

**REIMAGINING THE NATION: GENDER AND NATIONALISM IN
CONTEMPORARY U.S. WOMEN'S LITERATURE**

A Dissertation

by

MI SUN PARK

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Reimagining the Nation: Gender and Nationalism in
Contemporary U.S. Women's Literature. (December 2007)

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This dissertation discusses contemporary U.S. women's literature in the context of women's struggles with nation and nationalism, examining how Leslie Marmon Silko, Gloria Naylor, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Nora Okja Keller contest articulations of gender, ethnicity, and cultural affiliations in terms of the dynamics of national inclusion and exclusion. Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), Naylor's *Linden Hills* (1985), Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997) were written at the crossroads between contemporary feminisms and nationalisms and reveal women's centrality to national projects. Approaching these four literary texts not only as cultural narrations of nation but also as critical engagements between feminism and nationalism, this dissertation argues that postnational and/or transnational politics are manifest in these women writers' articulation of women's liminality between their cultural nations and the U.S. The chapters that follow analyze how women writers narrate the nation in various contexts while reinscribing women as subjects of national agency and the U.S. as a transnational and postnational site of contending memories and national narratives.

Chapter II examines a possible women's nationalist attempt to de-essentialize the nation by reading Silko's *Ceremony*. Silko provides a hybrid narration of the nation that challenges the full blood subjects' hegemonic model of Native American cultural nationalism. Silko, however, uses the gendered rhetoric of nation-as-women and denies women as national subject. Chapter III moves to a critical standpoint on cultural nationalism through reading Naylor's *Linden Hills*. Tackling the unmarked status of masculinity in Silko's project, chapter III examines how Naylor problematizes the gendered foundations of the African American cultural nation and deconstruct her contemporary African American cultural nationalism. Chapter IV discusses Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as a literary supplement to hegemonic history of the U.S. and Asian America and as a feminist corrective to masculinist narrations of the nation. The last chapter discusses the possibilities of transnational feminist coalitions through reading Keller's *Comfort Woman*. In their feminist, transnational, or postnational critiques of nationalisms, women writers demonstrate that it is not possible to reimagine the nation without feminism and textually embody the significant contributions of feminism to contemporary liberatory movements.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: RETHINKING GENDER, NATION, AND NATIONALISM

As Virginia Woolf observed in *Three Guineas* more than fifty years ago, women have had a difficult relationship to nation, the nation-state, and the national construction of subjectivity.¹ Woolf identified a nationalist call for patriotism as problematic to women because of women's unequal status as national citizens. Woolf's conclusive statement that "as a woman, I have no country" (*Three Guineas* 108) asks how women could be nationalists or patriotic to their nations when they are denied equal citizenship and equal access to national resources. In her autobiographical fiction, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Maxine Hong Kingston echoes Woolf, complicating Woolf's observation in her contemporary U.S. context. Kingston describes U.S.-born Chinese American women's complex relationship to their ethnic culture, national origin, and U.S. homeland. Kingston's narrative negotiation of what her narrator calls "boundaries not delineated in space" (8) poses a set of questions that remain at the heart of issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and belonging. What does it mean to belong to a nation in a nation-state which consists of many ethnic groups? What kinds of memories, forgetting, or national fabrications are constitutive of the nation within the U.S.? If a nation "is

This dissertation follows the style and format of *MLA*.

¹ Woolf writes: "'What does 'our country' mean to me, an outsider?' To decide this she will analyze the meaning of patriotism in her own case. She will inform herself of the position of her sex and her class in the past. She will inform herself of the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present. . . . 'Our country,' she will say, 'throughout the greater part of history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share of its possessions. . . . in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country'" (107-08).

imagined as a community” characterized by “a deep, horizontal comradeship,” as Benedict Anderson argues (7), then whose imagined community is it? Why do women remain in liminal spaces between their ethnic communities and their nation-state? As suggested in Kingston’s figuration of *Brave Orchid* as a trans-Pacific bearer of multifaceted history in Asia and in the U.S., why are women’s experiences and memories often disruptive to national memory and hegemonic historiography? How do women writers rearticulate such liminality in their radical revision of the notions of community and belonging?

In this study of contemporary U.S. women’s literature, I approach these questions in the context of women’s struggles with nation and nationalism. For women, symbolic boundary markers for ethnic and national affiliation are often fraught with contradictions and problems. U.S. ethnic women writers’ fiction and autobiography in the 1970s and 1980s were written, published, and received in cultural contexts powerfully shaped by the interactions between cultural nationalist ideologies and white hegemony in cultural institutions (Collins 2000; Elaine Kim 1982, 1990; Wong and Santa Ana). In such contexts, their literary works often reflect not only gendered and racialized contradictions of ethnic and national affiliation but also tensions between feminist and nationalist concerns that are rooted in the social realities of the U.S. (Dubey; Hernton; Li 1998). For example, Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzadúa’s autobiography, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1989), is a case in point to poignantly articulate the historical tension between gender and nation in Chicano anti-racist nationalist movements. Creating fictional contexts in their literary texts, African

American women writers such as Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison also challenge African American nationalism, revealing what bell hooks terms “internal colonialism” within African American communities (Dubey; Hernton). Similarly, writing in the decades of “ethnic nationalism” (Li; Wong and Santa Ana) or cultural nationalism (Collins 2006; Dawson), Asian American women writers such as Kingston and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha address the meanings of the U.S. and Asian America from the perspectives of women, deconstructing nationalisms. In turn, African American and Asian American women writers have often been attacked as assimilationist by male cultural nationalists, who associate feminism with anti-nationalism.² As many scholars in Asian American studies have observed, Asian American women writers thus occupy critical positions in relation to race and gender, ethnicity and nation, nationalism and feminism, history and literature, all of which are marked by gendered and racialized discourses and politics (Bow; Chu 2000; Duncan; Kang; Elaine Kim 1982, 1990; Rachel Lee; Li; Ling; Lowe). This observation is also true of women writers of other ethnic groups — Native America’s Leslie Marmon Silko and African America’s Gloria Naylor, for example — as my chapters that follow will show. Reading Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), Naylor’s *Linden Hills* (1985), Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, and Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* (1997), I examine how these women writers represent and negotiate contradictions and tensions between gender and nation.

² See Frank Chin’s introductory essay in his edited 1991 anthology. Chin attacks Kingston’s feminism as a bid for honorary whiteness (1991, 27). See also note 6 and Dubey.

Throughout this dissertation, I discuss nation and nationalism within the boundaries of the U.S., with the exception of Keller's *Comfort Woman*. The primary goal of this project is to examine how Silko, Naylor, Kingston, and Keller mediate and contest articulations of ethnicity, gender, and cultural affiliation in terms of the dynamics of national inclusion and exclusion. Significantly, the four texts I choose in order to examine U.S. women's rearticulations of nation and negotiations of nationalism are cultural products at the crossroads between contemporary U.S. feminisms and cultural nationalisms. As such, they are involved in re-conceptualizing the intersections among gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class with a new focus on women's problematic relationships to nation and nationalism within the U.S. Silko, Naylor, Kingston, and Keller acknowledge in their interviews that they came of age under the influence of both feminism and the civil rights movements in the 1960's and 1970's.³ From different ethnic positions, these four women writers problematize the assumed cohesion of ethnic or national community, revealing that the boundaries of the ethnic group's or the nation's political alliance are historically gendered and ideologically inflected. In doing so, they open new spaces in which national history and boundaries are rearticulated from the perspectives of marginalized or forgotten subjects such as mixed bloods, subaltern women, or trans-Pacific immigrant women.

Reading contemporary U.S. women's literature, I focus on nations that have no geographical territory and on cultural nationalisms that do not seek to build their own states. In recent studies of nation and nationalism, nation has been discussed as

³ See Ellen L. Arnold, ed. (1999, 7-8; 28); Maxine Lavon Montgomery, ed. (108; 112-3); Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin, eds. (viii; 3); Terry Hong (13-4).

inseparable from the state (Anderson; Bhabha 1990; Lois West ed.; McClintock 1995, 1997; Parker et al.; Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault, eds.; Yuval-Davis 1989, 1997).

While a nation in many contexts outside the U.S. often exists as a nation-state with its own state system and/or specific territory over which it strives for sovereignty (Enloe; Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault; Yuval-Davis 1989, 1997), there also exist within the U.S. cultural nations that neither have nor seek to build their own sovereign states.⁴ By nation within the U.S., I mean primarily ethnic communities that have been self-consciously reconceived since the time of twentieth-century civil rights movements as cultural nations for purposes of political alliance against white hegemony. Nations within the U.S. are not tangible, while the U.S. with its state power is a political unit which has tangible boundaries, forms a larger context for its cultural nations, and exerts its higher political power over them (Mayer 2; Deloria 1984). Although, as Joanne Nagel observes, “[i]n the United States nationality is often a synonym for ethnicity” (11), nation has come to have politically and affectively charged meanings as contemporary nationalist movements have sought to build ethnic communities into cultural nations.

As imaginary spaces of more politically informed and more self-conscious communities, nations within the U.S. function to replace racialized hegemonic identity with self-defined national/cultural identity, with a nationalist promise of protection from U.S. politics of racialization (Collins 2006; Robinson). In that there are many cultural nations in it, the U.S. is a multi-nations-state, one of whose general regulators is

⁴ See notes 1 and 5 of chapter II for contemporary Native Americans’ struggles for political visibility and cultural sovereignty. See note 5 of chapter IV for contemporary Asian Americans’ cultural nationalism in context of Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*. See Rod Bush; Collins (2006); Michael C. Dawson, for African American cultural nationalism.

gendered racialization; in the U.S., a variety of ethnic groups' national consciousness has been raised because of its state system under white hegemony (Collins 2006; Lowe; Mayer). A multi-nations-state with racializing power and gendered technologies, the U.S. has established "a hierarchy among these nations," "creating a competition among them over control of resources and the exercise of power as a means to achieve [U.S.] national hegemony within the state" (Mayer 3). In Silko, Naylor, and Kingston, nation means cultural nation such as Native America, African America, or Asian America. In the context of Keller's *Comfort Woman*, the nation primarily refers to colonial and postcolonial Korea. The U.S. as a Chinese or Korean immigrant woman's adopted land and her daughter's homeland is marked as a transnational and/or postnational space, in which traveling memories unravel the multilayered history of twentieth century's modernity.

With the rise of civil rights movements, a variety of ethnic groups have used the group-based, social justice framework associated with nationalist ideologies that emphasize a common history of subjugation and resistance and assume intra-cultural homogeneity for ethnic solidarity or, in the case of Asian Americans, panethnic solidarity.⁵ A co-product of U.S. racialization policies as well as social movements for equal rights, nations within the U.S. are not territorially bound, but constitute a powerful imaginary in which people identify themselves as a people of the same ethnicity or

⁵ Rod Bush, Patricia Hill Collins (2006), Michael C. Dawson, Dean E. Robinson, to name a few, provide accounts of African American nationalisms. See Vine Deloria (1984) for Native American nationalist movements. See Yen Le Espiritu (1992) for Asian American pan-ethnic coalitions since the 1960s. Frank Chin, et al., eds. (1974) and Chin's introductory essay in Chin, et al. eds. (1991) provide literary articulations of Asian American cultural nationalism.

history. Dean E. Robinson notes that the African American nation exists “as an affective state, or as any form of racial solidarity” (2). Vine Deloria argues that Native Americans see themselves as a nation subjugated by the superior power, the U.S., professing their unique history as indigenous peoples of America (1984, 12-5). With no definable geographical territory, the cultural nation is a discursive construct that functions to provide a base for ethnic identification and political alliance (Collins 2006; Deloria 1984; Robinson; Moallem and Boal in Caren Kaplan, et al. 1999). In this sense, the nation that contemporary U.S. ethnic subjects assert for collective empowerment corresponds to Anderson’s definition of nation as “an imagined political community” (6). While Anderson’s use of nation refers to the nation-state, contemporary U.S. contexts, however, require some revisions of his conceptualization. In his modernist discussion of nation and nationalism in the context of “print-capitalism,” Anderson contends that nationalism is a powerful means of nation-state building. The contemporary U.S. nation is formed as an “imagined community” but exists culturally as a “stateless” nation, whose national consciousness has been raised because of its multi-nation-state’s system. As such, U.S. cultural nations become a powerful source of identity that is more politically informed and more self-consciously chosen for collective survival and alliance, while complicating the intersections among gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

As the following chapters will demonstrate in specific contexts, the nation as a political imaginary for collective identification is gendered and exclusive. The idea of nation is connected to and historically conditioned by U.S. politics of race and ethnicity that are complicated by gender politics. My examples will also reveal that gender and

sexuality play key roles in nation-building and in maintaining national identity and boundaries (Collins 2006; Mayer, ed.; McClintock 1995; Nagel; Yuval-Davis 1989). In *Ceremony*, the boundaries of Native American tradition and nation are defined by racial “purity.” As products of inter-cultural sexual encounters, mixed blood subjects are denied full membership in the nation and instead assigned to exist in a liminal space outside-between the nation and the U.S. In *Linden Hills*, heterosexual men, especially highly-educated successful elites, have the prerogatives of nation-building and managing national community and boundaries, whereas homosexual men and the women of Linden Hills are completely denied their national subjectivity and agency, except in the case of women as reproductive machines of the nation. The patriarchal founders of Linden Hills, Naylor’s allegorical place name for a conservative version of the African American nation, reward heterosexual men, punishing gay men and silencing women. A nation of affluent African Americans, Linden Hills is constructed as “the hegemonic domain of both masculinity and heterosexuality” (Mayer 14).

In addition, masculine subordination of feminist to cultural nationalist concerns is often manifest in the formation and maintenance of the nation. As male nationalists have always considered feminist or women-related agendas secondary or even detrimental to nationalist projects in many third world contexts (Herr135), so gender issues are often posited as secondary to or in opposition to cultural nationalist issues in U.S. contexts (Cheung 1990; hooks 1981; Hull et al.; Elaine Kim 1990; LeClerc and West; Trinh 1989). Keller’s transnational narrative of a survivor of military sexual slavery precisely reveals the gendered silencing of women’s sexuality within third world

nationalism. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, written amidst the rise of Asian American cultural nationalism, showcases such attempts to subordinate gender to nationalist projects in the contemporary U.S., triggering decades-long debates between feminism and cultural nationalism. Like African American nationalists who actively pursued "The Black Sexism Debate" in the 1979 May/June issues of *The Black Scholar* in order to attack African American feminists and writers for distorting their realities,⁶ Asian American male nationalists such as Frank Chin and other male Asian American writers vehemently accuse Kingston's works of assimilationism that conforms to white supremacy (Chin et al. 1991). As Naylor's and Silko's male characters show, non-white men seek equal manhood by re-asserting male authority over women, masculinity against white hegemony, heteronormativity over sexual variety, and racial "purity." Such tensions between nation and gender complicate the formation of women's ethnic and national subjectivity by fueling the Janus-facedness of nation, community and exclusion (Bhabha 1990, 2; Herr 139).

Although it has begun to be demonstrated since the mid-1980s that it is not possible to understand ideas of nation and nationalism without understanding that gender and sexuality are central to both (Mayer 3; McClintock 1995, 352-56), recent studies of nation and nationalism often cluster around an international arena or the nation-state (Kim-Puri). In the 2005 special issue of *Gender and Society* dedicated to

⁶ Hernton 139-45. In his 1984 article, Calvin Hernton records the overwhelmingly negative responses to African American women's literature (especially, works of Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Ntozake Shange, as well as Toni Cade Bambara's 1970 anthology, *The Black Woman* and Michele Wallace's 1980 book, *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman*) by Black Aesthetic ideologues.

conceptualizing state and nation in connection to gender and sexuality, the guest-editors Hyun Sook Kim and Jyoti Puri point out that recent feminist scholarship on nation, state, and nationalism has provided useful international frames but still “remains ghettoized, with little impact on the ways in which issues of gender, sexuality, and race are conceptualized within American (read: U.S.) sociology” as well as within U.S. boundaries (138). In addition, “[t]he flawed promises of nationalism as an all-inclusive, horizontal community” have not been fully analyzed “from a race/sexuality/gender perspective” in U.S. domestic contexts (Kim-Puri 137). In Asian American studies, discussions of U.S. cultural nationalist impact on the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class have emerged recently.⁷ However, as Sau-ling C. Wong observes, such studies tend to ease cultural nationalist concerns from “[a] diasporic perspective [that] emphasizes Asian Americans as one element in the global scattering of peoples of Asian origin” (1995, 1-2). Calling this tendency a form of “denationalization,” Wong argues that shifting to a diasporic perspective from “a domestic perspective,” which “stresses the status of Asian Americans as an ethnic/racial minority within the national boundaries of the United States,” serves more to conflate Asian American with Asian by emphasizing “the growing permeability” between the two (1995, 2; 5). As a result, the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in Asian American subject formation is effectively decontextualized from U.S. domestic politics (Wong 1995, 5-8).

⁷ To name a few, see Rachel C. Lee; David Leiwei Li; Jinqi Ling. For excellent accounts of the details of the feminist critique of Asian American cultural nationalism, see Elaine H. Kim (1990) and King-Kok Cheung (1990).

Agreeing with Wong's emphasis on a domestic perspective that she argues is central to an understanding of subject formation in the U.S., I propose that nation serves as a useful category of analysis to disentangle intra-cultural and inter-cultural dynamics of the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race within the U.S. context. I suggest that we need to see the gendered significance of nation as a symbolic glue for political alliance in order to understand contemporary American life more fully. As a category of analysis, nation is a narrower term than ethnicity or race, and is more illuminating for examining cultural struggles for U.S. national citizenship as well as the boundaries of membership within ethnic communities. Unlike race and ethnicity as categories of difference, nation as another category of difference includes (nationalist) promises of protection and of "all-inclusive, horizontal community" (to use Kim-Puri 137) to its subjects. I do not mean that race and ethnicity are not useful terms. Rather, I propose to re-examine how the gender politics of nation and nationalism complicate subject formation and women's national agency in the intersectional dynamics of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. What I want to point out here is that nation is a site of contradictions and repression while it is imagined as a more politically informed community that promises protection. Within the boundaries of the cultural nation, women expect protection and equal rights but they are subordinated to men's struggles against white hegemony.⁸ Although women constitute an invisible center in nation-building and national history (Collins 2006; Enloe; Mayer, ed.; McClintock 1995, 1997; Yuval-Davis 1989, 1997), women exist liminally between their nation and the U.S. as

⁸ For other discussions in detail, see, for example, bell hooks (1981); Gloria Hull et al. eds.; Kaplan et al. eds.; Elaine Kim (1990); Barbara Smith, ed.

long as their nation is imagined as an exclusively male domain and thus remains the locus of gendered silencing and forgetting.

Approaching *Ceremony*, *Linden Hills*, *The Woman Warrior*, and *Comfort Woman* as critical engagements between feminism and (cultural) nationalism, I examine how national history and membership and contemporary U.S. culture are rearticulated in these authors' narrative negotiations of national boundaries. In doing so, I intend to provide an understanding of contemporary U.S. women's literature as productive textual mediations of political and social relations between women, nation, and the U.S. Close readings of how Silko, Naylor, Kingston, and Keller complicate nation from the perspectives of subjects at the margins of the nation and the U.S. reveal discursive contradictions within a nationalism that promises, in Anderson's words, "a deep, horizontal comradeship" of all members of the nation (7), and expose the problematic foundations of masculinist nation-building projects. My examination of the national construction of subjectivity in these heterogeneous Native American, African American, Asian American, and post-World War II trans-Pacific contexts, engages in current dialogues about gender, nation, and nationalism.

In the following pages, I attempt to situate my readings of the four women writers' texts in contemporary discourses on nation and nationalism and to elaborate the nation as the locus of gendered silence and forgetting and thus as the site of contending counter-memories. Reading contemporary U.S. women writers' literary texts as cultural narrations of nation, I invoke Homi K. Bhabha. While Anderson's definition of nation as "an imagined political community" of brotherly comradeship (6-7) has considerable

resonance for understanding nations in the contemporary U.S. context, I do not accept his view of nation as continuous and rooted in a linear, “homogeneous, empty time” of modernity and progress (24). Complicating the formation of nations in the contemporary U.S. by focusing on the gendered process of inventing nations, I rather share Bhabha’s attention to the temporality of the cultural production of nation. As the following chapters will reveal, Native America, African America, Asian America, and postcolonial Korea are imagined and constructed as masculine domains, in which women are denied subjectivity and agency and are silenced, except when used as abstract symbols for motherland, national “shame,” or as reproductive vehicles for the nation.

Although inspired by Anderson’s focus on the role of the cultural representation for nation-state building, Bhabha attends more to conceptual ambivalence in the continuous production of nation. In “DissemiNation,” Bhabha proposes that nation is constructed as “a form of social and textual affiliation” by “the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives” (1994, 140). Like Anderson, Bhabha also argues that nation comes into being or, more precisely, is invented, through cultural representations. Highlighting the impossibility of achieving national unity, Bhabha significantly adds to Anderson the observation that national narratives which construct the (ideal) image of the nation oscillate between double temporalities: the pedagogical and the performative. As the two modes of national self-representation, Bhabha argues, the pedagogical and the

performative often disrupt each other, for the former tends to represent the nation as traditional and monolithic while the latter is disruptive and potentially revisionist. Thus, the production of nation as narration is always replete with conceptual ambivalence (1994, 145-6).

For Bhabha, nation as narration both conceals and reveals “the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force”; nations thus are continuously haunted by their various others-within that exist “never outside or beyond us” but “emerge[] forcefully within cultural discourse” (1990, 1-4). Emphasizing that these others-within of the nation constitute a powerful cause of cultural compulsion to seek or veil this “impossible unity of the nation,” Bhabha comments that the U.S. also creates ethnicity-based cultural nations at its margins and that “the people of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction” of the centers of the nation and the U.S. (1990, 6). National cultures within (and also outside) the U.S. are thus “in a profound process of redefinition” and “are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (1994, 5-6). Reading contemporary U.S. women’s literature that is produced under the influence of women’s movements and cultural nationalist movements, I would point out that gendered asymmetry is evident in Bhabha’s discourse of nation and nationalism as much as it is in Anderson’s. I suggest that “the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” (Bhabha 1990, 1) is tightly connected to the gendered control of women’s sexuality for men’s national alliance. I would also add that the cultural compulsion to constantly reimagine the nation comes from the facts that national boundaries, sexuality,

and national others-within are not fully controlled and that the national unity is always imaginary.

Feminist scholars have introduced gender and sexuality as crucial categories of analysis, which are missing in hegemonic theorizations about nation and nationalism (Mayer 5; Yuval-Davis 1997, 1), and remain inarticulate in Bhabha's cultural discourse of nation as narration. Much of feminist scholarship has focused on women's marginality in the construction of national subjects, but also simultaneously on women's central roles in national projects. In nationalist discourses, women exist only as national symbols for male "ownership" of the nation (Enloe; Herr; Kaplan and Grewal, eds.; Kim and Choi, eds.; Mayer, ed.; Parker et al. eds.; West, ed.). Elaine Kim and Chungmoo Choi in a Korean context, as well as Anne McClintock in a western modern context, note that such gendered representations of women for male national agency are tightly connected to the history of colonization (Kim and Choi) or imperialism (McClintock). In the context of the contemporary U.S., I would add that gendered discourse and rhetoric of the nation are further inflected and strengthened by inter-cultural male national competition, and that cultural nationalism is one of the most powerful ideologies to justify and thus veil masculine subordination of women within an ethnic community. As Silko's male protagonist and the decades-long debates triggered by *The Woman Warrior* show, contemporary U.S. cultural nationalisms also betray what Cynthia Enloe observes in the representational economy of nationalisms: nation and nationalism "typically ha[ve] sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" and thus appropriated as an exclusively male

domain, although “women as symbols, women as workers and women as nurturers have been crucial to the entire [national] undertaking” (44). Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias list women’s national importance as cultural and biological reproducers of the nation, as the transmitters of its values, and as participants in the political, economic, and military struggles in the nation (1989, 6-14). A decade later, in her more detailed deconstructionist theorizing of gender and nation, Yuval-Davis notes that the gendered distinction between public and private spheres and “the conflation between the dichotomy of state and civil society and that of public and private domains” serve to make invisible women’s active participation in national projects (1997, ch. 4). Recently published essay collections discussing the relationship between women and nation(-state) supplement Enloe’s and Yuval-Davis’s observations on the gendered discourse of nationalism, by discussing women’s active participations and interventions in nationalisms in various international and U.S. contexts (for example, Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem, eds.; Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault, eds.; West, ed.).

My focus lies in examining how cultural nationalisms and national boundaries are deconstructed and re-negotiated in U.S. women’s cultural products and how these re-negotiations shed new light on our understanding of the intersections among gender, nation, ethnicity, and sexuality. While recent feminist research about nation and nationalism stresses women’s political activism within nationalist movements or analyzes women’s symbolic roles in national projects, women’s own cultural negotiations of the nation and nationalism are still considerably overlooked. Feminist scholars I address in the above paragraph as crucial contributors to theorizing nation and

nationalism also approach nation primarily as the site of political representation inseparable from the state. What I am suggesting by invoking Bhabha is that we need to attend to the cultural site of writing the nation, which seems to constitute the most powerful site of reimagining the nation. In other words, we need to see the power of cultural re-presentation of the nation to influence and transform political representation, for culture is the site in which the politics of representation relies on and is simultaneously split from cultural representations. In addition, in this cultural site, which Lowe argues is both “the terrain through which the individual speaks as a member of the contemporary national collectivity” and “the site through which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect, or disavowed” (x), women (writers) emerge as new subjects who claim nation and nationalist issues as feminist issues, producing new signs and paradigms that enable us to envision new forms of national subjectivity and community. Furthermore, I extend current feminist discussions of gender and nation to the still unmarked status of masculinity in nation-building and national projects as a serious topic of feminist inquiry. My reading of *Linden Hills* as a counter-example to Silko’s uncritical recourse to gendered rhetoric for her alternative nationalist project in *Ceremony* contributes to current feminist scholarship by tackling the unmarkedly privileged status of heteronormative masculinity in nation-building and nationalist discourses.

Examining how contemporary U.S. women writers reimagine the nation, I use the term “postnational” to problematize and critique the gender politics of nationalisms that deny or ignore women as national subjects. Feminist scholars have analyzed how

liminal spaces between women and the nation(-state) are produced and maintained, but such liminal spaces are not yet given articulate terms. I suggest that the spaces between women and nation are often marked as postnational. By “postnational,” I refer to a salient characteristic of the liminality between women and nation to show strategies both against and beyond masculinist nationalist definitions of women. I mean “transnational” as crossing ethno-national and U.S. national boundaries. When women reimagine the nation, deconstruct masculinist nationalisms, and thus rearticulate contemporary U.S. culture, they often transgress the boundaries of their cultural nations. Some of these transgressions betray postnational yearnings in order to retell women’s experiences and stories. In Kingston’s and Keller’s texts, transnational politics both within and across U.S. national boundaries are manifest when they reinscribe Chinese America or Korea against a nationalist impulse to separate the nations from the U.S. I connect “transnational” to “postnational” in order to highlight not only women’s liminality in their relation to the nation and the U.S. but also the interconnectivity between national boundaries and cultures. In their rearticulations of the U.S. and culture, the women writers I discuss show that women often become postnational subjects who challenge the masculinist nationalist definitions of their national subjectivities. Postnational subjects often widen the possibilities of transnational coalition across cultural nations within the U.S. as well as in international spaces. By connecting these two terms, I intend to shed light on emergent spaces, in which subjects that seem, from a nationalist perspective, disparate and unrelated come together in shared memories and narratives or political agency.

Among the texts I discuss, *Ceremony* performs exactly what Bhabha observes in the cultural construction of nation while employing the gendered nationalist trope of woman as nation. Silko's novel elaborates an alternative image of the Native American nation, in which mixed blood subjects emerge as new agents of national history. Silko deliberately opposes her protagonist Tayo's story to the pedagogical notion that the Native American tradition is change-free and should be transmitted intact to full-blooded male subjects. Rendering Tayo disruptive to the pedagogical hegemony of full blood subjects such as the Laguna elder Ku'oosh, Silko also uses the Laguna's mythic stories in order to make her disruptive alternative seem acceptable or even indispensable to the Native American present and future. In doing so, she unsettles the national boundary that has been essentialized by the notion of national "purity" in spite of an increasing population of mixed bloods. Silko's performative narration of the nation is marked as a form of post-traditionalism that embraces change and locates Native American nation and tribal traditions in on-going transformations since World War II. At the heart of Tayo's disruptive narrative, Silko lays the core themes of nationalist ideology that have shaped social movements in the contemporary U.S.: "the quest for self-definition, self-reliance, and self-determination" (Collins 2006, 144). However, it is by representing women as outside of Native American history that Silko achieves her nationalist project of de-essentializing the national boundary. Foregrounding how male homosocial affiliation works and is possibly expanded by unsettling hegemonic notions within the nation, *Ceremony* implicitly suggests that women constitute the spectral center for an effort to reinvent a national imaginary.

While Silko reimagines the nation through mixed blood male subjects at the margins, Naylor explicitly describes women's spectral centrality to nation-building projects. In *Linden Hills*, Naylor challenges discourse that insists upon the unity of nation. The Nedeed men's building of an economically independent nation is fundamentally undermined when the nation's inner workings are examined, especially in relation to gender and sexuality. The female protagonist Willa Prescott Nedeed's slow process of awakening through reading her foremothers' lives shows that patriarchal hierarchies are the foundation of the nation and that nation-building depends on a "powerful construction of gender" and heteronormative sexuality (Mayer; McClintock 1995). The Nedeed men's century-long project of nation-building manifests the characteristics of almost all nationalisms. Joanne Nagel argues: "Nationalism, coupled with masculinist heterosexuality, tends to embrace patriarchal forms of social organization that create different and unequal places for men and women in the nation"; it "tends also to be homophobic, and thus is intolerant of sexual diversity, particularly homosexuality" (160). In *Linden Hills*, women remain subaltern regardless of their husbands' class, and gay men are forced to masquerade as heterosexual or to leave. This implies that the nation is a patriarchal construct but that its foundations are precarious. Nonetheless, the precarious foundations of the patriarchal nation are sustained by hegemonic discourses and historiography.

Rearticulations of the power of ethnicity, nation, and nationalism to unevenly organize women's social life in the contemporary U.S. often involve deconstructing national memory and hegemonic historiography. Making explicit that gendered

forgetting is constitutive of the hegemonic historiography of the nation and the U.S., Kingston and Keller rearticulate both Asian America and the U.S. as sites of contending counter-memories. Bhabha notes in “DissemiNation” that “the obligation to forget” a certain past of the nation is necessary to construct national subjects and national will (1994, 160). Lisa Lowe more specifically argues that immigrants’ own forgetting of their history is constitutive of contemporary U.S. national culture (17). What is missing in these two scholars’ observations is the gendered nature of such national forgetting, which is Kingston’s target in *The Woman Warrior* and Keller’s in *Comfort Woman*. Opening a trans-Pacific site as a significant repository of subaltern counter-memory against hegemonic historiography, both Kingston and Keller use the trope of the ghost as a repressed and thus haunting memory in order to restore forgotten women’s memories. Against her contemporary Asian American cultural nationalists’ invention of Asian America as Asian American men’s pan-ethnic community separate from the U.S., Kingston proposes a trans-Pacific narration of the nation and thereby reinscribes Asian America in the U.S. In doing so, she claims her own subjectivity as a woman writer under and yet beyond what Trinh T. Minh-ha terms “the triple bind,” “the white-male-is-norm ideology” (1989, 6). Echoing and emulating Kingston, Keller opens a postnational space in which women emerge as subjects dangerous to hegemonic discourses of Korean, Japanese, and U.S. nationalisms. She reveals the problems of masculinist uses of women in the context of colonial and postcolonial modernity, and re-vitalizes subaltern survivor-women’s silenced voices by fictively re-creating the struggle to witness the trauma of military sexual slavery. In doing so, Keller deconstructs masculinist

nationalism. Survivor-women's breaking of the long silence that the nationalist discourses have forced upon them reveals that nationalism is a gendered discourse.

The chapters that follow discuss *Ceremony*, *Linden Hills*, and *The Woman Warrior* not only as cultural narrations of nation but also as critical comments on 1960's-70's cultural nationalisms in the U.S., and approach *Comfort Woman* as a transnational feminist narrative memory against masculinist nationalisms in the post-World War II age. Silko, Naylor, Kingston, and Keller claim nation and nationalist issues as women's or feminist issues, imaginatively showing how gendered control over sexuality plays a significant role in the national construction of women's subjectivity. The sequencing of my chapters reflects the growing intensity of feminist interventions in debates about nationalism. I devote each chapter to a single work in order to ground my analysis in particular ethnic groups, connecting the analysis to my entire project.

Discussing heterogeneous texts, I do not assume the homogeneity of an ethnic group.

I begin by examining a possible women's pro-nationalist standpoint through reading Silko's *Ceremony*. Chapter II examines in a Native American context a "common theme in the literature concerning gender and nation": "the feminization of the motherland and the call of the nation's son to defend her" (Mayer 11). Silko successfully replaces the hegemonic model of Native American cultural nationalism, one that essentializes full-bloodedness as "authentic" Native Americanness, into a "hybrid" nationalism that deconstructs the notion of cultural/racial "purity." However, in Silko's nationalist project, which is completed by her uncritical recourse to the gendered rhetoric

of nation-as-woman, masculinity is given the unmarked status that enables male homosocial bonding, when necessary, across cultures.

Chapter III moves to a critical standpoint on cultural nationalism through reading Naylor's *Linden Hills*. In this chapter, I tackle the unmarked status of masculinity in Silko's project. Naylor's positioning on African American cultural nationalism is double-edged: she is affirmative of the need for African American racial solidarity but critical of what she sees as the sexism and homophobia of African American nationalist projects and rhetoric. By critiquing hegemonic masculinist nationalism, Naylor qualifies the power of African American cultural nationalism as long as race and ethnicity are operating as the axes of power relations. Imagining women's subaltern history that is excluded in "official" historiography, she emphasizes the urgency of reconstructing African American community through feminist agendas. Notably, she does so in order to enhance African American solidarity as a means of reconstructing African American communities. At the end of *Linden Hills*, in which the conservative nationalist patriarch Luther Nedeed dies in a fire, she apocalyptically warns about the ultimate outcome of African American masculinist nationalist projects. Although Naylor problematizes the gendered foundations of the African American cultural nation, she still does not have her own project about nation and nationalism. Naylor's novel remains a feminist deconstruction of the notion of man-making history by re-tracing the gendered process of nation-building.

Chapter IV turns to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* to examine how cultural nationalism is productively deconstructed from a feminist stance. By bringing to the

front a women-centered history, Kingston supplements and corrects the gendered history of Chinese America that had been predominantly male because of U.S. immigration policy. Highlighting trans-Pacific women's memories that are almost completely ignored in Chinese America, Kingston provides a trans-Pacific narration of the nation as her feminist alternative. Using her own autobiographical experiences and her trans-Pacific mother's biography, Kingston shows us how an autobiographical fiction serves not only as a literary supplement to hegemonic history of the U.S. and Chinese America but also as a feminist corrective to masculine narrations of the nation. My focus on Kingston's representation of Chinatown in the U.S., not China, departs from a prevailing tendency in Kingston criticism that often conflates Chinese America with China or decontextualizes Kingston's autobiographical project from the complex historical construction of Chinese America. More significantly, my trans-Pacific reading of *The Woman Warrior* contributes to Kingston scholarship by deconstructing the dichotomous reinscription of Chinese patriarchy vs. American racism.

Chapter V discusses the possibilities of transnational feminist coalitions through reading Keller's *Comfort Woman*. Expanding Kingston's trans-Pacific space, Keller makes former military sexual slave women's memories and testimonies heard in the U.S., revealing the ways in which gendered and sexualized violence against women is constitutive of twentieth-century modernity. As a secondary witness narrative, *Comfort Woman* moves beyond second wave feminism's emphasis on community of experience toward that of empathy, in which those who do not share the same experience can emerge as co-actors of witnessing and political redress. In Keller's trans-Pacific space

that is marked as postnational, readers also participate in the act of remembering as secondary witnesses by mediating the two women protagonists' incommensurable worlds.

Contemporary U.S. women writers' literary imagining of their cultural nations and the U.S. is a strategic struggle to correct the gendered biases and foundations of contemporary movements of antiracism. From different positions to nationalism, each of the four women writers I discuss demonstrates that it is not possible to reimagine and reconstruct nation and the nation-state without feminism. As long as women remain in liminal spaces in their nation, the women writers show, there tend to be postnational excesses in women's national subjectivities, as Virginia Woolf decided that "[a]s a woman I want no country" (108). And when this kind of excess is articulated, such an articulation often gets cross-cultural resonance and transnational empathy, as Kingston's and Keller's works demonstrate. With women's cultural imagination of the nation, it is clear that the gendered representations of women as obstacles or vehicles for male empowerment no longer have political appeal on a nationwide scale. In their feminist, transnational or postnational critiques of nationalist subordination of feminist issues as secondary or even detrimental to national unity, women writers re-narrate the nation and thereby textually embody the significant contribution of feminism to make more viable both their national communities and cultural nationalist anti-racism.

CHAPTER II

**LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*: SYMBOLIC SUBVERSION
AND ITS GENDERED DISCONTENTS**

Envisioning an alternative nationalism in *Ceremony* (1977), Leslie Marmon Silko problematically uses the trope of women as Native Americans' historical loss and as Mother nature. Among the texts I discuss throughout this dissertation, Silko's *Ceremony* shows a possible women's pro-nationalist standpoint. In this novel, Silko reimagines the Native American cultural nation from the perspective of mixed blood male subjects, challenging full blood subjects' cultural nationalism. Rendering her male protagonist Tayo's "hybrid" nationalism disruptive to hegemonic nationalism, Silko elaborates a post-traditionalist narration of the nation that embraces change and historicizes Native American tradition. Silko's main project in this novel is to de-essentialize a Native American nation, which has been often thought as a space of ahistorical tradition and cultural "purity," by opening a space in which mixed blood males emerge as subjects of Native American history. Through the mixed blooded characters, Tayo and Betonie, Silko articulates an alternative nationalist discourse that grounds Native American tradition in the contemporary U.S. political context.

Against her contemporary Native American movements' alleged idea of Native American traditions as change-free, Silko redefines tradition as an on-going commitment to survival rather than as a site of "return" to Native American tribal pasts (*Yellow Woman* 200; *Conversations* 7-8). For this, she critically examines the cultural

significance of mixed blood and the impact of World War II, both of which make manifest the Laguna as a contemporary borderland culture. A World War II veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, the protagonist Tayo strives to heal himself and undergoes a visionary unlearning about white domination in the U.S. through the Navajo medicine man Betonie. With his mixed blood subjectivity that disturbs the notion of cultural “purity,” Tayo reveals the problems of intracultural domination. Emphasizing Native American agency and as an integral part of Tayo’s healing, Betonie tells stories that subvert the binary logic that posits Native Americans in opposition to white Americans. Through Betonie and Tayo, Silko provides an intriguing way in which Native Americans subsume white hegemony under the indigenous history of America, while moving beyond the exclusionary nationalist model that essentializes full-bloodedness as “authentic” Native Americanness.

However, in de-essentializing Native American nation, Silko’s attempt to envision an alternative version of de-essentialized nationalism ultimately remains incomplete because of its uncritical recourse to the gendered trope of woman as the lost land or as nature. Making males of mixed blood emerge as the central subjects of Native American history, Silko betrays contradictions between historicizing discourses that embrace change and the essentializing impulses that resist it. At the core of Silko’s project in *Ceremony*, female subjects are rendered as abstract symbols, which Gloria Naylor, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Nora Okja Keller, for example, critique in their feminist redefinitions of nation. As suggested in Silko’s allegorization of her protagonist Tayo’s reclamation of the lost cattle, Native Americans’ lost land is represented as

feminine, which is a typical rhetorical feature of nationalisms that define nation as men's property.¹

Silko uses female characters in order to highlight Native Americans' dilemmas and then conflates them with the mythic figures in Laguna stories. The spectral Laura, Tayo's dead mother, and Helen Jean, a helpless, wandering Native American woman, show that it is women's lives that bear the most multifaceted aspects of Native American history. The female body is the site of the increasing complications of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, as well as the most contested ground of uneven intercultural interactions (Anzaldúa; Nagel; Wiegman). Representing Laura and Helen Jean as the most disturbed aspects of Native American history, Silko associates Tayo's mother with Native Americans' Mother land, as the narrative of Tayo's quest develops. By using Laura as the bridge for Tayo to connect his personal loss to the Laguna's collective loss of their land, Silko makes Laura a vanishing point for a nationalist project. In addition, Ts'eh, Tayo's best helper, is associated with the Laguna's mountain spirit. Silko sacrifices gendered complexity for her male protagonist's self-decolonization, by eventually disassociating the feminine from real-life Native American women's social contexts.

Discussing *Ceremony*, I contextualize nationalism in Native Americans' struggles for political visibility and cultural sovereignty, which Native American

¹ In various contexts, feminists have critiqued hegemonic discourses that see nation as men's property, reclaiming women as national subjects. For example, see Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Mino Malle, eds.; McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds.; Tamar Mayer, ed.; Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault, eds.; Lois A. West, ed.; Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds.

movements have strived for since the late 1960s.² Native American scholars, such as Vine Deloria (1984), define Native Americans as “nations within” in terms of their indigenous rights to the land and their struggles for self-government. In Native American contexts, nation means cultural nation without territory; as such, it functions to provide an imaginary ground for Native American identification. With Native Americans’ historical deprivation of their “home,” which Catherine Rainwater argues is “a primary feature of all Native American experience” (119), the lost land symbolically functions as the national base for resistance. Silko asserts mixed blood males as national subjects, and thereby expands the boundary of national membership. By Native American nationalism in *Ceremony*, I mean an ethnic positioning that Silko assumes for the Laguna Pueblos’ and extensively Native Americans’ assertion of their rights to the land. As a counter-ideology, Silko’s nationalism professes a common history of Native Americans’ subjugation and resistance from the mixed blood male protagonist’s perspective. By nation in this chapter, I refer to Native Americans’ cultural nation, using nation and ethnic culture interchangeably for two reasons. Silko’s nationalism is not a nationalism that seeks to build a nation-state but a nationalism without the territorial boundary of nation. As such, Silko’s nationalism focuses on self-decolonization against multifarious forms to colonize Native Americans’ minds.

In this chapter, I read *Ceremony* as Silko’s failed project of her Native American cultural nationalism against two prevailing tendencies in contemporary criticisms of

² For accounts of Native American nationalist movements for cultural sovereignty, see, for example, Colin Calloway; Vine Deloria (1984; 1992); Jere’ Bishoop France; Albert Hurtado and Peter Iverson (418-518); Iverson; James Olson and Raymond Wilson; Neal Salisbury and Philip Deloria.

Silko's novel: the binary opposition of Native Americans' "traditional," "nature-oriented" way of life vs. an "all-objectifying" white way of life; and a persistent impulse to romanticize "the feminine" in favor of Silko's symbolic subversion. In doing so, I argue that Silko not only provides a positive Native American self-image against the prevailing stereotypes of Native Americans but also a viable redefinition of Native American tradition beyond oppositional logics. Silko partly succeeds in de-essentializing nation through rendering mixed blood males as emergent subjects in a contemporary Native American context. However, Silko undermines her own historicizing discourses by her use of Laguna myths. Re-essentializing female subjects into the mythic realm — outside of Native American history — Silko fails to envision a new nationalist model that allows women as national subjects.

Relocating Native American tradition within history, Silko seeks to create a cultural space in which Native Americans' changing realities are rearticulated against hegemonic discourses that are based on a binary opposition between Native American and white American. Against hegemonic definitions of Native Americans as changeless or amodern peoples in spite of modernization, Silko provides fictional landscapes to show the Laguna Pueblo's real-life changes since World War II. Based on the logic of opposition, much of the literary criticism on *Ceremony* since its publication tends to assume the "traditional" way of the Laguna Pueblos as stable. Such an oppositional logic, which Silko herself explains is the very target that she tries to dismantle in this novel (Arnold 1999, 71; *Conversations* 171), often genders a Native American way of

life as the “feminine” that turns out to have no relation to real-life women.³ Native American tradition is also romanticized as the “feminine principle” of life (that is, communal, spiritual, and/or nature-oriented). These kinds of readings generally do not question the stability of Native American “tradition.”

A famous Native American writer of the Laguna Pueblo and one of the most influential critics of this novel, Paula Gunn Allen is typical in the problematic tendency I observe in criticisms of *Ceremony*. In *The Sacred Hoop* (1986), Allen discusses Native American traditionalism as the feminine principle of life. She powerfully claims, “we are the land,” as “the fundamental idea of Native American life” (119). She characterizes non-Native American (that is, Western Christian) ways of thought as “opposition, dualism, and isolation (separateness)” (56), to which she contrasts a Native American tradition of dynamic holism, as if they are two totally separate realms with no interaction with each other. Celebrating “the feminine principle” of the Laguna tradition as reinvigorating, Allen argues that “Tayo’s illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land, and his healing is a result of his recognition of this unity” (119). However, by assuming the Laguna worldview as immune from historical changes, Allen decontextualizes Tayo’s subjectivity and ignores his illness as a World War II veteran and a survivor of the Bataan Death March.⁴ More

³ As for criticisms based on the oppositional logic, see Paula Gunn Allen (1986); William Bevis; Dee Horne; Per Seyersted; Rachel Stein; Bonnie Winnsbro, to name a few. See Allen (1986); Matthew Torey; Nancy Von Rosk, for readings of the novel that romanticize the “feminine” as the principle of Native American life,

⁴ In a letter to James Wright, Silko briefly notes that her “father’s first cousins, Jack and Les,” were “the men [she] was writing about when [she] wrote *Ceremony*” (*Delicacy* 59). Leslie Evans discusses his father, Les, a survivor of the Bataan Death March, as “a real-life model for Tayo” (15). Over 300 Native Americans took part in the March in the Philippines in 1942

problematically, Allen essentializes the land as ahistorical, although she insists on “we”-as-the land philosophy as a political base for claiming Native Americans’ indigenous rights in the U.S.

Reading *Ceremony* from a Native American essentialist lens ignores that Silko’s writing of this novel is deeply embedded in the contemporary U.S. context. It is the contemporariness of Native American life under ongoing change, not an allegedly “stable” tribal “tradition,” that Silko emphasizes in most of her major works, including *Ceremony*, *Storyteller* (1981), *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), and her essay collection on Native American life today, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996).

Ceremony was written amidst the Laguna Pueblo’s ongoing transformation since World War II and also amidst the upheavals of the U.S. social movements in the 1970s, the decade of oppositional politics. As many historians have argued, Native Americans have made themselves visible since the 1960s.⁵ While sharing the “anger and bitterness”

(Bernstein 46). Peter G. Beidler provides a more detailed account of the March in his re-reading of *Ceremony*. General McArthur “was forced to abandon 100,000 American and Filipino soldiers and civilians to inevitable capture by Japanese forces. The Japanese stripped their prisoners of their weapons and forced them to march some eighty miles in the heat of the jungle sun to barbed wire camps to the north. Many of the American soldiers and even more of their Filipino comrades died on the weeklong trek” (Beidler 25). Tayo, Rocky, and other Laguna veterans were “MacArthur’s boys”; Tayo gets “rewards for surviving the Bataan Death March” from the U.S. government (*Ceremony* 42; 40).

⁵ See note 2. According to these scholars, Native Americans had been believed to be “vanishing Americans,” especially from the 1890s until the early 1960s, a period during which waves of U.S. assimilation policies had been indefatigably executed on Native Americans. While Native Americans have succeeded in gaining visibility through protest movements since the 1960s, there still remain deeper problems. On the other hand, there had been surging interests in tribal traditions. Silko is critical of such “return” to tribal pasts. The nationwide surging interests in tribal pasts had not often been connected to here-and-now Native Americans’ contemporary problems, serving to relieve collective guilt about the violent history committed on Native Americans. The simultaneity of social visibility, surging interests in tribal pasts, and remaining deeper problems serves as one of the triggers of what Kenneth Lincoln calls a “Native American

of civil rights activists, Silko seems more preoccupied with unsettling her contemporary Native Americans' oppositional politics that strengthen the notions of Native American "tradition" as separable from white modernity. As Silko's critical comment on her contemporary Native Americans' traditionalist quests to revitalize a Native American tribal past, *Ceremony* makes it clear that a simple return to tradition is impossible (*Yellow Woman* 200; see also notes 5 and 8). More significantly, as the Laguna medicine man Ku'oosh's failure to heal Tayo implies in *Ceremony*, Silko perceives Native American tradition as an intense site of transformation.

Against an essentializing fixation on Native American nations as homogenous, old, relatively change-free, and thus traditional, Silko locates World War II with its atomic bomb as the core of the Laguna community's ongoing transformation in *Ceremony*. Representing World War II as a fundamental break in American life as well as in Tayo's subjectivity formation (*Conversations* 44), she radically historicizes the Laguna reservation, the setting of *Ceremony*, as the very site in which some of the most significant events in the twentieth century converge: the Laguna Pueblo men's massive participation in World War II⁶; the first atomic bomb test at Trinity Site, near the Laguna reservation in New Mexico, a few days before the end of World War II; the impact of

Renaissance," respectively argue Calloway and Deloria (1992). Focusing on a Native American literary achievements in the 1960s and 1970s, to which Silko is one of the major contributors, Lincoln narrows down the meaning of the cultural renaissance as "a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms" (8). A decade later, Robert M. Nelson criticizes Lincoln's labeling, "Native American Renaissance," in that it "tends to marginalize them" by validifying the categorization of literature "according to its ethnic antecedents" (1). In his theorizing of the "ethnocriticism," which is critical of Lincoln's argument, Arnold Krupat also points out that Native American "oral tradition" is also an invented one (37-8).

⁶ According to Alison R. Bernstein, "[i]t is more likely that closer to half of the reservation Indians actually registered," and "1,500 Pueblo Indians signed up, exceeding original estimate" (35).

uranium mining on Native Americans since the 1950s. The Laguna Pueblo reservation and other reservations had been under rapid “development” (in fact, mal-development) since the early 1950s because of their large uranium deposits or other natural resources.⁷ Considering this, it is significant that Silko puts the climax of *Ceremony* at the Jackpile uranium mine, whose operation began in 1952. In this novel, the mine serves as an apocalyptic sign for an age of all-encompassing destruction triggered by World War II. Amidst these changes, Silko perceives the Laguna “tradition” under challenge from newly emergent realities since World War II. Silko is also highly critical of the cultural nationalist moves that, by focusing on separation and loss, embrace an essentializing impulse, identity politics that posit Native Americans only as victims, and a dichotomous worldview that would ignore the complexity of life and interconnectedness (Arnold 1999 and “Introduction” in 2000; Coltelli; *Conversations*).⁸ Against essentializing notions of community and cultural identity, Silko notes in an autobiographical essay: “human communities are living beings that continue to change; while there may be a concept of the ‘traditional Indian’ or ‘traditional Laguna Pueblo

⁷ In *Storyteller*, Silko presents a photograph of Pagate Village, north of the Laguna reservation, taken from the open pit uranium mine in the early 1960s. A considerable part of the village is “swallowed by the mine” (270). See Churchill and La Duke for a detailed discussion of the exploitation of natural resources on reservations including Laguna since the early 1950s. The reservations replete with uranium were appointed as “National Sacrifice Areas” by president Nixon in 1972. Native Americans have been “sacrificed” to “radioactive colonialism,” note Churchill and La Duke.

⁸ Silko points out that Native American movements during the 1960s and 1970s “oversimplify the world,” commenting that “there’s no subtlety to their view. . . . what they miss is all of the personal subtleties and the unique experiences and aspects of this individual’s life. . . . It is much more important to explore all of the possible depth and all of the possible details of a person’s life and to range them through time. . . . This is how you begin to understand why these things happen” (*Conversations* 7). Based on her “in-between location” of mixed ancestry (Coltelli 148), Silko critically interrogates the notions of tradition and community that prevail among her contemporary Native Americans.

person,' no such being has ever existed. All along there have been changes; . . . any notions of 'tradition' necessarily include the notion of making do with whatever was available, of adaptation for survival" (*Yellow Woman* 200).

Written within these contexts, *Ceremony* provides an alternative yet gendered nationalism that affirms mixed bloods as subjects of Native American history but still defines women as existing outside history. In the following two sections, I discuss how Silko de-essentializes the Native American nation by deconstructing a hegemonic definition of mixed bloods and explore what she provides as an alternative for reshaping Native American tradition and nation. In the last section, I examine the contradictions between Silko's historicizing discourses and her essentializing impulses in professing her cultural nationalism.

Challenging Hegemony over Mixed Blood Subjects

Through Tayo's story, Silko asserts mixed blood subjects as an integral part of the Laguna history, revealing that the social containment of mixed blood subjects at the margins is constitutive of U.S. history as well as Native American history.⁹ *Ceremony* contains a story of mixed-blood ascription in Native American discourse, in which Tayo is defined as an embodied mark of "the disgrace of Indian women who went with [white men]" (57). In her contemporary context, Silko reveals that mixed blood subjects are

⁹ In recent criticism on Silko, mixed blood characters are celebrated as a new hybrid or mediational identity. See Michael Hobbs; Dee Horne; Marilyn Miller; Lewis Owens (1992); Anita Rupprecht; James Ruppert, for example. Such readings provide alternative frameworks that are designed to unsettle the oppositional logic or to avoid Native American essentialist perspectives. However, discussing Tayo as "a third space" or a new "mestiza" consciousness, they do not interrogate the social context of and the historical significance of Tayo's marginal status within Native American nations. I read Tayo as an emergent subject of the Native American nation who rearticulates national membership.

denied full membership to their identified “community” in the face of the hybrid history of Native Americans.¹⁰ As Silko reveals through Tayo’s mother Laura and the Lagunas’ attitude toward both her and Tayo, the denial of full membership to mixed bloods is historically constitutive of Native American culture. In the interlocking discourses of inter- and intra-cultural domination, the mixed blood Tayo is doubly othered: an inter- and intra-cultural other. “[T]his other, unwanted child” between Laura and an anonymous white man (65), Tayo is repeatedly forced to be conscious of the fact that he is a bodily text of Native American women’s shame. Perpetuated into an outsider status, he is not in-between. Rather, he has inhabited a painful space of neither/nor liminality (Miller 160; Owens 1998, 99; Stein 133). A Native American writer of mixed blood, Gerald Vizenor, argues that the cross-cultural other becomes “the double other of surveillance” and “separation,” and that this double other, “crossblood,” is invented as an anti-self of domination (1994, 168; 1990). A hybrid product of racialized sexual encounters, Tayo is contained at the margins of the Laguna.

To problematize the intracultural denial of mixed bloods’ full membership while contextualizing Tayo’s subjectivity formation in the pre-war Laguna, Silko strategically gives a very brief description of Laura. Laura’s life shows that intercultural interactions are gendered, racialized, sexualized, and uneven, and that there are profound excesses, which are inseparable from but not reducible to political domination and economic

¹⁰ See Devon A. Mihesuah (103-6) for the misguided notion that Native Americans are all full bloods.

exploitation.¹¹ As an embodiment of such interactions, Laura represents the most disturbed site of Native American life, in which ethnic boundaries are blurred by interracial sexual transgressions. When Laura:

had started drinking wine and riding in cars with white men and Mexicans, the people could not define their feeling about her. The Catholic priest shook his finger at the drunkenness and lust, but the people felt something deeper: they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves. The older sister had to act; she had to act for the people, to get this young girl back. (68)

Complicating the problems in the poor Laguna reservation, Laura's drinking with men outside the reservation shows how stereotypes of Native Americans are gendered in the intersection of sexuality, ethnicity, and class. While the Catholic priest defines Laura as a promiscuous, drunken "Indian" woman, the Laguna people only feel "they were losing part of themselves" but remain unable to redefine in their own terms what is happening to them. Their traditional worldview does not work, because "the fifth [or present] world had become entangled with . . . two names: an Indian name and a white name" (68).

Laura's life shows how Native American culture historically has been formed by uneven intercultural encounters of values, through which Native American ways of life and values are powerfully untaught. Urged by white teachers "to break away from her home," Laura is attracted to the white world (68). Laura has constantly been pushed to deny her culture by "what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the

¹¹ For discussions of the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in various contexts, see Gloria Anzaldúa, Joanne Nagel, Sherry Ortner, for example.

Indian people” (68). She thus seeks to establish her identity and the meaning of life through men outside the reservation, the white and Mexican men who smiled at her “despite the fact that she was an Indian” (68). As Tayo later realizes when he rethinks his mother’s life in Gallup, a city near the Laguna reservation, Laura also was “educated only enough to know [she] wanted to leave the reservation” although “there weren’t many jobs [Native Americans] could get” (115). After years of wandering with non-Native American men, she has come to have low self-esteem, suffers psychic unrest and splitting, and finally sees a truth “in their fists and in their greedy feeble love-making” (69). But she remains unable to articulate in her own terms what the truth is: “she had no English words for” it (69). Like June Kashpaw in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, Laura has been adrift in the world of white men and alcohol, and finally is lost in death.

Women’s bodies are the very site where cultural boundaries are maintained and policed for the sake of the “purity” of the nation. To the Laguna society, Laura, as a woman who transgresses cultural boundaries, represents a serious challenge, especially in controlling women’s sexuality. The Laguna people know that “what happened to [Laura] did not happen to her alone, it happened to all of them” (69). Silko describes the Laguna society as unable to handle the increasing problem of their young women like Laura, revealing the Laguna’s gender politics. Laura’s personal inability to redefine her experience serves to produce a self-victimizing locus for the “monstrous twin” of “shame” and self-hatred (69), which are painfully re-inscribed in Tayo. The Laguna people’s inability to disentangle the “twisted” “feelings” and “[en]tangled roots” drives the people to focus “the anger on the girl and her family,” although they know “from

many years of this conflict that the anger could not be contained by a single person or family” (69). Failing to take the challenge seriously, they instead decide to run Laura off the reservation.

A strong assumption of cultural “purity” is clearly manifest in the Laguna people’s response to Laura. Their gender politics ascribe their collective entanglement to the personal, which leads only to more entanglements. Gendered, personalized shame is often a collective wound. An embodiment of family disgrace and a destroyer of cultural “purity,” Laura leaves her community the discursive task of redefining cultural boundaries. Silko repeatedly emphasizes that the task “never has been easy” (125, 155, 254, 259), “isn’t easy” (259), and “won’t be easy” (173, 233), demanding “great patience and love” (36). As suggested in the fact that the task is undertaken by Tayo, Silko claims mixed blood males as emergent subjects who perform the task. Revisioning Native American nations as historically hybrid ones, Silko renders Tayo’s story a mixed blood son’s belated affirmation of his mother against the Laguna’s dominant interpretation of her as a “failed Yellow Woman.”¹²

Containing mixed blood subjects at the margins is coextensive with controlling women’s sexuality for maintaining national boundaries. Mixed blood means that there is no more national “purity,” disturbing the Laguna elders’ belief that the Laguna culture

¹² To her sister Auntie, Laura is a failed woman. Focusing on how the recovery of the maternal is accomplished in the novel, Nancy Von Rosk argues that Laura is a seemingly “failed Yellow Woman” (40). However, Silko subverts such a dominant interpretation of Laura’s life, by embedding allusively the Yellow Woman myth in the other female characters, argues Von Rosk. Silko explains: “Kochininako, Yellow Woman, represents all women in the old [Laguna] stories”; a woman of “vibrant sexuality” which benefits her people and by which her triumph is achieved, she often acts “despite disapproval, or concern for appearances or what others may say” (*Yellow Woman* 70-72). I argue that Silko represents Laura as a historical symbol for what has been happening and for Tayo’s self-decolonization.

and tradition should be preserved intact in spite of extra-cultural influences and intra-cultural transformations. Social stigmatization of Native American women's interracial sexual relationships is tightly connected to mixed blood ascription. An unwanted product of uneven intercultural encounter, Tayo shows the definitional politics of intracultural domination. Auntie, Laura's sister, and the most violent veteran, Emo, demonstrate how the Laguna discourse ascribes the Laguna's historical, intricate complexity to mixed bloods. Auntie has raised Tayo "to conceal the shame of her younger sister," Laura (29). However, she never conceals the details of how Tayo was born, always reminding him that he is an outsider. Deliberately marginalizing Tayo in her family, Auntie does not allow her son Rocky and others to call Tayo "brother." Against Old Grandma's sending for the Laguna medicine man Ku'oosh to perform a healing ceremony for Tayo, Auntie says: "You know what people will say. . . . They'll say, 'Don't do it. [Tayo]'s not full blood anyway'" (33). Although "a devout Christian" (77), Auntie does realize at every opportunity a kind of traditionalism that values full-bloodedness, a symbolic denominator of cultural "purity." Emo attempts to perpetuate Tayo's status as an outsider but in a different vein. Emo internalizes the hierarchy of races, in which white people are believed to be superior. Because he has the inferiority complex of a "genuine Indian," Emo has hated and ostracized Tayo from school or veteran fellows since their grade school days: "Tayo is part white" (57). In Emo's attitude and behavior to Tayo, whiteness is more foregrounded. Opposite of Auntie who values full-bloodedness, Emo ascribes Tayo's having "something right" to his partial whiteness (57).

Describing how Tayo happens to enlist in the U.S. Army, Silko reveals the different meanings of Native Americans' participation in the war to full blood and mixed blood subjects. A full-blooded Laguna man, Rocky expects to actively participate in the U.S. mainstream culture outside the reservation after the war, while Tayo desires to free himself from the Lagunas' ascription of mixed blood by going to war with his cousin. As Alison R. Bernstein notes, World War II provided Native Americans more democratic eligibility for citizenship and opportunities for assimilation and integration on an unprecedentedly massive scale (22-39). For Rocky, the U.S. army means a powerful access to the mainstream culture. Silko, by briefly contrasting Rocky's assimilationism through his schooling and Tayo's struggle to learn the Laguna way of seeing through his beloved uncle Josiah, emphasizes that, for mixed blood subjects like Tayo, the U.S. Army is primarily a means for intracultural inclusion. Attracted by the training programs listed in the army brochures, Rocky enlists. Tayo also "sign[s] his name after Rocky," because he is called "brother" by Rocky for the first time (72). The enlisted Tayo feels "happy that he would be with Rocky, traveling the world in the Army, together, as brothers"; and "Rocky patted him on the back, smiling too" (72).

Silko further complicates the Lagunas' notion of blood as the marker of cultural boundary through Auntie. Auntie's discourse on Tayo is overtly exclusionary and complicated by the Laguna's gendered discourse of women's sexuality. While dreaming that Rocky will be a pilot in the army and succeed in mainstream U.S. culture, Rocky's mother Auntie objects to Tayo's enlistment. She says, "Rocky is different . . . but this one, [Tayo]'s supposed to stay here" (73). She hopes that Rocky will become a

successful part of the mainstream culture with his “growing understanding of the outside world, of the books, of everything of importance and power” (76). For Auntie, Tayo is a “domestic” worker, who has to work with his uncle Josiah, helping the cattle business in the Laguna reservation. Having returned alone from the war, Tayo feels that “there was no place left for him” in Auntie’s house (32). He knows that Auntie has expected that it is Rocky who should have returned alive (28, 73). For Tayo, who fails in securing Rocky’s safe return, his participation in the U.S. Army betrays his hope that he could be fully accepted as a member of his family and of the Laguna society.

A mixed blood subject, Tayo is denied a voice in the Laguna society, and his war experience complicates his subjectivity formation. In the opening pages of the novel, Tayo is introduced as a World War II survivor, whose overwhelming memory is the Bataan Death March. Tayo survives the March, during which Rocky died beside him; in turn, he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. In the hospital after surviving the March, Tayo loses his sense of time, space, and his own self, “ha[ving] been white smoke” that was so “dense [that] visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there” (14). For a survivor of the March and the war that gave him haunting memories of “the dismembered corpses” and “human bodies” evaporated by the bombs (37), it is easier “to remain invisible here” (16). Returning home, Tayo further suffers from nightmares, speechless days, and compulsive vomiting. In addition, his uncle Josiah’s death in his absence during the war gives the returned Tayo the most overwhelming grief and sense of loss.

Through the spectral Josiah's mediation, Tayo begins his seven-year-long struggle for healing and ultimately for re-membering mixed blood males as national subjects. Remembrance is a primary necessity for such re-membering, suggests Silko. In spite of entangled memories, the still inarticulate Tayo remembers what Josiah taught him: "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going" (45). Beginning the cattle business, Josiah told Tayo that "[w]e'll have to do things our own way" (75). From this moment of restoring a memory that has been lost with Josiah's death, Tayo grounds his being in the Laguna landscape and becomes prepared for what Adrienne Rich calls "revision": "an act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction, . . . an act of survival" (1979, 35). For Tayo, the initial step for a new subjectivity is to redefine himself, "an old text" of his mother's shame, in his own terms. One of the powerful ways to accomplish this task is remembrance "with fresh eyes" "from a new critical direction." Silko's idea of remembrance in this novel corresponds to a gendered version of what Michel Foucault calls "counter-memory": a historically alternative memory to free the subjugated knowledge and repressed memory of the oppressed from hegemonic discourses.

In Tayo's remembrance, Night Swan, Josiah's Mexican love, functions as a feminine version of Josiah. Josiah offers a complementary substitute for Tayo's absent mother. While representing Laura as an integral part of Native American history, Silko does not interrogate a masculine silence about women's sexuality. Both Tayo and Josiah, as males, keep silent about Laura. Not interrogating the gendered silence, Silko instead

elaborates Night Swan as a maternal figure who helps Tayo redefine himself and his mother's "shame." Tayo wants to but refuses to tell Josiah how deeply he feels the pain of Auntie's marginalization of him and the Laguna people's shaming of his mother, because "he loved Josiah too much to admit the shame" (71). Whereas Keller critiques the gendered silencing about "comfort women" within Korean and Japanese nationalisms in *Comfort Woman* (1997), Silko keeps intact Tayo's bond with Josiah, which is in part based on gendered silence about Native American women's lives, especially their sexuality.

Remembering Night Swan's answer to his first talk about his feeling of being a mixed blood, Tayo begins to see his mixed blood as a site of intense affirmation. With his light skin from his unknown father, Tayo has suffered a pressing sense of inadequacy that has prevented him from belonging to the Laguna fully. Before the war, Tayo talked to Night Swan about his mother and his sense of what it means to be a mixed blood: "I always wished I had dark eyes like other people. When they look at me they remember things that happened. My mother" (99). Night Swan comments on the psychic mechanism of mixed blood ascription:

They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something happening around them, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites — most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing. . . . They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves. (99-100)

Helping Tayo re-conceive of his mixed blood status positively, Night Swan explains that change and difference are conceived as threatening and the fear of change is thus projected onto mixed-bloods, “the ones who look different.” As Night Swan observes, sameness is skin-deep; mixed bloods are made to be a screen onto which the related two cultures’ fear for “what has happened inside themselves” is projected while the fear inside remains concealed. Recalling her remark years later, Tayo realizes that mixed blood subjects are invented as the other outside cultural boundaries. He further infers that the fact that “[t]hey blame us” reflects the changing history of Native American nations, in which mixed blood population has been increasing but is still marginalized.¹³

Silko de-essentializes the Native American nation by addressing difference within a culture. Meanwhile, Laura is reduced to the cause of Tayo’s difference rather than further explored as the most suggestive site for revisioning Native American history. Silko reinserts Laura at the beginning moment of Tayo’s affirmation of his mixed blood subjectivity, and links Laura’s urban experience to mixed blood subjects’ “homelessness.” To Tayo, mixed-blood is another name for difference, as he confesses to Night Swan that he has envied full-blooded Laguna people’s “dark eyes” (99). To redefine difference, Tayo re-visits the simultaneous origin of his identity and difference: his othered mother. On his way to see Betonie for another healing ceremony, Tayo passes through the streets of Gallup, and recalls his mother. Gallup is the place in which various versions of “Indianness” are displayed for non-native visitors during the city’s

¹³ According to Bernstein, by the time of World War II, the full-blooded population had decreased to about 50% of the whole Native American populations, in spite of their persistent attempt to preserve racial purity.

celebration of ceremonial time. A city of intercultural interaction, Gallup is the birth place of mixed bloods, “the ones the women were ashamed to send home for their families to raise” (108). Tayo’s early life with his mother in Gallup was marked by hunger, homeless wanderings, loneliness when his mother was out with men, men’s battering of women and their children, violent drinking, and police reprisals. Like the “people crouching outside bars like cold flies stuck to the wall” (107), his mother led an aimless life only to her own destruction. Just as he had been lost in “white smoke” (14) in the hospital, his mother had been lost in “a dangerous place,” which made her unable to think of going home again. Linking his mother’s homeless life to Native Americans’ deprivation of the land, Tayo recognizes the ugly, homeless aspect of Gallup as having a profound meaning: “This is us, too, I was thinking to myself” (107). In his remembrance of his mother, Tayo recognizes that he can be lost again in the world of Gallup’s stereotyped world of “drinking Indians.”¹⁴ For him, “there was no place to go now except back to the hospital in Los Angeles,” because “[t]hey didn’t want him at Laguna” (118). Tayo then realizes the significance of his healing: making his own place for himself in order not to repeat his mother’s life. “He looked back at the bridge, and he made a wish. The same wish Rocky made that night in San Diego: a safe return” (116).

Preparing Tayo’s subsequent re-turning (i.e., reclaiming) to the Laguna as his own “home,” Silko critically examines the social construction of Tayo’s mixed blood subjectivity in the Laguna society, and complicates it by locating World War II as a

¹⁴ Mihesuah points out that Gallup has been one of “easy targets for public criticism” because of its Native American alcoholism, dangerous life, and interracial sexual “transgression” (98).

fundamental break in his subjectivity formation. In Silko's centering of the liminal time-space of mixed-blooded figures in the novel, Native American history is rearticulated as hybrid, and national boundaries are redrawn to include mixed blood subjects. From the perspectives of marginalized subjects, Silko challenges the notion of the cultural "purity" of the Native American nation, whose twin notion is the prevailing idea of white culture as still "foreign" and (thus) "evil."

Post-traditionalist Agency for Reshaping Tradition and Nation

For Tayo's slow process of becoming a new subject who reclaims marginality as a site for national transformation, Silko establishes an alternative patrilineal bond, in the way in which it serves to de-essentialize the Native American nation under full blood subjects' discursive hegemony. Considering that bond, it is no wonder that Silko's de-essentialized nation is also gendered in spite of its more inclusive boundary for mixed blood males. Tayo's uncle Josiah and the Navajo healer Betonie are two substitutive father figures, taking the place of the absent mother Laura.¹⁵ Proposing a viable definition of Native American tradition and a more sustainable way for cultural preservation than the full-blooded Laguna elder Ku'oosh's, Silko contrasts this masculine bond to the other full blooded veterans' aimless life of drinking and forgetting. The veterans — Emo, Harley, and Leroy — show Native American masculinity in crisis after World War II.

¹⁵ There are quite a few critics who discuss Josiah seriously. In *Native American Renaissance*, Kenneth Lincoln briefly notes that Josiah is Tayo's "surrogate father" (248). In a Lacanian frame, Gretchen Ronnow reads Josiah as "a nurturing mother figure for Tayo" (80). Allen associates Josiah with the earth spirit that she argues is a symbol for the Lagunas' tradition. Discussing Josiah, I focus on how Silko establishes a masculine homosocial bond across Native American cultures.

Silko represents Josiah as a significant figure who provides a masculine link between Tayo and the pre-war Laguna society, rendering him a spectral “father,” who died before the novel begins. Under the mixed-blood ascription in the Laguna’s dominant discourse, Tayo has a strong affective attachment to Josiah, because Josiah’s love and acceptance is so important to a small child of mixed blood, raised under his rejecting aunt. It is through Josiah, Tayo’s only source and object of love and care, that Tayo learns the Laguna way of life and tries to identify himself as a Laguna man. Silko’s rendering of Josiah as a spectral father figure is a deliberate strategy that prepares for another masculine line that powerfully transfers mixed blood male subjects’ counter-memory.

Subverting the prevailing notion of white people as “the destroyers and the thieves” of Native America (128), Silko provides an alternative definition of national identity not by blood but by community. In Tayo’s post-war situation, the temporal setting of the novel, Silko replaces Josiah with a more powerful father figure, Betonie. Unlike Josiah, Betonie has no blood relationship with Tayo. This “community” Silko proposes as the base of national identity is gendered; it is a community of masculine bonds. Whereas Josiah triggers off Tayo’s remembrance (see pp. 45-6), Betonie exerts the ceremonial, therefore, transformative power of story and helps Tayo become a new subject of national memory and history.

To highlight Betonie’s post-traditional agency as the alternative she proposes in the middle of the novel, Silko reveals the limits of Native American traditionalism and Native American masculinity in crisis in the post-war Laguna. Ku’oosh betrays the

traditionalist limit of cultural preservation in (spite of) the changing reality. Although he perceives cultural challenges and pressures, Ku'oosh keeps the old way. In his ceremony for Tayo, Ku'oosh acknowledges that "no word exists" to explain "the intricacies of a continuing process" (35). The Laguna tradition ("made of stories" [95]) needs new stories in order to preserve itself. As Ku'oosh shows, it is not traditionalists who can add stories for the Laguna's collective understanding of their changing world. In addition, like the other Laguna people, Ku'oosh also "blamed liquor and . . . the war" (53), unable to see why the Laguna veterans do not get better in spite of his ceremony and medicine.

Ku'oosh's failed ceremony raises a question: if people do not get well in spite of cultural preservation, for whom has the tradition been preserved?¹⁶ This is exactly Betonie's critique of Ku'oosh, an embodiment of traditionalism. Ku'oosh perceives World War II as "the white people's war," as if the Laguna society had no relation to the war in spite of the fact that many of the Laguna men participated in it (36). Ku'oosh's scalp ceremony for Tayo, which Silko explains is "a purification ceremony which was done for warriors, or anybody that might have killed another human being in the battle," is of no avail (*Conversations* 34). There are already differences to an extent beyond imagination between the Native American "old way of warfare" and "white warfare — killing across great distance without knowing who or how many had died" with guns,

¹⁶ In "Special Problems" (1990), Allen defends Native American traditionalism: "If people die as a result of preserving tradition in the white way of preservation, for whom will the tradition be preserved?" (380-81). Although Allen attacks Silko's publication of this novel for succumbing to "the white way of preservation," Allen's comment on tradition corresponds to Silko's critique of Ku'oosh's traditionalism.

bombs, and atomic bombs (36). Ku'oosh has not seen and would not believe "the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated"; and thus, what had happened in "the white people's war" "was all too alien [for him] to comprehend" (36-7). Without modifications in ceremony and new stories with which he could meet the changing needs of his people, Ku'oosh's ceremony, which has been performed for their "old way of warfare," turns out to be a flat repetition of the old, a repetition without making a difference. After Tayo's first healing ceremony, Ku'oosh leaves, saying: "There are some things we can't cure like we used to. . . . not [simply] since the white people came. The others who had the Scalp Ceremony, some of them are not better either" (38).

The returned veterans show Native American masculinity in crisis. The veterans are completely disconnected from their tradition and instead "faithful" to a prevailing stereotype of Native Americans as the "drunken Indians." Silko describes World War II as a serious brake against cultural preservation and transmission in Native American nations.¹⁷ Denied further participation in the U.S. mainstream culture after the war, the veterans develop an anachronistic nostalgia for their war days. As Harley remembers, he felt a certain kind of respect primarily because of his uniform, not being asked "if [he]

¹⁷ As historians have recently argued, through World War II, Native Americans came into contact with white and other cultures on an unprecedented massive scale. Their participation in the war resulted in a new taste of life off the reservation, deepening their desire to adopt white cultural values and to belong to a larger society of America (Bernstein 60; Calloway 403; Iverson 103; Franco 121). In her extensive historical research on Native Americans in an exclusive context of World War II, Alison Bernstein observes: "But it was the returnees, the ones who had lived nearly three years away from the land and their people, that worried the elders of Native American societies most," for the veterans "were the new culture bearers, the transformers and challengers of the ways of the past" (62). In a similar vein, Ku'oosh worries about "what will happen to all of us if [Tayo] and other[veteran]s don't get well" in spite of his scalp ceremony (38).

was Indian” (41). He “was a big spender” with his “military pay” in “the biggest city” full of “tall buildings,” “lights at night everywhere,” and “so many bars and juke boxes,” which was seen by him as a great contrast to the reservation (41). Most of all, there were “white women” who “fought over” him (41). Drinking, joking, and womanizing, the veterans are “trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war” (43). Robert Parker notes that they try to compensate “with a slavish repetition of ideas projected onto the past” for their helpless, jobless masculinity “with nothing to do” after the war (129). Their nostalgia for the war time is a displaced version of Native American traditionalism. Under Emo’s lead, their ritual has its own pattern, “from cursing the barren dry land the white man had left them, to talking about San Diego and the cities where the white women were still waiting for them. . . . But in the end, they always came around to it. ‘We were the best. U.S. Army. We butchered every Jap we found’” (61). Their sense of loss is directed at what they enjoyed in their uniform. And the past that they desire to re-vitalize is never the Laguna tradition.

As the veterans demonstrate, masculinity is also racialized. Moreover, men assert their masculinity by subordinating women, often regardless of women’s class, nationality and race. As observed in minority men across cultures, the veterans also resort to masculine hegemony over women in order to compensate for their marginalized status. The veterans’ nostalgia is connected to a racialized compensation of Native American manhood with sexual relationships with white women. To the veterans, “[b]elonging was drinking and laughing with the platoon, dancing with blond women,

buying drinks for buddies” (43). As the veterans’ compulsive talk of war and sex reveals, the social meanings of interracial sexual relationship are gendered. While Native American women’s sexual relationships with white men are a cause of social stigmatization, as it was for Laura, the veterans try to get, albeit temporarily, a secured sense of their equal manhood to white men through their sexual relationships with white women. At a peak of the veterans’ compulsive, self-deceiving talk of war and sex, Silko inserts a poem, which is also Emo’s story, to depict Native American soldiers during the war. Wearing the same uniform, the whites and the “chief[s]” had been treated the same (58).¹⁸ In his story, Emo, sometimes passing for a white in order to gain sexual favor, is a “hero,” whose pride and action are centered only in his sexual “conquest” of white women. Although he believes he could bolster his Native American masculinity with white women, such a compensation for his racialized masculinity is barely possible unless he fails in racial passing. Resenting that he no longer gets social recognition after the war, Emo cries, “They took our land, they took everything! So let’s get our hands on white women” (55). For him, white women are the object of “trade” for everything that he thinks has been taken away from Native Americans.

Through the veterans, Silko critiques a politics based on collective identification as victims. However, Silko does not explicitly problematize sexism revealed in the veterans, while representing the veterans as frustrated and thus violent. As clarified later in *Betonie’s* witchery story-poem and in the *Gambler* myth-poem, one of Silko’s repeated themes throughout the novel is that Native Americans cannot empower

¹⁸ For historical accounts of Native American soldiers’ life during the war, see Alison R. Bernstein (chs. 3-4); Franco (ch. 2).

themselves simply through opposition. For Silko, the politics of identity undermines agency as long as it highlights victim identity. Based on the binary opposition of victim and victimizer, such politics serve to repress intracultural difference and thus further the problems of intracultural domination (*Conversations* 36). In the Ck'o'yo magic poem inserted in the middle of the veterans' ritual (46-9), Silko likens their victim mentality to the Ck'o'yo magic, while emphasizing Native American agency and accountability. Compared to the Ck'o'yo magician, Emo is the leader of the veterans' self-deceiving life. The twin brothers, Ma'see'wi and Ou'yu'ye'wi, were tricked by the Ck'o'yo magician, and neglected their duty, believing the magic "could give life to plants and animals" (48). As the brothers "were fooled by / that Ck'o'yo medicine man" (48), the veterans fool themselves by cultivating a victim mentality, which reflects their sexist and racialized masculinity. Like the twin brothers who are so busy playing with the magic, the veterans are bent on an aimless life of alcohol and violent behavior, which is one of the controlling images of Native Americans (Mihe'suah 97-8). Using the Laguna's old story to contextualize what is now happening, Silko suggests that oppositional politics based on victim mentality is not helpful for transformation.

Betonie is Silko's alternative for national survival beyond both simple preservation of national culture and the dialectic of Native American victim and white victimizer. With Betonie's story about witchery and its apocalyptic vision, Silko attempts a double-edged project: a critical re-location of white domination within a larger indigenous story of America and thereby a radical opening of Native American agency. In his ceremonial transformation for contemporary needs and in his unique

revision of history, Betonie is an embodiment of what Vizenor terms “postindian warrior of survivance.” In *Manifest Manners* (1994), Vizenor refers to “postindian survivance” as Native Americans’ survival and viable sustenance through alternative “simulations” for self-decolonization or differently invented and reinvented stories against “the simulations of dominance.” Vizenor argues that “the simulations of dominance” invented and have successfully constructed heterogeneous Native Americans into an allegedly homogeneous “Indian.”¹⁹ In their revisioning of history as a contested ground of contending stories, Native Americans, through self-decolonization, have challenged a variety of simulations of dominance and its manifest manners, argues Vizenor (1994a). For both Silko and Vizenor, who have in common mixed ancestry and an intense interest in survivors, survivors are “crossbloods” (Silko, *Conversations* 40; Vizenor 1990, vii). Through Betonie, Silko exemplifies a discursive subversion performed from a “postindian” perspective. Betonie deconstructs the prevailing logic of Native Americans vs. Euro-Americans, revealing that the logic of opposition is in fact the co-product of “the simulations of dominance” and Native American complicit participation.

Betonie is a post-traditionalist agent-healer, who provides a viable redefinition of Native American tradition. Betonie speaks “good English” (117) in contrast to Ku’oosh, whose speech Tayo is partly unable to understand because of “the old dialect,” feeling ashamed that “his [own] language was childish, interspersed with English words” (34).

¹⁹ As his conscious and deliberate use of the word “simulation” suggests, Vizenor refuses to assume an authenticity of Native Americanness and to essentialize it. The “post” in Vizenor’s coined term “postindian” has a double meaning of “after” and “de-,” while his intended emphasis lies on the latter as in the word “decolonization.” For a detailed discussion of “postindian survivance” in general, see Vizenor (1994); in postmodern contexts in particular, see Vizenor (1994, ch. 3).

For Tayo, Betonie seems more contemporary than Ku'oosh: "This Betonie didn't talk the way Tayo expected a medicine man to talk. He didn't act like a medicine man at all" (118). Following his grandmother's advice, Betonie was voluntarily educated at the end of the 19th century by whites at Sherman Institute, Riverside, California, to which Indigo, the female protagonist of Silko's 1999 novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, is forcedly sent. Betonie has learned not to "take changes" for an assimilationist success in the white world but to cope with the changes by his active appropriations of the white culture (122). His grandmother, the Navajo traditional medicine man Descheeny's Mexican wife, teaches him that ceremonies against new evil should not be the same. She says: "[English] is carried on in all [tribal] languages now, so you have to know English too" (122); under waves of change, "[w]e must have power from everywhere. Even the power we can get from the whites" (150). For her, adaptive changes are essential. She teaches him a profound insight, which enables him to confront changing realities: "things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth" (126). Betonie's grandmother's teaching echoes the words of Night Swan. In a similar vein, yet in a different context, Betonie's grandmother, who was once a Mexican outsider-captive to the Navajo community, emphasizes how to survive.

For Betonie, tradition means ongoing commitment to survival. In his house there are piles of collected things: "bundles of newspapers," "telephone books with the years scattered among cities — St. Louis, Seattle, New York, Oakland," "the Coke bottles," "layers of old calendars," and so forth (120). These are part of Betonie's paraphernalia,

forming a “pattern” (120) to suggest that he has collected his experiences outside the reservation and has gained knowledge to trace and figure out the contemporary workings of witchery. As for his odd collection, Betonie says: “All these things have stories alive in them” (121). Against certain traditionalist beliefs that ceremonies should not be changed, Betonie lays the rationale of ceremonial modifications on his grandmother’s teaching: “We won’t survive” if “we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and their power will triumph, and the people will be no more” (126). For Betonie, simple cultural preservation cannot be viable and is even useless if people are not healed by the “traditional” ceremonies.

A post-traditionalist healer, Betonie uses story-telling as a “clinically” integral part of ceremony. He helps Tayo narrate his own story in a more coherent way, and then provides an alternative perspective for Tayo to no longer blame white domination for his being a mixed blood. Against the idea that white people are foreign and evil, he tells Tayo: “Nothing is that simple. . . . [Y]ou don’t write off all the white people, just like you don’t trust all the Indians” (128). Tayo’s talk with Betonie turns out to be an effective talking-cure. Betonie’s “clinical” use of story-telling is a situated and accountable practice of healing. Interrupting Tayo’s preoccupied talk of Josiah, Betonie intuitively touches a point that Tayo has repressed. “‘Rocky,’ Betonie said softly, ‘tell me about Rocky’” (124). Betonie helps Tayo release himself from another core of his trauma: “The tears ran along the sides of Tayo’s nose and off his chin; as they fell, the hollow inside his chest folded into the black hole, and he waited for the collapse into himself” (124). Tayo feels that he owes his own life to Rocky, because he failed to

secure Rocky's safe return. Betonie re-locates Tayo's helpless self-blame for everything that had happened and his illness and healing within a larger context of world-wide witchery, saying that there are "no limits to this thing" (132). Betonie's story-telling enhances Tayo's transitions away from hegemonic discourses as well as from his war experience, as later clarified in Tayo's further completion of healing.

It is Betonie's own willed position of a kind of "inappropriate/d other"²⁰ both to Native American traditionalism and to white culture that enables him to create a unique historical vision and efficient ceremonies to meet the changing needs. Like Tayo, Betonie, as a mixed blood, is doubly othered in inter-racial hierarchy as well as in his Navajo community. The Navajos fear him because of his odd fetishes from the white culture. With his significant modifications of ceremony (Roemer 22), he is an other to Native American traditionalists, although they, like Ku'oosh, have sent for him when their ceremony does not work. The in-between location of his old hogan, from which he can see "the whole town spread out below" (117), is symbolic to show Silko's version of the "inappropriate/d other." "People ask me why I live here," he explains, "I tell them I want to keep track of the people. . . Because this is where Gallup keeps Indians until

²⁰ "Inappropriate/d other" is Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept. For third-world women, difference "is chosen and defined in their own terms" in order that they can "reappropriate their space" and "claim a new difference, in defiance of genderless hegemonic standardization" ("Introduction" 1986/87, 5). Engendering their own language, third-world women remain as "inappropriate/d others" beyond any Western-centered (feminist) representational economy. See Trinh (1989). Inspired by Trinh, Donna Haraway connects Trinh's powerful idea to her own idea of "diffraction," which lets "the *effects* of difference appear," breaking totalizing visions that only reproduce the same (1999, 320). Haraway expands: "to be an 'inappropriate/d other' means to be in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ration)ality — as the means of making potent connection that exceeds domination" (1999, 320). Betonie's revision-ary story diffracts the Western paradigm of the rational conquest of nature and the world.

Ceremonial time” (117). Pointing to the filthy area of the homeless Native Americans, he adds: “this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is that town down there which is out of place. Not this old medicine man” (118). Betonie defines the in-betweenness of his location as the “first” there, a center from which he overlooks the world, watching it closely and purposefully. Appropriation without being appropriated and then integration in his own ways and from his own position are exactly what “inappropriate/d others” are enacting in order to make a radical space for and in their political subversion. Remaining “inappropriated” while appropriating, Betonie exemplifies a viable subject of transformative history-making. As an “inappropriate/d other,” Betonie enacts an alternative way of preserving tradition.

In his stories, Betonie calls for Native Americans’ accountability, opening a space for Native American agency. He redefines white people as Native Americans’ invented other, commenting that Native American history is not separate from white Americans. Betonie tells Tayo that “[t]hey want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction” (132). A separatist understanding of Native American history and culture serves more alienation of Native Americans in white modernization. Betonie’s story in the witchery poem (132-38) is an expanded story of his idea that “we invented white people” as evil (132). This poem tells us a story of a Native American witches’ contest in the hills outside Laguna. In their boisterous contending of witchery skills, a witch who does not show off any skills tells the story of white people. Asked what witchery it has, the mysterious witch says “[w]hat I have is a story,” which triggers other witches’ laughter and contempt (135). In

this witch's story, white people are created for Native American witchery and kill everything, out of fear. This witch continues to detail the arrival of white people to America and the process and the results of their destruction: massacres, wars, famine, drought, the poisoning of water and land. All of the destructions culminate in the creation and use of atomic bombs.

In his double-edged project of challenging hegemonic discourses about American history for Native American agency, Betonie emphasizes the power of story. He redefines history as a contested site, in which stories as interpretations of history contend with one another, reflecting power shifts and historical transitions. Betonie's story of Native American witchery's creation of white people is, of course, fictive. He does not believe in the literal creation of them but in the power of alternative story-making. Betonie echoes the second opening poem titled "Ceremony": stories "aren't just entertainment. / Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / . . . // You don't have anything / if you don't have the stories" (2). In *Woman, Native, Other*, which is powerfully inspired by Silko's and Kingston's writings, Trinh T. Minh-ha characterizes this kind of story-making as "intransitive writing," a subversive kind of writing that "does not translate a reality outside itself, but, more precisely, allows the emergence of a new reality" (22). Betonie uses his story transformatively by not adopting "established keynotes or policy," which Trinh argues as a characteristic of "intransitive writing" (19). Once told, the story is set in motion. The mysterious witch's story is too appalling even to the other witches. They ask the witch to "Take it back / Call that story back" (138). Shaking "its head," the witch answers: "*It's already turned loose. / It's already coming. /*

It can't be called back" (138). Story is transformative when it serves as a powerful way to recognize reality for "the emergence of a new reality."

Betonie's story-poem (132-38), inserted in the thematic climax of the novel (*Conversations* 20; Arnold 1999, 79; Cutchins 77; Stein 129), is a subversion of white-centered discourse, with an ultimate emphasis on Native American agency. Silko deliberately constrains white hegemony under witchery's global manipulation, emphasizing that agents are subject to their higher commanders' order. A powerful antidote to the idea of all-white destruction, Betonie's witchery story subverts the prevailing definition of the other in power relations. Betonie redefines white people as the other: they were originated by Native American witchery for "dark things" (133). With the witch's story-within-a-story, Betonie suggests that it is Native Americans who are seriously responsible for their own history as the originators of, complicit co-actors in the destruction (the witch says, "set in motion by our witchery / to work for us" [135]), and ultimately the seers of how "the trickery of witchery" works (132). For Betonie, Native Americans can and have to deal with "white people, . . . because we invented white people" (132). In spite of all of the too frightening destructions told in the witch's story, Betonie's messages in the entire poem are that white people's destruction will turn on themselves, with nuclear weapons that explode everything; and that evil's turning loose on itself "is already coming" (138).²¹ Seeing white domination as "a matter of transitions" with shifting balances and harmonies (130), Betonie subsumes it under a

²¹ How it will take place is one of the core themes of Silko's 1991 novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, in a more concretized, more complex way. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko provides a feminist narrative that goes beyond nationalism.

larger, indigenous story of Native America. In doing so, he opens a discursive space, in which Native Americans participate in ideological contention.

Betonie's post-traditionalism is suggestive of reshaping Native American tradition and nation. Locating himself in the contemporary U.S. context, Betonie does not reclaim America as Native Americans' as it was, but instead emphasizes American history as a contested site of stories. With his unique story of white people, Betonie replaces hegemonic discourses that define non-white people as the other. His story reveals a salient characteristic of contemporary cultural nationalisms in the U.S.: making counter-ideologies for national transformation. Seeing white dominance as "a matter of transitions" (130) that have been occurring in the indigenous history of America, Betonie suggests that Native Americans can enhance historical transitions away from white domination through discursive subversion. By establishing a masculine line for reshaping nation, Silko replaces filiation with alliance across a variety of Native American tribal cultures as a new base of Native American nationalism that has no longer any territory. This alliance for reshaping nation in contemporary U.S. moves beyond the traditional emphasis on tribal identities. Transferring a viable definition of tradition, the masculine bond between Betonie and Tayo foregrounds the possibility of Native American male unification as a nation against on-going colonization under U.S. hegemony.²² Women, however, remain outside this cross-cultural alliance.

²² An oft-cited white critic of Native American literature and theorist of "ethnoscriticism," Arnold Krupat, and the Native American writer, critic, and theorist Louis Owens (2001, 14) agree that (Native) America has never become postcolonial. Krupat argues: "contemporary Native American literatures cannot quite be classed among the postcolonial literatures of the world for the simple reason that there is not yet a 'post-' to the colonial status of Native Americans. Call it

A Symbolic Subversion and its Gendered Discontents

Through Tayo's visionary unlearning with Betonie, Silko seeks to symbolically recuperate Native Americans' historical loss in her contemporary U.S. context. Rainwater argues that Silko's narrative attempts to "resolve in textual space what cannot be resolved in geographical space" (117). To Rainwater's discussion of Native American writers' appropriation of the textual space of novel, I would add that Silko does so through Tayo's subsequent nationalist quest in the textual space. After his series of healing ceremonies, Betonie sends Tayo to further complete his healing. "Don't let them stop you. Don't let them finish off this world," warns Betonie (152).

Silko turns Tayo's further journey to a nationalist project while she eventually forecloses female subjects. Throughout Betonie's ceremonies, Tayo becomes overtly preoccupied with Josiah's lost cattle, as Silko describes: "there would be no peace until he [finds the cattle]" (145). Silko concretizes Betonie's discursive subversion by Tayo's quest for the cattle, which are also mixed breed like Tayo and Betonie. Silko allegorizes Native Americans' lost land as Josiah's lost cattle, as Tayo's process of reclaiming the cattle shows that the lost land exists as an imaginary basis for Native Americans' resistance. Using allegories to secure Tayo's nationalist quest, Silko proposes that Tayo's self-decolonization is suggestive of Native Americans' collective self-decolonization against U.S. hegemonic discourses that colonize Native Americans' minds. Tayo re-locates the cattle in the Laguna reservation and succeeds in forging a

domestic imperialism or internal colonialism; in either case, a considerable number of Native people exist in conditions of politically sustained subalternity" (59). In a similar vein, Owens argues that "Native American writing is not postcolonial but rather colonial" and that "the colonizers never left but simply changed their names to Americans" (1998, 51).

positive self-image by not succumbing to Emo's world of violence. Thereby, he ultimately re-members himself as a mixed blood in the Laguna society.

As a counter-ideology, Tayo's nationalism has double purposes: expanding the boundary of national membership and uniting contemporary Native Americans against the controlling images of Native Americans. For this double-edged project, Silko professes Native Americans' common history of subjugation and resistance, from a mixed blood male's perspective. Meanwhile, female characters disappear outside of Native American history, not allowed to be national subjects. As Tayo's process of reclaiming the cattle reveals, not considering seriously gendered and sexualized complexity reduces Tayo's nationalism to the matter of right to the lost land. It is as if all things would be "right" if the land could be acknowledged as Native Americans'. As an imagined territory that functions to unite Native Americans, the land becomes a black-hole into which gendered complexities and subtleties are obscurely melted.

Using the trope of the mother as the land, Silko colors as nationalist Betonie's idea that white dominance is "a matter of transitions" (130). Interpreting Betonie's teaching in his own terms, Tayo connects his lost mother to the Laguna's collective Mother, their lost land. Seeing Helen Jean with the veterans, Tayo reasons that there should be "transitions . . . in order to be the people our Mother would remember" (170). Re-interpreting Night Swan's saying, "you are part of it" (100), he positions himself as the agent for alternative transitions toward "our Mother." Through his re-encounter with his mother in the form of Helen Jean, he decides again that his returning of his lost mother is made possible through re-turning *to* "our Mother" land. Then, he begins his

quest for reclaiming Josiah's lost cattle. Tayo's turning his lost mother into "our Mother" land makes manifest a dissociation of women and the "feminine" for a masculinist assuming of male positions as the "right" owner and protector of that "feminine" land. Locating his mother, Helen Jean, and the veterans' aimless life in a larger context of Native Americans' historical loss, Tayo emerges as a new subject, who breaks Native American stereotypes, but also reveals a persistent use of women as an abstract symbol.

In her deliberate use of the Laguna myths to pave the way for Tayo's nationalist self-decolonization, Silko expresses a common theme of gendered nationalism: "the feminization of the motherland and the call of the nations' son to defend her" (Mayer 11). In her earlier attempt to dismantle the double bind of Tayo's mixed-blood subjectivity through his affirmation of his mother, Silko conflates Laura with the Corn Mother, the most important Laguna goddess. Silko strategically inserts a Laguna story of how the Corn Mother is returned long after she abandoned her people. In this myth-poem, Silko likens Tayo's further journey to the difficult task of Fly and Hummingbird to bring back the Corn Mother. Deceived by Ck'o'yo magic, the Corn Mother's people neglect their duty and realize it too late. Like Fly and Hummingbird, Tayo goes to return his mother. Laura as a personal symbol for the Corn Mother now becomes an object of a son's returning. As the story is also a collective myth, Tayo's project will represent the Laguna's collective returning of their Mother land, implies Silko.

Silko paves a way again for Tayo's nationalist quest through her strategic use of Helen Jean, re-contextualizing Betonie's paradigm for Tayo's personal struggle. To

Tayo, who now sees that “his existence and the existence of all white people had been conceived by witchery” (154), Helen Jean serves as another gendered symbol for a collective loss, while reminding him “the same thing his mother had done, to bring disgrace to the family” (218). Silko inserts the story of Helen Jean when Tayo is forced again by Harley and Leroy to hang out in a bar on his way home from Betonie. Helen Jean left her Ute reservation in Towac to find a job but eventually comes to dance and drink with the veterans in Gallup. In her urban life, she tries in vain to send money to her poor family on the reservation. It is his spectral mother that Tayo re-encounters through Helen Jean. Silko explains that Helen Jean is “a brief reference to Tayo’s mother”; “basically what happened to Tayo’s mother is what happened to Helen Jean”; they “resonate *on* each other” (Coltelli 140). For Tayo, who is empowered by his visionary unlearning with Betonie, Helen Jean functions as a bridge for the missing link between the personal and the collective. Seeing Helen Jean in the veterans’ company “drinking and hell raising” (168), Tayo redefines their aimless life in Gallup as a wrongly-directed “mourning of the lost going on forever”: the land (169).

Although Tayo finally becomes what Michael Hobbs refers to as “a radical reader,” one who “is able to liberate himself from the powerful dominance of various authoritative discourses” (302), gender issues remain outside Silko’s nationalist project. Silko’s nationalism is gendered in a masculinist way; although she presents forms of alternative masculine alliance across Native American cultures in her de-essentializing nation, her symbolic subversion comes at the cost of her mythic reduction of female characters. Laura is likened to the Corn Mother, who should be restored by a male agent

from her people, and Helen Jean is another reminder of the Mother land that has been lost. Silko's appropriating the "feminine" for her nationalist impulse culminates in her characterization of Ts'eh. A Montañó woman, Ts'eh is Tayo's best helper in his completion of healing as well as his search of the cattle. Ts'eh is introduced right after the Gambler poem. Many critics note that Ts'eh is strongly associated with an incarnation of the Spiderwoman or the spirit of the Laguna's sacred Mount Taylor.²³ Like the Spiderwoman who gives the Sunman the know-how to beat the Gambler, Ts'eh hints the direction for the lost cattle, and later she locates the retrieved cattle around her place. Ts'eh's femaleness becomes the "feminine," appropriated for what Allen passionately celebrates in *The Sacred Hoop* as "the feminine principle of landscape." Although she plays an active role in Tayo's reclaiming the cattle, Ts'eh also becomes a vanishing point when Tayo has to confront Emo at the Jackpile mine.

As she uses female subjects as gendered symbols for national loss, Silko relies on allegorization to secure Tayo's project. Tayo's reclaiming the cattle is Silko's allegory for the Laguna's and the Pueblo's history of resistance in the 20th century. With a series of assists from figures of mythic contours, Tayo searches for the lost cattle. Josiah bought the cattle from a Mexican man Ulibarri, because he wanted "some special breed of cattle" that could endure drought and other challenging circumstances of the Laguna's dry reservation (75). Instead of going south toward the cattle's mother land, Tayo traces north, guided by a Native American woman in her nomadic life, Ts'eh, and Betonie's vision of the stars in the north. By having Tayo carry "the bill of sale from Ulibarri

²³ To name a few, see Allen (118); Lincoln (244-46); Nelson (21); Owens (1992, 186); Rice (131); Stein (134); Zamir (405).

buttoned in his shirt pocket just in case” (187), Silko allegorizes the Pueblos’ historical resistances to U.S. federal government’s land allotment acts in the early 20th century and the Laguna Pueblo’s decades-long land reclamation lawsuit begun in the 1950s.

Rendering Tayo a representative subject of Native American resistance, Silko symbolizes Josiah’s lost cattle for the Laguna and Pueblo land divested by the U.S. government. According to James Olson and Raymond Wilson, the Pueblos in New Mexico became Mexican citizens after the Mexican Revolution, with legally “confirmed land grants issued by the Spanish crown.” Facing the U.S. land allotment bills designed to divest them of considerable part of their land, the Pueblos had resisted with their land right documents written by the Spanish government of Mexico. The federal government’s bills were eventually forced, though (Olson and Wilson 96-8). In an autobiographical essay, Silko explains the Laguna Pueblo’s land reclamation lawsuit in the early 1970s. When she was in law school, she writes: “I should have paid more attention to the lesson of the Laguna Pueblo land claims lawsuit from my childhood: The lawsuit was not settled until I was in law school. . . . [T]hey got twenty-five cents for each of the six million acres stolen by the state. The lawsuit had lasted twenty years, so the lawyer’s fees amounted to nearly \$2 million” (*Yellow Woman* 19).

Considering these facts, Tayo’s going north to seek the cattle implies that the cattle is not lost but “stolen” into the north. Having in mind the historical fact that south(west), as many historians argue, is the forced direction to which Native Americans have been moved to “reserve,” Silko makes north an allegorical mark for the whites’ stolen yet “legally propertied” land. Tayo eventually discovers the cattle in a northern

ranch with “a wolf-proof fence,” which is actually designed to “keep Indians and Mexicans out” (188). Examining the wired fence on a white landowner Floyd Lee’s ranch, Tayo hesitates “to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or an Indian” (191). Hesitantly, he wonders why he feels that it is he who steals.

The confrontation with the wired fence is for Tayo a critical moment of breaking “the lie” simulated by hegemonic discourses. Reawakening himself to how deeply he internalizes “the lie by heart” that “only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn’t steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted,” he cuts into the wire “as if cutting away at the lie inside himself” (191). In doing so, he clearly sees how witchery works through white domination and how “the lie” is an unavoidable part of himself that he must beat:

The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other. . . . If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; . . . the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. And always they had been fooling themselves, and they knew it. . . . the land — all of it — had been stolen. (191-2)

For Tayo, the U.S. is “a nation built on stolen land.” Silko makes her political stance manifest again in the last line of the passage: “the land — all of it — had been stolen” by white people. Although Silko employs in the above an inclusive rhetoric to address “white people and Indians” together, the passage’s connotation is nationalist in that it professes a common history of Native Americans’ deprivation of their lands and their on-going subjugation. In addition, the passage suggests that Native Americans need to “look[] beyond the lie.” Tayo is concretizing in a nationalist way what he unlearns through Betonie. While Betonie, emphasizing agency, views white dominance as a part of all-encompassing witchery and thus as “a matter of transition” (130), Tayo reduces global witchery to white domination.

Silko provides a psychological analysis of white domination in order to legitimate Tayo’s symbolic reclamation of the lost land. The passage quoted above tells us that it is the rich and powerful whites who feel “empty,” being “hollow” inside. Silko revisions the modern accomplishments of white civilization in the U.S.: “the great technology and the wealth” are made possible by their “more than two hundred years”-long psychic “emptiness” and “hollowness.” The more deeply they have been inflicted with this psychic burden of the “stolen” land, the more they have built up the wired fences of, for example, the capitalist system of private ownership and white-centered institutions that legitimate and teach “the lie.” The more “they had been fooling themselves,” the deeper “they knew” they had no right to the land.²⁴

²⁴ Deloria’s observation has a resonance with Silko’s idea of U.S. white civilization. Deloria argues: “there is a profound difference between American Indians and all of these other groups. The Indian is indigenous and therefore does not have the psychological burden of establishing

To secure Tayo reclaiming the cattle, Silko deliberately uses the Laguna's mythic stories. Tayo's reclamation of the cattle is not a literal and real restoration of what Native Americans have lost. Both in terms of the Native American situation of on-going colonization and in the complex contexts of historically and geographically different specificities, discursive struggles have had an increasing significance precisely to the extent that such an undertaking is politically impossible. While undertaking a symbolic project to re-claim the historically lost, Silko negotiates a "safe" space (Roemer 19) by making Tayo's nationalist project a ceremonial "cure," which I would alternatively call an imaginary enactment. Tayo's reclaiming the cattle is in essence a ceremonial or allegorized enactment. Once Tayo begins to act for reclaiming the cattle, Silko's characters who help his quest reveal strong mythic or "unreal" contours, sometimes including Tayo himself. In the Gambler poem followed by Silko's manifestation of a nationalist drive to make the lost land the political base on which Tayo claims himself as a national subject, Tayo is likened to the Sun, the grandson of Spiderwoman, the Mother Earth. The Sunman has to beat the Ck'o'yo magician Kaup'a'ta called the Gambler, because his sons, stormclouds, are fooled and prisoned by the Gambler. In contrast to the earlier moment when he was the object of Betonie's calling back home in the modified bear ceremony, Tayo now positions himself as the subject of returning the missing cattle home. On his way to search for the cattle, a hunter blesses Tayo with "a song for the sunrise," encouraging his quest: "Sunrise! / . . . / Father of the clouds / you are beautiful / at sunrise. / Sunrise!" (182). The hunter later reappears to help Tayo, as

his or her right to the land in the deep emotional sense of knowing that he or she belongs there" (1992, 60).

Mountain Lion (Owens 1992, 187) or another temporary incarnation of Ts'eh, who is also described as the Laguna deity (Eppert 732). Mountain Lion helps Tayo at his most dangerous moment. All of these mythic elements are used for Tayo's completion of reclaiming the cattle and simultaneously to serve as a screen against hegemonic gaze.

In elaborating Tayo's emergence as a national subject, Silko further resorts to the protective power of nature with an essentializing strategy. Using the safening power of myths and, at this time, essentializing nature and "blood memory" (200, 220), Silko secures Tayo's nationalist project symbolically complete. However, it is into an ahistorical moment that Tayo ironically "progresses" with his "blood memory." As an allegory of Native Americans' historical displacement to "reservations," the spotted cattle are described to have a persistent memory of the direction to home: "the dim memory [after domestication] of direction which lured them always south" (197). And Tayo is "confident of their direction" when he is caught by the ranch riders after he frees the cattle from the ranch (198). Meanwhile, the cattle in a northern ranch disappear into somewhere south. Guided again by the hunter, Tayo is led to Ts'eh. He finally finds out that the cattle happen to come to the big arroyo near Ts'eh's place without any artificial manipulation. To Tayo who worries about the whites' looking for the cattle, Ts'eh answers that they won't come "[b]ecause of all the snow up there" (213). Tayo's symbolic nationalist undertaking ends in a seeming ahistorical setting where there is "no sign the white people had ever come" (184).

It is notable that the ultimate agent of vitality and protection for Tayo's quest is nature beyond human possession. As for all of the contingent processes, Tayo sums up:

“nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing. The snow-covered mountain remained, without regard to titles of ownership or the white ranchers who thought they possessed it” (219). Re-grounding his being and the cattle in a nature that far exceeds human destruction, Tayo feels that life and the vitality of nature are beyond white ownership and are instead “locked deep in blood memory” (220). With Ts’eh, he inhabits a world of invulnerability: he “would leave the questions of lineage, clan, and family name to the people in the village, to someone like Auntie who had to know everything about anyone” (223). In addition to re-essentializing female characters outside history, Silko betrays contradictions between her historicizing discourse that locates Native American tradition within contemporary contexts of on-going change and essentialist discourses of myth, nature, and memory.

Precisely at this point, Silko tries to recuperate what her negotiated “safeness” possibly damages in her multi-layered project in this novel. Through Emo, who doubts Tayo’s sanity in his isolating life in the mountain, Silko historicizes Tayo’s ahistorical moment and re-contextualizes it into the post World War II present. The areas near Ts’eh’s mountain turn out to be a significant historical site in twentieth century U.S. history, at which the first atomic bombs were tested and on-going uranium mining has taken place. Silko describes Emo as an intracultural agent of “ck’o’yo manipulation” (204). By Emo’s plotting against Tayo, the “sacred” mountain changes into the culminating battleground in which all destructive powers converge. Running from the drunken Emo, whose “words were thick and slurred” to provoke Tayo’s violent reaction

(252), Tayo stumbles onto an uranium mine in the Cebolleta land grant. He finds out that he is “vulnerable” in “their place” (243).

Paradoxically, it is in his most vulnerable moment that Tayo is most empowered. He comes to be able to read a pattern of modern destruction: separation from the earth, division of all things for commodity or destruction. Remembering his grandmother’s story of the first atomic bomb test at Trinity Site during his absence in the war, Tayo perceives the uranium mine, in which he stands, as “the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid” (246). He historicizes his life as a World War II survivor and a Laguna man, whose home, the reservation, has been desecrated by uranium mining. In doing so, he gains an intuitive insight into how to reconstellate all of the parts of his historically specific life in a radical interconnection. He was “finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together — the old stories, the war stories, their stories — to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (246). In the place that Silko sees as representative of a fundamental break in the world history as well as in the U.S. (*Conversations* 44), Tayo experiences a moment of what Anzaludúa terms, *la facultad*: “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface,” and “an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (38). This kind of perceiving capacity is often occurring in one’s most vulnerability. With *la facultad*, Tayo’s vulnerability turns into a force of self-empowerment.

By not succumbing to Emo's invitation to violence that seems irresistible, Tayo finally forges a positive self-image against Native American stereotypes. With such an image, which also moves away from the notion of Native Americans as a "vanishing people," Tayo emerges as a new subject, who enhances the re-emergence of Native American nations in contemporary U.S. context. Experiencing *la facultad*, Tayo is now consciously able to avoid Emo's provoking of violence, "the sound of witchery" (250). To induce Tayo to confront him, Emo tortures Harley finally into a bloody death. Tayo desperately chooses not to fit a Native American stereotype: "another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud" (253). All of the process is painful and "has never been easy" (254). Instead, he gets "[t]he ear for the story and the eye for the pattern" (255). All of his experiences have to be storied and therefore, he has to return his story to the Laguna society. Crossing the river at sunrise, Tayo is led to the center of the kiva, the sacred place of the Laguna tradition. Telling the Laguna elders his story, he completes his years-long struggles to re-member himself in and into the Laguna society. With Tayo's re-membering, Silko suggests the emergence of mixed blood males as national subjects. With his story, Tayo bridges the Laguna's "old" tradition into contemporary contexts, helping make the Laguna society a viable community; in return, he, as a mixed blood, is fully integrated into the community. The novel ends: "Sunrise, / accept this offering, / Sunrise" (262).

With its failure to complicate nationalist issues with feminist issues, *Ceremony* provides a cultural nationalism that partly succeeds in de-essentializing nation yet remains incomplete. Silko's redefinition of Native Americans in contemporary contexts

serves Native American cultural resilience. Interrogating Native American tradition and nation from the perspective of mixed blood male subjects, Silko opens a radical space for Native American agency and self-reflexivity, beyond oppositional logics.

Nonetheless, *Ceremony*'s nationalism remains an initial stage of nationalism, in which women and the land are defined by male properties. Silko's rendering the feminine into the mythic precisely shows a mechanism of foreclosure, with which the voice and experience of women are primarily needed for building counter-ideologies and then erased for the legitimacy of the ideologies. Foreclosure means a process of further concealment of certain traces, without which there can be no substantiation and/or instantiation.²⁵ As a problematic effect of foreclosure committed in this novel, Silko's female characters are disassociated with their social context. The "feminine" as mythic serves for the notion of nation as men's property. Represented as "feminine," the land is assumed to be under "legitimate" male "ownership." What is at stake here is that "the feminine" as such is cut away from real-life women. Feminists have long critiqued this kind of "feminine" that exists outside history and instead in the masculine economy of representation. *Ceremony*'s gendered trope of women as the lost land and its containment of women and gender make its multi-layered radical edges blunt. In this novel, we see a historical repetition in the twentieth century's liberatory movements:

²⁵ In her critique of Western modern colonial discourse in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak calls this implicit process "foreclosure." What Spivak is doing in the first half of the book is to trace the traces which Western modern narratives foreclose in order to justify Western imperialism. Foregrounding the psychoanalytical mechanism of "foreclosure," Judith Butler (2000) discusses how gender is implicitly made into an emptied universality in recent leftist theorizings. For Butler (1997 and 2000), "foreclosure" is the way in which certain subjects are produced to establish hegemonic (i.e. heterosexual) "universality" and then erased by the universalized subject position(s).

women have been represented as the most powerful markers of the overdetermined problems of domination but gender issues are not seriously taken in liberatory and/or nationalist movements. As I will explore in next chapters, such a repetitive problem of gender containment needs to be challenged from more radical directions.

CHAPTER III

GLORIA NAYLOR'S *LINDEN HILLS*: DECONSTRUCTING NATIONALISM THROUGH A SUBALTERN REVISION OF "MAN"-MAKING HISTORY

Black liberation struggle must be re-visioned so that it is no longer equated with maleness.

— bell hooks, *Yearning*

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . . . We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. . . . Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.

— bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*

While Leslie Marmon Silko uses the gendered trope of women as the lost land and contains gender issues for her Native American cultural nationalist project in *Ceremony* (1977), Gloria Naylor critiques African American cultural nationalist discourse that sustains the patriarchal subordination of women and the silencing of homosexuality within African American communities. Naylor does so by positioning herself both as a

feminist and as a cultural nationalist.¹ Like Silko, Naylor grew up in the 1960s of the Civil Rights and Women's Movements, which she says are the two most powerful influences on her writing life (*Conversations* 112). Remarking that persistent critiques of masculinist hegemony within African American communities are essential for anti-racist movements, Naylor locates herself within African American women's literary and feminist traditions (Rowell 179). As she says in her interviews, "[feminism] gave me new definitions of self. . . . [And] I have often said that I am a cultural nationalist. That means that I am militant about who and what I am as an African American. I believe that you should celebrate voraciously that which is yours. . . . We need to celebrate the survival of culture among the underclass" (*Conversations* 107).²

Locating Naylor at the ideological crossroad between African American cultural nationalism and feminism, I propose to read *Linden Hills*, which is a community of affluent middle-class African Americans as well as the setting of *Linden Hills*, as Naylor's allegory for the African American nation. *Linden Hills* has generated much critical discussion for its intriguing narrative structure as well as for its depiction of the African American middle class, which is rare among African American literature. Almost all the critics of *Linden Hills* discuss a central concern of the novel, the African American middle class, while focusing on Naylor's use of Dante's *Inferno*; her narrative

¹ For a brief account of Naylor's life, see Virginia C. Fowler (ch. 1; especially for her literary formative years and her critical stance against the masculinist aspects of the Black Power Movement and Aesthetics, see 13-20).

² Here by "the survival of culture among the underclass," Naylor means African Americans' common history of U.S. slavery and post-slavery oppressions that are inextricably intersected with gender, race, class, and sexuality yet experienced variably among African Americans in their historical, situational specificities. As for her positioning as a feminist and cultural nationalist, see also *Conversations* (108, 112, 114, 129 and passim), the 2000 *Callaloo* interviews (1396, 1405, 1430), Ethel Morgan Smith (179) and Donna Perry (229, 237).

strategies in her extensive use of western patriarchal narratives including the Bible, Shakespeare, and Dante; Linden Hills's peculiar geography illuminating the moral decadence and racial de-colorization of African American middle class; or the two protagonists' alternating but independent journeys.³ That is, readings of the novel often cluster around Naylor's critique of how the quest for upward mobility and material success disorients the members of African American middle-class. Such readings tend to decontextualize Naylor's writings from the complex relations between African American feminism and nationalism since the 1960s. Deemphasizing *Linden Hills's* ideological undercurrents at a particular historical conjuncture, in which African American women writers have had to negotiate African American nationalist movements and discourses, the readings overlook this novel's central concern with African American nationalism.

Reading *Linden Hills* as Naylor's cultural negotiation between African American feminism and cultural nationalism, I discuss in the first section of this chapter the story of the Nedeed men's building of Linden Hills as Naylor's fictive history of the origin and the development of an African American cultural nation. Then, I examine how Naylor reveals the problematic foundations of the nation and critiques her contemporary African American cultural nationalism through the female protagonist Willa Prescott Nedeed's subaltern discovery of the nation's repressed past and through the male protagonist Willie K. Mason's journey to the present of the nation. Naylor portrays the

³ See, for example, Christin G. Berg; Sharon Felton and Michelle C. Loris, eds.; Henry Louis Gates and K. A. Appiah, eds.; Teresa Goddu; Helen F. Levy; John Noell Moore; Margaret Earley Whitt.

present Linden Hills through Willie and Lester's episodic encounters with its residents while working odd jobs to earn money for Christmas gifts.

As Naylor describes, Linden Hills was built and has been sustained by a conservative nationalism that seeks African American economic self-determination without challenging U.S. racism at a fundamental level. With her fictive history of an African American cultural nation-building, Naylor critiques the masculine rhetoric and discourse that prevails in African American nationalism since the 1960s. I argue that Naylor challenges contemporary African American nationalist norms of racial solidarity by revealing that the norms have strengthened the formation of the African American community as patriarchal, homophobic, and thus anti-communal. Given that there has been virtually no attention to Naylor's position about the two powerful ideologies, feminism and cultural nationalism, that have shaped contemporary African American women writers, my reading of *Linden Hills* as a cultural negotiation between African American feminism and nationalism contributes to Naylor criticism by highlighting African American women's complex relationships to African American cultural nation and nationalism.

While describing the power of women-centered, predominantly lower-class community as a political entity of subaltern viability in her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor directly brings feminist agendas to African American nationalism by creating a fictive African American nation that achieves economic "sovereignty" against U.S. racism, in *Linden Hills*. With her fictive focus on middle-class African Americans, Naylor employs a double-edged project to dissociate African

Americanness from lower-class status and poverty (Rowell 183) and to problematize the subordination of women and queer subjects within the African American community. In doing so, Naylor critiques African American nationalism that, according to scholars, is complicit to the subordination of women and queer subjects (Collins 2006; Dubey; West). In doing so, she also seeks to unsettle the hegemonic notion of man-making history that prevails in African American nationalist movements. *Linden Hills* contains Naylor's fictive history of nation-building from its inception in the 1820s to the 1980s. The female protagonist Willa comes to take a psychological journey to self-discovery, which reveals the past of the nation, and the male protagonists Willie and his friend Lester Tilson come to episodically encounter the present residents of Linden Hills. Except the untitled opening chapter, Naylor titles the chapters by dates from December 19th to 24th, and alternates Willa's and Willie's journey.

With the five Luther Nedeeds' century-long project of building Linden Hills as "a showcase" of African American success (9), Naylor allegorizes Linden Hills as an African American nation in which economic self-determination is most valued. In the first chapter, Naylor provides a story of the long process of the Nedeed men's nation-building. The five generations of Luther Nedeeds,⁴ all of whom have given the only son the same name, have established Linden Hills from a worthless land into a community of affluent African Americans. The story of their nation-building ends with the present Luther V's imprisonment of his wife and his son in the basement of the Nedeed home,

⁴ All of the Nedeed men are named Luther. This naming reveals their patriarchal assumption that their son must be "the stamp and will of the father" (18). In this chapter, I distinguish the men by Roman numbering, although it is not original in the text.

because Luther V does not believe that his white-skinned son is his. In the confined place, Willa comes to discover the long buried stories of the Nedeed women who precede her. On Christmas Eve, she ascends the stairs to the kitchen in order to reclaim her identity as a dutiful wife and mother. Separately marked in bold typeface, Willa's story is a disruptive one to Linden Hills's national history, revealing women's history as the repressed past of Linden Hills. While doing casual work in Linden Hills, Willie, an outsider of Linden Hills, and Lester, the only non-conformist among the present Linden Hills residents, come to see the inner world of Linden Hills. Linden Hills's well-educated, successful middle-class African Americans seem to have actualized their dream in spite of white hegemony, but their successes are at the expense of their cultural identities and communal ties. The farther Willie and Lester go into Linden Hills, the more privileged yet disoriented lives they see. At the deepest center of the increasingly disoriented lives is the Nedeed home. At the height of Willie's discoveries, Naylor arranges an elaborate contrast between Willa's subaltern reading and the Linden Hills historian Dr. Daniel Braithwaite's hegemonic notion of "objective" historiography.

Acknowledging the heterogeneity of African American nationalist movements and discourses, many scholars generally divide contemporary African American nationalism into the two broad categories of revolutionary and cultural nationalism.⁵ Revolutionary nationalism emphasizes the priority of class over race with its theoretical inclination toward Marxism, whereas cultural nationalism is based on the premise that African American people in the U.S. make up a cultural nation (Dawson; Dubey).

⁵ See Rod Bush; Collins (2006); Michael Dawson; Madhu Dubey.

Madhu Dubey characterizes African American cultural nationalism as follows: it professes “the distinctiveness of black culture . . . that must be developed in absolute separation from the surrounding white culture” (14-5); it emphasizes “a powerful sense of cultural unity” and “the black community” as “unified” “in stark contrast to the white U.S. ideology of individualism” (21-2). In addition, African American cultural nationalists oppose the African American past as repressive to their new future as liberatory (Dubey 24). In this chapter, I focus on African American cultural nationalism rather than revolutionary nationalism for two reasons: Naylor describes herself as cultural nationalist (see note 2) and cultural nationalism is more widely influential to African American communities (Collins 2006; Dawson; Dubey) and thus relevant to my discussion because of its impact on Naylor’s writings.

As a self-described cultural nationalist, Naylor is “militant” in claiming African American culture as a positive source of identity (*Conversations* 107, 123), which is a salient characteristic of contemporary U.S. cultural nationalisms (Collins 2006; Dawson; Dubey; Nagel). It is worth noting here that Naylor’s cultural nationalism is a qualified one that rejects the binary opposition between the past and the future as well as the notion of the unified African American culture. Naylor shares the cultural nationalist emphasis on the importance of culture and community, but critiques the discursive contradictions of cultural nationalism and its incapacity to reconstruct the African American past as a usable one for the African American present and future. Naylor sees that forgetting a common history of slavery and subjugation works as a necessity in African American cultural nationalist opposition between the oppressive past and the

liberatory future; thus, she stresses “the memory of that which has kept us whole as a people” (*Conversations* 45). For her, “communal ties” are strengthened by a historical sense and by an understanding of multiplicity and difference within African American communities (*Conversations* 46).

It is through the lens of gender and sexuality that Naylor intervenes in African American cultural nationalism by revealing the discursive contradictions and problems, which she observes in African American cultural nationalism. Naylor is very critical of the masculinist “male culture and its self-willed authority” in African American communities and African American movements (Rowell 188-89). As suggested in her essay, “Love and Sex in the Afro-American Novel” (1988), what seems for Naylor the most problematic part of African American cultural nationalism is its assertion of the incompatibility of African Americanness and homosexuality as well as its rejection of gender equality. Locating herself in the lines of African American women’s feminist negotiations of African American cultural nationalist discourses (Rowell; Smith; *Conversations* 129), Naylor directly shows that the controlling image of African American women as matriarch is the reverse projection of African American cultural nationalist patriarchal subordination of women. The five Luthers, the founder of Linden Hills and his successors, control the community as well as his family, denying women’s social existence in Linden Hills. In addition, as Henry Louis Gates notes too, Naylor writes against anti-feminist and homophobic ideologies of African American nationalists such as Eldridge Cleaver and Amiri Baraka (620). In her 1988 essay, Naylor defends James Baldwin, whose homosexuality was under Cleaver’s fierce attack, noting that

there has been “total silence” and “conscious evasion” about the issue of homosexuality and that “the homosexual man was the victim of a double consciousness, a double standard,” repressed “within their own community and in the world outside it” (“Love and Sex” 24). Cleaver defines Baldwin’s homosexuality as “un-black,” while Naylor re-evaluates Baldwin as a pioneering writer, who addressed the issue of homosexuality that has long been silenced in African American community. Against gender equality, Baraka, who is oft-cited by African American feminists as the most masculinist nationalist in the 1960s, essentializes the African American nation as a masculine domain, using the typically nationalist rhetoric of nation-as-family.⁶ Naylor’s works, including *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Mama Day* (1988), and *Bailey’s Café* (1992), show her conscious struggle against the anti-woman rhetoric and homophobic stance of the Black Power Movement and its literary arm, Black Aesthetics, deliberately celebrating the African American women-centered culture and tradition. In *Linden Hills*, Naylor addresses the issue of homosexuality through the story of a gay couple, Winston and David, whose love is denied by Linden Hills’s heteronormativity.

As Naylor in *Linden Hills* imaginatively describes through the five Luther Nedeads’ conservative nationalism, which is forgetful of African Americans’ common history, African American nationalism fails in forming an African American community based on a solid sense of African American history. For Naylor, simultaneously being a feminist and a cultural nationalist involves re-building the African American community. For her, community means a place of safety and self-determination with its emphasis on

⁶ For critiques of Baraka’s gender ideology that also permeated African American cultural nationalism, see Collins (1998, 168-70) and hooks (1981).

the historical sense of African American past (Rowell 179). As such, community constitutes and provides “a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African-Americans respond to social, economic, and political challenges confronting them” (Collins 2000, 298). Linden Hills never forms a community in this sense but rather a “colony” of affluent African Americans. By describing Linden Hills as a community built on the patriarchal construction of gender difference, Naylor seems to satirize the Black Art movement’s search for soul with Linden Hills’s soul-less community in its extreme isolation from poor African Americans. The residents of Linden Hills have sold “the mirror in [their] soul,” with which they “know who [they] are” (59). They have lost all of the ties that Naylor values as a cultural nationalist: “ties with family, then ties with community, ties with [the] religious and spiritual values” of African American culture, and “ties with [an] ethnocentric sense of self” that grounds individuals on African American community (*Conversations* 46). As a feminist, Naylor qualifies the power of African American nationalism as long as it provides a solid sense of African American history and enhances those ties.

Material Solid(ar)ity: A Planned Nation without Community

As many scholars have argued, masculinist heterosexuality is the core foundation on which (black) nationalism has built, and African Americans have called for racial solidarity only to build a community that is exclusively patriarchal and homophobic.⁷

Linden Hills is an exclusively African American neighborhood separate from whites. It

⁷ Concerning masculinist heteronormativity as a foundational imperative for patriarchy in African American contexts, see Collins (1998, ch. 5; 2000, chs. 6-7); Audre Lorde; Nagel; Cornel West.

was developed by the Nedeed men's nationalist plan to form an African American cultural nation, "a place where people had worked hard, fought hard, and saved hard for the privilege to rest in the soft shadows of those heart-shaped trees" (15).

Like *The Women of Brewster Place* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, both of which begin with a brief story of the birth of a place, *Linden Hills* begins with a story of the place from which the title of the novel comes. Naylor creates five Luther Nedeeds in the first chapter, and makes their story a narrative of the birth and development of Linden Hills into a nation. Like Morrison's *Bottom*, Linden Hills is literally carved out of a seemingly worthless hill by an ex-slave from the South (in Luther I's case, from Tupelo, Mississippi) in 1820, and the succeeding Luthers have developed it into "a showcase," "an ebony jewel" of African American pride (9). In that land, "[the Nedeed men's dream] had finally crystallized into that jewel" (16). As Dr. Braithwaite has observed Linden Hills's development from the early twentieth century to the present and finally evaluates, Linden Hills has become the place of "a shattered dream" (261) in the one hundred sixty-year-long process. It is now a disorienting place, as Willie concludes that he witnesses "[a] wedding that was like a funeral, and a funeral that was already a wedding," after he works for the gay man Winston's heterosexual wedding and Lycentia Parker's funeral (274). As Willa's and Willie's journeys are taken, it is made manifest that a patriarchal nation, originally built for "a true black power" (11) to show "what blacks could do" (16), has been sustained on precarious foundations. The patriarchal subordination of women, the homophobia, and the masculinist dream of self-genesis through necrophilia are key components sustaining the foundations of the Nedeed nation.

Naylor describes the historical subordination of women as the foundation of the Nedeed version of an African American nation. In elaborating the origin story of Linden Hills, she employs an apparently straight-line conception of time from a point of origin to the present, while deliberately not titling the opening chapter in order to emphasize that the linear temporality of the five Luther Nedeeds' nation-building is not the true temporality of reality. Such a textual strategy is suggestive of the Nedeed men's prescriptions concerning how Linden Hills has developed. Linden Hills has been developed and sustained as a series of succeeding patriarchs control the nation at the cost of women's labor and lives. The present patriarch, Luther V, pauses a moment to remember his mother's first name in vain. In the Nedeed men's house, the wives have had "no name" and "no face," as Willie finally guesses before he works for Luther V on Christmas Eve (273). Beginning with Luther I in the early nineteenth century, the patriarchal subordination of women has served as the very foundation of the Nedeed nation, which precisely corresponds to bell hooks's observation about the increasingly noticeable subordination of African American women within the slave community and in the post-Slavery age (1981, 16). Luther I reportedly sells his wife and children into slavery for the money that he uses to come to the North. Furthermore, he buys an octoroon woman as his wife and keeps the document that specifies that he is the legal "owner" of the slave-wife. The five Nedeed wives' lives reveal that it is women who were the first and remain the last "colony" within a patriarchal nation built on and toward racial solidarity by economic power. Linden Hills has been "an anti-community" (Diana 94) or a "dystopia" (Levy 204) for its members, at least for half of them.

Under the Luthers' meticulous control, Linden Hills becomes a planned nation. In her description of the birth of Linden Hills in the opening pages, Naylor associates Luther I's vision with God's creation. Thinking his world into a plan, Luther I sits at the bottom of the V-shaped hill for seven days in 1820; "on the seventh day of his vigil," he smiles, projecting his plan (3). Instead of farming the land, he builds wooden shacks, based on his belief that "black or white . . . they'll make you a rich man through the two things they'll all *have* to do: live and die" (6). With the knowledge that both whites and blacks are buried together in the North although they do not live together in the same area, as well as the proximity of his land to the town cemetery, he becomes an undertaker.

With Luther II and III, who concretize the outline of Luther I's dream, Linden Hills "eventually" becomes a "colony" of "the wealthiest black families" (13). Luther II, "the wealthiest man in Wayne County" (5), confronts plots by whites who also see the increasing affluence of Linden Hills. Luther II succeeds in providing legal and historical documents to show the Nedeeds' rightful ownership of the land. Against the possible, further "invasion" of whites, he "sold the land practically for air to the blacks who were shacking there" (7) by giving them a thousand-year-and-a-day lease. With his counter-cunning against "white money backing wars for white power," which he and his son see is "the future of America" (8), Luther II places conditions on this lease: such rented houses should be passed on only to their legitimate sons or can be sold to other African American families; otherwise, the right would revert to the Nedeeds. It is remarkable that Luther II's condition for the lease strongly reflects the cornerstone of a patriarchal

nation: the heterosexual, patrilineal nuclear family. Such a lease also intends to guarantee that Linden Hills should be forever a distinctive African American space that is opposite to the larger world of Wayne County. With its independent right to decide residential “citizenship,” Linden Hills constitutes a nation of economic “sovereignty” against U.S. racism. Inseparable from women’s subordination, such a family norm also serves to repress those who are outside of the normative boundary of sexuality and kinship. (I’ll return this in the third section.)

By focusing on the intra-racial class distinction, Naylor undoes hegemonic discourses of class. The issue of class concerning African Americans has been discussed almost always in inter-racial terms in binary opposition: whites-as-the-haves vs. blacks-as-the-have-nots (Christian 349; Omi and Winant). As a result, Naylor notes, the poor African American is often assumed to embody an “authentic” African Americanness; with a fictive focus on middle class, Naylor writes against the “idealized or romanticized life of the poor as metaphor for black authenticity” and intends to show that “we are not a monolithic people” (Rowell 183). In doing so, Naylor revises the master-plot of African Americans as a victim-class, imaginatively illustrating intra-racial differences according to gender and sexuality as well as class. Naylor elaborates the first chapter of a seeming origin-narrative as a preliminary step for deconstructing the allegedly assumed homogeneity of a nation within a nation-state. More specifically, against the prevailing notion that middle-class African Americans have benefited exclusively from the Civil Rights Movement (interviews with Giovanni 1396; with Smith 1430), Naylor

radically addresses the diversity and heterogeneity of African American experiences.⁸ Her point is to show how such critical determinants of identity and difference interlock with one another and are dynamically embodied in individual subjects.

Believing that material solidarity is effective against U.S. racism, Luther III and IV further stage their nation-making dramas of self-invention.⁹ Luther III prepares his son to firmly consolidate Linden Hills as the Nedeed “kingdom.” He desires to show the world Linden Hills “as his own,” believing that “[t]his wedge of earth was his — he couldn’t rule but he sure as hell could ruin” (8). To survive the Great Depression, Luther III relies on the power of money by making peace with the world under white hegemony: “Yes, make your peace with that white god who lived beyond the sky — he was going to deal with the white god who would one day *own* that sky” (8). For him, Linden Hills takes another new dimension: “a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America” (9). Luther III values material power as a means for racial solidarity against white hegemony.

As Linden Hills survives the Depression, Luther IV “fences” Linden Hills against poor African Americans by preventing them from entering it. For him, Linden Hills should to be separated from and contrasted to the newly forming neighborhood, Putney Wayne. Under his control, it now functions as a national boundary to artificially

⁸ As for nationalist discourses approaching African Americans as a “black” nation within a nation-state, see Patricia Hill Collins (2006), Michael Dawson and Dean E. Robinson, for example. For the discursive formation of the notion that the middle-class African Americans have been predominantly benefited by the Civil Rights Movement, and the subsequent critiques to that notion, see Rod Bush.

⁹ For discussions of the modern nation as masculinist self-invention, see Benedict Anderson (1991); Bhabha, ed. (1990); Anne McClintock (1995); Joanne Nagel, for example.

divide people and mark who is and can be inside and who should not. In terms of the issues of membership and boundary, selective inclusion means (sometimes massive) exclusion. In Luther IV's time, class differences are increasingly manifest among African Americans in Wayne County, in which Linden Hills and Putney Wayne become contrasting African American neighborhoods. What is at stake for Luther IV is boundary-making: "Nedeed never doubted that he'd be able to build the houses; the real problem was deciding who in Linden Hills should own them" (10). Attempting to prevent poor African Americans from entering Linden Hills, he reduces his fathers' dream-vision of racial solidarity to material success: "he realized that nothing was closer to the spleen and guts of the country than success. . . . Life is in the material" (9). In order to make Linden Hills "a showcase" to reflect the Nedeed men's vision actualized (9), he launches a project to re-sort the residents of Linden Hills.

Using his company, the Tupelo Realty Corporation, which "was terribly selective about the types of families who received its mortgages" (15), Luther IV makes Linden Hills a planned, memory-less community under careful surveillance. Similar to Naylor's contemporary African American cultural nationalists, who see their past as repressive, for Luther IV, the future of Linden Hills depends on African Americans' own forgetting of their past. Luther IV decides that those who have "the memory of our iron chains" (12) should not be allowed in Linden Hills. He persistently makes sure that only those who want "nothing better than a way to forget and make the world forget their past" (10) are eligible for "citizenship" in Linden Hills. To sustain Linden Hills as "a brilliance that would force a waking nightmare of what the Nedeeds were capable," he isolates

Linden Hills “with wire fences . . . strong enough, solid enough to bury permanently any outside reflections about other beginnings” (10-11). He thus expels from Linden Hills the tenants who have a historical memory of the South or “would dream of a true black power that spread beyond the Nedeeds” (11). It is clear that he attempts to “confine” “a true black power” under his own power. For Luther IV, Linden Hills functions as an authoritarian or even fascist nation that provides a series of boundaries to serve his rule as if it were the national will/power.

By the time of Luther IV, racial solidarity is “successfully” replaced with material solidity. The initial spirit of defiance and racial solidarity through material power has been lost. For Luther IV, “madmen like Nat Turner or Marcus Garvey,” who represent a militant spirit against U.S. slavery or the spirit of African American self-reliance for liberation, are the most unwanted tenants, because he thinks that Turners and Garveys could ruin “the finest in the new community” (11). While the former generations pass on “a sense of purpose about their history and their being” (260) and thus understand the collective need to defy the low expectations of African American success, Luther IV replaces the valued sense and historical memory (“the memory of our iron chains”) with the “gold chains” of material success (12). The toll for entrance to Linden Hills is now historical amnesia. By Luther IV’s emphasis on material solidity only among carefully selected African Americans, Linden Hills becomes a memory-less community, where, as the present Luther V anxiously observes, the Nedeed men’s own history is also being forgotten.

A paradox that both Homi K. Bhabha and bell hooks observe in modern or African American constructions of a people becomes clear through Luther IV's careful surveillance and management. Observing the double narrative movement and double time of modern nation-building, Bhabha notes that "obligation to forget or forgetting to remember" a certain past is essential for "the construction of the national present" as well as of the "rightful" members of the nation (1994, 160-1). hooks calls for "critical remembering" that is missing in African American nationalism, observing that economic survival costs African Americans forgetfulness to a certain degree: "One of the tragic ironies of contemporary black life is that individuals succeed in acquiring material privilege often by sacrificing their positive connection to black culture and black experience" (1992, 19). Luther IV "smiled at their simplicity" as people were willing to give up almost everything in order to live in Linden Hills. Ironically, he has Tupelo Drive designated as a historical site, at the time of his final completion of Linden Hills into a zoned district of eight circular drives. Tupelo Drive as a historical site bears an irony to show "that a magician's supreme art is not in transformation but in making things [African American] disappear" (12).

Naylor is very critical of the Nedeed version of conservative nationalist politics that has formed only a "community" of collective self-negation and cultural decolorization. Although Linden Hills originated on and against U.S. racism, it ultimately denies its own origin. As such, it is a multi-layered allegory for a nation built from a conservative vision and armed with wealth. Luther IV's replacing racial solidarity with material solidity constitutes a point of no return. With its residents' willed forgetting,

Linden Hills functions for them as a kind of (im)possible (i.e. pseudo-) vacuum of history. Within this marked area, people “forget what it meant to be black” (16). Luke Bouvier notes that Linden Hills, now crystallized by Luther IV into an emblem of African American success, becomes “a timeless space outside of history” or “a timeless anti-history where little changes” (142). As Luther IV demonstrates, the Nedeed men’s conservative politics betrays itself as exclusionary and as fundamentally self-isolating against collective empowerment. Such conservative nationalism eventually subsumes everything, and most significantly, its initial spirit of and potentials for political defiance under material success. As a result, the more vigilantly the Nedeed version of the conservative nationalist project is performed, the less there is to “conserve” or even worth “conserving.”

The entire narrative of the novel, which contains a variety of stories about Linden Hills’s present residents, is generated by and interwoven with the present Luther V’s aching awareness of Linden Hills’s uncontrollable internal fragmentation in the 1980s. Luther V perceives the paradox of the “obligation of forgetting to remember” their history as a serious threat to Linden Hill’s viability. Bhabha’s comment about nation-building in general that “[i]t is this forgetting . . . that constitutes the beginning of the nation’s narrative” (1994, 160) is true of Linden Hills’s case, too. As *Linden Hills* begins, the four Luthers are dead, and Luther V confronts “that continually dying dream” in the 1980s (18). As Dr. Braithwaite tells Willie, the present Linden Hills has “refused to build a history” (286). Seeing how futile Linden Hills’s century-long achievement of economic independence has become, Luther V reckons that there now seems to be “no

white god” for Linden Hills to defy; that its residents’ economic success turns out not to be effective as “vengeance”; instead, that their souls are possessed by “simply the *will* to possess” (16-7). For him, Linden Hills as a collective is decaying from within, increasingly fragmented into soul-less individuals; they have lost their sense of African American identity, which was the very source of Linden Hills.

As Luther V helplessly observes, Linden Hills is a vanishing point of significant ties to the residents’ own origin, family, community, and history. Even material solidity, which the former generations had envisioned as a powerful vehicle for racial solidarity, is not working now. In the century-long process of their toilsome nation-building, Luther V notices, “[h]is fathers had made a fatal mistake” to turn means to ends (17). Only for “the bright nothing that was inside of [the residents],” the successful Linden Hills is now dissociated from African American-ness: “Linden Hills wasn’t black; it was [simply] successful” (17). Here the so-called blackness, that which is an integral part of the residents, disappears. The Nedeeds are no longer a symbolic condensation of and glue for these communal ties; the farther they go down into Linden Hills, even persistently African American-identified persons’ “deep ties to their past” are “all melted away” (18), observes Luther V.

Seeing Linden Hills’s failure in ideological reproduction of its original spirit of racial solidarity, Luther V instead blames his wife for the noticeable decrease in Linden Hills’s sustainability. Anxious about “that continually dying dream” (18), Luther V strongly desires a son who resembles, even duplicates, him, as the Nedeed sons to the fifth generation have been called “big frog and little frog” (5). Unlike his forefathers, all

of whom married pale-skinned octoroon wives, he marries a darker-skinned woman. He fears that his pale-skinned son means the end of the Nedeed men's history. He thus refuses to name him and to believe that his son, later named Sinclair by his mother Willa, is his because of his "white" skin. He thinks that his son, in spite of "[t]he same squat bowlegs, the same protruding eyes and puffed lips," "mocked everything his fathers had built" (18). "He looked at this whiteness," associating it with "the destruction of five generations" (18). It is notable that for him, "blackness" means patriarchal masculinity, while the "whiteness" his son embodies is a disruptive force. However, the "blackness" Luther V values is only skin-deep. He simultaneously perceives and denies that the forces destroying what the Nedeed men have built up so far are already rooted in his fathers' "misdirected" "plans and visions" (18). Compulsively performing such a typical fetishist disavowal throughout the novel, he blames his wife. He reopens the old morgue in the basement of his mansion and imprisons his wife and his son together.

Luther V's construction of Willa as the very source of danger and threat to Linden Hills points to the paramount foundation of the Nedeed men's nation-building project: sexism as an institutional subordination of and violence against women. The narrative of the Nedeed men's nation-building history ends with Luther V's imprisonment of Willa and his own son. (A howling woman in the basement is the motif for and key to the entire narrative of the novel.) As Henry Louis Gates also notes, Luther V performs a typical script of race-d patriarchy that reinscribes racist notions by regarding a "white" son as "an unfaithful reproduction" or a fake and that constructs women as destroyers of the masculine dream of self-presence (620). As clearly revealed

in Luther V's act of "punishment," it is women who are to be blamed so that men can deny their failings: "Somewhere inside of her must be a deep flaw or she wouldn't have been capable of such treachery" (19). For him (and his fathers), women are merely reproductive vehicles that should vanish again into "shadow" (18) outside the realm of man-making history: "They had been brought to Tupelo Drive to fade against the whitewashed boards of the Nedeed home after conceiving and giving over a son to the stamp and will of the father" (18). Thus, he reads "this whiteness" of his son as a serious threat, because it reveals "a ghostly presence" of women that should be repressed in order not to influence men's realm, assumed to be superior (18). For Luther V, Sinclair does not seem to follow the Nedeed men's pattern, because his "white" skin makes it manifest what has been latent in the Nedeed women. The "ghostly presence" (18) finally writes itself back on the "white" son's body after five generations. As such, the unnamed son means for Luther V a symbolic and thus powerful rupture of the 160 year-long "continuum," in which the five Luthers are "indistinguishable from the one before" (Whitt 62). As specified throughout Willie's episodic encounters with the present Linden Hills's residents, it is the masculinist foundation of the nation, not the allegedly "treacherous" mother of a "white" son, that is really "a deep flaw."

A Subaltern Revision: Reading Women's Stories, Rewriting History

Through Willa's subsequent process of discovering the Nedeed women's histories and restoring their lost names, Naylor concretizes her critical vision of the "deep flaw" inherent in the Nedeed patriarchal nation. Examining the significance of place in constructing or failing to construct African American community in Naylor's

novels, Barbara Christian argues that Naylor criticizes the Nedeed men's idea that women's subordination to men is essential for male power (369). Christian further comments: "By emphasizing the Nedeed women's ignorance of their own herstory, Naylor shows how the repression of women's herstory is necessary to the maintenance of patriarchy and why it is that history is so exclusively male" (361). In other words, it is women's act of reclaiming the suppressed or even lost "herstories" that becomes a serious threat to male-centered history. Women are "dangerous" subjects when they transpose themselves from objects to subjects of (re)reading, speaking, knowing, and acting (hooks 1989).

To Christian's discussion of Naylor's use of geography to reconstruct African American community, I would add that transformation of patriarchy begins with a radical redefinition of women's conformity to their roles assigned in patriarchal terms. Among Naylor's novels, I observe that her most brilliant insight about women's self- and collective empowerment throughout her novels is in *Linden Hills*, which the author herself sees as "[her] masterwork" (*Conversations* 136). I would propose that Naylor's radical redefinition of women's conformity in *Linden Hills* provides a powerful insight for contemporary feminisms. In Naylor's novels, Willa is one of the author's female characters who show Naylor's feminist visions. But Willa is never a figure to help form a (women-centered) community of nurturing and sharing, like female characters in *The Women of Brewster Place* or *Mama Day*. Willa does not even decide to blame her husband or to leave her home. What Willa reclaims with all of her life energy that unites all and every cell of her being is precisely what she (as well as her foremothers) is

denied: her status as legitimate and right-ful wife and mother in the Nedeed family. Such a reclamation has a significant, radical edge: she refuses her role as a self-destructive victim that patriarchy often drives women to claim, which prevents them from recognizing their situations as not merely personal but as social, structural, and therefore political issues. And, Willa's process of redefining her role as a wife-mother in the patriarchal nation occurs with her excavation of her foremothers' "buried memories" (118) in the basement. While Christian focuses on Naylor's use of geography to reconstruct African American community, I attend to how Willa forms an imagined community with her foremothers and thereby transforms the basement from a gendered prison to a subaltern archive that powerfully serves to deconstruct "official" historiography and hegemonic discourses. In addition, I discuss the Nedeed men's necrophilia as symptomatic of the foundations of the patriarchal nation. Considering that there have been virtually no serious discussions of necrophilia in *Linden Hills* and that female radical subjectivity has been emphasized in African American literary criticism, my discussion of the issue of conformity as well as the significance of necrophilia will contribute to Naylor criticism, calling for rethinking radical subjectivity in terms of conformity.

Imprisoned in the basement, Willa comes to selfhood, deciphering subaltern "documents" that consist of diaries, letters, cookbooks, and a photo album. It is through her act of reading that she moves from wailing, which Naylor explains is "simply not powerful enough to keep you going" ("Love and Sex" 29), to forging a powerful means to reflect on her life in her own terms. Imprisoned at the deepest center of Linden Hills,

Willa is initially introduced to readers as an unspecified “long, thin howl” (42) that Willie hears in the night before he begins to work in Linden Hills. In contrast to her deliberate use of the linear temporality to describe the Nedeed men’s history, Naylor begins the first Willa-scene at the opening of the third chapter, titled “December 20th”, by describing Willa’s temporality as disconnected from the outside as much as if it were firmly bound “on the morgue wall” (65). Willa tries in vain to conjure her mother to help her. Her long screaming of “disbelief, frustration, or anger” (71) never reaches to others. To use Gloria Anzaldúa’s discussion of the power and significance of women’s speaking in tongues, “wailing” is Willa’s initial, “feeble protest when she has no other source” (33). With subaltern “documents,” Willa’s wailing is replaced with a series of enlightening discoveries that lead her to articulate her own self-discovery.

It is in this disconnected time and space of the morgue-basement that Willa symbolically cuts herself off from men’s language and history. The basement, located at the lowest tip of the V-shaped Linden Hills, is a symbolic space imposed on Willa yet replete with women’s “buried memories” (118), which turn the morgue-basement into a subaltern archive.¹⁰ She is calmed after “good” cries, ironically because she loses the slightest hope of “[a]ny possibility of salvation” (71) from Luther or from outside. Her

¹⁰ Naylor explains that the basement as “the heart of darkness” of Linden Hills is the very “geographical center, . . . where there is a[nother] history for you,” and that that herstory “definitely wrecks [masculinized] memory” (*Conversations* 45). She further explains: as such, it is also “a metaphor for that middle-class woman’s married existence [as (original brackets)] she was shoved into that basement”; here Willa does “uncover our history, and she does it the way women have made history, and that is in a confined place” (*Conversations* 71-2). For alternative readings of the basement, see Margaret Homans; Gates; Okonkwo. While Homans reads Naylor’s Linden Hills as a revisionist supplement to Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum*, Gates refutes Homans’s reading by focusing on gay male characters in this novel as “significant others” that patriarchal society outlaws. Okonkwo reads the basement as the space of transfiguration for “black messianic resurrection” (117).

son dies in the cold basement. She refuses to drink water Luther allows her through the pipeline or to listen to his words from the intercom. Helplessly seeing her son's death, she realizes the power of survival. Holding the child in her arms, Willa "sat there calmly and irrevocably immersed in the simple fact that had become part of her being," because she now knows the power of refusing to be erased: "Luther was a dead man if she left that basement alive" (71).

The social meaning of survival is gendered. For Willa, survival means to refuse to be erased or made to vanish into nowhere. The restless Willa allows herself to take a good sleep, using waiting as a strategy for survival. Willa soon recognizes that survival itself can be powerful, and decides that, although she is deeply hurt, she will no longer mourn her son's death. Instead, she hopes that she can "bury him," thinking that "there must be something that she could do to let them know that she cared" (92). Through Willa, who refuses to simply wail over her son's helpless death, Naylor alludes to the practice of African American women's infanticide under slavery, and thereby suggests a continuity of that practice in a subtle disguise under patriarchy. By Willa's son's death in imprisonment, and through the Nedeed women's lives the author later reveals, Naylor describes the Nedeed version of patriarchy as a persistently continuing "slavery" in the age of post-Slavery. In this slavery-within, African American patriarchs replace white patriarchs, continuing the cause of infanticide. What is at stake here is, as Naylor implies, African American notion of patriarchal masculinity that justifies the "killing" of whiteness in African American community.

For the imprisoned Willa, reading serves as the motivating force toward self-discovery, and finally to action. Willa comes to encounter Luwana Packerville, the first Luther's slave-wife, precisely at the moment of deciding to survive instead of dying with her son. As she wraps her son's body with a long bridal veil she finds in the basement, she discovers a Bible buried in the same veil. Etched on the bottom border of the Bible are the words "Luwana Packerville 1837" (93). Opening the Bible, she finds that Luwana scribbled throughout it and that her writing begins on the flip side of the cover with a message that intrigues Willa: "There can be no God" (93). Willa feels an instant sense of empathy: "yes, whoever you were, Luwana Packerville, you were right about that. This house couldn't still be standing if there were a God" (93). Naylor describes Willa's beginning to read Luwana's scribbling as a threshold toward an imagined community of isolated women sharing experience. And with Luwana, "[Willa's] mourning had begun" (94), but her mourning is no longer simply about her son's death. By not specifying the object of Willa's mourning at this stage, Naylor reconnects the meaning of mourning to an integral part of the radical re-construction of subaltern women's "buried memories" (118).

As Willa reads Luwana's writing, the morgue stops being a nowhere or a prison for women, and rather becomes a subaltern archive replete with "documents" constructed in other ways to show how women's histories are recorded. These "documents" Willa will intensely read contain exactly what "official" histories exclude: scribbled diaries and letters, recipe books, and a family photo album, all of which reveal (abused) women's own inner thoughts, feelings, and meanings that they would assign to

their lives and history. Such records, although not regarded as “serious” texts for “official” historiography, show what Spivak would call “subaltern agency” that has been assumed to be speechless. In their own ways, subaltern women write back, showing that whoever writes has a certain power unavailable to someone else who is denied the chance and the power to record her life in her own way. Similar to Keller’s *Soon Hyo/Akiko’s box*, in which she as a survivor of military sexual slavery leaves to her daughter her testimony to the violence against women during World War II, Willa’s subaltern archive of women’s “buried memories” (118) suggests that the historiographical and therefore social survival of the records as well as of the recording subjects depends on who will read them. Willa’s reading is a subaltern practice of what many feminists have seen as the primary task and initial step of feminist historiography: excavating and reconstructing women’s buried stories as counter-memories. Like Kingston and Keller, who also revision the national history by imaginatively reconstructing forgotten women’s memories, Naylor also invites us to re-view the nation through the history of the repressed.

Reading Luwana’s scribbling in the Bible, which is “the diary of a slave” with “no dates” and “no apparent order to the aging fragments” (117), Willa sees that she is not alone in being denied her maternal tie to her own son. Luwana’s slave-diary serves to interpellate the inarticulate, crying Willa into a subject; her act of reading begins to form a community of empathy, a faculty to understand the suffering of others as if it were her own.¹¹ Hoping for “[a] new land[, a] new life” (118) away from her slave life

¹¹ I thank Hae Yeon Choo for her insightful comment on Willa’s “imagining a community.”

under the Packervilles, Luwana married Luther I in 1837 only to discover that she “only exchanged one master for another” (117). Luther I purchased her and kept the documents securely locked away; she had no rights as a free woman. She further writes that marriage is a “cursed bondage” (117) in complete isolation “with no friends or relatives” (119) except the “deaf ears” of her husband and her son (121). As her son (Luther II) grows, she is forcibly separated from him; her days are spent reading, which is “[her] sole pleasure” (120), and writing imaginary letters to a second self she creates and names Luwana. With the imaginary Luwana, the real Luwana consoles herself, dreaming that “together we can weather those tiny tempests that blow through a woman’s world” (122). Willa intensely empathizes with Luwana’s *alienation* in her home, self-alienation (“And the true horror is that I am becoming, sister, a stranger to myself,” writes Luwana to her imaginary sister [123]), and finally total silence to death. Luwana’s complete silence makes explicit the importance of bonds among women. “There is nothing . . . that is going on in your home that is not repeated in countless other homes around you. Please venture out and make friends with the other wives. I alone am not enough for you,” answers the imaginary Luwana (123).

Through Luwana, who is able to see from her own experience that women are made only to function as reproductive machines for the nation, Naylor critiques African American cultural nationalists such as Robert Staples and Eldridge Cleaver, who reduce woman to womb.¹² Luwana’s writing from the mid-nineteenth century reveals that

¹² Cleaver celebrates African American woman as “the womb that nurtured Toussaint L’Ouverture, that warmed Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey” (208), while Staple

Linden Hills was founded on slavery-within, where women have been made the bearer of anonymous but indispensable labors. In this slavery-within, Luwana is further denied her maternal tie to her own child as her son grows. Luwana writes: “From his birth, he has been his father’s son in flesh and now in spirit. . . . I have been the innocent vessel for some sort of unspeakable evil” (123). Luwana finally realizes that her alienation is not related to her loss of sexual attraction or her imagined failure of maternal duty, but that women are defined as “innocent vessel[s]” for reproduction, who vanish into nothing when they outlive their “usefulness” for patriarchy (123).

Appropriating African American slave narratives in creating Luwana, Naylor poignantly critiques the patriarchal foundation of the Nedeed nation. Similar to the narrator of Frederick Douglass’s autobiography, Luwana learns how to read and write from Mistress Packerville. It is worth remembering here that literacy for African Americans was illegal during Luwana’s time (Naylor, “Love and Sex” 19). More significantly, it is through her illegal power of literacy that Luwana leaves written (scribbled) records of her life. Unlike Douglass’s narrator, who shows that “[t]o attain literacy, then, was actually to attain ‘being’ within the social fabric” (Naylor, “Love and Sex” 19), it is after about a century and a half that the very act of writing eventually makes Luwana a social being. In a similar way to which it takes more than half a century to restore the forgotten memories of Kingston’s no name aunt and Keller’s Soon Hyo/Akiko, it takes a long time for Luwana’s “buried memories” (118) to be excavated.

insists that African American women contribute to the liberation struggle through their womb: “from her womb have come the revolutionary warriors of our time” (qtd. from Dubey 19).

As Naylor, Kingston, and Keller suggest, women who write survive, although often by being read posthumously.¹³

Searching for Luwana's further writings, Willa encounters instead Evelyn Creton, who, according to the dates, is Luther III's wife. In contrast to Luwana's undated diaries, Evelyn's "thick, heavy cookbooks" (139) in two volumes "covered in black silk" (141) contain the dates and the ingredients for each recipe "[w]ith a fanatical precision" (140). As Evelyn's story unfolds, Willa sees a woman so obsessed with cooking "as if she were possessed" (141). Evelyn's meticulous records divulge her secrets, which triggers off Willa's critical revision of her long sense of guilt since she happened to witness Luther V's necrophilia. Reading through these two recipe books carefully, Willa notices Evelyn's making of "shame-weed," about which Willa once heard from her great-aunt Mama Day, the empowering matriarch of Willow Springs in Naylor's third novel. To make her husband sexually attracted to her, Evelyn adds to Luther III's meals dove's heart, amaranth seeds, and snakeroot for more than half a year. Getting no effect from this secretive "shame-weed," she turns in vain to making face cream. Like Willa's husband (Luther V), Evelyn's husband (Luther III) had not had sex with her after she gave birth to Luther IV.

As she reads about her foremother's secret and desperate marital life, Willa rethinks "the unspeakable" (174) and speaks it. Through Willa, Naylor suggestively adds another dimension symptomatic of the foundations of the Nedeed patriarchal nation: necrophilia. The Luthers, as undertakers, are described as having a curious

¹³ For feminist discussions that women who write survive, see Carolyn Heilbrun; Tillie Olsen; Adrienne Rich (1979; 1986); Joanna Russ.

attraction to and secret use of catfish heads. Through Willie and Lester, who are journeying into Linden Hills while Willa is reading her foremothers, Naylor describes Luthers as sexual “weirdo[s],” to use Lester’s word (39). In the second chapter, titled “December 19th,” Naylor gives an implicit clue to Luther III’s necrophilia. Lester tells Willie that he heard from Grandma Tilson that Luther III had paid double for her catfish heads while often fishing together with her. In the third chapter, Naylor briefly gives another clue to show the present Luther’s weird use of catfish heads. Willie and Lester are peeling off the wallpaper of Lycentia Parker’s room by the order of her husband. Chester Parker seems to Willie as if he already prepares for another marriage even before his wife’s funeral. Like Willa, Willie also sees Luther V’s sensuous touch of the dead body: “In the kitchen, he hacked off the head of the struggling body and put it in a plastic bag,” and “carr[ied] it out the back door to his mortuary and the body of Lycentia S. Parker” (70). Willie wonders whether what he sees, “a pleasant sensation through [Luther V’s body]” (185), is real or not. Through Willa’s thoughts after reading Evelyn’s cookbook, Willie’s inarticulate concern about Luther V’s touch of the body takes on a clearer significance (Whitt 109).

Reading that Evelyn also had an unfulfilled sex life, Willa guesses that there might have been a sexual “tradition” of the Nedeed men. Willa happened to witness her husband’s practice of necrophilia when she followed him to his work at the morgue. Knowing why she had had “lonely nights,” Willa felt that “she couldn’t have kept living with the man she saw in the mortuary that evening” (174). Connecting herself to Evelyn, she recalls that evening and the subsequent days when she lost her appetite. She claims

that, at the time, she had to run “from guilt, not from the sight of him lifting a fish head out of a plastic bag and turning it gently in his hands before inserting it in the spread body before him” (175). As if she talked with Evelyn, who might not have known about Luther III’s necrophilia, she comes to the conclusion that “this was simply the way life was when your husband’s work took him away so much at night” (175).

Arriving at the final section of Evelyn’s recipe book, Willa recognizes that “nothing was wrong” with the Nedeed wives, including herself (187). She affirms Evelyn as “such a proper woman,” re-reading her “careful and meticulous handwriting” as signaling the latter’s “vision of quiet dignity and immaculate grooming” (187). She imagines how Evelyn might have felt when she later used dried bull’s testicles, the menstrual blood of virgins, genital hair, etc., in order to conjure a certain power over Luther III. Deciding that she is the “one to validate these types of desires in a Mrs. Evelyn Creton Nedeed” (188), Willa intensely mourns the lonely death of Evelyn, who further tortured herself for years by taking laxatives and, finally, prussic acid. By juxtaposing Willa’s reading of Evelyn’s distant suicide with Willie’s witnessing the suicide of Willa’s only friend, Laurel Dumont, in the present Linden Hills, Naylor elaborates a continuity of women’s self-mutilation (I’ll return to this later).

In her critique of marriage at the social center, Naylor suggests the multiple significance of necrophilia as symptomatic of the sexual foundations of the Nedeed’s patriarchal nation. As Willa also witnesses, Luther V treats the dead bodies of females “as he’d been taught” (185). While touching Lycentia’s body during her funeral in the church, Luther V recalls: “Standing by his father’s side, being told to forget all the

nonsense he had learned in school,” he relearns that “female bodies are different,” for they “g[i]ve themselves up completely to your handling” (185). What is passed on to each of the Nedeed sons by his father is revealed: “With the proper touch, you could work miracles. . . . Attention to the smallest details — edges of mouths, curves of wrists — could bring unbelievable life into the body before you. But it was a power not to be abused; it took gentleness and care to turn what was under your hands into a woman” (185).

As a family “tradition,” the Nedeed men’s necrophilia is not simply a peculiar type of sexual preference. Rather, Naylor describes it as a centuries-long, masculinist, homophobic dream of sexual independence. As the gay man Winston is forced to succumb to Linden Hills’s heteronormativity, there is no homosexuality in Linden Hills (75). In her description of the Nedeed men, Naylor elaborates a connection between Linden Hills’s heteronormativity to an indistinguishable “continuum” (Whitt 162) of the Nedeed men, all of whom have almost identical lines of their fathers, highlighting the masculine dream of self-genesis and self-duplicating. Using women as mere bodies for reproduction (Bordo 76), the Nedeed fathers teach their only sons necrophilia at the time of the latter’s sexual initiation. Touching Lycentia’s dead body, Luther V recalls, “His father leaving him alone that night with his first body, everything explained” (185). Necrophilia is the most masculinist practice of controlling men’s own sexuality, while avoiding homosexuality and simultaneously “enjoying” a fully controlling power over a female body. Necrophilia as such a practice is related to a patriarchal dream of self-genesis without sexual inter-dependency, while using women only for reproduction. To

pass on in precise detail what, when, and how to do it in order to engender a son, the Nedeed fathers have kept journals that record “the dates and times of penetrations, conceptions, and births for every Nedeed in Linden Hills” so meticulously that their way seems, for the wife-doubting Luther V, to “ha[ve] been infallible for generations” (18). To use Susan Bordo, necrophilia relies on the gender ideology that defines women as a mere body for pleasure and as a fetal incubator (79-81).

Last but not least, necrophilia serves as the most powerful force to bind the Nedeed men’s only son to their father within Linden Hills, as Luther V thinks while he feels necrophilic sensations from Lycentia’s body in the chapel: “She was perfect. And what was the point in living if a man didn’t love his work?” (185). Each of the Nedeed only sons returns to Linden Hills after getting a modern education in big cities, whereas the villagers mistakenly expect that such an educated son would not return to take over his father’s business of undertaking. The Nedeed men’s necrophilia reveals its complex intersection with homophobia, gynophobia, and the patrilineal bond of sexuality.

In reading, Willa recognizes the continuity between herself and Luwana (marriage as an institution of slavery) and Evelyn (repressed desire in any Mrs. Nedeed). Although she empathizes with “their sad, twisted lives” (205), at first she refuses to identify herself with them: “She wasn’t like these other women; she had coped and they were crazy. They never changed” (204). In such an empathic resistance, she encounters another Nedeed wife whom she does not know, although the wife is her own mother-in-law, her son’s grandmother. Seeing Priscilla McGuire’s album, Willa notices the forcibly absent place of the wife in the Nedeed family. The album contains pictures

taken of Luther IV, Priscilla, and Luther V together. At first glance, the twenty-year-long series of pictures records the growth of the son. As the son in the picture (Willa's husband) grows from infancy to manhood, he had more and more clearly "the identical dark lines of the father" (208). Taking a close look at Priscilla in the photos, Willa sees that Priscilla was a modern, independent woman, ran for and served as the president of the local Association of Colored Women, but was finally "imprisoned" in marriage. Willa concludes that "the only thing growing in these pictures was [Priscilla's] absence" (209).

It is through finding herself in Priscilla's "soft, compassionate eyes" (205) that Willa moves to self-definition in and through the imagined community of empathy. Mirroring herself in the community, Willa slowly comes to think of her own desire and finally transforms herself into a subject of desire and action. Reflecting on her life in terms of "what she had wanted," she positively affirms herself and her marital life, and then articulates her own desire: "But there was nothing wrong with her. . . . And there just couldn't have been anything wrong with what she had wanted. A home. A husband. Children. That was all, and that was so little" (204).

Willa's discovery culminates in her reading of Priscilla's symbolic act of face-cutting. Priscilla is a simultaneous embodiment of and participant in the Nedeed wives' facelessness in Linden Hills. Through the photo album as a whole, Priscilla records the growth of her absence but also dis-members herself from her family by dismembering her face in the photos. Reading facelessness as a form of literal dismemberment and social dis-memberment, Vanessa H. Diana notes that Priscilla intends to inscribe her loss

of identity through physical de-imaging her face, and that such “a physical imaging of the loss of identity” “results from dis-membering one’s past” (89). Willa notices that Priscilla decapitated herself in the photos “on purpose” by using cleaning fluid, bleach, and hot grease (249). Priscilla scrawled the word “me” in lilac-colored ink in the empty hole of the dismembered face. It is in this faceless “me” that Willa intensely sees her othered self. From this moment forward, she is able to dissolve the past and her foremothers’ dis-membered lives into her present situation. She recognizes that the foremothers’ nightmares still run through her own reality while furthering female facelessness in the present. Staring at the hole that was once Priscilla, Willa touches her own face compulsively. Willa uses a pot of water as a mirror, and she re-creates and sees the real image of her face. Seeing her mirrored image “with a new shape and form to place in the air before her” (267), she touches her face again and again.

With her culminating awareness of the forced “dead” place of the Nedeed wives and with her own creation of a new self-image, Willa reclaims her body as her own. As Naylor describes Willa’s creating a mirror and thus re-creating a new self-image, the bodily power of touch is increased, complementing the power of vision or mirroring. Sure that her created mirror reflects a clear image of her face, Willa “now closed her eyes and used both hands, trying to form a mirror between her fingers, the darkness, and memory. . . No doubt remained — she was there” (267-68). Contextualizing herself in the Nedeed women’s history, she is now empowered: “she had actually seen and accepted reality and reality brought [such] a healing calm” that “she could rebuild” “whatever it was worth” (268). By mirroring and touching, she finally affirms herself as

a named subject: “Her name was Willa Prescott Nedeed” (277). This is the first and the only moment when Willa’s name is introduced in the novel. Then, she reconfirms her first name as her own “singular identity”; thereby, she redefines her marriage as “her [own] choice” (278). “She had owned that first name for as long as she had the face she was now certain that she had possessed” (277). Before she climbs the twelve steps toward the kitchen in order to reclaim her place, she makes sure again: “she took his name by choice. . . . She must be clear about that before she went on to anything else: she wanted to be a Nedeed” (278).

Empowered by her encounters with the three foremothers’ subaltern documents, Willa also talks back to what has imprisoned her own body. Tracing how she “come[s] to be exactly where she was” (278), she takes responsibility for her history “without any reservations” (279) and with “an identity [as a Nedeed wife] that was rightfully hers, that she had worked hard to achieve” (280). In order to root herself again in “the center of her being” (280) that she herself chose and had worked hard to keep as her own, she breaks her imprisonment and climbs the twelve concrete steps to the kitchen. As Willa’s journey back to ignored women’s histories shows, the restoration of subaltern women’s “writing back” is finally destined to empower subsequent “talking back” by other women of later generations. As Naylor makes explicit, it is such subaltern talking back that constitutes history’s “cunning passage,” which the Linden Hills historian Daniel Braithwaite fails to perceive. This reconstruction of subaltern women’s memories also constitutes a powerful motif in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Keller’s *Comfort Woman*.

At the heart of Willa's move from a passive object to an active subject lies the issue of conformity. It is the role of wife and mother that Willa redefines as her own choice and reclaims the kitchen as her own place, informing her husband that their son was dead. The imprisoned Willa's final climbing the twelve steps to the kitchen is an act of changing the meaning of the traditional role of mother and wife from a domestic machine to a socially recognizable and respected personhood. Women's redefinition of their roles can be revolutionary, when they, as women, reappropriate in their own terms the roles that are imposed as mere functions in patriarchal terms to deny their social existence as persons.

In Willa's process of reclaiming her role of wife and mother as her own choice, Naylor stresses more the urgency of women's own redefinition of their roles than making Willa as an embodiment of radical subjectivity. Rather, it seems that Naylor addresses the question of conformity as a serious issue of radical subjectivity, especially in the cases of women like Willa, who remain subaltern regardless of their husbands' class. It is notable that Naylor does not describe as a clearly conscious action Willa's reclaiming the kitchen as "the center of her being" (280). Instead, Willa is described as exerting life-energy or "unconscious" "power of will" "to unfathomable possibility." When Willa is climbing the steps toward the kitchen, her:

Memory mingles with desires. . . . [After a]n unconscious journey in toward the power of will, . . . She breathed in and out, her body a mere shelter for the mating of unfathomable will to unfathomable possibility. And in that union, the amber germ of truth she went to sleep with conceived and reconceived itself, splitting

and multiplying to take over every atom attached to her being. That nucleus of self-determination held the tyrannical blueprint for all divisions of labor assigned to its multiplying cells. Like other emerging life, her brain, heart, hands, and feet were being programmed to a purpose. (288-89)

Naylor does not connect Willa's awakening to what could result from a feminist consciousness-raising, but instead describes Willa's moment of "self-determination" as driven by an unconscious, even "tyrannical" will-power of any life that is "programmed to a purpose" to emerge and sustain itself. With such a description, Naylor seems to suggest that there are always resources and will-power within oneself that cannot be fully confined or ruled by social forces. Such inner forces help Willa "break" her long imprisonment, although she knows that neither her husband nor her situation will change. As Willa's name also suggests, will power goes beyond her knowledge of what she can and cannot do; as such, it allows her a crucial agency to "conform" to the role she desires to *reclaim*, both because of and in spite of knowing her situated self. Reviewing contemporary African American women writers at work, Claudia Tate provides an insightful comment that is also true of Willa's reclamation: "this type of change [a changed self] . . . occurs because the heroine recognizes, and more importantly respects her inability to alter a situation. . . . This is not to imply that she is completely circumscribed by her limitations. On the contrary, she learns to exceed former boundaries but only as a direct result of knowing where they lie" (xxiv). Knowing her situated self (the continuity and difference between herself and her foremothers), Willa tries to exceed the continuing boundaries by reclaiming her place while simultaneously

“conforming” to them. Although her will power and unlearning are not enough to alter her situation, she reclaims what she wants.

Naylor does not describe Willa merely as a powerless victim or finally as an agent of any radical change in re-directing her life. Naylor’s redefinition of conformity is related to female self-definition and to the importance of “women’s support for one another,” which Naylor sees as a central theme of her own work (Perry 220). Willa instead forms an “imagined community” with her dead mothers-in-law. While mirroring herself in this community that shows another continuum repressed in the Nedeed family, she comes to make a significant difference, achieving self-definition for the first time. It is, however, at the moment she begins to act by empowering herself that the novel ends. Willa reclaims her place as a wife and immediately dies in an accidental fire, which burns the Nedeed house. Naylor’s deliberate ending of her novel at a beginning point effects another imagined community, in which readers as well as Willie and Lester begin to envision another world at the moment of Willa’s death.

Critics have discussed Naylor’s ending of the novel with Willa’s death as a redemptive potential or a narrative flaw in creating a strong African American womanhood, or what hooks argues as radical subjectivity for anti-racist and anti-patriarchy struggles. Willa’s death is interpreted as a dead end (Andrews), self-destruction (Goddu), or a quick suicide (Homans). Margaret Homans suggests that the novel fails to “institute [a] countertradition of strong Black womanhood to oppose the destructive legacy of patriarchy” (396). In contrast, Catherine Ward notes that “although Willa and Luther are destroyed in a flash fire that sweeps the house, still Willa is

triumphant. She has put an end to the Nedeed dynasty and has inspired Willie to continue his spiritual odyssey wherever it leads him” (in Gates and Appiah, eds. 192). Providing a detailed reading of the novel in the context of African American messianism, Christopher Okonkwo argues that Willa’s death is “an enabling sacrifice” as an “irregular messiah,” who “supports the proactive subjectivity of subaltern women” (128). I do not see Willa’s death as a dead end or “a messianic self-sacrifice,” but rather as a significant disjunction to remind us of the importance of women’s intra- and cross-generational empowerment and support for one another. I read Willa’s death as Naylor’s serious warning to and critique of African American nationalism. In spite of her self-discovery, Willa has no connection to and support from other women and dies. As Naylor notes, “[i]n the end this novel is definitely apocalyptic” (*Conversations* 63). Willa’s death contains an apocalyptic vision if it should remain not interconnected by and for later generations.

As many African American feminists have noted, self-definition is key to individual and collective empowerment; when individuals articulate their experience and consciousness, a collective group consciousness that resists oppression becomes possible.¹⁴ To use Patricia Hill Collins in her discussion of Black feminist thought as an African American women’s tradition, Naylor suggests through Willa’s death that “Black women’s ability to forge these individual, often unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint is key to Black women’s survival” (2000, 36). Self-definition is directly

¹⁴ See Collins (2000); hooks (1989); and Lorde.

connected to survival; Willa, in defining herself in her own terms, shows “the centrality of a changed self to personal empowerment” (Collins 2000, 119). Naylor, however, also leaves Willa’s “potentially powerful” reclamation of the role of wife disconnected from “an articulated, self-defined, collective standpoint.” With such an ending, Naylor leaves us to rethink the issues of female subalternity and women’s isolation, which are powerful barriers against survival and empowerment. Willa’s isolated but powerful sense of self-in-connection (to her dead mothers) is very suggestive of (African American) women’s collective survival, which has not been taken seriously within African American nationalist movements. Willa’s disjunction to other women in her own and later generations constitutes Naylor’s apocalyptic vision for rebuilding the African American community as an individual and collective home. Willa’s death suggests that a space of and for female nurturing in connection is imperative for women’s survival. Willa’s life and lonely death in the private space without witness also reminds us of the power of the mother-daughter relationship to the daughter, as the daughter in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* or Keller’s *Comfort Woman* leads a meaningful life in the U.S. with a women’s genealogy she inherits from her mother.

Heteronormativity and the Gendered “Realism” of “Objective” Historiography

Naylor complicates the precarious foundations of the Nedeed patriarchal nation by addressing two significant issues: homophobia and a hegemonic notion of history. While she emphasizes women’s bonds in *The Women of Brewster Place*, in *Linden Hills* Naylor foregrounds Willie and Lester as witnesses to what is happening in Linden Hills, including Willa’s death, and thus positions them as implicit inheritors of her legacy.

Lester and Willie relearn and complement what Willa's life and death leave in Linden Hills. Through these two male characters, Naylor complicates the social construction of outsiders-within in Linden Hills, and makes a suggestive link to rewriting history, into which Willa's subaltern revisions and other repressed stories of the present residents are integrated in order to form a more accurate picture of the social life in Linden Hills.

In her description of Winston Alcott and his secret gay lover David, Naylor shares other African American feminists' critiques of the homophobia that has constituted another factor of silence and repression in African American communities.¹⁵ Luther V most vigilantly forces heteronormativity on the residents, for he perceives it as a firm foundation of Linden Hills, while his fathers more concentrated on preventing Nat Turners, Marcus Garveys, and poor African Americans from living in Linden Hills. Winston and David have enjoyed a happy and loving relationship for eight years. However, Winston decides to forsake David in order to ensure his career as "a promising young lawyer" (80) so that he will deserve to live in the most privileged street, Tupelo Drive, in Linden Hills. Luther V sends Winston's father, a respected businessman, several pictures that suggest Winston's homosexuality. As Luther V tells Winston, heterosexual marriage "is the only way if a man wants to get somewhere in Linden Hills" (75). Mr. Alcott forces Winston to choose between David and "a chance to be a corporate lawyer with a firm" (78). Challenged by Luther V's blackmail, Winston denies himself and marries Cassandra. Ushering the bridegroom Winston and "his best

¹⁵ For the issue of homophobia in African American feminism and communities, see Collins (2000, chs. 6-7); Lorde; Barbara Smith (1983, "Introduction"). As for African American cultural nationalism's homophobia, see West (521-29).

man” David (74) to the wedding, Luther pinpoints the heteronormativity upon which Linden Hills depends. The heterosexual family is the very foundation of Linden Hills, as Luther V further insists: “No one’s been able to make it down to Tupelo Drive without a stable life and a family. Besides, Winston didn’t want to stay single, did you, son? You didn’t want to go it alone” (75). As Luther V, Winston, and David all know, Winston could have “a stable life and a family” with David. Unlike David, who envisions another life outside Linden Hills to sustain their love, Winston accepts what Luther V insists as the only “fulfilling way of life” (75). Winston excuses his choice, asking David to accept the social construction of homosexuality as social death: “I can’t live with you. Not in Linden Hills. That would be suicide, and you know it. . . . Not like this — and my future is here. My career” (78-9).

By introducing the issue of heteronormativity, Naylor unsettles and revises the categories of gender and sexuality. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, she explores what Adrienne Rich terms “a lesbian continuum” through Theresa and Lorraine, who claim a lesbian identity against their homophobic families. In *Linden Hills*, the author further enriches the category of gender by exploring gay male sexuality. While re-gendering the Nedeed patriarchal nation-building project by revealing through Willa the subordination of women as one of its foundations, Naylor undoes through the lens of sexuality the alleged fixity of gender as a category relevant only to women. As Kimberley A. Costino suggests in her detailed reading of the novel with a focus on compulsory heterosexuality in connection to capitalism, Naylor examines heterosexuality as “a political institution” (53) sustaining Linden Hills. Winston performs “perfectly straight” at his wedding (74);

in turn, David undoes that performance by his “queer” reading of Walt Whitman’s poem about male homoeroticism as a seemingly celebrative gesture of the new bridegroom’s “best man” (74). David and Winston feel that heterosexuality functions as a compulsory institution, which “has given [them] no words — ultimately no way — with which to cherish [their love]” (79-80). It is not surprising that “the right words for what they are to each other” are completely forbidden (80). None of the wedding guests seem to notice David’s “queer” and Winston’s “straight” performances. Only Willie, a casual worker for the wedding, notices “something very queer” (90) in the entire process of the wedding.

It is worth noting here that Cassandra, Winston’s bride, is the least acknowledged victim in what Judith Butler terms the heterosexual matrix, in which the nuclear family has to be kept intact in order to secure the stability of sexual orientations. As Winston and David show, forced heterosexuality or heteronormativity functions to induce sexual complicity in exchange for social privileges. Through Cassandra, Naylor implies that heteronormativity is also gendered. In Luther V’s discourse, Cassandra, only as Mrs. Alcott, is an accessory to “decorate” Tupelo Drive. Cassandra is described only in a single sentence uttered by Luther V, who ushers Winston to the wedding: “Don’t worry, Winston. . . . *Cassandra will still be there*” (76). For Winston, Cassandra is simply a veil to protect his social privileges by masquerading to maintain a heterosexual family: “She wanted a husband — I needed a wife. It’s straight out of a soap opera. And they lived happily ever after until the next floor-wax commercial” (76). Winston employs a discourse of marriage as a social contract, but denies that Cassandra could have her own

expectations for her married life, something all of the Nedeed wives have also been denied. As suggested in her name from Greek mythology, in which she is the ignored prophetess of the upcoming disaster of the Trojan War, Cassandra is an anonymous but clearly symbolic synthesis of Linden Hill's gendered homosexuality, "the doomed marriage" (Moore 1141), and impending destruction, which will be actualized in Laurel Dumont's suicide.

Focusing on the connection between capitalism and sexuality, Costino argues that Luther V consolidates the link between heterosexuality and economic and social privilege in Linden Hills (46). I would add that Naylor critiques the African American nationalist assertion of the incompatibility of African Americanness and homosexuality (see pp. 84-5). Luther V contains homosexual desire and practice by rewarding Winston for his heterosexual family-making while re-asserting that David is simply Winston's male friend. When Willie "couldn't help feeling that something was missing from the jeweled sparkle in the air" of the wedding (83), Luther V ensures others again that heterosexual marriage is the cornerstone of "the stability and growth of Linden Hills" (86). During the wedding reception, Luther V states that by making a "wise" choice, Winston deserves to be "an outstanding member of this community" (86). Then, he announces that as a reward for Winston's "dedication to Linden Hills, . . . [t]he Tupelo Realty Corporation has decided to give [him] a mortgage on Tupelo Drive" (87).

While Cassandra as a "married" woman will stay in Linden Hills, Laurel Dumont showcases how precarious the social link between heteronormative marriage and women's legal status is in the nation. Although a rich and successful woman, Laurel is a

paramount case to reveal the “homelessness” of Linden Hills to its female residents. Thanks to her grandmother, who has sacrificed all she can give her, she has overcome the social barriers against African American women. Laurel has become “[a]n Amazon,” the “biggest woman at IBM” (228), and has settled down with a successful state attorney husband at 722 Tupelo Drive. As the successful African American male managers in General Motors, Maxwell Smyth and Xavier Donnell, also observe, African American women are “at the bottom” of the social ladder of upward mobility (115). A Berkeley graduate, Laurel is chosen to be a Dumont wife, for she “came with the Dumonts’ ingrained prerequisites: she was sepia, stunning, and successful” (232). When her husband files for a divorce, however, the childless Laurel loses her right to live in the mansion. Suffering incessant episodes of depression, she tries in vain to restore her long friendship with Willa and Ruth Anderson, a resident of the poor district, Putney Wayne. For the divorced Laurel, a Christmas party with her female friends seems the only depression-killer available. Luther V, not Willa who was originally invited to Laurel’s Christmas party, comes to Laurel’s house to inform her that she has to vacate the mansion.

Luther “corrects” Laurel’s naïve assumption that she is able to stay in the mansion, for she is “more than able to buy him out of whatever rights he feels are his” (244). Luther V reminds Laurel that her husband is the legal contractor. His rigid keeping of the specifications of the Dumonts’ lease turns the rich Laurel into a powerless “homeless” woman. According to the Tupelo Realty Corporation’s proviso for leasing Linden Hills’s houses, all of which have been under the Nedeed men’s legal ownership,

only African American families that satisfy the Corporation's meticulous specifications for the lease can reside there. More significantly, in Laurel's case, women can remain there as long as the male contractor (legally) lives with them or there are children who inherit the lease. Such a proviso made by the Nedeed men serves to further heteronormativity by connecting it to legitimate, heterosexual reproduction. With no children, Laurel's economic power (so-called "making it into Linden Hills" [15]) turns out to be no power to claim a right to decide her residency.

Laurel's impending eviction contrasts to Dr. Braithwaite's permanent residency in Tupelo Drive, the most privileged street of Linden Hills. Resisting Luther V's decision that brings her "a reflex triggered by a history of firing against ingrained male assumption that she didn't count" (246), Laurel tries in vain to defy him: "Daniel Braithwaite didn't move, and his wife has been dead for years. I didn't see you running down there to kick him out — when you should have. That crazy old Peeping Tom with his decayed willow trees is a disgrace to this neighborhood" (245). Naylor describes Laurel's deprivation of her "home" by Luther V as a double un-homing of "never-never": "Laurel took in the full weight of his words: she had never lived in a house in which she had never lived" (246). She realizes too late that home, not social success, is the ultimate goal of her life-long pursuits in her constant state of dislocation. The "homeless" Laurel takes the full weight of the Nedeed men's "decree" about the residential eligibility, and destroys instead her primary home, her body, by diving into her Olympic-size pool on the coldest day of the year.

Using Dr. Braithwaite as a counter-example, Naylor reinscribes the meanings of the lives of the Nedeed wives, Willa, and Laurel, against a hegemonic discourse of history. Making Willie the witness to Laurel's suicide, Naylor juxtaposes Laurel's story of female "making it into Linden Hills" and self-mutilation with Willa's reading of Priscilla's act of erasing her face image in her family photos. The only story to encompass the entire life of a character in the novel, Laurel's story begins with "the cry of an old woman, calling a little girl home" (216) and ends with her suicide. In a similar situation when he hears Willa's howl, Willie hears the cry of Roberta Johnson, who is visiting her granddaughter Laurel. Willie is the first to see Laurel's body; Dr. Braithwaite, who watches Willie and Lester all week from the huge window of his house, shelters Willie and Lester from the scene of death. While Willie's response to Laurel's death is visceral, Dr. Braithwaite tells them that "it was just a matter of time. . . . that personal tragedy today was just a minute part of a greater tragedy that has afflicted this community for decades" (256-57). To the two young men, who interrogate why he has done nothing for Laurel although he has long guessed what could happen to her, the Linden Hills historian excuses himself, saying that he is "a mere outsider" to family matters (256) and a historian "not being able to stop the course of human history, a collective history or an individual one" (257). To justify individual powerlessness to the suffering of others, he resorts to the discourse of private/public division. To him, "the course of human history" is beyond human accountability in a double sense. It is ironic that he has a notion of history without human responsibility while his office as a historian is to make "the course of human history" accountable. Willie persistently

insists that it is “a crime” not to “do *something* to keep the steam down” (257). He sees Dr. Braithwaite’s version of historical accountability as useless for social transformation, recognizing that it is neither based on a sense of commitment nor any sense of social responsibility to the suffering of others.

While (historical) knowledge means for Willie a transformative power, it is a reified knowledge “for the sake of knowledge” for Dr. Braithwaite (*Conversations* 47). A history professor, Dr. Braithwaite commits all of his life to recording the history of Linden Hills with “extreme care and immeasurable accuracy” (265). He had been funded for his education to a doctoral level by the Nedeed men and has been allowed an exclusive access to all of the documents carefully recorded and stored by the Tupelo Realty Corporation. Having built his reputation from his studies about Linden Hills, he assumes that he “know[s] everything about the Nedeeds” (259). As Willie soon observes, however, the Linden Hills’s historian’s life-long accomplishments, for which he was nominated for the Nobel Prize, turn out to “fabricate a patriarchy” (Moore 1141). While taking a close look at Dr. Braithwaite’s library full of stacks of books, especially rare books and documents by many African American leaders in the early twentieth century, Willie notices the fundamental partiality of the historian’s recording of the Nedeeds’ and Linden Hills’s history. He asks the historian: “I mean [you know] the wives and children and all? You’ve got their lives all in your books?” (259).

Challenged by Willie’s sense of the under-representation of women in his history-writing, Dr. Braithwaite provides an objectivist, realist idea of historiography. Positioning himself as a passive recorder of Linden Hills’s history, he “did nothing but

continue to compile data that Luther brought [him] and to crystallize [his] own observations” (261). He further insists: “I miss nothing; I record it all in its minutest detail. . . . I can only hope to record that knowledge, not rectify it” (262). He refuses to involve himself in the lives which he records. For him, an historian should be as neutral as if he were a camera; any ethical judgment or human desire for transformation could damage his camera-like writing of history. He thinks that, if writing history is done properly, “history becomes a written photograph” (261). Hence, it is imperative for him vigilantly to prevent his subject position from influencing his observation.

Dr. Braithwaite’s alleged objectivist, realist historiography is never objective but fundamentally partial, gendered, and paralyzing. He fails to see that in his process of crystallization, the suffering of others is merely objectified for knowledge production and reified into what Willie would call cold knowledge. Through the process of Braithwaitean crystallization, such cold knowledge loses its potentially transformative or affective power and instead paralyzes the knowledge-producers’ sense of commitment. As suggested in his killing the willow trees that blocked his view of the houses and streets in Linden Hills, he has “killed” the lived experiences and living memories of women, unsuccessful African Americans, and community as a whole with which he could be affectively involved: “I killed them when I realized that they might interfere with my work” (264). His killing the willow trees allows him to overlook Linden Hills, but prevents him from perceiving “history’s cunning passages.” By including Willie’s inner recitation of T. S. Eliot’s poem, “Gerontion,” Naylor suggests that Dr. Braithwaite’s historiography is based on his identification with the victors and thus tells

only the hegemonic side of the whole story. As Naylor suggests throughout the novel, “history’s cunning passages” lie in stories from experiences of socially othered subjects and of those who cannot but or are willing to counter- and dis-identify themselves with the victors. As Helen Levy aptly argues, “If memory of the community is the key to an enduring self for members of marginalized groups,” then the Braithwaites “rewrite those memories into palatable tales of deserved failure, enduring weakness,” and thus, for them, “lost rebellions deserve opprobrium” (211).

By contrasting Willa’s reclaimed histories of the Nedeed women with Dr. Braithwaite’s “objective” intellectual version of history, Naylor challenges the hegemonic notion of “man-making” history. While subaltern memory, when excavated, becomes possibly transformative for later generations’ self-discovery, Dr. Braithwaite’s version of hegemonic memory is forgetful of sufferings in its empathy for victors. Willa’s journey to a subaltern archive suggests alternative ways to empower oneself by reconnecting an imprisoned self to the seemingly lost histories. The subaltern “documents” in the morgue would be sorted out as useless by the Braithwaites or barred from the libraries of “official” historiography. While Willa’s close reading of such documents is furthered by increasing empathy to the socially erased women, the Braithwaites’ “serious” study of history excludes affective involvement and serves political hegemony. Thus, as Willie senses about Dr. Braithwaite’s twelve volumes of Linden Hills’s history, “official” history occludes as much as it reveals. Seeing “dust covers on the furniture” in “the darkened front room” before he leaves the historian’s house, Willie notices that it is difficult for Dr. Braithwaite from his huge “camera”-

window “to imagine children ice skating down there or women hanging wreaths in those windows, sweeping the porch, drying laundry” (266). If he had not “killed” lived experience and could have seen them, he would have gotten “a much different picture,” a more accurate picture of Linden Hills, concludes Willie (266).

Willie’s unlearning of Dr. Braithwaite’s history constitutes a significant step toward what Collins defines as “oppositional knowledge that both emerged from a situation of oppression and was central to Black women’s survival” (1998 xvii). Through his encounter with Dr. Braithwaite, whom Naylor explains “has turned his back on true knowledge” (*Conversations* 46), Willie positions himself as an “outsider-within” who reads against the grain and who, Collins argues, constitutes the standpoint for “oppositional knowledge.” After his encounter with Dr. Braithwaite, Willie realizes that there has been a dark basement where women “had had no face . . . and none of them had had names until now” (273). Attempting to specify these women with “no face” and “no names” in his own context, he asks: “What was that woman like down there in Nedeed’s house?” (273). His reflection on his encounters with the present residents during his week-long work merges into the still unspecified figure of Willa. Although he does not know or see her, he “knew he was committed” (276). Connecting himself to Willa with a sense of commitment, which Dr. Braithwaite refuses in his written history, Willie finally “gives birth” to the first line of his poem about Linden Hills: “There is a man in a house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name” (277).

Willie’s poetic encounter with Willa illuminates a future direction of Naylor’s cultural nationalism. Through Willa’s reading of women’s stories and Willie’s rewriting

of Linden Hills, the “base-ment” becomes a rich ground of “radical openness and possibility,” to use hooks’s redefinition of marginality (1990, 153). When marginality is reappropriated away from the hegemonic definition (marginality as the site of oppression and repression), “no name women,” Cassandras, queer subjects, self-abjecting subjects like Laurel begin to articulate and empower themselves as co-actors in history. Naylor is very critical of the Nedeed version of nationalism. The Nedeed nationalism initially attempts to resist racism but simultaneously fails to create a sound community. It has no culture in terms of self-love and mutual nurturing; money takes the place of culture. Instead, in its self-isolating, fenced land, it chooses to gesture toward intra-racial “superiority” by material distinction, while desiring social recognition by accepting whiteness as the unchangeable norm. It is a mimicked version of Western patriarchy, in which women and queer subjects are repressed. Unable to create a new paradigm that is not based on self-denial, such nationalism is, in essence, reactive and sexist.

Critical of hegemonic masculinist nationalism, Naylor qualifies the power of cultural nationalism as long as race/ethnicity/nationality is operating as one of the axes of power relations. For her, cultural nationalism can be meaningful when it reconstructs truly communal ties and thus helps individuals reground themselves on history, family, and community. When it creates against hegemonic discourses another culture of self-love, mutual nurturing, and finding resources within oneself, it serves African American survival (*Conversations* 114). And it can be empowering when it moves beyond a mere emphasis on “common” culture or history and persistently and self-critically struggles against sexism and against homophobia.

CHAPTER IV

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR*: REINVENTING TRANS-PACIFIC WOMEN'S MEMORIES, RE-NARRATING THE NATION

We know so little of the old country. . . . Family exists only because somebody has a story; and knowing the story connects us to a history.

— Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. . . . Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.

Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*

In the previous chapter, I tackle the unmarked status of masculinity in Leslie Marmon Silko's cultural nationalist project by discussing Gloria Naylor's feminist critique of the gendered nature of nation-building and contemporary U.S. cultural nationalism. In this chapter, I examine how Maxine Hong Kingston rearticulates nation and contemporary U.S. culture by productively deconstructing Chinese American cultural nationalist reconstructions of Chinese America, which had been predominantly male because of U.S. immigration policy. Silko in *Ceremony* (1977) and Naylor in *Linden Hills* (1985) show that women constitute a spectral center for an effort to re-invent a national imaginary, in which Native American or African American men identify themselves as a people.

Naylor's project in *Linden Hills* remains a feminist warning to the ultimate outcome of patriarchal and nationalist subordination of women. Kingston, in *The Woman Warrior* (1976), re-narrates and thus revises the national history of Chinese America and the national imaginary by bringing to the front trans-Pacific women's presence both in Chinese America and in the U.S. Kingston represents the trans-Pacific site, which is almost completely forgotten and willingly ignored in the history of Chinese America, as central to the construction and reconstruction of Chinese America. Highlighting a women-centered history in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston moves beyond Naylor's version of feminist critique of the nation and provides a feminist rearticulation of nation by incorporating the nation into U.S. history and contemporary U.S. culture.

Subtitled "memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts," *The Woman Warrior* includes five autobiographical accounts to show how a U.S.-born girl of Chinese origin finally becomes a particular type of warrior, whose best "weapon" is art (*Conversations* 20). The first section, titled "No Name Woman," provides the most articulate voice throughout the text, opening a trans-Pacific site that has been completely forgotten in Chinese American history. Coming out as a feminist writer, Kingston reconstructs the no name aunt, who "crosses" the Pacific as a haunting memory. The last section dramatizes the climax of the autobiographically constructed character,¹ as Maxine

¹ It is now agreed in recent autobiography studies that the autobiographical "I" or self is a discursive construct. See, for example, James Olney, ed. (38); Paul John Eakin (1985, 5-10, 277); Shari Benstock, ed. (5-6, 11, 55); Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, ed. (59); Carolyn Heilbrun (28); Nancy K. Miller (24, 126); Sidonie Smith (1993, 130); Pamela R. Matthews (1994a, 189, 193); Jeanne Perreault (2, 7); Anne E. Goldman (xxii-xxvi); Brownley and Kimmich, eds. (37-8). In addition, as Joan Scott (1992) powerfully suggests in her refutation of Samuel Delany's and others' foundational use of autobiographical experience as "uncontestable evidence" and "an originary point of explanation" (24), experience itself is discursively

struggles to engender her own language. In the second section, “White Tigers,” Kingston elaborates “a fantasy autobiography” (Smith 1987, 159) by appropriating her mother’s Chinese story of the legendary swordswoman, Fa Mu Lan, and then incorporates the fantasized autobiography into Maxine’s frustrating life in the U.S. In “Shaman,” she further reinvents the trans-Pacific site as a forgotten yet potentially powerful supplement to U.S. and Chinese American history, through allowing her mother Brave Orchid to perform self-representation as an oral autobiographer. In the fourth section, “At the Western Palace,” where she uses fictional elements in her autobiographical writing, Kingston represents Brave Orchid’s sister Moon Orchid as a living version of the no name aunt. Like the no name aunt, Moon Orchid had been left in China, but, owing to change in U.S. immigration policy, she finally crosses the Pacific decades after her husband’s entering the U.S. With her use of fiction in order to establish a women-centered history and tradition for her autobiographical project to reconstruct a new female selfhood, Kingston rewrites the U.S. as a site in which cultural memories are reinvented and rearticulated against hegemonic discourses. By making visible the forgetting of immigrant trans-Pacific moments, Kingston claims her own

constructed, reconstructed, always contested and thus open to reinterpretations; as such, it is “the discursive production of knowledge of the self,” not a reflection of external or internal truth (37). The autobiographical “I” of *The Woman Warrior* is very complex, and the narrator remains unnamed throughout the text (*Conversations* 133; Cheung 1993, 5; Kang 2003, 34). Indeed, there are multiple autobiographical I’s in the text. In addition, Kingston complexly weaves Maxine’s adolescent confusion and perspective with adult commentaries that are from the vantage points of the much older narrators and the writer herself. To avoid confusion, and because I also see the autobiographical I’s as discursive constructs, I refer to the autobiographically young Kingston as Maxine, the autobiographical “I” as the narrator, and the writer as Kingston. Kingston notes that Maxine, the narrators, and the writer herself are not identical; for Kingston, both Maxine and the narrators are literary constructs that have their own fictional lives (*Conversations* 133).

subjectivity as a Chinese American woman writer in the revised history of the U.S. as well as of Chinese America.

Discussing how Kingston claims Asian American women as an integral, constitutive part of (Chinese) American culture and nation, I argue that *The Woman Warrior* is a literary supplement to hegemonic histories of the U.S. and Chinese America and that at the core of Kingston's supplement lie trans-Pacific women at the margins of China and of the U.S. Kingston opens this long ignored site as a center for a national project to reinvent Chinese America and Asian America for political coalition and thereby provides a trans-Pacific narration of the nation. In "Women's History," Joan Scott argues that the mere inclusion of women is not enough, and that women's history provides corrective and truer accounts of history that supplement and replace established histories. Such a supplement is "both an addition and a substitute," Scott notes, constituting a key element of writing women's history (2001, 50). When Kingston figuratively conjures the no name aunt as a haunting memory and re-members her trans-Pacific mother and another aunt Moon Orchid within Chinese America and the U.S., she radically widens Asian American history and thereby adds something significant to U.S. history and culture. With such supplements, Kingston replaces hegemonic representations and histories that have excluded Chinese Americans as cultural aliens and have rendered Chinese American women invisible as outsiders.

Elaborating a situated account of her own life in connection to trans-Pacific women, Kingston redefines female subjects as alternative recorders of and witnesses to Chinese American women's historical presence in the U.S. rather than as mere victims

of Chinese (American) patriarchy and the U.S. racialization. With her autobiographical and imaginative revision of the historical complexity of gendered construction of Chinese America, Kingston moves beyond what King-Kok Cheung (1993) argues is a “feminist double-voiced discourse” to “make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak” (46), that is, a feminist strategy of double-telling to “disrupt simultaneously Chinese and white patriarchy” (25). Such discussions of *The Woman Warrior* as a double-voiced text have formed a prevailing tendency in the Kingston scholarship. What is often problematic in this tendency is the conflation of Chinese America with China and/or the assumption that patriarchy, whether Chinese American or the U.S. patriarchy, could be separately discussed from U.S. racism, and vice versa. In addition, in the readings of *The Woman Warrior* with a focus on Kingston’s double-telling narrative strategy, Kingston’s intervention in Asian American cultural nationalist reconstructions of Asian America as an exclusively male domain is not seriously discussed. Concerning the Asian American cultural nationalist reconstruction of Asian America, Lowe notes that “the category of ‘nation’ often erases a consideration of women” (73). Such a problematic tendency in Kingston criticism is further complicated by the gender politics of Asian American cultural nationalist re-invention of Asian America as Asian American men’s pan-ethnic nation for their political visibility against white hegemony.

Considering that the historically gendered construction of Chinese America is alternatively furthered by Asian American cultural masculinist nationalism, I complicate interpretive tensions in recent discussions of *The Woman Warrior*. In this chapter, I

discuss the significance of Kingston's opening of a trans-Pacific site by contextualizing her writing in the rise of Asian American cultural nationalism, which seeks to reconstruct Asian American history from a masculine perspective while obscuring gender and heterogeneity among Asian Americans (Espiritu; Kim 1982, 1990; Lowe; Li 1998). I then examine how Kingston reinscribes female subjects as disruptive to the masculinist understanding of Chinese American history. With critical foci on Kingston's representation of Chinatown in the U.S., not China, and more significantly, on the trans-Pacific site, the significance of which is missing in much of Kingston criticism, my reading of *The Woman Warrior* contributes to Kingston scholarship by deconstructing the opposition between nationalism and feminism, which is often associated with assimilationism, as well as the dichotomous reinscription of Chinese (American) patriarchy vs. American racism. In addition, my grounding of Kingston's characters on the twentieth-century history of Chinese Americans departs from existing criticism of *The Woman Warrior*, which often ignores the formative power of U.S. immigration policies to restrict Chinese American lives in China and in the U.S.

Written amidst the rise of Asian American cultural nationalism, *The Woman Warrior* constitutes the first powerful moment of feminist intervention in Asian American nationalist masculinization of Asian America, exploding tensions between cultural nationalism and feminism.² Frank Chin and other Asian American male writers'

² In her pioneering discussion of Asian American literature, Elaine Kim (1982) notes that for Asian Americans, the 1970s was a period of searching for a new self-image, for which masculinist cultural nationalist projects and feminist interventions contested with each other (173). Proposing an "ethnic-cultural nuancing of conventional Euro-American feminist positions on gender/power relations and a feminist critique of ethnic-specific identity," Lim

Aiiieeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers (1974) is the most oft-cited articulation of Asian American cultural nationalism. In this anthology, Chin and his colleague writers seek to articulate a distinct “Asian American sensibility,” a sensibility that is neither Asian nor assimilationist sensibilities (vii). They define the distinct sensibility in opposition to assimilationism as well as white hegemony. Assuming a representative voice for “American-born sensibility,” which is marked as nationalist in opposition to assimilationist, the editors of *Aiiieeee!* attempt to inscribe “Asian America as a presence” (ix) and to redefine Asian American manhood against the assimilationist idea of Asian Americans as a model minority and also against “America’s dishonesty—its racist white supremacy” — that has denied their voice for “seven generations of Asian-American[s]” (xvi). Using “the birth of the sensibility as the measure of being an Asian-American” (*Aiiieeee!*, ix), they assume an Asian Americanness and represent themselves as the authentic mouthpiece of Asian American experience. In doing so, they persistently accuse Kingston’s works (and later, increasingly well-known writers

identifies the late 1970s and the 1980s since *The Woman Warrior* as a “conscious and explicit conflict, between *women’s* ideas of culture and cultural nationalism as claimed by some males” (1993, 572; 577). In their extensive overview of representations of gender and sexuality in Asian American literature, Wong and Santa Ana add to Kim’s observation that feminist intervention is a hallmark of the 1970s and the 1980s (189). See Chin et al. eds. (1991) for Chin’s and his colleague’s reinvigorating nationalist project, which had been partly fueled by and strongly reactive to Kingston. With Kingston’s status as a canonical writer, her writing has become “a crucible for Asian American issues,” exploding tensions between cultural nationalism and feminism (Elaine Kim 1990, 79, quotes from Kim; Lowe 76; Li 1998, 44-5). In 1978, Kingston writes (1998, 49) and Elaine Kim echoes her a decade later (1990, 75): Chinese male writers’ alleged attacks on Kingston as assimilationist are masculinist attempts to subordinate women for their own political visibility. Wong describes as “pen wars” the long intense debates about gender vs. nation and about the issues of ethnic representation in its double sense, all of which are complicated with gender politics (1992a). See note 4 for the useful discussions among many publications of the “pen wars.” For the debate surrounding *Tripmaster Monkey* and Frank Chin, see Patricia Chu (2000, ch. 5). See also notes 2 and 13.

such as Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang) of assimilationism or distorting Chinese culture and thereby attempt to reassert male authority over Asian American women and their masculinity against white hegemony by subordinating feminism to nationalist concerns (see note 2).

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston effectively breaks the binary chain that often has been forced on women as an exclusive option since feminism: nation or gender.³ Amidst the rise of Asian American cultural nationalism, Kingston actively intervenes in Asian American male writers' persistent attempt to subordinate Asian American women for their political visibility, productively fueling the tension between Asian American cultural nationalism and feminist intervention. In turn, Kingston is the most intense target of the male writers' nationalist criticism (Espiritu 105; Lowe 76). And the ongoing debate between Kingston and Chin (the chief editor of *Aiiieeeee!* and more than a decade later, *The Big Aiiieeeee!* [1991]) has been central to Asian American literary studies.⁴ The male writers' cultural nationalism has also formed one of the crucial backgrounds of Kingston's subsequent works, *China Men* (1980) and *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989).⁵

³ Wong (1992b), Lim (1993), Cheung (1990; 1998), and Wong and Jeffrey Santa Ana provide succinct accounts of how Asian American women are pressed into choosing either nation or gender. Observations on such a tension abound in recent discussions of Asian American literature. See Kim (1990) for a comprehensive analysis of the decade-long debate between Asian American cultural nationalism and feminism. See also Kim (1982); Wong (1992a); Cheung (1992); Lisa Lowe; Jinqi Ling (ch. 5); David Lewei Li (1998); Grice. See also note 4.

⁴ Among many discussion of this debate surrounding Kingston and Chin, the following provide useful arguments: Cheung (1990); Elaine Kim (1990); Lee in Shirley Geok-lin Lim, ed. (1991); Lim (1991, 1992); Sau-ling C. Wong (1992a; 1992b); Li (1998, chs. 1 and 2); Ling.

⁵ See the editors' introduction to *The Aiiieeeee!* and Chin's introductory essay to *The Big Aiiieeeee!*. As a complementary work to *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* serves a double purpose: Kingston's personal need for understanding her own father's life, which is deliberately avoided in *The Woman Warrior*, and forefathers' history in the U.S.; her writerly desire to contextualize more specifically the historical backgrounds of *The Woman Warrior* (Kingston

“Nation” in the decades-long discursive context of cultural nationalism vs. feminism primarily means an imagined, cultural space in which Chinese Americans identify themselves as a people in the U.S.; as such, “nation” should be more precisely termed, “cultural nation-within” that provides individuals an imaginary ground for identification. The U.S. is a multi-nations-state, in which a variety of ethnic groups respectively assert themselves as a cultural nation or a culturally distinctive people. With its immigration policy and hegemony, the U.S. is the larger context of Chinese America. In this chapter, I use the term “nation” to refer to Chinese America, (extensively, Asian America) that has no definable geographical territory but rather is appropriated as “an imagined politically community,” to use Benedict Anderson’s words, by Asian American male cultural nationalists. I see the U.S. as a political entity, a nation-state that houses many intangible, ethnicity-based cultural nations and exerts its hegemonic power over the nations-within. As Kingston makes clear through the U.S.-born Maxine, to whom the U.S. is her only and real “home,” the notions of nation and home are primarily related to the U.S. Chinese America as a cultural nation provides an imagined space for identification.

As I discuss later in detail, Kingston subverts “a master narrative” of Asian American cultural nationalism, “the opposition between cultural nationalism and assimilation” (Bow 14), by centering a forgotten site of trans-Pacific women, whose

1991, 23; 1982). In her first fiction, *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston further revises cultural nationalist project to build a community, through a young macho character, who seems to have many similarities to Chin. See also Cheung (1990, 216-18); Kim (1990, 75-9); Lowe (1996 ch. 3); Cheung, ed. (1997 chs. 1 and 10); Li (1998 chs. 1 and 2); Ling (1998 ch. 1); Wong (1992, 125-6).

presence in Chinese America and in the U.S. is barely acknowledged. Challenging *Aiiieeeee!*'s cultural nationalist positioning, Kingston launches in *The Woman Warrior* her project to critique sexism and essentialist identity politics in cultural nationalist anti-racist and anti-assimilationist literary movement (Kim 1982, 1990; Li 1998). In intervening in the masculinization of Asian America as exclusively an male domain, Kingston provides a women-centered narration of the nation while foregrounding the interlocking power of gender and ethnicity in subject formation. As suggested in her remark that she, as a writer, had had a 30-year-long struggle with the pronoun, "I" (Marilyn Chin 58), a politically informed aspiration of speaking/writing as a Chinese American woman constitutes the most overwhelming urgency in *The Woman Warrior*. And later in *China Men*, this urgency more specifically turns out to be coextensive with the long ignored history of Asian Americans in the U.S. As Kingston's first full-scale attempt to speak as a woman who has grown up in a historically particular situation (the U.S. 1940s to the 1960s), *The Woman Warrior* is a feminist manifesto in the form of autobiographical fiction.⁶

⁶ Considering Kingston's literary trajectory in progress, I see that Kingston began her literary career with a clear positioning as a feminist through *The Woman Warrior*. The idea of *The Woman Warrior* as a feminist manifesto is also inspired by Caren Kaplan's discussion of "out-law genres," in which she includes ethnic and lesbian writings, testimonies, and prison notebooks, as well as by Smith's theorizing of autobiographical manifestos in her discussion of Hélène Cixous, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Donna Haraway (1993, ch.8).

Kingston defends *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as nonfiction, pointing out that the characters are real but their stories are fiction. She notes about both of the works: "what I've written are . . . the biographies of imaginative people. I tell the imaginative lives and the dreams and the fictions of real people" (*Conversations* 37). Based on recent autobiography studies that increasingly discuss the autobiographical self as a discursive construct (see also note 7), I read as autobiographical fiction what Kingston defines as "nonfiction," interpreting Kingston's view of the generic nature of her works detected in her interviews and prose essays as follows: biography is essentially about autobiography (myself in connection and in specific history); autobiography,

In her struggle to redefine the female “I” that is strongly associated with “slave” in Chinese American culture (47), Kingston deconstructs a false dichotomy of nationalism and assimilation, on which Chin and others rely. For Kingston, Chin’s derogatory equation of feminism to assimilationism downplays the significant contribution of Asian American feminism to form Asian American pan-ethnic community (*Conversations*). Against masculinist nationalist attempts to reconstruct Asian American men as the agents of U.S. history, Kingston consciously creates a women-centered tradition, through which women’s lost memories can be recovered for a radical supplement to hegemonic histories. Kingston’s making such a tradition for

biography, and history are story-making, that is, both construction-as-reconstruction and translation of life into story. *The Woman Warrior* as an autobiographical fiction is a particular kind of autobiography, which foregrounds fiction as a powerful prosthesis for such a translative reconstruction.

It seems natural that readings of *The Woman Warrior* have clustered around the issues of genre with gendered and ethnic complications, examining how Kingston’s text blurs and thus expands genre boundaries. For an extensive survey of critical interpretations to fix the genre of the text, and its generic excesses, see Chapter One in Laura H. Y. Kang (2002). For representative debates about the text, see Wong, ed. (1999). Estelle Jellinek’s collection discusses the text as one of the most crucial for exploring women’s autobiography. For Paul John Eakin (1985), Kingston exemplifies autobiographical “self-invention,” redefining autobiography as “an imaginative art” (3). Smith (1987) reads the text as the most challenging one to capture the problematic relationship of gender to genre in 20th century autobiography: the genre of autobiography is always gendered, and as Kingston makes explicit, it is also complicated by racial politics. Wong provides excellent refutations not only of Eurocentric categorizing of Asian American writings as “immigrant autobiography” (in Eakin, ed. 1991) and but also of readings of Kingston’s text as ethnography or anthropological “guide” (1992a). Julia Watson and Lee Quinby in *De/Colonizing the Subject* argue respectively that Kingston negotiates an autobiographical space for self-decolonization (Watson) and against disciplinary power relations (Quinby). Diane P. Freedman and Helena Grice focus on the text’s polyvocal alchemy of genres. In coining the term, “autobiographics,” to question the boundary of genres, Leigh Gilmore emphasizes autobiographical identity as a network of representations, defining Kingston’s text as “a discursive hybrid” (17). Proposing Asian American literature as theory (that is, “theoretically informed and informing”), Donald Goellnicht reads Kingston’s texts as “theoretical fictions or fictionalized theory, autobiographical theory or theoretical autobiography” (340-41). Analyzing form, personhood, and polyvocality in autobiographies by American women of color, Barbara Rodríguez discusses how Kingston’s autobiographical inscriptions construct different textual realities.

historical revision should be also contextualized in contrast to Chin's and others' further masculinist reactions to *The Woman Warrior* and their persistent celebration of male-identified heroic (often, literally martial) traditions of Chinese and Japanese cultures in *The Big Aiiieeee!*.

Writing *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston seems to be very conscious and critical of Asian American cultural nationalism that fails to see women's presence as historical co-actors. For Kingston, many Asian American cultural nationalist ideologies subordinate Asian American women to further Asian American men's political visibility (Kingston 1998, 49). Refusing to further participate in "deliberately forgetting" no name women, who had ironically contributed to Chinese American culture and history through their virtually "widowed" lives in China, Kingston in "No Name Woman" tells that "I *alone* devote pages of paper to" them (16; italics added). Observing such a deliberate forgetting as constitutive of cultural-nation building at the rise of Asian American nationalism in the U.S. (Lowe 27), Kingston writes about Asian (American) women in "pages of paper" against two grains: U.S. hegemonic discourses that deny Asian Americans as other; and Asian American cultural nationalist projects that seeks to reconstruct Asian American (literary) history by reasserting Asian American masculinity and by denying women's historical presence and agency.

Conjuring and Re-membering

It is by reinventing women's trans-Pacific site as a long forgotten but powerful repository of alternative memories that Kingston provides a feminist narration of Chinese America, and "unsays" — to use Patti Duncan's term — hegemonic discourses

that deny Chinese immigrant women's integral connection to and presence in the U.S. As suggested in the peculiar chapter titled "The Laws" of *China Men* (1980), in which Kingston meticulously lists the laws enacted from 1868 to 1978 that had influenced Asian American lives, Chinese America and extensively Asian America had been fundamentally shaped as a "bachelor society" and further inflected into predominantly male terrain by major legal exclusions in 1882, 1917, 1924, and 1934 — indeed, until the liberal change in the 1965 Immigrant Act that repealed immigration quotas according to national origin.⁷ As scholars have argued, Asian American history was thus normalized as masculine, with women's experience and contribution omitted, discounted, and rendered invisible, especially because of the demographics of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Asian America (Chan; Espiritu; Kim 1982; Lowe; Okihiro; Takaki). Immigrant women have been further rendered invisible again in Asian American cultural nationalist attempts to reconstruct Asian America as an "imagined community" for self-determination (Espiritu; Kim 1982; Okihiro). Yen Le Espiritu notes that "[b]ecause men predominated in this period, most research has ignored questions of gender altogether, as if men were without gender" (16). As Kingston makes explicit in *The Woman Warrior*, this approach to Chinese American history "as if men were without gender" is a gendered one. Kingston's trans-Pacific women-centered history in *The Woman Warrior* and later, her feminist retelling of trans-Pacific men's stories in *China Men*, constitute alternative narrations of Chinese America and the U.S.

⁷ For detailed discussions of the U.S. immigrant policy during the Chinese Exclusion era (the 1880s to World War II) and in the post-World War II era, see, for example, Sucheng Chan; Espiritu (chs. 2 and 3); Lowe; Ronald Takaki (chs. 8, 10, and 14); Wong and Chan, eds.

These two supplementary trans-Pacific narrations of the nation make it explicit that the formation of Chinese America is gendered by the complication of gender politics, not only of U.S. immigration policies but also of Asian American cultural nationalist discourse that renders Asian and Asian American women invisible.

Restoring memories that travel with trans-Pacific women in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston describes the lives of Asian immigrant women as powerfully influenced by U.S. immigrant policy in the twentieth century and as an integral part of U.S. history. The no name aunt is a historically peculiar version of the “widow,” who was left in the 1920s China and not allowed to reunite with her “Gold Mountain” husband in the U.S. because of the 1924 Chinese Exclusion Act. While later, in *China Men*, she further supplements Chinese American and U.S. history by focusing on the bachelor society of the “Gold Mountain Men,” who entered the U.S. as voluntary immigrant workers, Kingston delves into their virtually “widowed” wives in *The Woman Warrior*. Moon Orchid could enter the U.S., perhaps owing to the 1965 liberalization of the U.S. immigration policy. Making visible the “no name women” who were left in China by U.S. immigration policy or who crossed the Pacific owing to changes in the policy, Kingston rewrites Chinese America from women’s perspective.

Opening a trans-Pacific site as a significant repository of memories and history, Kingston reinscribes the no name aunt as a crucial figure who demonstrates the historical presence of Chinese women and trans-Pacific women in (spite of) the predominantly male-centered formation of Chinese America. In “No Name Woman,” Kingston strategically quotes her mother’s story of the no name aunt as a springboard for her own

imaginative reconstruction of the forgotten woman's life from women's perspective. Brave Orchid's version, introduced in the opening pages, is told as "a cautionary tale" on the day Maxine starts menstruating (Buss 46; Gilmore 176; Grice 52; Rusk 61; Smith 1987, 153), and ends the story with a warning about female sexuality. Enraged by the no name aunt's adultery, the villagers raided her house and destroyed everything in the house. They punished her for her illegitimate pregnancy, which the narrator speculates might be "a mistake during good times, [but] became a crime when the village needed food" (13). Right after giving birth, the aunt drowned herself and her baby in the family well.

Beginning her autobiographical quest for self by tracing lost memories, Kingston makes it clear that failure to recognize no name women's social existence is constitutive of the normalization of the male-centered history of Chinese America. Kingston deliberately uses her mother's story at the very beginning for double purposes: breaking silence "to name the unspeakable" (5) and providing the historical context of the no name aunt. Beginning her story of the no name aunt, Brave Orchid first introduces the historical background of the aunt's life: "In 1924, . . . your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt's new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain" (3). This brief allusion to male Chinese emigration to the U.S. at the period of female Chinese Exclusion in the U.S. 1920s suggests that the U.S. has a crucial connection to the aunt's life in China. As Kingston clarifies later in "The Laws" of *China Men*, 1924 was the year in which "An Immigration Act passed by Congress specifically excluded 'Chinese women, wives, and prostitutes'" from entering

the U.S. (*China Men* 156). Kingston grounds the no name aunt on U.S. history, highlighting the ways in which the U.S. wanted Asian male workers but not their families. This gendered pattern of the U.S.'s cheap labor recruitment in Asia shaped Asian women's lives and was the most significant factor in restricting Asian women under the influence of U.S. capitalist economy (Espiritu 17). Arranging Brave Orchid's story at the very beginning of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston makes it clear that the no name aunt is a co-product of the early twentieth-century history of China and the U.S.

With the trans-Pacific to connect the no name aunt and the U.S., Kingston historicizes Brave Orchid's representation of the aunt as a distant figure who emerges only in the context of cautioning about female sexuality. Brave Orchid's story contains no details of why and how the aunt becomes pregnant; she never tells the aunt's own thoughts and feelings. Instead, the aunt has been erased by her own family's deliberate amnesia, "as if she had never been born" (3). Maxine's trans-Pacific seeking for an empowered aunt rather than a forgotten victim constitutes a radical departure not only from her mother's story but also from dominant understandings of Chinese America. Maxine reimagines the aunt's life in two versions, in which she is either a rape victim or a transgressive woman "who crossed boundaries not delineated in space" (8). Maxine's reimagining the aunt betrays a similar process of what Adrienne Rich calls an "educated guess" that is essential for feminist revision because of the slenderness of language for women's lives (1986, 148). In the first version, Maxine attempts to detail the aunt's fear that "did not stop but permeated everywhere" (7). The aunt is further victimized by the rapist's own organization of the villagers' raid. In her imaginative detailing, Maxine

finds out that her mother's story is partly an as-if fiction, as Barbara Rodríguez observes (105). "My mother spoke about the raid as if she had seen it, when she and my aunt, a daughter-in-law to a different house, should not have been living together at all" (7). With such a discovery that leads her to a more radical reimagination, Maxine elaborates her second version at greater length. She tries to see whether the aunt's life is "branching into [hers]," so that the aunt can give her "ancestral help" (8). Connecting the aunt to her four "Gold Mountain" brothers' not returning to China, Maxine adds to her mother's brief story that the aunt committed a vengeful suicide, cursing her family and the village: "Poverty hurt, and that was their first reason for leaving. But another, final reason for leaving the crowded house was the never-said" (10). Her father is not simply a so-called "Gold Mountain man" with only economic interests, but an accomplice in making the no name aunt "the never-said" and thus denying no name women as integral part of Chinese America,—“the never-said”—Maxine comes to guess.

Like Nora Okja Keller in *Comfort Woman* (1997), Kingston opens an alternative space, in which a palimpsest of lost memories is addressed by trans-Pacific mother and re-invented by the U.S.-born daughter. Through the reimagining niece, the aunt becomes a female subject of emotion, desire, action, pain, and agency of revenge (albeit through suicide). Maxine speculates that the aunt has "a secret voice, a separate attentiveness" against Chinese conformity. As a subject of secretive desire and action, the aunt, like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, "kept the man's name to herself throughout her labor and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her"

(11).⁸ As such a complex figure, the aunt becomes for Maxine a bridge between the two conflicting cultural codes of femininity. “American-feminine” means for Maxine sexual attraction, while “Chinese-feminine” is associated with no individuality, no privacy, “no singularity,” and loud communications in public spaces (11). Maxine imagines that “[a]t the mirror [the aunt] combed individuality” against Chinese femininity ruled by the survival-oriented code of Necessity (9). She thus interprets the villagers’ punishment of the aunt as a collective envy for her private life and sexual attraction (in short, “extravagance”). Seeing privacy as a key component of individuality, the U.S.-born Maxine concludes that “[t]he villagers punished [the aunt] for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (13). Through Maxine’s reimagination, Kingston gives the aunt individuality that the aunt was denied, providing a different interpretation that the aunt’s “private life” and sexual attraction causes the villagers’ collective envy and punishment.

With her trans-Pacific approach to no name women in China, Kingston reveals that the dominant discourse of Chinese American history is gendered, not simply because of the historically male-dominated demographics of Chinese America, but rather by the forgetting of no name women in China and the bare recognition of trans-Pacific women’s social presence in Chinese America. This is why she employs the trope of

⁸ Kingston makes the aunt a Chinese version of Hester Prynne through Maxine’s imaginative speculations. Kingston comments: “my books are much more American than they are Chinese. . . . Also, I am creating part of American literature, and I was very aware of doing that, of adding to American literature. The critics haven’t recognized my work enough as another tradition of American literature. . . . When I was writing ‘No Name Woman,’ I was thinking about Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter* as a discussion of the Puritan part of America, and of China, and a woman’s place (*Conversations* 71-2).

ghosts in order to restore forgotten women's memories. In the ending pages of "No Name Woman," Kingston finally reconstructs the aunt as a haunting memory that makes the past matter for the present and the future.⁹ The aunt's memory, which travels with a trans-Pacific woman Brave Orchid, haunts Kingston: "Goods are not distributed evenly among the dead. My aunt haunts me — her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper" (16). Haunting constitutes for Kingston the motif of her writing about the aunt's forgotten life in "pages of paper." For Kingston, the no name aunt as a wandering ghost is "[a]lways hungry, always needing" a transformative recognition, and otherwise "remains forever hungry" (16). Kingston takes the Chinese aunt as "[her] forerunner," a crucial figure connected to her own life in the present U.S. (8), in order to reveal a gendered forgetting in Chinese American history.

With Kingston's imaginative writing of no name women's historical presence in Chinese America, "No Name Woman" constitutes a secondary witness, which I read as serving a powerful model for Keller in *Comfort Woman*. Conjuring the aunt as a significant memory, with which to provide a truer account of Chinese American history, Kingston highlights a denial observed in Chinese immigrants: "my family, having settled among immigrants. . . , needed to clean their name, and a wrong word would incite the kinspeople even here. But there is more to this silence: they want me to participate in her punishment. And I have" (15-6). Kingston suggests that what is "more to this silence" is immigrants' amnesia about their own history: "The real punishment was not

⁹ As for the significance of (women's) haunting memories, Kingston notes: "memory is really nothing. . . . It has to do with past times, and in that sense, it's insignificant, except when it haunts you"; the past, when it returns as a haunting memory, "breaks through and changes and enlightens the present" (*Conversations* 68).

the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her" (16). Kingston sees that this "deliberate[] forgetting" is a powerful factor in the gendered construction of Chinese America.

In the context of Asian American (nationalist) struggles for "'political emancipation' through citizenship," Lowe argues, immigrant integration into the U.S. includes "a denial that reproduces the omission of history as the ontology of the [U.S.] nation" (27). In an international frame, Lowe argues, Asian immigrants' and Asian Americans' "political emancipation" "is never an operation confined to the negation of individual 'private' particulars; . . . it requires acceding to a political fiction of equal rights that is generated through the denial of history" (27). For Lowe, who redefines Asian America as the international in the U.S. national, the history that becomes the object of denial and forgetting is related not only to the international history of wars in Asia (such as, the Korean war and the Vietnam war) but also to a history of U.S. racialization. U.S. racial politics restricted Asian Americans by determining if they were "ineligible for citizenship" and later "require[d] acceding to a political fiction of equal rights" (Lowe 27). In *The Woman Warrior's* context, I would specify that the trans-Pacific site is central to "the denial of history" and that the gendered forgetting of women serves to render "the omission of history as the ontology of the [U.S.] nation" as if the forgetting, which Kingston's family participates in, was "confined to the negation of individual 'private' particulars." I would also add that, through her refusal to further participate in her family's deliberate forgetting of the no name aunt, Kingston shows how contemporary Asian American cultural nationalist movements are also complicit

with consolidating what Lowe argues as “the ontology of the [U.S.] nation,” in spite of the fact that they challenge white hegemony. More significantly, as I discuss later, Kingston reveals through Moon Orchid’s Americanized husband that, in their seeking to reconstruct Chinese America as a politically informed community or a cultural nation against U.S. racialization, Asian American male cultural nationalists such as Chin are not different from the assimilationist husband in that they are complicit to ignore trans-Pacific women’s social existence in the U.S. and in Chinese America.

Through Moon Orchid, Kingston elaborates a historical continuity of the no name women in the 1960s. Kingston describes Moon Orchid as a living version of the no name aunt, who crosses the Pacific to reclaim her husband in the U.S. Unlike in the 1920s, when the no name aunt’s “Gold Mountain” husband and brothers could not send for her because of Chinese exclusion acts, Brave Orchid in the post-World War II U.S. has had a years-long struggle with the Immigration Office to obtain permission for her sister’s entering the U.S. Through Moon Orchid’s entering the U.S. after thirty years of separation from her husband, Kingston briefly alludes to changes in the U.S. policy in the post-World War II age that allowed family reunification.

As Kingston describes, Moon Orchid is an extreme example of trans-Pacific women’s dislocation, revealing another palimpsest of the history of Asian American immigration. Moon Orchid in the U.S. shows how trans-Pacific women are rendered again invisible by assimilated immigrant men’s denial of their history in China as well as by Brave Orchid’s ethnocentric version of Chinese American culture. First, in order to help Moon Orchid reclaim her husband, Brave Orchid betrays an ethnocentric aspect of

Chinese (American) culture, which is of no use in the new U.S. situation. From the first night of her sister's arrival in the U.S., Brave Orchid immediately pushes her sister to go to reclaim her husband, who has sent money to his wife for thirty years.¹⁰ To her sister, who is scared of that idea, Brave Orchid further insists that even the husband's children with his second wife should be under Moon Orchid's. For Brave Orchid, whose father had three wives in China, Moon Orchid is the "true mother" (125) to the U.S-born children because she is the first wife. Brave Orchid persistently pushes Moon Orchid to "demand [her] rights as First Wife" (127), and they finally go to Los Angeles, where Moon Orchid's husband lives. Opposite to Brave Orchid's imagination, the actual confrontation is a pathetic revelation or "tragicomedy" (Rusk 60; Wong 1993, 196). The ghostly America becomes real, turning the two motherly sisters spectral. By faking an accident, the two sisters come to confront Moon Orchid's husband, who has become a successful doctor in the U.S. The two sisters see "a man, authoritative in his dark western suit," who "looked and smelled like an American" (151-52). The young-looking husband immediately overwhelms them by addressing them as grandmothers. He rejects Moon Orchid with the same logic Brave Orchid uses for the reclaiming scenario: "In this country a man may have just one wife" (144; 153). Denied her identity as the first wife, Moon Orchid sees her husband as a ghost, who entered a land of ghosts as a man and then became one of them.

¹⁰ Moon Orchid with her bigamous husband is also a brief allusion to the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts from the 1930s to 1965. Until 1952, U.S. law prohibited Chinese immigrants from bringing their wives in China to the U.S. (*China Men* 158). For an extensive study of Asian Americans in connection to citizenship, see Lowe (1996). Wong and Chan's edited book provides historical analyses of Chinese American struggle to "claim[]America" during the Chinese Exclusion era.

Moon Orchid's husband reveals that immigrants' own negation of their trans-Pacific history is constitutive of Chinese America and contemporary U.S. culture. A successful brain surgeon in the U.S., he willingly denies his history in connection to China, negates his first wife, and instead relieves himself of his sense of guilt by having sent money to his wife and daughter in China. Moon Orchid's confrontation with her husband becomes a decisive moment of deprivation of subjectivity and identity. Producing another no name woman, Moon Orchid's husband redefines her as an "unreal" person in an ancient Chinese book and abandons Moon Orchid "twice" on the ground that "[s]he'd never fit into an American household" (153). His rejection of her suggests how Chinese America is further gendered by assimilationist denial of the immigrant history in the post-World War II age. Through Moon Orchid's husband's willing denial of his first wife, Kingston makes it explicit that Asian American integration to U.S. citizenship and national culture involves the negation of immigrant history. Critiquing such a process of further producing no name women, Kingston deliberately leaves the husband unnamed, while giving those women names and affirming their integral presence in Chinese America.

In the historical formation of Chinese America in the twentieth century, Kingston suggests, immigrant women have been rendered as "no name women" or invisible again as mad women contained in Chinatown. In their trans-Pacific dislocation in the post-World War II age, crazy women in Chinatown suggest another symptomatic continuity to the no name aunt's suicide in the 1920s. The no name aunt's family well, in which she committed suicide, is now replaced by mental asylums in California; "[w]e forgot

[them],” the narrator comments (189). As Brave Orchid remains unable to help Moon Orchid survive, so the latter’s husband’s assimilationism fails to help her survive in the U.S. and instead drives her to insanity.

Through mad women in Chinatown, Kingston clarifies again that the gendered construction of Chinese America is furthered by immigrants’ own forgetting of their trans-Pacific history. Moon Orchid and other crazy women haunt Chinatown, and these mad women in Chinatown are haunting figures in Maxine’s childhood. For the young Maxine, Chinatown represents the culture of repression that fosters gendered insanity. A character similar to Moon Orchid, Mary, who was born and lived in China, finally joins her family in the U.S. after almost twenty years of separation from her parents. While her siblings who were born in the U.S. “were normal and could translate” (187), Mary fails to learn the new language and to adapt herself in the new circumstances, and finally becomes mad. Maxine has had a long time to figure out “the difference between sanity and insanity,” seeing Chinatown as “ha[ving] become odd in its isolation,” with “half a dozen crazy women” even “[w]ithin a few blocks of [her] house” (186). Through Maxine’s struggle with (in)sanity by making herself able to understand and explain herself to others in a coherent way, Kingston implies that Chinese America is constantly haunted by its failing or repressed part.

Rearticulating Chinese America from women’s experience, Kingston reinvents immigrant women’s memories as counter-memory, and establishes a women’s trans-Pacific site for a feminist narration of the nation. Kingston conjures forgotten women’s lives as haunting memories in order to re-member them in Chinese America and the U.S.

Kingston's writing of them as named subjects also constitutes a powerful supplement to hegemonic narrations of the nation, while revealing how the gendered re-construction of Chinese America is furthered by immigrants' own negation of their trans-Pacific history. As a story of women's self-empowerment against the backdrop of the burgeoning feminist theory and literature of the 1970s, Kingston's writing also demonstrates that "the personal is political" and specifically historical. Kingston, coming out as a feminist, radically questions what is speakable and unspeakable and makes visible what has been rendered invisible in the official history of the U.S. In doing so, she makes her autobiographical fiction, especially "No Name Woman," amount to what Sidonie Smith defines as "autobiographical manifesto," which purposefully "contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, [and] the old politics" (1993, 157). To use Smith's phrases again, "calling the subject into the future," Kingston's autobiographical manifesto transforms the margins as well as the center (1993, 163). Through such a "conjuring," Kingston re-members forgotten women in the trans-Pacific history of China and the U.S., reinscribing forgotten women as subjects disruptive to the modern forgetfulness of women's historical and social presence.

Last but not least, with the transpositional use of her mother's story, Kingston creates a women-centered tradition, in which the mother is a powerful agent of cultural transmission. Throughout the text, Brave Orchid's stories (about the no name woman, the legendary woman warrior Fa Mu Lan, and her own life in China) serve as a "Necessity" (6) for her U.S.-born daughter's own survival, but they are not enough. They must be added to and revised with translative agency for and in the daughter's

present U.S. contexts, in which being a woman is not and should not be an “extravagance” (6), as it was in China. In that she presents female sexuality as dangerous and threatening, *Brave Orchid* as a storyteller seems to serve patriarchal hegemony. However, it is the provocative knowledge of the forgotten aunt’s death (Cheung 1993) that she transmits to her daughter. *Brave Orchid* is also complicit in the family’s deliberate forgetting but, nonetheless, has not forgotten the aunt. Re-contextualizing and historicizing her mother’s stories, Kingston makes visible no name women left in China and trans-Pacific women, both of whom constitute a completely forgotten site in Chinese America and thus in the U.S. In remaking her mother’s stories of the trans-Pacific site an integral part of her own autobiographical project, Kingston intends to write against at least three specific grains: 1) contemporary masculinist cultural nationalism, for which Chineseness is essentialized and in which women are denied subjectivity and agency; 2) what traditional story-telling often omits in service of patriarchy; and 3) what Talpade Chandra Mohanty terms, “the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse,” under which third world women are described only as powerless victims (19). Kingston’s writing against such neocolonizing signatures is the hallmark of *The Woman Warrior*. In establishing a trans-Pacific women’s genealogy, Kingston makes “no name women” “a discussion of the Puritan part of America, and of China, and a woman’s place” (*Conversations* 71-2).

Female Subjects as Recorder of and Living Testimony to History

At the heart of Kingston’s project of narrating the nation against hegemonic grains are the figures of socially ex-centric women. By looking through the immigrant

mother, Brave Orchid, and the legendary swordswoman-as-slave, Fa Mu Lan, Kingston further unsettles dominant discourses and representations that construct Asian Americans as “foreigners-within” “outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the [U.S.] nation” (Lowe 6). Ex-centric subjects are subjects whose subjectivities are denied, instead defined as “eccentric” (In the U.S. “we are eccentric people,” Kingston writes in *China Men* [15]). Ex-centric subjects as such are not-us-in-us. Kingston recenters gendered and racialized female ex-centricity as a powerful site of writing the nation. Kingston’s use of her mother’s story of Fa Mu Lan is a quintessential example that shows how Kingston reinscribes female subjects as recorders of and living testimonies to history. Incorporating the Fa Mu Lan story in her autobiographical fiction, Kingston shows how alternative subjectivities are imagined. For Kingston too, ethnic culture is gendered and gender is racialized (Anzaldúa; Lowe; Nagel; Wiegman, to name a few); gender is only part of a larger complex patterning of unequal social relations (Espiritu; hooks 1984; Lowe); the female body is the most contested site of “double binds” of gender and ethnicity (*The Woman Warrior* 48).

Affirming her mother as a powerful source of inspiration and empowerment, Kingston rearticulates contemporary U.S. culture and proposes her trans-Pacific narration of Chinese America as a corrective alternative to contemporary Asian American cultural nationalist narratives of Asian America that isolates Asian America from the U.S. as well as from Asia. Arranging her mother’s biography in the longest part of her own autobiographical project, Kingston further incorporates Chinese immigrant women into Chinese American and U.S. history. Throughout her

autobiographical fiction, Kingston grounds her characters in the twentieth-century U.S. history. Brave Orchid's biography in the middle of *The Woman Warrior* consolidates women's trans-Pacific site as a powerful repository of alternative memories for regendering the historically gendered construction of and masculinist reconstruction of Chinese America. As the predominant figure of Kingston's girlhood, Brave Orchid is a bearer of the twentieth century history of Chinese colonial modernity, trans-Pacific border-crossing during World War II,¹¹ and immigrant subalternity in the post-war U.S. Brave Orchid as such is an involuntary crosser of class borders, an embodiment of the gaps between national and cultural belongings, and simultaneously a breaker and preserver of Chinese cultural tradition.

Brave Orchid's border-crossing works as a brief allusion to Chinese Americans' complex connection to forged papers for work on "Gold Mountains," immigration, and U.S. citizenship. Brave Orchid had been left in China for more than a decade and was finally reunited with her husband against the backdrop of World War II, which drove the U.S. to loosen its immigration restrictions. Kingston begins her exploration of her mother with the daughter-narrator's reading of her mother's documents: the medical diploma that Brave Orchid received in the 1930s from the To Keung School of Midwifery, a modern women's medical college established by Europeans in Canton, China. Closely reading the three scrolls, the narrator finds out that they are "authentic" documents, but her mother's age is forged: it is recorded as ten years younger than her

¹¹ According to Espiritu, "[d]uring the pre-World War II period, U.S. policies barred the entry of most Asian women," while they began to be liberalized with World War II (16). See also "The Laws" in *China Men* (152-59).

real age. In the last section of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston briefly describes Chinese Americans' struggles for citizenship at the time of the Korean War, mentioning that "anybody here [is] on fake papers" (184). As shown in *China Men* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, "paper sons" mean Chinese who entered the U.S. or became U.S. citizens with forged papers through the help of those who settled down in the U.S. earlier. Baba, Kingston's father, is also described as a "paper son," who enters the U.S. with "fake papers" (*China Men* 47). With her forged age and the money her husband sends from the U.S., Brave Orchid goes to Canton and later enters the U.S.

By representing her mother as a modern woman in colonial China and a subaltern immigrant in the U.S., Kingston intends to counter prevailing representations: Asian immigrant as other (U.S. citizen in nationality but cultural alien; see also Li 1998; Lowe; Takaki), and third world women as pre-modern and speechless. It is worth noting here that, revisiting her mother, Kingston neither romanticizes her mother and China nor represents her mother as a mere victim of the U.S. racializing system. Rather, Kingston's focus lies in Brave Orchid's situated agency and immigrant struggle for survival in her trans-Pacific dislocation. Kingston's contrasting representations of Brave Orchid in China and in the U.S. disrupt the notion of women in the West as liberated and the U.S. as a liberating country.¹² In the middle of her story of doctoring in China,

¹² For postcolonial feminist critiques of such notions, see Trinh (1989) and Mohanty (2003). Echoing Kingston, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha in *Dictée* (1980) and Nora Okja Keller in *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl* (2002), for example, also disrupt the U.S. national self-representation as liberating. Against the backdrop of the Gulf War in the 1990s, Kingston poignantly critiques such U.S. national self-representation again in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. In Asian American literature among others, the U.S. is described as a dream country that often turns out not to be so. For literary overviews in Asian American social historical contexts, see Elaine Kim (1982) and Cheung ed. (1997, Part I).

Brave Orchid sums up in passing her American life: “You have no idea how much I have fallen coming to America” (77). Brave Orchid’s life shows that the U.S. is an *alienating* “home” that positions the immigrant generation at political and economic margins, defining them as cultural aliens.¹³

First, against the idea of third world women as illiterate and pre-modern that seemed to prevail in the West until the 1970s,¹⁴ Kingston represents Brave Orchid as “a modern woman,” one of the “new women, scientists who changed the rituals” (75-6). As critics also observe, Kingston deliberately echoes Virginia Woolf in describing Brave Orchid’s first day in the medical college (*Conversations* 218; Wendy Ho 129; Rodríguez 108; Rusk 85; Schueller 150). “Free from families” and “without servitude” under her tyrannical mother-in-law (62), Brave Orchid has a room of her own in the women’s college dormitory. To contextualize the “extravagance” (61) of her studying in a modern college, Brave Orchid adds: under modernization, Chinese women, to whom the most available job had been prostitution or slave-maid, also got “what they wanted: a job and a room of their own” (61).

Opening of the immigrant women’s trans-Pacific site, Kingston employs a subtle textual strategy to allow her mother to be a kind of oral autobiographer. In doing so, she makes room for a Chinese woman’s agency against the prevailing notion of third world women as incapable of self-representation. Kingston’s idea of “woman warrior,” whose weapon is language, is inspired by Brave Orchid. In addition to the fact that the Fa Mu

¹³ As for the social construction of Asian Americans as formal nationals and cultural aliens in the U.S. national formation, see Chu (2000); Lowe; Li (1998, Introduction); Wong and Chan, eds.

¹⁴ See Mohanty; Gayatri Spivak (1988) for critiques to the representations of third world women as speechless and powerless.

Lan tale is the most inspiring story told Maxine by her mother, Brave Orchid herself is a powerful word-warrior. As such, Brave Orchid provides her daughter a bridge identity, with which Maxine finally becomes able to transpose a literal “woman warrior” to a writer-warrior. A “champion talker” to her daughter (202), Brave Orchid turns out to be a verbal autobiographer, who “authors” what she has experienced, read, or heard into her own stories. Smith (1987) argues that Brave Orchid is the most powerful model for Kingston’s writing autobiographical fiction.

Brave Orchid’s battle with a Sitting Ghost that presses her chest while she sleeps in the haunted room in her college years in Canton is a paramount example to show her agency of self-representation.¹⁵ Brave Orchid, who is “good at naming” (63), defeats the ghost with her power of language. As she tells her daughter, Brave Orchid began the battle with the ghost with a conclusive comment: “You will not win” (70). She continues to threaten the ghost by revealing that it makes a mistake in haunting a medical school, which has so many flammables to burn it out, and concludes: “You have no power over a strong woman” (70). With a final threat, “I will fry you for breakfast” (71), she ignores the ghost and instead starts to read the textbook for the next day’s class. To her colleagues, who are curious about what happened at the previous night, she reconstructs the ghost as a horrible monster with no recognizable shape. In doing so, she

¹⁵ Paul Outka reads this ghost as “the material embodiment of perpetually unsatisfied desire,” and Brave Orchid’s victory over the ghost as “complete control over her appetites” (464-65). Smith reads the battle as “a primal struggle with the dynamics and the rhythms of an attempted rape” (1987, 161). Although both Outka and Smith provide interesting interpretations of the text from their respective analytical foci, their readings of this particular scene sound to me out of context. Focusing on Brave Orchid’s powerful acts of self-representation, I would read the battle as a common nightmare, that is, a vividly-felt but pseudo-threat in dream, with which we feel heavily pressed by something unrecognizable.

reinforces her own image as brave, strong, and self-controlling. Then, she convincingly calls for an ensuing collective exorcising act to burn alcohol and oil in the room so that the ghost leaves never to return. Brave Orchid's autobiographical storytelling is so compelling that the daughter-narrator imaginatively visualizes "a piece of wood dripping with blood" by the communal exorcism (75).

In her own life story, Brave Orchid emphasizes practical purpose and agency for making a respectable self. She successfully performs as "a natural scholar" with "a reputation of being brilliant" (63), "a capable exorcist" (92), and later a good doctor who has customers everywhere. The daughter-narrator even imagines that her mother, a "practical woman" (66), might have studied in a haunted room into which no one else wants to go. Studying in "a secret hiding place," she was able to be "a natural scholar who could glance at a book and know it" (63), explains Brave Orchid. Bringing her village peasants a doctor after two years of study, Brave Orchid "wore a silk robe and western shoes with big heels" in order to emphasize her modern training as well as her successful homecoming; thereafter, she "never dressed less elegantly" in order to maintain her professional fame (76-7). Furthermore, she maintains her power as a doctor by avoiding the deathly ill. Through this delicate orchestration of her self-image in public, she moves people in favor of her interest, securing her villagers' respect.

For Brave Orchid, delicate orchestration of self-image in public means versatile agency and control. Self-image needs to be orchestrated differently in different situations and contexts for practical purposes. For her, self-image is not and should not be different from her public image, as shown in her interpretation of the ghost battle: "I

am brave and good. Also I have bodily strength and control. Good people do not lose to ghosts” (73). Hence, for her, orchestration of self-image is not masquerade, parody, or disguise, but a sincere enactment to make self-image and public image coincide, which, in turn, greatly serves to enhance one’s own agency by fueling others’ respect or even admiration. This kind of self-image orchestration also seems to be a peculiar behavior code in a shame culture that most values “face,” that is, how one is seen by others, especially by those in one’s community. In the story of her slave purchase, Brave Orchid tells her daughter how to assume an as-if position with a full use of one’s cunning in order not to be deceived by others. She tests in various ways the girls who are sold to a professional slave merchant, and decides secretly in her mind who is the most eligible to be her nurse. Then she begins to act “as if she were very dissatisfied with the slave-girl’s answer so that the dealer would not charge her extra for a skillful worker” (81). In bargaining successfully for half the price named by the dealer, she assumes the position of a daughter-in-law who fears being outsmarted by her slaves in front of her mother-in-law, and then walks off into another shop. She uses an “as-if” positioning not to be controlled.

To avoid romanticizing Brave Orchid and China, Kingston complicates Brave Orchid’s self-representation with conflicting attitudes toward femaleness. Kingston inserts the narrator’s provocative questions regarding the Chinese practice of girl slavery. Brave Orchid’s storytelling produces in her daughter a haunting fear of girl slavery. This fear is a synthetic complication of gender, class, and culture: poor people in China sell their daughters for money; the narrator’s family is not rich in the U.S. Brave

Orchid's further storytelling of her midwifery reaffirms to her daughter that femaleness means hopelessness and deformity, and even possibly causes the haunting practice of "girl infanticide" (202). "The midwife or a relative would take the back of a girl baby's head in her hand and turn her face into the ashes,' said my mother. 'It was very easy.' She never said that she herself killed babies" (86). Noticing that her mother's midwifery has a connection to girl and deformed-baby killing, Maxine suffers from recurring nightmares and images of killed or deformed babies. Against the sustained fear of being a female, Maxine constructs Chinese-deformed as opposite to "American-normal." To "make [her] waking life American-normal," the narrator recalls, she tries to push the haunting image of the deformed, killed babies into "[her] dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories" (87). Concerning femaleness, Brave Orchid's stories are eventually translated as "impossible stories" by her daughter.

Describing Brave Orchid in the U.S., Kingston foregrounds immigrant marginality. A modern woman, who enjoyed an "extravagant" and professional life in a third world country, has become a subaltern woman at the margins of the U.S. Brave Orchid, as an immigrant-mother, has to work, picking tomatoes or in cannery factories in irregular shifts. As also suggested in *China Men*, Brave Orchid's and her husband's expectation that her medical training by the Westerners in China would be accepted in the U.S. is betrayed,¹⁶ while the narrator sees the uselessness of her mother's diploma. In the U.S., Brave Orchid's capable exorcism "did not 'long'" [i.e. last] (92), because the

¹⁶ In *China Men*, Kingston's father sends for Brave Orchid on a condition: "Go to Hong Kong or Canton and enroll in a Western scientific school. A science shool. Get a degree. Send it to me as evidence you are educated, and I'll send you a ship ticket. . . . Go to a scientific school run by white people" (67).

nature of the ghost is changed in the U.S. For Brave Orchid, the U.S. is a ghostly country, “where a human being works her life away. . . . I have not stopped working since the day the ship landed. I was on my feet the moment the babies were out. In China I never even had to hang up my own clothes. . . I didn’t need muscles in China. I was small in China” (104). Kingston describes the effects of immigrant subalternity as embodied in muscles, as the narrator reaffirms: “The silk dresses [my mother] gave me are tiny. You would not think the same person wore them” (104).

With her border crossing, Brave Orchid undergoes what Homi K. Bhabha calls “the unhomely” moment, no longer able to equate national belonging to cultural belonging. As Brave Orchid’s experiences reveal, geographical dislocation simultaneously accompanies cultural disorientation and awareness of changes in subject position (Bhabha 1994, 1). Kingston represents Brave Orchid in the U.S. as a significant figure, who keeps “the unhomely” moment as a part of her history. Brave Orchid as such is in contrast to her husband or Moon Orchid’s husband, both of whom are willing to forget their trans-Pacific moments as well as deny their connection to women in China. Kingston signifies the sustained effects of trans-Pacific displacement with contending ideas of and conflicting experiences of home. For Maxine, the U.S. is her only and real “home,” while her parents and other Chinese Americans affectively take China as their “home.” Kingston uses the two words, “emigrants” and “immigrants,” with deliberate subtlety in order to highlight difference in perspectives as well as the power of cultural dislocation over geographical migration. While Maxine and the autobiographical narrators call them “immigrants” (11, 16, 107, 115, 192, 193, 204), Chinese immigrants,

who lived in China, call themselves “emigrants” (5, 46, 47, 52, 59, 171, 191). Only after the immigrants “have no more China to go home to” because of the communist government’s dispossession of their land there (106), *Brave Orchid* begins to use the word “immigrants” (127), while still defining herself and other villagers in Chinatown as “Chinese” (107) or “overseas Chinese” (136). Furthermore, “the mythic China we in the West have made up” is the very source or place that causes Maxine’s gendered fear and anger (Kingston 1991, 24). The narrator recalls: “Whenever my parents said ‘home,’ they suspended America. They suspended enjoyment, but I did not want to go to China. In China my parents would sell my sisters and me. My father would marry two or three wives” (99). The “suspended” America does not function for Maxine’s parents as an affective ground for their identification. If contrasted to Moon Orchid’s successful husband’s forgetting of his trans-Pacific site, *Brave Orchid*’s suspending of America becomes a way of keeping the “unhomely” moment as a part of her history.

Challenging the notion that equates national with cultural belonging, Kingston locates Chinatown, not China, within U.S. history and culture. Kingston makes it clear that Chinese America has emerged in relation to U.S. social domination and has formed different cultures from those of the “original” China. For Maxine, who has no Chinese sense of village-community (“I could not figure out what was my village” [45]), China is utterly “imaginary,” as in Kungfu movies (*Conversations* 8). China in the movies seems for Maxine more Chinese than the real China in Asia. However, Maxine does not find herself as part of that China in the movies, either. Emphasizing the conditions of a specific historical time during and after the Chinese Exclusion era, Kingston challenges

dominant representations that conflate Chinese America or Chinatown with China, as the narrator asks: “Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (5-6). The narrator’s questioning is critical of the alleged conflation of Chinatown with China, which is prevailing not only in media representations but also in many readings of *The Woman Warrior*. As the narrator clarifies, “what is peculiar to” Chinese America should be considered primarily in the dynamic interplay between immigrant material conditions in the U.S. and dominant representations that exoticize Chinese Americans. Chinese Americans are denied social presence in the U.S. and are instead regarded as cultural aliens who belong only to “Chinese tradition.” As the narrator’s question implies, Chinatown is a culture that has formed in relation to cultural displacement and social discrimination in the U.S.

An immigrant survivor, Brave Orchid is Kingston’s best historical witness to Chinese Americans’ gendered trans-Pacific displacement, racialized integration into the margins of the U.S., and constant negotiation between cultural and national belongings. The U.S. becomes an undeniable part of Brave Orchid, driving her to an ongoing process of redefining her two “homes” and negotiating cultural differences. As memories travel with border-crossers, so does culture. Traveling culture is always modified for and in new circumstances. Brave Orchid selectively uses and modifies her “origin” culture for survival in her adopted culture. She tells Maxine the story of Fa Mu Lan as a model in order for her daughter to emulate in her own U.S. context. Like Soon Hyo/Akiko in

Keller's *Comfort Woman*, Brave Orchid inspires her U.S.-born daughter with other Chinese stories, testing the latter's interpretive skills for versatile survival. The Chinese American culture, which Brave Orchid practices and insists is Chinese, is "partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented," as Lowe observes of Asian American culture (65). Kingston suggests that, in this process of cultural translation and negotiation, "China" as immigrants' affective home culture is modified into Chinatown in relation to the U.S. dominant culture, constituting an undeniable part of the U.S.

Rearticulating her mother's story of Fa Mu Lan in the U.S. context, Kingston produces her own autobiographical story as a counter-site in which alternative forms of subjectivity can emerge. Kingston's use of the Fa Mu Lan story shows how she negotiates her own generational and cultural differences from her mother, an embodiment of historical and cultural dislocations. For Kingston, who appropriates a masculine tradition of Chinese martial art for women's empowerment in a pacifist way (replacing the literal sense of "sword" with a figurative one), the Chinese story of Fa Mu Lan serves as a medium of the present in order to grasp history as situated difference. Kingston describes Fa Mu Lan with the autobiographical "I" so that the narrator tells the inner life of the girl in a full identification with her, who becomes the legendary woman warrior. Using a fantasized autobiographical I, Kingston incorporates the legend into the young narrator's self-account.¹⁷ The Fa Mu Lan story ends with a collective memory

¹⁷ Kingston's revision of Chinese martial art and the Fa Mu Lan story has long been under attack by Chinese American critics and writers, the most aggressive of whom are the editors of *Aiiieeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeee!*. Kingston notes: "myths have to change, be useful or be forgotten. Like the people who carry them across oceans, the myths become American. The myths I write are new, American" (1991, 24). As for a "traditional" version of "The Ballad of

“about my perfect filiality,” but the subsequent autobiographical narration begins with a comment, “My American life has been such a disappointment” (45). Many critics have read the Fa Mu Lan story as an empowering fantasy of surrogate wish-fulfillment and the swordswoman as a countering figure to the no name aunt, noting that the principal attraction of the Fa Mu Lan story is the model-enactment of female avenging.¹⁸ I argue that the power of this story lies in its representation of the female body as a social text and a living testimony.

With the engraved language of genealogy and wrongs on her back, the woman warrior-I’s body becomes a testimony-text.¹⁹ As clarified in the last paragraph of “White Tigers,” without the “vengeful textuality” of the female body (Gilmore 181), Fa Mu Lan might not be the woman warrior whom the narrator wants to emulate and whom she later finds “not so dissimilar” (53) from herself. Dreaming of being called by a magic bird that might lead her to become another woman warrior, the narrator begins the Fa Mu Lan story, using a fantasized autobiographical I. Guided by her mentors, the narrator-girl trains herself for 14 years so that she can save “whole families” (32). Finally returning home, she is welcomed as if she were a son, takes her father’s place, and prepares to go to war as the leader of an army. Her parents perform a ritualistic tattooing to engrave their names, grievances, and address on her back.

Mulan,” see Simmons (1999, pp. 48-50); for Frank Chin’s version, with which he attacks Kingston, see Chin et al. eds. (1991, pp. 5-6); for Kingston’s version, see Kingston (2003, pp. 391-92 or 2002, pp. 108-10). As for detailed discussions of how Kingston revises the Fa Mu Lan story and other Chinese stories in *The Woman Warrior*, see Wong in Lim, ed. (1991); Wong (1992a); Simmons (ch. 2).

¹⁸ For example, see Eakin (1985, 259-61); Grice (52-53); Elaine Kim (1982, 202); Quinby (310); Rusk (67-8); Schueller (146-49); Smith (1987, 157-60); Wong (1993, 202-04).

¹⁹ Regarding the female body as testimony, see Yaeger (2000, ch. 8); for the female body as “a revenge text” (181) in *The Woman Warrior*, see Gilmore (ch. 5).

The nodal point to link the two juxtaposed and contrasting autobiographies is female subjectivities in sharedness and difference. The narrator initially identifies herself with the swordswoman, then discovers differences between them, and radically re-identifies herself with the latter. The idea of female avenging is liberatory for the narrator in fantasy, as many critics discuss, but it is not utterly empowering for her. Imagining the swordswoman's life, emotions and inner thoughts at the battleground, the narrator continues to detail what she sees as the climax of the swordswoman's story: revealing the language inscribed on the female body. Honored for her series of victories by the emperor, and then safely returning home from the war, the narrator-woman warrior goes to the baron who has exploited the villagers. Confronting him alone, she demands his life for his crimes and identifies herself as "a female avenger" (43). The baron, now knowing that the avenger is a woman, fires off an excitable speech full of "sayings I hated": "'Girls are maggots in the rice.' 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters'" (43). When he persistently denies his wrongdoings, she rips off her shirt to show him her engraved back as an undeniable evidence of his wrongdoings to her family. Although, as Smith argues, the idea of a "female avenger" is "truly subversive" for "female empowerment" (1987, 159), the narrator abruptly diminishes the fantasized heroine into a woman who is remembered in the service of Chinese patriarchy that values women's "perfect filiality" (45).

It is in her disidentification with Fa Mu Lan that the narrator re-discovers the swordswoman as well as herself. The narrator's return to her own reality in the U.S. drives her to see her difference from the legendary swordswoman. While the fantasized

“T”’s life ends with a collective remembrance, the narrator in the trans-Pacific U.S. is increasingly embittered. She gets no recognition in spite of her straight A’s. Instead, in Chinatown, she repeatedly listens to the same misogynist sayings that the baron repeats to the swordswoman. In spite of the narrator’s intense identification with the swordswoman, and unlike the story of Ts’ ai Yen in the last section, the Fa Mu Lan story does not “translate[] well” (209) for the narrator’s present U.S. context. Detailing her disappointing American life, the narrator tells what “new grievances” about her life among the immigrants would be added on her own back (46).

The process of the narrator’s disidentification reveals how situated accounts of history and difference emerge. Embittered, the narrator specifies the intersectional complications of ethnicity, gender, and class on her Chinese American female body: “no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet” (48). The narrator finds herself unrecognizable even in her own family. She repeatedly gets fired from her jobs in her defiance against her racist bosses, who use for their business banquet the restaurants “being picketed by CORE and the NAACP” (48). With her sense of “double binds,” the narrator identifies the American version of the baron in the Fa Mu Lan tale: U.S. social systems, whose regulatory apparatuses, as Lowe argues, are classism, racialization, and sexism, and in which her female body is the very site where such complex regulators operate intersectionally. It is after her recognition of her reality and difference from the

swordswoman that the narrator rediscovers the radical significance of the language tattooed on the swordswoman's back.

As Cheung (1993) argues, Kingston talks back to Chinese American patriarchy and U.S. racialization by using a "double-voiced discourse," especially through the Fa Mu Lan tale. The female body engraved with words of genealogy and revenge is the very ground on which the narrator radically re-identifies with the woman warrior who "gave the world a new martial art" (19). "What we have in common," she says, "are the words at our backs" (53). In addition, if the female "I" is still associated with slaves in Chinatown (47), the narrator redefines the swordswoman as a slave-as-heroine remembered in favor of Chinese American patriarchy. From a new critical direction, the narrator revises what constitutes this "new martial art" of female avenging: "words" (53).

Beyond the "double-voiced" critique of intracultural and intercultural domination, Kingston expands her idea of female avenging by grounding her female subjectivity in the history of U.S. gendered racialization. Reidentifying herself with the "female avenger" (43), the narrator redefines her subjectivity as a social text to reveal contemporary U.S. gendered racialization. Remembering the no name aunt, she now replaces the old wise mentors in the Fa Mu Lan tale with the aunt as her own guide. The narrator recalls what a fortune teller once told her: a girl who died in China follows you wherever you go, but the spirit can help you if you acknowledge her; you will become a medium yourself (52). For the narrator, who is now a "medium" as a writer, both her own body and the spectral body of the aunt, like the swordswoman's engraved body,

bear socially inscribed textualities that are worth being reinscribed in twentieth century U.S. history. Commenting from an adult vantage point on the young narrator's preoccupation with the meanings of living as a woman in a misogynistic Chinese American culture and a racist U.S. society, Kingston concludes: "May my people understand the resemblance [between the swordswoman and me] soon so that I can return to them. . . . The idioms for *revenge* are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words — 'chink' words and 'gook' words too — that they do not fit on my skin" (53).

For Kingston, female avenging is rewriting hegemonic histories and representations by another language of women's experience. With "so many words" that "do not fit on [her yellow] skin," Kingston "reports" as "a crime" the effects of not only a Chinese American misogynistic culture that fails to "understand the resemblance" between herself and no name women as well as the swordswoman, but also of the U.S. racializing system, in which Asian Americans are derogatively defined as "chink" or "gook." Such "revenge" is performed by acknowledging differently and making visible women's lives that are barely acknowledged in hegemonic discourses. The above passage also reveals what becomes the most fascinating part in the Fa Mu Lan story for the narrator: not "the beheading" but the public bringing to the front of what is at "our backs," as the swordswoman shows the baron her female body as undeniable evidence. Kingston's poetics of female avenging emerges in relation to U.S. dominant discourses

and Asian American sub-dominant discourses, both of which bolster systems of privilege.

By making writing an act of transformative re-inscription of the gendered, racialized female subjectivity as record of and testimony to situated difference, Kingston serves to open an emergent space for Asian American women (writers). In such a space, alternative female subjectivities — for example, Kingston herself as a contemporary version of Fa Mu Lan in the context of Chinese America and the U.S. — are imagined and emerge. As Kingston exemplifies, in that process, national cultures are produced and negotiated from the perspectives of women of marginalized minorities. Kingston resignifies ex-centric Chinese American women both in their complex subjectivities and as having their own agency for survival and cultural negotiation. Grounding her own autobiographical project to reconstruct a new female selfhood on immigrant women's trans-Pacific experience, she radically supplements the histories of Asian America and the U.S. and rearticulates contemporary U.S. culture as a site of contending memories.

Redefining Marginality and Claiming Subjectivity

Kingston's rewriting of nation and gender through "ethnic-nuanced and feminist-informed" construction of a female selfhood (Lim 1993, 572) emerges as an alternative formation of U.S. culture. Kingston associates her imagining of alternative subjectivities with the multiple meanings of her mother's act of cutting her frenum, and thereby pays tribute to her mother for forcing Maxine to become a subject of her own language: "Maybe that's why my mother cut my tongue" (163). A doctor in China, Brave Orchid cut Maxine's frenum against the Chinese belief, "a ready tongue is evil," because she

thinks that things are different in the U.S. (163-64). The adolescent Maxine doubts her mother's explanation, blaming her mother for her "terrible time talking" and "broken voice" in her early school years (165). Identifying herself as a filial writer, whose story begins with memories from trans-Pacific sites but ends with her own, Kingston re-connects her mother's cutting of her frenum to a radical act for making alternative subjects. That is, she replaces repression of a female voice in the original Chinese context with women's own subversion of that repression in a new U.S context, in which the daughters' speech is no longer "outlawed." Associating Brave Orchid's act with the horrible practice of clitoridectomy, Smith argues that Brave Orchid "passes on a tale of female castration" (1987, 168). Agreeing with Smith, Lee Quinby adds: "The cut frenum serves as a figure for the dilemma of the conflicting subjectivities produced by the systems of alliance and sexuality" (303). However, as Brave Orchid explains and the narrator re-affirms, with the cut tongue, Maxine is "able to move in any language" and "pronounce anything" (164). As Jeehyun Lim notes, the act of cutting the frenum may not be an unusual practice among Asians who urgently feel that their children need to speak English well. To use Lisa Lowe's observation about the making of Asian American culture, Brave Orchid's cutting of Maxine's frenum can be a purposeful practice that emerges in relation to the dominant culture that denies or subordinates Asian American as (linguistic and therefore cultural) others (65).

In her exploration of the meanings of her mother's cutting her frenum, Kingston defines again herself as a feminist writer by using a Chinese metaphor, "an outlaw knot-maker" (163), in her present U.S. context. "Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string

into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker” (163). As suggested in the final section of *The Woman Warrior*, the young Maxine’s reaction to gendered and ethnicized speechlessness is gradually channeled into writing. As she grows, Maxine encounters U.S. multi-national culture as a gendered and racialized subject. Maxine’s subjectivity is profoundly complicated by this encounter. The multi-national culture with its white hegemony writes back, further forms, and changes Maxine’s notions of and responses to her home culture as well as femaleness. Through a slow process, she learns, unlearns, and talks back to U.S. culture and her home culture, in both of which she is rendered unrecognizable. As a kind of *Künstlerroman*, the last section of *The Woman Warrior* dramatizes Maxine’s move from a speechless girl in-between two homes and two languages to a writing warrior. This slow process involves a revisionary construction of a female selfhood in the complex intersection of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and cultural and national belongings. Pamela R. Matthews would call this autobiographical female self “female self-in-context” (1994a, 200) and “female self-in-connection” (1994b, xviii).

Elaborating strategies that help initiate not only new signs for alternative subjectivities but also processes of redefining female selfhood and challenging the alleged notion of homogeneous national culture, Kingston focuses on Maxine’s linguistic struggle in-between two cultures. Narrating Maxine’s early years, Kingston describes the American school as a powerful site of subject formation. The power of

American schooling over Maxine's subjectivity formation is not seriously discussed in *The Woman Warrior* criticism, much of which instead focuses on a dominant feminist motif, women's (in this case, Maxine's) move from silence to voice. Maxine attends two schools: a Chinese and an American school. The former is run by Chinese Americans in Chinatown and teaches children Chinese literature after American school is over. The American school is the most significant cultural contact zone, the place in which Maxine encounters U.S. public culture on a more encompassing scale. As the children of Chinese immigrants, who "could never learn English" (149), first learn English that is different from the language used in their homes, their bodies become a constant battleground of subjectification. As Maxine enters a new world and a new language, the most overwhelming challenge for her becomes how to make herself heard. This challenge is closely connected to establishing one's own personality through communicative speech acts. As Maxine tells the little mute Chinese girl while torturing her to speak, "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality. . . . You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain" (180).

In the American school, Maxine's learning of the national language is dynamically complicated by her gendered, ethnic identity. Not being taught English at home, Maxine is assigned to have "a zero IQ" (201), flunks kindergarten, and becomes completely silent for three years. She speaks to no one, not even to her teacher when she needs to go to the lavatory. Her younger sister is also silent for years, and there are other Chinese American girls who are silent in school. Furthermore, "[n]ot all of the children who were silent at American school found voice at Chinese school" (168). Kingston

explains: “when the home culture is different from the public culture,” the children in a bilingual situation “are just shocked into silence” (*Conversations* 31). The narrator recalls: “It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery” (166). In the school, in which she likes the “Black Ghosts” best because they are “daring talker[s]” with their expressiveness and loud laughter, Maxine associates silence with her gendered ethnicity: “I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl. . . . Our voices were too soft or nonexistent” (166-67). Entering the public culture that further genders and racializes her subjectivity, she clearly realizes that language is power and that speech is a powerful means for one’s own social presence.

Making oneself communicative, especially in the public space of school, means for Maxine that cultural identity can be augmented beyond social inscription by reiterative performances in the face of interlocking constraints of gender and ethnicity. As she enters further and further into the multicultural situation, Maxine herself learns how to negotiate cultural difference. Developing her speech, Maxine feels an increasing anger toward non-Chinese Americans’ “not letting us to talk” (183). Desiring a “speaking personality” and angered by silencing, Maxine articulates cultural difference in a binary opposition: “Chinese feminine” vs. “American feminine.”

It is the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian. We make guttural peasant noise. . . . Normal Chinese women’s voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make

ourselves American feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans. . . . We invented an American-feminine speaking personality, . . .

(171-72)

American schooling makes manifest for Maxine that she is in a precarious position in a cultural borderland. Maxine's binding of "American" and "feminine" in her binary construction of "Chinese feminine" and "American feminine" reveals the hierarchical racialization of femininity, by which whiteness is prescribed as a social norm. As Maxine associates "personality" with acts of speaking a specific femininity, white femininity functions as a cultural and therefore performative ideal. Maxine now perceives her mother tongue as "ugly," "not beautiful," not elegant, "strong and bossy," while taking American girls' linguistic way as a norm. For Maxine, who tries to act more American than the Americans, personality is primarily related to "American-feminine" speech.

While stressing the formative power of gender and ethnicity in subject formation through Maxine's oppositional construction of the two femininities, Kingston describes subjectivity and identity as something that cannot be fixed or essentialized. Against her mother's and other immigrants' "loud voices, unmodulated to American tones even after years away from the village [in China]," Maxine has "tried to turn [herself] American-feminine"; she also tries to walk in the "American feminine" way: "knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese-feminine" (11). Maxine's reiterative acts of speaking and behaving in her invented "American-feminine" way show a process in which identity is produced and performed as a positioning and thus through which

subjectivity is re-negotiated.²⁰ Identity, assumed here as a white feminine personality, is a positioning for social recognition, and thus can be never complete, and is always contextual in relation to (multi-)cultural differences among white, Japanese, Italian, Chinese, etc. As speech acts, through which Maxine performs her identity, are always performed in renewed ways, so identity is not merely a matter of being or blood but rather that of becoming or performance. In a similar way to which speech is nothing unless it is made communicative, identity becomes nothing if it is not socially recognized.

For Maxine, English speech is a powerful means for self-definition to counter the powers that condition her subjectivity and cultural identity as unrecognizable as if she had no voice. Regarding female subjectivity in uneven power relations, Gloria Anzaldúa notes: “[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language” (59). Maxine’s preoccupation with speech is closely related to the social invisibility of Chinese American girls in the American school. Social recognition and recognizability reflect and are always inflected by power relations. For Maxine, whose straight A’s and smartness are often trivialized, to have a voice means to have a recognizable personhood. How painfully Maxine struggles for a recognizable voice is vividly dramatized in her desperate attempts to make the mute Chinese girl speak. This scene also shows a crisis in Maxine’s linguistic personhood-in-the-making. Seeing that “we were the same” (172) in all negative aspects, Maxine projects onto the girl a completely hatable version of Chinese American femaleness: for example, “her China doll hair cut” (173), “fragility”

²⁰ See Judith Butler (1990, 1994) for gender as performance and identity as the provisional achievement by reiterative performances of social norms.

(176), and “no words” (179). In addition, “I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for my team” (172). Torturing the girl to cry, which Kingston recalls later as “the worst thing I had yet done to another person” (181), Maxine tries to force her to speak even a single word but fails. For Maxine, a Chinese American girl is destined to be “such a nothing” (178) with no personality if she cannot speak in English. As many critics note, Maxine sees her mirror image or shadowy double in the mute girl.²¹ A gendered, ethnicized subject who eventually becomes “arrogant with talk” in the sixth grade (173), Maxine tortures the girl, and this act is partly an unconscious resistance to being reminded of her long “misery” in silence in her early school years, as well as her desperate defiance against the social inscription of Chinese American female subjectivity.

Against the prevailing tendency in the dominant discourses of Chinese America, including Asian American cultural nationalist discourse that posit Chinese America in opposition to white culture, Kingston describes Maxine’s home culture and the public culture as increasingly (albeit unevenly) permeating each other in subject formation. Describing Maxine’s struggle for having a voice, Kingston uses what bell hooks argues by “double vision,” a vision of marginalized people to see reality “from the outside in and from inside out” (2000, xvi). With her American schooling, Maxine’s struggle is increasingly complicated in her epistemological and behavioral conflicts with her home culture, and culminates in her confrontation with the immigrant secrecy that has long angered her. Quinby notes that “the acquisition of Western logic” becomes “constitutive

²¹ For example, see Cheung (1993, 88); Elaine Kim (1982, 203); Outka (478); Simmons (93).

of Kingston's new subjectivity" (313). Contrasting the homeland that she perceives in her childhood (the 1940s) with *Brave Orchid's* adopted land that her mother as a new immigrant perceives in the same period, the narrator describes her schooling as a series of disenchantments. "When I got older and more scientific," the narrator recalls, she becomes able to reason at what point her mother's explanation is contradictory (99). Furthermore, English is no longer for Maxine "the ghost language," as her mother sees it in opposition to Chinese — the only "human language" (98). Angered by her home culture that seems to her to deny her the capacity "to see the world logically, [and] logic[,] the new way of seeing" (204), Maxine begins to talk back to her mother from "the outside in and the inside out."

Maxine's unlearning of her home culture through her American schooling is integral to self-decolonization. Redefining "the margin as a space for radical openness," hooks argues that the struggle against colonization "may not begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family" (1990, 151). In a similar vein to hooks, who see margins as both sites of repression and resistance (1990, 145-153), Kingston describes Maxine's talking back to her mother as an act of resistance against her home culture's repression. Similarly when she describes *Moon Orchid* as a site of repression and thereby reclaims her as a suggestive figure for resistance, Kingston reveals that Chinatown, with its immigrant secrecy, has formed itself as a site of repression that incites internal resistance. Well-dramatized in Maxine's confrontation with immigrant secrecy, Maxine's process of self-decolonization begins, to use hooks, within her segregated, colonized Chinatown and her own family; it is coextensive with

her resistance against Chinese American intra-cultural repression of talking (back). The immigrants would not tell some aspects of their situation even to their children, “because [they] had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were [them]selves ghost-like” (183). So many things are unspeakable, whether good or bad. Maxine does not know even her mother’s real name (202).

Maxine’s struggle culminates in her blurting out her complaint list to her mother, who teaches her children “Don’t talk back” to those who are older than they are (192). It is by talking back that Maxine finally comes to understand her mother’s Chinese way of saying, and this releases her repressed desire and gendered anger. In addition to girl slavery and female infanticide in China, about which *Brave Orchid* tells her, Maxine hates the notion that achieving femininity is coextensive to making girls “sellable, marriageable” women (190). Maxine has a fear that her parents might “sell” her to a retarded man’s family, because they are rich. When he sits on a box in front of the laundry, Maxine explodes, expressing her anger to her mother in a single outburst. “I am not going to be a slave or a wife. Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won’t let you turn me into a slave or wife. I’m getting out of here. . . . Ha! You can’t stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn’t work” (201-2).

As Kingston describes in the climax of Maxine’s linguistic struggle, talking back to the home culture is a starting point for Maxine’s engendering her own language, with which she can reinscribe immigrant memories and Chinese American experiences as constitutive of contemporary U.S. culture. Maxine defies her perceived notions of poor Chinese American girls as sellable for money and women’s destiny as “a slave or a

wife.” By talking back to her mother, she also constructs her cut tongue as equivalent to Chinese practice of foot binding. At her further defiance, her mother finally concludes the battle by shouting “Ho Chi Kuei,” which means “a bad Chinese who couldn’t speak right” (*China Men* 295). Like Beccah, who sometimes relies on a dictionary in order to understand her mother’s words in *Comfort Woman*, Maxine searches her Chinese dictionary only to become confused; there are so many meanings for the word. For her mother, the act of cutting her tongue has not yet worked, because Maxine still does not know how to say “charming things” (203). Maxine believes that “it didn’t work” (202), for her mother is no longer able to stop her from talking. Kingston implies that the young Maxine needs to struggle more for her own voice. Talking back as a positive expression of anger and repressed feelings (hooks 1989; Lorde 1984) is only a starting point for engendering one’s own language, helping one move beyond the binary opposition between outside/public and inside/private.

Kingston ends *The Woman Warrior* with a juxtaposition of her mother’s story and the Chinese story of the ancient female poet Ts’ai Yen, who is captured and moved to a barbarian land but who finally returns home with her songs that will be remembered across cultures in China. Ts’ai Yen crosses national borders, albeit forcedly, and rewrites her life of border crossings from her own experiences but without romanticizing her homeland. She instead brings to the two nations songs of compassion, “sadness and anger” that both peoples of the two nations understand and their descendants remember (209). Throughout the text, Kingston arranges her mother’s story in the “beginning,” and thereby enriches her own story: “Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was

young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine” (206). Now a storyteller like her mother, Kingston locates herself within her mothers’ tradition, in which mothers, like her grandmother, empower their daughters. Trinh T. Minh-ha observes that the mother’s story in the ending pages is “the making of the mother” and that Kingston’s responsive story of Ts’ ai Yen is “the making of the daughter” (1989, 135). Kingston implies that she, like Ts’ ai Yen, becomes a “transcultural writer” (Outka 480) or “interethnic translator” (Wong 1992, 270), who rewrites intra- and cross-cultural history from women’s experience. Connecting herself to immigrant women’s lives, Kingston brings a trans-Pacific narration of Chinese America to contemporary U.S. culture and history.

Inspired by Kingston’s writings, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) argues that U.S. women writers of third-world origin write under “the triple bind,” “the white-male-is-norm ideology” (6), and move beyond such a bind in their own “subject-in-the-making” (102). Trinh provides another significant critique of cultural nationalist projects that force women to choose between nation and gender: “Many women of color feel obliged [to choose] between ethnicity and womanhood: how can they? You never have/are one without the other. The idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female), partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics” (1989, 105). Seeing such a nationalist division between gender and ethnicity as inseparable from “the triple bind,” Trinh critiques that cultural nationalist politics, by taking the masculinist subordination of feminism to nationalist concerns as its cornerstone, reproduces the logic of

domination. Published more than a decade before Trinh, *The Woman Warrior* has served to form an emergent space, in which Asian American women rearticulate their memories and experiences in the face of and against the U.S. dominant and Asian American sub-dominant representation that deny or subordinate them. Against what Trinh defines as “the triple bind” and the nationalist bind, Kingston’s writing autobiographical fiction is “knot-making” (163) that binds Chinese women’s trans-Pacific experiences in her own life and within the U.S. national history. Kingston rearticulates the twentieth-century U.S. nation as “a site of cultural struggle” (Lowe; Chu; Kang 2002), by centering a gendered trans-Pacific site as constitutive of the nation. Re-signifying gendered, racialized female ex-centricity as a transformative site, she constructively deals with tensions between gender and ethnic culture, both of which are formative of U.S. national culture. As such, *The Woman Warrior* ends at a starting point, remaining an unfinished project. In the next chapter, I examine how the trans-Pacific space Kingston opens up can be radically expanded in a transnational context and also for transnational feminist coalitions against historical amnesia about violence against women during World War II and the gendered silencing within postcolonial nationalism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: POSTNATIONAL REMEMBERING IN A TRANSNATIONAL SPACE: NORA OKJA KELLER'S *COMFORT WOMAN**

Witnessing is seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to, one's visions and representations. Witnessing is a collective, limited practice that depends on the constructed and never finished credibility of those who do it.

—Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*

The previous chapters examine how contemporary U.S. women writers negotiate symbolic boundaries for ethnic and national affiliations. As Silko, Naylor, and Kingston reveal in their texts, for women, national boundaries are often fraught with contradictions and problems. From different ethnic positions, these three women writers problematize the assumed cohesion of ethnic communities reconceived as cultural nations within the national boundary of the U.S. In this chapter, I examine how women's cultural negotiations of cultural nations, cultural nationalisms, and the multi-nations-state U.S. are extended into a transnational feminist frame by reading Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997). While Silko, Naylor, and Kingston represent the U.S. as a site of contending counter-memories, Keller expands such a representation,

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rendering the U.S. as a postnational and transnational space, in which traveling memories unravel the multilayered history of twentieth century modernity.

Keller's *Comfort Woman* is a fiction written against a more than fifty-year long domestic, and thus international, silence about military sexual slavery perpetrated by Japan during World War II.¹ The central project of this fiction is to imaginatively trace and excavate the historical itinerary of committing and then silencing a "sexual holocaust."² Keller's method is, as she says, to "get into the character's heart and spirit" with a writerly "imaginative leap . . . [from] empathy" (Johnson 102; 100). As such, Keller's fiction is a powerful postnational remembering against historical amnesia. I use the term "postnational" to problematize and critique the gender politics of nationalism that denies women as national subjects, while also meaning against and beyond

¹ I use the term "military sexual slavery by Japan" during World War II. I sometimes use the patriarchal sexist term, "comfort woman," with quotation marks, to critique the term's masculinist biases. Chungmoo Choi notes that in 1992 the UN accepted "military sexual slavery by Japan" as the politically correct term, based on the report of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan to the UN Human Rights Committee. The Korean Council's 1992 UN report has been "often cited as a pivotal moment in the international publicizing of this issue" (Choi, Editor's Note, *positions* 5. 1). Keller uses the problematic term for the title of her fiction, yet coats it fully with a feminist irony throughout the text. Keller deliberately changes the meaning of "comfort" from a noun to a verb. She explains: "I really struggled with even using the term 'comfort women,' because it was a term given by the Japanese soldiers to these women. . . . I was concerned that if I used the term, I'd be validating the term given to them, but I wanted to underscore the irony and expand the idea of comfort beyond the time of the war to the relationship between the mother and the daughter" (Johnson 97). As for the terminology, see also note 14.

² According to an official UN report, 145,000 of the women drafted by the Japanese army died during World War II (Schellstede 138). Scholars agree that more than 200,000 women from Asian countries were drafted into Japanese "comfort stations" during the war; that most of them were younger than eighteen years old; and that 80% of them were Koreans (Chung 227; Dolgopol 127; Hicks 11; Schellestede 109; Schmidt 2, 185; Stetz and Oh 3). Bonnie B. C. Oh reports that the women were forced to "serve twenty to forty men a day, at a rate of a man every thirty minutes" (Stetz and Oh, eds. 12). In her UN report on the issue as a UN investigator, Ustina Dolgopol notes that the average ration of Japanese soldiers to "comfort women" was 50: 1 (138).

masculinist nationalism. I use “transnational” as a term that highlights interconnectivity across and between national boundaries and cultures, in order to shed light on emergent spaces, in which subjects that seem disparate and unrelated from a nationalist perspective come together in shared memories and narratives or political urgency. Keller was “haunted” by the testimony of a Korean survivor of military sexual slavery, and thus felt “forced” to write this fiction after listening to the survivor, Keum Ja Hwang,³ at a human rights symposium held at the University of Hawaii in 1993 (Birnbaum; Hong 13; Johnson 97; Young-Oak Lee 154; Lieu). In a vein similar to Maxine Hong Kingston, who was “haunted” by and eventually wrote about her “no name” aunt after she was told her story, listening to Hwang’s testimony offered Keller a moment of witnessing the long silenced, subaltern women’s wounds, and finally led her to a translative practice of reconstructing this harrowing event into a literary text.⁴ With her own years-long research on the issue, Keller realized that the excessive silence surrounding it has a close relation to Korean nationalist complicity and thus international ignorance.⁵ In a situation where “there was hardly anything written in English” about

³ Hwang’s testimony is later recorded in Sangmie Choi Schellstede, ed. (2000; pp. 3-10). This book is a collection of 19 survivors’ testimonies in English that also provides three important UN reports on the issue from 1994 to 1999. For other testimonies of the survivors, see Keith Howard, ed.; Dai Sil Kim-Gibson’s film and book (1999).

⁴ Keller says: “[Hwang’s] story took hold of me. I felt so haunted. I began dreaming about images of blood and war, and waking with a start. Finally I realized that the only way to exorcise these dreams and the story from my mind was to write them down” (Hong 13). For Keller, then, ethics is in part both a matter of the autobiographical act of empathically listening to the voices of a historical wound, and a matter of feminist revision of history, historiography, and discourse.

⁵ Focusing on how the issue of military sexual slavery has been framed in Korean nationalist discourse, Hyunah Yang points out that “silence has been a condition as well as a key component” (1998, 124). Scholars have revealed that silence around the issue is a very complicated phenomenon. Survivors have been afraid that their families would be dishonored by their past as well as that they, as “raped women,” would be surely stigmatized. For the

the issue, Keller explains that she wrote this novel, imagining “what life was like for these women on a daily basis” (Johnson 100). It is not until the late 1980s that the issue began to gain Korean public awareness.⁶ Through the decades-long persistent struggle of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, and then more powerfully fueled by transnational coalitions, the long silenced issue has attracted international public awareness, especially since the first public testimony of a survivor Hak Soon Kim in 1991.⁷ In the early stage of the formation of transnational discourse about the issue in the 1990s U.S., Keller’s profoundly empathic imagining of the life and interior world of a survivor constitutes a powerful witness to the half-a-century-long forgotten violence of history.

In *Comfort Woman*, Soon Hyo/Akiko is Keller’s fictionalization of a military sexual slave victim-survivor in Korean colonial and American postcolonial spaces.

Comfort Woman is alternately told from the “very, very different” perspectives of Beccah, a young Korean American woman who has known her mother only as Akiko

complicated reasons of social silencing of the issue, see Chung; Yang (1997; 1998). As shown in her acknowledgement in *Comfort Woman* and in her interviews, Keller is deeply informed about the international discussions of the issue during the 1990s.

⁶ Choi and Kim, eds.; Chung; Hicks; Yang (1997; 1998). See also notes 5 and 7.

⁷ With Kim’s first public testimony in 1991, a series of UN Committee on Human Rights hearings of the survivors’ testimony with the Korean Council’s reports began in 1992 (Chung 237-39; Hicks 254; Soh 69 in Stetz and Oh, eds.). For historical accounts of the issue, see George Hicks (1995) and *positions* 5. 1 (1997). Hicks’s book is the first extensive, international study of military sexual slavery during World War II. *positions* 5. 1 is a special issue titled *comfort women: colonialism, war, and sex* edited by Choi and with contributions from Korean, Korean American, Japanese, and Japanese American scholars and artists. Based on the historical expositions of the issue in *positions* 5.1, *The Journal of Asian American Studies* 6.1 (2003) explores the cultural significance of the issue while recontextualizing it in the current U.S. For a Filipina survivor’s story, see Maria Rosa Henson. For more accounts of the issue in Japanese domestic contexts, see Yoshiaki Yoshimi, David Andrew Schmidt, and Chizuko Ueno.

Bradley, and her mother Soon Hyo/Akiko, a Korean immigrant (Johnson 100).⁸ Beccah's father Richard Bradley is an American minister who had worked as a missionary in colonial and postcolonial Korea. In the wake of Korea's division during the Cold War, Richard marries Akiko and brings her to the U.S. After he dies when Beccah is five, Soon Hyo/Akiko attempts to return to Korea with her daughter. But she "g[ets] as far as Hawaii," the setting of the fiction, "not knowing anyone, broke" (4). Beccah's narrative begins with her mother's death. She revisits her own and her mother's life, imagining how to understand the latter. Her narrative is about a Korean American daughter's belated but radical recognition of her mother's *entire* life. At the heart of Beccah's time-consuming process of relocating herself in the revisited mother-daughter relationship lies her mother's legacy: a cross-cultural women's genealogy. Soon Hyo/Akiko's narration almost always begins with her cherished memory of her daughter, whose birth is "almost a miracle" to her (15). For her, Beccah is the only force that enables her to root herself in the world.

While in *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), another fiction about "comfort women," Therese Park details the deceptive process of colonizing women into the Japanese military camps, the atrocities inflicted daily on the women, and the life-risking escape of the central character Soon-ah, Keller focuses on her central character's life after her

⁸ Keller uses the names, Soon Hyo and Akiko, with subtle differences. It is in the third last chapter titled "Soon Hyo" that Akiko's real name is first introduced. All the other chapters about her are titled "Akiko." I use the names, Akiko and Soon Hyo, according to Keller's strategic use of them. But to avoid confusion, I refer to her as Akiko when discussing the time periods before Beccah is born, and as Soon Hyo/Akiko since Beccah's birth, for it is manifest that with her daughter she becomes a survivor-agent. With a slash between the two names, I make her complex subjectivity explicit.

escape from the camp. Although she also indicts the brutalizing violence of history, Keller is more interested in how to survive trauma and the meanings of survival with agency rather than in a representation of victimization itself. Indeed, Soon Hyo/Akiko is described more as a survivor-agent than as a victim like Park's Soon-ah. As such, Soon Hyo/Akiko's entire life poses some questions. What does it mean, especially to the survivor herself, to be a survivor of the history that causes an irreparable trauma? What meanings and interpretations would the abused survivor assign to her own life as well as the history of violence? How would she exert her powerful will to live in the face of trauma and constant abjection? Why does decolonization still remain an incomplete project in the so-called postcolonial spaces? And why are women's experience and memories often disruptive to national memory?

As Keller's depictions of trauma and ghostly figures reveal, Soon Hyo/Akiko's past — her visceral experience as a “comfort woman”— is a haunting presence in trans-Pacific America throughout the fiction. To use Avery Gordon's insights about “ghostly matters” as profoundly symptomatic, social phenomena prevailing in our contemporary life and about haunting as “a particular mediation” that reveals “modernity's violence” (19), this fiction, a ghost-infested text, drives us to “confront what has been rendered spectral by the twin hands of the social and the writer” (14) and to think about what the ghostly figures want from us. In Keller's cultural imagining, haunting and spectrality are what places the present at stake. Similar to Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, Keller also uses the genre of fiction as an ensemble of cultural imagining, marginal and ghostly voices, affective experience, “unhomely” densities, and an empathic yet “slender

narrative” of belated recognition (Bhabha 1994, 5-11). Keller uses the genre of fiction this way so in order to revise historical memory of military sexual slavery through women’s perspectives. Employing a daughter’s “coming of age novel and a mother-daughter novel” in alternating first-person narrations (Birnbaum), Keller shows us that this long forgotten issue has some profound excesses that are not reducible to the problems of colonial domination or containable within a postcolonial nationalist frame. In her imaginative reconstruction of Soon Hyo/Akiko as disruptive, even dangerous to Korean and Japanese national hegemonic discourses of nation-building after World War II, Keller vividly shows that women’s sexualized bodies constitute the overdetermined core of colonial and postcolonial modernity in the 20th century. Supra-exploitative control of female sexuality and women’s bodies is a constitutive constant of domination, subjection, and complicity in the age of modernity (Enloe; Jodi Kim; Grewal and Kaplan, eds.; McClintock; Nagel).

Gendered and Sexualized Technologies of Unhoming in Colonial and Postcolonial Spaces

Keller re-enfigures women as active subjects of history and re-articulation. Soon Hyo/Akiko is a survivor. Induk, who is killed in her defiance in the military camp, is a ghostly figure to help Soon Hyo/Akiko survive. Beccah is a transcriber of her survivor-mother’s testimony tape. In Keller’s reinscription, women emerge as dangerous subjects to hegemonic discourses of Korean and Japanese masculinist nationalisms by breaking the long silence that the nationalist discourses have forced upon them. Cynthia Enloe

argues that many nationalisms have treated women only as symbols rather than active subjects. Nationalisms are:

remarkably *uncurious* about the abused women's own thoughts — about the meaning they might have assigned to foreign conquest. . . . Women as symbols, women as workers and women as nurturers have been crucial to the entire colonial undertaking. Yet nationalist movements have rarely taken women's experiences as the starting point for an understanding of how a people becomes colonized or how it throws off the shackles of that material and psychological domination. Rather, nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope. (44)

For Keller too, women's lives are rendered invisible in "masculinized memory." Keller sees that former sexual slave women's experience has been "a history that's not acknowledged" (Young-Oak Lee 158). In *Comfort Woman*, she makes visible the unacknowledged history through her translative imagining of "the abused women's own thoughts"; "the meaning they might have assigned to" their experience. In a way similar to Kingston's remembering of the no name aunt, who has been completely forgotten in the history of Chinese America and the U.S., Keller's different acknowledgment of former sexual slave women's forgotten history constitutes a radical point of departure for historical revision. Keller specifically reveals how women are posited only as the site of contest between male national subjects (Duncan 179; Enloe 42; McClintock 353-55), and thereby critiques the nationalist use of "comfort women" only as a symbol for "masculinized humiliation." With Soon Hyo/Akiko's trans-Pacific survival, a space

with postnational remembering is powerfully opened in which Korean / American women disrupt Korean masculinist nationalist discourse.⁹

In her imaginative rearticulation of women and nation, Keller reveals that deliberate forgetting is constitutive of national “memory” in colonial Korea and its postcolonial nation-building under U.S. hegemony. Against masculinist “memory” that denies women’s lives as an integral part of national history, Keller elaborates a feminist revision of what Bhabha posits in “DissemiNation” as the two modes of national self-representation. For Bhabha, the pedagogical mode of narration for nation-building tends to assume the nation as traditional and monolithic, while the performative one is disruptive and potentially revisionist. The two modes often disrupt each other, and thus the production of nation as narration is always replete with conceptual ambivalence (Bhabha 1994, 145-46). In Keller’s text, the pedagogical and the performative as two modes of writing the nation are inextricably twisted into a performative remembrance through a feminist narrative that disrupts traditional masculinist memories.¹⁰ Keller’s text counters willed forgetting that is deeply ingrained in the pedagogical narration of nation. Elaborately weaving women’s corporeal memory with the ghostly performance of the haunting past, Keller’s mode of narrativizing a silenced national issue disrupts what Bhabha argues as “the site of writing the nation” (1994, 146). With her “pedagogical inclination” toward disruptive narration (Chuh 19), Keller opens up a

⁹ As for Korean / American women’s transnational, “dangerous affinity” in this issue and other issues against Korean and U.S. nationalisms, see Elaine Kim (1999). For transnational feminist practice and theorizing, see Grewal and Kaplan, eds.; Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

¹⁰ For discussions of nationalism, gender, and masculinity in various contexts, see Enloe (ch. 3); Grewal and Kaplan, eds. (chs. 2-4); Anne McClintock (1995, ch. 10); Nagel (ch. 5).

space for remembrance, in which both the performative and the pedagogical become disruptive and revisionary to the masculinist dialectic of memory and forgetting in the formation of national subjects.

Rewriting nation from a postnational perspective, Keller describes the female body as the most vulnerable site for colonial violence and national forgetting. *Comfort Woman* shows that the deprivation of the colonized female subjects' ownership of their bodies is central to colonial enterprise. Colonization means for the colonized the loss of "home" in the sense of a sovereign nation. Hence, it means to live in a constant state and thus in a constant fear of being unhomed. For the colonized subjects, the domestic world becomes, to use Bhabha's term, "unhomely,"¹¹ beyond imagination. Soon Hyo/Akiko's life shows that colonial unhoming is gendered by the patriarchal and masculinist politics of sexuality. Through the audio-tape that she leaves as a legacy to Beccah, Soon Hyo/Akiko gives her testimony on life under Japanese colonization: "*Our brothers and fathers conscripted. The women left to be picked over like fruit to be tasted, consumed, the pits spit out as Chongsindae,*¹² *where we rotted under the body of orders*

¹¹ In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha argues that the "unhomely" is "a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" (9) and constitutes one of the salient characteristics in modern experience caused by geographical and cultural dislocations. By the term "unhomeliness," Bhabha means "something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (9). In his view, "unhomeliness" prevails in modern life, conditioning extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations (9). "Unhomeliness" is experienced in ordinary modern life, in which the social divisions between domestic and cross-cultural spaces are constantly redrawn, primarily because the innermost "recesses of the domestic space become the sites for history's most intricate invasions" (9) under such complicating conditions. Thus, "[t]o be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres," notes Bhabha (9).

¹² As Chung explains, *Chongsindae*, a euphemistic term that means "Korean voluntary corpse" for imperial Japan, officially "referred to both men and women who were mobilized for a variety of works including reportage, medicine, and manual [and sexual] labor during the 1940's";

from the Emperor of Japan. Under the Emperor's orders, we were beaten and starved" (193). In the tape, Soon Hyo/Akiko articulates how many women are forced into sexual slavery and finally solitary death with "true names unknown" and "bodies left unprepared, lost in the river" (192).

Soon Hyo/Akiko reveals how completely women are denied ownership of their bodies, family, and nation in the colonial world. Soon Hyo's body is the gendered and sexualized register of a series of "unhomely" moments. With their parents' earlier death from fatigue and pneumonia, prevalent killers in colonial Korea, Soon Hyo's sisters are scattered away from home to work elsewhere in order to earn their own living, and finally Soon Hyo is sent away from her native land to a Japanese military "comfort camp" in China. In the "comfort station," the only permitted actions are to "'close mouth' and 'open legs,'" and sexual slave women are "forbidden to speak, any language at all" (16). The twelve-year-old Soon Hyo is soon forced to become Akiko 41, a "comfort woman." Soon Hyo's becoming Akiko is the most intimate violence against women. In the first Akiko chapter, Akiko narrates the birth and death of her othered self, Soon Hyo: "I'm trying to remember exactly when I died. It must have been in stages, beginning with my birth as the fourth girl and last child in the Kim family, and ending in the recreation camps north of the Yalu" (17). Keller describes the effect of this bodily unhoming as a traumatic body/mind split that is "impossible to properly heal" (15), associating the unhoming moment with the death of a female self. Akiko narrates: "I

however, its strongest connotation points to Korean women drafted for the Japanese military (220-21). Through Beccah, who is listening to her mother's posthumous testimony on *Chongsindae*, Keller correctly translates the term into "[b]attalion slave" (193).

was twelve when I was murdered, fourteen when I looked into the Yalu River, and finding no face looking back at me, knew that I was dead” (15). And so many women’s physical and psychic “insides were ruined from so many men, so many times” (37). The female body is the most intimate and social site for colonial violation.

Colonial unhoming of the female body is further assisted by the politics of naming. All of the “comfort women” in the camp are given Japanese names and also numbers: Hanako 38, Miyoko 52, Kimiko 3, Tamayo 29, and so forth. Such a re-naming is an act of power that denies and erases Korean nationality and identity. Moreover, the fact that even as “Japanese” women, they are numbered as if interchangeable with their predecessors suggests that as women, they are denied individuality, regardless of their nationality.¹³ The numbering suggests that this bodily unhoming is committed on a massive scale. The brutalizing abuse of the women’s bodies is also unimaginable even on a daily basis, as Akiko narrates that the women in the camp are forced to “comfort” at least thirty soldiers per day (64-5; see also note 2).

In the scene of Akiko’s forced abortion, Keller compactly signifies how imperialism is tightly interwoven with racism and sexism to justify colonial violence on the female body. Akiko’s offspring must be aborted in order for her to keep her use-value for “comforting” the soldiers. While hooking the fetus with a stick in his one hand and squeezing Akiko’s nipples with the other hand, the Japanese camp doctor “spoke of evolutionary differences between the races, biological quirks that made the women of one race so pure and the women of another so promiscuous. Base, really, almost like

¹³ I am grateful to Dr. Pamela Matthews for an insightful note that the politics of numbering also denies women’s gendered identity and individuality.

animals, he said . . . Nature ensures that there is one dominant male to keep the others at bay and the female under control” (22). As Akiko remembers that “the doctor pinned me . . . with his stick and his words” (22), the abusive words are a powerful tool of control as much as the affliction of bodily pain. In the doctor’s intersecting discourse of imperialism, racism and sexism, Akiko is defined as “so promiscuous” and “base.” The doctor also justifies Japanese domination over Korea with an alleged emphasis on Japanese “evolutionary” superiority. Within this discourse, “comfort women” are regarded as “disposable commodities” for the colonizing army (147) and treated as “public toilets” “to bury their excrement” (193).¹⁴ Moreover, when the women lose their use-value for “comfort” due to venereal disease or pregnancy, they are ruthlessly killed or burnt.

Keller associates Soon Hyo’s female body with the social body that is mobilized with her own society’s inability to protect their female members like Soon Hyo. In Akiko’s narration of her family, Keller critiques the rhetoric of nation as family, while revealing the gendered dowry system, which leads to the sexual and economic exploitation of Soon Hyo’s body. Soon Hyo is deceived and sold for her eldest sister’s dowry. Soon Hyo’s eldest sister, fearing “that [the soldiers] would take her too,” tells Soon Hyo, “No mother, no father. We all have to make our lives” (18-9). Keller

¹⁴ For the problems of the terminology of “comfort women,” see Chunghee Sarah Soh in Stetz and Oh, eds. and Chung (especially 220-22). Soh unravels the implications of the multiple ideological representations of “comfort women.” They have been ideologically constructed as “comfort women” or “gifts of emperor,” “public toilets,” and “military sexual slaves.” The first naming is based on Japanese patriarchal fascism; the second on masculinist sexism. Both ideologies essentialize male sexual drives as “natural” and thus naturalize institutionalized sexual violence as inevitable. The third, radical re-naming is based on feminist humanitarianism.

explains: “When Akiko’s sister sells her, I wanted to show that she was betrayed by someone close to her, someone in her own family. I wanted to show the betrayal that some of these comfort women felt by their own country’s inability to protect them” (Young-Oak Lee 152).

Describing the female body as the social body, Keller deliberately re-presents women as subjects of resistance against colonial violence. Keller is critical of gendered discourse that posits only males as national subjects. In Keller’s figuration of women as subjects of national history, the personal is the political and, in Korean colonial space, therefore, the national. Through Induk, another comfort woman renamed Akiko 40, the unhomed female body is equated with the colonized nation. Keller explains that “the suffering of the comfort women can represent both the suffering of Korean women and the nation of Korea itself” (Young-Oak Lee 151). Induk resists the violation of her body, reclaiming her Korean name and linking her body to Korea. Akiko remembers her first night as the new Akiko 41:

In Korean and in Japanese, [Induk] denounced the soldiers, yelling at them to stop their invasions of her country and her body. Even as they mounted her, she shouted: I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive. I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do, I am a daughter, I am a sister. Men left her stall quickly, some crying, most angrily joining the line for the woman next door. All through the night she talked, reclaiming her Korean name, reciting her family genealogy, even chanting the recipes her mother had passed on to her. Just before daybreak, they took her out of her stall and into the woods . . . (20)

Induk resists Japanese soldiers' gendered and sexualized violence on her body. With the powerful statement, "I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive," she connects the subjugation of the female body and the nation. For Induk, reclaiming her body and name means reclaiming Korea against Japanese colonization. Induk is murdered for her further defiance in the woods, while "bellowing the Korean national anthem even after the soldiers had knocked her teeth out" (71). Her murdered body is displayed for "[a] lesson, [the soldiers] told the rest of us, warning us into silence" (21). Through Induk's desperate reclaiming and death in defiance, the personal becomes the national; the private body becomes the most public one.

For Keller, for whom Theresa Hak Kyung Cha as well as Kingston provides a powerful model in her writing of *Comfort Woman*, official narratives of *history* are too slender to carry the abused subjects' feelings and thoughts. Describing the enfleshed effects of colonial unhomings, Cha writes in *Dictée* that the colonized subjects' memory of them "pricks the skin, stabs the flesh" to the extent that words become "abstract" beyond their signifying function (32). Thus, only with "the volume of blood, the physical substance blood," can one "measure," "record" and "document" women's historical experience and the truths of colonial violence (Cha 32). Soon Hyo/Akiko echoes Cha: "I knew about blood . . . and pain sharp enough to cut your body from your mind. But I could not form the words" (106). Her stories and memories throughout the text are replete with "words connected to blood and death" (192); in particular, they are so in her words to Beccah who listens to the testimony tape. Through her special box for Beccah, she transmits to her daughter what Cha calls women's "blood memory," a

memory that is “physical enough . . . to the very flesh and bone, to the core” (Cha 32) to radically revise the too slender, too abstract expressions for women’s experience.

Akiko suffers another unhoming through the gendered, sexualized technologies of patriarchal domination in postcolonial Korea. With the help of Induk’s spirit and Manshin Ahjima, an ex-shaman, Akiko escapes from the camp under the cover of night right after her abortion. She finally shelters herself with American missionaries, who have established a Christian mission under the guise of a match company in Pyongyang from the start of the Japanese occupation in 1910. An orphaned girl, Akiko has literally no “home” to return to. More significantly, there is no “home” for an escaping “comfort woman.” Akiko is abandoned again in her native “home,” Korea. As Chungmoo Choi and Hyunah Yang argue in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, the ideology of female chastity has silenced the former “comfort women,” because they fear the social stigmatization of them as promiscuous. Aware of this mechanism of social stigmatization, which is, according to Soon-ah in *A Gift of the Emperor*, “worse than a death sentence” (106), Akiko keeps silent: “I refused to tell [anyone] where I had come” (93). At the end of the war, she can not think of returning to her sisters. Seeing that the other girls under the missionaries have “somewhere they could return to” and thus now excitedly expect to “find their families” and to “pick up the threads of their lives” (100), she knows that she has no place and no person to return to. There is no place for raped women in the Korean neo-Confucian hierarchy, whatever the cause of the rape. Akiko

narrates: “I knew, had known the moment I crossed the Yalu and entered the recreation camps, that my home village of Sulsulham¹⁵ was as far away as heaven for me” (101).

It is now manifest that, with her strategic use of the trope of violated women as a colonized nation, Keller performs a double play in redefining women both as victims and as subjects of national history. Compelled to write this fiction by the silence surrounding military sexual slavery, Keller recognizes a more pervasive, gendered social mechanism of foreclosure of women’s lives and expression (Johnson 105; Young-Oak Lee 145, 158). Keller is very critical of the masculinist use of women. Raped women function as a symbolic ground on which the colonized imagine themselves as having a shared identification with the colonized nation while at the same time re-ascribing the gendered, sexualized nature of colonization to the “private” matters of women (Kim and Choi, eds.; Grewal and Kaplan, eds.; Yang 1997). As for the discursive construction of these women in postcolonial Korea, Choi notes: “the troping of comfort women as raped nation is a powerful point. It strikes a deep chord of shame in the colonized and invokes nationalistic sentiments that inevitably narrativize an account of comfort women as untainted virgins” (*positions* 5.1, x). Simultaneously, with a patriarchal ideology of female chastity that serves to screen their masculine inability to keep their land and women, Korean males have been actively complicit in forgetting the issue instead of learning from the historical lesson (Choi, *positions* 5. 1, x). While strategically using the common trope of violated women as a colonized nation in order to foreground the

¹⁵ Sulsulham means pathetic loneliness. Keller notes: it is “a rather unusual name for a village. . . . But I wanted a fictional place to echo the feelings, the isolation Akiko felt” (Young-Oak Lee 156).

female body as “the site for history’s most intricate invasions” (to use Bhabha’s phrase 9), Keller also reveals that it is the very patriarchal ideologies and nationalist sentiments inherent in the trope that drives Akiko into such a profound sense of shame and guilt that she keeps silent about the violence committed against her for the rest of all her life.

Through Richard Bradley, one of the missionaries who provide Akiko food and protection after her escape from the camp, Keller elaborates a historical continuity of Korean women’s subordination for national contest between male subjects. In the mission, Akiko is re-named Mary and remains faceless and voiceless. As Keller herself and critics note, Akiko’s relationship with Richard alludes to South Korea’s subsequent cultural and economic subordination to the U.S. in its postcolonial nation-building (Johnson 154; Chuh 18; Kun Jong Lee 450; Yoneyama 70). With a Christian rhetoric of redemption, Richard pushes Akiko to “confess” what she had done so that he can help her, interpellating her as Akiko, a “comfort woman’s” name. For Richard, a former “comfort woman” is a “fallen woman” who has committed “the sins of the body” (94). Seemingly, Richard relies on his doctrine of Christian redemption; however, the heart of his sexual desire is not different from that of the Japanese soldiers. With his sensual touches on her body, Akiko feels only “as if he slapped [her] with the name the soldiers had assigned to [her]”; she sees “a secret” betrayed “in his hooded eyes, in his breathing, sharp and fast, and in the way his hands . . . wanted to fly up against [her] half-starved girl’s body” (93-4). Sensing what Richard wants from her, Akiko sees no difference between Richard and the soldiers. Considering Akiko’s colonial and postcolonial situation in Korea, Richard represents a Korean version of the myth that Spivak

discusses in detail in the colonial and postcolonial Indian context: American men saving Korean women from Japanese colonialism.¹⁶ Keller demystifies the myth, showing that Japanese gendered objectification of Korean women's sexuality is replaced and furthered by the U.S. Kandice Chuh observes that Richard's "motivations for 'helping' Akiko resonate strongly with her understanding of the use of her body by the Japanese military: in both cases, that body functions as a vessel for the desires of gendered empire" (18).

Akiko feels her marriage to Richard and immigration to the U.S. as another unhoming. Out of necessity and practicality, Akiko accepts Richard's proposal and is forcedly baptized. But after baptism, she only feels "empty, desolate, abandoned" (103). On their first night, Akiko feels herself as if "trapped under the bodies of innumerable men" again (106). Moreover, Richard's Christian rhetoric is not dissimilar to Korean patriarchal ideologies of female chastity, shame, and female sexuality. When she refuses to remain silent about her experience as a former "comfort woman" more than twenty years later in the U.S, Richard strikes Akiko down, "pushing her into the damp ground in an attempt to cover her mouth"; and he finally identifies her as "a prostitute" (196). Keller juxtaposes two contrasting views. For Soon Hyo/Akiko, being a "comfort woman" is about forcedly "laying down for a hundred men — and each one of them [is] Saja, Death's Demon Soldier — over and over," and thus about "bodies that were

¹⁶ As for the myth of "white men saving brown women from brown men" in the context of Indian *sati* (widow-burning), see Spivak (1999, chapter 3, which is an extended version of her famous 1988 article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). Lisa Yoneyama observes: Keller's novel disrupts "the uniformly progressive narrative of the United States as the generous liberator and guardian of the free world" as well as "the dominant American narrative of the Second World War" (70).

burned and cut and thrown like garbage to wild dogs by the river” (195). For Richard, what his wife is saying is “corrupt talk” spoken out of “perversity” (195). He orders silence under the name of “protect[ing] our daughter, with your silence, from that shame” (196). Although their relationship shows the patriarchal subjection of women in domestic space, which is supported by Richard’s Christian doctrine, Keller hints at the continuity of the gendered objectification of Korean women’s sexuality by Americans after World War II.¹⁷

Re-locating Akiko in the U.S., Keller further imagines the unhomeliness of postcolonial modernity. As a character, Richard is involved with Akiko’s subsequent experiences of “unhomely” conditionings. As a narrative device, he helps make plausible the presence of a former Korean sex slave woman in the U.S. As if he had no family, Richard continues “his odyssey across the United States” from New York to Florida, lecturing on “Spreading the Light: My Experience in the Obscure Orient” (107), and Akiko is displayed as a symbol of “the Obscure Orient.” Richard employs an orientalist discourse to highlight his “self-sacrificing” mission in a third world country. Wandering from church to church, Akiko comes to see the U.S. as “[a] country of excess and extravagance” (109).¹⁸ Like Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*, Akiko finally

¹⁷ Critics argue that through Richard, Keller suggests Korean subordination to American neo-colonialism after Japanese colonialism. See, for example, Chu (69); Duncan (80-182); Jody Kim (69, 72); Kun Jong Lee (448-50); Yoneyama (70). In *Fox Girl*, Keller portrays another version of “comfort women” in the American military bases in Korea called “America Towns.” Catherine Moon provides an excellent account of “fox girls.” As for women and military bases, see Enloe (ch.4); Joanne Nagel (ch. 6).

¹⁸ As Kingston shows in *China Men* (1980), Ronald Takaki (1998) suggests, and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong makes explicit in the subtitle of her 1993 book, Asian immigrants enter the U.S “from necessity” and move “to extravagance.” It is no wonder that Akiko, like Kingston’s Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior* (1976), sees “extravagance” everywhere in American life,

comes to a conclusion: “When you see [America] for the first time, it glitters, beautiful, like a dream. But then, the longer you walk through it, the more you realize that the dream is empty, false, sterile. You realize that you have no face and no place in this country” (110). Considering her homeless life with her wandering husband, it is no wonder that Akiko re-homes herself through her U.S.-born daughter.

Having experienced colonial and postcolonial conditions both with her enforced and willing crossing of cultures, Akiko reflects a profoundly “unhomely” complexity: “the world-*in-the-home*,” in Bhabha’s words (11). As Lisa Yoneyama notes, Akiko’s body bears multifaceted traces of gender, sexuality, and class in Korean colonial history; of Korean people’s cultural subordination to the U.S.; and of the racial marginalization of Asian immigrants (70). As such, it is the most political body. Through Akiko, Keller reveals the profoundly gendered and sexualized nature of modern history: the most private “home” turns out to be the most “unhomely,” public battle ground. In her description of how the unbearable weight of Akiko’s multifaceted history is pressed into such a world-*in-the-body*, Keller depicts from a feminist perspective what Bhabha argues: “the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (11). With the “unhomely” complexity that Akiko embodies, Keller criticizes the distinction between what should

because thrift is a “feminine virtue” as well as a deeply ingrained way of life in the poor country. In her cogent study of structural affinities of the 20th century Asian American literature, Wong points out that the recurring theme of “necessity and extravagance” depicts Asian immigrants’ life and aspirations in the U.S. Keller’s brief use of “necessity and extravagance” echoes Kingston. As she locates herself in Asian American women’s literary tradition (Hong 14; Young-Oak Lee 147), Keller echoes themes, images, and language of Asian American female writers, celebrating women’s genealogy. Keller emulates Kingston’s “ghost” story, “No Name Woman,” the central motive of which are also silence and haunting. Keller commends Kingston “for giving [her] a whole new perspective on what Asian American literature can be” (Hong 14).

remain secret and hidden and what should come to light. In other words, it is the very distinction between the private/personal and the public/national and its persistent association with the feminine/masculine that Akiko's body reveals as profoundly "unhomely."

Trauma, Shamanist Agency, and a Subaltern Ethics

Keller weaves the trope of ghosts with Korean shamanism in order to make space for subaltern agency in the face of trauma. For Keller, haunting serves as the genesis of her writing. In this text, there are at least three kinds of haunting. The writerly haunting Keller experienced after listening to a survivor's testimony is exactly what Dominick LaCapra terms "empathic unsettlement."¹⁹ The writerly haunting is reflected in the novel's double story of trauma and double haunting. Inside the text, there is the haunting return of trauma's belated effects; and there is Induk's ghostly "haunting" as a peculiar possession. To open up a space for agency, Keller re-arranges these two hauntings in a compatible relation of countering. Keller transposes Induk, a feminist nationalist (Chu 71), into an empowering ghost with whom Akiko finally becomes a shaman. Only with traumatic haunting, from which Akiko suffers, Keller's fiction might be a recolonizing representation of former "comfort women." For Keller, the single emphasis on victimization of women undermines women's agency. Clearly aware of

¹⁹ In his cogent re-examination of "truth," historiography, and trauma, LaCapra radicalizes the role of affect and empathy in writing history and trauma. He notes: in writing history, empathy enables us to counter "victimization, including self-victimization" as well as to counter "objectification and splitting of object from subject, including self-as-subject from self-as-object"; as such, empathy is "attending to . . . [an] affective dimension of the experience of the others" (40). "Empathic unsettlement" takes place in secondary witnesses, often producing some stylistic effects in writing (40). It is empathy without overidentification with victims, which enables secondary witnesses and readers to resist sensationalizing as well as sentimentalizing victims. See note 4 as for Keller.

this, Keller elaborates Induk's "haunting" "as a type of political consciousness" (Gordon 182); Induk as a ghostly figure is a direct product of the violent history but also has her own desire. Rendering Induk as such, Keller makes possible one form by which something lost and made invisible returns spectrally with a profound demand: transformative recognition and political redress.²⁰

Keller complicates her representation of the "unhomely" world of colonial and postcolonial modernity through Akiko's trauma, which facilitates the eruption of the violent past in the trans-Pacific present. The past returns to the present, haunting, as shown whenever Soon Hyo/Akiko lapses into the state of trance. Indeed, this fiction begins with Beccah's fear about her mother's frequent trances. Preparing food for the fifth annual remembrance ritual (*chesa*) for Beccah's dead father Richard, Soon Hyo/Akiko confesses that "I killed your father," which is soon revealed not to be factual (1). Beccah does not believe that her mother knows what she is saying, and instead fears that her mother is "slipping into one of her trances" (2). Through Beccah's filtered memory of her ten-year-old days, Soon Hyo/Akiko is initially introduced as a powerless victim of spells or of the spirits that Beccah cannot comprehend. For Beccah, her house is "full of mourning" (8); her mother seems like "a wandering *yongson* ghost," often lapsing "into a darkness of her own" (5). What she deeply fears is that her mother's "insanity" is true and real. Whenever her mother falls into a trance, she is afraid that

²⁰ For a thought-provoking discussion of "ghostly matters" in contemporary life, see Gordon (1997). Keller's writing exactly resonates to what Gordon argues: "to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories" (17); "Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (8).

“someone would hear [her] mother’s craziness and lock her up” (12). Not knowing her mother’s past as a military sexual slave, of course, Beccah can not know that her mother’s trance state signals trauma, revealing the psychic cost of the experience. Facing her mother’s death, Beccah, an obituary reporter for a local newspaper, finds that she does “not have the facts for even the most basic, skeletal obituary” (26). Not knowing how and where to start imagining her mother’s life, she observes: “When I was a child, it did not occur to me that my mother had a life before me” (26). In this regard, Beccah’s narrative is about her gradual reading of a palimpsest that is embodied in her mother’s entire life in spite of social erasure of the traces.

Keller signifies this palimpsest of modernity’s violence with trauma. Keller describes Soon Hyo/Akiko’s traumatic body both as a kind of memory that haunts official memory and as a site where survivor’s agency counters the belated effects of trauma. Forced to be a military sexual slave, Soon Hyo/Akiko’s bodily and psychological “insides [have been] too bruised and battered” (15). Keller describes Soon Hyo/Akiko’s trauma as a complex social sign-phenomenon. As a sign with profound excesses, trauma is a palimpsest that only partly shows history’s forgotten violence; it requires what Adrienne Rich calls “revision,” a radical approach from critical directions in order to read things rendered invisible. As a bodily witness to history, trauma is a deeply social phenomenon. Soon Hyo has become Akiko, but the latter can never return to the former. There is an irreducible break; Soon Hyo/Akiko is the same-but-not-the-same. The slashed relationship of Soon Hyo/Akiko — a continuity with an irreparable break — points to the place of trauma. As a survivor, Soon

Hyo/Akiko enacts the belated effects of trauma compulsively but not consciously. Her repeated enactments reveal women's disruptive memories that are silenced in national "memory."

At the beginning of the novel, Keller gives her initial definition of trauma: the state in which "I was already dead . . . [but] my body moved on" (15). Trauma means survival, yet with wounds "impossible to properly heal" or unsuturable cuts (15). Keller describes trauma as a radical, invaginated cut that breaks the holistic unity of the body and the mind. After she desperately escapes from the camp, Akiko is described as having lost her soul. From the holes of the broken unity of the body and the mind, the voices of Soon Hyo/Akiko's wounds frequent her "normal" reality, in which she is a caring mother who does "not want [her] baby to experience even a moment of insecurity, of want" (37). Soon Hyo/Akiko's trauma makes itself manifest through her repeated enactments of Korean shamanist chanting, dancing, and rituals as well as of her past as a military sexual slave. For Beccah, her mother's state of trance means powerlessness and profound loss of consciousness. With her mother, for whom she thinks she has been "the guardian of her life" (125) until she comes to listen to her mother's tape, the young Beccah is concerned with what she has to do as the only person who takes care of the tranced mother — "call Auntie Reno, buy enough oranges and incense sticks to last two weeks, secure the double locks on the doors" (2) — because when "the spirits called to her, my mother would leave me and slip inside herself, to somewhere I could not and did not want to follow" (4). To use Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma, Soon Hyo/Akiko's uncontrollably compulsive enactment is a bodily "voice that is paradoxically released

through the wound,” “the moving and sorrowful *voice* that cries out” for a transformative recognition (2), and “the very attempt to *claim one’s own survival* (64; original italics).

Soon Hyo/Akiko’s repeated enactments of her past and later Korean shamanism-based rituals are her unique attempts to claim her own survival in the face of the incomprehensibility of survival itself. Indeed, Soon Hyo/Akiko’s narration begins with her own question of how she could survive eventually to have a daughter: “The baby I could keep came when I was already dead. . . . it is almost a miracle. . . . So this little one is a surprise” (15). Her initial answer to her own questioning is the body/mind split: “That is why, twenty years after my body has left my spirit behind at the camp, my body was able to have this baby” (15). In turn, thirty years later, Beccah is also challenged by the incomprehensibility and thus the meanings of her mother’s survival, while listening to her mother’s tape. Crying, she narrates: “I could not view my mother, whom I had always seen as weak and vulnerable, as one of the ‘comfort women’ she described. . . . I could not imagine her surviving what she described, for I cannot imagine myself surviving. How could my mother have married, had a child, if she had been forced into the camps?” (194). Exploring the meanings of the survival of trauma, Keller chooses a “dreamlike” narration that flows “in and out of time, in and out of the spiritual and physical world,” trying “to replicate how [traumatic] memory works” (Keller in Johnson 101). In doing so, she imaginatively delves into Soon Hyo/Akiko’s post-camp interiority. Crossing the Yalu, the border river between China and Korea, in her escape, Akiko has already been in a traumatic body/mind split.

The frequent returns of haunting images and sounds to the surviving Akiko reveal the effects of the atrocities she experienced. After she returns to Korea, Akiko is often unable to distinguish her present from her camp situation. The haunting memories frequent her whenever she stops working in the mission:

Whenever I stopped cleaning or gluing to stretch cramping fingers or crack my neck, I heard the sounds of a woman being kicked. . . . Or I heard a man sigh loudly as he urinated on the body where he had just pumped his seed. And always, a low rumbling underlying every step I took at the mission house, I heard the grinding of trucks delivering more men and more military supplies: food, rations, ammunitions, boots, and new women to replace the ones that died, their bodies erupting in pus. (65)

The above passage reveals that trauma has belated effects that are beyond conscious control. Caruth's observations on trauma resonate with the above: "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event"; more significantly, trauma is experienced "as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment" (4-5; 10). As in the above quotation, Keller describes Akiko's trauma as a constant return of the event with its haunting images and sounds. Akiko further performs a traumatic compulsion when she sees Korean soldiers. Passing Panmunjom, she tries to run away as soon as she sees them. She feels as if their eyes were studying her face, breasts, and hips, judging her worth as their "comfort woman." Even twenty years later when she gives birth to Beccah, surrounded by doctors, her mind slips back to the camps; she feels as if she were pinned down again on the abortion bed.

After Beccah's birth, Keller subtly changes Akiko's powerless interpellations to the haunting images into Korean shamanist trances, by which Soon Hyo/Akiko is gradually able to counter the hauntings. It is noticeable that at the core of this countering is Induk. Just before her father dies of complications, Beccah witnesses her parents' quarrel. Her mother is dancing under possession in the yard, and her father begs her to come inside so that their neighbors will not see her. Associating the demon-possessed Mary Magdalena in the Bible with his wife, Richard forces Soon Hyo/Akiko to bow down before God so that she will be free from the devil spirits. Interpreting God as every man, including Richard, Soon Hyo/Akiko resolutely refuses: "I will never, never again lay down for any man" (195). Her compulsive enactments revitalize *a* past against her will or consciousness, showing a recursive temporality that disrupts the alleged pastness of the past. Connecting Soon Hyo/Akiko's traumatic stagings of her psychic hauntings to Bhabha's performative site of disruptive enunciation, Jodi Kim cogently comments that her shamanist dancing becomes "a site in which imposed silences are challenged and enunciation becomes possible" (63-4).

With her transpositional use of Korean shamanism, Keller makes Akiko's story of trauma into a feminist narrative memory through Beccah's restoration of her mother's true name.²¹ Soon Hyo/Akiko's move away from traumatic compulsion is made more

²¹ In the late 1990's in the wake of transnational discursive formation of military sexual slavery by Japan during World War II, three Korean Americans' fictions about "comfort women" were published: Keller's (1997), Park's *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), and Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999). Lee's novel focuses on a life-long hidden psychic dilemma of a male protagonist: a Japanese-adopted Korean and later Japanese immigrant in the U.S., who had worked as a medical officer in the Japanese army. Lee's novel is problematic in that military sexual slave women are objectified in the author's exploration of a male psyche. Albeit a vivid, realistic representation of the historical atrocities, Park's novel relies on a romantic frame in which men

clearly manifest after Richard's death, twenty five years after her escape from the camp. That is, it is as an immigrant single-mother that she gradually transforms herself into a more active agent. Using a mother-daughter narrative, Keller appropriates feminist potential of Korean shamanism for Soon Hyo/Akiko's countering of the hauntings. For Keller, Korean shamanism is "a very woman centered tradition," "a tradition that exists outside the cultural [that is, patriarchal] norms for women in Korea," and that "also illuminates post traumatic stress syndrome" (Lieu).²² For Soon Hyo/Akiko, Korean shamanism also serves as a mechanism for mourning and remembering the sex slave women's solitary, completely forgotten deaths, including her own first "death." Observing that both traumatic compulsion and Korean shamanist rituals are not consciously performed, Keller elaborates a transpositional connection between the two. She explains that Akiko's story mirrors "exactly posttraumatic reaction," and that she connects traumatic body/mind split to a peculiar possession observed in Korean shamanism (Johnson 101). Using Korean shamanism, Keller describes Induk as the very ghost who initiates Soon Hyo/Akiko into shamanism. By using Induk's "possession" as a strategy, Soon Hyo/Akiko exerts her own agency beyond victimization as well as against the haunting past.

are guides and "saviors." Park's central character Soon-ah is helped and "saved" by a conscientious Japanese news reporter. Without him, she could not escape and survive. In addition, Soon-ah remains a father's "faithful" daughter throughout the novel. After Soon-ah happens to witness her mother raped by a Japanese officer, she "couldn't look at her [mother's] face," thinking "somehow [her mother] was dishonest, unclean, and had fallen out of God's grace" (23). Most of all, Park identifies Soon-ah and other "comfort women" only as "victims," as shown in her dedication of her novel to "all *victims* of forced sex-slavery in Japanese military *brothels* during World War II" as well as her explicit narrative strategy (emphases added).

²² As she acknowledges in her interviews and in the acknowledgement page of this fiction, Keller consulted and studied Youngsook Kim Harvey's research (1980) on Korean shamans.

Elaborating an enabling bond of women, Keller makes it increasingly clear that Soon Hyo/Akiko's tranced enactment of Korean shamanism-based dancing, chanting and ritual is both a corporeal memory and her own unique way of mourning.²³ For Beccah, who fears her mother's leaving her into an incomprehensible darkness while perceiving her tranced mother's acts as only "rantings and ravings" (5), Soon Hyo/Akiko later explains that "it's not a matter of leaving you, but of retrieving something that I lost" (48). When Akiko is led to the Pyongyang mission, Manshin Ahjima, an ex-shaman who has seemingly converted to Christianity for food and support from the missionaries, teaches her how to find lost things: "Find the place of darkness within yourself . . . and imagine what you have lost" (59). At the ex-shaman's urging, Akiko thinks only of her mother, but soon she comes to see Induk as her mind flies into her own darkness. Following the ex-shaman's teaching that "a woman must find her own way" (59), Akiko compulsively cries for Induk's spirit to come to her again (as it did first in her escape): "And always, always I prayed her back to me. I needed her protection" (95). What Akiko is trying to *reconstruct* is Induk as a powerful counterforce against the frequent hauntings that "like all that was evil, would wait in the shadows, shape-shifting and patient, hoping for a chance to swallow you whole" (67).

²³ For detailed readings of Keller's use of Korean shamanism with different foci, see Kun Jong Lee and Tina Chen. Lee speculates that "Cha's feminist reworking of *Princess Pari* becomes the model of Keller's adaptation of the shamanistic narrative" (436). Noting that Soon Hyo/Akiko's becoming a shaman-as-an-agent is "a fundamental aspect of her Korean-ness," Chen argues that Keller uses Korean shamanism against U.S. cultural nationalism as well as Japanese colonization (123). I focus on Induk as an integral part of an enabling bond of women, which is one of Keller's key themes in this fiction as well as a key to feminist politics.

At the core of Soon Hyo/Akiko's eventual transformation into a survivor-agent capable of leaving to Beccah a significant legacy is Induk. Induk is the spectral center to the fiction. Induk's spectral centrality to Soon Hyo/Akiko's life points to a paradoxical simultaneity of historical agency and the place of trauma animated in the present. By giving Induk a spectral centrality to this fiction, as well as to Soon Hyo/Akiko's life, Keller strategically uses the trope of ghosts and weaves it with Korean shamanism that has some potential to break subordination of women. In the second Akiko chapter, Induk is described as a guiding ghost who pushes Akiko to go on walking during her escape. Akiko comes to experience a spectral unity with Induk. When Akiko attempts suicide in the river, Induk's spirit fills Akiko's belly and forces her to walk on, finally taking her to Manshin Ahjima, another guide to the missionaries. In this scene, Induk is described as a spectral force to powerfully vitalize Akiko's "instinct for survival in the blood and bones" (39). Through Manshin Ahjima,²⁴ Keller gives reader a brief explanation of the spectral unity of Akiko's "empty body" (36) and Induk's spirit. The ex-shaman tells Akiko: "Olppajin-saram. You've lost your soul. That is why you came to the graveyard. You were trying to steal someone else's spirit, a wandering spirit, maybe, one that was confused about where it belonged" (57). An "olppajin-saram," one who loses her soul between this world and the next, Akiko invites Induk's spirit into her "empty body" when Induk first appears to her at a graveyard near the Yalu river. According to Manshin Ahjima, to restore the unity of the body and soul requires "a pyong-gut, a healing ceremony," performed by a Korean female shaman (57). Akiko

²⁴ *Manshin Ahjima* means a female shaman. As for *manshin* in Korean shamanism, see Kendall.

gets no *pyong-gut* because she has no money and also because Manshin Ahjima, an apparent Christian convert, refuses to perform the ceremony (*gut*). Given no *pyong-gut*, Soon Hyo/Akiko by and for herself reconstructs Induk as the very initiator for her becoming a shaman. Soon Hyo/Akiko's life with Induk is a kind of life-long *pyong-gut*, a ceremony designed to heal the traumatic wounds.

Keller strongly suggests an enabling bond of women of resistance throughout the text, and in particular when describing Akiko's escape. The guides for Akiko are a military sexual slave woman's spirit, her mother, and a female shaman. To the escaping Akiko, the image of her mother constantly overlaps with Induk: the guiding spirit "would become Induk and my mother, and in turn my mother's mother and an old woman dressed in" traditional Korean dress (54). As I discussed in the previous section, Induk is an embodiment of women's resistance as national subjects, while she, like Soon Hyo, is simultaneously one of the most abjected beings under both colonization and the traditional Korean patriarchal hierarchy. Like Kingston's Brave Orchid, Soon Hyo's mother is a modern woman educated in a modern women's college established by Americans in colonial Korea. As a "student"- "revolutionary" (182), she actively participates in anti-colonial struggles, for which she is forced to fake a death in order not to be arrested and then secretly sent to an alien country to marry a man whom she does not know. Manshin Ahjima had cared for people's unfulfilled desire and tormented souls. As a former female shaman, she belongs to one of the most marginalized groups in Korean society. However, all of the guiding women are powerful in their will to choose death and/or care for others' lives. In her extensive study of women and Korean

shamanism, Laurel Kendall comments on Korean women's lives: "Public powerless[ness] and private strength, this contradiction permeates a Korean woman's entire life. . . . In [household or] *kut* [or *gut*, a prevailing Korean ritual performed by a female shaman] she transmutes this contradiction into high drama and comedy," subverting her subordinate role (164). Guided by "publicly powerless" yet "privately strong" female spirits, Akiko realizes that she "[is] walking with [her female] ancestors" (53).

Using the spectral figure as a significant counter-force, Keller both excavates and critiques what is made spectral by masculinist memory. Induk is the regenerative force that transform the helpless Akiko into a survivor-agent Soon Hyo/Akiko. As such, Induk is a "haunting" figure who continuously requires mourning, remembrance, and redress of forgotten social injustice. In their first encounter during her escape, Akiko hears Induk's spectral voice urging her to survive in order to remember "us," "comfort women": "No one performed the proper rites of the dead. For me. For you. Who was there to cry for us in *kok*, announcing our death? Or to fulfill the duties of *yom*: bathing and dressing our bodies, combing our hair, trimming our nails, laying us out? Who was there to write our names, to even know our names and to remember us?" (38). (All her life in her shamanist rituals, Soon Hyo/Akiko performs *kok*, *yom*, mourning, and annual remembrance for military sexual slave women, exactly as the spectral Induk demands.) After a long period when Akiko conjures her in the mission in order to block herself from the haunting images of the camp, Induk's spirit finally returns to Akiko. Induk chokes Akiko, indicting her again for leaving her dead body without any proper funeral.

As Induk's demand and indictment reveal, Keller evokes a ghost as a "social figure" that returns with its own desire. Providing an intriguing idea of ghosts as social figures generated "*out of a concern for justice*" (64), Gordon argues that "the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investing it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). Induk's repeated question about why Akiko left her body abandoned reveals the desire of this particular ghost from a "dense site" of Korean colonial condition. In her ghostly return to Akiko, Induk demands what Gordon notes about ghostly matters: "a different kind of knowledge, a different kind of acknowledgement" (64). Noticeably, it is only after Akiko has the courage to envision Induk with a silent yet intense affirmation that Induk "offered [Akiko] salvation" (96). Akiko confesses first and honestly her fear of death. Now looking at "the details of [Induk's] body," Akiko intensely affirms the latter's abandoned body in the woods as "beautiful" (96). Akiko's conjuring of Induk, which Kendall would argue is similar to Korean shamans' communication with the dead, is peculiarly used against the hauntings of the traumatic past.

With her powerful description of how Induk resists and is killed, Keller deliberately represents the spectral Induk in a transformative figure that enhances Akiko's subaltern agency to transform her troubling situation. Describing Soon Hyo/Akiko's relationship with Induk as very intimate, sometimes with sexual density, Keller connects subaltern agency to ethics of care. Even to the young Beccah, Induk is "the most intimate of her [mother's] spirits" (169). During Akiko's escape, Induk, like a mother, provides "her breast, which turned into an offering of freshly unearthed

ginseng” (37); with the ginseng, Akiko could walk on. When she is giving birth to Beccah, she completely identifies herself with Induk, cutting herself off from the Japanese doctor’s image. Against the haunting images of the camp, Induk “comes in singing, entering with full voice, filling me so that there is no me except for her, Induk” (36). Beccah’s healthy birth is parallel to Soon Hyo/Akiko’s re-birth when she is giving her breast-milk to her baby, while given Induk’s tender care. With her daughter’s birth, Soon Hyo/Akiko deliberately *reconstructs* Induk as her own Birth Grandmother spirit. By substituting Induk for “Samshin Holmoni,” the original Birth Grandmother spirit, who takes care of babies and mother, and to whom her parents would have devoted some offerings in a hope of a son (117), Soon Hyo/Akiko stands against the Korean pro-son ideology. It is always “after a long conference with Induk the Birth Grandmother” (83) that Soon Hyo/Akiko performs something to protect her daughter. Soon Hyo/Akiko thinks of Induk as another, enabling self in herself, “who followed [her] not only across the country but across the world, to become [her] guardian” (104). It is Induk who helps Akiko re-home in the U.S., when she initially finds “no place” (110) for herself. While she is visiting Richard’s mother’s house to mourn her death, Akiko refuses to help him pack the things and clean the house because of his mother’s “fat spirit” that demands the space (111). This scene suggests that Akiko already has a shamanist vision able to see the worlds of the dead. In their spectral unity — Induk in Akiko’s dreaming body — the trans-Pacific Korean ghost following Akiko lures the American ghost to be pressed and pushed away. Then, Induk inspires Akiko “to make this—the apartment, the city, the state, and America — home [her] own” (113).

Keller's deliberate representation of Induk as an empowering ghost culminates in Soon Hyo/Akiko's shamanistic autoeroticism. This scene is described with such overtly sexual density that Patricia Chu speculates about its possible "lesbian sexuality" (2004, 71):

With infinite care, Induk slides her arms around my back, cradling me into her heat. Her lips press the base of my throat, the hollow underneath my jaw, then travel lower to brush against my nipples. I feel them pulling, drawing my milk, feel the excess liquid trickle against my sides and down my belly. Induk laps it up, her tongue following the meandering trails. . . . I stifle a groan, try to keep my hips still. I cannot. . . . Once, I was not quiet when Induk came to me. (144-45).

In the above, Keller deliberately uses sexual intensity to show how Akiko feels and completely accepts Induk's possession of her. This "possession" should be contextualized in a complete contrast to the Japanese soldiers' and Richard's "possession" of her. As revealed later, Keller appropriates a shamanistic strategy, by which Akiko effectively refuses Richard's sexual subordination of her (Kendall 24; Chen 138).

Reading this scene quoted above as female autoeroticism under a peculiar possession, I would speculate that Keller deliberately foregrounds Akiko's survivor-agency against her domestic subordination. For this, Keller appropriates a possible feminist potential of Korean shamanism. When he witnesses Akiko's sexuality under Induk's possession, Richard says "in his sermon-preaching voice, Ah . . . self-fornication

is a sin” (146; original ellipsis). For Richard, female sexual desire and activity is a “threat” and a “sin”; it should be expressed only in heterosexual, “natural relations” (146). Thus, Richard blames her for being a “succubus” who “exchange[s] natural relations for unnatural ones” (146). Confronting her husband’s accusation of “self-fornication,” Akiko uses her possession by Induk as “a strategy” of the kind Kendall observes in Korean female shamans (24). For Akiko, “possession” is a complete unity with Induk. Akiko defines this unity, which is an “unnatural” sexuality to Richard, as “what happened spiritually”; thus, for her, it cannot be compared to “what went on between men’s and women’s bodies” (146). Akiko then associates “the lust, dark and heavy and animal” in his eyes (146) with the lust and “fear of death” of the Japanese soldiers (148) and reclaims her sexuality and “spiritual” unity with Induk as wholly her own. By describing Akiko’s possession with the potential intensity of a peculiar intimacy, Keller suggests how Akiko enables herself to survive in general and in particular in this scene, to resist her husband’s sexual lust and subordination: “After the night Induk came to me, opening my body to her song, I saw the soldiers’ fear of death and disease in my husband’s eyes. His fear that instead of saving me, he had damned himself. That he could not pass the test his God devised for him. And I knew then that he would not use me again like that. I knew then that he could not” (148).

Similar to the barred yet connected relationship of Soon Hyo/Akiko, Induk is another-me-*in*-me for Soon Hyo/Akiko. Induk is a spectral version of Soon Hyo; Soon Hyo/Akiko is a living, “coward” version of Induk: “I cannot believe she chooses to come

to me, a coward. But I am grateful” (144). As such, Induk comes to take an inextricable, central place in Soon Hyo/Akiko’s heart, as Akiko narrates, for:

we found her skewered body, abandoned alongside the path. We wanted to take her to the river with us to prepare her body for the separation of its spirit. . . . The women from the camp wanted to [perform a proper ritual] for her [as someone she loved should do], but in the end we left her, just as the soldiers had, mounted on the pole, her nakedness only half concealed by the forest’s undergrowth, her eyes dry and open and staring toward the river. (54)

The image of Induk’s body abandoned “twice” follows Akiko wherever she goes. At the core of Soon Hyo/Akiko’s traumatic memories are the naked, pathetic images of the abandoned bodies of the women rather than the brutalizing soldiers. This is why she refuses to separate herself from Induk in spite of “sinbyong, the possession sickness” (58). Akiko’s empathy to the dead Induk is one of the driving motives for Soon Hyo/Akiko’s wanting to be and later being with her spirit. Taking upon herself the task of “comforting” Induk, Soon Hyo/Akiko almost always feels that “Induk is near, also waiting, wanting me” to mourn and remember the forgotten deaths (143).

Through Induk in Soon Hyo/Akiko, Keller envisions an authentic ethics of care of others-as-self and of remembering. Using the term that Gayatri Spivak sharpened from Antonio Gramsci, I would call this “subaltern” ethics, which has been historically spontaneous among subaltern women, although it is barely transmitted through official historiography. As a powerful signifier for such subaltern ethics, Induk–Soon Hyo/Akiko’s relationship envisions ethics and thus politics of *selfing* the other. Induk is

Soon Hyo/Akiko's *selfed other*: an other that Soon Hyo/Akiko cannot and will not otherize, and another self that enables Akiko to restore her othered self, Soon Hyo. For Soon Hyo/Akiko, Induk signifies something that Soon Hyo/Akiko has lost; as such, Induk constantly "haunts" Soon Hyo/Akiko to retrieve it. As such, their complex, very intimate relationship calls for a transformative acknowledgement of the forgotten history. Soon Hyo/Akiko's possession by Induk is a peculiar form of life-long remembering in a spectral or shamanistic unity.²⁵ As Induk constitutes a spectral centrality to Soon Hyo/Akiko's entire life, so Soon Hyo/Akiko constitutes a ghostly centrality to readers as well as to Beccah — the narrative of this fiction starts from Soon Hyo/Akiko's death. With such double spectrality, Keller's text calls for a constant, attentive listening to the voices of the wounds and demands. Similarly, as shown in the sole "Soon Hyo" chapter in which Soon Hyo as Akiko's othered self finally breaks her silence in an intense speech, Induk as Soon Hyo/Akiko's selfed other always murmurs spectrally, calling for remembering the forgotten: "*Induk. Miyoko. Kimiko. Hanako. Akiko. Soon Hi. Soon Mi. Soon Ja. Soon Hyo. So many true names unknown, dead in the heart. So many bodies left unprepared, lost in the river*" (192).

Through this complicated figuration of Induk–Soon Hyo/Akiko, Keller makes Soon Hyo/Akiko a historical agent who moves beyond the victimization of "comfort women." Induk–Soon Hyo/Akiko constantly speak out their need and desire against

²⁵ For another reading of Induk, see Chu (2004). Inspired by Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity, Chu provides an intriguing discussion of the intersubjective formation of Soon Hyo/Akiko's subjectivity through Induk. Chu argues that Induk is "a transcendental Other," "an idealized, pre-Oedipal version of Akiko's mother." I read Induk as a peculiar memory that helps Soon Hyo/Akiko survive and remember sexual slave women's forgotten deaths.

subsequent victimization by Japanese “guilt money” for the survivors, which only serves the continuation of historical amnesia (197). Induk is the ghostly agent to help Soon Hyo/Akiko survive. All her life Soon Hyo/Akiko returns to Induk what the latter wants, as she explains to her daughter what she has performed all her life: “I am crying for the dead. To show proper respect. To show love” (172). For Beccah, her mother becomes a ghostly figure calling for the proper rites for the dead “comfort women” and herself, leaving Beccah her personal archive-box and cassette tape. It is this complex self of Soon Hyo/Akiko that finally passes on a cross-cultural genealogy of women (Korean grandmother – cross-cultural mother – “an American girl” [119]) to Beccah, revealing the violence of history. With this double signification of Soon Hyo/Akiko and her double figuration of Induk as a forced “comfort woman” and a spirit of defiance and unfulfilled demand, Keller suggests that one’s socially othered self can be radically restored by *selfing* the other. This subaltern ethics of selfing the other is a way “of retrieving something that [one] lost” (48), of resisting social silencing and historical amnesia.

A Daughter’s Homing: Toward a Future with Feminist Memories

Through Beccah, *Comfort Woman* becomes a transnational co-remembrance, opening a readerly space of empathy. Keller’s representation of Beccah as an indirect listener of her mother’s testimony is suggestive of the politics of redress. Keller effectively supplements the alternate chapters of Beccah and Akiko, which are our two accesses to the past, with the uniquely singular voice of the sole Soon Hyo chapter at the thematic climax of the novel. This textual structuring allows Keller to elaborately enact

a performative narrative of double-time and double accesses through Beccah and Akiko, whose respective worlds are so different from each other and whose stories are never directly delivered to each other. It is readers that bind such double-time and double accesses. In mediating the two worlds, “we” are also participating in secondary witness. Through this double-time narrative, Keller celebrates women’s genealogy, emphasizing the underlying pattern of women’s resistance and counter-memory. In a recent special issue of *Journal of Asian American Studies* (2003) on “comfort women,” Kandice Chuh, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, and Lisa Yoneyama invariably point out that in Keller’s fiction, transmission of historical memories and construction of a collective subject for political redress do not necessarily posit a stable connection between the victim-survivors and those who identify themselves as agents of secondary witness and redress. Even Beccah can access her mother’s life only through the ghostly voice from the tape and the remains in the special box. Nonetheless, “her discovery of her mother’s story parallels the world’s discovery of the stories of comfort women. They will not die unknown and unrecognized, lost in history,” notes Keller (Young-Oak Lee 155). As shown in Keller’s writing of this fiction, whose main goal is to “build more empathy” and “insight that [readers] might not necessarily have met or understood before” (Young-Oak Lee 153), a collective subject for the politics of memory, witnessing, and redress can emerge more powerfully from a community of empathy. As a subject who is born in the U.S. and is not directly told her mother’s testimony when the latter is alive, Beccah shows that those who have not experienced the violence of history can also actively participate in the politics of redress, as co-actors.

While representing her two central characters' subjective world as incommensurable, Keller foregrounds Beccah's marginal status in the U.S. and thereby avoids idealizing the mother-daughter relationship. Keller repeatedly shows how a daughter of a single, immigrant mother with "no real job skills or experience" (5) has to live in worsening material conditions. As Beccah's memory of her childhood shows, the single-parent family is the site of poverty, where "the rats and cockroaches . . . ruled The Shacks," her cheap apartment complex in a Hawaiian slum (43). Moreover, the spectral centrality to that family is foregrounded in Beccah's narration of her childhood. For Beccah, their house is full of her mother's "long wails of complaints and demands and wishes for the dead" (27) as well as the incomprehensible spirits: "I grew up – in a household of spirits, not one of them my father or the Christian God" (127). In addition, through Auntie Reno, who often condescends to Beccah by saying that "she was the only person who would hire [her] mother" (5), Keller shows how Soon Hyo/Akiko has been exploited under the racializing system of the U.S. As Beccah poignantly complains to her in the last chapter, Auntie Reno has economically exploited her mother under the name of helping Akiko earn a living as a spirit medium. Auntie Reno's racializing exploitation culminates in her attempt to display Soon Hyo/Akiko's dead body as an exoticized object for the visitors' money. Through Auntie Reno, who "isn't a blood relative" to Soon Hyo/Akiko or Beccah (3), Keller implies that an immigrant woman's body could be exploited even after her death in the U.S. system, one of whose general regulators is gendered racialization for economic appropriation.²⁶

²⁶ For a powerful analysis of racializing technologies of gendered race in connection to Asian

Soon Hyo/Akiko's story of agency and trauma is transnationally remembered by her U.S.-born daughter. The Korean immigrant-mother's story is contrasted to and thus enriched by Beccah's "American, present-day viewpoint[, which] helps readers access her mother's story" (Johnson 98). Keller begins this fiction with Beccah. For Soon Hyo/Akiko, Beccah is "an American girl" (119) and the very force to "root [her] to this earth" (117); as such, Beccah is a bridge for her mother, powerfully connecting "the boundary between Korea and America, between life and death" (116). From the first chapter, Keller hints at the belatedness of Beccah's understanding of her mother: "It has taken me nearly thirty years, almost all of my life" (13). It is after her mother's death that Beccah comes to know that her "ghostly" mother has been her "home," a caring mother and the giver of protection (113, 139), although she has always seen her mother as vulnerable and powerless. Considering that she is an obituary reporter who "still could not write [her] mother's obituary" (164), Beccah's narrative is about a process of sifting memory in search of daughterly ways to revisit her mother's life. Kun Jong Lee comments that "through her imaginative dialogue," Beccah's narrative "turns out to be the most elaborate obituary, in which she remembers and consoles not only her mother but also Induk and all the other comfort women" (452). Revisiting her relationship with her mother, Beccah roots her own life and identity in a cross-cultural women's genealogy.

Beccah's narrative shares a recurring theme of contemporary feminist literature: daughters' revision-ary recognition of their mothers' lives, often in their confrontation of

immigrants, see Lisa Lowe (especially chapter 7).

their mothers' mortality. Beccah's process of understanding her mother's life resonates with what Adrienne Rich describes as a feminist countermemory skill against historical amnesia and masculinist historiography. Rich says, "the educated guess is essential to feminist history. . . because [women's] lives have been the most undocumented in the literal sense" (148). Keller hints at this kind of guess in Beccah: "I find myself *second-guessing* my interpretations of her stories, and wonder, now that she is dead, how I should remember her life" (171; emphasis added). Through the Beccah chapters, Keller suggests an asymptotical possibility of transmitting a long buried, historical "truth." A forgotten past can be radically excavated but not fully recaptured. In Beccah's case, such a possibility is made open only after the survivor's death; the possibility of transmitting the truth of traumatic history is utterly asymptotical. This, however, does not mean that it is impossible to transmit a buried truth. Quarreling with Auntie Reno about her mother's funeral, Beccah realizes "that despite her reputation and the hundreds of people who paid in time and money to see her, no one knew her. . . . Not even I, her daughter — the only person who loved her, at least part of the time — really knew her" (140). It is not until she transcribes her mother's cassette tape on which her name is marked that she can understand her mother more fully, discovering her mother's life before her. More ironically, even when Beccah discovers her mother's real name, she can do so only through the ghostly voice from the tape as well as two documents from the American Embassy in Seoul and the Red Cross. Recognizing, albeit slightly, her "lineage, her [mother's] family," Beccah is finally able to guess that her mother's ghostly behaviors are "the ceremony for [Soon Hyo/Akiko] herself" (172). She begins

to *guess* that her mother's patterns of behavior, incomprehensibly mixed with Korean shamanistic elements, are related to her mother's own past, perhaps to traumatic experience.

It is at this moment of Beccah's affective readiness in revisiting her mother that Keller inserts the sole Soon Hyo chapter. In this chapter, Keller, like Cha in *Dictée*, also addresses the 3.1 Independence Movement (1919), insinuating what Soon Hyo/Akiko inherits from her mother. Her *Omoni* — mother in Korean— “died more than once” (175) as a “student”-“revolutionary,” and was “a wife who knew her duty” and “a mother who loved her daughters” in spite of the Korean patriarchal pro-son ideology (182). Soon Hyo/Akiko, sifting through memories, tells her mother's life, by which her daughter comes to know more wholly who Beccah herself is by knowing “who her grandmother is” as well as who her own mother is (183). The sole Soon Hyo chapter affirms a cross-cultural women's genealogy, the affective support from which powerfully fuels an American daughter to lead her life more meaningfully in the U.S. Soon Hyo/Akiko says: “when [Beccah] is older, she will sift through her own memories, and through the box that I will leave for her, come to know her own mother – and then herself as well” (183). In the box, Soon Hyo/Akiko leaves all the traces of her love for her daughter to “know that when she cries she will never be alone” (183).

In order to pass on a trans-Pacific genealogy of women, Soon Hyo/Akiko prepares a special box for her daughter on the twenty-second anniversary of her mother's death. Soon Hyo/Akiko constructs her box both with what she has received from her mother and with what she has kept for her daughter. A subaltern herstory is kept in the

box. It is worth noting what the box contains, which stands in a strong contrast to boxes containing “official history.” In her own special box, Soon Hyo/Akiko’s *Omoni* had kept things from her past and for her future: finger nails from her faked death; newspaper articles on the 3.1 Movement; a red-and-blue wedding dress; gold thread that she was forever saving in case she hopefully gave birth to a son; a fine cloth for her own shroud. Emulating her mother, Soon Hyo/Beccah also constructs her own special box for her daughter: Beccah’s one-hundred-day dress; Beccah’s dried umbilical cord; two official-looking documents containing Akiko’s “true name”; and “a *thin* cassette tape that will, eventually, preserve a few of the pieces, the secrets, of our lives” (183 emphasis added). This “thin” tape suggests what Cha also implies with her emphasis on women’s “blood memory”: the slenderness of language for women’s experience. Soon Hyo/Akiko consciously puts together her mother’s and her own things she has kept for her daughter, telling through the tape about Beccah’s Korean grandmother from her birth to death(s), and her own performance of *kok* (crying for the death) and annual *chesa* (remembrance ritual). For Soon Hyo/Akiko, the box “kept [her] mother’s past and future” as well as her own (183). This “subaltern archive” (Jodi Kim 70) with such seemingly “odd” contents validates Trinh T. Minh-ha’s powerful observation that “[t]he world’s earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women” (121).

The Soon Hyo chapter is an “unofficial” counter-history excluded in the “official” history (Chu 2004; Duncan; Jodi Kim), which serves one of Keller’s central projects in this fiction. Agreeing with Kim’s idea of “subaltern archive,” with which Beccah attentively listens to her mother “utter the inutterable” (70), I would read the sole

Soon Hyo chapter as an *independently transcribed* part of Soon Hyo/Akiko's tape.

Through this tape-chapter, we are told a long hidden story voiced by Soon Hyo. The central message of the taped voice is to remember: "*I sing the names by which I have known you, all of you, so that you will remember. So that I will remember. So that those who come after me will know. . . . So many true names unknown, dead in the heart. So many bodies left unprepared, lost in the river*"; "*Beccah-chan, lead the parade of the dead. . . . When I can no longer perform the chesa[annual remembering ritual] for the spirits, we will look to you to feed us*" (192; 197). The ghostly voice tells Beccah in detail how to perform a proper funeral for her and for the solitary deaths of military sex slave women (*kok, yom*, and annual *chesa*). To provide the "new context" that explains to Beccah why such remembrance rituals are so important, the ghostly voice continues to detail "her accounts of crimes made against each woman she could remember, so many crimes and so many names": in short, "the crimes of men" (194). By leaving this tape not fully transcribed, Keller shows again the slenderness of language for historical violence, on the one hand, and suggests that women's memories do not die with survivors' deaths, on the other hand.

Soon Hyo/Akiko's testimony reveals that she has been a subject of action and that situated resistance forms an underlying pattern of her life in the face of colonial violence and tran-Pacific cultural dislocation. Through the tape, Soon Hyo/Akiko also passes on a lesson which she got from her mother and by which she has survived:

My mother's generation was the first in Korea to learn a new alphabet, and new words for everyday things. She had to learn to answer to a new [Japanese] name,

to think of herself and her world in a new way. To hide her true self. . . . Those are the same lessons my mother taught me, the morals of her stories, and because I learned them early, I was able to survive what eventually killed my mother. Hiding my true self, the original nature of my head, enabled me to survive in the recreation camp and in a new country. (153)

Emulating her mother in her specific situations, Soon Hyo/Akiko has practiced the lesson she had learned from her mother, in her own way. The lesson quoted above suggests that an underlying pattern of Soon Hyo/Akiko's life in the face of what could kill her: secret resistance by subaltern agency. Akiko passes secret messages to other women in the camp. "We taught ourselves to communicate through eye movements, body posture, tilts of the head, or . . . through rhythmic rustlings between our stalls; in this way, we could speak, in this way we kept our sanity" (16). This silent language of the body is created both for the women's survival and against the colonial injunction of their speech in the camp. In Soon Hyo/Akiko's conscious act of "hiding [her] true self," silence comes to have another meaning. For her, impersonating Akiko all her life is her own chosen silence against social silencing.²⁷

Such an underlying pattern of resistance implies a subaltern agency in spite of suffering and constant abjection. Keller gives many subtle examples to show Soon Hyo/Akiko as a subaltern agent. For example, Akiko touches the soil in the river bank and slowly swallows it to take her country into her body before she leaves her home

²⁷ As for the theme of silence as an active "will to unsay" or "a form of discourse and as a means for resistance to hegemonic power" (2) in contemporary Asian American literature, see Duncan (2004).

country behind with her American husband. “I rubbed it across my tongue, the roof of my mouth, and I ground it between my teeth. I wanted to taste the earth, metallic as blood, take it into my body so that my country would always be a part of me” (104). By metonymically combining her body with Korea, she tries to keep herself against the cultural unhoming of her conversion and trans-Pacific marriage. Against Richard’s sounds of four languages to the infant Beccah, Soon Hyo/Akiko tries to balance her with another language of motherly body and touch. Just as she likes to care for the women in the camp, so she as a shaman cares for her customer-mourners, almost all of whom are new immigrants from Asian countries. In addition, despite Beccah’s assumption of Auntie Reno’s economic abuses of her mother, Soon Hyo/Akiko has been so “sharp” at her business that, as Auntie Reno later tells Beccah, “She knew exactly what she made, down to dah last cent. . . No one could fool your maddah” (204). Through Auntie Reno here, Keller exposes Beccah’s own partial perspective,²⁸ while foregrounding again Soon Hyo/Akiko’s immigrant agency.

Beccah’s listening to the tape is Keller’s version of the politics of accounting as witnessing. In the second to last chapter titled “Beccah,” Keller provides a bit more of the transcription of Soon Hyo/Akiko’s tape. Attentively listening to the tape, Beccah first writes down in scraps of paper what the ghostly voice tells her. Soon, she replaces them with “the sheet from [her] bed” and spreads it in the living room in front of the speaker, thinking that what her mother says through the tape needs “a bigger canvas” (192). Beccah’s writing down of the ghostly voice is an act of listening as secondary

²⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Sally Robinson for her comment on Beccah’s partial perspective.

witnessing. As such, it reflects Keller's own writing of this fiction as an autobiographically integral part of her listening to a survivor's testimony. As Keller, by writing *Comfort Woman*, stands publicly accountable for what she heard in Hwang's testimony, so Beccah takes accountability for what she is listening from the tape. Keller makes Beccah's witnessing an indirect, partial one through the tape, suggesting that the author's own is also a collective yet fundamentally limited practice. As such, Keller's fiction through Beccah turns out to be what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub comment on in their exploration of literature and art "as a precocious mode of witnessing — of accessing reality" (xx) — in connection with listening to trauma: "the act of writing [is] tied up with the act of bearing witness" (2).

As a secondary witness, Beccah emerges as a new subject of remembrance and political redress, "comforting" her mother, who was a survivor of historical violence and constant unhomings. Beccah's final refusal to Auntie Reno suggests that Keller, in her act of writing as secondary witnessing and revisioning of history, is very consciously self-vigilant and critical of sensationalizing consumptions of survivors' testimonies. Auntie Reno's persistent attempt to display Soon Hyo/Akiko's body for material gain signifies cultural consumption without history. Beccah performs all the processes of a proper funeral, based on her mother's teaching and legacy through the tape. Crying for the death (*kok*), Beccah cleans her mother's body with the water of "ginger and lily for purity and rebirth" (*yom*; 208). In doing so, she restores her mother's true name: Soon Hyo. Beccah sees for the first time her mother's "entirety," intensely affirming her mother as her "mirror image[]" (209). In the final scene, emulating her mother's acts of

eating earth, Beccah eats the ash of her mother's body, while sprinkling it over the river, through the flow of which her mother symbolically can reach her homeland. She narrates: "I held my fingers under the slow fall of the ash, sifting, letting it coat my hand. I touched my fingers to my lips. 'Your body in mine,' I told my mother, 'so you will always be with me, even when your spirit finds its way home. To Korea. To Sulsulham'" (212). This symbolic act of eating her mother's ash clarifies that the mourning daughter finally homes herself in her revisited mother, rooting her identity in a cross-cultural women's genealogy.

Keller articulates one of the primary aspirations of feminist literature — to revitalize silenced voices — by fictively re-creating the struggle to witness the trauma of military sexual slavery. As Keller's text suggests, official history excludes and occludes as much as it reveals. In interviews Keller identifies silence and collective amnesia as her literary motives for writing *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl* (2002), a fictive imagining of Korean girls who "comfort" American soldiers in Korea during the Cold War. With her imaginative focus on an individual victim-survivor-witness in both fictions, Keller makes the individual survivor's witness answer to the collective denial and silence that have affected historical accounts in which military sexual slaves are euphemistically described as "comfort women." The postnational remembering that is predominant in *Comfort Woman* challenges the hegemonic relationship between nation and gender. Keller effects a feminist critique of a masculinist dialectic of forgetting and selective remembering in a modern construction of nation. It is precisely through nationalist "obligation" to forget that Korea and Japan have constituted their own imagined

communities in which women in general and “comfort women” in particular have been denied membership in the nation. By showing how surviving women become dangerous to hegemonic discourses when they locate themselves as subjects of speaking, witnessing, and producing historical truth and knowledge, *Comfort Woman* challenges the notions of nation, history, knowledge, and truth. With Keller’s feminist politics of accounting, we are also witnessing a historical agency that is positively transformed through this fiction’s literary witnessing against hegemonic historiography and discourses.

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