ABSTRACT

EVERYTHING YOUR HEART DESIRES: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF CONSUMER CITIZENSHIP

by Winona L. Landis

This thesis project examines the notion of "consumer citizenship" as defined by cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini and the ways in which it is illustrated or enacted within the cultural products (texts, music, etc.) of Asian Americans in the twentieth and twenty-first century. More specifically, this project explores the ways in which Asian Americans create a space for themselves in contemporary society through the production and consumption of material and cultural goods. This analysis demonstrates how this "consumer citizenship" can be limiting for minority groups, while at the same time enabling them to craft alternative subjectivities in reaction to conventional consumer culture. In addition, this project analyzes Asian American texts in conjunction with those produced by members of other minority groups, such as Latino/as, in order to demonstrate moments of coalitional possibility within the realm of consumer citizenship.

EVERYTHING YOUR HEART DESIRES: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF CONSUMER CITIZENSHIP

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Faculty of Miami University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

by

Winona L. Landis

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2013

Advisor: Yu-Fang Cho

Reader: Julie Minich

Reader: Anita Mannur

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:
Consumer Citizenship and Comparative Practice

The years preceding the 2012 United States presidential election were heated and divisive ones, in which both parties questioned each other's intentions and candidates dragged each other through the mud. The most striking and decidedly new point of contention in this election, though, was that of the citizenship of President Barack Obama. Obama's claims to an American identity, as the son of an immigrant who grew up in Hawai'i, were called into question, most notably (and many would say laughably) by the multi-millionaire businessman and media presence Donald Trump. Trump demanded that Obama release his birth records to prove that he was a naturalized American citizen by birth, and eventually offered him a large sum of money if he would do so. As ludicrous as this turn of events seems, it does in fact highlight an important and overwhelming anxiety surrounding the definitions of citizenship and rights in contemporary American society. More specifically, it illustrates that citizenship, at least abstractly conceived, is tied to two major factors: race and economy. These doubts surrounding the nature of Obama's birth stem from his position as a racialized outsider (even in spite of his position as commander-in-chief). In fact, Barack Obama is biracial, but his appearance and the context in which he was raised mark him as only black.[1] Further, because he was raised and educated largely in the Pacific, particularly Hawai'i, his position in the American body politic is called into question. Despite his claims, Obama is viewed as an outsider, as someone who has occupied a liminal space geographically and continues to occupy that space racially. His obvious proof of legal citizenship and position as Commander-in-Chief do not allow him to transcend these conceptions and contradictions. And the fact that not a fellow politician but rather a figure from the American media was the most vocal of those in doubt suggests that the issue of citizenship has moved beyond the purely political, juridical realm, and into the public, popular imagination. Moreover, by introducing a monetary offer into the argument, Trump's doubts imply that citizenship is

---

[1] This dates back to the "one-drop rule," dictating that even one drop of African-American blood racialized that individual as completely black, as evidenced in the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson.*

something that can be bought and sold.

The emerging importance of these debates in American culture is connected to a variety of historical factors such as most notably to the increased pervasiveness of globalization, both economically and culturally, and to changes in immigration patterns and regulations. After the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act or Immigration Reform Act of 1965[2], which eliminated the system of national quotas, the U.S. saw an exponential influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, legally documented and otherwise. Mae Ngai provides evidence that, "since 1980 Europeans have accounted for only 10 percent of annual legal admissions; Mexico and Caribbean nations account for half the new immigrants and Asia for 40 percent" (265).[3] This dramatic change in demographics, connected to the expansion of U.S.-based transnational capital, fuels a racialized anxiety about the ability (or desire) of these particular immigrants to naturalize or assimilate to American society and culture. As a result, we must consider how the increased movement of racialized bodies into the United States, responding to the demands of the production of U.S. capital, will challenge the seeming exclusiveness of American citizenship, as these groups in turn demand to be recognized and to accrue certain rights. As this new crop of American immigrants—who migrate for economic gain, as a product of American capital's dependence on their labor, or as refugees from war-torn, post-colonial nations—make their way across the U.S. borders, dominant society become ever more suspicious of their intentions as citizens, due to their race and national and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, the ever increasing flow of global capital further signifies the importance of economic markers of citizenship, not only in the United States, but in other nations that have felt the effects of globalization for better or worse. As cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini asserts, citizenship and its practices are presently based on consumption and consumer culture, for, "Men and Women increasingly feel

---

2 Utilizing a post-1965 perspective or framework is obviously not the only approach to studies of immigration and citizenship, as subsequent policies in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as continued undocumented migration, contribute to the make-up of American society. However, as the Hart-Cellar Act was the genesis of some of the most noticeable demographic change (and also the most deceptive in it's "liberal" intentions), it is worth making note of here.

3 And these are, of course, only the numbers related to legally documented immigration. To add the number of undocumented immigrants to these numbers would likely be even more telling.

that many questions proper to citizenship...are being answered in the private realm of commodity consumption and the mass media more than in the abstract rules of democracy or collective participation in public spaces" (15). This change would seem to allow for greater access to rights and a broader definition of citizenship, but "consumer citizenship" is in many ways equally limiting because it is still based on the notion of an abstract individual that is able to purchase and consume as much as they please. If "identities depend on what one owns or is capable of attaining," (16) then the key term is "capable." Thus the problem with García Canclini's model of citizenship is that not everyone in society is able to consume equally, and so definitions of identity related to consumerism become especially important to those groups for whom the stakes are highest when laying claim to the rights and abilities of citizenship, such as racial minorities, immigrants, and the working class. The emphasis on consumer practices in contemporary American culture creates a need for these marginalized and minoritized individuals to consume in order to conform to dominant conceptions of "American" life and identity, even though such conformity is necessarily impossible. This thesis focuses primarily on these contradictions of "consumer citizenship" as they are especially evident in the Asian American experience—one marked by decades of legal and cultural exclusion.[4] Lisa Lowe first theorized the contradictory nature of these exclusions in her groundbreaking text *Immigrant Acts*, in which she cogently explains the disparities between access and racialized exclusion to which I have previously referred. She writes that:

> The economic contradictions of capital and labor on the national level, and the contradictions of the political nation within the global economy, have given rise to the need, over and over again, for the nation to resolve *legally* capitalist contradiction around the definition of the Asian immigrant subject. (10)

This project furthers Lowe's critical work by examining not only how these contradictions emerge on a transnational scale, between the "political nation" and the "global economy," but also by expanding the scope of the racialized and immigrant groups under investigation. It is worth considering how Asian Americans exist as contradictory subjects, as well as how their

---

4 The earliest examples of this exclusion include the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens, and the Immigration Act of 1924, which limited immigration from all Asian countries based on a racialized quota system.

subject formation is related to or even informs that of other minorities. In addition, this project focuses primarily on how these contradictions are acknowledged and combatted by the groups in question through the realm of consumerism and culture.

A fair amount of work has already been done on the presence of Asian Americans in the United States and how this presence is marked by economic production and consumption, particularly the latter. Christine So explains that "It is through the language of economic exchange, in fact, that we can locate underlying anxieties about the relationship between Asian Americans and the larger American nation, and recurring doubts over the ability to convert difference into sameness, disenfranchisement into universality, the racial minority into the abstract citizen" (3). She excavates references to capital and exchange, both literal and figurative, in Asian American texts in order to demonstrate the aforementioned contradictions associated with citizenship as based on an economic, consumer definition. More specifically, her aim is to illuminate how the material and historical anxieties surrounding Asian Americans as immigrants and contributors to the American economy manifest themselves in this literature. So contends that "Asians have historically symbolized economic imbalance, an association that reveals certainly that racialized identities are constructed through the machine of capital but also that economics itself is racialized" (14). It is the latter clause that I find most compelling and worthy of further exploration. If processes of racialization writ large are intimately connected to monetary and cultural capital, then I argue that it is important to consider these processes comparatively and relationally, for clearly "consumer citizenship" plays a similar, though not necessarily equivalent role, in the lives of other racial and ethnic minorities within the United States. In her own analysis, So notes that attitudes toward immigrants and minorities, as well as the U.S. position in the global economy, noticeably changed following the passage of the aforementioned 1965 Immigration Reform Act. However, although she recognizes the importance of migration from both of the regions of Asia and Latin America that this act generated, her analysis does not fully consider the potential relationship between individuals from these two groups, nor does it address how their experiences in the national and global economy may intersect or overlap. Furthermore, So foregrounds texts about middle- and upper-class Asian Americans, as it is these individuals "who have profited by economic exchange and who subscribe faithfully to the system as a means of well-being and prosperity" (19). While this may ring true, not all immigrants and Asian Americans inhabit this class position, which begs the

question, how does consumer citizenship play out within the racialized working-class? In the same vein, how does this monetary and cultural economy function in groups besides the financially comfortable East Asian Americans that are the basis of So's investigation?[5] And, perhaps most importantly, in what ways are Asians and Asian Americans not only consumers *but also* producers of national and global capital? These are the questions that emerge from the gaps in current research on Asian Americans as economic agents, which this project seeks to answer.

It is with these particular queries in mind that I also turn to the work of such scholars as Kandice Chuh, Karen Shimakawa, and Rachel Lee, all of whom have produced recent scholarship charting the changing trajectory of Asian American studies. In *The Americas of Asian American Literature,* Lee combines literary and cultural studies in an investigation of late twentieth century Asian American texts that push on the conceptions of the United States as a discrete, bounded nation. She notes that, "America is not commensurate with nationalism, though a narrowly nationalist framework has been the dominant hermeneutic in the field [of American studies] for over half a century" (5). In an effort to recuperate American and Asian American cultural studies from this more conventional approach, Lee expands her analysis in order to consider the United States' relationship with the rest of the globe, and how perhaps the U.S. borders do not simply end where Asia begins. More specifically, she takes this perspective using the lenses of both economic circulation and gendered production. As she clearly explains:

> The work of revitalizing 'America'—viewing it as one port in an economic system of circulating capital and labor across the Pacific—has ramifications for the political agenda(s) of Asian Americans. On top of contesting racial discriminations within the United States, Asian Americans might be encouraged to tackle the deformations and oppressions of late capitalism. Moreover, feminist criticism reconceived on this terrain would require more than a recovery of

---

5

It does stand to reason that East Asian populations such as the Chinese and Japanese are the most frequently discussed, as they have perhaps the longest history of legal and cultural exclusion from United States society, stemming from the previously cited Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, as well as Japanese internment during and after World War II. In addition, not *all* East Asian Americans and immigrants fall in the middle-class, as this is a heteregenous group in and of itself. *However*, the current scope of Asian immigration to the United States is much more diverse, including most noticeably a substantial number of immigrants from South and Southeast Asia. Thus, it is important to widen the investigative lens to include the experiences of such groups.

> women's histories in Asian locations: it would entail, at the very minimum, an account of enabling or disabling economic and social effects on women circumscribed by such international trade and labor routes and by the gendered terms of kinship reformulated under transnational conditions. (9)

Lee's argument here is worth pausing over, as it cogently articulates several important points regarding the present and future of Asian American studies. First, she emphasizes the importance of multiple sites of investigation; that is within the United States itself as well as globally, through an examination of America's presence in Asia and vice versa. Second, she notes the importance of women's experiences, especially as producers and circulators of global capital, in such a way that rather than the conventionally masculine narratives of migration and assimilation, we would also come to know and understand women's role in such narratives, in addition to their presence outside of them. With the United States' increasing dependence on third world female labor and production, it stands to reason that these women in question deserve greater awareness in Asian, Asian American, and transnational studies. Lee hopes, in particular, that this awareness will politically reposition Asian American studies in new and beneficial ways, with a renewed fervor not seen since the onset of the field, in conjunction with identity politics, in the 1970s. Although, while Lee's work is important in conceptualizing the politics of "representation" in literary contexts, my approach engages with a kind of structural analysis which focuses on cultural production and capital.[6] That being said, like Lee, I hope that redirecting the focus of these disciplines will allow for more projects of a greater political and social importance, and it is this motivation that enables me to add my own lines of inquiry into the discourse currently being generated by Lee and others. I contend that an examination of less conventional, women-centered immigrant narratives, as well as the female and queer presence in the transnational American economy, will open up new modes of being and defining "Asian" and "American," to which Lee refers. Moreover, as she advocates for a consideration of the U.S. and Asia figured globally and relationally, I also claim that such an approach should be utilized *within* the boundaries of the U.S. and Asia; reflecting on the relationships between Asian

---

6 For examples of this comparative approach and "structural analysis," see the work of Erika Lee ("'Yellow Peril'" and Asian Exclusion in the Americas" and "Orientalisms in the Americas") as well as Yu-Fang Cho's forthcoming text *Uncoupling American Empire*.

Americans and other racialized groups, as well as the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual variety of the nations that comprise “Asia”. Just as Lisa Lowe argues that the discourse of American Studies should rely on attentiveness to Asian American studies (and, I would argue, critical race studies and comparative racialization writ large) as a means to engage with “America’s ‘past’—its past as empire, its international past” (“ The International” 30). Scholars and theorists of Asian American and American studies should not overlook how America is figured internationally, as well as how Asia is figured in relation to the United States.

Karen Shimakawa and Kandice Chuh flesh out these issues more directly. They correctly identify the frequent oversight in Asian and American studies: "Globalization, after all, works in multiple directions; while much critical work examines the effects of that process 'elsewhere' (or on our conceptions of that 'elsewhere'), we end by considering these effects within American studies, which takes as its object that from which, ostensibly, 'global' effects flow -- but on which the effects of globalization have rarely been taken seriously" (11). In other words, instead of only thinking about how other (most frequently developing) countries feel the effects of increased modernization and "Americanization," we should also consider they ways in which the United States itself is affected by the cultures and products of these countries to which it is connected, or even depends. As they state, "in order to understand the phenomenon of globalization, it is necessary to 'globalize' academic practices by thinking across disciplinary and areal boundaries" (Chuh and Shimakawa 5). Building on this perspective, this thesis critically rethinks the locations of Asian American, the intersections of Asian American experience with that of other groups in the U.S. polity, and lastly, but most importantly, by investigating Asian Americans within and as producers of popular culture. For if Chuh and Shimakawa insist that "globalization" must be considered in terms of place as well as disciplinarity, then scholars must expand our theoretical gaze to include media such as films, television, and popular music by and about Asians and Asian Americans to gain a richer understanding of the processes of racialization at work in these groups.

Comparative, Relational Racialization

In terms of critical race studies, there has been a long history of investigating the intersections of Asian American experiences with those of other racialized groups. In particular, scholars have taken a great deal of time to consider how Asian Americans are legible through and

against African Americans in the contemporary United States.[7] However, a relatively undertheorized point of comparison is the relationship between Asian Americans and Latino/as[8], epecially in relation to consumption and the economy, as well as how these two groups are formed and articulated through related processes of racialization. More recent investigations of this nature include, most notably, the work of Mae Ngai and Grace Hong. Ngai approaches her comparative project from a largely historical and anthropological standpoint. Beginning in the early twentieth century, she maps the relational experiences of Asian and Latino/a immigrants to the United States, devoting a large amount of attention to Mexicans and Filipinos, as these populations occupy a unique position as ones who were formerly colonized by the United States. Thus, Ngai notes that their immigration to the continental U.S. is worth examining side-by-side because it is marked by related motivations and their presence is similarly received by dominant white Americans. These particular Asians and Latino/as often enter the U.S. illegally due to unfair and exclusionary immigration restrictions. They feel a need to immigrate, however, because of their dependence on an American-dominated transnational economy and, more significantly, its dependence on their racialized labor, and so they leave their homes to take on low-wage jobs, most often in the agricultural industry. Ngai very clearly sheds light on how the legacies of American (neo)colonialism and limiting immigration policies toward both Asians and Latino/as helped to construct the very notion of an "illegal immigrant," and she provides a great deal of material with which to contextualize these overlapping moments in U.S. immigration history. Ngai's reliance on statistical and archival sources provide different kinds of insights than what is available from a cultural studies perspective.

Therefore, in my own research, though I depend a great deal on Ngai's material excavation, I turn to the methodology utilized by Grace Hong, both in her own text *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* and in her

---

7 See specifically the work of Claire Jean Kim on the notion of "racial triangulation," as well as Colleen Lye's critique of Kim's work. This dialogue in and of itself is indicative of the related and overlapping processes within comparative racialization.

8 Work of this nature is not altogether nonexistent, however. For more on comparative racialization in Latin America and the Caribbean, specifically, see Lisa Yun's *The Coolie Speaks* and Evelyn Hu-Dehart's and Kathleen Lopez's "Asian Diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Historical Overview."

collection edited with Roderick Ferguson, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*. Her approach, to be specific, relies on an articulation of the ways in which processes of racialization in the United States cut across different groups, without simply and problematically equalizing all marginalized groups. Indeed, in the introduction to *Strange Affinities*, she and Ferguson note that their "project entails not only articulating commonalities between communities of color but imagining alternative modes of coalition beyond prior models of racial or ethnic solidarity based on a notion of homogeneity or similarity" (1). These alternative modes are connected to queer of color critique and women of color feminism; that is, paying attention to the heterogeneity of racial groups based on factors such as gender and sexuality, and how an awareness of such factors allows cross-racial connections and relationships to emerge. Such a critical approach entails not only "representing" those who were once absent from dominant narratives and cultural productions, but also mapping the processes still at work in racialized subject formation and how these processes continue to exclude some groups in the interest of including others. This methodology is particularly apparent in Hong's text *The Ruptures of American Capital*, in which she charts the related, but nonequivalent, histories of racialized economic marginalization in the United States, making a point to identify Asian/American women and Latinas as groups who are susceptible to this marginalization and upon whom the global U.S. economy depends.

It is this aspect of Hong's argument to which I turn in the first chapter of this project. By examining two contemporary and unconventional immigrant narratives, Angie Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee* and Gish Jen's *Typical American*, this chapter illustrates how the contradictions of Asian American and Latino/a working-class citizenships are made legible in these cultural texts in ways that historical narratives and materials cannot account for. Moreover, I devote the majority of my analysis to the women in these novels, demonstrating how their race, class, and gender impact their positions as citizens and consumers. In light of the changes in economy, migration, and globalization, which I have previously mentioned, it is imperative that we pay greater attention to the experiences of these women and how they are conveyed to wider audiences. By examining the female laborers in both texts, Esperanza colon and Helen Chang, I illuminate the ways in which the contradictions of consumer citizenship and inclusion in the American polity are particularly legible in the experiences of immigrant, marginalized women, and which is made further apparent in the context of literary cultural production. My argument is two-fold, however,

and by returning to and reconfiguring some of García Canclini's notions of consumer citizenship, I aim to demonstrate how the women in these modern immigrant families also hold a kind of producing and consuming power that they can use to their advantage in order to construct alternative American identities and subject positions. Such constructions are aided through an attentiveness to the ways in which the processes of Asian American and Latino/a racialization overlap and inform each other, especially when gender and class are included as lenses of analysis. I maintain a dialectical perspective, however, by illustrating how transnational and international subjectivities are often already informed by American capital; production and consumption is a viable alternative but it is not an easy way out. What is more important is not providing a specific solution, but rather mapping relational and coalitional possibilities that will help acknowledge and work against the contradictions of inclusion in American society. I examine such coalitional possibilities not only within the texts themselves, but also by virtue of my methodology: comparatively analyzing the cultural productions of minority subjects side-by-side as an example of relational and socially engaged literary and cultural studies. In the subsequent two chapters, I expand on these intersecting theoretical frameworks by analyzing the cultural productions of more liminal American or transnational spaces—Hawai'i and South/Southeast Asia—to further illustrate the power of cultural production to make and remake alternative subjectivities for marginalized individuals and groups.

Globalizing Locations and Disciplines

The first section of this project focuses primarily on a particular racialized experience within the discrete borders of the United States and the conventional textual form of the novel. However, by utilizing a comparative methodology, I open up these experiences to be read not only cross-racially, but also across national borders and various media. It is with these transnational and interdisciplinary motivations in mind that I turn to an investigation of popular media in my final two sections, as well as a broader and less bounded conception of Asian America. If, as I have endeavored to lay out in my introduction, contemporary American society and economy is defined by its global relations at home and abroad, then cultural and consumer citizenships should be theorized and examined through this framework.

At first glance, the second chapter of my project would still seem to be dealing with Asian Americans within a national, rather than global framework, as I focus on the fiftieth U.S. state of Hawai'i. However, as a former U.S. colony, one which Mae Ngai notes was first led by

American sugar plantation entrepreneurs and as the only state with an Asian American plurality, it is clear that Hawai'i's relationship to the continental U.S. is tenuous at best and strained at worst. Consider that President Obama was born in Hawai'i and thus in discussion of his citizenship, Hawai'i is framed as not quite part of the U.S., as faulty evidence against Obama's identity as a "true American." Further, with a history steeped in both military, tourism, and *economic* exploitation, it is also evident that Hawai'i is defined for many through the frame of economic production and consumption. What does Hawai'i produce that others can use? And how can Hawai'i be commodified for easy consumption?

These questions appear to have obvious answers, but what is not often asked is how citizens of Hawai'i conceive of themselves and use consumption for their own benefit. This is the question I keep in mind in my analysis of the novella *Rolling the R's* by R. Zamora Linmark, which is set in a working-class section of Honolulu in the 1970s. The subjects of Linmark's series of vignettes are primarily a group of Asian American pre-teens who are obsessed with American pop culture icons of the time, such as Farrah Fawcett, and who consume these products and images in over-the-top and darkly funny ways. It is their fascination with consumer culture that I explore in order to uncover the ways in which these subjects are not only producing their own unique Asian/American identities, but also how they are re-writing or re-producing these highly recognizable pop culture products, often subversively, to fit their own experiences. Thus, as with the novels of Cruz and Jen, I am interested in the potential power of consumer citizenship within racialized, marginalized groups. That being said, because this novella takes place in the liminal space of Hawai'i, its particular location will greatly inform my analysis. As Victor Bascara notes, the humor of Linmark's text should be considered in conjunction with the humor and "absurdity" of the U.S. (neo)colonial project in Hawai'i. In his words, "*Rolling the R's* exacerbates contradictions between a geographically and historically local formation on the one hand and, on the other, the national and imperial terms of coherence that this local formation ultimately fails to meet" (117). Hawai'i, then, occupies a unique space within studies of American, Asian American, and postcolonial studies that merits further exploration. Indeed, it is difficult for scholars to come to agreement on exactly where Hawai'i and Hawai'ian studies should be located, if it needs broader categorization at all. Therefore, to emphasize Hawai'i's precarious positioning, I also include in this chapter an analysis of the Walt Disney film *Lilo and Stitch*, a popular text which reads as comparable to Linmark's because the primary character is a

precocious young girl obsessed with pop culture. However, because the characters are constructed as native Hawai'ian rather than Asian, it is worth considering how consumer citizenships play out within this population, and how popular media renders them (il)legible to citzens of the continental United States.

The popular children's film at the end of Chapter 2 opens up this project to include popular culture both by and about Asian Americans in general. The final chapter focuses on two examples the popular music of South and Southeast Asian artists M.I.A. and Yuna. This is by no means the first or only example of the disciplinary move to include popular culture within Asian American studies. In the past decade, several edited volumes on the subject have been published, most notably by Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (2004), as well as Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (2009). In addition, there have been important developments in the consideration and reception of Asian popular culture within the United States (and other parts of the world). Jane Chi Hyun Park explains that "The growing visibility, accessibility, and popularity of Japanese anime, Hindi film musicals, Hong Kong action flicks, and the Korean Wave or Hallyu reflect the economic development of particular Asian countries in the past thirty years, as well as the willingness on the part of their governments and corporations to invest in the production, marketing, and distribution of domestic films targeted toward international markets" (5). This distribution of international media is indicative of the kind of globalization that Chuh and Shimakawa have previously referred to, but it is notably located within the dominant consumer market. While it is well worth reflecting on the influences of Asian popular media in U.S. film, television, and music, what frequently gets overlooked in such discussions is a foregrounding of Asians and Asian Americans as *producers* of media, rather than simply objects of consumption. Park herself notes in her afterword: "What I have not addressed, and what subsequent research might illuminate is the countering gaze, namely Asian and Asian American movies that return and resist, reproduce and rework the elements of Hollywood manufactured Oriental style" (198).

Extending Park's project to include popular music, this thesis calls for further research of this kind. Namely, my analysis of M.I.A. and Yuna focuses on their own agency as cultural and economic producers, who have found useful and politically charged ways to construct their image and music. Rather than reading them as passive, exotic artists and commodified Southeast Asian bodies, I shed light on their position as cultural agents through a close reading of their

music and an analysis of their reception in global (particularly U.S.) consumer society. In her project *Transnational America*, Inderpal Grewal notes: "the question of cosmopolitan knowledges, feminist and progressive, is one that is important in the transnational making of knowledge producers (including academicians and activists or those who combine the two realms of work), who cannot escape neoliberal conditions of possibility but can, as changing, contingent subjects, not be incapacitated by this neoliberalism" (3). By considering not only knowledge but also cultural production, my analysis places transnational popular musicians M.I.A. and Yuna within this category of activists and laborers who recognize that they are informed by the demands of American, neoliberal capital, but work to challenge this subject formation, or at least attempt not to be "incapacitated" by it. Because, as scholars like Lisa Lowe and Grace Hong point out, the U.S. and world economies are dependent on gendered third world labor to an often exploitative degree, it is important to investigate how such women are working within and against this relationship to (re)construct their subjectivity; subjectivities which are crucially informed by their national and ethnic backgrounds. In this way, my final chapter also continues to utilize a comparative methodology, but from within globally conceived Asian America rather than between disparate groups. And it is this theoretical approach that my project hopes to contribute to in American Studies, Asian American Studies, and studies of literature and culture. By examining individuals, groups, nations, media, and disciplines relationally, we stand to learn how these seemingly distinct categories inform and define each other, sometimes negatively and but more often productively, and how such relationships can contribute to and encourage a coalitional politics that works for a wide variety of cultural, economic and disciplinary change. Expanding academic and national boundaries can provide a fuller, more agentic understanding of racialized and marginalized national and transnational citizens who transform global consumer cultures.

America for Sale:

Consumer Citizenship & Comparative Racialization in U.S. Immigrant Literature

"But what are experiences for, if not to make us stronger for others who have yet to live through such things?" – Let it Rain Coffee, *Angie Cruz*

The quote in the epigraph comes from the inner thoughts of Esperanza colon, a working-class immigrant from the Dominican Republic and one of the primary characters in Angie Cruz's second novel *Let it Rain Coffee,* which this chapter analyzes in detail. This reflection stems directly from the death of her employer's husband, as Esperanza attempts to comfort her, albeit somewhat begrudgingly at first, with the recognition that she has her own serious financial and familial issues to grapple with. Yet, even in the midst of her own crisis, Esperanza recognizes a potential moment of connection between herself and her employer, for she has also lost her husband, and in spite of class and economic differences, reaches out to this woman in consolation and solidarity in her time of need. This connective, relational moment is, in my opinion, the crux of texts such as *Let it Rain Coffee,* which detail the lives of immigrants and racialized minorities in the contemporary United States. That is, in addition to illuminating the difficulties of citizenship and subject formation, these texts and cultural productions should also be read as drawing attention to moments of cross-generational, cross-class, and cross-racial relationships and coalitions; a feat which Cruz's text accomplishes on its own, as well as when read in conjunction with other examples of immigrant, multi-ethnic American literature, such as Gish Jen's *Typical American*. This chapter seeks to excavate just such coalitional moments within and across these two texts, in addition to foregrounding their crucial and timely purpose as cultural texts which speak to the impossibilities and contradictions of contemporary American subject formation.

These contradictions are explored in great detail by Lisa Lowe, who argues: "The promise of inclusion through citizenship and rights cannot resolve the material inequalities of racial exploitation" (23). Based on her reading of the intersections of immigration policy, economics, and cultural productions in the United States, she notes that the success of capitalism and definitions of citizenship depend upon contradictions between realities of race and the promise of

rights. That is, economic success and profitability depends on the work of certain racialized groups who lack equal access to that which they produce. These individuals are promised certain rights and abilities as citizens, and are expected to consume just as much as their majority counterparts, but they do not have the full ability to do so, thus bringing their status as "citizens" into question.

Because this contradiction is so deeply embedded in the lives of certain racialized groups, it is frequently the central focus of much of the literature and cultural productions originating in these groups. Texts created by immigrants and U.S. minorities are often narratives of attempted assimilation into the American polity and these texts have also begun to focus on the economic and consumer aspects of such assimilation, rather than the purely political. Latino/as and Asian Americans are populations that must grapple with these issues most notably, as they share a related, at times overlapping, history of racialized labor exploitation and because their very appearance marks them as perpetual "outsiders" in U.S. culture. Mae Ngai, in *Impossible Subjects*, attributes this permanent exclusion to the fact that Asian Americans' and Latino/as' race and ethnic backgrounds are definitively and legally conflated. Therefore, "[t]he legal racialization of these ethnic groups' national origin cast them as permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation" (8). In fact, the immigration laws and restrictions spanning the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century played a major role in the production of racial knowledge, creating terms of classification such as "Asian American" and, most notably, "illegal immigrant." Chinese immigrants had been ineligible for citizenship since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but following two landmark Supreme Court cases in 1922 and 1923[9] Japanese and Asian Indians were also deemed "racially ineligible" for citizenship, which therefore "cast Japanese and Asian Indians with Chinese as unassimilable aliens and helped constitute the racial category 'Asian'" (Ngai 38). This process of racialization was further solidified in the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, or the National Quota Act, which created a system of immigration quotas based on the country of origin: a system that was inherently racist and favored European (i.e., white) nations. What is perhaps most notable, though, is that this immigration act aided in the racialization of Chicanos

---

9 The cases to which I am referring are *Takao Ozawa vs. U.S.*, concerning an individual of Japanese descent, and *U.S. vs. Bhagat Singh Thind*, which dealt with an Asian Indian, both of whom were asserting a claim to naturalized citizenship.

and Latinos, without dictating a quota for Mexico. Rather, the implementation of numerical restrictions and the stricter enforcement of deportation policies "created a new class of persons within the national body—illegal aliens—whose inclusion in the nation was at once a social reality and a legal impossibility" (Ngai 57). Illegal immigration became (and continues to be) a primary concern for the Chicano and Latino community, but Asian groups also found themselves forced to enter the U.S. under illegal circumstances due to the racially biased quota system. As Ngai states, the existence of this social category "in Asian and Latino communities has historically contributed to the construction of those communities as illegitimate, criminal, and unassimilable" (2). The Immigration Act of 1924, therefore, stands as a relatively early example of the relational, comparative racialization of Asian Americans and Latino/as in U.S. legal discourse. These specific racialized groups occupy an especially precarious position in U.S. society in terms of the recognition of rights and claims to citizenship, and it is this shared, though nonequivalent, legal and material history that should impel us to examine their cultural works side-by-side, in hopes of bringing to light less historically legible connections.

Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee* and Jen's *Typical American* stand out as prime examples of texts that interrogate the consumer aspects of U.S. citizenship for Latino/as and Asian Americans in the mid- to late twentieth century, a time during which issues of consumption became especially important as markers of identity, partly because of the general proliferation of American consumer culture and but also due to the fact that (in)ability to purchase goods and media becomes one of the only means of differentiating citizens from noncitizens in an increasingly multiethnic, mixed society. Furthermore, I argue that these texts both disrupt the conventional immigrant narrative by addressing the "impossibilities" of assimilation about which Ngai and others are particularly concerned. That is, they draw attention to the impossibility of these subjects becoming full citizens due to the aforementioned contradictions of labor and access. More specifically, Cruz and Jen demonstrate the difficulties that female immigrants face in citizenship struggles and how they are particularly susceptible to the logic of consumerism. These disruptions are, in fact, made legible because of the fact they occur through the medium of cultural texts. Cultural productions by minority and immigrant groups illuminate certain discrepancies and moments of impossibility that traditional historical narratives leave out or elide. As Lowe explains, cultural texts enable us to remember rather than "forget" the "material histories of racialization, segregation, and economic violence" that have made possible the

United States as we know it today.

However, although these texts illuminate the "failure" of immigrants and certain minorities to be fully hailed as citizens, I do not intend for my analysis to be completely fatalistic. Even Lowe, though she sheds light on a disheartening history of racial marginalization and exploitation, maintains that her purpose is to "name the *agency* of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans: the *acts* of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification" (9, italics in original). By relying on this language of action, Lowe demonstrates that immigrants are not merely passive recipients or victims of dominant culture, but rather makers of and contributors to culture themselves. Although she focuses primarily on the experiences of Asian and Asian Americans, her analysis welcomes a similar consideration of immigrant and minority works in general, as she herself reads the diverse racial groups in the U.S. relationally. With this context in mind, I understand the novels of Angie Cruz and Gish Jen as a continuation of this lineage of "politicized cultural work," which, being produced in the late twentieth and early tweny-first century, are particularly attuned to the problems and issues of their time. Specifically, the past two decades in United States history have been marked by constant economic change and increasing globalization, making the idea of "consumer citizenship," as described by Néstor García Canclini ever more important and fraught. He notes that especially in light of our contemporary global era, we must "approach citizenship without dissociating it from those activities through which we establish our social belonging, our social networks, which...are steeped in consumption" (García Canclini 20). Therefore, by examining the depiction and enaction of "consumer citizenship" I hope to contribute, in the words of Ralph Dalleo and Elena Machado Saez, to "political projects that will mark our future horizons in substantial and creative ways" through a consideration of production and consumption (7). To be more exact, by building upon García Canclini's assertions that what we consume can and does hold a kind of political importance, and by closely considering the shared material histories of Asian Americans and Latino/as in the United States, I will illustrate crucial coalitional possibilities that can help "redefine citizenship in connection with consumption and political strategy" in ways that do not exclude racialized immigrant groups.

Market Failure and the Contradictions of Consumer Citizenship

Let it Rain Coffee and *Typical American* center, respectively, on the lives of the colon and

Chang families and seem, at first glance, to follow conventional narratives of migration and attempted assimilation. The former, published in 2003, was Angie Cruz's second novel, and its style is marked by alternating and sometimes unreliable speakers, narrative movements back and forth between countries and across decades, and even touches of "magical realism." It focuses primarily on the colon family—Santo, Esperanza, and their children—who move to New York from the Dominican Republic in order to better their lives through economic and material success, and are eventually joined by Santo's aging father Don Chan after the death of his wife. Set in the financially booming, yet unstable 1990s (with flashes back to the politically unstable 1960s in the Dominican Republic) the novel depicts the family struggling and ultimately finding themselves unable to assimilate into U.S. society. Their inability to do so is signified by the fact that they must work and produce even more than dominant white citizens in order to survive, but they are then unable to consume all of the products and media that would help mark them as "American." Juanita Heredia explains that "they work in employment that leaves no space for upward mobility and depend on an unfair economic system that punishes, rather than benefits, Latino immigrants" (97). Santo colon, the head of the household, works long hours as a taxi driver in New York, only just able to pay the bills, and even then rarely on time (Cruz 29). Although he works exceptionally hard, often until as late as three in the morning, his life is one of day-to-day survival rather than material comfort and success. He has little to no time for leisure and entertainment, even though that is what he and his family most desire and what they are ostensibly working to achieve.

This desire and the subsequent disparity between the reality of Santo's life and what he wants to consume is most apparent in the jealousy he feels toward the fun-filled lives of his customers. In these instances, "Santo felt an extra pang to return to Los Llanos. To go back to a time when music blared from radios even when the stars were out and it didn't cost him a day's wage to take his wife out to a club with live music" (Cruz 44). Here, Cruz demonstrates the inability of Latino/a immigrants to consume the American products and activities promised to them as part of the immigrant narrative, in spite of the work they perform. The colon family exemplifies "the incongruencies between illusion and reality that first generation immigrants may experience despite advanced opportunities in the United States" (Heredia 97). Cruz foregrounds these "incongruencies" precisely through her emphasis on the sadness, even perhaps

melancholia,[10] experienced by the colon family. But this sadness, rather than being an expression of an unfulfilled desire to fit into American society, results from a frequently overlooked desire to "return" home to Los Llanos. Santo's longing to return to the Dominican Republic in order to fulfill certain needs associated with cultural comfort and contentment, rather than simply money, points to a particular failure or impossibility within U.S. society. By emphasizing this fact in her text, Cruz further disrupts the commonly held notions that immigrants and racial minorities will eventually assimilate into and benefit from the U.S. culture and economy—or that they even truly want to.

Ralph Chang, the patriarch in Jen's novel, has experiences of frustration and dissonance similar to those of Santo. However, since his immigration narrative takes place several decades earlier, it also marked by the particularities of the Asian immigrant experience of that time. Ralph's initial motivation, for example, to come to America is to receive an advanced degree in engineering. Indeed, Ralph does not even intend to remain in America, as the narrator indicates. "He was going to be first in his class and he was not going home until he had his doctorate rolled up to hand to his father" (6). The use of the word "home" to refer to China demonstrates that Ralph originally has no intention of making a permanent life for himself in America. Like other immigrants who left Asia at the beginning of the post-World War II "brain drain," Ralph wants to make use of the benefits of the American university system and return to his home country where a high-level job would undoubtedly be waiting. However, Ralph's plans to return are thwarted by the Communist revolution of 1949 and China's subsequent fall from favor in U.S. foreign policy--a change in international relationships that had a notable impact on the perception and treatment of Chinese nationals in America, but which traditional history does not often adequately narrate. Jen, by contrast, effectively calls attention to this abrupt transition in her cultural work, not by incorporating political and historical details into the story of the Chang family, but instead by noting a change in Ralph's self-made narrative of success. That is, Jen illustrates the fluctuating history of Asian American (specifically Chinese American) visibility in the U.S. by demonstrating Ralph's sudden desire to define himself in terms of "typical American" markers of material comfort and consumer citizenship.

---

10 For further discusssion of this feeling of "melancholia" in immigrant populations, albeit from a British perspective, see Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, 2010.

In order to fulfill what he believes to be the accepted course of American success—material wealth and the narrative of the self-made man—Ralph abandons to his plan to be an engineer and academic, and instead opens his own business (an ill-fated fried chicken restaurant called Ralph's Chicken Palace). Initially, Ralph and his family seem to be able to adhere to the expectations of U.S. "consumer citizenship," purchasing a house in the suburbs and various other "typically American" material goods. However, through the use of the rhetorical strategies of dark humor and satire, Jen points to Ralph's inability to fully conform to U.S. culture. For example, although he is able to purchase his own car, a convertible no less, he leaves the roof open during a rainstorm, effectively ruining the car. "How wet everything was! The seats were soggy; his leather briefcase had dulled and darkened; there was a pool in each of the four footwells of the floor. He yanked at the roof. Water piped out from the accordion folds. The mechanism was stiff; between the wet vinyl and his raw hands, he could only get it to straighten halfway before it stuck" (Jen 184). Ralph has gained a recognizable marker or symbol of material access, but quickly loses the ability to enjoy it or make use of it. Moreover, Ralph's "failure" renders him visible as an outsider or racial other in the eyes of his neighbors. "When he slowed, he saw that people took notice of him driving in the rain with the top down. This made him uncomfortable enough that finally, before he came to the many-eyed cluster of shops closest to his house, he stopped by the reservoir to put the top back up" (Jen 183-4). Rather than an overt politicization of Ralph's struggles, Jen narrates Ralph's inability to assimilate—and the resulting alienation and discomfort—through the particular lens of consumerism by illuminating his misuse and destruction of American material goods.

Further, even though Ralph's business has a successful beginning, his decision to add a second story to the restaurant exposes a fatal structural flaw: a foundation built upon unstable land that will eventually cause the building to collapse. These aforementioned examples illustrate, in the words of Rachel Lee, Jen's criticism of "profit-making and self-aggrandizement as a supposed infinite quest" (59). In spite of Ralph and his family's best efforts, their attempts at achieving monetary success are continually thwarted by outside sources. Although these outside forces seem to be merely unfortunate happenstance, Jen uses these events to imply that the Chang family's failure is directly connected to particular, racially-based inequalities embedded in U.S. society. She addresses this more directly when she describes the Changs' inability to consume or participate in American leisure activities, such as watching baseball, which they can

only do in their own home, since "the one time they went to an actual game, people had called them names and told them to go back to their laundry" (127). Not only is the Chang family, because they are racially differentiated, unable to completely participate in consumer culture, the particular insults they receive imply that they should be working and producing, rather than enjoying the "products" of their labor. In addition, their distance from American life, even (and perhaps especially) entertainment and pasttimes, speaks to a historical legacy of Chinese exclusion from both legal and more informal and social forms of citizenship. Jen does not identify or name a dominant white "villain" that racializes the Changs, and indeed her narrative focuses primarily on their relatively insular domestic life. However, through such moments as the racist taunts of the baseball game patrons and the failure of Ralph's Chicken Palace, she draws attention to a long trajectory of anti-Asian racism within the United States; a history with its beginnings in the Yellow Peril and fear of Asian economic domination on the West Coast in the latter half of the nineteenth century and continues to the Cold War anxiety of Ralph's era.

Admittedly, although they both must grapple with systemic inequality and racism, Ralph Chang and his family fare better than Santo and the rest of the colons. Although the Changs ultimately fail to a degree, they are still able to more convincingly perform the role of American citizen through acts such as purchasing a home, owning a business, and even the "typically American" practice of underreporting their taxes in order to gain a larger profit. Their temporary success can be understood as Asian Americans' unique position as the contemporary "model minority." As such, the Changs are perceived as the stereotypical Chinese Americans who "have overcome discrimination without protest and have achieved socioeconomic success (that is, the American dream)" (Schlund-Vials 14). Moreover, the temporal setting of Jen's novel is crucial to an understanding of the Chang's (attempted) success and "model minority" position. Ralph Chang immigrates to the United States in the post-World War II era when intellectuals and students from China were encouraged to establish themselves in America. He eventually becomes a member of "an expanded and reinvigorated Chinese American middle class [that] began to live in the suburbs and university communities" (Ngai 203). The Changs, then, are at least able to replicate some semblance of the "typical American" success narrative. The colons, by contrast, are unable to even appropriately mimic "American-ness" and are thus doomed to failure almost from the outset. This is especially evident in the fact that the one time that Santo decides to consume something for pleasure, to take advantage of the products of his labor and go

dancing at a club, he is robbed and viciously murdered upon returning to his cab. Moreover, his death occurs less than halfway through the novel--a narrative choice that heavily problematizes the conventional ideas of immigrant success by emphasizing tragedy and injustice. Indeed, although Santo's death is not described as racially motivated, the temporal setting and publication of Cruz's novel calls to mind instances of violence against the immigrant community, especially Mexican and other Latino immigrants, during this time. The year 1994 was the beginning of Operation Gatekeeper, the United States' attempt to curb illegal immigration which led to a "militarization of the border" and did little to halt the movement of undocumented immigrants. Instead, it resulted in increased migrant deaths, either due to "exposure" in the harsh deserts through which immigrants were now forced to navigate (Ngai 266) or due to the retributive violence of self-proclaimed "gatekeepers," who felt it was within their rights to kill unarmed individuals attempting to cross the border under their watch. Although Santo's death occurs several hundred miles from the border and he himself is not a Mexican-American, the senselessness and injustice of his murder seems to act as a reference point for these other, numerous moments of racially motivated violence, particularly in the Latino community. And indeed, Cruz's use of Santo's death as the impetus of the economic and emotional downward spiral for the colon family further signifies their unassimability.

Despite a recognition of her characters comparatively privileged position, Jen does trouble stories of assimilation in her novel as well, due to the fact that her characters do ultimately fail to fulfill the expectations of U.S. consumer citizenship, calling "model minority" characterization into question. It is true that, as Chinese Americans, the Changs exist as "preferred" minorities, especially considering the attitude towards and internment of Japanese Americans during and immediately after the war. The complicated and nuanced view of Asian Americans as a distinct group emerges in a conversation between the Changs and their neighbor (the aptly named Arthur Smith) shortly after they move to the suburbs:

> "You folks Japanese?"
>
> "Chinese."
>
> "There you go," he said. "That's what I told Marianne. It aint Japs moved in. Them Japs is farmers. These don't know dirt from dirt." (158-9)

While Mr. Smith seems relieved to know his new neighbors are not "Japs," his feelings toward

the Changs are still not welcoming. For the Changs this is not a moment of relief, but rather profound discomfort. Their occupations and lack of landscaping knowledge prevent them from being conflated with their fellow Asian immigrants, but they still inevitably find themselves entangled in a process of racialization that leaves them at a distance from majority American society. In this brief exchange of dialogue, presented with very little commentary, Jen again evokes a history (and, for the Changs, a tangible present) of Asian discrimination and marginalization, one that is intimately connected to racialized labor and production.

Although *Typical American* is set in the late 1940s leading up to the early 1960s, it was published in 1991. And as a text that is so attentive to the intricacies and hidden narratives of its particular moment in history, one cannot help but wonder what purpose it serves within the culture of the late twentieth century. As an important cultural text, however, I argue that it illuminates not only mid-century issues of racialization and consumer citizenship, but also pushes us as readers to consider how it may also speak to the problems and specificities of the historical moment in which it is produced. The 1990s were marked by economic change and growth not unlike the years immediately following World War II, and in particular, this decade saw both the boom and bust of international Asian economies. China was beginning to emerge as a global superpower, displacing its hemispheric neighbor Japan. This growth resulted in an influx of transnational migration by wealthy Chinese businessmen from China to the U.S. The term "migration" here is important as, much like Ralph when he first lands on U.S. shores, these men see themselves as travelers, with no intention of making a permanent home in America. These transnational citizens are simultaneously welcomed as global partners and viewed by U.S. society through a veil of suspicion, which Aihwa Ong attributes to "The Asian masculinist quest for global power and visibility clash[ing] with the Western fear of being invaded--materially and symbolically—by Asian corporate power" (21). To that I would also add that this period of growth (as well as the publication of Jen's novel) comes just a few short years after the student protests in Tiananmen Square, adding a second layer of distrust to the American public's attitude. This fear and anxiety is not unlike that which Ralph and his family find themselves subject to several decades prior, in a period also marked by expansion and shadowed by violent political revolution. Gish Jen has created a cultural text that unites two similar and yet distant points on the axis of Asian immigrant and Asian American history in the United States, calling attention moments of inability, impossibility, and failure that this history frequently ignores. She uses the

post-war theoretical framework of Asian American existence to rethink more contemporary narratives of marginalization and racialization.

Through such failures and by "limiting herself to those 'codes of Americanness' already available, Jen offers a profound critique of the racial and gender presumptions embedded in national scripts of success" (Lee 70). It is these comparable, though nonequivalent, limitations that suggest that stories of the Changs and the colons are worth reading in conjunction with one another, in order to illuminate the inequalities faced by many racial minorities in U.S. society. And in addition, it is through a comparison of these "gender presumptions" in *Let it Rain Coffee* and *Typical American* that these shared citizenship contradictions and possibilities for collective resistance become especially apparent.

The Consumption and Debt of Immigrant Women

Esperanza colon and Helen Chang do not only occupy the position of wife and mother within their respective families. Both women are also workers and producers, upon whom their families become dependent when adverse circumstances arise. Santo even notes that "since their arrival in Nueva York, all [Esperanza] wanted to do was work" (Cruz 73). After her husband's death, Esperanza must become the sole breadwinner, working more and more hours as a caretaker and forcing her children to increasingly fend for themselves. However, no matter how often she works, Esperanza is unable to free herself from her mounting debt, for "like so many working-class Latina immigrants, she falls prey to the manipulations of the credit card system in the United States" (Heredia 99). Inundated with images of material possessions that she feels she must purchase to demonstrate her success in the U.S., Esperanza gleefully yet secretly buys countless consumer goods on her new credit cards until finally, "when she reached the credit card's generous limit--which she only knew about because her cards no longer went through--she filed the credit card itself in the drawer [with the bills], expecting to pay it all one day, little by little" (Cruz 34). Esperanza is not yet fully aware of her contradictory existence; she does not understand that because of systemic inequalities, she cannot actually afford to buy the goods that she is expected to, even on credit. "As a contradiction of modernization, Esperanza participates in consumer culture but is often left indebted; that is to say, she is not in control of her earnings and accumulates debt" (Heredia 97). Thus, she becomes yet another immigrant woman of color mired in an endless cycle of debt and labor. It is in some ways easy to read Esperanza, in this

case, as a willing actor in her own financial downfall and thus as an unsympathetic character. However, as Angie Cruz herself noted in a personal conversation, Esperanza should not be viewed so negatively or one-dimensionally, for her agency also extends to the intense amount of labor she performs to provide for her family (immediate and extended, domestic and international). Her fall into debt is understandable and speaks to the daily experiences of many immigrants and working/lower class individuals in the United States. Esperanza's character, then, deserves reader's sympathy, rather than scorn (Personal communication, April 4, 2013).

This particular affective response to Esperanza's situation is also made apparent in the fact that she is susceptible to not only the adverse effects of material consumption in the U.S. but to media consumption as well. Her vulnerability as a consumer is particularly evident in the way in which she idolizes and desires the life of the Ewing family on the television drama *Dallas*. Her main impetus to come to the United States is to move to Dallas, Texas and emulate their life, which she sees as the ultimate example of American identity. Even her children's names (Bobby and Dallas) result from her almost obsessive consumption of this series. Esperanza is unable to comprehend that although the Ewings of *Dallas* seem be the pinnacle of American success, this existence is one she can never attain. And its unattainability stems not only from the fact that she is a Latina immigrant, while the Ewings are a wealthy white family, but also from the more obvious fact that *Dallas* is a fictional series. To Esperanza, however, "the images of the celluloid screen are more tangible and authentic than life" (Hong 119) and her desire to emulate them never wavers. That is, until she meets the actor who plays Bobby Ewing on the subway. Unable to separate reality from fiction, she accosts him as if he is Bobby Ewing, until he is forced to explain that *Dallas* is not real. Esperanza, embarrassed and angry, then tells him:

> They should've shot you. They should've shot all of you for lying to people, making it look so easy. And look at you, you're a nothing, like me, on a train, you live like me, but on TV, you pretend that you're something else and I believed in you. (Cruz 250)

Although she still does not quite grasp the difference between fictional television and real life, Esperanza does demonstrate in this moment of frustration that she is beginning to understand the impossibilities of her immigrant existence. Cruz's text emphasizes that, from Esperanza's perspective, the Ewings made the American success story look easy but that in actuality, it is a goal that has always been out of her reach. Esperanza as a character illustrates

how consumer culture and media in the U.S. can negatively impact the immigrant experience because although there is much that racial minorities can learn about American culture through media, it also has "the capacity to colonize and control the minds of individuals by constructing false expectations and misleading representations of a reality that may be irrelevant to their real lives" (Heredia 99) due to a lack of representation and unrealistic depictions. As a female immigrant of color, Esperanza is already dependent on cycles of production and consumption, and so is especially prone to these negative and "misleading" influences.

Even though Helen Chang does not find herself overwhelmed by debt in quite the same way as Esperanza, she too falls prey to the logic of consumerism, while eventually becoming an agent of labor upon which her family is dependent. For example, Helen is the member of the Chang family who has the strongest desire to move out of the city and into a "darling" split-level in the suburbs. Through magazines, television, and other media, Helen has conceived a specific vision of her American life and decides she will do anything she can to acquire it. She even suggests to Ralph, "*Maybe I should go to work, save up some money for a down payment*" (Jen 137, italics in original), to which Ralph responds unenthusiastically and dismissively, hoping to fulfill his own narrative of American success by having her remain at home. Yet, even from her domestic position, Helen will not give up on her desire to be a homeowner. She manages to acquire a "*special kind of loan*" as part of a "*new program to encourage people to move to the suburbs*," and while the down payment is not especially costly, "the monthly payments, however, were quite high" (Jen 154). The image of American material success that Helen desperately wants to achieve makes her unaware of the fact that, as Grace Hong identifies, "the promise of universal incorporation offered by these developmental narratives is contradicted by the material histories of racialized and gendered difference upon which the property system is based" (8). In other words, this "special loan" that Helen acquires is ostensibly one that is structured to take advantage of immigrants, and particularly immigrant women. The banks, in these situations, take advantage of immigrants' intense desire to assimilate into American culture, while knowing full well that due to structural and economic inequalities the cost of assimilation is too high.

Indeed, Helen and her family realize sooner rather than later that they are living beyond their means. Therefore, "[a]s a first step toward cutting costs, Helen volunteered to go to work in the chicken palace, as the cashier. Ralph objected, but they both knew there was no choice;" (Jen 240). Disrupting both Ralph's and Helen's narratives of monetary success and distinctly separate

public and domestic spheres, Helen becomes another example of an immigrant woman of color who must labor in order to survive. Furthermore, Helen's survival becomes more than simply a struggle to pay the bills, but also a struggle to protect herself from the objectification of the customers. Ironically, her strategy in this regard becomes a kind of performance:

> She got herself a larger apron after that, one that covered her whole front, rather than just the waist down, with very large ruffles. For a while, she pretended to barely speak English. "Dank you, prease come again." Then she began to look boldly at people--she stared, even—finding that this brazenness made them look away. (Jen 241)

Rather than trying hard to assimilate, to conform to certain characteristics of "American-ness," Helen finds that in order to get by, she must further distance herself from U.S. culture. She differentiates herself from other American citizens through her speech, her appearance, and even her aloof demeanor. She has come to the disheartening realization that she will never fully be able to fit into American society, and in fact her continued presence within this society at all is dependent on her inability to conform. Jen's narrative then, much like Cruz's, "focuses upon the limits of American national narratives, not least by revealing their gendered and racial biases" (Lee 60). Helen Chang and Esperanza colon, her counterpart in racialized labor, are vulnerable to the appeals, manipulations, and contradictions of "consumer citizenship" because of their identities as female immigrants of color.

Conclusion: Inability or Possibility?

Let it Rain Coffee and *Typical American* are obviously narratives that are rather pessimistic, or at least skeptical, about the limits of "consumer citizenship" for Latino/as and Asian Americans. However, while it is productive to illuminate the inequalities and contradictions intrinsic to this discourse, it is also somewhat unproductive to end discussion on this point. These narratives should also compel us to ask further questions about the intersections of citizenship and consumerism; to consider how these unconventional immigrant narratives may provide insight into alternatives for the individuals depicted. As García Canclini articulates, "we should ask ourselves if consumption does not entail something that sustains, nourishes, and to a certain extent constitutes a new mode of being citizens" (26). In other words, is there a way to use models of "consumer citizenship" to empower rather than marginalize these racialized groups? Is it possible to think about how these texts could positively theorize consumerism "as

an avenue of participatory democracy" (Hong 89), even for subjugated immigrant women?

Cruz's female activist character, Miraluz, could be read as a potential answer to these questions. Building upon her background as a member of the resistance during the reign of Trujillo, Miraluz decides to rebel against the exploitative, patriarchal factories and sweatshops that employ women in the Dominican Republic. She gathers a group of fellow female workers into an egalitarian collective that will produce their own line of underwear (dubbed El Secreto de la Victoria) to be marketed to the United States, as an alternative to the exploitative corporations like Victoria's Secret. To convince the other women to join her collective, she explains to them: "If the money that our families send us makes up half our economy, then what they choose to buy can affect the conditions of the women in these factories... What if those who have the money to shop, shop from the companies owned by women like us?" (Cruz 229-30). Miraluz offers a conception of consumer citizenship in line with García Canclini's, in which what one chooses to consume can have a direct and beneficial political outcome. She explains to Don Chan colon, her longtime political ally, that her “revolutionary label” is what she calls “socially responsible capitalism for the people, where everyone can still participate in the process. Those who want to buy can still buy, but without the guilt” (Cruz 278). Her character, then, could be seen "as an example of how politics can be rethought through the market" (Dalleo and Machado Saez 105).

This reading, however, is a bit too simple, as it neglects to take into account the ways in which Miraluz is always already an American producer and consumer. Not only are she and the other women dependent on income from their families who have settled in the United States, they are also still playing into the ways in which the Dominican Republic and other developing nations are entrenched in the global economy that heavily favors countries like the United States. Lowe explains in her analysis:

> Transnational industry's use of Asian and Latina women's labor--in Asia, Latin America, and the U.S.--is the contemporary site where the contradictions of the national and the international converge in an overdetermination of neocolonial capitalism, anti-immigrant racism, and patriarchal gender stratification. (160)

Miraluz's alternative method of production is admirable, but does not fully break away from the circulation of global capital in a way that would equalize Dominicans and immigrants. It recognizes this contradictory and overdetermined site of power, but does not thoroughly subvert

it. After all, “socially responsible capitalism” is still capitalism—one that will assuage the guilt experienced by upper-middle class North Americans. Miraluz even plans to use the internet to her advantage to market the wares of El Secreto de la Victoria. This is indeed a practical and profitable move, and although she is introduced to the internet through Santo’s son Bobby, who explains that because it is still a new technology it will be “free,” (Cruz 283), one cannot help but wonder when the U.S. influence in the Dominican Republic will take the power of technology away from the people. Moreover, as a technology originating in developed nations and to which the dominant white population has the most access, it would seem to be only a matter of time before the internet becomes simply another tool of Western-centric global capitalism within developing nations. Through their relationship with the U.S. economy in these ways, Miraluz and her female workers demonstrate how they have been "transformed" into American producers and consumers "before leaving their homeland" (Heredia 92).

With this critique in mind, I would not completely delegitimize Miraluz's efforts. I argue, rather, that readers should view Miraluz as an example of the possibilities of coalitional movements and politics. It is important that Miraluz does not rebel independently, but instead gathers together women of varying ages, backgrounds, and circumstances in order to further this admirable cause. The Dominican Republic, as a country affected by immigration and colonization, has a population comprised of various ethnicities (Dominican, Haitian, mulatto, Asian). Thus by uniting different members of this heterogeneous population, Miraluz demonstrates the progress that can be made through such collectivity, a collectivity that Lowe also nods to in her investigation of Asian and Latina transnational labor that I have previously cited.

Although the characters in Jen’s text do not make these same connections as overtly or politically as Miraluz and others from Cruz’s novel, I believe Jen is advocating for such coalitions, particularly at the closing of her novel. With Ralph's sister Theresa lying comatose in the hospital, Helen realizes that "Theresa had made that world possible" (288), "that world" being Helen's home (tense and problematic as it may sometimes be) in the United States. Recalling her bond with her sister-in-law, Helen comes to understand the importance of gendered bonds of support and love.[11] Even Ralph Chang, in my opinion, can be read as opening himself

[11] Rachel Lee reads the relationship between Helen and Theresa as not only

to coalitional possibilities in the end. On his way to the hospital, a memory of the possibilities of unconventional family bonds comes to mind. He remembers Theresa and her (married) lover Old Chao swimming in wading pools in the backyard, calling out to his wife Helen, "*Join us! Join us!*" in a mix of Mandarin and English (Jen 296). This recollection illustrates Ralph's slow realization that family and community bonds are about more than blood relation. And in addition, it foreshadows Jen's sequel novel *Mona in the Promised Land*, in which Ralph's daughter moves toward a coalitional politics as an Asian American teenager interested in Jewish culture and faith.

Mona in the Promised Land, focuses on teenaged Mona Chang, Ralph and Helen's youngest daughter. Specifically, the narrative follows her desire to convert to Judaism; to become what Cathy Schlund-Vials has dubbed a "Jewish Chinese American." It is easy to read this story of conversion from a pessimistic perspective. That is, because of the inability and "unwillingness of the other characters to acknowledge the viability of the protagonist's 'shift'" (Schlund-Vials 109), *Mona in the Promised* seems to reinforce the unfortunate fact the identity is inextricably tied to ethnicity and appearance, as is also evidenced by the two previously analyzed texts. However, I prefer to give a more nuanced reading of Jen's coming-of-age story. By shifting her focus from the first-generation to the second, I argue that Jen is tracing the legacy of American consumerist motivations within immigrant families, while also demonstrating the possibilities for cross-racial, gendered, and intergenerational coalitions. While it is true that Mona's quest to choose her own identity, to separate race from self, is difficult and fraught, it ultimately signals her desire to make a genuine connection with similarly marginalized groups.

At the same time, Mona's "switch" or "conversion" is resisted by everyone from her mother to Rabbi Horowitz, who will end up educating her on Jewish religion and history, the most frank and honest resistance comes from Alfred, an African-American who is employed at her family's restaurant. In response to Mona's claim about conversion and "education" he asserts that, "We're never going to have no big house or no big garage, either...We're never going to be Jewish, see, even if we grow our nose like Miss Mona here is planning to do. *We be black motherfuckers*" (137, italics in original). Schlund-Vials reads statements like these as "the

---

homosocial, but also romantic/sexual. While I find this to be a valid and illuminating interpretation, it is not necessarily central to my own argument about coalitional possibilities through gender, and so will not discuss it in detail.

inability of those around [Mona] to forget or dismiss dominant readings of ethnicity and race" (113). And while it is certainly true that Alfred doubts his capacity to choose a Jewish identity because of his "blackness" as well as Mona's ability to "grow her nose" (a stereotypical marker of Jewishness as a race), there is also a recognition of class stratification embedded in his dismissal. By explaining that he will never have a "big house" with a "big garage," Alfred realizes that as an African-American, as a racialized minority, he lacks purchasing power and the ability to be a fully interpellated consumer citizen. By contrast, "Mona's upper-middle-class socioeconomic position affords her the necessary leisure time to convert" (Schlund-Vials 121) and therefore allows her to more fully access some semblance of dominant, white citizenship.

And yet, if this is true, how then can we explain Mona's subsequent frustration with Judaism? What can be made of her break-up with her Jewish boyfriend who only wanted her to be "a kind of Jewish Yoko Ono" (Jen 223)? I argue that Mona begins to take the words of individuals like Alfred to heart, not in a depressing and fatalistic sense, but rather in a way that leads her to realize her ability to make more genuine connections with similar and yet different minority groups. In a conversation with Alfred, Mona reveals that despite her chosen Jewish identity, there are still some notable lifestyle differences between herself and her friends like Barbara, such as the fact that instead of hiring a gardener, Mona herself is in charge of lawn maintenance, leading to the following noteworthy exchange:

> "How come your daddy don't drive no Caddy-lack yet, all those flapjacks we send singing all day?" asks Alfred. "Why are you the gardener?"
>
> "Ancient Chinese tradition, I guess. No rice paddies to tend, so I mow the lawn instead..." (Jen 155).

While clearly meant to be humorous, this conversation also reflects a complicated intersection of race and class. Alfred sees himself as lower in class than Mona and the Changs, as he is their employee, but at the same time, Mona and her family have themselves not been able to achieve the degree of success that Alfred thinks should be afforded to them. And although Mona jokingly attributes it to "Ancienct Chinese tradition," there is a degree of truth in the statement, as it is her Chinese American identity that prohibits her from enacting a more complete American consumer citizenship. Earlier in their conversation Alfred claims: "White is white, man. Everything else is

black. Half and half is black" (155) and while seemingly an exaggeration, since it precipitates Mona's comment about gardening, it also stands as evidence of a connection between Mona and Alfred, despite their differences. Neither of them is white (and therefore, at least in some regards, neither of them is Jewish), and so neither of them has complete access to the benefits, material and otherwise, of dominant white American citizenship.

At this point, Mona becomes increasingly aware of certain class and consumer differences between her "fellow" Jewish friends. After her boyfriend Seth criticizes her father's apparent capitalistic exploitation of his workers, Mona is quick to jump to his defense. "This pancake house is everything for us... We're not like you. We don't have investments. We don't read the *Wall Street Journal*. I've never even seen a stock certificate" (Jen 159). The position of Mona's parents as business-owners is admittedly more complicated than Mona reveals in this instance, and it does not place them (or her) on equivalent standing as Alfred and the other employees, but it does nevertheless point to certain tensions between Mona's chosen identity and the one assigned to her by others. Again, it is her position as a Chinese American that causes Mona to realize that conventional material success and security associated with "Jewish-ness" will always be just outside of her reach. This realization demonstrates that "the United States is a place not of gain, but of loss, a location marked not by possibility but by limitation, and a country still invested in monolithic articulations of identity" (Schlund-Vials 110). However, I assert that regardless of these "monolithic articulations of identity" and apparent contradictions of consumer citizenship, Mona's relationship with characters of different, yet not altogether unfamiliar, racial identities such as Alfred, do in fact illuminate important moments of possibility.

By utilizing a comparative analysis of the cultural productions of Latino/as and Asian Americans as I have done, I assert that these same connections and coalitions can and should take place within contemporary United States society at large. By understanding how Asian American and Latino/a immigrants are similarly, but not equivalently, racialized and marginalized—especially when taking the experiences of women into consideration—we can, in the words of Hong, "bring together these different, yet aligned, struggles" and thereby "highlight solidarities that might arise *through* a variety of disidentifications and contestations" (xix, italics in original). There is a great deal at stake if we examine intersections in terms of both similarities

and differences. And perhaps more importantly, we may expose ways to utilize consumer citizenship for the benefit of racialized and gendered groups if we critically examine ways in which these groups do not and *cannot* conform to the expectations of U.S. society.

Locating Loata and Lilo:

Commodification and Consumption in Hawai'i

I begin this chapter, somewhat unconventionally, with a popular cultural text produced by media conglomerate Disney. However, as it is grounded specifically in Hawai'i and also (albeit sometimes problematically) emphasizes minority experience, I argue that it it worth analyzing in order to excavate how a popular and widely distributed children's film deals with issues of race, citizenship and consumption. *Lilo and Stitch*, released in 2002, centers on the lives of young Lilo and her sister Nani, ostensibly racialized as native Hawai'ians, and the alien Stitch, whom they adopt as a pet and eventual member of their unconventional family. There are striking similarities between the lived experience of Lilo and Nani and the children of R. Zamora Linmark's novel *Rolling the Rs*, especially in relation to consumption and (re)production, and so I argue that it is worth investigating the significance of these similarities. Reading relationally will thus also expose the often overlooked gaps and dissimilarities between Asian American and Polynesian experiences, as they relate to claims of locality in the contested space of Hawai'i.

Perhaps most notably, both texts feature precocious children who exhibit a thoughtful, critical approach to consumerism. Lilo obsessively consumes American pop culture, the object of her consumerist desires being Elvis Presley. She listens to his records on her record player, convinces Stitch to emulate Presley because he is, in her eyes, a "model citizen," and much of the film's soundtrack is composed of Presley's most popular songs. This choice, in many ways, makes sense, seeing as Elvis Presley himself is intimately connected to Hawai'i in the minds of most Americans through his surf movies and he spent a great deal of time their during his career. [12] In this way, Lilo's consumption of him does not seem altogether very subversive, especially when considered in conjunction with the activities of Linmark's Farrah Fawcett Fan Club. However, it's also important to note that Lilo, despite her gender, does not wish to consume Presley based on physical attraction and desire, but rather she has a desire to embody him or have others close to her do so. This can be seen in the moment when she is forlornly lying on her

12

See Allan Punzalan Isaac's reading of Presley in *Blue Hawaii* in *American Tropics*.

back while her Elvis record plays in the background. Lilo mouths the lyrics to Presley's song, thus allowing his voice to become hers. Although it is possible to read this as an appropriation of Hawai'ian subjectivity (something Presley did for much of his career), another possibility emerges when we consider that Lilo is listening to this song after a particularly painful encounter with her peers, in which she was ridiculed and marginalized. The music of Elvis Presley, then, becomes an outlet for her frustrations and she uses him to speak to her own unique experiences, much as Katrina and the like rewrite and recast pop culture products to suit their needs.

Admittedly, Lilo's experiences can also be read in a less than positive light. Emily Cheng firmly asserts that the film "seems to be embedded in a neo-liberal structure of feeling in representing Hawaii's relationship to the larger U.S. nation in terms of tourism and a celebration of indigenous culture, as well as through calling attention to the liberal market as upholding the family and nation, in a sense" (130). The inclusion of native characters, along with their consumption of typical American market products, does not provide an alternative to conventional conceptions of Hawai'i, but instead reemphasizes the multicultural "melting-pot" metaphor which previous texts have sought to debunk. Moreover, according to Cheng, Lilo's consumption is not agentic but rather indicative of her assimilation into the U.S. neocolonial project, placing her in stark contrast to Linmark's protagonists. However, Cheng's analysis does not fully take into account Lilo's activities as not only a cultural consumer, but also a producer. In particular, Lilo creates not only her own products, but also her own mythos and teleology, in order to make a space for her often overlooked identity in dominant Hawai'ian culture.

When the viewer is first introduced to Lilo, she is running late to her hula practice, having spent time with a fish friend named Pudge at the beach. Her instructor questions her tardiness and Lilo explains that she needed to bring Pudge a peanut butter sandwich because "Pudge controls the weather." Leaving him hungry, therefore, would have negative consequences on the weather patterns in her locale.[13] Lilo's story, in this case, works to explain her own particular experiences, while also building upon her subjectivity as a native Hawai'ian. As Noenoe Silva

13

There's a twinge of tragedy connected to Lilo's imaginative story in this example as the viewer is later told that her parents were killed in a car accident after a sudden rainstorm. Her need to control the weather, then, speaks to a desire to prevent further loss.

explains in *Aloha Betrayed,* the concept of "aloha 'aina" associated with the Hawai'ian anti-annexation struggle and most commonly translated as "nationalism" or "patriotism" is really far more complex. It "encompasses more than nationalism and is not an exact fit with 'patriotism,' the usual translation. Where nationalism and patriotism tend to exalt the virtues of a people or a race, aloha 'aina exalts the land" (11). Lilo, by constructing a narrative that illustrates the intersections of the natural landscape and phenomena with human experience, taps into this legacy of "aloha 'aina" particular to the Hawai'ian islands. At the same time, because this story is also an imaginative creation of her own--one that admittedly others, even fellow Pacific Islanders, do not completely understand--Lilo is constructing or culturally producing her own identity using the media and narrative available to her. This same kind of subject formation through creative production is visible in Lilo's interactions with her peers and her sister. Following her hula class, Lilo attempts to play with her classmates: a diverse group of young girls made up of Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and one particularly vocal *haole,* who emerges as the leader. Lilo excitedly shows them the doll she has constructed herself, in an effort to mimic their own, and the girls immediately mock her project due to its ugliness. Lilo, in her disappointment, initially rejects her homemade doll, but then reclaims it after her peers have left, hugging it tightly to her body. This scene demonstrates that, although Lilo's cultural productions, coupled with her Hawai'ian identity, often leave her marginalized by her peers, they are also crucial to allowing her to render her experiences legible--to others and herself, not unlike how Edgar, Katrina, and perhaps most notably Loata, construct and (re)construct their own subjectivities in *Rolling the R's*, even at the expense of their alienation. Similarly, Lilo defines her particular experiences in relation to Hawai'ian tourism in a scene with her older sister and guardian Nani. Sitting in her bed at the conclusion to her emotionally trying day, Lilo gazes fondly at the numerous pictures she has taken and posted on her wall of Mainland tourists on the beach. Most of them are tackily dressed, sunburned, and/or overweight, and yet Lilo remarks to her sister, "Aren't they beautiful?" Emily Cheng interprets this particular moment as "mak[ing] a relationship of tourism and fascination with other cultures visible, for while tourists go to Hawai'i to experience 'aloha spirit',' the locals find the white mainlanders equally exotic." However, from Cheng's perspective this scene is problematic because, "In positing this relationship of equal exchange, the film seems to elide the unequal political and economic power, and histories of settler colonialism and violence that mark Hawai'i as a U.S. state" (128).

While I agree that *Lilo and Stitch*, even as a cultural product in and of itself, ignores these legacies of violence and economic and military dominance, I also think there is a productive potential in Lilo's photographs. They emphasize the importance of cultural production as a method of resistance to dominant society and discourse. Silva notes the importance of these modes of protest in her own project, explaining that, "print media, particularly newspapers, functioned as sites for broad social communication, political organizing, and the perpetuation of the native language and culture" (13). Lilo's photographs may not be as organized or sophisticated a method of protest and subject formation, but they are equally overlooked in their importance and validity due this fact that they do not appear overtly political. It is crucial to note, however, that they allow Lilo to create a space for herself in the hierarchized and tourist-dominated Hawai'ian society through her ability to turn the "ugly" into something "beautiful," much as she does with her doll and even her familial relationships. She establishes herself as a cultural producer in a way that both validates her own marginalized status and makes it visible to the audience. Lilo does not fit in, even in an already liminal space, like the Hawai'ian islands, but her creations and stories allow her to make sense of her status and comfortably reject conventions of normality; a rejection that the protagonists of the Hawai'ian-based novel *Rolling the R's* also make when they choose to "queer" the popular American texts, media, and individuals with which they are obsessed, leading readers to suspect that there is something particular about Hawai'ian experience that leads to this level of consumer disidentification.

From Disney to Small Press: Conscious Consumerism in Hawai'i

R. Zamora Linmark's unconventional novel *Rolling the R's*, focused on the lives of a group of preteens in 1970s Honolulu, contains a vignette entitled "Remixing America," which is made up almost entirely of disco song lyrics—a stylistic choice that reflects the overabundance of popular culture in the lives of the novel's characters. The speaker in this brief chapter entices and tantalizes the reader to come to the discotheque America, stating that, "America's got everythin' your heart desires: Dancin', pinball, fooz-ball, dancin', skee-ball, Pac-Man, dancin', and more dancin'. Buy a slice of pizza, get a medium-size Coke free. Seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year, America's dancin' on your beck and call" (26). The specific location of a disco dance club in this highly referential section of text is an important symbol of how "Remixing America" also refers to the nation as a whole and its consumerist, materialist

promises to its citizens. It evokes the prevailing sentiment that America is the only place one would want to be: from the repetition of "dancin'" five times in this one quotation America is evoked as a place that has "everythin' your heart desires," especially if those desires are related to consumable media and entertainment, as we see. These are the goods, items, and activities that one should want most, not only from a discotheque, but also from a nation; that is, America (in both senses) is conceived as a neverending "seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year" party filled with food, music, and celebrities, which one is expected to desire and through which one is expected to define themself

It is perhaps especially crucial that this obsession with consumer culture and mass media is located specifically in the state of Hawai'i and on a more specific level amongst a group of queer and precocious Asian and Pacific Islander preteens. Throughout its history, Hawai'i's relationship to the continental United States has been based on economic production and consumption. From the creation of the Republic of Hawai'i in 1895 to its annexation and installation as a U.S. territory to its eventual admittance as a state in 1959 to the present day, Hawai'i has existed in the United States imaginary primarily as a producer of various tropical commodities (i.e., pineapples and sugar) and as a tourist destination.[14] This island state has, in fact, been consumed on multiple levels. Adria Imada traces the cooptation and consumption of traditional Hawai'ian hula in her article "Hawai'ians on Tour: Hula Circuits Through the American Empire," in which she explains that in the early twentieth century, before Hawai'i became an official U.S. state, the nature of Hawai'i as an economic outpost began to change. She writes: "The orientation of the territorial economy was shifting from agribusiness to new crops of tourists. Hawaiian bodies and Hawaiian culture—particularly Hawaiian music and hula—became valued commodities for the tourist industry, both inside and outside Hawai'i" (112). Even in the latter portion of the twentieth century, this commodification of Hawai'i as a consumable destination and location still persists, as Morris Young identifies. Most television shows and films produced in American popular culture about Hawai'i, for instance, still rely on cliches and tropes of Hawai'i as a tourist, consumerist paradise. They "have not moved beyond

14

For more specifics on the exact history of Hawai'i (particularly as it relates to Asian American and Pacific Islander experience) see Ngai's *Impossible Subjects,* Isaac's *American Tropics,* and Silva's *Aloha Betrayed*, from which I gathered a great deal of my historical information.

representations which continue to exoticize the place and the people" (Young 188). On another level, as an island and a kind of liminal space, Hawai'i is also constantly inundated with consumer goods, for anything that isn't "natural" must be imported, whether food, human, or media. Katherine Bjork, for example, charts the long history of contract labor in Hawai'i, even after its annexation into a decidedly anti-contract labor U.S. polity. After the overthrow of the Hawai'ian monarchy, the newly established Republic of Hawai'i became a literal economic and corporate oligarchy, as it was run by expatriate American entrepreneurs, such as the Hawai'ian Sugar Planters' Association. Groups such as this highly encouraged the use of immigrant contract labor, but specifically a racialized contract labor. "The preference for laborers from Europe held by federal officials and some advocates of 'citizen labor' in Hawaii was at odds with the desire of Hawaiian planters to continue 'oriental' labor migration under contract" (Bjork 142). The term "oriental" is important to note, as the HSPA and other similar groups utilized labor primarily from Asian countries like China, Japan, and later the Philipines. The heavy recruitment of such immigrant groups partly accounts for the Asian/American plurality in the Hawai'ian population today, as well as the hierarchized nature of these racial groups, of which there are also lasting remnants. Bjork notes that: "The HSPA did not merely rely on the natural barriers that language and culture posed to workers' organization; the Association encouraged fragmentation of the work force along ethnic lines by imposing wage scales and job allocations based on race" (148). It is these racialized[15] means of stratification and division in the workplace that have persisted in some ways to the present day in Hawai'i, where East Asian/Americans such as those of Chinese and Japanese descent, as well as white Hawai'ians or *haole,* occupy a higher rung on the social ladder than groups like Filipinos, who were frequently subject to the greatest workplace exploitation and discrimination. Although, Filipinos still occupy a slightly more privileged status than native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders, who are frequently invisible in the narratives of their own homeland. Filipinos are still able to reap (some) of the benefits of settler colonialism in Hawai'i, whereas native Hawai'ians are usually discussed only in a historical context, in relation

15

By racialized, I mean categorization and discrimination that is dependent on how one is racially marked. Thus, to be racialized has to do with one's appearance, as well as how one is perceived by others, which depends on an intersection of physical and social (i.e., class, ethnic background) factors.

to their attempts to resist colonial rule, when they are discussed at all.[16] *Rolling the R's*, as a cultural production articulating the Asian American experience in Hawai'i, makes these inequalities and hierarchies more legible, even as they affect the lives of racialized and marginalized children. The group of children upon whom Linmark's narrative focuses the most time and attention are from working-class Filipino (as well as Vietnamese and Polynesian) backgrounds and exhibit an emerging queer sexuality. Thus, they are multiply excluded from American identity and citizenship, due to their class, race, and sexuality.

In the chapter "Two Filipinos," the hierarchies and contradictions of identity in Hawai'i emerge most clearly, stemming from a seemingly innocuous classroom sharing activity. Mrs. Takemoto goes "row by row asking [the children] their ethnicity" (67) and with a few notable exceptions, such as the Samoan Loata and the Okinawan Jared Shimabukuro, most of the children announce that they are Filipino. Nelson Ariola, however, refuses to recognize his Filipino heritage and instead claims that he is only American. When the rest of the class, especially the other Filipino children, object to his self-classification and ask why he won't claim his Filipino identity, he explains that it is not only because he "was born here," but also:

> "...because," he pauses, "because I'm not an immigrant." He glares at Florante and Vicente. "I don't speak English like I got a plugged nose," he says, shifting his eyee to Mai-Lan. "And because my grandfather never came here for cheap labor." He sneers at Benjamin Fontanilla, who, when he's not busy living in his own small world, tells his classmates stories about his paternal great-grandfather, Apo Lakay, who was a Sakada, one of the first Filipinos to arrive in Hawai'i to work at the sugar plantation on Kaua'i." (67-8)

Nelson's reasoning articulates the multifaceted and contradictory aspects of Filipino/American identity. From his perspective, he cannot be Filipino by virtue of his birth, and yet that is still not reason enough. He also disclaims his heritage due to his language and family history, as a way of differentiating himself not only from his Filipino classmates, whom he views as a lower-class, but also from the other Asian and Asian American students like Mai-Lan, who is actually of

16

For more on these points see the previously cited Candace Fujikane and Noenoe Silva.

Vietnamese descent. At the same time, the objections voiced by his classmates, both Filipino and white, indicate that he cannot truly escape his ethnicity; that he will constantly be racialized by those around him despite his intense desire to be viewed as simply American. Interestingly, though, this process of racialization is not limited to the Asian American characters, for even white Stephen Bean is "raced" by Katrina, who calls him a "haole" when he claims to be authentically American. When he protests that he is "Caucasian," Katrina replies, "Same freakin' smell, dumbass... You in Hawai'i and a Caucasian is a haole is a haole is a Caucasian. And if you no can handle the tropical heat, go back to Antarctica" (69). Her remark demonstrates that based on their location in the liminal location of Hawai'i, even the typically neutral and "raceless" white individuals in the context of the U.S. continent exhibit a traceable and identifiable racial difference, unlike those on the mainland. The term "haole" was originally used by native and "local" Hawai'ians in the late nineteenth century to mark their white colonizers, which differentiates these individuals from their counterparts still on the Mainland. Therefore, being classified as "haole," renders those like Stephen Bean related to, if still distinct from, their fellow racialized Hawai'ians and because Katrina uses the term as an insult (a valence which it still carries) it complicates the power structures on the island associated with divisions between "local" and "settler" or "outsider." Those who are "haole" are also marginalized, though not quite to the same degree as Filipinos and Pacific Islanders, because they will never truly "fit in" to the island culture.

The use of this term and its resultant conflicts also contributes to the picture of a "multicultural paradise" often associated with Hawai'i. But as Katherine Bjork points out, this conception is problematic, for "it suggests at once a kind of 'melting pot' trajectory for Hawaiian [sic] society while at the same time clearly implying the survival of a racial hierarchy" (148). Lisa Lowe more explicitly theorizes the problems with multicultural "melting pot" project. She argues that, according to the logic of multiculturalism, "The important distinctions and contradictions within and among racial and ethnic minority groups are leveled according to a pluralism that effectively continues to privilege the centrality of dominant culture" (90). That is, in places like Los Angeles and Hawai'i, but also in the United States more broadly, the existence of different groups or identities is acknowledged, but only on a superficial level that overlooks the ways in which these various groups are differently and unequivalently formed, in the interest of creating an image of positive, convivial diversity. Linmark's text and his choice of

protagonists illuminate this problematic and hierarchized space of modern Hawai'i, as we see when "The Two Filipinos" ends with a harsh statement from Edgar, who says to both Nelson and Stephen, "The ground you standin' on is not the freakin' meltin' pot but one volcano. And one day, the thing goin' erupt and you guys goin' be the first ones for burn" (70). Playing on the same "melting pot" metaphor referenced by Bjork, Edgar brings to light the inherent inequalities that make Hawai'ian society volatile, rather than progressive and dynamic. Moreover, from his particular perspective, he can see that these issues will not always remain below the surface, but will rather eventually "erupt," and indeed, his outburst and the deliberate (mis)consumption exercised by him and his friends throughout the text stand as examples of just such eruptions and disruptions.

Linmark's non-linear, highly referential text also makes clear that these preadolescents, rather than giving in to the futility of their marginalized existence, construct a new space for themselves in Hawai'ian, and therefore, U.S. society via consumption of goods and especially media. Moreover, they critically and sometimes incorrectly consume these products, allowing their newly created spaces and identities to subvert typical conventions of American identity. In this way, these children demonstrate the power and potential of consumer citizenship, as articulated by García Canclini and analyzed in the previous chapter.

"Who in Kalihi doesn't want to be Farrah?"

Perhaps the most apparent and salient instance of this reconstruction and "remixing" of American consumer culture is the appropriation of Farrah Fawcett by the young Honoluluans, which includes: Edgar Ramirez, an openly queer young Filipino who is also obsessed with Donna Summer; Katrina Cruz, a Filipina very cognizant of her own sexuality despite the fact that she is only ten years old; Vicente, whose love of campy popular culture is couched by the fact that he is closeted; Florante, a Filipino whose family recently immigrated to Hawai'i in the wake of political violence; and Loata Faalele, a Samoan boy whose voice the reader hears fairly infrequently. Edgar forms the "Farrah Fawcett Fan Club" with his friends to provide a space in which they can celebrate and respond to their pop culture idol. Their weekly meetings are comprised of both familiar fan club activities, as well as those of a much more structured and critical nature:

> Once a week, the club met at Edgar's house to: 1) write letters to Farrah Fawcett c/o ABC Network; 2) show off their collections of Farrah memorabilia, including cut-outs from glamour magazines and Farrah's latest swimsuit poster; 3) role-play scenes from *Charlie's Angels*; and 4) discuss socio-politically charged issues raised by the show, such as prostitution, lesbian undertones, and Orientalism. (23)

The first two items on the agenda are not unlike activities you would encounter within any preteen fan club gathering. However, the critically engaged discussion and role-playing are responsive and critical instances of fan engagement and participation. The fact that a group of fifth graders is attuned to issues of sexuality and representation in the show *Charlie's Angels* demonstrates that their viewership is highly active and reflective. They recognize that their beloved television show is actually constructed quite problematically, but rather than ignoring these constructions or rejecting the show entirely, Edgar and company incorporate a discussion of these problems, such as "lesbian undertones" and "Orientalism," into their fan practices--a balanced and mature form of consumption that I would argue results from their marginalized subject positions. Because they experience generalizations and constructions related to their race and gender on a regular basis, these children are better equipped to recognize these same generalizations within American media and to subsequently rewrite or remake them, which we see in the fact that they also "role-play" scenes from the show and their own imagination. They enact and reenact moments from *Charlie's Angels* in which they play the title roles, and most often "queer" them through cross-gender casting. Edgar, for example, always insists on playing Jill Munroe (originally portrayed by Farrah), which demonstrate that gender and race alone do not prohibit someone from acting as Farrah. Rather, it depends on a wide variety of intersecting factors, including individul preference and agency.

This agentic role-playing is especially evident in a later chapter of Linmark's text, "The Casting," which is constructed like a film or television script and features the children arguing over who should play what part in their reenactment of *Charlie's Angels*. Notably, Katrina, although she is the only girl in the group, expresses frustration at being cast as Bosley (again) and demands an explanation from Edgar, the self-appointed "director" of the scene. He explains that the character assignments have nothing to do with gender identity, and instead depend upon

a combination of innate character traits and embodied appearance such as femininity, intelligence, and perceived sexuality. Katrina replies to these casting directions in disbelief:

> So, in other words, you tellin' me that cuz Sabrina look like one lez I cannot be her cuz I more fem than her but not fem enough for be Jill Munroe or Kelly Garrett. You sayin' that's why everytime we play *Charlie's Angels*, I end up playin' Bosley... (129)

The reasoning behind Edgar's casting practices (other than, obviously, to ensure he that gets to play the coveted role of Jill Munroe) displays a complex negotiation of sexual and gender identity. These children have constructed a spectrum of femininity and masculinity, homosexuality and heterosexuality that, compellingly, do not necessarily correlate with the genders of the characters or children in question. Florante, for example, is able to play the part of Sabrina Duncan not only because he "resembles Sabrina Duncan" more than Katrina, but also because Sabrina "look butch enough for pass for one guy" (128). Based on this logic, then, it makes more sense for Florante, a boy, to play the more butch Sabrina. Whereas Katrina, despite the fact that she is a girl, must play Bosley, because as she concludes, "that means Bosley stay somewhere between butch and fem" (129). Not only have Katrina and her friends rewritten the intentions and meanings of a popular television show to fit their own needs and desires, they have also used these characters to help craft their own identities, long before current television fans classified themselves by asking themselves such questions as, "Are you a Carrie or a Charlotte?" and in a much richer and nuanced fashion. As Victor Bascara explains, these preteens are "simultaneously enamored by and critical of the American mass culture that structures their queer desires. By abortively seeking to inhabit the models of proper comportment displayed in the movies and broadcast over the radio, they subvert those models and imagine new ones" (113). In this way, Linmark's text illuminates how multiply marginalized individuals, such as Edgar, Katrina, and the rest of their band of misfits, display an agentic form of consumer citizenship, one which involves a deliberate misuse of consumer objects, as well as a kind of give-and-take between media and viewers.

The obsession with Farrah Fawcett is not limited to these fifth graders, however, and in fact, based on the chapter "Kalihi in Farrah," consumption of her mediated body is a staple occupation of many of the residents of this working-class neighborhood. In particular, high

school student Orlando Domingo not only wants to watch Farrah, to consume her, but also to *be* her. When the reader is first introduced to Orlando, the primary aspect of his identity is that:

> Orlando Domingo's favorite letter is F, not F for Filipino, but F for Farrah, and he won't answer to his friends and classmates who call him Orlando, his teachers who address him as Mr. Domingo, or his mother who nicknamed him Orling.
>
> "Just call me Farrah," he says, "as in Far-Out Farrah, or Faraway Farrah." (23)

Orlando's captivation with Farrah takes on an embodied quality, as he recreates her "million-dollar mane" using his mother's curlers and mimics her wardrobe episode-by-episode, always, of course, in full make-up "courtesy of Helena Rubinstein's The Paris Boutique Kit" (24). In short, his consumption of Farrah enables him to become Farrah, as is evidenced by the fact that his gender-bending image takes up a prominent position on the cover of Linmark's book. This image, however, is also marked by Orlando's Asiatic, Filipino features (dark skin, dark hair, etc.). Thus, the text also demonstrates how Orlando is not an exact facsimile of Farrah, but rather his own uniquely imagined version of her. Indeed, based on the reactions of school officials, there seems to be a fear that anyone and everyone in Kalihi has the ability to become their own version of Farrah. The football coaches panic and explain that, "We gotta do something before our boys catch this madness and start huddling in skirts and pom poms" (24). Being and consuming Farrah and *Charlie's Angels*, then, has less to do with the sexuality and gender of these individuals (although this certainly plays a part) and more to do with the viral nature of these media and products. Although, at the same time, these two points are not necessarily separate, for the fear of "contagion" would likely not be so fervent if it was not intimately connected to the potential for sexual and gender transgression. The teacher and coaches are afraid that their star players will not only imitate Orlando's obsessive consumption, but that they will do so through performances and embodiments of "queerness" by wearing skirts and holding pom-poms, just as Orlando consumes Farrah down to the minutiae of her clothing and appearance.

By using a language of contagion to describe the consumption practiced by Orlando, Linmark implies that it would apparently be all too easy for the other high schoolers and children to replicate this behavior. And indeed, if Edgar, Katrina, and company are any indication, they already do. In addition, as Bascara notes, Orlando "is also an example of the legal apparatus's

inability to contain transgressive formations that exceed direct regulation by the state under liberalism" (127). Put another way, Orlando's transgressive and subversive choices and methods of consumption display the limits of traditional legal and juridical citizenship, especially in the United States. As I articulated in the previous chapter, the current neoliberal structure of the United States creates a contradictory dichotomy between the abstract, race-less (i.e., white) citizen and racialized and sexualized "others" that fall outside the realm of this abstract citizen, as well as help to define it based on their very inability to belong. Therefore, in response to this contradictory existence, Orlando demonstrates the possibilities connected to a citizenship and belonging measured, instead, by culture and agentic consumption.

F for Failure (?)

It is also possible, of course, to read these characters as "failures," especially in light of the fact that they are vilified and marginalized, sometimes violently so, by mainstream[17] society, even insofar as Honolulu and Kalihi already fall outside of the mainstream. In particular, Edgar, Katrina, and the others to a somewhat lesser degree are repeatedly singled out by their teachers for punishment due to their rebellious behavior and poor performance in the classroom. The final chapter in Linmark's text, aptly titled "F for Book Report," stands as a prime example of this contentious relationship and is comprised entirely of Katrina's book report on the Judy Blume novel *Forever: A Moving Story of the End of Innocence*. Although it is easy to read this as an example of Katrina's literal failure, by ending the book with this chapter, I argue that Linmark is actually pointing to her power and agency, and her ability to rewrite conventional narratives and "texts" to her own advantage. First and foremost Katrina's very choice of text for this report is an unconventional novel by popular author Judy Blume. Judy Blume's young adult novels, while immensely popular, especially among young girls in the 1970s and 1980s, are hardly the types of books one would normally use as the subject for a class assignment. That is, they are popular, rather than literary, texts. And *Forever* especially qualifies as such, as it is a highly sentimental and affective story of young romance and the loss of virginity, subjects that are already

17

Here I'm using "mainstream" to refer to normative white, heterosexual, American subjectivity. And American, in turn, also implies the continental United States, hence my point that Hawai'i already occupies the limits of "mainstream" society.

questionable for a fifth-grader to be reading about. Katrina not only relates to this text, however, but does a great deal of interesting and compelling work with "reclaiming it" in her book report. She writes, "Forever is one of the bestest books I ever read cuz it's so true-to-life and I know it cuz I lived it.... Was kinda scary actually, reading this book, cuz felt like I was reading about myself" (144). Although Katrina's response to this book is very subjective and steeped in emotion, she demonstrates the very power of this type of reader response. What is most important to her, as a reader and consumer, is that this text speaks to her own personal, lived experience. She is able to see herself in it, even though she is ostensibly not the target audience. Katrina, in this way, has created a space for herself in the realm of American consumerism where she had previously been overlooked by reading, relating to, and reconstructing a popular novel about a Caucasian teenager to suit her own experiences. In this way, Katrina's rereading and rewriting is a dialectical move that gestures toward her desire to be incorporated into the dominant societal narrative while simultaneously rejecting this narrative outright. The fact that these two means of subject formation are almost inextricable from each other is important because it demonstrates that the cultural products to which Katrina has access can help to mediate her experiences, but only in limited ways, and so she must rely on her individual experiences and agency to respond to and rewrite these texts.

Moreover, Katrina uses her reading of Judy Blume to create an almost pedagogical moment, demonstrating the tension between her and her teacher and even reversing the conventional power dynamic. Towards the end of her surprisingly lengthy report, she states, "I recommend this book especially for you, Mrs. Takemoto, cuz you might learn a thing or two about love and the painful truth that nothing last forever, even love" (148-9). These are achingly wise and poignant sentiments, especially coming from a ten year-old, and it's not difficult to imagine the anger and frustration Mrs. Takemoto must have felt when reading them. Katrina's intention is quite admirable, though, for she displays a genuine desire to "educate" Mrs. Takemoto, instead of allowing Mrs. Takemoto to educate her. She tells her teacher to forget about her unfaithful husband, stating, "Why hang around somebody when he like you out of his sight? You only wasting your time" (149). While this moment of personal albeit unwarranted advice is seemingly out of place in the genre of a book report, Katrina bases the lessons she has learned about love and which she would like to impart to Mrs. Takemoto on her reading of *Forever*. Furthermore, by recommending the book to her teacher, Katrina indicates that she would like

Mrs. Takemoto to exercise the same level of critical, personal reader-response. Thus, Katrina not only reconstructs Judy Blume's narrative to fit the life of a working-class Filipina in Hawai'i, she explains that this level of critical, conscious consumption is possible with nearly everyone, even those who are resistant to it and perhaps especially those in her liminal and marginalized Hawai'ian community. Through the very structured and traditional genre of the book review, Katrina is able to powerfully construct and defend her own subjectivity and extend these possibilities to her readers, further demonstrating how, "The preadolescent children simultaneously abide by and parody the regimentation of organizational disciplining to properly appreciate their objects of desire" (Bascara 126). More importantly, by focusing on a sentimental and popular, and thus "non-literary," text, Katrina justifies an increased attention to these highly consumable texts which, like similarly pulp-y and sensational media like *Charlie's Angels*, may provide a means for overlooked individuals and groups to assert their identities through the very act of consumption and (re)production.

Consumption and Inclusion/Asian and Pacific

The previous examples have demonstrated what I would deem the "productive consumption" of the characters in Linmark's text, especially as related to their specific location as inhabitants of the Hawai'ian islands, which are actually sites of multiply layered localities and identities. As Victor Bascara notes, "Rolling the R's exacerbates contradictions between a geographically and a historically local formation on the one hand and, on the other, the national and imperial terms of coherence that this local formation ultimately fails to meet. The contradictions that emerge at the site of these confrontations ironically and presciently fuel the pleasures of the precocious preadolescents in Linmark's text. These Asian Pacific immigrants to the United States desperately seek to become the Americans that we--and they--see they had already long been under neocolonialism" (117-8). Bascara effectively identifies these contradictory sites as places and gaps where the U.S. neocolonial project unexpectedly emerges and is sometimes subverted. At the same time the conflation of "Asian Pacific immigrants" here leaves one important question unanswered. It's true that the merry band of preteens on which Linmark's text focuses most of its attention does contain a Pacific Islander, a Samoan named Loata Faalele, and that his inclusion in the group is, on the surface, a subject of little to no discussion or debate. However, a closer inspection of the group's interactions reveals that there

are many problematic ways in which Loata's unique experience as a Pacific Islander is lumped in with the experiences of his Asian American compatriots or otherwise completely ignored or overlooked. In fact, the few times Loata speaks up to add his perspective to a group discussion or to dissent from the majority opinion about what music they should listen to or who should play which part in *Charlie's Angels,* the others respond with eyerolls, exasperation, or even by telling him to shut up. Even in a group of already outcast children, Loata Faalele in some ways becomes doubly marginalized despite (and perhaps because of) his groups' best efforts at inclusion.

In this regard, the interpersonal dynamics of Linmark's text reflect in microcosm a larger debate currently circulating the field of Asian American studies. Should the category of Pacific Islander Studies be included as a subfield of Asian American academic inquiry? And, similarly, are Pacific Islanders part of the same political and social identity as Asian Americans, but simply with their own unique perspectives and agendas, not unlike South Asians and Southeast Asians?[18] The perspectives on this matter are divided and, sometimes, heated, although there has also been some critical work done to bridge these divides. In addition to Bascara, Allan Punzalan Isaac, for example, in his *American Tropics*, argues for a use of the Pacific Rim (including and especially Hawai'i) as a way of reorienting American and Asian American studies to consider the reaches and implications of American (neo)colonial empire. Specifically, he writes: "By extending its borders to incorporate tropical lands and peoples through its neocolonial adventures, the U.S. nation-state created an 'American Tropics' as part of its national identity" (5). Isaac very productively argues for the inclusion of these tropical, colonial outposts in studies of American identity and history, in which the instances and legacies of imperialism are often elided or deliberately forgotten. However, his project still admittedly recenters the discipline in favor of Asian location (i.e., the Philippines), as his primary goal is to recover the Philipines as not only an Asian, but also as a decidedly American location. Although he provides several examples and readings of cultural productions concerning Pacific Island locations such as Hawai'i, his emphasis, as an Asian American and Filipino Studies scholar, remains primarily on the implications of considering an "American Tropics" in relation to the Philipines. His reading

18

I feel that the tone and framing of these questions already begins to reveal my own perspective on these issues, but I also think that there is no clearer or more succinct way to lay them out for my reader.

of Filipino and Hawai'ian texts such as *Dogeaters* and *Waimea Summer* relationally is important to his geographic project, but I would like to further explore how Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands are materially *distinct* from Asian locations and nations. Scholars such as Candace Fujikane note that a purely Asian American approach can unwittingly perpetuate projects and ideologies of settler colonialism in these Pacific Island locations. That is, Asian/Asian Americans often forget that they are also foreign occupiers of these Pacific locations, regardless of the length of their occupancy. Not even the marginalized queer preteens are completely exempt from this complicated hierarchy, for, "While Japanese and Chinese settlers have come to dominate the political system in Hawai'i, Filipinos and other subordinated Asian groups, too, are settlers, even as the racism and discrimination they are subjected to illuminates the complex power differentials among settler groups" (Fujikane 76). Thus, reading the experiences of such groups in tandem with Pacific Islanders runs the risk of further hiding or limiting the latter's agency, just as the dominant roles of Edgar, Katrina, Vicente, etc. can cause readers of *Rolling the Rs* to forget about the Samoan Loata entirely.

Even Linmark, as a Filipino writer, can sometimes unknowingly overlook Loata in favor of foregrounding the hilarious interactions of his Filipino characters. Still, there are in fact moments when Loata's agency and his unique perspective emerges for the reader to uncover. For example, in the chapter "Battle Poem of the Republic," Florante describes a nationalistic poetry contest in which he and his classmates participate and the various poems which they produce. In particular, Florante notes that "Loata Faalele wrote 'bout this road in the deep end of Kalihi Valley diverging and he could not figure out which one to take, so he took the one that was less familiar, and he ended up in Laie" (57). Loata has clearly plagiarized the oft-referenced poem by Robert Frost, but interestingly, he has rewritten to suit his own experiences, not unlike the rewriting the Katrina did in her book report. In this regard, both children are exercising their power not only as consumers of typically American products (canonical and otherwise), but as textual and cultural producers. I would like to focus closer attention on Loata's production, however, because, "The humor of the racialized absurdity is bettered only by the narrative that Loata lives out in his version of the poem. He seems to have done Frost one better: he actually arrives somewhere, namely Laie. (Laie happens to be the site of the famous Polynesia Cultural Center.)" (Bascara 122). In other words, Loata, whether consciously or unconsciously, writes his subjectivity into Frost's narrative and it is a subjectivity that is distinct not only from a

conventionally American one, but also that of his largely Asian American peers. By ending his poem in Laie, a location of Polynesian cultural significance, Loata reminds the readers of his own Polynesian identity. And although Loata (obviously) does not win the poetry contest, I would argue that it is his failure to win that demonstrates his distinct subjectivity, since, as a Samoan, he is continually overlooked, even when attempting to conform to dominant American narratives and even in favor of his Asian American counterparts.

Through his text, then, Linmark admittedly foregrounds Asian American and Filipino American experience, but it is this choice that in fact illuminates crucial inequities still in place on the island of Hawai'i and which particularly affect Polynesians and Native Hawai'ians. We see this at play to a great degree in the chapter "Kalihi is in the Heart," in which the touristic aspect of Hawai'ian existence is perhaps the most explicitly discussed. After a deaf American tourist couple mistakenly boards the stuffy and uncomfortable "#7 green bus" which gives a disorienting "tour" of the Kalihi area and subsequently suffer fatal asthma attacks, the children discuss the touristic appeal (or lack thereof) in Kalihi. Edgar explains the contradiction that, "to [tourists], you invisible... But to you, they not." Loata fails to grasp Edgar's point and, frustrated, Edgar asks him to pretend to be a tourist in Kalihi: "Eyes closed, Loata begins to map out Kalihi. 'Get Kam Shopping Center, the open market, Higa's store, Boulevard Saimin, Fujiya's Ink, Sato's Shave Ice Store, the Purple Man's house, Pohaku's Bar...'" (106). Edgar remains frustrated, however, because as he explains these are "local places you seein', not tourist traps" (107). To Edgar, the distinction is obvious, but Loata fails to understand why these places of such importance and significance in his own life would not have the same function for visitors. Moreover, he doesn't seem to understand why his friends are able to easily separate local from commodified spectacle. It would be too easy to read this instance as stemming from a general stupidity on Loata's part. Instead, I assert that this scene exemplifies the different orientations and experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders even when they occupy the same space, both in the text and in the context of disciplinary formation. Moreover, Loata's spatial reading of Kalihi is dismissed even by his friends, again demonstrating his doubly marginalized position as a Pacific Islander amidst *haoles* and Asian Americans. To maintain a more nuanced reading of Linmark's text, however, I see this chapter not as authorial oversight, but as crucially illuminating the problematic racial hierarchies within Hawai'ian society. Edgar's attempts to include his Samoan friend seem to fall short, and thus it is worth considering how even within a

discourse like Asian American Studies, steeped in identity politics, the experiences of certain groups are overshadowed or cast aside in favor of more dominant readings of space and subjectivity. Thus, in keeping with what Kandice Chuh advocates for in *Imagine Otherwise*, Asian American studies and Asian America should not be evoked as merely a noun or descriptive category. Rather, Asian American critique serves as a verb or "subjectless discourse," through which we can understand and theorize minoritized experience in the United States. As Chuh explains, Asian American "literature" can and should be defined more as "theory" rather than an ahistorical category of literary works because this “literature” is primarily "interested and invested in the socio-historical apparatuses and processes through which racial categories are manufactured and signified" (19).

With this reading in mind, it is worth noting that, in spite of different modes of being and seeing, these Asian American and Pacific Islander children do nonetheless occupy and interact with the same space. Therefore, rather than either rendering Loata's existence as identical and thus invisible, or dividing him from his peers completely, I argue that it is necessary to analyze their subjectivities relationally. J. Kehaulani Kauanui in her essay "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question,'" advocates for precisely this type of comparative critical work. Speaking to the proposed more "inclusive" name change to the Association of Asian American Studies to account for Pacific Islanders, she states, "there may be fruitful intellectual linkages between Pacific Islander studies and Asian American studies (just as there may be between African American studies and Asian American studies)," but that thus far, "these linkages have yet to be fully explored - and even the calls for them have been misunderstood" (134). To take up this call as characterized by Kauanai, it seems to me that these "linkages" between Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders are necessary and worth exploring because of their spatial proximity and connections. To return to Isaac's project in *American Tropics*, it cannot be ignored that these locations, especially Hawai'i, are occupied by similar groups of people (native and settler) and also *occupy* similar spaces in the American imaginary. By being attentive to these spatial relationships, a justification for a comparative bridge between Asian American studies and Pacific Islander studies emerges. Such an attentiveness may very well draw attention to potentials for comparison and coalition between Asian Americans and other minoritized groups in general, as my project as a whole endeavors to show. Loata and his friends, although oriented to the localities of Kalihi and Honolulu somewhat differently, still find themselves interacting

with the same people, places, and consumer products, and so in order to properly locate the Asian American experience as well as Loata himself, we must ask how and why these experiential differences occur.

Reading *Rolling the R's* and *Lilo and Stitch* side by side brings to light the ways in which Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Hawai'ian islands both occupy precarious and frequently marginalized positions. This status is especially fraught when the individuals in question actively distance themselves from the dominant majority through a misuse or reappropriation of consumer media and products, and when we consider how the characters of Lilo, Katrina, Loata, and the rest are not only racially, but also sexually and/or socioeconomically differentiated. Linmark's text and the children's film both foreground characters from working-class backgrounds, often with unconventional or "broken" families. Lilo, for example, is being raised by her older sister Nani, who must work several jobs in the service or tourism industry in order to make ends meet. Katrina Cruz is the child of a single mother with a questionable sexual reputation. Florante's family is a part of the Filipino diaspora resulting from the violence of the Marcos political regime. However, despite these apparent similarities, it is crucial to consider how these individuals are relationally but still differentially configured. Lilo, after all, is mocked by all of her peers, white *and* Asian American alike. And Loata's voice is frequently overridden or ignored by his friends, however much he may get along with them. Moreover, both Lilo and Loata engage with cultural production in a manner through which they can articulate their experiences: Loata through his rewriting of the classic Robert Frost poem, in which he inserts the Samoan Cultural Center, and Lilo through her (re)imagining of the Hawai'ian relationship with land and location. Therefore, although both the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in these texts exemplify consumer citizenship as a powerful mode of alternative subject formation, they do so to somewhat different ends. Based on the sheer amount of popular culture production and consumption present in these texts, they work to illustrate how Hawai'i is "relocated when the Local and Global interact in multiple public spheres where a range of participants consume and produce Paradise for their own purposes" (Young 198). In other words, conceptions of Hawai'i, especially from the perspective of those on the islands, is a complex interaction between the media and consumer products originating from within and without, sometimes competing with and other times informing each other. In much the same way, it must be remembered that actions and consumer practices of Asian Americans

and Pacific Islanders also compete with, inform, and overlap each other in complex ways in the state of Hawai'i and that while the two groups deserve to be considered relationally precisely because of their proximity, the differences cannot be elided in favor of coalition. Loata and Lilo have distinct consumer subjectivities of their own, and a comparative methodology will excavate these distinctions, rather than ignoring them.

Rhymes, Chords, and Civil Unrest:

South and Southeast Asian Musical Artists as Cultural Producers

The headliner of the 2012 Super Bowl Halftime show, to some peoples delight and others chagrin, was the internationally acclaimed popstar Madonna. Her performance, as expected, included her classic hits, as well as newer tunes, and relied on "surprise" guest artists. One such guest artist was the Sri Lankan hip-hop artist M.I.A., who, in keeping with her notoriously confrontational media persona, gave the middle finger to the camera (and thus millions of viewers) mid-song. After the event, journalists and fellow performers, including Madonna herself, spoke out against M.I.A.'s performance and its lack of class and even perceived "immaturity," while M.I.A. remained remarkably quiet on the issue. The question that no one bothered to ask was, just why was such a provocative and anti-capitalist artist performing at the Super Bowl--an event framed entirely by the overwhelming consumption and circulation of cheap goods and capital--in the first place? One potential answer to this query is that this performance is just one specific example of how the U.S. in particular "imports" not only inexpensive material items, but also movies, food, fashion, and most notably music from the developing nations in Southeast Asia in which they maintain an economic foothold. Fascinated by certain styles and artists as markers or representatives of a foreign and yet strangely familiar culture, America hungrily consumes everything from Bollywood films to M.I.A.'s aggressive, hip-hop influenced dance music. And indeed, there is no better place to display these exoticized commodities than at an event like the Super Bowl, which is viewed by millions of people not only in the domestic United States, but also around the globe. In an attempt to demonstrate the neoliberal notions of multiculturalism (which I have examined in detail in the previous chapters) of which the United States is so proud, the Super Bowl halftime show becomes a celebration of the diversity and international character of American popular music and culture. M.I.A.'s decision to flip off the viewer, then, emerges as a moment that deliberately disrupts this narrative. Although by participating in this event she agrees to participate in the wider circulation of global capital dependent on the oppression of racialized and marginalized groups, her

performance also contains an awareness and subsequent rejection of her complicity, since she herself exists as a cultural producer from the developing region of Southeast Asia. It is this two-sided identity (global pop artist and racially marked woman from the third world) that actually provides M.I.A., and similar female performing artists, with a great deal of agency and power in the realm of transnational popular culture.

It is epecially important, in light of political and economic developments in the United States and globally, that M.I.A. and other such artists originated in the region of South and Southeast Asia. In the decades following the immigration reform act of 1965, which dispensed with the system of national quotas, the United States witnessed a notable increase in the number of immigrants from this region, many of whom were motivated by "economic opportunity" (Lim and Chua xvii). Similarly, with the increase in technological development in many of these countries, as well as the Western economy's dependence on cheap labor from export-processing zones, it is evident that more and more of the goods consumed worldwide originate in these nations bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Moreover, either as a byproduct or a necessary consequence of the Western world's tangible presence, Europe and the United States have also become heavily invested in the consumption of various South and Southeast Asian cultural products. It is clear, then, that the relationship between Western nations and South and Southeast Asia is currently understood through the lens of material success and consumption. This notion of consumption, in turn, reflects the recent theoretical focus on the political importance of popular culture, especially in regards to minorities and racialized subject formation. Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, in their Asian/American pop culture anthology *Alien Encounters,* cogently explain that, "popular culture is important to the ways in which Asian Americans move (or are not allowed to move) through the world" (3). This image of movement across the "world" as a whole is, I argue, an especially important point on which to fix the axis[19] of Asian American cultural production. Because of the importance, if not dependence, on global capital and labor from South and Southeast Asia and owing to an increased westward migration from these regions, culture, media, and identity for Asian Americans is nowadays multiplicitous

19

I borrow this geographic terminology from Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, from whose work in the anthology *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora* I draw much inspiration for my own project.

and transnational. To theorize about Asian American culture necessitates a consideration of Asian culture and vice versa. This begs the question, then, what role do these artists play in the circulation of their work? Thinking transnationally within this discourse can create a more expansive definition of Asian American culture, but it also illustrates how "diasporic subjects are not immune to the romantic commodification of their 'homeland' culture" (Nguyen and Tu 26). Are these globally popular artists, then, merely exoticized objects to be purchased by Western audiences or are they active, willing cultural producers? Not only does this present a false binary, I would argue, especially in the case of popular musician M.I.A., that the latter characterization is worth further investigation. Artists like the now wildly famous M.I.A. do in fact stand as examples of more than simply "world music;" an eclectic, foreign sound to be collected and categorized. Rather, her music is representative of the power that third-world artists can wield in the current era of transnational capital and popular culture.

A fair amount of work has already been done on the role of M.I.A. (also known by her given name Maya Arulpragasam) as a politicized performance artist and (potential) transnational, post-colonial feminist. In particular, M.I.A.'s persona seems to stand as an example of "feminism without borders," to which scholar Chandra Mohanty refers. She clarifies that:

> Feminism without borders is not the same as ‘border-less’ feminism. It acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent. It acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real--and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division. (2)

As global performing artist who bridges the third world and first world, M.I.A. exemplifies this attentiveness to borders and divisions, as well as a desire to move beyond them--specifically through the global proliferation of her politcally motivated music. She was born in Sri Lanka and immigrated to Great Britain at age ten, not long after the beginning of the Sri Lankan Civil War, which ended up lasting a long and violent twenty-five years. M.I.A vividly remembers the start of the war, which she says many believed "would only last for a few hours" (Tabanca) and carried these recollections with her to her new home. Although she tried to leave the war behind, stating in an interview that her attitude was that of, "Fuck the war... Fuck Sri Lanka. I live in

England now--fuck all the bad shit" (Tabanca), the disappearance of her cousin in her home nation led her on a mission to confirm and learn the circumstances of his death, which would (re)introduce her to her Tamil heritage, the Tamils work as freedom fighters in the civil war, and specifically the Freedom Birds, an all female faction of the revolutionary Tamil Tigers. Her rekindled connection to the conflict in Sri Lanka and its gendered effects, coupled with her own experiences as a third-world female immigrant in a nation still dealing with its legacy of imperialism and racism, M.I.A. sought to bring attention to the war, the Tamil cause, and the lives of third world women through her art and music. As Lisa Weems argues, "Specifically, M.I.A. speaks out against economic imperialism, patriarchy, and violence, yet acknowledges the necessary 'hustle' of subaltern participation" (57). The music of M.I.A. draws attention to issues of inequality and opression in Sri Lanka and other similar post-colonial nations by playing directly into the language of violence, sexuality, and consumption (monetary and otherwise). Indeed, it is her outspoken, agressive lyrics that have thrown M.I.A. into the global spotlight, with periodicals from *Rolling Stone* to the art and fashion magazine *Bullett* dissecting her commercial success and "third world swag."[20]

However, although this international superstar of Tamil origins is perhaps the most well-known South Asian musical artist, she is by no means the only one. Most recently, a young musician named Yuna (full name Yunalis Zarai) from Malaysia was pulled out of her realm of MySpace internet fandom and signed to a well-known American label. She has already toured America, playing at several big name music festivals, and yet, a cursory listen to her album will reveal a sound remarkably different than her musical neighbor M.I.A. Yuna's use of acoustic guitar and ukulele, and the relatively slow, soulful, and sometimes sugary sweet tone of her songs places her in the same category of female alt-pop musicians as Ingrid Michaelsen and Feist, the latter of whom she cites as a musical influence. I first encountered Yuna while writing one night with a late night talk show playing in the background. After Yuna was introduced and began her song, I found myself nodding along to the easy rhythm and struck by the velvet tones of her voice, so I paused in my work and looked up to investigate this new artist, fully expecting to see another quirkily dressed, doe-eyed white girl. Instead, I saw a young woman of color of

---

20 Phrasing taken from the headline of a *Bullett* online interview with M.I.A.

Asian heritage wearing a multi-colored headscarf. Yuna defied my expectations and also pushed me to question why I had such expectations at all. Why had I assumed she would be white? And furthermore, why, in my mind, did her Asian ethnicity seem at odds with her musical style in the first place? What exactly did her race have to do with her art, if anything?

It is these questions, as well as the notable stylistic difference between M.I.A. and Yuna, that I wish to further examine in this paper, building on what Weems has identified as the ways in which "globalization affects different groups of South Asian girls located differently within both material and symbolic economies" (58). Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Cheng Lok Chua, in the introduction to their collection of Southeast Asian creative writing *Tilting the Continent*, identify the contemporary concerns of this region, noting that, "Today, Southeast Asian nations are looking for a shared identity and destiny without, however, sacrificing their political and cultural autonomy. ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, inaugurated in 1967, has helped create a regional identity based on common security and economic goals" (xii). To these goals, I would also add a common desire to draw attention to the detrimental after effects of colonialism still affecting the region. Malaysia, for example, only achieved independence from Britain in 1957, and since then has had to grapple with the lingering affects of a colonial political system, the balance between modern society and traditional Islam,[21] and the boom and bust of Asian economies in the 1990s. Sri Lanka, by comparison, gained its independence from Britain in 1948, but did not become what we now know as the republic of Sri Lanka until 1972. Peace in the republic was relatively short-lived, however, because civil war between the Singhalese majority and Tamil minority erupted in the early 1980s and lasted for almost three decades (with the militarization and violence stemming from this war still a visible, tangible presence). Thus, these two nations were differently affected by the postcolonial period, but are also connected through the very presence of these negative after effects. Yuna and M.I.A., by tapping into widely different global musical styles, are therefore both using their cultural products as a means of "speaking out," especially for women in their home countries. Their differences demonstrate the multiple ways in which the lingering effects of violent revolution and economic upheaval

21

Islam, it is worth noting, is the official state religion of Malaysia. They are also an exceptionally diverse nation with Malays, as well as ethnic Chinese and other diasporic Asian subjects among its citizenry.

have formed and impacted nations and citizens in this corner of the globe. That being said, by analyzing the work of both of these South/Southeast Asian female artists in conjunction with one another, I aim to demonstrate that in spite of these notable differences in style and history, they both illustrate the potential and power of women as producers (cultural and material) in these rapidly developing nations. Indeed, these artists exemplify the kind of unified but autonomous motivations to which Lim and Chua point in their historical overview.[22] To be more specific, this analysis will allow me to consider the "fields of possibility that transnationally produced and circulated music may open up" (Brown 132). As Néstor García Canclini articulates, "We have to examine not only coproduction, but also conflicts that revolve around the coexistence of ethnicities and nationalities in the workplace and in sites of consumption" (96). South and Southeast Asia are crucial sites of both work and consumption, as the countries here are home to not only these aforementioned cultural artists, but also export processing zones, factories in which workers of various ethnic backgrounds assemble cheap goods and technological parts, and diverse, expanding cities that are establishing themselves as burgeoning economic powers with access to the capital of transnational corporations. This region of the globe clearly desires to be noticed, one way or another, and so by paying close attention to the products emerging from this region, we can understand these transnational, multiethnic zones as holding more power and agency then the West would like to believe.

A protocol to be a rocker on a label?

It didn't really drop that way,

My beats were too evil.

- "Bird Flu" (2007)

22

My approach is not meant to foster a kind of "Pan-Asian" political project that elides the important differences in the histories and colonial legacies of these various nations. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that by paying attention to the *particularities* of these countries and their citizens, cultural producers and activists can work to upset the status quo in these areas which remain under the thumb of Western, global capitalism.

The above lyrics from M.I.A.'s single "Bird Flu," found on her critically acclaimed sophomore album *Kala,* exemplify the overall character of this record: angry, confrontational, and self-aware. It also stands out as one of the most vivid instances of M.I.A.'s cultural work as a third world, transnational feminist--one with a strong awareness of her position as a Tamil refugee and a globally-recognized musical artist. Of course, women were active participants in the Sri Lankan civil war, enlisting with both the Sri Lankan army and the opposing Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the latter of which M.I.A.'s father is notably affiliated with) since the beginning of the conflict in the early 1980s. Women's involvement came not just out of necessity, but also as a result of "the pressure from young Tamil women themselves to actively participate in the armed conflict" (Silva 330). Although their presence as "freedom fighters" was highly lauded, especially by the Tamil Tigers, Silva notes that their participation was also contingent on their ability to fit into two notable, traditional stereotypes: the "militant mother" and "armed virgin," both of which limit or erase female agency, especially as it relates to sexuality (Silva 331-2). M.I.A., by contrast, can be viewed as a fellow Tamil "freedom fighter," but one that subverts dominant discourses of revolutionary femininity precisely by drawing attention to the combative power of female sexuality. Furthermore, her lyrics address not only the local, domestic conflicts of her native Sri Lanka, but also how these conflicts play out on a larger global scale--and how women can fight back against Sri Lankan and Western oppressors.

In "Bird Flu," a dance song with notable influences from M.I.A.'s Tamil heritage, she illustrates the struggles faced by her fellow Sri Lankan women in the tense and violent years (decades, in fact) surrounding the civil war, most graphically in their aforementioned sexual objectification (or erasure of sexual agency). She describes how men or "roamers," which can be read as the armed soldiers and participants in the civil war,[23] stalk the streets, "Jumpin' girl to girl/ Make us meat like burgers" (M.I.A.). M.I.A. points to the bodily violence women must face on a regular basis, as they are treated as objects to be consumed wantonly like cuts of meat. In addition, M.I.A. uses her lyrics to capture their existence as laborers, ones who are "making bombs with rubber bands." Their products, in this specific case, are ones that contribute to the

23

I think it is compelling that M.I.A. does not name these oppressors as Singhalese (or Tamil), allowing them to therefore be interpreted as members of either faction, which demonstrates the violence (particularly sexualized violence) perpetrated by both parties.

destruction and warfare overwhelming their country. This characterization gestures not only to female inolvement in the civil war, but also to their existence as laborers in the current economy, as Sri Lanka is known for exporting various products like tea to Western nations, but also providing these nations with cheap service labor in newly outsourced call centers. Although Western sources like Dow Jones cite that Sri Lanka is a growing and emerging market, well ahead of many of its South/Southeast Asian neighbors, not everyone in Sri Lanka is able to profit from the benefits of this economic growth. As individuals unjustly burdened by the demands of third world production and contradictions of bodily autonomy, women are in an especially fraught situation, but embedded in M.I.A.'s rhymes are powerful and even vengeful moments of power and action. For example, when informed that people are coming to check her "papers," the singer (in a voice both uniquely her own and standing in for the aforementioned women) explains that, "Credentials are boring/ I burnt them at the burial ground/ Don't order me about/ I'm an outlaw from the badland" (M.I.A.). Obviously this verse speaks to M.I.A.'s identity as a "refugee rebel girl"[24], but because this rebellious act occurs at the "burial ground" in response to the demands of the bureaucracy of the "village," it is also apparent that this moment of potential is situated with women in the developing world (Sri Lanka to be exact).

What is perhaps most illuminating and powerful in M.I.A.'s lyrics is that she positions women and herself as wielders of power due to their identities as producers and consumers. She states that, "But I put away paper for later so I'm stable/ A better something better to come/ So I could get cable," describing the ways in which save what little money they earn in order to achieve not only a sense of security, but also the ability to purchase certain material and media products. But rather than characterizing women in this instance as simply passive, dependent consumers, M.I.A. returns to this verse at the end of her song to provide a different perspective. Echoing earlier lyrics while also subverting them, this same woman explains that she "Put away shots for later/ So I'm stable," and also warns the listener that "Bird flu gonna get you/ Made it in my stable/ From the crap you drop/ On my crop when they pay you" (M.I.A.). Not only is the third world woman in this situation using her same stockpiling, consumer habits to accumulate products and "shots" to use to her advantage, she also uses her position as an industrial producer

24

Phrasing borrowed from Weems.

to create a "bird flu," a biological weapon with which to fight back against her oppressors, created from their own raw materials. As Grace Hong articulates, women such as the ones in M.I.A.'s songs are "examples of the alternative practices and knowledges that disrupt and disorganize the homogenizing tendencies of late twentieth-century global capital" (142). The third world woman uses her "subaltern" identity to disrupt conventional neocolonial power dynamics by declaring war on her own terms, flipping the structures in which she is currently embedded in her favor. "Bird Flu" sheds light on issues facing women in Sri Lanka, while also providing them with a greater degree of agency to change their situation or "fight back," most interestingly through the realm of production and consumption that typically oppresses them.

This same "flip" occurs in a later track on M.I.A.'s album, one which speaks very overtly to the marginalizing and unequal facts of the global economy. In her song "World Town," M.I.A. directly identfies her oppressor, stating, "Look at what you did, you done it before/ Every little dollar keeps me down more" (M.I.A.). The dollars being spent and circulated in her country are not equalizing or liberatory, but rather the demans of global capital only serve to "keep down" third world subjects. Moreover, it is clear that she is not pointing to an isolated or particular moment; by explaining that it has been "done before," M.I.A. draws attention to an ongoing cycle of economic exploitation. And indeed, this cycle is one that spans generations, as she notes earlier that, "It ain't your weekly cash/ That feeds my mum the rice" (M.I.A.). By naming her "mum" as a specific victim, M.I.A. further solidifies her implicit assertion that the problem of access and violence in South Asia (and Sri Lanka especially) is a particularly gendered one. As Mohanty notes, a transnational, inclusive feminism requires acknowledgement that "being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in; that there can be unjust and unfair effects on women depending on our economic and social marginality and/or privilege" (3). M.I.A.'s music and lyrics are directly attuned to these disparities and recognize specifically that women in her home country are the ones who most frequently struggle for self-preservation, either in terms of material comfort or bodily autonomy, as is evident in their participation in and subsequent victimization as a result of the civil war.[25] Yet, although M.I.A. is tapping into

---

25

It's important to note, here, that I don't intend to merely use M.I.A. as an example of "third world" or "transnational feminism," but to illustrate that through her cultural productions she is directly engaging in and practicing the kind of socially just, inclusive feminism for which Mohanty advocates.

contemporary national issues as inspiration for her rhymes, the title of this track signifies that these problems are both local and transnational. In the chorus of her song, which sounds simultaneously like both a command and a chant or mantra, she exclaims, "Hands up!/ Guns out!/ Represent/ The world town" (M.I.A.). Representing this "world town," it would seem, is not an easy or violence-free task. The "world town" of M.I.A.'s lyrics is one that can ostensibly be "anywhere," but it is not a picture of idyllic, multiethnic, coalitional cooperation and resistance. Instead, it is one marked by submission and physical oppression. As such, this "world town" is both universal and decidedly specific; the events and tone of the chorus identify it as a "(third) world town," one with which a South Asian artist like M.I.A. would be intimately familiar.

With this analysis of M.I.A's lyrics, I would like to return to "Bird Flu," the first song addressed in this section, as it is on this particular track that M.I.A. most clearly identifies and vocalizes her position as a maker of certain cultural products. It is through a consideration of M.I.A.'s self-characterization and marketing choices that supports the contention that it is specifically through the medium of popular music and culture that M.I.A. can control her own subject formation as well as address particular issues of postcolonial nationhood. In "Bird Flu," she makes note of the fact that global audiences clamored for her to be a "Rocawear model" and a "rocker on a label," thus articulating an awareness of her own marketability. However, she also makes it a point to explain to the listener that she fails to conform to or outright rejects certain expectations and standards. She cannot be a "rocker," for instance, because her "beats were too evil." Her frank and sometimes violent and vitriolic lyrics in some ways add to her appeal, while also rendering her unpalatable to conventional consumer tastes. Her anger at first world complicity in the violence and inequality in third world countries, and the fact that she frequently advocates for these victims to rebel in an equally violent manner, is shocking and sometimes alienating for Western audiences. This is evident in the fact that, although she has acheived a great deal of success in the U.S. and U.K., she also has a number of vocal detractors.[26] In

26

A noteworthy example of criticism against M.I.A. stems from her performance at the 2009 Grammy Awards. In spite of the fact that she was nine months pregnant, M.I.A. still took the stage, leading to an outcry from the public that she was a "bad mother" and that she was deliberately endangering her baby for the sake of her career and fame. These detractors have failed to take into account that, in addition to the fact that M.I.A. is now raising a healthy and happy little boy, she also frankly does not care what her critics have to say.

particular, due to her association with the Tamil Tigers, who are technically classified both in Sri Lanka and countries like the U.S. as a terrorist group, there are many who have been quick to label her as a terrorist as well. Fellow Sri Lankan artist DeLon publicly criticized M.I.A.'s apparent glorification of the Tamil Tigers mission in a "diss video" that coupled graphic images of the violence perpetrated by the Tigers during the civil war with images and samples of M.I.A.'s music. DeLon, as a result, was effectively blacklisted by M.I.A. and her supporters and apparently even had to grapple with death threats ("Sri Lankan rapper"). While this may seem to be merely an example of two rival artists seeking celebrity at the each other's expense, DeLon's use of the Sri Lankan civil war to "diss" M.I.A. instead demonstrates the lingering presence of this violence in the lives of both artists, as well as the contested position of M.I.A. in her home country and the United States. Her existence as a transnational musical artist is not an easy one and in some ways depends on the very mixed reactions to her performances and productions.

That being said, it is both her rejection of certain expectations of popular media, as well as her willingness to adhere to others (consider, for example, her controversial performance at the 2012 SuperBowl, to which I have previously referred), that allows her identity as a cultural producer to carry such weight. If her desire is truly to draw attention to and advocate to change the plight of third world bodies (especially female bodies) in her native Sri Lanka, than this may actually be best accomplished by "gaining access as a celebrity Third-World girl within U.S. media outlets" (Weems 70)[27]. In response to critiques of M.I.A.'s "authenticity" as a political artist, one blogger states that "I read M.I.A. as a person in a difficult and contradictory position: Someone who’s come into a huge amount of privilege, after growing up without it, someone who’s benefiting from the very system she condemns, and is attempting to use her position of power to bring attention to the problem" ("M.I.A. IS A FAKE"). In this regard, it is easy for Western feminists to write off her confrontational and radical lyrics and positions by pointing to the ways in which she now benefits from an exploitative system, thus calling into question the sincerity of her political arguments and the degree to which M.I.A. is "qualified" to speak for her oppressed countrywomen. However, the issue here is that M.I.A. does not fit neatly into the category of "feminist" as defined by Western (i.e., white) feminists, and so she must couch her

27 The capitalization of "Third World" in this instance is Weems' decision, not my own.

message and intentions in different, particular terms. M.I.A. demonstrates a sophisticated attentiveness to not only her nation's specific neocolonial, post-revolutionary conditions, but also to the ways in which her ambiguous relationship with global capitalism can actually promote change and a greater agency for the women about whom she writes.

Find your light

Don't hide from what you are

And rise before you fall

And hope for something more

Live if you really want to

- "Live Your Life" (2011)

In comparison to the agressive, graphic nature of M.I.A.'s lyrics, this song by Yuna, complete with acoustic guitars, soulful jazz-influenced vocals, and an overall hopeful tone, seems gentle and innocent. It may be surprising to many listeners that a pop song such as this, one clearly drawing on the aesthetic of indie artists from the U.S. and U.K., comes from a young Muslim woman from Malaysia. Through these aesthetic and lyrical choices that Yuna is able to "shake up" the global pop music scene; her "radio-friendly" music illuminates crucial inequities in the realm of popular culture and global capitalism. By paying close attention to the meaning embedded within both her written lyrics as well as the style and quality of her performance, Yuna troubles notions of authenticity and representation by walking a thin line between seemingly generic American pop music and her distinctly Southeast Asian and Muslim identity. By forcing her listeners to consider her easy-to-consume songs in conjunction with her strikingly "foreign" appearance, these listeners must grapple with their perceptions of Asians, Muslims, and the cultural productions created by these groups.

M.I.A.'s "Bird Flu" incorporates traditional Sri Lankan percussion instruments, whereas Yuna's music fits quite easily into a recognizable Western consumer aesthetic. "Live Your Life," is a spare, simple tune with vocals comparable to jazz-pop artist Norah Jones. This Western

aesthetic is not altogether surprising, considering both Malaysia's colonial history and their emergence as one of the hypercapitalist Southeast Asian "tiger economies." Aihwa Ong, describing her own experiences as a diasporic Malaysian, notes that:

> When I was a child growing up in Malaysia, it seemed as though we were always trying to catch up with the West, which was represented first by Great Britain and later by the United States. Although Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957 (and became Malaysia in 1962), British-type education and the mass media continued to construct our world as a failed replica of the modern West. This colonial effect of trying to learn from and imitate the global center has been a preoccupation of postcolonial elites seeking to articulate a destiny that is a mixed set of Western and Asian interests. (29)

It stands to reason, then, that the economic and cultural products of Malaysia would reflect these same "mixed interests," and Yuna's approachable pop music exemplifies this fact. Her popularity in her home country and abroad creates a material formation that is hard to disentangle, and leads some to question the validity of Yuna as an Asian or even an Asian American consumer. Rather, perhaps she is a kind of postnational pop artist. However, as Jayna Brown notes in describing the proliferation of global popular music, "Manipulation and '*inauthenticity'* is what makes this new moment increasingly defined by a state of play, a spinning off from, if not free of, the market" (132, emphasis mine). That is, it is precisely because Yuna strikes us as an "inauthentic" Asian artist, one who has been apparently saturated by American market values, that makes her a potentially powerful cultural producer. She pushes listeners to question why it is that she must bear the burden of "authenticity" while other artists are free from such expectations. Maria Stehle attributes this characterization to the fact that Yuna, as an artist, also plays the role of a "cultural mediator." Since her heritage marks her as an "other," she "is charged with the task to mediate, that is explain the East to the West..." (89). Because we as listeners and viewers place artists like Yuna in this role (albeit sometimes unconsciously), we thus expect her to speak for an entire population, to be a generalized cultural representative. Yuna, however, through her "inauthentically" Asian musical style and such relatable lyrics as "All my life I've been looking for something amazing/ It's almost like I've been stargazing" (Yuna), is able to "playfully" subvert consumer (and cultural) expectations.

This is not to say that Yuna's music is an attempt at assimilation or a simple catering to the popular tastes of the market. Rather, to further complicate Yuna's position as cultural producer, we must also consider her appearance and certain performative choices she makes. For example, there is, a notable moment of disruption in Yuna's eponymous debut record. The song "Remember My Name," is not only comparably uptempo, but also showcases a more assertive facet of Yuna's identity. In the opening verse she explains that, "I am sensing that a storm is coming/ They calling me out to play/ Got a feeling I'm gonna win it/ They think I don't have game" (Yuna). The tone of these lyrics is expectant and even slightly defiant. Yuna is anticipating a storm, representative of some kind of change or major event, and that in spite of (or perhaps because of) this brewing storm, she will come out on top. In the subsequent chorus, Yuna repeats to her listener, "I know/ You gonna remember my name." She is very clearly indicating that her presence in the global pop music scene will not be easily overlooked, thereby demonstrating an active awareness of her cultural and political importance, rather than a passive internalization of global (i.e., Westernized) tastes. On a deeper linguistic level, the song "Remember My Name" also presents the listener with a surprising and easily overlooked moment of subversion. When comparing the songwriting in this track to the rest of the album, differences in diction and formality emerge, such as when Yuna utilizes slang contractions like "gonna" and leaves out minor verbs. Her other songs rely on crisp, clean language, while "Remember My Name" displays a much more relaxed linguistic sensibility, demonstrating an ability to play with the English language that is particular to Yuna's position as a citizen of a former British colony. In describing the literary work of other formerly colonial subjects from Malaysia, Lim and Hua focus on "the ironies of finding a voice in a borrowed tongue, the disorientation of living with each foot in a different culture, and the travail of actualizing a female self in a male-dominated society" (xix). As a cultural producer and popular artist, Yuna is not only acutely aware of these contradictions and negotiations of identity, but she gives voice to them through her cultural work and performative choices.

The particularities and negotiations embedded in Yuna's position as cultural producer from Southeast Asia are most apparent in her visibly recognizable identity markers. The strongest example of such is that Yuna, as a practicing Muslim, always wears a headscarf or hijab. In the music video for "Live Your Life," she is depicted looking out upon and walking quietly through the quintessentially Western (though also decidedly international) city of New

York. Throughout the song, even in the clips of her performing on stage, she wears several different colorful hijabs. Her physical comportment in this video marks her, even embodies her, as a cultural other in relation to Western consumers. Her covered head stands in stark contrast to the individuals she passes on the street and to the layout of the city as a whole. In this way, Yuna very specifically bridges an Eastern and Western aesthetic. Moreover, by maintaining a visible tie Muslim and Malaysian identity, she troubles her identification as a passive cultural producer clamoring to fit into the American music scene. In fact, in several interviews Yuna articulates her desire to give a voice to fellow young women who practice Islam. In an interview with *Filter* magazine, she explains:

> "I'm obviously very different than most [musicians]. But this is my identity. This is who I am. I'm sure it's unsual to an American audience to see a [covered] woman, but it's even uncommon in Malaysia. But there are still girls like me, who are conservative--but cool--like me. I try and find a balance." (El-Ali)

I read this "balance" for which Yuna strives as an experience particular to a Malaysian female modernity. And yet, her stylistic and performative choices are not illegible to Western consumers. In the previously cited interview, writer Kendah El-Ali remarks that the first time he met Yuna, "I made a mental note to watch my behavior. My name reveals me for the (non-practicing) Muslim I am, and I was about to meet a Malaysian singer-songwriter whose devotion to our mutual faith leaves her happy to pray five times a day and cover her head with a scarf" (El-Ali). Yuna's music, then, speaks to the Muslim diaspora in countries like the United States, even if simply to illuminate cultural differences. Moreover, it is interesting to note that individual consumers like El-Ali use Yuna as a means to define their own, often fraught and changing, subject positions. For American consumers, particularly those of Asian and Muslim heritage, but also music fans defined more broadly, Yuna stands out as a refreshing example of the productive possibilities of Southeast Asian artists in the West. At the same time, there is a problematic dimension to the consumption of Yuna's music, for as evidenced by the Filter magazine interview, El-Ali (and ostensibly other listeners) are heavily fixated on her devotion and piety, as well as her perceived innocence connected to her appearance and lifestyle choices.[28] Although

28

Yuna certainly "defies expectations" of what defines a global pop musician, allowing her to stand in for all Muslim artists or using her to make sense of one's own subject position negates her agency as an artist and overlooks the ways in which her music and performance reads as specifically Malaysian.

Aihwa Ong first began to explore the emergence of Malaysian women as producers and consumers in her ethnographic work, focusing specifically on young women from rural villages who became factory workers. She connects their position as wage earners to an anxiety about their sexuality, which was exaggerated in the public imaginary. More importantly, Ong focused on these women's own complicity and/or subversion of these perceptions, pointing to how, "[i]n their changing positions within the family, the labor process, and wider society they devise counter tactics for resisting images imposed on them and come to construct their own images" (4). Yuna, though, does not appear to fit the image of the overtly sexual Malaysian female, especially considering her embodiment of Islam. However, she does indeed fit Ong's conception of the modern Malaysian woman who is "constructing" her own image. Her image may differ from the one first investigated by Ong because her popularity comes several decades after her ethnographic investigation. Clearly, certain problematic perceptions of Malaysian women linger in the early twenty-first century, but Yuna is speaking to and about a new Malaysia, as a nation working to modernize while simultaneously solidifying its identity as a predominantly Islamic country.[29] Yuna in many ways epitomizes this balance between the new and the traditional, the "cool" and the "conservative." According to Maila Stivens, women in Malaysia are most often figured as the harbingers of change and modernization, especially where the relationship between the state and Islam is concerned. Stivens argues that, "the active support of revivalist and other versions of Islam by women in contemporary Malaysia is evidence that a version of political agency is opening to women. The adoption by women of Muslim dress in its many

---

For example, Yuna, like other practicing Muslims from around the globe, does not drink alcohol--which El-Ali notes is a particularly surprising choice considering her career in popular music and the party-heavy lifestyles of other musicians in her peer group.

29

Specifically, there is a great deal of ongoing debate about how to balance Malaysia's political system, which is based heavily on the system in Great Britain, with Islamic principles like Sharia law. The primary question is whether or not the country's laws should be primarily secular or based in religion (or some combination thereof).

variants, especially the veil, speaks to this" (30-1). Yuna, by donning the hijab, connects herself with her fellow, newly politicized Malaysian women, and also introduces this issue to her Western (i.e., American) audiences. Furthermore, her soft vocals and uplifting lyrics contribute to this formation of the Malaysian Muslim woman as a picture of non-confrontational, but apparent modernity. Stivens provides a reading of the former deputy Prime Minister's wife and political activist Wan Azizah Wan Ismail that I believe can be readily applied to Yuna and other such women, wherein their "perceived 'feminine qualities of integrity and fidelity and [their] piety greatly enhance [their] political credibility" (17). Therefore, instead of interpreting Yuna's lyrics as simply contributing to a larger pop music culture dominated by American desires, we must also consider how they reflect her particular experience as a young Muslim women grappling with cultural expectations that are somewhat at odds with one another.

It is, therefore, worth noting that while Yuna got her start as a popular musical artist in Malaysia, she is still often the subject of criticism in her home country's media. Both her personal style and her music are decidedly conservative when compared to other female Malaysian artists, like the dance pop singer Mizz Nina, whose videos have been removed from many websites due to their provocative nature. Yuna, however, is still frequently criticized for an apparent "lack of commitment" to her Muslim faith. An article for the Pakistani news site Dawn.com focusing specifically on the emergence of Malaysian female musical artists recognizes that although Yuna chooses to adhere to traditional Muslim dress and refrains from overtly sexual songs, her very popularity as a Muslim artist calls the sincerity of her faith into question. Entertainment writer Daryl Goh explains, "“Muslim females are generally free to perform in small venues in the local scene. But once they gain popularity, that’s when the problems start... The moral police start paying attention.” ("Malaysia's Female Pop Artists Break Out with Social Media"). Clearly women in Malaysia are in a kind of double-bind, no matter how they choose to convey themselves. They are either too sexual or their conservativism appears to make light of something serious in the popular sphere. The song "Live Your Life," in this regard, is speaking to a gendered, and often religious or ethnic, particularity, as much as it is also generically and globaly appealing. The same news article also states that Yuna and her fellow artists, "have used social media to appeal directly – and successfully – to fans" ("Malaysia's Female Pop Stars Break Out with Social Media"). In a country that is marked by a rapid increase in internet-usage, particularly in relation to social media, the fact that Yuna's

success originated in the public realm of the internet comes as no surprise. And moreover, by tapping into a widely accessible medium, she is able to spread her music and intentions (however contested they may be) to both Malaysian consumers clamoring for artists that speak to their own experiences and eventually consumers and fans from around the globe. In the verse of "Live Your Life," she encourages her listeners that, "We were meant for something bigger than this/ Don't ever try to dismiss yourself 'cause you don't have to" (Yuna). If this "we" is not only the generic, universal listener, but rather her female peers and compatriots in Malaysia, Yuna seems to be speaking specifically to their powerful, yet often troubled existence as the ones who must carry or embody the cultural change occurring in their country.

Using this comparative framework, the varied works of M.I.A. and Yuna emerge as markedly distinct in form and content. The former taps into both a global "riot girl" persona as well as a discretely Sri Lankan (post) revolutionary anger. The latter, on the other hand, typifies the veiled, but no less politicized young female Malaysian Muslim--a move she makes through her easy-listening pop music. I argue, however, that the differences between these women and their countries of origin should not lessen their regional and transnational political project. Their very popularity as cultural producers in the Western hemisphere, particularly in the United States, compels us to ask just how much these nations depend on the labor (cultural and otherwise) from their less developed counterparts in the East. After all, as Grace Hong notes, "in the current era, global capital reproduces itself exactly by manipulating racial, gender, and sexual differences for the purposes of accumulation" (xxi). Are artists like M.I.A. and Yuna, in the end, merely a human example of the United States' "accumulation" of products and labor from South and Southeast Asia? Furthermore, are they a continuance of the United States' exoticization of all things Asian and American? Mimi Nguyen, in describing her own foray into cultural production, rather than her work as a cultural theorist, notes that she was almost constantly bombarded by an audience who wanted to consume not simply her productions, but her own embodied, racialized identity. Speaking specifically to the punk, DIY aesthetic in which she is operating, Nguyen declares that, "The promise of abstract citizenship offered by punk and the Internet to a decidedly not-so-abstract me is a one-handed affair, contingent, it seems, on how I want to narrate my raced, sexed, and gendered body into nominally democratic publics" (182). Nguyen in this instance is pointing out the potentially inescable bind in which female Asian and Asian American cultural producers find themselves. In their desire to represent their own individual and cultural

particularities, they must also contend with consumers who desire them as representatives of an intriguing (often sexualized) other. This is a fate diasporic producers must especially come to terms with, as they are most often viewed as "indistinct from or perpetually tied to their 'native homelands'" (Nguyen and Tu 21).

To conclude my interpretation here, however, is much too bleak and neglects the agency of just such artists and laborers. As I have demonstrated, Yuna and M.I.A. are aware of their positions within the global marketplace and sell their "products" accordingly, that is, to their advantage. Whether their intention is to reclaim power for marginalized female laborers or draw attention to a growing and vocal female Muslim population, these two women are attentive to the issues of their respective countries and market themselves with these issues in mind. Mohanty, in her call for a feminism "without borders," states that, "We need to be aware that these ideologies [sexism, misogyny, racism, etc.], in conjunction with the regressive politics of ethnic nationalism and capitalist consumerism, are differently constitutive of all our lives in the early twenty-first century" (3). While I do not completely agree that projects connected to ethnic nationalism are necessarily "regressive," I do contend that M.I.A. and Yuna are productively aware of how these intersecting factors named by Mohanty are "differently constitutive." Moreover, their music is built upon the relationships and connections that may emerge through these differences, in the regions of South/Southeast Asia and across the globe in general. Grace Hong concludes her own project with the hope that we may uncover a "vocabulary for new sites and strategies of struggle, contestation, and emergence" (145) through a close consideration of female immigrant culture and "women of color feminism." By reading the work of two disparate yet strongly connected transnational female artists together, the realm of popular media and music emerges as this potential new vocabulary. Moreover, by considering how these artists fit within the discourse and experiences of Asians in America, and how they are both related to and distinct from cultural productions originating in the developed world, we may unearth crucial points of connection. Especially where patterns of identification and consumption in the U.S. are concerned, global pop music pushes Americans to interrogate their relationships with third world women's labor as well as to question the boundaries of Asia and America.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. "Melancholic Migrants." *The Promise of Happiness.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Bascara, Victor. "Everybody Wants to be Farrah: Absurd Histories and Historical Absurdities." *Model-Minority Imperialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 113-34. Print.

Bjork, Katherine. "Race and the Right Kind of Island: Immigration Policy in Hawaii and Cuba Under U.S. Auspices, 1899-1912." *Studies in Pacific History: Economics, Politics, and Migration*. Eds. Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giraldez, and James Sobredo. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002. 140-54. Print.

Brown, Jayna. "Buzz and Rumble: Global Pop Music and Utopian Impulse." *Social Text*. 28.1. (2010): 125-46. Web.

Cheng, Emily. "Family, Race, and Citizenship in Disney's *Lilo and Stitch*." *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*. Ed. Niall Scott. New York: Rodopi, 2007. 123-32.

Chuh, Kandice. *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.

Chuh, Kandice and Karen Shimakawa, eds. *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.

Cruz, Angie. *Let it Rain Coffee*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005. Print.

Dalleo, Raphael and Elena Machado Saez. "Introduction: Sellouts? Politics and the Market in Post-Sixties Latino/a Literature." *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2007. Print.

---. "Movin' on Up and Out: Lowercase Latino/a Realism in the Work of Junot Diaz and Angie Cruz." *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2007. Print.

Dave, Shilpa, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren, eds. *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. NYU Press, 2005. Print.

"Dow Jones Emerging Market Indices." S&P Dow Jones Indices. Web. http://www.djindexes.com/emergingmarkets/. Accessed: 18 April 2013.

El-Ali, Kendah. "Getting to Know: Yuna." *Filter*. 8 Mar. 2012: n.p. Web. http://filtermagazine.com/index.php/exclusives/entry/filter_47_getting_to_know_yuna/. Accessed: 5 Feb. 2013.

Fujikane, Candace. "Foregrounding Native Nationalisms: A Critique of Antinationalist Sentiment in Asian American Studies." *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*. Ed. Kent A. Ono. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. 73-97. Print.

Garcíaé Canclini, Néstor. *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*. Trans. George Yudice. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.

Grewal, Inderpal. *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print.

Heredia, Juanita. "Angie Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee* (2005): A Diasporic Response to Multiracial Dominican Migrations." *Transnational Latina Narratives in the Twenty-First Century: The Politics of Gender, Race, and Migrations*. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2009. Print.

Hong, Grace Kyungwon. *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Print.

Hong, Grace Kyungwon and Roderick A. Ferguson, eds. *Strange Affinities*: *The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Hu-Dehart, Evelyn and Kathleen Lopez. “Asian Diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Historical Overview.” *Afro-Hispanic Review*. 27.1 (2008): 9-21. Web.

Imada, Adria. "Hawai'ians on Tour: Hula Circuits Through the American Empire." *American Quarterly*. 56.1 (2004): 111-49. Web.

Isaac, Allan Punzalan. *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Print.

Kauanui, J. Kehaulani. "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question.'" *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. 123-43. Print.

Jen, Gish. *Typical American*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991. Print.

Lee, Erika. "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas." *Pacific Historical Review*. 76.4 (2007): 537-62. Web.

---. "Orientalisms in the Americas: A Hemispheric Approach to Asian American History." *Journal of Asian American Studies*. 8.3 (2005): 235-56. Web.

Lee, Rachel C. *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print.

Lilo and Stitch. Dirs. Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois. Walt Disney, 2002. DVD.

Linmark, R. Zamora. *Rolling the R's*. New York: Kaya Production, 1997. Print.

Lim, Shirley Geok-lin and Cheng Lok Chua, eds. *Tilting the Continent: Southeast Asian American Writing*. Minneapolis: New Rivers Press, 2000. Print.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. Print.

---. "The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique." *Cultural Critique*. 40 (1998): 29-47. Web.

"Malaysia's Female Pop Stars Break Out with Social Media." *Dawn.com*. 12 Oct. 2012. n.p. Web. http://dawn.com/2012/10/19/malaysias-female-pop-stars-break-out-with-social-media/. Accessed: 15 April 2013.

M.I.A. *Kala*. Interscope, 2007. Mp3.

"M.I.A. IS A FAKE: Some Thoughts on Authenticity, Politics, and Truffle Oil." *Tiger Beatdown*. 2010 June 7. n.p. Web. http://tigerbeatdown.com/2010/06/07/m-i-a-is-a-fake-some-thoughts-on-gender-politics-and-truffle-oil/. Accessed: 15 April 2013.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.

Ngai, Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Print.

Nguyen, Mimi. "Tales of an Asiatic Geek Girl: Slant from Paper to Pixels." *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*. Eds. Alondra Nelson and Thuy Linh N. Tu with Alicia Headlam Hines. New York University Press, 2001. Print.

Nguyen, Mimi Thi and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu. *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.

Ong, Aihwa. *Flexible Citizenships: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. Print.

---. *Spirits of Discipline and Capitalist Resistance: Factory Women in Malaysia*. 2nd edition. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010. Print.

Park, Jane Chi Hyun. *Yellow Future: Oriental Style in Hollywood Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Print.

Perlez, Jane. "Once Muslim, Now Christian, and Caught in the Courts." *New York Times*. 24 Aug. 2006. n.p. Web. Accessed: 18 April 2013.

Schlund-Vials, Cathy J. "Introduction: Perpetual Foreigners and Model Minorities: Naturalizing Jewish and Asian Americans." *Modeling Citizenship: Jewish and Asian American Writing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011. Print.

Silva, Neluka. "'Gendering Terror: Representations of the Female 'Freedom Fighter' in Contemporary Sri Lankan Literature and Cultural Production." *Terror and the Postcolonial*. Eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton. UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Print.

Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawai'ian Resistance to American colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.

So, Christine. *Economic Citizens: A Narrative of Asian American Visibility*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Print.

"Sri Lankan rapper DeLon still suffering consequences of speaking out against M.I.A. & the Tamil Tigers." *Brooklyn Vegan*. 2 Oct. 2012. n.p. Web. http://www.brooklynvegan.com/archives/2012/10/sri_lankan_rapp_1.html. Accessed: 15 April 2013.

Stehle, Maria. "Gender, Performance, and the Politics of Space: Germany and the Veil in Popular Culture." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. 32.1. (2012): 89-101. Web.

Stivens, Maila. "Becoming Modern in Malaysia: Women at the End of the Twentieth Century." *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity, and Globalisation*. Eds. Louise Edwards and Mina Roces. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 16-38. Print.

Tabanca, Idil. "The Story of How M.I.A. Got Her Third World Swag." *Bullett*. 19 Dec. 2012: n.p. Web. http://bullettmedia.com/article/the-story-behind-m-i-a-s-third-world-swag/. Accessed: 29 Jan. 2013.

Weems, Lisa. "M.I.A. in the Global Youthscape: Rethinking Girls' Resistance and Agency in Postcolonial Contexts." *Girlhood Studies*. 2.2. (2009): 55-75. Web.

Young, Morris. "Whose Paradise? Hawai'i, Desire, and the Global-Local Tensions of Popular Culture." *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. Eds. Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren. New York: NYU Press, 2005. 183-203. Print.

Yun, Lisa. *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Print

Yuna. *Yuna*. Fader Lable, 2012. Mp3.