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National (Be)Longing:
American Imperialism and Identity Formation in Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I examine narrative strategies used by writers of the American West to create, discuss and critique “American” identities. The work of contemporary multi-ethnic US authors including Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters and Dream Jungle, Nina Revoyr’s Southland, and Manuel Muñoz’s What You See in the Dark, I argue, should not be considered as a separate category of American literature, but rather a part of an on-going conversation within twentieth and twenty-first century American literatures. These texts are a part of a crucial and often overlooked component of American literatures. They reveal a legacy of denied belonging that supports cycles of structural, cultural, and personal violences against marginalized subjects. Since multi-ethnic literature of the US and multi-ethnic US subjects are diverse and shifting, and do not rely solely on geographical, national, or physical limitations, they are thus difficult to define. Yet the authors included in this project use that very ambiguity as a potential for interrogating the concepts of “America,” “American subject” and “American literature” to reveal how American experiences, ideologies, and rhetorics challenge, complicate, allow, or deny belonging in America, and contributions to American narratives.

These authors, I suggest, take on the challenge of representing minority experiences while also seeking to define an America that envisions the multiplicity which is foundational in narratives of America, but which is so often excluded in practices of national belonging. In order to make this argument, I investigate the relationships between national identity and transnational affiliation, between visibility and violence, between subjectivity and identity, and between kinship and affiliation.

My project draws on recent critical conversations on identity in US multi-ethnic literature, and I build upon work by scholars including Lisa Lowe and David Eng that foregrounds the fluidity of identity in order to examine the effect of racializing processes that are built into cultural discourses on people and communities of different levels – local, national, transnational and global. These conversations also reveal a central concern of US multi-ethnic literature and scholarship to be the deconstruction of essentialism, and what Yen Le Espiritu calls the “emergent quality” of panethnicity present for ethnic Americans and ethnic American scholars (“Asian American Panethnicity” 7). Multi-ethnic literature of the US presents opportunities to identify and counteract discourses of power that produce and are obscured by essentialist concepts of ethnic identities. However, such deconstructions, while they reveal unequal power structures, might also be seen to limit the possibilities for minority empowerment through political mobilization.

Together, Dogeaters, Southland, What You See in the Dark, and Dream Jungle posit different models through which individuals’ experiences can be represented, alternative methods of national belonging can be expressed, and new constructions of identity can account for multiple – and often conflicting – alliances. Occasionally, these novels suggest that important aspects of identity must be ignored in order to gain community alliance. I argue that those aspects of identity which the state, popular culture, or dominant ideology erase or “forget” in order to gain strategic support for or visibility of minority groups in America are many times the very aspects that are the most marginalized. The novels also then frame an argument about American identity both by creating the possibility of an American identity for native and ethnic American minorities and by revealing the ways in which US popular culture and global capitalism both structure and disrupt possible ethnic American identities.
DEDICATION

For Miles, Nancy, Dale and Will, without whom this project would not have been possible.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Identity in Contemporary Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States ................................................................. 1

Chapter One: “You like to mix things up on purpose, dib a?”: Dis/placing Subjectivity and National Belonging in Dogeaters ............................................................................. 18

Chapter Two: What We Come From: Kinship, Desire and Violence in Nina Revoyr’s Southland ................................................................................................................ 69

Chapter Three: Who We See When We See Violence: Violence, Gender and Ethnicity in What You See in the Dark .................................................................................... 117

Chapter Four: “It was Justified”: Indigeneity and the Hoax of Authenticity in Dream Jungle .......................................................................................................................... 160

Conclusion: Looking for the Local in Twenty-first Century Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States ............................................................................................................. 189

Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 193
Introduction: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Identity in Contemporary Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States

In 1950s Los Angeles, Frank Sakai, a Japanese American man, in Nina Revoyr’s novel *Southland*, embarks on a relationship with Alma Sams, an African American woman. He loves her, not despite of the racial and social barriers of the time, but, at least in part, because of them: “It would be wrong to think their need for each other had nothing to do with race. What he loved in her was not just her intensity, her beauty, but everything she’d come from” (Revoyr 283). Their relationship is built on a connection that grows from shared experiences of being overlooked, oppressed, and criminalized by American society and discourse, and the connection between them ripples out into the community, and into the future through their descendants, the genesis of alternative identifications, structures of relatedness, and community formations. In the novel, the relationship between Frank and Alma shows that in difference there is the possibility for connection. And in connection, there is the possibility for change. Each of the novels discussed in this project – Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*, Revoyr’s *Southland*, Manuel Muñoz’s *What You See in the Dark*, and Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* – takes as a focal point the idea that, in representing characters whose subject positions are often ignored by dominant American society on grounds of racial, class, gender and/or ethnic difference, notions of American identities can be rewritten to include the diversity of American experiences, thereby creating connections through representation of difference.

In this project, I examine narrative strategies used by writers of the American West to create, discuss and critique “American” identities. Questions of identity and belonging pervade much of the literature written by contemporary multi-ethnic US
authors. I choose to use the term “multi-ethnic literature of the United States,” following Martha Cutter, the editor of *MELUS*, a predominant peer-reviewed journal in the field of multi-ethnic literature of the US, and the broader *MELUS* community. This terminology is useful for my project as it represents the complexities of discussing literature by authors who are American, and who are, in some way, a member of an ethnic American group that is neither a majority nor dominant in the US. Multi-ethnic literature of the US” is also, in part, an optimistic term, as it conveys a suggestion that US literature, like the US, is multi-ethnic. The term therefore allows critics and authors to foreground literature by authors and regarding subjects who are often marginalized in the US, and to illustrate that such literature is not separate from “American” literature, but a crucial, and often overlooked component of American literatures. Since multi-ethnic literature of the US and multi-ethnic US subjects are diverse and shifting, and do not rely solely on geographical, national, or physical limitations, they are thus difficult to define. Yet the authors included in this project use that very ambiguity as a potential for interrogating the concepts of “America,” “American subject” and “American literature” to reveal how American experiences, ideologies, and rhetorics challenge, complicate, allow, or deny belonging in America, and contributions to American narratives.

The authors included in this project – Hagedorn, Revoyr, and Muñoz – write from very different positions, but are involved in a shared project in that they all examine aspects of experience that shape identity and belonging in the twenty-first century in the American West, in particular in mixed, even transnational populations. Their novels address the factors that come to bear on individuals marked by race, class and gender in order to challenge and complicate traditional constructions of American identities. In
challenging what it means to have an American identity, their texts also challenge what it means to have an American literature. Each author foregrounds the difficulties and conflicts that their characters face as a result of their subject positions, and the ways in which heritage has been and is conceptualized, classed, and gendered in American culture. These authors, I suggest, take on the challenge of representing minority experiences while also seeking to define an America that envisions the multiplicity which is foundational in narratives of America, but which is so often excluded in practices of national belonging. In order to make this argument, I investigate the relationships between national identity and transnational affiliation, between visibility and violence, between subjectivity and identity, and between kinship and affiliation.

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY AFFILIATION IN MULTI-ETHNIC LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES

On a broad scale, my project aims to further the study of contemporary ethnic American authors and ethnic American subjectivities and identities as key components of American literature. The novels that I examine in this project were chosen in part because, while Hagedorn, Revoyr and Muñoz are gaining critical recognition, their texts are neither canonical nor mainstream, perhaps partly because they offer narratives of subjectivity and American experiences outside of the majority perspective. In their novels, these authors explore models of narrating and constructing ethnic and/or multi-ethnic American experiences in ways that reveal the diversity of American lives and subjectivities, and the necessity of including ethnic and multi-ethnic American identities into narratives of American and American literature. These novels highlight how contested concepts of indigeneity, kinship, and violence limit the potential of
forming, representing and understanding ethnic minority identities as a part of an American narrative. The conflicted constructions of indigeneity, kinship, and violence function as instruments of the state and of members of national and local communities who describe and enact conditions of access to affiliation, and so they can deny belonging to both individuals and communities who appear to be outside the boundaries of affiliation. In some cases characters also use these problematic concepts to justify the denial of belonging to others. Yet, these texts are also in conversation with more canonical multi-ethnic literature of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Together with canonical texts including Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Rudalfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, Hagedorn, Revoyr and Muñoz’s novels reveal a legacy of denied belonging that supports cycles of structural, cultural, and personal violences against marginalized subjects.

This dissertation also speaks to the need for interdisciplinary exchange and conversation between literary studies and other fields, such as anthropology and sociology. My project draws on recent critical conversations on identity in US literature, and I build upon work by scholars including Lisa Lowe and David Eng⁴ that foregrounds

⁴ Lowe and Eng are particularly useful to this project as both authors examine particular ways in which Asian Americans are denied national belonging in America through legal structures and daily practices of life in America. They also suggest that, in response, Asian American literature and film offers alternative routes to and participation in American national belonging. Lowe argues, in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Practices*, that American legislation – particularly immigration and housing law – that denies Asian Americans citizenship has contributed to a perception in American culture of Asian Americans as perpetual immigrants, and as such, Asian immigrants to America have developed a distance from American national culture that constitutes Asian American culture as alternate site of identity and affiliation. David
the fluidity of identity in order to examine the effect of racializing processes that are built into cultural discourses on people and communities of different levels – local, national, transnational and global. These conversations also reveal a central concern of US multi-ethnic literature and scholarship to be the deconstruction of essentialism, and what Yen Le Espiritu calls the “emergent quality” of panethnicity present for ethnic Americans and ethnic American scholars (“Asian American Panethnicity” 7). Multi-ethnic literature of the US presents opportunities to identify and counteract discourses of power that produce and are obscured by essentialist concepts of ethnic identities. However, such deconstructions, while they reveal unequal power structures, might also be seen to limit the possibilities for minority empowerment through political mobilization.

The direction of the field of Asian American studies is an example of this concern with partiality versus universality. As Lowe and Kandice Chuh outline, Asian American scholars need to approach Asian American literature and criticism with an awareness of the vastly varied contexts, histories, struggles, and experiences of Asian Americans including, for example, Japanese Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Chinese Americans, Taiwanese Americans, Filipino/a Americans, and Indian Americans, which are all currently encapsulated under the heading of “Asian American studies.” Yet, as Asian Americans are vastly underrepresented in America generally, and in literary studies

*Eng’s The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy similarly draws on American legislation and legal cases such as Lawrence v. Texas – the legal decision that overturned Texas’ anti-sodomy law – to reveal a national “racial forgetting” connected to certain forms of queer freedoms, which he identifies as queer liberalism. Particularly significant for this project is Eng’s argument that queer diasporas constitute a new poststructuralist narrative of kinship and family.*
more specifically, critics including Espiritu suggest that choosing to house this variety of experience and history together in Asian American studies offers both solidarity and a stronger potential for representation and visibility.

In selecting texts to include in this project, I sought to deconstruct a division between representation of universality and particularity by choosing texts that use narrative strategies which reveal the effects that seeking for, and being barred from participation in the community has on individuals, as well as the effects that individual actions and lives have on community construction, growth, and identity. Individually, but more so when in context with each other, these texts demonstrate that the particular and the universal inform, shape, and can reflect each other.

**TRANSNATIONALISM AND GLOBALIZATION**

Interdisciplinary approaches inform the national, transnational and globalized contexts of my argument, which I deploy as a way of reading transnational and national literature in the current era of globalization. These texts, read together, reveal the diversity of American experience, and explore the role and construction of national literature in an increasingly global and transnational world. For American literature authors and critics, a transnational or global focus provides useful models of complex, contemporary identity formation, as theories of transnationalism and globalization recognize and investigate the exchange of people, capital, and power between and across national and cultural boundaries. As Sue-Im Lee and Nathan Ragain\(^2\) argue, US

\(^2\) Lee and Ragain’s essays on Karen Tei Yamashita’s novels both pinpoint a tension in identification between universality, globality and particularity. Lee argues in ‘We Are
multi-ethnic literature explores the increasing diversity and flexibility of twenty-first century American subjectivity as an effect of globalization. For critics, including Lee and Ragain, the globalization of the twenty-first century requires new conceptions of national belonging, and ethnic American texts that represent globalized or transnational subjectivities posit alternatives to homogenous models of national awareness, national identities and individual identity construction. In revealing how characters negotiate conflicting affiliations, these novels investigate and portray who “we” are when traditional models of defining a “we” are becoming unmoored (Lee 502). Though these novels offer and interrogate different solutions to identity formation challenges in twenty-first century America, they emphasize the possibility of locating a transnational, global, or differently American “we” in identifications and affiliations based on narratives of origin, of family history, of kinship bonds, and of local community connections.

By exploring the production of and exchanges between global and local power structures, I am able to identify modes of resistance through representations of specific communities and individuals affected by transnational forces. Aihwa Ong conceptualizes

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Not the World’: Global Village, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s Tropic of Orange” that Tropic of Orange explores and critiques constructions of a “globalist ‘we’” that connect to contemporary debates about universalism (502). Lee suggests that constructions of a universalist global we celebrates imperialism, presuming that one position can speak for all positions, and posits an alternative model of a global collective in Tropic of Orange, a new model that contains difference, and self-negation, and is therefore capable of also expressing “the transnational, transcontinental nature of human existence without imperialist dimensions” (503). Ragain also explores Yamashita’s critique of universality, and her interrogation of affiliation through particularity in I-Hotel, identifying a model for framing the nuances of “universalist politics without erasing the conflicts that arise” from particular positions through intimate, individual relationships (139).
“transnational” as denoting movement as it occurs through space, but also in the changing nature of national and transnational lives and experiences. For Ong, besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to “the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logic of states and capitalism” (Ong 4). Transnational individuals, in Ong’s theory, have flexible citizenships – they cross and recross physical and metaphorical identity boundaries, and, like Gloria Anzaldua’s mestiza consciousness, as described in Borderlands/La Frontera, are able to build bridges across those borders.

TECHNIQUES FOR REPRESENTING SUBJECTIVITY

Fissures between individual agency and strategic essentialism or universalism lie at the heart of contemporary scholarly conversations about subjectivity. Anthropologist Lauren Leve explores the tension between individual experience and group affiliation, concluding that “the sense of belonging – to ethnic, national, religious, racial, indigenous, sexual, or any of a range of otherwise affectively charged, socially recognizable corporate groups – is among the most compelling of contemporary concerns” (513). On the one hand, an increased focus on individuality and agency foregrounds individual experience in order to break down stereotypes and add nuance to reductive representations of people that are based on race, class, gender, orientation, or other markers of identity. On the other hand, “socially recognizable corporate groups” may be necessary to generate the political clout required to ensure minority voices are heard. This debate reinforces binary perceptions of both individual and community identities, and, in a way, often reduces
subjectivity to a fixed construct. However, the debate also generates a conversation that scholars including Linda Martin Alcoff, Gloria Anzaldua, Mary Louise Pratt and Yen Le Espiritu use to deconstruct fixed subject positions. Linda Martin Alcoff suggests that individuals and communities can respond to these external pressures by constructing concepts of identities that are shifting, fluid, and, as critics as varied as Amin Maalouf and Ong argue, are capable of border and boundary-crossing. This dissertation draws a parallel between this tension between individual experience and community affiliation in studies of multi-ethnic literature of the US and current debates in identity theory that focus on the effects of post-structural and post-modernist theory of the constructions, constrictions, and political ramifications of raced, gendered and classed subject positions.

Even as postmodernism promises a greater representation and acceptance of a plurality of voices, along with which, Henry Giroux suggests, might emerge a “more viable public life,” the tension between individual experience and group affiliation can be heard in the concerns of certain scholars that postmodernist theory and techniques might have marginalizing effects on the reception and publication of multi ethnic US literature (qtd in Natoli and Hutcheon x). Postmodern techniques, such as those employed by Hagedorn in Dogeaters and Dream Jungle, allow authors to deconstruct fixed identities and foreground the operation of structural and ideological forces that limit and reinforce essentialized subjectivities. However, as critics including Craig Womack and Susan Stanford Friedman argue, at the same time poststructuralist theory creates discourse that “involves a retreat from the insistent and growing presence of women, people of color, and Third World people on the literary and critical scene” (Stanford Friedman 466). Thus Manuel Muñoz’s invocation of twentieth century American realism in What You
See in the Dark functions as its own form of experimentation in literary methods that, in signaling a break from deconstruction, re-inscribes narratives of lived experience in America with stories of women in marginalized positions. In speaking of the different techniques employed by Hagedorn, Muñoz and Revoyr, I am not seeking to assess or compare postmodernism and American realism, but rather seek to show how the postmodernist and realist techniques employed by these authors provide different strategies for representing the diversity of subjectivity and identity in American literature.

Together, Dogeaters, Southland, What You See in the Dark, and Dream Jungle posit different models through which individuals’ experiences can be represented, alternative methods of national belonging can be expressed, and new constructions of identity can account for multiple – and often conflicting – alliances. Occasionally, these novels suggest that important aspects of identity must be ignored in order to gain community alliance. I argue that those aspects of identity which the state, popular culture, or dominant ideology erase or “forget” in order to gain strategic support for or visibility of minority groups in America are many times the very aspects that are the most marginalized. The novels also then frame an argument about American identity both by creating the possibility of an American identity for native and ethnic American minorities and by revealing the ways in which US popular culture and global capitalism both structure and disrupt possible ethnic American identities.

SYNOPSIS AND METHODOLOGIES

Chapter 1: “You like to mix things up on purpose, dib a?”: Dis/placing

Subjectivity and National Belonging in Dogeaters
To analyze the models of subjectivity posited in these texts, I use methods suggested by the texts themselves, adapting my approach so that I can more accurately identify and respond to the particular argument about subjectivity. In the first chapter, I argue that Jessica Hagedorn’s 1990 novel *Dogeaters*, the first novel by a Filipina American author to reach a broad audience in the United States, reveals a division in Filipino culture between those who have a transnational identity and those whose identities revolve around national Filipino/a affiliations. As Hagedorn foregrounds the colonial and imperial legacies in the Philippines, and the continued presence, physically and culturally, of the United States, I identify how and where transnational and national affiliations come into conflict and challenge access to Filipino/a national belonging.

I contend that colonialism and neocolonialism divide Filipino/a identification along class and gender lines. *Dogeaters*, which is set in the 1950s-1970s in the Philippines and Los Angeles, traces the intersecting lives of Filipino characters from the upper-class and political aristocracy, to the working class and poor of Manila during the Marcos regime, presenting a wealth disparity that is connected to conflicting methods of belonging. While the upper-class are able to engage in transnational projects through commerce, cultural commodity, and travel, the working class and poor invest in local knowledges and national projects, creating and revealing a division in Filipino/a culture.

I show how, as a consequence of the tension between national and transnational affiliation, some Filipino/as become disconnected from their country and history, while other Filipino/as seek to identify with and seek to recover, indigenous, pre-colonial Philippine culture. Thus the members of the Gonzaga family, an upper-class Filipino/a family, whose stories and narratives frame the novel, represent the different legacies of
colonialism and imperialism – a legacy of colonialism that is both the desire to break with the past and the separation between these groups in the Philippines.

Chapter 2: What We Come From: Kinship, Desire and Violence in Nina Revoyr’s Southland

The second chapter examines the intersections of race, class and gender in kinship in Nina Revoyr’s 2008 novel Southland. I suggest that in Revoyr’s exploration of problematic and constricting structures of race and belonging in mid- to late-twentieth century Los Angeles, questions about racial construction, gender and class tensions impact the daily lives of individuals. Where Hagedorn’s novels focus on the negotiation of identities and community belonging in a transnational setting, Revoyr’s novel explores the structures and cultural discourses in America and in American towns and regions that allow for, limit, or deny belonging.

Southland follows Japanese American Jackie Ishida, and African American James Lanier, as they search for the connection between Jackie’s grandfather, Frank Sakai, and James’ cousin Curtis Martindale in an attempt to understand why Frank would have written a will indicating that his store in the Crenshaw district should go to Curtis upon Frank’s death, and why, when Curtis died during the 1965 Watts riots, Frank would have held onto the money from the sale of his store, with a copy of the old will, until his own death in 1994. In its discussion of the mystery of family ties, the novel investigates what it is that makes some family bonds more or less visible to the family but also to the local community, and to the nation. Following Janet Carsten’s definition of kinship as a system of relations constructed within a community through social processes and experienced as
part of everyday practices, I draw upon kinship theory to identify and analyze practices – and limitations – of relatedness in the novel (3).

*Southland,* I argue, reveals how national structures and discourses affect and shape the intimate relationships of everyday life. And therefore, *Southland* allows us to investigate the relationship of the individual and the community in a multi-ethnic America, suggesting kinship as a key component to national and community belonging.

**Chapter 3: Who We See When We See Violence: Violence, Gender and Ethnicity in What You See in the Dark**

In the third chapter, I argue that Manuel Muñoz’s 2011 novel *What You See in the Dark* traces the contributions of gender, ethnicity and class to the alienation of individuals from each other and from their communities, and suggests that such alienation affects what sorts of violence we can see, and against whom we see violence being done. Muñoz also implicates media representations of violence against women as a cause of gendered, classed, and racialized violence, and paradoxically, a reason that such lived experiences of violence against marginalized people may be difficult for white Americans to see. Set in the 1950s and 60s in Bakersfield, California, the novel follows the lives of four women – the Actress, waitress and hotel owner Arlene, and Candy, a middle-class young white woman who works with the final main character, Teresa, a young Chicana woman – and traces difficulties in reconciling idealizations of American life with daily lived experiences. Using theories of the critical gaze, such as Laura Mulvey’s and the more recent developments in the field by Alexandra Howson, building on Johan Galtung’s theory of structural violence, I argue that Muñoz’s interrogations and
reversals of the male gaze, in a novel set in the 1950s, and which engages with films like *Psycho* that helped Mulvey to theorize the gaze, demonstrate the applicability of the theory for understanding issues that persist into the twenty-first century – namely, how women suffer a type of indirect violence when they internalize self-worth in response to popular media, and the difficulty they have in reconciling the fantasy life of films with the realities and complexities of lived experience.

The novel’s implicit and explicit comparisons of middle class life in rural California to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* suggest that Hollywood’s stylish, black and white rendering of violence against white women both enables and erases the everyday, structural, racialized violence of the 1950s American west. Through the interactions of key female characters, who occupy several different subject positions, Muñoz posits an ethical model of subjectivity through which women can come to knowledge through the presence of a female other who reflects, or reflects with a difference, the self. Yet, as Muñoz demonstrates, representations of women in popular culture that turn women into objectified, and often sexualized, others limit the possibility of self-knowledge.

*Chapter 4: “It was Justified”: Indigeneity and the Hoax of Authenticity in Dream Jungle*

In the fourth chapter, I return to Hagedorn to interrogate the discussion of ‘authenticity’ and origins in her 2004 novel *Dream Jungle*. Where *Dogeaters* investigates legacies of colonialism in the Philippines that result in the desire to break with the past and in divisions between national and transnational Filipino/a subjects, I argue that *Dream Jungle* reveals that the colonial past is very much present in the lives of
contemporary Filipino/as in the novel, and leads to a desire for origin, and a need to claim authenticity.

In its discussion of the “discovery” of a “stone age” tribe, the novel reveals an imperialist fascination with primitivism. In my analysis of this chapter, I draw on theories of primitivism, which, as Adam Kuper and Victor Li argues, operate through constructions of people or societies as “primitive” that enable the constructing person or society to distance themselves from that culture, and to assert their own modernity which enables me to argue that Zamora and his interactions with the Taobo reenact, with resistance, colonial first encounters, and expose how those encounters invoke a concept of primitivism through which colonizers, scientists, and academics can reify their own modernity. In Dream Jungle, colonial and neo-imperialist constructions of “primitive” native Filipino/as are at once an integral part of, and a challenge to contemporary constructions of the Philippines as a nation. Hagedorn therefore suggests that a model of the Philippines and of Filipino/a subjectivity that acknowledges both the imperial and colonial history of the Philippines – as well as the involvement of the US in the Philippines now – and of the diverse and multiple indigenous peoples who, when colonized by the Spanish, constituted the Philippines. This model thus relies on the intersections, and incompatibility of colonialism, American imperialism, modernity and indigenous peoples. Francesca Merlan, and Patricia McAnany and Shoshaunna Parks argue that indigeneity, as a construct which, similar to colonialist and neoimperial constructions of primitivism, can act as a distancing device when applied to a group to signify a colonial or post-colonial position. Yet indigeneity as a politically recognized category, protected by measures such as the United Nations’ 2007 Declaration on the
Rights of Indigenous Peoples, also offers marginalized groups a way to claim a strategically useful identity. I argue that, in the novel, first contact narratives that evoke a distinction between “the primitive” and “the modern” are revealed to be phantasms of colonialism and post-colonialism with which individuals in colonized places and the Philippines in particular struggle as they work to negotiate their own experiences, subjectivities, authenticity as Filipino/as, and the lingering power dynamics of a colonial legacy. Additionally, Hagedorn’s use of postmodern techniques in the juxtaposition of Zamora and the Taobo tribe with the filming of *Napalm Sunset* – a fictional account of the filming of *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines during the Marcos dictatorship – suggests that, for Hagedorn, postmodernist methods represent the constructions of and challenges to “the nation” in the twenty-first century. The model proposed in *Dream Jungle* of a Philippines nation and Filipino/a subjectivity is thus encompassing of colonial and imperial interventions in a “nation” of many and diverse tribes, geographically separated from each other across over 7,000 islands, and is one of both constant self-construction and self-collapse, propelled by and challenged by Filipino/as who seek to comprehend and define – or perhaps to challenge and deconstruct – a “nation” in a transnational and colonial context.

**CONCLUSION**

Together, these texts, *Dog eaters*, *Southland*, *What You See in the Dark*, and *Dream Jungle*, draw on realist and postmodernist methods in order to achieve a similar goal – they depict the variety and richness of the particular and the local which together composes a multi-ethnic American and represents multi-ethnic American experiences.
Yet they also reveal the continuance of American imperialism, as well as the exploitation and/or erasure of multi-ethnic Americans and Filipino/as in the pursuit of imperialistic endeavors.
Chapter One: “You like to mix things up on purpose, di ba?”: Dis/placing Subjectivity and National Belonging in Dogeaters

As the first Filipino American novel to reach a broad, popular audience, Jessica Hagedorn’s 1990 novel *Dogeaters* is an ideal text for studying the complexities of late twentieth-century American identity and its challenges. The novel depicts the division in Filipino culture between those who have a global/transnational identity, and consequently are involved in transnational projects and commerce, and those who are more affiliated with local communities in the Philippines and who are invested in national projects. The division of the narration falls along class and gender lines, the result of the violent and continuing effects of colonialism and neo-imperialism. Thus the novel also frames an argument about American identity more broadly, as it reveals the ways that US culture and global capitalism both structures and disrupts possible Filipino identities, and in doing so reveals how the legacy of American imperialism extends into the present and beyond both Philippine and American borders.

In *Dogeaters*, the effects of this rupture of affiliation in Filipino culture spread through society in culture, communities, and individual lives, and for Hagedorn result in the alienation that for some makes a denial of Filipino/a origins desirable. That is, the colonial residue leads to a disavowal of the Philippines for some characters – a desire to pass as something other than Filipino/a – due to the lack of a shared origin other than the imperial moment. In other cases, the colonial legacy generates a desire to recover lost origins and to feel affiliation or connection with indigenous, pre-colonial Filipino/a culture, one that would exist free of imperial history and the influences of global capitalism. For Hagedorn, the effects and lived experiences of a colonial/imperial legacy
does not make a “Filipino/a subject” impossible. Instead, her novel demonstrates that negotiating the colonial/imperial legacy is a shared experience for Filipino/a subjects, one that generates competing knowledges, identifications and narratives as alternatives to official or state sanctioned histories, including Americanized views of the Philippines. Through negotiating their shared experiences, some of Hagedorn’s characters are able to exercise a measure of agency in their own identity and in their relationships to local, national and global communities.

Hagedorn frames the tensions surrounding contemporary identity in the Philippines and its diasporic communities in a tension between literary forms. On the one hand, her novel is postmodern in that it is fragmented, achronological, and polyvocal. She employs a pastiche of styles such as letters, excerpts from radio serials, news reports, and ethnographies to represent multifaceted and irreducible Philippines experiences and history. Yet Dogeaters is also richly historical and the same narrative approaches that we may term postmodern approaches can be seen in the Filipino context as being a continuation of a longer, rich aesthetic heritage, one identified with older, even indigenous forms of communication. The title itself speaks to these tensions – “Dogeaters” is a derogatory term used by Americans in the 1900s against Asians, and specifically against Filipino/as as an indictment of “uncivilized” people who would supposedly eat dog meat. Hagedorn’s use of the term invokes at once the long-term racism directed towards Filipino/as by Americans – a specific flavor of racism, tinged with allegations of primitivism and savagery – and the westernization of certain Filipino/as, which hints at the internalization of anti-Filipino stereotypes within Filipino/a culture. It is therefore the perfect word to suggest the contention between “modern” or
assimilated Filipino/as and those who identify with older ways that the novel stages. The term is, in one context, an externally applied derogatory term. Yet it also becomes a determining phrase as it operates in the ways that enact the dynamics of the novel – it speaks of history and backgrounds, and jointly of embracing and rejecting, or desire and repulsion for those backgrounds. Similarly, the characters in the novel enact these tensions internally, on an individual basis, as they negotiate personal connections to and rejections of the Philippines. They also embody these tensions on a larger scale together as community comprised of competing factions between those who set up a national identity, and those who are involved in a transnational project.

For Hagedorn, the colonial/imperial legacy of the Philippines generates class and race constructions which circulate through different forms of knowledge including those in movies and radio dramas, indigenous culture and beliefs, religion, and tsismis in Philippine society during the 1950s-1970s. These alternative knowledges are at times complementary and at other times in direct conflict as they impact how characters understand national belonging, class and race constructions, and the role of America in the Philippines. Filipino/as have shared experiences of these alternative knowledges, but Hagedorn’s novel suggests that shared experience does not lead to a shared understanding, negotiation of competing constructions, or subject position. Instead, these alternative knowledges reveal and perpetuate a rupture between members of the upper-class who identify as not indigenous Filipino/a and members of the working class who are associated with indigenous peoples and culture. These ruptures recall the long history

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3 Tagalog for gossip.
of Spanish and Catholic colonial encounters in the Philippines, dating to the 1500s, in addition to American imperialism and neocolonialism. As a result, Hagedorn’s characters have fluid Filipino/a and American identities, and through their fluidity, they challenge these categories.

In *Dogeaters*, the spectrum of characters that span these two segments of the population and hold differing assertions of preferences and allegiances, enable us to reflect on what it means to be Filipino/a, and how one can – and should – participate in national belonging. Perhaps not surprisingly, due to the imbricated nature of identity, the novel depicts many versions of identity in a single family. The Gonzaga family illustrates both how individual Filipino/as experience and make sense of their lives and, more broadly, acts as an allegory for Philippines culture. The Gonzaga house, with carefully detailed rooms that echo the allegiances of the family members to which they belong, might be seen to represent allegorically the Philippines nation. The upper-class members of the family, including father Freddie, uncle Augustin and cousin Pucha, identify themselves as not-Filipino/a, instead selecting privileged mestizo/a, European, or American affiliations that are strongly invested in global and transnational projects. On

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4 As the Philippines has a complex and unique position in relation to colonialism, nationalism and the global economy, Filipino/a subjectivity has been a focus of study in many fields, including literature, history, and anthropology. Critics including Yen Le Espiritu argue that the history of Spanish and American colonization, along with the persistent effects of US cultural and commodity capital imperialism both in the Philippines, as American companies and military bases set up operations in The Philippines, and in the US, as large numbers of people (particularly women) migrate to the US to work (primarily in labor and care industries), has resulted in making the Philippines, and Filipino/a subjects transnational, whether or not they migrate across national boundaries. The characters in *Dogeaters* each experience and negotiate the effects of this interrupted history.
the other hand, family members who identify with indigenous Philippines peoples and cultures, including *Lola* Narcisa and the servants of the Gonzaga household, are personally invested in national projects. These identifications and perceptions of national belonging are further complicated by characters, including Dolores and Rio Gonzaga, who inhabit a liminal space between affiliation with the upper-class and the working class, between the Philippines and America, and who are alternately and at times simultaneously engaged in transnational and national projects.

In the opening scene of *Dogeaters*, ten year old Rio Gonzaga sits with her cousin Pucha in the Avenue Theater in Manila, watching *All That Heaven Allows*. As they watch, Rio and Pucha absorb and reflect the film, introducing the novel’s exploration of a struggle for identities shared across class, nationality and gender divides in the Philippines in the 1950s-70s. Rio and Pucha compare themselves to – and measure themselves against – the American film stars.

Jane Wyman’s soft putty face. Rock Hudson’s singular, pitying expression. Flared skirts, wide cinch belts, prim white blouses, a single strand of delicate, blue-white pearls. Thick penciled eyebrows and blood-red lips; the virginal, pastel-pink cashmere cardigan draped over Gloria Talbott’s shoulders. Cousin Pucha and I are impressed by her brash style; we gasp at Gloria’s cool indifference, the offhand way she treats her grieving mother. Her casual arrogance seems inherently American, modern, and enviable. (3-4)

Rio and Pucha’s reactions to the film mirror and expose the power of US imperialism in the Philippines and highlight forces the characters’ search for identity. Wyman and
Talbott’s expressions, their fashions and their emotions are each seen as necessary and elements of the “desirable” American subject – an upper class woman who is sexually desirable to American males and desirable to Pucha and Rio as representative of an ideal subject position. For these girls, identity is made in the intersection of an individual and culture – in this case, American mass culture. Their comments on the actress’ styles reveal how the girls take in the stars’ self-fashioning and reflect how they understand the stars’ appearances, their “looks,” – Talbott’s “Thick penciled eyebrows and blood-red lips; the virginal, pastel-pink cashmere cardigan draped over” – to be connected to their behavior – “Cousin Pucha and I are impressed by her brash style,” and “gasp at Gloria’s cool indifference, the offhand way she treats her grieving mother”, and so are suggestive of a perceived link between looks and acts. The link the girls intuit between the stars’ looks and their behaviors and experiences leads to the girls’ to the conclusion that they could change how they act by changing how they look, and vice versa. If they were able to craft themselves into the model American stars, they might have American lives and experiences that seem, at the moment, to be highly desirable. If they could look like Talbott, they could act like her and achieve the “casual arrogance” that seems to them to be “inherently American, modern, and enviable.”

The scene, like other forms of American influence, geographically and temporally locates “being” or “home” in America and its values, and thus always denies it to Filipino/as. It brings to the foreground a disconnect between the promised lives represented in American texts and media and the lives that face the girls – the intimacy, confidence, and celluloid perfection in the film opposed to alienation, uncertainty and gritty Filipino/a reality. The film reveals the exportation of American culture to the
Philippines, while Rio and Pucha’s discussion illustrates how the Hollywood portrayal of American life, subjectivity, and experience are strongly internalized by upper-class Filipino/a society. Pucha and Rio watch *All That Heaven Allows* from the balcony of Manila’s “Foremost! First-Run! English Movies Only!” cinema:

The sky is a garish baby-blue, the clouds are ethereal wads of fluffy white cotton. In this perfect picture-book American tableau, plaid hunting jackets, roaring cellophane fires, smoking chimneys, and stark winter forests of skeletal trees provide costume and setting for Hollywood’s version of a typical rural Christmas. Huddled with our chaperone Lorenza, my cousin Pucha Gonzaga and I sit enthralled […] ignoring the furtive lovers stealing noisy kisses in the pitch-black darkness all around us. (3)

The intimacy of the theater – conveyed by its darkness, the kissing lovers, and the “huddled” girls – and the expanse of Technicolor sky compound the disconnect implied by the juxtaposition of tropical, urban Manila which the girls experience by sitting in the “pitch-black darkness” and fantasizing of the idealized rural America on the screen.

This scene is followed by a section narrated by an older Rio, long since immigrated to America, who reflects on the disjunction between the characters represented in the film she remembers seeing with Pucha and the America she has experienced, saying:

The role of Jane Wyman’s son is a minor one, completely forgettable.

The character’s name is “Ned” – that much I remember. Ned Nickerson is the name of Nancy Drew’s boyfriend in those books the American
Consul’s wife gives me the following Christmas. Now, after all these years in America, I have yet to meet a man named “Ned” or anyone with the surname “Nickerson.” (6)

Here, Rio shows how much of her expectation of America is grounded in popular culture exported to the Philippines. Older Rio clearly sees and denounces the false expectations created by American cultural exports, suggesting from the outset of the novel both that American cultural exports tangle up Filipina attempts to negotiate identities and affiliations, and that these cultural exports are not equipped, as they are, to address the experiences of Filipino/a Americans.

The film offers the girls a compelling but ultimately hazardous promise of female agency in America. It portrays an American culture filled with the ideas of social change related to class and gender inequality that circulated in America in the 1950s⁵, and reveals the hypocritical and uncritical perspectives limited social change in America. Ultimately, however, it asserts an idealized American culture; a Thoreau-esque American individualism through which a return to nature along with faith in oneself and in love can conquer societal forces and expectations. In the film, Cary Scott, an upper-class widow

⁵ After her husband’s death, wealthy Cary Scott becomes involved in gardening, and romantically interested in her gardener, Ron Kirby. Her adult children and her friends disapprove of the relationship and induce her to end it, by invoking her duty as a mother to her family. Soon her children leave home, offering Cary a television as company instead, leaving her more isolated and lacking in motivation than she was after her husband’s death. When Ron has a life-threatening accident, she realizes that she was wrong to allow social expectations, antiquated notions of female duty and class stand in the way of her happiness with Ron and the back-to-nature lifestyle he represented. The plot therefore reflects the tensions in American culture in the 1950s about the roles of women and about class status, but it also works to reaffirm many of these same conventions.
played by Jane Wyman, falls in love with a younger man, landscaper Ron Kirby, played by Rock Hudson. Cary’s difficulty reconciling her own desires with societal conventions foreshadows how female characters in the novel must work to reconcile their identities, desires, and place in society both as a part of a class system and as women whose roles are often formed in ways that are meant to support the dictatorship. Pucha’s desire to marry Boomboom Alacran, Baby’s infantalization and nervous illnesses as well as her elopement with Pepe Carreon, a soldier, and the beauty queen Daisy Avila, who joins the insurgents show how gender politics in the novel often intersect with and in some cases drive gendered politics.

The film in part challenges the role of women in their families and communities, suggesting that, while women might be conceived of by society as having a dual obligation both to their husbands and families, as well as to their communities – in the film’s wealthy society, it is a woman’s job to uphold the family home, family memories and to meet and preserve societal expectations – these duties can overshadow the more foundational obligation that a woman owes to herself. When Cary falls in love with Ron, she experiences a rebirth closely associated in the film with a renewed appreciation of and connection to nature. Cary’s position and her choices (or apparent lack thereof) relate to Rio and Pucha’s positions as well as that of Rio’s mother Dolores. Both the young women and the established society woman struggle for identity and agency within a confining patriarchal and capitalistic system. However, the film suggests that living

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6 Perhaps a reference to President Ferdinand Marcos’s son, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr.
simply and being true to oneself can create an escape from this oppressive system, at least for men. Cary does end up with the man she loves, apparently asserting her agency and achieving her goals. For Rio, Pucha and Dolores, such an “out,” if it does exist, is inaccessible in part because, as Filipinas, they lack the potential to “return” to a rugged American individualism.

Rio and Pucha react to the America portrayed in this and other films by turning to opposing methods of negotiating the systems that confine them and the influence of America Filipino/a culture. Enjoying TruCola and bibingka at the stylish Café España after the film, blond, fair-skinned Pucha ignores Rio in favor of flirting with two boys, one of whom is the well-connected BoomBoom Alacran, at the next table. “Pucha is flattered by the hissing boy’s grossness…She is a changed person, smiling and chattering about Rock Hudson, Ava Gardner, and her latest favorite, Debbie Reynolds. She is suddenly solicitous, oozing sweetness and consideration” (5). For Pucha, romantic availability and attractiveness is connected to Catholicism, to American popular culture and her higher class status, and depends partly on a disavowal of traditional or lower class Filipino traits or interests.

Conversely, for Rio, American popular culture offers an escape from what she sees as the threatening, constricting Filipino aristocratic society in which “I am powerless; I am only ten years old. I remember to this day how I longed to run out of the fluorescent Café España back into the anonymous darkness of the Avenue Theater, where I could bask in the soothing, projected glow of Color by De Luxe” (5). Unfortunately, the older Rio reflecting back on this memory sees that escape as an empty promise. For her, American culture simply offers different constraints, particularly to a young Filipina
who desires to attain what America’s cultural exports promise, and who never can. The America represented in the film does not exist, as Rio discovers, and even if it did, she, as a Filipina, is barred access.

In asserting opposition to the idealized Hollywood America of the film, older Rio suggests that the method of storytelling in American cultural exports sets up singular or essentialized, and therefore unrealistic, portrayals of life, identity and experience. Older Rio’s presence suggests that narrators, stories and perspectives should be varied and achronological if they are to reflect Filipino/a multiple and always contentious lives, experiences and identities. For Hagedorn, one character’s perspective is limited by the limited knowledge they have access to and the limited experiences on which they can draw and as a result their identities likewise are partial and incomplete. Rather than faulting that partiality however, Hagedorn embraces it throughout the novel as the only possible way of knowing anything. Rio’s experiences and reflections set up knowledge as something that is limited and partial because Filipino/a identity, based on transnational, imperial, colonial and neocolonial relations is also limited and partial, neither one nor the other. However, the myriad perspectives and knowledge to which multiple people have access complement and complete each other, even when they are in competition, as they create a full picture of the ranges and limitations of Filipino/a subjectivities. The multiple perspectives in the novel work together to demonstrate not only the necessity of partial knowledge, but the superiority of knowledge created in this way. The older Rio, possessing firsthand knowledge of America, sees through the idealized versions of American life that younger Rio and Pucha so eagerly consume. The
juxtaposition of younger and older Rio suggests Hagedorn’s alternative – a pastiche pedagogy, constructed through multiple and shared individual, limited knowledges.

In order to reflect the polyvocal, flexible and shifting nature that Hagedorn identifies with Filipino/a culture, Hagedorn constructs an alternative narrative of Philippines history through juxtaposing popular culture with the lived experiences and expectations of Filipino/as. She does so through multiple avenues – through Rio and Pucha’s viewing of *All That Heaven Allows*, through the “tsismis” in her characters’ conversations, and also through the perspectives offered by a variety of characters and narrators which contest the “official” accounts of the Philippines. Hagedorn introduces “official” accounts through (fictionalized) scientific treatises, American presidential addresses, and news articles. Each of these sections illustrate the ways in which Philippines history, identity, and national belonging have been disrupted by three hundred years of colonialism and commodity capitalism.

*Tsismis* or “gossip,” allows characters a method for resisting official accounts, narratives and histories of the Philippines, allowing the transmission of important resistant, and at times even counterfactual, information. *In Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe argues that *tsismis* in *Dogeaters* functions similarly to the concept of “rumor” as articulated by subaltern studies historians. In this

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7 Such as Vicente Rafael, who, in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* suggests that rumors which circulated during the Japanese occupation of Manila offered alternative histories and revealed the flexible nature of Filipino national identity – Rafael posits that “rumors point to the possible unfolding of history and circulation of power elsewhere, at a tangent to the present trajectory of events” (117). Also, Reynaldo Ileto, in his “Outlines of a Nonlinear Employment of Philippine History,” addresses the relationship between elite, linear histories and popular knowledges that are subjugated by
view, *tsismis* is a discourse which, in tightly regulated Philippines society, presents opportunities for social organization, critique, and resistance in “unsanctioned sites and discourses” that escape the suppression of more overt resistance (Lowe 114). The *tsismis*, accompanied by multiple accounts of lived experiences from different characters’ perspectives in *Dogeaters*, “dramatizes the recollection of history as spasmodic hearsay and as an ongoing process of partial, imperfect recollection” (Lowe 120). The limited knowledges enabled by individual character’s perspectives are thus shared through the different and occasionally disagreeing narrations and through *tsismis* and act to rewrite the narratives of Philippines history. Diverse and partial knowledges, exchanged in unauthorized private, communal and local spaces, reinvest Philippines history and culture with local and indigenous knowledge, with national pride, and with traditions and affiliations without erasing the experiences and effects of colonialism. *Tsismis* therefore also reinforces the identities and experiences of Filippino/as.

Alternative and competing forms of knowledge are conveyed in the novel through Hagedorn’s focus on the characters’ experiences of events rather than the historical context of the events. Hagedorn’s characters are thus connected through events, but the events often take the backstage to the experiences. Events bring characters into the same place at the same time but the key significance of the events is in how they affect different characters, and how they bring the characters into contact, a significance

official accounts of history and events, suggesting that histories of the Philippines produced by nineteenth century elites internalized European colonialist ideology (154).
reinforced through the stories of the events\(^8\) that, rather than being told in their entirety in one section of the novel, are broken up and dispersed across different characters’ sections, and told by different narrators. Consequently, alternative, unofficial historical narratives *Dogeaters* arrive out of lived Filipino/a experience, made visible through the characters perspectives of their experiences and lives. Hagedorn reveals the dependency between history and the subjects who experience, internalize, negotiate and resist it. By privileging ‘experience’ over event, Hagedorn contests historical explanations for the Philippines and monolithic Filipino/a identities and instead offers a pastiche Filipino/a subjectivity that represents the diversity of Filipino/a experiences and positions. In doing so, she subverts transnational perceptions of relationships between American and Filipino/a identity.

In *Dogeaters*, Hagedorn’s Filipino/a characters create and maintain subjectivities in response to the effects of colonialism and economic imperialism. Their shared experiences result in alternative forms of knowledge that are both complementary and competing; a duality exemplified in Rio’s account of her maternal grandfather and her imaginings of his death scene, enabling her to delineate the points of contact and conflict in American and “indigenous” Filipino/a epistemologies. Aptly named, as he invokes a Walt Whitman-esque inclusive American identity (as well as the failure of this type of inclusive ideal of nineteenth and twentieth century America) Whitman is an American who came to the Philippines with the army, and stayed after marrying *Lola Narcisa*. Yet

\(^8\) Such as the story of the assassination of Senator Domingo Avila, the events of which the reader must piece together from Joey, Romeo and Daisy’s sections.
Whitman, frail and dying in the American Hospital, is afflicted, according to Lola Narcisa, with bangungot, a mysterious tropical Filipino malady that results from a batibat, a hag-like creature, sitting on her victim’s face or chest to suffocate them while torturing them with nightmares. Rio tells us:

My Lola Narcisa claims that her husband is the first white man stricken with bangungot. She seems almost proud of his nightmare sickness, a delirious fever in which he sweats, sleeps, and screams. Most bangungot victims die overnight in their sleep. It is a mysterious illness which usually claims men. My grandfather’s case is even stranger than most—he’s been sick like this for weeks. At first, the American doctors diagnosed malaria. After a week, they patrolled the corridor outside my grandfather’s private room, consulting each other worriedly and coming up with more far-fetched theories. Bangungot is ruled out of the picture by the chief of staff, Dr. Leary, who dismisses the tropical malady as native superstition, a figment of the overwrought Filipino imagination.

(14)

The “native superstition” defeats the American doctors as grandfather Whitman succumbs to bangungot, for which American science offers no cure. Modernity linked to progress, science, American capitalism and neo-imperialism (the doctors are stationed at the American military base), is in opposition to “folk” knowledge, incapable of responding to or taking into account local knowledge and history.

Whitman’s illness in the novel also signals the gradual collapse of Romanticized concepts of American identity under the pressures modernity and twenty-first century
capitalistic/imperialist “scientific” knowledge. His name invokes Walt Whitman, the iconic American poet, whose anthem to American identity and belonging, “Song of Myself,” in part portrays American subjectivity as a unifying whole. The long poem expands “myself” to include the stories of many, diverse “Americans,” such as a Native American Woman married to a trapper, and a runaway slave, exalting an idealized American subject that is multiple, inclusive, and geographically expansive, in some ways similar to the shifting Filipina identity that Dogeaters posits. However, as Whitman lies dying a slow and agonizing death, senile and ravaged by his Filipino disease, Hagedorn suggests that the America and the American identity imagined by “Song of Myself” may not be sustainable, calling into question the “real” possibilities of an inclusive American identity. As in the American films the girls see, Whitman at once represents the promise of an inclusive American subjectivity and the failure of that Romanticized view. He is a victim of the American focus on progress through global capitalism and neoimperialism and through scientific “advancement” that denies local or folk knowledges, for, as he suffers, Whitman loses his humanity, a loss which Rio associates with his whiteness: “the white man tosses his head from side to side, still locked in his eternal nightmare after all these years. He barks like a dog, grunts and sputters like an old car” (16-17). The effects of the illness render Whitman slave to his “eternal nightmare[s],” suggesting that “Song of Myself” Americans have no place in the limited American purview. Grandfather Whitman, like Rio, is trapped between worlds, neither here nor there, the colonizer and the colonized suffering the maladies of both, which neither world can cure. Progress that denies the past, that separates itself from “folk,” indigenous, and local knowledge, the novel suggests, is not progress but stagnation and death. Ultimately, Whitman’s death is
inevitable, as, for Hagedorn, “scientific” American modernity that privileges progress and advancement over local knowledge is unsustainable in a transnational world. Rio attempts to make sense of her grandfather’s death through American film actors, further revealing both the appeal and the limits of American reference points in her struggle to understand the relationship between the Philippines and America and her own relationship to America:

I try to imagine Lola Narcisa bending over my grandfather’s bed like Jane [Wyman], an angel of mercy whispering so softly in his ear that none of us can make out what she is saying…My grandmother wipes the drool from the corners of his mouth while my Rita Hayworth mother, Dolores Logan Gonzaga stands as far away from her father’s bed as possible. She seems terrified and bewildered by this image of her dying father… “DON’T TOUCH HIM!” my Lola Narcisa screams in English at Doctor Leary. Everyone stops dead in their tracks, stunned that the shriveled brown woman has so loudly and finally spoken.” (16-17)

Rio invokes American references in order to comprehend Whitman’s death, but while her references further implicate American imperialism both at home and abroad in the Philippines – Jane Wyman was a wife of Ronald Reagan who was the American president at the time of Dogeaters publication, a president who was understood to be a ‘new imperial president’ – as American references they disable her from fully participating in and understanding her own Filipina experiences and history. There are multiple layers of disassociation at work here as Rio’s American points of reference distance her from her Filipina subjectivity and family, but her physical presence and
history in the Philippines limits her from ever achieving a fully American perspective. Rio’s understanding of her grandmother and also of the indigenous knowledge, history and lineage that Lola Narcisa represents is problematized by her tendency, perpetuated by American military and cultural presence in the Philippines, to resort to American perspectives and “modern” science and medicine.

It is only through the use of American cultural knowledge and references that Rio’s Filipina grandmother can make the American doctors see her. The doctors, in Rio’s imaginings, are “stunned that the shriveled brown woman has so loudly and finally spoken” in a way that they can understand. In her recreation of Whitman’s death as an American movie scene, Rio brings the competing indigenous Filipino/a and scientific American epistemologies into contact. Both perspectives change through the exposure so that Lola Narcisa’s voice can be intelligible through the unintelligibility of Whitman’s death. Rio rewrites her family as American; yet the action is subversive. In doing so she alters what it means to be American, reasserting the significance of “folk” knowledge to create a kind of mestizo identity that supports pastiche subjectivity as an alternative to both essentialized indigenous identities and to modernistic, exclusive global identities that reject local, folk knowledge and history. Ultimately, grandfather Whitman’s death acts as the impetus for change in Rio and Dolores’ life. While he represents the possibilities and limitations of the promise of America and the legacy of America in the Philippines his death creates a break, creating an opportunity for his Filipina descendants to begin to see themselves as separate from the legacy of American imperialism. However, like the legacy of American imperialism, his is a ghost that will always haunt
the Philippines, as his daughter and granddaughter seek to find stable ground in the midst of competing legacies.

Hagedorn’s Filipino/a identity exists in the myriad possibilities for negotiating shared experiences without devaluing competing forms of knowledge. The alternative histories and limited, competing epistemologies lead to interconnected Filipino/a subjects and Filipino/a experiences of subjectivity. Alternative forms of knowledge engender Filipino/a subjectivity that is at once multiple and embodies both indigenous history and culture and the colonial/imperial legacy. Filipino/a subjectivity is not essentialized nor universalized because it is multiple, and that is also what makes it Filipino. Yet, as Hagedorn demonstrates through Rio, Whitman, Freddie, Dolores and Lola Narcisa, this is a precarious position in which to exist. These characters show the range and substantial limitations for negotiating and maintaining Filipino/a identity.

Hagedorn represents the Philippines, its individual subjects, and the pervasive problems and tensions in its culture, through difference – different experiences and perspectives that can work together to present a more nuanced view of the Philippines and Filipino/a experience. For Hagedorn, alternative narratives of history rely on diverse and multiple character experiences and perspectives, and so both alternative narratives and diverse narrators are necessary to understand and articulate the ways that many and varied responses to the colonial/imperial legacy of the Philippines create not one unique subjectivity, but rather many different negotiations of subjectivity. Hagedorn’s characters have contentious, shifting, and often transformative relationships to their own subjectivity as Filipino/as, and they must each negotiate a complex relationship to Philippines nationality and to their own ethnicity or family history, constructions which
are complicated by a history of colonization and the increasing effects of US imperialism and global capitalism. These negotiations differ from character to character and are the defining trait of Filipino/a identity. Each character experiences his/her relationship to the Philippines differently, depending on their individual subject positions – their class status, gender, ethnicity, etc. – and they engage with the Philippines either as a nation or as a transnational enterprise, depending on their subject positions and experiences.

Rio is a modern Filipina subject, the product of Spanish colonialism, American military occupation and neocolonialism, and the resulting Marcos dictatorship. She therefore illustrates the ‘impossible’ subject position of Filipino/as who are at once racially and nationally identified but also deeply affected by colonial and transnational politics, cultural exportation and economic capital. Following Kwame Anthony Appiah, we might see in this modern Filipino/a subject position a cosmopolitan identity that represents the possibility for freedom of/from history and national ties. But Rio’s position and reflections as a young girl in the Philippines and as an adult in America instead illustrate a complex and ambiguous experience of identity and affiliation, one that does not necessarily align itself with agency and mobility. She is a descendent of each

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9 Appiah suggests, in his 2007 *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, that transnational subjects embody a potential strategy and future for overcoming ideological issues that violently divide people and nations by revealing underlying fundamental values that can enable global understanding. Yet his cosmopolitan subject is in a markedly different position from Rio’s and other modern Filipino/a subjects, as Appiah’s cosmopolitan subject is presumed to be financially independent and moving transnationally through choice rather than necessity. As Yen Le Espiritu and others discuss extensively, many Filipino/as who migrate to America or to European countries do so in order to work (often in a care work position) and send remissions to their families who remain in the Philippines.
nation, and she is a member of the privileged upper class. But she is also a woman, and therefore suffers the effects of sexism. She is denied, through the entirety of the novel, a “transnational-as-transcendent” subjectivity. In Rio, the novel contests cosmopolitan or transnational “floating” subject positions as the likely result of conflict, and of colonial legacies. Instead, she suggests that any benefits to being in a transnational subject position must also be considered with associated negative aspects. Inherent to having a ‘floating’ identity, free of the ideologies and historical burdens or legacies of specific peoples is a loss of anchorage to affiliations, connections, a sense of place, and a sense of history. Rio explains at the end of the novel that she and her brother are destined to “fly around in circles,” and in their transnational positions, “we swoop and dive in effortless arcs against a barren sky, we flap and beat our wings in our futile attempts to reach what surely must be heaven.” The result is dislocation – aimless, they “swoop and dive” in a characterless geography, “against a barren sky” that is neither America nor the Philippines, but some indeterminate other space – and the longing for solid connections and affiliations (247). In addition, because their history has been colonized, interrupted, and erased, overwritten with cultural exports from Spain and America, Filipino/a culture, ideals, and dreams cannot participate in global exchange on equal terms with America, Spain, and similar global cultures. An attempt to equate Filipinos to Americans or Spaniards or to consider them as transnational subjects who enter the arena on equal footing requires the intentional forgetting of colonial and neocolonial America and Spain endeavors in the Philippines. The novel makes clear that Rio and her brother will never be American, will never be transnational or global citizens with equal access and
belonging, and can never be Filipino as their ancestors may have been, and this is exactly what makes them Filipino/a now.

As a method for identifying where and how she might claim belonging, Rio reclaims her family’s history of connection to local Philippines people and culture, to American culture and military, and to Spanish imperialists and neocolonialists. Her alternative history gives her a sense of origin and hope for the future as a narrative not disrupted by colonialism and imperialism, but as the story of a Filipino/a family that does not end or begin with imperialism or colonialism. Lowe argues that, through Rio’s narrative:

Dogeaters thematizes the displacement of an Asian immigrant/Asian American narrator who ‘remembers’ the Marcos era. It foregrounds the connections and discontinuities between her diasporic location and the Filipino nationalism that emerges as a consequence of and a challenge to Spanish colonialism (sixteenth-century-1896), U.S. colonialism (1902-World War II), and neo-colonial martial law (1954-1972). (Lowe 112-3).

Yet Rio does not only “remember the Marcos era,” she creates a way to ‘remember’ the Philippines as a continuing story that incorporates history, present and future. Rio’s remembering necessitates a certain amount of fabrication, since she lacks physical evidence and tangible information about her own family history. She explains that the information about her paternal Gonzaga family was lost when a “mysterious fire” destroyed the original family mansion, so she cannot “know” the background of her father’s family or evaluate his claims about them and their history (93). That fire erases part of her history in the same way that colonial memory erases indigenous history and
culture. The establishment of a colony is a catalyst for the gradual erasure of a national Filipino/a legacy. Loss, homelessness, and displacement for the Gonzaga family are at once the result of fire and of colonization, and therefore their present “diasporic” family is causally connected to these earlier events and their legacies.

While Rio seems to feel this loss keenly, as it adds to her sense of homelessness and displacement, her father actively participates in the obfuscation of his own family history, possibly to enable his survival strategy of adaptable loyalties. When Rio’s uncle Cristobal, who lives in Spain, commissions a genealogical investigation of the family, Freddie is uninterested, even by his brother’s claim that “we are direct descendants of Christopher Columbus” (238). Freddie’s disinterest in Spanish genealogy, and the brother’s different decisions of where to live – Freddy in the Philippines and Cristobal in Spain – illustrates that what matters to them is a function of their individual identities.

Cristobal follows the lead of his mother, Abuelita Socorro, who identifies as Spanish and actively works to forget her Filipina ancestry and upbringing, while Freddy articulates an interest in having a flexible citizenship and enacts a certain degree of loyalty to the Philippines, which he never leaves. Yet Cristobal and Abuelita Socorro, and even Freddy, to a degree, demonstrate the limits of flexible notions of belonging and family – Freddy, despite his insistence of flexibility, never leaves the Philippines, even when it means he is separated from his wife and children, and Rio feels separated from her Abuelita Socorro and Uncle Cristobal by their allegiance to Spain. Rio too enacts a loyalty to the Philippines, and sees her uncle and paternal grandmother’s strong identification with Spain and Spanish culture as rejection of their Philippine heritage and
upbringing. Rio’s paternal grandparents were wealthy members of the Philippines aristocracy and, as such, denounced their ties to a Filipino subjectivity that had been constructed as primitive, traditional, and low-class. Rio says, “You’d never know it, but Abuelita Socorro is Filipino just like my Lola Narcisa is Filipino. My father’s father, Don Carlos Jose Maria Gonzaga, was born right here in Manila, near Fort Santiago. But he and his wife considered themselves Spaniards through and through” (93). Rio is disconnected from and slightly disdainful towards her abuelita, whose kisses always make her “think of funerals” (94). Abuelita Socorro refuses to identify with her Philippines heritage, reeks of “overpowering Spanish perfume,” and mimics strongly Catholic beliefs and dress. These combined make Rio feel that Abuelita Socorro “is a foreigner to [her],” a recognition that her grandmother’s affiliations lie far from the Philippines and that Rio’s identity (and her difficulty coming to terms with it) is firmly rooted in modern day Manila (93). Yet, Abuelita Socorro is essential both to Rio and to the novel’s model of modern Filipino/a identity. Abuelita Socorro is a silent, removed reminder of the continued impact of Spanish colonization and the Catholic church on the Philippines, and she and her husband’s disdain for the Philippines in preference to Spain explain Freddie’s, Uncles Cristobal’s and Agustin’s affiliations for Spain and their insistence of the benefits of being “adaptable” and maintaining a transnational identity.

Like his mother, Uncle Cristobal identifies himself as Spanish, an identity he enacts by living in Spain and investing himself in the family’s Spanish history. The

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10 Abuelita Socorro “was very pretty when she was young, a mestiza born of landowning parents in Cebu” (93).
specific history he prizes is that which exemplifies Spanish colonialism, seeing himself as
a “direct descendent of Christopher Columbus,” a relationship even his name, Cristobal,
calls to mind. Freddie, on the other hand, sees himself as transnational. He is
uninterested in family, Spanish, or Filipino history. He focuses, instead, on his own
present affairs and business negotiations. When “Uncle Agustin and Uncle Esteban have
[their copies] bound in leather,” Freddie “purposely misplaces” his own, actively erasing
this supposed evidence of the family origins (239). However, Rio’s description of the
money spent of the project as “squandered” suggests that for Rio and her father origins,
lineage and family history exist somewhere outside of charts and papers.

Rio’s ruminations on her father’s lack of concern about family history, and the
different approaches her parents take to identifying belonging and alliance, at once reveal
the different ways that Filipino/as negotiate their positions as Filipino/as and expose
Rio’s construction of alternative history and the alternative knowledge that it enables.
Freddie’s hypocritical insistence on adaptability for survival – “Adaptability is the simple
secret of survival,” he insists (8-9) – while refusing to identify with the Philippines
despite having been born and raised there is a manifestation of the colonial/imperial
legacy. Freddie privileges his Spanish heritage to a degree, but sees himself more as
having a flexible, transnational citizenship, rather than a national identity: “What matters
is I feel like a visitor [in the Philippines]. After all, my great-grandfather came from
Sevilla…It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what you say – it’s how I feel” (8). Rio’s
reflections on Freddie’s alliances reveal both the appeal and the limitations of his
methods:
I never worry about my father. He has connections and believes in paying bribes. In his later years, he is often broke, but when he really needs or wants it, he finds the money. There will always be a way out for him. I am still not sure what sort of passport he waves in the air, if he owns one or two. Maybe Spanish, maybe British, maybe Filipino, maybe anything. It is the sort of business he keeps to himself. He believes in dual citizenships, dual passports, as many allegiances to as many countries as possible at any one given time. My father is a cautious man, and refers to himself as a ‘guest’ in his own country. (7)

Freddie “feels like a visitor” and “guest in his own country,” despite being born and living his whole life in the Philippines, an alienation that suggests the limitations of a flexible identity. Even as he declares a pragmatic belief in “as many allegiances to as many countries as possible” and professes a disinterest in his brother’s genealogical project, Freddie declines a Filipino identification, a position which associates him with colonizers and colonized. As Rio points out, on one hand this position makes her father safe, as he always has an “out,” but, on the other hand, he is also always alienated. This identity is enabling in some ways, for, as Rio notes, he is adaptable, equipped for survival in any event or location. Yet it also disables his sense of belonging in the family – represented by his disinterest in genealogy – and is also suggestive of a larger dysfunction in Philippines national belonging. If, after all, some of those who feel a loyalty to the Philippines also have a flexible identity such as the one Freddy posits, a Philippines national project is also already limited that adaptability, and those citizens’ unwillingness to fully commit to a Filipino/a national belonging.
The nuances of Freddie’s identity, the flexibility of which competes with Dolores’ Filipina identity reveals how gender functions as a factor in identifying and articulating subjectivity in relation to class and ethnicity in the Philippines. Freddie and Dolores are privileged citizens in multiple ways – they are upper-class, wealthy and have the ear of highly placed Filipino politicians. They are also each mestizo in ways privileged in 1950s Philippines, as Freddie’s ancestry includes Spanish colonizers and Dolores’s an American military man. Yet they identify and articulate their positions very differently, partly because of the ways gender is linked to both class and ethnicity in the Philippines. Freddie’s position of adaptable alienation and his preference for his Spanish ancestry (and thus his identifications with colonizer ancestors) privileges patriarchy. He claims ancestry from male colonizers and denies allegiance with female colonized ancestors, offering the fact that his great-grandfather “came from Sevilla” as support for his sense of being a visitor in the Philippines. He dismisses his wife’s reminder that “your great-grandmother came from Cebu!” (8). In contrast, Dolores focuses on matriarchal and local ties to express her national allegiance. Despite having a dual nationality, and though she “carries American papers because of her father” (8), Dolores, the daughter of a Filipina woman and an American man who was stationed in Manila:

feels more viscerally connected to the Philippines than [Rio’s father] ever could. She used to argue with him. “I don’t understand, Freddie. You were born here. Both your parents and most of your brothers were born here. I was born here, so were our children. You are definitely a Filipino. A mestizo, yes – but definitely a Filipino’ (8).
While Freddie’s emphasis on adaptability offers Rio a model for transnational identity, Dolores’s articulation provides Rio a method through which she can view Filipino/as in a transnational context. Dolores’s lens allows remembering the past and carrying it into the future – “I was born here, so were our children” – that implies both a past and a future, a continuing legacy, in the Philippines. She sees being Filipino/a as predicated on family and geographical ties – you were born here. Both your parents and most of your brothers were born here – I was born here.” Dolores’s expression also suggests a multiplicity of possible Filipino/a subjects – “You are a Filipino. A mestizo, yes – but definitely a Filipino.” She implies that there are various mestizo and non-mestizo Filipino/a identities. Dolores cannot, however, understand that Freddy is a transnational Filipino who feels more comfortable actively participating in transnational projects.

Together, her mother’s ability to claim the past and imagine a Filipino/a future and her father’s adaptability enable Rio to negotiate both official history and generalized identity by constructing a personal narrative of her own relationship to her family, and the colonial legacy it has passed to her. The older Rio’s remembering of the Philippines is predicated on her mother’s sense of being a Filipino/a in a transnational context, focused through geographical and familial bonds that assert a continued presence in the Philippines, in the past and present, and assumptions of the future. Yet, she is also displaced through familial ties to people like her father who negotiate the effects of the colonial/imperial history of the Philippines by privileging a transnational Filipino/a subjectivity. By placing herself and her experiences in context with her relationship to her family members, particularly her female family members, their personal histories, affiliations, and experiences in certain subject positions, Rio finds grounding, tethering
herself to her family in the place of other impossible affiliations. Rio has access both to family members and to family history, as well as a relatively privileged position as an upper class woman with Spanish and American ties. Yet while Rio is able negotiate the colonial/imperial legacy, she is always in some way outside of national belonging, in both the Philippines and in America.

For Hagedorn, the position of women in the Philippines makes visible how the Philippines themselves were feminized and objectified under American imperialism, but as the women in the novel show so powerfully, the Filipina position also may confer a potentially liberatory subjectivity that privileges local affiliation and family. The character of Dolores offers a negotiation of the imperial/colonial legacy of the Philippines through privileging Filipino/a subjectivities that are connected to the geographical space of the Philippines and embedded in a sense of continuity. Hagedorn suggests that matrilineal lines construct a link to the past and to Filipino/a people and history that has otherwise been (and continues to be) dissolved by colonialism and neocolonialism. The focus on these women is driven by a Filipino/a desire for a history (although history itself is debated throughout the novel) and for a “real” belonging or identity (though belonging to what and identification as whom are also both in question). Filipinas in *Dog eaters* thus have the roles of connection and contention as they signify a shared history, national origins, and the brutal impact of colonialism and imperialism.

Dolores and her mother *Lola* Narcisa’s positions reveal the possibilities and limitations for Filipinas. Their negotiations of agency cast light on how connected constructions of gender, class and ethnicity lead some Filipino/as (like Freddie) to privilege global/transnational identities and others (like *Lola* Narcisa) to privilege local
and national Filipino/a identities. Yet as a whole, the novel privileges and endorses local and national Filipino/a identities, though it complicates these national and local identities with the awareness of the colonial aspects of the Philippines history that underscore Filipino/a nationality with a trace of transnationalism. Rio continually refers to Dolores as her “Rita Hayworth mother,” an observation that points to the complexities of Dolores’ position, and the presences of American consciousness in Filipino/a culture by linking her to Rita Hayworth, a Spanish American dancer/pinup star/actress/producer. Hayworth’s public manipulation of her own ethnicity and her manipulation at the hands of the Columbia film company presented a public spectacle of ethnicity, beauty, motherhood and performing society expectation to 1950s-1970s audiences. The references to Hayworth in regards to Dolores can thus be seen as signifying the similar tension between self-invention or agency on Dolores’ part and the ways in which external social forces work on her as she performs an upper-class, national Filipina identity. Hagedorn’s invocation of Hayworth’s struggles, as explored by Adrienne McLean in Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity and Hollywood Stardom, might be rearticulated as the struggle to “understand and control the terms of one’s identity and subjectivity” (2).

The novel draws implicit parallels between Hayworth’s and Dolores’ struggles to find themselves amidst external expectations, transnational societal pressures, and their own contention with these pressures. As both Hayworth and Dolores occupy multiple positions – Dolores is a mother, a society figure, American, and Filipina – we can see that like Rita, Dolores has what McLean terms a “heterogenous subjectivity” (McLean 2) made up not only of the positions she occupies but of how she sees herself and her constant awareness of how others see her. As an upper class woman and renowned
hostess, Dolores is often the center of attention and of gossip (Hagedorn 85). Hayworth and Dolores also share a continual focus on transforming themselves in search of socially acceptable beauty, as Dolores “uses cold creams, moisturizers, takes daily naps with masks of mashed avocado, mashed *sinkamas*, and red clay from France smeared on her face. She is a beautiful woman who works hard at it” (82). And, like Hayworth, Dolores is “caught up in a continual process of cultural resistance, pleasure, and negotiation,” which results, on the one hand, in the ability to circulate through self-invention and re-invention – both Hayworth and Dolores seem to have the ability to morph into many possible identities, but on the other hand denies a central subjectivity, which might make it difficult for Hayworth and Dolores to find an internal sense of self (qtd in McLean 2). Hayworth’s struggle to find a sense of herself, suggests McLean, is a loss of identity, the result of the physical transformations that Margarita Carmen Cansino underwent, as well as the shifting identities she embodied in continuing efforts to produce the Rita Hayworth bombshell envisioned by the studio. Who she was came to be entangled, in the minds of the public, with the representations of Rita Hayworth in her films and through carefully crafted PR portrayals, in both of which she performed a very specific mode of transnational object of interest, and desire. Her transformations, and difficulty living in the role she and the studio created, speak to the impossibility of that desired subject, her transnational status also works to, albeit problematically, rewrite the image of an “American” woman, presenting the possibility for a transnational American woman. Dolores, the novel suggests, furthers this potential alternative, transnational American woman as she seeks for a place where she, and her complex, multifaceted experiences can exist, with agency and the opportunity for self-expression.
Dolores’ struggles represent the difficulty of unifying her national affiliation with the Philippines and her position as an upper class woman. As her struggle continues, her actions and articulations become increasingly resistant to the limitations of Filipino/a society, resistance that Dolores also works to instill in Rio. The stories Dolores tells Rio about her life pick up undercurrents of the competing legacies of the Philippines as they act on gender, ethnicity and class structures. Correspondingly Rio’s depictions of her mother are increasingly interrupted by whispered asides filled with tsismis (that gossip which enables an alternative narrative about the Philippines), often particularly revealing of the class and national/transnational conflicts in Filipino/a culture. In Rio’s mind, therefore, her understanding of issues of gender, class and national and transnational projects become deeply entwined with her memories of her mother. Dolores engages Rio in her first tsismis at Jojo’s, an affordable but not-so-fashionable salon. Jojo’s, peopled as it is with working class patrons, represents a growing discontent in Filipino middle and working class society with national narratives and social structures (55). And through tsismis with Rio about Dolores’ experiences at the prestigious Monte Vista club, Dolores introduces the division between upper and working class society:

The sign by the Monte Vista pool reads:

**NO YAYAS ALLOWED TO SWIM**

Which means that when Congressman Abad’s daughter Peachy was five years old, her yaya had no business jumping in the pool to save her from drowning. Ana jumped in anyway, dressed in her spotless white uniform and matching white plastic slippers. She pulled Peachy out of the pool before the stupid lifeguard even noticed anything was wrong. My mother
told us all about it – she was sitting right there by the pool and would’ve
jumped in herself except that like Pucha, my mother can’t swim. (61)
The irony in this anecdote – that the yayas are prevented from caring for their upper class
charges by the elitist rules of the upper class – reveals both the racism and the classism of
the Philippines society. The story leads Rio to begin questioning the usefulness and
persistence of arbitrary rules around her that are in place to enforce a division between
the upper class (and especially the political class), and the working class Filipino/as.
Rio’s reflection also reveals that the gendering processes in Philippines class divisions
not only restrict upper-class and working-class women, though in different ways, but also
pose a danger to the continuity of the very societal division they uphold, suggesting that
this form of racism and classism underpins and in many ways inhibits a national identity.

Dolores’ personal memories, her experiences in upper class Filipino/a society, and
her construction of her private spaces reveal that the restrictions on women exist as an
effect of the Philippines’ colonial/imperial legacy, and illuminate the ways in which these
restrictions are a function of race and class as well as gender. Dolores appears as
constrained, in some ways metaphorically, as when she could not act to save the child
because she is unable to swim, and also at times physically by a kapre, a creature from
Philippines mythology that, like the batibat which Lola Narcisa insists tormented her
husband, sits in her lap or in the corner of her room.

“Was it an angel who sat on my chest? Or that demonic kapre again?” My
mother isn’t sure. “Like the night Rio was born – smoking his damn cigar,
the only light in my hospital room at that time of night … He watches me
from the dark corner of the room … He’s familiar, and not so terrifying
now. He’s been with me since Raul was born, perched at the foot of my
bed in another hospital – which one, I can’t remember...” (79)

In Philippines mythology, *kapre* are tree-dwelling trickster characters who at times take a
romantic interest in women and will follow them benevolently throughout their lives. For
Dolores, the *kapre* is sometimes an oppressive force, and, at other times, a comfort, one
she turns to in the visceral and lonely moment of childbearing. In this terrifying moment,
alone, birthing a child under the threat of attack without her family or a doctor, Dolores
reaches out to that which is consistent in her life:

“He is my secret guardian angel, the only thing I can hold on to in that
shabby Catholic hospital. Where is my husband? I keep asking the nuns.
He’s on his way, they keep telling me, the liars. I don’t believe them, and
start screaming for my mother. No one hears. The nuns are chanting
Dominus Agnus Dei in the chapel down the hall, it’s dark and hot and the
baby’s coming, I know it’s a girl this time, but no one is there to help me –
not my husband, not my son, not my doctor who is detained. The sirens
are going – is it typhoon signal number three or an air-raid alert? Are the
Japs bombing us? I’m screaming for help – where is my charming
husband? The angel-gorilla soothes me, he looks familiar, he looks like
Freddie’s brother Agustin, he puffs on his fat supernatural cigar and
strokes my hair. Talk to me! I beg him. Talk to me!” She pauses. “It’s
not exactly an ape, you understand. Not exactly a baboon with wings.
More like a big hairy angel – the size of a house.” (79)
This scene, featuring a woman giving birth to a daughter, searching for her mother, for comfort, is all about origins and connections. Dolores herself is a child of paradoxical origins. She’s the daughter of Lola Narcisa, who Rio’s memories have framed as a woman deeply tied into the working-class, indigenous and nationalistic Filipino/a community, and Whitman, a white man who Hagedorn casts as representative of American idealism, imperialism and limitations and who died of a Filipino’s ailment. Dolores is bringing a child into the world under contentious and uncertain factors: the anticipated attack, the Catholic hospital, and the giant, frightening monster from folklore. The Catholic hospital acts as a reminder of the lingering effects of Spanish colonialism, which cut Filipino/as off from their own history, and continues to silence them and obscure their connects to their origins, shown here through the nuns chanting “Dominus Agnus Dei” and drowning out Dolores’ cries for her mother. In this alien, silencing space, the only comfort Dolores can draw is from the also terrifying Kapre, who now is her “secret guardian angel, the only thing I can hold on to in that shabby Catholic hospital” (79). Dolore’s vision of the kapre, about which there is something both primitive and pre-verbal, might represent the past which does not talk – despite her repeated demand to “Talk to me! I beg him. Talk to me!” – and so cannot communicate, but which is still present, haunting her, and haunting the Philippines, even in the midst of the Japanese attack, when she is hidden inside a Catholic hospital, both of which represent the multiple layers of colonial endeavors at work in the Philippines. She is therefore both disturbed by the kapre, and comforted by the presence of the past. Though the kapre has connotations of Spanish colonialism – Dolores notes that it looks like Spain-affiliated Uncle Agustin as it smokes its cigar – it is nonetheless familiar, and
soothing. The *kapre*’s presence, and the presence of the familiar and soothing
Philippines in the inhospitable Catholic church is not completely satisfying, however –
still slightly out of Dolores’ reach, the *kapre* refuses to respond when she begs him “*Talk
to me*” (79). For Dolores, this ghost of the past that lingers though it does not
communicate is still comforting and present in her most difficult moments. But it also
remains always just out of her grasp.

Like her visions, Dolores’s construction of her rooms in the Gonzaga house also
reveal the lingering presence of a pre-colonial Philippines, creating a space in which she
can enact a Filipino/a national identity denied to her in the public sphere of upper-class
Filipino/a culture, in small but subversive ways. Her rooms in the house are her private
sanctuary in which she can enact the identity and national belonging she chooses, largely
free from the influences of her husband, and of the ideological, class and patriarchal
expectations that she must perform to in the public sphere. Dolores only invites non-
heteronormative, working class characters, and her daughter into her rooms, making a
space for Filipino/as who are not valued and/or accepted in upper class Filipino/a society.

And yet, while the rooms shelter her and provide a space for subversive actions and
ideas, they also always contain the reminder that these ideas and affiliations are under
pressure from the outside world through her husband’s occasional presence in the room,
which is barely mentioned, but signified by an armchair where he “reads his Raymond
Chandler novels at night” (84). The chair functions as a constant reminder that Freddie,
his complaints about her, and his unwillingness or inability to understand her are never
far away. Even so, Dolores is most comfortable in her private space in her home, in the
rooms that she designed. They are “mysterious mauve rooms, so cool and softly lit.
Whenever she looks in any of her mirrors it is always night and she is always beautiful” (84). The rooms are described only in relation to Dolores’ friends and the stylists Salvador and Uncle Panchito, whom Dolores’ homophobic husband dislikes. Salvador and Panchito have a stronger presence in the room than Rio’s father, as they are frequently present, talking with Dolores, trading clothing, beauty tips and tsismis. Rio mentions that:

Uncle Panchito worries about my mother. He has never understood why she had all the windows in her room boarded up. They argue about it sometimes. “It’s creepy,” he complains, “I never know what time it is! It isn’t healthy living like this. Dios ko – your house feels haunted!” My mother smiles. “Of course it’s haunted.” The room, she goes on to explain, is designed to soothe her. “Like a womb.” “Like a tomb,” Uncle Panchito corrects her.” (85-86)

Dolores’ rooms, like Dolores herself, represent a complex, haunted, cyclical identity caught between life and death. The rooms are at once a womb and a tomb, with boarded up windows so that there is never “any sense of day or night in my mother’s rooms, or of the glaring heat outside her mauve sanctuary” (84). They offer the continuity that the colonial/imperial legacy of the Philippines obfuscates. Yet they, like the Kapre who resembles Uncle Agustin, do not signal a return to pre-colonial Philippines and a forgetting of colonization. Instead, the rooms are “haunted” by the ghost of colonialism. But, in the novel, hauntings are not always terrifying but rather signify a silent reminder of what has been and the necessity of learning to live with and among what remains. For Dolores, the ghosts have become familiar; they are part of the way she makes sense of
her world and interacts with it. The rooms, like the Kapre, are comforting and unsettling. Ultimately, however, Dolores’ resistance to the constraints of her life render even this comfort unsustainable as the limiting, as she finds herself wishing to live with a vibrancy they cannot sustain.

Though her rooms give her a space to enact the Filipino/a national identity and affiliation that Dolores desires, that small, private space is ultimately not sufficient to counter the constraints of upper-class Filipino/a society, and Dolores finds that she must relocate to America in order to have the life, and perhaps to enable the Filipino/a identity and subject position that she desires – a dislocation that suggests that, as the scene in which Rio reflects on All That Heaven Allows, that, for some Filipino/as, some essential element of life is located in a space outside of the Philippines. After her fiftieth birthday, Dolores’ interest in art transforms as she begins to paint “with furious energy,” and alongside this transformation, she chooses to move with Rio to America (244):

My mother begins painting shortly after her fiftieth birthday…she paints and paints; with furious energy, she covers immense canvases with slashes of red, black, yellow, and mauve…She moves into Raul’s now empty room and converts it into her bedroom-studio…Without warning, she cheerfully announces she is sending me to school in America and moving there with me for an indefinite period. I am ecstatic, at first. Everyone else is stunned. (243–4)

Dolores’s decision to move to America, which follows close upon the heels of her artistic awakening, indicates a transformation that can only be realized by leaving her womb/tomb rooms and the hidden and overwritten histories they both shelter her from.
and represent. To self-actualize, she can no longer remain in the Gonzaga household or in the Philippines, in the grips of both the Catholic church and the burden of patriarchy. Her artistic awakening, her sudden desire to create her own artwork, is linked to her sudden desire to remove herself from the precarious position she has inhabited. Her sudden claiming of artistic desire and agency, which is linked to her desire to move to America, reveals the difficulty of maintaining a Filipina identity and negotiating national belonging and individual identity. In the Philippines, her artwork is violent, energetic, and “bleeding”: “she covers immense canvases with slashes of black, yellow, and mauve… ‘My bleeding bouquets,’ she calls them” (244). But if, as Rio’s experience watching the film in the beginning of Dogeaters suggests, some essential element of “being” is located outside of the Philippines, Dolores may feel that she cannot live in the Philippines. Her decision to move to America is not, therefore, a rejection of her Filipino subject position, but rather is a way to embrace a different relationship to her culture and heritage by leaving a place and position which devalues and limits it. She still loves her family and her country, but is willing to do so only on her own terms, and, ironically, is only able to be Filipino in the way she wants to be when she leaves the Philippines—“‘Tell Raul I miss him more than he could ever imagine,’” Dolores tells Rio, “‘But he’ll have to visit me here if he wants to see me—’” (244).

Lola Narcisa, like her daughter Dolores, also firmly allies herself with Philippines culture, but where Dolores struggles to incorporate that alliance with actively participating in upper class society, Lola Narcisa does not try to negotiate these mutually exclusive identities, instead affiliating herself with indigenous servants and working class
Filipino/as. As a result, she is looked down upon and ignored by the family and upper-class society. Rio states:

When guests inquire after her, my Rita Hayworth mother simply says Lola Narcisa prefers eating alone in her room. Actually, my lola prefers eating her meals with the servants in the kitchen. She prefers to eat what the servants cook for themselves, after everyone else in the house has been served their food. While they eat kamayan with their hands, she and the servants go over the intricate plots of their favorite radio serial, Love Letters, which they listen to after dinner in my grandmother’s cozy room.

I know. When my cousin Pucha isn’t visiting or spending the night, I’ve joined my Lola Narcisa and her friends many times” (9-10).

Lola Narcisa’s refusal to modernize is an always present trace of the family’s links to the lower class. She represents the interests, habits, and associates mark the family as not belonging exclusively to the European and American influenced upper-class echelon into which her son-in-law works so hard to fit. She chooses to avoid upper-class functions and even family meals, preferring instead to associate with the servants, with whom she shares behaviors, foods, and interests that are coded in Philippines society as lower-class – Rio describes her lola and the servants eating the foods the servants prepare for themselves kamayan, or with their hands (11). To Lola Narcisa, the servants are equals, “friends” with whom she chooses to associate rather than subjugate. She is therefore the physical embodiment of the family’s history as, and continued connections with, rural, non-modern people.
The roles and spaces occupied by women in the Gonzaga family are analogous to the varied and contentious, yet essential, positions occupied by women in the Philippines. The Gonzaga home, inhabited by characters with different stakes and positions in national belonging, is by extension analogous to the demarcations and ruptures of affiliation in the Philippines. *Lola* Narcisa is respected as a matriarch of the Gonzaga family, but she is excluded from the family table both by her son-in-law’s shame of her connections to working class and indigenous culture and by her own preference for her private rooms and association with the servants. The exclusion of *Lola* Narcisa from the Gonzaga family table mirrors the gendering of certain forms of national identity – as shown in Freddie’s denial of matrilineal inheritance and the ability shared by the Gonzaga women to imagine and continue a Filipino/a future – and participation which is a form of forgetting Philippines history as an extension of a colonial legacy of devaluation, and the colonial/religious legacy of patriarchy. For example, *Lola* Narcisa both essential, and hidden away, as she represents an alternative Philippines identity that proclaims a continued connection to indigenous Philippines people, history, and traditions, and an acknowledgement of the brutal occurrences and events of colonialism and imperialism in the Philippines.

Like *Lola* Narcisa, *Love Letters* does nationalist work for the Philippines which the upper class write off because it connects to working class Philippines peoples and culture and because it privileges Philippines national belonging above transnational connections, an economically disadvantageous position for the upper class. *Love Letters* is the epicenter for *Lola* Narcisa’s interactions with the servants, and her ties to indigenous Philippines. It represents an idealized Filipino national identity which
acknowledges pre-colonial traditions, cultures and beliefs, and so the rejection of the show by upper-class men including Freddie and Uncle Agustin who identify with colonizers/imperialists and who see the show as of interest only to the lower-class represents also a rejection of an allegiance to traditional working-class Filipino/a subjectivity. Rio explains:

According to my father, Love Letters appeals to the lowest common denominator. My Uncle Agustin’s version of the lowest common denominator is the ‘bakya11 crowd.’ It’s the same reason the Gonzagas refuse to listen to Tagalog songs, or go to Tagalog movies. I don’t care about any of that. As far as Love Letters goes, I’m hooked – and though I’d definitely die if cousin Pucha ever found out, I cry unabashedly in the company of Lola Narcisa and all the servants. (11-12)

This passage indicates a large disparity between the working class and the upper class: though Love Letters is “the most popular radio serial in Manila,” and therefore has an extensive audience, it is looked down upon by the upper-class, specifically because of its audience. The President, a character who invokes Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos, uses his “boast of being an avid fan” of the radio show to perform loyalty to the Philippines. But Uncle Agustin and Pucha’s reactions to the show reveal the divide in Philippines society and culture between the transnationally-affiliated upper-class and the nationally-affiliated lower-class workers. The division between the Philippines approved

11 A wooden clog, popular in the Philippines before the introduction of rubber sandals. Here, the reference signifies those who have or perform a traditional, strongly Filipino/a, working-class identity.
and endorsed by the upper-class and the alternative Philippines portrayed in *Love Letters* reveals an uneven participation by the upper and working class in national and transnational projects. The upper-class, represented in the novel by Río’s father and the Gonzagas – Uncle Augustin and Cousin Pucha in particular – “refuse to listen to Tagalog songs or go to Tagalog movies” thereby refusing to acknowledge a connection to rural, non-modernized Filipino/as. This refusal to connect to the lower class, or to Tagalog history, culture cuts the upper-class off from participation in Philippines national projects and leads them to engage more strongly in transnational projects. The people who identify as Filipino/a, those who Uncle Augustin refers to derogatorily as the “bakya crowd,” are strongly invested in Philippines national projects rather than transnational projects, as is demonstrated by their intense interest in *Love Letters*. Uncle Augustin and *Lola* Narcisa therefore represent two different legacies of colonialism and imperialism – a legacy of colonialism that is both the desire to break with the past and the separation between these groups in the Philippines. Uncle August, and the arriviste/social climbing part of the family – who seek to be “modern,” “American” or “European” – represent a response to colonialism and imperialism through social advancement, class status and affiliation with Western culture, while *Lola* Narcisa and the servants emphasize national belonging by performing traditional Filipino/a culture, and investing themselves in national projects such as the daily soap opera of *Love Letters*.

*Love Letters* is a cultural production which imagines and represents a particular kind of community that “is the nation” (Anderson 25). Benedict Anderson describes this form of representing a community as a device for the presentation of simultaneity in “‘homogenous, empty time,’ or a complex gloss upon the word ‘meanwhile’” (25). The
idea of simultaneity through multiple simultaneous and intersecting storylines shows up in *Love Letters* in the coexistence of the audience and in multiple storylines and characters. The working class people of Manila tune in every week day to hear the story, some individually, and some, like the servants of the Gonzaga household who congregate in *Lola* Narcisa’s room, in groups for each installment. A new story is featured each week, and a new episode comes on, “every night of the week, each story beginning on a Sunday and ending on a Saturday. Everyone weeps at the inevitable, tragic conclusion on the seventh night” (Hagedorn 11). The serial plot, as it mirrors the trapped and forgotten circumstances of indigenous Filipino/as, is always “inevitable, tragic,” suggesting that the repeated tragedy *is* the national narrative, or at least a critical component of the national narrative. The shared experience of listening to the dramas acts as a weekly catharsis, a shared experience that brings together the nation, and a reminder of the continued presences, and significance of indigenous Filipino/as.

However, it might also suggest that some people, like Dolores, leave the Philippines to escape this cycle of tragedy, as much as anything else.

The representation of people simultaneously existing alongside and connected to each other in time and by the nation, though they may never meet or know of each other

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12 Hagedorn’s attention to the consistent timing of the episodes, and to the consistent, shared reactions of the audience creates, as Anderson argues newspapers create, a “simultaneous consumption,” through which the audience members, and particularly those at the Gonzaga household, know that their experience of listening to the serial are being replicated by thousands of others “of whose existence” they are aware, yet whom they may never personally met. Hagedorn highlights the significance of this simultaneous, shared experience in a brief plot overview of “Love Letter #99,” ending the excerpt with “meanwhile…” (13).
specifically$^{13}$, is the key to national identity in the novel. It is evidence of a shared past and future generated and ensured by cultural products like *Love Letters* and indeed like Hagedorn’s novel itself. However, the assumption of continuity in national projects, including *Love Letters*, as “a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history,” reveals that *Love Letters* presents a threat to the transnational projects undertaken by the upper-class, and particularly upper-class men. Specifically, the narrative of a continuous history and future for the nation forces the upper-class to recognize, even unconsciously, that the class and racial differences they enforce and respond to are artificial constructs (Anderson 26). In nations like the Philippines, the temporality of the telenovela represents an assumed continuity of past into present and leading into future, and so the narrative structures reality in its plots – through shared investments and shared resolution, it creates a sense of national belonging and of coming together for those who listen to the serial. And, for those who do not listen, it perhaps strengthens a sense of alienation, of being a temporary visitor to the Philippines, as Freddy feels, and gives more motivation for a transnational identity.

*Lola* Narcisa and the lower-class servants’ investment in *Love Letters*, and in national affiliation reveals the attempts of upper class people to discredit national affiliations with the Philippines on the basis of class prejudice. Freddie’s attempts to ignore *Lola* Narcisa and “the bakya crowd” parallel the American and European aspirational upper-classes desire to cut themselves off from this alternative Philippines,

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$^{13}$ A structure which *Love Letters* and *Dog eaters* share, revealing that both are involved in nation building, and rebuilding work.
and to make it and the history and colonial reminders it represents disappear. Yet *Lola* Narcisa’s Philippines persists, forging a link between the indigenously associated working class and the upper-class, surviving as a reminder that even though class difference between servant and master is racialized, it really is a *class* difference.

Rio, stuck in the rupture between these different Philippines and Filipino/a subjectivities, represents the Filipino/a experiences that each character – Whitman, Freddy, Abuelita Socorro, Dolores, and *Lola* Narcisa – struggles with in some way – conflicted, pulled between multiple competing allegiances, covering, denying, and resisting. “Hooked” on the show and strongly bonded to her *Lola* Narcisa, and so to the working class Filipinos with which her *Lola* identifies, Rio also wants to meet upper-class expectations so that she can continue her participation in that society. She cannot decide whether to declare (through her actions) her allegiance to the upper-class for her own political gain, as Pucha chooses to do, or to visibly stand in support of the lower-class, indigenous Filipino/as. And, despite her attachment to the Filipino/a-oriented *Love Letters*, Rio continually makes sense of the events in her life, particularly as they pertain to her family, through references to popular American films and film stars, indicating her struggle to negotiate competing epistemologies that arise from competing Filipino/a identities.

As her family acts as an allegory for the Philippines and the Gonzaga house represents the fissures and competing constructions of the Philippines as a nation, Rio stands as an allegory for the divided Filipino/a subjectivity. She wields family stories and experiences as a way to comprehend and remember the violent effects of imperialism and neo-colonialism on Filipino/as. She reveals Filipino/as as dislocated, partial,
floating, yet also grounded in the past and in shared hopes for the future. The novel privileges Rio’s voice, starting and ending with her, as a method for highlighting women’s views and their potential to remember the past and imagine a future through their roles as historians and keepers of the futures of Filipino/a identities, via maternity and the refusal to succumb to patriarchal forgetting of the Philippines. Yet, if the novel privileges Rio’s voice and her experiences as representative of Filipino/a struggles and positions, we are cautioned by Pucha’s reappearance at the conclusion of the novel against coming to any easy conclusions. Pucha’s interjection at the end of the novel reaffirms the diverse, inclusive nature of Hagedorn’s subject, much as Pucha response destabilizes the story that Rio has told.

Puwede ba? 1956, 1956! Rio, you’ve got it all wrong. Think about it: 1956 makes no sense. It must have started sometime around 1959, at the very least! You like to mix things up on purpose, dib a? Esta loca, prima. Que ba – this is cousin Pucha you’re talking to…Doña, we grew up like sisters, excuse me lang! I’m no intelektwal as you’ve pointed out loud and clear, but my memory’s just as good as anybody’s…Hoy, what are you trying to prove? (248)

Pucha, whose voice in the novel has been filtered by Rio up to this point, claims the right to tell her own version of events. Like many “unofficial” narratives that interrupt “official” narratives in the novel, Pucha interrupts Rio’s narrative and, in doing so, concurrently interrupts and supports Hagedorn’s representation of the Philippines and Filipino/a subjectivity. She argues with many key points of Rio’s narrative, saying:
Maybe the movie was in color, maybe not. That’s not what’s important. Oye, prima – this much is true, you’d better wake up and accept it: 1959 was many years ago. Your mother’s father is alive. Your Lola Narcisa is dead. Our abuelito and abuelita are alive and well and living in Mallorca with Tito Cristobal. Your father isn’t poor – how can you lie about such big things?...Your mother and father are still together. Nobody’s perfect, Rio – but your parents stayed married no matter what, through thick and thin and your father’s kalochan, thanks be to God. (249)

Pucha’s interjection simultaneously affirms Hagedorn’s representation of Filipino/a subjectivity as an individual experience and clarifies that this representation is only part of the picture. It shows that different versions of events vie for authentication. Each will work to become “official” by repressing other interpretations. Pucha’s interjection demonstrates that subjects who are in different positions relative to the national discourse will have different voices and perspectives, and that these voices can co-exist, even though they are contradictory. Pucha and Rio were born into very similar situations, yet Pucha’s privileging of the upper-class, and her transnational affiliation give her vastly different perceptions of the Philippines and of herself as a Filipina. Rio’s narrative, a recollection of her experiences growing up in the Philippines from her current position as an immigrant to the US “mediate and defamiliarize the ‘homeland’; at the same time, the ‘Asian American’ writing of a culturally heterogeneous and class-stratified Manila as her past grounds Rio in a multivalent collective memory that diverges repeatedly from the voice of the subject interpolated within a single national discourse” (Lowe 113). Tracing Rio’s lineage illuminates the multiple subjectivities, affiliations, experiences and
perspectives of Filipino/as as they struggle to find past and future around in context of a colonial/imperial legacy.

Whether Pucha or Rio’s memory is more accurate is irrelevant – what matters is that neither is ascendant and neither can silence the other by claiming to be authentic or correct. Hagedorn’s construction of Filipino/a identity relies upon a pastiche of individual voices and interpretations to tell the story without essentialization or reduction. Pucha’s assertions about what Rio got wrong thus also caution us to read her story not as the final word, or as representative of “The Filipino/a experience” of subjectivity, but rather as a piece of the story which helps us to see and understand the rest, and also to understand that the “truth” may not be, finally, known.

Hagedorn’s representation of Filipino/a subject positions and identities is founded upon and fueled by interweaving forces – the ways that a history of Spanish and American colonization and continuing American cultural importation and commodity capital imperialism influence gender, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation – and how individual subjects negotiate these shared tensions. For Hagedorn, Filipino/as do not need to find the “right” answer, or chooses the “right” way to negotiate the effects of these forces. Filipino/a identity instead is created by the experience of these intersecting forces. Each subject is Filipino/a in that he or she is affected by both the cultural narrative and the material realities of the Philippines’ historical experiences. Therefore, what is Filipino/a is the experience of navigating this specific social, historical, and cultural context, regardless of what the individual’s method or response might be. Rio reveals, in her final section in the novel that she is “anxious and restless, at home only in
airports” (247). She has a recurring dream that captures the sense of restlessness and dislocation she experiences:

My brother and I inhabit the translucent bodies of nocturnal moths with curved, fragile wings…The meaning is simple and clear, I think. Raul and I embrace our destiny: we fly around in circles, we swoop and dive in effortless arcs against a barren sky, we flap and beat our wings in our futile attempts to reach what surely must be heaven. (247)

Rio and Raul, like their parents and grandparents, are destined to be constantly in flux as they negotiate multiple allegiances and the colonial/imperial legacy of the Philippines. They are never quite sure of their origin or their destination. They drift without chart or compass. But, without fixed courses, they might assume multiple positions and perspectives. In the end, Abuelita Soccoro, who chooses to identify as Spanish despite her Philippines heritage and childhood, is as much a Filipina subject as Dolores, who chooses to identify as Filipina yet migrates to America. And both are as truly Filipina as Rio, who recognizes and articulates her own sense of displacement, and who embraces this displacement as her position, her destiny.

In repositioning Filipino/a subjectivity to account for a spectrum of identifications and experiences born out of transnational strife and a history of colonial and neocolonial encounters, Hagedorn also delivers a novel that frames an argument about American identity. Dogeaters became a bestseller in America, the first novel by a Filipina American to do so, precisely because it speaks to the struggles that different populations have with identity in the US. Rio’s unsettled position resonates with readers in the US, reflecting the continually shifting narrative of American identity and national belonging.
The novel creates the possibility for American identities that are inclusive of transnational and ethnic American minorities, and reveals the barriers to national belonging faced by these minorities. Additionally, the novel brings to the foreground local and global concerns about America’s role in the global community. Just as it crafts a new Filipino/a subject based on a negotiation of a dark history and multiple divisions and alliances, the novel likewise posits a new American subject as well – one in whom concerns about American national belonging, and the role of America in the global community are continually being negotiated – embraced and reproduced or rejected and transformed, but always a part of the equation for American experience.
Chapter Two: What We Come From: Kinship, Desire and Violence in Nina Revoyr’s *Southland*

“It would be wrong to think their need for each other had nothing to do with race. What he loved in her was not just her intensity, her beauty, but everything she’d come from”

*(Revoyr 283)*

The possibilities posed in Hagedorn’s novels for reclaiming genealogy and family alliances in order to build an “unofficial” mestizo Filipino/a history and identity are closely connected to the examination of family history in order to envision alternate futures that take place in Nina Revoyr’s 2008 novel *Southland*. Revoyr takes an intimate approach in her exploration of problematic and constricting structures of race and belonging in mid- to late-twentieth century Los Angeles, framing her questions about racial construction, gender and class tensions as forces that are deeply implicated in the daily lives of individuals. However, where Hagedorn’s novels are focused on the negotiation of identities and community belonging in a transnational setting, Revoyr’s novel explores the structures and cultural discourses in America and in American towns and regions that allow for, limit, or deny belonging. *Southland* reveals how national structures and discourses affect and shape the intimate and kinship relationships of everyday life. *Southland* therefore allows us to investigate the relationship of the individual and the community in a multi-ethnic America, suggesting kinship as a key component to national and community belonging.

In *Southland*, racial tensions in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 60s – and in the 1990s – obscure and hide kinship connections. By unearthing these connections, Revoyr interrogates the functions of socially-constructed structures and discourses of kinship. As
Judith Butler argues in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Beyond Life and Death*, structures and discourses of kinship deployed by and suiting the needs of the state make certain kinship connections invisible (6, 58). In addition, these sanctioned kinship relations incite large and small violences, and limit these individuals’ abilities to belong in local and national communities. *Southland*, however, suggests the persistence of alternative forms of belonging which in turn enable alternative, previously unimaginable futures.

The novel’s plot revolves around a mystery. When he dies in 1994, Frank Sakai, a second-generation Japanese American, leaves behind a hidden will dated 30 years earlier and a box containing $38,000. The will dictates what should be done with the store Frank owned in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles in the case of his death: “My store, located at 3601 Bryant St., shall go to Curtis Martindale” (10). However, as the store was sold years ago, neither his granddaughter Jackie nor his daughter Lois (Jackie’s aunt) know who Curtis is, or why Frank would have left him such an inheritance. The women determine that the cash in the closet is the proceeds from the sale of the store, and in order to fulfill Frank’s wishes, Lois asks Jackie to find Curtis, so they can deliver the money to him. As Jackie searches for Curtis, and for the link between Frank and Curtis, she uncovers her grandfather’s secret history. In doing so, she confronts the ways in which definitions of kinship and belonging deployed by the nation in the 1950s and 60s fueled tensions between African Americans and Asian Americans, particularly in multi-ethnic Los Angeles. These definitions of kinship denied belonging to Japanese Americans on local and national scales, and made certain kin or kin-like bonds invisible. When Jackie discovers that Curtis was Frank’s son, the product of his love affair with a black woman, Alma Sams, her transformed understanding of her grandfather’s history
and, in turn, her own identity, reveals the possibility of an alternative family structure and methods of belonging.

Traditional and alternative modes of familial and societal belonging have been discussed by scholars from a variety of fields using kinship theory. First introduced by anthropologists in the 1950s, kinship theory has resurfaced recently in discussions of the relationships between the state and the family. In speaking of kinship as it intersects with multi-ethnic literature of the US, I follow Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon in not looking at kinship as a function of biology, but rather in looking at the ways that structures of kinship become naturalized, both as biological systems and as discourses of who and what can be a family within a culture. The ways that a group of people talk about kinship bonds within their community influences how they understand relationships and belonging, and therefore in some cases can function to exclude transgressive families or kinship bonds. Tracing kinship structures in a society, as David Eng does in *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*, demonstrates that rules of belonging and un-belonging in a society can pivot

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14 As they explain in the introduction, Franklin and McKinnon’s anthology *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies* aims to incorporate recent technological advancements in medicine and biology to reveal and deconstruct naturalized concepts of kinship.

15 David Schneider’s text *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1980) is generally accepted to be the first text to inquire, from an anthropological perspective, into the structure of the family as constructed rather than natural. It is therefore representative of this type of claim and of the reflexive study of kinship as a western pre-occupation or as influenced by Western ideologies in anthropology.

16 Eng suggests that certain gays and lesbians in the US are empowered by a “queer liberalism” fueled by economic privilege and political protections of intimacy. Yet, this
on intersections of race, class, gender, orientation and ethnicity and can be deployed for political advantage.

Looking at the naturalization of structures of kinship and the ways in which the naturalization of certain kinship structures can support social inequality also reveals transgressive relationships as opportunities to rewrite both kinship structures, and methods of belonging within a society. Judith Butler, for example, in her 2002 book *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Beyond Life and Death*, develops a theory of kinship to demonstrate state investment in the naturalization of certain kinship structures, and to argue that transgressive forms of kinship are possible in a contemporary setting in which “kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive” (22). Elizabeth Povinelli also develops a theory of kinship in her 2006 book, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*, in order to express the ways in which intimate relationships between individuals are influenced by discourses that normalize kinship structures in specific cultures. Kinship theories allow scholars to examine the “bounded integrity of nations…races and castes” and, since the 1950s, is increasingly a “medium through which both the fixing and crossing of boundaries between these categories is signified” (Franklin and McKinnon 19).

Bringing Butler and Povinelli’s work on kinship theory into connection with Revoyr’s novel can shed light on how certain relationships in *Southland* are regulated, and how, as a result, they become invisible and/or inchoate. According to kinship theory, “queer liberalism” retains traces of miscegenation that erases issues of race in narratives of queerness.
and in *Southland*, the family unit serves as an initial intersection of an autonomous individual and a constitutive community, and so certain politically motivated structures of the family are implicit in national ideology and produced by it. Family structures are related to, created by, or maintained through what Povinelli identifies as the “intimate event,” or the ‘way in which the event of normative love is formed at the intersection – of [the] … discourses” of individual subjectivity and the formative society (4). Because the intimate event occurs in the intersection of the autonomous individual and the society in which (and in terms of which) he/she lives, Povinelli argues that the nation has a stake in the moment of that event – in defining what the event can be, how it can take place, where, between whom, and with what outcomes. In *Southland*, Jackie is unable to see how Frank and Curtis are connected through the majority of the novel not because Frank and Curtis had a particularly confusing, unusual or complex relationship, but because the bonds which tied them together were transgressive to structures of kinship permitted and normalized by the dominant, white society.

Franklin and McKinnon’s work on deconstructing naturalized concepts of kinship can be extended to *Southland* to explain why the relationship between Frank and Curtis is a question for the characters in the novel – if kinship, as Franklin and McKinnon suggest, is naturalized into being about scientific fact, then the question of kinship between Frank and Curtis reveals a basic belief in the novel that Asian Americans and African Americans are scientifically separate groups. Kinship has been naturalized in twentieth

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17 Butler, Povinelli, Eng, and Franklin and McKinnon each develop and explore this argument to identify privileged family structures, as well as the reasons for and the effects of normalizing certain family structures in specific locations and contexts.
century Euro-American society so that the family structure and its social organization is understood as coinciding with its biological structure. Looking at the family and the normativity of certain family structures shows us what is at stake and which interests are being served by the privileging of those structures, as it also reveals the possibility for alternative structures. The naturalization of kinship is a symbolic order that depends upon a generative concept of “nature” and “natural producing not only a context for society but a model for what that context itself can be” (Franklin and McKinnon 5). So, the question “What is Curtis to Frank” is not only about an individual relationship but also about a larger connection, as it draws attention to the barriers that separate Asian American and African American groups, positing the possibility that what we may see as barriers that stem from essential biological differences are actually instead hierarchical barriers embedded in symbolic systems that legitimize difference as essential and material\textsuperscript{18}. Following Franklin and McKinnon, then, we can see that Curtis and Frank’s relationship causes anxiety to the other characters in the novel because they reveal that these groups are not separate, that these barriers are porous and can be (and have been, likely more than once) transgressed. Curtis and Frank also unsettle racial constructions, and any sort of externally applied biological arguments of race, as Curtis, who everyone believes is black, who identifies as black, and who is killed in part because he is black, is

\textsuperscript{18} Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney analyze biological kinship discourses, arguing that “inequality and hierarchy come already embedded in symbolic systems” and are “elaborated through contextualized material practices” (ix-x). They argue that the naturalization of kinship structures produces social inequalities, through which differences are legitimized and set into a hierarchy as “natural” or “genetic” in essentialized categories of “sex,” “race,” gender,” “reproduction,” and “family.”
also linked to Japanese Americans, thereby undermining visible markers of race.

Talking about kinship, rather than “family” or “community,” as it is deployed by different characters in *Southland* thus allows us to examine bonds as they operate in different scales. Kinship is inherently multiscalar – it addresses the formation of the society through the formation of the family, and the discourses surrounding both, and so is useful for approaching both the “smaller,” character-driven questions of the novel, as well as the larger questions of national belonging, history and visibility that surface in *Southland*. The intimate event – the deep, personal bond between individuals, through which communities can be brought into contact by the connection between individuals, and through which kinship can be formed – breaks down the community to its component parts, occurring on a personal, *intimate* scale, in the connection of two people. And, as these two people are a part of constitutive communities, the connection between them then scales out to their communities – bringing communities into contact through the personal connection of individuals. It functions similarly to the realism and *Southland* specifically – as it evokes “the real,” the complexities of everyday life, large generalizations about human conditions, by conveying small, specific details about specific people. The novel itself is, in its focus on one family, intimate. In Revoyr’s novel, the relationships between individuals evokes the larger kinship structures, showing how these definitions of kinship are so tightly regulated and disciplined that they influence, in some cases literally, what characters can and cannot see.

Understanding kinship as naturalized makes it possible for theorists to interrogate the relationship between kinship structures and the cultural discourses in which it exists, and which it has aided in producing. Culture, according to Butler, is created in response
to, and in turn deploys, strategic forms of kinship, then erases itself so that these constructed structures appear to be both natural and normal. In *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler models an analysis of kinship and culture through a reading of Antigone’s act of burying her brother Polyneices in rejection of her uncle Creon’s demand that he be left to rot. Antigone’s story provides a case study for critics to interrogate the problematic division of kinship and the state. Responding to Hegel, Lacan and Levi-Strauss, Butler argues that “the family” is not a natural construction, but rather is the site of normalization. Antigone, in Butler’s interpretation, exposes the “socially contingent character of kinship” (6). Recognizing and validating certain kinship structures causes others to fade from visibility and from inclusion in civic, legal, and political discourse and structures. This in turn makes certain relationships not only “less privileged” but entirely invisible. Following Butler, we see that culture itself is rooted in (and inextricable from) this kind

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19 Judith Butler argues, in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Beyond Life and Death*, that kinship constructs exist in a circuitous and self-referential symbolic order. Butler deconstructs Lacan’s interpretation of Antigone, which is influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s claim that structures of kinship and family are not derived from natural causes. Lacan’s interpretation is based upon and meant to elucidate his understanding of the symbolic order, and so “relocates Antigone’s fatality in terms of the necessary limits of kinship” (40). Lacan identifies Antigone as positioned at the threshold of the symbolic domain, which, according to Butler, is not the unwritten, untraceable laws with which Antigone claims to be acting in accordance, nor is it the laws which Hegel defines as of the feminine, nor is it the same as public law, but an alternative symbolic or imaginary order (Butler 40). Butler explains that the function of the symbolic domain is to “transcendentalize its claims… The effect of transcendentalism is an effect of the claim itself” (Butler 43). Butler’s argument illustrates the reciprocal relationship of words and the process of normalization or universalization. In enabling a claim to be made, the symbolic order also enables that claim to appear to be transcendental in that specific symbolic system. However, understanding that the symbolic order is a circular system that relies internally for verification and reinforcement of claims also indicates that other systems are possible in which alternative claims can be made.
of differentiation of kinship structures. Thus, looking at kinship in a novel like Revoyr’s enables us to see larger cultural processes and ideas of belonging, unbelonging, and participation.

Butler’s analysis of Antigone establishes kinship structures as socially contingent and demonstrates the possibility for alternative methods of belonging\(^{20}\). Both of these claims help us understand the erasure of Frank and Curtis’ connections in *Southland* as a result of 1960s Los Angeles dominant definitions of kinship, enabling us in turn, to establish the circumstances for the “intimate event” – the intimate personal connection, and the way that connection extends to their relationship to their communities – between Frank and Curtis’ mother Alma. We might understand kinship not as an essential or universal context but rather, as Butler puts it, as “a set of performances [that] reconstitute kinship through their repetition.” Socially acceptable structures of kinship therefore can be altered through aberrant performative repetitions, which can produce unanticipated consequences (Butler 58).

It is precisely this formulation of alternative methods of belonging with which Revoyr’s novel engages. In *Southland*, Jackie traces Frank’s history back to the close-knit community her grandfather had been a part of in the Crenshaw district, and to the early 1960s riots. She discovers that Curtis was a black teenager who worked at Frank’s

\(^{20}\) Butler suggests that a careful examination of Antigone’s actions, and her speech claims in relation to the act reveal how the laws which govern kinship function as a symbolic order which maintains itself by transmitting and repeating foundational claims. Butler demonstrates how, in the transmission of the claims from the progenitor and the necessary continual reiteration of the claims which gives it both its power and the appearance of universality, there is the possibility for rupture, for repetition with aberration which will allow those laws to be radically rewritten.
store. With the help of Curtis’ cousin, James Lanier, Jackie learns that Curtis was killed during the riots when he and three other young men were locked in the deep freezer. Yet Jackie and James are unable to see the connection between Frank and Curtis for the majority of the novel, blinded by their own assumptions about their family histories, assumptions which are informed by larger social narratives that deny connections between African Americans and Japanese Americans in both the 1960s and 90s, times when the establishment or recognition of connections between these communities could empower both collaboratively and challenge social inequalities between white Americans and Americans of color.

Povinelli argues that understanding the cultural discourses that generate and maintain kinship structures in specific cultures enables us to understand the relationship of a specific individual to the culture of which he/she is a part. Following Butler and Povinelli, then, cultural discourses normalize certain strategic kinship structures and so cultural discourses can regulate and discipline the kinds of kinship bonds that are created and deployed in a culture (Butler 6, Povinelli 197). Racial divisions present in 1960s and 1990s Los Angeles render the relationship between Frank and Curtis incomprehensible to society as a whole. Revoyr’s novel reveals that kinship practices and structures are regulated and disciplined by cultural discourses, and examines which relationships enable families as well as bonds that are able to be shared by individuals, and the relationship of the state to the family. In Southland, actions that transform notions of kinship also present the possibility of transforming the larger culture.

In this way, the novel integrates what Povinelli calls an “autological subject” and a “genealogical society.” Frank and Alma are examples of what Povinelli calls
autological subjects, as their connection functions on both an intimate, personal scale, and a larger scale that brings their communities into contact through them. The autological subject is a subject considered in the context of their inherited “discourses, practices, and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom associated with the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism” (Povinelli 4). The process by which one becomes an autological subject, then, describes how an individual in a certain culture conceives of herself, her role in society, and the possibility of her own agency, according to, in response to, or in transgression of cultural discourses about the self and society. This autological subject, according to Povinelli, is part of a larger “genealogical society,” one that acts through “discourses, practices, and fantasies about social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances” (Povinelli 4). The genealogical society is thus the inherited, shared understanding of a culture, created and maintained by the stories that a culture tells itself about its history, its people, its myths, and its own structure\(^{21}\). However, these stories do not exist in a vacuum, and as they are neither

\(^{21}\) Presuppostitions that intimate relations, government institutions, and economic relations are based on a mutual recognition of the worth of another person circulate through and between subjects in liberal genealogical societies, and inform how people think about themselves – who they are and who they should be – and how they talk about themselves and others, and how they govern themselves and others. The word becomes the deed, as discourses of “love, work, and civic life” govern practice (Povinelli 6). Povinelli further problematizes the binary of subject and society: “As people go about their ordinary lives – their practices of love, work, and civic life – they continually constitute these discourses as if the discourses were the agents of social life, as if there were such a thing as the sovereign subject and the genealogical society, as individual freedom and social constraint, and as if the choice between these Manichean positions were the only real choice available to us. They do this as if all other actual and potential
essential nor natural, they can change and transform, as Butler suggests, through small aberrations in their repetition (Butler 58). As individuals in a community alter their practices slightly, their small deviations rejoin the discourses of the community and create ruptures that allow for new possibilities for individuals.

Revoyr’s novel reveals the relationships between her Japanese American characters and the society in which they live to be fraught with violences – small violences, or microaggressions, of everyday life, and cataclysmic violences such as the imprisonment – that function to rupture the threads of alliance and identification that would allow them to “belong” in and to the society. Michael Peletz suggests that examining ambivalence in kinship relations allows us to see how kinship is shaped by tensions and contradictions in differential power relations (385). The violences in Southland that rupture and prevent alliance emerge from racial and class tensions supported by the structures of the state, and by discourses that empower the state by removing the possibility of empowerment through collaboration. Each character experiences different types of violence, revealing that violences generated in response to tensions about race share a common origin but manifest differently according to an individual’s subject position. The violences also share a common endpoint, as they each, small or large, result in a rupture of belonging, connection or alliance.

22 Povinelli explains that “The multiplicity of discourses wound into any one object meets the multiplicity of the object as it changes over time, is stretched by any given discourse, and winds others as it twists away from them” (Povinelli 8).
An example of one such small violence that results in a division between people that shows how Revoyr’s novel situates these moments as both personal and as having a larger impact, beyond one individual or one family, may be seen in a discussion of the tensions which developed in the Sakai family as Jackie’s mother, Rose, and her aunt, Lois, are teenagers. Lois’ perspective of a particular moment focuses on an important game of tennis in which Rose competes. Rose and their mother, Mary, are deeply invested in the game and its outcome in ways that are strongly aspirational – the game is at a country club in the upper-class city of Gardena, located in the South bay area of Los Angeles, and both Mary and Rose are concerned with how the game and Rose’s performance could demonstrate Rose’s ability (and, we can extrapolate, her worth and the Sakai family’s worth) to the Gardena country club community. Lois’ memory of the “day her family had divided” is a small violence that results in a kinship rupture: “Looking back, she could see that it had been happening for years, but one Saturday morning in 1963, each member of the family had fallen clearly in one direction of the other” (34). Lois equates the division with her family members’ reactions to her perceived role in Rose’s (her sister) loss in the tennis match. Lois first irritates Rose and Mary by taking the wrong shoes for her sister Rose to wear in a tennis match in Gardena:

Lois knew her family was mad at her. Rose would hardly look at her, hadn’t spoken since she’d flipped her ponytail in exasperation…Her mother had been tight-lipped, informing her, simply, “This is a very important match, Lois. I hope you didn’t ruin it for your sister.” Even her grandmother Sakai, who never yelled at anyone, still added to the general
air of disapproval. Only her father had refrained from scolding her, trying instead to mollify his eldest. (34)

Lois compounds her family’s irritation with her when a puppy she is playing with at the match breaks away from her and steals the tennis ball Rose is about to serve. Rose’s composure is shaken by the crowd’s laughter and she loses the match. The loss, and the perceived damage it has had on Rose’s social success, which, though vague, is equated with her respectability and the respectability of her family in the eyes of upper-middle class Gardena society, forces a crisis which aligns Rose and Mary, along with

Grandmother Sakai, against Lois and Frank:

On the car ride home, Lois slumped in the back seat and suffered yet another berating from her sister and mother. Rose was almost hysterical, complaining to her parents about how Lois was a brat, and a bad student, and she was trying to ruin her life, and Mary scolded Lois for spoiling her sister’s day. Lois felt small, the bad daughter. Even her grandmother refused to look at her. But then, in the middle of this barrage, she caught Frank’s eye in the rearview mirror. He’d laughed right along with the rest of the crowd when the puppy went after the ball. Now Lois saw that his eyes were still laughing, despite his immobile face. He looked at her in the rearview mirror, not adding to the din of voices. Then he winked. And in that moment, as they drove up Crenshaw and back toward their house, although she didn’t say anything or even return the gesture, she felt the weight of everyone else’s fury lift off her, and became her father’s child. (38-9)
The incident solidifies and makes visible the alignments in the family, and also illustrates that the family members ally with each other in accordance with their own community connections and methods for belonging. Rose, Mary and Grandmother Sakai ally because they each see the incident as a humiliating denouncement of their respectability as a family. They identify with the Gardena community as an indicator of middle and upper-middle class status, and a place of Japanese American upward mobility. Lois and Frank, on the other hand, bond because they see the experience in terms of diversity and acceptance not based upon class status, illustrated by the fact that they see each other and themselves in the context of Crenshaw – a community that thrives on difference, both in ethnicity and class status, as they enter into the district with which Frank so strongly identifies.

The scene also reveals the different ways each member of the family identifies with their family history and heritage. Their understanding and internalization of family history affects the community identifications they choose, and demonstrates that these interrelated community alliances and self-identifications allow for different possible futures. Lois “hated leaving Crenshaw to come down to Gardena, where everyone lived in big, bland houses; where all the boys her age were already talking about college and becoming doctors, and all the girls spoke of make-up tips and Barbie dolls” (34). For Lois, belonging in the Crenshaw district, both as it exists and as it is constructed in her father’s stories, is:

- the greatest joy in life…She loved the Crenshaw district, and she loved her father’s stories about how much it had changed over the years, since the time it was known as Angeles Mesa. It was filled with houses now, and
crowded with all sorts of different families. But Frank described a neighborhood of huge, open spaces; of fewer and heartier people. For Lois, going down to Gardena, which was stiff and all-Japanese, was like going to church – something she knew she should do and appreciate, but which bored her to the point of sleep. (35)

Lois’ experiences of Crenshaw are filtered through Frank’s stories about his past in the area, and so, for Lois, Crenshaw and her father are strongly associated with each other. She understands her father’s history through his stories of Crenshaw, and she sees Crenshaw as it exists in his memory; not filled with houses and conflict, but a “neighborhood of huge, open spaces” and opportunity. Lois’ identification with Crenshaw, and her desired future are therefore tied up with her personal negotiation of her family’s history as a story of fluidity and transition – which for her mother and grandmother is focused on class mobility, but which Lois finds at the margins of society:

Steadiness, in any form, was stifling to her. She liked the extreme, the inexplicable, the ridiculous and evil. She liked Grandma and Grandpa Takayas’ stories of the hustlers and pimps they served in the old days in Little Tokyo; of the gambling house where they wouldn’t let Mary make deliveries because of the desperate, devious men and shady women. She liked their stories of nine-month winters and planting rice on early mornings in Japan, and her grandmother Sakai’s tales of surviving on locusts, fried for crispness or boiled for soup. (36)

The stories and the spaces (Crenshaw, the Angeles Mesa, and Japan) represent to Lois a family and a life on society’s fringe. They appeal to her precisely because of their
“impropriety” and disregard for societal expectations and norms. They offer her an alternative to the Gardena society she finds so boring. They are also deeply connected to her position as a Japanese American citizen, providing her with a personal history and connections to communities that expand beyond American citizenship: “They were citizens now, all of them, transformed into Americans at the mass naturalization ceremony at the Hollywood Bowl in ’54, but to Lois, their stories of old Japan were like the best kind of fairy tales – fantastical, with familiar elements and odd but recognizable characters” (36). Lois is able to merge the events of her family’s naturalization as American citizens with the family stories about Japan to create for herself a fluid and inclusive identity and belonging.

Lois’ love for Crenshaw, and everything it represents to her is deeply aligned with Frank’s desire for a future he once had for himself, and which he perhaps still carries the hope of for his daughter, as revealed by Revoyr’s repeated emphasis on his looking at Lois through the rearview mirror, as though he is looking back at himself as a younger man. Lois’ thoughts on marriage support both the hope and possibility of an alternative future, Frank’s second chance embodied through Lois’ romantic relationships:

Her parents exchanged a few words and then fell silent again, and Lois thought, watching them, not for the first time, that she never wanted to marry. Marriage, to her, meant what her parents had – steadiness, like a small efficient business. Her parents never fought, but they didn’t hug either, or talk about anything that wasn’t related to the family or work.

She knew that love could be more than that. (36)

The romantic relationship Lois desires, influenced by her observation of her parents’
cordial and “efficient,” but not emotionally fulfilling relationship, instead sounds similar to Frank’s relationship with Alma, and therefore signals a shared desire with Frank for an intimate connection to a significant other. As an adult, Lois has a non-traditional relationship with Ted Kanda that contrasts to the traditional relationships of her sister and her parents, enabling us to see how positive relationships that transgress normalized kinship structures can form in the novel out of intimate connections, and can subvert such normalized kinship structures by the very fact of their existence:

[Ted] wasn’t really Jackie’s uncle – he and Lois never married – but they’d been together for almost twelve years now. And Jackie, after not knowing what to make of Ted at first, had grown to adore him, although her parents still regarded him with a kind of benign suspicion. Rose acted like he was a grunting, dirt-caked cowboy, swinging his lasso in their living room, endangering their lamps, and her father, Richard, was more friendly, but still bewildered. The fact that Ted was an engineer for TRW did nothing to improve their opinion of him. They were also displeased with Lois’s living situation, especially after Frank moved in (presumably he’d be offended by his daughter’s scandalous domestic arrangement), although Jackie didn’t imagine that they’d like Ted much better if he and Lois ever got married. (22)

Like Frank and Alma, Lois and Ted’s relationship alters their genealogical society by introducing factors that cross cultural lines; for Frank and Alma this factor was largely race, while for Lois and Ted the factor is class. Jackie’s upper-middle class parents, particularly Rose, disapprove of Ted first because he and Lois are not married, but also,
foundationally, because they see him as an uncultured man who does not fit into family, or their social sphere. Yet it is primarily for this reason that Lois feels so comfortable with her relationship with Ted – he represents the departure from the strict cultural expectations of her mother and sister.

The different models of Japanese American identities, by circulating in the same family, show that individual identity is contested on multiple scales – they are challenged within the family and local community, as well as in the nation, as certain models are more closely aligned with the structures and limitations of American national belonging.

Regardless of the degrees to which Lois, as an adult, is able to achieve her desire for open, fluid and non-traditional belonging in her community and in personal relationships, her desire for inclusiveness is contested by certain members of her family. Her sister and mother see Lois’ connections with multi-ethnic communities and lack of concern about upward mobility as a deterrent to their own community and national belonging. They employ a model of Japanese American identity that aspires to belong by belonging to an elite, socially acceptable group – specifically the Japanese upwardly-mobile community signified by Gardena. This identity emerges from the confluence of American national structures and discourses and from those expectations of the “proper” way to be Japanese American that circulate in the Japanese American communities such as Gardena in the 1960s, as it is represented in the novel. In Southland, the model of Japanese American identity with which Lois affiliates clashes with the model with which Mary and Rose affiliate, as her lack of upper-middle class connections and concerns could bar the whole family from achieving the status needed to be accepted in societies like Gardena. The novel privileges Lois’ model, suggesting that, as her identifications
function on inclusion – of difference, of other ethnic minority groups, of lower and working class – rather than exclusion, it can be bolstered by the very factors that would be detrimental to Mary and Rose’s model, and so is a more sustainable method of belonging, and a method through which more people can belong.

Revoyr’s novel sets up the Japanese American assimilation model with which Mary, Rose and Grandmother Sakai identify as being far removed from the empowering cross-connections represented by Frank and Lois’ alliance with Crenshaw, contrasting the assimilation model’s focus on limiting and boundaries with the cross-connections opportunities for boundary-crossing. The upwardly-mobile model of Japanese American identity is useful for the state because of the exclusiveness it reinforces, which works to reduce the likelihood of crosscultural collaboration which might empower ethnic minorities in America, particularly in communities in which ethnic groups live in close proximity. Anthropologist Carole Nagengast argues that “Among the primary goals of the modern, post-Enlightenment state are assimilation, homogenization, and conformity in a fairly narrow ethnic and political range, as well as the creation of societal agreement about the kinds of people there are and the kinds there ought to be” (109). The dissidence between Lois and her sister, mother and grandmother reveals that this limiting model of Japanese American identity creates and maintains an aspirational desire for the middle-class that supports a homogenous American identity, with loyalty and ties to American citizenship through methods that serve the state’s goals. However, Lois and Frank’s alternative methods of connecting and belonging to other individuals and to communities reveal the failure, the impossibility, and the denial of this vision of assimilated, homogenous conformity to a national ideal. The competing dreams that unroll for
individuals in *Southland* are, on the one hand, personal. Yet on the other hand, they connect the lives of Frank and Lois to what Carole Nagengast calls “the crisis of the contemporary state [which] springs from its differentially successful monopolization of power and the contradiction between it and the demands of peripheralized people(s) who through resistance have created new subject positions that challenge fundamentally the definitions of who and what ought to be repressed” (Nagengast 109).

This “crisis of the contemporary state,” as it is expressed in the familial and civic crises in the novel, reveals a fundamental disagreement between those who, like Mary and Rose, maintain or seek to attain exclusive and powerful subject positions and those who, like Frank and Lois, struggle to create or expand inclusive identities. The racial tensions and violence directed at the Asian American and African American characters in the novel thus emerge as a direct result of the attempt, by the state, in communities, and by individuals, to uphold limiting identity models that sublimate difference, possibility, and alternative connections between and across racial and class lines. The divisions between these identity models, and the violence to which the divisions contribute, are the backlashes generated by the erasure by the state of racial tensions that therefore go unaddressed and build until they erupt. Racial violence, in *Southland*, is generated through these limiting models, enacted on an intimate scale between people with different access and claims to, as well as different belief in the legitimacy of a certain vision of American national belonging. The tensions depicted in the novel work to keep people who could function as potential allies in creating an alternative vision of the nation and of “Americans” separated by enforcing and supporting structures and discourses that delimit who can be connected to whom along race and class lines. On a national level, this
division causes a failure of consensus through which, Nagengast argues, “ethnic or political opposition, which is otherwise suppressed or subtle, becomes overt” (109-110). The eras in which the novel is largely set – the 1960s and the 1990s, historical moments which were also strongly marked by the racial tensions between African Americans, Latino and Asian Americans as more of the former migrated to the area – are two specific moments in Los Angeles history when consensus failed quite spectacularly and opposition erupted into violence with the 1964 Watts Riots and the 1992 Rodney King riots.

The novel bridges and evokes both of these eras by situating Jackie and James in the era of the King riots as they conduct their investigation of the murder of Curtis at the hands of a policeman during the earlier Watts riots. The racial violence as well as the tension and racial panic that African American officer Robert Thomas experienced in the 1960s, particularly as a black member of the incredibly racist and slow to integrate 1960s LAPD, leads him to murder Curtis, as well as Curtis’ younger (half-)brother and two other young men, during the Watts riots. Thomas acts out of an anger generated by his desire to affiliate with the dominant white society, and to reject affiliation with the lower-class African Americans whom he deems as “punks.” The young men are at Frank’s store, attempting to protect it from looting and fire, when Thomas and his partner find them. The riot provokes a division of kinship/state crisis for Thomas, who sees the riot as representative of the clash between his affiliation with African Americans and his identity.

as a trustworthy and dutiful police officer; “This riot was the worst thing he’d ever experienced, and beneath his anger at the punks who were tearing up the city was a deep and gnawing shame. Shame that he was the color of the arsonists and looters. Shame that other people’s worst beliefs had been confirmed” (299). Franklin and McKinnon argue that “ideologies of kinship become embedded in and signifiers of relations of power that draw lines of hierarchy and exclusion, bring about relations of dominance and subordination, and generate a range of violences in the heart of kinship” (Franklin and McKinnon 18). Thomas, who himself has been the target of racism from other officers on the force, prioritizes his connection to the force, and the city that he protects above his connection with these youths as members of an oppressed minority, which he sees as a subordinate group.

Revoyr’s depiction of the complexities of Thomas’ subject position reveals that the violence he enacts is in part a result of his position, and is influenced by the constructions of race in his local and national communities. Thomas reflects on structural racism as a black officer in the 1960s LAPD, during which time he “had to work ten times as hard as the white cops to get any kind of respect. And the recognition was grudging, you know, like we were a necessary evil. I tell you, there were a lot of racist black cops back then” (136). The novel links Thomas’ own struggles and the difficulties he saw his father experience as he was growing up to a kind of racial panic that leads to Curtis’ death. The policeman is unable to “see” Curtis as an individual, occupying what Nagengast names a “legitimate” subject position (Nagengast 109). Thomas buys into a limiting, exclusionary African American identity model similar in function, and in expectation, to the Japanese American identity that Rose and Mary privilege. For Robert,
class and regional affiliation are deeply implicated in the African American identity he seeks to maintain – he sees himself and his family as respectable, middle-class, cosmopolitan African Americans, a response to lower-class, Southern blacks that he believes are responsible for perpetuating the negative stereotypes that Robert believes fuels the racism he suffers. This class identification articulates itself as a kind of racism, as Robert himself assigns racially-loaded terms and stereotypes to the young men. He uses key words in his dialogue and internal monologue that code himself and his family as middle-class and acceptable – “respectable, college-educated” – and “other” blacks as lower-class and unacceptable to society, such as “ignorant,” “course and uncultured” (136). Thomas’ kinship with his father and his affiliation with the white cops on the police force function as forms of connection that Franklin and McKinnon identify as generated out of “acts of disconnection or rupture” (18). In choosing to identify with a “model-minority” African American identity that emphasizes affiliation with the white middle-class through his acceptance and use of cultural discourses of race, Thomas severs any affiliation with “other” African Americans, even those in the LAPD, whom he believes do not represent the ideal African American model: “some of the of the first few black men on the force didn’t do much to change their views. Some of those Negroes were so ignorant I don’t know how they got through the Academy. They came from nothing, you know, and acted like it. Made it real hard on the rest of us” (136). As James notes, the struggles that Thomas endured in order to achieve the “success” and the position he desired meant that he had “had to twist himself to get as far as he did” (137).

Thomas’s own experiences with prejudice and racism in the police force were underscored by his memories of his father, who was unable to find work that met his
college-educated qualifications, so Thomas, “rather than hating the white men who were too offended by his father’s skills to hire him at the work he was trained in, had instead despised the southern masses with whom his family was lumped together” (122). The police force served as a state alternative to kinship with the Los Angeles African American community: “He’d thought he was escaping them, blacks like them, by joining the department” (122). Thomas refuses to acknowledge kinship with the young men because he has been the victim of the effects of the mid-twentieth century Los Angeles cultural discourses which represented the recent African American migrants from the South as “coarse and unpleasant” (122). Thomas sees himself as different from the “niggers” in Los Angeles because of his authority position, and therefore sees himself as separate from the young men. However, as he believes that the oppression he has experienced is due to the assumption others make about his affiliation with the “lower-class” African Americans that he “despised” (136), he turns the oppression he has suffered back on them as a way of claiming power and asserting dominance through his association with the police force. Thomas assumes the young men are contributing to the riot, refusing to believe that they could be “the only niggers on the street – the only ones – who weren’t getting themselves in trouble” (288). Thomas’ disassociation from the young men, and the lower-class, urban African Americans he sees them as representing is particularly clear during his confrontation with the young men through his declarations that he is not the same as them, and through his repeated use of referring to them as a collective “you” of which he is not a part:

All you hoodlums on the street, you’re destroying your own neighborhood. I don’t see white people out there on Crenshaw or central.
It’s you. He glared at them. He was not one of them, never had been, no matter what they or Lawson [a racist white cop] believed. He thought of his father, how much smarter and more refined he was than the ignorant blacks they’d had to live among. And now these punks in front of him, who were just as useless as the ones he’d grown up with. “It’s niggers like you who give the rest of us a real bad name. White people don’t treat you the way you like? Well, it’s because you do this kind of shit.” (312-313)

This tirade and Thomas’s decision to lock the young men in the freezer are the result of his inability to see the young men as having equal access to legitimacy in America and as African Americans. Because they fail to conform to the subject position that Thomas believes is respectable for young black men, Thomas sees them as threatening his own position and everything he has worked for:

It was more than Thomas could bear. This fool talking to him as if he, Curtis, were an equal. When it was fools like him that made his job so hard, made men like Lawson not see him as a peer… “protecting this?” he said weakly. “Why would you want to protect this?” And he raised his arms, both taking in the store and dismissing it, and Curtis saw the sweat marks again. His own T-shirt was soaked clean through, and he felt perspiration trickle down his legs…

“You hot, boy?”

Curtis shrugged.

“Yeah, it’s hot. Well, I’m sorry you’re so uncomfortable. But I got just the thing to cool you off.” He pulled his gun out quickly, and Curtis
squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for the impact of the bullet. But when he
opened them, the cop was gesturing toward the back. “Go on,” he said.

“Go back there.” (313)

Though it is unclear whether Thomas consciously intends for the young men to die, his
anger at the ideas that Curtis could be his equal, and that the store is worth protecting
reveal that his violence is a response to his sense of his identity and position being
threatened by what Curtis and the store both represent. In trying to protect the store,
Curtis and his friends are also working to protect everything that the store represents, and
which is antithetical to the assimilationist, pro-state position Thomas supports: by
protecting the store, they are working to protect the social unity of cross-ethnic and racial
groups, a social unity which allows people with alternative subject positions, like Curtis,
like Lois and Frank, to access community belonging and to connect with individuals
across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries. Moreover, the store, as Frank’s successful
enterprise, represents the possibility that this alternative community can have economic
power and independence, which is a direct threat to the sovereignty of the state.

In excluding himself from belonging with a larger African American community,
Thomas performs the work of the state; the aggression he enacts in his daily interactions
with the people on the street, leads to the violence of murdering the young men, the
cataclysmic result of the exclusionary models of American ethnic minority identities
approved by and circulated in cultural discourses. In one sense, then, Curtis represents a
threat to the state, as his father did before him, as he has the potential, both by the
circumstances of his birth, and in the role he is growing into in the Crenshaw district as
the corner store-owner whose store functions as a contact zone, bringing the different
ethnic groups who live in proximity together in a community space, to thereby begin to suppose cross-cultural collaboration and capitalistic empowerment. By killing Curtis, and specifically, by using the store itself to kill Curtis, Thomas ruptures the potential for community development and ethnic minority inclusive empowerment. The novel shows that Curtis’ death is a result of his invisibility in the eyes of his society, and the illegitimacy of his position in Thomas’ perception. Yet he is a character, an individual rather than an allegory, and his death is also a simple tragedy, both for the violent disruption of Curtis’ life and potential, and for those who suffer his loss. His death in turn ensures that his position remains unknown and unclaimed until his half-sister and niece begin looking for him years later. His recovery then is also a recovery of alternative or silenced histories – personal histories, and larger national histories that are suppressed by curricula, official state histories, local and national narratives, and family stories. His recovery necessitates a change in the way his family constructs and tells their stories.

In Southland, violence occurs on an intimate scale as a result of alienations and disagreement over what subject positions are legitimate, yet this intimate Los Angeles story can be extrapolated to the nation. Following the novel, we can see that these limitations of belonging not only dictate which groups can be affiliated but also which individuals can be connected, according to race, class, and gender. Frank and Alma’s relationship is impossible in the eye of society since, as Frank is Asian American and Alma black, their relationship crosses ethnic barriers. And so Curtis, the product of their impossible union, is invisible because Frank and Alma’s relationship remains hidden and overwritten in history. Frank and Alma’s situation is similar to Jackie’s situation, in that
each experience intimacy with people whom the cultural discourses of the family do not recognize as acceptable romantic partners – this parallelism in the novel sets up an argument for the union of ethnic minority communities with gay and lesbian communities in the US in order to gain agency to combat oppression, in the same way that the novel sets up an argument for communities and individuals to unite across racial and ethnic lines. Frank, as a Japanese American during the years leading up to World War II, the internment of Japanese Americans, and the struggle for civil rights, is a part of an ethnic minority group that is represented and perceived through American cultural discourses as either invisible or criminal. Frank’s experiences mark and define him, limiting him to a Japanese American subject position, which, during the time period was extremely constricting. The very “impossibility” of the relationship with Alma was, therefore, the making of a possibility, even if that possibility is then covered over or denied. Furthermore, Frank’s Japanese American ethnicity meant that, in the years leading up to World War II, he was made invisible – hidden away metaphorically by anti-Japanese immigration and housing laws, and literally during the course of the US internment of Japanese Americans. The Issei (Japanese immigrants to America) were explicitly cut off from national belonging in America through anti-miscegenation and anti-immigration laws, as well as laws including the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Law, which blocked Japanese immigrants from attaining American citizenship, and the 1940 Alien Registration Act, which required the fingerprinting and documentation of all immigrants.

Though the Japanese American community in Little Tokyo exists adjacent to the African American community in Watts, and though the two exist in close proximity in the multi-ethnic Crenshaw district, during Frank’s youth, and again during both the 1960s
and the 1990s, tensions between the two communities create an apparently unbreakable
division between the two communities. While the two communities are revealed to exist
in proximity but separate from each other, individuals from each community are able,
indeed are required, to interact in broadly communal, commercial ways in the Angeles
Mesa; shopping in the corner store, eating at the same restaurants, sharing leisure spaces.
The contestation of this shared space, and the shared metaphorical space the two
communities occupy in the American conscious, on the one hand leads to violence such
as the riots, through what Bergesen and Herman identify as “ethnic competition\(^24\),” and
yet on the other hand can also function as a contact zone for cross-cultural exchange and
collaboration; the potential genesis for a larger, multi-ethnic community.

Revoyr reveals the actions of the individual and inter-individual connections to be
the determining factor for the product of this shared space to be violence or collaboration
through a scene on the beach in which Frank is forced to choose how to ally himself, and
through Frank and Alma’s relationship. The scene on the beach demonstrates that there
is literally no place for Frank and other Japanese Americans in the American

\(^24\) Ethnic competition theory, advanced by Olzak and theorized by Bergesen and Herman
to have had a causal relationship to the 1992 uprising in Los Angeles, builds on Barthes’
ecological ideas of niche overlap and resultant conflictual competition (Barthes 1969),
and argues that competition between ethnic groups over identities and boundaries in
shared, desegregated spaces can result in ethnic violence that includes riots. Particularly
significant here is that Olzak argues the efforts of a “dominant residential ethnic group,”
which, in the Watts and Crenshaw districts in the 1960s and 1990s would have been
African Americans, to “exclude in-migrants are also considered part of the competition
process” (qtd in Bergesen and Herman 40). In Southland, the “in-migrants” would
include both the communities of African Americans who migrated to Los Angeles from
the south in the 1960s, and Asian Americans, including Japanese Americans, who
migrated in large populations to the area in the 1940s-60s and 1990s (Bergeson and
Herman 40).
consciousness, and reveals that Japanese Americans can either ally with African Americans in the hopes that through the collaboration, and through the production of a shared community in a shared space, each will be empowered, or that Japanese Americans and African Americans can continue to contest shared space, necessitating violent and divisive results. Frank makes the decision to ally himself with African Americans when, as a teenager, he and his friends must choose which side of a White/Colored beach to enter:

They stopped, abruptly, because they all saw the sign. It was a dark brown board, attached to a pole that was sunken into the edge of the sand, and it had two arrows painted on it, one pointing right, the other left. Above the left were painted the words, ‘Whites only.’ Above the right were the words, “Coloreds only.” … Frank stared. He’d never seen a sign like this, although he’d heard about them…He’d never had to think like this, either – for his first eight years, he’d lived in Little Tokyo, and then for the next seven in Angeles Mesa, where there weren’t enough people of any color to legislate such boundaries. If the beach was divided into two distinct sides, on which side did he belong? Just then, a burly whiteman passed by on the way to his car, his chest burned pink and tender. “Japs go over there,” he said helpfully, pointing towards the colored side. His wife swatted him on the forearm. “Oh, honey, no they don’t.” The couple disappeared and the three boys were left standing in uncomfortable silence. Finally, Frank took a deep breath. ‘Last one to the water has to
walk back home,’ he said. And then he took off running, to the right. (97-98)

The choices Frank makes throughout the novel, allying the African American community, identifying with cross-cultural Crenshaw, supporting the community through the use of his corner store, together reveal Frank as an individual who resists assimilation to an ideal of whiteness and as an individual in competition with African Americans for recognition and legitimacy as an American, showing him to be a man whose affiliations and choices throughout his life connect him to the community with which he shares space, and into a common history of oppression and exclusion.

Frank’s decision to ally himself with the African American community is based on his experiences growing up Japanese American and therefore in a perennially contested and shifting subject position. Like Thomas, Frank has watched his family be oppressed, ignored, and violently displaced by the state. Thomas and Frank’s similar experiences, both of oppression and of being forced to choose with whom to ally, reveals the paradox of African American and Japanese American community belonging and conflict in Los Angeles; the very shared experiences and shared spaces that would allow for African Americans and Japanese Americans to strengthen themselves as individuals and as a community through understanding, connecting to, and empowering each other are the same factors that lead to contested ideas of national belonging and identity, and to the violence generated in response to competition, rather than collaboration. Yet where Thomas falls prey to competition and violence, Frank chooses inclusiveness, perhaps, the novel suggests, influenced by his positive experiences with other individuals in the community, and his earnest desire to support his community, both locally and nationally.
Frank continues to choose inclusiveness as he is tested throughout his adult life. As cultural discourses restrict Frank’s ability to feel legitimately affiliated with American national belonging and ideas of who can be American, he still struggles to find methods for connection, collaboration, freedom, even when his family is forced into internment camps, separated and mistreated, and Frank is forced into untenable positions:

The hakujin soldiers had come around a few months earlier, distributing questionnaires to separate Japs from Americans, in order to determine who was still a loyal citizen. And when they came again…asking for young men to volunteer for the army, Frank signed up right away. His mother, who still remembered the green hills of her homeland and longed to see her brothers and sisters before she died, begged him not to fight for the country that had claimed her husband and daughter. But Frank, despairing, needed simply to move, to be free. And he knew he was trapped. If he didn’t fight, he’d be branded, excluded forever, lose what little chance he still might have for making a life in his own country.”

(100)

The dilemmas Nisei men faced, as represented by Frank, demonstrate that the position of Japanese American men in America shifted with the advent of World War II from being invisible – with no place for them on the beach – to being criminals, with their actions and identifications under scrutiny and under suspicion. Executive Order 9066, by which President Roosevelt authorized the internment of Japanese Americans, focused on the criminality and suspect allegiances of Japanese Americans, and Japanese American men in the internment camps who refused to volunteer to fight in the war were assumed to be
Japanese spies. And yet, in “choosing” to volunteer, in order to preserve what “little chance he still might have for making a life in his own country,” Frank makes it impossible for the limiting constructions of Japanese Americans to continue to function unchanged or unchallenged – he will not be “excluded,” and the future he fights to preserve is a vision of the future directly in contrast to the future envisioned by the such exclusionary discourses and state actions as Executive Order 9066.

The future Frank fights for is an inclusive, cross-cultural, and collaborative community future, as demonstrated by his relationship with Alma, and his later work in the Crenshaw community. Frank’s connection with Alma acts as an alternative method for participating in American national belonging and for legitimizing his citizenship. Frank’s status as Nisei denies him space in the American community, and, again, he circumvents erasure by allying himself with the ethnic minority community, through his connection to and love for Alma. It is his desire for an alternatively legitimate citizenship that creates the possibility for Frank to love Alma both because of and in spite of their social statuses and ethnic backgrounds. Frank and Alma fall in love, and are together for several months before Alma becomes pregnant, and her parents send her away. Frank and Alma both later marry people who share their ethnic background. For Frank and for Alma, the difference represented by the other is the foundation of their desire. Seen in the context of kinship, Frank and Alma’s relationship therefore is a form of transgression

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25 Though technically an American citizen, Frank is forced to declare his allegiance with America by volunteering. The forced nature of Frank’s “volunteering” for the army creates a paradox: in being forced to identify with America, and fight for America, Frank’s agency is taken away, and he is denied the rights of a citizen that should protect him from such a position.
that “makes” room for alternative modes of being and belonging.

In general, love creates the potential for growth. Butler implies that this is the case for Antigone, whose love for her brother and her father leads her to bury her brother against the strictures of the state. Povinelli, too, argues that love, and specifically sexuality, and the expression of sexual desire, can transform genealogical society through the transformation of the fantasies of the autological subject. But this is not love in the “love conquers all” sense – rather, as Povinelli explains, love is political. The experience of intimacy is not exclusively, or even largely, about desire, pleasure or sex, but instead, is about “things like geography, history, culpability, and obligation; the extraction of wealth and the distribution of life and death; hope and despair; and the seemingly self-evident fact and value of freedom” (Povinelli 10). Therefore, “love” and its social practices are the “processes by which the dialectic of individual freedom and social bondage is distributed... and how discourses that arise from this distribution circulate, are localized, and are contested” (Povinelli 10).

According to Povinelli, discourses about love and its social practices are difficult to identify and articulate in a liberal, post-Enlightenment genealogical society because in such a society, love is strategically structured and regulated through paradoxical configurations. On the one hand, the discourse of love in a liberal society suggests that love can erase the social markers and inheritances of a genealogical society, allowing people to join together across barriers of race, class, and culture, so that it “expands humanity, creating the human by exfoliating its social skin, and this expansion is critical to the liberal Enlightenment project, including the languages of many of its most progressive legacies” (176). On the other hand, the social practices of love are often
completely opposed to this fantasy. The paradoxical discourses of love, of whether love eradicates, looks beyond, scrubs off the social skin\textsuperscript{26} or whether it is located in and is about the body, emerge partly because the participants in the discourse disagree about what exactly they are referring to when they refer to concepts like “family,” “body,” “sexuality,” and “values.” Additionally, they also “arise because people still dream of a form of equality that would hegemonize the entire social field, solving once and for all the difference of difference” (Povinelli 179).

Love functions as a transformative factor because it is jointly about the familiar and the strange. At its most basic, love is about a connection and an identification between the self and the other. This connection must in some way be a balance between connection – the self, and the ability to relate and identify – and difference – the other, who is not a part of me, who is external. This balancing act can therefore be differently negotiated, with potentially revolutionary effects, in the confines of discourses which otherwise limit the relationship between the autological subject and the genealogical society. As people have different conceptions about the nature and purpose of love, this creates the opportunity for different experiences of, conceptualizations about, and speech acts describing love. Revoyr demonstrates that for Frank and Curtis’ mother Alma, “the point of loving is to thicken rather than thin out the social world” (Povinelli 179). Though they have different reasons for loving each other, both desire a balance of the familiar and the strange that offers them alternatives to the dictates of the autological

\textsuperscript{26} The discourses and cultural expectations about love that Povinelli suggests influence and demarcate a person’s social possibilities (Povinelli 179)
subject in their genealogical societies, both the one they share in the Crenshaw district, and the genealogical societies of their ethnic and family backgrounds. More specifically, for Frank, loving Alma “thickens the social world” by providing him with a connection not only with another person, but with a woman who represents a negotiation between the uncertain, in- legality only citizenship granted to second generation Japanese Americans during the mid-twentieth century, and the rejection of his history and experiences growing up in Little Tokyo and multi-ethnic Angeles Mesa that assimilation with white American culture would require of him. Alma is his way out of the conflicting kinships that led Thomas to violence against those whose kinship he rejected. Through his intimate connection with Alma, Frank also shares a connection to the multi-ethnic America he chose to ally himself with on the beach. Their relationship pulls their genealogical societies, the Angeles Mesa African American and Japanese American communities, which are adjacent but not connected, into contact. Their desires for each other, and for a future in which they can belong together, reveals the possibility for an alternative future for both Frank and Alma. On a broader scope, their personal desires and relationship suggests the possibility of an alternate picture of community, and of kinship. Revoyr writes:

It would be wrong to think their need for each other had nothing to do with race. What he loved in her was not just her intensity, her beauty, but everything she’d come from. He saw in her earth-brown skin not just the girl he loved, but the faces and families of his moved-away friends whom he loved and missed so deeply... He heard the music and saw the swirling smoke of the jazz clubs Victor had taken him to in Watts; tasted the
cornbread and catfish and red beans and rice Mrs. Conway sometimes
fixed them after practice. And Alma was also simply not-Japanese – not
like the small folded-in young women who were so constrained and
accepting of him; not the women he failed to protect. (282-3)

In loving Alma not just for who she is, but for where she came from, the genealogical
society which made it possible for her to exist as she is, Frank enacts the future he
desires – a future that is inclusive and diverse, in which belonging is facilitated by love,
not by similarity. If Alma and Frank are able to share a connection and create a bridge
between their histories and their communities, their relationship would invalidate the
discourses that fuel racial tensions by making members of different minority races
adjacent but not allied. Their connection is therefore a fundamental argument that the
violent non-belonging between these groups may not be permanent. Yet, if he is drawn
to Alma in part because she offers an alternative to the “fragile” Japanese women that he
felt he had failed, there is a sad irony here. Alma is also a “women he failed to protect”
in the end, and the one whose tragedy he bears the most direct responsibility for. Though
their relationship ultimately fails, the novel uses the story of their “present” to suggest
that certain social structures can change over time.

Frank chooses Alma as a way to belong, and Alma chooses Frank because she
connects to his experience of oppression and search for alternative choices. For Frank,
Alma represents the community he belongs to, a multicultural community that is both
comfortably familiar, and different from his own family, and therefore separated from the
tragedy that his family has suffered. Loving Alma allows Frank to associate himself
more closely with the more progressive, open and multi-ethnic genealogical society that
he identifies with. It also legitimizes his citizenship as an American through his participation in her community, creating a local alternative to the national belonging that overlooked and/or criminalized his presence as an American.

Similarly, for Alma, the way Frank is positioned as an autological subject makes her own position possible and acceptable. For Alma, Frank is an alternative to the men and the futures that Alma sees as possibilities in her life. Choosing Frank gives her agency, the possibility to imagine something else:

Frank was gravity and fortitude – not a forced, oppressive silence, but a man who didn’t air his grief; who bore his cross alone. She knew that he was pained, but also knew he would never ask for pity. His silence made hers acceptable. And he was not her brother, or aunt, or father – whatever difficulties and self-hatred their lives had conferred had passed over him, or at least taken another form. And yet, he was her brother, also – another soldier, a man of color. His skin was brown but of a different shade – wet sand, and not the earth.” (283)

The novel suggests that their intimacy is based upon a shared understanding that comes from having similarly contested, excluded and delegitimized subject positions, produced from similar effects through apparently wildly different genealogical societies and life events.

Frank found, with Alma, that he didn’t have to explain things – that when he told her his sister and father had died, she seemed to know what it had been like, marching slowly up the spine of Italy, grieving for the family now placed in the ground…that when he said he couldn’t find a job after
the war, he didn’t need to tell her about the “No Japs Wanted”
signs…Alma knew these things; she felt them. And while she gradually
gave Frank the straightforward, newspaper facts about her family’s history
– Rees’s murders and suicide; her aunt’s repeated stabbing of her violent,
cheating husband; her father’s drinking and struggling faith – she didn’t
have to explain to him, either. (281)

Frank and Alma, though they have had different experiences, come from different
backgrounds, and belong overtly to different communities, nonetheless can understand
and connect through experiences of the oppression and exclusion. Their shared
understanding exists across racial, class and gender boundaries. The relationship is
empowering for both, allowing Frank and Alma to see themselves, and each other as
equals, and therefore as complex, significant individuals with histories and desires:
“Every other woman had been surrender, acquiescences, soft pleasure wrapped in
whispers and laughter. But Alma Sams was like a tidal wave. She didn’t want to be
overpowered, or to overpower him. She needed to hurl herself at Frank, and to know that
he would be there to catch her…She took him. She contained him without giving
way…he met her halfway; he let her empty herself with him, and for this she was grateful
and loved him” (282).

However, although their relationship provides both Frank and Alma with the
potential for a life different from those envisioned by their genealogical societies, they
are ultimately unable to surmount the divisions created by the tensions in their
genealogical societies; they are pulled apart by one of the small violences of their lives.
Alma, who the narrator notes is the stronger of the two (Revoyr 282) envisions a future in
which their relationship is normalized and accepted by the state and the community – she imagines them married, and Frank is unable, for a crucial moment to imagine this alternate future:

She wondered if they’d ever get married. The young man didn’t utter a word, but she felt his whole body stiffen, and she pulled away and looked at him, confused. Wouldn’t you marry me? She asked…Yes, he said. Yes, of course I would…

“You hesitated. You had to think about it. I can’t believe you. I’m not good enough to marry?”

“That’s ridiculous,” he said. “You know I love you.”

“Do you?” She glared at him. “Is it?” (334)

Frank loves Alma and sees them together in the present, but he is still held too tightly by the expectations of his genealogical society and cannot imagine what a shared future would look like, or how it could occur. Even though he quickly re-evaluates to try to allow for the possibility, the damage is done. At the beginning of this conversation, their voices are shared – “Wouldn’t you marry me? She asked…yes, he said. Yes, of course I would…” – the lack of quotation marks or spacing indicating their closeness in their intimate connection and the vision they share of the world and of the future. But, as Frank hesitates, Alma pulls away metaphorically as well as physically, and their voices break into a split dialogue:

“You hesitated. You had to think about it. I can’t believe you. I’m not good enough to marry?”

“That’s ridiculous,” he said. “You know I love you.”
“Do you?” She glared at him. “Is it?” (334)

This separated dialogue signals that their intimate event has been interrupted by Frank’s failure to imagine a world in which he could be legally wed to Alma, and in Frank’s hesitation, we see the limits of the “intimate moment.” While these individual connections might allow Frank and Alma to come together across racial and cultural lines, they also do not exist entirely outside of these boundaries, and, ultimately, through the influence they have had on Frank, these boundaries reassert themselves and pull Frank and Alma apart. Alma and Frank separate on bad terms, and, when they discover she is pregnant, Alma’s parents remove her from LA, sending her to live with her sister in Oakland, where she marries an African American man, Bruce.

Though Frank and Alma are driven apart by Frank’s inability to envision a shared future, the story of their relationship provides the foundation for James and Jackie to do so. Franklin and McKinnon assert that:

kinship can be mobilized to signify not only specific kinds of connection and inclusion but also specific kinds of disconnection and exclusion – as well as the boundary-crossing trickster movements that confound such classifications. Since relations of power are central to the articulation of such classificatory boundaries and movements, kinship is also utilized to articulate the possibilities for social relations of equality, hierarchy, amity, ambivalence, and violence. In doing so, it becomes evident that kinship’s classificatory maneuvers can be mobilized to bring into being other categories of relationality. (15)
Through uncovering Frank and Alma’s story, Jackie and James’ understanding of their own backgrounds and thus themselves are altered – the inclusion of Frank and Alma’s love story into Jackie and into James’ personal histories changes the way each conceptualize family, understand the past, and envision the future.

Jackie and James’ recognition of Frank and Alma’s alternative experience and practice of love at once leads them to identify each other as family, and to expand their concepts of what is possible for their own identities, desires and futures. The moment of revelation comes when Jackie and James both claim Curtis as their kin, after meeting with Alma’s sister, Althea, who shows them a photograph of Curtis with Alma. Looking at a photograph, Jackie tries to determine the relationship between Curtis and Frank:

Curtis was a bit lighter-skinned than his brother, but still darker than Bruce [Alma’s husband] – dignified and handsome. And he was wiry and slight – like Alma, but also, perhaps, like Frank. She tried to see signs of her grandfather in him – the set of his mouth looked familiar and there was something around his eyes. But she couldn’t tell for sure…Then she thought, this is the boy that Grandpa loved, whatever the connection. (292)

Simultaneously, gazing at the same picture, James says, “that’s my cousin…that’s my man” (292). These speech acts, these acts of claiming shared kinship to Curtis solves the mystery and rewrites the structure of kinship permissible in and through the discourses of the genealogical society. Jackie and James both finally acknowledge the kinship between Frank and Curtis, and this altered understanding of kinship enables them to articulate and claim the legitimacy of the relationship between Frank and Alma. Jackie says to Althea:

“Mrs. Dickson, I think my grandfather really loved your sister…”
Althea swung around and looked at her. “Love ain’t something you feel, young lady. Love is something you do. And what’d Frank Sakai ever do for my sister?”

“A lot,” Jackie said.

“He did,” Lanier concurred. (281)

Jackie and James’ assertion that Frank’s practices count as love therefore legitimizes the relationship between Frank and Alma – they recognize, through Frank’s actions towards Alma and Curtis after Frank and Alma break up that what Frank and Alma shared was not just attraction. Frank’s continued efforts to be involved in Curtis’ life are the tangible pieces of Curtis’ love for Alma – from Frank’s initial decision to give Curtis a job to his efforts to provide a space in which people can interact across racial barriers.

The relationship between James and Jackie as they acknowledge their shared kinship brings together their genealogical societies. As a result, they are able to share a kinship bond, and a version of intimacy which the novel reveals to be based not on sexual desire but on a shared vision of the future, and a shared understanding of which America they want to be a part of, and work together to create. By working together to recover, and therefore normalize the relationship between Frank and Alma, Jackie and James finish and continue Frank and Alma’s intimate event. Jackie and James discover a collaborative power, and are able to find belonging and identification with each other across racial lines. For Jackie in particular, both her relationship with Lanier and her increased awareness of the importance of community to her grandfather leads her to choose to become engaged in her community, and to work with Lanier to struggle against the racism and violence in the community, as her grandfather once did.
The recovery of Frank’s secret history in the novel also creates the potential for a new, alternative romantic future for Jackie, as Jackie’s realization of Frank’s alternative method of belonging sets up her own alternative kinship connection. Once she and James have solved the mystery, recognized the intimate connection between Frank and Alma, and identified the kinship between Frank and Curtis, Jackie’s understanding of the possibilities of kinship and belonging in her own culture complete their shift. At the beginning of the novel, Jackie had largely, though mostly unconsciously, rejected the multi-ethnic Crenshaw genealogical society to which her grandfather had been so strongly connected. Her mother and father had moved her out of the area and into largely-white suburbia. Jackie, without intentionally cutting herself off from her grandfather’s community, had drifted away from him, into a job as a corporate lawyer, and into a relationship with Laura, a white local political aide. As her friend Rebecca points out, Jackie is often disconnected from her ethnic and family history: “She suspected that it had to do with Laura and with the place where she grew up, and with the fact that, except for Rebecca herself, Jackie didn’t really have any Asian friends” (104). In fact, at times, Jackie appears to be not only disconnected from her Asian American history but almost repulsed by it. Growing up and attending school in a primarily white community, with parents who placed more emphasis on successful careers than on family connections, Jackie has internalized the very cultural discourses regarding Japanese Americans that Frank chose to reject, viewing her kinship to Japanese Americans as subordinate to her affiliation with white, corporate and state America. Rebecca, as a Japanese American woman who is strongly connected to Asian American history and communities in Los Angeles through her own family background and her job with a non-
profit group that provided legal aid to immigrants, represents to Jackie a connection to an Asian American community privileges bonds with the local and multi-ethnic community above affiliation with the state. Jackie therefore initially finds Rebecca interesting but “unerotic”:

She’d never go for Rebecca…despite, or maybe because of (as Laura said) “the things they had in common.” It wasn’t that she didn’t find her friend attractive or appealing. But Rebecca was half-Japanese, and despite her green almond-shaped eyes and wavy brown hair, she looked Asian enough to turn Jackie off; to make Jackie think of her as a mirror she didn’t want to look into. Kissing Rebecca would be like kissing a sister, if she had one – unerotic, strange, slightly creepy. But it was more than that.

Rebecca, with her brains, her looks, and above all, her panache, made Jackie feel stiff and boring in comparison.” (105)

At this point in the novel, while Jackie is following the expectations of her upwardly mobile parents and grandmother, Rebecca represents both a stationary choice and a reminder of a particular identification of Asian American (and particular queer Asian American) that Jackie shies away from affiliating with.

Yet as she uncovers more of her grandfather’s life, and begins to build her own connections with the Crenshaw community through James and through all of the people who love and remember her grandfather, Jackie feels increasingly ill at ease with her relationship with Laura and with her choices about her career. Once she and James have solved the mystery, recognized the intimate connection between Frank and Alma, and identified the kinship between Frank and Curtis, Jackie’s understanding of the
possibilities of kinship and belonging in her own culture complete their shift. She sees her own kinship with James, through Curtis, and the multi-ethnic community represented by Crenshaw through James and Frank. Her recognition of these kinship and kin-like bonds redefines her relationship with her genealogical society, allowing her to be connected to the local multi-ethnic community, and that local connection facilitates her connection with a global Asian community. She becomes increasingly interested in incidents of oppression and violence towards the Asian immigrant population in California, and breaks off her relationship with Laura. As her connection to the genealogical society, and her understanding of kinship changes, Jackie finds herself drawn to Rebecca. At the end of the novel, Jackie’s perception of Rebecca has transformed, so that the similarities and differences between them are no longer restrictive; Jackie finds Rebecca, and everything she represents, and which Jackie had previously rejected, desirable. She initiates a relationship with Rebecca, and creates the opportunity for a shared intimate event, finding in Rebecca a possibility to recognize and reconnect with her past, and the possibilities her grandfather and Alma dared to dream of:

Gently, patiently, Rebecca kissed her again, and Jackie felt something loosen in her, something ancient and glacial start to creak and break free…Jackie felt the relief, as Rebecca’s hand moved down her neck and over her shoulder and onto her breast, of being with someone who was capable of meeting her halfway. Jackie touched Rebecca’s face, her smooth, long back, and pulled her tighter, closer. And she knew, for the first time – and finally, with this person – that in surrendering herself, she
would also, somehow, be given herself in return – stronger, newer, and complete. (343-4)

While Frank’s intimate relationship with Alma lends legitimacy to his position as an American citizen through a connection to the local community, Jackie is strongly connected to the state already through her own participation in white upper-middle class society and as a lawyer. The effects of her intimate event therefore offer a different effect for Jackie. Jackie’s intimate relationship with Rebecca allows her to experience a connection with herself as a part of her family’s history, and as a part of the local multi-ethnic community recognizing, as Frank did that – “in surrendering herself, she would also, somehow be given herself in return.” The self she is given is a self-built on knowledge and acceptance of the past, of her grandfather’s legacy. And so, as a direct result of uncovering Frank’s secret history, Jackie is able to reconstruct her understanding of her own history and identity, and to imagine an impossible future.
Chapter Three: Who We See When We See Violence: Violence, Gender and Ethnicity in What You See in the Dark

*Southland*, by Nina Revoyr, stages the argument that cultural constructions of kin and kinship relations structured at the intersections of race, class and gender often lead to violent divisions rather than to belonging. In a similar search for the roots of violence, Manuel Muñoz, in his novel *What You See in the Dark*, traces the contributions of gender, ethnicity and class to the alienation of individuals from each other and from their communities, and suggests that such alienation affects what sorts of violence we can see, and against whom we see violence being done. However, Muñoz also implicates media representations of violence against women as a cause of gendered, classed, and racialized violence, and paradoxically, a reason that such lived experiences of violence against marginalized people may be difficult for white Americans to see. The novel’s implicit and explicit comparisons of middle class life in rural California to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* suggest that Hollywood’s stylish, black and white rendering of violence against white women both enables and erases the everyday, structural, racialized violence of the 1950s American west. Through the interactions of key female characters, who occupy several different subject positions, Muñoz posits an ethical model of subjectivity through which women can come to knowledge through the presence of a female other who reflects, or reflects with a difference, the self. Yet, as Muñoz demonstrates,

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27 Muñoz is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, as well as a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts. His short story “Tell Him About Brother John” won the 2009 PEN/O. Henry Award. The foundational Chicana author Helena María Viramontes, who acted as a mentor for Muñoz during his graduate work at Cornell University, has lauded Muñoz’s writing as “not merely a contribution to Latina/o letters, but a major breakthrough” (“Reviews”).
representations of women in popular culture that turn women into objectified, and often sexualized, others limit the possibility of self-knowledge. Muñoz posits a theoretical model of violence that reconstructs how, and against whom, we see violence by connecting the structural violence done to women who internalize Hollywood representations of women, with the invisibility of structural violence and physical violence, and Psycho’s voyeuristic narrative of male-female violence.

In the novel, Muñoz contrasts the filming of Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho with daily life in Bakersfield, California, in order to demonstrate how American cinema – characterized by dramatic plotlines and glossy stylizations – obscures the mundane and unplotted nature of daily life. Muñoz’s novel therefore is also a part of an American realism of the late Twentieth century, which follows postmodernist experimentation – an aesthetic choice which Muñoz leverages as an antidote to experimentation that might obscure violence and undermine marginalized voices and Latino/a experiences. Muñoz uses second person in certain sections to enable a point of view that exposes the limitations of individual perspective is a direct response to Hitchcock’s films and their voyeuristic, objectifying aesthetics.

What You See in the Dark focuses on the story of a young woman, Teresa Garza, and the rippling effects of her murder at the time of the filming of Alfred Hitchcock’s iconic film Psycho. Set in Bakersfield, California in the late 1950s, where Psycho was staged, the noir-esque novel traces the lives of characters in the small community leading up to and following Teresa’s murder in order to reveal that the indirect violence done to women by objectification, and by the privileging of white and middle-class stories, has an array of ramifications. Muñoz suggests that one ramification plays out in areas of
knowability: women become disconnected from themselves and from other women, unable to know each other, or to know themselves, as demonstrated by the interactions between four women: the Actress, who is driven to Bakersfield to prepare for filming *Psycho*; Arlene, a waitress at the town diner who, with her son Dan, owns and operates a roadside motel; Teresa, a young Mexican-American woman who has fended for herself since her mother abandoned her; Candy, a young white middle-class woman who works with Teresa at the Bakersfield shoe store. Arlene and the Actress, and Candy and Teresa. The novel posits its ethical model of subjectivity through the interactions of these women, set against the filming of *Psycho*.

Muñoz suggests that “popular culture” and “cinema” condition us to see and value certain types of violence – particularly direct physical violence perpetrated by an identifiable (and usually male) actor against a young, white, middle-class female victim – while obscuring the violence that happens outside of these specifications. In the novel, whiteness displays its privileged status through exposing the film’s normalization of violence towards women as being either only violence towards white women, or at least only being when it is violence towards white women, especially young, beautiful, middle or upper class white women. The normative status of whiteness in the film in turn works to reinforce the violences towards women and towards “others” more generally. *What You See in the Dark* reveals that the real violence of *Psycho* is not Marion’s murder, but the portrayal of Marion’s murder as exploitative and voyeuristic gendered violence. Doing the same kind of critique of cinematic violence, we can see how 1950s Hollywood film and the film industry turned young white women into objects to be seen, watched and desired even in their own eyes – and in doing so, rendered “others” including
Chicana women invisible, vulnerable and ultimately erased. The novel therefore sheds light on the real psycho predator – not Norman Bates, but the structural violence that is often overlooked in everyday life.

By redirecting the focus of violence in the novel from the man with a knife, Muñoz is able to foreground the experiences of the women who suffer violence, thus creating a model of violence where we see not the motivations of the killer, but the social inequalities that normalize women, especially women marginalized by class or ethnicity, as victims. Centering our view on women and women’s experiences also reveals the wide-reaching and diffuse effects of structural violence. Such structural violence, the novel suggests, affects all women, though differently according to privilege and position. The intersections of violence are additionally complicated by their rootedness in gendered or racialized discourses: Muñoz suggests that the perpetuation of violence is in fact the norm, and what makes experiences of violence different is the specific make-up of each act of violence directed towards women. By presenting the suffering of violence as a norm, Muñoz reveals the operation of privilege in violence.

*What You See in the Dark* contrasts everyday violence and the long-reaching effects of murder with the cinematic portrayal of voyeurism-fueled violence featured in movies like *Psycho* to reveal representational ruptures inherent in typical Hollywood constructions of women, marginalized Americans and violence. In discussing violence in the context of *What You See in the Dark*, I draw upon Johan Galtung’s theories of violence as he addresses how “violence” operates in government, cultural and societal structures, as well as in individual acts of person-on-person violence, a definition that is useful for understanding why and how Teresa’s murder is connected with the Actress’s,
Candy’s and Arlene’s alienation in the novel. Galtung also suggests that, like direct violence, violence in a social system disproportionately affects disenfranchised groups, and in fact, furthers that disenfranchisement, a theory that helps us to understand why the violence against Teresa is so hard for characters in the novel to see or understand. In this context, violence occurs when human beings are influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations, or, in other words, when personal physical and spiritual health and wellbeing is impinged upon or limited whether by a specific actor or structure (“Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” 168). When violence is enacted by a specific subject, it is considered direct violence, but violence can also occur where there is no clear actor, when a victim’s potential is limited by structural or systematic inequalities, something Galtung has labeled “structural violence.” Unequal access to healthcare for the lower class or for minorities is an example of such indirect, structural violence, as limited health care, while not perhaps immediately life-threatening, might reduce both quality and length of life.

Muñoz’s novel suggests that the operation of indirect violence perpetuated against women by popular cinema and mass media generates and obscures direct violence by channeling the social ontology (the socially accepted method of understanding and knowing) of direct violence. Specifically, actions of direct violence in the novel, such as Teresa’s murder, are shown as only one facet (though a particularly brutal facet) of violence, that affects women. The experience of indirect violence against women is ubiquitous, as demonstrated by the experiences of the women in What You See in the Dark, and how violence plays out in the lives of these women depends on their ethnicity and social class. But class and race also play roles in the social perception of violence,
and the privileging of white women’s experiences masks how violence stretches across class and racial borders. Muñoz’s novel looks at a variety of violences and their interactions, ranging from the violence that impacts Arlene’s life as a result of her husband’s desertion, forcing her to work multiple jobs with long hours in order to provide for herself and her son, to the violence that the Actress experiences in the form of sexism that results from the oppression of women in Hollywood. Both Arlene and the Actress experience violence as a result of cultural expectations for women’s behavior and appearance, particularly as they are spread by popular culture in the forms of Hollywood movies and entertainment magazines. And Teresa, before she is murdered, experiences a violence of alienation, the result of both her mother’s abandonment in search of idealized romance, and of the class and racial prejudices that haunt this small town. These are examples of indirect violence through which “insight and/or resources are monopolized by a group or class or are used for other purposes, then the actual level falls below the potential level, and violence is present in the system” (“Violence, Peace, and Peace Research” 169).

Structural and direct violence in the novel operates along the seams of gender, class, and race to normalize violence against women and reveal connected privileges – in the context of which violences are visible and are given attention by the community – of whiteness and the upper and middle-class. In terms of class, the novel presents the privileged upper-class, white Actress and relatively privileged middle-class, white Candy as experiencing similar forms of indirect violence that stem from attempts to measure themselves and their lives against Hollywood ideals of women and their experiences. The resulting violence is a rupture between reality and expectation that limits their
potential to connect with other women in their communities, and which can be seen in the Actress’s inability to reconcile her celebrity image with her personal identity (which leads her to clash with Arlene) and Candy’s jealousy towards, and inability to understand, Teresa. Arlene and Candy’s resulting inability to bridge this divide in their own identities between who they think they should be and what they think they want, against who they are and what they desire suggests that they need to find an alternative source for identification and understanding. Each woman seeks to connect with another – Arlene with the Actress and Candy with Teresa – but their ability to recognize self and other, reality and representation, has become tangled in celluloid stories. However, their experiences and the degree of violence they experience is complicated by class – Candy, a middle-class young woman has options and prospects represented by her “sweet boy,” where Arlene, an older woman who works at the diner while also maintaining the hotel her husband left behind when he abandoned the family, is in a relatively less-privileged position. While both are alienated, Arlene’s experience of indirect violence has a stronger effect, distancing her from others in the community so that she can’t even see the possibilities for romantic involvement, as, for example, when she actively ignores Vernon’s cautious advances (41).

In these experiences of violence, race and ethnicity complicate Arlene, the Actress, Candy, and Teresa’s class privileges, or lack thereof. Muñoz’s 1950s Bakersfield demonstrates that the focus in our culture on the violence done to white upper-class or middle-class women can mask and even exploit the violence done to nonwhite women and/or lower class women. The novel, following late twentieth century American realism, acts as a response to the authors and scholars in the late twentieth
century who argued that the postmodern move took away the possibility for marginalized voices to be heard. Choosing to represent the effects of cinematic representations of women and violence on women in a specific community, through a narrative whose style signals a return to American realism, allows Munoz to both demonstrate the invisibility of violence against marginalized women and to recenter their stories. In the novel, these violences differently affect those with fewer resources with which to combat or counteract them. Teresa, as a young, lower-class (and entirely on her own, as her mother abandoned her to search for romance in Texas) Chicana woman, is in a very precarious position. She consequently suffers multiple structural and direct violences – she is ignored by the townspeople, her relationship with Dan is frowned upon by many people, including Arlene, who see her as an inappropriate partner for Dan, and often literally hidden away at work until they need her to speak Spanish with a customer – yet she also has a level of insight the other women are denied which allows her to recognize the distancing effect of living one life while expecting another. The murder of Teresa, at the hands of her wealthier, white boyfriend Dan (Arlene’s son) is omnipresent in the novel, though the scene of the murder itself is not sensationalized. This has the effect of normalizing direct violence against marginalized women to the point where it becomes practically invisible – an invisibility repeated in the spectral, sublimated death of Teresa. Teresa’s death, as it is not written in the novel, and as the majority of the characters do

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28 Critics including Craig Womack and Susan Stanford Friedman argued that privileging postmodern experimentation above representations of human lives and experiences silenced those who used such representations to reveal inequality.
not react to it, is shrouded in silence, mystery, and a distinct lack of sensationalism that is pointedly in contrast to Marion’s murder in *Psycho*.

Paradoxically, the privileged Actress becomes synonymous with violence through the role she plays in *Psycho*, while Teresa’s violent death is nearly invisible to her indifferent community. Teresa’s experiences of violence are rendered invisible to society because, as a nonwhite, lower class woman, Teresa is less significant than a white, middle-class movie character, and so her experiences are less visible. The knowability and (in)visibility of violence both underpin and play out in interactions between the Actress and Arlene, and Teresa and Candy. The experiences of the women, and reactions to and representations of their respective experiences within the novel, reveal the presence of dominant racial and class hierarchies in representations of and reactions to gendered violence.

The interactions between Arlene and the Actress demonstrate how popular culture, delivered in this case by Hollywood films and entertainment magazines, alienates women from their community, from other women, and even from themselves. When women in the novel internalize messages from popular culture regarding how to be a woman, they can experience a divide in their identities between who they think they are, and who they believe they should be. Arlene feels removed from her community first by losing her individual identity in her marriage to Frederick Watson – “She had stood in front of the municipal judge for hardly ten minutes and then stepped away with the same name. Arlene Watson. Except now, as Frederick’s wife, she had no first name” – and later by the effects of her husband’s abandonment (40). Frederick’s departure cements the emotional distance Arlene experiences, when “she knew how, behind her back,
people talked about how Frederick had left her. She knew that. It was that kind of town” (42). When Arlene’s husband leaves her, Arlene is left with a son, a roadside motel, and bitterness towards the other women in her community. Alienated, she lacks any form of physical or emotional support. She feels prematurely aged and unable to reach out to those around her, even when she works in close contact with community members in her job at the diner. This isolation is illustrated in her interaction with Cal, a young man who often eats at the diner:

Sometimes Cal forgot his manners and wore his hat indoors, as he was doing today. He was young. She reached up and removed the hat for him, as she had been wanting to do all morning long. He put his hand sheepishly on the hat but made no apology, keeping his finger on the newspaper. She had wanted the gesture to be playful, a suggestion that she was approachable and not just the one among the older waitresses with a hard line for a mouth, but Cal had offered no real reaction, as if she had never done anything at all. (41)

Cal’s lack of “real reaction” to her gesture, either vocally – he “made no apology” – nor physically – “keeping his finger on the newspaper” as though she had not reached out – compounds Arlene’s sense that she has no connection to or effect on the world around her, that her actions are discounted “as if she had never done anything at all” (41). The world moves along without her much as the highway moves away from her roadside motel, taking customers and income with it (42).

Arlene’s disassociation from others is rooted in her perception of herself as a woman without worth, a direct result of her internalization of some of the expectations of
women built into 1950s American social structures. These expectations, for her and others like her, have been disseminated and reinforced through popular culture, particularly by movies that present young women as objects rather than actors in their own lives. Muñoz, writing in the twenty-first century about the 1950s and 60s invokes a critical gaze, a theoretical concept introduced in Laura Mulvey’s foundational “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” While Mulvey’s theory may seem dated in twenty-first century application, Muñoz is writing about the 1950s, and about the very films that helped Mulvey to theorize the gaze. His interrogation and reversals of the male gaze are therefore appropriate for the subject matter, and demonstrate the applicability of the theory for understanding issues that persist into the twenty-first century – namely, how women suffer a type of indirect violence when they internalize self-worth in response to popular media, and the difficulty they have in reconciling the fantasy life of films with the realities and complexities of lived experience. Following Mulvey then, we understand that men are generally presented as a surrogate for the viewer, a “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ego ideal” with whom the male audience can identify (Mulvey 20). Women on film in contrast, often act as erotic objects, not portraying people with agency or interior lives but receptacles for male fantasy and desire, so that they appear either “as erotic object for the characters within the screen story” or “as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 19). The novel suggests, as does

29 Mulvey’s theories have since been contested and complicated by scholars including John Fiske, Stuart Hall, Linda Hutcheon and Teresa de Lauretis.
Mulvey, that the differentiation between male and female active/passive roles onscreen has an effect on the way that women think about and perceive themselves and others around them. Arlene has trouble reconciling her own internal thoughts and desires with those of the people around her as she constantly judges herself by the expectations of female beauty and desirability that movies demonstrate are necessary for a woman who deserves to be loved. In addition, there is a disconnect in her thinking about interiority. She knows that she has interiority – that she is a thinking, feeling, actor in her own life – but simultaneously, she shares the culturally-dominant view of women as passive objects without interiority. Even if she were able to articulate a rich interior life, because she does not measure up to societal ideals of women, her story would be unwelcome, and would go unheard:

What she wanted to tell the girl waitresses was that life was not anything like those magazines, but she did not want to sound like a bitter woman. She had stories of her own to prove it. But how was she supposed to tell them when no one bothered to ask about her life? Especially not lately, since Frederick had left her, and all around her swirled assumptions about the reasons why… She wanted to put down the coffeepot, the slice of apple pie, rest her hand on Priscilla’s shoulder, and explain, to tell her real story, as it happened. To say to all of them, *There’s the story you think you know, and there’s the one I need to tell you.* (51).

Mulvey suggests that “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 19). Following
Mulvey’s argument that discourse and ideology are unconsciously absorbed, the source of Arlene’s dissatisfaction lies in Arlene’s desire to be an active participant in her life and community – signaled through her desire to be called “Arlene – which is irreconcilable with her urge, derived as a result of gender norms in mass culture – represented by the insistence of the townspeople to refer to her as “Mrs. Watson” years after her husband’s betrayal, to be passive and, like the women in the films, to perform a masculine ideal of femininity. She is unable to connect to others because she is unable to identify, much less negotiate, this internal tension.

Arlene’s brief interaction with the Actress pivots on Arlene’s internalization of popular media’s messages about women’s worth and subjectivity and reveals that these messages make it difficult for women to reconcile lived experiences with cinematic representations. In the following scene, this difficulty is shown to be directly tied into Arlene’s inability to understand and connect to the Actress, or to herself. Arlene asks the Actress if she really is the celebrity the Actress resembles:

“Pardon me,” she said, “but does anyone ever tell you that you look like -”

“the woman interrupted her with a wave of her hand and a shy, almost nervous smile.

“Oh, no! Not in the least.”

“You mean no one tells you?”

“No, I mean I don’t think I look like her at all.”

…She wouldn’t take her eyes off Arlene. Finally, she asked, “Is there something wrong?”

“No, ma’am,” said Arlene. (46)
Muñoz’s description of Arlene’s interaction with the Actress emphasizes Arlene’s alienation by reproducing the processes of representation in film. Yet, as Iris Young argues, “the image of the woman has not ceased being that of the Other,” and so, knowledge through identification with another woman is continually deferred by internalized Otherness (3). As films such as Hitchcock’s represent women as objects for the male gaze, they desensitize viewers to women’s emotions and obscure the possibility of seeing a woman as an actor in her own story, rather than an object of desire in a man’s story.

The interactions between Arlene and the Actress, the shared desire for understanding, with the specter of male-driven Hollywood lingering in their interactions, implicate this reduction of women from subject to object onscreen in the alienation of women from themselves and from other women. Muñoz deploys an array of “male gazes” throughout the novel – The Director’s, the chauffeur’s, the men in the café many of whom don’t look up, Dan’s, the boyfriend’s, the Mexicans who call to Teresa, Cheno’s, the shoe store owner’s, the patrons at the club where Teresa sings. Alexandra Howson, following Simone de Beauvoir and building on Iris Young’s argument from *Throwing Like a Girl*, explains that “women are encouraged to become more aware of themselves as ‘objects’ of others’s scrutiny. In public spaces where the female body is potentially transgressive, the ‘male gaze’ operates as a disciplining mechanism that encourages docility” (73). The objectification of women’s bodies in film plays out in the novel as a self-regulation of women’s agency and subjectivity. For Arlene, the inability of society to consider women as subjects rather than objects creates an impenetrable
distance between herself and other women – even while she longs to connect with them, she cannot:

[Arlene] looked one more time at the woman, as if to invite her once again to admit that she was or wasn’t who they all thought. But the woman only stared back at her with a face so shorn of feeling that Arlene did as she had before – she looked away – and her thank-you to the customers came as it did on those days when she was most exhausted, the sunlight orange in the plate-glass windows and the hours too slow, her voice caught in her throat, the very sound that reaffirmed everyone’s worst possible imaginings about her. What man, after all, would have stayed with someone who spoke so sharply, in such an unfriendly tone, her head hanging? (50).

Arlene herself also therefore links her inability to connect with the Actress and her inability to perform to societal expectations of female behavior and attractiveness – “her voice caught in her throat, the very sound that reaffirmed everyone’s worst possible imaginings about her” – with male desire (or lack thereof) – “What man, after all, would have stayed with someone who spoke so sharply, in such an unfriendly tone.”

For Muñoz then, when women’s interactions with each other, and indeed their individual values, are mediated by the assumed presence and expectations of male viewers and desires, relationships between women are impossible – or at least the kinds of interactions between women that would affirm self-image/identity:

As she walked away, she muttered, “the spitting image,” regretting it instantly. The words came out low, almost under her breath, maybe even with a note of unintended hostility – here was the perception about her all
over again, the way she carried herself, but now with people who didn’t
even live in the city. She wasn’t a mean, cheerless person at all, just
exhausted, unable to summon the spirited smiles of the young waitresses,
the way they pitched their voices high and loud and sunny, always enough
to turn a whole table of men deep in conversation to answer back. It was
difficult to balance her tone or the need to smile, like trying to remember
to correct her posture, trying to stand straight as a dancer. (47)

Arlene is influenced by social norms and expectations that police women’s appearances
and behavior – “spirited smiles,” “high and sunny” voices, remembering to “correct her
posture” and to “stand straight as a dancer.” She believes that, because her exhaustion
makes it difficult for her to perform to these expectations, she is both unliked by others,
she assumes, who see her as “mean, cheerless,” and unworthy of their attention. And, as
her muttered “the spitting image” reveals, the Actress’s refusal to acknowledge her
celebrity further feeds this disconnect. The Actress refuses to acknowledge her celebrity
in part because it is not actually her – it is only an image, a Hollywood representation of
her likeness. Yet the ramifications of the denial for Arlene create a further disconnect
between who she is and who she thinks she should be – a denial of the self that reflects
the other also creates an additional fracturing or distancing of the self. For, if Arlene
structures herself unconsciously in response to Hollywood representations of women and
femininity through the images of women like the Actress, this denial unsettles the
foundations of her self-perception. In other words, the “real” Actress can’t really “be” –
an aspect of reproduction signified in the novel by Muñoz’s avoidance of the Actress’s
real name. In referring consistently to her as “the Actress,” Muñoz reveals a division
between the actress and “the Actress” as a celebrity. The Actress’s disavowal of being the woman Arlene and the others believe her to be also points to this rupture, as the Actress, as a living woman, is not and cannot be “the Actress” disseminated through popular media. This “spitting image” also reveals a duality or fracturing of identity which Arlene shares, as Arlene’s thoughts circle constantly around the type of woman she thinks she should be, and the type of woman she thinks she is.

The distancing effect of the cinematic messages about women that circulate around Arlene and the Actress, and which separate them, depend, in part, on the women’s willingness to buy into them. Neither woman is entirely passive in receiving these messages; Arlene in particular gives them power by actively believing them to be true. Arlene sees herself as divorced from others, left behind, unwanted, while missing the opportunities granted by people like Vernon Jones, a local farmer whose interest is rejected by Arlene, when, for example, she misses the opportunity to interact with him: “‘Bye, now,’ Vernon said, and stepped out the door, just as Arlene was setting the cups down. She was too focused on setting them down...that by the time she could raise her head to return his good-bye, the door had already closed” (46). But what Arlene considers as the misperception of others is actually her own perception of herself, the result of the combined social valuations of women’s worth judged through men’s attention. Her husband Frederick’s departure signals a departure of Arlene’s value. Women are perceived as objects not actors in pop culture and the lack of representation of older women in pop culture that adds to a sense of their lack of worth. The narrative structure of the novel obscures the validity of Arlene’s perception, creating space to read the ways in which motivations and identities are obscured to our perception. We don’t
know whether Arlene’s sense of low self-worth is shared by others. But this is a component of the structural violence done to Arlene – she is made to feel as though she is without value, as a woman, as an older woman (though she is only 47), and as a woman whose husband has left her. She allows this violence in part by internalizing these messages.

Perhaps for her interactions with the Actress to have a significant effect on Arlene, so that she can begin to break down the barriers she has built up by internalizing cinematic representations of women, the interaction must involve the Actress. The Actress (otherwise unnamed woman) embodies at once the general experiences of women in this day, a Hollywood type, and Janet Leigh’s iconic performance as Marion in *Psycho*. The Actress embodies the interaction between screen space and life space, the give and take between representation and reality, for, as Mulvey suggests, “Stars provide a focus or centre both to screen space and screen story where they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)” (18). In confronting the Actress regarding whether she is who she appears to be, Arlene is also confronting herself about her own difficulty reconciling her lived experiences with the expectations for her life generated and compounded by contact with American popular culture. Her thoughts link the Actress’s refusal to be identified – “as she walked away, she muttered ‘the spitting image’” – with her own sense of failing to perform a desired identity – “The words came out low, almost under her breath, maybe even with a note of unintended hostility – here was the perception about her all over again, the way she carried herself, but now with people who didn’t even live in the city” (47). Where earlier
Arlene felt disconnected from her community in Bakersfield, she now also feels out of place in a broader sense, “with people who didn’t even live in the city.”

Yet Arlene’s encounter with the Actress also reveals the possibility of connection, and offers a way to redefine the action of “looking” as a method of connection when the looking is done by women. It also suggests, however, that when women do connect – in the sense of seeing each other – the result is not necessarily affirming, as they may still suffer negative effects from unequitable privilege:

It occurred to Arlene, too, that the woman had stared back because Arlene had indeed discovered something, and it felt like the same stare she gave herself in the early morning hours, just out of bed, when she stared unblinking into the bathroom mirror and wondered how she could go on the way she was, working two jobs and not knowing what was to become of the motel. The thing was, it was easy to know what troubled her. Her face in the bathroom mirror during the early morning hours said it all. Her face stared back at her, as if waiting for Arlene to ask something of herself. (55)

In looking at the Actress, and prompting the Actress to look at her, Arlene is able to see herself in the Actress’ face, allowing for a moment of identification. This identification is uncomfortable because Arlene is uncomfortable with looking at herself, so that even when she looks in the mirror, she looks at “her face,” as distinct from “herself.” Her focus on “the face” signals that sees only the representation and not the interiority. Her discomfort stems from her dissatisfaction with her life and her discomfort with the role she continues to play. Yet her discomfort is key, as it demonstrates the possibility for
women to connect, and to learn something more about themselves in learning more about another woman and vice versa, when they are in control of the direction and meaning of the gaze. And, as the line “As if waiting for Arlene to ask something of herself” suggests, there is also room in this recognition for the women to choose how to interact with each other – negatively or positively.

The Actress’s response to her interactions with Arlene also raises questions of appropriation, and the brief, strange connection between Arlene and the Actress stages an explicit parallel to the processes of representation and objectification of women within Hollywood films and, consequently, circulated through American culture. Arlene and the Actress’ next encounter, in which the Director takes the Actress to Arlene’s motel and asks for her assistance in winning Arlene’s compliance for the location to be used in the film, shows that women must control the gaze in order to identify with each other. Arlene becomes angry and hostile to the Actress when her “deceit” regarding her celebrity identity is revealed. Yet Arlene’s anger makes it possible for the Actress to feel a brief sense of identification with Arlene. The Actress uses this interaction and her response to Arlene’s strong emotions to begin to project an interior life for her character on the screen. Such an act could complicate how women are portrayed in film, how viewers think about the women on the screen, and how women are able to interact with each other outside of film. The Director, with no knowledge or interest in the context of Arlene’s life or of Arlene and the Actress’ interactions, believes that he best understands the simple financial desires that motivate Arlene, so he issues instructions to the Actress, in essence controlling the Actress’s interactions with Arlene. The Actress follows the Director’s instructions, though she recognizes that, in light of their previous encounter,
Arlene may not react well to the Actress, and to the Director’s requests. Following instructions from the Director, the Actress asks Arlene for permission to use the motel, but Arlene, stung by the realization that the Actress lied about her identity, refuses:

There was a point when the woman knew exactly who the Actress was, and she stopped almost midstride, close enough to the car to speak without having to raise her voice[...] “you…,” the woman said[...] “you’re movie people…I asked you in the café if you…,” said the woman, shaking her head. “You lied to me.” [...] The woman folded her arms. Though she stood a bit away from the car, there was no mistaking that she was small framed, her thin brown hair pulled tight in a bun, her eyes souring at them in distrust, her mouth pursing downward. (139-40)

And so the Actress’s request to use Arlene’s motel as a location for the film fails, insofar as the Director is unable to accomplish his goal.

The Director alienated Arlene and the Actress from each other in a way that parallels the invisibility of class and gender inequalities in popular culture and reveals the alienating processes of cinematic representation of women. This second exchange between Arlene and the Actress is mediated by the Director, who has no direct interactions with Arlene and who clearly is uninterested in more accurately understanding her position or desires as he glosses over both Arlene and the Actress’ objections and is either unable or unwilling to read Arlene’s reactions. Since he neither understands Arlene, nor desires to, his instructions only result in further alienating her:

“To be honest,” said the woman, “I don’t like dealing with liars.” “Tell her we’ll compensate handsomely,” the Director said. “I do think we
could manage a nice compensation,” said the Actress. “For all your time.”

“You Los Angeles people…” The women shook her head. “You think money solves everything…” (141)

The Director reduces Arlene’s value to the need for a set for the movie shoot, and projects on her his desire for her agreement and his assumptions about class and gender. The Director neither speaks to Arlene nor attempts to discern what she might want, what might convince her to allow them access to her space. He dismisses and simplifies her as easily as he reduces her motel to an imagined replica: “‘So unpleasant,’ said the Director. ‘In any case, I’m sure the set decorator can put together a typical room from a few paragraphs. It’s an easy layout to copy. Flat, rectangular. Nothing complex’” (141). In the Director’s view, Arlene is contiguous to her motel: single-layered, easily understandable, and easily reproduced because she lacks complexity and uniqueness. In instructing the Actress in this commercial transaction with Arlene, the Director reduces both women to instruments for his own gain. And, positioned as instruments in this transaction, the women are thus unable to connect as human beings.

The Actress is able to identify with Arlene as human beings only when the Director is not interceding. When the Director intercedes, either directly through his commands to the Actress, or indirectly as a part of Arlene’s internalized perception of femininity, which is largely rooted in Hollywood stereotypes, the Actress’s rapport with

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30 The Director similarly reduces the Actress during filming – as the Actress realizes during the movie shoot, the Director is more interested in camera angles and body movements than in the inner life of her character, so that “all she had in her head about this woman’s vulnerability, her moment of surprise, and her terror was now revealing itself to be almost irrelevant” (181).
Arlene is broken. Arlene’s complexity refutes the Director’s perception of women as uncomplicated tools who lack interiority and subjectivity. The Actress, in contrast, stops to think about Arlene’s emotions, which leads her to wonder about her experiences, her life, her desires:

The ride back was quiet. She thought about the woman, her fierce response to their presence, to her small white lie. What kind of person was she to react with such defensive hurt? she wondered. The woman was a café hostess, but what was she doing at the motel? Was it a second job? No, not if she was still wearing the uniform. Perhaps she was married to the man who owned Watson’s Inn, an unhappy marriage, given the way the Actress had noticed the woman casting glances at her and Carter [her driver] during their meal. The woman had tried to figure out if she could place her as a Hollywood star, to be sure, but she had also paid mind to the way she set down the plates in front of Carter, her eyes darting quickly to his face as if to gauge if he was pleased. A café waitress. A wife. A motel owner. A harried café waitress. A lonely wife. A desperate motel owner. She spun the words in her head, more and more of them, inventing, watching Bakersfield come into view. Who could live in this city? What brought or kept them here? (142-43).

Arlene[^31] is the key for the Actress to see into the interior lives of rural, working class people and seeing her as a subject is what allows “Bakersfield [to] come into view” for

[^31]: Arlene has class markers that identify her as working or lower-middle class – she works two jobs (as a waitress at the café and as the owner/manager of the motel) – but
the Actress, to make her think about those who live lives far different from her own Los Angeles experiences. Yet even when the Actress wants to connect with Arlene, she, like the Director, does so for her own ends, limiting her chance of “seeing” Arlene, and reproducing a cycle of exploitation against Arlene.

The novel suggests that this is a result of the structural violence done to women in that they are continually denied the possibility of identification through a variety of means – the focus on men’s interiority, the objectification, and the commodification of women by mass culture. The Actress’s construction of Arlene’s subject position is resoundingly similar to the way Arlene constructs it herself – “She was a waitress. She was a motel owner. She was a mother. She was an abandoned wife. She served coffee…Her name was Arlene. She served pie. Her name was Mrs. Watson. Her name was Arlene Watson before and during and after” (54) – a repetition of key identifiers that help Arlene to determine and remind herself about the story she has constructed of who she is, a story that she wanted to share (54) – but was unable to until the Actress identified with Arlene’s emotions and was able to begin to understand Arlene’s position. And the way this section is narrated reveals the insufficiency of the Actress’ understanding of Arlene, and of Arlene’s understanding of herself, as Arlene’s understanding represented is so similar to the Actress’:

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these markers are complicated by a few factors – her son Dan is regarded as well-off (3-4), and she owns her own business in the motel she inherited from her husband. However, Dan has his own money from his work at the Cantina, and the Motel is struggling so, while Arlene can afford to help Dan out, she remains in a delicate financial situation. Moreover, she identifies as working or lower-middle class, drawing distinctions between herself and wealthy or upper-middle class women (45).
The Actress thought of what she’d discussed with the Director that evening, about exteriors and brevity and visual cues, and she brought all this to bear on her character, the Phoenix secretary. A Phoenix secretary was not enough. For simplicity’s sake, yes. But a Phoenix secretary had an interior, too, a heart filled with dark hope and longing after she’d looked at a photograph and with justifications she’d made while lying awake in the dark. The Actress would not gloss over these things, however much she had to invent them, have hints of it flash across her face. (144)

As much as the Actress wishes to invest the character she plays with an inner life, she is bound by the desires of the director and the conventions of film. The character she plays, based on Arlene, is brutally murdered in a scene depicted with loving, voyeuristic detail for a male audience. Any agency the Actress invests in the character is therefore subject to the desires, fantasies, and violence of men specifically and society. Ironically, this returns this Actress-as-Arlene to the literal position of Arlene, to the powerlessness and cycle of exploitation that lead her to react to the Actress’s first overtures. Instead of disputing the Director’s view, therefore, the Actress exploits Arlene by using her real life position, experiences and suffering to create, under the purview of the Director. This use

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32 Yet another of Muñoz’s reversals, as he constructs the Actress’ portrayal of Marion, the victim from Psycho, as based upon or inspired by Arlene, the mother of the murder, who, in the movie was the root cause of Norman’s insanity and violence. Here Muñoz sets up Arlene as parallel to the victim in the film rather than the catalyst of violence.
of Arlene and her subjectivity is the novel’s depiction of how patriarchy trumps other forms of political potential.\(^{33}\)

While the interactions between Arlene and the Actress reveal the alienation of women from themselves and from other women in the constant specter of Hollywood, their interactions also reproduce invisible violence against nonwhite and lower class women. The novel’s critique of the violence done to women by Hollywood reveals that *Psycho*, though it takes into account class, makes the women we see into a homogenous, white category. This only reinforces an ideology of violence against women that sets us up to consider violence against women as culturally significant only when those women are young, middle-class, white women. Additionally, it conditions us to see violence as only occurring in cases of direct violence, such as Marion’s murder, so that we do not consider the circumstances that might have influenced Marion to steal money from a sexist client in order to marry her lover, so that she can be “respectable.” Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, the iconic Hollywood cinematic representation of physical violence against women, constructs violence as being both against a particular female subject – a white

\(^{33}\) Following Bonnie J. Dow’s argument regarding the power of hegemonic processes in television, the Actress’s use of Arlene’s interiority for her character in the Director’s film functions to protect and continue to circulate the dominant ideology through what Barthes terms inoculation, the use of small amounts of oppositional ideology in cultural productions in order to “protect the dominant ideology from radical change.” (Dow 262)

\(^{34}\) In the film, Marion steals money from her office that has been deposited by Cassidy, a man who sexually harasses her throughout the exchange of money with her boss. She also tells her boyfriend Sam that she wants to marry him, and end their secret rendezvous so that she can be respectable: “We can see each other, we can even have dinner... but respectably, in my house with my mother’s picture on the mantel and my sister helping me broil a big steak for three!” (Hitchcock).
woman – and the result of women’s transgressions. Marion’s social transgressions lead her to encounter the murderous Norman, whose abusive mother, we learn, is to blame for his psychosis. Hitchcock encourages the audience to sympathize with Marion, to understand her position and her motivations. He spends a great deal of time developing her story – fully a third of the film is devoted to Marion, who, in a standard trope of the Hollywood movie might otherwise be killed in the first five minutes, or possibly even before the film begins in order to allot the full run time to Norman, Lila and Sam. Instead, Hitchcock chooses to linger on Marion, making this “socially unsettled” character sympathetic, making this victim visible, and, in turn, creating a particular image of the victims of violence against women.

The Actress’s interactions with Arlene complicate the image of the victim of violence as a young, beautiful woman as they help her to recognize the interiority of working class, women, yet the Actress and Arlene are both white women, as is the woman the Actress portrays in the Director’s movie. However, Muñoz’s representation of their difficulties operating within their social structure creates a moment of awareness that reveals the limits of our vision. The complexities of their interactions, problematic as they are, open a path for delimiting women as subjects, so that the juxtaposition of the other key interactions between a pair of women in the novel – Candy and Teresa – can be read as the next step in asking who we can see when we look at violence – if we can see the structural violence experienced by a lower class white woman, perhaps we can begin to see other, more marginalized women, and the even more obscured violence done to them.
In the novel, Candy and Teresa’s relationship reveals the invisibility of Teresa, the uncomfortable circumstances of her life, and of the violence against her. Yet Candy’s attempts to understand Teresa and the circumstances of her murder posit the possibility of seeing women who are ignored by society due to race and class positions, and of uncovering violence against invisible women. Candy’s viewing of Teresa progresses through Teresa and Dan’s relationship and evolves from envy of Teresa into empathy with Teresa as she notices the erasure of Teresa from the town’s memory and tries to understand the violent, though vaguely described event that ends Teresa’s life. Through this evolution of understanding, Candy begins to see the direct violence against Teresa that is obscured both in the narration of the novel and in the community. As a result, Candy is also able to see how Teresa has been alienated as a consequence of her ethnicity and class status. Candy, a relatively privileged white woman, works at the shoe shop with Teresa and dates a “sweet boy” whose position and prospects Candy appreciates, though he also bores her. She spends a fair amount of her first person narrative focusing on Teresa, especially Teresa’s relationship with Dan. In contrast, Teresa, a young Chicana woman who had lived in the town with her mother until her mother departed for Texas is search of a romance, is marginalized by her low economic status and lack of meaningful connections within the community. Teresa occasionally envies Candy’s expendable income, but in a reversal of their relative positions of privilege, it is Candy who more often actively wishes she could be in Teresa’s shoes. Teresa, who is in a precarious subject position, is denied agency by her community. As a young, lower class Chicano woman, who lacks family or social connections, Teresa is limited to the positions the community allocate to her in a community narrative of her life:
Around town, she was known as Alicia’s daughter – Alicia, that woman who used to work at the café, the woman who left not long after the Bakersfield earthquake in 1952, boarding a bus, it was said, to go back to her ex-husband in Texas, leaving Teresa to raise herself...[Teresa] learned quickly that people in Bakersfield had their own ideas about who she was and could be. Alicia’s daughter. That poor girl left alone. That girl who lived right above the bowling alley, a green door at street level opening up to a narrow, dark stairwell, the room at the top. (59)

Though people remember her mother Alicia fondly, the town’s collective consciousness denotes Teresa as “that girl,” a poor girl “left alone,” and is therefore denied mobility or agency in the town.

In What You See in the Dark, Muñoz critiques even as he pays homage to Hitchcock’s film, its way of “seeing” women, and its iconic status as the film by the iconic director who “teaches” us how to see films. The townspeople project onto Teresa their perceptions of what a lower-class woman, a Chicana, can be and/or do, and in doing so, they deny Teresa control of her own story, both alienating and erasing her from the town. Teresa inherits her mother’s position, suggesting that, to the town, at this time, Chicana women are interchangeable and their stories insignificant: “People forgot

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35 Following Nicole Seymour’s construction of ontology and visibility in response to Todd Haynes’s Safe, Seymour argues that in “accounting for intersecting factors such as race, class, and sexuality” the consideration of the normalized health risks experienced by the nonwhite, lower class workers at the literal and figurative edges of the film also shows that “those factors make for disparate experiences of bodily risk” (30). Safe, she argues, thus “links the (in)visibility of envirohealth concerns to dominant racial and class hierarchies, in addition to those of gender” (28).
her mother…[Teresa] felt sometimes…that people had forgotten all about her, that they’d not only forgotten about her mother but about how her mother had left and why, and once they’d forgotten that story, Teresa would also disappear, like a figure into fog” (60).

Teresa is significant to the people of Bakersfield in that they know and can identify with her through her story, yet as her story is erased from the collective memory, and not bolstered through representations of women with similar stories in popular culture, she too fades away in their consciousness – “once they’d forgotten that story, Teresa would also disappear, like a figure into fog.” The novel’s discussion of race and desire in 1950s Bakersfield deals with the limits of vision, knowledge, and “belonging” and reveals that cultural discourses of race, class and gender, disseminated and reinforced by popular culture including *Psycho* contribute to the “disappearance” – and literally the violent erasure – of Chicana women’s experience.

In the novel, Candy’s second person narration stands in for the reader’s or for the dominant epistemological perspective. Candy, middle-class and white with strong ties to the community, is blind to Teresa’s situation, which suggests that the dominant societal perspective is also blind to the precariousness and inequality experienced by women in positions like Teresa’s. This limitation of sight is introduced in the novel’s opening line: “If you had been across the street, pretending to investigate the local summer roses

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36 The novel also demonstrates the erasure of Chicano men, as exhibited by the almost unremarked upon disappearance of Cheno. Cheno’s fate is left up to the imagination of the reader with only the note that police had interviewed him, and that he was subsequently deported. Since there is nothing that ties him to the crime, we can abstract from the text that perhaps Cheno was involved with an altercation with Teresa or Dan, and that the police may have noted his immigration status when they investigated the event, resulting in a deportation.
outside Holliday’s Flower Shop, you could have seen them through the Café’s plate glass, the two sitting in a booth by the window, eating lunch” (3). The “two” whom Candy “could have seen” had her position been altered, are Teresa and her murderer/boyfriend Dan, yet Candy’s (and by extension the reader’s) inability to see them indicates the ease with which the dominant epistemological perspective overlooks that which it does not choose to recognize as significant, unconsciously turning to other, more culturally significant, subjects. This inability to see also signals an inability to know or to understand – by not seeing a person (or a race, a social class, a concept, a connection, a relationship, etc.), we avoid the need to make room for them in our ontology. Explicitly paralleling Candy with the dominant perspective, Muñoz registers this blindness, calling attention to the divergence between Candy’s perspective of Teresa – and later the inability of the Bakersfield community to connect Dan to Teresa’s death – and Teresa’s lived experience.

Candy and Teresa are joined by their desire to know, and by their awareness of the limits, powers, and disadvantages of what is not and cannot be known, an awareness that develops for each through their interactions with each other and their thoughts about each other. Candy and Teresa’s overlapping stories open and close the novel, foregrounding the limits of Candy’s (and our own) perception of Teresa in the beginning of the novel, revealing how much of Teresa and Teresa’s position was outside the range of Candy’s vision. In the beginning of the novel, Candy is unable to see the precariousness of Teresa’s position, seeing instead only the positive aspects of Teresa’s life with an envious air that suggests she doesn’t think Teresa, a poor Chicana, deserves to have things that mark her as having a higher class status such as a job performing at
the local dance club/restaurant, and having handsome, white Dan Watson as her boyfriend. Her resentment of Teresa for these perceived transgressions border on obsession:

With your eyes closed, you think of what it will be like to go back to work at the shoe store, working alongside that girl, how hard it will be not to seem jealous about every good thing that has come her way. It won’t be long before she quits the job altogether, stepping through the doorway never to return, leaving you to go through the days without any exit of your own. (20).

Candy also desires what she believes Teresa can do – find an “exit” strategy from social and class restrictions. Ironically, she sees Teresa as stepping out of a restrictive social position and, feeling trapped herself, and unable to see Teresa’s hardships from her own position of relative privilege, Candy resents Teresa for this apparent escape. Perhaps this disconnect between the freedom and mobility Candy envies in Teresa and Candy’s realization, in the face of Teresa’s murder, of how utterly trapped Teresa was, is what motivates Candy to understand the circumstances of Teresa’s life and death.

In the novel, this is violence – violence, for Muñoz is invisible and unpredictable, and repeats the tragedies of inequality. There is no backstory of an abusive mother to motivate violence, and the tragedy of it does not lie in the death of a good woman, working to redeem herself of her poor choices. The tragedy is that violence makes those who were invisible in life invisible in death as well. There will be no sister or concerned boyfriend to discover what has been done to Teresa and bring her murder to justice. There is only a regulation headstone, and Candy unconsciously noticing that no one
seems to know or care what happened to Teresa. The unexpectedness of Dan’s violence, for which there is no foreshadowing beyond the link to *Psycho*, and the complete lack of demonstrated motivations are a strong reversal of the presentation of Norman in the film. The film directs the gaze onto Marion’s body, but not her interiority, and onto Norman’s interiority, as a way to provide a cause for his violent actions. The last two thirds of the film, in general, and the final scene in particular are all about figuring out what is going on in Norman’s head to motivate his transgressive actions – overtly the murders, but secondarily the cross-dressing. In the novel, however, the gazes are reversed. Candy and Teresa, and even Arlene’s gazes attend to Dan, while Dan is denied the interiority that the novel traces for these women. This reversal is part of why the conclusion of the novel is so strategically unsettling, as it forced us to notice what answers we expect, and what we still don’t know when we have access to only part of the story, to only certain people’s interiority.

In Candy and Teresa, then, Muñoz posits a way to counter Teresa’s invisibility. With Candy and Teresa, like the Actress and Arlene, the novel models a way for women to understand themselves by understanding and relating to other women. This model failed for the Actress and Arlene because the Actress recreated the conditions of patriarchy in seeking to use her connection with Arlene for capitalist gain, and it initially fails for Candy and Teresa. Candy, like Arlene, sees the image of Teresa in her relationship with Dan – a Cinderella story of the poor woman brought into the spotlight by a handsome, wealthier man – and believes it to be Teresa’s truth. Yet she slowly becomes more successful at looking for Teresa’s interiority. Arlene and the Actress’s interactions were only apparently beneficial to the Actress, as she exploited Arlene to
generate her performance of Marion. The relationship between Candy and Teresa is a slightly more equitable to both women, as Teresa is empowered through her encounters with Candy, their discussions allowing her to perceive herself in a more positive light through Candy’s eyes. In doing so, Teresa realizes that she can see in herself a subject of desire or of jealousy: “She wanted Candy to know and not know at the same time…she realized for the first time that maybe her own life could be an existence that others could dream about. That everyone, at one time or another, stood near a window and looked out, imagining a life that was not their own” (119). Seeing herself through Candy’s eyes is empowering for Teresa not only in that it means that she can be someone to be jealous of, but because it means she too has the power to see – “she asked, because she wanted to ask the questions now, not just answer them” – and to desire, and these traits are validated in that they are shared by Candy and the possibility she represents for identification with the community from which Teresa is consistently alienated (119). Through Candy, Teresa realizes that “everyone…stood near a window and looked out, imagining a life that was not their own” – a concept that affects each of the main female characters in the novel, while the realization of it is reserved for Teresa alone, enabled, perhaps by her alienation, developed as a response to her marginalized subject position.

Candy and Teresa’s thoughts about each other, like Arlene and the Actress’ mutual interest, emerge from and reveal conflicting desires: the desire for economic advancement, in conflict with an unconscious desire to know oneself through knowing another, or to escape restrictive social situations. But only Candy is in a privileged enough position to seek an exit. Teresa seems to find opportunities for exits from her situation first through her potential relationship with day worker Cheno, then with Dan
Watson and the chance to perform at Las Cuatro Copas, only to be constrained more strongly than before by the violence directed against her both by the circulation of rumors in the community and by Dan’s violence.

For Teresa then, every possibility for empowerment or escape, besides her connection with Candy, is limited, loaded with the silent threat of continued or aggravated violence. Though Teresa can see herself through Candy, Candy is completely blind to realities of Teresa’s position, a blindness revealed by her own system of reflecting on Teresa literally without looking at her – seeing “with [her] eyes closed” – a partial vision that results in her seeing Teresa’s position as enviable – “how hard it will be not to seem jealous about every good thing that has come her way” – when the actuality of it is so different. Candy’s idealized view of Teresa and Teresa’s position works to negate the racialized and classed factors that put Teresa at risk of inequality. Candy insists that “No, you were not there. But you could see it. And that made it a fact, if you told it.” By seeing Teresa, and extending her understanding of Teresa to the dominant epistemology by telling Teresa’s story – “and that made it a fact, if you told it” – Candy makes her story of Teresa into fact, making Teresa, and the violence she suffered, visible despite the social stratification and racial barriers.

Teresa’s death, as well as the revelation of her death, and the details surrounding it, are multiply obscured in the text, a technique that again reinforces Teresa’s ultimate invisibility contrasts with hyper-realistic, lovingly explicit death scenes such as Psycho’s iconic shower scene. Teresa’s murder is first revealed in Candy’s section:

When next week’s edition of the paper is thrown on the doorstep, the paperboy misses his target and it lands in a bush. The paper soaks
through. Because there is nothing else to do, the rain keeping everyone indoors, you lay the paper out on the kitchen table to dry in the steamed-up warmth of the house. The ink has run, but parts are salvageable, the news of the entire city spread out for inspection. (22)

Yet while “the news of the entire city” is “spread out” to Candy’s view, laid open “for inspection,” the story of Teresa’s death is obscured and erased in multiple ways, signifying multiple erasures of Teresa herself and the violence against her in the dominant epistemology – her death is mentioned only on page three of the paper, with a picture of the bowling alley over which Teresa lived, lacking pictures of Teresa (and therefore lacking any physical visual representation of Teresa as a victim of violence), and the pages are “ink-smereared from the rain and nearly impossible to read” so that, while it is “clear something terrible happened,” the only concrete information Candy notes is that “She was twenty-three” (22). In the novel, this erasure is literal, in that Teresa’s life is rubbed out, and also resonates in the lack of interest in her death. Teresa, and her death, are made visible and significant only in so far as she affects Candy, and not for her own sake, as the narrative describes not Teresa’s death but the impact of Teresa’s death on Candy. Yet each additional aspect of Candy’s experience of Teresa’s death highlights and reveals the erasure of Teresa and the violence done to her so that the absence becomes glaringly obvious, as does Candy’s increasing discomfort with her complicity in Teresa’s erasure.

Teresa’s violent death, and the invisibility of the violence against her, wrapped up with the invisibility of Teresa herself, produce for Candy (and for the reader) a rupture in the perspective through which Candy views the world. Ironically, the violence against
Teresa which ends her life allows Candy to see the racial and class inequalities that had plagued Teresa in life. Teresa’s death and the reactions to her death from the Bakersfield community allow Candy to see Teresa. She realizes, gradually, the risks of Teresa’s classed, raced and gendered position, and recognizes her erasure and the erasure of the violence done to Teresa. The novel thus suggests that making violence against racialized and classed subjects visible can also help to make those subjects more visible, and to lessen the divide between privilege and inequality.

Candy’s perception of Teresa and Teresa’s death together are the epicenter of the violence that results from, and which fuels, the “structural operations” of gender, race and class in the small community (Seymour 30). Feeling Teresa’s absence strongly – “All winter long, the splintered green door remains locked, a strange brightness in the dull of the January fog” (25) – Candy becomes aware of the multiple ways in which Teresa, and her murder, are erased by the community, starting with the societal negation of violence at the cafe – “The rain clears up and patrons in the café discuss it with the waitresses when Dan’s mother is not on shift. They scoff at the paper, calling it a situation and not a murder” (24) – as the patrons revise Teresa’s murder to a “situation” which both alleviates Dan of guilt and suggests that Teresa is at fault for incurring risks. She also notes that “The cemetery put a little marker about the size of a fist over in a corner lot – TERESA GARZA – because city regulations mandate that no graves go unmarked,” an observation of the structural inequality of the city government which requires that all citizens are recognized upon their deaths but which does not consider or work to address how those of lower-class status or female or nonwhite members of the community may be suffering in life (24). Candy’s observation also implies that, if the city regulations
hadn’t required it, Teresa’s grave would have been unmarked, signifying that the community did not care enough to note where she was buried.

*What You See in the Dark* pairs the violence and invisibility of Teresa’s death, as well as its inexplicability, with *Psycho*’s narrative about male-female violence in order to redirect focus from the agent to the object of the attack. The novel suggests that in doing so, the very unintelligibility of violence might become visible, as, in turn, will the victims of violence. In *Psycho*, Norman is explicable, and the illness that motivates his actions is traced to his mother’s abusive tendencies. In *Psycho*, violence is personal, motivated by individual factors, and as such it can be traced and understood. Yet in *What You See in the Dark*, Dan’s violence is invisible because it doesn’t have a clear, personal motivation. Instead, it hinges on, and is obscured by structural reasons. The difficulty that the community and Candy, initially, has in understanding the crime against Teresa mirrors the difficulty that Candy had understanding Teresa prior to her death: seen from the outside, through the dominant epistemology, the facts of the murder don’t line up – the motivations and details are illegible. Just as the townspeople were unable to understand privileged Dan Watson’s interest in Teresa, they are unable to understand why Dan would have murdered Teresa. While these questions of motivation reflect a central tension in *Psycho*, the film solves the problem of an unintelligible violence by looking into the murderer’s life, interiority and motivations. But there are no easy answers in *What You See in the Dark*, no demented mother to blame, and so the crime remains inexplicable, as crime often does in life. The late twentieth century American realism

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37 As, denied access to Dan’s interiority, are we.
techniques Muñoz employs in the novel support this representation of violence as well. The novel focuses on the mundane, telling the stories of individuals in Bakersfield – stories that are not terribly exciting, about a community that is also not terribly exciting – as a part of an aesthetic that is very different from Hollywood, and from *Psycho*. As Revoyr does in *Southland*, Muñoz on the intimate – the daily lives, thoughts and relationships of specific people in a small community, and in doing so is able to reveal the intrusion of overarching structures of violence in daily lives and experiences. Through this approach, Muñoz reflects the erasure of violence against marginalized women as an effect of the dominant epistemology and reveals the potential to rewrite the paradigm by focusing on the interiority of the victim, rather than the criminal.

*What You See in the Dark* suggests that instead of searching for meaning by investigating an attacker’s motivation in the wake of a crime, authors and filmmakers can look to the victims. By understanding the experiences of the victim, the novel posits that we can better see and understand ourselves, and in doing so, perhaps in some ways circumvent violence. Candy’s discomfort with the erasure of Teresa and her violent death escalates until she feels for Teresa an almost painful identification, similar to that shared between Arlene and the Actress. Where she had previously sought to “know” Teresa by imagining her future prospects and romantic interludes with Dan, Candy realizes that “what you do with darkness is pitch yourself into it,” – that is, to become

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38 The ambiguity of the novel could also be understood to be inviting us to recognize that we don’t know what happened to Teresa, and to feel that lack, in order to demonstrate that the more we understand the interiority of the victim, the more we want to know what happened to them and why.
more than a movie spectator in the dark (Muñoz 250). This line suggests that for Candy to know and see Teresa, and through Teresa, herself, she must recognize the violence to which she was subjected, both in life, and after.

The call to “pitch yourself in” also reveals that, for Muñoz, the key to developing a perspective that can identify and address structural violences lies in the ability to use experiences to gain new knowledges that you can then project onto past experiences, an ability fostered by storytelling. The line makes explicit a theme implicit in the rest of the novel: that movies offer a limited perspective, while a novel – or stories conveyed through words – can create a more complex and nuanced perspective. Moreover, a perspective that depends on or utilizes a limited, static point of view, will likewise be limited, as Arlene and the Actress’s abilities to know themselves and each other in their interactions is limited as they are influenced so strongly by internalized cinematic representations of life. As Muñoz puts it in a 2012 interview:

I just trust words more, precisely because they are capable of being so devious. Movies are ultimately static to me. They can offer only one vision, and rarely do we “see” things differently. We can replay them and confirm our suspicions. Books are so much different. They depend entirely on our willingness to give ourselves completely to the darkness of our imaginations. We can read the same book together but have different versions of the narrative. We can reread and imagine something else if our own experience has changed…the act of reading forces us to remember that we have changed, and that we are always changing. (“A Conversation with Manuel Muñoz” 253).
Muñoz, in complicating his novel with the story of a murdered woman, and his character Candy, in her act of telling us Teresa’s story, force us to “‘see’ things differently.” And, in the novel, Candy tells a new story of Teresa that allows Candy to project her experiences and reflections of Teresa’s death onto her past interactions with Teresa. In doing so, she can succeed, to a degree, where Arlene and the Actress failed – she can understand Teresa, her subject position, and her experiences, and can share her story.

In this new fantasy, Candy merges her and Teresa’s stories, attempting to counteract the literal and metaphorical erasure of Teresa’s death. She puts herself in Teresa’s position, imagining her at the moment of her death:

Love was arriving through the open door. She heard its knock, over and over, insistent. A light was coming, brilliant and unstoppable. Something dark was forming in her throat. A burst of light was forming there. You tried to swallow to keep it from arriving. You wanted her to close her eyes. You had to force yourself to close them. You know she saw something. You wanted that girl to see something, and there was no going back once she did” (Muñoz 251).

In this fantasy, Candy seeks to understand Teresa’s experiences, position, and emotions, a process that culminates in a rewritten epistemology that constructs Teresa as a seeing and knowing subject – “You know she saw something. You wanted that girl to see something, and there was no going back once she did.” By turning Teresa, a silenced, murdered woman into an observer, a seer, Candy and Muñoz transform her from the objectified victim of Dan’s violence into the actor in her own story. On the one hand, the attempt is doomed to fail in that Teresa has been murdered, and cannot be brought back
to life. It is also problematic, in that Candy can be seen as using Teresa’s death, making the death of a poor, nonwhite woman significant in that it now holds significance for a white, relatively privileged woman. On the other hand, however, the merging of the women and their perspectives in this fantasy, suggested in the confluence of Candy’s desire and Teresa’s imagined actions – “You wanted her to close her eyes. You had to force yourself to close them” – and the obscurity of who, exactly “that girl” is, and who wants her to open her eyes – “You know she saw something. You wanted that girl to see something, and there was no going back once she did.” Is it Candy who wants Teresa to see, to become an agent, to be reborn? Or is it Teresa who wants Candy to see and to recognize something outside of her own experience and the dominant epistemology? Both seem to occur in that they happen simultaneously – the insistence that “there was no going back” once “that girl” saw something suggests that there is no going back for either woman: Teresa, by seeing and being seen, can no longer be erased, and similarly, Candy, in seeing Teresa, and her exclusion, has altered her understanding of the world, which, in turn, alters what the dominant paradigm sees and knows. There is no erasing that revision, or Teresa’s inclusion. And while Teresa’s reflection and her use of the word “you” blurs the separation between Teresa and Candy’s experiences and desires, it also extends that desire to all of us, bringing the reader into the story and into Teresa and Candy’s shared perspective. Therefore, Candy reciprocally gives Teresa significance by changing what we see – altering who can see violence, and what types of violence can be seen. Together, they make visible the inequalities of the social and legal structures of Bakersfield, as well as the corresponding, perhaps inevitably – “brilliant and unstoppable” violence enacted against her by Dan.
Thus the “psycho” we should fear, Muñoz suggests, is not only the killer but also the systemic and structural inequality of our society, as well as individual and cultural refusals to see the operations of racial, gendered or classist structures, and the consequent inability to redress them. In the novel, the actual event of Teresa’s murder remains obscured, with little indication of motive, and with no detail or description of the event. This is in marked contrast to the lingering camera that records each of Marion’s final moments because the murder itself is not the act of violence, or the attacker’s motivations that Muñoz seeks to expose. Focusing on the moment of the murder would only continue to obscure the true violence and the larger motives through which it is incited, and would valorize the crime and the criminal. The obscurity of Teresa’s death forces our attention to the erasure of the violence against her. Teresa, What You See in the Dark reveals, will inexorably suffer violence not because she somehow brings violence upon herself but because of the complicity of the community in racial, ethnic and class-oriented violence through structural and cultural violence, and the erasure of lower-income people of color in what we see and what we know.
Chapter Four: “It was Justified”: Indigeneity and the Hoax of Authenticity in Dream Jungle

In Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn suggests that the colonial and imperial legacy of the Philippines divides individual, family and community histories of Filipino/as and, by doing so, engenders a paradoxical forgetting of and desire for origins. This conflict generates complex and occasionally conflicting Filipino/a subjects who each negotiate lived experiences, privilege particular national or transnational affiliations, and construct an individual relationship with Philippines and Filipino/a culture and history. In her 2004 novel Dream Jungle, however, Hagedorn suggests that Filipino/as also must contend with an idealized myth of pre-contact Filipino/a subjectivity, and a national history steeped in colonialism that erases and overwrites the indigenous history of the Philippines to meet western conceptions of the nation, and to serve western claims of modernity.

In the novel, Zamora, a wealthy mestizo Filipino, engineers a hoax about a stone-age tribe, the Taobo. As it evokes myths of pre-contact identities and civilizing or modernizing projects, Zamora’s narrative of the discovery of the tribe – supposedly shielded from outside contact by the rugged terrain in the Mindanao mountains gains national and international recognition – draws in scientists, reporters and academics from America and Europe, as well as urban centers of the Philippines. The story he sells is so attractive that Zamora himself seems to believe his own hoax. Through Zamora and the Taobo, Hagedorn investigates the attraction of encounter stories that explorers, academics and scientists use to construct ideas of modernity, primitivism, authenticity, and indigeneity. The novel uses the logic of categorizing a group as “primitive” during an encounter, by which explorers, scientists and/or academics distance that group from the
“civilized” or “modern” West to reveal that, in the Philippines, colonial encounters and aims are invested in constructions of national identity. *Dream Jungle* suggests that this division between primitive colonized peoples in the Philippines and colonizers/imperialists works to reify claims of colonialists’ modernity – as opposed to a “primitive” group – that functions to justify colonial and contemporary neocolonial enterprises.

Yet, the novel also reveals that the phantasm of indigeneity, tied together as it is with a colonial history in the Philippines, creates a crisis of identification for Filipino/a subjects. The construction of “primitive” tribes and people, in the novel, positions characters like Zamora – who are urban, and/or mestizo/a, and/or who do not identify as indigenous – somewhere between modernity and ancient history. This fantasy of indigeneity suggests to Filipino/a characters like Zamora that to be “authentically” Filipino is to be like these idealized “lost” tribes – a pure and preserved state of humanity, isolated and secluded. Yet, to interact with the world on global or transnational scales, Filipino/as must also be able to demonstrate that they exist in the modern world, among modern nations – a state that is difficult to achieve when those nations are invested in seeing Filipino/as as “primitive” indigenes. This paradox generates for Filipino/a characters like Zamora a desire for origins, and a need to stake a claim of “authenticity.” In response to the paradoxes of Filipino/a experience, Hagedorn suggests, through Zamora, that an “authentic” national Filipino/a identity is not possible under the limitations created by colonized history of the Philippines and the national identity that colonizers and imperialists have aided in developing by hinging together the disparate ethnic and cultural groups who resided in the islands when colonization begun –
and again in the contemporary Philippines diaspora, including the twelve million Filipino/as who live overseas. Perhaps then, Zamora’s story posits, impossibility is the solution – if these models of “nation” and “national identity” don’t work for a nation constructed of diverse constituents and various economic and militaristic engines, then rather than looking for possible futures or possible solutions, these models should instead be deconstructed so that an “impossible” solution of self-making (and unmaking) can take its place.

In Dream Jungle, the scenes between Zamora and the Taobo reenact, with resistance, colonial first encounters. First contact narratives, parodied by Hagedorn in the initial meeting between Zamora and Taobo, that evoke a distinction between “the primitive” and “the modern” thus create a story of colonialism and post-colonialism with which individuals in colonized places and the Philippines in particular struggle as they work to negotiate their own experiences, subjectivities, authenticity as Filipino/as, and the lingering power dynamics of a colonial legacy.

Dream Jungle revolves around Zamora’s “discovery” of the Taobo, a tribe that he presents to the world as a “lost tribe” of the Stone Age, supposedly isolated from contact with the rest of the Philippines and the outside world by the remoteness of their home in the Mindanao jungle. Concurrent to Zamora’s discovery and presentation of the Taobo, Rizalina, a young Filipina, comes to live with her mother, the cook for Zamora, at Zamora’s compound. Rizalina comes into contact with the Taobo when she meets Bodabil, a young Taobo boy who Zamora has brought to live in a hut in the compound, and together Lina, Bodabil and Zamora reveal the variety and complexity of contemporary Filipino/a experience and subjectivity. As Zamora’s marriage and his story
about the Taobo both unravel, Lina runs away, avoiding unwanted advances from Zamora. She becomes a prostitute, and attracts the attention of Vincent Moody, an American actor in the Philippines to film *Napalm Sunset* – a fictionalized representation of the filming of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Meanwhile, Filipina-American journalist Paz Marlowe takes an interest in Zamora’s story and travels to the Philippines to meet with Zamora and the scientists involved. Each storyline ties together to deconstruct Zamora’s hoax, and to reveal a grander hoax of “primitive” constructions of the Philippines by Westerners and Filipino/a politicians who, on the one hand, relegate the Philippines to a cinematic backdrop for Western imperialism, and on the other, exploit the Philippines for public relations and capitalist gains – thereby embroiling Filipino/As in a struggle to negotiate positions and subjectivities as Filipino/As under the burden of colonialism, neocolonialism, and a persisting spectre of primitivism, indigeneity and authenticity.

In the novel, Hagedorn critiques the layers of projected desires and stereotypes that function in Western colonialist and neocolonialist representations of Filipino/a subjectivity most clearly through the filming of *Napalm Sunset* and the character Zamora. *Napalm Sunset* is Hagedorn’s fictional representation of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, which adapted Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – a 1899 critique of European imperialism in the Congo – as a contemporary indictment of American imperialism during the Vietnam War era. But, as the filming of *Napalm Sunset* foregrounds, *Apocalypse Now* itself perpetuated American imperialism and furthered the invisibility of American exploitation of the Philippines, as Coppola shot the film in the Philippines, with the cooperation of dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Released in 1979, the
film features helicopters rented from Marcos, which were also being used to fight insurgents in the southern Philippines. Coppola had a financial arrangement with Marcos wherein he paid the military thousands a day in return for the helicopters and Filipino pilots, on the condition that “The production will pay the military thousands of dollars per day, as well as overtime for the Philippine pilots. In return Francis can use Marcos’s entire fleet of helicopters as long as they are not needed to fight the communist insurgency in the South” (qtd in Lee “Remains of Empire” 53). As Hsui-Chuan Lee argues, the President’s helicopters were thus “instruments of both domestic political cleansing and imperial cultural invasion” (54). The filming of Apocalypse Now was therefore ironically directly financially involved in supporting the Marcos regime, and also in rendering the Philippines archipelago “invisible by figuring it as a geographical substitute for Vietnam/Cambodia” (Lee 54).

Like Napalm Sunset, Hagedorn’s character Zamora signifies a connection between European colonialism and contemporary American imperialism, critiquing both through the suggestion that American imperialism continues – and obscures – modernist endeavors and colonial exploitation of the Philippines. The unraveling of Zamora’s hoax in the section “Joke’s on Us: The Sacred Mysteries of the Taobo,” reveals the greater hoax of primitivism used by colonizers and neocolonialists against the global south, and the Philippines in particular. The section depicts a speech addressing the Taobo hoax and Zamora López de Legazpi, written and presented by Professor Amado G. Cabrera, an anthropologist, who, in the novel, works with Zamora to document and study the Taobo tribe. The Taobo, which is Tagalog for “human being,” live in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, supposedly isolated from other tribes in the region by mountains and
rainforests. The Taobo have, consequently, retained their Paleolithic, cave-dwelling culture for millennia. Zamora, a wealthy entrepreneur with Spanish and Filipino ancestry, claims to have “discovered” the tribe, with the aid of a guide familiar with the region. However, as Cabrera explains, and the rest of the novel illustrates, suspicions have arisen about the tribe’s “authenticity” as an “untouched,” isolated stone-age culture:

Back in 1971 a man named Zamora López de Legazpi introduced the world to a small band of Paleolithic cave dwellers known as the Taobo. Supposedly they lived in the remote Mindanao rain forest, isolated from other tribes and the rest of civilization. The media hailed his discovery as the “ethnological find of the century.” Was it, in fact, the hoax of the century? Twenty years later we are still not sure.” (305)

The plot echoes a real-life controversy that emerged in the Philippines in 1971 with the “discovery” of the Tasaday tribe, a supposedly isolated people with a stone-age level of technology and society. However, doubts were later brought forward about the tribe’s status as isolated and as a separate ethnic and linguistic group, and it has since become clear that initial reports about the Tasaday’s isolation and primitivism were exaggerated or falsely asserted by government officials and the media (Headland 48). Manuel Elizade (the inspiration for Zamora), who claimed to have discovered the tribe, was accused of perpetuating a hoax in order to allow the government and his agency PANAMIN (recreated in the novel as Zamora’s PIMPF) to retain control of thousands of acres of rich rainforest.

Zamora’s perception of the Taobo exposes the Western desire for and construction of an “untainted” and unified Filipino culture or subjectivity as a method for
asserting Western modernity. Zamora’s position and the Taobo hoax demonstrate the difficulties and yet the necessity of negotiating the effects of the Philippines’ colonial, imperial past – including the disruption of Philippines history and culture, and the lingering desires and difficulties of claiming authenticity as a Filipino/a – within the contemporary context of the Philippines in relation to the US’s neocolonialism and the impact of global forces. The Taobo hoax suggests that one burden of the colonial and imperial past of the Philippines that persists for contemporary Filipino/as is the specter of primitivism, which makes it both desirable and impossible to identify – by constructing it – an “authentic” Filipino/a subjectivity. Primitivism, suggests Victor Li, in his text *The Neo-primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity*, “functions as a grab-bag concept into which everything that is seen as opposed to the modern West is gathered” (viii). Primitivism, in this context, as a concept used by societies, academics, or scientists who see themselves as “advanced” or “civilized,” is a concept which, like concepts of the “premodern,” or “archaic,” functions as an opposition to concepts of modernity, and therefore can strengthen a society’s claims of modernity (Li viii). The term does not have a clear, singular definition, but instead “is a relational concept that expresses various ‘modern’ needs” (Li viii). Thus constructing society as a “primitive society” enables colonizers, scientists, and/or imperialists to distance themselves from that culture, and to assert their own modernity.

Indigeneity is linked to primitivism as indigeneity is rooted in part in a colonial history. “Indigeneity” in part identifies a group as a people who inhabited a particular place before a colonial encounter, and who have continued on in that place through the colonial era (Merlan 304). As such, “indigeneity” often carries connotations of the
colonial and neocolonial binaries of “primitive” and “modern.” Yet indigeneity also has flexibility and, when appropriated, presents possibilities for political gain through groups’ strategic claims of indigeneity. It is a term that paradoxically has been constructed, and still is in the process of being constructed, yet it carries political weight and has real valence as it articulates the experiences and subject positions of those whose lands have been colonized – as Ronald Niezen explains, “Today the term is both a fragile legal concept and the indefinite, unachievable sum of the historical and personal experiences of those … who share, at the very least, the notion that they have all been oppressed in similar ways for similar motives by similar state and corporate entities” (Niezen 4). Indigeneity, when claimed by colonized peoples, can offer colonized peoples a counternarrative of authenticity and origins, an expression of identity, “a badge worn with pride, revealing something significant and personal about its wearer’s collective attachments” (Niezen 3).

In speaking of indigeneity in connection with Dream Jungle, I am focusing not on indigeneity as an essentialized or biological category, but as a term that signifies a connection between a group and a locale (Merlan 304) and which connotes the constructions and deployments of indigeneity on local, national and global scales. This definition of indigeneity enables me to identify the paradoxes in deployments of “indigeneity” by colonizers and westerners, in the affiliation certain ethnic minority groups have with indigeneity, as well as the political weight that indigeneity can carry for colonizers and for people who claim indigeneity. In part, indigeneity can signify “groups that have been colonized or subjected to treatment by nation-states or the international community that is considered immoral or exclusionary” (McAnany and Parks 81). Yet
indigeneity is also a term claimed by or extended to some groups to gain political power and/or as an expression of cultural identity (McAnany and Parks 81), as with the UN’s 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was intended to act as an international tool for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples (Merlan 304). The Philippines, for another example, has written indigeneity into extensive and foundational government documents and policy (Hirtz 895) illustrates how indigeneity can be seen by certain ethnic minorities and political groups as an identification that has strategic power, as it carries historical connotations of “belonging and originariness and deeply felt processes of attachment and identification, and thus it distinguishes “natives” from others” (Merlan 304). Furthermore, scholars including McAnany and Parks, as well as Alexander Hinton and Janet Levy, suggest that the frame of “indigeneity,” though burdened problematically with connections to capitalism and the construction of primitivism, is useful for tracing the characteristics of situations that map onto the intersection of colonial and modernist enterprises.

Thus in Zamora and his Taobo hoax – and in how attractive Zamora finds his own hoax – Hagedorn reveals that for the Filipino/a characters in Dream Jungle, negotiating a Filipino/a subjectivity involves wrestling with constructions and claims of indigeneity that are burdened with both this divisive aspect – from the use of indigeneity by colonizers to separate themselves from native peoples and assert their own modernity – and this communal element that comes from the use of indigeneity by natives and locals to signify origins, connections, and in some cases as a basis or argument for a certain type of authenticity that may be contested.
The obsession with indigeneity and the romanticized primitive which operates in the Taobo hoax, and contributes to its success, also persists in contemporary constructions of Filipino/a subjectivity. As anthropology Professor Cabrera says in his analysis of the Taobo and Zamora:

The ethnographic evidence is nil. We have all been made fools. The Taobo were a marvelous prank cooked up by our very own notorious mestizo trickster, the late Mr. Zamora López de Legazpi Jr., aka “El Segundo.” …The Taobo exist, but are fake. PIMPF was a money-laundering scam. Zamora López de Legazpi Jr. was a gangster, a poet, and an exploiter of dreams” (Hagedorn Dream Jungle 306).

Zamora, as the variety of descriptions Cabrera uses for him suggest, is suspended between his Spanish ancestry and his position as a member of the Filipino/a upper class, leading him to seek (or construct) an “authentic” Filipino subjectivity through which he can both claim connection to the Philippines, and identify a nation to be colonized. Zamora is from the Philippines, yet he does not associate himself, nor is he associated by other characters with Filipino/as, but instead is often associated with European history, culture, and identity. His father, a man with a Hispanic background, owned and operated silver mines, which helped to position his family as Philippines aristocracy. Yet, as his interest in the Taobo, and in Rizalina, as “authentic,” “pure” Filipino/a subjects demonstrates, he desires a way to claim a connection to the Philippines that is denied by his Spanish heritage, and the transnational affiliation of the majority of the Filipino/a upper-class. Zamora’s Spanish/upper-class Filipino identity is undercut when Cabrera refers to him as “El Segundo,” a Spanish term which means Junior, or “the second,” and
therefore implies a kind of doubling or belatedness – in particular, a Zamora seems to be a belated, paradoxical version of Miguel López de Legazpi, a Basque Spanish governor who founded the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines. Miguel López de Legazpi founded Cebu and declared Manila as the capital of the “Spanish East Indies,” and so figures prominently in both the construction of the Philippines as a nation, and in the colonization of the Philippines by Spain. There are multiple levels of critique involved in Zamora’s position and characterization as he represents a resurrection, or revisitation, or referent of Spanish colonizer Miguel López de Legazpi from the 1500s, and also the corrupt imperialist Manuel Elizade from the 1970s, therefore suggesting a parallelism between the times, and positing that similarly exploitative enterprises occur against the Philippines in these time periods. As *Napalm Sunset* suggests that the colonialism critiqued by *Heart of Darkness*, and the imperialism both critiqued by and enacted with the filming of *Apocalypse Now* are similar events, despite the different time periods, settings and actors, Zamora’s referents to Miguel López de Legazpi and Manuel Elizalde demonstrate that methods of exploitation of the Philippines continue, shifting in appearance and deployment to avoid critique. Indeed, as *Napalm Sunset* suggests, critiques of certain arenas of exploitation can mask the presence of other types of exploitations, other colonialists.

Zamora is thus the literal and metaphorical descendent of Spanish colonizers and American neocolonialists, and his family money comes from mining and capitalist ventures that exploit the Philippines. His foundation, PIMPF, is ostensibly set up to fund the protection of the Taobo but actually is a cover for government logging and mining in the protected lands. Cabrera’s wording conflates Zamora and his hoax with a
romanticization of the “primitive” and pre-modernity. As a mestizo whose father and wife privilege Western ties above their connections to the Philippines and as a member of the elite upper-class, Zamora is in search of a way to perform and experience a Filipino/a subject position. Zamora’s story and his relationship with the Taobo therefore provide us with a method for understanding the forces which shape contemporary Filipino/a subjectivity. Though he is a con artist, Zamora is also invested in the story of the Taobo, and his sections of the novel suggest that he believes the con that he is perpetuating because he is invested in finding a connection to an “authentic” Philippines.

Hagedorn uses Zamora, his mestizo position and paradoxical desires to discuss the classification of cultures by Western scientists and colonizers and to reveal how this classification has burdened Filipino/as with an inherited idealized, “primitive” and authentic Filipino subject. The colonial projection of an ideal primitive subject results in exploitation that simultaneously generates and relies upon externally constructed concepts of authenticity and primitivism. In Zamora’s position, the novel suggests a connection between inheritance – literal, capital, and metaphorical – and subject position and agency. It is his inheritance that enables, and perhaps compels, Zamora to use his economic capital to enter politics and support a despotic regime and capitalistic neo-imperial system. But it is also his inheritance of the colonial and imperial legacy of the Philippines that leads him to feel disconnected from the Philippines, and unauthentic as a Filipino/a, since he does not fit a “primitive” model of Filipino/a subjectivity.

With Zamora and his Taobo hoax the novel plays out the persistence of colonialism in contemporary Philippines, interrogating a desire or dream of an “untainted” subject which colonialism and neocolonialism employs to present a
possibility through which one could evade or rewrite the damaging effects of a
colonialized history. For Hagedorn, contemporary Filipino/a experiences are mired in a
form of colonial legacy which casts Filipino/a subjectivity as primitive, and therefore
Filipinos never fully participate in global modernity nor can achieve an “authentic”
Filipino/a subjectivity. In the novel, being able to claim an “authentic” subject position is
a model of subjectivity that might counteract the colonial/imperial legacy of the
Philippines, providing a sense of origin, and legitimacy. Authenticity, as a term, is linked
to rural life, and can be seen as a response to the “primitive/modern” dichotomy. Regina
Bendix suggests, in her book *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore
Studies*, that “the quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and
antimodern. It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized
only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and
sentiments created in modernity” (Bendix 8). Authenticity is therefore problematic, as it
relies on the same forces that created the need for authenticity to respond to this need. It
is also problematic in reference to subjectivity in that it reinforces notions of a “true”
subjectivity, subjects and/or experiences for which a person should strive, and suggests
that other experiences, subjectivities and/or subjects are less legitimate.

Zamora’s hoax is therefore unsettling precisely because it reveals the “hoax” of an
authentic Filipino/a subjectivity that the West assumes and projects, and with which
Filipino/as must struggle as they work to negotiate a Filipino/a subjectivity. Commentary
regarding the Tasaday tribe, on whom the Taobo are based, contains a similar
romanticization of the primitive, as in Charles Lindbergh’s foreword to John Nance’s
ethnography of the Tasaday: “Here is man, shorn of all his civilized
accouterments… There is a wisdom of the past to which the primitive man is close, and from which the modern man can learn the requisites of his survival. It is the instinctive wisdom that produced our human intellect by evolving life through epochs” (Lindbergh ix-xi). Like Zamora’s construction of the Taobo, Lindbergh’s reflections on the Tasaday set them outside of his narrative of civilization and human development – “there is a wisdom of the past to which the primitive man is close” connects the Tasaday to the past, disconnecting them from life in the same world and time as the “modern man” – suggesting that to be primitive is to be perfectly preserved in a continuous and static state of being. Johannes Fabian, in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, critiques such constructions of subjects as “primitive,” arguing that, as anthropological accounts appear objective, they can reify subjective assumptions about the culture being observed. Fabian identifies temporal disconnections – observations that, like Lindbergh’s imply that “primitive” people do not exist in the same time as modern people – as narratives that anthropologists and other observers deploy as a means of alienating the culture they observe from modernity and civilization. He argues that “the anthropologist in the field often employs concepts of Time quite differently from those that inform reports on his findings” (21) and the divergence of these concepts of time can create a chronological distance from the observer and the observed. As a result, Matti Bunzl explains, “Others thus never appear as immediate partners in a cultural exchange but as spatially and, more importantly, temporally distanced groups” (x).

The constructions of cultures like the Taobo, or the real life Tasaday, as “primitive” depend on a Western perspective. Adam Kuper, in *the Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of Illusion*, argues that the idea of a primitive society –
particularly concepts of “primitive” societies that formed convergently through the 1860s and 1870s with the field of anthropology, reflects the perception of modern, urban society as an “age of massive transition” (5). The concept of “primitive” societies enables modern people to look back “in order to understand the nature of the present, on the assumption that modern society [has] evolved from its antithesis” (Kuper 5). Western perspectives of the “primitive” therefore carry connotations of modernity, in part through a denial of coevalness, a mode by which one distances the “primitive” from the “modern.” The idea of a primitive society “implies some historical point of reference” and presumes that modern society has evolved out of a “society ancestral to more advanced forms” (Kuper 5). In labeling the observed as “primitive,” “stone age,” etc., the observer removes them from coexistence in contemporaneous time and relegates them to the past: “Beneath their bewildering variety, the distancing devices that we can identify produce a global result. I will call it denial of coevalness. By that I mean a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (Fabian 31). Fabian suggests that modes of distancing “primitive” cultures from “modern” cultures has global effects, an argument that Dream Jungle also posits through Zamora’s construction of the Taobo hoax. These distancing modes affect the “primitive” culture by projecting onto that culture the colonizers’ desire for an extra-temporal utopia, a persistent and powerful fantasy of “pre-contact” that limits the possible positions of the colonized. And as “conceiving global history in terms of universal progress, this allochonic logic [logic which employs the denial of the coevalness in anthropology] identified and constituted late-nineteenth-century “savages” as “survivals” – inhabitants of more or less ancient
states of cultural development,” this fantasy thus casts groups such as the Taobo in the novel as relics of ancient human culture in which the “civilized” observers can watch a performance of human history and through which their status as civilized can be asserted and proved (Bunzl xi). As Bunzl argues, the denial of coevalness aids observers in justifying and naturalizing exploitation, colonialism, and neocolonialism:

“Anthropology’s allochronism established a ‘civilized’ West as the pinnacle of universal human progress, an argument that helped legitimize various imperialist projects” (Bunzl xi-xii). In Dream Jungle, Zamora’s encounters with the Taobo reveal his investment in ascribing primitivism on the Taobo in part to assert his own links to modernity, but also to present or construct a Filipino experience and identity that, as it is removed from the history of colonialism and neoimperialism, is, to Zamora, authentic.

In his initial meeting with the Taobo, Zamora reveals and rehearses the colonialist desires at work in representing a culture as “primitive.” Yet he also sees in the Taobo a way to connect with the Philippines. In the moment when he first encounters the Taobo, he sees in them a “dream” of origin, of connection, which he feels he does not have a legitimate claim to, referring to it as a “stolen” dream which he is claiming for himself. Yet the moment of encounter is also the moment in which Zamora literally, as well as figuratively, does not see the Taobo, who hide from him in the forest, watching Zamora in return:

How to explain that moment when Zamora López de Legazpi first laid eyes on them? Zamora’s gaze was steadfast and shameless. O they were beautiful, powerful, strange! Their fierce, wary eyes scrutinized him in return, taking in the brown, unruly curls on his head, the scraggly beard of
his pale, unshaven face, the muscular arms and small, compact body that was, surprisingly, no taller than theirs. He had walked into a dream.

Someone else’s dream – perhaps Duan’s – but now stolen and claimed by Zamora. (5)

In this moment, Zamora, gazing “steadfast and shameless,” sees difference – “O they were beautiful, powerful, strange!” – while the Taobo see similarity as they “scrutinized him in return…[the] small, compact body that was, surprisingly, no taller than theirs.” While Zamora claims this encounter as his own, the watching and wary eyes of the Taobo reveal that the encounter is an exchange, with agency on each side.

Zamora’s desire to connect with the Philippines through his interactions with the Taobo, and his difficulty in doing so, are evident in the ways that Zamora presents himself in this first meeting with the Taobo. Zamora introduces himself as the “Spirit Father” of the Taobo:

Over and over Duan repeated the crucial phrase for Zamora to say: Ago mong Amo Data, for “I am your Spirit Father” … Just before he let Zamora alone in the clearing, Duan taught Zamora something else to say to the forest people, something important: Laan-lan, for “I mean you no harm.” (12)

The novel thus satirizes colonial fables of first contact encounters, particularly stories in which colonizers are seen by the “primitive” natives as a god, narratives that reinforce both the perceived difference between colonizer and colonized and the superiority of the colonizer. Zamora presents himself as a benevolent god and in doing so, reveals that all Zamora knows about connecting with the Philippines is measured through conquest.
Though he might “mean… no harm,” he cannot interact with the Taobo without harming them.

Hagedorn therefore suggests that the fantasy of a “primitive” Philippines is used by scientists and academics outside of the Philippines as a basis of knowledge production and affirmation of the contemporary moment in contrast to a tribe that represents ancient human history. It is also, however, used by politicians and capitalists in the Philippines as a basis of political identification and/or as an origin that answers some desire for authenticity. The fantasy and how willingly people – politicians, scientists, and even Zamora himself – buy into the Taobo hoax reveal the systematic and continuing operations of colonialism in contemporary Philippines in the guise of American and European scientists and academics who seek to “aid” a “primitive” people, and politicians and capitalists in the Philippines who benefit from claiming and preserving a link to the past that is structured through claims of indigeneity.

The hoax thus enables Hagedorn to stage an argument about the essential impossibility of an “untainted” culture, and to call into question the motives behind such a desire. Zamora, though he is the origin of the hoax, nevertheless gets caught up in the fantasy of the encounter and of the Taobo, desiring through his interactions with them a simplified relationship to the Philippines, a way to claim authenticity as a Filipino that he seems not to feel, and a way to have a sense of origins. Thus the novel suggests that the power of these myths appeals to Filipino/as as an expression or enactment of Filipino/a identity.

Zamora’s relationship to the Taobo in part mirrors the relationship of early Spanish and American colonizers to tribes in the Philippines. He exploits them, but sees
himself and represents himself to them as their protector, a reductive perspective that sets Zamora up to patronize and exploit the Taobo. Zamora’s attempts to speak to the Taobo trace back the history of conquest in the Philippines from English to Spanish to Himal, a language of indigenous southern Philippines villages (familiar to the Taobo but not their own language):

“Don’t be afraid” Zamora whispered in English. He felt foolish – for why English? A twig snapped, but Zamora kept his eyes fixed on the canopy of dark trees above. “Don’t be afraid, mi hijito,” he continued in a low, gentle voice. Zamora added, in awkward Himal, “I am your Spirit Father, here to protect you.” There were eyes and ears everywhere, watching and listening. Bodabil froze in his tracks, surprised by the familiar words the stranger was uttering.” (11)

Zamora speaks first in English, which recalls American imperialism in The Philippines after the U.S. acquired the Philippines in the Spanish-American war. In contemporary Philippines, English is the language of American neocolonialization, of power, and of government. In this context, Zamora’s “Don’t be afraid” should be treated with skepticism. Zamora follows English with Spanish – “mi hijito” or “my son” – taking the Taobo further back into the Philippines’ colonial history to the Spanish colonizers, a connection further demonstrated by the religious overtones of “Spirit Father,” and “my son,” as the Spanish conquest also brought Catholicism to the Philippines. Zamora is finally able to establish contact using Himal, a language with which the Taobo are familiar. He speaks to them in their own language, moving from second colonizer, to first colonizer, to them, the not-yet-colonized. Zamora’s use of these languages thus
demonstrates how Zamora’s desire to play a paternalistic, protector role in relation to the
Taobo can never be fully separated from his role as an intruder, an outsider with political
and economic motivations.

Zamora’s difficulty in maintaining a Filipino position, his experiences negotiating
the divide between the “modern” West and his lived experiences as a Filipino mirror his
own distancing of the Taobo, and draw a connection between colonial constructions of
the Philippines which demarcated the Philippines as “primitive” and distanced the
Philippines temporally from “modern” nations and the dislocation of Filipino/a
subjectivity. Zamora’s denial of coevalness to the Taobo is also demonstrated in this
initial meeting by his sense of having stepped out of time into a dream. Confused
descriptions of the length of Zamora’s journey to find the Taobo reveals the literal,
temporal and metaphorical distance between Zamora’s urban life and the Taobo, but also
demonstrate his desire to reach the Taobo, a desire linked to his Filipino subjectivity and
identity. Zamora’s journey to the Taobo in the beginning of the section is described as
lasting for days – “Zamora López de Legazpi had been travelling for days to Lake
Ramayyah. The lake, once filled with crocodiles and considered sacred by the Himal
people, was located in Cotabato del Sur, the southernmost tip of the Philippine
archipelago. It was...approximately 550 miles from Manila, as far from Zamora’s
mansions, cars, polo horses, and beauty queens as anyone could imagine. Zamora had
traveled first by helicopter, then by jeep, then on foot” (6) – yet later in the same sections
is described in terms of mere hours – “Just hours ago his knockout Teutonic goddess of a
wife had sat up in bed and yelled out his name. ZAH-MO-RAH! She caught him just as
he was about to sneak off in the gray light of dawn. “Why are you going to Mindanao?
What is so important?” (9). The further distances are registered through links to the geography of the Philippines and to the indigenous people of the Philippines, and hints at a conflation of the two, as the geography of the Philippines is described in terms of the traditions and folklore of the Himal – “The lake, once filled with crocodiles and considered sacred by the Himal people, was located in Cotabato del Sur, the southernmost tip of the Philippine archipelago.” The closer distances are registered in connection with Europe and the West – “Just hours ago his knockout Teutonic goddess of a wife had sat up in bed and yelled out his name” – suggesting that Zamora feels more aligned with Europe than his own country, and that his journey to the Taobo mirrors the journeys of European explorers.

Zamora’s search for a Filipino/a identity, and the postmodern elements that reflect his search, convey the disjunction of fantastical perceptions and performances of subjectivity that arise in response to the colonial history of the Philippines against subjectivities that are rooted in the lived experiences of Filipino/as. Critics including Craig Womack and Susan Stanford Friedman have voiced concerns that postmodern techniques and ontologies might be destructive to multi-ethnic US authors, as postmodernism stresses deconstruction of grand narratives, and “essential” truths – a movement that might make it difficult for traditionally marginalized authors and subjects to represent a cohesive narrative of multi-ethnic experience in the US. Hagedorn, however, suggests that postmodernism, rather than being detrimental to representing marginalized voices and experiences, is instead a solution. Postmodern ontologies and techniques may be precisely the method appropriate for representing nations and subjects like the Philippines – a “nation” comprised of thousands of islands and many different
cultural groups who were defined as a nation by Spanish colonizers, external powers seeking to invade and conquer – and Filipino/as – people who, as discussed in Chapter One, are fractured by multiple allegiances, and investment in competing projects. When the nation and the national subjects are broken apart, Zamora’s experiences suggest, rather than looking for methods to make them cohere – or appear to cohere – perhaps instead it is preferable to embrace the incoherence, and to see what new models can fall out of a nation of impossible subjects.

Zamora’s interactions with Bodabil, the young Taobo boy with whom he is fascinated, and Rizalina, a pre-adolescent Filipina who, with her mother, is a servant in Zamora’s home, demonstrate Zamora’s desire for a connection to, and conquest of, an “untainted” Filipino subject, but also reveal how such a subject is fictional – a creation of Zamora’s desires, and the result of his inherited and competing colonizer and colonized positions. In Rizalina’s encounters with Zamora, Zamora demonstrates a paternalistic attitude and disquieting lust toward Rizalina as well as the Taobo that is wrapped up in his desire for an “untainted” Filipino/a subject:

The jungle boy squatted by Mister Zamora’s desk. He wore some sort of loincloth this time. I clasped a hand over my mouth, amazed to see him. The boy jumped up to imitate me, covering his mouth with one hand, his dark eyes gleeful… “He’s about your size,” the master observed with satisfaction. “You could be his sister.” Bodabil danced around me. “You shouldn’t be frightened,” the master said. “The Taobo are the gentlest people on earth”… Master Zamora touched Bodabil lightly on the shoulder… “I admired your boldness and curiosity,” Mister said to me in
English. “That’s why I decided to reward you by arranging this meeting.

Bodabil’s a treasure, isn’t he? Pure, untainted. Do you know the word ‘untainted’? Of course not.” (37)

While both Rizalina and Bodabil represent Filipino/a subjectivity to Zamora, as illustrated in the many comparisons Zamora draws between them – “He’s about your size…You could be his sister” – he draws a distinction based on authenticity: “Bodabil’s a treasure, isn’t he? Pure, untainted. Do you know the word ‘untainted’? Of course not.” To Zamora, Rizalina is the personification of the contemporary ethnic Filipino people and culture, which, in Zamora’s perception is both purer than his own mixed heritage, and at the same time is inferior as it is less “civilized” or privileged. He struggles with his own position as a member of the cosmopolitan and largely transnational Filipino/a upper-class, and thus sees contemporary Filipino/as as indelibly tainted by contact with the global north, with Spanish colonizers and American imperialists, while Bodabil represents untainted indigeneity. Zamora sees Bodabil not as an individual person, but as the personification of the Taobo tribe, and therefore as a record of the past “purity” of humanity, and the superiority of his own position. Bodabil performs as Zamora requests, yet often does not understand what he is performing, and seems primarily focused on pleasing his observers – “his dark eyes gleeful.” In a similar fashion, Zamora uses Bodabil as a reward for Rizalina’s actions when he is pleased with her – “I admired your boldness and curiosity…That’s why I decided to reward you by arranging this meeting” – which he indicates by speaking in English, again performing the colonial role against a Filipino/a subject.
The discovery that the Taobo were likely not a “stone age” tribe therefore in addition to revealing that conceptions of “primitive” and “modern” societies are constructions that serve colonial enterprises and support Western claims of modernity, also demonstrates that there is no pure, perfect, untouched and therefore authentic subject. The idea of an “untainted” Filipino/a subject is a colonial dream. Bodabil’s account of meeting Zamora demonstrates the Taobo’s suspicions about him and awareness of the political significance he presents. Bodabil’s mother Uleng warns him to stay away from Zamora and his company: “Uleng chastised Bodabil in the rapid-fire Taobo language. *Stay away from those demons before we all die…* She was unhappy with the strangers in their midst, especially Zamora. ‘He is a bad spirit,’ Uleng whispered. ‘He will take our forest away’” (Hagedorn *Dream Jungle* 52-3). Zamora sees the Taobo as a simple, gentle, primitive people, who would welcome his presence. But Bodabil’s perspective puts that construction to the test, implying instead that the Taobo people had varied and not always favorable responses to his appearance in their lives. Rizalina similarly is drawn to Zamora, and distrustful of his intentions. Neither is blindly complicit in his perceptions of them, or in his desires towards them, and so demonstrate the gaps in his construction of an “untainted” Filipino/a subject.

Yet, while Zamora’s hoax reveals the impossibility of an “untainted” originary, “authentic” subject and exposes the roots of such a concept in colonial primitivism. His actions also allow us to see contemporary Filipino/a subjectivity in the reflection of his dream. Zamora, and the Taobo hoax reveals and rehearses how colonial desire constructs, locates, and fixes its objects and the persistence of that dynamic in a modern post-colonial world. But Zamora’s inability to both see himself in or to separate himself
from these people, for Hagedorn, gets at the paradoxes of modernity. Zamora himself represents the negotiation of contemporary Filipino subjectivity, a position which can reveal the ruptures in the external construction of Filipino/a subjectivity as performativity. Zamora also represents a Filipino subjectivity. In fact, as Cabrera suggests, he represents a subjectivity that is “inherently Filipino”:

One of the first things I asked myself was, why? Why would Zamora do it? A man this rich, smart, handsome, this set for life – why bother? And of course I knew the depressing answer almost as soon as I asked the question: because he could. The simple arrogance of it all is beautiful, *di ba*? So inventive, outrageous, playful, and inherently Filipino! And that is what I liked best about him, why I continued to work with him despite all my misgivings. (Hagedorn *Dream Jungle* 308)

The “inherently Filipino” subject that Hagedorn posits in Zamora demonstrates that contemporary Filipino subjectivities are negotiations of lived experiences and performances constructed in response to the primitivization of Filipino/as that aided in justifying Spanish and American colonialism and the continuance of contemporary American neocolonialism.

Hagedorn’s model of Filipino/s subjectivity in *Dream Jungle* is therefore a model of contradictions, built upon a shared experience of colonialism and imperialism, and a paradoxical erasure and fantasy of the indigenous histories of the Philippines. Colonialist endeavors in the Philippines are foundational elements of the national construction and national history of the Philippines, and aid in constructing a cohesive Filipino/a subject out of diverse cultural groups, tying tribal and cultural histories from many different
tribes that inhabited the islands in the archipelago together as a nation that could be
colonized. As Hsiu-chuan Lee argues, “the idea and contour of the Philippine ‘nation’ is
itself an imperial inheritance” as Spanish colonization and rule “gave the initially
disparate islands a cartographical unity” and named the nation after King Philip II of
Spain (51). American imperialism is likewise involved in contemporary constructions of
the Philippines as a nation, both overtly, as when the islands were ceded to America from
Spain in the 1898 Treaty of Paris and American refusal to recognize the First Philippine
Republic as an autonomous nation led to the Philippine-American War, but also through
continued support of dictators including Marcos, the American military presence in the
Philippines, and the exportation of American culture to the Philippines throughout the
twentieth century. Such continued intervention, argues Lee, “instilled in Philippine
national formation a ‘mimicry’ nature. Nationalism became an ideal because it was taken
as a norm of modernization, a sign of civilization” (Lee 51). The “untainted” Filipino
experience for which colonialists search, represented in the novel by accounts of
Magellan’s expedition to the Philippines and by the Western response to the Taobo
hoax – demonstrated here again even after the hoax’s reveal, in Cabrera’s perspective of
Zamora, of the inherent subjectivity of a Filipino as “inventive, outrageous, playful,” as
he continues to miss the point – never existed except in the dreams and desires of the
West.

39 Hagedorn includes selections from Antonio Pigafetta’s accounts of Magellan’s
expedition to the Philippines to illustrate that colonialism and its effects have not ended.
The parallels between these accounts and other traditional manifestations of colonial
desire, and Zamora’s response to the Taobo demonstrates that Zamora both represents
and repeats the cycle of colonialism.
Yet, the recuperation of Zamora’s personality, signified in Cabrera’s grudging admiration, reveals that, while the primitivization of Filipino/as in the novel is an inheritance with which contemporary Filipino/as must struggle in order to negotiate a Filipino/a subjectivity, that struggle – or perhaps the willingness to struggle, to contend with the forces that mark the Philippines – is something to be admired. Hagedorn uses postmodern techniques to depict Zamora and his subject position, suggesting that this is a postmodern subjectivity, and a postmodern nationality, that arise when the narratives of nationality falter to reveal the operations of colonialization and ideals of modernization.

The third person limited scenes that focus on Zamora’s story – like the epilogue, “Zamora in the Year 2000” – are fantastical, unreliable, and anachronistic. The epilogue is the only scene narrated in first person by Zamora, and which occurs after his death, to set up Zamora’s attempts to negotiate his own subject position and his relations with the Taobo as a mirror for the impact of American imperialism and neocolonialism in the Philippines:

I have no nose, but I can smell. No eyes, but I can imagine. No ears, but I hear everything. I am sick of this stifling darkness, the metal odors permeating my ashes and bones, all this nothing… Coño⁴⁰, I can feel your eyes roll back with disdain at the mere mention of my name. Zamora sounds like such a typical colonial! So patronizing, so arrogant, so glib.

Your withering contempt powerful enough to penetrate the bronze –

⁴⁰ “Damn” or “shit” in Spanish and Tagalog.
Grecian-style urn displayed on the marble mantelpiece in the sala\textsuperscript{41} of my
daughter’s condo in New York City…Pathetic. All that is left of me, yo,

\textit{ako}\textsuperscript{42}, I, Zamora de Legazpi Jr.: not much more than a sandwich bag.

\textit{puñeta kayong lahat}\textsuperscript{43}! (319-320)

Zamora’s sense of separation, dislocation and inadequacies are the product of those
colonial enterprises, and so complicate his position. While Zamora is divided from other
Filipinos by his economic situation, his influence in the country, and his colonial
heritage, he nevertheless shares the difficulties of navigating Filipino subject positions.
Though he exploits the Philippines, and reproduces binary constructions of “primitive”
and “modern” through his interactions with the Taobo, he is not “a typical colonial,” as
he shares also a Filipino/a identity, indicated here by his casual use of Tagalog slang
indicates. He is a doubled-subject, as “\textit{yo, ako},” a repetition of “I” first in Spanish, then
in Tagalog reveals, the one who employs the fantastical – as a revenant ruminating about
his own cremation, reduced to a Ziploc bag of ashes in a New York apartment, unable to
return to the Philippines and forgotten about by those he loves – to reveal the continued
violence and trauma of colonialism in the Philippines.

Zamora is, therefore, the manifestation of the Philippines’ inheritance of Spanish
and American colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism. Though he seeks to find a
Filipino culture and subject position, he himself is the representation of this new model of

\textsuperscript{41}“Salon” in Tagalog, but also, intriguingly, “sin.”

\textsuperscript{42}“\textit{yo}” for I from Spanish, repeated with “\textit{ako}” for “I” from Tagalog.

\textsuperscript{43}“Damn you all” in Tagalog.
an impossible subject; a contemporary Filipino, with conflicting affiliations with his colonial and indigenous Philippines heritage, who is constructed out of, and into, a Philippines created by colonial desires and history, and recreated by Filipino/as who, like Zamora, seek to comprehend and define – or perhaps to challenge and deconstruct – a “nation” in a transnational and colonial context. He, the Taobo, Rizalina, and even Paz, the Filipina American journalist, represent a diffuse and non-cohesive subjectivity that nevertheless coheres through shared experiences of colonial, imperial, national, economic and historical forces. Furthermore, as Taobo is Tagalog for “human being,” Hagedorn suggests that this model might extend out of the Philippines to represent the situation of humanity in the early twenty-first century – paradoxical and impossible, and situated between alliances that are mired in capitalism and imperialism, and in the process of breaking apart.
Conclusion: Looking for the Local in Twenty-first Century Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States

The twenty-first century is an exciting time to study American literature. As we move into an increasingly globalized and transnationally connected community, the face of American literature is changing, reflecting the diversity of American experience. As a result, American literature of the twenty-first century is becoming a category that includes ethnic, multi-ethnic, and transnational literature as a necessary and intrinsic aspect of representing American lives. Increasingly, then, the study of American literature, and theories of American subjectivities and identities should take as a central point of interest the methods of, and challenges to, belonging in America.

An interest in regionalism in the global era has been an implicit organization of this project. The novels were set in the American west, and/or the Pacific Rim, revealing the American west as a site of transnational, multicultural, yet also regional communities and exchanges. As Stephanie Foote explains, “like the nineteenth century, the twentieth is troubled by claims for recognition and representation by marginal people. Because it is a form that works to preserve local customs, local accents, and local communities, regional writing is a form about the representation of difference. As such, it offers critics a way to analyze one of the nineteenth century’s most effective literary strategies for managing the conflict between local and national identities. An analysis of regional writing’s literary strategies becomes even more important when we realize how many of our contemporary ideas about the value and status of a particularized cultural (or local) identity are derived from regional writing’s strategy of protecting local identities by preserving them in literature” (Foote 4).
For the twenty-first century, regionalism offers strategies not only for managing conflict between local and national identities, but also for managing conflicts between national and global or transnational identities, while preserving representation of the local. As such, it posits a different approach for considering the national in the context of global and transnational exchange, through representations of regional and local communities and identities that cohere to form a cosmopolitan nation. Building from nineteenth and early twentieth century regionalism can aid twenty-first century critics to identify and explore the role of the local in forming, and so in reforming, national identity. Foote suggests that “the global ambition of the late-twentieth-century United States bears a striking resemblance to its late-nineteenth-century incarnation; it has been variously characterized as, among other things, the age of greed, the end of history, the triumph of capitalism, the dissolution of the nation-state, or, if the idealists are to be believed, the dawn of an informed cosmopolitanism” (Foote 4).

Rather than focusing largely on depictions of rural life, twenty-first century regionalism focuses on local communities both rural and urban. Thus twenty-first century multi-ethnic regionalism creates opportunities for connection across an increasingly diverse population, a population that is not strictly confined to the continental US. It also, therefore, allows for paradoxical critique of and engagement with the nation.

The novels suggest, therefore, that, as we work to rewrite narratives of America and American identity in a globalized age, regional affiliations and identifications are
undergoing a resurgence, and becoming increasingly relevant as ways to locate belonging in the intersections of conflicting national and transnational subjectivities.

Though regionalism and regional studies as the twenty-first century progresses will likely look different from the regionalism of the early twentieth-century, studies of place-based or place-centric affiliation and methods of identifying might offer a productive theoretical tool for analyzing constructions, intersections, and limitations of race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation in ethnic, multi-ethnic and transnational American literature.

*Dogeaters* and *Southland*, for example, suggest that understanding how regional and local constructions of social relations fit into broader constructions of the nation in turn illustrates how national narratives can subvert the socio-historical context of a place in order to fuel or rationalize certain representations of national identity. A new ethnic American regionalism might also aid in the recovery of indigenous experiences and knowledges.

As we read these texts together, we can see that American literature in the twenty-first century can posit methods of belonging inclusive of difference by privileging and foregrounding the diversity of subject positions in America. These novels suggest that the tension between individual identifications or subjectivity and community affiliation can be redressed by reshaping our conceptions of what a community – locally, nationally, and transnationally – looks like, and what the lived experiences of the members of the community might involve. Such an approach makes it possible to reclaim people who, because of how the societies in which they live construct race, ethnicity, class,
indigeneity, and/or kinship, lack representation, like Curtis Martindale in *Southland* or Teresa in *What You See in the Dark*. 
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