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Imagined Islands: American Empire and Identity in the Postcolonial Pacific

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Valerie Chihiro Solar

June 2010

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Imagined Islands: American Empire and Identity
In the Postcolonial Pacific

By

Valerie Chihiro Solar

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2010
Dr. Traise Yamamoto, Chairperson

In this dissertation, I analyze literature from Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Guam and Samoa, in order to examine some of the individualized effects of American empire in the Pacific on identity. I choose works from these areas because they each represent a variation of legal entanglement with the United States: a former sovereign nation incorporated as a state, a colony that is now an independent nation, an unincorporated territory, and a nation split into two because of U.S. claims to half of it. I primarily utilize the lens of Asian American studies but also employ feminist and postcolonial theory in order to study some of the linkages between self and nation, subjectivity and migration, place and personhood.

I analyze the novels of Nora Okja Keller from Hawai‘i to examine the entanglements between Asia, the U.S. and the Pacific in the theater of war. Jessica Hagedorn’s novels afford a glimpse into the after-life of colonialism in the Philippines, the Chamoru poetry of Craig Santos Perez and Chris Perez Howard’s biography of his
mother demonstrate differing perspectives on the continuing American occupation of Guam, and the narratives of Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt of Samoa display some of the layered effects of multiple colonizations upon the disenfranchised of the islands.

A secondary goal of this project is to push the boundaries of Asian American studies to see if and how Pacific Islander studies can be fruitfully combined with the discipline. Although Asian American studies has primarily been focused on citizenship within the United States, Pacific Islander studies also concentrates on issues surrounding indigeneity and sovereignty struggles in locales outside of the mainland U.S. By broadening the focus of Asian American studies, it is possible to point the way for further, nuanced studies of the relationships between U.S. and non-U.S. imperialisms and the “minor transnationalisms” that surpass the binaries of cultural formation that dominate discussions of postcolonialism and nationalism.
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Introduction: Imagining Places

“To deny human beings the sense of a homeland is to deny them a deep spot on Earth to anchor their roots” --Epeli Hau‘ofa

In this dissertation, I examine the work of authors from Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Samoa and Guam. While the majority of my scholarship has been within the field of Asian American and American literature, I chose to work on texts from these islands as a way of illuminating some of the dark spots in the field as well as in my own education. Utilizing this background, I also borrowed liberally from postcolonial and feminist theories in order to parse through some of the linkages between self and nation, subjectivity and migration, place and personhood.

These four islands represent a wide variety of legal and cultural formations: state, former sovereign nation, independent nation, unincorporated territory, but all are places of multiple colonial intrusions in the forms of religion, foreign commercial interests and U.S. military concerns. The authors from each of these locales write about the permeability of the boundaries between private and public especially for those who are marginalized because of gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation or national origin. Through the recognition of the mutually constitutive nature of identity we can begin to understand some of the particular pressures brought to bear upon those who are struggling to claim a place in the world.

My primary goal in this dissertation is to add to the small but growing field of Pacific Islander literary studies. The secondary goal of this project is to push the boundaries of Asian American Studies to see if Pacific Islander literature and cultural
studies could find an academic home within the discipline. I agree with Amy Ku’leialoha Stillman who states that, “there cannot be an Asian America that overlooks the various relationships with not only the emerging United States but also the Pacific Islands over time” (243) and Vicente Diaz also says, “If there is a commonality between Pacific and Asian American histories […] it is this force-field called ‘America,’ or more precisely, the various ‘Americas’ that are located both on the continent and on the various islands” (2004, 187).

Just as Asian American studies has insisted upon the particularities of the Asian/American experience\(^1\) versus African American or Chicano/a or Latino/a experiences, so too must Asian American scholars “strive to comprehend the kinds of historical and political struggles that Native Pacific Scholars are trying to articulate” (Diaz 2004, 184). As Asian American Studies has matured as a field, there have been accusations that it has replicated some of the same hegemonic and oppressive institutional biases that it purported to work against. Probably the most (in)famous example of this was the protest staged at the 1998 Association for Asian American Studies Conference in Honolulu objecting to the presentation of the Outstanding Book Award to Lois-Ann Yamanaka for *Blu’s Hanging*. Many Filipinos and others complained that Yamanaka’s portrayal of Filipinos as poor and morally degenerate perverts simply reiterated old and hurtful stereotypes that “attest[ed] to continuing local Filipino subordination within a system of local Japanese and white structural power” (Fujikane 159-160).

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\(^1\) I use the slash here to indicate the Asian in America and American of Asian descent.
While it can be politically and culturally expedient to combine Asian American and Pacific Islander studies, the Blu’s Hanging controversy illuminates the dangers of the homogenizing label of “Asian American” itself. One of the key points of friction for Pacific Island scholars is that the Asian Pacific American label would flatten out the experience of indigeneity that informs many key political movements for self-determination and sovereignty as opposed to the paradigmatic experience of immigration that has informed the Asian Americanist critique. This is a critical difference but it need not be a crippling difference. The site of affiliation between these two areas is the United States and its promise of subjective equality through citizenship. A productive dialogue between these two areas of study has the potential to unbalance the hegemonic narratives about U.S. nationalism, culture and citizenship through “all those other ‘Ps’ that have historically articulated their political realities and identities in relation to America” (Diaz 188).

Asian American studies has been focused on citizenship but that focus has been almost exclusively on the mainland United States. Asian Americanist critique needs to expand its focus to take into account the geography of citizenship which is what Pacific Island studies adds to the conversation. How is citizenship experienced differently from the outside in? That is, what are the different valences of citizenship whether one is located in the mainland or on an island? How is U.S. citizenship and alliance experienced when it has been grafted onto an indigenous or islander identity? As James Clifford asks, “How is ‘indigeneity’ both rooted in and routed through particular places?” (469) and how does diaspora inflect the terms of migration and immigration for Asians and Pacific
Islanders? This is not a one-way street, either. Diaz cautions the “Native Pacific Scholars need to understand the specificities of Asian histories as they are bound up with the American imperial project among and amidst Native Pacific Islanders in the continent and in the Islands” (184-185).

In the following chapters I examine texts by Nora Okja Keller from Hawai’i, Jessica Hagedorn’s novels set in the Philippines, Chris Perez Howard and Craig Santos Perez’s works from Guam, and Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel’s narratives of Samoa, to uncover some of the ways that notions of home, self, citizenship and belonging are influenced by dislocation, displacement, migration and stasis. In particular, I examine some of the ways that the cultural wash of Western military and commercial imperialism has shaped contemporary Asian and Pacific Islander experiences and how the abstract geo-political and social environment infiltrates the private space of home and self.

The title of this dissertation, “Imagined Islands,” takes its inspiration from Benedict Anderson’s canonical *Imagined Communities* for his premise that the glue that holds together a nation or a community is a central narrative. I apply this idea to the ways that the central U.S. national narrative of inclusion and benevolence does and does not apply when it comes to the residents of these island nations. My title also marks the ways that the national imaginary has forgotten or glossed over the imperial status of the United States and its forcible takeovers of places such as Hawai’i and the Philippines. This imagined community also works to gather together these Pacific Islands as well. For example, Guam’s motto is “Where America’s Day Begins” and there is an intense patriotism that occludes the long history of American occupation through the narrative of
Japanese occupation and brutality. These locations, partially because of their physical location far away from the mainland and partially because of the way that the American legal system has worked to efface any ruptures in the narrative of democracy, are often forgotten about by the general population in the mainland United States. This amnesia allows the substitution of a narrative of liberation and altruism so that any collective guilt that might be felt about colonization is washed away. Asian American studies has also forgotten about some of these disjunctions in order to maintain its authoritative stance regarding exclusion, citizenship and justice.

Thus, I begin my dissertation with Nora Okja Keller’s novels, *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*, a set of novels that deal with the plight of Korean women sexually used and abused by two imperial occupying armies, the Japanese and the American. The action in Keller’s books takes place in Korea, the mainland United States and Hawai’i. This triangulation of location is a fictional demonstration of the real-world entanglement between Asian and the U.S. in the hybrid locality of Hawai’i. I also begin with a chapter focusing on Hawai’i because of the ways that it literally embodies the forgotten junction of American imperialism and Asian hegemonies and Hawai’i’s position as a crossroads as well as a homeland. The image of Hawai’i has been created and marketed as a multi-ethnic paradise of camaraderie and relaxation that elides the state’s postcolonial status. This disjunction between image and reality sets the stage for work that lays bare some of these contradictions. Keller’s work sets the stage for the common themes in this dissertation: the fraught avenue to subjectivity in light of gender, racial and national marginalizations, the ways which American empire has cloaked itself in the rhetoric of
liberation, romance, and benevolence, and the manner in which the home becomes a metaphor for the outside world.

Keller’s work looks at some of the forgotten victims of war, prostitutes, and brings to light the connections between American and Japanese military ambitions. In particular, Keller uses the structure of the family as a way to work through the difficult issues of suffering, patriarchy, and abuse. For Keller identity comes into being in homes where mothers sell daughters, sons pimp out mothers, sisters turn on each other, and parents are physically or emotionally absent. Home is a dangerous place precisely because it indexes the dangers of the outside world. In turn, children create makeshift families and attachments and struggle to become agents in charge of their own lives and bodies.

Keller’s work also marks the hollowness of America’s promise of freedom and opportunity. Instead of being a land of liberty and possibility, the Korean women in her novels find that they are trapped within the same cycle of denigration and objectification at the hands of men. However, Keller’s characters do find a measure of peace when they are able to find their place within a female genealogy and excise men from their lives.

The inclusion of Nora Okja Keller under the label “Asian Pacific American” is the most problematic since she is neither Native Hawai’ian nor writing from a Pacific Island nation. Her position as a Korean American living in Hawai’i and writing about Asians in America is emblematic of the current debate in Asian American Studies regarding the positioning of the Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders within the field. That is, where do these two fields stand with regards to one another? When is it productive to
align them and when does it make sense to separate them? Can we include Keller’s work because she is of Asian ethnicity and writing from a Pacific island that is part of the United States? Or is she another Asian American writer who has co-opted and erased the presence of Native Hawai’ians through her focus on the troubles of Korean women? While these questions are valid, some are more productive than others. Instead of utilizing the “either/or” binary, a more fertile way of working through these vexed queries would be to use the “both/and” model. For instance, Keller’s narrative of the unwilling migration of Korean women to the United States because of Cold War interventionist policies coupled with the setting of Hawai’i illuminates the ways that the geo-political aspirations of the United States has both attempted to silence women’s experiences and erase its imperialist past in Hawai’i. A meta-analysis of Keller’s work shows how Asians in America have been both victim and oppressor through their experiences of exclusion as well as their own disregard of other displaced peoples such as Native Hawai’ians and Native Americans.

My second chapter, “‘Let Him Look All He Wants – He’s Paying for Every Second’: The Price of Beauty and Revolution in the Novels of Jessica Hagedorn” takes a look at another outpost of American empire – the Philippines. I again analyze two books by the same author in order to more fully delve into common thematics. In this case, I examine the way that Hagedorn’s fascination with stage and screen works as a metaphor for the relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Hagedorn disrupts the heteronormative narrative of nation and war through her use of spectacle, sexuality and
war. Just as Keller focuses on the forgotten victims of war, Hagedorn focuses on the forgotten colony.

The Philippines has a unique entanglement with the United States as a former colony and spoil of war. While the Philippines was a colony between 1898 and 1946 (interrupted by Japanese occupation during World War II) and its people were U.S. nationals between 1898 and 1935, they were never granted citizenship. However, as U.S. nationals, they were able to migrate freely to the mainland United States, work without restrictions and serve in the United States Armed Forces. Even though U.S. colonization of the Philippines officially ended after World War II, a continued military presence coupled with U.S. aid and interference in domestic politics ensured an interlocked domestic and foreign socio-political situation.

Although I label the Philippines as the “forgotten colony,” this isn’t quite the case. There have been numerous critiques within Asian American discourse about the exteriority of “Filipino America” and its hybridized society that is the result of Spanish, American, Chinese and Japanese occupations. However, the adjective “forgotten” is often applied to the case of the Philippines which “effectively support[s] the aura of American exceptionalism central to U.S. nationalism (Chuh 32) partially because “the deployment of identity as a mechanism for furthering political representation” (33) with identity working as an assimilative mechanism. Because the Philippines has a history of multiple colonizations, its unique juridical status regarding immigration between these islands and the mainland United States and “the diversity of the social and cultural formations among people residing in the Philippine islands” (Chuh 34), the narrative difference from the
trope of immigration/exclusion so common in Asian American studies becomes
suppressed or “forgotten.”

Hagedorn’s equation of gender subversion with political subversion models a
flexible idea of citizenship that includes room for revolution as well as for compliance.
Hagedorn’s use of narrative pastiche and postmodernist structure demonstrate the elusive
and illusory nature of narrative and she uses the trope of the movies to lay bare the
malleability of narrative. The refusal to be “proper” women or men leads to rebelling
against other social norms such as the oligarchic system of power in the Philippines.
However, Hagedorn’s novels also demonstrate the vast machineries employed in
disciplining the female body in order to uphold rigid nationalistic standards of proper
citizenship. Ultimately, the women and queers who attempt to put into practice
alternative ways of being, end up diminished or exiled and Hagedorn’s novels end on
rather pessimistic notes.

Both Keller and Hagedorn undermine the heternormative narratives of nation
through their focus on the marginalized and by disturbing the patriarchal underpinnings
of the family. Through this interruption, these authors help us to recognize and revise
some of the assumptions underpinning Asian American studies which can expand the
borders of Asian Americanist discourse to include heterogeneous formations of
subjectivity. This disturbance of heteronormativity also demonstrates some of the
products of the integration of postcolonialism within Asian American studies.
Hagedorn’s placement of her characters in the Philippines rather than the U.S.
demonstrate that while “America” is a component of identity, it is not the sole constitutive element.

The trajectory from Hawai‘i, the Philippines and then to Guam marks the passage from state, to post-colony, to unincorporated territory, legal formations that mark the U.S. presence in the Pacific. In these cases we see how “America” is just one nation among several. Utilizing Pacific Islander sensibilities, then, enables Asian American studies to flex “nationally, internationally, transnationally, sub-nationally, supra-nationally, and even extra- and post-nationally” (Diaz 185). In all of these texts, the focus is on the body and how that body is emplaced within the nation and its narrative.

The third chapter of my dissertation, “Where America’s Day Begins: Guam and American Imperialism” opens by asking why and how certain narratives get told and codified and who benefits from particular stories. The legal, cultural and political narrative surrounding Guam and its relationship to the United States has been one of benevolent tutelage on the part of the United States and of patriotic gratitude on the part of Guam. I utilize two texts by Chamorro authors Chris Perez Howard and Craig Santos Perez to analyze the ways that they accommodate and resist this narrative. First, though, I examine the legal context of Guam’s liminal status through a short analysis of the Supreme Court cases known as the “Insular Cases” that decided the legal and political status of Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba. One of the last remaining colonies in the world, Guam has been an “unincorporated territory” since 1898, meaning that it belongs to the United States but it is not part of the U.S. It is in the case of Guam that U.S. imperialism has been the most successfully cloaked through the narrative of liberation and romance.
Utilizing a narrative of “military necessity” as justification, the U.S. military has successfully occupied Guam for over a century.

Guam is the Pacific island that challenges the amnesia of American empire through its paradoxical political importance as a military staging ground and its cultural absence within mainstream U.S. social narratives about citizenship. Although there are dedicated Chamorros who agitate for decolonization, demilitarization and sovereignty, Guam is a colony that is rarely included in the list of other indigenous struggles for freedom. This is partially because of its small population, its rarity in national news and the patriotic narrative that still resounds through the island via memorializations such as its annual Liberation Day parades.

*Mariquita: A Tragedy of Guam* (1986) by Chris Perez Howard tells the story of his mother during the 1930s and 40s before and during Japanese occupation of Guam. For Howard, the Chamorro woman and her love for an American man and her subsequent tragic death under Japanese occupation metonymizes the plight of Guam itself. Howard claims his mother’s story as the tragic story of Guam and uses the patriotism of both woman and island as justification for the inclusion of Guam to be a fully recognized part of the United States rather than as an unincorporated territory. In his book, Howard carefully uses the story of his mother as a way to demand full legal and cultural inclusion into the American body politic.

Craig Santos Perez uses poetry to reclaim his marked body in order to explore the layered meanings of being Chamorro in the twenty-first century. His book, *from Unincorporated Territory*” explores the hybrid and shifting nature of “native” traditions
in light of centuries of colonization by the Spanish, the Americans and the Japanese. Perez specifically tackles the vexed nature of American citizenship and his piercing commentary illuminates the contingent nature of citizenship and rights for all. Perez’s explorations into the history of Guam interrupt the dominant narrative of a linear trajectory to citizenship and his poetry displays the antagonism to a universalizing narrative of governmentally granted rights.

These two texts are the clearest examples of the current state of American empire – an empire that works to efface itself through the rhetorical promises of liberation and citizenship. For both Howard and Perez, the body is the site where issues of patriotism and citizenship are questioned and they both point out the ways that the fiction of equal rights is only achieved through a denial of history. It is through the partial form of U.S. citizenship that Guam’s citizens retain the memories of imperialism. Although Howard’s narrative works to prove that Guamanians are worthy of full U.S. citizenship because of their unswerving loyalty, there are several moments in his text that transgress his intentions and call into question the political realities of the inclusionary rhetoric of the U.S. cultural narrative.

The fourth chapter, “Where is the ‘I’Land?: Samoa and the Self” is the furthest afield both in terms of location and literature. Samoa is a group of islands that are split into American Samoa and Samoa (formerly known as Western Samoa). The former is a dependent nation and while its citizens are considered U.S. nationals, they are not U.S. citizens similar to the status of Guam’s citizens. I employ a sleight of hand by analyzing the works of Samoa, a group of islands west of American Samoa that have never been
under formal U.S. rule but instead have been colonized by Germany and New Zealand. I use Samoan literature rather than texts from American Samoa because there are currently no literary works available off-island. In this chapter, I focus on the subject’s emplaced experience of the postcolonial condition rather than making a direct linkage to U.S. imperialism as I do in the previous chapters.

In this chapter, I analyze Albert Wendt’s *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979), one of the first novels published by a Samoan author and now considered canonical in the field, and Sia Figiel’s *Where We Once Belonged* (1996), the first novel by a Samoan woman to be published. Both of these authors are from Samoa and involved in many indigenous rights activist movements and their art is intimately tied up with their political beliefs.

This chapter foregrounds the crucial element of place within experience in addition to gender, class and national origin. I ask the question, “where is the postcolonial?” and explore the ways that the body and its accrued meanings shape the subject’s experience of colonial and postcolonial situations. Wendt’s novel, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* follows a single family’s story as a metaphor for the nation of Samoa. For Wendt, men are trapped in neocolonialist situations that promise to enrich them but in reality impoverish them by denigrating traditional modes of being and understanding while offering the paucity of money and Western education in its stead. Figiel links narrative with song, myth and and anecdotes in homage to a traditional Samoan form of story-telling, *su’ifefiloi*, in order to convey the double marginalization of being female and a postcolonial subject. Both Wendt and Figiel posit laughter as a potentially
subversive tool in the arsenal for maintaining a sense of self and pride, but ultimately this tool is insufficient in the face of massive bureaucratic institutions such as religious or educational systems. In the work of both of these authors, the educated postcolonial subject becomes trapped in his or her own static version of pre-contact purity, a legacy of colonialist educational systems.

Another key point in both *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* and *Where We Once Belonged* is the notion of center/margin and displacement. Figiel examines the shifting terrain of the center and her playful re-imagining of the various centers of Samoa ranging from the Catholic Church to the movie theater. This re-centering of perspective demonstrates what James Clifford recalls in his essay, “Indigenous Articulations,” when the Native American Black Elk claimed that Harney Peak in South Dakota “is the center of the world. And wherever you are can be the center of the world” (qtd. in Clifford 470). Figiel makes much the same claim – the center is always with us if we choose to see it. This powerful statement is one of the ways which her main character, Alofa, is able to begin to see a possibility for herself in a hybrid Samoa. The thematics of place expressed through the tropes of center and margin reveal the ways which the overdetermined narratives of colonial victimization are insufficient.

These novels make evident the ways in which the category of critique that is Pacific Islands studies exceeds the mono-nationalist focus of Asian Americanist discourse. Vicente Diaz points out that “the ground covered by ‘P’ also includes Islands and Islanders not formally under United States rule, as well as Islands and Islanders under U.S. rule who continue to live lives that are not entirely subsumed under U.S.
hegemony” (185). This chapter points the way for further, nuanced studies of the relationships between U.S. and non-U.S. imperialisms and the “minor transnationalisms” that surpass the binaries of cultural formation that dominate discussions of postcolonialism and nationalism.

In these four examples, Hawai‘i, the Philippines, Samoa and Guam, we see that U.S. imperialist project is still underway although it has been cloaked in the rhetoric of benevolence and liberation. The postcolonial subject in these places has been doubly displaced since the very presence of American empire has been occluded and these islands have experienced multiple colonizations that do not fit into traditional mono-imperial experiences such as the British in India or the French in Algeria. Instead, the intra-Pacific, Asian, and American colonizations that have occurred in this region complicate the meanings and experiences of the subject under colonialism and its aftermath.

Asian American literature and cultural studies has always been concerned with the ways that the subjectivity is inflected by gender, national origin and ethnicity. The contemporary example of these Pacific Islands demonstrates the ways that the American narrative of inclusion and equality cannot be sustained in the face of the bodily reminders of its colonialism and militarism. Instead, the stories of those who do not fit into the dominant social narrative have been ignored or erased altogether. My discussions focus on literature as a location where the author speaks on behalf of and as part of a collective consciousness. I use literature because I believe that it functions as a “mediation of
history, the site through which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect, or disavowed” (Lowe x).

My work on literature from the Pacific Islands is just a small beginning and I strive to explore some of the coalitions and fissures between several different branches of thought – Asian American critique, postcolonialism and feminism. The literature, political movements, performances and study coming from these areas do not glorify “authentic” or “traditional” ways of being, nor do they valorize “hybridity.” Rather, the activities of these authors and others whose work may be unsung and untheorized, offer eloquent descriptions and possible alternatives to the ways in which law, politics, commodification, and education work to narrow possibilities.

The variety of textual responses I cover within this project demonstrates the competing versions of what it means to be a Pacific Islander American, an Asian American and an American. The debates within Asian American and Pacific Islander studies about affiliations and antagonisms can be conceived of as “collaborative antagonisms” to use Kandice Chuh’s term. She explains that this term works in the “doubled sense of working together and working subversively against, and antagonistic in the ways in which diverse approaches to knowledge critique and identify each other’s limits” (28). The antagonism demonstrates the “impossibility of any objectivity” and the “inadequacy of any totalizing approach to or disciplining of knowledge” (28). There are productive points of comparison and contrast between Pacific Islander studies and Asian American studies primarily through the tropes of travel, migration, displacement at home and abroad. By including Pacific Islander studies with Asian American studies, there is
both the promise of political and institutional strength as well as the danger of the
suppression of difference. However, both disciplines with their separate and shared
histories have the power to question, disrupt, interrupt, and shake up institutional
boundaries so that there is room for complexity and consensus, however difficult it is to
imagine what those islands might look like.
Blue Hawai‘i: Narrating Home and Loss in Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*

I begin this project with a chapter focusing on Hawai‘i because of the way that Hawai‘i has been invaded, colonized, and absorbed into the body politic of the United States through the powerful mechanisms of amnesia and narrative. The narrative re-working of Hawai‘i’s past has created a domesticated exoticism, a tropic location that is unthreatening in its blandness. Hawai‘i becomes the state where diverse ethnicities live in harmony under the lovely smile of pretty girls doing the hula. Hints of Hawai‘i’s colonization and of U.S. militarism are safely managed and contained through the fetish memorials at Pearl Harbor, former plantations turned into bed and breakfasts and the Bishop Museum. In other words, the touristification of colonialism, militarism and racism mollifies the sting of guilt as these things are relegated to the past. The locale of Hawai‘i itself provides several key themes that will be touched upon in later chapters: the American empire and the effacing of that empire through re-narrativization, the transnational flows of desires, and the shaping of experience and subjectivity through these two phenomena.

I analyze two of Nora Okja Keller’s novels, *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl* to track the ways that U.S. empire has traded in bodies to efface its military and imperialist ambitions in Asia and the Pacific. These two novels are also emblematic of the tensions arising between Asian American and Pacific Islander studies. The main non-equivalency between these two fields lies within the purported goals of these disciplines. Put in simplified terms, Asian American studies has been concerned with the claiming of
America as “home” and a home to which those of Asian ethnicity could also rightfully claim through the avenues of citizenship and settlement. Pacific Islander studies, which is also concerned with “home” on a slightly different register, also actively pursues political agendas informed by struggles for decolonization, Indigenous rights, and sovereignty. America might serve as a point for these groups to coalesce around however, an American identity has been central to Asian American claims while that identity has been of secondary concern to many Pacific Islander scholars.

In Hawai‘i, given its history of commercial exploitation, labor importation from Asia, colonization and amalgamation into the U.S. fold, standard theories regarding the racializations of Asians on the mainland don’t quite fit. Haunani-Kay Trask, a Native Hawai‘ian scholar and activist incisively articulates one of the main contentions about Asians and Asian Americans and Hawai‘ian interactions: “Our Native people and territories have been overrun by non-Natives, including Asians. Calling themselves ‘local’ […] They claim Hawai‘i as their own, denying indigenous history, their long-time collaboration in our continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom” (2). That is, to focus on anti-Asian racism and its afterlife is insufficient and can even be said to consolidate the problem of Asian American concerns subsuming Pacific Islander issues in a replication of other forms of hegemony.

In Keller’s work, there is an absence of Native Hawai‘ians, a gap that could be troubling for its presumed claim to an Asian ‘local’ presence. Rather than place her characters as naturalized ‘locals,’ though, Keller’s portrayal of the Korean women in her novels are women who make no claims of belonging there or anywhere. While I make
note of the absence of Native Hawai’ians in Keller’s work I also agree with Kandice Chuh who points out “we must also be cognizant that prioritizing the politics of racial representation may occlude authorizing other, equally important interpretive registers” (142). To focus solely on Keller’s representations of Koreans, Japanese, and whites in Hawai’i or of choosing Hawai’i as the setting for her novels overlooks not only the key narrative action that occurs in Korea and the mainland U.S. but the entanglements between these three locations that is demonstrative of U.S. geo-political ambitions. Instead Keller’s use of multiple locations as well as her utilization of the trope of the family serves to de-link “home” with nation and its patriarchal narratives of nationalism by subversively imagining a different iteration of home and family.

I choose to use Nora Okja Keller's novels, Comfort Woman and Fox Girl, and read them side by side because of the way that she links past American incursions in Korea to its present day effects on the status and emotional burden carried by Korean Americans, and by extension other Asian Americans, particularly in Hawai’i. Her focus on the ways that Korean women and children have been brought into the U.S. as “family” becomes a literal embodiment of the re-narration of loss and lack, a loss of North Korea to communism and the lack of resolution to a war that was never officially ended, into the closed circuit of the nuclear family. Keller's novels attempt to re-narrate this loss into an alternative to the heteronormative, patriarchal family – an alternative familial space that is resolutely and exclusively female.

Keller's first novel, Comfort Woman, takes place in the waning days of World War II through the 1980s and follows "Akiko" (nee Soon Hyo) from her days as a
“comfort woman,” the euphemism used for the women forced into prostitution for the Japanese Imperial Army in Korea, her marriage to Rick Bradley, a missionary, and their move back to mainland America, and then as a single mother in Hawai'i. The novel uses an alternating narration between Akiko and her daughter, Beccah, with both voices moving from past to present. These two narratives don’t really overlap in time or in memory which reflects the way that the lives of these two intersect but don’t overlap each other with each woman in her own space, struggling to understand the other, but never really succeeding. The narrative also travels from present day to the past and back to the present day which also reflects their circular, rather than linear, migrations from Korea to mainland America and to Hawai'i.

Akiko's narrative consists mainly of inner monologue and is disjointed, skipping around from her time in the camps and her escape to the American missionaries, to her idyllic early home life and then to her time in America when her daughter Beccah was born. But, it is firmly rooted in the past – and, as we read her story, we understand how Akiko's past will always be the largest part of her. Her descriptions of her life in Korea and in America are mostly concerned with the ways that the war and occupation has deformed her life and the lives of millions of Koreans. On the other hand, Beccah's narration is mostly concerned with her isolation from her classmates and her mother and the psychic toll that this takes on her. Through her descriptions of her childhood, we also understand how Akiko's past trauma intrudes into Beccah's life, especially in her relationships with men. The result is that we begin to understand the ways which Akiko attempts to recuperate a sense of subjectivity and self-worth in light of her degrading
experiences and the ways that Beccah attempts to understand herself and her mother, however belatedly.

Keller's second novel, *Fox Girl*, is thematically linked to *Comfort Woman* through a similar plot of a young girl forced into prostitution for an occupying army. In the first book, the occupiers are Japanese and in the second they are American, but in both novels there are allusions to the ways that women have been used continuously as objects for foreign occupiers. Keller's novels use the Korean woman to metonymically stand in for the Korean nation and its position in world politics. Anne McClintock explains, "gender differences between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. Excluded from direct action as national citizens […] women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (354). That is, Korea’s position is allegorized as a gendered hierarchy of power with the dominating nation figured as super-masculine and the subordinate nation or nations figured as feminine in varying degrees.

*Fox Girl*, published in 2002, follows the fate of two young Korean girls, Hyun Jin and Sookie, who are forced to fend for themselves as prostitutes in the liminal area surrounding the American base – a space called “America Town.” America Town is so named not only because it abuts the base but also because it caters to all of the desires of the serviceman from Coca Cola to prostitutes. Hyun Jin's father, a store owner, dotes upon Hyun Jin, while his wife has a troubled and harsh relationship with her and eventually kicks her out of their home. Hyun Jin and Sookie act as doubles for each other, both going to the same school and are best friends who are both marked by
darkness – Hyun Jin with a large birthmark on her face and Sookie through her dark skin. About halfway through the novel, we discover that Sookie and Hyun Jin are really half-sisters because Hyun Jin's father and his wife were unable to have children so he had one with Duk Hee, his childhood friend, and convinced his wife to adopt her and raise her as their own child. The remainder of the novel follows Hyun Jin's expulsion from home, her life as a prostitute and bar girl/hostess in America Town and her flight to Honolulu where she is trapped at working at a replica of the club she left behind in Korea – down to the name, Club Foxa.

The name of the club as well as the novel refers to the fairy tale of the fox girl that is repeated in several different versions during the course of the narrative. Each version has in common the theme of a beautiful young woman who is really a fox in disguise. The disguise is used for different ends in different versions – sometimes it is to steal a soul, sometimes to retrieve stolen knowledge or a jewel, and sometimes it is just a disguise for survival. The story of the fox girl becomes a metaphor for the way that masking is needed for survival but it is also a metaphor for the malleability of narrative. For example, when Hyun Jin says that she doesn’t want to be a fox girl because she is evil, her friend’s mother says, “I suppose it depends on who tells the story” (26). The last two chapters of the novel focuses on Hyun Jin’s escape from the club, the dissolution of her friendship with Sookie, and her new family formation in Hawai’i.

“She Will Sift through Her Own Memories”: The Renarrativization of Loss

Both of Keller’s novels are about intense suffering and loss especially in the arenas of family and nation. But, just as importantly, her novels are about narrative and
its possibilities for the re-formation of a self and subjectivity in the face of severely constrained choices. Language and story carry the possibility for hope and fulfillment but they also carry the seeds of destruction. One of the burdens that narrative is called to carry is to testify about traumatic events. Leigh Gilmore points out the contradiction at the heart of this call to witness: “at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma. Thus language bears a heavy burden” (6) and “for the survivor of trauma such an ambivalence can amount to an impossible injunction to tell what cannot, in this view, be spoken” (7). The contradictory nature of the burden to speak of the unspeakable manifests itself through alternative avenues such as the language of shamanistic other-worldly communications and physical messages in Comfort Woman and through fairy tale and the body in Fox Girl.

Language and speech play a troubling role in Comfort Woman. During Japanese occupation, Koreans were given new names and were forced to learn and use Japanese to replace their native language. Akiko seems well suited to avoid this particular obliteration of her identity since she has always utilized alternative means of communication. Akiko reminisces about washing clothes with her mother and she imagines: “I remember that as we crouched over our wash, pounding out the dirt, I pretended that my mother and I sent secret signals to one another, the rocks singing out messages only we could understand” (17). These “secret signals” link the two of them beyond the ephemera of language and it is the physical that carries the true nature of Akiko’s bond that continues even beyond her mother’s death. One night after they had
carried home the wash her mother lies down and Akiko massages her mother’s temples until she feels her mother’s pulse slow and stop. However, Akiko “continued to pet her. I wanted her to know that I loved her” (18) and she links the physical expression of her love to her own daughter. Akiko explains, “I touch my child in the same way now; this is the language she understands: the cool caresses of my fingers across her tiny eyelids, her smooth tummy, her fat toes. This, not the senseless murmurings of useless words, is what quiets her, tells her she is precious” (18). The “mother tongue” is a language of its own, one that provides the comfort and safety that “the senseless murmurings” of spoken language cannot.

This dependence on physical means of communication carries over from Akiko’s home to her experiences in the comfort stations. The Japanese forbade the Korean women to speak while in the camps but “We taught ourselves to communicate through eye movements, body posture, tilts of the head or – when we could not see each other – through rhythmic rustlings between our stalls; in this way we could speak, in this way we kept our sanity” (16). While communication is crucial to maintaining sanity, the constructs of language are mistrusted because of the way language has been used as a tool of violence.

One of the types of violence done is the erasure of identity through re-naming, which is a re-narration of identity. The Korean women who were trapped in the comfort stations as sexual slaves to the Japanese Imperial forces were all given Japanese names and numbers as symbols of their interchangeability and replaceability: “Hanako 38, her name given because her face was once pretty as a flower, Miyoko 52, frail and unlucky
as the Miyokos before her […] Akiko 40. Tamayo 29” (19). Each number, while marking that woman as unique, also marks the number of women she is replacing. It's not only the Japanese, of course, who do violence to these women through mis-naming, Keller implicates Americans as well. When Akiko first goes to the American mission in Seoul, she is warned that her name will be changed again, “Be prepared...I think they call all of the girls Mary” (58) and while Akiko is in America and traveling with her husband she is called a “poor little orphan Jap” (109) and “a Chinee” (110). These re-namings and misrecognitions are attempts at erasing individuality, but the women also use language as a means of reclaiming their selves.

Akiko 40, the comfort woman who precedes the Akiko of the narrative (who is Akiko 41), provokes her own death through her refusal to be quiet and she “talked loud and nonstop. In Korean and in Japanese, she denounced the soldiers, yelling at them to stop their invasion of her country and her body. “Even as they mounted her, she shouted: I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive. I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do, I am a daughter, I am a sister” (emphasis added, 20). Although Akiko 40 names herself via her roles, she inserts herself with the pronoun “I” in order to humanize herself. Although language becomes the tool that Akiko 40 can posit herself as a subject and to describe her own self, it is also her usage of language that gets her killed. She snatches away her own identity from the hands of the Japanese and it is her refusal to be misnamed and misremembered that first forges the connection between her and Akiko 41 (nee Soon Hyo Kim) who becomes her replacement in the camp. Akiko 41 hangs on to this defiance and memorializes her predecessor by remembering her Korean name,
Induk. Induk takes on a second life as Akiko’s spirit guide and facilitates further communications.

Although Induk is the spirit who guides Akiko during her escape from the comfort station and in America, Akiko’s communication and possession by Induk lead her husband and daughter to label her as unstable and intermittently insane. However, it is through her communications with Induk that Akiko is able to witness and testify about her trauma and the trauma of her generation. More pragmatically, Akiko’s spirit possession manifests itself in fits where she tells fortunes and reads people’s troubles, which makes her enough money to purchase a house.

Through her communication with Induk, Akiko is able to reclaim a sense of self. This self comes through the insistent remembrance of her own past and of the deceased women who were in the camp with her. Although the typical immigrant narrative would fix the “immigrant” in an ahistorical frame by deleting her past, Akiko insists on retaining her past, however painful through her yearly recitations: “Abugi. Omoni. Kun Aniya. Mul Ajuoni. I sing the names by which I have known you, all of you, so that you will remember. So that I will remember. So that those who come after me will know. Induk. Miyoko. Kimiko. Hanako. Akiko. Soon Hi. Soon Mi. Soon Ja. Soon Hyo” (192). She includes herself in this litany as both Akiko and as Soon Hyo, for it is by both of these names that she has been formed and transformed. Although Akiko doesn’t know each woman’s Korean name, not even that of her own mother who was simply “Omoni,” she still bears witness through her memorialization of them.

This almost ceaseless repetition does more than memorialize and specify – it is
also a mark of Akiko’s trauma. The mark of a traumatic event is repetition and it is through the form of repetition that the victim seems most stripped of agency. The flashbacks, the nightmares, the automatic bodily responses of cringing or crying out seem to attest to the lack of control. Cathy Caruth states that “these repetitions are particularly striking because they […] appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected” (2). But, Akiko’s litanies and her possessions by the spirit Induk are the link between knowing and not knowing and represent both the control that Akiko has over her self and the lack of power that she has because of her position as a poor Korean woman during World War II and of an immigrant to the United States in the war’s aftermath.

Akiko’s daughter, Beccah, also intuits the importance of memorialization as the writer of obituaries in the local paper. Although Beccah sees this position as a stepping stone, she is stuck at her job, in her dead-end affair with a married man and her relationship with her mother whom she alternately resents and pities. Beccah’s alienation from her self occurs partially because she refuses to remember her own past trauma and doesn’t understand her mother’s either. Akiko, however, prepares for the day when Beccah will accept her own stories:

I will tell my daughter a story about her grandmother. I sift through memory […] I will tell my daughter these things, and about the box that kept my mother’s past and future, and though she will never know her grandmother’s name, she will know who her grandmother is. Later, perhaps, when she is older, she will sift through her own memories,
and through the box that I will leave for her, and come to know her own mother – and then herself as well. (182-183)

Paradoxically, to bear the weight of memory is a way to be able to define one’s self to oneself. Kandice Chuh defines this freedom as an “individual’s ability to act upon the self, to exert control over one’s relationship to others by means of having the freedom to behave in certain ways” but it is not just an action but a “condition within which an individual takes his or her self as object of epistemology, one inscribed by the uneven terrain constituted by the broad range of power relations” (115).

To understand one’s self within these power relations, one must also be free to communicate with others. This connection is crucial for it establishes what Martin Buber terms the “I-Thou” relationship. This relationship is one where both parties view each other as subjects rather than as objects or experiences, which is termed the “I-It” relationship. Dr. Dori Laub, noted Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst dealing with Holocaust survivors, states that one of the major issues impacting survivors is that the “historical imperative to bear witness could essentially not be met during the actual occurrence” because it was, “beyond the limits of human ability (and willingness) to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine” (68, emphasis in original). Yet, as Laub further goes on, “it is essential for this narrative that could not be articulated to be told, to be transmitted, to be heard” (69, emphasis in original). Akiko’s narratives within the novel, her clear-eyed assessment and remembrance of the horrors of the comfort woman slavery camp, her escape, her entrapment in a loveless marriage and her communications with her spirit
guide Induk are the belated acts of witnessing and testimony that could not occur during the actual occurrence.

It is Akiko’s insistence on telling her story and being heard are what finally humanize her to her daughter. After Akiko’s death, Beccah finds a box full of cassette tape recordings of her mother’s songs and stories and she hears for the first time of her mother’s experiences during World War II. But, even then Beccah has trouble believing the horror of the story: “I clawed through memory and story, denying what I heard and thought I remembered [...] I wanted to drown my mother's voice, wanted to reassure myself that these atrocities could not have been inflicted on her” (196). Auntie Reno, Akiko’s friend and employer takes Beccah to task:

You was her daughter, dah one come from her own body. But you nevah know shit about her, did you? [...] One tough woman. You tink she so out of it all the time, Beccah? Dat she so lolo I can jus' steal her money – not dat I would, mine you – an' she not goin' know it? [...] I'm telling you, your maddah was so sharp. You know she save all her money for you? She knew exactly what she made, down to dah last cent in dah Wishing Bowl. She even know wen you wen sneak money for school lunch, field trip, stuff li’ dat. No one could fool your maddah. (203-204).

In the end, it is Akiko’s stories and her memories that have not only borne witness to the suffering of Korean women but have also enabled her own survival.
“I’m Changing the Ending Before I Get Eaten”: Narratives of Survival

Akiko’s use of story and narrative in *Comfort Woman* is her means of testifying and transmission, in *Fox Girl*, story is used for a different type of survival. This novel takes place in the area surrounding an American military base in Korea sometime during the 1960s and 70s. In this area called “America Town,” Hyun Jin and her family, Sookie and her mother, Duk Hee and an assortment of other rag-tag characters attempt to eke out an existence by catering to the servicemen stationed there. For each of these characters, the narratives that they tell and that they revise enable them to explain some of the awfulness of their daily lives.

The folk tale of the fox is a common one in Asia and there are several iterations of this story. What is common to all of them is the fox always disguises herself as a beautiful woman in order to trick a man. Sometimes the fox is looking for love and sometimes the fox is looking to kill, but in either case, the man is always blinded by her beauty and her womanly wiles. Occasionally, the man will be able to discover the fox’s true nature through some tell-tale sign but this doesn’t always mean happiness for either the fox or the man. In this novel, Hyun Jin’s father tells her one version where a fox disguises herself in order to suck out the souls of men, but her friend’s mother, Duk Hee, gives the story a different ending that explains that the fox was simply looking for the jewel of knowledge that one of the boys had stolen from her during a kiss and that the disguise was simply a way of attempting to retrieve her own jewel. Hyun Jin’s father squarely blames the fox girl without giving an explanation as to why the fox would want to kill these men, but Duk Hee’s version points out that understanding the circumstances
and motivations behind the action can make the difference between condemnation and empathy.

An early scene in the novel has Duk Hee, a prostitute working in America Town, passing on her knowledge to her daughter Sookie and to Hyun Jin through a seemingly innocent afternoon of eating and playing with cosmetics. Duk Hee takes turns putting make-up on each of the girls in what could be construed as an amusing transmission of womanly secrets from mother to daughter. However, Duk Hee tells them “that this makeup is magic – a disguise that lets us move through their world safely” and reiterates, “It’s like the story of the fox who wraps herself in the skin of a dead girl […] in real life, we have to become like the fox girl” (25). Hyun Jin takes Duk Hee’s advice seriously and utilizes the mask of “Hunni Girl” for her stage persona in order to “do what the other girls didn’t want to do […]. I was the GIs’ lifesize doll, always smiling, always bendable, always able” (192). For the women who are scrambling to survive, language and story become tools that mask their selves and enable them to endure.

In both of Keller’s novels, women are constantly fighting to claim a subjectivity in a life that seems designed to rip it away from them. Lauren Berlant describes this phenomenon as “desubjectification” and explains that this is a condition “in which ‘ordinary’ subjects lose a sense of their rationality or legitimacy as subjects in everyday and national life in response to negatively invested social phenomen.” Berlant paraphrases Julia Kristeva's explanation of “dejects,” as those who are, “faced with a substance or phenomenon that unsettles the constitutive rules of order in their horizon of life expectation, dejects become shaken, aversive, incompetent to subjectivity. They feel
a traumatic loss – of themselves” (286). In order to re-claim their own selves, the characters in Fox Girl re-narrate their stories utilizing the trope of story-telling and reinterpretation.

When Hyun Jin reflects upon the time she was kicked out of her childhood home she tells herself:

Sometimes I think I could have changed my story at this point in my life, just by choosing how to interpret what my father said. When he echoed his wife, repeating, 'Blood will tell' I thought at the time that he was acknowledging that I could be nothing more than a whore. But now, I can almost believe he was reminding me that I was his daughter, that I carried his heart, that I had choices. (125)

This passage is particularly poignant for its belief in the power of narrative to shape lives. However, Hyun Jin says that she only “sometimes” thinks that it would have been possible to change the course of her life and that she can “almost believe” that her father loved her. While narrative is powerful, it cannot overcome the material realities of a life of limited choices. This passage invokes the power of narrative only to call it into question. Language is paradoxically what opens up possibilities but it is also what can trap us into accepting certain denigrated identities and identifications.

Towards the end of the novel, after Hyun Jin, her adopted daughter Myu Myu, and Sookie have migrated to Hawai’i to work as “special entertainers” in a club specializing in Korean prostitutes, Hyun Jin gathers herself and Myu Myu together to escape and Sookie and her john give her a ride to the airport. During this scene of
departure, Hyun Jin panics at the thought of ending her relationship with Sookie but
Sookie tells her yet another version of the fox girl story in which the “the fox girl try
to live like people, but she have secret: animal hunger” (278) and the fox girl ends up eating
the kind farmer who had taken her in and cared for her. Hyun Jin doesn’t understand why
Sookie is telling her this story until Sookie finally asks, “‘Do you feel sorry for the fox,
Hyun Jin?’” and when Hyun Jin still doesn’t seem to understand, Sookie replies, “‘The
people still get eaten,’ she said. ‘I’m changing the ending before I get eaten. [...] ‘You’re
the fox, Hyun Jin. Making yourself what you’re not to get more than you need. In the
end, you’ll destroy yourself and everyone around you’” (278). Sookie’s parable both
accuses and explains her own actions of abandoning Hyun Jin and her daughter. In the
animal world of survival that Hyun Jin and Sookie find themselves in, narrative is the one
arena where they have some semblance of control. Narrative, however, doesn’t change
the fact that their lives have been constrained by their position as women or Korean.
Hyun Jin also reflects, “Other times, I think the maps of our lives are etched into vein and
muscle and bone, and that mere words – however interpreted – don't have the power to
change anything” (126).

Keller is deeply ambivalent about the location of truth – language is the basis of
subjectivity and yet it can be a powerful tool of oppression and so she relies on the body
even though that body is the same one marked out for abuse. As Hyun Jin and Myu Myu
are working and playing one afternoon, Myu Myu looks at Hyun Jin’s face and instead of
thinking that she is ugly because of her large birthmark exclaims, “‘Your face is a map,
Mama,’ she announces, breathless, solemn. Your head is the world!” (288). Hyun Jin is
relieved and tells her daughter that her face is a map too, “And I am struck by the obvious truth of my words. Her face is a map – an inheritance marked by all who were once most important in my life. I have caught familiar but fractured reflections of Lobetto and Sookie, Duk Hee and even my father. They have traversed time and distance, blood and habit, to reside within the landscape of this child's body” (289). Although maps are one type of language and ordering in the world, both Hyun Jin and Myu Myu choose to change the meaning to suit themselves and their situation. Instead of memorializing the people who were important to her through song or story, Hyun Jin remembers them through her daughter’s body. Hyun Jin looks at her and thinks, “I know with absolute clarity that the best of Sookie, of Duk Hee, or Lobetto, of me […] is here and has always been here under the skin, in the bone and in the blood, in this jewel of a girl” (290). Ultimately, for Hyun Jin, language and story have proved to be too treacherous with their multiple and shifting meanings and she relies on the body to bear the burden of meaning.

Queering the Home

The home as an imaginative and political construct is one of the most compelling formations in Asian American studies. This notion carries with it a history of meaning and manipulation and earlier Asian American studies concentrated on the claiming of America as a homeland to repudiate their position as the inassimilable foreigner within the borders of the United States. In a place like Hawai’i, the claiming of home becomes even more difficult because of its ambivalent position with regards to the Native Hawai’ian population, the Asian and mixed race Asian ‘locals’ and the haoles who have also settled in Hawai’i for generations and claim their home. One of the reasons for this
difficulty is the tendency to link “cultures, peoples, or identities and specific places [which] has served to ground our modern governing concepts of nation and cultures” (T. Swedenburg qtd. in Chuh, 87). For the characters in Keller’s novels, women who have been forced into prostitution, there is a doubled alienation from home and nation for them. Akiko and Hyun Jin’s position as women who have prostituted themselves to occupying armies cuts them off from polite society and their natal families in Korea and their foreign birth, unfamiliarity with English, and immigrant status isolates them from mainstream American society as well.

These ambivalencies are most strongly reflected in the problematics evolving from locations that should be sources of comfort and pleasure, such as the home, the family, or even Hawai‘i itself, but instead are places of harm, grief, and even betrayal. The home should be a safe haven, Hawai‘i should be a trouble-free paradise, and thus both locales resonate with each other in the imagination, but neither place ever delivers fully on its promise. In both cases, the home and Hawai‘i, each locale resonates with the implications of larger transnational, geo-political concerns. Keller demonstrates that the most private of realms, sexuality and family, become those most affected by the public domain. In Comfort Woman, Akiko is sold to the Japanese soldiers by her sisters, thereby breaking any familial bonds of comfort and protection, while in Fox Girl, daughters are prostituted by their mothers, mothers are pimped by their sons, parents abandon their children – all in the name of survival. The physical home becomes a place of danger but the idea of home is still compelling. Kandice Chuh gives a compelling alternative definition when she names home as “that condition in which there is an
equality of ability to participate in negotiating and constructing the ethos of the places in which we live” (124). A focus on an ideal condition of equality and ethos doesn’t substitute for the metaphorical usages of the physical home, rather it adds another layer to hold in mind when analyzing the language of the domestic.

The rhetorical use of the home and the domestic is a common way to work through larger “public” issues. The reasons for this are two-fold: 1) it demonstrates that the supposedly separate spheres of home versus the outside world really are not that separate; and 2) it also can serve to eclipse the concerns of socio-political upheaval by masking it in the domestic drama. In her book, *The Anarchy of Empire*, Amy Kaplan explains that during the nineteenth century when America was engaged in its most aggressive expansion of national borders, the rhetoric surrounding women's roles, particularly their domestic duties, began to shift and to mark the expansion of the “empire of the mother” (24). This supposedly interior and private realm of familial relationship instead becomes a “mobile and mobilizing outpost that transformed conquered foreign lands into the domestic sphere of the family and nation. At the same time, the focus on domesticity could work to efface all traces of violent conflict” (25). The focus on familial constructions didn’t stop in the nineteenth century of course and we can see how the domestic space is where the “political and economic, as well as the intensely personal implications of this history can be fully registered. The home left behind, the home built, the home destroyed: this is the true history of immigration and war” (Kinney 94). Keller’s focus on the home and the family register that instead of erasing any signs of violent conflict, the home indexes the violence of the world outside its doors.
The presence of Asian ‘locals’ in Hawai‘i marks the violence of U.S. military and colonial ambitions and desires for land, geo-political dominance and commercial hegemony. Many of the Asian/Hapa people are the legacies of the importation of cheap Asian contract labor to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations and their dominance is also partially due to the decimation of the Native Hawai‘ian population through disease and displacement. Keller manages to avoid some of the controversy between “local” and “native” by refusing to naturalize their presence in Hawai‘i and instead demonstrating the very “unnatural” ways that Akiko and Hyun Jin arrive. One way to take into account for the critical difficulty of this situation is to mount an Asian Americanist critique that is informed by postcolonialism and its criticisms of empire instead of using the immigrant story to critique the obvious shortcomings of U.S. liberatory narratives that celebrate individualism and initiative. Lisa Lowe describes the engines of “displacement, decolonization, and disidentification” as “crucial grounds for the emergence of Asian American critique” (104) by their refusal of “assimilation to the dominant narratives of integration, development, and identification” (101). In other words, by disarticulating “home” from a physical space or a territory and instead use it to name an ideal condition, then “Asian American studies [could] conceive of itself as a decolonizing project that […] works to displace and provide alternatives to dominant structures of knowledge” (Chuh 139). By doing so, the inherent conflict that seems to appear between Asian American studies and Pacific Islander, particularly Native Hawai‘ian studies, is at least disarmed temporarily.
One commonality between these two areas of study, along with others, is the investigation between gender and politics. In the home, the supposed domain of women, this yoking together is made the most obvious. Within the locale of the home the most private activities, such as sexual activity, are monitored and regulated. Lauren Berlant wonders in her book, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City,* what would happen if we produced a "genealogy of sex in America in which unjust sexual power was attributed not to an individual, nor to a patriarchy, but to the nation itself? Such an account would expose the circuits of erotic and political dominance [...] it would radically transform what is considered national about the history of the 'public' and the 'private' in the United States” and it would be one that established an alternative history as “one that claimed the most intimate stories of subordinated people as information about everyone's citizenship” (221). Though I seem to be moving back to a nationalist framework with this quote from Berlant, I want to focus on her use of the “genealogy of sex” to trace some of the marks left by U.S. colonialist aspirations.

One of the connections that I make in my claims for the metaphors of home is the way that the power relations within the home are a manifestation of the power grid on a larger, global scale. In Keller’s novels, she demonstrates how the patriarchal narratives that uphold nationalism and map a gendered code of dominance between nations, also obtain within the home. Thus, I also read *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl* as narratives that demonstrate the failure of a heteronormative family and posit an alternative construction that is able to secure the safety and comfort of each of its members. By breaking the
patriarchal structure of the family, Keller’s novels suggest that dislodging a nationally focused critique opens up the horizon for imagining other potential formations of home.

Akiko’s story in Comfort Woman is as much about the loss of one home and the search for another as it is about the memorialization of grief and suffering. Akiko recalls her own moves and explains her understanding how “the moment I crossed the Yalu and entered the recreation camps, that my home village of Sulsulham was as far away as heaven for me” (101). Sold to the Japanese by her sister after their mother’s death, “home” has become an unreachable condition. The massive movement of Koreans after Japan’s defeat in World War II and explains that “they moved to escape memories, to search for new lives and new homes” (104). Akiko realizes that the destruction of home is not unique and she describes her dreams in which “I will always see the thousands of people, the living and the dead, forming long queues that spiral out from the head and feet of Korea, not knowing that when they reach the navel they will have to turn back. Not knowing that they will never be able to return home. Not knowing they are forever lost” (105). The body of Korea becomes occupied and then bisected by the Japanese and then by the Americans in the imperialist ambitions of both countries and in both cases, it means the loss of a place as well as a condition where the inhabitants are able to participate in the construction of the shape of their “home” because of unequal and oppressive power relations.

Akiko is able to escape from Korea because she allows herself to be married to Rick Bradley, a young American missionary who works at the mission in Seoul she shelters at after her escape from the comfort station. For Akiko, her marriage becomes
another reiteration of her time in the camps and on her wedding night, she realizes that “my body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men” (106). This situation is only alleviated for Akiko through the love she has for her daughter and her own relationship with Induk, the spirit of the woman she replaced in the camp. After her daughter’s birth, Akiko states, “my daughter is the only living thing I love” (18) but it is Induk who “comes in singing, entering with full voice, filling me so that there is no me except for her, Induk” (36). Through this odd trio, Akiko is able to create a home for Beccah that affords some safety, although Akiko’s own past marks it as one that is fraught with fear.

Keller writes of the force of desire as a means of resisting a male-centered hegemony. Although Akiko is quite pragmatic about the usefulness of men when she tells her daughter that, “Women need men for children. God listens to men” (127) she resists the colonization of her inner self through her sexualized relationship with Induk. Akiko describes her spiritual and sexual intercourse with Induk and one night when her husband finds her masturbating, he takes advantage and has sex with Akiko, but for Akiko “it was as if Induk was still there, between us, inside him and inside me. The buzzing that I felt with her unfurled within me, gaining strength until I could not contain it” (146) but later when her husband attempts to lecture her about the evils of “self-fornication” Akiko laughs at him and asks, “How could he compare what went on between men’s and women’s bodies with what happened spiritually” (146). Akiko’s separation of the two, the spiritual and the physical, is what enables her to survive her time in the camps as well as to survive her life in the U.S. The spiritual sustenance needed for Akiko’s recognition
of her own worth and subjectivity are provided by other women. It is through this queer space, female-centered and spiritually rewarding that Akiko is able to claim her own body, self, and subjectivity.

In *Fox Girl*, the failure of the heteronormative family to provide any safety or comfort becomes the most obvious. Hyun Jin’s original family headed by her father and his wife expels her after they suspect her of prostituting herself. Hyun Jin’s father seems unable to stand up to his wife and rather than protect his daughter, he protects his marriage. Hyun Jin’s attempts to create another home with her friend Sookie and Duk Hee falls apart because of the need to compete in bars for the resources of the G.I.s, another attempt at living with her friend Lobetto and his mother also proves destructive when Lobetto pimps her out and sells her virginity to three young servicemen.

While the heteronormative family is a failure, not all homosocial formations of family work either. In *Fox Girl*, the mother-daughter relationship between Duk Hee and Sookie is marked by betrayal, competition, disappointment and abandonment. At one point, Sookie and Duk Hee are working as dancers at the same club and Sookie ends up “stealing” her mother’s boyfriend, Chazu. Towards the end of the novel when Duk Hee has now been relegated to the lowest rank of prostitute, working and living in what is called the “fish bowl” named for the glass cubicle that shows everything, Duk Hee betrays Sookie to a young pimp and he beats her. When Sookie confronts her mother about this betrayal she instead shouts, “It’s your fault I’m the way I am! I was just a little girl. A little girl – you should have protected me” (251) and we learn that Duk Hee sold Sookie’s virginity at age eight. What has deformed this mother-daughter relationship is
the both the absence of a stable family structure that has been made impossible by the
incursion of American military men into Korea. The denigrated position of women,
almost powerless except for the ability to sell their bodies, breaks down even the
strongest bonds of family.

It is only at the very end of the novel, that we see that there is a possible
alternative to a life of bare survival and exploitation when Hyun Jin is rescued by Gerry,
the owner of a greenhouse in Waimano located in the interior of Oahu. Hyun Jin literally
reaches the end of the road when she takes a taxi from the airport to find a long lost uncle
but it turns out he has moved to San Francisco. Upon hearing this news, she faints,
“dropp[ing] to all fours, ear pressed to earth, and hear[ing] the world singing like crickets
with that in-and-out beat of the tides, of the blood in our veins, of the panting of the fox.
Then everything stopped, went dead, and I knew that it was all over. I had nowhere else
to go. I was run to the ground” (285). The next and last chapter of the novel is one of
pastoral loveliness set five years later. Hyun Jin is now working at the greenhouse and
she is playing a game with Myu Myu and Gerry at the kitchen table. Hyun Jin explains,
“Gerry says she’s made us family, hanai-ing Myu as her granddaughter” (288). Away
from the need to compete for scarce resources, Hyun Jin is finally able to relax. Although
Gerry, through her name and as provider, acts in a “masculine” role, this family is
resolutely female. This family, notable for its isolation as well as its exclusion of men, is
the first to provide a haven of comfort, belonging and sufficiency.

The scene continues when Gerry brings over a bowl of aloe vera gel for Myu Myu
to put on Hyun Jin’s irritated hands and although she is a little disgusted by the peeling

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skin, “she raises my fingers to her lips. ‘Does it hurt?’ she asks, and kisses each one. I suck in my breath, from the pain of it, from the joy of it” (289-290). The closure of the novel with this scene of comforting and the circulation of caring between Gerry, Hyun Jin to Myu Myu begins to promise that Hyun Jin’s harsh life will be mitigated through this final adoptive family of hers. By closing with this scene, Keller questions the validity of a heteronormatively wrought family structure, a structure that has only harmed Hyun Jin and other women. “Home and family, metaphors for national belongingness” (Chuh 144) are reworked to demonstrate the potential of safety and a true meaning of home by “queering” the naturalized masculinist social configurations that uphold formations of home as well as nation.

These novels by Nora Okja Keller are interruptions in the American narrative of exceptionalism. While current scholarship has done much to insert critiques of American empire, there is still a tendency to gloss over the connections between the geo-political military ambitions of the U.S. in Asia and the Pacific and immigration. Keller’s use Korean women immigrants and the locales of Korea, Hawai’i and the mainland U.S. as the settings for her novels demonstrate the long history between these three locations. The disruptive potential of a “queer” reading of home and family voices an “antagonism to the universalizing narratives of both pluralism and development […] and opens Asian American culture as an alternative site to the American economic, political, and national cultural spheres” (Lowe 29).

The problematics of representation of a Hawai’i bereft of Native Hawai’ians is partially ameliorated through Keller’s refusal for her main characters to claim Hawai’i as
home. Utilizing the lens of postcolonialism, however, begins to shift the narrative of a
naturalized “local” paradise to one that is able to look beyond the boundaries of the
nation while also allying itself with the concerns of Pacific Islander concerns. The
decolonization of Hawai’i and other islands begins with imagining a different formation
and a different narrative for these locales.
The colonization of the Philippines is rarely given a second thought by most contemporary Americans, but the specter of America looms large in the imagination of the Philippines. This country, a collection of 7100 known islands, has been colonized by the Spanish, the Americans and the Japanese. Even though the Philippines became formally independent after World War II, the U.S. still plays a large part in the political, social, economic and cultural lives of most Filipinos, so much so, that many Filipinos complain that their country suffers an inferiority complex and its people automatically assume that anything imported is better than a domestic product. This chapter has a twofold focus: First, it looks at America’s cultural imperialism via cinema and consumer products and their associated pleasures. Secondly, this chapter also examines some of the ways which America's colonial past is ever-present and yet forgotten in the rhetoric surrounding the Philippines, Filipinos, and their peculiar international and domestic relationship to the United States. This amnesia is willfully executed through the appropriation of the beauty pageant and an ersatz Hollywood glamour.

America's colonization in the tropics reached its zenith in 1898. This year saw the incorporation of Hawai’i, Guam, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines as appendages to the ever-growing nation of the United States. The case of the Philippines, however, provides some of the clearest examples of the accommodation and amnesia surrounding
America's colonialism in the 20th century. A key component of the accommodation of America's growing empire in the Pacific was (and is) the rhetoric of liberation. The acquisition of these extra-territorial island nations threw into relief some of the arguments about the shape of the American nation that continues today, arguments that include discussions surrounding the borders (and borderlands) of America, immigration, labor and war.

By the late 19th century, the Philippines had been colonized by the Spanish for almost 500 years and under the guise of liberating this nation, America went to war with a decrepit Spanish Armada. Although President McKinley had initially pledged that he would not acquire any overseas territories, this promise was soon forgotten. While there was plenty of opposition from anti-imperialists, notably led by Mark Twain, who wrote a scathing indictment of America's burgeoning imperialism in his essay, “To a Man Sitting in the Dark,” there was a stronger cadre of religious figures envisioning new lands to convert, businessmen thinking of a gateway to the markets of Asia, and politicians hoping to establish America as a world power, who swayed McKinley. A typical sentiment about the Philippines and of Filipinos was expressed by Albert Jeremiah Beveridge, later elected senator of Indiana. He pointed out that the Pacific was a prime staging ground and that the Philippine was “logically our first target” and justified this all by stating, “We are a conquering race...American law, American order, American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on the shore hitherto bloody and benighted, but by those agencies of God henceforth to be made beautiful and bright” (qtd. in Karnow 109). What is particularly interesting about this statement is its passive
construction. While “Americans” are positioned as aggressive and active, a “conquering” race; the tools of America and Americans: law, order, civilization and the flag, “will plant themselves” presumably without any need for actual Americans to bloody their hands. This slippage from active to passive construction foreshadows the ways in which the agents of imperialism, Americans, were seen as passive participants in a manifest destiny and thus could still be “exceptional.” Of course, during World War II America was once again able to claim the mantle of liberator when it defeated the Japanese Imperial Army and MacArthur was able to make his triumphal return.

The exhibitionism of MacArthur’s pronouncement points to what Guy DeBord says is, “both the result and the project of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society’s unreality” (4). In Jessica Hagedorn’s work, the circular transit between “result” and “project” is made evident in her utilization of the tropes of spectacle, feminine sexualilty, and war. While war and militarism are seen as masculinist projects, Cynthia Enloe, in her groundbreaking work, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, points out the ways that women have been and continue to be deeply affected on a daily basis by wars and by militarization. Although women in combat are still seen as aberrant, at least in the United States, women have always been used to “support” men at war, whether it is through variations on domestic roles such as nursing and cooking, or in sexualized roles as prostitutes, bar workers, or entertainers. Sex and war are two of the circumstances where power hierarchies are expressed through gender dynamics and spectacle becomes the technology that makes this power differential clear. One of the ways to disrupt an exclusively male
and heterosexist scenario is to switch perspectives to others such as women, transvestites and gays, who are normally considered outside of the “proper” boundaries of the military. In both of the novels that I examine in this chapter, *Dogeaters* and *Dream Jungle*, Hagedorn explores alternative and layered narratives in order to investigate some of the ways that the boundaries of nationhood, gender, and citizenship are flexible and permeable.

Filipino and Filipino American novelists disrupt the borders of national and academic discourse. Kandice Chuh writes, “‘Filipinos' may be understood as a category of critique rather than identity. It is an analytical category through which we can plainly see the a priori emptiness of identificatory terms, one that bespeaks the constructedness and constitutive instability of seemingly purely descriptive terms” (56) and for the ways that it “refuses to allow Asian American studies to solidify the boundaries of what constitutes its proper objects of knowledge” (57). While Asian American studies wants to concentrate on Asians *in* America, this ignores the entanglements between Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the U.S. The peculiar relationship that the Philippines has to the United States provides one of the best examples of the sleight-of-hand involved in the naturalization of U.S. imperialism and Asian Pacific immigration.

While traditional American Studies has been predicated upon the notion of America as “exceptional,” Asian American studies has based its *raison d’etre* upon the idea of exclusion. Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* argues that the racialized history of the term “citizen” in America and its exclusionary practices is what gives Asian American cultural practices its force as a disruptive and memorializing force. Likewise, David
Palumbo-Liu in his book *Asian/American: Crossings of an Historical Frontier* argues that American modernization and industrialization occurs concurrently with the categorization of Asians as “non-white” and thus not eligible for the protection and social valence of the term “citizen.” Karen Shimakawa also points to how the Asian American body acts as the bearer of abjected meanings for the American imaginary. What these three critics, and many others, have invested in is the power of *exclusion*. This force has given Asian American studies its velocity, as well as its virtue, in terms of resistive political agendas. However, the danger of relying solely on exclusion as motivation is that it can veer dangerously close to a rhetoric of victimization. One of the outcomes of the study of Filipino American literature is to open up the field of Asian American studies and broadens its focus to multiple sites of inquiry, through the insertion of ambiguity and ambivalence about the twinned natures of exclusion/inclusion, citizen/alien, queer/straight and other, even less fruitful, binaries.

This is not to say that the only role of Filipino American (or other PI American) literature is simply to revitalize Asian American literature or American studies. Rather, this area of study is one of the most promising avenues for “un-learning” previously held assumptions in many disciplinary fields from area studies, indigenous studies, women's studies, religion, sociology, archeology, linguistics, postcolonial studies and so on. The transition and transformation of academia comes about because of new and exciting

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2 I am in no way implying that these three critics are hiding under the banner of victimization. However, I am stating that it is easy for others to pick and choose from this work (and the work of other critics like Lowe, Palumbo-Liu, and Shimakawa) and to focus solely on exclusionary practices do the detriment of actual insight.
fields such as PI studies. For this chapter (and most of this project), I follow the path of feminism and other established methodologies.

When reading with a feminist eye, it is always tempting to read any novelistic venture in order to “uncover” previously overlooked resistive and revolutionary moments by women, especially when looking at topics considered “masculine,” such as war. Hagedorn sets her novels during moments of overt American intervention in the domestic policies and politics of the Philippines in order to demonstrate that the bifurcation between domestic and foreign are not clear cut. Because of Hagedorn’s focus on marginalized peoples and discourses, such as gossip, there is the temptation to equate them with revolution and resistance. I follow Viet Nguyen's contention that the way Asian American literature has been read by critics as examples of either resistance or accommodation is oftentimes too limiting and has more to do with “the relationship of Asian American intellectuals generally to Asian America” (4) and that this binary doesn't take into account the “flexible strategies” used by authors, sometimes resistant, sometimes compliant, sometimes canny, sometimes not. This is not to say that one should divorce one's concerns from one's reading – quite the opposite. The trick is to attempt to ensure that is not all one is reading for. In this chapter, I attempt to do precisely that – to strike a balance between my own yearnings for revolutionary rhetoric with a more nuanced analysis that takes into account the varieties of strategies utilized by the authors and by the characters within their novels and limiting a sense of (self) righteousness.

In this chapter, I look at the novels of Jessica Hagedorn in order to examine the ways in which she uses the tropes of spectacle and spectatorship as metaphors for
U.S./Philippines relations. The stage with its artificiality and mimicry is used to address the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines. The U.S. maintains the simulacra of democracy through the artificial prop of a military neocolonialist regime – on one hand espousing equality and opportunity and on the other hand, deeply involved in maintaining the oligarchic grip of the comprador system of incestuous back-room deals benefitting the entrenched elites. Hagedorn’s use of movie-watching and making, beauty pageants, and weddings, explore a variety of subtle meanings within their main metaphorical usage. In these instances, I analyze how girls and women take part in spectacle-making and their varied responses. Hagedorn focuses on the ways that “woman” as symbol is pressed into the service of nationalist allegories of liberation and she links gender subversion to political subversion. I also pay attention to the ways in which transvestite and queer figures appear in Hagedorn’s work and how they function to “queer” the metonymics of the U.S./Philippines relationship. Transvestites and homosexuals highlight the constructedness of naturalized situations such as gender identification, oligarchic class rule, and the subordinated position of the Philippine Islands in its relationship with the United States.

Hagedorn works against the erasure of the marginal\(^3\) in active, nationalist agendas and demonstrate some of the ways that a feminist consciousness is not antithetical to a nationalist stance although most nationalist agendas are unfriendly to feminist schemas. Underpinning her concerns with female identity is a preoccupation with citizenship for those who are marginalized because of gender, sexual orientation, class, or even location

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\(^3\) “Marginal”, of course, is a relative term. What I am really attempting to say here is anyone other than the idealized nationalist figure – a young male with some education and/or property.
such as the overseas citizen. Hagedorn is interested in the ways which the seductiveness of the image has been used to de-historicize and to re-narrativize history and her novel is an attempt to place the focus back on the Philippine Islands and their people. Hagedorn’s focus on the porosity of the imaginary and national borders between the U.S. and the Philippines and sets her novels, *Dogeaters* and *Dream Jungle*, in both of these locations to demonstrate the fluid nature of identity and identification. However, Hagedorn’s work is ultimately ambivalent about the probability of a feminist and nationalist agenda working together. She still seems to view the Philippines as a locale that is deeply influenced, almost inescapably, by its long history of colonization and its starkly divided social system. She is fatalistic about its ability to move beyond gendered stereotypes and ultimately locates the women who would challenge the system outside of Manila mainstream society.

*All the World’s a Stage: Beauty, Self-Invention and Citizenship*

The portrayal of women/queers in staged settings such as the beauty pageant or wedding or even as objects of everyday visual consumption is used as a metaphor for the staging of a beneficent and equal relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines. Women and queer bodies illustrate some of her specific concerns of about the relationship between the United States and the Philippines: the patron-client unevenness, the U.S.'s amnesia regarding its destruction and imperialism in the Philippines, the feminization of the subjugated nation, and the intertwining of desires between postcolonial state and former colonizer. The relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines can be characterized as one of spectator to spectacle. Rainier, a German
filmmaker, says to Joey Sands, the young hustler in Dogeaters: “It's a picture I take with my mind, so I won't forget you,” and Joey thinks, “Let him look all he wants – he's paying for every second” (149). The U.S. keeps looking at the Philippines in order to fix a particular ahistorical image of democratic tutelage in its mind while it willfully forgets how much both parties have had to keep paying for its economic, social and sexual favors.

Hagedorn's first novel, Dogeaters, is a sprawling, multi-layered story that weaves together multiple narratives all loosely connected by the powerful and immense Alacran family. Like any family it has its poor relations and its wealthy ones, the success stories and the black sheep. The novel begins with Rio Gonzaga and her cousin, Pucha, at the movies while Rio’s grandfather, Whitman Logan, is dying in the American hospital while screaming for his hometown of Chicago. Rio is one of two first person narrators and while the novel begins with her, she drops out of the story about half-way through.

The other first-person point of view is from Joey Sands, a young hustler, but we also get chapters from Lolita Luna, a bomba film star and her lover, General Nicasio Ledesma, who is a cousin to Severo Alacran, the head of the richest family in the Philippine Islands. There is also a major storyline about Daisy Avila, daughter of an opposition politician, who wins a beauty contest and later becomes a guerrilla fighter and is tortured by General Ledesma. Also included are Baby Alacran (Severo’s ugly daughter who marries Pepe Carreon, a lackey of General Ledesma), Romeo Rosales, a movie star
wanna-be, and his girlfriend Trinidad Gamboa, among others⁴. While these characters are separated by wealth and status, they all are still connected. For example, Joey Sands works for a bar that is owned by one of the minor (and poorer) members of the Alacran family. Romeo Rosales is arrested under suspicion of assassinating Senator Avila, and Pucha Gonzaga, one of the initial characters, marries into the Alacran family. This interconnectedness not only demonstrates the cronyism and corruption of Filipino politics that also demonstrates the ways in which all decisions reverberate to reach multiple levels of society. This disjointed and fractured narrative pastiche seems to call for the term, “post-modern.” Lisa Lowe points out that “Asian American work emerges out of very different contradictions of modernity: out of the specific conditions of racialization in relation to modern institutions of state government, bourgeois society’s separate spheres, and the liberal citizen-subject” (32). That is, the uneven material conditions of the subjects that Hagedorn writes about almost necessarily produces an uneven narrative. However, the author’s intertwining of their lives also demonstrates the ways that the notion of “separate spheres” and the gap between rich and poor is not as great as imagined, especially when filtered through the lens of the ever-present cultural wash of American cinema and media forms.

It is tempting to discuss Hagedorn’s characters as literal embodiments of hybridity since her main characters are all products of Western and Filipino/a alliances and they all vacillate between several modes of being. E. San Juan, Jr., noted Filipino cultural studies critic, points out that there is the danger of “[p]ostcolonial criticism today seek[ing] to

⁴ Rachel C. Lee has a helpful appendix in her book The Americas of Asian America where she lists fifteen different main characters and plotlines in Dogeaters.
compensate for the subalternity of people of color by eulogizing their ‘hybrid,’ ‘in-between,’ decentered situation…It is easy to perform the unilateral trick of reversing the negative and valorizing our plight as immanently positive…” (123). Ella Shohat points out that we need to “discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (110). Lowe states that hybridization is the “process through which they survive those violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives” (82). Hagedorn’s multiple story lines and her characterizations demonstrate that being on the periphery is a dangerous, difficult and dirty place to be and that there is no special compensation of virtue or insight to be gained. In other words, Daisy Avila, guerilla fighter, only becomes a dangerous rebel after she is tortured and no longer protected by her father’s status. Joey Sands is more than happy to sip fancy French cognac, smoke English cigarettes and snort Columbian cocaine until his own life is threatened. Pucha Gonzaga seems perfectly content to keep shopping and getting her nails done. None of the characters in these novels are portrayed as burning with altruistic patriotic, nationalist fervor and instead take a variety of paths and identities that are the most expedient and in line with their personal values and needs. What Hagedorn’s characters all us to glimpse, then, are the heterogeneities that are elided through traditional, anti-colonial narratives that threaten to homogenize revolutionary nationalisms.

Beauty carries with it a presence and a visibility that is normally not available to women and utilizing beauty as a technology of politics is one avenue of power. However,
the standards for beauty are fairly rigid and these standards are always codified in a public setting such as beauty pageants, weddings or in the movies and magazines. To subvert these beauty norms then is a political statement. Hagedorn uses two beauty queens, Daisy Avila and Madame, the First Lady of the Philippines, to explore differing types of citizenship and nationalism that are nonetheless both reached through the same channel. Hagedorn’s use of these two beauty queens demonstrates two different avenues of nationalism. If beauty is the avenue for active participation in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, Hagedorn’s ambivalent narrative also demonstrates that it is a flawed one. Rachel C. Lee points out that ambitious women like Madame were “the vehicles through which government leaders and film producers ‘taught’ the viewing audience to enjoy their passive recipient position […]. Women thus emerged as both a lure and a tool” (82). The beauty queen acts as the properly feminized, i.e. disciplined, body that is also held up as a literal prize. Her body stands in for an idealized and sexualized nation, a nation that can be taken, with “taken” acting as a verb like “sexually taken” and also “taken” as in a prize being taken away.

In Dogeaters the First Lady is described as “Queen of beauty queens, Miss Universal Universe…Pearl of the Orient…Jet-Set Ambasadress of Adobo and Goodwill…whose unwrinkled face reflects the shining love, the truth burning in her heart…” (218). The list of the First Lady’s titles both soothes us through its naming and claim to knowledge and overwhelms us with its superlative force. The First Lady is a metonymy for the nation through her insistence that surface appearance is a true reflection of the state of affairs of the interior. As she says, “People talk about
corruption...we are a corrupt regime—a dictatorship. Dios ko! We make deals with the Japs...everybody’s starving. We take your precious dollars and run...Where would we run to? I wouldn’t look like this if I were corrupt, would I? Some ugliness would settle down on my system. You know the common expression – ‘ugly as sin’?" (220) and leaves it to her audience to correlate her beauty with her goodness and morality.

Madame’s reliance on the epistemology of visibility serves to literally and figuratively blind her audience to the corruption of the regime. There is a purposeful and deep-seated desire to equate the external with internal truth – the “performance” makes “reality.” Thus the spectacle of beauty, and specifically feminine beauty, marks a negotiation between self and nation through its allegorical power.

Images of beautiful women are commonplace and we are inundated with ads, movies, descriptions, pictures and contests to let us know precisely what kind of beauty is currently desired. But to gaze upon beauty is to also acknowledge the gap between looker and looked upon, to recognize and to mis-recognize. For Daisy and Madame, Hagedorn’s alliance between beauty and citizenship marks the negotiation of the distance between legal and cultural citizenship and beauty seems to promise to bridge the distance between the two. Anne Cheng states that beauty “promise[s] to erase all signs of castration [...] Perfection, after all, promises completion: the lack of lack” (54) and that it:

offers a coercive identity predicated on an equally compulsive reminder of the haunting conditions of lack. For beauty as the fulfillment of a promise – a promise of fullness itself – is always more pronounced when its nominee proves to be less than sufficient to the nomination...So beauty
poses a consideration that always offers the opportunity for recognizing failure. (55)

In the figure of Madame, despite her insistence of her fulfillment, she speaks of herself in the third person and states, “There is nothing she wants for herself. Absolutely nothing” (224). The third person usage marks the “failure,” that is, the alienation between women and their image, a gap that Madame attempts to fill by insisting that she lacks for nothing. But the gap between the person and the utterance, here made more obvious by Madame’s referring to herself as a stranger, demonstrates the lack of self-possession by women of their own selves.

While Madame professes to find completion in her role as a beauty, Daisy Avila has a completely different reaction. Daisy is a dark horse contender in a beauty contest run by the First Lady and the other contestants include, “Baby Ledesma, a niece of the famous General, Baby Katigbak, Baby Abad, the Congressman's youngest daughter, and the disappointed runner-up, Severo Alacran's stunning niece Girlie” (101). Notably, all of the women except for Daisy have names which are diminutive and interchangeable signaling their diminutive and interchangeable status as objects of spectacle. After winning, Daisy shuts herself in her bedroom unable to stop weeping. Even she “cannot pinpoint the source of her mysterious and sudden unhappiness” (105) and she thinks to herself “to be considered exceptionally beautiful in a country overrun with beautiful women is a personal triumph. She has attained her goal. Why then is she so unhappy?” (106). Of course, it turns out that Daisy is so unhappy precisely because she realizes the meaninglessness of the crown in light of the massive suffering and inequality in her
country. Daisy's refusal prompts even the First Lady to get involved and as the First Lady weeps on national television she proclaims, “Daisy Avila has shamed me personally and insulted our beloved country” (107). Madame’s statement makes overt the correlation between herself and the nation and the female body with a particular type of disciplined citizen. This overheated response to Daisy's active refusal to play her expected role, prompts Daisy to leave the enclosure of her bedroom and come out and in turn denounces “the beauty pageant as a farce, a giant step backward for all women. [...] She accuses the First Lady of furthering the cause of female delusions in the Philippines. The segment is immediately blacked out by waiting censors” (109). Daisy’s refusal to fulfill her duties as the “most beautiful woman in the Philippines” (100) is a refusal to do her duty as a citizen by acquiescing to her role as an object.

Lauren Berlant defines these moments of interruption as “diva citizenship” and explains that this “does not change the world. It is a moment of emergence that marks unrealized potentials for subaltern political activity. Diva Citizenship occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege” (223). As a woman, Daisy has no real privilege in the political or public realms although she interrupts the dominant narrative as if she does. This action demonstrates some of the real power of beauty. However, it is important to pay attention to Berlant’s initial statement where she says that this interruption “does not change the world” and in fact, can be dangerous because it offers a “remaking [of] the scene of public life into a spectacle of subjectivity [and] can lead to a confusion of willful and memorable rhetorical performance with sustained social change itself” (223). In other words, all talk
and no action. Daisy does join a guerilla group and takes action to overthrow a corrupt political regime but Hagedorn breaks off Daisy’s narrative and relegates Daisy to an unnamed maternal figure in the insurgency. This excision from the narrative and the refusal to write an active and triumphant ending for Daisy demonstrates that rhetoric, no matter how fiery and inspirational, is no guarantee of sustained social change.

The beauty contest chapter, “Sleeping Beauty,” is interesting in several regards. Hagedorn begins by utilizing the subordinating conjunction construction: “Before her twentieth birthday, before she marries a foreigner in haste and just as hastily leaves him, before she is given the name Mutya by her guerrilla lover in the mountain, Daisy Consuelo Avila is crowned the most beautiful woman in the Philippines [...] We are serenaded by mournful gecko lizards” (100). The backwards construction of the conjunction before the subject symbolizes the ways which we need to work backwards continuously, to know our history and the history of others, in order to understand the present situation. Many critics characterize Dogeaters as relentlessly contemporary and post-modern in its lack of history; I argue that chapters such as “Sleeping Beauty” refute that charge. It’s not so much that history doesn’t matter, different histories matter in different ways. Hagedorn is letting us know that it is only by remembering the past and putting it before our eyes, can we understand the present. And the present is a series of broken, fragmented sentences with the meaning always deferred.

Daisy’s breakdown occurs precisely when she realizes the performative nature of so much surrounding her. We see Daisy Avila’s experience of displacement occur after what should be a moment of pleasure because of her realization that the beauty pageant is
being used as a tool to discipline women and men into accepting the notion that certain people will be crowned winners because of their looks and political connections, just like the nation is controlled by certain people who have the right charms and the right family connections. However, Daisy is able to claim her “place” when she joins the opposition fighters – thus connecting her with the politics of her assassinated father, Senator Avila.

Even though Daisy seems to have rejected the spectacle of the pageant, significantly she uses the medium of spectacle itself for this announcement - the live television show. This moment of consenting to become a public spectacle, but on her own terms, is a strategic moment that highlights the difficult position of Daisy and other women who refuse inculcation into the dominant order. Not only that, but “her actions contesting women’s oppression also affirms, even exploits, the hegemony of the televisual apparatus and the way in which it exacerbates a hunger for spectacle” (Lee 92). In honor of Daisy's decision to reject the objectification of women, a rock band records an underground hit, “Femme Fatale” an apt title for Daisy but one that also points out the near-fatality of her decision since she is later kidnapped, raped and tortured for her subversive political activities. The exaggerated responses by both the President and the First Lady are symptomatic of the hysterical disciplining through the insistence on an exaggerated and infantilized performance of femininity. Through this excessive response the nation-state attempts to rigidly maintain control over all aspects of behavior and agency. However, Daisy and the rock band both utilize mediums of spectacle for their own subversive ends pointing to the ways that spectacle itself is inherently unstable and
can be used as a resistive tool as well as a pacifying one. Daisy’s denunciation of the beauty pageant becomes a pointed denunciation of the government itself.

The spectacle of beauty and its compulsory heterosexuality reinforces rigid notions of “proper citizenship” through the use of women as objects. And, this use of women to sell something is so common that it is almost unremarkable. Images of women are used to sell material goods such as cars, refrigerators and toothpaste, to more abstract goods such as religion with images of the Virgin Mary, nationalism through symbolic such as Mother Russia or the burkha or even inspiration through the figures of the Muses. Hagedorn explores two different paths of nationalism available to two different women using the same tool of the beauty pageant and while both come to occupy similar positions of power – one as the First Lady of a legitimatized government and the other a leader in a guerilla insurgency, they both end up strangely irrelevant. Madame ends up talking about her shoes and her drawings to reporters and Daisy gets cut out of the narrative altogether. Hagedorn’s narrative demonstrates that feminism and nationalism are still ill at ease with each other because of the way that current structures of nationalism still adhere to patriarchal norms that dooms women to irrelevance and erases their voices.

Hagedorn’s novels do give voice to a number of characters who otherwise rarely show up in national histories or memories such as homosexuals or bakla. One of the most striking features of contemporary Filipino American literature is the interaction

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5 Bakla is imprecisely translated as “homosexual” but in Tagalog the term refers more to the gendered behavior of a person, rather than their sexual object choice. Martin Manalansan argues that bakla is someone who is possessed of a female heart and thus their preference is for straight men.
between homosexuals and other “queer” bodies with heterosexual women. In Hagedorn’s novels, homosexuals and transvestites play important roles both creating and participating in spectacle and artificiality. While the costuming and drama of “woman” is naturalized through spectacles of weddings, beauty pageants, and the movies, the transvestite de-naturalizes and highlights the constructed meaning-making nature of these events through their appropriation and participation in them. That is, I read the catheysis of queer men and straight women as a means of pointing out the socially constructed meaning of gender and the means by which this relationship both supports and subverts ideas surrounding national and cultural citizenships. Viet Nguyen theorizes “The queer body arises […] because it allows [the author] to address two related historical situations – the relationship of the Philippines to the United States and the relationship of the dominated to the dominating in the Philippines” (126) as well as being the “ideal postcolonial subject that demonstrates the ways by which legacies of the colonial era can be critiqued and overthrown” (126). Rachel C. Lee is more interested in the ways that the queer body and the female body intersect in Filipino/a literature to examine the uneven distribution of benefits from nationalist agendas as well as the ways which it “clears the space for alternative, as-yet-unrealized identifications to emerge” (103). In either case, this is quite a lot of symbolic work for the “queer” figure to do. In both cases, Lee and Nguyen identify gender subversion, i.e. “queerness”, with political subversion. I agree, but I also think that the “queering” of spectacle itself is a metaphor for re-visioning the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines. Through the use of queer male bodies,
Hagedorn demonstrates the multiple subject positions and privileges that can occur at the same site, sometimes almost simultaneously.

The beauty pageant is such an outré performance of compulsory heterosexism that requires women to be displayed as objects, so the hijacking of this form by transvestites both upholds a culturally readable format of femininity as well as subverts it by replacing “real” women with “fake” ones. What might be the purpose of this? Judith Butler points out in *Gender Trouble* that “gender, for instance, *as a corporeal style*, an ‘act’ as it were …” is simultaneously, “intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (italics in original 96). The construction of meaning at stake here is the familial and heteronormative nation, a nation that attempts to bind its unruly elements into a totalizing narrative but it is a narrative that is constantly interrupted.

In the chapter titled, “Her Mother, Rita Hayworth” the nature of feminine beauty is underscored through its very *wearability* and its connection to the closed community of film (specifically American film.) Rio’s mother “has smooth skin the color of yellow-white ivory. She stays out of the sun. She thinks it’s bad for the skin…My mother uses cold creams, moisturizers, takes daily naps with masks of mashed avocado, mashed *sinkamas*, and red clay from France smeared on her face. She is a beautiful woman who works hard at it…She yells at me and cousin Pucha not to play in the sun, she warns us about cancer, old age, and the perils of ugliness…” (82). Here, the denaturalization of beauty, i.e. it is something to be worked at and for, underscores its accessibility and its possibility, while hinting at the danger of being outside of the circuit of consumption. To
be outside of this exchange circuit literally means being outside of the privilege of citizenship.

Rio’s mother’s beauty is created by two transvestites, Salvador and Uncle Panchito. These two come by every week to give manicures, pedicures, hair cuts, and to make dresses. There is a marked difference between the two of them, though. Rio observes, “In spite of his effeminate gestures, Salvador is married, the hardworking father of seven. I know he has eyes for my brother Raul” (80) but “Uncle Panchito likes to wear dresses and other women’s clothes from time to time. He often wins ‘Most Original’ at those transvestite beauty contests he goes to with my mother” (81). What does it mean that Salvador has “effeminate” gestures and “eyes” for Rio’s brother in light of his marriage and fatherhood – two seemingly contradictory positions according to Western norms of homosexuality. Hagedorn uses this moment to comment on the insufficiency and the inappropriateness of universalizing Western modes of “reading” the textual body. There is always a difference and there is always a gap between signifier and signified. This is another example of the ways which “natural” assumptions about sexual choice and desire are overturned and instead there is a much more fluid acceptance of the possibilities and the enactment of several types of identity, none precluding the other.

The triangulation of desire, spectacle and beauty come together and disrupt the usual Western notions surrounding gender identification, appearance, and sexual object choice by highlighting the very ease with which everyone dons and discards the clothes and other accoutrements of beauty. By forcing the reader to question the meanings behind gender difference, a difference that is naturalized in spite of multiple examples of cultural
construction, the linkage to political meaning is not too far behind. Even as gender subversion is linked to political subversion, the masking inherent in drag lends itself to reading the meanings behind the masking necessary for the work of femininity in the first place. This reliance on those who perform gender underscores the performative nature of female identity and thus works as a metaphor for the heavy reliance on mimicry to perform the sleight of hand needed to ignore massive poverty, suffering, and general economic and social injustices.

However subversive transvestitism is, however, it still equates femininity with a particular and artificial beauty that is to be consumed: Beauty is a product for others. There are several layers of meaning to the transvestite’s costume drama. One is the insistence on visibility and this happens through mimicry of women. and as Homi Bhabha consistently points out, the mimic is “almost the same, but not quite” (86 italics in original) and this “representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (86). That is, in order to mimic one must necessarily be different than the object (or person) being mimicked and thus this imitation highlights its difference. This mimicry highlights the constructed nature of identity and carries with it the possibility of refusing or negates certain types of identification. Is transvestitism a matter of “diva citizenship”? Or does it point the way to sustained social and political change simply by visibly demonstrating that there are alternatives? Why the need for the unsubtle performances of the transvestite diva? Perhaps because grandiose spectacle performs “survival and the bitter banality of negotiating everyday life in a way that creates a transgressive and threatening counterculture” (Berlant 224) and we can see how a “leopard print shirt tied
in a knot at the waist” with “black Capri pants” “longish hair streaked blond and pulled back in a ponytail” (Hagedorn 81) worn by Panchito, one of the transvestites employed by Rio’s mother, implies a refusal to be worn down by an oppressive culture, that no matter how small the resistance, there is never complete capitulation.

In Hagedorn’s novel, transvestites uphold current modes of power, despite their subversive potential. This contrasts directly with other portrayals of their subversiveness such as in Ninotchka Rosca’s novel, State of War where a group of transvestites hide shotguns under their skirts and start shooting government soldiers during a bombing. But whether or not transvestites are used in the novel to uphold or tear down current government regimes, their access to power, whether it is through their approximation of feminine beauty or through their proximity to it as fashion designers, seamstresses, manicurists or beauticians, beauty is the constant.

If beauty, as Cheng says, promises to fulfill lack, then ugliness is its opposite, the glaring reminder of lack. If beautiful people can find some comfort in being the object of desire, what about the ugly? Baby, the daughter of Severo and Isabel Alacran is decidedly unattractive and her parents are convinced that “their daughter is the burden they share, secretly sure she is the price for all their sins” (21). Baby Alacran suffers from mysterious skin rashes and uncontrollable sweating, incurable shyness and baby fat that she carries with her into her young womanhood. If women are generally powerless, then ugly women are doubly powerless. Initially, Baby’s response is to retreat from public view and from the sight of her parents.
Baby Alacran feels most comfortable in her own bedroom surrounded by servants who speak to her in Tagalog and sing lullabies to her. As a child, Baby develops a terrible, itchy rash that her father is convinced is leprosy and won't go near her and “with her feet swollen and deformed, wrapped in bandages, Baby is forced to spend most of her time in bed or a wheelchair. She is unable to go to school for more than a year” and “it is the first and only time Baby Alacran is indulged by anyone” (28). As her parents go out to nightclubs, Baby is true to her name and reverts to an infantilized situation – one that finally affords her some comfort. The contrast between Baby and Daisy highlight some of the possible responses to the pressures of social expectations surrounding women and their object status in society.

Even after her recovery, Baby still prefers the isolation of her bedroom and away from her parents' screaming fights and irritation at her lack of social graces, beauty, or any of the other important characteristics for a young, rich woman in Manila society. However, Baby is wooed by Pepe Carreon the nephew of General Nicasio Ledesma and she elopes with him in defiance of her mother's disapproval. The elopement is covered up by claiming that Baby was kidnapped by Communist insurgents and when she shows up at home visibly pregnant, “it is Baby's small triumph, her only revenge” (29) and she is given “the wedding of the decade” (30). General Nicasio Ledesma, the same general who will later interrogate, torture, and rape Daisy Avila, “visits the Alacran mansion to offer aid and sympathy” (29) and is the best man at the wedding but the wedding isn't described until more than one hundred pages later, after we've already read of Baby's second confinement with her pregnancy. The description is a hallucinatory post-modern
occasion for narrative back-tracking, internal monologue, and dreamlike montages
switching back and forth from speculation about Senator Avila's assassination and Baby
Alacran's wedding fears.

The wedding chapter entitled, “The Weeping Bride” is so non-linear that it is
difficult to make sense of it at all. There are tantalizing glimpses of familial connections,
pronouncements regarding “authentic” Filipino culture and food, nonsensical
superstitious beliefs, inner monologues and hallucinatory descriptions. The main
descriptions in this chapter tie together Baby Alacran’s wedding fears, Senator Avila’s
assassination, and food. The following excerpt, while lengthy, serves to demonstrate the
intertwining of these three things:

The wedding banquet never stops. A nauseating feast for the eyes, as well
as the belly and the soul. Ox-tails stewed for hours in peanut sauce, egg
custards quivering in burnt sugar syrup, silver tureens fill to the brim with
steaming hot, black dinuguan…It’s the black blood of a pig she pours on
her head, the black pig’s blood stew she bathes in, to mourn the death of a
man…

‘Imagine,’ she once confessed to her cousin Girlie, ‘I’ve been eating and
enjoying dinuguan for years, never even considering – dugo is dugo, dugo
means blood! My god, it’s the black blood of a pig. […] Now I can’t eat it
anymore, without feeling sick.’ (156)

Just like Daisy’s dissatisfaction with her beauty pageant crown, the wedding feast makes
everyone sick with its never-ending gustatory richness – a richness that is literally made
of blood, just like the richness of the upper classes of metro Manila society is built upon the sweat and blood of others. Why would Baby Alacran slip into reminiscing about a secret grieving ritual about the assassinated Senator Avila, later reiterated at the end of the chapter as a self-serving fantasy that enables her to sleep at night? What could be the possible relation between the pampered only daughter of the richest man in the Philippines, an outspoken opposition leader, and pig’s blood stew? A page earlier in the chapter, an omniscient third person narrator explains, “She does not know why she married, or mourns. She is not a political person. […] In spite of herself, she had longed to invite him to her spectacular wedding, and made the mistake of mentioning it. She was ridiculed, as usual. She was dismissed. The weeping bride knew better, of course. It was impossible. It was silly. She had no control over the situation.” (155). Like the sacrificial pig whose blood enables the rituals of celebration and grieving, Baby Alacran’s wedding serves as both a gala and a circumstance that she has “no control over” and although she has the advantages of name, social standing, and money, she still weeps over her lack of power to invite who she wants to her own wedding. Baby Alacran’s position of power/powerlessness serves as a reminder of the narrow confines of femininity for those in the Philippines (and elsewhere). Her “spectacular wedding” is simply that, a spectacle that serves as a symbol for her father’s wealth and has little to do with her or her own happiness.

Like the beauty pageant, the wedding is the display and celebration of a form of state-sanctioned heterosexuality. In the case of Baby Alacran, the wedding is “Baby’s small triumph, her only revenge” (29) and “her face, which seems unblemished and
almost pretty in the soft evening light” (30) is the only moment she is described as attractive. Baby’s subsequent pregnancy and marriage are long-lasting punishments for daring to assert herself. Daisy’s similar triumph at the beauty pageant throws her into a panic as well and both women initially react in the same way to their achievements – by retreating and crying in their bedrooms. Baby, however, continues to stay in her bedroom and watch daytime TV talent shows and soap operas, re-enacting her only happy moments of childhood while Daisy emerges as a feminist guerilla ready to bring down the dictatorship. The divergence in their subsequent actions points to the varying responses possible to the same social forces.

The two chapters that describe Daisy’s transformation are titled, “Epiphany” and “Breaking Spells”. Daisy’s initial retreat is the needed respite from the glare of the spotlight and it is this privacy that enables her to reach her epiphany about the subordinated role of women in society and her subsequent determination to do something about it, to “break the spell” that the spectacle of the beauty pageant has woven over everyone. This retreat from the limelight, in some ways, is similar to the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale where a detachment from her former life is necessary before her transformation into an adult.

Importantly, Daisy’s transformation comes after a period of retreat from the limelight. In both of Hagedorn's novels, there is a concern with watching and being watched, there are also several key moments of retreat and rest by almost all of the main female characters. Viet Nguyen reads these moments of the women retreating to their bedrooms as an acquiescence to the martial order of Philippine society and that the
women (and queer) actors have their “crucial revolutionary movement” when they have an “awakening from the induced sleep (literal or otherwise) of the movie theater and the female bedroom and the movement from confined spaces to open ones” (137). Instead I read these bedroom scenes not as a retreat per se but rather as a regrouping and a canny strategy to refuse participation (however long or short that refusal may be) in the panoptic nature of discipline. These moments in the bedroom, whether the women are crying or dreaming or praying, are all moments when the women are alone, something that never happens outside of the bedroom where instead they are constantly harassed into acting in someone else's drama. Nguyen sees the bedroom scenes as a preliminary to the “real” action, a staging grounds for the later resistance of these actors. However, I read these moments as both an acknowledgment of the confined nature of women's roles within Philippine society as well as a means of self-maintenance. It's not necessary for these women to move (literally) outside in order to evince “revolutionary” movement. Their retreat, this refusal to participate is, in itself, a revolutionary and resistive moment, as well. When women retreat from the outside world, whether they are hiding from the dangers of soldiers or of parents, they are indulging in both a recouping of strength as well as a construction of their own reality.

In Hagedorn’s work, then, the power of beauty is unquestioned. Rather, it is the uses to which that power can be put that are tested. Can feminine beauty be untied from “ideal citizenship” as Anne Cheng puts it? Or is feminine beauty too tied to the patriarchal halls of power to ever stand on its own? And what would beauty look like without a beholder? Within the confines of restrictive gender roles, it appears that the
most direct access to power that women (and queers) have is via their approximation to a certain form of feminine beauty. Hence, the First Lady’s rise to power through her role as the “Ambasadress of Adobo,” Daisy Avila’s awakening to a feminist nationalist consciousness after being crowned the “most beautiful woman in the Philippines,” Rio’s mother’s comparison to Rita Hayworth, and even Uncle Panchito’s title as “Most Original” in his bakla (transvestite) beauty shows, become important approximations of power and influence.

While Hagedorn attempts to pull apart the layered strands of power and beauty, especially in a place where everyone is obsessed with it, it is important to recall that the two women who openly reject the avenues of power available to women through their beauty are Rio Gonzaga and Daisy Avila, and neither stays in Manila. Daisy is exiled but returns illegally and lives under cover in the mountains and Rio ends up in the U.S. This points to what Lee terms, “the peculiar predicament of women in the postcolony” (103). A predicament created and sustained by a neocolonial elitist government and a patriarchal social and religious order, both of which depend on women “remaining in the economy of exchange” (Lee 98) through their status as object of spectacle.

**Going to the Movies: The Society of the Spectacle**

Mikhail Bakhtin defines the action of the carnival such that, “it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators […] Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it” (7). This definition could easily be applied to the way that many people react to film – while
we are watching a film, we are caught up in the action and drama and no other reality exists for us. In Hagedorn’s work, film and stage are central tropes and the gaze is always an active one, one that produces meaning as well as exposes underlying structures of power. In both *Dogeaters* and *Dream Jungle*, the author utilizes cinema as a trope for some of the larger meaning-making structures in place in Manila society.

Most feminist film and narrative theory grapple with the phallogocentrism structured within language and images with the female body as the bearer of meaning rather than the maker of meaning. As Laura Mulvey has said in her canonical article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. […] women are simultaneously looked at and displayed” (62) and she goes on to discuss the theoretical difficulties present for the female viewer in the consumption of the images upon the screen puts the viewer in a masculine position regardless of actual gender. Mary Ann Doane, in one of her responses to Mulvey’s article, “Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,” posits that another difficulty with theorizing female spectatorship, in Freudian terms at least, is the lack of distance between subject and object. That is, “woman” as object on the screen leaves no gap borne of dis-identification for the viewing subject in which meaning can accrue. Thus, there is a tendency to think of the female spectator as oscillating between feminine and masculine positions as a sort of semi-transvestite. In Hagedorn’s work, we see some of this in the character of Rio Gonzaga, a young girl who is much more intrigued by the female characters she sees on the screen rather than the romantic situations. Hagedorn also places queer men at the site of spectatorial pleasures and they have an entirely
different reaction. Because the queer men in Hagedorn’s work oscillate between the “active” position of the male gaze theorized by Mulvey and the disadvantaged position of the postcolonial subject, Hagedorn uses them to see through the production of spectacle. While Mulvey and Doane’s theories point out that to speak about film means speaking about gender and power, it is clear that their theories are insufficient for novels like *Dogeaters* and *Dream Jungle*.

bell hooks points out, of course, that not only must we speak of gender but that we must also include race and the question underlying her essay, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” is how do black women watch mainstream Hollywood films that almost always portray white women as desirable and black women as disempowered stereotypes such as mammies, nags, or tragic mulattoes? To this I add, how do audiences from different nations and a different social structures watch mainstream American films that portray people, situations, and places that are completely “foreign”? How and where does identification occur in these instances? In the case of race, bell hooks makes the claim that, “Black female spectators actively chose not to identify with the film’s imaginary subject, because such identification was disenabling […] and chose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator” (295) and instead to use the power of the gaze as an interrogating tool. Manthia Diawara claims that “every narration places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influence the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator” (qtd. in hooks 290). By accounting for these particularities, we are able to begin to fill in the gaps left by Doane and Mulvey’s
work. For Hagedorn, the movies provide both agency and disempowerment, escape and engagement and how each spectator reacts is very much influenced by their realities.

Mulvey’s passive/active split rests upon Lacan’s theory of mis/recognition that occurs during the mirror stage of development where the small child looks in the mirror and recognizes herself. However, this identification is with a misrecognized body – “the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject” (Mulvey 60). This misrecognition provides both an escapist fantasy (arguably one of the main reasons for movies in the first place) and an unreachable standard that nevertheless one is compelled to emulate. But how does this mis/recognition occur? One way is through the portrayal of seemingly private moments such as romantic drama, family conflict, and inner moral struggles which blur the boundaries between spectator and actor. And it is this portrayal of intimate moments, moments that occur in one's own everyday life (but with better looking people), that lends itself to the mis/recognition inherent in the experience of cinema. Laura Mulvey writes that it is in the movies that there is an “intensity of expression” and a “joyous recognition” that “is the birth of the long love affair/despair between image and self-image” (61). This oscillation between love affair and despair, between image and self-image is similar to the movement that occurs between the masculine masking that occurs for female viewers according to Doane. However, in both of these theories, there is a sense of the insufficiency of the female viewer themselves, which leads to a disavowal of pleasure for the feminist subject. bell hooks says as much when she writes that Black women either “shut out the image, looked
the other way, accorded cinema no importance in their lives,” or “assume[ed] a posture of subordination, they submitted to cinema’s capacity to seduce and betray. They were cinematically ‘gaslighted’”(293). Instead, pleasure in the movies comes from critical engagement and interrogation or what she terms as the “oppositional gaze.”

I argue instead that in Hagedorn’s novels, movies are apprehended as potential alternative narratives to the relatively constrained positions for women in the 1950s in the Philippines. Hagedorn’s descriptions of the movies and the responses that they elicit demonstrate that they can serve as both a model of action as well as an escape. However, Hagedorn also utilizes movies as a metaphor for the ways that they market an artificial reality and cover up the modes of their production just like beauty pageants market an artificial construction of femininity and then “sells” it to its audiences as “natural.” Hagedorn warns us about mistaking these narratives, that is, any constructed narrative, as a natural and “correct.”

Like the naturalized constructions of femininity in movies and other staged spectacles, most accounts of citizenship, whether imperialist or postcolonialist, are masculinist in nature. Anne McClintock, in her book about race and gender in the colonial discourse, Imperial Leather, notes that, “all too often in male nationalism, gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit” (354). In other words, women are used as markers of power or are
exchanged as means to cement the bonds of power⁶ between men. What Hagedorn does is to write about what it means to be both an object of exchange as well as a subject. While some of the women and men that Hagedorn writes about fully participate in, and are seemingly collusive to, their own subjugation (to the point of actual enjoyment), I would argue that this strategy points to the relatively limited options open to Filipinas of a certain economic and social class. Class can buy some movement, but it can’t buy freedom. McClintock goes further and states that women are, “Linked symbolically to the land [and] are relegated to a realm beyond history and thus bear a particularly vexed relation to narratives of historical change and political effect” (31). Hagedorn’s narrative examines female viewership and their relationship to themselves as subject and object in order to determine to what extent women are outside of “narratives of historical change.”

_Dogeaters_ opens up in 1956 with Rio and Pucha Gonzaga in the Avenue Theater in Manila watching Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman in _All That Heaven Allows_. Pucha, the fourteen-year-old mestizo, dim-witted and boy-crazy cousin of Rio, loves American Hollywood melodrama but Rio, for all of her coolness and insight, also loves American cinema and imagines herself, “back into the anonymous darkness of the Avenue theater, where I could bask in the soothing, projected glow of Color by De Luxe” (5). We are tempted to dismiss Pucha’s infatuation with the movies as one of teen-age shallowness but Laura Mulvey is right when she terms cinema “magic” and many of the adjectives used to describe the effect of the movies on its spectators partake in the vocabulary of

⁶ For a fuller description of the use of women as a means of exchange between men, see Gayle Rubin’s canonical essay, “The Traffic in Women.” Although written more than 30 years ago, it is still trenchant and is still relevant today.
magic: “bewitching” “enchanting” or “fantasy/fantastic.” These are all terms that imply that the spectator is transported out of her body and into another. Is Pucha and Rio’s love for Hollywood similar to the masochistic gaze of victimization, a gaze that enjoys the pain of being insufficient and longs for transformation? Or is there recognition and identification between themselves and the image on the screen and the loving gaze is a form of narcissism? Amy Kaplan argues in her book on American imperialism, *The Anarchy of Empire*, that in the late nineteenth century that early American cinema brought the foreign home and made the exotic familiar, thereby making “out there” part of “in here” but the same can be said for Hollywood films overseas – the repetition of the images makes them familiar. I argue that it is both the longing for transformation and dissatisfaction but also the identification that comes from familiarity. Although Rio and Pucha are young girls and thus are still in the process of searching and emulating role models, they are still clearly aware of class difference and privilege that allows them to partially identify with the figures they see on the screen.

From this cinematic lesson, Rio and Pucha drink in, “[f]lared skirts, wide cinch belts, prim white blouses …Thick penciled eyebrows and blood-red vampire lips; the virginal, pastel-pink cashmere cardigan…casual arrogance [which] seems inherently American, modern, and enviable” (3-4). In addition to the clothes, Rio remembers Jane Wyman as a, “determined woman alone in the winter…on the way to see her young lover” (6). Here American consumer items, the sweater, the car, are equated with the abstract notion of freedom. For Rio the “dark green Buick, the color of old money” (6) creates the association of these material items with freedom but Rio’s pleasure in
watching Jane Wyman, especially the pleasure that she takes in Jane Wyman’s independence, breaks the gendered power-laden dynamic that Mulvey theorizes inheres in the process of looking because Rio doesn’t see Jane Wyman as object, rather, here is a woman who is gloriously a subject in her own right. While Rachel Lee claims that Hagedorn “dissects cinematic seduction by scrutinizing spectacle as a social relationship wherein the spectator’s pleasure rests on the disavowal of the commodity transaction” (88), but Rio is pretty clear in her correlation between the commodity items displayed in the film and their symbolism of benefits such as freedom and independence. However, the two girls still long for the material goods portrayed and later in the novel, both of them parade around in cashmere sweaters – in this case, the sweaters become the material proof of their money and their closeness to the American ambassador’s daughter. Both of these girls still act as ideal consumers of Hollywood cinema/commodity culture because as women they are both “products and consumers of commodity exchange…The work of femininity, then, requires the consumption of commodities” (Stacey qtd. in Nguyen 136) and it is the work of the cinema to both promote this consumption as well as to obscure the uneven social relations that brought it forth.

At the end of the novel, however, Rio has a reoccurring dream that reflects her new awareness of some of the obscured power structures that would commodify and discipline women – but also reflects how these cultural artifacts of Americana can sustain oppressions but can also be transformed by native agents. She relates:

In dream after dream, we are drawn to the same silent tableau: a mysterious light glowing from the window of a deserted, ramshackle
house. The house is sometimes perched on a rocky abyss, or on a
dangerous cliff overlooking a turbulent sea. The meaning is simple and
clear, I think. [...] we fly around in circles, we swoop and dive in
effortless arcs against a barren sky, we flap and beat our wings in our
futile attempts to reach what surely must be heaven.” (247)
To reach “all that heaven allows,” Rio must be transformed and while this transformation
allows her to “swoop and dive in effortless arcs” it also reveals that the goal is a
dangerously empty promise, a “deserted ramshackle house” that is still out of reach of her
“futile attempts” but one that “surely must be heaven” because of the difficulty of the
journey. This metaphor of dream reflects the confusing and dangerous journey that Rio
takes through Manila society, American promises and growing into womanhood – all
paths fraught with intrigue, danger, but also excitement.

Hagedorn further explores the dazzling glamour of film and deconstructs and
disassembles it to reveal the “dirty” side of film-making. When we see the finished film
on screen, it is easy to forget the years of writing, shooting, and editing that go into
creating an artificial setting so convincing in its realism. Amy Kaplan defines realism as a
mode of narrative that brings order to a world made, “unreal [by] intense class conflicts
which [produce] fragmented and competing social realities, and [by] the simultaneous
development of mass culture which [dictates] an equally threatening homogenous reality”
(Kaplan 1988, 9) and yet produces a cohesive and coherent world by “seeing it without
being seen in turn” (7). Hagedorn lays bare the commodity side of film-making and by
doing so also lays bare the commodification of U.S.-Philippine relations.
While in *Dogeaters*, Hagedorn focuses on the consumption of movies, in her third novel, *Dream Jungle*, Hagedorn focuses on the production of movies and she takes on the biggest spectacle of all – war. This novel fictionalizes the filming of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippine jungle during the last days of President Marcos' rule and inserts points of view from various Filipino locals, an actor, an aspiring filmmaker, a prostitute, the local elite, and others. The novel is loosely based upon the events surrounding the filming of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, but it is told from the point of view of those normally left out, the minor actors, the extras, and the people whose country has been invaded once again by Americans.

E. San Juan Jr. aptly characterized the production of this movie: “the Philippine countryside was suddenly transformed into a stage prop [...] which reprised the Vietnam War as both spectacle and therapy, utopian dream and technological nightmare. In this context, the carnage at Balangiga, Samar, or the massacre at Bud Dajo, Mindanao, at the turn of the twentieth century are eclipsed by My Lai and displaced in the vertigo of cinematic illusion” (85). Spectacle replaces reality, especially American spectacle replacing Philippine reality. By inserting these other voices, even imaginatively, Hagedorn works to re-center the Philippines and to wrest attention away from the American cinematic creations.

In *Dream Jungle*, Hagedorn again utilizes the structure of cousins, one who goes to the U.S. and one who remains in the Philippines. Paz Marlowe, on assignment for a music magazine and her cousin, Pepito Ponce de Leon, go to the set of the filming of *Napalm Sunset* directed by Tony Pierce, which is the fictionalized Francis Ford Coppola
and his near-disastrous filming of *Apocalypse Now*. Pepito “made no secret of his sexual preferences, nor of his lifelong dream of making movies” and he conjectures, “If an overpopulated, complicated, postcolonial India could produce a glorious filmmaker like Satyajit Ray, why couldn’t an overpopulated, complicated, postcolonial Philippines produce an artist of equal stature in [him]?” (224). The correlation between the Philippines and India is an apt, if imprecise, one, but it highlights the forgotten colonization by America that while officially over, still unofficially continues through U.S. involvement in Filipino politics, economics, and media saturation. Pepito’s presence in *Dream Jungle* is similar to Joey Sands in *Dogeaters* in that both bodies serve to metaphorically “queer” the claims of benevolence that the West has claimed in its relationship to the Philippines. In both cases, these men lay bare the transactional nature covered up through the narratives of desire, romance, and good-will.

Viet Nguyen suggests that the outsider status of the queer subject stands in for the ways in which the colonization of the Philippines has been forgotten in the American narrative of benevolence and democratization and “the queer body metaphorically ‘queers’ the claims of the United States that it is a democratically exceptional state that has never engaged in the politics of imperialism [...] but also because the queer subject historically has occupied a position of invisibility and marginalization within both Filipino and American cultures” (128). While Nguyen points to the twinned amnesia/invisibility of the queer body, these same bodies do more than “queer” the mythos of American exceptionalism.
Hagedorn uses these men as visible and material signs of economic and cultural imperialism. Pepito’s name hearkens back to the centuries of Spanish colonization as do his looks, he is a “chunky, bespectacled man with Jesus Christ hair and the haughty, craggy face of a Spanish conquistador” (236) and Joey Sands is the result of a prostitute and an African American serviceman: “He was stationed at Subic Bay – that’s all I know about him – Not his name. Not anything” (146) and so he chooses another patronym for himself: “Sands” for the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. It’s these two men who crack open the façade of disinterested, friendly relations to reveal the uneven power hierarchies at work whether it is Tony Pierce swooping in and making deals with the President in order to use military helicopters or westerners coming to the Philippines for sex tours, there is the sense of entitlement that the Philippines and its resources are there to be taken. While both men are involved in the creating or abetting spectacles such as sex shows or movies, they are perfectly aware of their transactional nature and have neither the temperament nor the luxury of money to shield themselves from these monetary realities like Westerners do.

By the end of Dream Jungle, Pepito has achieved his dream of becoming a film director, but instead of making a multi-national and multi-million dollar masterpiece, he directs cheap knock-offs of American movies mostly starring former Miss Philippine contestants and Vince Moody, a left-over actor from Tony Pierce’s film. No one involved in these films pretend that they are art, an affectation that only those with money and privilege can afford. For example, when Pepito offers to share screenwriting credits with Vince, he demurs and says, “Just gimme my money and I’ll say the lines. In English or
Tagalog, or whatever you want” (315). Pepito thinks to himself, “You can’t blame Moody for being crass; he’s lived in this country long enough to learn a few lessons. Cash up front, none of the usual “percentage of the profits” shit. *Let’s keep things simple,* that’s what Vince Moody says. Smiling that shy, self-effacing smile, *Nothing personal, man, just business.* Which is why Pepito continues to hire him” (315). It is the clear demarcation between the personal and business that endears Vince Moody to Pepito because there is no longer any dissimulation about the true nature of their relationship. Vince Moody who doesn’t return to the United States, goes “native” and in this case, this means that he is able to strip away the illusions that mask the monetary nature of almost all social relations – as he says, it’s all “just business.”

Joey Sands displays some of the same pragmatism when he calls out his lover, Rainier, a German film director, when Rainier wants to hear about a live sex show featuring boys who are on stage pretending to take showers. Rainier asks, “ ‘Are they hungry or greedy?’ […] I look at him, perplexed by his question. ‘There’s a difference, you know,’” and Joey replies, “ ‘Hey man, How should I know? Boys are hungry and so they perform. Audience pays to sit there, greedy to watch -- ’” (141-142). What perplexes Joey is how Rainier could even assume that the boys were anything but hungry while Rainier tries to eclipse the commodification of poor, young boys through his question, which is why the question matters to him. Rachel Lee points out that by “highlight[ing] the content of the spectacle rather than the context of the gazing, [Rainier] therefore denies the power differentials and sexual exploitation that produce such conditions for gazing” (89). Rainier even tries to occlude the nature of his sexual and transactional
relationship to Joey by telling Joey that he is in love with him, but Joey just thinks about how much he wants to order breakfast instead. Joey has no illusions about love and is perfectly aware of his position as commodity.

It is only Joey Sands, the boy hustler, who seems to be fully aware of his status as commodity spectacle. When Joey first meets Rainier, a German movie director, he thinks, “I’m on display. The German is watching me from the bar” (131) and he even takes a perverse pleasure in this thought. Joey explains, “I imagine I’m in my movie. [...] I’ll admit, I can get off with some old man that way. I need my own movies, with their flexible endings. Otherwise, it’s just shit” (132). Initially, Joey seems to even enjoy his status as a desirable spectacle, but then his awareness of his disposability and his lack of power, “it’s just shit,” intrudes. Joey’s explicitness regarding the transactional nature of sex simply makes public what most would like to keep private while Rainier clearly prefers to think that his offer of love can erase the exchange of money and we again see how economic, social, and political hegemonies work to disguise themselves through the obfuscatory language of romance and movies.

While queer men are the ones who are able to clearly see the commodity nature of spectacle, Hagedorn demonstrates how women can both be critically engaged and also collude with the tools of native oppression. I want to read side by side two scenes in Dogeaters, one at the very beginning and one towards the end, in order to tease out some of the strands of meaning that Hagedorn hints at through her multiple uses of spectacle.

The hallucinatory transgressing between fiction and fact expresses itself in the chapter titled, “The Famine of Dreams.” In this chapter, Daisy’s torture, multiple rapes,
and her encounter with General Ledesma are interspersed with the script of a *telenovela*, the same radio romance drama that Rio Gonzaga and her grandmother love to listen to. The title of the chapter points to the insubstantiality of the images fed to the Filipino people – in a sense, the bread and circus of their lives which distracts them from the convoluted and corrupt political practices of its First Family. The title of the *telenovela*, “Love Letters” points to the irony inherent in the doublethink that occurs in the highest levels at “Camp Meditation,” the name of the torture detention center - so called because it is the place where detainees can “meditate on their crimes against the state. The commercials for the TruCola and Sportex department store, some of the business concerns of Severo Alacran are also included, implicating everyone in the novel in Daisy’s torture. The connection between blood and money is the one that we all work hard at forgetting. How could we stand to live with ourselves if we were completely aware of all of the injustices, the blood spilled, the women abused, and the children left hungry, and all of this made possible by our every purchase of a Coca-Cola, a movie ticket or a pair of shoes? While some level of amnesia is necessary to keep ourselves sane, novelists like Hagedorn work to make sure that we remember what it is we are trying to forget. It is important to keep in mind the difference between amnesia and forgetting because amnesia marks its presence through is very rupture, the noticeable hole that it leaves in our memory, while forgetting simply erases the traces of its ever having been and Hagedorn points out the rupture in our national narratives.

The complicated interweaving of characters, storylines, and lives by Hagedorn is perfectly illustrated in this chapter. Daisy Avila is arrested by Colonel Nicasio Ledesma,
whose daughter was also in the Young Miss Philippines pageant. He is also the lover of Lolita Luna, a popular bomba star who is supported by Mabuhay Studios, one of the companies of Severo Alacran, the most powerful man in the Philippines and a distant relative of General Ledesma. The guest star of this particular episode of “Love Letters” is Tito Alvarez, the childhood friend of Romeo Rosales, the hapless wanna-be movie star who is shot and arrested as the assassin of Daisy's father, opposition leader Senator Avila.

Upon first reading the cutting back and forth between the telenovela and the narrative action of torture seems to serve to dramatically contrast the innocent entertainment with the sophisticated cruelty of Camp Meditation. Upon second (and third) reading, however, it becomes clear that even within the torrid romances of “Love Letters” there is a reflection of the underground horror of the repressive regime of the Philippines and the elisions and camouflage employed for protection. In one excerpt from the telenovela, Ponciano, the father has come home with blood on his shirt and groaning. Magdalena, his wife questions him accusingly, “Where have you been? You didn't go to the river again, did you?” and Rosalinda, their daughter asks, “Papa, what are you trying to hide?” while Magdalena again accuses, “You did, didn't you? You did it again--” (214). But what is going on at the river, or what Ponciano is trying to hide or even what happened to cause his bloody shirt is never explained. This domestic drama is then followed by a narrative intercut of General Ledesma telling Daisy that her father's favorite song was Bing Crosby's “White Christmas.” The irony of this is two-fold. A white Christmas is precisely what will never happen in the tropical heat of the Philippines.
and this is also the song played over the radio during the fall of Saigon as the evacuation signal for all Americans and other non-Vietnamese civilians. “White Christmas” serves as a palimpsest of domesticity, war, and drama – one that Americans have enacted, and then tried to erase, all over the Pacific.

In both forms of melodrama, the imported *All That Heaven Allows* and the domestic “Love Letters” the compulsory heterosexual narrative is disrupted by desires too unruly to be controlled. In the first case, it is Jane Wyman’s choice of a younger, lower-class lover and in the second, it is Ponciano’s uncontrollable actions, whatever it is that he “did” that leads to the disruption of a smoothly functioning family. The borders between spectacle and spectator become increasingly blurred. Nguyen states that this novel, “in a sense ‘outs’ this world, making clear what the fetishism of the commodity makes mysterious and where the cinematic image helps to obscure: the social relations between human beings, as they are mediated by the commodity” (137). In this case, money, sex, torture, blood, all comes together as entertainment.

The evasiveness, in both the melodrama and in the way that the General refuses to recognize his torture of Daisy and of others (“Look – my men rearranged him totally. A styrofoam cup where his brains should be – isn't that ingenious?”) (215) is analogous to the ways which the struggle between memory, language and spectacle occurs and the ways that the struggle over representation is also the struggle over history. In this scene, the violation of the borders of the body are examples of the way that all borders no longer make any sense, just as the borders separating war from peace, meditation from torture, or America and the Philippines, no longer obtain.
Both Rio and Daisy reject the confines of their roles (or are rejected, depending on how one reads these scenes). Rio ends up in the United States and Daisy “describe[s] the absurd terms of her release from Camp Meditation, how she was granted a pardon by the President on condition she remain in permanent exile” (232). The varying responses, from simple disbelief to national action, demonstrate that resistance to social norms at any level is not easy nor is it guaranteed any level of success or recognition. Through these two characters, Hagedorn demonstrates that the confines of gender expectations is too tight to slip in the Philippines and that gender subversion is political subversion.

**Conclusion**

In each of these instances, the struggle over narrative – whose version gets told – is a symbol for the struggles over nationalist narratives. Hagedorn utilizes the movies as a way of creating alternative narratives and possibilities. As Avery Gordon says in her book *Ghostly Matters*, “life is complicated” and that seemingly banal statement is also a guide for our critique of “various forms of blindness and sanctioned denial,” and it “might guide an attempt to drive a wedge into lives and visions of freedom ruled by the nexus of market exchange” (5). As Pucha Gonzaga says in the last chapter of *Dogeaters*: “*Puwede ba?* 1956, 1956! Rio, you've got it all wrong [...] I'm no *intelektwal* as you've point out loud and clear, but my memory's just as good as anybody's ...”(248). This opening sentence does double duty: it points out the fallibility of memory and throws the rest of the novel into doubt with its potentially unreliable narrators and narratives while at the same time it re-claims those narratives from “*intelektwal*”s and reasserts the validity of the memories and narratives of those that aren't sanctioned by official historical
narratives and the authority of academia. As Pucha later writes, “I just want you to get my damn history straight, Rio – _puwede ba_, it matters to me” (249).

What kind of implications do these novels have for the state of American literature? For Asian American literature? For Filipino literature? I argue that one of the purposes of literature, and of the novel in particular, is to explore particular versions of memory and history. This imposition of narrative upon chaotic events re-orders and re-visions a past so that readers can either make sense of history or re-experience the shock of that history. Replacing one version with another doesn’t right a wrong, but it does open up a variety of strategies for both listener and storyteller.

The contest in the struggle for cultural constructions of meaning upsets and unbalances the carefully staged illusions of democracy. Both American and Filipino governments have utilized rhetorics of heterosexuality, beauty and femininity in order to placate and lull their respective populations into a sense of security and inevitability. However, through the novelistic form, Hagedorn has imagined an interiority to those subjects normally thought to be lacking one: teenage girls, prostitutes, movie extras, maids, and transvestites. In other words, all of those outside of the normal halls of power, who, nonetheless struggle to maintain and exert control over their own lives and destinies and in doing so, manage to shift national narratives.
“Where America’s Day Begins”: Guam and American Imperialism

The Personal is Political, OR How I Learned to Love the Bomb and Stop Worrying

I use these two well-worn phrases, one a rallying cry from feminists in the 1960s and the other from Peter Sellers and Stanley Kubrick’s Cold War satire, Dr. Strangelove, because of my long-held guilt over the ways that my post-Summer of Love childhood exemplified trajectories of Western and Japanese militarism and imperialism, trauma and difference stemming from World War II. I’ve learned that sometimes the best place to begin is within one’s self and that identity politics are not a hold-over enshrined in the halls of left-wing ivory towers but instead, a rich source of inspiration and understanding.

My interest in Guam is both a personal and a political one. Unlike the locations discussed in the other chapters, Guam is a place that I have lived in and have memories of that are both fond and vexing. I lived in Guam on the Andersen Air Force base located on the northern part of the island between 1972 and 1974, during the height of the Vietnam War. My father was a sergeant in the Air Force and my mother, a recent immigrant from Japan, stayed at home to look after me. I recall riding my tricycle down the driveway of our base housing and into the street and watching the B-52 bombers take off each morning. They were an awe-inspiring sight – fat, grey monsters swollen with bombs that would take off so low that it seemed impossible that they could ever get airborne at all.

I share this memory because of the way that the meaning of these tableaux changed. Initially I recalled them with a nostalgic sweetness for a lost and innocent childhood and it wasn’t until a high school history class that I understood the significance of those bombers. Guam was a base used to further America’s Cold War interventions in
Asia, my father was part of a military colonial presence that dislocated and
disenfranchised native people, my mother was simultaneously a symbol of Japan’s defeat
in World War II as well as its imperial ambitions in places like Guam. What could I do to
reconcile all of these tangled threads of Cold War politics, Western imperialism, Japanese
militarism and the migratory flows of bodies both willing and unwilling across the
Pacific? For a long time, I did nothing. Guam was simply a curious fact about my
background and one that was rarely recalled. However, as I got older and began graduate
school, I realized how my present has always been entangled with my past and I realized
some of the larger significance of what I had witnessed as a child. I began to understand
that every chapter of the history taught in school was an amalgamation of stories and I
became interested in the way that this narrative was constructed, particularly narratives
surrounding citizenship and nation.

What is the story that stories tell us? That is, what is the subtext to any narrative
that we read? Stories tell us and inform us about a subject but what does the story tell us
about the storyteller? How do the meanings of these stories change depending on the
demands of the present? While each text purports to give us a “window” to the subject, it
gives us a blurred and moving picture. What is just as important as the telling of a story is
how the story is heard and received. In the case of Guam, the official narratives
surrounding Guam have been ones of liberation from the Japanese and patriotic loyalty to
the Americans. These nationalist narratives have affected the production of rhetoric
surrounding the island to the extent that almost all native voices are channeled through
this structure in order to be heard.
The literature from Guam is intriguing because of the ways that it illuminates the tangled threads of American imperialism, Constitutional law, Japanese militarism, and the narratives of nationalism and its progeny, transnationalism. In this chapter, I first take a look at one of the lead cases in a series that became known as the Insular Cases which dealt with the status of newly acquired territories after the Spanish-American War. I do this in order to ground the literature that I analyze. In this chapter I examine a biography by Chris Perez Howard about his mother titled, *Mariquita: A Tragedy of Guam* (1986) and a selection of poems by Chamorro activist and writer Craig Santos Perez from his collection *from Unincorporated Territory* (2009). These two very different texts illuminate the flexible strategies used by Chamorros when dealing with some of the complex history of Guam, citizenship, and American empire.

Chris Perez Howard uses the biography of his mother, his memories and the stories that he has heard in order to present a story that allegorizes Guam as a victim and in need of American intervention. His text reflects a 1980s America fully in the grip of Reagonomics, the Cold War and the need to justify the continuation of military colonization of small Pacific Islands like Guam. The realism and linearity of his narrative helps to give a sense of closure as well as a naturalized telos to the presence of U.S. military troops.

Craig Santos Perez, on the other hand, comes from an academic and activist background which clearly informs his literary work as well. His use of a fractured narrative, multiple voices and languages, pictures, broken lines of poetry, quotes form

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7 I use this term, “flexible strategy” following Viet Nguyen’s usage in his book, *Race and Resistance*. He utilizes this label to describe the tactical use of accommodationist stances as well as resistive ones by authors.
other works, all serve to thematize the ruptures and layers that make up the current Chamorro identity. Instead of denying or repudiating the colonial past, Perez demonstrates how the developmental neatness of a realist narrative does not makes sense in a place like Guam where multiple contradictions and tensions exist cheek by jowl. Both of these texts centralize the body as a privileged locus of meaning and history although how and to what purpose they do so, is quite different.

_Mariquita_ is a short text regarding the tragic circumstances about the author’s mother during the occupation during World War II by the Japanese Imperial Army. This biography follows his mother from her late teens to her courtship by the author’s father, a Naval enlisted man. It then ends with her last days of forced servitude to Japanese Imperial forces followed by her execution. This narrative follows the expected contours of pro-American and anti-Japanese sentiment and repeatedly stresses the marital and martial fidelity of the Perez-Howard family. For almost twenty years, this was the only published text from Guam by a Chamorro writer.

The poems that I have chosen from the chapbook, _from Unincorporated Territory_, are by Craig Santos Perez, a native Chamoru\(^8\) who received his MFA from the University of San Francisco and is currently a doctoral candidate in Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley.

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\(^8\) There has been some change and some debate about the terms, “Guamanian,” “Chamorro” and “Chamoru.” Guamanian and Chamorro were used fairly interchangeably to describe the native population of Guam up until the 1970s and the advent of ethnic identity politics. Chamorro is the term commonly used to describe the indigenous peoples of Guam while Guamanian is used to describe any resident of Guam. Thus, every resident of Guam (excluding American military personnel and their dependents) are Guamanian but not all Guamanians are Chamorro. The debate surrounding the spelling and pronunciation of the term Chamorro/Chamoru stems from the debate over whether the “orro” ending is too hispanicized (and colonial) versus the “oru” ending which is deemed to be more authentically Pacific Islander. However, even amongst many natives of Guam, the terms “Chamorro” and “Chamoror” are used interchangeably. For a more detailed examination of the debate please see Ronald Stade’s excellent anthropological study, _Pacific Passages: World Culture and Local Politics in Guam_, especially Chapter Six.
His academic and artistic concerns come together in a way that illuminates the ways which the dry language of law and politics can be infiltrated and inflated by the blood and tears of the peoples who are directly affected by those same laws. He begins his chapbook with a Preface that offers an explanation of the title and of the ambivalent status of Guam and how something as seemingly remote as Supreme Court cases over a hundred years ago still affect his daily life and his “attempt to begin re-territorializing the Chamorro language in relation to my own body, by way of the page” (12).

While these texts are very different in form and intention there are some striking similarities, specifically the way in which the body is read and written. For Howard, the female body stands in for the liminal status of Guam’s standing on the international stage, neither a state, a nation, nor a territory. The female body is one that is abused, suffers and dies and metaphorizes the ways that the Japanese governments attempted to squash its spirit and body and it is this same body that is gladly joined with U.S. forces. Perez, on the other hand, focuses on the male body and the ways that the genealogy of colonization is evidenced both within and outside of the body. My purpose in this chapter is to examine how the body of the Chamorro native comes to stand in for the larger ideas surrounding the stateless status of Guam itself.

“Foreign in the Domestic Sense”: The Supreme Court, Guam and U.S. Imperialism

In order to understand Guam and the position of its writers, it is necessary to understand some of its military and judicial history. It is impossible to get away from the same historical listing of dates no matter what the text: Ferdinand Magellan “discovered” the island in 1521 and the Spanish colonized it until 1898 when it was ceded to the U.S.,
along with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines for twenty million dollars as part of the victor’s spoils in the Spanish-American War. From 1898 to 1941, Guam was under U.S. Naval control, then in 1941, the Japanese invaded and occupied the island with a particular brutality and re-named the island “Omiya-jima” (Holy Shrine Island). On July 21, 1944 the American armed forces recaptured and “liberated” Guam (Rogers 5, 108, 162). These are the bare facts but these facts hide a wide-ranging set of meanings and memories.

The motto of Guam is “Where America’s Day Begins,” but in the mainland United States, Guam is a mostly forgotten colony. Overshadowed by Puerto Rico in terms of immigration visibility and population, shuffled aside in critical work about Filipinos and U.S. colonialism, and forgotten in legal writings about island nations and citizenship which tend to focus on Hawai’i, the people of Guam are truly invisible U.S. citizens. They pay taxes, but they cannot vote in national elections nor do they have a voting representative in Congress or the Senate. They are subject to taxation without representation but instead of starting a revolution like the American colonists, they instead have cloaked their demands for full recognition in the language of patriotism.

This ambiguous situation occurs for several reasons but the primary reason involves the legal liminality of Guam that dates back to the Treaty of Paris between Spain and the U.S. This treaty, signed in December 1898 stated that, “The civil rights and political status of the native inhabitants of the territories hereby ceded to the United States shall be determined by the Congress” (Rogers 113). And this is still the underpinning of Guam’s status. This island is officially an “unincorporated territory”
which means that while it is not of the United States, in other words, it is not a state or a district (like the District of Columbia), it belongs to the United States. Between 1898 and 1950, Guam had a Naval administration appointed by the President of the U.S. President Truman signed into law the Organic Act of 1950 which created a domestic legislature and though Guam is self-governing it is still subjected to the plenary power of the U.S. Congress. Despite this change in governorship from the U.S. Navy to its own citizens, the judicial ruling on the legality of Guam’s status still remains under the doctrine of the Insular Cases which means that it is without any possibility of statehood or independence. It is important to note that while the Organic Act was passed and signed into law by Congress, it was never voted on by the residents or citizens of Guam. Although the Act was signed into law on August 1, 1950 it was made to be retroactively effective to July 21, the sixth anniversary of Liberation Day (Rogers 221-222) thereby reiterating the paternalistic “granting” of self-governance by the U.S. One of the provisions of the Organic Act was to grant a limited form of U.S. citizenship to Guamanians. Guam is subject to U.S. laws but the Constitution does not fully apply especially in terms of the rights and privileges of citizenship. While “law is the apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body” (Lowe 8) it is clear that in this case these bodies are particularized through the very peculiar form of their U.S. citizenship, demonstrating that it is clear that some citizens are more equal than others. These changes in governance show one thing – that the people of Guam haven’t had a say in their own government for almost five hundred years.
An analysis of the vexed nature of this marginalized citizenship demonstrates the fragile nature of the nation-state compact, a bargain that is usually imagined as sturdy and inalienable. Linda Kerber’s essay, “Toward a History of Statelessness in America” uses Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* to ground her examination of the relationship between these supposedly inalienable “rights of man” and national belonging. While these rights, such as freedom, the pursuit of happiness, and a right to life and participation in civic life are supposedly universal and abstract, we see in fact that they are very particularly rooted in national belonging. That is, the very rights that are supposedly universal become unenforceable for those people who lack a government to guarantee them. As Arendt points out, “if the laws of their country did not live up to the demands of the Rights of Man, they were expected to change them, by legislation in democratic countries or through revolutionary action in despotism” (qtd. in Kerber 732). But how can the people of Guam change any laws if the very form of their citizenship denies them the right to vote?  

Instead, Guam’s status proves to function as the state’s “Other.” That is, the state is able to define itself through what it is not. Guam is definitely *not* a state, but it is not a sovereign nation, either. Guam is an island that is populated by a variety of Pacific Islander and Asian peoples who are bi-lingual and often multi-lingual and they have never been a sovereign nation. While these details emphasize the differences between Guam and the rest of the United States, this island’s case also contradicts some of the

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*While I keep insisting that there is a lack of voting privilege for the people of Guam, this is only in terms of federal instances. The citizens of Guam can and do vote locally to elect their own governor and congressional representatives. However, the governor can be replaced at any time without the consent of the people and the congressional representatives do not have a voting presence in either the House or the Senate.*
usual notions surrounding statelessness. As Kerber further explains, “stateless persons have been commonly understood to be a population made vulnerable by movement […] But citizenship ties can be fractured in stasis as well as in movement” (729). The people of Guam have stayed put for hundreds of years but their citizenship status has changed due to the military and political machinations of larger nations vying for strategic control of ports on the way to Asia. Guam embodies the inherent contradictions always at play in American empire.

Some Citizens are More Equal than “Others”: Downes v. Bidwell

The series of Supreme Court decisions collectively known as the Insular Cases (1901) and were concerned with the status of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. The most important of these cases is Downes v. Bidwell and it is this case that furnishes the most rhetoric concerning citizenship and sovereignty for the newly acquired colonies from Spain in the aftermath of the war in 1898. A new category of people, the “noncitizen national” was invented in order “to describe a new status of people who lived under the U.S. flag without the full range of constitutional protections that flag normally carries” (Kerber 734). As has always been the case in America since the Naturalization Act of 1790, the politico-juridical system was very interested in excluding certain types of people from becoming fully participating members of the nation. Even when citizenship was granted, multiple barriers have been erected in the form of restricted movement such as reservations, segregation and internment camps as well as through the obstacles placed on voting such as poll taxes, grandfather clauses and literacy tests. What makes the case of Guam so invidious is that it appears to have all of the rights historically
denied to marginalized people – citizenship, the right to free travel, and lack of segregation. However, one need only to scratch the surface to see that their citizenship is hollow: the people of Guam do not have full voting rights, are restricted from almost one-third of their island because of military bases and because of their relative lack of economic power, one of the only means of travel is to join the military.

Initially, one of the main justifications for this oddball status was to secure favorable tariffs on raw goods produced in the newly acquired territories but another reason was explained by Supreme Court Justice Henry Billings Brown:

We are also of opinion that the power to acquire territory by treaty implies, not only the power to govern such territory, but to prescribe upon what terms the United States will receive its inhabitants, and what their status shall be in what Chief Justice Marshall termed the 'American empire.' [...] Indeed, it is doubtful if Congress would ever assent to the annexation of territory upon the condition that its inhabitants, however foreign they may be to our habits, traditions, and modes [182 U.S. 244, 280] of life, shall become at once citizens of the United States.

In other words, the natives of Guam are simply too “foreign” to be considered to be part of the citizenry of the United States. Following this justification by Justice Brown is the explanation that while the residents of the newly acquired Florida and Louisiana territories were going to be admitted as soon as possible to the rest of the United States, and the long-term residents of Alaska “with the exception of uncivilized native tribes” would be admitted but in the case of “Porto Rico [sic] and the Philippines, the civil rights
and political status of the natives shall be determined by Congress.” It is clear that both
the locale of these islands, places deemed unconnected to the U.S. by land or history, as
well as race and ethnicity played a large part in the determination of citizenship for these
people connected and yet unconnected to the United States. The correlation between
citizenship and race is not a new or unique observation it is still an important one
especially in the continuing state of exception for the colonized peoples of American
empire. Alaska and Hawai‘i eventually became states primarily because of compelling
commercial interests. Alaska’s vast mineral wealth and Hawai‘i’s rich plantations
apparently were enough to overcome any compunction about large non-white populations
and these territories were extended the full benefit of the Constitution. Eventually, the
Philippines became an independent and sovereign nation, but Puerto Rico and Guam are
still attached to the United States and do not have the full rights and privileges of
citizenship. Puerto Rico is currently a commonwealth of the United States which means
that it is self-governing and has its own constitution and its semi-sovereignty is respected
by the United States. Despite numerous referendums in Guam, its status as an
unincorporated territory has never changed. While no longer under a Naval government,
Guam’s strategic military importance in the “American Lake” is one of the reasons for
the United States to maintain its authority to rescind any or all of Guam’s legislation, but
apparently there isn’t enough commercial interest to fully incorporate this island but too
much strategic interest to allow it its sovereignty.

David Palumbo-Liu asks, “how is the imagination of space linked to political and
racial ideologies of the nation?” (217) and while it is tempting to point the finger at
Guam’s locale as one of the reasons that the U.S. rarely bothers with it, after all it is a little island very far away in the vast Pacific Ocean, this is not the only reason. We have only to look at examples of non-citizenship within the borders of the U.S., moments where the “politics of space” are brought to the forefront. Two instances, other than the briefly mentioned “uncivilized native tribes” in Alaska, are the cases of American Indians and the Japanese in America.

The Supreme Court case, *The Cherokee Nation v. The State of Georgia* (1831), used the term “domestic dependent nations” to describe the relationship of this group of people to the surrounding state of Georgia and the U.S. in general. These “domestic dependent nations” were characterized as having a relationship which, “resembles that of a ward to his guardian” that is, these people were not deemed fit or ready for U.S. citizenship and based upon this decision, American Indians were not given U.S. citizenship until 1924. Instead, Native Americans were given the choice of assimilation or elimination. Even in cases of assimilation such as the Cherokee, they were deemed *within* but not part of the United States.

Asians living in America were “aliens ineligible for citizenship” until the passage of the Magnuson Act in 1946 that allowed only the Chinese out of the various Asian ethnicities living in the U.S. to become citizens. Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were evacuated and then segregated into internment camps located in various remote locales under Executive Order 9066 which authorized the Secretary of War and his designees to “prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent […] from which any or all person may be excluded” (Kitayama 161) with the justification that
military necessity and order needed to prevail. In the cases of American Indian and Japanese American removal, the rhetoric of the preservation of the standards of U.S. justice and safety were utilized.

The powerful attempts by the state to preserve an idealized and uniform citizenry expressed itself spatially. In these cases, the reservations for Native Americans, Chinatowns, and internment camps for Japanese and Japanese Americans are all examples of areas where U.S. citizenship didn’t apply, was never granted, or repealed, and all were/are located within the contiguous borders of the U.S. What these places do have in common is that they are all inhabited by people of color and the Supreme Court utilized the language of order, discipline, and regulation to justify racial discrimination. These instances are examples of the paradox of U.S. citizenship in which the inclusionary rhetoric of the national narrative of democracy is disrupted by the alien and undesirable body. Robert G. Lee, author of Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture, carefully parses through the notion of the “alien” which relates to these instances of containment and control. As Lee explains, “Aliens, outsiders who are inside, disrupt the internal structure of a cultural formation as it defines itself vis-à-vis the Other; their presence constitutes a boundary crisis” and it is the aliens presence that “disrupts the narrative structure of the community” (3). This “disruption” in the narrative of the U.S. demonstrates the fraught avenues of citizenship, sovereignty, and culture for non-white peoples living in the contiguous U.S. or under its flag.

In Downes v. Bidwell, Justice Brown in his majority opinion writes, “There are certain principles of natural justice inherent in the Anglo-Saxon character, which need no
expression in constitutions or statutes to give them effect or to secure dependencies against legislation manifestly hostile to their real interests” (emphasis added). That is, the “Anglo-Saxon character” itself is enough to guarantee a certain and natural order of justice, and thus no need to Constitutionally protect other from American interests. The assertion of the inherent justice and order of white people also emphasizes its opposite: the lawless and savage nature of non Anglo-Saxon people, such as the inhabitants and natives of the various island nations that were in the process of being colonized and annexed in the waning years of the nineteenth century.

All of these examples serve to reiterate the ambiguous and fragile nature of U.S. citizenship for those who do not fulfill certain parameters of citizenship such as being white, male, or propertied. Here is where we see an overlap between Asian American and Pacific Islander texts. Many Asian American texts are concerned with the rift between legal citizenship and cultural citizenship and the larger assumption by mainstream America that they are either inassimilable or foreign and there are many of the same concerns marking the texts from Guam. Even as recently as 1998, Congressional Representative Robert Underwood (D) brought forth a Resolution that begins, “Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States has enjoyed the loyalty of the United States citizens of Guam” and asking for recognition of the centennial anniversary of the Spanish-American War “as an opportune time for Congress to reaffirm its commitment to increase self-government consistent with self-determination for the people of Guam” (H.R. 494). Although this resolution passed

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10 Examples of these texts would include works by Frank Chin, Monica Sone, Amy Tan, Louis Chu, and Carlos Bulosan among others.
unanimously, there has been no movement by the U.S. Congress to change Guam’s current status.

The resolution by Underwood is an example of how the “pursuit of enfranchisement coincides with a refortification of the state as a guarantor of rights and precludes the necessary critique of the state as the protector of liberal capitalism” (Lowe 23). There is very little rhetoric of disloyalty, even amongst Chamorro activists who agitate for separation and sovereignty. Instead, the most common and enduring request is for inclusion and recognition. One way that this request takes place is through enlistment in the military. This form of citizenship has only been available relatively recently to women who traditionally fortified their citizenship through marriage. In either case, we see how the Guamanian body is deemed insufficient and must attach itself to a larger political body for recognition. The refortification of the state also coincides with the heavy militarization of Guam and its disproportionately high enlistment rates. Almost 10% of the entire population has enlisted during the Iraq War (La Plante) and it was the top recruitment post in 2007 despite its population of only 173,000 (Harden). But the militarization of Guam has other consequences as well in terms of the gendering of the island itself. In *Mariquita*, the narratives of paternalistic racism, the metonymization of the female body with the land and the cloaking of martial intentions with the rhetoric of romantic love are all present.

*Mariquita: A Tragedy of Guam*

This short text is an imaginative biography of the author’s mother, Maria Aguon Perez, who was commonly known as Mariquita, and her marriage to a young enlisted
man, Eddie Howard. In addition to the description of Chris Perez Howard’s parents’ meeting and courtship, the text is equally focused on the occupation of Guam by the Japanese which resulted in the capture of his father and the death of his mother. The realist tone is supplemented by family photos, copies of official depositions regarding the disappearance of Mariquita and a newspaper clipping from the *Honolulu Advertiser* detailing the sad story of the two children whose mother was presumably murdered by a Japanese officer. While Howard attempts to negate any sense of American imperialism and shapes his book into a particular narrative that fits in with American military aims, there are moments that erupt, seemingly beyond his control and awareness, when he is describing the female body.

The economy of allegory is utilized in the title to effeminize Guam and to make it an object of pity. Viet Nguyen points out that “One of the most important representations of the Asian American body politic in the post-Vietnam War period is that of the victim” because this is one of the “few ‘sympathetic’ representations of Asians and Asian Americans in dominant American discourse” (27). There is a long history of political, historical and anthropological stereotypes that characterize islanders as either the “noble savage” or the “ignoble savage” with images of women as particularly objectifying. Howard’s narrative works to replace the “savage” with the “victim” in order to gain sympathy for Guam and its citizens. Margaret Jolly and Lenore Manderson state in their introduction to *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure in Asia and the Pacific* that “Constructs of Polynesian women in the Pacific […] regularly conferred on them the propensity for sexual excess” (8) and that they were particularly “feminine” and
“pleasure-oriented.” In fact, these tropes of femininity and pleasure are part of the orientalist gaze so common in masculinist narratives about Asia and the Pacific. The construction of a certain type of island femininity then allows America to fashion itself as masculine rescuer and to obfuscate its colonialist regime through rhetorics of romance and liberation. This linkage also serves to portray Guam as a tragic place because of the Japanese occupation and in need of the protection of its American liberators. Through this rhetorical trick, Howard effaces Guam’s history of centuries of Spanish colonization and American military occupation previous to World War II. Mariquita’s unswerving marital fidelity matches the steadfast loyalty and patriotism of Guam’s residents to America.

Howard’s descriptions of his mother fall in line with stereotypical descriptions of Pacific Islander women despite his assertion to the contrary. He describes her as, “a lovely girl, shapely and petite, a pleasing mixture of several of the races that comprised her native culture. […] Her skin was warm brown, smooth and unblemished” (2) and while he follows this up with the caveat that “she was not the stereotyped island girl depicted in romantic literature – uncomplicated and submissive” (2) there is nothing in his descriptions of her that would support this assertion. In fact, the litanies of Mariquita’s attributes are keeping in line with many orientalist fantasies of the perfectly submissive island girl. While Mariquita has several “Western” attributes such as her working outside the home, her education and religious practices as well as her English skills, she is still able to combine these with a strong sense of family duty, a docile and passive personality and an unswerving faithfulness to her man to the point of death.
Despite Howard’s statement to the contrary, he ends up reiterating not only stereotypes of island women but also the rhetoric of American benevolence and Chamorro patriotism.

Howard’s descriptions of his father’s actions and his mother’s reactions are meant to encapsulate the U.S./Chamorro relationship. Just as clearly as Mariquita is meant to represent the sweet and loyal Chamorro, Eddie, Howard’s father, is the “right” kind of American who is protective, loving and understanding. Howard paints a portrait of gentlemanly conduct and chivalrous respect when describing the wooing of Mariquita by his father. Although initially Mariquita seems to rebuff Eddie’s advances, one night when she is walking home with her brother after the movies, the two of them pass by a bar full of drunk servicemen and a commotion ensues.

“Hey, where are you going, pretty girl?” one of them asked. Mariquita and Frankie [her brother] hurried on, ignoring him. “Let me come with you. I’ll show you a good time,” he continued leaving the other man and starting after them.

Mariquita and Frankie walked faster as the American stumbled along after them. He stopped and shouted, “You dirty native! Who do you think you are?”

Hearing a commotion behind her, Mariquita looked back and in the dim light saw Eddie knock the man down. “Hurry Frankie,” she said, urging her brother on as tears filled her eyes. (22)

There are several things going on in this short scene. First is the normalization of the presence of military men in her town. Although the U.S. Navy had governed Guam for
forty years by this point, the military presence goes completely unremarked by either the author or by Mariquita. The American presence and intrusion in their city is a given and drunk sailors are also seen as a given. The second factor to notice is the presumed sexual availability of island women as evidenced in the serviceman’s, “I’ll show you a good time” remark. The normalized seizure and occupation of the island is expressed through the way that the sailor assumes that Mariquita and other women are also available for the taking. Although Mariquita is walking with another man, the sailor disregards this and lays claim to Mariquita’s body. Instead of answering back to the sailor, she urges her brother to walk faster until the man shouts out, “You dirty native! Who do you think you are?” It’s unclear who this racist remark is directed towards but what is clear is the presumption of superiority, especially marked by the question, “Who do you think you are?” This question, with its layers of indignation and entitlement encapsulates the arrogance of the military presence on Guam and this overt display is what finally causes the pair to stop. When they turn around, they see Eddie hit the man in what is to be interpreted as a chivalrous defense of Mariquita’s honor, something that Frankie is unable to do. Eddie’s action protects Mariquita in a way that Frankie is unable or unwilling to do, just like the island of Guam is presumed unable or unwilling to come to its own defense. It is clear that this scene is supposed to demonstrate to the reader the honorable intentions of Eddie and by extension, the honorable intentions of the U.S military. The racial slur and the disrespect are unmistakably presented as an aberration.

The next chapter titled, “An American in Guam,” continues the story of that evening and offers an explanation of the event and Eddie’s character. Howard goes to
pains to explain how highly unusual both Eddie’s reaction was as well as the behavior of
the servicemen in the first place. “He was normally a gentle person, placing reason above
violence, but his infatuation with Mariquita had disturbed his equilibrium” (23). In other
words, Eddie’s gentle character is disturbed by his feelings for Mariquita and it isn’t his
fault that he becomes violent in response to a fellow American. In other words, it is the
circumstance, not the character, which is to blame. One has to assume that if Eddie
wasn’t infatuated with a local woman, then the racial slur would be unnoticed or taken in
stride.

Howard goes to further pains to explain the unusual nature of this event by
writing: “Life on Guam was peaceful and harmonious. This particular incident was
highly unusual because of the racial remark the American had made to Mariquita. The
relationship between the Americans and Guamanians was overtly one of friendship and
mutual respect” and that (23). However, it is the insertion of the word, “overtly” that
cues the reader in that even Howard realizes he is being ingenuous. Why use the word
“overtly” at all if there is nothing covert occurring? By using this word, we realize that
the opposite is true and the next sentence contradicts his assertion of racial harmony:
“Racial prejudice, if any existed, was hidden, although it could be argued that it did in
fact exist because there was a private school for military children and the social clubs and
party lists were very exclusive” (23). So, which is it? Does racial prejudice exist openly
or is it hidden? While Howard tries to say one thing, that there is racial harmony, his
examples of the sailor shouting out to Mariquita and the separate schools and social lists,
point to another reality. In this short scene we see how Mariquita and her experiences are
pressed to serve as a symbol of the island of Guam, a place that is sweet and loving and yet needs protection, and Eddie’s role as a symbol of the might and goodness of the U.S. Just in case we haven’t understood this connection yet, Howard writes that “The military personnel were proud to serve their country and felt that they were personal representatives of America” (23). While Howard attempts to write this scene as a case in point of the inherent benevolence and chivalry of the U.S./Guam relationship, his example provides more than he bargained for.

As it turns out, Mariquita had been pressed into service as a representative of Guam before and Howard quotes extensively from an interview that Mariquita gave to Collier’s magazine which appeared in the April 18, 1939 issue. After the usual description of Mariquita’s beauty and femininity, there comes a moment in the interview when she is asked about the “American School,” a private school for military dependents as well as for native children that was paid for through the taxation on luxury goods at the commissary. Mariquita’s reaction is more complicated than what would be expected of a patriotic Chamorro: “‘What do they mean by that name?’ […] ‘Aren’t all schools in Guam American schools? Don’t we salute the same flag, sing the same patriotic hymns in our classrooms, love and respect the same great men?’” and the interviewer writes, “You would be constitutionally unable to disagree with anything Mariquita says” (29) and later in the article Mariquita points out, “Only lately […] have civics been taught. I guess they didn’t want us asking too many questions about citizenship” (30). It is these trenchant observations that demonstrate that even early on, that even though American history and nationalism have been swallowed by the colonial subject, the very questions Mariquita
asks demonstrate her (i.e. Chamorro) awareness of the ruptures caused by race within the
production of patriotic colonial subjects. In this moment, Mariquita exceeds the expected
boundaries of the assimilated native. Instead of gratefulness at her limited inclusion
within the United States, Mariquita tartly points out that “I guess they didn’t want us
asking too many questions about citizenship” after she has asked a lot of difficult
questions. While Howard attempts to portray his mother as the idealized, patriotic
Chamorro, her actions and answers prove to be too complex. The interviewer’s
explanation points to the differences between the notion of legal citizenship in his
mincing answer that “constitutionally” we (presumably meaning “real” white Americans
with full citizenship rights) cannot disagree leaving unsaid the assumption that, of course,
in all sorts of other ways we can disagree with Mariquita’s claim to full citizenship.

The text is riddled with numerous instances of Mariquita asserting her American-
ness. However, the author makes clear that it is the harsh experiences of Mariquita during
the Japanese occupation of Guam, and by extension all residents of Guam, which give her
especial claim to U.S. citizenship. The portrayal of Mariquita and other Guamanians11
victim status performs two related and important functions. While enlistment in the
armed services was not possible for Mariquita as a woman, Howard’s portrayal of her
incarceration in a concentration camp in the interior of the island as well as her forced
servitude to an officer in the Japanese Imperial Army substitutes for the sort of military
service that would have been the norm for a man. Keith Camacho posits that military

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11 Here I deliberately use the term, “Guamanian” as opposed to “Chamorro” for purposes of inclusiveness
because there were Chinese and Japanese immigrants living on Guam at the time of the invasion who were
also subjected to the same tortures and abuse that Chamorros were.
service is a strategy used by Chamorro activists as a way to lay claim to a “thicker” citizenship (172). It is through military service that those who would otherwise be marginalized citizens can claim an elevated citizenship that allows them the privilege while adding legitimacy to their criticisms and dissent against their colonizer (172).

Fully half of the text is concerned with the invasion and occupation of Guam by the Japanese and liberation by U.S. forces. This emphasis on Japanese occupation and cruelty and American benevolent liberation also is expressed in displays such as the annual celebration of “Liberation Day” on July 21. More than just a day, this is a week long festival that culminates in fireworks and a parade in the capital city of Hagåtña (formerly known as “Agana”) (“Guam”). In fact, almost all narratives surrounding Guam and World War II rehearse a well-worn chorus of Japanese brutality, American liberation, and Chamorro loyalty and patriotism. This ranges from a work like Mariquita to the official National Park Service’s guide to the National Historical Park in Guam which proudly announces that “This unique National Park is the only site in the National Park system that honors the bravery and sacrifices of all those who participated in the Pacific Theater of World War II” (“War in the Pacific”). Vicente M. Diaz, the foremost scholar on Guam and its issues, states that this particular discourse demonstrates the “political imperatives of a postwar American colonial history and historiography” but doesn’t deal with “unresolved issues such as postwar land condemnations, war reparations […] Guam’s neocolonial status, and […] the unprecedented economic and social growth and impact on indigenous culture and the land itself” (156). This narrative continues to be

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12 I have been asked to paraphrase Camacho’s essay here because the manuscript I have has subsequently been changed for publication due in April 2010.
used even when it is clear that America’s interest in Guam is almost purely for military and strategic reasons rather than from some sort of altruistic desire to free Guam and its people from oppression.

As I mentioned towards the beginning of this chapter, a story doesn’t just tell us about the teller, but it also tells us about the listener. That is, what kinds of stories will be listened to and heard? While the narrative of occupation and liberation is one that has been pressed into service *ad nauseum*, Diaz points out, “On the other hand, there are other stories that not only do not support the dominant narratives of liberation, but also do not have the cultural or political capital to trouble them in public […] These marginalized stories of life at the margins have the potential to disrupt the dominant paradigms but don’t because the social and political costs are tremendous and the returns have yet to present themselves” (159). Thus, Mariquita’s pointed observation about the contradictory site of Chamorro-ness and U.S. citizenship must be embedded within a larger narrative about patriotism and loyalty.

The rhetoric of patriotism is a language of devotion and it uses the vocabulary of romantic love. Heterosexual romance is often employed as a metaphor for U.S. military domination and colonization. An example of this usage occurs at the end of the book after Mariquita has been forced to work as a servant for the commanding officer in the Japanese Imperial Army. There comes an oddly protracted scene covering almost three pages, of Mariquita’s insistence that “she would rather die than disgrace her husband by sleeping with the Japanese” and that she “could not respect herself” and face her children if she had to be unfaithful to her husband. Despite her mother’s pleading to do whatever
it takes to survive, Mariquita insists, “Eddie is the only one who will ever touch me” (75). Like a soldier, Mariquita refuses to surrender and become a traitor and instead honorably chooses to die in service to her country. This scene is emblematic of the ways which the colonial system itself has often been cloaked in the rhetoric of romantic love. Naoki Sakai points out that “an international relationship of domination and subordination acquires an extremely intensive symbolization through the trope of romantic love because the latent scenario that is conveyed is the confirmation of the explicit super-masculinity of the colonizing man” (211). Not only has Eddie himself demonstrated his masculinity by defending Mariquita’s personal honor, the U.S. military will soon demonstrate its strength and dominance through the decisive defeat of the Japanese.

The romantic relationship between Mariquita and Eddie stands in for the heterosexual normalecy that underpins nationalism which in turn requires the maintenance of masculinity and domination. Sakai explains it thus, “Characteristically, the colonial power relation is articulated to the sexual relation in double registers. The domination of one group of men by another group of men is re-inscribed in the domination of women by men” (212). But, this power is cloaked in terms of romantic love because romance implies a mutuality, a consent and even a desire on the part of the dominated and precludes the socio-political equivalent of rape, that is, a violent imposition of an unwanted attention with the intention of harm and overt authority. Howard’s narrative implies a desire for union with the United States as a full partner, just as he envisioned his parents marriage as a partnership.
This slim volume, for almost twenty years, was the only literature to be written by a Chamorro and we can see how the forces of nationalistic narratives shaped the story of the author’s parents. Cloaked in the language of romance and mutuality, the linkage between Mariquita, Eddie and Japanese occupation and American liberation demonstrate the ways which the female body in particular is pressed into service to ameliorate anxieties about colonization and domination in the American empire. Although Howard is cleaving to the predictable narrative are about patriotism, love, and gratitude expressed by the people of Guam, he also uses this account to insert serious questions about the value and meaning of U.S. citizenship for the people of Guam.

*Incorporated Body, Unincorporated Territory: Craig Santos Perez and the Politics of Place*

From its very cover, Craig Santos Perez’s chapbook of poems proclaims the layering of Spanish and American colonization over the island of Guam. The graphic is a series of thick red lines superimposed upon a white background clearly meant to represent the stripes in the U.S. flag. The stripes are not smooth, however. Midway through the horizontal stripes a disturbance begins and the topmost stripe becomes a bell curve. Next to the bump is the title, *from Unincorporated Territory*, and underneath these words and within brackets is the Spanish word, “Hacha” meaning “axe.” The title, of course, refers to the legal status of Guam and of its people but more than that, Guam is the bump in the otherwise smooth narrative of American incorporation of diverse peoples under its flag and Perez’s poetry is meant to slash its way through, much like the axe slashes its way through a closed door.
This volume is about the same page length as Howard’s biography but it is almost all the two have in common. While Howard’s narrative is a clumsy attempt at a realist narrative, Perez’s poems are both a lament and a celebration of Guam. The book opens with a Preface that combines quotes from the Territory Clause of the Constitution, a Biblical quotation, a statement about Guam’s cartographic representations and an encyclopedic entry about its Mercator locale. From there, Perez goes on to discuss the geographical creation of Guam and the Insular Cases and quotes from Downes v. Bidwell. These fragmentary “official” entries spliced with personal observation sets the tone for the rest of the text. These interweavings demonstrate the ways in which Guam has been subsumed under the layers of words written and spoken about it, just like the mostly submerged volcanic mountain which forms Guahan (the Chamorro name for Guam) and its mostly submerged history.

Perez also quotes from two other authors in his Preface. The first is a poem by Robert Duncan titled, “Uprising: Passages 25” (1968) that begins, “Now Johnson would go up to join the great simulacra of men, Hitler and Stalin, to work his fame/with planes roaring out from Guam to Asia./All America becoming a sea of toiling men” (emphasis in original 10). Perez explains that “Uprising” is “one of the few poems in American poetry that mentions Guam. In the poem, however ‘Guam’ only manages to signify a strategically positioned U.S. military base [...]. This ‘reducción’ of ‘Guam’ enacts the cultural, political, geographic, and linguistic ‘reducción’ that has accrued from three centuries of colonialism” (11). To work again this reduction of “Guam,” Perez claims the

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13 “Reducción” is the term that the Spanish used to describe the process of establishing missions, converting natives and stationing soldiers to protect the missions and priests (Rogers 43).
“unincorporated” as well as the preposition “from” to use these words as a free place to begin. As he says, “From indicates a particular time or place as a starting point […] from imagines a source, a cause, an agent, or an instrument; from marks separation, removal, or exclusion; from differentiates borders” (italics in original 12). To be from someplace is to mark the movement away, the simultaneous claiming of a locale as well as the acknowledgment that one is no longer there. Perez recognizes the agency in his movement but he also recognizes the way that his movement includes separation.

Each of the titles of the poems in this collection include “from” in their title. Perez explains that this “bears its weight and resultant incompleteness” (12) and he also explains that the Chamorro words enclosed within brackets in each poem symbolize how within “the ocean of English words, the Chamorro words in this collection remain insular, struggling to emerge within their own ‘excerpted space.’” But it is much more than words struggling, “These poems are my attempt to begin re-territorializing the Chamorro language in relation to my own body, by way of the page” (12). Perez’s move to “re-territorialize” his body is a move to re-claim his own language and his own discursive production of identity. Unlike Howard who doesn’t question the presence of the U.S. military on Guam, Perez deliberately links his work to the work of other authors struggling to find a place for their own voices amidst the rubble of a fragmented nation and a fragmented self.

The epigraph to the poems themselves is a quote from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s Dictée: “From another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the Chronicles. For another telling another
recitation. Our destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of search. Fixed in its perpetual exile” (13). Just as Cha was writing in part to uncover some of the hidden or missing pieces of American imperialism in Korea, Perez’s work also demands for the reader to work at recovering the hidden colonialism of the U.S. Clearly, Perez is using his words and his narrative to “write back” and to fill in some of the “missing” from the “Chronicles.”

The second poem in the collection, “from Achiote,” is a collage of pictures, encyclopedia entries about the achiote plant, a list of various names for the plant, “poetic” sections about the narrator’s grandmother, historical information about Father Sanvitores, the first priest to convert the majority of native Chamorros, and reflections about the current state of Guam.

This poem utilizes the symbolization of sight, history and memory, and the connections between the land and body in order to remark upon the palimpsest of occupation and blood that has been visited upon the island of Guam by successive waves of intruders. The inclusion of historical and legendary information about Father Sanvitores acknowledges and claims all of the genealogy of Guam and it is through the recovery of Guam’s totality of colonization as well as native language and knowledge that Perez begins to make good on his initial goal of “re-territorializing” his own body and identity. The poems all have unnamed narrators and describe personal moments with family members, a technique that promotes identification between narrator and author.

Perez writes of the various types of displacement that occur in Guam. While some non-native flora and fauna, languages, religions and foods have become incorporated as
“traditional” others are still “un-incorporated.” This dis-places our position as a neutral reader in order to question the truth of history and meaning. The poem opens up with the explanation that the achiote plant is indigenous to Central and South America and that it came to Guam carried by Spanish colonialists and has been incorporated into Chamorro folkways through food and medicine. This adaptation of achiote prefaces the connection between colonized and colonizer in ways that are unexpected, such as the connection created by the symbolization of sight and blindness. The relatively dry explication of the achiote plant is followed by description of the narrator’s grandmother followed by one of Father Sanvitores that are almost anecdotal:

my grandmother leans over the achiote plant and picks its ripe “shells” our hands among the red veined leaves  
*an attractive pink flower made it a popular hedge plant in colonial gardens*

“ahi” she says when i touch the flowers

“don’t touch your eyes”

--the frail blind body of father sanvitores [1672]

is led around by a rope tied to his waist  
he refused glasses because “if the poor were too poor for glasses”

*evangelizare pauperibus misi te*

a small satchel: a breviary, a new testament, lumps of sugar for children who could recite their prayers and
catechism lessons

flagellation physics discipina a cilice

he’s always i fi’on-mu: a Sunday school warning: if you don’t say your prayers you wake with bruises [no:ahi]

[achiote can be used to treat skin problems, burns, venereal disease, and hypertension]

(18-19)

The harvesting of the achiote plant by the grandmother and grandson emphasizes their family connection, but her warning to her grandson to not touch his eye followed by the mythos of Father Sanvitores’ piety as exemplified through his own refusal to wear glasses, links the two figures through their ability/ inability to see. The trope of seeing is a particularly powerful one to use because it is through sight that difference is often re-affirmed. Robyn Weigman points out that “while vision is the privileged sense of modernity, its ability to establish and guarantee both meaning and truth is repeatedly undermined” (3). Perez’s poem uses the trope of blindness and insight to re-position the perspective of the reader as well as to make linkages between colonizer and colonized, thereby demonstrating that vision is an unstable terrain to base memory upon.

Initially, we are drawn to the premise that through native wisdom, there is deeper insight. Father Sanvitores’ refusal to utilize the technology of glasses is often used as an example of his piety and his dedication, in other words by living a life as poor as the people he is trying to convert, he is able to be closer to them by eliminating a hierarchy
based upon money or class. However, on second thought, Father Sanvitores’ refusal to wear glasses actually makes him a larger burden on the natives because he must be led around by a rope tied to his waist in the jungle, thereby reinscribing the hierarchy of power through the physical labor of those who have to lead and carry him around the jungles of Guam.

Father Sanvitores’ usage of the cilice, a coarse shirt made of horsehair, as well as his self-flagellation are both well known parts of the legend of his piety. His denial of his body is contradictorily brought about by his abuse of his body, making its physicality all the more apparent. The Sunday school warning that “he’s always i fi’on-mu (near you)” reiterates the panoptic eye of the Christian god through the almost-blind Father and the physical punishment as a result of metaphysical disapproval. In other words, the body becomes the bearer of meaning in an easily readable way for a Catholicized population, the scars and bruises on the body tell a story of sinfulness and disappointment. For a militarized community, scars and bruises indicate the story of survival and resistance, and for other groups, those same signs on the body might mean victimization and oppression. Again, the visual markers on the body are unreliable texts and their meaning changes depending on the interpreter.

Perez utilizes a technique of delayed translation in his poems. A word is translated later in a poem or in another poem altogether, thereby linking various sections together. This technique is initially frustrating as one goes flipping through to find the meaning of a particular word, but it also reiterates the ways that words, stories and meanings can change and be pressed into service for a variety of purposes. The translation of the word
“ahi” from the previous page in the warning that the grandmother gives, comes right after the warning tale about the necessity of saying one’s prayers serves two purposes. One is the actual translation of the Chamorro word used on the previous page (“no”) and the other is to negate the warning itself. We don’t learn what “i fi’on-mu” means until two pages later where it is located on the bottom right-hand corner of the page after a tale about the unwanted baptism of Chief Matapang’s daughter by Father Sanvitores. In this location the translation also serves a double meaning. The deception of Father Sanvitores as well as the murder committed by Matapang are “always with you.” That is, both of these acts are part of Chamorro genealogy – the courage needed to rise up against the intruder but also the courage needed to explore an unknown region sustained only by faith. The arrogance, fear and deception utilized by both the chief and the priest are also part of the lineage of the Chamorro people. Perez’s mixture of these stories and histories is not a revisionist claim to a pure “pre-contact” past. Rather, Perez mixes forms and stories and languages in order to proclaim the hybridized past and the hybridized future.

The Chief’s name is another example of the change brought about in Guam by its Spanish and Catholic colonization. The narrator’s grandmother uses the chief’s name to admonish the boy: “and when I rubbed my stained hands on my face and threw stones at the sky my grandmother called me ‘mata’pang’”(20). This moment occurs right before the story of Father Sanvitores’s aggressive baptism of the chief’s daughter and then on the last page of the poem, we read: “‘mata’pang’ used to mean ‘proud and brave’ used to mean “alert eyes” – he led the/ rebellion against the Spanish before he was captured and killed—/ Now it means “silly” or “rude” or misbehaved” or “uncivil” (23).
Perez’s positioning of the translations and explanations of words and phrases serve to let us know that there are two versions of each story and that we (including Chamorros) don’t know or understand the multiple versions of the stories until later. This layering of words serves as to remind us that modern-day Guam is a palimpsest of multiple colonizations and occupations, military violence, and economic rupture. The use of English with the Chamorro words in brackets prompts us to realize that within the body of English lies a fracture of meanings, just as there is a multiple and fractured meaning carried within each person inherited from the lives and deaths of Spanish priests, soldiers, and native Chamorros.

The redefining of the chief’s name is intercut with a few lines about the Japanese occupation: “my grandmother used achiote to make chalikiles and hineksa agaga so young when the japanese army/ invaded and renamed hagåtña ‘akashi’/ --the ‘red city’— ‘bright red stone’” (23). These few lines reiterate the re-namings that have occurred again and again in Guam and that the Japanese occupation, an event that is usually given precedence over Spanish colonization, is really only a few lines in a long story of occupation.

However, another poem in a series titled, “from Ta(la)ya” (“Taya” means empty and “talaya” is a type of throw net used for fishing) goes into more detail about the Japanese occupation and begins:

“ichi ni san shi go roku shichi hachi kyuu juu” my grandmother recites from the couch when

she
sees him bowing

[the Japanese military forced men to dig massive and elaborate tunnels in yigo and agana to connect military encampments]

she struggles to get up from the couch and stands next to him and tries to bow also but her back

instead she sings: eighth of December nineteen forty one people went crazy right here in guam

Oh mr sam, sam, my dear uncle sam Won’t you please come back to guam

(80)

The poem begins with counting out the numbers one from ten in Japanese and then the stanza ends with a modification of a wartime verse popular during the occupation. Although the “him” in the poem is not identified, his bowing and the grandmother’s recital of Japanese words, as well as the bracketed information about the brutality of the Japanese occupation, points to a Japanese visitor. Is the visitor there to apologize? To memorialize? It is unclear and the visitor himself is unimportant except as a bodily reminder, just like the grandmother’s aching back, of those difficult days. The explanation of the difficulties under Japanese occupation is bracketed and set aside – remembered but not an integral part of the poem. However, as Perez noted in the beginning, the words and phrases placed in brackets “remain insular, struggling to emerge within their own ‘excerpted space’” (12) and they serve as a linkage to the current U.S. military occupation and the ways that Guam nationals are used as cheap labor for the current regime as well.
The ditty that the grandmother sings is a case of one occupier’s words replacing another. Does it really matter if the grandmother is counting in Japanese or reciting a date in English? Only to the occupier. The sing-song quality of both reduces them to mere sounds but this diminishment also serves to underscore how tightly the Japanese and American occupations are bound together. The ditty begins with a historical date and then utilizes the language of kinship and desire. However, the original does not include the line, “people went crazy right here in Guam.” This newly inserted line no longer absolves the people of Guam, nor does it cast the Americans in a completely blameless light. The implication is that everyone, all people, went “crazy” in Guam on this day and perhaps continues to do so in light of the intense military build up. The last couplet evinces a desire and invitation for the Americans to return which re-codes the verse as “an apparatus for remembering many different things: it recalls a Chamorro story of intense suffering, of enduring loyalty to the United States, and finally, of intense gratitude and love toward America for returning to ‘liberate’ the Chamorros” (Diaz 157). This “intense gratitude” is reflected in the invitation for “Uncle Sam” to return to Guam which portrays desire and longing for the U.S. military to return and to “save” the people of Guam. These wartime stanzas serve to emphasize the need for American intervention and reiterate how much U.S. militarization absolutely depends on Japanese brutality. This demonization justifies using Guam as “the tip of the spear” for the U.S.’s Asian defense strategy. While the initial return of the U.S. military was undoubtedly welcome, it is also clear that they have long overstayed their welcome.
The last lines of the poem reflect upon the irony of the memorialization of the war in Guam, an irony that seems to be lost upon the officials creating celebrations like Liberation Day and the War in the Pacific National Park. The man whose story is being told remains anonymous and representative of the experiences of men both during and post-war.

he spent two years in forced labor camps
soldiers came in their truck early morning roll call and drove him and other to build the airstrip in barrigada picks and shovels sacks and shoulder bars
[…]
he was then stationed in asan to construct machine gun encampments first they made the forms mixing salt water from the beach with cement and sand
he said, “the quality of the concrete was not good because of the salt” after they made the foundation and retaining wall they set the concrete
[Guahan remains one of the few official colonies in the world]
he said he never carved his initial into the concrete he said he even tried to avoid leaving fingerprints
the next morning they tore out the form twenty years later he would return to Guahán as the superintendent of the national park service war memorial
he said “my job was to preserve things that i wasn’t willing to build”

(81-82).

For this man, his wartime service is ironically reflected in his present as the guardian of memorials that he doesn’t want to keep. The temporary and crumbling nature of the Japanese occupation is contrasted to the ever-lengthening duration of the American occupation. The attempts by the man in the poem to erase any sign of his involvement and his forced labor in building the foundations is cruelly compared to his current occupation of preserving the signs of his own servitude – in both cases, we see the unwillingness and the resignation. This unwilling memorialization points to one of the ways which “An American fiction of itself was inscribed and maintained, fought for and protected in an on places like Guam […] to accomplish that specific act of historical and cultural construction” (Diaz 157-158) and the desires of those who have the most to do with war are those with the least amount of power to object and thus are overlooked.

While this situation is changing, it is often the voice of the people of Guam who are often disregarded.

The next poem, “from Lisiensan ga’lago” consists of nine words surrounded by a box with eight of the words crossed out. The words are a mixture of English and Chamorro, “ocean,” “peace,” “light,” “niyok” (coconut), “tano” (land), “hanom” (water), “breath,” and “bread” but the only word not crossed out is “attadok” which means, “arrivals.” Superimposed upon this box of words is the number “8000” in dark, supersized font. Below this montage are the words, “please visit:” and then a listing of three different websites all dedicated to news about Guam and the decolonization
process. The invitation in the previous poem expressed in the popular wartime ditty for Uncle Sam to come back again has been answered and now approximately eight thousand Marines and their nine thousand dependents are being moved from Okinawa to Guam as part of a 2006 agreement between the U.S. and Japan for a realignment of troops in Asia ("Minaghet"). The polite, “please visit” pointing the reader to the websites has a different connotation to its invitation and instead of asking U.S. troops to come back to Guam, it is vehemently asking them to go away. The number “8,000” overwhelsms the fragile balance currently maintained and the result is an elimination of almost all natural resources as well as more abstract notions like peace and light. Following this poem is a map showing all of the various U.S. military bases on Guam. These two visual poems are the most explicitly anti-military and stand in stark contrast to Howard’s narrative. While Howard has already ceded the island to U.S. forces, Perez is working to re-claim Guam and to rescue his home from further invasion.

These three poems, “from achiote,” “from Ta(la)ya,” and “from Lisiensang’a’lago,” intersperse English, Chamorro and Japanese to explore the various manners of memorialization surrounding the Catholicization and colonization of Guam by the Spanish, the occupation by the Japanese during World War II, and the American liberation and its continued militarization. In each poem, the connection between the layers of colonization leave their mark upon the body as well as the land whether it is the bruises that result from not praying or the aching backs of those men and women forced to hard labor during the war to the overwhelming number of bodies expected to land again in the next few years as part of the expansion of the Marine Corps presence. Perez
does not deny or lament the past, instead he enfolds it into each poem recognizing that
the meaning of the past is malleable and serves the present, whatever those needs may be.

**Conclusion**

Working on this chapter has brought up numerous memories for me – an apt
reaction since the two texts that I examine are both concerned with memorialization as
well. How do we “remember” our past in ways that service our present? How does a
nation or a group of people remember their past and for what purpose? As Carol Gluck
says in her essay, “The Idea of Showa,” “In the open debate over nation history […] the
past itself is a medium, in which fundamental political, social, and cultural issues were
being expressed or contested on the terrain of public memory” (2). For Perez and
Howard, the past has been pressed into service to look towards two different futures.
Howard’s biography of his mother is utilized to make the argument that Guam “deserves”
to be fully included in the national body politic of the United States. Perez’s work looks
to the past in order to say, “enough is enough” and to envision a free and sovereign future
for Guam.

I began with the Supreme Court case, *Downes v. Bidwell*, to not only contextualize the
liminal nature of citizenship that both Howard and Perez grapple with in their texts but
also to demonstrate how a concern with the body is not solely the territory of minoritized
writers. Since the very beginning of the United States as a nation, its citizenry has been
closely monitored for specific types of desirable and undesirable bodies. Even those
already located within the borders of the nation, American Indians, African slaves, Asian
laborers, were denied citizenship. Those located outside of the contiguous borders of the
U.S. continue to face barriers for the recognition of their citizenship. In the case of Guam, citizenship has been granted but it has also been denied. In examining the literature from Guam, we are able to further understand the depths of the paradoxical nature of citizenship under an imperial flag.
Where is the “I”land?: Samoa and the Self

“We each have preferred maps, learned maps – what we believe our cultures, our nations, ourselves were and are”—Albert Wendt

Where is the post-colonial? Where does the “I” belong? How is the “I” created and how does that knowledge and production differ depending on where one literally stands? Is the “I” always alone or is there room for “we” within subjectivity? These are the questions that haunt this project. The “post” in “post-colonial” seems to indicate a temporal moment, a moving beyond an outmoded political practice, literary theory, or aesthetic movement such as “post-modernism” or “post-structuralism” or even “post-feminism.” However, new geographical criticisms indicate that it is space, rather than time, that is a “social product, one that masks the conditions of its own formation” (Blair 544). In choosing to focus on the large geographical region known generically as “the Pacific” (or Pacific Rim, Pacific Basin, or even the Pacific Islands), I layer the spatial with the temporal. Is there something specific to this locale that places it imaginatively in the “post-colonial”? And is “post-colonial” even the term that is the most productive to use in this case?

Ella Shohat, in her essay, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’” points out that one of the problems of using the term “post-colonial” is that it “implies a narrative of progression in which colonialism remains the central point of reference…but which leaves ambiguous its relation to new forms of colonialism, i.e. neo-colonialism” (107). Shohat seems to fall on the side of “neo-colonial” and “post-independence” as her terms of choice to more accurately describe both temporally and geo-politically what might be happening in
various locales. However, the term “post-colonial” seems to have gained currency in the North American academy partially because of the supposed distance of the United States from the ravages and responsibilities of empire. However, the literature from the Pacific enriches the field of postcolonial studies by demonstrating that the usual focus on a “white” Europe and a “black” frontier doesn’t fit because of intra-Pacific colonization (primarily the secondary colonialism of New Zealand and Australia), inter-island immigration, and Asian migration. The Cold War policies and aims of the United States and Japan have also displaced European interests in the Pacific, which were primarily resource driven, and have made this region a nuclearized and militarized outpost where location has become of prime strategic importance.

Jenny Sharpe writes that “the ‘post-colonial’ [can] be theorized as the point at which internal social relations intersect with global capitalism and the international division of labor” ( ). Her definition can also shed light on the complex situation in the Pacific I look at texts from Samoa specifically to unearth this intersection between internal social relations in the families represented in these pages to see how their domestic relations are pressured by the demands of foreign interests. My purpose in this chapter then, is to demonstrate the ways in which the “space” of Samoa creates a unique site of post-coloniality and the ways that movement and statis within this space affects identity and subjectivity. I use two novels by Samoan writers. The first by Sia Figiel is titled Where We Once Belonged (1996) and the second is Albert Wendt’s Leaves of the Banyan Tree (1979). I chose Figiel’s text because it is the first published by a Samoan
woman and Wendt’s novel is considered by Pacific Islander scholars and critics as ground-breaking and it is canonical.

In my first chapter, I looked at the ways in which Hawai‘i acts, literally, as an in-between space, physically located between Asia and America but is still a part of the United States. As such, Hawai‘i becomes a “safe” place for the United States to imagine a sort of racial harmony that seems to elude the contiguous forty-eight, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In my second chapter, I utilize the domesticated foreignness of the Philippines, a post-colony whose government is still heavily dependent upon U.S. remittances and other economic support, as a way to examine how extra-territorial places help to define and coalesce the borders of an exceptional empire. In this chapter, I write about Samoa in order to examine the resonances of U.S. cultural imperialism in the Pacific. Samoa’s peculiar split status as both U.S. dependency and sovereign nation is reflected in the literature that I examine. Unlike Hawaii, which is included in the imagined community of the United States or the Philippines which has a long history of migration to and from the U.S., Samoa is rarely thought of as “American.”

One challenge in writing about this area is the way that postcolonial theory almost works here but doesn’t take into account the specificities of a non-European based mode of colonialism as well as the ways in which the binary of metropole/colony don’t neatly align with the case of Samoa because of the peculiar way that this island nation was

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14 It is important to keep in mind that there are actually two Samoas, one is American Samoa, the dependency and the other is Samoa (formerly Western Samoa), the independent nation. In this chapter, unless otherwise specifically stated, I refer to the nation of Samoa.
divided up during its bid for independence in 1964. One island became an independent nation and is now Samoa (which had previously been colonized by Germany and then New Zealand) and it still looks towards New Zealand\textsuperscript{15} as its metropolitan capital. The other island became American Samoa, which is still under dependent nation status with the United States. Despite this split, these two islands are nevertheless strongly connected because of a strong and continuing indigenous recognition of a continuation of family ties, language and a way of life called \textit{fa’a Samoa} (the Samoan way). Samoa is an example of the ways in which nationhood has been imposed and yet has not overcome an inter-island mentality that supersedes the western imposition of “nation.” In both Samoas there competing “missions” by Peace Corps volunteers and Mormons and the military. However different the impulse is amongst these groups, what remains constant is the perception that a posting in Samoa is a posting in the far flung wilderness and a place that is disjointed in both time and space where spatial isolation is equated with temporal backwardness. I am examining literature from Samoa instead of American Samoa because there has yet to be any literature from American Samoa available outside of the island. Keeping in mind the differences in the history and contemporary situation between these two island groups, I believe that the literature from Samoa still fairly represents a postcolonial situation common to both.

Within this public domain of “nation” I look at the ways in which supposedly private and “natural” attributes such as gender and ethnicity configures experience in these novels. That is, how does each gender experience the same space differently? How

\textsuperscript{15} And, of course, New Zealand, with its own colonized status and colonizing status is yet another issue in itself.
are white people and brown people portrayed? What are some of the coping strategies utilised and which strategies are used when? One of the reasons that I examine these novels through this lens, the geography of the body, so to speak, is that we still tend to think of matters of the body as private, especially in terms of sexuality, when in fact, these are the matters that are the most publicly regulated and disciplined. One example would be the continual association of women of color with an “exotic” sexuality and a lack of inhibition, especially Asian and Pacific Islander women. By asking the question, “what do we know about the body and how it occupies space and what can we learn from this?” we can do much to deconstruct our own assumptions about place, gender, and power regimes in a more complex way.

Underpinning this reading, however, is the central assumption surrounding the term, “experience.” It is difficult not to reify this notion into something outside of and somehow “beyond” material and historical conditions. For example, it is difficult to think that there isn’t some sort of essential biological basis for “woman,” however much that biological category gets culturally constructed and imbued with social meanings. However, the “experience” of being a woman (or man or homosexual or young, etc.) changes over time and place. Joan W. Scott, in her key essay, “Experience,” asks, “How can we write about identity without essentializing it?” and then partially answers her question by prescribing “trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced and which processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they aren’t noticed” (33).
The colonial project sought to discursively produce and define the terms and limits of experience and identity through its endless regulations concerning “bodies and pleasures” to paraphrase Foucault. Relatively recently in Samoa, native authors have begun to write back about their own experiences and their own interpretations of events against the interpretation of experience by colonizers or other outsiders. Foucault warns us, however, that interpretation itself can become an appropriation of “a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a new game” (qtd. in Scott 37). However, it is only through interpretation and analysis that we can begin to understand what the game might be in the first place.

**Samoa and Literature**

There have been many stories and tales written about Samoa but the most notable are by Robert Louis Stevenson and by anthropologist Margaret Mead who made her reputation on her popular text, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In either case, the discursive creation of an idyllic life quickly becoming compromised by the incursion of western ways was one already familiar to home audiences used to the memorialization of the vanishing Native Americans, the frontier, and other places and people decimated by the colonization of natural resources by invading armies. There has always been a lurid fascination and revulsion for the exotic and the dispossessed particularly surrounding bodily practices – ranging from *sati* to cannibalism. Despite this theme’s familiarity, it was (and is) one that still resonated with audiences in America.
Writers such as Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt have written partially in order to correct the notion that Samoa is a place that still maintains an “authentic” or “natural” connection to nature and sexuality. They play with words, images and forms in order to simultaneously invite and refuse the reader’s understanding. They have begun to transform these images of the Pacific by insisting on a different version of stories, one that places Samoa at the center of the world instead of as a marginal, tiny island, lost in the vast oceanic expanse of the great Pacific and on a map that centers itself on landmasses.

Albert Wendt is a professor of English and has taught at both the University of New Zealand Auckland and the University of the Pacific, Fiji. Albert Wendt is probably the most well-known of Samoan authors and he continues to be a driving force behind the flowering of Pacific writing and publishing. In addition to his teaching, he has edited two major anthologies of Pacific writing, Lali: A Pacific Anthology (1980) and Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980 (1995) and authored numerous short stories, novels, plays and poems in addition to his political and teaching activities. His epic novel, Leaves of the Banyan Tree, published thirty years earlier, in 1979, is canonical. Wendt has specifically said that one of the reasons he writes is “to correct the inaccurate images of his people that have been created by early explorers and anthropologists like Margaret Mead” (Hereniko vii).

Wendt’s first novel focuses exclusively on men in his portrait of colonial Samoa on the verge of independence and he tells a story of one family as representative of the changes experienced by Samoa and its people in its gradual exfoliation of traditional
ways and its incorporation of Western values. Wendt has said in an interview that,
“Novels present the most complex histories that have been written. […] I learn more
from […] fiction than I would learn from history books” and that a novelist doesn’t set
out to “analyze the national personality of the country. You simply write about interesting
people. And if you write about them well, you will bring out some of the features of the
people of that country” (Hereniko and Hanlon 91).

His epic covers three generations of the Tauilopepe family and their rise from
poor aiga (family) to the richest, most powerful clan in Sapepe, a backwater village. The
novel is divided into thirds and begins with Tauilopepe Mauga’s story, then is interrupted
by his son Pepe’s narrative, and then extends to the narrative of Tauilopepe and Lalolagi
(Pepe’s son and Tauilopepe’s heir) and Galupo Malo, an illegitimate son of Tauilopepe’s.
Tauilopepe Mauga works and schemes his way to the top by adopting papalagi (white
man) ways, especially in terms of capital accumulation and religion. The first section is
thus aptly titled, “God, Money, and Success” and is also the name of the sermon
Tauilopepe preaches one Sunday at church. The middle section, “Flying-Fox in a
Freedom Tree” is adapted from an earlier stand-alone novella of Wendt’s, and begins
with Pepe’s invocation of Robert Louis Stevenson and his novels and tuberculosis, the
former a trait that he aspires to and the latter a state that he is already dying from. Pepe’s
story is essentially a complete repudiation of his father’s way of life and details his
education, marriage, law-breaking and finally his exile and disinheritance from the aiga
(family) up to his death from tuberculosis. The final section, “Funerals and Heirs” returns
to a much older and a supremely successful Tauilopepe and his heir, Lalolagi, Pepe’s son.
In this section, a young man, Galupo, is introduced as a prodigal son of a disgraced aiga in the village and he plots the downfall of Tauilopepe as revenge for his disgraced mother as well as to claim his own place in the family genealogy. Galupo manipulates events so that he becomes the heir to Tauilopepe’s plantation and his aiga status as village matai (chief).

Sia Figiel is the first Samoan woman to publish in English with her novel-length narrative Where We Once Belonged (1996). This narrative won the prestigious Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for a First Novel and Figiel has also written Girl in the Moon Circle (1996) and Those Who Do Not Grieve (1999) as well as volumes of poetry. I chose Figiel’s first book because it is structurally the most traditionally narrative and is the most accessible to non-Samoan audiences with a partial glossary of Samoan words and phrases and a somewhat linear structure with recurring characters. In this text, there is a sustained exploration of key questions surrounding identity and the specificities of gender in Samoa. Like Wendt, Figiel has also taught at University of Hawai’i Manoa and she continues her political activism at the office of the Congressional Representative Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa) where she has been a staff member since 2006. In the case of both authors, creative expression stands next to their political and cultural activism.

Figiel’s novel is commonly described as a “coming of age” story that centers on Alofa Filiga and her friends, Lili and Moa and her family. It is that but it is also a commentary on the postcolonial situation in Samoa rendered in linked vignettes, myths, dreams, rules and lists, as well as anecdotes about school, church, food, and beatings.
Alofa, her family and her friends attempt to negotiate their way through a landscape marked by the hegemony of Hollywood and pop culture and a society that at once values family and devalues the women in those families.

**The Places of Pleasure and Pain: Rebellious Laughter**

Sia Figiel, in her novel-length narrative, *Where We Once Belonged*, attempts to “write back” as an insider in order to break down the anthropological and ahistorical notion of “tradition” as it relates to Pacific Islanders, especially women. She does this through her use of female narrators and her focus on other female subjects. Not only does this text challenge the readers’ expectations of Pacific Islander life through its gendered portrayals, it tests readers through its fragmented form of linked vignettes known as “su’ifefiloi”, its mixture of Samoan and English with an incomplete glossary, and its appropriations of Samoan myths, magical realism, multiple points of view and a mixture of writing styles such as first person direct address, lists, songs, and prayers which highlights the layered and incomplete nature of narrative and its relation to lived experience.

Figiel’s explains that her style is heavily influenced by her exposure to *fagogo* (storytelling or legends) and *solo* (poetry) and is an attempt to “relexify” Samoan into English. Relexification means “to replace the vocabulary of a language with words drawn from another language, without changing the grammatical structure” (Nunes 14). Figiel’s

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16 Of course, the notion of “inside”/”outside” is itself highly contested and contestable. Ethnic studies (and other fields concerned with “minority” interests) both reify and attempt to dissolve difference. In Pacific Islander studies, there is often an identification of subject position that degrades to a recitation of bloodlines and ones “authenticity is often related to tribal/ethnic affiliation. Both Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel are representative of the difficulty of parsing through the weight given to ethnicity versus location. Wendt is ethnically Tongan but grew up mostly in Papua New Guinea as the son of missionaries whereas Figiel is ethnically ½ Samoan but grew up mostly in New Zealand and Germany.
style, influenced by her multi-lingualism, her experience as a performance artist as well as her position as a woman and an expatriate, simultaneously allows us to glimpse life in contemporary Samoa but Figiel also uses these forms to confuse the non-Samoan as a way of demonstrating how much we (non-Samoan) readers will never know or understand (Subramani 121).

The vignettes mainly center on Alofa and there is a vaguely temporal telos of the narrative that begins with Alofa’s “innocent” state, that is, pre-menstrual as she is the “last in our circle to catch the moon-sickness”(1) to her understanding about the death of her aunt Siniva who committed suicide and was exiled from the aiga (family) for her refusal to fit in with either western or Samoan expectations. Alofa changes from the “aka kauvala’au [cheeky]” (6) girl who laughs all the time to one who wonders, “should I too pour kerosene over my body and run towards the sea? Should I too put a rope around my neck and hang from a breadfruit tree, drink weedkiller, or eat wild berries? (239).

Through the experiences related in the book, the reader begins to understand that this response, while a not-uncommon one, is ultimately not one that Alofa chooses because she is able to synthesize her multiple influences while still recognizing the painful path that is ahead of her.

One of the main themes of this book is the shaping of identity and Figiel focuses on some of the ways that identity comes into being through community. The title, Where We Once Belonged, refers to both the gradual replacement of communal values by Western individualism as well as a wistful reflection on the changes wrought by Christianity and Coca-Cola. Community in this text includes family and friends as well as
church congregants, teachers, and Western media such as television and movies. The author writes about the ways that gender is a defining factor in creating identity as well and the negotiations that continually test and transgress boundaries of public and private, self and other.

Woman, as object and symbol, has been associated with families and homes through an institutionalized naturalization process that attempts to deny political, and thus public, subjectivity. We see evidence of this socio-political process through a society still governed by Judeo-Christian norms that emphasize a patriarchal hierarchy in the church and in the family, a labor market that is still heavily segregated in terms of gender and even a variety of federal regulations (or lack of regulation) that denigrate child-rearing or child-bearing such as lack of available and affordable child care or lack of access to contraception. The combination of these norms and regulations press the connection between “woman” and “home” and imply a static, timeless quality to the “natural” role of women, a role that is decidedly tied to the material and to the body. Much of the negotiation of identity by the girls in this story between the pressures imposed by family, education, and other social institutions occur within a home. One of the initial changes that occur in the process of identity formation is the change from child to adult through the period of adolescence. Changes in the body, changes in responsibilities and expectations, and changes in desires all come crashing together.

One of the first scenes in the novel is of Alofa and her friends, Moa and Lili, getting together in the house of Mr. Brown, a “palagi [white person]” who “worked for the Bank of Western Samoa” (6) to see all of his rooms and to eat his foreign food. As
they are looking through his refrigerator and cupboards for ice cream and other novelties, Alofa spots a box of cornflakes. She explains:

I had never seen cornflakes in real life. I’d always seen them on TV. A woman pouring milk into a bowl of cornflakes. A man smiling at the woman. The woman smiling at a boy. The boy smiling at a girl. The girl smiling at a big dog. Happy music everywhere. Cornflakes made palagi people happy. I wanted to see what it could do to Moa and me. (9-10)

As Alofa reaches for the cornflakes, a pornographic magazine falls down at her feet and Alofa is confused because “The women in the magazine were very happy-looking…but not cornflake happy” (12). Here, confusion arises because of the differing types of “happy” but both having to do with consumption. In one case, white people are happy because they can consume the exotic breakfast food of cornflakes and in the other, women are portrayed as “happy” to be the objects of a devouring gaze. The juxtaposition of the cornflakes and the magazine demonstrate the side by side commodification that occurs with women as both consumer and consumed. However, it is Alofa’s reaction that provides the scene’s revelation of identity and community and it complicates the expected and overdetermined narrative of victimization.

After looking at the magazine, Alofa realizes that “Suddenly my panties were wet in the crotch…and that had never happened before. My heart was beating-beating-beating also. I was afraid of what was happening, and I was hoping, too, that Lili and Moa’s crotches were also wet’” (12). Instead of embarrassment or shame, Alofa feels desire. Alofa’s desire serves two purposes: it demonstrates how desire exceeds boundaries and
rules concerning female sexuality and it also emphasizes the communal nature of experience. Instead of desire being experienced individually, Alofa wants to make sure that it is a shared event and her understanding of herself as a woman occurs within the company of her friends. Here, the experience of sexuality and pleasure is experienced in a relatively safe, homosocial communal setting whereas later heterosexual experiences are linked to shame, punishment, cruelty and isolation.

Alofa’s explains the insufficiency of the typically Western notion of individual identity during a school assignment to write an essay on any of choices of: “1. My village. 2. My pet. 3. On my way to School today I saw a…” (135) and Alofa writes about her “pet” pig that is being raised by her family to eat. Miss Cunningham “the American peacecorps” teacher (135) tries to explain to Alofa that the pig that belongs to her whole family is not something that is hers alone and emphasizes the possessive pronoun, but Alofa still doesn’t understand. Alofa tries to puzzle out the difficulties of this essay assignment and concludes that, “I knew only that it was hard to witness something – anything – alone. You were always with someone. I didn’t go to school alone. I went to school with Moa and five, maybe even ten, other girls at the same time” (136) and finally realizes that “Nothing was witnessed alone. Nothing was witnessed in the ‘I’ form – nothing but penises and ghosts. ‘I’ does not exist, Miss Cunningham. ‘I’ is ‘we’…always” (137). The communal form of identity is not one that rules out the discernment of individuals as separate and unique beings. Instead, the communal identity is one that emphasizes the creation of self within a community and awareness that there is no such thing as “I” without others to reflect back a sense of self. Alofa’s assertion that
“I” is always “we” is correct in this sense and demonstrates that it is the Western notion of individual action and agency that is the mistaken one.

While the above examples seem to valorize a “traditional” way of being, i.e. the communal versus the individual, Figiel is clearly not advocating a return to a pre-contact Samoa. Instead of a static picture painted by colonialist narratives that would appropriate Samoan culture and tradition, Figiel paints a picture of the hybrid nature of the contemporary moment. Right before the cornflakes scene, Alofa revels in watching American television and she and her friends imagine themselves as each of the Charlie’s Angels, Kelly, Jill and Sabrina. They also love heading into town to watch Bruce Lee films and washing their hair with Wella Green Apple shampoo. There is a real pleasure that these girls take in appropriating Western culture for their own ends. This might seem to point to a celebration of hybridity, but read in conjunction with other scenes, a much more complex picture emerges.

Hybridity is a concept that has received much attention in the last ten years as a key part of the rise of postcolonial studies. Some key attributes of the discourse surrounding hybridity emphasize several things: there is no such thing as a “native” or “traditional” purity or authenticity, cultural mixing is a two-way affair rather than the one way imposition of a colonial norm, hybridity is a state of being to be celebrated rather than decried, and finally, hybridity is also a strategy of resistance and strength rather than a position of capitulation and half-hearted assimilation. Lisa Lowe’s definition is narrower and defines “hybridity” as “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations […] Hybridity,
in this sense, does not suggest the assimilation [...] to dominant forms but instead marks
the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination” (67). What
is particularly useful in Lowe’s definition, however, is the notion of “survival” versus the
valorized concept of “resistance.” These two contradictory positions create a sort of “in-
betweenness,” an ambiguity and ambivalence that can be unsettling to the subject as she
tries to determine her path.

Alofa describes herself and her friends as “in-betweens” and she further explains
that “we were not completely good and we were not completely bad” (5) and despite their
attempts at “good” things, such as never missing church meetings, doing chores for the
pastor, helping their mothers cook and clean, “We were in-betweens because we loved
laughing, and laughed and laughed at the slightest things” (5). Laughing is viewed as a
dangerous and subversive activity because laughing inherently disturbs order and while it
recognizes power and authority, it also refuses to allow them absolute control.

Alofa and her friends tease each other and play tricks on the boys who mock
them, they go to the movies and swim in the ocean and manage to have fun wherever
they go but while these games might ameliorate some of the harshness of their lives, it
ultimately doesn’t protect them from a life of poverty, beatings, and sexual pressures and
incest. One afternoon Alofa and her friend Moa discover their friend, Lili, beaten and
bloody in an abandoned house after she has just miscarried. Like the house, used and
abandoned by its family, Lili has also been used and abandoned and they all learn a harsh
lesson. Alofa and Moa attempt to comfort her but then Lili tells them her father was the
one who beat her as well as impregnated her. After finding this out, Alofa is silenced and
“didn’t say a word for the rest of the day. I didn’t even sing during the lotu [church service] that evening. What for?” (64). Alofa is angered by Lili’s father’s incestuous behavior but not his beating. Alofa explains that “Being beaten up is alofa – love. Real love. Real love is when children are beaten up bad by their parents. […] To beat a child is to give her respect, to teach her how to behave, to teach her to be humble, to listen, to obey, to love her” (222). It is hard to agree with Alofa’s definition of love, but it is a definition that also demonstrates the harshness of everyday life.

Alofa wants to be accepted and loved for being a “good” girl. She recites the lists of rules and tests for what girls should or shouldn’t do, things like, “Girls should never dry themselves with the same towel a boy or a man has used” or “Girls should always volunteer to do housework” (36) or “If you can jump rope with your eyes closed and cotton stuck in your ears and say the names of all your relatives at the same time, then you have passed the test for truth telling” (47). Of course, the church has plenty of rules for girls, too. Rules that Alofa meekly recites such as, “we were not allowed to laugh too much or too loudly. We were taught to be meek […] Never wear the same panty twice when you have the moon sickness. Never laugh at blind people or deaf people…or palagis. Never walk around alone at night – only bad girls and teine o le po [lit. child of the night] walk around that late. Never wear anything exposing your knees. Never wear pants on the malae [open space in the village for ceremonies] or at the pastor’s house” (141) and the list of restrictions goes on. Importantly, laughter is one of the actions to be reined in demonstrating laughter’s subversive power. It’s not a lot of power, but laughter shows that the opposition is not infallible. This sort of masochistic self-denial in order to
become a “proper” young lady demonstrates that a communal, social identity is not an easy task and a laborious construction that bears the marks of the quandary of gaining approval through the habitual denial of self and agency.

The ending depicts Alofa coming to a layered subjectivity and an understanding that there are multiple ways to express the discontent and also to accommodate the ways that her world has changed due to continuous Western influence in media and religion. Alofa remarks, “As I thought these thoughts the Tuli of Tomorrow flew high up in the sky, a fue [chief’s fly-whisk] tattooed on her wings, a to’oto’o [talking chief’s staff] tattooed on her peak […] and I began walking…walking-walking…away from Siniva’s grave…towards the new gathering place where ‘we’ once belonged” (239). The “Tuli of Tomorrow” seems to promise a brighter future, one that successfully combines fa’a Samoa (the Samoan way) symbolized through the tattooing of the fue and the to’oto’o which represents a hierarchy that has not yet fallen into Western standards of hyper-masculinity combined with Alofa’s deliberate walking away from the gravesite but there is still a tinge of regret in the last three words of the text which, at the same time, signifies a disabling fracture from the past. Alofa’s position as a teen girl, as well as her own specific experiences and knowledge, places her in an ambivalent position between the dangers that “home” and “tradition” can represent as well as the frightening future foretold by her Aunt Siniva’s suicide.

This ending echoes another famous ending in Asian American literature in John Okada’s No-No Boy when Ichiro, the main character, walks away from another dead body:
A glimmer of hope – was that it? [...] He walked along, thinking
searching, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the
community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive
insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart.

(250-251)

In both cases, these two characters, marginalized because of ethnicity and gender, are
captured in between – Alofa is caught between two paths, rejection of Westernism as well
as her Samoan family and village or acceptance of these things, neither of which are very
palatable and Ichiro is only afforded an “alleyway” from which to chase the “faint and
elusive insinuation of a promise.”

These ambivalent endings serve to move beyond the binary models of oppression,
I.e. oppressor/oppressed and resistance/acquiescence, and point towards the ways of re-
articulating an identity. Both of these endings demonstrate that a subject does not stand
outside of a structure of power to “resist” but rather is caught within a complex web of
dominance that provides various avenues of agency and subjectivity, no matter how
difficult those choices may be. In both cases, these characters recognize their
marginalization but they all choose to walk different paths.

In Albert Wendt’s novel, The Leaves of the Banyan Tree, laughter and pleasure
are tools in the arsenal of survival but ultimately they are not enough to do battle against
the relentless pressures of family, capitalism, church, and other social expectations. The
novel is divided into thirds and the middle section titled, “Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree”
is the story of Pepe, the son of Tauilopepe, whose family story is the basis of the novel.
The section opens up with Pepe’s explanation that he is dying of tuberculosis and thus needs to hurry and tell the story of his life. As he explains, “You get Tb [sic] and you want to be a verse-maker. […] I decided to become the second Robert Louis Stevenson, a tusitala or teller of tales. But with a big difference. I want to write a novel about me” (158).

From the opening, it is clear that Pepe wants to claim Samoa for himself and wrest it away from palagi representations but he does so through the appropriation of one of the most famous white tale-tellers about Samoa. Pepe’s mediated claim self-consciously admits that there are no pure spaces in Samoa any longer. It is also clear that he is a trickster and a joker but he also makes it clear that his jokes and word-play are meant to arouse curiosity and to question the order of things. He warns us:

So, before I continue my novel, let me tell you that I am, as my friends know well, a tall-teller of tales. Or is it a teller of tall-tales? So please read this humble testament with fifteen grains of Epsom salts, and please excuse the very poor grammar. You see, I did not have much formal education. Unlike many of the present generation who went away overseas and returned with degrees in such things as education, drinking, revolutions, themselves, and more themselves, etc. (159)

Of course, Pepe’s grammar has been impeccable to this point but his sarcastic commentary about those who have been educated overseas turns out to be true, especially in the case of his own son, Lalolagi, who turns out to be a selfish and lazy but an expert in spending money and drinking at the club.
While Pepe doesn’t go overseas to school, he does leave his home village of Sapepe and his first day of school is overwhelming but he quickly makes friends with another joker, Tagata, who becomes a lifelong companion. They play a trick on the teacher who tries to humiliate Pepe in front of the classroom by instigating a long speech interrupted by comic questions all under the guise of sincerity. This pattern repeats itself through their lives. Later, when Pepe is expelled and goes to live in Apia, they play similar tricks on American tourists who come to the marketplace years later.

Masterfully perceiving that the assumption of superiority by the teacher leaves her vulnerable to tricks, the same is true of the American visitors. Tagata greets their taxi and says, “‘Howdy frands. Nice day, ain’t it?’ […] They are astounded. ‘Now, today we gonna show ya the real genuine Samoan market.’ The men try not to laugh, but their women do” and then Tagata proceeds to cheat them out of as much money as possible by showing them around the market and “describ[ing] Samoa to the tourists, like it is Hawaii which he has seen in the Hollywood movies. The Yanks nod the head. One woman says, ‘Gee, it is lovely. I never believed they are as civilized as this’ (188). Then Tagata takes them to a market stall manned by another friend who poses as a poor man down on his luck selling ancestral necklaces which are really made of toothbrush handles. Their friend, Lafoga, pretends to be reluctant to sell his family “heirlooms” until the Americans practically throw their money at him because “‘Poor man does not want to sell but he needs the money,’ one woman says. ‘Buy the lot’” (189). After purchasing the

There is a long history of institutionalized “Joking Nights” in Samoan culture. The comedians on stage (or in the center) are not held responsible for the parodies and caricatures that they perform of those in power. Thus, laughing and joking in Samoan culture is an institutionalized way of safely critiquing those in power and there are regularly held “Joking Nights” by schools, youth groups, and villages as fundraisers.
fake hierlooms Pepe explains that “The Yanks sigh because they are glad to get away from their first sight of misery and poverty. You see, there are no beggars in America, so the movies show you, and it upsets Yanks to see beggars” and “Tagata praises the USA all the while as we go round. He says that the USA is the best goddam country on earth. The Yanks fall for it, because they are hearing what they believe and are willing to pay money to hear a foreigner, a dwarf, saying it” (189). The literal purchasing power of the Americans, shield them from any long lasting guilt and maintain the appearance of benevolence and justness.

Although Tagata and Pepe laugh and count their money, it is unclear, in the end, who is the butt of the joke. Initially, of course, it is the gullible Americans who are foolish and while they enjoy their feelings of superiority, echoed in the woman’s surprise at the “civilized” nature of Samoans and their charitable purchase of the necklaces, but they are also uncomfortable confronting the reality of a poor country with poor people. The Americans use their money as a way to “help” those in the marketplace but they are also the ones who are able to leave the dirt and the poverty and return home with their “exotic” souvenirs.

After this scene, Pepe returns to the current moment in the hospital and he says in a lengthy tirade:

“My country does not need writers like me; it wants tourists; and I am sure that after I die Samoa is going to be like Hawaii and Tahiti and all the other tourist centres which are tropical paradises in the posters but which are con-men paradises for stripping tourists naked. The tourist trade is
going to be the new missionary trade, only this time the Bible is to be the Yankee dollar […] and the altar of sacrifice is to be our people, and the choirs are to be ‘natives’ in ‘genuine Samoan dress’ from Hollywood, singing ‘genuine Samoan songs’ from Hawaii, and dancing ‘genuine Samoan dances’ like the hula. […] And we are laughing. (189-190)

Pepe’s initial raucous laughter at the tricks played on tourists becomes bitter as he predicts the “fake” pan-Pacificism of a Hollywood that neither knows nor cares about the particularities of each of the many island nations in the Pacific. Although the diatribe’s concern with the “genuine” is potentially problematic in its delineations of authenticity, Pepe’s outburst is valid in its concerns about the commodification of identity under the homogenizing tourist gaze.

Pepe comes to the realization that Westerners have done more harm than help and he significantly comes to this realization within the most Western of institutions, the hospital where he is dying of a disease introduced by Western sailors: tuberculosis. Just like Alofa comes to realize the dangers and pleasures of sexual desire within the privacy of various homes, Pepe comes to realize the ambivalent nature of “progress” within Westernized locations.

Pepe’s friend, Tagata, the one who was quick to defend and to laugh with Pepe in school, ends up committing suicide. Tagata’s suicide letter echoes some of the earlier sentiments of Pepe’s and Tagata writes:

Because life is ridiculous it has to end the most ridiculous way, in suicide like Christ. Laugh, Pepesa […] Laugh, Pepesa, because there is nothing
else to do. The paplagi [white man] and his world has turned us[...] and all the modern Samoans into cartoons of themselves, funny crying ridiculous shadows on the picture screen [...]. [I] leave in this my will, but 1001 laughs, as the movies say, which I desire you, your Excellency, to laugh one laugh every night from now on until you die. One laugh laughed loud will keep away sorrow and your father and the Romans and the LMS [London Missionary Society] and the modern aitu [ghosts] and the police and the Judge and bad breath. One laugh will turn everything to lava and joy and forgiveness. (226)

Laughter has turned from a tool to survive to the last gasp of hopelessness. Even though Tagata insists that laughter will keep away sorrow and religion and all of the other bad things that Western contact has brought, it is the laugh in the face of a tidal wave. It might be defiant, but it is also the laugh of despair. After reading Tagata’s suicide note, Pepe resigns himself to dying as well and he realizes that there is no changing the world now, there is no movement backwards. The only movement possible, as Pepe sees it, is one of destruction and it is a fruitless destruction. Finally, at the end, while there might be laughter, Pepe’s only vision is one of maggots eating at his flesh “like bubbles as beautiful as diamonds” (229). Pepe reflects, “I have travelled and have seen what there is to be seen and felt and done what there is to do, and I found laughter” (229) and he finds comfort in the thought of going to join his friend Tagata in death and to continue his laughter, a laughter that was never sufficient in the material world.
In Wendt’s novel, as in Figiel’s novel, laughter and pleasure are initially portrayed as potent tools in the arsenal for survival but ultimately they are insufficient in the face of the overwhelming forces of capitalism, modernization, and Western religion. While Figiel’s novel shows possibilities in the face of pain and difficulty, she doesn’t valorize a static notion of a “pure” past. Wendt’s novel, on the other hand, is fairly uncomplicated in its wholesale condemnation of Western colonization and capitalism. Through the favorable portrait of Pepe and his friends and the unsympathetic characterizations of Samoans who adopt Western ways, Wendt’s sympathies are clear.

**Marginality and the Marketplace**

Another important feature of resistive critical theories such as feminism, postcolonial studies, or ethnic studies was the initial emphasis place on the “marginal.” By highlighting the insidious ways that certain people were pushed to the margins of the socio-political process because of the color of their skin, their gender, their class or their sexual identification, among other characteristics, these theories delineated the ways which the “center” was a tenuous place to be in that it required constant affirmation of what it was *not*. Although the “center” is a tenuous position it is not to say that it isn’t a powerful one. One of the technologies of maintaining an ideological “center” was to literally spatialize the center and the periphery through colonial conquests.

Colonialism is as bureaucratic as it is ideological and its many institutions served to ideologically separate “us” from “them” as well as to define, separate, and emplace certain bodies in certain locales. One example of this shift in perspective is the marginalizing of one’s own country through the tools of textbooks, religious practices
and fashion. No longer the center of the world, a colonized locale now becomes
peripheral with the metropole/center now located elsewhere (Paris, London, Washington,
D.C.), oftentimes thousands of miles away. This imperial shift demonstrates the
discursive construction of the binary split insisted upon by the logic of colonialism.

One of the key themes in this narrative is finding one’s place, whether that place
be within a genealogical line or analyzing the myriad “centers” and thus, myriad
peripheries, of a person’s life. Alofa’s “place” is shaped by two things that she cannot
change, she is a girl and she is Samoan. These two aspects mark her journey in very
specific ways.

Figiel’s chapter titled, “The Centre” highlights the instability of the discursive
practice of naming and placing. The narrator states, “Apia, capital of the Independent
State of Western Samoa. Apia, centre of all commercial and governmental activities,
tourism, and trade” and then astutely observes, “There is no consensus as to what the
centre of Apia is. Everyone has their own version, their own definition, which varies in
degree from one person to another” (65). This chapter then dutifully describes all of the
various “centres” of Apia – the LMS (London Missionary Society) building thought to be
the center by Fesili Aku-Iai the Protestant minister, the Catholic cathedral presided over
by Fathers Francis Boaz and Fai’ipula Beaglehole which is identified as the centre by
“Soia [who] doesn’t care about Apia…[and] doesn’t care about the nature/nurture thing
either ” (70), the kung-fu theater is the center for “Alaisa Fiaola-Confusion, the half
Chinese boy from Alamagoto” (70), and “The dead dogs of Apia don’t give a damn about
the center […] They don’t waste time thinking about where things are. Nor do they care
to name them. They just know. […] New Market is the centre…always has been, always will be” (73).

Placed within this chapter is also a mythic version of the creation of Samoa and the etymology of the name “Samoa” (“Sa” meaning sacred and “Moa” meaning the middle or the center), a short genealogical history of one of the taxi-drivers Ludwig “(Luki) Spinoza whose great-great-grandfather Heinrich was a colonist (but a good one, his great-great-grandchildren would like us to remember)” (83), and what we later learn is the back story to Alofa’s own illegitimate origins and her mother and father’s coming together. These histories placed side by side in this chapter re-place Samoa, colonialism, and Alofa herself at the center of things, too.

This chapter demonstrates that the power to decide where the center is, is a key one because from the center comes strength, both socio-political as well as personal. Declaring certain locales and/or people “marginal” also carries with it the connotation that they and their opinions, feelings, and standards, do not matter and thus weakens social ties, self-esteem, even familial connections. Alofa’s in-between status is both a demonstration of the marginalizing of the “in-between” but it also demonstrates that there are still unknown paths that are not pre-determined and thus when she walks away from her aunt’s graveside at the end of the text, she is going towards a “new gathering place” (239), one that is indicative of the new paths that must be carved out in the mish-mash world of the new Samoa.
Rebels With a Cause: Education and Anger in the Post-Colony

While Alofa works to re-center herself through the incorporation of multiple influences, Samoan as well as Western, the formalized education system in colonialist and neocolonialist situations is one that continually works to keep its pupils off balance and de-centered. One of the key experiences in both Figiel and Wendt’s novels is education. It is through formalized education that the grip of the colonial is most clearly seen through the well-meaning but misguided efforts of the Peacecorps teachers to the strict, militaristic style of boarding school headmasters. While education is presented as the necessary means to compete in and assimilate to a white man’s world, it is also the tool that reiterates the social hierarchy of white and brown. The role of education is a vexed one in postcolonial literature since the language and concepts are usually those of the colonizer and thus, the difficulty of coming to grips with a “raised” consciousness within the neocolonialist setting of school is a common theme. This difficult position often traps those who would protest against the “progress” and commodification of their cultures through Western commercial, media, and other influences in a stasis because it seems that no matter what kind of action is taken, it is tainted.

One of the effects of a colonial education is the emasculation or feminization of men. I use “emasculaton” to mean that masculine privilege is recognized and deliberately taken away, whereas with “feminization” there is no masculinity or associated privilege recognized in the first place. The stereotypes surrounding Pacific Islander men share more with nineteenth and twentieth century notions surrounding Africans and African Americans with simultaneous attribution of “savage” or “primitive”
characteristics such as lack of self-control, overt sexuality, and brute strength coupled with child-like attributes such as docility and diminished intelligence. While part of the feminization of Asian American men has to do with their association with the model minority, a term that distinguishes them from “non-model” minorities, i.e. those who would challenge existing racial hierarchies because an active, challenging character is one typically associated with male potency. Because Pacific Islanders do not fit into typical notions of “model minority” in terms of education or economics and are heavily represented in American football as well as in rugby (two sports that don’t have female equivalents), there usually isn’t the feminization that occurs with Asian American men. However, Pacific Islanders’ relative economic and political weakness serves to place them in a subordinate socio-political position, so an emasculation occurs, that is, a stripping away of power commonly associated with a hierarchy that values masculinity and its attributes.

In their home islands, Pacific Islander men have a similarly ambivalent power structure where colonial structures have upheld and reinforced traditional male roles while suppressing female roles of power such as with the role of the matai (chief). The matai is in charge of family and village decisions but it is a title and a responsibility that can be held by either men or women, although it is more commonly held by men. Men are still a source of much of the physical labor and indigenous men are more likely to hold positions of relative power in government jobs or other corporate fields. However,

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18 According to a recent 60 Minutes segment titled “Football Island”, American Samoa has a population of just over 65,000 and yet there are over 30 players of Samoan descent in the NFL. For interesting discussions of the re-masculinization of Pacific Islander men via sports see Vicente M. Diaz and Ty P. Kawika Tengan’s work.
the relative lack of education compared to *papalagi* (white or Western) workers in addition to a general lack of fluency in English places Pacific Islander men in a subordinate economic position. The corrosive effects of this systemic disenfranchisement express itself in ways similar to the ways that disenfranchised men around the world express hopelessness and helplessness with high rates of domestic violence, alcoholism, and suicide (Mayeda et al. 70). It is primarily in this educational/economic manner that Pacific Islander men are placed on a lower rung of the ladder.

In *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, Pepe suffers from feelings of displacement when he is sent away to go to school in Apia, the capital. During his first day of school, Pepe’s difference is continually highlighted by his own and his teacher’s observations. He notices that “The classroom is so different from the one in Sapepe. There it is an open fale [room] and we sit on the pebble floor and it is not hot like this one” (168). His anxiety over his origins is highlighted when the teacher introduces him to the class as “This is the new boy. He is from the *back*” (169, italics in original). These two observations – the distinctions between the two classrooms and the placement of Pepe from the “back” (the teacher might as well have said “backwards”), correlate the movement from the village to the city to one of progress and the spatial becomes overlaid with the temporal.

This movement becomes the physical analog to the (neo)colonialist rupture from a dark, primitive past to a bright future and to be smart enough and/or rich enough to go *away* becomes a recurrent motif. To leave the home village for educational purposes marks the disruption caused by geographical shift but also the fracture that occurs
because of the discipline of the educational institution itself. Pepe becomes painfully aware of the contradictory nature of places and of Westernized educational boarding schools and the manner in which these locales uphold colonial hierarchies.

Within the confines of the boarding school, where Pepe used to be one of the top students, he becomes disillusioned and disgusted with the hypocritical nature of the educational structure which mirrors the larger social structure in a colonized Samoa. Pepe attempts to seduce a fellow student for two reasons. First, he wants to expose the hypocritical nature of the social and religious regulations placed upon Samoan sexuality by Western culture. Pepe also uses his seduction of the girl to in order to demonstrate his disgust with the entire system of education and to force a confrontation with the authorities so that he can publicly show his disdain for the organization. Pepe is brought to the headmaster’s office and the interview quickly runs aground when Pepe starts off by asking:

“Why do you think we cannot rule our own country?”

“But we do, Peepee. We do. Uh-h. It is just that you people are not ready for leadership yet.”

“But we ruled ourselves for hundreds of years before you came.”

“Yes, but look where it got you.”

“Where?”

He slaps his desk. “Why did you call that girl prefect a…uh-h…a…”

“A bitch?” I help him.
He slaps his desk again and rises to his feet. “Now, Peepee. Now I do not want you talking like that. Hear? You have done wrong to that girl. Now you have to pay!”

“Like my people paid and are still paying?” I smile. “Like black men and Chinamen are paying all over the world.”

“You are a racist, boy. It is Samoans like you who make our good work here get nowhere. You are like all the other uppity and ungrateful Samoans!” he says.

I laugh. (183-184)

We see the anger and confusion by the colonial order when the colonized man is not adhering to stereotype. Thus, the contradictory accusation by Mr. Peddle, the headmaster, that it is Pepe who is racist because of his acknowledgment that race and ethnicity are important factors in the oppression of men around the world.

Highlighted in this passage is the erasure of women’s experiences under the double oppression of patriarchy coupled with colonialism. While it is unclear whether Wendt is unconcerned or simply unaware of women’s issues at the time of his writing this novel, but women are continually used as means to an end or are almost nonexistent in the narrative except as background figures. Wendt’s novel aligns nationalism with masculinity and his critique of colonialism is entwined with the critique of emasculation that accompanies it. In this narrative, women are objects to be utilized in the quest for re-asserting masculine agency and pride.
The third example of going away for education are the sons Lalolagi and Galupo. Lalolagi is Pepe’s son and he is completely devoted to Tauilopepe and his material ways. Lalolagi is sent overseas to New Zealand for his education. This signals that his family is quite wealthy and his experiences at boarding school come to us in epistolary form and are mainly missives detailing how fantastic the sports are and asking for extra money. On the other hand, Tauilopepe doesn’t realize that Galupo is his illegitimate son until almost the end of the novel when Galupo finally tells him about his difficult upbringing as a boy whose only obsession was novels and figuring out how to use people for profit – men for material wealth and women for sex – and then to utilize their weaknesses to his advantage. Galupo’s self-education moves him towards a particularly isolationist and nihilistic world view and he calls everyone else, “Other-Worlders” and only sees them as pawns in his life to move around as he pleases.

Galupo’s purpose in his moving to Sapepe is not necessarily to destroy Tauilopepe, rather he explains:

I want to claim my origins, my identity. I want a name. Yes, father, a name. […] Because you’ve turned this land, which rightfully belongs to me and to generations not yet born, into a mockery of what it should be. It is now a caricature like you, father, and all your kind who inhabit Apia. You are the shadows, men without souls. But I don’t suppose you understand what I’m trying to say. It’s too late. We’re years and an education apart and you’re just one of the ‘mimic men’, as one writer has put it so aptly […] My mind is also the best, the most devious, the most
heartless that papalagi books have produced in our sad country. You’ve always tried to know and love the papalagi world. But you’re an amateur at it. Me, I know the very depths of that world… (368-369).

And in many ways, Galupo is right – he has absorbed the true lesson of papalagi colonialism: other people and their land are there to move around like pawns in a game whose purpose is to increase wealth. “Other-worlders” cannot know, feel, or do the same things and thus it is permissible to subordinate and destroy them. Galupo’s migration from Apia to Sapepe is a particularly invidious metaphor for the way that neocolonialism has taken root in the very heart of the islands. While Tauilopepe adopted papalagi ways and forced them down the throat of his fellow villagers which led his neighbors fearing and disliking him, Galupo uses a mixture of Samoan methods such as displaying filial piety to his adopted aiga, taking part in the council meetings, and even converting some Mormon villagers to the dominant Methodist church of Sapepe in combination with his reliance on Western methods of accounting and work. The villagers are in awe of his papalagi knowledge and his willingness to come back to the village and to take part in traditional ways and are supportive of his plans to take over Tauilopepe’s aiga.

Wendt uses people in the same family as a means of showing the various and destructive responses to colonial education and Figiel uses family members to show different reactions to education as well. Alofa is afraid of being smart because the three women that she knows who were smart are mean, insane or dead but also because it means that she will be sent away to go to school. It is not just the separation from family that worries Alofa but that school is also the location of further beatings and humiliations
as well. She is teased one day because she doesn’t know what a daffodil is after memorizing “The Daffodils” by Wordsworth and she is forced to go to school one day with her head shaved after getting caught kissing a boy. But it is what happened to her aunt Siniva that causes the most fear for Alofa.

Alofa demonstrates one type of survival technique and she uses Siniva, Alofa’s aunt, to explore another type of “in-betweeness” that doesn’t work so well. While Alofa’s hybridized consciousness comes from cheesy TV shows like *Charlie’s Angels*, Bruce Lee movies and rock music, Siniva follows the more classic inculcation to the hybridized Western Samoa through formalized education. Siniva had been the star of her village and was the first one to go to New Zealand on a government scholarship to the university where she received her B.A. and M.A. in History. Instead “after she returned from New Zealand, and told everyone that Jesus Christ was not Samoan and that people were living in the darkness. The faifeau [pastor] said she was pitiful and it was such a waste” (199).

While Siniva condemns the unthinking consumption and rampant Westernization of Samoa, she hangs on to some of those same affects, such as her degree and even her rebellious attitude as proclaimed by Western norms of counter-cultural style. She was “fat, wore an afro, no bra…and you could easily see her nipples through the Jimmy [sic] Hendrix t-shirt she was wearing. Sandals. Peace earrings. Yin-yang rings. And a cap with a picture of a burning American flag and ‘Get out of Vietnam’ scribbled under it” (190-191). Siniva also adopts other Western modes of being and she lives “in the abandoned

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19 Of course, history as a subject is an intriguing authorial choice as the discipline blends seemingly rational and dispassionate narrative that presumes to supersede personal experience in order to teach one about one’s self.
house of the German man” and “besides Mr Brown (who is not a Samoan), Siniva was the only person in our village to have a fence around her property” (201).

While Siniva refuses to follow the script written for her by a neo-colonial regime that expects her to fall in line and get a good government job and reproduce what Homi Bhabha terms a “normalized knowledge” (86) she still adopts some of the trappings of western ideas especially in terms of private property. This notion is one that fatally divides her from the rest of her family and village and she is first beaten by the men in her family, then exiled. She eventually lives by herself on the outskirts of town. While Siniva insists that other Samoans are living in “darkness” her own blindness is described as the result of an encounter with a mythic Samoan bird:

Besides being the village fool Siniva was also a warrior. She was anointed by a bird who flew out of the Lightness […] There it told Siniva that she was wasting herself, and that she should live as a memory of those who lived in the Lightness […] ‘You are free,’ said the bird to Siniva. ‘You have remembered, again. Return to Malaefou and live among children. Tell them about us, Siniva. Tell them about our Lightness. Tell them that we are still there, that we live on. […] This Siniva obeyed. But, before she left the pond the bird scratched out her eyes and threw them to a water-eel swimming in the tears of the forgotten light. (193)

While Siniva literally lives in darkness as a blind woman, she insists that she lives in the light. This paradoxical situation analogizes the paradoxical circumstances of her remembrance in the first place when she had to go away to university in order to come
back home and “remember.” While Siniva begins to understand and is critical of current Samoan adoption of all things Western, she remains blind to her own acceptance of Western cultural norms that separate her from her family and village and thus her exhortations to her family that “Everyone is blinded […] Blinded by too many Bibles. Blinded by too many cathedrals…too many cars…too many faleapa…six million dollar men…too much bullshit” (237) sounds hypocritical. Siniva embodies the paradox of blindness and insight and ends up reiterating a rhetoric similar to colonialist narratives of a static and pure pre-civilized past. In both Wendt’s and Figiel’s work, the characters who cling to the past blindly are the same ones who can’t imagine a future that incorporates elements of both Western and Samoan life and thus both of them die, like their dreams of an unspoiled Samoa.

Like Siniva’s character in Figiel’s novel, Pepe’s Western education does not produce the docile colonial subject. Pepe completely rejects the two things that characterize his father: God and money, by refusing to work and by burning down a church. But these gestures prove futile for Pepe ends up in jail, exiled from his family, and finally dies of tuberculosis in a hospital outside of Apia. In many ways, Pepe’s character functions in a similar manner to Siniva’s in that he is an archetype of the awakened consciousness that has enough knowledge to be angry and disenchanted but not enough power or knowledge to do something productive about the system. In both cases, anger without direction ends in death.

The movement of all of the main characters tracks their ideological responses to westernization. Tauilopepe has a linear movement that goes from being a poor man in a
small backwater village to one of the richest Samoans in Apia and he embodies the unquestioning acceptance and utilization of western tools in the pursuit of “success.”

Pepe and Siniva’s journeys are circular and Pepe goes from Sapepe to Apia back to Sapepe and then back to Apia while Siniva goes from her village of Malaefou to New Zealand, back to her village and then to the outskirts which symbolize their vacillation between Western and more traditional Samoan ways. Galupo, the eventual heir to Tauilopepe’s fortune, moves from another small island in the Samoan group to Sapepe and he represents the nihilistic and cynical utilization of all of the tools afforded to him by both Samoan and Western ways. Alofa, out of all of the characters, is the one who is the only one who walks on a new, uncharted path. A frightening one, perhaps, but it is also one that demonstrates her courage.

**Conclusion**

These two books by Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt demonstrate just a few of the ways that in Samoa bodies are still mapped and moved through postcolonial politics. While traditional postcolonial theory is useful for the way that it describes power differentials and some of the effects of living within such an uneven system, discussions utilizing notions of movement and emplacement illuminate other aspects of contemporary Samoan life. Looking at the role of laughter and education enables us to reflect upon some of the possibilities and insufficiencies in these areas.

Albert Wendt’s novel is particularly powerful for its portrayal of multiple generations of men and the evolution of colonialism to neo-colonialism through the trope of movement and its metaphorical yoking with masculine privilege. Wendt’s work is
clearly a way of “writing back” in order to demonstrate the corrosive spiritual and psychological effects of colonialism on the men who live under it. Unwittingly, Wendt’s novel also demonstrates the double oppression of women under colonialism as his male characters all use women for material and sexual gain.

Figiel’s book also is a form of “writing back” and she does double duty by describing the narrow confines of the world of women who are restricted because of gender as well as ethnicity. Figiel also challenges typical Western notions of individuality and identity through her portrayals of women and community and subjectivity. As in Wendt’s novel, Figiel explores movement and emplacement particularly through her imagining the various centers available to the imagination. Constant in Figiel’s work is the notion of multiplicity in the sense that Lowe describes, “designating the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power” (67) but also in the sense of having multiple possibilities. While Wendt’s male characters are fairly static, Figiel’s main narrator, Alofa, constantly wonders about the multi-layered facets of people and places and comes to a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of her family and friends, especially for her lost Aunt Siniva who commits suicide at the end of the novel.

In both texts, there is the exploration of “in-betweenness” and its connection with laughter and pleasure, although that laughter is bittersweet to say the least. But, it is the possibilities of laughter, coupled with the vacillation between places, that provides a gleam of possibility. Neither Wendt nor Figiel provide happy endings. Instead their
novels end ambiguously because in the postcolonial Pacific where “I” and the “land” begin and end is just as ambiguous.
Conclusion: From Here to There

This dissertation begins with a chapter focusing on literature from Hawai’i written by an Asian American woman as an entry point to thinking about the ways in which the labels of “Asian American” and “Pacific Islander” arise in tension with each other because of seemingly stable divisions of identity and disciplinary studies. Nora Okja Keller’s position as an Asian American living in Hawai’i and writing about Korean women migrating to America under difficult circumstances might be seen as illustrative of the ways that the paradigmatic concerns of Asian American literature, migration and exclusion, overwhelm and subsume Indigenous concerns regarding representation, sovereignty and postcolonial power regimes. Amy Ku’leialoha Stillman demonstrates through her use of maps and mapping, that the cultural, commercial and military flows in and around the Pacific have long involved the fusion of Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Western colonial powers including the United States. Thus, Keller’s potent combination of U.S. and Japanese military incursions in Korea with migration to Hawai’i is the continuation of a story begun centuries ago.

I also begin with Keller’s work because it is problematic in its erasure of Native Hawai’ians within her text. This bears further critique as to the ways in which Asian locals have naturalized their position in Hawai’i through the displacement of Native Islanders. This narrative absence also marks a critical gap in Asian American studies. Though there are strong connections between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders through the nexus of “America,” there are also key differences. The maintenance of difference is difficult but it need not be fatal. Kandice Chuh points out, “In conceiving of
multiple kinds of differences, we must of course recognize that they do not exist independently of each other. Rather, they converge and conflict and thus participate in shaping each other” (148). I ask how the interactions between different people from different places and genders shape components of identity and how do each of these singularities in themselves -- place, gender, and power -- shape experience. To say that experience and identity are political is not an overstatement, but there is always a tension between the two poles of identity and politics. Of course, this is not the only way of thinking about the political and Kandice Chuh makes the argument that “the political may be seen to be animated by difference, not identity […] these terms allow us to take as motivating grounds for collaborative efforts to detoxify the relations of power that install difference as division […] instead [of] the basis for unification” (147). To begin to dislodge the reification of identity as an a priori category of knowledge is what I search for in each of the texts that I examine in this dissertation. Instead, I seek out the moments of subjectivity, difference and complexity in order to nuance the ways that Asian American studies has intersected with postcolonialism, feminism, Pacific Islander studies, among other disciplinary tracts.

One of the areas of difference and commonality between the fields of Asian American and Pacific Islander studies is the theoretical attention paid to the ways that various power regimes attempt to quash difference through the tools of social, cultural, and political control. I utilize literature for this investigation because I believe that literature is powerful. It masks itself within realist dialogue, it reveals itself as constructed through postmodern pastiche and fragmentation, but most of all, it is the sign

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and the symbol of the connection that we make with our world. This is not to reify literature and the text. Rather, by examining narrative, we have a place to start deconstructing the technology of the power structures that we all find ourselves living within. Narrative is powerful precisely because of the ways that it can seem to totalize experience but it also carries within it the traces of its incomplete nature. Literature is the imagining of alternatives instead of recitations of the usual. The texts that I analyze write about the sexual control and abuse of women in Korea and America, the technologies of beauty and spectacle in the Philippines, the continued military occupation of Guam, and the gendered experiences of colonialism and postcolonialism in Samoa. In addition to mere descriptions, however, these texts help us to envision choices. As Avery Gordon astutely points out, “We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there” (5).

These texts constantly remind us of the diverse coping mechanisms and the degrees of success and failure in the search for agency and subjectivity. It is this notion of complex personhood that Gordon elucidates in her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* that is critical to keep in mind when reading but also during disciplinary and personal interaction. Gordon defines this term by pointing out:

- people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. […] Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society’s problems are entangled
and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what
their imaginations are reaching toward. (4)

These texts also help us to understand that those who seem to live in the most dire and
degrading of circumstances are more than victim or superhero. To remember complexity
is to remember personhood.

Through this careful remembrance and recognition, the alliance of Asian
American studies and Pacific Islander studies still maintains tension and difference but it
is a productive friction. Chuh exhorts us to remember that in order to “address, account
for, and accommodate difference, we must remember that there is no common subject of
Asian American studies; there are only infinite differences that we discursively cohere
into epistemological objects” (147). Chuh’s urging aligns with Vicente Diaz’s vehement
statement: “whatever productive dialogues there may be between Pacific Islander Studies
and Asian American Studies, under no circumstance should Pacific Islanders, or Pacific
Islands Studies, be subsumed under the institutional framework of Asian American
history and experiences” (184). The key word in Diaz’s declaration is “subsume.” For
the productive dialogue between Asian American studies and Pacific Islander studies to
occur, it must be a dialogue between equals and not an hierarchical or patronizing
discourse.

The complexities presented in the literature I have analyzed remind us that every
narrative is always undergoing re-reading, revision and renegotiation. What Asian
American studies and its alliance with Pacific Islander studies can do is to deconstruct
how those narratives get re-presented and by whom and to what effect. That is, we need
to ask the question: Who benefits? By attempting to recognize power and its workings, the orientation of Asian American studies can begin to expand its areas of study and become an unbounded discipline, “one that while in the structure of the academic institution is not structured by it” (Chuh 151).

Asian American studies is poised to take on some of the intersections that the dialogue with Pacific Islander studies reveals. Chuh calls this the pursuit of “subjectlessness” that is, the deconstruction of identity that has become sedimented within Asian American studies. Instead of pursuing justice through an equalization of subjectivities, a subjectless Asian American studies, rather than becoming an empty signifier can become the home for intersectional knowledges. Some of these junctures of learning could be an analysis of comparative sexualizations working on questions such as how the emasculation and effeminization of Asian American men is or isn’t similar to the hypermasculinization of Pacific Islanders. Where are the disjunctions of the signifying technologies between Asian American, Pacific Islander and African American studies? How is the orientalizing gaze of America re-focused and deployed when it comes to women from the Pacific and how does that get carried over to other women of color in the mainland? How do these bodily identifications inform us about the fissures in citizenship for all? What are the alliances that can be formed between scholars who interrogate the layers of identifications between family, island, and nation? How does the concentration on identity and subjectivity help and hinder the pursuit and recognition of political aims? Although identity is that which we cannot not want, to paraphrase Gayatri
Spivak, how can we break apart the ways that identity gets deployed as a divisive measure?

There are many challenges for the fields of Asian American and Pacific Islander studies and it appears that some of the academic boundaries are starting to shift, albeit slowly. How will the disciplinary barriers melt or congeal? I am not venturing a prediction, but the flexible alliances between current institutional arenas as demonstrated in this dissertation is one possible way.
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