture is oppressive to the female gender and, so, seen as confining and disenfranchising. Thus, not only do Kingston and Tan address how Chinese American women resist complete assimilation within America but they also delineate further problems encountered in the oppressive aspects of an original culture. The silencing of the story of No Name Aunt in Kingston's family is but one example of the unpleasant heritage of girls living within a patriarchal Chinese culture and family. A cautionary tale which is told to Maxine in selective story-telling, the story of No Name Aunt is recounted by Maxine's mother through her memory of Maxine's aunt's sexual transgression. To fill the gaps of details that have been omitted from her mother's selective story-telling, Maxine uses her fictive powers of the imagination to compensate and account for the lack of knowledge about her aunt. Different modes of articulation, including speech and silence, will also be examined to interrogate the reasons behind the use of a chosen means of self- and/or cultural expression in Chinese American women's voicing of memory. By capitalising on the way in which Chinese talk-story suggests the act of code-writing as well as the act of code-breaking, the female tradition of story-telling is thus seen to deftly encode within its tales layers of 'covert images of resistance' (Mohanty et al. 35). It must be noted here that in spite of Kingston and Tan's differing use of genres--Kingston employing the narrative form of memoirs to disseminate the polyphonic nature of voicing and

Tan drawing on the novel form to engage readers in her contiguous concern with the varied discourse of multivocality--they share a mutual interest in the feminist topos of double-voicing.

By the term 'double-voicing', I refer to the way in which Kingston and Tan's texts employ and engage with the double play and dual significance of voicing in its capacity as passive silence and active articulation. In other words, their novels address and overturn conventional interpretation of silence and the act of silencing as symptoms of women's victimisation that reinforce the binary oppositions in oppressed / oppressor, weak / strong, and victim / agent relations⁶. These binary juxtapositions which reinforce a reductive and unequivocal reading of non-verbalised expressions of voice (i.e. silence) fail to account for women's agency – much less the covert 'dynamic oppositional agency'⁷ (Mohanty 13) in silences. In a reductive reading of silence as passivity and submission, women's self-affirming ability to generate 'effective political strategies' within lines of approach that include imbricated forms of both articulation and silence are also denied. An exploration into the contradictions and ambivalences of women's experiences must be addressed in order to reveal how women are truly located within the inter-connecting structures of the racialised, gendered and cultural world. Hence, the intricate relationship between the various systemic forms of race, class, gender, and ethnicity must be analysed to examine the way in which female oppositional strategies enforce what Sandoval calls 'differential consciousness' (Sandoval 44) for psychic emancipation so as to

⁶The intimate connection between voice and agency and the constitutive complexities inhering in the notion of silence as a sign of passivity finds exemplary expression in Jenny Sharpe's analysis on Mary Prince. See Sharpe 120-151.

⁷ Mohanty calls for a forceful, vigorous and dynamic form of resistance that enables women to come together as a political alliance group in acknowledgement of their common context of struggle against imperial colonialist forces.

challenge and resist the cultural reduction of Chinese American women by both Chinese patriarchy and white America.

1.1 Ambivalent Memory: The Interplay of Loss and Recovery

1.1 (i) Racial Melancholia as Transmitted Memory

The simultaneous rejection and incorporation of Chinese Americans within the national fabric, and their position as America's racial other, can be read as creating an experience of Freudian melancholia. Seeing that race constitutes a distinctive locus of exclusion for American nationality (Stern cited in Cheng 2001, 13), the intrasubjective damage and 'psychic implications of haunting negativity' (Cheng 2001, 25) suffered by Chinese Americans may be seen to give rise to a pathologised melancholic disposition. The 'white gaze' (Fanon 113), to use Fanon's term, underscores the racist undertones in the project of seeing/not seeing which characterises how the racial other is 'naturalized over time as absence, as complementary negative space' (Cheng 2001, 16). For example, when LuLing Young in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* reveals that 'The two old English ladies lived on top, and I lived in a room on the basement floor of the cottage' (*BSD* 278), she alludes to the racial hierarchy which positions the racial other as an invisible dull presence and consigns them to the categories of the cultural unconscious.

The Chinese American's internalisation of the white gaze inevitably begets a subjective dilemma that foregrounds the interplay between their 'ontic self' (how they come to their sense of being) and their 'racial self' (how society labels their being) (Cheng 2001, 75). Even as these warring ideals are manifested within the individual psyche, so too do they materialise in the outward comparisons the racial body draws between herself/himself and the white body. As a result, the 'profound

resentment' (Cheng 2001, 9) towards the introjected and reviled self, which characterises the dilemma within the racial melancholic, causes Ruth to renounce her Chinese race when denying her mother, who uses Chinese words which sound like 'gobbledy-gook-gook' to her and her white friends. This denunciation is evident when Ruth exclaims in desperation: 'She's not my mother!'... 'I don't know who she is!' (*BSD* 65)

Freud conceptualises melancholia as characterised by an inner self-destructiveness which involves an internal battlefield in which the melancholic subject fails to overcome the mental depression suffered as a result of loss experienced. In 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Freud distinguishes innocuous mourning from insidious melancholia by positing the latter as a psychological illness: a pathological condition which is closely associated with the psychic state of depression. In terms of loss, the melancholic body is unable to 'get over' the loss it has suffered as it unconsciously refuses to let go of the object it has irretrievably lost. In contrast to mourning which is a healthy response of normalized grief to losses sustained, melancholia thus implicates a process of unresolved grief whereby an open wound caused by the object of loss is allowed to feed on itself incessantly to the point of impoverishing the ego. As an incurable wound, the injury inflicted is permanent and devoid of all possibilities of healing. According to Freud, this inability to replace losses and to invest in new objects defines, and confines, the psychical cathectic energies of the melancholic body. Consequently, the melancholic ego enters a state where it is perpetually impoverished as a direct result of the unconscious refusal to give up the love it obsessively holds for the object it has lost.

For Freud, then, melancholia is embodied by a disturbance of individual psychology with a debilitating effect on the self's psyche, which wrestles with acute

affliction of the intrapersonal kind. Interestingly, Freud delineates the relationship between the melancholic body and the lost object as typified by both love and hate – loving the very object the melancholic body has lost, yet simultaneously hating the lost object because of the inability both to disavow and identify what precisely is lost. These dual conflicting emotions define the melancholic's lack of closure as well as the inability to replace loss with other new objects. Such an impoverished internal world typifies the irreparable damage and the permanent state of grief, as opposed to normalized mourning, which Freud sees the melancholic subject as suffering. Thus, while mourning is intimately intertwined with transient grief, melancholia is characterised by the intransigent state of perpetual grief and continued grievance. The subject/ego's attempt to transcend the impoverishing effects of melancholia proves to be futile in view of the permanent forces which continue to afflict the melancholic subject.

Anne Cheng's coinage of the term 'racial melancholia' signals the interlinking of Freudian melancholia with America's systemic process of racialisation. Viewing American racial dynamics as a melancholic construct, Cheng argues how the loss of whiteness as an ideal afflicts racialised bodies to a point where the assimilatory processes become symptomatic of a national condition of melancholia (Cheng 2001, 12). Furthermore, in the wake of the legal exclusion of Asian Americans based on racial and cultural distinctions, Cheng views the problematics of such a foreclosure to full assimilation as the 'melancholic bind between incorporation and rejection' (Cheng 2001, 10), reflecting the way in which America sustains its dominant, white national ideal via the exclusion-yet-retention of bodies it categorises as foreign. By positing that melancholia alludes to 'an entangled relationship to loss' (Cheng 2001, 8), Cheng revises definitions of Freudian

melancholia to encompass the uneasy ways in which loss, exclusion and absence are handled and digested by the American body politic.

According to Cheng, loss then involves the simultaneous processes of denunciation and incorporation, denial and exclusion, of the object even as America consumes the body of the racialised other within its cultural, political, and social matrix. On the one hand, this forms the basis of national melancholia where failed integration and partial assimilation of Asian Americans within the white American national fabric imprisons both dominant and marginal subjects. On the other hand, the raced other's melancholic ego experiences a loss of racial origins in attempts at assimilating into white America's culture. This failed assimilation is partly attributed to the effects of immigration which bring about a delay in the registration of history between the immigrant parent and their American-born offspring. As such, the origins of loss exist as transmitted memory, in which subjective formation is delayed because of the inheritance of past spectres of family history. In other words, transmitted memory, as Cheng elucidates, manifests itself in the spectral presences of an elusive past history in second-generation immigrants whose identity formation is a key issue for Cheng.

Following on from this topic of identity loss, David Eng and Shinhee Han revise the idea of permanent loss in identity when addressing and expanding Freud's notion of melancholia in their paper 'A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia' (2001). Here, Eng and Han draw on Cheng's theory of race as a vexing melancholic construction. Acknowledging the way in which racial and Freudian melancholia may be employed as useful theoretical frameworks in which to elucidate the problematics of suspended assimilation, unstable immigration and abject racialisation of Asian Americans, Eng and Han depathologise melancholia by shifting away from the

theory of melancholia as a solipsistic psychic disorder. In proposing a notion of racial melancholia that views it as a conflict between white and non-white intersubjective bodies, they move away from the theory of melancholia as intrasubjective damage, disease, and dis-ease. In other words, Eng and Han depart from negative readings of melancholia as permanent individual damage that is non-negotiable and suffered by the ego as a result of its failure to resolve losses. By insisting on this renewed emphasis placed onto racial melancholia as conflict rather than damage, they simultaneously propose an alternative way of thinking through the issues of suffering and loss by suggesting that loss is manageable within a socially supportive paradigm. The idea of positive rebuilding on a communal level with the constructive support of group interaction is a concept that closely recalls Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic work on productive suffering, in which she argues that suffering can become productive under the stress of hardship (Klein 163-64). And so, Eng and Han suggest that melancholia is a conflict that presents a problem to be addressed through intersubjective ties. In short, social conflict is to be resolved in social connectivity. In such way, loss is managed and differentiated from definitions of melancholia as irreparable damage. Hence, Eng and Han's theory of melancholia highlights positivity of individual psyche. In short, they effectively advocate a project of reinstating health through intergenerationally shared experiences.

Transformative racial melancholia acknowledges that loss within immigration, assimilation, and racialisation is omnipresent. However, the experience of loss and the associated effect on identity are minimised in the transformation of losses into gains. Instead of concentrating on the 'hurt-you kinda secret' that 'do you damage forever, never can change after that' (*BSD* 13), transformative racial

melancholia reinforces positive group identification within a Chinese American collectivity by departing from the theory of the racial other as solipsistic victim.

Thus, the constructive recasting and re-appropriation of racial melancholia from its original negative basis as ‘the origins of loss’ (Cheng 2001, 153) diverts attention away from loss to the renewed project of recovery and recuperation. Rather than a state of ‘endless self-impoverishment’ (Cheng 2001, 8), depathologised melancholia provides a framework for understanding how ‘suffering can become productive’ (Klein 163-64) through the intergenerationally-shared intersubjective conflict experienced by the Chinese Americans as a collective cohort. The transformative powers inherent within depathologised melancholia materialise in the memories of the past which are transmitted and revised across generations in the cyclical acts of remembering and forgetting. As a communicative device between the immigrant parent and their American-born offspring, memory as evoked through ‘selective will’ closely traces the healthy undertones of depathologised melancholia. Transmission of memory allows for and enacts the revising of loss from negativity to positivity in the social gains reaped.

1.1 (ii) Memory’s Dual Processes of Remembering and Forgetting

In *The Woman Warrior* and *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, depathologised melancholy is pursued through the dual quality of memory, wherein the oft juxtaposed mechanisms of remembering and forgetting are both entailed. The retrieval of No Name Aunt’s story from the recesses of Brave Orchid’s stored memory illustrate the active process of remembering what the rest of the villagers would, on the contrary, rather forget. The tale of No Name Aunt is both empowering and debilitating. As a story actively and transgressively remembered by Maxine and

her mother, it features as a source of empowerment. As a tale of shame, it is a debilitating story that conveys the limits of being a girl in a racial patriarchal society. No Name Aunt, who is Brave Orchid's sister-in-law, carries an illegitimate child as a physical sign of her illicit affair with her unnamed and unknown male lover. The punishment exacted upon Maxine's aunt by her 'watchful' (*WW* 13) villagers in China involves the un-naming, or rather dis-naming, of this aunt as they shun her for her sexually transgressive act. In view of this history, Brave Orchid admonishes Maxine with 'Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you' (*WW* 13). Brave Orchid shares the villager's 'unspoken' story of No Name Aunt with Maxine at the point of Maxine's own sexual awakening when Maxine starts to exhibit signs of physical maturity via her body's natural menstrual cycle. Brave Orchid's maternal concern to protect and warn Maxine against bringing a similar level of shame upon the family contains an aggressive quality as well. Yet, after summoning her remembered tale of No Name Aunt to warn her daughter, Brave Orchid pleads with Maxine to forget that she ever transmitted this tale of shame to her. The active will to remember encompasses conscious decisions to forget in order to prevent further losses to Maxine's family. Furthermore, this communally (un)told story of No Name Aunt illustrate the active remembering processes undertaken by Brave Orchid to tell this story; this act both empowers Maxine through her mother's transgression of the silence surrounding No Name Aunt's story and debilitates Maxine in its heavy warnings against betraying the patriarchal norms of her Chinese culture.

Steeped in humiliation and punished in the way 'No one would give her a family hall name' (*WW* 21) after disrupting the familial 'equilibrium' (*WW* 19) and giving 'silent birth' (*WW* 18) to her illegitimate child, No Name Aunt thus features

as an admonitory figure for Maxine. Yet, Maxine is also complicit in her aunt's punishment of silence in fearing to ask her mother for further details about this unnamed woman. Maxine's identification with her aunt's femininity and sexuality gives rise to a desire to 'deliberately forget' (*WW* 22) her, yet also culminates in the realisation of the futility of doing so when finding herself 'devoting pages of paper to her [aunt]' (*WW* 22) when narrating her mother's tale of No Name Woman to the readers of *Woman Warrior*. In other words, Maxine (both narrator and author) finds herself dedicating a great many pages to the story of No Name Aunt in the opening section of her novel *Woman Warrior*, which serves as Kingston's written memoirs of her girlhood spent with Chinese and American figures as remembered ghosts of her past. Having retained the silence of No Name Aunt's story for fifty years, Kingston faces up to the hauntings of No Name Aunt in her conscious rememberings of her aunt through her mother's transmitted memory of this aunt. With her limited knowledge and complicity with her aunt's silence for fifty long years, Kingston (through the younger version of herself in the narrator of Maxine within *Woman Warrior*) now vividly and imaginatively narrates what it would feel to be both a shamed outcast and powerful transgressor of the strictures on women.

The patent break with the all-embracing secrecy binding No Name Aunt's family and the villagers to expected modes of silence functions to empower Maxine as she herself defies the patriarchal cultural constraints that delimit women's choice to express themselves. Maxine's own betrayal of the expected norms of the patriarchal rule in which 'women in old China did not choose' (*WW* 14) mirrors her mother's audacious choice to break the silence through the female tradition of talk-

story.⁸ As a source of inspiration for her explicit articulation of her aunt's 'unspeakable' tale, *Brave Orchid* provides the driving impetus for Maxine to amass the courage to 'tell on' (*WW* 22) her aunt. Maxine's remembrance of her aunt's life and her subsequent verbalised expressions of what happened to her aunt, in addition to Maxine's speculations on the hidden aspects of her aunt's life, illustrate how the continued legacy of No Name Aunt has both a profound positive and negative impact on Maxine. Hence, in its dual function as a pre-emptive warning and an enabling avenue to female empowerment, the tale of No Name Aunt serves to delineate the ambivalence produced by the desirability and undesirability posed by remembering. Through her mother's recollections of No Name Aunt's story, Maxine gains a personal caveat serving to discipline as well as facilitate her emerging sense of womanhood, whilst informing her of the processes of memory involved in the act of relaying and keeping silent her aunt's tale.

The Bonesetter's Daughter explores the concept of memory as an active entity which is sustained and driven by the will to survive the harsh difficulties rife within the reality of Asian American life. Consequently, this surviving mentality which underscores memory's works involves memory's dual cyclic processes of remembering *and* forgetting. In employing what Nietzsche calls 'memory of will' (39)⁹, Tan utilises memory as a two-way act which entails remembering the useful parts and learning to forget the less constructive parts of one's past. This is to say that memory becomes powerful when it is selective and when active will is

⁸ Talk story is a predominantly female cultural tradition as stated by Kingston in an interview in which she notes that even men's stories are derived from women's talk-story: "...without the female story-teller, I couldn't have gotten into some of the stories...many of the men's stories were ones I originally heard from women". In Timothy Pfaff, "Talk with Mrs. Kingston," *New York Times Book Review* (15 June 1980), 26.

⁹ I read Nietzsche's theory on the 'memory of will' as suggesting the way that forgetting may be posited as a source of strength and even of robust health to gain mastery over life and identity.

employed to remember and forget, to recall and erase¹⁰. In a similar fashion to Tan, Kingston thematises selective memory by having Brave Orchid recount only useful sections of No Name Aunt's story to warn and educate Maxine about female sexual licentiousness. Rather than espousing memory as a mere one-way track which precludes the act of forgetting, the women in Tan and Kingston's texts embrace memory as a two-way track of remembering and forgetting when drawing on recollected memories of the past as both personal and communal tool for positive identity formation.

Selective memory, then, addresses the desirability of forgetting certain aspects of the past through active choices –not necessarily conscious ones– in learning to focus on the positive outcome of negative losses. This selective memory is comparable to what Ben Xu calls 'functioning mentality' (as qtd in Singh et al. 263), which refers to the active nature of memory and the psychic refusal to submit to past failures and sadness. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the functioning mentality in selective memory is best exemplified by LuLing. As her daughter Ruth points out, 'though [LuLing] still remembers the past [...] She doesn't recount the sad parts. She only recalls being loved very, very much' (*BSD* 337). Selective memory demonstrates the process of active forgetting in which LuLing gains a positive mentality that allows her to move on from the past and dissociate from loss. Whilst willful forgetting is here akin to the ability to move on from loss that Freud attaches to mourning (and not to melancholia), forgetting also signals an unconscious nature of preserved loss associated with melancholia. For in LuLing's active forgetting of the past, even whilst she actively chooses to focus on the quality of love had rather than love lost, she embodies an unconscious desire to push out an internalised and

¹⁰ Freud's notion of memory as repetition and erasure is equally relevant here. See Sharpe's discussion in Sharpe 123.

deeply incorporated pain associated with the processes of immigration, racialisation, and assimilation. However, in diverting attention away from loss and channeling her concentration on something else besides pain, LuLing sets herself back on the path to restoring health as she manages pain with the counter-emotion of love. In other words, LuLing actively forgets past sadness by focusing on the positive aspects of her time in China and America. Hence, by channelling her energy away from the sadness and pain that typify her melancholia, LuLing converts losses into gains through actively forgetting sadness even while forgetting points to the unconscious nature of internalised loss.

Remembering, with its counter-process of forgetting, is crucial to effect psychic social and individual transformation in Asian American women. In the words of one feminist, 'women especially need to remember because forgetting is a major obstacle to change' (Greene 298). Forgetting indicates the risk of losing memories which help to shape the ego as remembering reduces this risk. In other words, remembrances of the past help in engaging with identity formation by implementing effective change in way of emancipation from debilitating and constricting definitions. When LuLing writes in her memoirs 'These are the things I must not forget' (*BSD* 147), she testifies to the willful act of remembering to keep alive her sense of identity and reaffirm her personal history within her family –the 'Liu clan' (*BSD* 147). Yet, even as Ruth's mother engages in the process of remembering by writing down these very words that caution both herself and her daughter against forgetting their memories of the past, LuLing casts aside the oppressive elements of her past as she pushes for 'Change' (*BSD* 170) in her circumstances. First-generation Asian American immigrant LuLing acts thus to put into effect 'psychic emancipation' (Sandoval 3) from systems of exploitation that

confine her, and that allowed for the female sex to be sold as ‘slave girl[s]’ (*BSD* 206) in China. By forgetting and revising the past in her personal recollections, LuLing disallows melancholic paralysis to take hold of her body. LuLing’s heartfelt message written in Chinese calligraphy that reads ‘These are the things I must not forget’ (appearing in the chapter entitled ‘Heart’) is preceded by the line ‘These are the things I know are true’ (appearing in the chapter labelled ‘Truth’ that comes directly before ‘Heart’). In recording these sentences in her journal, LuLing invites a reading of the correlation between memories and truth in which personal memories from the heart bespeak a personal truth of tales. Luling’s experiential truths within experiences of the past are tapped within the deep recesses of her heart and these memories allow her to engage more fully with her identity –both her past history and her current present– as she effects a psychic emancipation from limiting cultural, racial and gender classifications which LuLing eventually transmits to her daughter Ruth.

Subsequently, loss that is managed through memory’s act of forgetting is dealt with not in its fundamental sense of negative injury but, rather, as a vital condition that enables the female subject to acquire and experience transformative melancholia. This is the case when Luling expresses her receptiveness to loss and forgetting by saying to Ruth, ‘I hope you can forget just as I’ve forgotten’ (*BSD* 338). Faced with the prospect of being “depress[ed] ‘cause can *not* forgot” (*BSD* 92), LuLing speaks of a sense of hopelessness in being stuck with the ‘inability to forget’ (Nietzsche 1980, 8). However, by choosing to focus her energies on recollecting good times and channelling energy away from past pain, hurts and sadness, LuLing goes from being ‘miserable’ (*BSD* 132) to feeling ‘happy’ (*BSD* 329) as she learns that forgetting is both an act of will and a deliberate, conditioned process of memory

deletion . When LuLing states that ‘The only way to push it out of my mind was to go into my memory’ (*BSD* 255), she describes the juxtaposed workings of willful memory in which remembering is necessary for managing and pushing out the internalised pain associated with losses. Here, she clearly states that forgetting becomes necessary to managing loss within memory.

Transformative melancholia through the works of memory is further demonstrated in LuLing being a ‘keeper of diaries, journals, family records, and photographic albums.’ (Greene 296) LuLing keeps her past history and emotive experiences recorded within her memoirs in order for Ruth to tap into the ‘reservoir’ (*BSD* 330) of her past by means of a ‘memory web’ (*BSD* 337). Part of the reason why LuLing keeps a journal is due to her early onset of dementia (*BSD* 91) which compels her to keep a recorded diary of her life. By doing so, LuLing enables a younger female generation (embodied in daughter Ruth) to sift the positive entities of ‘happiness’ (*BSD* 338), ‘love’ (*BSD* 339) and ‘freedom’ (*BSD* 339) from the written memories of the past. Her mother’s journals also invite Ruth to explore the memory web used to create and reconstruct the past. By thus animating Ruth to keep a record of her own past, her mother’s memoirs encourage Ruth, in turn, to sit down and ‘write a story’ (*BSD* 339) about her own life to contribute to the continued legacy of women’s story-telling in her family.

The battle that Ruth consequently wages within herself of whether to call up past memories, especially those reflecting her bitter experiences when quarrelling with her mother during her adolescent years and the physical assault suffered as a child, is a sign of the complexity within the active will of memory. Ruth learns from her grandmother Bao Bomu that ‘the past [is] but what we choose to remember’ (*BSD* 338). Ruth sees the benefits and constructiveness of past memories, yet is also

cognisant of the debilitating effects of bad memories. This accounts for her role in ‘book doctoring’, which is essentially a form of escapism as it allows her to revise what others have written without having to face the prospect of confronting her own life story.

Ruth’s reluctance to face her own past experiences is set in stark contrast to LuLing’s willful construction of the past, as the latter assumes a position of attentive self-acknowledgement as the mature matriarchal figure. Ruth, on the other hand, is preoccupied with ghost writing because of the way it absolves her from having to confront ‘what she did not like about herself or others’ (*BSD* 27). This is epitomised in her early desires to write a book which does not deal with her own story. As the narrator puts it, ‘[Ruth] wanted to write a novel in the style of Jane Austen, a book of manners about the upper class, a book that had nothing to do with her own life’ (*BSD* 27). And so, Ruth in her early days as a book-doctor shirks her past by being her grandmother’s ghost-writer and working as a book-doctor with desires to write a book, yet a book far removed from her own life-story. LuLing’s memoir writing and Ruth’s book-doctoring are two different forms of memory revision with different motivations at play and a difference in the practices as well. While Ruth has no intention to record the past, LuLing has every intention to document the past. Also, while Ruth does away with her memories, LuLing taps into them to record the many instances in her life.

Ruth’s ambivalent attitude with regard to writing is further symptomatic of the fear she faces in confronting who she is, signifying her sense of instability about her identity and insecurity about her relationship with her mother. The reservations, as well as attractions, of writing which Ruth perceives are manifested in the lines:

Years before she had dreamed of writing stories as a way to escape. She would revise her life and become someone else. She could be somewhere else. In her imagination she could change everything herself, her mother, her past. But the idea of revising her life also frightened her. (*BSD* 27)

Here, Ruth admits how the act of life-revisioning within story-writing entails the necessity of facing her inner voices, her past with its disagreeable aspects and her mother whose ultra-Chinese disposition she struggles with. Yet, even as Ruth feels the need to change her past, she is compelled by the lessons obtained in honouring, respecting and revering important links with the maternal figures around her. The fears and hesitations she possesses with regard to writing her life story, which aptly echo the ambivalence of memory, are part of a rite of passage she experiences in order to better understand herself and those within her life. Aided by her mother's stories, which are recorded and passed on to Ruth in the bundled stacks of paper LuLing leaves her, Ruth is in a more able position to re-assess and tap into the recesses of her own past to forge vital communication ties with previous generations.

And so, the permanence of the written word and the physical concretization of past memories appeals to and also deters Ruth from writing stories which deal with her memories of the past. When the omniscient narrator mentions that '[Ruth was] sensitive to the fact that the authors saw their books as symbolic forms of immortality believing that their words on the printed page would last far longer than their physical bodies' (*BSD* 37), it becomes evident that Ruth is cognizant of the massive potential that writers possess in leaving behind a written legacy. As an effective antidote to the writer's transient physicality, the enduring imprint of the written word addresses the human desire, and indeed Ruth's longing need, for the semblance of durability offered by the immortality of the written and spoken word.

1.2 Articulate Voice and Female Agency in the Antinomies of Speech and Silence

Similar to the workings of memory, articulation is posed in an ambivalent light, with Kingston conveying the boons of both verbal self-expression as well as articulate silences. Within the ambivalent quality of voicing, depathologised melancholia is further engaged and pursued within Kingston's and Tan's text. In *The Woman Warrior*, the ambivalence of articulation is exemplified in the bathroom scene where a frustrated Maxine verbally confronts a mute Chinese schoolmate. Maxine, as the narrator and central female character of Kingston's novel, struggles with assimilation attempts and uses her rejection of as well as detachment from her Chinese ethnicity and Asian race as one yardstick by which to measure her success in assimilating. Having rebelled against her mother's strongly-defined Chinese traits and characteristically Asian lifestyle during her formative childhood period, Maxine continues to struggle with the assimilatory pressures in America, as exemplified in her dilemma with aspects of voicing. In particular, this oft-analysed episode explores the complexities and significance of verbal articulation in terms of the ambiguities inherent in the experience of Chinese female-ness.

In the gender-differentiated space of the bathroom, Maxine is the female aggressor who oppresses the Chinese girl who does not talk. Yet, in identifying and empathising with the girl's vulnerability--evident in Maxine's observation of the girl's fragility in her 'baby soft [and] tracing paper, onion skin' (*WW* 158 & 159) – Maxine is also an unlikely mediator who wishes to help the girl break out of her silence. Maxine's dual roles as facilitator *and* intimidator are further delineated when she scolds her and says 'I'm doing this for your own good', yet simultaneously threatens the girl in her admonishment: 'Don't you dare tell anyone I've been bad to

you' (*WW* 162). Here, Maxine is both sympathetic and scornful of the girl's silent disposition. Maxine's dual responses to this mute Chinese girl, who reminds Maxine of her Chinese self, point to Maxine's internal struggle with the cultural demands to assimilate into American 'loud' ways, on one hand, and the preservation of her Chinese-ness, on the other hand. In other words, her bifurcated interaction with this girl reflects an internal anxiety that symptomises her racially melancholic body. Such a conflict between voice and silence represents Maxine's internalised loss –one that precipitates a cognisance of losses that leads to a further awareness of a need to manage this embodied silence.

Furthermore, Maxine interprets the girl's silence as a sign of her passivity and subservience to the prescribed cultural norms of female acquiescence in which the Chinese female figure is snared. Maxine internalises the beliefs and values of the cultural oppressor and white coloniser when playing the role of the American aggressor in intimidating and berating the mute Chinese girl. The girl's silence is viewed, erroneously, by Maxine as an essentially crippling and disabling force.

Consequently, the comparisons Maxine makes between verbal expressions and oral reticence – by aligning the former with American values and the latter with Chinese ethnicity – causes her to conclude that silence is a restrictive and disenfranchising quality. Maxine's threatening acts towards the girl take on a violent and, indeed, quasi-sadistic element when she 'honks' (*WW* 159) her hair and squeezes her 'fatty' (*WW* 159) cheeks to the point of being afraid that the girl's skin might just disintegrate in her hands. Playing the role of the antagonist, Maxine shouts and screams at the 'sissy girl' (*WW* 158) as Maxine draws comparisons between the mute fragility of the girl and Maxine's own loud, American, 'steady and normal' (*WW* 158) voice.

Maxine's strong animosity and hatred for this girl lies in the ironic fact that, with respect to the similar physical features they share, the girl is essentially a mirror-image of Maxine. Maxine's act of violence and source of hatred for this girl belie her sense of empathy and identification with the girl in terms of their common Chinese physical traits, ethnicity and heritage. Maxine is physically violent to the girl when she describes how 'I reached up and took the fatty part of her cheek...meat between thumb and finger...I gave her face a squeeze...When I let go, the pink rushed back into my white thumbprint on her skin' (*WW* 158-9). Perhaps it is precisely because rather than in spite of their similarities that Maxine finds herself unable to accept the mute girl for who she is. Maxine forcefully attempts to coerce the girl into speech given that Maxine views the way a mere whisper if successfully elicited would suffice as a sign of the girl's agency and personality –attributes of power Maxine readily removes from being ethnically and physically Chinese.¹¹

Maxine's sense of desperation and overwhelming frustration at failing to get the girl to utter a single word point to Maxine's ideas on enabling agency and subjective power as attached to words. This is clearly evident when Maxine declares aloud to the girl: 'you are a plant. [...] That's all you are if you don't talk. If you don't talk, you can't have a personality. [...] You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain' (*WW* 162). Maxine makes the connection between talking and identity and/or personality, and reveals the parallel ties she constructs between verbal voicing and intellectual power as well as female agency. Maxine thus demonstrates her embedded conviction in the power of words and verbal articulation

¹¹ Dominant criticism of this bathroom scene interprets Maxine's abuse of the mute girl as masking a racial identification between the girls. See Cheng 78. Cheng also reads the point of physical contact between the girls as the threat of contagion given that Maxine identifies with whiteness/American pedagogical authority in leaving a 'white thumbprint' (*WW* 159) on the girl's cheek after Maxine violently squeezes it.

as she views the girl as weak and without an identity or personality. Maxine's further use of the metaphor of an inanimate 'plant' devoid of a brain depicts the way Maxine views the girl as lacking agency given the attachment Maxine makes between power (authority) and words (vocalisation).

Though Maxine equates verbal articulation with action and female agency, silence does not automatically entail female paralysis and inertia. Having failed to get the mute girl to talk, Maxine falls desperately ill as she spends the 'next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness' (*WW* 162). This illness points to the flawed connection Maxine makes between empowerment and verbal articulation. For in this time when she is ill, Maxine resorts to using her body rather than her voice to speak. In this period of sickness, Maxine is bereft of energy to speak as her languishing body rests in bed. Maxine's poorly physical state reflects her passive condition in which her illness consumes her whole body and leaves her without speech. When she recuperates and is finally able to return to school, Maxine finds that the girl she previously tormented, for the latter's lack of vocal expression, is faring well. Contrary to her initial belief, the girl is not as frail, helpless and vulnerable as she expected, seeing how she has the support and protection of a network of people in her family 'taking care of her' (*WW* 164). Rather than care provided by the girl's family as a form of agency, it signals how the mute girl does not need agency. In other words, there is no need for the girl to exhibit the kind of agency that Maxine attaches to vocal expression since she is taken care of by her family. Contrary to Maxine's ideas on the association between agency and loud voicing, agency becomes redundant in the case of the mute girl. In other words, the mute girl has no agency because she does not speak, and yet it is the case that this girl does not need agency. The community of support and care provided to the mute

girl signals to the luxury of agency. Maxine's ambivalent position with regard to the girl's passive silence and the emphasis Maxine places on the vocal ability for self-expression thus delineates the complex interplay between the dialectics of verbal articulation and muteness, as well as the attachments and dissociations between female power, agency and identity as they link up to both these forms of communication. With power as well as agency underlining *both* acts of speech and silence, Maxine learns that Chinese female identity is not necessarily threatened by muteness, seeing as the modes of verbal articulation *and* muteness both elicit competent and powerful articulations /expressions of voice.

Silence plays an important role in the articulation and legitimisation of personal and cultural memory. The fact that voiceless-ness can be 'a decision, a matter of will, not a disease or malady' (*BSD* 10) encapsulates the empowering quality of silence. Similarly, King Kok Cheung's aptly titled book *Articulate Silences* bespeaks the way silences, gaps and absences are themselves pertinent forms of expression – whether as a strategy of opposition, a form of social commentary or a way to accommodate flexibility within voicing. For all their varied purposes, the silences written into Kingston's oeuvre represent the strategies of coding that mark forms of voicing and non-voicing as forms of expression. Consequently, the technique of coding points to the way that a 'double-voiced discourse' (Showalter 34) is at work within the text.

Double-voiced discourse signals the way women's writing comprises both a 'dominant' (voiced) and 'muted' (non-voiced) story. The covert cultural allusions interwoven into *The Woman Warrior* – take for example, what Kingston has pointed out as the 'puns for Chinese speakers only [...] not [...] for non-Chinese speakers' (as qtd in Skandera-Trombley103) – are part of this double-coding approach which

marks the strategic lack of full transparency in Kingston's writing. In other words, what remains unsaid in *Brave Orchid's* account of her life signals the 'transmutation [and] transportation that takes place' in these moments of silence that have the capacity to 'tell the truth' (Moyer). Such double-code approach suggests that the discourse of silence has the ability to convey personal and cultural truth via the articulation of traditionally repressed memories of the racialised subject. The articulation of these memories in loud expression and self-imposed silence legitimise these memories by acknowledging their previously repressed states.

By further employing what Foucault understands by the term 'counter-memory'¹² (Bouchard 153), *The Woman Warrior* operates to oppose the dominant notion of hegemonic identity and history. Consequently, the affirmation of gaps and silences within Kingston's text serves as the assertion, legitimisation and validation of personal, historical and cultural identity of women who are racially and ethnically different from the main cohort of white American society. In fact, as one feminist articulates, 'What Hong Kingston does *not* tell us about her mother but allows us to read between the lines and in the gaps of her stories reveals as much about her mother as what she *does* tell us about her' (Minh-ha 135). Such openness, which is best exemplified and accommodated in the silences of *Brave Orchid's* talk-story in *The Woman Warrior*, marks the submerged plot of female revelation that enables the racially marked woman to forge her personal memory and cultural history effectively via the modes of seeming unspoken states.

With Ruth professionally working to revise books which fall into the categories of 'Self-Help, Wellness, Inspirational [as well as] New Age' (*BSD* 37),

¹² Foucault uses this term counter-memory in close alignment with his concept of 'effective history' as 'oppos[ing] history as knowledge' and simultaneously revealing 'knowledge as perspective'.

her dealings with books that address communicative difficulties, mind-body issues, cognitive behavioural patterns and spiritual awakening are good indicators of her interests; they highlight her proclivity in deciphering the meaning of life and her inner longing to untangle the complex web of problems in her relationships. Ruth's work with books is a form of avoidance of her story. Yet, her book-doctoring eventually brings her to face her own life-story. Ruth's work with books points to an act of memory revision and forgetting that is akin to her mother's ambivalent attitude towards the past. In addition to the need to understand her mother, Ruth's love affair with her partner Art also features as an area in her life that she wishes to improve. Though her relationship with Art does not take precedence over Ruth's efforts at improving her relationship with LuLing, her interaction with Art is important in revealing Ruth's take on the dichotomy within the juxtaposed self-expressive forms of vocality and silence.

Significantly, Art's name serves as a metaphor and/or metonymy for the processes of writing traversed by Ruth in her ongoing relationship and ties with both verbal and written forms of human communication. As the name 'Art' tacitly suggests, Ruth is engaged in encapsulating and exploring the various modes within the art of writing and transliterating, as well as book-doctoring. As a holder of a doctorate in linguistics and a specialist in American Sign Language, Art heightens Ruth's sense of the significance of language and communication in establishing and stabilising relationships. With Art explaining to Ruth how language is essentially 'what people mean but don't necessarily say' (*BSD* 25), he implicates how silence is a form of communicative tool that is as potent as sound, words and speech. Thus, sign language as articulate silence is illustrated both in Art's name and his occupation.

In addition to this, Ruth's 'yearly ritual' (*BSD* 10) of losing her voice in order to 'sharpen consciousness about words and their necessity' (*BSD* 10) points to stillness and silence as forms of therapeutic meditation which serve not only to re-awaken the human senses to the power of expression, but also as a means to re-assess the communicative devices that strengthen human relationships. Voluntary silence can function importantly as an enabling, empowering and disenfranchising tool. This is evident in the way Ruth is 'silent', but crucially 'still has her voice' and realises that 'she does not need to talk' (*BSD* 337). Her conscious decision to remain verbally mute is, thus, cast in an authoritative as well as a facilitating light – a choice which reflects her role as an agent rather than a victim. This is not to disregard the internal ambivalences which are subsumed within silences, for had LuLing been silent and failed to relate her story to Ruth through words both spoken and written in her memoirs, then Ruth would not have the additional help at her disposal to discover the enabling quality and energizing force which lie in the breaking of self-imposed silence. Hence, the tropes of vocality and silence are addressed as double-edged swords which both contain elements that have the ability to empower as well as make the subject passive. Within this dichotomous framework of vocality and silence, Art and Ruth's relationship falters due to a breakdown in their communication, but once those communicative ties are re-established, their relationship recovers through mutual support. Thus, Ruth's search for the meaning/s of life and the relationships that she forges, and re-forges, are rooted in the ambivalent interplay between the juxtaposed powers of vocal and silent articulation.

Expressed words and voluntary silence are sources of strength which mobilise Ruth to seek out to make sense of her mother's life-story in order to make sense of her very own life. Similar to Maxine in *The Woman Warrior*, yet differing

in the way that Maxine is verbally told tales about her mother and No Name Aunt whilst Ruth learns about her family in her mother's written memoirs, Ruth mirrors Maxine's enthusiasm for story-telling through spoken and unarticulated words. Ruth carries out a voluntary "speech or word fast" (*BSD* 9) to remind her of the power of words in shaping, defining, and invigorating life. The power of story-telling lies in the foundation it provides for the discovery of self by establishing relationships between self and others forged in communication. The level of difficulty faced by Ruth in her relationships with close family and friends is played out as more problematic than Maxine's. Although Maxine possesses an equally ambivalent attitude towards her mother – expressing both adoration for Brave Orchid's feats and repulsion for her mother's unpleasant truths and 'lies' (*WW* 148), it is Ruth who struggles more in stabilising her relationship with her mother and also with her boyfriend Art and his kids. In contrast to Ruth, we know little about Maxine's present –whether she is better off or just leaving things out. Yet, the answers to these questions are of little matter given that *Woman Warrior* documents and prioritises the narrative strands of the mother's story more than the daughter's life-story to trace the importance of the family's past which feeds the present. While family past is of prominence in *Woman Warrior*, Tan's *Bonesetter's Daughter* places an emphasis on the daughter's difficult and estranged relationship with figures of both her past and present as she seeks to understand her present state. The themes of voice and silence are, hence, used to highlight daughter Ruth's life as it comes to be informed by the written stories of her mother.

1.3 The Doubled Nature of Story-Telling

Depathologised melancholia is illustrated in Kingston and Tan's treatment of the binary and also bifurcated nature of talking-story, in which stories of pain act as

stories of empowerment. Significantly, Kingston's *oeuvre* is framed by the dual parables provided in the tales of Ts'ai Yen and No Name Aunt, whose stories continue to empower as well as burden subsequent female generations. As a complement and supplement to the oral story about No Name Aunt, the legendary folktale of Ts'ai Yen operates as a crucial source of empowerment for the female protagonist in Kingston's *Woman Warrior*. With Ts'ai Yen's song 'translating well' (*WW* 186) down the generations, Ts'ai Yen provides a counteracting story of embattled success to the tragedy of Maxine's No Name Aunt. Although fundamentally a tale of captivity and detention about a detained poetess and an imprisoned revolutionary, Ts'ai Yen's story conveys the significance and importance of attaining physical and psychic emancipation for the disempowered Chinese woman. Ts'ai Yen achieves both physical and psychic freedom in the songs that she sings during her captivity and when her ransom is finally paid and she is released by the Southern 'barbarians' (*WW* 208). Ts'ai Yen's captors are pronounced as barbarians – a label which Kingston uses to denote Ts'ai Yen's captors' alienation from civilization or lack thereof. As the daughter of a famous scholar, Ts'ai Yen views her captors as primitive and with neither literature nor poetry, and a clear void of the power of the pen. Hostage Ts'ai Yen, in contrast, wields power in her lyrical songs and poetry that she writes. As a powerful abductee, Ts'ai Yen thus stands as a stark contrast to her uncivilised abductors whose powers of authority are reduced to their mere physical brute and, therefore, barbaric force.

By signaling the freedom available in the power of the written and vernacular word, Ts'ai Yen's story and song forecloses the air of confinement and struggle which envelops this tale of captivity and ransom. Maxine's female identification with Ts'ai Yen is on the level of a woman warrior or avenger, she envisages herself

to be when she battles with white tigers. When Maxine recounts how Ts'ai Yen would fight ferociously by 'cut[ting] down anyone in her path' (*WW* 185), Maxine's vernacular account of Ts'ai Yen's courage and bravery implies pride in this woman warrior's achievements. Though an imprisoned captive of the Southern Hsiung-nu chieftain, Ts'ai Yen is by no means a passive hostage, seeing as she defies the barbarians by singing about her homeland in China and about her beloved family. The additional fact that Ts'ai Yen was a scholarly poetess and a song-writer further challenges prescriptive notions of gender limitations imposed on the female sex by perpetuating systems of Chinese patriarchy. Unlike No Name Aunt who faced overwhelming social stigma because she bore an illegitimate child, Ts'ai Yen and her children who she bears during her time in captivity return to their homeland greeted with a warm reception.

The psychic emancipation achieved by Ts'ai Yen in both the artistic avenue and in physical combat serves to enlighten Maxine regarding the possibilities of liberation within the rigid limitations of confinement. Ts'ai Yen's physical detention by the barbarians, and by the systems of patriarchy, informs as well as empowers the female into action and constructive agency amidst their delimiting physical condition. Her song of 'Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', passed on to Maxine, serves not only as a strong testament to the successful female transmission of oral stories but, also, as a testimony bearing witness to the female strength and authority achieved from within and beyond restrictive and confining situations. This signaling of female empowerment, in stories ostensibly about struggle and pain, points to the doubled nature of story-telling and points to the transformative and liberating undercurrents attached to tales of female incarceration.

Furthermore, talk-story crucially serves as an important strategy for the creation of shared narratives. It does this by functioning as a communal activity which forges a sense of belonging and identity via the kinship bonds established. As Linda Ching Sledge has noted, talk-story is ‘a conservative, communal folk art and for the common people, performed in the various dialects of diverse ethnic enclaves and never intended for the ears of the non-Chinese.’ (Huntley 18-19) This sense of exclusivity bequeathed to those partaking in the shared experience of talk-story bespeaks a key feature inherent in the Chinese tradition of story-telling: that of code-bearing, whereby tacit cultural messages are written implicitly into texts.

As a practice originating from the agricultural villages in old China, story-telling arose from an imperative need to transmit culture within an illiterate community. Cultural coded narratives, therefore, played a crucial role in communal bonding and affirming identification in the values and history of a Chinese community sharing in this vernacular tradition (Huntley 95; Spinner 10). In *Woman Warrior*, when Moon Orchid articulates that ‘American children had no feelings and no memory’ (*WW* 107), Moon Orchid talks of the way that talk-story is clearly an alien concept to white American children. Because of their removal from their Chinese heritage and because they have Moon Orchid as a mother who fails to engage in talk-story, Moon Orchid’s own children are without empathy for their elders and possess no real and living memories of their cultural heritage, Chinese background, and Chinese values.

Because stories may also encode ‘covert images of resistance’ (Mohanty 35), talking-story involves not just the act of code-writing but code-breaking too. This double function of talk-story is demonstrated within the character of Brave Orchid who encodes her family history and her Chinese culture into the stories of ‘No Name

Aunt' and the Chinese cultural heroine Ts'ai Yen. Yet, Brave Orchid is a code-breaker as well as a code-bearer, for in transgressing the village's rule of not speaking about the story of her aunt who brought shame to their family, she breaks the unwritten code of not transmitting their stories.

Furthermore, in the chapter 'Shaman', by relaying the tale of her successes achieved at *To Keung School of Midwifery*, Brave Orchid invites her daughter to decipher the covert images of resistance she has written into her narrative: that of defiance to stereotypical ideas of the Chinese female as underachieving and meek. Brave Orchid defies the accepted cultural norm, and Maxine is quick to pick up her mother's non-conformity via her talk-stories about her achievements, such as her receiving a 'diploma' (*WW* 74) and being a 'capable' exorcist (*WW* 87). Thus, Brave Orchid challenges the view that there is 'no profit in raising girls' (*WW* 45) and overturns the suggestive implication in the fact "There is a Chinese word for the female *I* – which is 'slave'" (*WW* 48-9).

Similar to Brave Orchid's talk-story, Maxine's talking-story in the acts of story-telling within the narrative and writing of *Woman Warrior* bespeaks a 'collective memory' (Singh et al. 17) which is shared and inherited from her Chinese ancestors. This is evidenced in the way talk-story facilitates the act of 're-membering'¹³ (DeShazer 6) events, actions and values that define membership within groups of kinship. Story-telling becomes a good source of empowerment for Maxine, but is also counterproductive when it binds her to mere repetition instead of drawing her to the transformative powers available. However, Maxine transforms rather than repeats the stories she hears to make her studies more powerful. Both

¹³ DeShazer's use of the term 're-membering' encompasses the way remembering constitutes membership within a female collectivity in which women connect with an inherited maternal legacy.

character and author Maxine articulates the close association between the act of story-telling and the ancestral legacy of knot-making. She explains to readers that she ‘would have been an outlaw knot-maker’ (*WW* 147) on account of her story-telling and novel-writing acts transforming and breaking the silence of the past. Story-telling by a younger Maxine and novel-writing by an older Kingston are acts that evidence the collective memory in the cultural tradition of talk-story passed down to Maxine by her mother Brave Orchid. Maxine’s subsequent appropriation of talking-story by using her imagination and creative faculty add to recollections of her mother’s stories and personalises shared memories of their familial past.

And so, Maxine’s use of the descriptive term ‘outlaw’ (*WW* 147) signifies the way in which, via her speculative and imaginative faculties, she revises and adds to the stories in a fashion similar to that of a knot-maker who weaves the threads of a yarn. Comparable to a knot-maker, the story-teller thus ‘weaves’ tales that only those privy to the communal codes are able to decipher and interpret. Historically, the art of knot-making¹⁴ encapsulates Chinese secrecy within its deft designs that typify the ancient tradition of documentation in Old China (Carus 2-3). Chinese exclusivity and communality are thus referenced within Maxine’s talking-story which forges collective affinity and avows her shared memories with the other women within her family.

Applying this exclusivity to the contemporaneous context of Chinese immigration, the secrecy implicit to talk-story features as a survival tactic amongst Chinese Americans to cope with America’s Exclusion Acts¹⁵. By containing what is

¹⁴ Story-telling as knot-making alludes to the ancient Chinese practice of *chien sheng* or knotted cord which was used as a means for keeping records and communicating information.

¹⁵ A series of Exclusion Acts include: The Exclusion Act of 1870 founded on the construction of Asian peoples as the ‘yellow peril’, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Oriental Exclusion Act of

‘poetically true about our struggles’ (Sistern as qtd in Mohanty 35), talk-story redefines ‘an embattled immigrant culture’ (Sledge as qtd in Huntley 18-19) and functions as a survival mechanism to fend off American ‘Immigration Ghosts’ (*WW* 107) in ‘Alien Office[s]’ (*WW* 107) intent on sending Chinese immigrants back home. Just like how *Brave Orchid* relates the tale of a comrade ‘crouching’ stealthily and motioning her ‘not to talk’ (*WW* 107), *Brave Orchid*’s evasive approach to America’s adverse ‘genocidal immigration policies’ (Wong ‘Autobiography’ 158) signals her taking part in the practice of secrecy as a tool of survival to gain entry into and subsist in a white America.

1.4 The Mother-Daughter Nexus: Connecting With and Rewriting the Past

Through the rewriting of the past undertaken by mothers and daughters, the transformative power within depathologised melancholia is further demonstrated. As a way of dealing with these strands of buried and repressed grief, the rewriting of the past is an effective mode in interceding into the hidden grief of intergenerational melancholic transmission of racial identity. It must be reiterated that my argument regarding transformative melancholia neither reverses melancholia nor converts it into mourning. Rather, depathologised melancholia places the emphasis on intersubjective psychological models which depart from the theory of individually-suffered permanent melancholia as intrasubjective solipsism. The transformative energies within a continuum of melancholia and mourning are tapped in significant intersubjective contacts and social bonding. Mother-daughter relationship, which

1924 that terminated all labour immigration from mainland Asia. Citizenship through naturalisation was denied to all Asians between 1924 and 1943. From 1943 to the 1960s, a quota system for Asian immigrants was in practice in which only professionals with specialised experience were granted citizenship. Mohanty 25.

highlights the theme of ancestral linkage, demonstrates the availability of transformative powers as these social familial bonds are constructed and reinforced within the pervasive metaphor of bones in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. As a family heirloom and a traditional Chinese practice, bones provide 'character' (BSD 275) to the descendants of the Liu clan which consists of the family lineage of Ruth's grandmother Bao Bomu and mother LuLing. Acquainted with bone-setting since she was a child, Ruth's grandmother is proud of her father as the 'Famous Bonesetter from the Mouth of the Mountain' (BSD 158). Bao Bomu, as 'a woman of strong character' (BSD 287), challenges and defies patrilineal transmission of the bone-doctoring art by adopting this practice herself—a practice that she passes down to LuLing and Ruth when each of them go about setting and doctoring their lives in the art of book-writing. As the younger generations of the Young family show, bone-setting or bone-doctoring is akin to the modern-day practice of book-writing. Whilst bones are worked, set and corrected to remedy the ailments of the suffering patient who seeks bone-setting corrections, the book writer discovers and forges a sense of self within her place in familial history through her act of writing and transcribing her story.

Despite being a woman, Bao Bomu inherits the 'family heirloom' (BSD 156) of bone-setting and bone-doctoring which has been passed down from 'father to daughter' (BSD 156). As the title of Tan's novel readily suggests, *Bonesetter's Daughter* points to the way bone-setting 'was their inheritance' (BSD 159) amongst the girls of the Young family. The bones themselves act as an avenue to establishing a 'connection' (BSD 275) to ancestral ways of life through intergenerational 'family' (BSD 277) links. Considering that the novel traces Ruth's quest for knowledge about the lives of both her mother and grandmother 'who shaped her life, [and so] who are

in her bones' (*BSD* 338), the novel demonstrates Ruth's awareness of the lessons to be learnt from her family's intergenerational practice of bone-setting. Ruth declares, 'As the years go on, I see how much family means. It reminds us of what's important. The connection to the past' (*BSD* 85). Resetting bones thus signify the process of connecting to a familial past, a connection that opens up opportunities for the transformative revision of loss.

The physical act of re-positioning and re-arranging bones implies possibilities for rewriting and transforming set precepts which have defined and confined Chinese women in the past. As an outlet for transformation and reconstruction, bone-setting allows *Bao Bomu* and LuLing to defy the limits of confinement to revise the past. In this respect, *Bao Bomu* emerges as a 'locus of truth' (Wong 'Sugar Sisterhood' 196) and acts as a vital source of LuLing's and Ruth's 'Genes, Generation, and Geospiritual (Be)Longings' (Li 111). Functioning further as the restorative 'figure of the homeland' (Lowe 140), *Bao Bomu* is the Chinese foremother who serves as a vital point of origin, though a 'divided origin' (Lowe 140) as Lisa Lowe would argue on account of the generational and geographical distance separating mother and daughter.

Significantly, Ruth's quest for understanding her ancestral origins is positioned within the dichotomies and ambivalences of cultural assimilation in America. Located away from the ancestral village of Immortal Heart and in the contemporary Land of the Gold Mountain, Ruth tries to 'make sense' (*BSD* 326) of her family background by 'figur[ing] out' (*BSD* 327) the significance of her family's Chinese ancestral practice of bone-doctoring within her American physical settings. This is to say that Ruth, through her actions and personal choices, demonstrates the binary interplay and contending conflict between the cultures of 'Chineseness' and

‘Americanness’ even as, and perhaps precisely because, she wishes to learn the truth about her Chinese ancestral past. For ‘all the good things’ (*BSD* 35) in America, Ruth still sees the practicality and benefits of Chinese ‘wisdom’ to ‘warn her away from danger, disease and death’ (*BSD* 65). Faced with difficulties in assimilation, Ruth’s curious desire to understand her Chinese ‘bones’ culminates when she realises ‘what it meant to feel like an outsider’ (*BSD* 56), having experienced as a child ‘how she didn’t fit in’ (*BSD* 56) in ‘race-differentiated’ (*BSD* 56) America.¹⁶

The particularity of bones, as opposed to flesh, signifies a time-honoured practice and lasting endurance of an ancient Chinese ancestral heritage, seeing how it denotes permanence and durability in contrast to mutable flesh. Since, ‘bones’ also entails ‘family’¹⁷, family connections and bonds are reiterated and reinforced. Thus, the metaphor of bones serves to affirm Chinese identity within America, especially in the face of America’s process of racialisation and the concomitant demands for assimilation, and is vital for shaping a sense of familial origins as dramatised in the mother-daughter relationship.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston exhibits how Chinese ancestral links are important conduits to the past, in order to facilitate a sense of identifiable roots and to enable the vital act of rewriting past. The mother-daughter relationship is explored through remnants of the past which Maxine salvages by means of the stories her mother tells her of personal life in China and her difficult entry and start in America. In this way, Maxine successfully maps the stories of her mother’s experience onto

¹⁶In this respect, Ruth also defies the law of immigration set down by Hansen which states that ‘The second generation work assiduously to embrace their American identity [while] the third generation [...] consciously work towards acquiring the meaning of their ancestry, however defined’ (7). See Singh et al., 3-7.

¹⁷In Tan’s *Bonesetter’s Daughter*, references to bone indicate Ruth’s family heritage and family ties. E.g. Ruth describes LuLing and Bao Bomu as women who are ‘in her bones’, rather than them being of one flesh.

her own private experiences of life in modern-day America to garner the significance of her mother's tales in transforming the very confines that have defined her mother's past, and which continue to define her very own presence in a race-differentiated America. Using her speculative and imaginative powers to fill the gaps of her mother's stories, Maxine's creative potential augments rather than defiles her mother's memories of the past, in order to revise the past and release the positive agencies implicit to the rewriting of past. Her creative imaginative powers are put to use and clearly evident through her articulating lines such as 'It could very well have been' (*WW* 16) and 'Maybe my mother's secret place was...' (*WW* 63). The revision of the past is made palpable when Maxine confesses that she sees No Name Aunt's life, as well as her mother's life, 'branching into mine' in order to provide her with 'ancestral help' (*WW* 16) in making some sense of her present life. Even as Maxine finds her heritage a burden and her mother extremely difficult and even cruel at times, Maxine maps her mother's past and No Name Aunt's past onto her present experiences in order to gain knowledge about the women in her family. She moulds, shapes and appropriates such history in order to colour her sense of roots and establish contact with her female progenitors, thereby tapping into the mother-daughter female dyad to gain a sense of place within her history as a Chinese-descended immigrant to America.

Returning briefly to Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of the psychic crypt as an attribute of parental possession, I wish to point out the way Abraham and Torok's crypt points to a phantom lurking within the encrypted (yet also accessible) secrets buried in this psychic tomb. I argue that the phantom, when transposed in the context of Chinese immigrant experience, represents the displacement and dislocation of the child from the ancestral homeland and refers to a

significant psychic condition that is thus not entirely one's own, and therefore not in sync with models of autonomous¹⁸, independent, and self-identical subjectivity. In other words, the ancestral phantom is poignant because it identifies the intergenerational intervention into the psyche as a form of active mediation necessary for psychic health. This process has usually not been presented as positive by other critics. However, I argue that intergenerational intervention by family members produce psychic effects within the child as secrets are transmitted and simultaneously decoded by progenies. In *Woman Warrior*, Maxine mother's ability to spirit away the ghosts which haunt her at *To Keung School of MidWifery* unfolds in the chapter called 'Shaman', a term which alludes to the intermediary acts between the world of the living and the dead. In her successful exorcism of the ghosts, Maxine's mother is positioned as both an interpellated subject within the world of ancestral phantoms, and a subject who interposes herself between the supernatural and living worlds. Maxine's mother exorcises the ghosts from her own crypt even as her secrets (the ghosts of her past) are handed down and passed on to Maxine. Maxine unpicks her mother's story about ghosts that plague her during her childhood. Maxine is both dislocated from her mother's Chinese ghost culture and the China which her mother tells her. Yet, the psychic effects these stories have on Maxine are irrefutable as Maxine links her mother's Chinese ghosts to the ghosts she observes in America. Maxine notices bus-boy ghosts, garbage-man ghosts, and taxi-driver ghosts within her surroundings in America. The attention placed on ghosts is telling, for the symbol of the ghost is an important metaphor for America's process of racialisation which turns raced subjects into invisible ghosts. The prevalence of ghosts is, on the other hand, also suggestive of the remains of the secrets of parents,

¹⁸ For further discussion on non-autonomous Asian American identity, see Chang 'Melancholic Remains', 110-133.

in this case the mother, which are both encrypted and encoded as they are passed down to daughters.

To represent racial others as ‘ghosts’ indicates the reified abstraction of race, seeing how America’s ideology of racism manifests itself in the mapping of the racial body onto the marginal polities of society; ghosts thus metaphorise the invisibility that results from America’s refusal of Chinese immigrants’ subject status and represents the ‘exclusion-yet-retention’ (Cheng 10) of internal foreign aliens. Similarly, in *Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the ghost of *Bao Bomu* features as the ethereal presence haunting both Ruth and her mother LuLing. LuLing is quick to assume her daughter is capable of mediating for her with this ghost, believing how Ruth has the ability to communicate with the dead. LuLing’s conviction that Ruth is a conduit to opening up the lines of mother-daughter communication misapprehends the direct connection between parent and child, as LuLing bypasses her own links with her Chinese-born mother in resorting to her daughter’s help. Standing in for the unconscious phantomic haunting of the child by the parent and, hence, for the psychic crypt of secrets transmitted directly and indirectly along the generational gaps, the ghostly figure of *Bao Bomu* signifies the way in which Ruth becomes the mediator and transmitter of both her grandmother’s history and her mother’s memory of China.

The process of mother-daughter transmission of history and memory is reflected in the two sections which comprise *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*. Firstly, we have the mother’s narrative in which the maternal voice speaks out with authorial facility in recounting her nostalgic reminiscences of her ancestral bone-setting heritage in China as well as her fraught experiences in America. The second section introduces daughter Ruth Young, who is contending with both her Chinese self, of

which her mother's continued presence in her life is a constant reminder, and the reality of her American livelihood, marked by her white American boyfriend, her preference for American food, her American job as a book-doctor or editor, and her displacement from her ancestral homeland. Ruth's attempt to learn her ancestor's medicinal art of bone-setting exemplifies her efforts to understand the personal history of her foremothers. And so, in her endeavours to translate her mother's journals, a diary of sorts which LuLing entrusts to Ruth, Ruth begins to unpick the strands of her racial and cultural heritage as she re-identifies and re-engages with her mother's Chinese language, no longer reducing it to 'chingchong ugly' (*WW* 154) or 'gobbledy-gook-gook' (*BSD* 62). Her turn to external help - using a Chinese-English dictionary, her boyfriend's linguistic expertise as a language instructor, and consultations with one of her mother's Chinese friends, suggests Ruth's determination to understand the tales belonging to her mother. In the effort to put right the fact, as LuLing blurts out in a moment of exasperation, 'Nobody listens my heart' (*BSD* 92), Ruth resorts to her professional skill at book-doctoring and, simultaneously practices a kind of pseudo-medicinal art comparable to her ancestor's bone-setting practice of restoring health. In other words, Ruth makes productive the transmitted strands of her historical cultural past by tapping into her mother's stories about China, struggles in coming over to America, and difficulties faced in assimilating into American life. In restoring psychic health to herself and her mother via her active agency in tapping the lines of self-articulation and expression, Ruth listens to her grandmother's phantasmic message 'to take what's broken, to feel the pain and know that it will heal' (*BSD* 338). Though Ruth is terrified of the prospect of facing who she is, where she has come from, and who her foremothers are, she writes her own story with a clear sense of certitude by using the ancestral help

recovered through her book-doctoring. Because it is her mother and grandmother's suffering and exclusion that she comes to understand, Ruth's transformation suggests that the melancholic losses resulting from immigration, assimilation and racialisation may be channeled into transformative gains realised within the inter-generational support offered by matrilineal bonds. Thus, the ability to make suffering productive is exemplified in the active communicative strands between three generations of women, all of whom discover the meanings of their personal and communal identity in their shared stories of history.

1.5 Multiple Subjectivities: Hybridised Identity and the Dialogic

Dilemma of Chinese Americans

In arguing for productive melancholia, hybridisation acts as a vital process in addressing the multiple subjectivities of Chinese American identity. A process that marks the history of survival in relationships of unequal domination, hybridisation represents the empowered means of coming to terms with America's uneven power relations (Lowe 67). This is best exemplified in *The Woman Warrior* in the scene in which Maxine confronts 'the [Chinese] girl who does not speak' (*WW* 156). While it reveals Maxine's acting out the simultaneous pressures of conforming to American assertive ways of speaking up and the Chinese axiom that 'a ready tongue is an evil' (*WW* 148), this scene also elicits a productive moment of racial melancholia in that the examined bodies of Chinese American girls throws up the intricate connection between race, nationality and gender in articulating hybridised Chinese, American, and female identity which unfolds within the space of the 'girls-only' lavatory. This scene in which a Chinese American girl bullies another, by demanding that the other girl responds to the question 'What is your name?' (*WW* 159), conveys the importance of avowing identity through self-assertion even as it demonstrates

Maxine's frustrated impatience. The importance of hybridity is further instantiated in the fact that both girls attend an American and Chinese school, suggesting thus the complementary side-by-side existence of the girls' Chinese and American selves.

The depathologising of melancholy, that is, the shifting away from the view of melancholia as irredeemably pathological and solely associated with the negative experience of loss and injury--is thus subverted and challenged in the Asian American topos of compound or hybridised identities. In particular, the complexities lying within the notion of a hybridised identity are manifested in the multiple kinds of subjectivity which are palpable within the interplay of femaleness, nationhood and ethnic background.¹⁹ The demands of these three attributes, operating in a dialogic interplay which stresses the existence of *Chinese-ness*, *American-ness*, and *female-ness* alongside one another, are negotiated to augment Maxine's sense of self and to point to the multiple subjectivities which inform an understanding of her identity. It follows that while Maxine identifies with her Chinese ethnicity by employing the first-person plural 'we' in using the collective phrasal noun 'we Chinese girls' (*WW* 25), she is also quick to embrace an 'American-feminine' self (*WW* 155). Maxine demonstrates a love-hate relationship with these modes of identification as she ratifies and refutes, extols and vilifies, the different components of her Chinese, American and female traits, which provide her with a sense of who she is.

¹⁹ In addressing the multiple subjectivities of Chinese Americans, various Asian American theorists point out the distinctions between 'hybridisation' and 'hyphenation' of identity. David Palumbo-Liu, Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan warn against the use of the hyphen. Palumbo Liu argues that creative schiziness of 'Chinese Americans' (without the use of the hyphen) is a sign of health compared to the pathological schizoid personality of 'Chinese(-)Americans'. Liu *Asian/American* 302-4, 295-336; Chin and Chan 65-79.

Conclusion

Central to my project is the movement away from victim consciousness and psychic internalisation to a socially-defined space of intergenerational enfranchisement, where the boundaries between mourning and melancholia, voices and silences, memory and history are blurred. These reach a point of fluidity to enable transformative agencies to be reworked into the Asian American agenda of decolonising the mind and body. Such a project of decolonisation is heavily aligned with the purposes of depathologising melancholia to encapsulate the daily modes of survival and the possibility for a healthy psychic state.

As a means of survival, depathologised melancholia's transformative potential and positive agency are empowering channels in the reclamation of the denied legitimacy of minority subject's identities and histories within the national fabric of America. The sense of lost histories and histories of loss mediated across generations from mother to daughter, yet suspended too in the processes of displacement and immigration, delineate the ways in which these origins of loss exist as transmitted memory. It is this transmission of memory which enables Asian American women to free themselves from restrictive interpretative enclosures determined by cultural, social and white patriarchy.

Hence, the transformative forces in depathologised melancholia provide active forms of agencies that facilitate the employing of alternative strategies in order to manage loss within social, political and national realities. Racist ideology that is culturally indoctrinated and yet culturally subverted is legislated within America's institutions and constitutional practices. By creating an open channel to transcend categorical borders of fixity, transformative melancholia collapses

previously impervious boundaries to signal the healthy intermingling of multiple realms which provide a sense of legitimate existence in Asian American hybridised identity. Through the intergenerational voices of memory between mother and daughter, the further intersubjective contact established through this means provides the social support for the transformation of racial melancholia from pathologised losses to a healthy sense of gains. More than just a simple reframing of perspective, transformative racial melancholia signals not just a positive mental approach and attitude to losses, but it also describes an actual mechanism deployed within social circles to empower both the individual and community who are defined by white America as racialised other.

CHAPTER 2

History, Loss, and Homecoming in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1981) and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1982).

The pain inherent within the process of articulation, and by extension its associated process of reclamation to recover what Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* calls the loss of 'local cultural originality' (18), can be closely linked to what Nancy Peterson has labeled 'history as wound' (1). In other words, memory, which is employed in the cultural act of story-telling, constructs self-identity as well as history through narrative masking and revelation of physical and psychic wounds suffered by melancholic bodies of racialisation. Given that painful memories are dealt with and physical injuries are addressed, the narrative construction of history through the telling and sharing of stories enacts a process of identity reclamation. In this process of identity construction, the tangible and psychic pain inherent in an obfuscated history as well as a history of loss signal the way history inflicts and redresses wounds. Historical wounds are dressed and acknowledged in the communal act of shared story-telling which works the literary construction of self-identity in articulate voices –in both words and silences. By applying Nancy Peterson's concept of a 'double burden' (1) to Asian American literary works – a term which she coins to encompass how writers are handed the dual task of writing both literature and history – we can see how the role played by Asian American

writers like Hak Kyung Cha and Kogawa involves witnessing painful moments of history as well as documenting the silences, gaps and absences in history within their narratives. From the vantage point of novels allowing for ‘imaginative speculation’ (Peterson 9), these writers are able to deconstruct as well as (re)construct the past in the present, and thus use their narrative flexibility to create a potential community where their readers play a crucial part in nurturing a collective memory that was previously lost/erased in America’s larger national history.

In *Loss*, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian point out that melancholia’s inability to ‘get over’ the lost object and ‘continuous engagement with loss and its remains’ provides the creative ability to ‘generate sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past and the reimagining of the future’ (4). This facilitating role of melancholia is indicative of the positive transformative energies available within various losses sustained, whether these losses are a result of dominant oppressive forces or a delayed transmission of stories between generations. By examining the melancholic losses suffered in a number of traumatic events such as the Korean War and the Japanese internment experience, *Dictee* and *Obasan* rewrite the historic past by revisiting memory. These texts’ introspective interrogation on what exactly is lost explores how the ‘lost object’ comprises both a lost history and a history of loss. The project of recuperation in the telling of stories picks up these remains of loss and works in producing creative sites for the redemption of history, and the projection and representation of history via psychical containers of memory. By putting forward counter-hegemonic discourses that foreground specific periods of historical injustice, Cha and Kogawa’s texts are preoccupied with rewriting the past to transform and transcend traditional notions of authoritative history, thereby their novels point to the dual effects of the past on the present and future.

Both Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982) and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) are engaged in a transformational dialogue through their transactional interchanges on the themes of history, trauma, and witnessing as these texts deal with the trope of female subjectivity and the concept of home. I have paired an Asian American text together with an Asian Canadian text in order to engender readings that will highlight and complement their similarities as well as differences in treating these issues, which contribute significantly to the process of depathologising racial identity within the collective environment of female communality. At the time in which both texts were published, i.e. in the period of the 1980s, ethnic female autobiographies within minority literature were increasing in prominence (Schneider). In *Dictee*, the women from Cha's family background as well as successful female figures in history are placed centre stage, in order to articulate their real-life experiences of pain and the transcendence of suffering. In *Obasan*, the women who feature formidably in the life of the protagonist, like the figures of Aunt Emily, Aya Obasan and Mother, speak of the trauma and rich history of the past which inform Naomi's indelible memory of them. Furthermore, Kogawa's text is interested in presenting an alternative or counter-hegemonic history to work against, as well as alongside, official versions of the past. Employing an array of writing styles and narrative techniques, from *Dictee's* experimental, non-linear, and fragmented style to *Obasan's* conventional novelistic form with its numbered chapters and first-person narrator, these novels also incorporate auto/biographical impulses within their empowering modes of narrative.¹

¹ Lisa Lowe in 'Decolonization, Displacement and Disidentification' avers that the stylistics of fragmentation and non-linearity signify more than just the refraining from the style of transparent transmission, as it connotes a kind of writing she calls 'decolonizing'. In this regard, *Dictee* may be interpreted as operating on a metacritical level. It should also be noted that the narrative technique of using flashbacks which *Obasan* employs further testifies to 'decolonizing writing' which serves as an

The term ‘auto/biographical’ which I use to describe the narrative texts of *Dictee* and *Obasan* employs the solidus ‘/’ to suggest the fluidity and permeability between the autobiographical and biographical literary modes. Critics have been quick to identify the way *Dictee* and *Obasan* are often read as autobiographies (Grice 86; Lowe 129). However, given the self-referential and second-hand narrative accounts of additional women supplementing the autobiographical voice of the author-cum-narrator, these texts destabilise the genre of Asian American autobiographies in their inclusion of further autobiographical *and* biographical voices of women within the narrator’s realm of influence. Hence, both first-hand and second-hand accounts of the life-stories of mothers, aunties, and other female historical figures add to Cha’s autobiographical voice in *Dictee* and to the narrative voice of protagonist Naomi who acts as Kogawa’s fictive biographer in her novel *Obasan*.

Using David Goellnicht’s terminology ‘theoretico-narratives’ (351) helps us understand the way *Dictee* and *Obasan* destabilise genre expectations and genre. Although Goellnicht distinguishes between autobiographical fiction and theoretical fictions or fictionalised theory, I see the two literary forms as operating in conjunction with each other in *Dictee* and *Obasan*. Theoretico-narrative refers to the way in which the historical and remembered past is recounted in narratives, and yet a revision in the strategies of representing past is also subscribed. In other words, Cha and Kogawa’s texts operate as more than autobiographical narratives as they engage in and challenge the various historical and memory discourses that exist outside the confines of the narrative text. The incorporation of alternative strategies within these texts constitutes a slippage of genre boundaries that signals the way fiction operates

anti-normative, anti-representational strategy characterising counter-narratives’ working displacing ‘official’ accounts of narratives as well as histories.

as theoretical discourse. *Dictee's* and *Obasan's* eclectic narrative style and multivocal perspectives serve to complement the narrator's act of self-representation of both historical past and personalised memory. Their narrative texts challenge generic categories, hence the use of the solidus (/) to indicate such a slippage. Female subjectivity is forged through the many layers of female voices, thereby challenging phallogentric laws of genre as well as androcentric discourses of identity. By their auto/biographical mode, *Dictee* and *Obasan* create new identities by using textual spaces to facilitate dialogic interaction amongst women brought together by common suffering and loss. Anderson points out the connection between writing and identity when she states the need to 'create a space for the yet to be written feminine self' (13). In *Dictee* and *Obasan*, while narrators speak to and about the problem of identity, narratorial voice is supplemented by the voices of other women. I argue that this biographical aspect of auto/biography constitutes a form of theoretico-fiction which is at work when narrative texts present both personal and historical discourses within remembered accounts of the past.

Dictee and *Obasan* effect a testimonial narrative of history by exploring the powers of expression in both the tropes of silence and speech. By translating the silence of historical experience into literary forms, Cha and Kogawa bear witness to the traumas of Korean Americans and Japanese Americans as a result of the racial loss suffered in moments of historical crises such as the Korean War, Japanese relocation, and the internment experience in North America. Historicising these experiences entails the tracing of these moments not only as past events but also as present effects or what I shall refer to as the 'traumatic presence of the past'. Literary theorists have pointed to how the past cannot be made inseparable from the present,

as past instances feed into the present via sharing a mobile, fluid relationship.² Ideas of submission, obedient acquiescence, and reticent fortitude attached to Korean American and Japanese Canadian female identity are reworked as historical events are told using counter-hegemonic voices of women united in their experience of loss. Hence, *Dictee* and *Obasan* records past pain as historical fact, and voicing serves as the critical tool in literature to bear witness to the racial loss encountered in lived experiential history.

The animated eloquence with which Cha and Kogawa articulate and embody the diffused voices point to the multiple and collective body of testimonial truths tapped within the writing and speaking of history. In their ‘anti-documentary document’ (Cheng 145), Cha and Kogawa present personal history as an additional force to contend with officially-sanctioned history. This presentation of personal history is done through an eclectic and esoteric writing style. In other words, experientially based histories are mediated and represented through an eclectic mix of written forms, pictorial images, and diversified voices, which all posit the narratives as a counter-tactic to the hidden loss and buried occlusion of historical discourses on Asian American subjectivity and identity. By presenting and proffering ‘another way of seeing’ (Mulvey 28), history is written and narrated in such a way as to pose a different perspective that marks the expanding realms of historical culture and historical representation. In this regard, these narratives exemplify what Nancy Harstock terms a ‘standpoint epistemology’³ (283) in which

² Walter Benjamin, amongst others, elucidates on this reciprocal relationship shared between past and present. See Benjamin. Benjamin famously comments on the blurring of past and present when writing that ‘the angel of history’ appears in the present ‘moment of danger’. <<http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html>>

³ Harstock’s coinage of a feminist or women’s ‘standpoint epistemology’ takes women’s experiences, instead of men’s, to be the point of departure. In other words, ‘women’s experience’ is the starting point from which to construct knowledge. By uniting several feminist epistemologies, standpoint feminism criticises the dominant conventional epistemologies of hegemonic rules and systems of

countervalorisation provided by women's experiences brings forth unsanctioned historical narratives, which are treated as primary accounts of the world seen from the margins.

Cha's experimental narrative and Kogawa's novel place the concerns of a loss of history, an erasure of identity, and the immediate presence of trauma at the centre of their narrative works. In their engagement with 'self life-writing', these auto/biographical texts point towards the shared processes of self-formation, self-representation and self-presentation within America's socio-historical literary space.⁴ Put simply, *Dictee* and *Obasan* both forge a cultural map which plots the heterogeneous voices of non-subjects of history that have been officially subjugated and repressed by a white patriarchal dominant culture. In placing the periphery at the centre, these texts accentuate and demonstrate how contradictions within the recording, mediation, and production of history provide grounds for antagonism to the unjust demands made upon deracinated racialised groups to remain in complicit silence and quiet acquiescence to heteronormative mainstream history. In this light, I argue that Cha and Kogawa's texts bring awareness to the way literature functions as counter-histories, counter-narratives, and counter-discourses that open further possibilities for subverting patriarchal, androcentric, and heteronormative limits imposed on racialised subjects within Asian American literary texts.

powers. Contemporary standpoint feminism acknowledges the multiple differences dividing women that make it impossible to claim a single or universal 'women's experience'. See Hartsock; and Clough.

⁴ For more on autobiographical novels functioning in restorative ways, see Minh-ha; and Grice. Grice writes, "The autobiographical form functions as a kind of 'talking cure', as autobiographical discourse offers a way of bearing testimony as well as extending its authority as a discourse of 'truth' to these women's stories." (p. 159) Here, given that Grice's use of 'talking cure' refers to Freudian collapsing of melancholia into mourning, I would like to point out that my argument contrarily emphasises the productive management of loss in the concept of transformative melancholia which depathologises melancholia but stops short of reversing or converting it into mourning. Whilst mourning does away with loss in its firm avowal of loss, transformative melancholia *uses* loss for ego formation in individuals and communities.

In this chapter, I examine the ways *Dictee* and *Obasan* continue the progression of the mother-daughter dyadic relationship which characterise many Asian American literary narratives (Grice 35-75). As interventions and additions in the ongoing debate on identity politics and feminist culture, Asian American novels position themselves within theoretical and analytical discussions in which psychoanalytical thinking and contemporary feminist thought open new ways of reading identity and subjectivity in Asian American works.⁵ By foregrounding the concerns of a female gendered community, Asian American women's literature uses this very realm of intersubjective communication and social interconnectivity as an avenue to the psychic transformation of identity.

In view of a preoccupation with history and the documentation of racial loss – a loss that is both catalyst and construct of melancholia, *Dictee* and *Obasan*'s female auto/biographical practice and their other symbolic acts of journeying home serve as effective modes of dealing with bodily and psychic losses. Consequently, the intimate connection I suggest between traumatic loss and the wound points to how loss is, firstly, a source of pain, and secondly, an injury inflicted on the racial body. The physical and psychic wounds sustained by the racial melancholic subject result in the need to manage loss and the sense of loss. If we were to use Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as 'unclaimed experiences' (Caruth 10) to facilitate our understanding of melancholic losses in racial grief, the historicising of loss as pain and injury within *Dictee* and *Obasan* speaks of the delayed transmission of loss where loss is registered as wound *only* after the actual event takes place. The belated effects of loss means that memory plays an important role in addressing the wounds

⁵ Asian women have been accused of aligning themselves with 'white feminism' and this has been critiqued by Chinese culturalist and scholar Frank Chin, whose attack on Kingston's unauthentic representation of Chinese peoples has been largely foregrounded in Asian American literary studies.

of history via simultaneous recollection of the traumatic event and transformation of the experience attached to the event. I hereby build on my theory of melancholia, memory and loss presented in the first chapter by using the framework offered by trauma studies to propose the transformative possibilities which are available in the aftermath of loss. The wounds inflicted by racism are registered as losses through the traumatic presence of the past. Hence, in addition to the pain and injury of racism which constitute loss itself, the psychosomatic wounds of loss are recognised and made productive in the conflict of the present. This traumatic presence of the past is what permeates into the life of protagonist Naomi when describing her current feelings of loss:

There is one word for it. Hardship. The hardship is so pervasive, so inescapable, so thorough it's a noose around my chest and I cannot move anymore. (*O* 232)

This self-revelation occurs in the post-internment period of the novel's present narrative time –that is, *after* the racial segregation, financial hardship, and class demotion that resulted from relocation during the Second World War. Here, Naomi admits to the internalisation of wounds which precipitates a palpable rather than imaginary physical paralysis. This paralysis is described in vivid terms –as an omnipresent 'noose' that tightens around her chest and suffocates and stifles her. It is as if Naomi experiences these losses viscerally, even as it is her parents who suffer the actual losses accompanying physical internment as both living experience and past event. Naomi's sense of paralysis is caused by the material losses instigated by the historical stripping of her family's assets – their class position, monetary wealth, estate property – and their subsequent deracination due to shared present experience of the past historical event of Japanese internment sanctioned by Canadian authorities.

In this chapter, I shall first deal with the potent act of voicing that is implied in the process and act of making and documenting history. Both the concept of silence, exemplified in the image of the ‘stone’, and speech serve as important tools in witnessing historical events that speak of Asian American loss. This chapter will thus continue the exploration on the antinomies of speech and silence addressed in the first chapter by examining the potent use of the metaphor of stone in both *Dictee* and *Obasan*. By arguing that the stone encapsulates both silence and speech, I discuss the consequences and implications of the act of voicing in rewriting history and revisioning alternative histories. Secondly, I analyse how the construction of alternative histories, or counter-histories, deconstructs History’s authority and dismantles white authority’s position as a prime voice of historical documentation. By exploring history in terms of loss, I hope to encompass the acts of further injustice rendered on the racial melancholic body. By drawing attention to the various losses (physical and psychical, extraneous and intravenous, inclusive and exclusive), I hope to provide a reading of loss as a paradoxical source of personal and social gain attained through collective interdependency and female communion.⁶ Lastly, I shall look at how the female auto/biographical form and acts of homecoming operate as salient means to reclaim and authenticate history and a sense of identity.⁷

⁶ Critical interpretations of loss in *Dictee* include Lisa Lowe’s ‘Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictee*’, in which Lowe argues that losses in language and subjectivity are reflected in the novella’s broken and painfully disrupted text. Yet, Lowe also avers *Dictee*’s counter-cultural possibilities. See Lowe 128-153. Another critical reading of *Dictee* takes ‘mother loss’ to be the theme of the novel. See Grice 37. My argument positions these losses as leverage for positive transformation in the way loss is neither cured nor avowed. Instead, losses are made productive through intersubjective connections which build up and not debilitate the melancholic subject.

⁷Linda Anderson’s work on female autobiographical texts makes a strong correlation between women’s autobiography and the problems of identity. See Anderson. Also, Helena Grice’s essay ‘Homes and Homecoming’ is a useful exploration on the various meanings in the metaphor and symbol of the ‘home’, as this trope links up to Asian American experience. See Grice 199-230.

2.1) Witnessing Voices of History through Speech and Stone

The process of documenting and narrating history by means of voicing is deeply intertwined with the act of witnessing, i.e. the act of bearing testimony to truth experiences, both present and past. To attest to a historical event in both its present and past manifestations encompasses the act of voicing in its various forms: oral and written, tacit and apparent, muted and audible. The documentation of history is aided by the workings of memory so as to map out not just factual events but also the lived experiences registered in the past and present. By interrogating both speech and silence, *Dictee* and *Obasan* explore how history is rewritten in literary texts. This narration of history works to formulate a sense of identity within the literary construction of self through the telling of both personal and communal past. Through *Dictee's* analysis of human anatomy and its dissection of the oral-respiratory system, Cha exhibits a heightened cognisance of how oral sounds are produced. Likewise, *Obasan* explores the close dichotomous intertwining of speech and silence by choosing to speak of the oral mode of silence in the potent image of the stone. *Dictee's* account of the struggles and triumphant victories of female progenitors such as Joan of Arc and the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon gives voice to the melancholic plight they face. Similarly, *Obasan* explores female intergenerational acts of voicing as the novel's protagonist, Naomi Nakane, attends to the melancholic call of 'loved ones' (O 295) –her Mother and her two aunties– in bringing her family's historical past and her immediate present together.

By opening with a scene that depicts a seemingly faithful translation of a French-English dictation class, *Dictee* illustrates the significance given to both speaking and writing in the text. Whilst alluding to the historical linguistic colonisation of Korea by French authorities, this grammar lesson points to how the

writing process inevitably ‘mimicks the speaking’ (D 3). Cha’s mimicry or parody of the French authorial speaking voice, in what appears to be an *ad verbatim* dictation class, marks the transposition from speech to written text, as the text which is dictated (i.e. *dictee*, the French word for dictated text) appears in both French and English in Cha’s *Dictee*. The vocalisation of the mind’s ideas entails the vernacular and written codes, where that which ends up being written is ultimately derivative of the mind’s speech. Cha’s further transliteration of the linguistic commands within the dictated text marks her formal adherence to what has been spoken. Abiding faithfully and absolutely to the rules of dictation, yet also stretching the pedagogical model of its formation⁸, the dictated material includes punctuation marks which are spelt out in full within the written piece. This is unusual for a piece of dictated material and such transgression, if not subversion, of the normative rules of dictation point to the autonomy rather than subjugation of the Korean subject. Cha’s voice mimicks the French coloniser in saying:

‘Aller a la ligne C’etait le premier jour point Elle venait de loin point ce soir au diner virgule les familles demanderaient virgule ouvre les guillemets Ca c’est bien passé le premier jour point d’interrogation ferme les guillemets’ (D 1)

And translated into English, these very lines read:

‘Open paragraph It was the first day period She had come from afar period tonight at dinner comma the families would ask comma open quotation marks How was the first day interrogation mark close quotation marks’. (D 1)

⁸See Lisa Lowe’s discussion of how the identical reproduction of this dictated material in *Dictee* is accompanied by a ‘failed’ subjection in that *Dictee* “‘seizes upon the punctuation’ to render explicit the disciplinary artifice of the dictation.” In Lowe, ‘Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictee*’ in *Immigrant Acts*, 128-153, 133.

Both French and English texts appear in *Dictee* one after the other in sequence—French followed by English. This act of mimesis underscores the authority and power of the French colonial missionary-cum-educator seeing as the French language precedes the English version of the dictated material. Signifying the linguistic colonisation of Korea by French Catholic occupiers, the authority granted to the French speaker here signals the dictaphonic structure of language as occupation and command. The exploration of this dictation lesson as linguistic interpellation (Cheng 2001, 162) points further to the way language is a coercive force, as Korean subjects remain on the receiving end of the communicative line of transmission. Given that these Koreans are listening to French and transliterating French speech into English words, their loss of their Korean mother tongue suggests a double loss they face in using the language of the colonial occupation. With mimesis functioning as a precondition for the process of identification (Cheng 2001, 163), the mimicking of speech in the written word demonstrates the Korean subject's identification with the French coloniser through a form of linguistic coercion. As the colonised subject who is racially distinct yet not totally different from her white foreign occupiers, the Korean subject forges her subjectivity in the mimetic process of voicing even while the French dictator asserts his own authoritative agency. This is evident in how the dictation lesson also features as the site and means for resistance from French colonial masculine authority since the Korean subject exploits contingent spaces opened up by the dictation lesson. In other words, both the French transliteration and English translation of that spoken by the voice of an authoritarian hegemony explore the submission and subversion performed by the Korean subject in response to events of historical colonialism.

Just as the dictation class exposes the intricate processes of voicing, affective history is tapped into within the stories of exemplary women impacting Cha's life. The stories about Cha's mother and the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon are mediated through a heightened cognisance of speech sounds in voicing. With the revelation of the trials and tribulations of these women who, similar to Aya Obasan in *Obasan*, are 'possessor[s] of life's infinite personal details' (*O* 19), Cha explores the mechanisms of self-expression through her examination of the human oral-respiratory system. The chapter entitled 'Urania/Astronomy' delves into the human anatomy by providing insights into the human organs which are responsible for linguistic speech. In describing how the 'tongue' within the 'mouth' works 'as one' (*D* 67) to produce 'speech' (*D* 75), Cha locates these physical parts by including a cross-sectional diagram of the human oral tract. Similarly, the vocal cords and larynx are seen to be responsible for the production of 'Noise' (*D* 75) and 'Cries' (*D* 73), and ultimately for the generation of 'words' and 'lines' that make up the 'sentences' and 'paragraphs' (*D* 69) within *Dictée*. In their compositional fragments, the human organs which provide these grammatical blocks of speech echo the bodily parts of the flesh, bone and blood of Yu Guan Soon in the section 'Clio/History' (*D* 32). With the heroic tales of how this revolutionary fighter survives oppression by Japanese colonial forces, her triumph over patent attempts at the 'SUPPRESSION' (*D* 31) of her voice speak of how she successfully reclaims a discursive and historical space in which the process of articulation restores the subjectivity inhering in identity. Yu Guan Soon's voice resounds clearly in her spoken words of resistance. Guan Soon is hailed by Cha as 'heroine in history' for her 'devotion to generosity and self-sacrifice', and her 'actions [which] are marked exceptional' (*D* 30).

Challenging the hegemonic tyranny of the Japanese occupiers, Guan Soon

assertively articulates:

‘One is forced to ask who is in charge of these men who are nothing more than brigands. Their mode of warfare seems purposely designed to stir every honest man into a frenzy. Is this their object? If not, why do they practice so wicked so mad a policy?’ (*D* 31)

Reminiscent of Guan Soon and the sentiments she expresses, Cha’s mother is likewise challenged and questioned by American immigration authorities upon entry into America and by Japanese border personnel once returning to Korea. In this scene of homecoming, the Japanese officials at the Korean immigration border interrogate her: ‘You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. [...] They comment upon your inability or ability to speak. [...] You say who you are but you begin to doubt. They search you.’ (*D* 56). Their suspicion underscores the tacit discrimination which renders Cha’s mother an object of exclusion – a marginal/ ethnic/ postcolonial/ female subject - in her suspended homeland due to her quiet reticence and seeming lack of proficiency in both her native tongue and the Japanese occupier’s language of domination. Consequently, her mother’s response and engagement in the act of voicing [‘You open your mouth’ (*D* 58)] challenges dominant authority and enacts a conscious awareness for the need for historical recovery in inclusive acts of voicing: ‘To claim to reclaim, the space’. (*D* 57). Yet, the act of voicing is fraught with paradoxes inherent to the production of oral speech accompanying the linguistic colonisation of Korea, where expectations to assimilate into all state apparatuses as evidenced in the heterogeneous forms of domination in the Japanese, French, English, and Korean languages are placed upon Korean subjects. Cha describes the process of coming-into-voice as:

[...] Stop. Start. Starts.
Contractions. Noise. Semblance of Noise.
Broken speech. One to one. At a time.
Cracked tongue. Broken tongue. (*D* 75)

The fact that the organ used for the articulation of speech is ‘broken’ and ‘cracked’, due to the forces of suppression which silence it, precipitates in a resultant cacophony of stumbling, stopping, and stuttering sounds which are elicited from the mouth as multi-lingual and broken words are uttered in fragmentary and incomplete sentences. In this, the texture of words plays a part with the spoken words eliciting a ‘noise’ which is caused by painful contractions akin to the process of being in labour, since both new life and speech are given birth to here. The difficulty in the articulation of speech - the labour in speech - is also attributable to the aggressive control and suppression of Korean native tongues (the language and their physical tongues⁹) by French and Japanese colonial authorities. Hence, as witnesses to the politics of voicing and the corollary physical mechanisms in speech acts, both Yu Guan Soon and Cha’s mother testify to the affective re-writing of subjectivity within the agency of voice.

With the bid to reassert subjectivity, the dual modes of speech and stone (i.e. silence) are employed as complimentary bifurcated approaches to articulate the roles of inclusivity that are inscribed within counter-history. By opening the novel against nature’s backdrop of the coulee (the French word to describe a dry streambed) which is often frequented by her Uncle and herself, the narrator of *Obasan* draws an important comparison between silence and the image of the stone. In this natural physical setting, the narrator confesses how ‘I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I

⁹ See also Lisa Lowe’s discussion of the ‘broken tongue’ as a violation of the physical organ of the tongue, which stands as a descriptive index of the material violences of linguistic colonialism. Lowe 139.

hate the sealed vault with its cold icon' (*O* Preface). The analogy between silence and the stone is thus suggested and demonstrated in the descriptions of a closed and locked vault which the stone encapsulates.

Obasan also includes an epigraph from the bible's book of Revelations (2:17-22) that is highly significant. This biblical verse highlights the image of the stone and establishes links between the metaphor of the stone and identity formation. Contrary to the stone being an image of silence, we now have the telling image of the 'white stone' with a 'new name written' on it. This image of the stone with a written name sets the tone and provides an overarching framework for the novel's discourse on silence and identity. The full quotation from *Obasan* reads:

*To him that overcometh
will I give to eat
of the hidden manna
and will give him
a white stone
and in the stone
a new name written*

The Bible (O epigraph)

This particular biblical verse as an epigraph precedes Naomi's story of her family's difficult and painful internment experience. Whilst the reference to the bible readily points to Joy Kogawa's own Christian upbringing, it buttresses the prominent image of the stone within a biblical context in its allusion to how God's chosen ones, the Israelite slaves, were fed 'manna' once saved from their Egyptian masters by Moses. The theme of deliverance is written into the image of the stone, in which silence captured in the stone becomes an effective mode of resistance to man-made forms of hegemony. Here, the new name written in the pure, 'white stone' which is

offered by God/Christ/Father – a three-in-one figure - to those suffering in life marks the possibility for the spiritual and psychic processes of renewal in the construction of personal and social identity. Significantly, a description of stone and stillness also appears at the end of *Dictee* where stones attached to the ends of bell-ropes cause ‘immobile silence’ (*D* 179). The close association between stone and silence is what draws the two texts of *Obasan* and *Dictee* together in its parallel use of the image of stone and powerful stillness as resistant.

Even as the stone represents resistance through its stillness, the narrator in *Obasan* is seen to hate rather than embrace the stone. Whilst the metaphor of the stone is associated with words in *Obasan*¹⁰, it is associated more with silence in *Dictee*. In other words, stones are what seem to stop words in *Dictee* while stones are what release words in *Obasan*. In both instances though, stone represents resistance to the hegemonic cacophony of white discourse in both its reticent quietness and loud articulation. As with the way words carry a sense of burden (‘the burden of words’, *O* 283), Naomi hates the stone for the burden of resistance it carries. The negative aspects of stone are embodied in its physically unbreakable nature which entails the burden of having to break through history to rework the multifold layers of foundation on which stories are formed. As with a stonemason laying and sculpting stones to create a finished product, bearers of the stone build on the quiet fortitude of its resistance. By either refraining from or releasing words, the stone keeper challenges and resists hegemonic forms of history. The dual quality of the stone –its good resistance which is also its negative burden– is instantiated when Grandma Kato in *Obasan* articulates that grief ‘will depart from our souls’ (*O* 283), yet the ‘burden of words’ attached to the articulation of loss features as something

¹⁰ Grice argues that speech serves as a kind of panacea in *Obasan*. See Grice 47.

Naomi would otherwise want to do without. Fear, anxiety, danger of loss reawakened and loss becoming an increasingly proximate experience are all forms of negative associations of the stone. And so, even as the metaphor of the stone is associated with the release of words in *Obasan*, the burden of resisting hegemony is what initially hinders Naomi from embracing the power of the stone.

The juxtaposition of speech and silence in the image of the stone conveys the diverse forms of articulation serving to trace history's experiential accounts of racial melancholia. Whilst signifying the way the racially melancholic voice has traditionally been silenced, the image of the stone also symbolises the power inherent within the voicing process. Rather than working in contention with the properties of the stone, this voicing power is attributed to the stone's qualities of substantiality, durability, and resistance. As a solid piece of rock, the material stone is defined by its physical firmness and unyielding quality when exposed to nature's unforgiving elements. As mentioned previously, it is the image of the stone which opens the text of *Obasan* and which, pertinently, closes the text of *Dictee*.

Surrounded by the natural environment of the coulee, of which Naomi tellingly speaks of in the first chapter of the novel, Kogawa writes 'The word is stone. [...] Words, when they fall are pockmarks on the earth.' (*O* Preface). In a similar trajectory, Cha concludes *Dictee* by giving us a mental picture of 'weights of stone' (*D* 179) which prevents bells from ringing out. Here, the subsequent loosening of ropes so that these bells peal 'to break stillness' (*D* 179) echoes the 'freeing word' (*O* Preface) to be found in the underground stream which the narrator in *Obasan* imagines she is able to trace. In both these instances where the stone is conjured up, both in its physical and symbolic sense, the allusion to the buried silences of minority history (with the absence of historical documentation and void of

legitimacy given to their histories) as well as the power of expression (with the releasing of words) signify the importance of rendering voices to the Asian American collective, and restoring legitimacy to these very voices. Hence, while Cha certainly implores Korean Americans to ‘meet the weight of stone with the weight of voices’ (*D* 162), both she and Kogawa command the power of the pen to release the voices of speech and silence when delineating hegemony’s mistreatment of Korean and Japanese Americans in wars fought and the implementation of relocation policies. Cha and Kogawa’s novels, thus, use the metaphor of the stone in different ways to denote both reticence and articulation. In other words, stone is used to convey the quietness of words, yet also points to the articulation of words.

With missing pieces of knowledge on family history, due to the elision of facts resulting from the fracturing and separation of families in times of war and internment, voicing becomes an important trope in balancing the lack of textual records on the lives of the Asian American melancholic subject. In *Obasan*, Naomi speaks with great sadness of the fact that ‘No one knows the exact day that you die [mother]’ (*O* 291). Her physical separation from her mother has resulted in this lack of knowledge. More crucially, the failure to transmit this piece of information and the lapse in documenting her mother’s whereabouts during a time of war have yielded a ‘certitude of absence’ (*D* 131) that signifies, on a larger scale, the void in the knowledge of deaths, the number of deaths, and the cause of deaths of those who perished in the Japanese-American War. With her Uncle’s recent death, the note on which Kogawa’s novel opens and closes, Naomi increasingly learns of the necessity in documenting events through the voices of speech and stone. Critically, the

monosyllabic ‘O’¹¹ uttered by Obasan is symptomatic of the void in history that has to be filled and addressed in order to forge a semblance of family history and identity. Being a signifier of ‘zero’, ‘O’ serves further as a theoretical limit to socio-historical inclusion and connotes the way in which Asian Americans are marginalised and made to suffer for their racially distinct status. With subsequent descriptions of Obasan’s ‘unfinished symphony’ (*O* 54) and the ‘untold tales that wait for their telling’ (*O* 271), it becomes evident that the voices of Naomi’s history (that of her Mother’s past and the larger history of Japanese Americans internment) are interrupted by white America. This interjection is also clearly demonstrated in *Dictee* in the lines:

If words are to be uttered, they would be from behind the partition.
Unaccountable is distance, time to transport from this present minute.

If words are to be sounded, impress through the partition in ever slight
measure to the other side the other signature the other hearing the other
speech the other grasp. (*D* 132)

Here, the ‘partition’ which Cha speaks of signals both the racial divide and the interrupted break or infringement imposed by History’s hegemony. The fact that Cha uses the conditional grammatical conditional ‘if’ consecutively in these sentences, which deal with the act of speaking, points to the tentative mood in the challenge against the prevalent absence of historical voice.

The absence of historical voice is further exemplified in Naomi’s mother who occupies a realm of voicelessness, yet a ‘powerful voicelessness’ (*O* 290). Mirroring the ‘silent territory’ (*O* 271) and ‘Wordlessness’ (33) of Naomi’s aging Aunt

¹¹This ‘O’ is expressed by Obasan every time she is startled by Naomi. Instead of the more conventional spelling ‘Oh’, Kogawa chooses ‘O’ to encapsulate the shortness and dryness of the expression ‘as if she [Obasan] has no energy left’ (*O* 11).

Obasan, Naomi's mother is silent for she does 'not speak or write' (*O* 289) across the miles that separate her from her daughter. We hear about her life happenings through the letters of Aunt Emily and through the lasting impressions of 'old photographs' (*O* 219) left in Obasan's house. Significantly, Mother's silence features as one of 'the silences that speak from stone' (*O* 132), whereby the absence of a direct voice expresses, instead of undermines, her position as a figure who mediates both the loss and pain inherent within the experience of racial melancholia. With Naomi's Mother unable to return to Canada and having to stay in Japan, her physical separation from her daughter causes a chasm of silence between the two bodies. Thus, physical and verbal communication breaks down because of physical distance. This distance is compounded by the fact that letters from Naomi's mother are hidden from Naomi because the Nakanes wish to hide the truth of her mother's refused entry into Canada from Naomi the child. However, her mother's silence traverses the ocean that separates them and speaks to Naomi. As a signifier of loss and the pains that result from the discriminatory policies against the Japanese, Naomi's mother testifies to the way silence symptomatises both personal loss and a history of national pains. Due to this palpable silence, Naomi becomes increasingly vigilant of the need to attend to her mother's buried tales. In spite of her silence, and precisely because of it, Naomi actively seeks communication with her mother as she calls out to her, 'Mother, I am listening. Assist me to hear you.' (*O* 288). Here, in attempting to make sense of her mother's 'wordless words' (*O* 289), Naomi listens to her mother's expressed yet non-verbally articulated message transmitted through wordless communication. Wondering whether her mother is able to 'speak through dream' (*O* 274), Naomi seeks further explanations for the mistreatment of those who suffered the consequences of what she calls 'the yellow peril that lived in the minds of the

racially prejudiced' (*O* 49). In a moment of epiphany, Naomi declares 'There are so many betrayals- departures, deaths, absences – there are all many absences within which we who live are left' (*O* 294). An epitome of such absences is the death of Obasan's husband, whose physical departure from the lives of Naomi and Obasan catalyses Naomi's journey into the past and leaves Obasan alone where both she and Naomi are faced with 'indescribable items' (*O* 54) in the 'dark recesses' (*O* 54) of memory. Not too unlike the unrecognisable food remains that Obasan keeps in her refrigerator, these nondescript items neglected within memory call for concerted effort 'to make familiar, to make knowable' (*O* 49) lost remains and remains of loss buried in memory. Consequently, it becomes increasingly evident that Naomi recognises that the physical death of her uncle and physical departure of her mother are part of a wider framework of death and absence within the history of relocation, internment, and family displacement. With Mother's enduring voicelessness and Uncle's death amid a world of absences, Naomi becomes convinced of the speaking power of the stone. Towards the novel's end, when Naomi revisits the coulee, she says 'My loved ones, rest in your world of stone. Around you flows the underground stream. How bright in the darkness the brooding light. How gentle the colors of rain' (*O* 295). Here, Naomi gives cognisance to the way in which the silent world of absences, resonating in the binary images of light shining through the darkness and hues glistening through the raindrops, works interchangeably and in alliance with the world of sounds. This evocation of the language of sound, which is reflected off and from the stone, signifies the interwoven message of the intrinsic powers within voicelessness. In addition, Maxine imagines the way the stone elicits an underground stream of water that runs through the coulee –the water's flowing gushes

transforming the coulee from a dry streambed into an abundant, and rich, water-filled creek bed.

Besides her own Mother, two other significant women who create a tangible impression upon Naomi's life are the figures of her two aunts, both of whom I have briefly discussed in previous paragraphs. Obasan and Aunt Emily dramatise the dichotomy of voicing as they, willingly or incidentally, find themselves engaged in historicising and witnessing the past. Aunt Obasan, after whom Kogawa's novel is named, is typified by her silent, tacit and measured ways, while Aunt Emily is her complete antithesis being outwardly-spoken, dynamic and quick to engage with the past in her attempt to rewrite history and uncover the truth about the injustices of Japanese internment. These binary figures feature prominently in the novel, and are posed to highlight conflicting yet complimentary positions regarding the treatment of the past. As juxtaposed characters they further serve as symbolic indicators of the bind between speech and silence in articulating the past. While Obasan, Naomi's first aunt on her father's side, is predisposed to shutting the past within her 'vault of thoughts' (O 31), Aunt Emily, on the other hand, is the 'word warrior' (O 39) who embarks on 'marathon talking' (O 41) when dealing with Japanese-Canadian issues. As Naomi points out, Aunt Emily sees herself 'rushing from trouble spot to trouble spot with her medication' (O 41), fast to verbally attack the 'crime[s]' (O 41) committed against Japanese Canadians. The further allusion to the image of 'wounds seen and not seen' (O 41) proves useful in highlighting the physical and psychic trauma suffered, which Aunt Emily sees it as her calling to bring to voice.

In their differing ways, Obasan and Aunt Emily thus bear testimony to the wounds of the past: the former through her shuffling gait and weary bodily presence

(*O* 36), and the latter through her non-stop conference talk (*O* 38). Just as Uncle's stone bread is rock solid, Obasan provides Naomi with no 'direct' (*O* 22) answers to her incessant series of questions: 'If you can't even break it, it's not bread. [...] It's all stone' (*O* 16). Obasan proves to be as impenetrable as the stone bread which Naomi finds difficult to eat, much less digest. Precisely because of her silence, the words that Obasan does speak become all the more. A Japanese word which Obasan utters quietly to herself is 'Kawaiso', which is 'the word [that] is used whenever there is hurt and a need for tenderness' (*O* 133). Standing in as a pseudo-matriarch for Naomi, in place of her physically-absent Mother, Obasan signifies the silence pain shouldered by the Nisei who have witnessed and survived others dying around them. As Naomi articulates, 'She is tired today because of Uncle's death and because so many others are dying or have already died' (*O* 218). The importance of voicing within the stone, and amidst the stone, is conveyed through the key figures of Obasan, Emily and Naomi. Indeed, Naomi is implicated too within the voices which make up history: 'I can cry for the flutes that have cracked in the dryness and cry for the people who no longer sing. I can cry for Obasan, who has turned to stone' (*O* 237-8). By assimilating the modes of both sound and stone, as personified by Emily and Obasan respectively, Naomi learns how although 'one lives in sound, the other in stone' (*O* 39) their common tales of persecution and racial injustice prevail. In this way, Naomi is exposed to the various ways in which the painful past, which incurs deep wounds, is dealt with within the two female bodies of Aunt Emily and Obasan, who have witnessed the harsh reality of death. Thus, the two modes of articulation within sound and in stone are treated coterminously, as the novel does not place more value on one mode over the other.

The role of memory in facilitating the act of voicing is imperative to both *Dictee* and *Obasan*. While Cha asks regrettably ‘Why didn’t I write it all down, keep diaries and journals, photos arranged in chronological order in a fat picture album’ (*D* 238), Naomi toys with the idea of forgetfulness which seems appealing for its sheer convenience (*O* 54). Because ‘past recall is past pain’ (*O* 54), as Naomi puts it, she has chosen to dismiss the past and is only persuaded to confront it at Aunt Emily’s urging. With the lure of forgetfulness comes the risk of the erasure of personal and communal history. Without textual records and picture albums to speak of the experiences within history, loss is reinforced on a double level as loss experienced in ‘the slaughterhouses of prejudice’ (*O* 223) and as a result of the lack of historical records, or what *Dictee* describes as ‘Dead words [from] disuse’ (*D* 133). The importance of memory to the voicing of history is further accentuated through *Dictee*’s sections on ‘memory’, ‘second memory’ and ‘Memory’, which work collectively in ‘refusing banishment’ (*D* 149) of the recollections and remembrances owed to the Korean American historical experience. With Aunt Emily’s further adage ‘Remember everything’ (*O* 60), and her modeling the need to write letters, diaries, and journals, Aunt Emily in *Obasan* testifies to the way memory bears witness to historical experiences that proves integral to establish and reclaim a voice through speech and articulate silence.

2.2) Deconstructing History: Re-Visioning Loss in Counter-history

Preoccupied with witnessing the multiple voices of history, *Dictee* and *Obasan* simultaneously construct the historical past by deconstructing mainstream history. As these texts engage in the production of alternative histories, they take apart the strands of state-endorsed, officially-sanctioned history to document

‘unfathomable’ (D 32) losses suffered by the racial melancholic minority. A further point to note is how counter-history is both present and unspecifiable because it is a history of loss. The desire to put forward other histories which offset official history is evident in Cha’s and Kogawa’s revising History, with a capital ‘H’, for the purpose of assembling the history of loss and lost history, i.e. both the history of racial grief and history/ies of personal experiences that have been obscured and obfuscated by the dominant culture. By tracing the paralysing ‘hardship’ (O 232) during the internment experience and the colonization of Korea respectively, *Obasan* and *Dictee* are engaged in the project to ‘resurrect it all now. From the past.’ (D 33) In other words, their works set out ‘to examine whether the parts [are] false [or] the parts [are] real’ through ‘History’s revision.’ (D 28) In addition, both *Obasan* and *Dictee* seek to expose how ‘one telling’ is by no means ‘how it was’ (O 236). With the act of historical construction presupposing and being a precursor to the work of deconstruction, the piecing together of the many fragments of counter-history speak of the active dismantling of hegemony’s rendering of history. These fragments within history, indicative of the fragmentation of memory as well as the creative faculty of the imagination, signal historical loss as a double presence *and* absence of history in Asian American literary narratives about racial grief.

Consequently, lost history and the history of loss mediated in the pain and suffering of racially melancholic subjects point to a need for Asian Americans ‘to invent [their] own history.’ (O 239) The need to reclaim histories that have been lost and buried is pertinent in the positive formation and formulation of a sense of identity. The resuscitative desires of *Dictee* and *Obasan* work a textual and literary creation of history in the acts of the authors’ novel-writing and the characters’ memories of their life experiences. The efforts to revive history in the narrative

documentation of counter-history provide an insight into the novels' productive desire to recover historical loss. In spite of the fact that counter-history is shrouded in vagueness because it is both present and unspecifiable as a history of loss, the articulation of counter-history has the ability to make loss productive. Furthermore, the loss of history which both *Dictee* and *Obasan* address in their texts situates counter-hegemonic history as a significant, though fragile, mask of identification with the process of historical construction and documentation. Even so, the urgency for a need to recover previously denied voices speaks of the potent desires to manage the inherent pain and losses of racial abjection within history.

The term 're-visioning' encapsulates how historicising loss involves the creation of counter-voices which address not just the listeners and readers of history, but also the 'watchers' and 'seers' of history.¹² With the inclusion of photos and other allusions to various visual modes of identification, *Dictee* and *Obasan* cater to the holistic experience of historical construction through its reference to both the sights and sounds of history. These, in effect, provide a synaesthetic quality to these texts, where the senses of both seeing and listening are involved in the literary unfolding of counter-history. Through such means, Cha and Kogawa are able to comment on the multi-coloured, multi-dimensional history belonging to the many generations of Asian American immigrants whose multiple voices are recorded in these texts. In acknowledging and registering visual modes of historical representation, evidenced in *Dictee's* hand-written calligraphic excerpts and Naomi's

¹² The acts of watching and seeing are readily implied in the experiential process inherent to the testifying of history, which involves a testimonial witnessing as events slowly unfold in contrast to documenting history (through the printed word) from a position of one who already knows the facts. Yunte Huang contends that Cha uses poetry as a testimony, not document, of colonial history and violence in *Dictee*. See Huang 2008, 131-141. Susan Sontag's writing on photography avers how photographs provide a semblance of experience, rather than a genuine or real experience, seeing that they evoke the image of a tourist's camera and an associated voyeurism attached to the act of bearing witness to other people's reality as well as one's own in watching, seeing, and capturing a historical event through the lens of a probing camera. See Sontag 57.

curiosity regarding the photographs of her mother in *Obasan*, Cha and Kogawa engender new meanings to the process of History's revision. Furthermore, *Dictee*'s very tangible photographic inclusions of various images ranging from pictures of Cha's mother (young and old) to landscape portraits of a barren desert and the tragic shootings of Korean revolutionaries are interspersed in the narrative to provide this visual message within the documentation of history. The fact that Cha expresses her history through verbal, textual as well as visual methods mirrors the diversity and multiplicity of stories in the history of Korean American immigration. Similarly, albeit less overtly so, *Obasan* makes use of stories relayed through pictures when Naomi studies photographs of her absent mother ('The woman in the picture is frail and shy and the child is equally shy', *O* 64) and Uncle ('the ID card with Uncle's young face. What ghostly whisperings I feel in the air as I hold the card', *O* 294), and of other Japanese evacuees with whom she identifies ('The newspaper clipping has a photograph of one family, all [with perfunctory] smiles, standing around a pile of beets', *O* 231). Indeed, *Obasan* speaks readily of the allusion to the past, and the recording and unfolding of history within these very photographs, when she calls out 'Mukashi mukashi o-o mukashi... In ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times...' (*O* 65). The signification of these pictorial images to the visual aspect of history, hence, re-inscribes history as both a revisionist and re-visioning project which both Cha and Kogawa sees it to be their task to undertake.

With a concerted effort to recuperate personal history, the nature of historical representation as a form of public discourse is put into question by both *Dictee* and *Obasan*. Cha's and Kogawa's critique of the historical obfuscation of human crimes within the official meta-narrative of national history signals the political import of their texts, how these losses have been occluded erroneously in History and how

these recovered histories inhabit both the private and public discourse. In *Dictee*, the official discourse of national history encompasses the History of Korea and significant events such as the Korean War, its Japanese occupation and the French Catholic colonisation of Korea. In *Obasan*, the internment of Japanese Canadians features as the historic event and experience which has been occluded from or referenced obliquely in Canadian history textbooks.¹³ Individualised, subjective experiences of loss experienced in times of war, immigration and relocation translates to public records of print where the state's authority over History is brought to question by the recovery of personally mapped histories. While documenting the details of traumatic racial prejudice within national and cultural polities, Cha and Kogawa are concerned with the articulation of loss inherent in racial grief to transcend these melancholic losses of personal injury, death and persecution. The act of grievance afforded to counter-history, which accords agency to the racially abject subject, is performed through the speaking voices of Cha and Kogawa, who reveal private experiential knowledge of truth-facts relating to the very public experiences of racial prejudice. Their interest in the loss suffered within the past, as well as loss of the past, manifests itself through the private entries of these writers and the eventual dissemination of Cha and Kogawa's historical autobiographies for inclusion within history's public discourse.

Along this line, *Obasan*'s concern with re-writing Canadian history from the point of view of the racial melancholic subject facing 'political expediency, race riots, [and] the yellow peril' (*O* 20) becomes urgent. Through Kogawa's mission to set apart 'what's right [from] what's wrong' (*O* 219), alternative history emerges to counter 'white-walled, whitewashed' (*O* 269) versions of history that have been

¹³ It is significant that *Obasan* has been used as a political text in the redress hearings conducted in Canada to provide evidence for the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s.

written into Canadian historical texts. Challenging how national versions of historical discourse mask the 'straight' (O 219) telling of facts, Kogawa's novel includes a verisimilitude of public and private records which document the first-hand experiences of Japanese Canadians and their intimate details of life under internment. A significant part of Kogawa's novel deals with the revelation of the 'private words' (O 38) of Aunt Emily via her letters, diary and journal entries as she aims to educate Naomi about the historical past. As Naomi reads these epistles recounting their 'short harsh history' (O 40), she learns of the trials and tribulations borne out of 'Official racism in Canada' (O 41). With records of the way 'relocation camps' (O 40) resembled bleak conditions where 'blackouts' (O 96) and miserly rations (O 105) were the norm, the novel effects a historical construction, and reconstruction, of the past which challenges hegemony's representation of History. By documenting the reality of the dead 'buried in the prairies' (O 270), in contrast to newspaper reports of 'Grinning and Happy' (O 231) field workers, the novel reveals that Japanese Canadians were enslaved and murdered by the Canadian government's order for Japanese internment and relocation.

Similarly, the intimate stories of Cha's experiences and the historical account of Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon within *Dictée* signal both personal and political reconstitution of identity available in the creation of counter-hegemonic history. One significant event within Cha's life is her survival of the Japanese killing of her brother. The section 'Melpomene/ Tragedy' traces the murder of Cha's brother as this tragedy is marked by both Cha's and her mother's grief over how he 'gave [up his] life' (D 85) in the student demonstrations of 1962. This execution impacts upon Cha's sense of personal history as she is now left without a sibling, and her mother is left with only one child. In subverting the brand of being 'useless'

(*D* 83), Cha's brother's activism is seen as a heroic form of martyrdom to achieve a sense of Korean identity. Likewise, the story of 'Child revolutionary child patriot woman soldier deliverer of nation' (*D* 36) Yu Guan Soon ratifies a political reconstitution of identity, in that her national arrest is celebrated by Cha as a triumphant moment that displays Guan Soon's courage, strength and resolve in the face of adversity. Such moments of apparent pain and loss within the physical struggles against hegemony's historical weight are re-written, revised and re-transfigured to construct counter-historical narratives which transform these negative losses into personal and political gains in the determining act of identity production.

In *Obasan*, the revelation that 'The body of grief is not fit for human habitation' (*O* 295) and Naomi's simultaneous recognition of the way in which 'the song of mourning is not a lifelong song' (*O* 295) point to managing loss through grief, a process synonymous with breaking out from the confines of pathologically-defined racial melancholia rather than successfully mourning loss. In *Obasan*, 'Grief's weeping' (*O* 295) signifies an emptiness located within the past that must be addressed in the traces of memory and history. This grief caused by emptiness signifies embodied racial loss of both protagonists in *Obasan* and *Dictée*. The personification of grief in the vivid description of grief's weeping exhibits the tragic sense of loss in experiences of internment and relocation. Through Aunt Emily's suggestion that 'Denial is gangrene,' (*O* 60) the call to confront and remember this emptiness or loss is symptomatic of the move to transform the negative energies of loss. The association between gangrene, a malady of irreversible putrefaction which affects the body, and the denial of grief demonstrates the way in which grief within loss, indexed in both memory and history, has the potential to cause physical decay. The use of medical terminology serves also to signify the importance of

remembering and, paradoxically, of letting go of loss, grief and emptiness. In the concerted effort to heal loss and deal with 'History, the old wound' (*D* 33), further analogies are made between actively confronting loss and the practice of medicine. In *Obasan*, the Western procedure of surgery is alluded to as a metaphor for the treatment of grief. In a similar fashion, and yet rather differently, *Dictee* suggests that the Oriental science of acupuncture may serve as a curative way of dealing with ailments of loss. And so, while Aunt Emily is compared to 'a surgeon cutting at the scalp,' (*O* 232) the illustrative black-and-white mappings of the human body's acupuncture points (*D* 63) signify ways in which to treat the loss of loss. Collectively, both these curative actions point to an intervention into the grief suffered by the racially melancholic subject, in order to transform these melancholic losses actively.

Alternative histories recorded within minority literature trace how loss inflicts injury and is itself the injury inflicted by racism. This double infliction of loss is the case when Emily describes the fears and anxieties surrounding the 'outright race persecution' (*O* 101) of Japanese Canadians in the internment experience. By speaking of the relegation of Japanese persons to the peripheries of society, Emily expresses how this marginal experience triggers a personal injury to the psyche as the myth of an inviolable self is destructed by the loss of social integration. On the other hand, the physical persecution of racism is itself the loss that is the violent injury (Cheng 175). Consequently, this double loss in which the racially abject body internalises losses causes a lack of participation in the national social sphere and, in psychoanalytic language, forfeits any symbolic presence of an indestructible ego. The psychological and physical inferiority rendered by racism becomes the loss and the injury. Such inferiority is also evidenced through the

invisibility, at best partial visibility, of racially abject bodies as they merge their 'ontic' selves (how they see themselves) to their 'social' selves (how others see them). To use DuBois' terminology, double consciousness (3) is what catalyses the sense of racial loss. *Obasan* explores these losses in a sudden parenthetical admonition that punctuates Naomi's thoughts:

'Keep your eyes down. When you are in the city, do not look into anyone's face. That way they may not see you. That way you offend less.' (*O* 218)

Here, 'offending less' becomes a way of life which signals the way racialised subjects learn to become physically invisible in white America. This invisibility is symptomatic of their psychic internalisation of loss – a loss due to 'the color the hue' (*D* 57) of their skin. The injunction to avoid looking into the eyes of white Americans signifies the build-up to racial inferiority within Asian American minority subjects as racism's injury is interiorised and embodied. The authority accorded to white Americans is signaled in the juxtaposition of the pronouns 'they' and 'you'. The binary pronoun pairing of 'they' and 'you' points to the inclusive collectivity of the dominant race in contrast with the exclusionary models ascribed to the abject Asian body. 'They' refers to an elite, privileged group whilst 'you' denotes the castigated, singled-out, and racialised individual. The injunction 'to keep eyes down' reflects Naomi's subconscious voice – an inner voice which takes on the premonitory warnings conveyed to Naomi by family, friends and white America. Hence, the loss that Naomi suffers is both racial prejudice that is shown to her and the injury which this loss inflicts on her inner psyche.

Just as loss is registered as wound and injury in these counter-hegemonic discourses, the unrecognisability of loss is addressed too within the traumatic present of *Obasan* and *Dictée*. These texts recognise that loss cannot be exactly pinpointed.

For instance, with the deaths and physical departure of Naomi's Mother and Cha's brother, the racially melancholic subject is able to identify who it has lost, yet not what it has lost. Such melancholic loss in Freud's sense in which 'a substitution and preservation of loss [occurs] without having to acknowledge that loss as loss' (Cheng 2001, 86), gravitates towards the notion inherent within the 'origins of loss' (Cheng 2001, 153) where the knowability of what exactly has been lost remains problematic. The unrecognisability of loss is illustrated in *Dictee* in its decontextualisation of the representations of suffering: the decontextualised text, uncaptioned images, unlabelled photos, as well as the haphazardly positioned handwritten letters. Though loss is registered in the wounds and injuries inflicted in the 'decapitated forms' (*D* 38) and 'Blood stains' (*D* 85) which are the direct consequence of the wars and protests fought, *Dictee* also represents this history of loss via its use of grainy pictures of physical torture and facial depictions of overt despair; these images amplify the text's recognition of the unrecognisability of loss even while they register this loss. This nature of melancholic loss is similarly reflected in *Obasan* where Naomi's uncle's signature 'stone bread' (*O* 15) comes to replace and remind Naomi of her recent loss of her bereaved uncle. Just as the bread is equally impermeable and unbreakable, so too is the loss that is registered in her uncle's death undecipherable. Furthermore, *Obasan*'s twine ball (*O* 54) which is made up, in part, from the twine which wraps Aunt Emily's package containing the re-telling of their history (*O* 52) mirrors the entangled web that implicates the registering and documenting of traumatic, melancholic loss even whilst the unrecognisability of this loss is addressed in alternative versions and representations of both the personal and communal history of loss and suffering.

2.3) Destabilising Genre: Female Subjectivity in Women's

Auto/biography

The autobiographical form is a generic classification that is constantly destabilised in both *Dictee* and *Obasan*, as these texts inscribe the flux and process of loss as well as history. The new textual identities produced and created in the writing of this self-making narrative act reinforce the accessibility of the textual space for self-definition and self-assertion, as well as intersubjective communal support provided by the larger female collectivity. By eschewing linearity in their narratives, these autobiographical texts chart how personal and social gains are able to transform historical loss and loss of history from individually-experienced melancholia to an empowered self in community. In using the terms historical loss and loss of history, I refer to the experiential and material losses suffered in history and the history that has been erased and obfuscated from formal records of the past. Articulating both personal subjectivity and communal interdependency through autobiographical writing that deals with individual, familial and communal loss(es), Kogawa's and Cha's texts construct female subjectivity as it is forged using the self-reflective and self-reflexive lens of the female auto/biographical form that records true events within history.

Because *Dictee* and *Obasan*, like *Woman Warrior*, defy literary categorisation within a specific genre in their cross-generic styles, these texts destabilise expectations of the autobiographical form that early critics have assigned them. While I wish to use the term 'auto(/)biographies' to describe *Dictee* and *Obasan* so as to place an emphasis on the multitudinous autobiographical and biographical voices of women, I do not subscribe to limiting the multifarious generic functions performed by these texts. *Dictee* is a composite piece of work drawing on

an eclectic mix of written and pictorial sources, whilst also depicting the lives of real-life historical figures who Cha extols. These composite of female voices include the extensive delineation of the life of Cha's mother and the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon. *Obasan*, on the other hand, employs a narrative style and a fictive character by the name of Naomi Nakane who is the main rather than sole narrator of Kogawa's semi-autobiographical novel based on true events of Japanese internment and relocation. With their eccentric written styles, such as the haphazard inclusion of pictures and handwritten sources of writing, changes in time shifts, as well as caesuras signified by the blanks / spaces between sentences and pages, *Dictee* and *Obasan* defy what is conventionally expected in an autobiography: a single voice of narration, a smooth chronological timeline, and the systematic unraveling of information about a main subject (Smith and Watson 9). By challenging and disrupting expected tropes of the autobiography, the autobiographical novel of *Dictee* and the semi-autobiographical, historical novel of *Obasan* thus reveal a resistance to generic conformity. My use of the solidus in 'auto/biographies' refers to the extended form of life-writing that incorporates a blurring of genre boundaries to consider the multidimensional roles and the myriad as well as multiple subjectivities of both the individual woman and her community of women.

In line with the destabilising work performed by *Dictee* and *Obasan* as they delineate experiential truths within the lives of Cha and Kogawa, these literary auto/biographies also draw on the collective powers of the female community at large. And so, despite autobiography being a deeply reflective form of textual self-expression, the community of women alluded to within the writing and the external dialogues exchanged between one autobiography and another autobiography signal the emphasis *Dictee* and *Obasan* place on identification, rather than identity.

Importantly, this identification process feeds the female autobiographer's sense of subjectivity, where an *inter-subjective* female community and ongoing *inter-textual* conversations between one autobiography and another, including the continuous dialogue between the female autobiographers themselves, shape a sense of their identity within a community where identification becomes available.

Identification with female figures who have suffered various losses, which is a central motif within *Woman Warrior*, is also illustrated in *Dictee* and *Obasan* through the community of women who feature significantly in these auto/biographies. Just as Obasan, Aunt Emily, Mother and Grandma Kato are central to the formative development of Naomi, and are implicated in her life story as displayed by the entangled web of Obasan's twine ball (*O* 54), the daughter figure who walks to 'take back remedies' (*O* 169) for her ailing mother towards the close of *Dictee*, highlights the empathetic process which contribute to the sense of female subjectivity. The intersubjective support available in the process of female identification with other women is evident when Cha says: 'Tell me the story/ Of all these things./ Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us' (*D* 11). The juxtaposition of 'me' and 'us' indicates the inclusionary status in which identification with others formulates a sense of identity in a constructive group. By empowering and enabling those relegated to the exclusionary realms of society, female identification within a communal collectivity serves thus as a source of positive energy. As Obasan urges Naomi and Aunt Emily to unite, she reinforces the message of identification in declaring 'Together, with strength, with energy, let us walk' (*O* 162). The female presence and, by extension, the importance of the female transmission of identity through the process of identification, is further displayed in the use of the maternal imagery; take for example, the allusions to the 'amniotic deep' (*O* Preface) and

‘series of concentric circles’ (*D* 175) that point specifically to the roundness of the womb. Female subjectivity facilitated and engendered through both self-awareness and identification with the matrilineal community augments the autobiographical aspect of self-development and self-growth, as typified in the vital function played by auto/biographies as self-making narratives.

New textual identities that are created within and in writing are vital to the self-making mission of female auto/biographies. Because ‘the blank page symbolises a location of self-birth’ (Higgonet and Templeton 15), the act of writing in shaping subjectivity has often been propounded by critics (such as Weinstein 5) as a key aspiration and concern among ethnically raced women writers. The writing impulse is an especially vital component for the production of textual as well as psychic containers of the mind within minority literature. Put simply, writing plays an important role in investigating the way sheets of paper serve as the blank canvas or space for the auto biographer. This textual space is what contributes to identity construction and, more specifically, the literary construction of self. Thus, by working through life experiences within the act of autobiographical or ‘self life-writing’, the female writer is taken through a journey to establish a healthy psyche amidst losses instigated by historical acts of internment and the segregation experience.

In *Obasan*, the writing process is delineated as a rejuvenating practice for unlocking significant textual spaces as well as facilitating dialogic avenues where the experiences of relocation can be voiced without undue censorship. The testimonial diary entries of Aunt Emily are symptomatic of the ability to create legitimate spaces within the textual realm where the female auto/biographer’s voice can be heard. This is important for the identity and psychological health of the writer, where written

records serve to channel physical and emotional experiences. Significantly, the writing process is delineated as a resuscitating tool which instills renewed life by giving one cause 'to live' (*D* 141). In *Dictée*, the rejuvenating practice of writing is evident through Cha's explanation that 'by writing [the writer] could abolish real time' (*D* 141) and become successful in 'displacing death' (*D* 141), even if for just a moment. The suspension of time within the nascent state is also alluded to in Kogawa's infantile account of Obasan as a 'newborn baby' (*O* 218) who 'has not learned to weep' (*O* 294). This image of Obasan being born again is closely linked to the self-creating capacity in writing, even as Obasan remains reticent in her self-restraining ability 'not to weep' as she faces imminent death due to old age ['the time is approaching for her' (*O* 218)]. With Aunt Emily who makes a living creating textual materials as she publishes papers in history journals, and Naomi's discovery of herself as she peruses Aunt Emily's written pieces about the past, the renewal powers of writing transcend the writer by impacting those who share in this past.

Subsequently, the self-creating opportunities in writing forge a healthy presence via the assertion of a valid and legitimate female subjectivity, where writing enables 'Voices' to 'Rise [and] shift upwards' (*D* 162) in order to challenge, subvert and denounce the fact that 'We are the despised rendered voiceless' (*O* 132). The power of the pen to suspend loss and displace death is evoked by Cha and Kogawa to illustrate how auto/biographers write for the self *and* for the reinforcement of intersubjective female bonds. It is through identification with Obasan, Aunt Emily, Grandma Kato that Naomi makes sense of her present history, and through stories about strong female characters like Cha's mother, Joan of Arc and Yu Guan Soon, that Cha locates her sense of self. Such social gains speak, therefore, of the significant forging of personal subjectivity and communal

interdependency within auto/biographical narratives which make and shape the sense of self.

Female auto/biographical practice functions as an avenue of empowerment and effective agency for the development of female subjectivity. As an expressive antidote to racist treatment, auto/biographies provide a means for the production of transformative loss. By providing an arena for the articulation of historically silenced tales, the practice of auto/biographical writing serves the double purpose of self-decolonisation.¹⁴ In other words, even as writing presents the opportunity to deal with loss effectively {‘If these matters [of lived horror] are sent away in this letter, perhaps they will depart a little from our souls’ writes Grandma Kato to the Nakane’s’ (*O* 283)}, the act of writing life-stories decolonises the mind and spirit. The authoritative voice that speaks out and finds its form in auto/biographical accounts of lived past challenges and subverts the white coloniser’s voice of authority. Cha and Kogawa invest in these powers of self life-writing by forging subjectivity out of the loss experienced in Japanese Canadian’s ‘Racial Discrimination by Orders-in-Council’ (*O* 40), and in the Japanese massacre of innocent Korean civilians (*D* 81). The conferences that Aunt Emily attends serve as ‘meeting ground for a lot of highly charged energy’ (*O* 41). In the same way, auto/biographical writing acts as a channel for speaking out about previously repressed and unspeakable tales of racial injustice. As a ‘champion of words’, Aunt Emily is described as the personification of the body’s self-doctoring system. Aunt Emily’s actions are comparable to the actions of the body’s white blood cells (*O* 41).

¹⁴ Autobiography’s links to decolonisation has been argued by Mab Segrest, who suggests how the autobiographical project is an act of ‘self-decolonization’. See Watson 146. Although Fanon would view this differently, arguing how decolonization entails a communally-driven, nation-wide, violent revolution which is powered by a mass people. See Fanon *Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

To 'write without ceasing' (*D* 141) becomes a communal call to nurture a rich community, in which the female writer empowers both self and others through the power invested in the words she pens. Both penned and verbally articulated words raise awareness of an obfuscated history, in which memory is employed as a resource to make known and to expose the alternative histories of silenced, subjugated, and racialised peoples.

In line with auto/biography's role as self-expression, I propose that the auto/biography itself may be conceived as a kind of 'talk-story', a cultural rendition of confessional expression that serves to shape female subjectivity. By engaging with the acts of inter-bonding and inter-sharing, these life stories subvert the pathological meanings attached to racial melancholia as they are assigned onto Asian American women. The oral quality of life-story writing is captured within the expression of 'talk-story' where stories are relayed as if they were verbally and personally told. By opening *Dictee* with written transcriptions of orally dictated material, Cha tells of the process of cultural dictation in which French colonialism and American imperialism colour the experiences of the Korean subject – twice removed from society as racialised body and colonised vessel. In the section 'Urania/Astronomy' (*D* 66-73), the French-English dictation process is further delineated when Cha writes the spoken words of the French dictator down in her auto/biography. 'Dictator' here carries dual meanings –firstly, it signals the historical colonial dictatorship by French occupiers; and secondly, it refers to the linguistic dictator who dictates spoken words which the Korean subject then writes down. Given that written words are the physical manifestation of the spoken word within the dictation process, the Korean's 'broken tongue' (*D* 75) not only refers to the influences of several languages upon their tongue but also signals the physical injuries inflicted within the history of

colonisation. With pages dedicated to the way in which oral speech is generated through the biological and anatomical mechanisms of the body (*D* 66-75), and with *Obasan*'s emphasis on Naomi's mother's songs and bedtime stories (*O* 62), the 'talk-story' quality inherent within writing is constituted in the production of Cha 's and Kogawa's auto/biographical works.

2.4) Retuning Home to Unknown Destinations: Issues of Identity and Belonging

Both *Dictee* and *Obasan* are concerned with the issue of home: what home means, what it comes to represent, and what the return to home entails. Both these literary texts are interested in these ideas, not least because the concept of home illustrates the way in which displacement, ethnic dislocation, racial segregation, memory's fragmentation, and cultural dispossession affect those who are relegated to the margins of cultural and national polity.

Whilst *Dictee* traces the Korean American dilemma by documenting the impossible return to a 'conflict-free' Korea, *Obasan* presents a story of a family split up by the Japanese Canadian internment and rules of relocation. If we take into account Gaston Bachelard's argument that there is a marked distinction 'between the house and the non-house', thus a recognition that 'outside and inside form a dialectic of division' (40), the inner spaces of home and house signify not just physical warmth and concrete protection within the four walls of a house. Additionally, the inner spaces of the house also point to the psycho-somatic dimension of psycho-emotional security provided by a known sense of geographical roots and physical living spaces. In both *Dictee* and *Obasan*, the childhood home takes on an internal-external spatial dichotomy. In the words of J. Gerald Kennedy, the childhood home

is an ‘almost magical site...associated with indelible, formative experiences’ (24). Since both growth in maturity and growth in security are experienced within and amidst the childhood home as physical backdrop, the internal-external division symbolised by the house refers to both a physical and psychic kind. In other words, these novels deal with the issue of home in such a way as to highlight its fundamental links with the maternal figure, especially the mother. Because memories of the home are intimately intertwined with recollections of the mother during formative years, the exploration of the confines, boundaries, and interstitial spaces of the home opens up an examination of the mother-daughter bond in the maternal relationship.

The association of matrilineal links to the idea of the home is clearly demonstrated in *Obasan* through Naomi’s memories of her childhood house in Vancouver. Naomi fondly remembers her time at the house and vividly recalls the physical appearance of the house during her time at an internment camp. Now removed from the house, Naomi is able to better appreciate its splendour, comfort and grandeur offered. She mentions, ‘The house in which we live is in Marpole, a comfortable residential district in Vancouver. It is more splendid than any house I have lived in since.’ (O 60) With the house being ‘large and beautiful’ (O 60), the comfort and security offered by the house lies in stark contrast to her fragile and bare surroundings at camp. Naomi remembers the various spaces within the house: ‘the playroom’, ‘the music room’, and the kitchen where she used to keep her ‘family of dolls’. When Naomi mentions how she ‘missed [these dolls] more than anything else’, Naomi alludes to the love that enveloped her in her childhood years. As ‘representatives of the ones I loved’ (O 64), these dolls are treasured by Naomi as the love she showers upon her dolls mirrors the love showered upon Naomi by her

mother. Here, Naomi fondly reminisces the times she used to play with her dolls as her mother prepared homely-cooked meals in the kitchen. Naomi's enduring memories of her mother are tantamount to the lasting presence of a physically absent mother whose 'quiet' stillness permeates her daughter's life. In particular, Naomi remembers the way her mother 'chant[ed]' (*O* 66) stories as Naomi 'snuggle[d] into her arms, listening and watching the shadows of the peach tree outside [her] window' (*O* 66). Naomi recollects further details attached to these stories. She says, 'Night after night I ask for Momotaro' (*O* 66) –a story that features a peach fruit that eventually bears a child called Momotaro¹⁵. Given that a peach tree physically sits outside of Naomi's childhood house in her garden, this localised point of reference strongly suggests parent-child relationship within the concepts of home, homecoming, and exile as these themes link up to the story of Momotaro the peach boy. The Japanese folktale of Momotaro is a story of exile and successful return to the home, so it is significant that it is Naomi's favourite. It becomes particularly difficult for Naomi that her family's internment and mother's later exile to Japan mean that 'Trains do not carry us home. Ships do not return us again.' (*O* 225) Here, Naomi's perpetual sense of exile is portrayed in her use of the present tense to denote how she does not return home as modes of transport are at a halt. Naomi's exile is thus located in an immediate presence, and the close familiarity and association with her feelings of displacement feature as an on-going everyday lived experience. The sense of up-rootedness and displacement due to relocation and internment are maintained, as she never does return to her home and never does recover from the losses caused by the physical displacement and physical splitting of her family. Naomi's physical exile from both her Canadian childhood house and her

¹⁵ Momotaro or 'Son of a Peach' is a Japanese vernacular story about a boy, born out of a peach, who leaves his home to fight robbers/ogres who have raided a neighbouring island. Once successfully defeating these trespassers, he is greeted with joy and triumph by his parents on his home-coming.

ancestral home in Japan speak of the visceral losses to which she responds by connecting the notion of home with her mother and her motherland.

In *Dictee*, the section entitled ‘Calliope’ deals especially with the issue of home and homecoming. This section is named after the Grecian muse of epic poetry and traces the heroic deeds and courageous acts of women whose political activism in Korea and their trials and tribulations in life become sources of transformative energy to Cha. Pages are dedicated to the life-story of the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon and Cha’s mother. In addition to the tales of the feisty female revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Cha delineates the story of her mother whose life experiences are no less ‘epic’ to Cha’s mind. This section teases out the intricacies of historical events within the life of Cha and her mother and examines how her mother and other heroic women within Korean history serve as an inspiration to Cha. These figures act as role models in reminding Cha that the home is both a physical place of origins and a psychic construct of identity. In other words, Cha learns that the home is both location and dwelling, as well as a mental state in which childhood memories of maternal love are associated with the sense of being at home.

The ‘Calliope’ section of Cha’s auto/biography therefore details a subsequent series of events starting with her mother’s geographical distance from her Korean homeland. Cha speaks of how her mother was born in Manchuria, China, where her family sets up their permanent home since escaping from the Japanese occupation of Korea. Cha continues by telling of how her mother settles into ‘a village’ where Koreans live as ‘Refugees. Immigrants. Exiles.’ (*D* 45) It becomes increasingly evident that her mother’s sense of home is suspended since she is, as Cha puts it, ‘farther away from the land that is not your own. Not your own any longer.’ (*D* 45) Her mother’s dislocation and detachment from Korea becomes palpable in her

mother's disidentification, dissociation, and dispossession of her homeland. As a nation whose history involves being first colonised by the French and then the Japanese, Korea has been blighted with conflict, wars, and foreign occupation. This resulted in a wave of emigration out of Korea to pursue seemingly better lives and topographical terrain. Movement away from a country that has been previously colonised is movement that is a double loss to both Cha and her mother. The deprivation of rightful ownership of an ancestral home equates to a sense of disbelonging and great displacement. This sense of dispossession is exemplified in the way the Korean immigration borders are filled with uniformed personnel conducting 'search[es]' and 'demand[ing] to know who and what you are' 'every ten feet' (*Dictee* 57) that her mother takes in her attempts to gain entry back into Korea. Kathleen Kirby, in *Indifferent Boundaries*, describes the home as a 'densely signifying marker of ideology' (21) and further identifies the home as attached to ideas associated with the mother (i.e. the mother figure, the motherland, the mother tongue). By relating the home to a 'walled site of belonging' (21), Kirby addresses the way the home serves as a site of nurturance that generates a sense of origins through identification –both nostalgic and tangible– with the family and childhood home. In 'Calliope', Cha the narrator associates the home with the mother when saying 'You are home now your mother your home.' (*D* 49) As the mother is seen as 'the first concept' (*D* 50), the mother is the original site of birth. The home is also a place where one is 'sheltered from the harshness of daily life' (*D* 48) and where, as Naomi Nakane in *Obasan* articulates, 'nudity [...] is completely thinkable' (*O* 58). Such openness, ease, familiarity and comfortability within the home which offers a sense of security are available through close-knitted ties between parents and children. Despite, and because of, both physical and mental exile from their

geographical roots, mothers and daughters consequently forge permanent homes away from their ancestral homeland, and so manage their losses by turning them into gains.

Thus, the home becomes synonymous with the safe perimeters of a walled house which offers sanctuary, security, and a sense of trust –all of which provides the feeling of being bordered off and protected from external dangers. These feelings are vital for psychic health and for healthy gains in mental well-being. The transformation of melancholic racial losses are predicated upon this shift of perspective from displacement to attached home. The positive feelings generated by the idea of belonging, having, and possessing a home are central for overturning pathologised identity in a lacking ego. When Cha describes one of her journeys home and says ‘You take the train home. Mother...you call her already, from the gate’ (*D* 49), the walled boundary of the home that divides the outside physical world from the internal world of safety is signalled in the image of the ‘gate’ which fences off danger and the harshness of an external realm from the safety of a protected inner space.

The separation of the physical world from the interior world is even more marked in Cha’s description of her memories of her mother ‘tak[ing] [her] *indoors* and bring[ing] [her] food to eat’ (*D* 49, emphasis added). As a powerful antidote to the times when ‘you are alone and your hardships immense’ (*D* 49), the home offers a source of sanctuary and a steady sense of geographical roots as a place of nourishment and nurturance. Early theories of melancholia as individually-suffered and individually-sustained permanent impoverishment of the ego are also conveyed in the previous quote. The scenario of being alone with one’s hardships denotes the pathological threat of melancholia which destroys identity. However, with links to

the mother fortifying a sense of childhood home no matter how physically distanced the mother and motherland may be, melancholic losses are managed as transformative gains. As well as validating identity through identification with other family members, the idea of the home establishes the mother as the central foothold. Naomi's recounting memories of her childhood house is done with great vividness and detailed accuracy. As she announces, 'If I search the caverns of my mind, I come to a collage of images – somber paintings, a fireplace, and a mantel clock with a heavy key like a small metal bird that fits in my palm.' (O 61) The heavy key serves as the gateway to her loaded memories of the walled perimeters of security that provide her with protection from the external world. 'Heavy' works in both senses of memories of the home being a burden and being freeing or releasing or unlocking. The metaphor of the bird further denotes freedom achieved by the self as this freedom may be contained in the palm's hand. Hence, the freedom from pain, loss, and suffering is within one's reach. With Aunt Emily urging Naomi not to make the mistake of 'deny[ing] the past (O 60) in counselling Naomi 'You have to remember' (O 60), Naomi heeds Aunt Emily's advice to remember the past. Precisely because the Vancouver home is 'splendid' (O 60) compared to the 'cage' (O 118) and 'hut' (O 229) of internment camps, Naomi recalls her Vancouver home with great affection and a fundamental attachment of the home as mother. When announcing 'All right, Aunt Emily, all right!' (O 60), Naomi defies initial reluctance to recall the past by admitting to feelings which are provoked by her Aunt of the comfort offered by her Vancouver home.

Obasan is an internment narrative about relocation, of constantly being on the move without the prospect of ever returning to the original home or place. However, home is also 'a state of mind' (Kingston as qtd in Grice, 199) –an

emotional space that occupies the psycho-dynamic realm of our sensory minds.

When Naomi laments the impossibility of her mother returning to Canada and talks about wanting to go back to her original Vancouver home, she also yearns for the emotional state of security in having her family reunited. As part of the Canadian government's orders for relocating Japanese Canadians to various destinations, the inevitability of having to 'move house' (O 206) incessantly results in not just the physical strain of having to inhabit make-shift homes for short time spans, but it creates also the suspension of psychological stability and emotional wellness. When Stephen says firmly to Naomi, 'We can't [go home]' (O 206), he encapsulates the contradiction between the desire to return to a known destination, both a homely place of familiarity as well as a psychical space of comfort, and the impossibility of that desire being fulfilled.

With the real physical experience of exile, both the self- and state-imposed kind, there is a risk of the home becoming a place of nostalgia, a utopia or a mythologised site. In Kogawa's *Obasan*, the protagonist's experience of a suspended home highlights her sense of displacement following relocation of her family to several makeshift homes by the Canadian government. Her nostalgic yearning for her original home in Vancouver is evident when Naomi confesses that 'No matter how I wish it, we do not go home' (O 149). Once again, Naomi's use of the present tense in this statement to do with her ideas regarding home reveals her continued sense of displacement. The fact that she never does return home signifies a loss that is never compensated for or cured. Naomi neither revisits nor returns to her childhood Vancouver home; she is also prevented from flying to visit her remaining relatives in Japan. Her everyday sense of loss is thus made palpable in these words which confirm Naomi's everyday condition of melancholia. Amidst these losses,

Naomi learns to manage her feelings of displacement. Contending with the class dynamics of a binary system of upper white class versus a lower class of yellow race, Naomi's family experiences the class demotion associated with Japanese American internment, institutionalised exclusion, and physical relocation from Vancouver. They are moved to sites in Slocan, British Columbia, Lethbridge, and Alberta by the Canadian government. Naomi's original dwelling becomes tinted with nostalgia as she yearns for the 'early Vancouver days' (*O* 294) now that she is made to occupy a makeshift shelter in a 'chicken coup' (*O* 233) within the plain fields of Alberta, a far cry from her previously capacious Vancouver house.

With Naomi's ancestral homeland being a distant and remote place, her mythologisation of Japan at a younger age is eventually supplanted by a real and tragic sense of loss suffered by those in war-torn Japan. Speaking about the ancestral homeland, Patricia Duncker describes the 'danger that the Homeland, the remembered, imagined or reconstructed country of origin...can become an ideal dream, untouched by history conflict, poverty or corruption' (221). Naomi's double losses are felt more tangibly now that she and her brother 'are not children any longer' (*O* 278) and the risk of becoming nostalgic for a war-affected homeland declines with real knowledge. Dual losses are marked in Naomi's physical detachment from her Japanese homeland and her new knowledge of the national losses Japan sustained in the Second World War, during which America launches a physical and military assault on both the Japanese nation and its people. The physical losses in Japan include the air bombings by American planes and the nuclear attacks on cities, harbours and ports. Naomi's grandmother Grandma Kato is one to have suffered from the nuclear bombs. As Nakayama-sensei says to Naomi and Stephen, 'Senso no toki –in the time of the war –your mother. Your grandmother. That there

is suffering and their deep love.’ (O 279) As Naomi recounts letters written by her grandmother, Naomi reveals how ‘Grandma Kato’s sister, their mother, and her sister’s husband died in the B-29 bombings of March 9, 1945.’ (O 282)

This nostalgisation of homeland speaks of destinations that are ultimately unknown, yet identified and recognised as a geographical and emotional site of origin. In moments of crisis and loss, exemplified in the Korean civil war and cold war, the home takes on an unknown physical location which nevertheless provides a sense of working ‘*towards the destination*’ (D 80), and against melancholia’s psychodynamic pathology. By mentioning ‘Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search’ and that ‘We are inside the same struggle seeking the same destination’ (D 81), Cha signposts the way in which a place of belonging and home are suspended. Given that ‘*There is no destination other than towards yet another refuge from yet another war*’ (D 80), home as an unknown destination paradoxically provides a protective utopia against a world of hostility. This third dimension to the home is already hinted at by second generation women writers such as Meena Alexander, Sara Suleri and Shirley Geok-Lin Lim who consider the home as a remembered physical location and imagined site (Grice 201). As a place of security to be tapped into and called to mind when needed, the idea of home as a nostalgic utopia of safe refuge indicates the melancholic need for a semblance of roots.

Even as *Dictee* and *Obasan* explore related ideas regarding the concept of the home as geographical roots and as a psychosomatic site of security, these texts also subscribe to these ideas in varying degrees. While *Obasan* magnifies the notion of the home as a source of identifiable identity, *Dictee* dismantles this idea by representing the home as an elusive place. In *Dictee*, there is no fixity to the notion of the home, as identity is constantly being held in question. Whether they are in

China, Korea, or America, Cha and her mother are interrogated about who they are ('They ask you identity', *D* 56). In *Obasan*, the home is associated with anxiety even as family unions take place within a known, distinct, and identifiable childhood house deeply associated with one's identity. In *Obasan*, Naomi's anxiety is to do with the fragmentation, dispersal, and dislocation of her family members due to war, relocation, and internment. The concept of the home is therefore also always being redefined despite the physical existence of the house and exists in a state of constant flux as the modalities of genealogical, familial, and physical roots simultaneously shift. And so, while Cha and Kogawa's novels both display complementary readings regarding the trope of the home, *Dictée* and *Obasan* differ on the extent to which the home is a known and unknown, arrived and suspended, destination in both the physical realm and in the heart.

John McLeod encourages us to rethink the meanings of home and belonging, by bringing to our attention the impact of migration and trans-national movement in today's fast moving world. He states,

Conventional ideas of 'home' and 'belonging' depend upon clearly defined, static notions of being 'in place', firmly rooted in a community or particular geographical location. But these models or 'narratives' of belonging no longer seem suited to a world where the experience and legacy of migration are altering the ways in which individuals think of their relation to place.
(214)

McLeod points to the idea of the home as an internal state of mind that may be sourced as an empowering tool given that Asian Americans inhabit, to use Amy Ling's phrase, a space 'between worlds' (9). In *Dictée*, the fact that the home is intimately intertwined with the figure of the matriarch, from whom all things start and are derived, speaks of the transferable or portable sense of belonging that Cha

carries with her wherever she is currently situated. Cha herself admits, ‘Mother, my first sound. The first utter. The first concept.’ (*D* 50) The mother as site of origin signals how despite ethnic dislocation, cultural dispossession and geographical uprootedness from a detached Korean homeland, as well as within a white America where ‘Their signature[,] their seals [and] Their own image’ (*D* 56) are embodied in racial terms, the concept of home is accessible via indelible links to the mother. Not just effected as a psychical place, the home becomes more than just a geographically positioned location of origin as Asian American women learn to empower themselves by enhancing and enriching their notion of the home with associations of the warmth, safety and comfort of their mother.

Both *Dictee* and *Obasan* explore the process of writing as an act of home-coming and a journey in which to evoke some semblance of home, belonging and identity. Writing features as an act of textual voicing which effectively opens up a space in which identity, both personal and communal, are shaped and defined. The notion of writing as a means to produce a textual home for the self is addressed by Helena Grice in *Negotiating Identities*. Grice points out that the home and the construct of the house can be thought of as a textual container (202-203), and therefore conceived of as an important vehicle to forging textual identities. In other words, a writer’s attempts to claim textual and actual territory for herself and her ancestors are made possible through such avenues. As an empowering tool, writing is a crucial and enabling apparatus for casting, shaping and probing a writer’s identity. Links to identity-formation through textual definition are demonstrated in the veritable open spaces it provides for women to challenge their liminal presence in a white, male-dominated, exclusionist environment. Women writers counteract America’s exclusionist surroundings by forging their homes, and their identities,

through textual works give that a sense of belonging is forged through the textual container. *Dictee* is an epitome of the way the process of writing is crucial to the notion of identity formation. By incorporating not just the written word, but in recording oral registers as well as graphic images, *Dictee* exemplifies the way in which the act of writing serves as a salient means to formulate identity through the textual realm. Cha's text is cognisant of the way in which self-articulation and self-expression comprise multitudinous forms, variant styles and multifarious modes of expression. By interweaving hand-written manuscripts, maps, diagrams, illustrations, and mimicking the process of dictation as well as incorporating hand-written annotations of crossed-out words, *Dictee* illustrates the organic development of identity through the labours of writing. Herein lies the power of writing as a textual home and container. With Aunt Emily's diary entries, journal articles, newspaper clippings, autobiographical accounts of the protagonist's life experiences in *Obasan*, the textual space created by Kogawa explores Japanese American internment and its effects on the identity of those affected as an act of homecoming, familiar and yet unknown in its very destination.

CHAPTER 3

Performative Agency: Challenging Oriental Hyperfemininity and Melancholic Illness in Jessica Tarahata Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) and Fay Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993)

The intertwining factors of gender and sexuality are constitutive components of America's racialisation of its Asian population. Writer Jessica Hagedorn mentions in an interview that '[I]dentity for me is not only racial, but sexual. I cannot think of myself as addressing the multicultural issue without including gender culture within the framework' (as qtd in Lee 167). Here, the interlocking apparatuses of gender, sexuality and race (see also Bowe; Lowe; Koshy; Lee) are acknowledged to play a part in apprehending the psychic retention and melancholic transmission of racial injuries of Asian American subjects. As sexualised subjects discriminated against as foreign and exotic, Asian American women contend with their racial status and Oriental sexuality prescribed by their social roles. To this end, losses that are externally inscribed upon their bodies become at risk of psychic internalisation.

In two Asian American novels published in the 1990s, Jessica Tarahata Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* and Fay Myenne Ng's *Bone*, the intricate relationship and close interplay between race, gender and sexuality are demonstrated. The way Asian American women react and, more importantly, respond to the 'Oriental' archetypes set down by Western perceptions, attitudes, and perspectives are also traced. In defiance of passive notions of Oriental hyperfemininity and the hyperbolic

representations as racialised subjects, the Asian female community within and outside America challenge ascriptions of their Orientalism by employing agency to assert their individual and communal subjectivity. I argue that this female agency marks the double intervention into Western platitudes of Asian American women's sexualised and racialised statuses. Asian women assert their personal subjectivity from within a position of loss to counter psychic internalisation of their 'abject other' and 'foreign outsider' status. To this end, they overturn their ascribed roles as exotic temptress and domestic goddess to make melancholia productive. Subversive performance, gender non-conventionality, and the ambivalent embracing of Oriental stereotypes demonstrate the salient ways in which they transform their melancholia. The transformative management of racial melancholia is, thus, effected from within their sexualised and gendered positions, rather than from beyond these combined products of racialisation. Collectively, suffering as 'psychic citizenship' (Eng and Kazanjian 366) with other racialised Asian women evidences the productive gap for making melancholia productive. Hence, I argue that these novels offer a reading of agency carried out in the performativity of Oriental femininity and female sexuality as instances of productive melancholia.

This chapter examines two contemporary novels that address America's sexual racialisation of Asian women within and outside America. Filipino American writer Jessica Tarahata Hagedorn in her novel *Dogeaters* (1990) casts incisive projections of the lives of American-colonised Filipinas. On the other hand, Chinese American novelist Fay Myenne Ng delineates the performative responses of Chinese American women in her novel *Bone* (1993). In drawing on both novels, I aim to build on and extend Tina Chen's concept of impersonation as Asian American identity-in-process. In exploring the way in which Filipina and Chinese American

women handle the various stereotypes placed on them, I argue that the performativity of their impersonated roles helps claim an American identity and critique the institutions that have designated them as ‘foreign aliens’.

Both novels, *Dogeaters* and *Bone*, follow in the footsteps of the historical novels of *Obasan* and *Dictee*, as they contextualise the racial stereotyping of Asian women within specific settings that provide a canvas for mapping various permutations of sexuality and gender linking up to racial melancholia. *Dogeaters* is set during the Marcos’ rule in an American-obsessed society within the post-colony of the Philippines. Conversely, *Bone* is set in San Francisco’s Chinatown and delineates the lives of a Chinese family that comprises three girls, their mother, and their stepfather. While Hagedorn captures the special status of Filipino women as U.S. colonial wards (Chan viii), Ng outlines the ways in which the underlying bond between sisters, and between mother and daughter, diminishes patriarchal authority that buttresses Chinese American women’s racialised and gendered subjectivities. Attentiveness to the responsive reactions of Filipinas and Chinese Americans to the concept of Oriental female stereotyping exemplifies the agency exercised by these groups of Asian women in their capacity as performative players of their sexuality. Formulaic ideas of the Oriental female stereotype as physically reduced sexual bodies highlight the exigent call to tackle the losses of racial stereotyping within racial sexualisation.

In both novels, loss is precipitated in several manifestations as evidenced in the physical instances of destruction in the motifs of death, illness and nightmares. In reinforcing their speaking *and* acting selves, Asian women draw strength from their communication with other women even as they perform their gendered and sexualised roles individually. Subsequent challenges to and defiance of losses are

symptomatic of the injuries of racialisation and sexualisation and serve as more than mere redress for loss. These acts are a productive means in which Asian American women convert loss into gains within positive identity. In this subject formation, a healthy sense of identity is achieved by making racial melancholia productive as an everyday condition in which to tap communal empowerment.

Both *Dogeaters* and *Bone* allegorise the contradictions of the Oriental female stereotype through the crisis in, and links between, the nation and its extraterritorial spaces. While *Dogeaters* is set against the backdrop of bustling Manila in the former American colony of the Philippines, *Bone* is set in America's San Francisco. And so, whilst Hagedorn deals with American Orientalism and white imperial expansion in the Philippines, Fay Ng's novel is attentive to the processes of immigration and assimilation of Asians into America. This chapter pairs these two novels together to highlight their dialogic interplay and interaction as regards their treatment of cultural, as well as racial, stereotypes in sexualised and gendered Oriental women. Put together, these novels point to the need to recognise the mutually constituted and constitutive realms of the nation and its extraterritorial spaces. Koshy usefully points out that the sexual licence accorded to Oriental women is based on their extraterritorial relationships with men given that the moral orders of the nation and marriage in white bourgeois domesticated America are threatened by Asian women (137). In effect, the increased entry of Asian wives in the post-1965 relaxation of legislative laws on Asian immigration (Chan) heightened America's domestic contact with Asian women.

In exploring Asian femininity, the literary novels of *Dogeaters* and *Bone* are important sites for the expression of melancholia caused by America's imbricated processes of racialisation, sexualisation, and genderisation. In *Dogeaters* and *Bone*,

Filipinas and Chinese women are subjected to the amalgam of racialisation and sexualisation by their indigenous cultures and by Western man's ascriptions of Orientalism. Positioned as the male subordinate and the white woman's inferior, Asian American women suffer losses that potentially yield debilitating and pathological melancholic effects. As this chapter argues, melancholic losses are manifested in the symbolic motifs of death, illnesses and nightmares. Such exemplifications of loss signal the exclusion of Asians by a white hegemony, and the binary struggle between a melancholic retention of loss and the transformative powers of female agency. Consequently, the energies of empowerment channeled through intersubjective ties are pivotal to transforming racial melancholia within racialised subjects.

Representations of Oriental women in *Dogeaters* and *Bone* demonstrably pander to the stereotype of the excessively feminine and/or exaggeratedly sexual Oriental woman. Yet, these narratives also resist, contest and alter identifications with the ascribed category of racialised, sexualised, and objectified Asian women. In other words, both novels replicate and challenge the belief that Asian women embody and typify Oriental hyperfemininity. 'Hyperfemininity' is a term I use to reference Asian women's exoticised sexuality and corporeality projected onto them by white American men within and outside America. In other words, it is a status conferred on Asian women by gender expectations laid down by patriarchal, patrilocal cultures and by a male-dominated Western systemic structure. *Dogeaters* and *Bone* give expression to and vocalise the fraught status and complex subject-position of Asian American women as national citizens. The stereotype of Oriental hyperfemininity is further informed by an analogous reading of geographical Asia as feminine (J. Chang 'I Cannot', 240). In other words, the various permutations of

Asian female identity and gender stereotypes are informed by the prescription of hyperfeminine roles to both Asian women and the Asian region.

Sexual racialisation and melancholic loss are bound in an intricate relationship that points to the interlinking processes of racialisation and sexualisation as potential sources of depression. Double loss in sexual racialisation is experienced by Asian women as consignment to the role of ‘ancillary others’, or those who are defined according to categories of race and gendered sexuality. The ostracisation of Asian women and their relegation to society’s periphery suggests the restrictions in Orientalist ascriptions attributed to the matrix of race and gender. *Dogeaters* and *Bone* explore Asian women’s placing in the patriarchal realms of nationality, race and culture. While celebrity-obsessed, image-conscious Filipinas in *Dogeaters* demonstrate the extent to which Oriental femininity is both a passive (weak) and transgressive (strong) role, *Bone* exhibits individual ownership of the roles of the mother, sister, and lover. I employ the term sexual racialisation to encompass the binary mechanisms of racialisation and sexualisation, in which male anglo-centric typecasting of Asian women results in losses. As this chapter puts forward, melancholic loss stemming from sexual racialisation is managed to produce active transformation of identity as an avenue of strength. I argue for the conversion of loss into identity gains within acts of performativity in female agency which are enacted from within and without the Oriental position.

The dualistic interplay between the reinforcement and active opposition to Oriental female stereotypes exhibit the agency adopted by Asian women. Here, ‘agency’ describes the active role of a person who addresses rather than submits to prescriptions of weak Orientality. Agency is elicited in these women’s active responses to racial and sexual objectification. Tina Chen’s theory of Asian American

'double agency' evokes the idea of impersonation as "the assumption of a public identity that does not necessarily belong to 'someone else' but [that] has been assigned to and subsequently adopted by the performer in question in order to articulate an identity comprehensible to the public" (14). Applying Chen's theory, Asian women adopt multiple roles as mothers, wives, lovers, and daughters ascribed by social, cultural and political norms. In embracing and overturning these manifestations of Oriental femininity, Asian women transform pathological definitions of identity via their productive acts of racial and gender performativity. These women's efforts at addressing the negative permutations of their raced, gendered and sexualised selves channel a transformative melancholia that offers a sense of positive identity to both self and community.

Performativity is a valuable concept to bear upon my argument regarding transformative melancholia in Asian American agency. The concept of performativity informs the way opportunities for transformation, resistance, and change arise in repetitive subversive acts. Jonathan Culler, in *The Literary in Theory*, explicates the 'gaps [for] resistance and change' (150) within performativity. Here, Culler evokes Austin's speech act theory regarding performative utterances and discusses Butler's extension of performativity to gender. Culler explains the way Judith Butler draws upon Derridean iterability when Butler argues for gender performativity as repetitive 'never singular' (150) acts of gender performances. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler writes

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a

ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (95)

For Butler then, gender assumes a performativity that allows contestation against the coherent notion of the production of a ‘natural’ sexed and gendered self. Even as Butler argues that the transformations in gender performativity are minimal and incremental (see also Butler, *Gender Trouble*), I argue that these shifts are significant in paving the way for healthy subjectivity. Furthermore, with Butler arguing that acts of performance are not known ‘fully in advance’ (Culler 150-154; Butler *Bodies*) in ritualised productions of gender, I argue that opportunities to make racial melancholia productive are available in this space of uncertainty in which the subject comes into being.

By combining Chen’s double agency with Butler’s performativity, I use the term ‘performative agency’ to describe active moments in which critical gaps present opportunities for challenging and subverting the constrictive limits within Asian American racial stereotyping. Along this line, performative agency plays an important role for affirming a subject status away from pathological definitions of melancholic loss. The gaps tapped within performative agency signal the spaces in which the normative terms of America’s sexual racialisation are reframed, challenged and revised. I argue that both the subversive performance of Oriental hyperfemininity and gender non-conventionality exemplify active Asian American agency that supports transformative melancholia. To this end, melancholia becomes constitutive of a healthy identity instead of severed from positive identity.

My concept of performative agency involves the idea of subversive gender performativity as both a tool and an exercise. In other words, performative agency serves as both an aid and an enactment towards positive identity. As a facilitating medium, gender performance grants Asian women the power to transform their identity from within the Oriental label. As an exercise, performative agency encapsulates the capacity to liberate from constricting stereotypical roles that are a source of pathological disposition. The exercise and tool of performative agency engender new possibilities for moving beyond ascriptions of gendered racialisation within patriarchal and colonial structures. The liberating transformations that result challenge a reading of Asian women's behaviour as pandering to racial and sexual caricatures. One important way in which performative agency works is by creating empathy between women. Shared experiences challenge the regularised conditions of race, gender and sexuality which dictate the way non-normative behavior are cast as sources of damaging melancholia. In subverting stereotypes, performative agency overturns prescriptive normative standards by dismantling the idea of a unified authentic identity. Hence, as both instrument and practice, performative agency opens up an avenue for reframing loss as a constructive pathway to positive gains, and for the positive articulation of healthy identity.

3.1) Subversive Performance in Racial Stereotypes – Oriental Hyperfemininity and Gender Non-conventionality

Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* and Fay Ng's *Bone* portray similar yet contrasting forms of Asian performativity in racialised and gendered identity. Whilst *Dog eaters* examines the various permutations of Oriental hyperfemininity to examine overtly feminine behavior associated with Asian women, *Bone* investigates

the non-conventional roles adopted by Asian women. In both novels, performative agency in Oriental hyperfemininity and gender non-conventionality convey opportunities within the open spaces for asserting transformative / productive melancholia. In *Dogeaters*, ultra-feminine dispositions are embodied in Filipina women in an American-influenced Philippines. *Bone*, on the other hand, looks at the stereotypical roles cast upon Chinese daughters and wives in America and the way female domestic roles are used to elicit challenges to women's submissive positions within both white American and Chinese cultural patriarchy.

Murnen and Bryne (as qtd in McKelvie and Gold 219) usefully describe hyperfemininity as the exaggeration of physical behaviour considered to be typical of the female gender. On a similar note, Koshy reads hyperfemininity as synonymous with hypercorporeality (Koshy 127). Koshy's explication on hyperfemininity is closely linked to the hypersexualised roles of Filipina women, for whom contact with white American men augments women's objectified roles (101). In light of these theorisations of Orientality, I explore the way *Dogeaters* demonstrates a contrapuntal 'active-passive' model that is arguably inherent to Asian feminine behaviour. This double-edged concept of stereotype offers a useful insight into the ambivalent workings of Oriental hyperfemininity. The stereotype as 'mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief' (Bhabha 82) explains the imbrication of active and passive models of Orientalist female behaviour. In light of the exoticisation, feminisation, and objectification of the Asian race, Asian women assume contradictory subject-positions that transpire from their antagonism to these demands for culturally-dictated subordination within their hyperfeminine roles.

The etymology and theoretical roots of the word Orientalism bear useful implications for my discussion of Oriental hyperfemininity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘Orientalism’ as a term to refer to the Orient or the East in contrast with the Occident West. Shaped by Edward Said’s influential book *Orientalism*, the concept of Orientalism describes the West’s fascination with Eastern culture and art. Said states that Orientalism is ‘a manner of regularised (or Orientalised) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient’ (202). Here, Said points to the inadvertent exoticisation, primitivisation, and sexualisation of Eastern regions, their peoples and culture which are determined by Western attitudes and perspectives. In Said’s formulation of the concept of Orientalism, Said signposts the West’s subjugation of Eastern regions and their subjects. Oriental, thus, points to the racial profiling and the gendered figuration of the East as female contrasted with the male Occidental West (Said 49). In short, the romanticisation of Eastern regions has been used to justify Western exploits and colonial interests in Eastern peoples and faraway Eastern regions.

Scholars and critics have noted the way Orientalism shapes and informs the construction of Asian American identity, whilst also observing the resistance to Orientalism (see Ma; Li; and Lye). In particular, Juliana Chang extends Said’s definition of Orientalism when taking Orientalism to encompass the subordination of Asian women. In adopting the term ‘Oriental feminine’, Chang evokes the metonymic hyperfeminisation of Oriental women brought about by the feminisation of Oriental Eastern regions (‘I Cannot’, 240). Chang’s discussion on hyperfeminisation recalls the links Koshy makes between hyperfeminisation and hypercorporeality, by evoking the refusal of Asian women’s subject status in

excessive feminine traits inscribed onto her body. In this way, Chang argues that hyperfeminisation results in Asian women being viewed as the colonial other 'who stands outside history and modernity' (241). Chang's use of Oriental femininity alludes to the type-casting of Asian women in a position of domestic subservience as obedient wife and the unsexed housewife. It also points, conversely, to Asian women's powerful sexuality as the exotic temptress. The reduction of Asian women's subjectivity by systemic functions of American national and cultural patriarchy results in the perpetuation of their subordinated status as objects and mere articles of male desire, fantasy and brute physicality.

In America-centric Philippines, the female characters in *Dogeaters* openly flaunt their sexuality as beauty queens, preening wives of politically influential men, and attractive *Mabuhay* movie stars. These women are portrayed as both sexually-exploited (passive) and exploitative (active) women in the domestic space of the home and the public cityscape of Manila. Alternatively, *Bone* is a narrative centring on 'a family of three girls' (*B* 3) which addresses the relationship between three sisters and, thus, delineates three related yet distinct responses to the cultural, transnational trope of Chinese femininity. In both novels, the double-edged Oriental stereotype speaks of contending yet intricately connected representations of strong and weak Asian femininity. Oriental femininity is represented by the binary opposition between both autonomy, on the one hand, and passive obedience, on the other hand. The doubled nature of Asian Oriental stereotyping points to the wound of sexual racialisation that needs to be addressed for the female subject to make losses productive.

Sexuality in Oriental hyperfemininity is employed as a manipulative tool to subvert both patriarchal and colonial systems. Female sexual prowess is exemplified

in the image of the 'dragon lady' (Prasso 77); this appellation is used to describe the domineering Asian woman whose sexuality transgresses the domestic passivity prescribed by the West. Alongside this figure of the dragon lady exists the portrait of the quiet woman confined by the limits of Asian patriarchy and American patriarchy. Instances of female subservience to cultural and national patriarchy are evident in figures such as the 'China doll', Japanese 'geisha' and Asian 'mail-order bride' – all of whom promulgate a sexualised subservient image of Asian femininity. In addition to these figures, the domestic wife within the marital home also falls into this category of obliging female subservience.

Strong individuality and obedient passivity may also be embodied in one Oriental woman. In other words, the dual-pronged representations of Oriental femininity are embodied in the single female body, as both categories of sexual passivity and dragon-like femininity merge. Whether exemplified in the bodies of different women or manifested in one body, this strong/weak model of Oriental female sexuality is indicative of the hyperfeminisation, hypersexualisation, and hypercorporeality of Asian women. In short, Oriental women find themselves cast as sexual objects whose femininity is in excess of their persons. In light of their sexualisation, Oriental women hold up American Hollywood images of the Western *femme fatale* as standards for female beauty. The perception of Western women as exemplary models of beauty is a lasting corollary of the colonial legacy of the West on the East. As *Dog eaters* illustrate, white Western perspectives and attitudes adopted by Asian peoples are informed by America's transnational ties with the Asian region.

In response to their objectified subjectivity, Asian women's performative strategy locates gendered sexuality as a potent site to challenge destructive ideas about Asian races in the Oriental hyperfeminine role. One such destructive idea is demonstrated in the Western prescription of deviant sexuality onto Filipinos given America's colonial legacy in the Philippines (Koshy 14-15). In *Dog eaters*, American (post-) colonial influences are also evidenced in the public parading of women's bodies in competitions that mirror 'Miss America' beauty pageants and invite the male gaze. The daughter of Senator Domingo Avila and Luisa Avila is one such woman who openly subscribes to Oriental hyperfemininity through her actions. Daisy Avila enters herself into a national beauty pageant much to the chagrin of her intellectualising mother. Daisy is consequently reprimanded by her mother Luisa as 'a disgrace to the Avila name' (*DG* 101). Luisa's disapproval of Daisy corresponds to the mother's objection to the gratuitous public staging of her daughter's body. Luisa censures daughter Daisy's actions as pandering to Oriental hypercorporeality.

Historical links between American colonialism and Oriental hypercorporeality further accentuate the position of the Filipina as objectified other, who adopts a sexualised and hyperfeminised role. In his political pamphlet 'The Suffering Filipino', Daisy's father, Domingo Avila, makes ready references to the reduction of Asians as an enabling other of modernity. Domingo writes that a 'cultural inferiority complex' (*DG* 101) indoctrinated in the minds of Eastern people by the West flames the 'need for assimilation into the West' (*DG* 101). As the omniscient narrator further reveals, Domingo's consent for his daughter to take part in a 'government-endorsed beauty contest' (*DG* 101) bears testimony to the way Filipina subjects are 'united by hunger for glamour and Hollywood dreams' (*DG*

101) –the same kind of Western ideology that promulgates the objectification, hyperfeminisation and hypersexualisation of Filipinas.

The Filipina actress Lolita Luna in *Dog eaters* best exemplifies the seductive persona of the exotic Oriental woman who is hypersexualised as an object of male desire and fantasy. As a woman who uses her hyperfemininity to achieve her status as a screen siren, Lolita epitomises the Asian woman who capitalises on her sexuality to secure ties with white men of power. Lolita's position as the subsidiary colonial other is accentuated in her relationship with her current beau, General Ledesma, who is 'a powerful man who want[s] [Lolita] more than any other woman' (*DG* 170). In the portrayal of Lolita as 'limited in her thinking' (*DG* 171), Lolita is cast as one 'who does not know' that she is in fact also 'a talented actress' (*DG* 171). Lolita's internalisation of society's image of her sexualised, objectified body is accompanied with a corresponding lack of awareness of her real talents at the expense of her overt sexuality.

Lolita thus exploits sexuality's construction as a tool of female manipulation in using her 'magnificent body' (*DG* 171) to tease and 'mock' (*DG* 171) her white lover. In the way that Lolita 'punished him with her beauty' (*DG* 170), Lolita seduces the General with her 'high and defiant' moves when 'floating around the room [and dancing to] hypnotic music' (*DG* 170). The General is transfixed by Lolita and finds himself unable to end their affair despite the affair being a 'messy one' (*DG* 176). Lolita is not altogether a passive partner in their liaison as she also uses the General for 'drug money, rent money [and] access to his power' (*DG* 176). Lolita's sexual prowess is thus exemplified by her powerful hold over her white Spanish lover who is putty in her hands.

Lolita's female agency is best illustrated in the scene that takes place in the gender-defined space of the bathroom. Here, Lolita retreats momentarily from the presence of her lover the General who waits for her eagerly in the adjoining bedroom. The omniscient narrator announces that the bathroom is Lolita's 'favourite room, her hideaway' (DG 176). Within this space, demands to cater to male spectatorship are nullified as Lolita entertains the sight of her body in physical solitude. Lolita's performativity of her feminine body is demonstrated as she catches her reflection in the mirrors of the white bathroom. With the bathroom's white tub, white rug, mirrored walls and ceiling, the bathroom is both 'antiseptic and sexual' (DG 176). The whiteness and antiseptic nature of the bathroom exemplify Lolita's contradictory position as regards social ascriptions and expectations set upon her to conform to the Orientalist female stereotype. Lolita's flagrant sexuality is accentuated against the bathroom's antiseptic whiteness, which is set as a stark contrast to Lolita's sexualised tainted self. The mirrored walls of the bathroom also grant Lolita a self-autonomy away from the male gaze and white spectatorship. In this moment of solitary independence, Lolita exhibits a significant escape from prescriptive Orientalism. And so, the bathroom brings out an autonomous identity away from her lover the General through its antiseptic mirrored walls that accentuate both her sexuality and free individuality.

The symbol of the Oriental stereotype is also troped in the subservient Asian woman who acquiesces to male wants. In *Dogeaters*, these women are exemplified by Trinidad Gamboa, girlfriend to Romeo Rosales, and Baby Alacran, wife to Pepe Carreon. While Trinidad is described as one who has 'never defied her father and had always placed her parents' concerns above her own' (DG 53), Baby likewise submits to the patriarchal leadership of Pepe from the moment she lets him dictate

every detail of their wedding (*DG* 29). As a ‘weeping bride’ (*DG* 155), Baby does not know why she marries Pepe nor does she wish to be pregnant with Pepe’s child. As a ‘sleeping beauty’ who spends her days in bed, Baby fills her waking hours watching meaningless day-time TV. Baby’s physical paralysis reflects her internalisation of Pepe’s projections of her as a passive bride. Baby’s lack of physical movement also highlights her somatic subservience to male-dictated norms.

Just as the Orient is romanticised, Baby’s and Pepe’s relationship is laid out in excessively romantic terms. In wooing Baby, Pepe litters his speech with abstract nouns such as *desire*, *adoration* and *love*. Pepe’s use of such words signifies the sexual licence of men, while Baby’s inability to comprehend his romantic language points to a collapse of their relationship. Baby’s discomfort with Pepe’s language marks the cracks in their relationship as his language subscribes to a ‘superior-male vs. inferior-female’ hierarchical model that upholds the idea of the superior man as rescuing prince. In light of this hierarchical paradigm, ‘Baby decides it is her duty to love him’ (*DG* 27) as she adheres to the command determined by cultural and patriarchal impositions of female submission. Even as Baby does not wish to serve such male ends, she nevertheless decides to follow through her commitment to Pepe as his obedient, subordinate wife. Rather than this choice being no choice at all, Baby is neither coerced nor completely self-directed as she decides to play the acquiescent role.

In their domestic attachment and adoration of their male partners, both Baby Alacran and Trinidad Gamboa serve as binary juxtapositions to the sexually promiscuous ‘torrid siren’ (*DG* 53) Lolita Luna. High-living Lolita keeps an array of foreign lovers –an Englishman, an American playboy banker, and a Spanish lover– all of whom testify to her use of sexuality as an asset or what Koshy terms ‘sexual

capital' (15). Lolita's agency in exercising her sexual licence is contrasted with Baby's and Trinidad's doting loyalty and passive inclinations towards their male partners. Likewise, Trinidad's infatuation for Romeo is without a mutual exchange of affection. Together, Baby's and Trinidad's relationships with men are defined by social and cultural pressures. Yet, Baby and Trinidad also exhibit agency in choosing to have a partner, no matter how poor a choice this may be given the domineering characters of their partners. Expectations on Trinidad to find a male partner and Baby's longing for escape from the patriarchal pressures of the Alacran family are pressure forces that dictate their choice to enter into relationships. Returning briefly to Koshy's theory of sexual capital, I would argue that Baby and Trinidad demonstrate their sexual prerogative when acting, however poorly, within a set of constraints in which their decisions determine the relationship they share with their partners. Baby's choice to marry Pepe reinforces her self-determined efforts to break loose from cultural patriarchy. Baby challenges Filipino's cultural belief that '*Females will be [the] family's curse*' (DG 242) in attempts to speak out against patriarchal constraints. When announcing her engagement, Baby 'breaks the customary silence at the dinner table with her quavering voice' (DG 23). Despite her nervous and shy disposition, Baby asserts a voice even if only a timid voice. Here, Baby initiates a form of self-empowerment albeit a limited kind of freedom. Because Baby is 'unbearably shy, soft, plump, short [and] without any hard edges' (DG 25), Baby's break from silence is accentuated as a departure from her usually quiet ways. In contrast to Lolita, Baby and Trinidad embody the acquiescing Oriental female stereotype. Yet, all three girls as domestic wife, doting girlfriend, and sex siren display their sexual capital when using female sexuality to empower themselves within the cultural, national, and patriarchal realms they face.

The colonial undertones buttressing the Philippines' consumption of American exports of white femininity heighten the tension between female, colonised other and white coloniser subject. Daisy's sudden change of heart from happily winning the title of 'Miss Philippines' to her outright objection to women's bodies being publicly staged encapsulates her opposition to the objectification and colonisation of Filipina women. Daisy, thus, turns into an unwilling beauty queen with her rejection of her conferred status as 'the most beautiful woman in the Philippines' (*DG* 100). Subsequently, Daisy voices her 'public denou[ement] [of the] beauty pageant as a farce, a giant step backward for all women' (*DG* 109). Here, she aligns herself with white feminist democratic ideals in speaking out and refusing to conform any longer to the objectified hyperfemininity expected of her. Frustrated and apprehensive about the fact that 'Our country belongs to women who easily shed tears and men who are ashamed to weep' (*DG* 105), Daisy rebels against national constructs of hyperfemininity and the treatment of women as culturally dispensable pawns within white and Asian patriarchal systems. Given that this comment is one that she makes in a moment of self-epiphany, Daisy highlights the pressures on Asian women to embrace and submit to idealised notions of female sentimentality contrasted with male reticence. Daisy highlights the intersecting vectors of gender and sexuality in neo- and post-colonial Philippines undergirded by white American paradigms. Hyperbolic treatment of Oriental hyperfemininity is instantiated further in the names of Luis Alacran's daughters 'Baby' and 'Girlye' –names that readily allude to the imposition of excessive femininity. While Daisy Avila now resists the reductive objectification of women, Girlye Alacran panders to exhibitionist feminine traits by taking part in the junior category of the 'Miss Philippines' pageant, thereby

demonstrating her willing embrace of patriarchy's and mass culture's ideology of Oriental femininity.

Where some may embrace and others may reject the Oriental performance of female sexuality, there are Filipinas who simultaneously subscribe to and disdain their Oriental stereotyping. Pucha Gonzaga, in addition to Daisy Avila, is one who exemplifies this double response to hyperfemininity. At the beginning of the novel *Dog eaters*, Pucha is seen to openly subscribe to girly ways. The omniscient narrator announces, 'Pucha plays with her hair, affecting a coy pose as she, too, suddenly becomes aware of the boys' attention.' (DG 4) Later, Pucha enters into a subservient role in her marriage to Boomboom Alacran. Yet, Pucha successfully ends her marriage by 'get[ting] a divorce' (DG 243) from her physically abusive husband. Pucha's assertion of her independence from matrimonial ties constitutes an exercise of agency. The overtly girly Pucha represents the Filipina who both panders to and spurns Oriental hyperfemininity in her rejecting patriarchal rules in which spousal abuse typifies loss experienced in imbalanced power paradigms. The rules of raced (white), gendered (male) and heteronormative (patriarchal) standards underlying racial stereotyping in female Orientalness are tested by such ambivalent responses.

In addition to the hypersexualised persona and objectified passivity of Oriental women, direct inscriptions of female empowerment are also written into the narrative of *Dog eaters* to embody the strong and defiant Asian woman. The female protagonist Rio Gonzaga challenges prevailing images of Asian femininity by refusing the gendered and racial scripts of Oriental female stereotypes in both her performative speech and actions. As an interpellated subject of racial and cultural patriarchy, Rio faces the intransigent structures of this system. Rather than being a

complete victim of cultural and patriarchal impositions of identity, Rio resists the definitive roles of femininity by exercising her individual will as agent of free choice. Several scenes in the novel instantiate this process. Rio's embarrassment with Pucha's coquettish ways (*DG* 5), Rio's refusal to cry when her grandfather dies (*DG* 57) and Rio's defiance to wear a 'red dress' (*DG* 83) exemplify her strong individual will. Rio adamantly refuses to behave in socially-accepted ways, declaring 'I hate dresses! And I don't want a birthday party' (*DG* 83); such acts encapsulate her 'rebellious' (*DG* 83) resistance against conforming to the stereotype of feminine behavior. In refusing to wear a dress, Rio insists that the red dress' 'itchy petticoat' (*DG* 83) is uncomfortable and impractical. She also 'cut[s] off all [her] hair' (*DG* 236) upon discovering she has 'started menstruating' (*DG* 236). Rio's defiant resistance and rebukes to imputations of Oriental femininity demonstrate her active decisions to assert her individuality in the midst of female racial typecasting.

Furthermore, the trope of Oriental femininity is informed and defined, though not exclusively, by the physical presence of the white male sojourner in the extraterritorial space of Asia. Such contacts made with native Filipino culture are set against the drug-infested, sexually-promiscuous scene of Manila. Across Manila's landscape of alterity or 'otherness', the concept of Asian female sexuality is further exposed in relation to white-male encounters. America's enduring imperial rule in Philippines is readily signaled in the American movies and American-inspired radio serials patronised by both Pucha and Rio. Yet, the scenes of actual physical contact between Filipino women and white foreigners are dealt with fleetingly, and the rare moments in which they are described are rapidly deflated. The brevity accorded to these encounters underscores the transience and lack of commitment of the white man. For instance, *Dogeaters* describes the way Daisy Avila 'marries a foreigner in

haste and just as hastily leaves him' (*DG* 100). White English foreigner Malcolm Webb is the same 'playboy banker [who is] an old boyfriend of Lolita Luna' (*DG* 100). Malcolm Webb both marries Daisy and fathers Lolita's 'blue-eyed son' (*DG* 100). Malcolm's liaisons with both Filipinas are momentary and testify to the way Asian women are treated and viewed by the white foreigner to Asia as expendable sex partners. Alluding to the allure of first meetings between two different races and cultures, the white man's contact with exotic Oriental women is thus fleeting and flippant. Malcolm Webb, as his name suggests, leaves the scene of Manila just as quickly as he enters this web of affairs. His brief and tempestuous liaisons are symptomatic of the way he deems Daisy and Lolita to be unworthy illegitimate partners. Webb's indifference also serves as metonymic representations of the white man's emotional disengagement with Oriental women. As the omniscient narrator explains, 'When [Lolita's] son was born, the Englishman said he would love to bring Lolita back to London and marry her, if only... He had a problem finishing sentences.' (*DG* 170) Malcolm's lack of commitment is exemplified by his inability, or rather unwillingness, to complete his sentences. Malcolm's empty promises, signaled by the conditional phrase 'if only', reference the 'lies' typifying the colonial transaction and economical exchange between white-male and Asian-female.

In contrast, Leonor Bautista's religious devotion and her lack of desire for male companionship is aligned with the conception of white women as stoic and asexual. Leonor's reserved persona is manifested in the independent life she leads from her husband. From day one of her marriage, Leonor announces to her husband 'I would like to be as far from you as possible' (*DG* 68). Her husband General Bautista 'show[s] no reaction when the reclusive Leonor immediately asked for her own bedroom down the hall from where he slept.' (*DG* 68) Their mutual indifference

towards each other reveals how their union is in fact a non-marriage. The description of introverted Leonor who marries to appease her parents and parish priest is a marked difference from the unabashedly sensual Lolita as the General's 'sex goddess' (*DG* 48). The General's continued liaison with Lolita Luna reifies the image of the sexualised, feminised Filipina. Lolita's 'flagrant sexuality' (*DG* 171) is emphasised in descriptions of her as the subject of male fantasy for legions of male admirers including Romeo Rosales, 'Lolita Luna's biggest fan' (*DG* 49). In the example of Leonor and Lolita, the Asian woman is portrayed as sexually desirable in comparison with her asexualised, white female counterpart. The white masculinity of the General and white, asexualised femininity of Leonor are held in dichotomous tension with Asian, sexualised femininity. Hence, the Orientalist female stereotype is inscribed alongside juxtaposed paradigms of white, powerful masculinity and white, sexually-abstinent femininity.

Though her sexual attractiveness alludes to her objectification, the Oriental woman's physical beauty also serves as a positive tool of desirability. In this way, physical attractiveness is troped as a positive attribute of femininity rather than gross flagrant sexuality. Oriental hyperfemininity is embraced and flaunted by the ultra-feminine Pucha Gonzaga who is characterised by her frequent giggles and regular appointments at the beauty parlour 'Jojo's New Yorker' – a name that readily signals American normative standards of beauty. Pucha flaunts her femininity by 'wiggling and strutting all over the place' (*DG* 6) to gain boys' attention. She also holds the view that 'bathing suits have been created for the purpose of showing off the body' (*DG* 60) rather than for any practical purpose. Pucha celebrates the female body, even though she panders to the male gaze. Thus, Pucha's attitude signals the sexual prerogative of Asian women even as it serves 'male-agented ends' (Mulvey 28-34).

In contrast, Trixie Goldman the American consular's daughter wears the less feminine apparel of 'jeans and her father's old t-shirts' (*DG* 236). For this reason, even if somewhat erroneously, Pucha derides Trixie and calls her a lesbian. Pucha's subscription to hyperfemininity sees her flaunting her body as a tool to sexual attraction and desirability.

While *Dogeaters* foregrounds the troping of Asian hyperfemininity and hypersexuality in Filipina women who parade their Orientality as a restrictive constraint (appearing as victims) and a female prerogative (appearing as agents), *Bone* delves into the structure of the family to highlight the patriarchal undercurrents determining the roles of Chinese wife and daughter. *Bone* treats the issue of sexual racialisation by examining the portrayal of the docile yet subversive Oriental woman. The novel thus explores the limiting as well as liberating forces within this model of the Chinese American woman. Just as Oriental hyperfemininity is double-edged, the stereotype of submissive wife in the Asian family is both embraced and challenged by Dulcie Fu, otherwise known as Mah in the novel. Mah is mother to three girls, wife to Leon Leong and mistress to Tommie Hom. Mah's daughters Leila, Ona and Nina similarly contest the stereotypical role of the dutiful daughter. I argue that the way Mah and her girls manage the issues of femininity and race demonstrates that *Bone* is not so stuck after all. And so, just as *Dogeaters* plays on Oriental hyperfemininity, *Bone* opens opportunities for transformation in female sexuality and femininity via the challenges to the stereotype of faithful wife and dutiful daughter.

With an array of critical material on *Bone* suggesting that its stuck narrative does not offer any ready solutions (Y. Chang; J. Chang), the active choices made by women to tackle melancholic losses may be read as clear possibilities, however

small, in moving forward from racial loss. In other words, popular critical argument regarding the novel's stuck and solution-less narrative are countered by women's responsive actions in tackling their racial stereotyping. Although not solutions in themselves, the decisive actions and chosen responses to loss that Mah, Leila, and Nina make indicate their strong sense of agency. For instance, Ona's death is emblematic of the racial, sexual and gender melancholia that paralyses all members of the Leong family. Even as Leila admits 'Ona still shaded everything we did' (*B* 19), Ona's death is not all-together disabling and disempowering. Female empowerment is also achieved through this loss. Rather than sapping Mah's energy and plummeting her into an abyss of grief, Mah's tearful outburst at Ona's death serves as a path towards clarity. As Leila reveals, 'Mah cried, but the crying seemed to give her strength. She wanted to see the sewing ladies out, but they patted her hand and said "No, no. Sleep now."' (*B* 107) To the omniscient narrator's amazement, Mah's cries provide her with energy rather than deplete her of energy. Mah's tearful cries are thus a positive response to loss rather than an anemic reaction to loss. Although crying is often associated with energy expenditure, when Mah cries she simultaneously instigates a transformative momentum to see her through her losses. The strength Mah garners from the cathartic process of crying is followed up in her sleep. Mah chooses not to suppress her emotions, as Chinese customs and patriarchal dictates of femininity would demand her do in public. Mah's crying, therefore, signals her transgressive attitude as she breaks the mould of solitary suffering in loss. Comfort and consolation received from other women provide a sharing of the experience of loss which creates further positive energy from within loss.

In line with definitions of Oriental femininity being recast in women's use of transformative energy to make melancholia productive, another point that signals the intimate relationship and dialogic interaction between *Dogeaters* and *Bone* is the father-daughter relationship. In *In Her Mother's House*, Wendy Ho highlights the increasing prominence and often underrated role of fathers in mother-daughter talking-stories. According to Ho, the father's story is important because 'those who can improvise and tell more than one story can survive the fluctuations of loss, dislocation and re-situation' (228). Father-daughter relationships thus provide a further insight into the way gendered sexuality functions in trans-cultural and transnational spaces within the framework of loss, pain, and suffering as a result of the combined processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialisation.

Leila's relationship to her stepfather, Leon, and Rio's relationship to her father, Freddie, capture the way that fathers in both *Bone* and *Dogeaters* shape their daughters' management of historical trauma, past, and racial melancholia. Transnational, transmigrant Chinese American Leon and Spanish Filipino Freddie Gonzaga are passive male characters compared to their more verbally expressive wives. In *Bone*, Mah's loud 'endless lament' (*B* 56) accentuates Leon's 'noisy loneliness' (*B* 56), while in *Dogeaters* Dolores Gonzaga's outspokenness is a contrast to Freddie Gonzaga's quiet 'mysterious' (*DG* 8) ways. The living testimonies provided by father's muted stories teach daughters a shared history of subjugation and subjection. Whilst recognising the losses shouldered by their fathers, daughters come to re-vision an alternative scope of freedom away from individual losses. Like Rio who is cognisant of her father's strong allegiance to his Seville roots (*DG* 81), Leila becomes empowered by her stepfather's assumption of multiple identities as a Chinese immigrant 'paper son', whose papers on entry into America

are fabricated for survival. When Leila takes Leon to the social security office, the office clerk assails him with questions. The clerk asks ‘why he had so many aliases? So many different dates of birth? Did he have a passport? A birth certificate? A driver’s licence?’ (B 56) Leon’s identity is questioned in this scene in which demands are made upon him to produce hard documents and relevant papers to prove his identity in his American host country. Yet, Leon remains silent and elusive. Leila’s knowledge of her stepfather’s venerable struggles is what enables her to see the heroic side of her stepfather – his perseverance and mental stamina in coping within white America. Cutting across time and geographical spaces, daughters of first generation immigrants to America inherit the historical losses suffered in their family. Yet, daughters are also made aware of the strict immigration laws and the cultural differences between the host and native countries. Fathers’ intergenerationally-transmitted knowledge empowers daughters via shared heightened awareness that equips them in dealing with a raced America.

The links between mixed ancestry and national citizenship expose and point to the racial hierarchies of gendered identity. The complexities inherent in interracial, intercultural marriages highlight the way mestiza identity or mixed descendancy in *Dog eaters* is symptomatic of melancholic losses of sexual racialisation. This loss also speaks of the mestiza woman as doubly impacted by racial injustice within gendered identity. In *Dog eaters*, Rio’s mestiza identity is attributed to her Filipina, American and Spanish ancestral background. Because of Rio’s American grandfather (DG 16), Rio’s mother Dolores is one who ‘carries American papers’ (DG 8). Yet, Dolores Gonzaga ‘feels more viscerally connected to the Philippines’ (DG 8). Through her mother’s family heritage, Rio is made more acutely aware of her Filipino nationality given that her American familial roots

sharpen a sense of subjectivity as Filipina Asian. Awareness of her mixed American Filipino genealogy is evident when Rio describes her mother as both American and Filipina. With this knowledge, Rio places her Oriental feminine self in a racial continuum in which categories between white and Asian-ness are blurred, and the boundaries between race, culture and nationality become fluid and mobile. Yet, this racial continuum remains subject to both race as a gender construct and gender as a racial construct. When Rio declares the way her Spanish-affiliated, American-inclined Filipino father ‘believes in dual citizenships, dual passports’ (*DG 7*), she points to his management of the insecurities of a feminised Oriental male population in Freddie’s ‘many allegiances to as many countries as possible at any one given time’ (*DG 7*). Hence, links between mestiza identity and transnational, transcultural belonging inform the hierarchical structures of race within gendered identity. Racial hierarchies in gendered identity exemplify the intricate workings of racialisation in the Oriental tag.

3.2) Further Female Agency Enacted in Racialised Sexuality

In addition to Tina Chen’s concept of Asian American double agency (62) as a useful avenue to dealing with Oriental racial stereotyping, Wendy Ho usefully identifies the mother-daughter dyad as a critical opportunity ‘to enact new formations of agency’ (138). Ho’s evocation of the word ‘agency’ here refers to a willed act of self-empowerment initiated by contact, specifically, with the mother. The fact that new growth is possible in interpersonal ties of female interdependence signifies developments that transpire in female bonding. Along this line, communally-fostered subjectivity acts as a means by which mothers and daughters discover an ability to be transformed by shared losses sustained on both a subjective and intersubjective level. The double ability in women’s speaking and acting bodies

brings attention to Asian women's performative agency that empowers the abject body to manage its objectified subordination via collaborative repetition in speech and bodily action. The intervention into being sexually racialised –a condition that also points up the spectacle of Oriental women and her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 33)– further signifies the transformation of Western racial ideology of Asians as foreign and liminal objects on the edge of sociality.

In *Bone*, double agency is referenced when Leila remembers her grandfather's advice 'to act' (B21) via both verbally and bodily ways when facing losses. As Leila's grandfather used to tell her, when fear strikes one must '*Open the mouth and tell.*' (B 21) Physical loss in the family and, by extension, losses in Orientalist stereotyping may be made productive in the bodily and speech performance of opening the mouth to share experiences and dissipate fear attached to losses. In addition to strengthening communicative ties, the act of 'tell[ing]' (B 21) to express oneself through verbal communication entails positive self-empowerment to conquer debilitating melancholic fear. Although Leila's grandfather is now physically deceased, Leila learns and triumphs from the loss of this paternal figure in the family. Leila's grandfather informs the female familial progeny of the transformative powers of verbal expressions when subjected to the harsh racial sexualisation of Chinese Americans. With advice passed down by Grandfather Leong, Leila learns to communicate more closely with her mother Mah and her sister Nina in renewed efforts to forge better ties with both.

Subsequently, further female agency is examined in the mother-daughter dyad and sisterly affections between racialised sisters Leila and Nina. Because bones refer specifically to Grandfather Leong's bones to be repatriated to China, *Bone* readily points to the matrix of the immigrant family to America. Set against a

backdrop of Chinese immigration into the United States, the novel details the plight of second generation Chinese American daughter Leila and the ways she sets about redefining and reinforcing filiative ties within the Fu-Leong family. Leila Fu-Leong –this double-barrelled surname attributed to Mah’s marriage to Lyman Fu and Leon Leong– contend with her gendered and sexual disposition via the bonds with her sisters and mother. Leila’s relationship with Nina is defined by Leila’s conscious attempts to strengthen an understanding of sister Nina. With the death of Ona, Leila rekindles and revives her relationship with her living sister Nina. Leila says, ‘I want another kind of relationship with Nina. I want an intimacy with her I hadn’t had with Ona the last few years’ (B 25). In the Spanish restaurant that Nina chooses over a Chinese diner so as to avoid having to ‘eat guilt’ (B 26), Leila responds to a male waiter’s question ‘You two Chinese?’ Nina replies with an affirmative negative response: ‘No. We’re two sisters’ (B 36). Here, the waiter’s immediate sexual racialisation of the girls by quickly labeling them as Chinese elicits a response in which Leila asserts her biological ties with sister Nina. Here, Leila’s communal subjectivity with Nina is exemplified in her filiative attachment towards Nina. Similarly, Leila’s concern for Mah overrides needs for self-autonomy as Leila seeks to help Mah manage her life in the post-separation period from Leon. The mother-daughter bond strengthened between Leila and Mah is aided by the communicative tools available to Leila ‘in her mother’s house’ (Ho). Contrasted with Nina’s ‘fast move [...] three thousand miles [in New York]’ (B 91), Leila continues to live with Mah in Salmon Alley. Even after she leaves home once married, Leila returns to dinners at Salmon Alley which is turned into a site of reinforcement of mother-daughter relationship. Female agency is nurtured through such links and enduring contact. Continuing mother-daughter communication instantiates ‘intergenerational

shar[ing]' (Eng and Kazanjian 363) integral to restoring mental health.

Intergenerational ties allow for the role of impersonation to claim identity whilst simultaneously critiquing the American institutions that designate the status of Asian 'alienness' upon both Leila and Mah. In Leila's eventual departure from Salmon Alley to set up her own family with husband Mason, a trajectory of forging independence in a way that neither diminishes nor detracts from her daughterly attachment to her mother is signaled.

If female agency is demonstrated in the relationship between Mah and her daughters, the relationships between Asian women and their boyfriends and partners further illustrate the exercise of performative agency within Asian sexuality. By attending to their sexuality, women act as double agents through their speaking and bodily performative acts. As agents of their bodily mechanisms and expressive faculties, these women exhibit the management of racialised sexuality in their handling of losses within oriental stereotyping. When Nina advises Leila to 'Marry Mason here. Marry Mason now' (*B* 33), she is attendant to Leila's sexual needs for a husband. More than just a daughter and a sister, Leila is girlfriend-cum-fiancé-cum-wife to Mason. Leila's, and indeed sister Nina's, sexuality as Chinese girls means that their oral words uttered and physical actions enacted signal both the speaking and acting subjectivity of Asian American women as these girls draw upon their sexual status to embrace and counter ascriptions of their Orientality. Leila's marrying Mason at City Hall without the prior consent and knowledge of her parents (*B* 21) instantiates both un-Chinese ways of marrying (without a celebratory banquet and a preceding Chinese tea ceremony) and her display of sexual independence away from Chinese cultural and America's racial constraints.

In *Bone*, the active employment of female agency is delineated in Mah's ties with the women she works, even as and precisely because these affiliations are prompted by Mah's need for companionship when Leon goes to work at sea. Describing one particular episode in which Mah breaks down because she is upset that Leon is not present 'to make all the decisions' (B 79), the omniscient narrator says that Mah has to do 'all the asking' (B 79) when planning Grandfather Leong's funeral and is subsequently humiliated as she feels like she 'owe[s] everyone' (B 79). In this incident when Mah cries, Leila recalls how 'several ladies went and gathered Mah into their arms' (B 79) as their 'cooing voices' (B 79) provide relief. Here, the omniscient narrator describes the way Mah discovers 'true comfort [...] coming only from the arms of other women' (B 81). This discovery marks the way agency is forged in contact and communication with others within a female communality. The consolation offered by the sewing ladies enforces the intersubjective support tapped within female compassion. Through such support offered by these ladies, Mah gains an agency which the women exhibit in offering their 'underneath threads' (B 81) of their hearts to Mah.

Given her 'marriage of toil' (B 33) with Leon, Mah exercises her open sexuality by keeping her male lover in the face of difficult husband-wife relationship with Leon. Mah chooses to be Tommie Hom's lover even whilst she is still Leon's wife. Mah's use of her sexual prerogative defies limits of Oriental racialised sexuality that constrains the role of the Asian Chinese wife as the faithful, loyal, and self-sacrificing kind. Additionally, Mah displays her agency by marrying twice for reasons of financial security and companionship. However, contrasted with 'the next generation [who] marries for love' (B 33), Mah's arranged first marriage and her second marriage of convenience display her lack of choice compared to her

daughters' free will to marry whosoever they please. Agency is thus demonstrated as an exercise that escalates further down the intergenerational line. Yet, Mah's agency in the performativity of her two marriages and as Tommie Hom's lover serves to accentuate the Chinese woman's increasing sexual freedom which culminates in the next female generation's choice of marriage for love.

3.3) Melancholic Loss in Death, Illnesses and Nightmares

Sickness and loss are conveyed by the metaphors of suicide, illness, nightmares, and troubling dreams in *Bone* and *Dogeaters*. Yet, the novels also signal the way healthy restoration and a renewal of energy are referenced in these ostensible symbols of pathology. Death in these novels speaks of a 'living death' (Holland 17) experienced by Asian subjects as a consequence of sexual racialisation. When Leila says, 'I'd lost my sister' (*B* 151), the poignancy of this statement marks not just the physical demise of her sister but her melancholic retention of loss and, by extension, Chinese American losses. Leila confesses 'I knew, no matter what people saw, no matter how close they looked, our inside story is something entirely different' (*B* 145). This inside story comprises a Chinese American collective experience which Leila links to an interminable hurt – a continual sense of loss and persistent pain felt by the Chinese as a racialised class. Leila asks, 'What would we do after the telling? We'd bury Ona; we'd mourn Ona. And then what?' (*B* 145) Here, Leila speaks about the way the process of grieving loss is never complete or finished as the psychic internalisation and melancholic incorporation of loss occurs even after the telling of grief. Even so, Ona's suicide and other various manifestations of loss in illness and nightmares can become sources of strength for the racially abject community. By signaling the cathartic experience of loss, the metaphorical use of the negative tropes of sickness indicates the performativity of

avowing loss in order to build the ego's character. The management of loss in the avowal rather than disavowal of loss acknowledges, rather than, replaces loss. This management of the negative aspects of loss underscores transformative racial melancholia that functions to instill positive identity.

Bone's narrative revolves around the death of Ona and the novel opens with an emphasis on the way the family is central to Chinese traditional culture. In *Bone*, the missing link in the family shows up through the absence of Ona. In Ona's physical demise, the members of the Fu-Leong family set about their daily tasks with the ethereal presence of Ona looming over them. Ona's death pervades the thoughts, actions, and activities of her parents and sisters who experience racial and familial displacement as they face the loss of Ona in San Francisco's racialised Chinatown. When news of Ona's suicide is disclosed to Leila, Leila says, 'telling Nina and hearing her response slowed everything down and I felt my loss for the first time.' (*B* 151) As the child 'stuck-in-between' (*B* 139) Leila and Nina, Ona personifies loss suffered by the family. On the announcement of Ona's death, Leila states that 'None of us wanted to think about Ona being dead.' (*B* 129) As Leila attests, 'Mah worried about her affair with Tommie Hom, but it was Ona. Nina couldn't wait to get away from us, but it was Ona. I thought all I wanted was to get out of Salmon Alley, to live in the Mission with Mason, but it was Ona. Who knows what went through Leon's head? Easy money. Easy win. An easy way to win Ona back.' (*B* 129) The repetitive riff in the phrase 'it was Ona' conveys the way in which Mah, Nina, Leila and Leon are faced with the task of managing the loss of Ona. However, this loss is manifested and translates itself into other forms of injury. The physical loss of Ona is reified in the family's emotive feelings and material reality of displacement and loneliness. This displacement is exemplified in Leon's tendency to wander between

his ‘bachelor pad’, ‘Uncle’s café’, and ‘the Universal, Woey Loy Goey, the Square’ (*B* 62). As Ona’s biological father, and with ‘*On*’ of Ona’s name derived from Leon’s Chinese name (*B* 131), the effect of Ona’s absence on Leon cannot be underestimated as Leon wanders through a ‘maze of suburban streets’ (*B* 74) to cope with his loss – directionless and aimless in mourning Ona’s death.

The transformative effects of loss, and how racial melancholia is managed in the gendered bodies of Asian women to beget a healthy avowal of loss, is crucial to understanding the theme of melancholic loss in Ng and Hagedorn’s novels. By avering that loss may be reframed as a ‘productive category’ (Han and Kazanjian 363) which promotes ‘rebuilding on a communal level’ (Ibid), Eng and Han challenge Freud’s initial premise for the theory of melancholia as interminable and irreversible suffering that entails disavowed loss. With several instances of melancholic loss permeating *Bone*, in which the Leong family experiences a circular trajectory in trying to come to terms with Ona’s death, the changes engendered through such losses are evidenced in the way Leila successfully leaves her family home at Salmon Alley to set up her home at the Mission with Mason. Her departure from her family is not an act of abandonment or an escape from the sorrow of Ona’s death because, even as it reminds us of Nina’s own departure from Salmon Alley, it figures as a necessary act that imports health by way of its significant extension of the childhood home with a new home. In this continuation of the site of home, loss is no longer held onto as an unhealthy incorporation into the ego. Leila herself confesses at the end of the novel, ‘I wasn’t worried when I turned that corner, leaving the old blue sign, Salmon Alley, Mah and Leon – everything – backdaire.’ (*B* 194) Her lack of hesitancy is tinged with a quiet confidence in moving forward. This confidence is attributed to her sense of ‘reassur[ance]’ (*B* 194) in Leon’s reminder

that '*The heart never travels*' (B 193) and knowing that what she 'held in [her] heart would guide [her]' (B 194). The homing device that lies in Leila's heart provides her with the transformative energy to manage her individual and family's losses.

Transformative racial melancholia is evident seeing that Leila utilises an internal radar that guides her and provides her with a sense of direction in her vast 'ocean' (B 150) world. This internal radar is both planted and nurtured within her heart with the aid of the words of wisdom from her stepfather Leon. The bond between Leon and Leila is apparent when Leila confesses, 'He's not my real father, but he's the one who's been there for me. Like he always told me, it's time that makes a family, not just blood' (B 1). Leon's maxim regarding the way the heart remains 'still' amidst a treacherous tide of disadvantaged socio-economic, political and personal strife, suffered as a subordinate racial-ethnic family in white America, conveys how the constants of love and 'a heart full of hope' (B 163) prevail. Just as this optimistic message is that which initially attracts his wife Dulcie Fu to him, Leon slowly reveals and teaches this adage to his daughters. And so, despite the family's loss of Ona, it comes as little surprise that the Leong family exhibits some degree of transcendent 'peace' (B 131) in their overwhelming grief for Ona. With part of Ona's Chinese name meaning 'peace', Leila gradually learns that 'Ona's heart still moves forward. Ona's heart is still counting, true and truer to every tomorrow' (B 145). As Ona continues to live in their hearts and minds, this lost daughter and sister becomes the object of loss that is incorporated within their egos. Yet, with Leila's self-epiphany that Ona's heart still moves forward, a new and brighter tomorrow is indicated. Hence, in spite of Leon being 'lost' (B 62) in his times of misery, Leon teaches that transformative racial melancholia in Ona's death makes loss productive and instills lessons from loss suffered.

Death pervades *Bone* as the novel begins with the announcement of Ona's death and events leading up to her suicide. The theme of death explored in *Bone* may be understood in terms of Abraham and Torok's psychic 'crypt' which highlights the transmission of loss along intergenerational lines. Ona's suicide is recorded as she 'jump[s] off the Nam Ping Yuen' (*B* 143). She plunges to her death from the thirteenth floor of one of four housing projects being built in Chinatown. Ona's death figures as melancholic loss sustained by all members of the Fu-Leong family. Mah becomes distressed by Ona's death, as she links every failure and disaster to this loss. In Mah's words, 'Ona jumping is only the worst thing' (*B* 128). Admittedly, Leila herself goes on to confess that she 'wasn't ready to say goodbye to Ona' (*B* 129). For in Ona's death, Leila loses not only a sister in the 'deep stillness and emptiness' (*B* 129) experienced in the immediate aftermath, but also comes to realise that 'Ona was dead before we had a chance to save her [because] [w]e hadn't had time to catch up' (*B* 129). While Leila regrets not spending time with Ona while she was alive, she discovers that 'let[ting] go' (*B* 129) involves memories – 'I know we had to let our memories out' (*B* 129). At Ona's funeral, Leila chants a one word question 'Why. Why. Why. Why. Why?' (*B* 133) which articulates her enigmatic puzzlement at Ona's suicide and an initial denial about losing a loved one. With Leon's 'noisy loneliness' (*B* 24) coupled with Mah's 'endless lament' (*B* 24), frustration and anger in Ona's suicide persists after her death. Questions of disbelief and the sudden departure of Ona from their lives catalyse Leila's memories of past moments spent with Ona. Leila remembers the way the two of them made a 'tight team' (*B* 129) sewing culottes under Mah's supervision. In Freudian terms, Ona becomes the lost object who is the object of love, or object-cathexis, which refuses to be truly dead. This is evident in Leon's habit of collecting items ('was a collector', *B*

5), including memories of Ona that he refuses to let go. Leila reveals that she too ‘keep[s] everything, and inside I never let go. I remember everything’ (*B* 61). This holding on to memories signifies the need to hold onto the cherished loved object whilst providing, even if ironically so, an avenue to making melancholic loss productive from within the physical death and absence of Ona. Precisely because coming to terms with loss involves remembering everything, the avowing of loss in full memory rather than selective memory makes possible the management of loss. As with the dual workings of memory in ‘forgetting and remembering’, as discussed in the first chapter, the acknowledgement rather than the forgetting of loss grants access to manage melancholia for building identity. Memory assists rather than impedes the process of transforming loss. Homi Bhabha’s explanation of traumatic remembering is particularly illuminating and useful here. According to Bhabha, traumatic remembering ‘is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present’ (63). Violent for its intrusion into the present and agonising for the undesirable moments of flashbacks it presents, memory becomes elemental to sorting out fragments of the past to produce a comprehensive picture of reality entailing the experiential and historical experience of losses in death.

The melancholic loss in the death of Ona is described as ‘sorrow [that] moves through the heart the way a ship moves through the ocean’ (*B* 145). This potent metaphor in the powerful description of sorrow is efficacious in evoking how Ona – as lost object– has been introjected within Leon’s ego or identity. As a collector of both old and new objects, Leon never throws anything out, including Ona’s ‘old blanket’ (*B* 5). Leon is constantly fixing or repairing broken objects and never quite getting them fixed before starting on a new project. Such is Leon’s symptomatic

display of his melancholic incorporation of loss, staged to show a pathological model in his disavowal of loss. Leon's use of the word 'sorrow' (*B* 145) denotes not just Leon's insurmountable grief, but the rest of the Fu-Leong family members' inconsolable sadness in their grief over Ona's death. As discussed earlier, the loss they struggle with is not merely the loss of a daughter and sister. In the death of Chinese American woman Ona, the losses within the discriminatory processes of racialisation and sexualisation of the Chinese race are referred to as well. Leon uses the adroit metaphor of the ship travelling across a 'simple superior' (*B* 145) ocean to accentuate the limited success in moving forward: 'One mile forward and eight miles back' (*B* 145). This signals the difficult and slow voyage to depathologise melancholia for the healthy restitution of identity. The slow progress to loss management is thus marked in Leon's take on the lessons which he learns in his experience of losses. '*Forward and forward and then back, back*' (*B* 145) further describes the gradual movement towards health and recovery as steady advances towards anchoring the transformative energies in losses.

While *Bone* deals with racial melancholic loss within the metaphor of death, the plethora of illnesses plaguing characters in *Dogeaters* becomes symptomatic not only of the loss of health, but also of the death of identity created by sexual racialisation. Here, I return to the phrase 'sexual racialisation' to signal the way gender and sexuality are inherent components of America's process of racialisation. Additionally, the use of this term indicates the way Asian females are doubly, if not triply, subordinated by racial segregation as Asian bodies are marked by the combined factors of class, gender, sex, and race. The physical illnesses take their toll on characters in *Dogeaters* by afflicting their physical corporeal bodies and affective mental state. With illnesses like Baby's leprosy-like rash (*DG* 28) and Daisy's

chronic drowsiness (*DG* 158), physical and mental ailments do not seem to have an identifiable cure. With Baby's physician unable to prescribe appropriate medication to cure her rashes, the paralysis affecting both individual and community in a shared experience of loss permeates and confounds society. On a visceral level, the corporal putrefaction of sufferers of loss crystallises the injuries suffered in and through sexual racialisation. As *Bone* and *Dogeaters* demonstrate, melancholic loss is manifested in two physical forms of injury. Both death and illness thematise the melancholic loss sustained within, and embodied in, the body of the racial other. In light of this fact, positive transformation becomes available in the intersubjective support and interpersonal gains achieved from such a position of losses. In *Dogeaters*, intersubjective support that aids positive transformation is manifested in the way Baby and Daisy draw strength from their relations with other women. Daisy who is 'tired of being cooped up in her family's house for weeks' (*DG* 112) decides to leave and get out of her 'ovenlike room' (*DG* 108) to escape the 'uncertain refuge of dangerous sleep' (*DG* 108). She refuses to remain 'a corpse stupefied by the tropical weather' (*DG* 108) and goes 'to visit her cousin Clarita' (*DG* 108), who is like a sister to her. The fact that their mothers 'are childhood friends and maintain a close relationship, even though their husbands have been feuding off and on for twenty years' (*DG* 112) is already a testament to the intersubjective gains women achieve in the female ties they forge. Daisy finds in Clarita a source of comfort, strength, fortitude and resistance. Clarita likes to paint. Her paintings are graphically obscene for their clear references to 'yellow' Asians as a sexualised race. She paints pictures that depict 'shocking miniature landscapes of bright yellow demons with giant erect penises hovering over sleeping women' (*DG* 113). Baby, on the other hand, forges a relationship with her cousin Girlie, through whom contact with the

outside world is achieved. Baby is shown to have ‘no control over the situation’ (*DG* 155) with her husband Pepe, a man described in predatory terms as a ‘sinister groom’ with ‘canine teeth’ (*DG* 154). Baby is referred to only tangentially, and in connection to her husband as his bride and wife. Baby’s name is not mentioned in the novel once the marriage has taken place. Baby is thus seen in a detached way, as her subjectivity is removed in references to her as Pepe’s bride or wife. Standing as the gendered and sexualised sign of racial difference, both Baby and Daisy exhibit physical manifestations of the losses they suffer, yet they also display a certain level of female agency in contact with their female cousins.

Illnesses suffered by characters in *Dogeaters* testify to the melancholic loss resulting from the racial sexualisation of Filipinas. Signifying the transference and internalisation of loss, pervasive illnesses typify the melancholic past and presence of physical and psychic wounds sustained in racial stereotyping. Injuries caused by various illnesses plaguing Filipinas are testimony to the anxieties generated by the racially melancholic condition. The injuries instigated by illnesses are symptomatic of the melancholic wounds of the processes of racialisation and sexualisation. Both the reactionary and revolutionary responses to these injuries signal the communal agency exercised to manage their collective individual losses. Baby’s ‘melancholy eyes’ which are at once ‘dark and erotic’ (*DG* 25) are a telling physical symptom of the non-specific topical illness she suffers. Baby’s afflicted eyes are indicative too of the sadness and grief experienced due to loss of female independence in a patriarchal society. Baby’s ‘itchy rash develops into hideous, watery blisters and open sores’ (*DG* 28) to a point where it is a kind of leprosy that causes her family to isolate her. Baby’s topical fungus continues to provide her with grief as her feet become swollen and deformed which ‘force[s] [her] to spend her time in bed or in a wheelchair’ (*DG*

28). Baby is also crippled psychically by the anxiety that accompanies her condition of racial, gender, and sexual melancholia. Because of her illness and her pregnancy, Baby ‘spends her afternoons, lying in bed’ (*DG* 157) paralysed and prostrate. Because she is unable to reap the full benefits of her transgressive actions in attempts to escape patriarchy, Baby thus experiences the full effects of her limited agency. Baby leaves her authoritarian parents to marry a chauvinist husband who consigns her to a role as domestic wife. Yet, although limited in her success of performative agency, Baby recognises that she is subject to racial sexualisation and sexual racialisation that pervades her reality.

Illnesses are not just restricted to women, as Rio’s grandfather is seen to be ‘the first white man stricken with *bangungot* which is ‘a nightmare sickness, a delirious fever in which he sweats, sleeps, and screams’ (*DG* 16). With Whitman’s physical scourge causing him to break out in feverish sweat, Lola Narcissa identifies his illness as ‘*bangungot*’ (*DG* 14) – labeled as such to refer to the Filipino cultural folklore of sudden death in sleep (Munger and Booton 677). Read allegorically, the white man is an intrusive and contaminating presence in Asia. Whitman’s physical deterioration speaks of national melancholia in addition to the racial melancholia faced by racialised subjects (Cheng 10-13). Notably, Whitman’s ‘mysterious illness’ (*DG* 16) remains undiagnosed by his white medical doctors in America. Whitman’s name is clearly a pun on the ‘Whit[e] man’ whose colonial interests are reprimanded by his contagion with a tropical illness. Collectively, the images of sickness and confinement display the tropes of melancholic loss and of being ‘stuck’ (*Bone* 139) in the melancholic retention of wounds. Yet, for all these losses and precisely because of these wounds, *Dogeaters* gestures to transformative racial melancholia in the opportunities presented in these moments of crisis. I refer to the communal

agency which is channeled in both conscious and unconscious ties with other melancholic ‘ill’ sufferers, both within one’s sex and beyond lines of one’s gender.

In addition to Whitman’s *bangungot*, Daisy Avila suffers from nightmares which are a subconscious reaction to her rebuking the gross exhibition of female sexuality in American-cultured Philippines. Daisy’s retaliation to Oriental hyperfeminine models feature as bold opposition to patriarchal expectations and ideologies of sexual racialisation. Interestingly, Daisy is unable to identify the cause of her melancholic grief that is manifested through her recurrent nightmares. Yet, her loud actions in shunning the paparazzi’s lens readily point to her protest against the sexualisation of Filipinas. Daisy’s physical and psychic affliction is accentuated by her not knowing exactly what it is that she has lost. The omniscient narrator declares, Daisy ‘does not know why she mourns’ (*DG* 155) and ‘cannot pinpoint the source of her mysterious and sudden unhappiness’ (*DG* 105). Unable to comprehend her melancholia, Daisy finds it impossible to locate the reason why she feels sad. Daisy’s inability to recognise the source of her melancholia signals the psychic internalisation and unconscious incorporation of wounds from a combined reality of racialisation and sexualisation. Descriptions of Daisy ‘like a corpse’ (*DG* 155) instantiates her feelings of loss –a state in which opportunities for transformation in this moment of crisis is presented via communal agency in intersubjective ties. Daisy’s exchange of letters with her cousin Clarita adds female empathy to a shared sense of racial and gender melancholia. Daisy gains a semblance of empowered liberation in her identification with other Filipinas. Her ties with Clarita inform her of the gendered social conditions in which women transform their identity. Along this line, Daisy’s nightmares may be read as powerful transitions to the psychic management of melancholic loss. Further references to tomb-like spaces are

instanced when Rio's uncle remarks that his sister's boarded-up bedroom is 'like a tomb' (*DG* 86). Rather than subscribing to her brother's view, Dolores Gonzaga uses the analogy 'like a womb' (*DG* 86) to explicate her cocooned condition within the room. This description reinforces the maternal female connection. The womb functions as an amniotic site for the provision of support, love and sustenance, which underscores the intersubjective support rendered in the restorative project of making loss productive via intergenerational lines.

In addition to illnesses and nightmares that serve as tropes of racial, gender, and sexual melancholia, the hierarchical tensions underpinning intercultural, interracial pairings between opposite genders speak of further losses subjected upon the Asian American body. In *Bone*, the fact that Ona's parents are quick to draw an assumptive link between Ona's suicide and her half-Spaniard mestizo boyfriend, Osvaldo Ong, testifies to the racial dynamics within the hierarchal structures of gendered sexuality. In *Bone*, Mah and Leon are quick to blame Osvaldo, 'You think that Ong boy, that half-Spaniard, had anything to do with it?' (*B* 148) With the Leong's merger with the Ong's, the initial partnership between the two families in running a laundry business together signifies the support rendered to each other in the face of white America's racialisation. But when the Ong's mismanages their accounts, the Leong's vehemently objects to Ona's continued relationship with Osvaldo. As Leila explains, 'These days, Mah and Leon were giving [Ona] a hard time for going out with Osvaldo.' (*B* 15) As a corollary to the racial and gendered hierarchies within the functional systems of uneven powers in white America, escape from racial tensions that underscore such kinds of betrayal is pursued by characters in *Bone*. The omniscient narrator says that 'Escape' is '[w]hat Leon searched for, what Ona needed' (*B* 150). Mah's reminder to her daughters to 'have a way out' (*B*

191) also exemplifies the theme of escape. Mah's philosophy refers to an imposing reality of loss by addressing male-female relationships. Rather than removing oneself from loss, 'escape' denotes the transformative management of loss rather than permanently doing away with loss. Mah's cautionary reminder intimates the maternal figure's acknowledgement of the melancholic construct of raced and gendered hierarchies in male-female relationships. Signalling the structural and cultural deficiencies in unfair power distribution, Mah's admonition conveys the racial dynamics affecting marriages between spouses and relations between racial minorities. The intersubjective message of grievance unlocks the possibility for communal agency. In short, the process of grieving aids to provide shared identity, thereby releasing melancholia's pathological hold as individual suffering through intersubjective identification within a collective experience of loss.

CHAPTER 4

Political Agency, Transgenerational Transformation, ‘Inside Outsiders’ and Linguistic Signification in Susan Choi’s *The Foreign Student* (1998), *American Woman* (2003) and *A Person of Interest* (2008)

This chapter examines the various modes of resignification of racial melancholia by discussing the signifier in transformative racial melancholia at work when agency creates ‘livable lives’ (Butler, *Gender Trouble* viii). Resignifying racial melancholia entails altering and shifting the previous idea of melancholia as permanent damage. Consequently, remodifying the terms of loss as psychic damage precipitates a new signifier within transformative racial melancholia which taps positive agency. Within transformative melancholia, I argue that the notion of livability is deeply intertwined with the management of life’s predicaments. Self-preservation is deployed by those excluded from the normative rules of social inclusivity established by dominant groups. Asian Americans as racially melancholic subjects make active choices in assertive action to reinstate positive definitions of identity through the social intergenerational circles they inhabit. The affirmation of legitimate identity triggers collective affirmations of self within the community. These subsequent affirmations of viable and legitimate subjectivity are urgent when considering the state of human vulnerability. Vulnerability is highly suggested in Freud’s early concept of melancholia which entails an impoverished identity that

results from the ego's incorporation of avowed loss. Societal marginalisation and racial exclusion further accentuate the subject's vulnerability within dominant circles of culture.

In this chapter, I argue that a positive sense of existence is forged in which livability is asserted in the management of racial melancholia as an everyday state. Central to my argument of making racial loss productive through political communal agency is the concept of livability that encourages the construction of inclusive conditions for strengthening identity through the experience of loss. As Butler defines it, livability is underscored by a need 'not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation' (*Undoing Gender* 4). Livability encourages socially-ascribed, non-normative bodies 'to rethink the possible' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xx) and 'minimise the possibility of unbearable life or indeed, social or literal death' (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 8). Agency and choice are intertwined in the process of creating livable lives. Furthermore, transgenerational transformative melancholia in experiences of war and internment is enacted through postmemory in narratives about 'inside outsiders' rather than 'outsiders within'. The role of language in the linguistic resignification of racial melancholia also serves to affirm positive identity.

In the light of Butler's argument regarding human interdependence (*Precarious Life* 22), an emphasis on social connections highlights the intersubjective networks available for individual and group strengthening. I argue that the theory of interdependency informs the process of transformative racial melancholia and reframes negative, personal, and individual loss as intersubjective, transgenerational, and pan-ethnic gains between racially abject groups. Interdependence represents the healthy need for intersubjective exchanges of mutual

love, empathetic support, and constructive communication. It also creates opportunities for gains in collectivity by opening up avenues for resistance and change which are necessary for renewing positive group identity. By transforming perspective (via psychoanalytical lines) and challenging normative conditions (via practical applications), agency is practiced and exercised in choices made through supportive energy within interdependent human relationships. Intersubjective connections between racially melancholic persons feed into, and are also fed by, the idea of livability. In other words, intersubjective connections serve as the engine that drives and powers the agency required to create livable lives. Even whilst communal support leads to livable lives, livability strengthens communal ties that support transformative existence. I stress the way human relationships are pivotal to renew conditions for ‘cultural intelligibility’ (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 17) that provides racialised subjects with transformative power. In other words, agency for the collective objective of creating livable lives uses relationships as a support system to help racially melancholic subjects progress from within their isolation in white America. I argue that human contact in intersubjective relationships facilitates management of loss by harnessing social gains within human interconnectivity. Significantly, the joint creation of a contemporaneous livable context in which legitimate subjectivity is forged provides vital positive psychological artillery with which to make loss productive, thereby resulting in the material outcome of agency within transformative loss.

In this chapter, my use of agency extends beyond the performative agency of the Asian woman discussed in the previous chapter. Agency here enacts a communal appropriation of melancholia by putting special emphasis on the communal dynamics that galvanise political action and revolutionary activism. Instead of

agency in individual behaviour, I extend the concept of agency to encompass action taken communally. I conceive of this communal, political dimension of agency as bolstering the transformative energies available in depathologised racial melancholia and, thus, proffering a healthy interpretation of Asian American identity alongside a positive framework of making active choices and imposing such choices in collective action. I argue that transformative action is, hence, an active response taken intergenerationally. Through such action undertaken by a collective communality, pathological readings of identity as individual loss may be overturned.

My use of the term agency is informed by Judith Butler's in *Gender Trouble*. Butler explains that 'agency' involves a subject or actor of free will, yet one who is no less subject to a larger socio-political world (185). Butler also draws an explicit connection between agency and signification. Butler's contention is that agency is an effect of signification as well as resignification, the latter process allowing for the possibility of 'alternative domains of cultural intelligibility' (*Gender Trouble* 185). Possible alternative domains bear importance within the act of transforming racial melancholia. Resignifying racial melancholia away from definitions of individual pathology and permanent injury entails creating opportunities for racialised subjects to challenge normative conditions in which ascriptions of pathological identity have been imposed. In 'A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia', Eng and Han propose that racial melancholia is a type of 'psychic citizenship' (Eng and Kazanjian 366) rather than an individual loss. My argument regarding the resignification of melancholia from pathological to transformative loss is based on Eng and Han's proposition of depathologised melancholia in social gains. Eng and Han effectively reframe racial melancholia as a communal experience rather than individually experienced, individually suffered loss. To this end, they suggest that racial melancholia be

depathologised in the 'productive gaps' (Eng and Kazanjian 364) available along a fluid continuum of melancholia and mourning. I argue that these gaps open up the assertion of legitimacy in identity via intersubjective support and proactive action taken in agency. In light of early notions of melancholia as individual damage, my theory of transformative melancholia allows for the resignification of individual losses as social gains. The transformative revision of prescribed pathological markers of race includes challenges to normative conditions set down by a white hegemonic group. Consequently, the resignification of racial melancholia dismantles pathological melancholia by promoting a shift from and revision of loss. I argue that making loss productive rather than working through loss avows loss so that melancholic subjects may rise up from within the everyday experience of loss.

The process of resignification opens up and provides opportunities for the construction of new meanings whereby racial and cultural normative codes are actively dismantled. In other words, the reiterable practice of agency lends itself to the resignification of racial melancholia in the gaps opened up by choices for repeated action in communal acts of agency. Although Butler argues that transformations in attempts at repetition produce minute shifts, I argue that, in the texts I examine, shifts in reiterable agency are empowering in the cumulative sum of amassed repeated action. Thus, I propose that the changes or shifts in codes of ascribed identity, although minute, are nevertheless transformative in making loss productive. These shifts actively work to challenge normative configurations practised by a governing society and a hegemonic system of functional coherences. The subsequent change from depathologised racial identity to healthy psychological disposition transpires within repeated acts of communal action that collectively assert legitimacy in individual and collective identity. Transformative powers

galvanising these acts of resistance are manifested in political activism, violent agency, and collective voicing in Choi's novels. Such avenues for reiterable agency are potent means for producing spaces for resignifying racial melancholia from negative losses to positive gains.

In addition to Butler's theory of agency, I borrow from the theory of cultural memory in social trauma studies to draw out the multivalent implications of identity and subjectivity exposed within human interconnectivity and social interaction. Historically, Asian Americans have been subject to the traumas of racial injustice within war and internment experiences. As a result, these experiences of trauma constitute a form of collective loss for Asian Americans as a racially melancholic group. Identity and subjectivity are both eroded within these communal experiences of injustice which cause pain, immense grief and lost pride. Collective communal wounds of trauma victims are highlighted, even as wounds are sustained on a personal level. Shared memories of these experiences are the result of loss sustained by Asian Americans as a group. The group's memories –both individual and collective– prompt and support their subsequent action to manage losses through communal agency. The communal dynamic of agency is underscored by the notion of human beings as social creatures. As one scholar writing on female agency states, human beings are creatures who are 'deeply embedded or "situated" in social life' (Barvosa-Carter 125). The social aspect of human existence and behaviour underlines how agency is conceptualised as a collective dynamic – an idea also endorsed by Butler in her theory on subject formation on how the subject comes to 'be' when hailed by the other (*Giving An Account of Oneself*). My concept of transformative racial melancholia is based on the intersubjective avenues of agency whereby the subject comes into being through shared memories with communal

others. Identity and subjectivity are consequently forged in memory, which generates and works alongside communal agency to make losses productive.

The seemingly contradictory terms of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘agency’ need not necessarily be interpreted as conflicting. It has been widely argued that psychoanalysis focuses on (personal) subjectivity whilst identity politics deals with the concept of agency (Eng 25). David Eng notes that the theoretical project of psychoanalysis is concerned with individual subjectivity while the identity politics of race is ‘thoroughly examined in terms of domination and agency rather than subjectivity’ (Ibid.). As Freud first conceptualises it, psychoanalytical theory accents intrapsychic subjectivity. With recent developments in psychoanalysis, primacy on the intrapsychic has been extended to include interpersonal ties and relational links towards restoring mental health (Stolorow and Atwood). I situate my argument regarding agency alongside this development in psychoanalysis, where gains are to be reaped in human social interconnectivity. When considering the wider transformations that arise in the psychic renewal of personal subjectivity, the seemingly contradictory strands of ‘subjectivity’ in psychoanalysis and ‘agency’ in identity politics of race may be read together to produce a sharing of their definitions along a continuum. More than just an individual experience of self, (personal) subjectivity may be aligned with (communal) agency when considering the positive energies generated by social contact and intersubjective relationships. In other words, communal agency strengthens personal subjectivity and individual identity, whilst tapping broader social circles for self-reinforcement and self-empowerment. With the socio-political world continuing to impinge on the self, both subjectivity and agency are developed for creating livable lives.

In so far as agency comprises communal acts of individual will, the term ‘agency’ may be understood as action taken in concert with others. Consequently, empowerment and emancipation are available in the concept of agency as social action. Gill Jagger defines agency as ‘the capacity both to envisage particular projects and then to implement them according to one’s free will’ (102-3). In line with this definition, agency evokes the complementary noun ‘agent’ which may be defined as one who chooses to take action instead of submitting to an external fate. Rather than acting in contradiction with social structures, individual free will goes hand-in-hand with agency as free will is exercised in collective action.¹ Agency creates transformation within social connections, and this chain also works in the other direction. In other words, intersubjective transformation feeds the concept of agency, just as agency brings about this transformation. A choice to take action produces intersubjective transformation through the relationships strengthened in collective action. The positive results of transformation within social interconnectivity, in turn, reinforce agency. Given the challenges of asserting and affirming subject-status to overturn abjectness ascribed onto racially melancholic bodies, agency is important for collectively working to inscribe legitimacy and viability of individual and group identity.

In this chapter, I provide close textual analyses of three critically acclaimed novels by Susan Choi to explore the ways in which these texts deal with these challenges. The novels include *The Foreign Student* (1998) which won the Asian American Literary Award for Fiction; *American Woman* (2003) which was a Pulitzer Prize Finalist in 2004; and Choi’s latest contribution *A Person of Interest* (2008)

¹ The areas of philosophy and sociology adopt differing views regarding the concept of agency. My use of agency is closely aligned with a philosophical understanding of agency as organised action by a group to meet a collective objective.

which was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award in 2009. The political and social dimensions of the term ‘agency’ will be explored by investigating the tropes of loneliness, revolutionary activism and acts of voicing. As I shall argue, these novels demonstrate the empowering energies of agency by exploring the transgenerational, intersubjective ways in which livability is reinforced in transformative melancholia.

Self-awareness for mobilising agency is consequently achieved in interpersonal relations. In other words, intersubjective ties and romantic relationships are pursued as responsiveness to self-want. Such self-recognition of what the self wants is clearly encapsulated by the potent metaphor of the ‘hall of mirrors’ (*FS* 210) in *The Foreign Student*. Rather than a ‘single chamber’ (*FS* 210), white middle-class Katherine in *Foreign Student* discovers a hall of mirrors when looking into herself. The omniscient narrator states, Katherine ‘looked into her heart and found a hall of mirrors instead of the simple chamber that contained the irreducible fact.’ (*FS* 210) Looking into the deep recesses of her heart at a time when her affair with the foreign student, Charles, is on the wane, Katherine admits that this hall of mirrors yields several possibilities for the self. Mirrors operate here as instruments that reveal to Katherine the intimate coded messages of her heart. In light of Katherine’s new-found feelings for Chang, the use of the mirror acknowledges the multi-layered, multivalent facets of self in a poignant moment of self-reflection. Self-epiphany to myriad subjectivities is prompted by Katherine’s interaction with both Charles and Chang. Here, Katherine’s self-awareness produces energy for self-growth and self-renewal. Katherine’s self-reflexivity is initiated by contact with these men as her affirmative knowledge of self is derived through this self-reflexive exercise that provides transformative energy.

Mirrors also serve to highlight both true and social selves in pairing actual self with image of self projected by others. The poignant metaphor of the ‘hall of mirrors’ (*FS* 210) evokes Jacques Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ as it recalls the notion of an ontic (real) and social self. The reflected image of self in the mirror may be interpreted as the self being hailed by the symbolic ‘other’ that appears in the mirror. Butler’s contention that the subject ‘comes to be’ (*Precarious Life* 22) when hailed by the other resonates here. However, instead of language buttressing the way the self comes to know of its existence in others’ address, the reflected image of the self is at once its unfamiliar and recognisable other. The other in the mirror, thus, is both the self’s reflected image and the physical other subject. The self’s coming into being through this manifestation highlights the self’s ability to dismantle cultural codes that propagate the self as abject other. Revision of cultural intelligibility performed in the workings of self-reflexivity in the mirror challenges hegemonic denial of the racialised person’s subjectivity through the self/other physical manifestation.

The affirmation of positive identity in self-reflexivity and communal agency for transformative melancholia add to the thematic development within Asian American literary canon. Korean American novelist Susan Choi addresses identity matters by exploring these extensions in her novels. Choi brings attention to male protagonists and so revises the traditional topos and reception of the Asian American canon as female-centred. This shift invites explorations into the intricate and complex relations between genders. It also introduces an important movement beyond the concerns of female identity. As the focus turns to the Asian male protagonist, a broader scope for the examination of issues on identity and beyond identity is presented. This exposure tests the borders and boundaries of the way

Asian American livelihood and existence are portrayed in Asian American fiction. Choi also depicts Asian Americans as interpolated into untraditional settings and unfamiliar scenarios not normally associated with Asian American lifestyle. Such change of social, physical, and topographical background invites further exploration into the ways in which Asian Americans are not limited to set categories and specific settings. Choi's *Foreign Student* offers a story about a male Korean student who enters into a relationship with a Southern white middle-class girl. Relations between Asian men and white women extend the social boundaries to which Asians have been confined. Similarly, Choi's *American Woman* foregrounds political activism in subversive acts of violent bombings against the American government. Not merely confined to nuclear-family settings (as in *Bonesetter's Daughter* and *Obasan*, for example), Choi's novels encompass narrative terrain of a more expansive form. Choi's fiction traces the way Asian American subjects are interpolated into other fictional genres such as the crime mystery. For example, the male protagonist Lee is immersed in the murder investigation of mail-bomb victim Professor Hendley in Choi's *Person of Interest*. Instances of generic extensions away from the autobiographical novels of Maxine Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* stretch the novelistic tradition within the Asian American literary field. These developments are important for Asian American literature as they shed light on the progressive methods in which definitions of Asian American identity are enlarged. By incorporating unconventional settings within new circumstances, Choi's novels partake in a larger American literary canon.

4.1) Communal Action: Forging Livable Lives in Relationships

Active and passive forms of communal action display the proactive choice that accompanies agency. Communal action is taken to meet the concerted aims to

create conditions conducive for livable lives. As mentioned early on in this chapter, my notion of agency is supported by the concept of livability to manage human vulnerability in loss. Agency is performed to fulfill the need for inclusivity which forges livable identity. Agency to obtain inclusive conditions for livable lives is powered by intersubjective connections which, in turn, support transformative melancholia. The forms of agency include political activism, which entails radical action in violent protests and subversive revolutionary action against paradigms of heteronormative powers and patriarchal authorities of governance. Active opposition to political structures that maintain losses exemplifies as an assertive communal response to loss. Here, agency involves defying passive submission and affirming assertive voices against a dominant hegemony. In short, communal action operates as collective active response to achieving livable lives.

The choices of individuals to take positive action together are manifested in their revolutionary agency in radical acts of violence. Through relationships fostered in the community, active decisions to challenge the social structures that perpetuate racial, cultural, and gender injustice result in collective action against loss. As Choi's novels demonstrate, affirmative action displays communal political agency that works both to challenge indoctrinating systems and to manage loss. In this section, the trope of loneliness versus social integration will also be examined in light of the isolation –both voluntary and socially-imposed alienation– of racialised subjects in white America. Isolation symptomises loss. Isolation also signifies racial segregation in melancholic America. Choi's novels illustrate the way melancholia is experienced in the intense isolation of racialised subjects who both choose this position of loneliness and are socially excluded from America's larger national body.

Livability is thus an important concept that underscores the intersubjective process of making racial melancholia productive. The concept of livability undergirds the assertion of a positive psyche and healthy well-being. In Susan Choi's novel *Person of Interest*, the protagonist's step-son Mark is described as having a love for the open wilderness. Mark's retreat into nature heightens man's ability to survive amidst both open surroundings and the harsh conditions of a callous city from which he comes. Even as the forest's untamed environment is contrasted to man's cityscape, the urban life from which Mark retreats mirrors the unsheltered conditions of the wilderness. In the forest, man's vulnerability to punitive weather conditions and untamed predators is exposed. The city, on the other hand, presents related yet different challenges of survivability against man's socially-indoctrinated laws. Mark goes hiking at a time when he resolves to unravel the mysterious lines of his genealogy. In the urban wilderness, Mark suddenly thinks of the word 'Hegira'². He considers that 'Hegira' means 'any journey or flight from danger, to a more safe or congenial place' (*PI* 287). In terms of re-inscribing cultural intelligibility whereby legitimate identity is affirmed away from a dangerous position of non-subjecthood, Mark is quick to take on his identity as competent trekker as he conquers nature by adopting and equipping himself with a set of appropriate skills necessary for his safety. Because hiking is a sport that exposes one to nature's elements within expansive and unsheltered terrain, the need for protective tools to ensure livability becomes crucial. Mark's awareness for the need of protection subsumes useful intersubjective contacts which he makes to aid his passage to safety. It is no coincidence that the word 'Hegira' pops into Mark's mind as he converses with a camper who similarly seeks retreat from the cityscape. Mark exercises active agency

² 'Hegira' is the English word used to describe the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 which marked the beginning of the Muslim era. Generally, this word is used to refer to a journey by a large group to escape from a hostile environment. *OED* defines hegira as an exodus.

when momentarily retreating into nature on his hiking expedition. As salient tools for safety, Mark's active choice to take pre-emptive action against hostile conditions function as empowering agency.

In forging livable lives, an identity is created that maintains an old self and is still recognisable in spite of a new transformation. Freud's early theory of pathological melancholia argues that a completely 'new structure of identity' (Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' as qtd in Butler, *Gender* 74) is formed. My argument regarding transformative melancholia entails a renewal process in which constructive depathologisation of melancholic identity takes place whereby a self—at once new—is part of a previous, existing self. In other words, depathologised melancholia results in a simultaneously old and new self.

The productive process of renewing identity arises from positive agency taken to secure better lives. Agency to make for better lives is derived from individual free will in choosing affirmative action in collective behaviour. Relationships operate by allowing for something new to be produced through the self's discovery of the roles it assumes when in interaction with others. In other words, the self comes into knowledge of its function and significance within a community of others. Support in interaction and communication allows for self to be formed, defined, and signified in intersubjective ties and social relations that bring awareness to the self's place as part of a collective whole. The positions assumed by self include the roles of daughter, friend, comrade, colleague and so on. These positions are independent yet always placed in relation to a larger collectivity or communal group.

Relationships, thus, lead to the agency that allows for identity to be experienced anew or differently since subject formation occurs in social interconnectivity and relationship ties. In other words, intersubjective support and communal ties rebuild group identities and personal identity of individuals who share and partake in the community. Collaborative challenge entails meeting the concerted objective to assert positive identity through communally-strengthened communal action that creates value. Positive investment in value-creating action empowers racially melancholic subjects. To this end, agency speaks of more than just ‘a new frame of thinking, a new lexicon’ (*FS* 323) to address conditions in which racially-marked bodies lose their subjectivity. As a survival strategy, agency plays a crucial role in instilling a healthy sense of pride by restoring authenticity and legitimacy to both individual identity and group identity.

Relationships, I argue, are subsequently viable avenues of empowerment. Intersubjective communal ties function to assert legitimacy of identity previously denied in the historical obfuscation of the raced body’s ‘subject’ status. In Choi’s *Foreign Student*, the tenuous but deeply-felt ties between Chang Ahn and Katherine operate on a level similar to the relationships illustrated in *American Woman* between Jenny and her father, and between fleeing fugitives (Juan and Yvonne) and their captive hostage. In *Person of Interest*, Lee’s relations with others such as his wife, colleagues, and children demonstrate the integral struggle between isolation and loneliness, on the one hand, and needs for social interaction and integration, on the other. It is this interplay which underlines the way relationships are explored as a means of transforming the racial melancholia plaguing these characters. The binary tropes of loneliness and sociability, held in interlocking tension with each other, resonate with Judith Butler’s idea of human inter-corporeality. In other words, the

binary opposition and dialectical tension between the two motifs of isolation and social integration accentuates the degree of inherent desire for social contact and evidences the extent to which the self ineluctably depends on corporeal others to manage its racialised identity.

In *Foreign Student*, the benefits and limits of intersubjective contact are explored in the love affair between white American middle-class girl Katherine and white university professor Charles. Katherine's long-term relationship with Professor Charles Addison causes her to reflect on her desires, needs and wants for companionship and happiness. As the affair began in her early teens, Katherine realises that she has spent her life 'immobilised by the fear she would lose Charles' (*FS* 210). At the age of twenty-eight, she acknowledges her previously distorted thinking. The omniscient narrator states, 'So long as the power to withhold her happiness lay outside herself, she could wait, and stoke her despair with the intensity of imagining its opposite. But now she was suddenly sure of [Charles], and for the first time free to wonder whether she was sure of herself' (*FS* 210-11). It is important to point out here that Katherine's relationship with Charles eventually points attention back to her own subjectivity. Katherine's self-epiphanies signal the role of the external other in providing temporary happiness by alleviating the 'chasm of loneliness' (*FS* 211). As much as happiness lies within oneself, the process of self-renewal in relationship with others has an important role to play. Precisely because contact with Charles revealed an over-dependency on him, Katherine's sense of her self is informed by her intersubjective relations.

Katherine allows her happiness to be reinforced by the non-self or other, and by the stimulus provided in the other. As such, the other's extraneous bodily presence influences and determines her feelings of happiness. Katherine's

indifference to social norms given she does not desire ‘marriage or the friendship of women her age or the thoughtless routine of a social life’ means that she ‘want[s] things she never wanted before. [...] a sense of conclusiveness in whatever form it took’ (*FS* 210). Katherine’s yearning for ‘conclusiveness’ explains her ‘daring’ (*FS* 210) thoughts in contact, communication, and intimate ties with others. Instead of nullifying the need for social contact, Katherine displays self-renewal via desires precipitated by social contact. Social contact thus sharpens a sense of individual worth denied by society. In intersubjective interaction, Katherine grows increasingly cognisant of the active decisions to want to grow up and shoulder, rather than shirk, responsibility in identity. To this end, positive outcome emerges from intersubjective contact even if the relationships themselves are not always happy and healthy.

The exploration of the inexplicable attraction between Katherine and Korean student Chang Ahn further fuses the thematic strands of identity in *Foreign Student*. In other words, this novel features the character development of Katherine as much as the struggles of Tennessee’s newcomer Chang who enters Katherine’s life. Through contact with each other, Katherine’s and Chang’s lives are irreversibly changed as their past and present are inextricably linked. The intertwining of their lives arises from a magnetic attraction between them. From Chang’s extension of ‘dinner’ (*FS* 174) to their exchange of letters once Chang leaves to continue his education in Chicago, their relationship is characterised by an affinity towards each other. Katherine’s relationship with Chang is typified by selfish love. The narrator states, ‘He had loved her independence so that she never could have needs, he had loved her stories because they had meant that her real life lay elsewhere and in no way relied upon him.’ (*FS* 290) Chang’s selfish desire to want Katherine to have no needs typifies his unease with the possibility of her growing dependence on him. His

denial of her needs also signals his anxiety at being unable to meet those needs. Katherine, on the other hand, is ‘determined to give as much of herself as she could force someone else to accept’ (FS 290) as she ‘needed to believe that he had loved her, but the thing that truly thrilled her was herself in love’ (FS 290). Their relationship is nurturing to Katherine as it meets her selfish wants as well. Even if Katherine offers so much of herself, Chang never fully accepts all she has to offer and never fully embraces her being as having needs. Their selfish yet intimate love defines their relationship. Katherine’s early romanticisation of love as sacrificial and dependent is carried over into her liaison with Chang. Katherine’s ‘never brooding or demanding’ (FS 290) demeanour is both part of her character and her role-playing to meet her lover’s demands. Katherine and Chang develop an awareness of themselves –their needs, wants, and ability to take and refuse– whilst in interaction with each other as both play out the roles assumed in the self. Katherine is ‘absolutely impelled by love’ (FS 291) to the point that love supplants ‘loss she’d grieved for all these years’ (FS 290-1) –loss of ‘herself’ (FS 291) during her relationship with Charles. Katherine and Chang’s relationship demonstrate the extent to which love evolves in complicated ways to reveal that intersubjective connections expose needs of self for self-growth and positive identity.

The relationships in *American Woman* between radical activists Juan, Yvonne, and Jenny testify to the intricate bonds forged in the midst of human vulnerability. The three fugitives –Juan, Yvonne, and their captive Pauline– seek refuge from American authorities at a countryside hideout provided by Jenny Shimada. It is during Pauline’s captivity that a recorded tape is dispatched to the media. In this tape, Pauline announces “My decision is made: I will stay with these comrades forever, because theirs is the only battle there is. They are my family” (AW

87). Though the public sees her press statement as brain-washing by her captors, Pauline remains adamant that she is part of the ‘family’ of radical activists. From a relationship of animosity, Pauline proclaims her loyal allegiance to Juan and Yvonne. Similarly, when Jenny loses her lover, compatriot, and aide William when American authorities imprison him for bombing American buildings, Jenny loses a loving and supportive relationship to sustain her. The narrator declares the way Jenny ‘tried not to think, of how terribly lonely it was’ and that ‘a companion would give her the gift of another perspective. Two were more likely than one to make crucial corrections, to compensate for extreme paranoia, or extreme tendencies towards the sense of invulnerability’ (*AW* 70). William as ‘confidante’ (*AW* 69) fulfils an emotional need for social contact whilst filling the lacuna of having someone to share her experiences. Jenny’s need for social contact also suggests how a sense of real, not imagined, strength is forged in intersubjective connection. Managing human vulnerability that is manifested in loneliness and isolation requires conjoined effort to deal with life’s precariousness. The inter-corporeal nature of human existence is revealed as a viable means and strategic mode to address vulnerability, not least within racial subjects. On the run from American authorities for her complicity in the bombings, ‘[Jenny] never meant to become a familiar face anywhere, yet she’d find herself chatting with people.’ (*AW* 69) Jenny befriends the hardware-store owner, train conductor, and the librarian of the small town in which she seeks refuge. Jenny’s ‘lone Asian face’ (*AW* 69) differentiates her from others. Her desires to create connectivity and forge communicability with others are important in gaining livability amidst her isolation. She compensates for her social disconnectivity by making small talk with strangers. As a fugitive, Jenny sees herself

forced into a life of unnatural loneliness contrary to her human needs for intimacy and sociability.

In *Person of Interest*, loneliness is also experienced by the Asian American male protagonist, Maths professor Lee. Lee's reclusive lifestyle and grim isolation highlight his intense solitary existence. His isolation is symptomatic of the racial melancholic losses he sustains to his psyche. Although Lee's loneliness is a brand of self-imposed isolation, it also points to the social segregation of Asian Americans in white America. Racial melancholia in loneliness is at odds with the syncretic energies of positive agency in intersubjective connection. Lee's social contact is limited to brief encounters with his colleague Hendley before Hendley's untimely death and perfunctory greetings with his students who hardly use his office drop-in sessions. Lee's 'office hours were an empty detention, unvisited and unproductive for him, no matter how much he pretended' (*PI* 4). Lee's loneliness is further delineated when the narrator mentions that loneliness is what Lee 'possessed in greater measure and finer grade than did his colleagues' (*PI* 9). Lee finds himself not only estranged by white America, but also from his own family. He is divorced from his first wife Aileen, separated from his second wife Mrs. Lee, and has an estranged daughter Esther from his first marriage. The non-relationship between Lee and Esther, as well as between Lee and his step-son Mark, demonstrates tenuous strands that define Lee's non-committal ties. As Lee finds himself on an arduous journey to defend himself and clear his name from the 'Persons of Interest' (*PI* 215) list drawn up by the FBI, Lee comes to recognise his private longing and need for intersubjective support and connection. As he flees from the FBI, Lee increasingly acknowledges his need for emotional support and open communication with his

family. This is evident in the flashbacks he experiences of times spent with Aileen and Esther (*PI* 213 and 219).

Significantly, Lee's links with his loved ones are rekindled in the family reunion after he successfully acquits himself of Hendley's murder. Lee's reunion with Esther after years of sparse contact is all the more poignant for the lack of normal father-daughter contact. Lee's needs for intersubjective connection encapsulate the individual's choice for agency taken for personal strength. Lee's run from the FBI brings to attention his sense of acute loneliness as he seeks refuge from white American law enforcers. It is during this moment of danger that Lee awakens himself to the deficiencies in loneliness. Psychological, emotional and physical needs for intersubjective ties also appear within Mark and Esther who reestablish contact with Lee. Collectively, their return to interpersonal interaction is a resounding sign of a communally-prompted exercise of individual free choice to transform a racially melancholic situation. Agency creates livability through intersubjective connections as Lee takes the initiative to regain contact with Mark and Esther. Lee's intersubjective (re-)connection with Mark and Esther is achieved in their accorded willingness and concerted efforts to reconcile with Lee. With Lee's intense isolation as a potentially pathological symptom of racial melancholia, Lee actively addresses his vacant loneliness by managing intense isolation with communal acts of love.

The tropes of loneliness and love are cast in contending binary positions as loneliness signifies paralysis whilst love is suggestive of the path to health. At the height of Lee's loneliness, Lee denies and shuns love. The narrator states, 'Lee had taken every impulse of love ever directed at him and destroyed it somehow' (*PI* 9). This unnatural disposal of love is a sign of Lee's rejection of the positive and renewing energies attained through love at a time when he experiences

overwhelming loss in loneliness. The loss of sociality and loss of family which Lee experiences accentuates both love lost and love had. As the omniscient narrator states, 'Before losing Aileen, Lee had not understood that her merciless knowledge of him was a rare antidote to aloneness that he would only be privileged with once' (*PI* 341). Here, the narrator reveals how Aileen's love and intimate knowledge of Lee provided him with an 'antidote' to his intense aloneness despite their relationship being negative in many ways. As a remedy to loneliness, the love Aileen showered upon Lee during their marriage points to the transformative powers in intersubjective connectivity. Lee's further losses in public backlash during the intense FBI investigation brings him to an awareness that 'Perhaps love can't surrender to loss, but at least in that tireless rebellion it recognizes itself' (*PI* 341). Psychoanalytically speaking, the 'tireless rebellion' in object cathexes (object-love and object-hate) derives and results from object loss. In short, loss intensifies the emotional force and sentiment of love of which Lee has hitherto denied and deprived himself. This process explains Lee's 'cravings for [...] the company of his estranged only child' (*PI* 226) when he is forced into a solitary hide-out away from the media's glare. It also accounts for Lee's equivocal relationship with the FBI agent Morrison with whom he eventually shares a 'friendship' (*PI* 340). Lee's social interactivity becomes most obvious when Lee successfully 'find[s] his voice' (*PI* 340). Hence, Lee breaks out from his secluded shell of private isolation into the communicative realms of social interconnectivity with a heightened cognisance of the worth and value of intersubjective contact. Thus, the significant value of love offered in interaction with others is emphasised in Lee's acknowledgement of love lost in loneliness, even as he rejects love at first.

In *Foreign Student*, loneliness is transformed from a debilitating symptom of racial melancholia to being a vital trigger for healthy gains in intersubjective contact. Loneliness prompts social gains within intersubjective connections and is a precursor to the communal agency in which decisions are made to connect to a collective group. At first glance, Chang's socially-imposed and self-induced loneliness seems to be all prevailing. Yet, '[Chang's] loneliness was a discipline aimed toward defeating itself. [...] It dictated a course of action.' (*FS* 165) Even as Chang's loneliness is self-defeating, his life is consumed by a defense mechanism in which he chooses his loneliness. Chang's life-long aim towards complete loneliness ['He hadn't lived his life alone for nothing' (*FS* 165)] is attributed to his friend Peterfield's disloyalty of him back in Korea, his father's lack of loyalty to the Japanese, and his being humiliated that his enemies used his father and continue to use him for their own devices. Social exploitation causes Chang to pledge 'undividing allegiance' (*FS* 164) to himself, going so far as to convene a 'Committee for the Preservation and Welfare of Himself' (*FS* 165) to reinforce his determined resolve to avoid more humiliation. The omniscient narrator's description of Chang's intense isolation indicates that loneliness has the potential to catalyse a spiral of negative emotions in internalised loss. In short, loneliness is a debilitating trope of melancholic grief and yet it also instigates subversive acts by mobilising transformative powers for managing desolation.

It is significant that Chang proactively chooses to further his education outside of his Sewanee college by leaving for Chicago. Although his college professor Bower thinks that Chang is merely inviting more loneliness, Chang sees his move from Tennessee as an opportunity to take 'initiative' (*FS* 225) for his own education. Bower says to Chang, 'You will be on your own. Things are easy for you

here. [...] You are surrounded by your friends [e.g. Katherine and his college peers]. If you go off somewhere for the summer you'll have to watch out for yourself.' (*FS* 225) Chang's active choice signals how he decides to step out of his comfort zone, moving from a place of symbolic loneliness to a chosen state of individually imposed loneliness. Chang is undeterred by the prospect of physical loneliness as he learns to 'watch out' for himself in white America where he is treated as a 'visitor' (*FS* 225). Chang's proactive decision to take control of his education defies expectations of him as withdrawn, passive, and accommodating. Even as Chang's social ostracisation is a product of America's racialisation, to a certain extent his loneliness accents his choice to live with the loneliness expected of an Asian outsider. This choice of loneliness, in contrast to social connections, paradoxically serves in leading him to recognise the value of intersubjective moments, accentuated by their rarity.

Because of the added effects of the Korean War on Chang's life, Chang's relationship with Katherine provides an insight into the irrefutable tension between his defensive need for isolated existence and his emotional desires for social contact. This conflict is evident in Chang being torn between feeling 'incurably alone' (*FS* 248) and wanting to share his life stories with Katherine. The dialectical tension between him causing Katherine pain and bringing her happiness in sharing his life stories with her complicates their relationship. It speaks of Chang's conflicting desires to inform Katherine as well as refuse her the details of his past. This dilemma is manifested when the omniscient narrator further states, 'If he had told her what pained him, she might care for his pain, and gain nothing.' (*FS* 286-7) If Chang tells Katherine his stories, the stories have the potential to strengthen his intersubjective connection with her. Yet, the possibility of Katherine sharing in his mental anguish

of his war-time experiences also blights Chang. It is the case that Chang ‘had never meant to tell her anything [b]ut he wanted her so much to understand’ (*FS* 287).

Hence, Chang’s want and need for her to understand him underscores the threshold point where contact with another intersects with the need to be alone. Although Chang instinctively prefers and chooses loneliness over social interaction, here his need for Katherine to apprehend his stories of the past reveals his hidden subconscious need to be recognised and acknowledged by others.

For all their chosen loneliness, both Chang in *Foreign Student* and Lee in *Person of Interest* eventually discover that relationships help to aid them rise above their melancholic positions through received recognition from others that transforms their non-subject status. Choi’s novels, thus, suggest that it is unnatural and damaging to be alone all the time, especially when subjected to ruthless marginalisation processes such as abject racialisation. In such situations, intersubjective relationships play an important role in transforming the loss faced by the racialised subject who is castigated as alien body. By assisting in managing loss, relationships between bloodline members, friends, and partners alleviate the condition and situation of socially dictated and individually imposed loneliness experienced by Choi’s protagonists. Chang’s entry into the small town community of Sewanee is a personal and social challenge for him in so far as his military experience in Inchon, South Korea readily paved the way for a life of seclusion built on a defensive mechanism in which Chang adopts an isolated, slow-to-trust people approach [‘he could be loyal to no one but himself’ (*FS* 164)]. However, contact with the white middle-class girl Katherine and his college peers eventually opens his eyes to the positive gains to be made through communal agency in social connection. Chang’s mutual affinity and attraction towards Katherine results in beneficial effects

as they choose to continue to remain in close interaction for all Chang's resolution to remain in loneliness. Even as they sporadically feel ambivalent about their relationship, both Chang and Katherine are seen to benefit from the intersubjective ties gained in their relationship as they encourage and invite each other to confront the past, examine the self, and discover their many subject-roles in life. In other words, subject formation is made possible in interaction with others as roles are discovered, assumed and played out. Similar to Chang, Lee in *Person of Interest* leads a fairly reclusive life before he finds an unlikely friend in Agent Morrison who ends up being his 'sole advocate' (*PI* 200) during the FBI investigation on Lee as a murder suspect. Lee's re-establishing connections with his daughter and step-son also demonstrate Lee's active transformation of his racially melancholic situation when supplementing his intense loneliness with moments of intersubjective connectivity which reap him social gains.

In addition to being a personal choice, the intense isolation which Lee is subjected to by white America is attributed to the by-and-large view of Asians as secret-keepers who are compulsive pathological liars. The polygraph test which Lee is forced to undergo amply demonstrates America's perception of Asians as guilty liars having no conscience when withholding secrets. As Agent Morrison declares, the polygraph test always produces 'false negatives' (*PI* 199) on Asians. However, Morrison sees Lee as an exception on account of his 'complete assimilation' (*PI* 200) in America. Even as Lee leads a solitary life by choice and by society's determinations, Morrison views Lee as successfully assimilated into America given his forty-year residency in America and his detachment from his original birth-country which is never mentioned in the novel. According to Morrison, Lee is not 'an Asian immune to the polygraph test' as he sees Lee as 'a person of conscience

who's not unfamiliar with guilt' (*PI* 200). With Agent Morrison's support of Lee, the media's portrayal of Lee evolves from animosity of this lone Asian figure to eventual acquittal of his role in the mail bombing. The significance of this evolution in terms of the novel's arguments regarding racism, isolation, as well as transformative intersubjectivity lies in such alliance and formation of unexpected friends that increases recognition of both subjectivity and subjecthood (selfhood) of racialised bodies by, and in interaction with, white America.

Furthermore, Choi's *American Woman* also thematises revolutionary agency in political activism. Here, agency and action are closely aligned in the larger context of support rendered to and by others. Jenny recognises this link in a moment of retrospective reflection. At a point when she is detained by America's law enforcers, Jenny is tried in court for her acts of violence against the American government, as her role as accessory to harbouring fugitives, and her alleged part in the murder of a grocery store owner. It is during this time of imprisonment that Jenny reflects on her time with the fugitives, duly realising that 'the secret was just taking action. You couldn't leave them [Juan, Yvonne, and Pauline] to transform themselves.' (*AW* 350) Jenny pinpoints how guided support is vital and necessary for transformation and change, referring specifically to the trio of fugitives Juan, Yvonne, and Pauline—all of whom she provides shelter to before she is imprisoned for her crimes against the American government. As she sits locked up in her cell, Jenny reflects on her actions and the strength garnered from her previous relationship with William. Jenny and William's partnership is reinforced in the omniscient narrator's statement 'Together they'd been such a closed globe.' (*AW* 350) Although this metaphor of the 'closed globe' evokes an intersubjective dependency which forecloses open communication with others, nonetheless Jenny's and William's synergistic union is a step towards

the intersubjective corporeal porosity or interdependent reliability celebrated in Butler's concept of livability. As the omniscient narrator states, 'Every action they had ever done they'd done assiduously together. That had been part of the power of it, that their every movement was in tandem.' (*AW* 74) Here, revolutionary agency in integrated collective action is displayed in their togetherness. The fact that Jenny and William relate to each other demonstrates their teamwork, inter-dependence, and the mutual strength harnessed within their shared ties.

Revolutionary agency demonstrates the element of choice, as anger and fury are channeled into action. Revolutionary agency serves thus to explain Jenny's 'kinship to another transformative anger she'd carried for years' (*AW* 350), and how William 'could channel her fury, and transmute it into useful action' (*AW* 350). Choice is evidenced in how William displaces Jenny's anger by facilitating the conversion of Jenny's anger into action, and by tapping into their 'transformative anger' (*AW* 350). Here, the intensifying adjective ('transformative') highlights the kind of shared action carried out and exhibits the extent to which anger inflames violence which, in turn, serves as a tool of 'provocation, as a means to incite revolution.' (*AW* 350) Helping to move for the forging of livable lives, violent action for revolution is aimed at avowing the legitimacy of raced subjectivity via the assertion of affirmative identity in communal acts of subversion against a white hegemonic class.

In light of transformative anger catalysing revolutionary agency, political activism is demonstrated as channeled by the shared spirit of communality and community. This sense of togetherness and of fostering a circle of community highlight the group strength drawn from the active choices made to collaborate and unite with other sufferers of loss. Despite her white-skinned background, Pauline is

identified by her captors as an 'antiestablishment rebel' (*AW* 175) who declares herself to be part of the family of her non-white captors (*AW* 87, 175). In contrast to Pauline, Jenny's 'nonwhite-skin background' (*AW* 171) is a symptom of her racial loss which Pauline empathises. In spite of white America believing that Pauline is brainwashed by her captors, the growing intimacy between Jenny and Pauline bridges them together as their different backgrounds are blurred during their time together. As the omniscient narrator reveals, 'Their intimacy, from the moment it really began, had seemed so complete that [Jenny] supposed it would have been an aspersion [to suggest otherwise].' (*AW* 358) Furthermore, 'they never carefully tutored each other in their own histories' (*AW* 358) and never bothered mentioning the 'lost continents of their life' (*AW* 358) which they each acknowledged in the other. Such implicit union in mutual feelings of attachment is also demonstrably evident in the combat trainings which Pauline and Jenny carry out together for strength building. Together with Yvonne and Juan, Pauline and Jenny act as a tight-knit 'group' to exercise 'discipline [in] testing the self' (*AW* 267). Their group trainings show the way 'Large groups worked the best' and that 'the large-group context, increased intimacy.' (*AW* 267) With the Watergate scandal adding to a hotly charged political climate, American sympathy for radical acts is heightened (*AW* 76) in political activism and radicalism being channeled as a means to unite for a common cause. Hence, the relationships built and strengthened whilst Pauline is held captive by Juan and Yvonne come during an increasing need to join forces to strengthen the individual body against the brute forces and dictating powers of white American hegemony.

4.2) Internment as Postmemory: The Transgenerational Transformation of Melancholia

Using Daniel Y. Kim's recent contention that the Korean War functions as a subject of postmemory and acts as a source of transgenerational transmission of trauma ("Bled In" 550), I argue that a corresponding strand operates alongside this transmission—that of transgenerational, intersubjective, as well as pan-ethnic transformative melancholia. In other words, parent-child relationships as well as social connections between various ethnicities within the Asian race serve as avenues for transforming racial melancholia. Daniel Kim argues that Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory with its emphasis on parent-child relationships refers to the transmission of trauma along generational lines. Taking Kim's contention as a departure point, I suggest that if such transmission ensues, then these transgenerational lines of communication open the possibility for the productive process of transforming loss experienced in melancholic trauma. The term 'melancholic trauma' which I use here incorporates both the psychic disposition of a damaged ego and the belated feelings of distress, shock and injury when loss is experienced. In line with Hirsch's argument regarding 'postmemorial working through' ('Surviving Images' 29) and taking into account trauma's belatedness (Caruth 17), the traumatic experiences of war and racial prejudice are relived and re-visioned in post-historical time through the belated acts of remembering and forgetting. Though not always desirable due to the pain and troubling emotions, the act of recalling history enacts attempts at restoring psychic health by encouraging open conduits within transformative relationships. With first-generation parents who have lived through a history of traumatic events such as internment and war, the

memory of the traumatic event is posteriorly impressed upon their children in what Daniel Kim thus refers to as the process of transgenerational transmission of trauma.

I argue that transgenerational transformation of pathological melancholia is opened up by the very same lines that allow for transgenerational transmission of trauma. By examining Choi's novels, I explore the way in which Choi's protagonists use their relationships and immediate social interactions to mobilise themselves onto a path of self-discovery where they engage actively in a process of self-revelation to understand their past and their family's past. This path to self-revelation makes melancholic identity productive. The journey of self-discovery through communal modes of stimuli empowers both self and community. The 'unexplored volume of [one's] character' (*AW* 343) is thus made known and unfolded. Consequently, I argue that the transmitted memories of war and internment are converted into action and resistance. Transgenerational transformation is clearly evidenced in *American Woman* via father-daughter transmission of the history of Japanese internment, of which Jim Shimada is custodian. Jenny Shimada inherits the memories of Jim's history of the Japanese internment despite never having lived through this event. Active parent-child transmission is exemplified in the novel by Jenny's conscious as well as subconscious awareness of her father's shameful past, and the way she is both plagued and curious about her dad's Manzanar internment. In response to Jenny's constantly barraging her dad with questions about his past, Jim rebukes her with a defensive question 'Why ask about that?' (*AW* 163) It is clear that whilst Jim Shimada shuns the melancholic past, Jenny seeks to actively uncover it with her view the past serves as 'a key to understanding him, to knowing him, perhaps even to being his daughter.' (*AW* 163) Jim Shimada's past is tied to Jenny's character – who she is, her inheritance, her familial past and present, and her being Jim's

daughter. Although she possesses direct generational ties with a survivor of the internment, Jenny is not paralysed by the transgenerational transmission of racial trauma and melancholic past. Instead, she actively seeks to learn more about the past. This active engagement with the past signals father-daughter transformative racial melancholia. The omniscient narrator further reveals that, '[Jenny's] discovery of what he'd endured was the beginning of her discovery of history and politics, of power and oppression, of brotherhood and racism, and finally, of radicalism.' (*AW* 163) Exhumed memories of her father's past also reveal to her the public scale of transgenerationally-shared personal trauma caused by racist structures and processes of racialisation. The asymmetrical power structures which permit racial oppression act as sources of melancholic trauma. Jenny makes historical trauma and racial melancholia productive in the collective activism and radical 'bombings' with William. Jenny's radical acts are carried out in tandem with friends within her peer group and across other minor ethnicities, and these instantiate the active transgenerational transformation of melancholia.

As Jim's daughter, Jenny is already born into a condition of loss and postmemory. When Jenny describes how her memories surface like 'the sense of discovering a book, with a bookmark stuck in it, she hadn't realized she'd owned' (*AW* 343), Jenny articulates her ownership of a whole host of memories belonging to her, yet are not hers at the same time. This metaphor of the book encapsulates the life-stories which are written into the pages of memory belonging both to Jenny and her father, and those sharing the same Japanese-American history. These telling bookmarks signpost pages that convey a lifetime of stories about Japanese internment, class demotion, geographical dislocation, and emotional displacement. Shared experiences and emotions transmitted in generational postmemory signal the

way in which Jenny readily meets such a position of loss. Jenny's own direct memories (her primary memory) and the transmitted memories she inherits from her father (her secondary memory) heighten the double loss she experiences as a result of generational postmemory. In other words, her memory of her dad's memory of losses suffered in racial, class, and economic divisions augment the loss she suffers as a second-generation survivor. And yet, through such loss and postmemory, Jenny embarks on a path of self-discovery. Her emerging memories of the past cause her to ponder, 'Hadn't she found herself, without knowing how, among the self-confident children of the white upper class? With whom she had fought for the rights of the colored and the poor.' (*AW* 343) Jenny's subsequent involvement in the political fight for the rights of the oppressed and deprived is motivated by postmemory that sees her born into loss.

In *American Woman*, Jenny's relationship with her father functions as an idiom of remembrance, transmission and transformation. Jenny's mother is not mentioned at all in the novel, and does not even make a single appearance. Moving on from the mother-daughter talk-story tradition which aids in depathologising identity via strengthened communicative links, father-daughter ties offer another variable to the equation of historical injuries and wounds associated with melancholic trauma in the internment experience. In particular, Jim's and Jenny's identities are explored in the poignant scene when they attempt to move back to Japan. The descriptive scene of their flight from Stockton to Tokyo in a DC-8 jet is filled with several symbolic metaphors that signify the processes of transmission and transformation. Prior to getting on the plane, Jenny remembers how the 'purchase of tickets seemed to absorb all her father's bravado as well as his money'. (*AW* 340) Not only do the expensive flight costs impose on Jim financially, but with initial

‘airport apprehension,’ Jim fails to handle pre-flight news of ground staff losing their seats together. Having boarded the plane and being upgraded to first class, nine-year old Jenny goes to play with the other children in the first class cabin while her dad is asleep. As she wanders from her seat, Jenny discovers a spiral staircase which leads into a ‘bubble-like lounge’ filled with people she describes as ‘beautiful – incandescently gold-skinned and gold-haired’ (*AW* 343). When her father comes to retrieve her, Jenny remembers how the look on her father’s face ‘had not been concern, as the other adults must have realized, but wounded and rewounded, vengefully bandaged-up pride.’ (*AW* 343) Jim’s pain, shame and injury are instantly recorded in his wounded facial expression. Jim’s wounded pride and concomitant feelings of shame are linked to class categories and racial distinctions. Compounded by unease at being in the same social sphere as the white upper class, Jim avoids the air stewardess and the parents of the other children. While Hirsch argues that photos are the primary medium for transgenerational transmission of trauma (‘The Generation’ 103-128), the picture of Jim’s face which remains etched upon Jenny’s memory serves as the means for transmitting the strands of the father’s trauma onto his daughter. Jenny remembers Jim’s damaged look clearly as she recalls the events of this flight. Her memory of her father’s bandaged-up pride heightens not only her own memories of this embarrassing incident, but also evokes the memories belonging to her father of past internment and associated feelings of shame, hurt, guilt and inadequacy at being Japanese American.

The striking clarity of the memory of her father’s wounded expression is further described by Jenny as ‘a durable memory, as vivid as her most vivid memories of the five years they spent in Japan.’ (*AW* 343) Considering that her memories ‘tend to lie fathoms deep in her mind, untouched by consciousness, for

years at a time' (*AW* 343), it is significant that her father's expression, more than anything else, is what remains with Jenny and is that which rises to her consciousness when she remembers the flight. As a 'durable' memory, her memory of her father's reaction to her playing with white upper class children serves as the open conduit to postmemory and to transformative gains. With Jim's first-hand experience of internment, the photographic evidence he carries in his facial expressions triggers and transmits the memory of shame, class marginalisation, and racial segregation. In other words, Jim's shameful past of internment is relayed to Jenny in her memory of the photographic clues which Jim leaves her. It is also relayed to Jenny through her memory of the conflicting emotions of shame, guilt and hurt associated with internment. Jenny's memories echoes Jim's own memories of internment that lie deeply buried in the recesses of his mind. Yet, while Jim is haunted by America's internment of Japanese, Jenny proactively confronts the memories that she possesses. Jim's choice to forget past memories is driven by his 'tinge of guiltiness his whole life after being interned: the same blameless guilt that had made him feel disgust for his parents, and for everyone else who'd been wrongly accused.' (*AW* 324) While Jim is disgusted by the treatment rendered to the Japanese by white America, he simultaneously alienates himself from the Japanese community in America. Jim's isolation from his past explains his choice not to keep any Japanese friends in California, choosing instead to label Japanese Americans derogatorily as 'sheep' (*AW* 324). Jim's refusal to see the Japanese in a positive light encapsulates his shame at complicit membership within a shamed and disgraced, racially-castigated group. It also signals his banishing the visible reminders of the past in an effort to halt the transmission of racial trauma. Yet, for all Jim's efforts, Jenny remains the recipient of the generational trauma of internment. In other words,

melancholic trauma is relayed and transformed by the second generation in their 'durable memory' of the past.

Relationships are thus keys to transgenerational, intersubjective transformation of melancholia. In addition to father-daughter relationships, the show of support Jenny receives in court from other ethnic minorities illustrates pan-ethnic communal relations as an emerging source of individual strength. Arrested for her alleged role in kidnapping Pauline, Jenny is tried in court for these offences. Jenny receives assistance rendered to her in this pan-ethnic support. As the narrator describes, 'everyday the courtroom was full of Japanese and Filipino and Korean and Chinese faces, the tight-knit people her father had always avoided. [...] They wore buttons that simply said JENNY. It was the tireless support of these people [which] the judge cited as his reason for sentencing [Jenny] to the minimum.' (*AW* 359) The appearance of this mass of people, strangers to Jenny, demonstrates a pan-ethnic, intersubjective, transgenerational show of solidarity in the face of adversity. In this public act of collective support and communal affection, the judge who presides over Jenny's case takes into account the unstinting support Jenny receives. Though perfect strangers to Jenny, her visually 'tight-knit' supporters treat Jenny like 'their sister or granddaughter.' (*AW* 353) Jenny's defence lawyer George Olson also observes that Jenny's tireless advocates who are sympathetic towards her 'glare daggers' at him 'because I'm not an Asian.' (*AW* 353) It becomes clear that the collective Japanese, Filipino, Korean and Chinese support of Jenny is based on their mutual racialised subjectivity. Jenny's supporters are hostile to Olson, yet they need not be towards one who defends Jenny against the charges brought against her. Rather than an expression of lost faith in court proceedings and the American justice system, the pan-ethnic coming-together of these Asian people in the courtroom

exhibits the powerful ways the racially melancholic individual is helped and strengthened by the physical, moral and emotional presence of others.

It is significant that just as Jenny gets out of prison, she visits yet another prison – her father’s Manzanar internment camp. Having served her short prison sentence, Jenny brings Jim back to the internment camp where her father was previously detained. Father and daughter return to the internment camp for a ‘MANZANAR REUNION’ (*AW* 369) soon after Jenny is released from state prison. Whilst serving her time, Jenny admits to the way prison ‘made [her] feel more like a member of a despised category’ (*AW* 355), a feeling which reiterates her father’s own feelings at being relocated to an internment camp. The physical journey Jenny takes from her present-day prison to Jim’s prison of the past represents the symbolic passage of transmitted postmemory. For Jenny, her choosing to accompany her father to his internment camp crystallises her embracing her role as Jim’s daughter with an awareness that her identity is influenced and shaped by her father’s past. It also signifies how Jenny maps herself onto the historical experience of Manzanar by being physically present at the site. For Jim, his personal consent to revisit the actual site of melancholic loss is a huge act of accepting his past and admitting the way his past has shaped his identity. The fact that both father and daughter return willingly to a place that carries much history and memories of pain and battles fought marks a psychological and physical journey come full circle, yet also advancing in the fashion of a spiral. Jim’s change of heart –from avoidance of his personal history of incarceration to actual confrontation with a collective past– signals the transformative attitude embraced by father and daughter.

Generational postmemory and its role in transmitting racial melancholia in the space of the family pave the way for the transformation of loss into gains. Both

Jenny and Jim no longer struggle with memories of the past towards the end of the novel, as both are at peace with the knowledge and history of their identity.

Significantly, it is Jenny who drives them both to Manzanar as her father sits in the passenger seat. This driving arrangement symbolises the second-generation daughter leading and taking the helm of history as father-daughter ties are rekindled in memories which are personal and collectively shared. Hence, in going back to Manzanar, Jenny and Jim move together to an empowering position rather than being stuck in interminable detention and a psychic state of internal imprisonment.

4.3) Creating American Identity: Moving Beyond Immigration

Narratives

Susan Choi traces the movement away from an outside immigrant status to the concept of the inside American subject, yet a subject integrally located on the outside peripheries of sociality. I wish to refer to this condition as that of being an 'inside outsider'. Moving from the immigration narrative of *Foreign Student* (1998) to stories of embedded Asians in America in *American Woman* (2003) and *Person of Interest* (2008), Choi chronicles the life of the Asian immigrant in America with a strong sense of historical roots to the motherland in her first novel and omits details of the birthplace of her Asian American protagonist in her most recent novel. Choi's *American Woman* is sandwiched between the immigrant narrative *Foreign Student* and *Person of Interest* in chronological and developmental terms, and advances the notion of Jenny as an inside outsider whilst retaining an American sense of nationality. In *Person of Interest*, Lee is the Asian American on the inside looking out instead of positioned as an outside immigrant. In other words, Lee possesses the advantageous viewpoint of an insider although he is socially labeled as an outsider. This 'inside outsider' position accounts for assimilation and acculturation as

processes that may lead to the adaptation, re-adoption, and re-appropriation of identity for one's advantage. So while *Foreign Student* is clearly rooted in the Korean protagonist's experience of immigration into America as he moves to Tennessee to pursue a better life, *Person of Interest* gives no identifying background information about Lee and therefore refuses to provide a conventional narrative of the immigrant experience. In *Foreign Student*, Chang's life is informed by his past in Korea as he suffers flashbacks and recurrent nightmares of his war-time encounters back in his homeland. With experiences of his home country feeding into his present time and his struggles to assimilate into an American lifestyle, Chang is distinctly positioned as a foreign outsider whose immigrant status serves to accentuate his presence as other.

Susan Choi points out that she deliberately makes no mention of the male protagonist Lee's past in *Person of Interest* by purposely leaving unspecified the origins of Lee's birth-country (Murphy 39). Known only by his surname, Lee is from an Asian background even as the novel does not state which Asian country he is from. When he is first introduced in the novel, Lee has been living in America for 'four decades' (*PI* 200). As such, he is not identified as an immigrant. Rather, there is a shift in emphasis toward the process of forging identity within the American national sensibility. This shift of attention away from the process of immigration to the notion of the inside outsider traces the evolution and development of Asian American texts within a literary canon that progresses from immigration narratives to narratives about hybridised American subjects. The hybridisation of identity, addressed in the first chapter of this thesis in the discussion of Maxine in *Woman Warrior*, is in opposition to pathologised hyphenation. Hybridisation mobilises the depathologisation of racial identity by strengthening a syncretic sense of belonging

whereby geographical positioning as insiders leads to social integration. I argue that the concept of ‘inside outsider’ that is demonstrated in Choi’s novels supports hybridised subjectivities in which the processes of immigration, assimilation and racialisation are dealt with as productive rites of passage to a healthy notion of identity.

The term ‘inside outsider’ refers to the outsider who is situated on the inside and who carves out a rightful place within the physical and mental circles of a society. As opposed to the direct classification of an outside immigrant, the appellation and concept of the inside outsider draw on the fact that inherent struggles are faced in the fluid yet contentious circles of inclusivity and exclusivity in America’s social polity. Useful parallels may be drawn between the ‘inside outsider’ and the widely-circulated terms ‘foreigner within’ or ‘outsider within’, the latter terms adopted by a number of theorists in Asian immigration studies to mark America’s treatment of Asian peoples as foreign aliens (Lowe 8; Palumbo-Liu 5). This concept of alien foreigners is underlined by the fundamental notion of first contact by Asian immigrants infiltrating white America. As an ‘inside outsider’, the Asian American occupies a peripheral positioning which is still tangible. However, this term serves to shift the primary focus from outside foreigner to the notion of Asian American inclusivity within mental and physical ‘inside’ positions. Amongst others, the position of being within America and thus privy to American points-of-view drive the process of reframing loss to elicit positive meanings of identity, and so encourage psychological benefits away from a pathologised splitting of identity manifested by immigrant pressures to assimilate.

The mental state of never belonging –of always being an outsider while located within the physical realms and inner boundaries of the white nation– exists even whilst in the physical habitation of an inside space. There is an acute sense of occupying the two worlds of inclusion and exclusion within a lived experiential reality of America’s racialisation. Whilst feeling lost is partly attributed to the psychic internalisation of losses, feeling that one is without belonging is part of the transnational experience and signals the very real, socially-imposed exclusionary acts. As *American Woman* demonstrates, the transnational spaces outside America show up this sense of exclusion even more acutely. Feeling betrayed by America, ex-interned detainee Jim Shimada temporarily moves back to Japan where he is rejected as Japanese. The narrator states, ‘In Japan he’d emerged as indelibly and hopelessly American. It had been in his slight advantage in height and his unerasable Los Angeles accent, in his casual dress which in Japan just seemed sloppy, in his inability to master Japanese.’ (*AW* 161) Jim’s American affectations cause him to be ostracised by his Japanese countrymen. Neither belonging completely to Japan nor America, Jim feels excluded as he internalises this state of exclusion by returning to white America. His American-born daughter Jenny is put through a similar series of exclusionary practices. The ‘tests’ (*AW* 162) conducted by her school in California epitomise abject treatment given to the Asian race who are seen as foreign specimens to be studied, probed and declared foreign in America. The omniscient narrator explains that Jenny undergoes ‘tests of the sort she imagined were given to retarded or incorrigible children, flashlights shone in her eyes and then bright wooden puzzles and ink blots and reading aloud’ (*AW* 162). These tests are subjected upon Jenny once returning to America from Japan. They comprise the school’s readmission procedures before allowing Jenny to enroll. Such differential acts signal the

objectification, devaluation and reduction of Jenny to an article of exclusion in America, her home and birthplace.

Yet, Jenny's loyal idea of America as her designated home is revealed when the omniscient narrator states that Jenny sensed 'this nation was hers, her own nation-within' (*AW* 82). For all the exclusionary practices that America subjects her to, Jenny remains faithful to America as her home country. She takes ownership of her American status as one with American citizenship living on American soil. America is her 'inside' nation 'sharing borders yet pursuing itself on an alternate plane' (*AW* 83). Here, the description of 'sharing borders' denotes the way America is a nation that encompasses different groups of peoples – several races and many cultures. It also refers to the transnational movement of Americans and an accompanying sense of physical, emotional, and psychic belonging in the concept of sharing boundaries. Jenny expresses due frustration with America's racial-profiling when rebuking 'Just because I'm a Japanese woman, you can't define me in terms of that' (*AW* 139). Jenny, here, acknowledges America's exclusion-yet-retention of racialised subjects as she begins a journey to disavow loss by accepting her American position as inside outsider.

Inside-outsider identity is also illustrated in *Person of Interest*. In Aileen's hand-written letter to Lee, the three words '*This*' '*Place*' '*I*' (*PI* 352) are highlighted. These italicised words amplify and heighten the meaning of 'I'. 'I' entails identity in personality and physical space. More than just an abstract notion, 'I' stands for a place of belonging where legitimate subjectivity is forged. In *Precarious Life*, Butler writes that 'I' goes 'missing as well' in the very process of 'I' losing a 'you' (22). Butler's notion of 'I' reveals human interdependence as integral to the subject's sense of identity. Aileen's letter demonstrates a three-dimensional vector of 'I'

mapped to the matrices of 'I-to-you' and 'you-to-I' relations. In short, 'I' is plotted using the coordinates of x (space), y (place), z (being). This mapping of 'I' is demonstrated when Lee observes that 'the letter did what it must have intended it to do: it conveyed her to him, thoroughly, without any constraint' (*PI* 352). Aileen's identity as an inside outsider is transmitted to Lee in Aileen's 'I-to-you' letter that encodes her habitation of an inside place 'I', yet a place that is also located on the margins given the three words 'this', 'place' and 'I' appear separately as punctuated fragments rather than in consecutive form.

The (re-) construction of a new but recognisable self within depathologised hybridised identity is a product of agency creating livability. The idea of construction is an important one to bear upon the identity politics of race. It introduces the way the assembling process is encompassed within the transformative changes for resignifying racial melancholia positively. Along this line, 'reconstruction' better describes a process of starting with the old to gather existing pieces to form a new improved product. Whilst constructing connotes that a new entity is produced, reconstruction entails working with that which is available to create the something new. Choi's *Foreign Student* points to identity (re-) construction in its use of adroit metaphors to underline the process of renewing psychic health. Protagonist Chang goes to work in a rebinding in which he is faced with 'books that had already been made, used, and broken.' (*FS* 234) Although he initially thinks he goes to work in a bindery, Chang ends up in a rebinding. As the omniscient narrator explains, 'He had thought it would be an actual bindery, where books were made. [But] the books [that] came into his hands [were] covered with grime and full of dust, printed in cheap ink that blackened his fingertips on porous yellowed paper that crumbled at the edges or broke if it was folded.' (*FS* 233) In the

rebindery, old books are put together again to make these books new, thereby creating a new product. Rebinding thus signifies the act of reconstructing the past by looking on the past using a positive lens to collate the many pages of one's life.

In *Person of Interest*, Mark reconstructs melancholic identity when he talks about his attempts to 'formalize memory' (*PI* 258). As Lee's step-son and Aileen's son from her marriage to Gaither, Mark suffers loss in not knowing the identity of his parents. Mark's and Lee's reunion only comes after Lee proves his innocence in the mail-bombing murder. The omniscient narrator states, '[Mark] had the sense he'd begun *reconstructing* himself, so that [his present] encounters, and not his childhood tempest, were the touchstones he harked back to when asked how he'd gotten to where he was now.' (*PI* 258, emphasis added) Mark defines himself by focusing on his achievements –specific moments or 'snapshots' in life captured by his 'old Canon' (*PI* 258). As the step-son of an Asian immigrant, Mark is the epitome of a person with variegated roots in a hybridised family. His attempts to weave all hybrid elements together to gain a coherent picture of who he is sees him assembling the many old and new facets of his life to manage them in identity reconstruction.

In a similar way, *American Woman* presents identity reconstruction as a key concept that underscores the process of creating identity anew, yet retaining an old self. The creation of American identity is encapsulated in what Juan calls 'ego reconstruction' (*AW* 249). Ego reconstruction, as Pauline describes, is 'a serious game. It's a trust exercise.' (*AW* 249) Ego reconstruction is thus an exercise that 'builds trust' (*AW* 249) given that the game involves providing candid descriptions of another within the closed confidence of a small group. The forging anew of identity to reconstruct ego thus takes into account others' perspectives in closed confidentiality. Ego reconstruction resonates particularly well with Moya Lloyd's

notion of 'subject reformation' ('Politics and Melancholia' 39). Lloyd's theory on subject reformation involves the signifying practice of reiteration in which different traits, characteristics and personalities are tried and put on. Reconstruction echoes the workings of reformation. In *American Woman*, when Yvonne explains to Juan 'How we all wear a mask, yet there's nothing beneath it. Our real selves are a put-on, a mask' (*AW* 249), she reveals the way a projected self is at once a true self. The different roles adopted by projected self are implicit to the process of self-reformulation. Ego reconstruction takes into account projected veneer as self-identity. Jim's frustration with the many social projections of his identity is evident when he asserts that he would like to think of himself as 'neither American nor Japanese, but New Yorker [ignoring firstly New York's association as "the immigrants' city"]' (*AW* 338). Here, Jim expresses a desire to identify himself with a city instead of a nation and a race given that others' descriptions of him account for racial-profiling in America. Furthermore, Jim reveals a cognisance with his everyday racialised status when insisting that others should view him as 'a citizen of the world, a Universal Human' (*AW* 338). Jim simultaneously urges daughter Jenny to 'know herself now, with her life in a forge' (*AW* 358) – a life that shapes and is shaped by the many roles derived in reiterative interaction with others. Moya Lloyd's argument regarding subject reformation is premised upon the idea that reiteration poses the opportunity for identity to be invented (Carver and Chambers 92-105). With the concept of 'ego reconstruction' underpinning an identity process that involves self-reformation, *American Woman* builds on the importance of constructing identity for creating livable lives in the constant acts of putting-on self-masks.

The links between class position and race are also explored in *American Woman*. Here, the notion of being American yet raced and demoted in class is examined in light of Jenny's managing loss in American identity. The implications and repercussions of class demotion are revealed in context of an isolated existence leading to concerted communal political activism. Class distinctions between Pauline and her radical captors are most evident at the height of Jenny's and Pauline's simultaneous court trials. While Jenny is sentenced to prison, Pauline gets off lightly. The omniscient narrator says, 'More than anything else Pauline would come to symbolize the immutableness of her class. She would seem to have gone through the muck and emerged from it clean.' (*AW* 354) Pauline's status remains immutable, untainted, and 'clean' on account of her white upper-class social standing. Furthermore, even as '[Jenny] and Pauline would be tried, and convicted, and sentenced, [...] the acts they had committed before they had met [and] their time together would be further obscured, or rather, never inscribed into the record at all.' (*AW* 355) Denying their paths ever crossed exhibits American society's refusal to weigh the girls up together on account of Jenny's non-white class and Pauline's upper-class white heritage. Refusal to measure the two girls together exposes the class and race distinctions which privilege one girl over the other. Pauline's 'clean' record is further evidenced in the way she is regarded as 'purely a victim' and fault is attributed to her attorneys 'who'd done such a bad job' (*AW* 354-5). As the omniscient narrator states, Pauline ' "get[s] the book thrown at her" yet somehow [is] redeemed, or rather shown to require no redemption, while Jenny would "get off easy," for somebody like her' (*AW* 355). Even before Jenny is captured and detained in prison, she is already aware of the class divisions that separate her from those who are not 'a member of a despised category' (*AW* 355). Jenny also acknowledges that

money is that which protects the white upper classes given the fact that ‘she’d never known someone with money’ (*AW* 68). Jenny is excluded from the social circles of the upper-class wealthy by the process of racialisation that reduces her to the segregated category of the lower class which offers no real protection in the law. And so, Jenny manages her losses within race and class discrimination by constructing a temporary violent identity in communal agency with her partner William.

The role of violence in the creation of a livable American identity is featured heavily in *American Woman*. For a start, Jenny Shimada in *American Woman* resorts to violence against the American government, and it is this crime that forces her into hide-out. Her need to use violence as a fundamental tool to express her radical form of protest against ‘the nation’s abuses’ (*AW* 352) exhibits the fine line between the violent compulsion for change and active passivism in forging livability. Choices to act in violence or live in quiet determination demonstrate the extent to which identity is shaped by a desire for change, and how violence plays its part as a tool in the affirmation of identity. In short, violence is used as an instrument to assert the legitimacy and viability of identity. In this respect, violent acts should not be viewed as impulsive reactions to white heteronormative authority. Rather, radical agency may be subsumed under the category of pro-active action, as opposed to simple reaction or spontaneous retaliation. Pro-active action invents identity by forging a livable American identity, even if this identity is at first subsumed by violent action. Jenny recognises the potential for transformative identity in revolutionary violence, She thinks of weapons groups ‘not as mustered force that might topple ‘The System’ but as ‘a delicate process of changing individual minds, or a rare chance to try’ (*AW* 296). Instead of seeing proactive radical acts using an outside-in view as ‘violent

[and] courting destruction' (*AW* 295), Jenny adopts an insider's approach by viewing political activism as a venerable force to alter individual minds. Violent responses cauterise wounds caused by the suppression and repression of identity that is evident in Jenny being 'nobody's story' (*AW* 319). Jenny sees her bombing acts with William as 'an act of violence to match acts of violence' (*AW* 350). Although motivated by vengeance at first, Jenny acknowledges that their intentions are also aligned with seeking justice for groups who have been wronged. In short, her violent bombings of American buildings with William are also inspired by the mission to 'save and redeem' (*AW* 351-2) peoples whom the American government has persecuted. The renewal of minds in both revolutionaries and those they seek to protect is the main objective for their political activism in violent radical bombing.

Violent radical action also functions as a means of asserting identity in seizing attention. Through powerful attention-grabbing acts, the social perception of racialised subjects as weak and feeble is overturned. Radical acts of violence effect the stamping of collectively-endorsed individual authority as well as group cohesion. In *American Woman*, the narrator says, Jenny 'believed in violence – as the only reliable way to seize people's attention. As a means toward enlightenment.' (*AW* 351) Jenny's self-conviction comes at a point when 'She had wanted to force others to see the unparalleled shock of the real [that] she'd felt forced onto herself' (*AW* 351). Jenny's wants to force an education upon others comes after having watched a monk immolate himself on national TV. Jenny remembers her initial alarm at the image of the monk burning in a 'column of flame' (*AW* 351). It is this sort of shock tactic which she desires to impact and duplicate. Jenny is frustrated with being 'a ridiculous, small, not-taken-seriously, average American girl' (*AW* 350). The connection between seizing people's attention and forging identity has to do with

overturning feelings of inadequacy and smallness in insignificance. Rage and anger constitute major catalysts for Jenny's responses. As the omniscient narrator states, 'It had been overwhelming anger that drove her when she set out to protest the war. She had been enraged by the state of the world, but perhaps even more she'd been enraged by herself' (*AW* 350). William and Jenny's subversive bombings are motivated by 'Exalted intentions – never fatal results, perhaps just thanks to luck. No salvation, either. Only anger, infectious like fire' (*AW* 352). Anger is the leading emotion that culminates into violence. In turn, violent acts themselves generate anger. Though Jenny 'abhor[s]' (*AW* 352) America's engagement with violence, she simultaneously uses violence to seize the government's attention and make a stand for the 'rights of the coloured and the poor' (*AW* 343).

The connections between violence, mourning, and grief shed further light on the way anger is measured as a viable force towards ego reconstruction. In the attempt to depathologise racial identity and assert legitimate subjectivity, Jenny carries out violent acts. While a means of enlightenment, her violent actions are not always a successful response to loss given Jenny's feelings of guilt and her eventual custody by American authorities. Jenny's imprisonment and detention in prison provides a time of mourning and reflection on the invariable losses she suffers. Alone and with ample time to reflect, Jenny considers the impact of her losses. The omniscient narrator states, 'Left alone in a cell with her grief was a weird, weightless thing – there were no imperatives of time or of action, of get-over-it-now-and-move-on, there was nothing to do but sit balled at the end of her bed, because lying flat all her guts would fall out.' (*AW* 349) Jenny pays for the cost of carrying out her planned bombings with William and for harbouring Pauline's kidnappers by serving a jail sentence. Plagued by grief at her failed attempts to incite a revolution and

subsequent detention by American authorities, Jenny internalises the losses suffered at the levels of race, class, and social status. Instead of violent anger undergirding her grief, there is something passive and resigned about her sitting balled up at the corner of her bed. Her despondency, relayed in her foetus-like balled-up position, shows a regression to the irrefutable fact that America's problems remain unsolved and unhealed by her. Knowing that 'she and Pauline were destined to pay different prices' (*AW* 354), and that she would be 'a token for the first time in her life' (*AW* 355), Jenny grieves for the loss of her freedom. She also grieves for the 'same fatal world as always, with its staggering inequalities, which she realized now weren't exceptions to be excised but the rules of the game' (*AW* 357). Significantly, Jenny now admits the way losses are 'the rules of the game' and that inequalities cannot be excised or removed or cured. In short, Jenny learns to manage inequalities rather than cure her losses. And so it is that Jenny tries her hand at writing, having failed to achieve that she set out to in her violent acts. Jenny 'sit[s] in her cell, and writ[es], amazed she could render herself into words' (*AW* 358). As an active act of individual and personal expression, Jenny's writing forges ahead ego reconstruction even as her acts of political and revolutionary activism pays limited dividends.

4.4) Voice and Articulation: The Role of Language in the Linguistic

Signification of Melancholia

Writing opens up the potential for the enabling practice of resignifying racial melancholia. In short, the linguistic act of writing facilitates and channels avenues for racialised subjects to express themselves through 'unedited thinking' (*AW* 360) about self and community. Thus, resignifying loss into gains is supported by the use of the writing tool as a linguistic signifier to express oneself uninhibitedly and fully. Writing, here, denotes a process that involves both linguistic voicing and physical

articulation as channels to uncensored self-expression. Unhindered self-articulation in language allows for unconstrained self-fashioning in the organic process of writing.

More than a therapeutic mechanism, writing reveals the extent to which the self is able to communicate with the larger community. As such, writing is both a constructive outlet and positive response to the ineluctable social, racial and class constraints that impinge into the lives of racially melancholic subjects. Melancholia is managed through interconnectivity with others that is achieved by writing. Writing involves both a writer and an addressee to whom the written piece is directed. The addressee in this case is both the self who writes and the rest of the community who are the potential readers. For racialised subjects, writing is turned into a linguistic and physical tool that thus provides a helpful and effective way for melancholia management in writer-reader interaction.

The transformative mechanisms of writing are explored in all three of Choi's novels. In *American Woman*, it is significant that Juan and Yvonne attempt to pen a book together. This is first suggested by Jenny's friend Frazer as a way to generate money and thus 'replenish funds' (*AW* 36). Financial reasons aside, Frazer advises Juan and Yvonne to try their hand at 'Writing a book. About your views, why you've done what you've done, like in your communiqués, but longer' (*AW* 36-37). Significantly, Frazer points out that 'it's another way of waging war. A war of words.' (*AW* 37) This war of words which Juan and Yvonne set out to wage against the American government demonstrates their attempt to manage their melancholic losses. Juan and Yvonne take decisive action to avenge the killing of their comrades at an anti-war rally, and thus curtail the risk of losses being incorporated into their ego. Yvonne calls the American government 'pigs' as she cries, "It took the pigs five

thousand four hundred bullets.” “That’s six hundred bullets per person.” (*AW* 34)

Similarly, in *Person of Interest* and *Foreign Student*, written words are exchanged through letters to communicate the writer’s personal feelings and to forge contact with others. In *Person of Interest*, Aileen writes letters to Lee to keep him abreast of her life even while they remain separated and divorced. In *Foreign Student*, Katherine leaves notes for Chang (*FS* 181) and Chang reciprocates by writing letters to Katherine while he is away in Chicago. One of Chang’s letters reads:

“I am writing to you from Chicago, where I am enjoying myself very much. I will spend the summer here. I have the luck of an interesting job.” (*FS* 272)

In this letter, Katherine picks up more than just what Chang is telling her about his life in Chicago. Chang also conveys his mood: ‘A whole letter had been composed, assembled, and mailed to transmit to her that arctic, careless tone’ (*FS* 272). Self-expression is effortful for the reticent Chang both because of his limited skills in written English and because of his naturally quiet and reserved vocality. Chang’s penning of this letter is a huge indicator of the emotional closeness he feels to Katherine. The fact that every one of his sentences begins with the first-person pronoun ‘I’ depicts the way Chang attempts to write himself into the letter. In short, the subject of the letter is Chang (who is self) even as Chang is communicating with Katherine (who is other). Chang’s personal voice expressed in his writing of self and ‘I’ demonstrates the uninhibited expression of his feelings and own subjectivity even as the letter is brief, controlled, and restrained on account of its succinctness. Hence, in all three of Choi’s novels, the self-fashioning writer ‘I’ expresses own personal subjectivity whilst also communicating with the other in the reader.

Positive revisioning by language is achieved in the way Choi revises the true story of the 1988 kidnapping of newspaper heiress Patty Hearst. The Hearst

kidnapping, on which Choi's novel *American Woman* is loosely based, is written into the narrative's fiction with Pauline standing in for the real Patty. In this novel, Choi uses language to revise history by inserting an Asian American woman within her account of this true historical incident. Choi gives simultaneous –if not additional– import to Asian subjective presence when introducing Jenny as the novel's female protagonist. Choi's novel focuses on the life events revolving around Jenny, a Japanese American woman who comes into contact with Pauline and her kidnappers. Through the writing of this novel, Choi effectively demonstrates a revisioning of history by presenting alternative history in which Asian American presence is noted. In shifting focus and revising centrality from white American to Asian American presence, Choi's *American Woman* defies conventional conditions by inscribing Asian American female presence into the circumscribed norms of white America. Hence, Choi uses language to revise this facet of historical truth in her novel that addresses the Asian American woman. By shifting focus from the white American woman to Asian American woman, Choi delineates the way the white American woman lies on the peripheries of her story in *American Woman*.

Language also plays an important role in the perceived inscrutability of Asian Americans given their encounters with linguistic barriers and their isolation–cum–interaction within white America. The linguistic signification of racial melancholia is reflected in the losses that are troped in language, as language manifests itself as both a symptom and product of racial loss. In other words, language is both cause and effect of racial melancholia. Yet, it is also a legitimate means of making losses productive. In short, the very tool that brings about debilitating losses is also the means to deal with these losses. The linguistic re-signification of racial melancholia simultaneously produces and restores from a position of loss. Language is thus a

salient tool not only to articulate real and perceived losses suffered but also to manage and transform negative losses into gains. Language plays a double-edged role by functioning as an indicator of the crippling effects of loss, and offering empowerment through the liberating energies contemporaneously tapped and unleashed in the modes of voicing and articulation.

The limitations as well as freedom from loss offered in the use of language are displayed in the way Chang in *Foreign Student* grapples with the English language. From his first arrival into Sewanee, Chang ‘talk[s] very little’ (*FS* 10) and is close to being ‘mute’ (*FS* 10). Perceived language incompetence is regarded as more than loss of articulatory abilities. Consequently, ‘His limited English was mistaken, as it so often is by people who have never been outside their own country, for a limited knowledge of things.’ (*FS* 17) And so, ‘He liked having a hidden advantage.’ (*FS* 17) Given that his inarticulateness is mistaken for a lack of knowledge, Chang finds himself better off sitting down with the Webster dictionary in renewed determination to master English. Ironically, his spoken English deteriorates the more he is tutored by Charles Addison. As the omniscient narrator declares, ‘His spoken English may have actually grown worse during this time.’ (*FS* 16) Chang first uses English in his capacity as translator at the United States Information Service in Korea. The omniscient narrator states that ‘Communication at USIS had always been a brusque, economical affair: the same few sentiments expressed and reexpressed, and the same few phrases used to express them.’ (*FS* 16) The losses epitomised here are cultural, racial and linguistic losses resulting from his limited use of English. In America, Chang recognises that he cannot survive on the few phrases he relied on in Korea. He is cognisant of the way his English ‘had always been utterly, ruthlessly pragmatic, driven by his faith in its power to transport

him. It had gotten him into USIS, and across the ocean to Sewanee, and then, just as he was in danger of becoming apathetic from accomplishment, it had brought her [Katherine] within view.' (*FS* 219) Language is symptomatic of the linguistic, cultural, and racial barriers imposed on the body. Yet, language also plays a liberating role since it serves as more than just a tool for practical communication. As Chang appropriates language by playing it to his advantage when actively studying the English vocabulary, learning its grammar, reading poetry and practicing its vernacular usages for contact with Katherine, Chang exhibits the social freedom to be gained in language.

The way in which Chang's name is linguistically transposed into an all-American name within the appellation 'Chuck' carries resonances of identity loss. This transposition denotes more than just an erasure of his Korean background. By eradicating his name in one swift conversion from 'Chang' to 'Chuck', white America blots out identifiable signs of Chang's Asian-ness signified by his original name. Chuck is an all-American name that is undoubtedly familiar and less alien-sounding compared to the Korean name Chang. However, as Mrs Reston points out, "[Y]ou're not going to save any syllables going from 'Chang' to 'Chuck.' You're not even going to save any letters, unless you transliterate the name as the French would. And I don't see why you would want to do that." (*FS* 9-10) Here, the college's vice-chancellor's housekeeper Mrs Reston identifies the irrational and nonsensical manner in which white Southern society has modified Chang's name. In the linguistic erasure of his name and apparent deficiency of his knowledge in his limited spoken English, Chang faces losses signified in language on a racial, cultural and social scale. Words transmit indispensable information, and names carry resonances of one's racial and cultural origins. Hence, the linguistic signification of

racial melancholia occurs in the erasure of Chang's name as losses to his subjectivity and identity are simultaneously incurred via his (dis-) use of the English language.

Nonetheless, the positive transformation in the linguistic resignification of racial melancholia is also possible in the way language is used to empower communities through open communication. Empowering energies available in the resignifying practice of language arises from and also revises the condition of racial melancholia. The active appropriation of language is worked into both national and individual consciousness so that language is transformed from a tool of censorship and segregation into a resourceful means of self-revival. Along these lines, the terms of racial melancholia are revisited to enable losses to be recast as gains.

Transformation is itself made accessible through the potent tool of language as voice and articulation. Here, resignification subsumes both the positive meanings inscribed onto racial melancholia and the depathologising work of language. The incorporation of loss is overturned through expression in language that challenges the fettering boundaries in marginalisation, oppression and racial segregation. Hence, I argue that communality of experience which is evident in communication through language appropriates language as a salient tool to manage social, cultural and racial loss.

In *Foreign Student* and *Person of Interest*, a salient example of the appropriation of language to manage loss lies in the way Choi plays out the existing similarities and dividing tensions between math and English. In these novels, the relationship between the languages of math and English demonstrates language as both empowering and isolating/alienating. As a tool for communication, math may be considered a language like English. On a differential scale, the associations of math (Asian, mysterious, subdued, and studied in terms of symbols) stand in contrast

to English (West, eloquent, impassioned, constituting words and phrases). These associations with math and language are developed in the novel through Lee's aversion to using English as a tool of articulation, choosing instead to rely on his mathematical knowledge and expertise in Calculus to immerse himself in a cryptic yet familiar realm of symbols. As math is understood by the linguistic West as difficult, enigmatic and unintelligible, Lee as a math specialist personifies all these qualities associated with math. However, rather than perpetuating difference and signifying a closed system, math acts as an effective medium for self-expression, assertion and affirmation. In other words, math provides an outlet for the frustrations of isolation, segregation and marginalisation. In *Foreign Student*, Chang's aptitude for math is readily testified to in his scholarship to study advanced calculus. Chang's preference and skills in math are further allegorised in the dichotomic juxtaposition between him and his classmate Crane. Standing in stark opposition to each other, Crane and Chuck symbolise English and math respectively. The narrator states, 'Crane resented a foreigner doing better than he did, and because Crane was doing his worst work in math he grew suspicious of math for the distasteful foreignness of its appearance, which he began to see as the root cause of Chuck's facility with it.' (*FS* 220) Crane confers the condition of alienness upon Chang, on account of Chang's physiological and physiognomic Asian features as well as his competency in math. As both an able math student and Asian foreigner, Chang is alienated as he is regarded as an outsider whose aptitude in math further crystallises his anomalous peculiarity. Crane's prejudice against math signifies the perceived associations attached to the subject. Crane views math as 'a pernicious, useless system controlled by pernicious, inscrutable persons, like his malevolent professors and his Oriental floormate.' (*FS* 220) Crane's racial stereotyping of Chang and the accompanying

awkwardness, inscrutability and insidiousness which he attaches to the subject and study of math thematise the congruent pairing of math and the trait of Asianness as perceived by the white Western observer. However, it is evident that Chang finds refuge, comfort, and consolation by immersing himself in calculus. As the narrator reveals, Chang becomes disillusioned with English to the point that he finds himself ‘los[ing] all interest in the English language and sp[eaking] less than ever, [as he] ate alone in the dining hall staring fiercely at a page of mathematics.’ (*FS* 219) Here, math becomes a tool for the linguistic resignification of racial melancholia, seeing that it is resorted to as a means and source of strength in addition to acting as an intensifier of his isolation. Along the same line, when Chang admits to ‘mov[ing] Katherine’s note again. It had been marking page fifty-six of his calculus book’ (*FS* 217), he exposes the interposition of English into math, revealing too the tension between his need for contact with a white American girl and the solace he finds in his calculus book. Clipped between pages of math, this written note that Katherine directs to Chang embodies the intermixing of languages and the intervention of English into Chang’s world of math, whilst providing an insight into the diffused and polyphonous forms of communication used in fortifying knowledge and claiming ownership of self.

Likewise, in *Person of Interest*, the intermixing of math and English is demonstrated in the scene in which Lee unearths a copy of his PhD math thesis from the university library only to find ‘a much smaller sheet, from a notepad, occupied twenty-four’s former place. This bore a message in English, not math.’ (*PI* 242) This letter which Lee believes to be from his college friend Lewis Gaither offers a symbolic reading of the intrusion of English within a complete body of work on math. In this instance, just like Chang’s discovery of Katherine’s note in his calculus

text, English interrupts and interjects into math. Being a math specialist, Lee is assuredly more comfortable navigating the remits of his math major/forte. Interestingly, Lee is ever only articulate in spoken English when appearing on TV in unrecognisable (*PI* 14) and surprising ‘eloquent outrage’ (*PI* 15) about the killing of Hendley. The narrator explains, ‘Seeing himself on TV was like seeing a stranger perform a harsh version of him, under the merciless lights, and then hearing his voice, the strong accent that still stained his English despite decades of vigor, was its own agony.’ (*PI* 14) Lee’s inability to recognise himself during this explosive moment of fluent vocal expression beamed to the rest of the nation demonstrates the extent to which he is unaccustomed to employing English as an expressive tool of communication, thus he is unable to identify his own image that is at once him yet not him. Lee’s eloquent expression of rage also signifies the degree to which he appropriates English by keeping intact his Asian accent that tarnishes his spoken English. Hence, the introjection of Lee’s familiar mathematical world by the vernacular English that he underutilises marks the disruption and intrusion into his comfort zone given that his English eloquence momentarily forces him out of his inscrutable shell.

Though the word ‘math’ is not capitalised in the novels, the importance accorded to math in Choi’s work is undeniable. It is thus distinguished further from the assigned prominence of English spelt consistently with capital ‘E’, Pertinently, *Person of Interest* and *Foreign Student* exhibits the way the English language is deprioritised and supplanted by the protagonists’ emphasis on math. With his first name never revealed, Lee is the university math professor who is the male protagonist in *A Person of Interest*. Choi’s *Foreign Student* similarly features an Asian student studying math. As both Lee and Chang advance their studies in

Calculus, they contemplate the rudimentary and functional importance of acquiring, mastering and expressing themselves in English. As first generation immigrants to America, Lee and Chang assume the typecast of protagonists in immigrant narratives whose ability to master English serves as a barometer for their success or failure at assimilation in America. Yet, Lee's and Chang's expressive abilities in English are superseded by their mastery of math.

Math is the language which Chang feels more comfortable with as communicating is done through 'universal' (*FS* 219) short-hand equations and indices. In *Foreign Student*, it is surprising that Chang earns a 'B' grade for history class given that he writes an 'impassioned, grammatically reckless paper on the mistreatment of the American Indian' (*FS* 219). In contrast, Chang's 'A' grade for Calculus exemplifies his forte in math and mastery of the symbols, equations, and indices which he is accustomed. Rather than being a gauge for failed assimilation into American culture and language, Chang's grammatically flawed English demonstrates the extent to which his math proficiency is an asset to deal with America's racialisation. When Chang says 'I determine groups. What law describes them. Which belongs with each other' (*FS* 169), Chang speaks of the mathematical frameworks which he operates by and displays his tendency to think and speak in the language of mathematical sets and groups. Even as, and precisely because, he previously worked for USIS (United States Information Service) to translate and sell America to Korea, Chang's 'universe' (*FS* 170) is defined using the terms of groups – of divisions and boundaries, and of sets, subsets and supersets. The notion of containment and demarcation is subsumed by mathematical sets which encompass ideas of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, not only does Chang describe what he does

as a math student but he also shows the way ‘the arcane of math trumped it all’ (*FS* 246).

The symbolic connections between math and English, thus, are played out in the language of groups and subgroups that resonate closely with the problems of inclusion and belonging that Chang encounters. In math, it is Chang who determines the groups, whereas with English he is the one being determined. The power accorded to Chang through math forges a sense of authority whereby identity is ascertained and constructed in accordance with determinate gains rather than negative losses. For Chang, English stands in as a symbolic representation of the racial marginalisation and exclusion that society imposes on him. Math, on the other hand, empowers Chang through the language of inclusion of which he is a master as he specialises in number theories of sets and subsets.

In *Person of Interest*, Mark reproaches his dad Gaither with the statement ‘It’s not math Dad. It’s not “If P, then Q”’ (*PI* 277). Here, Mark is frustrated with the way his dad uses algebraic numbers, symbols and equations as forms of everyday communicative tools that exemplify his automatic application of mathematical shorthand systems to everyday situations. Mark, aka Lewis Gaither Junior, is particularly annoyed with the way his dad views life through the lens of math and positions everything within the frame of mathematical concepts, formulae and calculations. Chang in *Foreign Student* similarly exhibits the way in which voicing is performed in the dichotomous juxtaposition between the articulatory modes of math and English. Chang who wins a scholarship to study advanced Calculus at Tennessee studies math diligently alongside the Roget’s thesaurus. As he arms himself with his thesaurus and calculus texts (*FS* 167), he goes about ‘systematically, single-mindedly pursuing this goal [of] studying himself to sleep, rising early and studying

his way from breakfast to lunch, and from lunch to dinner, and from dinner to bedtime again.' (*FS* 165) Chang's studious and conscientious endeavours to master the English language, for ease of communicating with others in the white South, is also intimately linked to his attempts to establish closer ties with Katherine. The narrator reveals that 'Every possibility of speech had been a possibility of speaking to her' (*FS* 219), as Chang continues to build up his vocabulary and expressive ability so that he is able to communicate with Katherine. Chang's concerted effort to learn English for social and intimate contact is combined with the symbolic encoding of math into everyday situations in which Chang's calculus, history and English classes infiltrates into his social world. Hence, the terms of calculus' differentiation and integration serve to highlight problems of exclusion and inclusion in a white America where 'All [Chang's] meals [fed to him] were [symbolically and literally] white' (*FS* 167).

In addition and as a response to math and English, the different languages spoken use a variety of linguistic discourses that affect the lives of Asian Americans. Firstly, there is the native language brought into America by immigrants who leave their original homeland. Secondly, there is the English language of America which is adopted as the mother tongue of second generation Asian Americans. Thirdly, there is the language that is brought into the Asian homeland by colonisers. These different languages comprise the 'babel of tongues' (*AW* 338) that simultaneously project the way melancholia is transmitted and represented in the many languages spoken. America's English language, Jenny's and Jim Shimada's Japanese language, Chang's Korean mother tongue and the language of math specialised by Chang and Lee are not merely symbolic of racial melancholia but they underscore a progression into narratives about the inside-outsider. Social segregation of Asian Americans is

presented in acts of voicing and articulation in the mastery, proficiency, and procurement of these language tools. Languages depathologise identity by virtue of the hybridised rather than hyphenated composition of these modes of articulation that enumerate the condition of the inside outsider. With the linguistic signification and interpellation of subject operating at several levels of voice and non-voice, Asian American subjects are equipped with tools that are at once pathological and depathologising mechanisms for the losses they encounter.

Conclusion: The Choice of Social Interconnectivity in a World of Inequities

The way *American Woman* concludes is a key to understand the place of political agency in a modern world in which solutions continue to be elusive. Solutions to problems are chimerical given that recovery from loss is not complete in a world that continues to impose boundaries and demarcations on groups of people differentiated by race, class, status and other markers of identity. An external power imbalance results from the dynamics of intersubjective conflict between interracial communities. This power imbalance is part of a structural functional system of society. Psychic internalisation of losses adds to the material reality of everyday loss in white America. Along this line, the desire to seek the tools for managing loss so as to deal effectively with the cultural and structural phenomena of racialisation is important for the choices made by a healthy ego to implement ways of managing melancholia. Choice and the ability to choose certain actions empower racialised subjects and pave the way for the transformation of debilitating losses. Furthermore, intersubjective connections facilitate making melancholia productive given the intergenerational support provided by the community that allows individual and group identities to be forged. Agency encompasses such choice to action. Social

gains within the family –biological and fraternal– subsume the political agency in the choices to exercise free will and act as agents rather than be pigeonholed as victims. Political agency assumes positive roles of the self which is an important and critical step for reframing losses into gains.

American Woman concludes with the omniscient narrator announcing that Jenny is destined to be ‘revised’ (*AW* 356). This acknowledgement features as an open admission of the transformative powers of identity. Even as Jenny was involved in ‘selective service recruitment center bombings’ (*AW* 355), Jenny assumes, embraces and performs her simultaneous roles as friend, lover, daughter and comrade. The omniscient narrator states that Jenny ‘was destined to be so revised, to be described by Pauline as “nicer than most of the people I met – but still a terrorist I lived in fear of” (*AW* 356). Pauline thinks of Jenny as both nice as well as a dangerous presence. The possibility for ‘infinite revisions’ within identity is manifested in Pauline’s revised impressions of Jenny from feared terrorist to trusted comrade as they take on their performative roles during their time together as fugitives. In addition to self-revised identity, revision of identity by others reflects a world of fluid boundaries that mark the infinite roles and mobile perspectives encompassed by identity.

Political agency is a timely response to the oppression and suppression of racial groups. The potent response of political agency is evidenced in the actions of Jenny and her comrade friends. Political agency for melancholic management encompasses communal action that engages the energies of empowerment in social interconnectivity. As the omniscient narrator states, Jenny gradually learns that losses are persistent in a world of ‘inequities’ in which ‘no solutions remained’ (*AW* 357) and ‘unsolved problems’ (*AW* 357) are a norm. In short, Jenny recognises the

powerful energies to be harnessed in transgenerational ties. Even though William stops loving Jenny and she eventually stops writing to him, Jenny remains loved by her father Jim. Jenny revives close contact with Jim Shimada as she discovers a newfound intimacy with her father in their renewed relationship by the end of the novel. A renewed understanding of her father is a positive result of her soul-searching journey. Jenny's political activism with William was necessary at that time in order for Jenny to deal explicitly with her increasingly racial melancholic state. Though Jenny feels 'no wiser, no less prone to dumb, selfish acts' (*AW* 357), Jenny would not have reached a level of recognition of the transformative powers of social interconnectivity had it not been for these acts. At the end of the novel once she is freed from prison, Jenny chooses to live in a house occupied by 'young graduate students or searchers' (*AW* 361). Jenny also chooses to accompany her father back to the internment camp to visit others who suffered alongside him. The enduring significance of social interaction is an important lesson that Jenny learns amid daily encounters with real everyday losses.

The world's 'staggering inequities' (*AW* 357) do not prevent Jenny from desiring to nurture life. The omniscient narrator says, Jenny does not want 'romance, marriage, or family life' (*AW* 361). Jenny only thinks of being 'a companion to a child' (*AW* 361) and 'secretly saw herself now as a person accumulating knowledge and the ability to be the best of the world to a child' (*AW* 361). This yearning for the maternal role concretises the way intersubjectivity is an important source of strength. Jenny contemplates that both she and child will reap mutual gains from their relationship. Jenny believes that she can 'be the best' (*AW* 361) to the child in a world of continuing volatility. Jenny leans towards motherhood and exhibits a subconscious need for life in her desires to nurture and protect a child within a

supportive environment. The increasing prominence Jenny places on transgenerational mother-child connections rekindles Jenny's role as daughter to Jim as Jenny realises the importance of intersubjective support within child-parent relationships.

A shift in focus from female Asian American protagonist to male Asian American protagonist traces the additional development of the Asian American novelistic tradition. Change of emphasis from daughter to father marks a shift from matrilineal stories to father-daughter narratives. While *American Woman* explores the father-daughter relationship through its narrative emphasis on Jim Shimada and his daughter Jenny, *Person of Interest* illuminates the relationship between its male protagonist Lee and his daughter Esther. Father-daughter relationship is explored in Lee's estranged ties with daughter Esther. Yet, Esther does not feature heavily in *Person of Interest*, which details Lee's isolated life within America's urban social scene. In short, readers of the novel are not told much about daughters as they are about the fathers. These novels' exploration of family ties in intersubjective connectivity maintains the importance of familial interconnections of father-daughter ties which are developed from mother-daughter narratives, such as the early Asian American novels of Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and Tan's *Bonesetter's Daughter*.

In Choi's *Person of Interest*, Lee's rekindled ties with his step-son Mark is also examined as a thematic development alongside his reunion with his long-lost daughter Esther. Father-daughter relationship is thus supplemented with the ties between father and step-son. Focus on father-daughter ties in extended families becomes now a part of the Asian American novelistic tradition that maintains the primacy of parent-child interconnectivity. In *Person of Interest*, Lee has a daughter and a step-son from his marriage to Aileen as he marries a second time to a lady

known only as Mrs Lee. Lee's self-imposed life of austerity and isolation results in his estranged relations with his step/children and his wives. However, a poignant moment is depicted when Lee finds his estranged step-son Mark pulled up in his driveway. Mark presents Lee with a birth certificate that proves Mark's parentage, and asks Lee to validate that Aileen was his mother. Mark's and Lee's combined efforts to re-establish their kinship delineate the significance of transgenerational interconnectivity. In a world of chaos, conflict, and divisions in which white America continues to 'bomb the Middle East and blow tons of people up so [Americans] can get gas for cars' (*PI* 346), *Person of Interest* points to the importance of the family nexus within the reunion of Lee, Mark, and Esther. Instead of a mother-daughter reunion typical in early Asian American novels, the extended relations of father, step-son, and daughter are portrayed. Transformative force in these extended relations is underlined by mutual willingness to manage loss in their concerted social bonding.

To sum up, I have argued that the trope of political agency as demonstrated by transgenerational postmemory, father-daughter intersubjective ties, inside-outside Asian identity, and the linguistic resignification of racial melancholia serve to create livability in the notion of transformative losses. In spite and because they are racially melancholic subjects, Asian Americans act as agents of their ego development. By so doing, they forge inclusive conditions in which to establish and affirm positive identities from within their condition of losses. The construction of positive Asian American identity is supported by intersubjective ties nurtured by a communal collective environment. The inscription of a healthy sense of self and group identity is entailed within the depathologising of Asian American identity, which works

within the transgenerational management of losses faced in intersubjective racial conflict.

CONCLUSION

Rethinking Racial Melancholia

In his essay 'The Ego and The Id', Freud revises his definition of melancholia from pathological disease to a healthy component for ego building or identity formation. Melancholia, thus, is recast as essential for forging the ego's character given that Freud describes melancholia as a condition in which subjectivity is formulated and identity is strengthened. Freud, effectively, suggests a continuum of mourning and melancholia in which finite categories between the two processes of loss are blurred. Freud's later theory of melancholia, contrasted to his early conceptualisations of the distinctions between melancholia as pathological and mourning as healthy, resonates closely with the idea of depathologised melancholia.

In line with Freudian theory of melancholic identity, my argument regarding transformative racial melancholia is built on the idea of positive identity that is forged via social support. In other words, the racialised subject discovers a sense of positive identity in identification with other melancholic subjects. Serving as more than mere 'psychic citizenship' (Eng and Kazanjian 366), intersubjective identification provides social interconnectivity so that agency as opposed to solipsistic victimhood is propounded.

Furthermore, the assumption of responsibility to respond to losses marks what I call a 'response-able' strategy with which to make losses productive. In my concept of loss management, losses as permanent damage in racial melancholia are thus challenged. In effect, the racial-melancholic subject is able to use losses as a

healthy platform to produce and create positive identity. By converting losses into gains, transformative melancholia enables a healthy sense of identity through intergenerational identification that ultimately overturns debilitating and pathological meanings attached to early notions of melancholia.

My thesis examines novels by Asian American women writers. Although I analyse novels, there is much scope for the exploration of racial melancholia in other forms of literary writings such as poetry, drama, and theatre. Other literary forms similarly deal with the methods of recording, addressing, and tackling racial loss, and so provide alternative expressive outlets for tracing and testifying to the losses in racialisation. Indeed, other literary mediums such as poetry, theatre, and stage performances are equally valid means in which to examine the trope of racialised identity. I have chosen the medium of the contemporary novel given that ‘creative activism’ (Bow 11), to borrow Leslie Bow’s term, is explored through the novel’s expansive and flexible literary form which merges the creative imagination with historical truths. Within the large scope provided by the literary novel –its form, structure and content – Asian American identity is redefined and explored in the experiential historical contexts of immigration, assimilation and racialisation. In exploring Asian American cultural and historical diversity, I examine the consigned status of the Asian alien immigrant by offering the more productive concept of Asian ‘inside-outsider identity’. Transformative agency, I argue, creates livability by generating and inscribing inclusivity of the racial melancholic subject in both the psychic and social realms.

The diverse range of Asian American novels in this thesis includes works by various North American authors of Asian descent. These writings comprise those by Asian Canadian novelist Joy Kogawa and other Asian American writers such as

Maxine Hong Kingston and Susan Choi. These novels are set in both an American landscape and the Asian extraterritorial region. The reason for choosing novels that traverse the national boundaries of the United States of America –both in their context and authorship– is so that the territorial relationships between Asia and America are enumerated in my literary analysis of Asian American subjects’ racial melancholia within the hegemony of a white American society.

On the whole, my thesis is interested in the larger concepts of voicing and agency. Firstly, voicing in language is facilitated by the workings of both memory and history as important vehicles to affirm positive identity. Also, voicing challenges and resists the limiting confines subjected on Asian peoples by white American hegemony, and so enacts agency. Secondly, the agency within female performativity and political action signals the active choices made to make losses productive for survivability and livability.

This thesis is specifically premised upon psychoanalysis being a productive conceptual tool that lies not outside the realm of sociomaterial conditions but rather as part of this latter realm. In short, my thesis uses the medium of subjectivity –both intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity– to delineate the psychoanalytical workings involved in loss management in which intrasubjectivity and intersubjectivity form a mutually supportive system. The rebuilding of self and communities encompass the transformative losses that are elicited in depathologising identity through intersubjective support. Consequently, my argument regarding transformative melancholia builds on subject-subject relations as opposed to subject-object relation which is part of an early clinical notion of intersubjectivity based on patient-analyst dynamic (see Cheng 187). My theory of transformative racial melancholia is built on the inseparability between the social and the personal argued by Anlin Cheng (205).

Furthermore, I use psychoanalysis as a starting point to argue for a healthy sense of identity achieved in social functioning via the assumed roles within gender performativity, double agency, and political communal agency enacted by Asian Americans.

Developments within the Asian American Novelistic Tradition

As demonstrated in the novels I have examined, the developments within the Asian American novelistic tradition include the way Asian Americans are interpolated into different genres and settings. In the recent contemporary novels of Susan Choi, Asian Americans are portrayed as immersed in unfamiliar territory and encounter modern-day comprehensive issues related to broader national concerns such as war and terrorism. Departing from early Asian American female autobiographical writings of Hong Kingston, more recent Asian American novels are increasingly involved in other American genres like suspense, mystery, and political activism. The novels of Hong Kingston's successors like Amy Tan, Hak Kyung Cha, Joy Kogawa, Jessica Hagedorn, and Fay Ng depict the broadening concerns addressed within the Asian American novel.

Whilst identity is at the forefront of the Asian American novel, the emphasis is no longer placed specifically on the processes of immigration and assimilation that perpetually situate Asians as foreign outsiders by virtue of their racial descent. In other words, Asian American novels are now seen to trace the way acculturation – the two-way process of change in favourable adaption and adoption of new and old cultures – is at work in eliciting positive racial identity. The productive management of losses in hybridised Asian American identity augments the concept of depathologised subjectivity within healthy ego formation. The notion that racially

melancholic identity encompasses permanent damage in abjectness is challenged within the inclusivity forged in the concept of 'inside outsider' identity. Inside-outsider theory acknowledges losses as a condition through which to gain a positive sense of identity rather than merely disavowing loss. To this end, the inside outsider concept works with loss as a condition in which to achieve positive healthy gains.

I argue that today's Asian American novels move beyond immigrant narratives to narratives about the 'inside outsider'. The latter concept entails an inside space that is forged from within the status as a non-white racial outsider. Because of their Asian ancestral background and Asiatic family origins, second generation Asian Americans who are born and bred in America remain outsiders in a predominantly white American continent. Because America is a land of immigrants and because of the historical weight of a white hegemony, non-whites continue to be considered as outsiders along the racial spectrum in America. This treatment of racialisation persists even as Asians are increasingly incorporated into the larger social system, as evidenced in better job positions, class, and public roles assigned to them.

Furthermore, the trajectory away from early mother-daughter stories to tales about father-daughter relationships is reflected in both a shift onto leading male protagonists and the increasing eminence of father-daughter relationships in Asian American contemporary novels. The centrality placed on female relationships between mothers and daughters in *Woman Warrior*, *Bonesetter's Daughter*, and *Dictee* is supplemented by the presence of father figures, such as Naomi's uncle in *Obasan* and Leila's step-father in *Bone*. Fathers, step-fathers, boyfriends, husbands are all further tropings of the male figure who plays an increasing presence within the novels of *Dogeaters*, *American Woman*, *Foreign Student* and *Person of Interest*.

These men enlarge the idea of intergenerational, transgenerational, and intersubjective relationships as a vital medium to manage loss in identity.

In the light of all these developments within the Asian American novel, I have shown that the purposeful trajectory away from early matrilineal autobiographical works supplements the concept of intergenerational relations for communal rebuilding of identity. Collectively, the Asian American contemporary novels which I have examined in my thesis serve to illustrate the expanding form and structure of the Asian American novel that foregrounds identity matters as a central issue from which notions of subjectivity in relation to social environment are delineated.

Loss Management: Productive Melancholia is Not a Cure

To sum up, loss in these novels is neither cured nor healed. The emphasis here is not on therapy or rehabilitation. The management of loss reflects the all-pervasive processes of immigration, assimilation and racialisation that take place on a daily basis. These processes incur a continual flow of melancholic losses on racialised subjects. Transformative melancholia emphasises the management of loss as a productive means to overturn and dissociate from early notions of melancholia as pathological and debilitating. By reframing melancholia as productive loss rather than pathological loss, the racial melancholia experienced by Asian American subjects is managed as a condition not to be risen above, but to be used as a state through which positive identity is formed. Instead of subscribing to the view that loss is to be recovered from, cured, healed, or remedied, I argue that such 'working through' of loss is an utopic idea given that remaining scars from inflicted wounds mark a failed renewal of a previously unaffected old self. Also, the emotional,

mental, and physical scars are that which help to build character and to strengthen identity.

A recovery from loss presupposes that loss equals damage. In contrast, my notion of transformative melancholia builds on the concept of loss as interracial conflict. Transformative racial melancholia situates loss as an intersubjective condition that is managed rather than overcome through intersubjective relationality and support. To this end, the medium and tools of memory, history, gender performativity and political agency work as viable routes to forge positive individual and communal identity in loss.

Transgenerational transformative melancholia is supported by and achieves hybridised Asian American identity that encompasses the multiple subjectivities of being raced, classed, gendered, and ethnicised within a larger national collectivity. In other words, intersubjective connections allow for individuals to rebuild identity via collective communality and within a shared community. Furthermore, the scars left behind by racial wounds are sustained collectively in intergenerational family relations that make possible the overturning of the concept of racial melancholia as individual pathology. In the sharing of stories via both talk-story and the writing tradition within the novel, further agency is enacted for livable lives to be carried out in Asian American identity. Both vernacular and written stories speak of racial wounds that testify to the transmission of losses and the subsequent transgenerational transformation of melancholia.

It is hoped that this thesis is the start of a continued engagement with the identity politics of race as it links up to the notion of a productive, constructive and progressive identity. Positive identity is crucial to health which mobilises action

rather than depression. Although my argument on transformative racial melancholia takes as its literary scope Asian American livelihood as portrayed in novels, it is also hoped that its basic concept of depathologised melancholia which assists the attainment of a healthy psyche to manage everyday suffering, loss and pain transcends the Asian American experience. In short, transformative racial melancholia is applicable to the lives of other racial minority groups within a dominant hegemony as it is in the lives of Asian Americans.

APPENDIX

Abbreviations in Citations

- AW* Susan Choi, *American Woman*
- B* Fay Myenne Ng, *Bone*
- BSD* Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*
- D* Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee*
- DG* Jessica Tarahata Hagedorn, *Dogeaters*
- FS* Susan Choi, *Foreign Student*
- O* Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*
- PI* Susan Choi, *Person of Interest*
- WW* Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Amongst Ghosts*

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