UC Santa Barbara
Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title
Pluralism, Transition, and the Anglophone; and Just an American Darker than the Rest: On Queer Brown Exile

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2vz1n12v

Journal
Journal of Transnational American Studies, 12(1)

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Publication Date
2021

DOI
10.5070/T812154887

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Pluralism, Transition, and the Anglophone

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In his 1993 novel *In a Far Country*, K. S. Maniam explores the spiritual effects of cultural pluralism in Malaysia, where the four official races—Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Others—make up a single national identity. Maniam's protagonist, Rajan, is an assimilated second-generation Indian, whose desire for social mobility has outweighed his own sense of self. Despite his success in real estate, Rajan is filled with "a terrifying emptiness" (25) that leads him to seek three mentors who each symbolize one of the races of postcolonial Malaya: 1) his father, the spiritual link to Rajan's homeland of India; 2) his Chinese colleague, Lee Shin, who cultivates a Chinese identity displayed as orientalist chinoiserie;[1] and 3) the Malay mystique Zulkifli, who speaks of the tiger as a symbol for the Malay community's "traditional, mystical attitude to the landscape" (12). Rajan rejects each of these possible mentors, finding little in Indian, Chinese, or Malay identity that speaks to his own experiences. His journey is not one of ethnic selfdiscovery, but a political odyssey that leads him to understand how people "build up walls" that "prevent us from knowing each other, knowing ourselves" (39).

Maniam's metaphor of cultural identity as a wall that blocks us from knowing ourselves distinguishes many Anglophone novels that come from the former "tropical dependencies" of Southeast Asia, particularly colonial Malaya (peninsular Malaysia and Singapore), the Philippines, and the various English-speaking diasporas in North America. From a North American point of view, seeing cultural identity as a "wall"

seems at odds with the histories of racial organizing that claim cultural identity as a gateway to greater understanding and social commitments. But from a Southeast Asian context, Maniam's narrative probes the premises of cultural pluralism as a mode of governance instituted by colonial rule, which separated populations according to their racial identities as a means of enforcing order and providing social legibility. The novel's dreamy, reflective style undermines realist representations of cultural identity that have been reinforced through narratives of racial harmony. *In a Far Country* forgoes the notion that one's ascribed identity should provide spiritual fulfillment, and instead echoes the sentiments of Anglophone writers who see ascribed cultural identities as a remnant of colonial governance. What does it mean to understand oneself and others not through cultural identity, but through what Maniam calls "the crossovers" that are the material reality of diversity?[2]

Transitive Cultures asks how English-language writing from Southeast Asia and its diasporas in North America can be read together to reveal forms of pluralist governance in sites across the transpacific, in Asia as well as in North America.[3] It builds upon a wide range of scholarship in Asian American studies and Southeast Asian studies and theories of diaspora, postcolonialism, and cultural studies to ask how Anglophone narratives deracinate the primary optics of multiculturalism by forgoing the presumption that given nationalist and ethnic identities should be the primary means for providing one's spiritual, social, or even political fulfillment. Anglophone literature from Malaya (Malaysia/Singapore), the Philippines, and their diasporic populations in Hawai'i, the mainland United States, and Canada traces how terms like "diversity," "racial harmony," and "tolerance" are embedded in a transnational history of imperial networks and colonial governance. Narratives in English from Southeast Asia and its migrants often depict the Southeast Asian as an individual who is expected to perform an "authentic" and "tolerable" identity that is diasporic, empowered, and hypervisible, as well as imperial, confining, and monolithic. Since Southeast Asian migrants often have a long history of migrancy, where the "original homeland" is already several homelands away, these writers see even their own given racial and diasporic identities as contributing a structural role through the hypervisibility of cultural practices and traditions, so that, for instance, the traditional needlework of the Malays becomes a mark of talent for working in microprocessor factories, and the matronly affection of Filipinas becomes a mark of talent for domestic servitude and nursing. How do these narratives allow us to shift from seeing identity as an ascribed characteristic to be praised or empowered, to seeing categories of identity as imperial strategies of appropriation, social stratification, and incorporation, which are needed to represent the nation (and global corporations) as multiculturalist, and thus exceptional?

To navigate these landscapes, Anglophone texts consider seriously the potentialities of crossover. In K. S. Maniam's 1997 essay, "The New Diaspora," he fleshes out his metaphor of the tiger as a symbol of an ethnic nationalism that requires "the continual and ritualistic immersion into the spirit of the land so as to be reaffirmed."

The tiger represents a clinging to an inherited sense of culture, and rejects a more complex inward journey that lies beyond ready-made identities and histories. Maniam contrasts this figure of the tiger with that of the chameleon, "the blending into whatever economic, intellectual, and social landscapes that are available." The tiger's promise of stability and mutual respect leaves one in a "cultural entrapment" that neglects the perspectives offered by other cultures, while the chameleon "seeks to inhabit, simultaneously, different intellectual, cultural, and imaginative spaces." While the tiger is strong in purity, and defends its young against outside forces, the chameleon remains aware of and knowledgeable about the cultures around it. The chameleon thus is not necessarily a migrant or minority subject, but an "insider and outsider at the same time," an individual "exiled within [his or her] own homelands." Whereas the tiger represents an affiliation with "pragmatic tolerance," the chameleon imagines a form of dealing with one's cultural and historical context without relying on the identity-based optics of capital and the state to find one's essence. The chameleon rejects the "culture of fear" brought about through multicultural contexts—the fear that violent racialized factions will emerge. Maniam's metaphor speaks to multiplicity as a "true nature" by emphasizing the act of adapting to varied perceptions and expectations.[4]

Maniam's metaphor of the chameleon echoes other literary artists and thinkers within Southeast Asia. In the 1970s, the writer Lloyd Fernando also wrote of Malaysian and Singaporean pluralism as a colonial legacy that ultimately needed to be reevaluated in the wake of the race riots of the 1960s. Fernando envisioned an alternative type of cultural form that saw migrant cultures as partaking in "an unceasing process" that is "capable of continuing as if in infinite series" (*Cultures in Conflict* 14). Written in the wake of the 1960s crises that saw multiple race riots across Malaya, Fernando's essays theorized a cultural form based on the conscious ability to transition among multiple racial "types." These transitions were not occurring merely to access positions of privilege, as one might envision cosmopolitan subjects or those who "pass." Transition belonged to what Fernando called "in-between migrants" whose ways of life did not reflect their ascribed identities, but who were too disadvantaged to claim cosmopolitan or global belonging. They thus appeared to onlookers within localized racial forms, and their political attitudes were difficult if not impossible to parse because their very survival relied upon being identified as ethnically authentic. Like Maniam, Fernando saw transition as a hidden but shared cultural practice, one that belongs both to the writer "crossing over" for a wider perspective, as well as to characters like Sally in Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, a service worker of ambiguous racial history and sexual orientation, who goes as Sally Yu (Chinese) and Salmah (Malay).

For both Maniam and Fernando, cultures of transition were condemned to remain unrecognized, to fade away struggling against a colonial pluralist discourse where transition was unthinkable. Within a world of borders, nations, and pluralist

conceptions of identity, these "chameleons" appear as already established identity types. But their practices of transition provide an alternative politics of identity from the vantage point of Southeast Asian colonial history, where identity can bring both a sense of community and belonging, as well as the implicit demand to close off cultural borders. By exposing how identities have been produced through imperial encounter and the demand for surplus labor, these narratives encourage migrants not to reject such identities, but to manage them with a broader vision of belonging that allows for cultural, spiritual, and political crossover. They urge us to see identity as a process of unceasing transitions that shifts with every new context—a process that can be controlled, reimagined, and, with enough savvy, made pleasurable.

To read the motif of transition across multiple contexts, I dub this unceasing process "transitive culture" to mean a set of shifting cultural practices tactically mobilized in contexts where identity is defined as fixed and authentic. I implicitly invoke Paulo Freire's notion of "transitive consciousness" as a state between fighting for survival and political agency, wherein subjects gain an awareness that enables them to perceive and respond to themes and myths that stretch over histories and nations. To be transitive for Freire is to be aware of the broader situation even when not recognized politically. Yet, one can still foster "a permanently critical attitude" to "become integrated with the spirit of the time" (5).[5] "Transitive" calls not upon the aggression of the tiger, but upon the chameleon's ability to perceive of imperial culture as "the result of men's labor, of their efforts to create and recreate" (Freire 41). "Transitive" invokes its Latinate sense of "to go" (*itus*) "across" (*trans*), and its dominant sense "to pass into another condition" (*OED*). Transitive culture, like a transitive verb, positions the migrant between one subject (himself or herself) and infinite conditions or possibilities, acknowledging ever-evolving, complex histories, and selves re-created through drift, detour, and difference.[6]

This book asks how transition can be recognized as a sustainable cultural form that maneuvers through, rather than directly against, given identities and categorizations. By emphasizing "culture," I spotlight how transition functions as a cultural practice that is engendered through contexts of pluralism and that takes advantage of recognizable aesthetic forms or genres. I am influenced here by Brent Hayes Edwards, who has written of diaspora not as a culture but as a cultural practice, a strategic cultural response to uprooting (22). As James C. Scott has similarly written, cultural practices become politicized when "open, organized, [and] political activity" is seen as "dangerous, if not suicidal" (*Weapons of the Weak* xv). In the context of Southeast Asia, where authoritarian regimes have made populations legible through immobilization, Scott stresses the importance of local knowledge, informal processes, and improvised tactics, which allow groups to remain mobile and illegible (*Seeing Like a State* 6). Tactics are learned through practice and experience, and reveal forms of difference that cannot be adequately understood from an objective, schematic point of view. Such tactics emerge as tactile knowledge, what Scott calls *metis*, from the Greek for cunning or "cunning intelligence"; the knowledge of riding a bicycle, of living

in one's own body.[7] Though Scott deals with rural migrants and itinerant communities, I follow his insights in formulating transitive cultures not as organized social actions, but as the shared cultural practices that underwrite the complexity of identity.

In *Bodies That Matter* Judith Butler invokes the term "transitive" to describe when an identity, in being named, also inaugurates the subject into a norm that she is expected to routinely recite and reproduce (6). Naming a newborn baby a "girl" is "transitive" when it "initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' is compelled" (232). This process, though embedded in culture and language, is not absolute. One is "compelled," as Butler writes, to perform gender, sexuality, race, and nation, but this development is susceptible to an array of disruptions: queer sexual desires; critical, violent, and intimate encounters with others; inhabitations of "abnormal" bodies; and witnessing the reiteration of state, colonial, and imperial forms of governance. Indeed, today the term "transition" in the United States invokes a spectrum of queer political discourses, where "to transition" is to elide normative definitions of gender. But as others have argued, this critical edge of transition becomes lost in its reiterations as an authenticating label for one's "true self": a "transwoman," a "transman."[8] As witnessed in talk shows and celebrity transitions, the impetus of witnessing transition—racial, gendered, sexual, or other—is to rename such individuals into recognizable and celebratory identity types.[9] Transitive culture broadens the idea of transition beyond that of a new identity to be recognized for one's "true self," to an understanding of shared tactics and techniques for dexterously crossing gendered, racialized, and sexualized borders, for being, as RuPaul stated, "not real," but "everything and nothing at all."

Like Butler's and Freire's conceptions of "transitive," transitive cultures suggest some awareness of the varied processes of identity-making, which are often revealed through experiences of exile, migrancy, mobility, and critical encounters with colonial histories and contemporary imperial violence. Transitive cultures thus respond to major and minor instances of being uprooted from one's given identity, of feeling estranged from or indifferent toward one's given culture, community, gender, sexuality, and nation. Such expressions do not easily register within the tactics of North American liberal politics. They come not through manifestos or political speeches, but through connotative signs of metaphor, symbols, gestures, performances, and tone. Their refusal to seek public recognition for their "true selves" reveals how identity is practiced in the everyday within contexts of plural governance, what are usually called "multicultural societies."

Multiculturalism and the 1960s

> If the cultural basis of colonialism is racism, … then the cultural basis of neocolonialism is multiculturalism.
>
> —Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Asia as Method*

In the United States, the 2007–2008 economic crisis spurred a discursive sea change, whereby American multiculturalist values of tolerance and diversity were put radically into question. As Gayatri Spivak put it, the limitations of such values were exposed as the white middle class feared themselves becoming "subalternized," of losing access to healthcare, education, welfare, and housing (Gairola). Succeeding years have seen greater crises in the American racial imaginary. From the victimization of racial minorities through the US subprime mortgage crisis; to the #BlackLivesMatter protests that erupted over the deaths of Trayvon Martin (2012), Michael Brown (2014), and Eric Gardner (2014), and the subsequent acquittals and refusals to indict their killers; to the election of a president endorsed by the leaders of the KKK, whose efforts to galvanize the Republican base included the dehumanization of Mexican immigrants as rapists, drug addicts, and thieves. These events are counterdiscourses to a dominant perception of America as a multicultural nation. The election of Barack Obama (2008), the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court (2009), as well as the Supreme Court decision to allow same-sex marriage (2015) have all been deployed as evidence that the long project of the American civil rights movement has reached into the highest governmental offices. What if, however, we saw these two discourses of race as part of the same general ideology? What if we saw both series of events as mutually reinforcing the panoptic gaze of the state, which makes positive representations of empowered racial minorities hypervisible? Can we be living in an age where both class and race are at their most unequal, while at the same time, we are also the most equal that we have ever been?

These two discourses, one of racial crisis and the other of racial progress, have drawn lines in the sand across the academy, dividing those who wish to defend multicultural institutions, and those demanding to dismantle them in exchange for more intersectional and antiracist coalitions.[10] The former have come to the defense of ethnic studies and identity-based projects in universities and public life, while the latter, represented best by critical ethnic studies scholars, have continued to explore how American tolerance has been casually invoked to bolster support for imperial expansion, and has produced new "Others" in those deemed racist, sexist, fundamentally religious, or otherwise *in*tolerant.[11] For these scholars, the difficulty in parsing the American political crisis as a racial crisis lies in the sacrosanct history of civil rights, perceived as a bottom-up 1960s movement. Though the most recognized speakers about civil rights politics, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, rarely used the terms "multiculturalism," "diversity," or even "tolerance," contemporary racial discourse invests heavily in these thinkers in marking its own origin as a domestic

American product, and its most valueladen ideological export. In turn, American racial histories have cast the United States as a morally superior power, one of "multicultural exceptionalism" that legitimates imperial and capitalist projects abroad. The separation of civil rights history from a revolutionary anti-imperial politics has made the contemporary American context a particularly difficult minefield to navigate through. Despite flagrantly racist social structures, from its prison system and its anti-Hispanic immigration policies, to its racially skewed poverty and its targeting of Islamic "terrorists" at home and overseas, the American project of multiculturalism has continued to provide the talking points for antiracist politics.

It is through this contemporary fissure that we need to take a broader historical and spatial view to consider how contemporary racial governance can be traced back to the challenge of racial management that emerged within American and British colonies in Southeast Asia. As Shu-mei Shih and many others have pointed out, racial discourses in America have continued to presume that the values associated with civil rights (diversity, tolerance, multiculturalism) are a Western and American construct, thus serving to "safeguard the primacy of the West as the source of methodological and theoretical paradigms" (Shih, "Toward an Ethics" 92). Understanding the American racial crisis means decentering America from its own invented history of global multiculturalism, and to instead construct an alternative genealogy that traces contemporary racial formations to sites in Southeast Asia, where pluralism was deployed as an imperial strategy. In the everyday multiculturalist exceptionalism of the United States, one easily forgets that "American" is not the only nationalist symbol naming a multiracial populace. The terms "Malaysian," "Singaporean," and "Filipino" all refer to diversities of people that rival that of the United States in varieties of language and ethnicity. While the 1960s are seen as the time of the birth of multiculturalism in the United States, in the former colonies within Southeast Asia, the 1960s mark a series of crises where riots and repression unmasked the ideals of diversity and tolerance.

With the protest-driven end of British rule after the Second World War, postindependence Malaysia and Singapore suffered their own crises in multicultural ideals. First envisioned as a multiracial nation, the Federation of Malaysia broke down only a year after Singapore's inclusion, when during the 1964 Maulud (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) celebration, fights between Malay Muslims and Chinese Singaporeans culminated in race riots that resulted in twenty-two deaths and hundreds of injuries. Although this crisis is often blamed for the separation (or abandonment) of Singapore from Malaysia, it also signals a crisis in how multiracialism was imagined within a postcolonial context, where racial differences had been identified as a potential source of violence and upheaval, thus necessitating a strong state power (the British) to "keep watch" over ethic factions. Before the end of the decade, the ideals of multiculturalism were torn asunder by the 1969 race riots that occurred throughout Malaysia, causing the state to forgo multiracialism in its "New

Economic Policy" that produced Malay hegemony and prompted the exile of many Chinese and Indians. Meanwhile, Singapore continued its narrative of racial harmony through a state as strong-handed as Britain's before it. Under the ideals of a militant multiculturalism, Singapore was able to legitimate one-party rule and to enforce the draconian Sedition Act of 1948 by restricting freedom of speech and prohibiting "seditious" gatherings and protests.

In America's former colony of the Philippines, the election of Ferdinand Marcos in 1965 contradicted the ideals of a multiethnic Filipino/a populace through twenty years of repressive rule, nine of those years under martial law. "Filipino" was previously imagined by revolutionaries as a conglomerate of distinct ethnolinguistic groups, but American colonizers later emulated the British in Malaya by recasting the diverse Filipina/o populace as potentially violent and thus in need of colonial management. Post-independence saw the contestation of Filipino identity until Marcos's rule, when those of religious, linguistic, and ethnic difference were repressed and branded as enemies of the state. A new multiracial crisis under Marcos culminated in the 1968 Jabidah massacre, when Filipino armed forces killed dozens of Filipino Muslim (Moro) recruits attempting to desert. The massacre sparked an insurgency for Islamic autonomy in the Philippine South that has continued to this day, and helped prompt Marcos's nine years of martial law. During Marcos's rule, the "multiethnic" Philippines would be ideologically replaced by the concept of "Filipino" as Catholic (in the anti-Muslim sentiment) and as Tagalog-speaking. With the fervent religious differences between Catholics in Luzon and the Visayas and Muslims in Mindanao, as well as cultural and linguistic differences between groups, the Philippines is, as E. San Juan calls it, "vibrant with differences—at the price of the suffering of the majority of its citizens" ("Paradox of Multiculturalism" 2).

In both the former colonies of the Philippines and Malaysia/Singapore, the 1960s crises caused a fundamental recasting of racial, religious, and ethnic differences into political factions. In all three cases, the ideals of multiracialism were not defeated so much as deferred into the future, thus rationalizing the presence of a repressive state to manage factions. This history offers the 1960s as a conjunctural moment in the formation of American multiculturalism, not of its origin-point, but of its migration from the colonies to the imperial center. It enables us to separate multiculturalism from its sacrosanct history, and causes us to find historical corollaries in the present moment that avoid, as Vijay Mishra has put it, the "tendency to read multiculturalism as a purely Western phenomenon" ("Multiculturalism" 199). In a context where racist structures pervade every aspect of American life, in education, incarceration, police violence, poverty, and consumerism, the view from Southeast Asia allows us to reframe our understanding of multiculturalism as well as its critiques.

Multiculturalism as Discourse

> For the intellectual the task, I believe, is explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the sufferings of others.
>
> —Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*

Broadly defined, "multiculturalism" is most often conceived of as a social system that expects racial and ethnic groups to visibly and proudly express their given identities in order to be recognized politically and to be accommodated socially by state institutions such as public schools and the armed forces, as well as through positive forms of cultural and media-based representation. But as an ideological symbol, "multiculturalism" plays the role of an empty signifier wherein "culture" need not signify race or history.[12] In the United States, multiculturalism emerged in the interwar period, when, despite the past racial "diversity" of North America (indigenous, African Americans, and Chinese), it wasn't until the "New Immigration" of Jews, Eastern Europeans, and Southern Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that notions of cultural pluralism began to flourish. Following the work of William James, the political philosophers Horace Meyer Kallen (1882–1974) and Randolph Silliman Bourne (1886–1918) defended cultural pluralism during and after World War I, when American xenophobia was at an all-time high, and later culminated in the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. In his 1915 essay "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," Kallen argued against "melting pot" models of assimilation, and advocated instead for a cultural pluralism model defined as "multiplicity in a unity [and] an orchestration of mankind."[13] Alain Locke later expanded on the advantages of cultural pluralism as an alternative to assimilation, yet the concept rarely migrated from the realm of political philosophy, as Kallen himself noted. It wasn't until the post–World War II era that cultural pluralism became a rallying cry for American patriotism and imperial power.[14]

Critics of institutionalized multiculturalism in the United States have seen it as a state and capitalist co-optation of civil rights discourse that commodifies and depoliticizes difference. This counterdiscourse points to how state and corporate power have produced, in the broadest sense, Asian Americans as highly skilled "model minorities," Latin Americans as service and farm laborers, and African Americans as trapped within a "culture of poverty" (Lisa Lowe; Dylan Rodríguez).[15] Since the War on Terror, critical ethnic studies scholars have focused on multiculturalism's role in giving moral justification to US imperial practices worldwide. Jodi Melamed calls this form "neoliberal multiculturalism," and defines it as "the contemporary incorporation of US multiculturalism into the legitimating and operating procedures of neoliberalism," including counterterrorism ("Spirit of Neoliberalism" 15). Melamed's work considers how the era of multiculturalism and the era of neoliberalism do not merely coincide, but act as co-constituting ideological forces that organize conceptions of difference by recognizing racial identities as labor classes and as targets of state repression.

I expand upon Melamed's work by refusing to confine critiques of multiculturalism within a nationalist perspective (whether Canadian, Australian, or American). The genesis of the term "multiculturalism" in fact speaks to its emergence not as a characterization of the United States populace, but of the United States in contrast to its overseas enemies, who were cast as "monocultural." "Multiculturalism," as far as I can trace it, was first used in the novel *Lance: A Novel about Multicultural Men* (1941) to characterize people ("men") who could transcend nationalist languages and culture. The novel's subsequent review in the *New York Herald-Tribune* in July 1941 used the term "multicultural" to mark the United States and its allies as morally and ethically superior to the racial nationalism of the Axis powers, comparing the "national prejudice" of the Japanese and Germans to America's "'multicultural' way of life." Even in its genesis, multiculturalism had little need to be defined—its function was simply to provide an exceptional characteristic that projected racial prejudice onto others. Confined by this nationalist lens, multiculturalism continues to celebrate racial diversity to give value to US empire, allowing the United States to embody "the universal, so that US government and military actions are to be understood as being for a supranational good" (Melamed, "Spirit of Neoliberalism" 16). In the context of the US War on Terror, to see multicultural ideology as disseminating from the United States to the global "rest" allows America to make "monoculturalism" and religious fundamentalism a category of stigma that justifies torture (ibid.). World War II can thus be seen as the catalyst that brought pluralist values to the forefront after the racist violence characteristic of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and later communist Russia and China, all of which were depicted as totalitarian powers that pushed for various forms of ideological, cultural, and political homogeneity, despite the fact that Soviet Russia, Imperial Japan, and Communist China all had multicultural agendas of their own (Jin). In an effort to win the ideological battle, American discourses diagnosed enemy nations as homogenous social structures, while in contrast, the United States was marked as a nation accepting of difference, with immigrant groups (and later refugees) as living proof. With the emergence of the United States as a superpower, multiculturalism was no longer an ideal that offered alternatives to overseas expansion, as Randolph Bourne had theorized a "Trans-National America." It was enshrined as the epitome of how a moral and just society was organized, a blueprint to be exported abroad.

If the Allies-led war against racial nationalism saw the invention of multiculturalism as a term, the Cold War was its moment of flourishing. The World War II narrative of a diverse America against the racist Axis powers would, during the Cold War, convert to envisioning a multiculturalist nation (the United States) against totalitarian communist states. The United States would fashion itself plural in order to cast the stigma of racial nationalism upon communist countries aligning with the Soviets and the People's Republic of China. This comparison enabled a new imperial governance that operated through "nonterritorial imperial tactics," including "economic support," "humanitarian aid," and "structural adjustment policies" (Kim 18).

Domestically, the Cold War resulted in greater migrations of Asians from French Indochina, a symptom of wars in Asia that was reframed as a symbol of national diversity and compassion (Tang 86).[16] Internationally, the ideals of communism were reconstituted through depictions of communist homogeneity. Images of Han Chinese crowds saluting Mao Zedong went sideby-side with depictions of diverse American military fighting in Vietnam. The answer to incorporating populist desires for structural equality came in claiming multiculturalism as the face of empire. With the waning of the Cold War in the 1980s and 1990s, multiculturalism became formalized in education and media representation, which coincided with the production of new "intolerable" others. The hostage crisis in Iran and the subsequent wars in Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait drew upon religious intolerance as yet another instance of homogenization, while the drug wars of the same period saw many civil rights activists and people of color incarcerated for possession charges, an injustice that flew under the radar of a culture newly saturated with multicultural concepts of "empowerment" and "identity."

Critical ethnic studies scholars have emphasized how multiculturalism has been instrumental in creating legitimacy for institutions such as the US military and the prison industrial complex, and have refused America's self-representation of multicultural exceptionalism. This crucial scholarship has worked toward building a transhistorical and comparative lens that causes us to reconceptualize multiculturalism as an ideology formed through comparisons. The "multicultural society" of 1941 has as its foil the Axis powers, while conceptions of US diversity during the Cold War conflated the economic equality promised in communist states with racial and cultural homogeneity. The formalization of multiculturalism in US institutions also allowed the US state to continue identifying its enemies as intolerant and racist (present-day revisions of the terms "backward" and "uncivilized").[17] Critical ethnic studies scholars have unsettled the "bottom-up" narrative of multiculturalism as an exceptional form of social belonging originating in North America. They thus leave open the question of emergence. What happens if we shift our view from one sort of Anglophone society (Australia, Canada, the United States) to the Anglophone societies within Southeast Asia, where values of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism are not coded as grassroots, social justice products, but as legacies of colonialism and empire?

Pluralism as Colonial Strategy

> The fundamental character of the organization of a plural society as a whole is the structure of a factory, organized for production.
>
> —J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*

If we understand multiculturalism as a governing strategy reliant upon celebratory conceptions of diversity, tolerance, and "racial harmony," we can begin to compose a longer genealogy of multiculturalism that first emerged as an imperial form, beginning with the British and then the Americans, that took root within imperial centers. Though

British and American colonial histories are often thought of as distinct, much historical work has shown how these two empires constituted each other in Southeast Asia through the sharing of infrastructure, linguistic mapping, and transportation technologies. Joint imperial projects between the United States and Britain were most clearly present in the shared governing strategies that formed a pluralistic conception of the "local" in order to manage, produce, and incorporate racialized populations. The "inter-imperial" connections, Paul Kramer writes, played a central role in building state governance throughout the colonies in terms of "organization, policy making, and legitimation," such that "the architects of colonial rule often turned to rival powers as allies, foils, mirrors, models, and exceptions" ("Power and Connection" 1316). The impetus to mark the American colonial state as pluralist emerged from the need to differentiate its "legitimate" colonial project from the "illegitimate" colonial powers also operating within Southeast Asia, particularly the British. The parading of tolerable ethnic minorities was common in both the British and American colonies, and comparisons were frequently made upon the degree of stability that the colonial governments could provide. As Kramer writes, the British often legitimated their empire through exhibiting "civilized" natives, while the Americans did so by viewing themselves as an "anti-empire" or a "non-empire," educating Filipino/as through American literature, culture, and religion to guide them toward democratic independence. This process of colonial race making was meant to surveil populations and place them into hierarchies to fashion cooperation ("Power and Connection" 1319), resulting in forms of racial thinking that "had a decisive impact on American racial ideology itself" (ibid.). As America abroad fashioned itself as pluralist, America at home began to do the same. As Matthew Frye Jacobson has written, white ethnics in the United States were able to assimilate with Anglo-Saxons as Caucasians by comparing themselves to Filipino/as, on the one hand, and on the other hand by incorporating Filipino/as into the American national imaginary alongside Native Americans and African Americans, as populations who could be educated and controlled by a white supremacist managerial force (181). The inter-imperial ethical war thus reconstituted American identity itself, as both British and American colonial powers executed a managerial technique that taxonomized racial identities and made the most educated hypervisible, providing segments of peoples who were divided but not factionalized, and who were constituted as "the White Man's Burden."

The colonial history of Southeast Asia sheds light on contexts where diversity serves the interests of the state as both a governing strategy and a legitimating ideology. The ability to manage pluralist populations casts the colonial state as managerial rather than coercive—in the American context, a non-empire empire. By taxonomizing populations, colonial states also produced stratified labor classes, where one's racial identity determined one's position as a field hand, manager, or factory worker. Indeed, the concept of a "pluralist society" originated in the economist J. S. Furnivall's 1910 analysis of "Southeast Asian tropical dependencies," where Furnivall criticized pluralist strategies for employing racial difference in order to maintain cheap labor costs and to

exploit resources (310). Colonial plural societies were an ideal place for fomenting capitalist investment, as they lacked a central set of cultural values, a common "social will" that would pressure economic forces to provide a living wage and better working conditions.[18] Furnivall argued against the colonial governments' depictions of themselves as civilizers, educators, and managers, and explored how this managerial class looked at social problems "not as a citizen but as a capitalist or an employer of labour" (306).[19] These plural societies were the manifestation of both multinational philosophy and capitalism in its purest form; they were societies that respected cultural values so long as common desires were directed toward economic values.

These comparisons of multiculturalism, multiracialism, and pluralism are not meant to laud some instances of racial management over others, but to pinpoint the fundamental assumptions that these formations share. Since multiculturalism's dominance as the primary antiracist politics in the United States, leftist critiques of multiculturalism have focused on particular elements and symptoms, such as "boutique multiculturalism" (Regina Lee), "official multiculturalism" (Lisa Lowe), "neoliberal multiculturalism" (Jodi Melamed), "imperial multiculturalism" (Duncan Ivison), "conciliatory multiculturalism" (Wen Jin), and "establishment multiculturalism" (E. San Juan). These concepts are meant to separate a corporate and state-sanctioned multiculturalism from the multiculturalism of cross-racial coalitions and large-scale societal transformations ("strong multiculturalism" or "critical multiculturalism") in order to reveal the inconsistencies of multiculturalist practices in the United States. Many of these critiques, however, seem to offer few alternatives, and rarely do they seek to unsettle the very fundamental optics of multiculturalism that makes it seem necessary, that is, the "identity" of identity politics.

If multiculturalism is the abstract governing strategy, identities are the particular modes through which power is enacted. But identities are not simply framed by power. They are invested with such ideological and personal intimacies that to criticize them (or those who take them on) marginalizes the personhood and agency that exists behind the optics of population and community. Suffice to say that racial identities are modes of recognition and communal belonging, and thus provide routes for marginalized peoples to earn the privileges that come with state recognition—citizenship entitlements, equality under the law, mutual respect, democratic participation, historical and cultural representation. Therefore it should elude no one as to *why* identities are claimed by minorities themselves. The power enabled by claiming identities can be marked as a strategic positioning that reflects shared memories, languages, and cultural practices, and can offer "lifestyles of empowerment" (Grewal 16). The adoption of identities is never *not* a negotiation, as their entire purpose is to conflate notions of ethnicity, race, nation, sexuality, gender, and labor, and to produce racial types that hardly reflect the individual living under its name. The critical theorist Étienne Balibar famously identified this conflation as enabling a "neoracism" that continues racist institutions and social stratification by assuming that racialized bodies

are fixed into "insurmountable cultural differences" (22). But what makes neoracism racist isn't merely this conflation, but the imperial context wherein these differences are valorized only when presented as "tolerable"—a strategy of "acceptance" that divides, hierarchizes, and produces Others under consistent surveillance and repression.

Transitive Cultures departs from previous critiques of racial identity in seeing its homogenizing forms not as a problem to be resisted by naming more heterogeneous forms of identity, but as a governing strategy that is routinely being traversed, managed, and appropriated. Asian American studies has particularly contributed to the deconstruction of Asian American identity, so much so that the preoccupation with identity critique has characterized Asian American studies almost as much as the subjects it treats. "Asian American" identity itself began as a political response to the injustices of the Vietnam War and the denial of civil rights. It exists as an invented identity that emerged through the very racist optics that it sought to resist, transitioning "Orientals" into "Asian Americans." This reinvention was made possible not by accounting for unseen modes of difference, but through appropriating the state's mission to control the production and circulation of difference, with the taxonomy of identity serving as a primary means of obtaining and orchestrating this control. This disciplinary method is characteristic of what Michel Foucault called biopolitics, a strategy of governance that emerged in the nineteenth century and produced subjects who were self-regulating, productive, and passive, but who took on modes of identification (and thus subjectivity) as authentic representations of themselves. In his lectures, Foucault noted that in the era of late global capitalism, biopolitics had shifted within a neoliberal context where political power was exercised "on the principles of a market economy" (*Birth of Biopolitics* 131). He explored this contemporary form using the term "governmentality," or the "art of government," which named an "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections" that induced an ideological order so profound as to reinvent social relations. As Furnivall too concluded, it took an ensemble of forces to produce populations who could be categorized through group identities, but who thought of themselves as individual self-regulating subjects.

This book employs the term "pluralist governmentality" to capture the varied dimensions of pluralist racial forms. The Singapore literary scholar Philip Holden has argued that governmentality can illustrate "continuity between the colonial and postcolonial states," and I would add that governmentality too reveals ideological overlap between the colonial states and the imperial centers. In the case of Southeast Asia, colonial pluralism has legible logics, rationalities, and legitimations that appear congruent with postcolonial as well as North American governments. Rather than call this racial form "multiculturalist governmentality," I find "multiculturalism" itself a tool made blunt by overuse. I hereafter retain the term "pluralist" to invoke multiculturalism's colonial heritage and to unmask its reliance on conceptions of difference rather than similarity, where even the slightest set of differences can turn a

group multicultural rather than homogenous, plural rather than mono. Pluralist governmentality names an art of government that expects individuals to visibly express their difference via given group identities, and in doing so, to represent imperial state power as neutral, universal, or benevolent. In what follows, I chart a genealogy of pluralist governmentality as it has developed in Malaya, the Philippines, and Asian North America.

Pluralist Governmentality in the Transpacific

> To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.
>
> —Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Transitive Cultures follows a tradition of comparative projects from thinkers like J. S. Furnivall, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Benedict Anderson, and others to visualize a transnational history of pluralist governmentality that has operated through imperial networks and colonial governance. Despite the pioneering work of these scholars, Southeast Asia still remains in the popular imaginary as a region too complex to be studied in any broad or comparative manner. It contains economies both high (Singapore, Taiwan) and low (Laos, Cambodia); religions that challenge their own normative conceptions (the moderate Muslims, the consumption-permitting and militant Buddhisms); and histories that belie Western understandings (the "semi-colonial" history of places like Thailand, the scattered remnants of Chinese domination and Japanese colonization). This great complexity, when read under today's pluralist common sense, is interpreted as containing "the great merit of diversity" (Reid 6). But from another point of view, this region's histories of trade, economic migrations, investment capital, militarization, and national formations in the face of great cultural, linguistic, and religious difference reveal a crucial nexus in the formation of pluralist governmentality. From the vantage point of Southeast Asia, the US brand of multiculturalism, which Beng Huat Chua has referred to as "liberal multiculturalism," can be distinguished as a unique form of pluralist governmentality that "insists on the 'freedom to choose' as a basic right of an individual" ("Cost of Membership" 171). In this view, multiculturalism in the United States appears not as *the* legitimate form of racial egalitarianism, but as a unique racial formation produced through the intersection of imperial strategies and American cultural pluralism.

Pluralist governmentality has its roots far from American soil. Modern pluralist ideas that we today would recognize as American can be traced to defenses of cultural pluralism in Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who adapted the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's notion of multiple truths into notions of cultural difference, separating "truths" by cultures rather than historical periods (Berlin). Often regarded as the first philosophical spokesman for both nationalism and multiculturalism, Herder

named the nation (*Volk*) as a sovereign cultural whole, where each contained "a centre of happiness within itself " (Herder 186).[20] Many of these philosophical ideas remained unpracticed until the Indian Mutiny in 1857, when a colonial rebellion caused the British Crown to take over governance of South Asia from the East India Company. The crisis of rebellion gave the opportunity for pluralist ideas to emerge within policies meant to manage unruly populations. In 1862, the English political scholar Lord Acton argued that multinational (pluralist) empires or confederacies were the best way to derive consent from the governed because they allowed freedom for cultural autonomy. As Acton wrote: "Where there are only two races there is the resource of slavery; but when different races inhabit the different territories of one Empire composed of several smaller States, it is of all possible combinations the most favourable to the establishment of a highly developed system of freedom" (35). Acton found the ideal progenitor of this political style in the United States, which he considered a great pluralist federal structure, so long as each state had autonomy. Acton's ideal of a multinational federation was to be field-tested in the British colony in Malaya, which in 1867 fell into the control of London's Colonial Office. As a colonial entity populated by distinctly different ethnic groups—namely Chinese, Malays, and Indians—Malaya was to be governed through a form of pluralist governmentality that permitted the freedoms of cultural and religious autonomy, while successfully extracting resources (tin, gold, rubber).

The challenge for European colonizers in governing Southeast Asian societies was the same that researchers today have in studying it: that the region seems to be divided by a regional "cultural matrix" that is far more diverse ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally than its neighboring regions of India and China, making Southeast Asia seem impenetrable and unknowable. [21] This "fluid cultural matrix" has extended, in various permutations, to the present day, and is most visible in state nationalist discourses that promote varying forms of pluralism to produce a national people and to deradicalize resisting groups.[22] In the Philippines, US colonialists devised a particular form of pluralist governmentality that stressed ethnic and religious difference to disintegrate factional groups and to prevent "any sense of national unity that would challenge colonial rule" (San Juan, "Paradox of Multiculturalism" 1). In Malaya, different forms of ethnic nationalisms have been put forth as alternatives to a state nationalism that manifests through education, state ritual, and the media.[23] The difficulty of comprehending Southeast Asian nations has pushed scholars to rethink these organizing forces as more akin to pluralist models that reinforce national belonging by valorizing the nation's diversity and racial harmony.

If "cultural diversity" often characterizes studies of Southeast Asia, "free market," "commerce," and "trade" make up the second major concentration, since much of Southeast Asia's "diversity" has roots in the long-distance labor migrations that have been continuous since at least the sixteenth century (Lieberman, *Strange Parallels* 45). Already established trade routes set the stage for European colonizers to mark populations by their racial difference, in effect pairing racialized bodies with particular

fields of labor.[24] These racial distinctions were not confined to any colonial state, but were revised and reimagined through the vast network of colonial trade routes in French Indochina; the Dutch East Indies; British India, Burma, and Malaya; and Spanish and American Philippines. As trade was dynamic and interdependent among the colonies, race was not made and remade simply through the colonizer's will. Southeast Asian societies did not just receive trading posts and imperial market-trade, but designated ports for the purposes of hosting trading routes, hoping to take advantage of these markets. Ethnic identities, employed for colonial rule, were not purely products of colonialists themselves, but were often managed and reinterpreted by colonial subjects for their own gain. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of these race-making projects that J. S. Furnivall criticized pluralist societies for only encouraging cross-racial interactions "in the market place, in buying and selling" (313).[25] Yet despite Furnivall's warning about the racial inequality within pluralist societies, contemporary neoliberal discourses of pluralist societies often cite Furnivall to reinforce the notion of a "Furnivall-Smithian" social structure, which marries the diversity of pluralism with the "liberation" of the free market, as if, together, they form an ideal antiracist space (Young 17). This binding of pluralist values with the free market allows us to trace pluralist governmentality as a transpacific form of power, wherein the assumption that the market is an equalizing and pluralistic force seems to be the very ideological incentive—as well as the ideological veil—that has maintained imperial dominance.

If the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War notes a sea change for US domestic politics in forming pluralist governmentality, it marks a seismic shift in Southeast Asia, where the Cold War marked two separate and competing pluralist structures: the Soviet communist federation and the American imperial "sphere of influence." The Cold War era was a period of cataclysmic violence in Southeast Asia, with Chinese-led communist insurgencies and coups in Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos, as well as anticommunist atrocities in Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. These aggressions were made within imperial spheres recognized through American alignment rather than citizenship. As the scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing has rightly pointed out, the repudiation of communist states led nations like Taiwan to embrace the United States as their alternative, as US alliance included a faster route to modernity, and gave partial autonomy within a pluralist imperium (166).[26] In former colonies like the Philippines, Taiwan, and Malaya, the US role in World War II allowed it to finally surpass other colonizers as the benevolent imperial power, the "savior" from the Japanese, and the protector after the abandonment of Europe. Though American prowess was disrupted in the subsequent violence in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the amount of American ethical capital shored up during World War II solidified the United States as the trusted transpacific power, ushering in neocolonial regimes across Southeast Asia that have remained in place to the present day.

This genealogy of pluralist governmentality aims to understand contemporary multiculturalism as a broader transpacific strategy that shares distinct qualities with colonial pluralism in the colonies and cultural pluralism in the United States. First, pluralist tradition is not necessarily antagonistic to nationalism, but advocates for a larger "confederation," "multinational empire," or "trans-nation" that organizes and manages cultural differences. Second, this pluralist tradition emphasizes the equalization of cultural difference despite the vast asymmetrical inequality of class, gender, and linguistic differences, splitting up populations into collectives bound not by a common "social will," but by capitalist forces that seek to produce cheaper and sell higher. Finally, as the Cold War context shows, understanding this larger history causes us not to speak of a single "multiculturalism" that affects American minority groups, but of a transpacific American imperial sphere that operates through "pluralist strategies," "pluralist discourses," and "pluralist technologies." Rather than provide a "fictive ethnicity" of the nation-state, through which the state is the main expression of a national will, the state is made to appear "neutral," an "umpire" managing different groups, whose factitious nature could at any moment turn violent. If pluralism was never about creating harmony, but managing racial conflict, then the multicultural state, by definition, is also an imperial state.

Yet to speak of America today as an empire feels like adopting a trend only surpassed by speaking of the death of the American dream. In the words of Noam Chomsky, talking about American imperialism is like talking about triangular triangles. I carefully follow Paul Kramer's use of "imperial" as an adjectival framing device for "a category of analysis, not a kind of entity" ("Power and Connection" 1350). In both theory and practice, pluralist governmentality is a form of imperial power, whose imperial subjects are cataloged to represent both the diversity and harmony of the imperium, as well as the unruly factions whose way of life threaten its cohesion. Tracing pluralist governmentality across time and space reveals its common alliances to terms like "civilization" and "progress." So too, "pluralism" and "multiculturalism" refer to utopic endpoints, so that the entity cast as "multiculturalist" is also cast as "exceptional."

Transitive Cultures in Anglophone Literature

It is in the bedrock of pluralist governmentality where transitive cultures emerge as a transnational formation that reveals how identities compete, shift, and transition in various contexts across the transpacific.[27] To explore these cultures, this book focuses on literary narratives that consider multicultural strategies through the use of English, a distancing language that is variously coded as "neutral," "universal," or "colonial," and is seen as a lingua franca operating among diverse linguistic groups. Because Anglophone authors do not fit their national ethnic norm, their literatures have been pushed to the margins of both the nation-state and the global English audience. Their use of English can also be seen as a means of positioning themselves outside of ethnic

and national identities to better grasp the function of pluralist governmentality internationally (from the Global North to the Global South) and domestically (from Manila to Cebu in the Philippines, from the Malay and Chinese majorities in Malaysia and Singapore). These literatures offer conceptual tools to understand pluralist governmentality in its multiple forms, as their very use of English marks them as imperial products.

Anglophone literature from Malaysia and Singapore has reinterpreted the region's history of diversity and free trade into a broader history of pluralist governmentality. Texts by Lloyd Fernando trace the region's diversity to prenational eras like the sixteenth century, when the Ming Empire fostered trading routes between maritime Southeast Asia and China, and Malaysian cities like Melaka were used as geographically convenient trading ports (see chapter 1). Statedriven celebrations of diversity are shadowed by Anglophone texts that trace how this diversity was produced through the intrusion of various colonial powers—the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the Japanese—wherein Chinese traders and Tamil laborers were imported to support the trading centers of Melaka, Penang, and Singapore.[28] Anglophone writers have thus depicted the reality of racial divides, like the Chinese in multinational factory work (Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch*), intimate sexual and religious crossovers (Lee Kok Liang's *Flowers in the Sky*), the suppression of Tamil temples (K. S. Maniam's *In a Far Country*), and the resentment felt for state multicultural policies like the New Economic Policy or the Internal Security Act (Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Joss and Gold* and *Among the White Moon Faces*). Anglophone narratives by Chinese in Singapore often resist the commodified identity of being a "trade diaspora" or speaking Mandarin (as historically most Chinese in Singapore are Hokkien), while other narratives represent both nations' race riots as an opportunity for the state to produce new forms of social control (Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* and *Green Is the Colour*). These texts reinterpret English from being a "neutral" language—one not ascribed to any three ethnic groups—to speaking for crosscultural and cross-ethnic communities.

Anglophone literature in the Philippines uncovers the enormous class divisions that correspond with linguistic, cultural, and religious differences. Many Philippine novels, for example, trace the dominance of a mestizo class of Chinese, American, and Spanish mixtures back to the earliest moments of national formation (see chapter 2).[29] The prominent Filipino Anglophone writer, Nick Joaquín, famously wrote in 1988 that "the identity of the Filipino today is of a person asking what is his identity" (*Culture and History* 244). His texts characterize Filipina/o identity as a process of becoming, emphasizing "what we are at this moment." F. Sionil José's novels capture the difficulties for Ilocano and Cebuanos to integrate into Tagalog-based state nationalism, while novels by Eric Gamalinda and Ninotchka Rosca reveal how histories of economic strife and imperialism spill out of pluralist histories that promote the Philippines as a place of diversity. As is the case with Malaysia/Singapore, Anglophone literature often

becomes an expressive haven to critique nationalism and state policy in times of censorship. Famously, during Martial Law, Ferdinand Marcos seemed to censor almost every expressive medium besides literature in English, believing that Filipino/as rarely read literature (English or otherwise). With even greater absence of state censorship after Marcos, the theme of transition appears in narratives concerning queer subjectivity (Bino Realuyo's *The Umbrella Country*), mestizo privilege (Miguel Syjuco's *Illustrado*), state oppression (Ty-Casper's *Awaiting Trespass*), and transnational migration (Charlson Ong's *Embarrassment of Riches*).

Since the 1980s, class strife in the Philippines has become a transnational phenomenon, propelled by the estimated eight million Filipina/os working overseas as domestic workers in places like Hong Kong, Korea, and Israel; as nurses in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom; and as technicians, engineers, and merchant seamen worldwide.[30] Recent Anglophone literature like José Dalisay's *Soledad's Sister* and Mia Alvar's *In the Country* critically responds to Philippine textbooks and media that parade the image of the "family-oriented" Filipina, or the "sea-faring" Filipino, which shape national identities into multicultural identities that are easily placed in global divisions of labor (McKay; R. M. Rodriguez). Philippine Anglophone literature allows us to understand how pluralist governmentality can function as an *intranational* empire that seeks to "civilize the margins," and how this intranational empire is also necessary for finding recognition through given identities that then cater to the export of commodified bodies.

Literatures in English push us to understand the motif of transition as a response to pluralist governmentality. They give us a glimpse at the methods and modes of transition, at the ability to remain invisible even within contexts of hypervisibility, and at the ways of surviving and flourishing within the identitybased optics of their (and our) time. These texts provide a critical reconceptualization of pluralism, not as the ideal end of liberal democracy, but as a form of imperial governance masked under the guise of benevolent rule over unruly racial factions. In doing so, they also give us a chance to explore how various cultures, at the dawn of multiculturalism, managed to "decorporate," not through outright resistance, but through feigning incorporation. This was by no means always a revolutionary, resistant, or even counterdiscursive act, but a means of harbor and safe haven, of keeping a community not based on race or nation, but one of colonial, imperial, and pluralist leftovers. This literature exposes a politics of marginality that eludes rather than reinforces the power of the imperial state. If we can see pluralist governmentality as a structure forged out of the need to control a "diverse" colonial populace for the purposes of providing cheap labor and of legitimating imperial power, then we can begin to see this literature itself as a type of social practice, one that develops a culture of transitioning among given identities in order to access a more critical, reflective, and ambiguous mode of being.

The Anglophone

> I have been faithful / Only to you, / My language. I choose you / Before country.
>
> —Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Lament" in *Modern Secrets*

I draw on Southeast Asian texts written in English to uncover responses to pluralist governmentality from groups speaking within a language deemed "inauthentic" to their ascribed identities. In lacking authentic, national, or even diasporic culture, these writers explore pluralist racial formations across the region. Their literature compels us to confront Southeast Asian history, wherein identities have been produced at the nexus of multiple imperial projects, competing postcolonial states, and various forms of multiracial governance. Southeast Asia offers a method of thinking race *ex*-centrically (as well as *ec*centrically) that forces us to shift from "diaspora" as a framework that reinstitutes national categories by seeing migrants as caught between a homeland and a host country.[31] Such conceptual models tend to reflexively equate Western cultural practices (like speaking English) with particular nation-states, creating a Western "homeland" that can only play host to its Others. But the view from Southeast Asia suggests that those models may themselves be a product of pluralist governmentality, wherein the complex political histories of "homelands" are routinely simplified and defined solely by their relationship to the Western power, marking migrancy as a progressive act ("diasporic peoples," we are told, never seek refuge *from* the United States).

Transitive Cultures reframes Asian migrant texts from diasporic texts into "transpacific Anglophone" texts that spotlight works deemed "inauthentic" to both nationalist literatures and American ethnic literatures. I see Anglophone as a way to account for marginalized literary traditions within the United States that do not fit easily into the Anglo-American literary canon, and are thus seen as foreign or minoritized. I take this gesture from Shu-mei Shih, who uses "Sinophone" to signify non-Han Chinese minorities both outside and inside the People's Republic of China, particularly those in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. For Shih, "Sinophone" exposes how global multiculturalism renders "national cultures of the globe," and makes visible the "new global regime of multiculturalism" by disrupting the conflation of nation and ethnicity (*Visuality and Identity* 63), and by parsing the complexity of Chineseness to make identity "difficult to consume" (ibid. 5). Shih's use of Sinophone to disrupt global multiculturalism allows us to consider how the Anglophone might also offer alternative modes of seeing Southeast Asian and Asian American cultures as employing similar responses to pluralist governmentality. Whereas the Sinophone thinks through instances of Chineseness within an American minority politics to separate "minor" Chinese cultures from the hegemonic form represented by the People's Republic, I see Anglophone as doing the opposite. That is, the Anglophone brings the political dimensions of anti-imperial politics within the

former colonies to American minority politics. Rather than think in terms of majorities or minorities, the Anglophone traces how communities fluctuate among positions of power through mobility, history, and transition. Its emphasis on imperial networks spotlights Southeast Asian migrants, whose presence has been difficult to render within American minority politics, because their very bodies speak to American imperial projects, and their "success" as "model minorities" has been less visible. Their ambivalence is manifest in the multiple terms used to describe them: "Southeast Asian," "Asian Pacific Islanders," "Asian Pacific Americans," "Filipino/a," "Malays," or simply "mixed." Anglophone bypasses identities made solely based on ethnicity or race while still accounting for the marginalization present in Asian American populations. Rather than mark the migrant as tethered to the "homeland" and the "host country," or co-opt the Asian American into multiculturalist discourses of success, "Anglophone" coheres as an expression of the "inauthentic."

Transitive Cultures treats Anglophone literature of the transpacific since World War II, which includes texts from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, as well as from Southeast Asian migrants in Hawai'i, Canada, and the mainland United States. By reading across the transpacific, I hope to excavate a complex imperial history of pluralist governmentality that enables us to isolate its typical logics and procedures, and to derive new means for resisting or managing its contemporary formations. Many of the texts examined here are categorized in nationalist terms as Asian American, Filipino, Malaysian, or Singaporean.[32] The racial histories of many transpacific Anglophone writers are often too mixed to meet a reader's expectations about minority literature, and their refusal to incorporate with the language and culture of their own nation also eschews national identities. This ambivalence in a pluralist social order has allowed transpacific Anglophone literature to either be ignored or marginalized as "second rate."[33] Similarly, in the American context, much of Asian American literature has been ghettoized into a "literary Chinatown" that meets a reader's expectations for "real voices," and uses marketing techniques that emphasize authenticity and exoticism (Partridge). This study follows materialist literary critics and reads these texts as refracting histories of pluralism, while also constituting alternative cultures that have operated within it.

My readings of Anglophone literature focus on Malaya, the Philippines, and its diasporas to understand how the postcolonial use of English has enabled new ways of depicting the relationship between race/identity and state/capital. As Shirley Geok-lin Lim observed in her 1993 book, *Nationalism and Literature*, Malaya and the Philippines both exhibit what N.V.M. Gonzalez called the "crossroads syndrome," as Lim defined it, "the collision of Asian and Western cultures leading to a sense of discontinuous history and cultural hybridization" (11). Anglophone artists depict the crossroads of race and empire within a language presumed to be a "neutral," "imperial," or "cosmopolitan" mode of address. But as a non-nationalist and inauthentic language, English can easily be appropriated to evade the censorship of the state and the condemnation of nationalist audiences (Holden, "Colonialism's Goblins" 26). By being

cast as a distanced and estranged language, English can stage discussions of race, identity, nation, and language itself as socially constructed categories rather than ontological ones.[34]

In Malaysia and Singapore, English has been entrenched since the British colonial policies that promoted its use in business under the East India Company (Ibid. 160). After independence, English became depicted as a necessary "neutral" medium for communicating among races. The "mother tongues" of Tamil, Chinese, and Malay contrasted English use by providing a "cultural ballast" or "moral compass" to stabilize traditional identities, keeping Malaysians and Singaporeans from being "set adrift" in the mobile language of globalization. English use contains a multicultural/neoliberal double-effect because it not only implies a society wherein no one group is dominant, but also functions as a world language that gives access to an international business class (S. G. Lim, *Writing S.E./Asia in English* 39). As the Singaporean poet Edwin Thumboo wrote in his preface to *Perceiving Other Worlds*, many Anglophone writers turned to English in order to recognize histories of imperialism, migration, and racial mixture, which nationalist narratives had sought to diminish. English literature, rather than English administration, has been a project of reexamining English to better discover what had been "over-looked, neglected, or suppressed as a colonial language" (xvii).

The use of English to analyze colonial discourse and to build interethnic coalitions harks back to the use of English during the colonial period as a crossracial lingua franca. Shirley Geok-lin Lim's devotion to English "before [her] country" expresses an allegiance to English that carries historical roots within her Peranakan background. The first non-British English language journal of the Straits, *The Straits Chinese Magazine*, launched in 1897, provided an outlet for Straits Chinese (and Peranakans) to communicate among various southern Chinese dialects. This use of English also gave Straits Chinese writers the chance to engage in political discussions and to experiment with Western literary forms, producing stories that sought to inspire social change (Keong 41). English use, then, became seen as a main vector that could shape new communal identities opposed to the racial categories proffered by the nation-state.

In the Philippines, Anglophone writing emerged out of American colonial education, where the linguistic diversity of the Philippines was reimagined by American schools as a "linguistic 'chaos,'" and English provided a practical solution as "the bearer of cultural value and moral authority" (Wesling 11). In effect, English grew to encompass so much of the territory that the Philippines has now become the third largest English-speaking country in the world, a surprising fact considering that its literary contributions have nowhere near the recognition of Anglophone nations like Canada, Ireland, or India. From the beginning of American colonization, the English language was thought to be a civilizer on its own,[35] and attempts to educate Filipino/as in English resulted in a very quick cultural shift, so that by the 1930s more Filipino/as

spoke English than Tagalog, and Manila's Anglophone publishing scene far outshone that of anywhere else in the region (Holden, "Colonialism's Goblins" 161). After independence, English was still kept as an official language used in education, and remained as an elite, mestizo medium until the 1960s, when Tagalog-language texts emerged from the renewed sense of Filipino/a nationalism. Even still, many writers continued to prefer English as both a national and a global lingua franca. As in Singapore and Malaysia, English in the Philippines was labeled as "neutral," but was often associated with imperial interests, mestizoness, and upper-class cosmopolitanism. As F. Sionil José has written, Anglophone literature had the potential to bring Filipino/as "closer to our colonizers so we could understand them, and also curse them—to repeat, curse them in the language they handed down to us" (21).

Indeed, English's immediate distancing allowed a critique of sensitive social norms and strongly held nationalist ties. The ideology of English as a tool to communicate among ethnic groups has placed the Anglophone writer in the position of a cultural interlocutor, where English can symbolize a discursive space that allows the individual to be both "inside and outside" of a racial identity. Topics deemed sensitive or silenced are often mediated through English as a way of exploring racial issues in a speculative, estranged discourse. Thus English use can avoid the language of the nation-state, while still maintaining colloquial idioms and code-switching.

Across Southeast Asia, English use has become a highly valued skill, and it cannot be separated from its imperial heritage or the desire to be published by Western presses. However, to cast all cases of English as mimicry reinforces the notion that the English language is owned by the colonizers (who never had to learn it in schools), and that it is really only for Anglo-Saxon people. In some parts of the Visayas, Ilocos, and Mindanao in the Philippines, English is used as an alternative to Tagalog, which can seem like an arbitrary national tongue. National languages too have a history of effectively marginalizing other linguistic groups, leading many writers to side with English over their given national identity (Lim, *Writing S.E./Asia in English* 47). In his essays on English writing, Lloyd Fernando saw Anglophone texts as "deserv[ing] study because they explore intercultural problems under compulsion" (*Cultures in Conflict* 124). Indeed, such writers have attempted to build new cultural form through owning English as a discursive space to manage and reinterpret racial categories.

I group Asian American literature into the transpacific Anglophone as a means of emphasizing a text's ambivalence toward Asian American identity projects. Scholars have already pointed out that labeling a text as an "Asian American novel" has become increasingly problematic, especially for novels that take place outside of the United States (*Book of Salt*, *Dream Jungle*, *Turning Japanese*) or novels that feature protagonists who identify as migrant or transnational (*Salt Fish Girl*, *Brazil-Maru*). Novels from Southeast Asian diasporic writers, such as Jessica Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle,* Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, and Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, depict the struggle to be liberated from given cultural identities, Asian American included. Despite these limitations, Asian American scholars continue to

insist that "Asian American literature is American literature," a characterization that promotes the multicultural mythos of America, and limits these texts and authors within national epistemologies and commitments (Ho 128). This book reads them as neither Asian nor American, but as transpacific Anglophone, a category that stresses encounter and exchange.

As identity categories in the United States are commonly seen within cemented histories of struggle, transpacific Anglophone literature in the United States appears less as an aggressive, explicit critique of pluralism, and more as an implicit critique that can be exposed by reading against realist and autobiographical tendencies. Rather than "denationalize" Asian American politics, these texts, when read outside the logics of pluralism, can work to undermine multiculturalist myths. Many of the novels treated here gesture toward the creative freedom of "inauthenticity" by developing styles of antirealism through myth, irony, absurdity, and speculation. They operate as "antihistories" that deviate from the sentimental and romantic genres through which nationalist myths are so often mediated. Absurdity and play make history appear more as speculation, shoring up a seemingly infinite variety of ethnic identities to account for suppressed (or "intolerable") cultural practices. For Asian American scholars like Tina Chen, Jeffrey Partridge, and Betsy Huang, Asian American literary production and criticism has long assumed an "autobiographic imperative" that casts "all Asian American fiction as forms of life writing" (Huang, *Contesting Genres* 7). Anglophone thus not only names an archive, but a method of reading that deviates from reading for typical tropes of "minority literature": identity construction, empowerment, marginalized histories, autobiography, and ethnic authenticity. Anglophone readings include and expand upon the sarcasm, the satire, the play, the wearing of different masks, and all the carnivalesque elements that constitute a creative project.[36]

In "Stranger in the Village," James Baldwin's brief visit to a remote village in Switzerland sparks an epiphany about his own black identity. American history, he realizes, can be seen as repeated efforts to protect, dignify, and valorize white identity. And this imperative has characterized nonwhite identities, including Baldwin's own, by their persistent need to stabilize and justify their own belonging within America.[37] Likewise, the identities enabled and empowered through American ethnic literature are modes of recognition that respond to American whiteness—white forms of masculinity and femininity, white presumptions to civilization as a European product. Transpacific Anglophone literature, in one sense, reveals how American minority politics has always relied upon whiteness as its major constituting force. Anglophone literature opens new comparisons from across the array of cities, nations, and identities within the transpacific. It contrasts forms of imperial power and domination that exist in America as well as in China, the Philippines, and Malaya. The impetus of Anglophone literature dares us to ask of ourselves: Who are "we," if we need not compare ourselves to American whiteness, to American heterosexuality, and to American patriarchy? Who are we without these comparisons, and who are our Others?

Chapter Overview

In order to study transpacific Anglophone texts without losing historical and local specificities, the chapters of this book flow through the transpacific, from Malaya to North America, as well as through history, from the 1960s to today. Each chapter uses a comparative mode of analysis that juxtaposes authors of various genders, nationalities, and diasporas, to compare histories and perspectives. Similar to Edward W. Said's "contrapuntal analysis," I analyze texts from different positions and contexts simultaneously to contrast how different groups respond to pluralist governmentality, and to understand how these texts create allegiances by imagining new forms of crossover (*Culture and Imperialism*). I rely not on comparing the imperial center to its Others, but on comparisons of Others to Others, where those who appear victims from the US vantage point can be seen as colonizers from a different view. These comparisons attempt to understand how cultural tactics emerge as strategies for confronting transnational forms of domination by disrupting binaries between "the perpetrators" and "the victims," the "dominant" and the "marginalized." Each chapter thus compares texts to foster what Said has called an "exile perspective," wherein "an idea or experience is always counter-posed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light" (*Culture and Imperialism* 60). To think comparatively is to think like an exile, which is to think critically. By refusing to focus on one nation, one event, one author, we are compelled to broaden our view by seeing things "not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way" (ibid.).

Part I: "Histories," investigates the tactics and affordances that emerge in Southeast Asian contexts of pluralist governmentally. I read metahistorical novels that juxtapose colonial histories with postnational race riots, revolution, and state repression. Chapter 1 treats Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* (1975) and Su-Chen Christine Lim's *Fistful of Colours* (1993) to consider how these two canonized literary texts represent the region's "communitarian multiculturalism" as a reiteration of British colonial pluralist strategies. Both novels follow "multiracial clans" rather than individuals to meditate upon histories of violent and intimate racial crossover. Chapter 2 reads two Philippine Anglophone novels, Alfred Yuson's *Great Philippine Jungle Energy Café* (1988) and Ninotchka Rosca's novel *State of War* (1988). Both novels reveal ways in which ethnic, racial, and tribal identities can be made excessive to the cultural practices encouraged by state and capitalist actors, and both interrupt realist representations of 1980s state repression with absurd historical narratives that parody the multiple revisions of racial identities over Philippine revolutionary history. Both chapters explore how transpacific texts eschew official state histories of diversity and racial harmony through genealogies of transition.

Part II: "Mobilities," explores novels of transpacific travel to ponder how radical shifts in locality can conjure new racial, gendered, and sexual identities, while also revealing the everyday presumptions about identity back at home and abroad. I

conjure the term "global imaginary" within these chapters to understand how pluralist governmentality functions not merely through nation-states and governments, but through metropolitan cities, global capital, and symbols of belonging that reappear in transit. Chapter 3 treats two novels where travel across the Pacific invokes comparisons that see North American spaces as ideally liberal and tolerant. In Peter Bacho's *Cebu* (1991), a Filipino American priest travels to the Philippines to cast Filipino/as as "intolerable" migrants branded by loose sexual norms and violent tendencies, while in Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* (2003), a lesbian Singaporean psychologist living in Vancouver, Canada, reimagines the homeland as a place of patriarchal violence and homophobia. These narratives reveal how pluralist governmentality constructs North American cities as liberal and tolerant, while spaces outside North America, like the Philippines and Singapore, are constructed as bastions of historical trauma, violence, patriarchy, and perverse sexuality. My fourth chapter extends this inquiry by reading texts of queer brown migrancy, beginning with Lawrence Chua's 1998 novel, *Gold by the Inch*, which follows a gay young migrant of Thai, Malay, and Chinese heritage as he travels through Thailand and Malaysia. I compare Chua's text with R. Zamora Linmark's 2011 novel, *Leche*, which follows Vicente De Los Reyes, a queer Filipino Hawaiian migrant who travels to the Philippines, only to be "boxed in" as a foreigner or *balikbayan*. Both novels consider queer of color travel as a rejection of American senses of brownness and homonormativity. In Southeast Asia, brownness becomes an ambiguous and illegible racial form that offers opportunities for transition.

Part III: "Genres," explores the aesthetic forms of transpacific Anglophone texts, focusing on how these texts transgress racial, gendered, and sexual identities through nonrealist (speculative) genres. Here I expand upon previous reflections about how literary form, tone, and style challenge representations of diversity, tolerance, and racial harmony. Chapter 5 draws from Hwee Hwee Tan's *Mammon Inc.* (2001) and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao* (2001) to consider how both novels use styles of cynical distancing (like chick lit) to represent Southeast Asian migrants who form new communities based on their shared roles in service work. Chapter 6 considers the antirealist elements of the texts treated in this book, and explores the rise of speculative fiction in contemporary online Anglophone writing. I trace my own experiences as a fiction writer writing under the name "Kawika Guillermo" to ask how aesthetic strategies can reframe our understandings of pluralism and transition. In my conclusion, I return to the concept of transitive culture as a means of building new coalitions and collectivities against contemporary forms of pluralist governmentality.

This transdisciplinary genealogical project highlights transpacific Anglophone literature as an all-too-ignored literary tradition, and explores how crossing national, racial, and gendered borders can reveal new ways of seeing pluralist governmentality in its various forms. My purpose in taking a more critical stance toward diversity, tolerance, and multiculturalism is not to claim these values as insincere or failed, or to

progress them into a new phase, but to ask what has been done—and continues to be done—in their name. Any project of supranational, queer, or antiracist solidarity must also take into account how such values can cater to nationalist exceptionalisms, with often catastrophic results for those then presumed worthless, villainous, or fake.

Chapter 4.
Just an American Darker than the Rest: On Queer Brown Exile

This chapter expands on the arguments in chapter 3 by considering how queer mobility and transition offer alternatives to a global imaginary characterized by tolerance, mobility, and multiculturalism. I treat novels of queer mobility from two Southeast Asian diasporic authors, R. Zamora Linmark, whose novels *Rolling the R's* and *Leche* explore queer Filipino/a migrants in Hawaiʻi and Manila, and Lawrence Chua, whose novel *Gold by the Inch* (1998) follows a queer Thai/Malaysian/Chinese diasporic who returns to his multiple homelands. The brown and queer narrators of these stories begin by rejecting a global imaginary to instead transition toward new forms of identity in Southeast Asia, where their brown bodies transform from devalued working-class skins to ambiguous sites of meaning-making. While in Bacho's and Kwa's novels, mobility only made their protagonists more certain of the intolerance of the homeland, in these novels travel allows characters to collect tactics and local knowledges of identity and power, and to compare them across borders. These novels begin by refusing the desire to belong to a global imaginary that manifests as a disguised form of pluralist governmentality, which leaves their protagonists open to alternative forms of cultural belonging.

Here I expand on the global imaginary, loosely defined in the last chapter as the normative social imaginary for how race, gender, and sexual differences are lived within global spaces, that is, as an ideal, postracial social formation. As an imperial form, the global imaginary is always expanding to include others—new imperial subjects, new ways of performing gender, new sexualities—at the same time as it hierarchizes newly identified populations into regimes of global capital and state surveillance. While the narratives from chapter 3 reveal the desire to remain within the global imaginary and to insist on its tolerant superiority, the novels in this chapter explore the "colonial leftovers" and the "historical stains" that are left behind in the desire to become global. In both *Gold by the Inch* and *Leche*, belonging to a global imaginary is something that poor queer-ofcolor subjects particularly fail to achieve. They fail to become Thai, Malaysian, or Filipino/a, just as they fail to belong to a global imaginary built on diversity, multiculturalism, and homonormativity.

Lawrence Chua's 1998 novel *Gold by the Inch* follows a twenty-three-year-old gay Southeast Asian American unnamed narrator who travels to Southeast Asia after a failed love affair in New York City. This unnamed narrator is multiply queered: he is of Thai, Malay, and Chinese (Teochew/Peranakan) descent. He is sexually queer as well,

as his omnivorous sexual desires tug him from space to space, from go-go bars to brothels and public toilets. He seeks out romance, love, sex, and belonging through monetary transactions, deluding himself that the pleasures he experiences exist outside a system of barter and exchange. The novel works episodically, and like a travel narrative it seems unsettled and wayward, tracking its mobile narrator to Paris, New York, Honolulu, Thailand, and Malaysia. Each new location reflects the narrator's unsettled identity and inspires a new erotic register, as the narrator transitions into bottom, top, sadist, masochist, fetishist, and lover. R. Zamora Linmark's 2011 novel, *Leche*, returns to the queer Filipino character from his previous novel *Rolling the R*'s, Vicente de Los Reyes, now thirteen years older and returning to the Philippines for the first time since he left as a child. Instead of an awaiting homeland, Vicente finds a similar neocolonial state rich in guarded mansions and the need to fake a racial harmony for tourists. In a nation where Filipinoness is heterogeneous, hybrid, and predicated upon hierarchies structured by one's capabilities with English and American culture, Vicente is no longer able to identify simply as a Filipino, as he did in Hawai'i. His attempts to understand his homeland through vexed notions of Filipino authenticity place him as a tourist, traveler, and American. Like Chua's narrator, Vicente transitions as both a "brown boy" and "rice queen," a trope that Eng-Beng Lim has identified as a central trope in colonial encounter. Indeed, both *Gold by the Inch* and *Leche* wrestle with the "white man" and "brown boy" dyad (also called the "white man/native dyad"), which Lim defines as "a pedophilic Western modernity bearing the homoerotics of orientalism" (4), wherein the brown or native boy can represent infantilized darker-skinned adults, and functions as an accepting love-child to "predatory capitalism, queer orientalism, and the white male artist-tourist on the casual prowl for inspiration and sex" (9). Hiram Pérez has similarly observed that for the white and Western "gay cosmopolitan," "brown" signifies "the fantasies about racial and sexual others who fascinate modern gay male identity with their instinctive, earthy, volatile, scatological, savage, and dirty allure" (14).

As with previous chapters, I focus on reading two novels together (*Leche* and *Gold by the Inch*) to focus on the slippages in identity across contexts, and to understand transition as more than an opportunistic tactic, but as a strategy developed through communal cultural crossover. Both novels feature traveling narrators who are challenged by mobile encounters that force them to broaden their ways of seeing their American-produced identities: Thainess, Filipinoness, Malayness, queerness, Americanness. Both novels see transpacific travel as crucial to practices of transition, producing an intellectual cunning developed through mobile encounters. As both novels take place in the early 1990s, they capture a moment between the Cold War and the War on Terror, when brown bodies were, for a brief time, politically ambiguous and incorporated into the global imaginary as workers, consumers, and travelers. Indeed, the early 1990s could be seen as the "Rise of Asia," when Southeast Asia began to transform from a space of war and trauma into a space open to

investment, consumerism, and political integration. While Southeast Asia itself was in a period of transition, Linmark's and Chua's texts shape their narrators too as figures of transition—people who can turn identity on or off as they choose, from closeted "Filipino" in Hawai'i to "hooker" in New York, to "client" in Thailand, to "returned son" in Malaysia, to a "*balikbayan*" in the Philippines. Both novels expose the supposed authenticity of multicultural identities as forming the basis of biopolitical management, where authenticity, in practice, means "being able to 'place' things and persons" in order to "assess the relative strangeness and/or acceptability of the thing or person in question" (Manalansan 290). These novels cause us to understand, as Vernadette Gonzalez has put it, "not the authenticity of these attachments, but their manufacture" (3).

Linmark's and Chua's texts provide a stage to explore the transitions that come with travel. They articulate feelings of loss and the desire for fulfillment for people of color travelers who seem deprived of the "soul-searching" narratives of white travelers, and who are instead expected to find their fulfillment by collapsing upon their ethnic orientation. These narratives of racial transition thus crossover into narratives of gender transition. That "he/she is transitioning" suggests the incomplete maturation of a human being who is marked as undeveloped due to the viewer's own categories of identity. As Jack Halberstam has argued, to be "transitioning" need not reflect a deferred future, or a lack (spiritual or otherwise), but can simultaneously be "a symbol for postmodern flexibility and a legible form of embodied subjectivity" (*In a Queer Time* 17). An easy co-optation of transition thus emerges when flexibility itself becomes associated with a utopic, postracial, postgender future—a global imaginary built upon tolerance, flexibility, and mobility.[38] However, taken out of its associations with progressive futures, the temporal associations of transition can also allow both ambiguity and recognition by naming an ever-present condition, the beginning and end of which is irrelevant to their material presence of being in the now. Thus, these novels explore the intricacies of feeling unmoored from nationalist or even global futures. Being "unsettled" here complicates accounts of migration as a settling, or as an arrival. The brown, queer migrant remains unsettled in order to protect the self from the settled communities. Home and settlement are not only elusive, but undesirable. These narrators see the need to feel "safe" and "secure" as enacting the very authoritarian restrictions upon one's freedom to find oneself, a privilege given only to those in power who can occupy states of wanderlust and self-discovery. In these brown queer travel novels, transition emerges as a tactic that is recognized only by those who practice it. It characterizes a community that produces feelings of belonging, loyalty, and kinship—an alignment based less on racial identities and more on relationships with imperial power. These novels thus ask how transition can allow for growth, flexibility, and modes of self-discovery that do not simply lead back to presumed gender, sexual, or racial identities.

In spotlighting the transnational travel of brown queer bodies, these novels reclaim the privilege of feeling lost in oneself through a picaresque traveling form

where encountering others both challenge and guide the traveler. Mobility not only offers new identities and selves, but through self-discovery, reveals the pains, structures, and violences that invoked the desire to travel in the first place. The travelers' education comes from a process of mobile encounters, as the American, poor, brown, queer travelers begin to imagine themselves in the optics of Southeast Asian contexts. Indeed, both novels share a sense of brownness as a form of racial ambiguity that aligns their narrators with Southeast Asian bodies, permitting them to enact transitional roles that would be unavailable to them in an American racial formation.

Throughout his career, José Muñoz formulated "brownness" as a conceptual framing that enables vaster considerations of how local and global forces degrade the value of brown people. "Brownness" comes without immediate value, and whatever value it achieves can be put down, attributed to "exotic" and "spicy" excesses. Yet "brown" only operates provisionally within identity categories, as "a waiting station of sorts between white and black, or white and Asian," and thus brownness can also reveal "how bodies are situated" within given binaries (white/black, white/Asian) (Pérez 175). In both novels, brownness becomes an everyday embodiment that shifts meaning in Southeast Asia, where brownness can signify a blended mixture of histories and races, and does not itself signify a particular class, race, or creed. This shift leaves transition open as a viable cultural practice, allowing these narrators to disidentify with the American sense of brown, toward a transnational brown commons. Muñoz describes his concept of "disidentification" as a process that "scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text" so that the "code of the majority" appears as "raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (*Disidentifications* 31). To queer Muñoz's own term, I ask if we can see the "cultural text" being "scrambled and reconstructed" not as a commodity, but as the brown subject and all the attached attributes deemed natural or given: Filipinoness, Hawaiianness, and an exotic gay "brown boy" identity that serves the homonormative.[39] In the global imaginary of the 1990s, to disidentify with the ascribed brownness of diversity and multiculturalism did not leave one marked as terrorist or communist radical, but left open a new, uncharted identity whose meaningful content was still in process.

Rolling the R's and "Queer Communal Subjectivity"

In R. Zamora Linmark's 1995 novel, *Rolling the R's*, his adolescent characters of 1979 Honolulu contend with the unrelenting surveillance over masculine performance and Filipina/o American identity. Linmark's young Filipino migrant, Vicente de Los Reyes, wrestles with being closeted while he dreams of sex with celebrities like Scott Baio and Matt Dillon. He remains uncertain of his own queer performance and appears rather as a critical examiner, fascinated with gays, straights, haoles, Filipina/os, transsexuals, and others. From the first vignette of *Rolling the R's*, Vicente listens to his out-of-the-

closet friend, Edgar Ramirez, who reveals to Vicente that he had a dream where "we saw you in the corridor givin' Parker Stevenson the Hardy Boys treatment. You actin' like you knew the ropes by trade, spreadin' your legs for spill out the one-and-only clue. You was so grown-up, you knew who you was, and was lovin' it too" (2). Edgar's dream that Vicente "knew who you was" hails Vicente into a recognizable gay identity, and the use of the second person "you" here stresses the conditioning of this hail as it becomes directed toward the reader. Vicente, like the reader, does not speak back in this vignette. Edgar's dreams of Vicente coming out of the closet are merely assumed to be Vicente's own. In Martin Joseph Ponce's reading of *Rolling the R's*, Edgar's call to perform queerness is meant to "disidentify" with heteronormative acts of expression. Edgar appropriates dominant images of male and female normativity, like posters of John Travolta and Scott Baio, and fetishizes them as objects of queer desire and consumption. Indeed, Vicente's refusal to come out of the closet could be read either as disempowering or as a means of resisting the homonormative identity wherein brown gay men are assigned into roles of "brown boys" who satisfy white "rice queens."

Vicente's desire not to be identified resists the image of Hawaiʻi as a space of multiracial tolerance that has been promoted by both tourist and military regimes since the 1980s, and has continued in television shows like *Hawaii Life* where white settlers are invited to buy and auction off island land. This view of Hawaiʻi as a multiracial utopia is met with scorn in *Rolling the R's*, which questions the relationship of ethnic identity with queer sexuality, transgender performance, and "islander" masculinity. Linmark's closeted Vicente is tormented for his queer sexuality by his family and friends through the language of self-affirmation and cultural identity, as he is never quite "Filipino" or "gay" enough, while Vicente himself seeks instead to withhold any gender, sexual, and ethnic affinities. This act of withholding marks him as a betrayer and fake in the eyes of Edgar, yet it also reflects a flexibility that allows Vicente to remain critical of pluralist discourses seeking to manage and incorporate him. In contrast, Edgar bears the brunt of his school's queer bashing. He learns to deal with the names he is called, "fag, "bakla," "homo," "sissy," "mahu," and "panty," and he "swallow[s] the names like the vitamins I gotta take before I go to school … cuz they supposed to make me grow big and strong" (5). The pain that Edgar learns to cope with makes him antagonistic toward the closeted Vicente, who expresses curiosity for other forms of queer identity. Vicente shares Edgar's desires but not the risk of social violence inherent to coming out. In the queer logic of the novel, the tension between Edgar's hypervisible gay identity and Vicente's closeted self takes the form of superficial surface markers, when the transgender woman, Exotica, names Edgar's pouting lips "ambitious, manipulative, and powerful," marking Edgar's affinity with gay identity as both courageous and as a means of controlling his own legibility through a recognizable queer discourse. Exotica then becomes "hypnotized" by Vicente's lips, with its "curves" that "mean eternity," and the fullness for "a kiss that means beauty and sadness" (15). Here the transgender figure of transition places Vicente's refusal to be hailed as gay in an "eternal" form like "the redness for birth,"

an opaqueness that decontextualizes his unspoken desires. The "secret" that Vicente is "trying to hide" is not merely his gay sexuality, but the unbound and unnamable sexual desires that operate in excess of it (15).

Vicente's refusal to align with a recognized identity makes him difficult to incorporate into multicultural narratives about overcoming racial and sexual barriers. His experiences give us pause, as his anxiety and frustration with maintaining his identity is set against the 1980s backdrop of a supposed Hawaiian "racial harmony" that is the afterlife of World War II and the Cold War, when attempts to depict America as multicultural gave unprecedented national attention to the territory of Hawai'i, the first American state with a majority Asian population.[40] As the gateway to Asia, Hawai'i's multiracial veneer covered over long histories of violence, servitude, and exploitation, beginning with the *Mahele* ("division") of 1848, when American missionaries and merchants bought up land from indigenous people to transform into industrial sugar plantations (Wu 211). With chattel slavery a thing of the past, and the Hawaiian natives decimated by Western diseases, growers looked to Asia to supply farm hands: Japanese seeking refuge from the unsettled society of the Meiji Restoration; Chinese as part of the coolie trade routed through ports in Hong Kong, Portugal, and Puerto Rico; and Filipino/as, who had been made colonial subjects. In *Rolling the R's*, the site of pluralist ideological reproduction remains the school, where Vicente's teacher, Miss Takata, teaches him the implicit racial hierarchies of multicultural Hawai'i, threatening to take him and his friends out of class to teach them "a thing or two about integration" (49). As Dean Saranillo has pointed out, the production of multicultural space in Hawai'i can be traced to American colonial education as part of a "deliberate, intentional, purposeful miseducation and disinformation by the government" to promote colonial pluralism (124). The public school system in Hawai'i that valorized a particular brand of racial harmony coincided with the simultaneous establishment of other colonial schools in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. Saranillo's comments echo Renato Constantino's essay, "The Miseducation of the Filipino," where Constantino argues that Philippine schools inherited the miseducation of American colonial schools, which taught them "to regard centuries of colonial status as a grace from above rather than as a scourge" (49).

The valorization of a multicultural (and thus exceptional) American culture carries implicit superiority to Filipino/a culture, and does the work of reifying (rather than hybridizing) conceptions of both. As Meg Wesling wrote in her book *Empire's Proxy*, American literary education was made into a tool of American exceptionalism, as narratives about racial uplift were used to distance US officials from the "openly exploitative" example of *British* colonial rule (8). As detailed in chapter 3, American exceptionalism helped constitute Filipino/a American identity as a separation from the *manong* generation. Saranillo reads this identity as thus an articulation of colonial miseducation (125),[41] and insists instead on the term "Filipino settler," as it stresses imperial subjectivity while "forcing non-Natives to question our participation in

sustaining U.S. colonialism" (141). "Filipino settler," for Saranillo, inverts the nationalism inherent in "Filipino American," emphasizing instead the erasure of native Hawaiians and other indigenous tribes from American subjectivity, but also disrupts notions of "homeland" and "host country" by naming the overdetermined context of migration as neither totally "forced" (by US colonization) nor totally "free" (in migrants moving for better opportunity).

Saranillo's call to replace "Filipino American" with "Filipino settler" troubles understandings of settlement and migrant arrival. To presently "settle" upon land assumes a prior "unsettling" of politics and/or land that prompted the migration—in this case, US colonialism and sugar cane plantations. To be a settler reinscribes the individual within the political, economic, social, and environmental unsettlings that were the conditions of identity articulation. The problem with "Filipino settler," however, is inscribed within the term itself—the presumption that such groups have "settled," have claimed land that isn't their own, and thus the term takes for granted that the limited range of Filipino American identity in Hawaiʻi reflects the transnational context wherein Filipino/as have become displaced, "unsettled" migrants even within the Philippines itself. "Filipino settler" can flatten the differences that Linmark's texts seek to draw out, where new forms of Filipinoness depend upon different histories of engagement with US empire.

Indeed, Vicente's refusal to adequately "settle" into given identities speaks to the neocolonial context and distrust of mainland American discourses, where Asian American identity can operate within a contemporary form of pluralist governmentality. Its rehearsal of racial pasts also reveals a limited utopic horizon that continues to be reliant upon the institutional power of the state, on one hand, and the conditions of possibility enabled by empire (via settler colonialism) on the other. In refusing "settlement," Vicente also confronts the migrant's desires to feel settled—to have a recognizable and communal identity under the auspices of a stable (though imperial, unjust, and unequal) power structure.

For some Asian American scholars, Linmark's *Rolling the R's* demonstrates how queer and diasporic writing disrupts nationalist and racial identities through idealizing sexuality and its communities as a viable alternative, a community that victimizes Vicente for remaining in sexual obscurity. In David Eng's analysis, the novel exposes a notion of queer communal subjectivity that disrupts ethnic identities while also making available more politicized forms of affiliation. While ethnic identities are made tenuous, sexuality "binds them together as a social group with a common sense of purpose" so that "the coalitional possibilities of 'Asian American' as a viable or even workable group identity are engaged, renewed, and rendered efficacious by this detour through queerness" (225). Queerness in this case could reflect an identity indifferent to nationalist status, as Chandan Reddy has noted, where "identifying as a 'queer' immigrant rather than an American immigrant powerfully deflects identification with the U.S." (qtd. in Eng 225). Eng's focus on *Rolling the R's* pressures the

text to formulate Asian American queer communities as "a name under which progressive politics can be strategized and rallied" (226).

Previous readings of *Rolling the R's* do not engage directly with Vicente as a closeted character who is bullied and harassed by Edgar, and who emerges as the main character of the book's 2011 sequel, *Leche*. Vicente's refusal to come out of the closet, in fact, sparks Edgar's ire and results in Vicente's sexual abuse at the end of the novel, when Edgar pimps him out to a teenager, Roberto, for twenty dollars, and abandons him with Roberto in a shed. Although Edgar acts as a gay hero through his revolt against straight white (haole) attitudes, his embrace of gay identity is laced with an excessive embrace of American consumer practices, spending "all his money on life-size John Travolta or Shaun Cassidy or Scott Baio posters" (3). The reading of *Rolling the R's* as rejuvenating Asian American political solidarity by "a detour through queerness" is belied by Edgar's consumerobsessed performance of queer identity, and his desire to force Vicente out of the closet, even it if means subjecting him to a sexual assault. Edgar shames Vicente as "two-face closet-case," Miss In-Denial, and "major closet case," and attacks Vicente with the same queer bashing insults that he himself had learned to absorb: "missus" and "faggot" (135). Indeed, the familiar hatred that made words like "faggot" seem ugly to Edgar, motivates Edgar to use them toward Vicente: "fuckin' fag," Edgar says, "he goin' get it. . . . No matter how many times you like run away from yourself, you cannot" (135). Enacting the gaze of colonial powers in reading the illegible, Vicente's friend Katrina diagnoses Vicente as an "unconscious two-face" and "schizophrenic" unable to choose sides (119).

The Brown Boy in the Global Imaginary

> Your skin is your uniform. A beacon and a membrane … Dark,
> but not dark enough to hide your insides.
>
> —Lawrence Chua, *Gold by the Inch*

In R. Zamora Linmark's *Rolling the R's*, Vicente's disidentification with queer consumption reflects an unease with settling into any prescribed identity. In Lawrence Chua's 1998 novel, *Gold by the Inch*, this unease comes from the narrator's repeatedly having to play the "brown boy" to his white gay boyfriend, Jim, in order to seek security and approval. In a French subway, the narrator is harassed by "ten men in black paramilitary uniforms" who throw him violently against a wall (56). Once the police realize he is American, they pat him on the back, just as Jim returns from the toilet. During the attack, the narrator realizes that his skin was "an act of resistance" (58): "Jim gave me the appearance of belonging," the narrator says, "to a place, to a time, to him. As decoration, I wasn't always able to articulate my value, but Jim knew it intrinsically" (57). The brown skin that Chua's narrator embodies necessitates Jim's presence as a constant symbol warranting the narrator's social value to belong. The belonging that the narrator feels as an American is only recognized by others insofar as he maintains

the value given to him by a white interlocutor. "But," the narrator says, "it was the value I now knew was less than the worth of my skin. Skin the color of decay. Another layer crumbling in the rinse" (60).

Chua's unnamed narrator relies on Jim as a universal subject whose whiteness acts as a referral to give the narrator's brown skin value in a context where it is presumed to have none. In chapter 3, I introduced the binary between the "tolerable" and "intolerable" migrant, where the intolerable signified new migrants whose Americanness was still under question. The novels in this chapter extend these concepts by focusing on two categories of American brownness: one of rural poverty, whose presence in the city warrants surveillance, and one whose belonging is given value by the endorsement of a white (or more tolerable) American. Lisa Marie Cacho similarly divides brownness between the "respected" minority and the "deviant" minority (183), with the latter as being in excess of "ideological codes" that are "used for deciding which human lives are valuable and which ones are worthless" (186). In the United States, Jim does the work of ideological coding when he assesses the narrator's value, allowing him to be recognized and thus to belong, but always in spite of his race. As a brown queer man, the narrator's belonging is unstable, even as he finds himself in an apparently multicultural global imaginary. Thus he feels forced to emigrate from the United States where his skin only represents the fear of "Foreignness" and "Contagion" (121). His skin cannot be cast aside, but continually exposes the contradictions of the global imaginary. Jim refuses to see these contradictions: "When I had told Jim what had happened [in the subway] he didn't believe me," the narrator says, "He was certain I had made up the story just to amuse him" (57). The narrator's embodied brownness is his exclusionary mark, one that allows him to discover contradictions that Jim either cannot see or chooses to ignore.

While the narrator is tethered to a brown skin that marks him as either valued or devalued, Jim acts as a neutral universalist whose whiteness gives him access to a global imaginary without skin. Jim's addiction to cocaine allegorizes this feeling: "Jim always said that the cocaine made him feel as if he were unencumbered by his body. It left him free to indulge in mine" (88). The narrator decides to become a nomadic traveler when, in New York, Jim smashes a phone against the narrator's face. When the police arrive to settle their domestic dispute, Jim refuses to identify the narrator as his housemate or lover. The narrator's brown skin makes his innocence invisible: "He told them I was trespassing. That they should arrest me. I begged them to let me call our next door neighbor, who could vouch for my identity. One of them started to giggle when he put the handcuffs on me. I couldn't blame him" (59). Even as Jim denies the narrator's encounters with police harassment, he still is conscious enough of their racial difference to manipulate ideological codes, and to mark the narrator's race, gender, and queerness as "deviant." The narrator feels entrapped by the fixity of the American system, like vines that "always bring you back to the forest" (59). Southeast Asia provides a space of refuge from these ideological codes, as it is only after arriving in Malaysia that the narrator gets revenge on Jim by calling the American police from

a pay phone and reporting Jim as a drug smuggler. Identified only by his American accent, the narrator is able to mark Jim with the same ideological coding tactics that Jim had used on him, naming whiteness within a set of criminal categories: "Six foot one. Blond. American passport" (89).

The narrator's disillusion with the global imaginary provokes his desire to travel to Southeast Asia, yet as he travels, so his skin, his queerness, his language, and his American notion of brownness travel with him. He thinks, "My own body is starting to return to itself in these weeks since I left [Jim]. … I think I can do things with it now that I never knew I could do" (88). Whereas in France and New York his brown skin marked him "as an illness," brownness in Southeast Asia permits him to transition to a wider array of identities, each of different value depending on the context. Mobility here unfixes categories and values that were once reliant on Jim's presence, as the narrator's skin no longer presumes the same cultural practices. But as values are relational, for the narrator to add value to himself often means devaluing others, particularly, his lover Thong, whom he fetishizes as a Thai national in the same way that the narrator was once fetishized as a brown boy. As he says, "At twenty-three, would you believe I've never been with anyone like him before … . What I mean by that, like him? Like me" (13).[42] *Gold by the Inch*'s narrative is held together by the narrator's overwhelming desire for Thong, a desire that reflects the colonial obsession for the native boy as "a sign of conquest … a savage domesticated as a child, and a racially alienating body in need of tutelage and discipline" (E.-B. Lim 9). Yet this desire manifests as an attempt to understand Jim's privilege in desiring the narrator. Whereas the narrator could never truly reveal himself to Jim for fear of losing Jim's referred value, neither can Thong do the same. The narrator articulates Thong's value whenever given the chance, describing even his sexual trespass within terms of value: "You used to like the fact that other men were having him. It made him more valuable to you" (165). Despite this casting of value, the narrator continues to grasp for an honest relationship. His own likeness to Thong, that they can "pass for brothers" (27), deludes him into buying into American racial hierarchies where brownness is a fixed mark of subjugation as well as solidarity.

As the narrator's mirror-image, Thong reveals the limits of the narrator's transitions: that despite his brownness the narrator cannot form himself into any identity he pleases; that to belong to some identities also means becoming structurally positioned at the bottom of a class hierarchy. When they first meet, Thong performs the "brown boy" to the narrator, complaining that "he doesn't know who his father is. … They all live in a shack with a dirt floor somewhere in the slums of klong toei" (31). Once they become more intimate, Thong invites the narrator to live with him in his father's house so that the narrator can save money. Thong's father, it turns out, is a sugar merchant, and the "shack" is in fact a mansion surrounded by an electric gate, a long driveway, and a garden (31). The narrator, unable to free himself from his skin in America, takes racial identity for granted as the only way in which groups are

hierarchized. It is not the narrator's skin nor cultural behavior, but his American accent and passport that remain his most important signifiers. His previous desire for the global imaginary has framed culture as a commodity to be owned, stirring only anger when he is dispossessed of it: "I wish people here would stop trying to teach me the fine points of my own fucking culture, you know?" (170). Pushed into being Thai, Malaysian, and Chinese in the United States, his inability to understand the purposes behind Thong's transitions comes from the arrogance that he really is any one of those identities, that he "owns" these cultures. The more the narrator attempts to own Thong, the more estranged the two become, until the narrator catches Thong in bed with his "replacement," a woman (198). Even after Thong has slept with other men, and together he and the narrator had enjoyed threesomes together, Thong's bisexuality acts as the ultimate trespass for the narrator. It signifies a personhood as illegible to the narrator as his own brown queer personhood is in the United States. Even in a novel filled with upfront erotic imagery, the bisexual figure stands as the most unsettling sexual image. It reveals to the narrator that he cannot ever own or possess Thong (and therefore Thainess). In their last heated argument, Thong casts him as another foreign sex tourist, "just an American darker than the rest, doing things in Thailand you could never do at home" (201). Despite having so little privilege in America, the narrator finds that his own desire to conquer and own other cultures—even those that were "given" to him in America—has left him disconnected, consigned only to see the smiling surface of the locals.

Queer Exile and the Tourist Gaze

These novels about queer exile contrast with the mobilities of Bacho's *Cebu* and Kwa's *This Placed Called Absence*. Rather than harden imposed identities, here mobility allows these travelers to deny given identities—queer, minoritarian, or otherwise—and to instead permit the affective growth and self-discovery so often restricted to white travelers. While in *Cebu*, Ben's return to his homeland ends with a reaffirmation of his Filipino American identity, in these novels, mobility destabilizes the identities of these queer brown travelers, and every transition enables new relationships with others. Once becoming travelers and nomads, these characters cannot be confined within an identity that fits easily into the structure of the global imaginary. Their unstable identities reveal transpacific structures of stratified ethnicities, as their brown ambiguity keeps them from belonging within any particular space. Rather than rediscover their racial identities by returning to their homeland, these travelers instead appropriate the pleasure-seeking wanderlust of white travel by queering travel literature itself.

More often than not, travel narratives are figured as optic extensions of what Mary Louise Pratt famously called "imperial eyes," wherein an empire "becomes dependent on its others to know itself," and creates "an obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself " (4). Travel literature,

from Herodotus to Lord Byron, has helped imperial powers get a sense of what lies in the prospective colonies, from "discovering" the types of rituals and food to identifying (and thus casting) racial, gender, and sexual characteristics upon local populations. As Edward W. Said argued in *Orientalism*, this literature shapes people and cultures from "the Orient" as undeveloped, unchanging, exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous, thus producing the West as advanced, developed, civilized, progressive, and safe. Countering this imperial form of travel, Pratt insists on reading and producing autoethnographies, referring to the accounts of creoles, indigenous peoples, and natives who countertravel and write of the imperial center in order to evade imperial eyes.[43] Extending these arguments, John Urry has argued that travel writing can help understand the orientalisms of a "tourist gaze," which Urry describes as the tourists' expectations of the foreign in relation to the mundane and the everyday of their lives. Travel texts for Urry are unique in that they invest certain objects with pleasures that "involve different senses or on a different scale from those typically encountered in everyday life," and such pleasures are often reflected back by locals for financial benefit (*Tourist Gaze* 12). Indeed, travel literature can be integral to understanding how imperial powers produce socio-cultural sensescapes wherein the performance of the traveling body and its perceptions are contrasted with the everyday.[44] For example, postcards of Hawaiʻi routinely contain romanticized and idyllic visions of the islands' beaches, though one may spend five days in Hawaiʻi and in only 5 percent of that time lie out on the beach (if there is no storm). Yet the memories, photographs, and travel writings will be almost solely focused on scenes that re-create the postcard. The sensescapes of a place, the very feelings and physical sensations one has within a travel experience, are limited to the already established tourist gaze.

Both *Gold by the Inch* and *Leche* appropriate travel literary forms to express the experience of queer brown exile. First, both texts explore how postcards and other touristic objects articulate the limits and potentialities of travel. Chua's narrator carries a "sheaf of postcards" with him across Penang, which he calls "windows onto a river of lust" (61). He uses a postcard of the Chao Phraya River to reflect on his own relationship to imperial history by calling the river by its colonial name, "the menam," and writing of himself as a colonial mimic: "I'm twenty-three," he writes, and wearing a counterfeit "black suit" that's "not real. … But I wanted to wear it. It makes me look different" (7). Similarly, Linmark's *Leche* includes a pastiche of touristic writings, beginning with a "Tourist Tips" section that Vicente (now going as "Vince") uses as a survival guide to Filipino/a culture (12). These sections, which contain tips like "'Filipinos' to Westerners; 'Pilipinos' to nationalists," not only maintain a distance between Vince and the locals by reinforcing his position as a tourist, but also allow him to distance himself from imperial power. Even as the tips enact an orientalist geography that separates (and thus produces) Filipinoness, Vince's self-reflexivity chops away at these binaries, as the tourist tips are slowly outnumbered by Vince's own postcards, which offer his thoughts of Manila inspired by his annoyance at the

city's heat and loud music. As Manila assaults both his senses and his categories of meaning, he writes on a postcard, "All that crap about Western metaphors, signs, and symbols is useless here" (180).

Both *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch* depart drastically from typical travel forms by parodying tourist commodities like postcards, and in providing a historian's knowledge of the cities they encounter. Both narrators display an archive of historical knowledge about the places they visit, and their analytical voices counteract their initial travel encounters. In *Leche*, Vince at first makes naïve and often racist judgments about Filipina/os: "Filipinos talking loudly behind your back is their indirect way of showing you that you are important enough to kill time with" (9). This intimate narrative of Vince's frustration, after a woman gossips about Vince being gay, is entirely absent at other times in the narrative, when we are faced with a disengaged voice, as in this description of Malate (downtown Manila): "MALATE Pulse of Manila. Crammed with bars, restaurants, hostels, motels, cafés, and potholes. A small fishing village during the Spanish colonial period, the name was derived from the Tagalog 'maalat'—salty—because of the seawater from the nearby Manila Bay that seeped into the drinking wells" (82). This historical voice operates like an exterior shot in a film before cutting to an interior scene, where Vince's naïve reactions occur. The narrative functions as an expert informant, historically informed, semi-academic, and compared to the pleasures of Vince's intimate narrative, pessimistic. It offers a hyperawareness of the space, and gives historical information that doesn't complement Vince's simple impressions so much as highlight his naïve mode of tourism.

Gold by the Inch's unnamed narrator similarly has an academic knowledge of history, one that is often conjured in moments of gay sex. Chua juxtaposes a statement from the American Department of Defense on the importance of "security" with a dreamlike scene of a white angel who chains the narrator to a public toilet and cums in "your mouth," leaving "you" with "a wish to die a hundred times this way, the object of someone else's history" (81). Rather than oppose the pleasures of the intimate travel narrative, the historical voice here reinforces the pleasures of sub-dom erotic practices by adding the historical weight of colonial violence to the encounter. Earlier, a quotation from the *Hikayat Abdullah* focuses only on the book's representation of sex slaves (41), and later, a historical meditation on the colonial extraction of rubber from Malaysia intersects with a scene where the narrator enacts sexual vengeance on a white tourist in a rubber suit. Transitioning into a native brown boy by "fumbling for the English word" (115), the narrator tries "to make [his] body disappear" by urinating inside the man's rubber suit: "He is surprised, but it only takes a moment before it fades into indignation. You put your hand over his mouth and continue urinating … you push him down, still peeing. Cover him with your body. The rubber takes on a new sheen" (116). A scene that invokes the colonial violence of rubber plantations is here made into pleasurable sex, and the narrator's transition into the "brown boy" takes on an attitude of fetish and fun. Where the narrator could only be seen as the "brown

boy" in America, his ability to become this figure as a choice rather than a devalued stigma opens the encounter to new forms of eroticism (and erotic vengeance).

The historical reflections in these novels displace the excitement and thrill of travel with a historian's knowledge of colonial violence that seems to "kill the party," so to speak. But historical knowledge does not leave a pessimistic view of travel so much as bear the burden of historical accountability, where travel provides a platform for historical violence to be made more intimate. As queer travelers, these narrators cannot speak for local communities, but instead rely on historical facts to inform their encounters, erotic or otherwise. Their historical diatribes reject the sensescapes of the global imaginary to instead broaden spatial understanding. Both authors are familiar with the academy: after publishing *Gold by the Inch*, in 2012 Chua earned a Ph.D. from Cornell where he studied under Benedict Anderson; Linmark was a Fulbright scholar in the Philippines and a professor at the University of Hawai'i during the years he wrote *Leche*. Their novels can be read as the expression of intellectuals in exile, as Said has called it, those thinkers imbued with a metaphysical sense of "restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others" (*Representations* 53). Their styles reflect a condition of exile where unhappiness becomes a mode of being and thinking that resists the trappings of the national, the local, and the global. The exilic intellectual thus "tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness," and dissatisfaction with every new space brings upon a new "curmudgeonly disagreeableness," that operates as both a style of thought and as "a new, if temporary, habituation" (ibid.). Indeed, the narrators of both novels derive pleasure from the spaces they inhabit even as they remain highly critical of their own positions within them. Such historicized encounters contain the pleasure of being surprised, as Said writes, "of learning to make do in circumstances of shaky instability that would confound or terrify most people" (ibid., 59).

Leche and *Gold by the Inch* queer travel literature through appropriating travel objects like postcards, through rehearsing imperial history, and lastly, by applying the second-person plural narrative typical of travel guides, which employ the second person to focus readers on sensations of food, landscape, and sex. "You can't really say you've been to George Town unless you've stepped inside China House," says the Lonely Planet guide to Malaysia. A tourism brochure for Angeles City, the most well known prostitution site in the Philippines and the previous location of the US Clark Air Force Base, advertises go-go bars with "young women eager to show you a good time" who can help *you* get "loaded and laid" (Ralston and Sutherland). And so on. As travel narratives often use the plural "you," to make the reader feel included in the experience, the traveler then is made to appear "neutral" or "universal" in respect to the target audience—in nearly all cases, the traveler is presumed white. In response, *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch* use the second person to impose historical responsibility upon the pleasure that readers absorb from travel writing.[45]

Leche appropriates the second person to queer travel as a mode of seeing, where travelers often inhabit "lumpy, fragile, aged, gendered, racialized bodies," yet they perceive new places by inhabiting a white imperial gaze that is enhanced by the use of the second person (Urry, *Mobilities* 48). *Leche* recognizes this in its "tourist tips" sections, which separate "you" (white) and "them" (Filipino): "Don't use Spanish on them because their Spanish is not your Spanish" (120). The second-person narrative expresses the dissociation of travel, where the traveler is always presumed to be a white tourist, who knows little to nothing of the space. Vince, as the reader of these tourist tips, seems to adjust them as he spends more time in Manila, replacing their frequency with his own postcards, and revising them to expose the colonial violence that tourist sensescapes only occlude. A tourist tip on Filipino stares says: "Staring can't kill you; Philippine colonial history would have lasted in a blink rather than four hundred years" (85). The last tourist tip section becomes critical of its own genre: "Your Manila is only one of the hundreds of millions of versions.… Keep tourist tips where they belong: at the International Dateline" (316).

In Chua's text, the second person is used liberally to double the narrator into different selves, and to implicate the American reader into the narrator's own imperial complicity. At first, the second person seems to name the American version of the narrator himself, who he seeks to leave behind. "I died when I was ten," the narrator says, "and that's when you were born … you came into the world when the plane took off, circled Subang International Airport, and then tore off into the clouds" (52). The second person allows the author to make sense of his transitions among multiple identities, as the "you" figure shifts back and forth from his American self, to his ideal Thai self in Thong, to the reader, and to the "brown boys" who pop up in his dreams, where "you" names Graham Greene's local lover (126). In the end, when the narrator allows himself to reconnect with his American side, his self is imagined as the Western world reinhabiting his body with New York, Paris, and Los Angeles (207). But on the next page, the second person breaks into a direct call to the reader, the implied "second person": "You thought this was something in which you wouldn't have to participate. Thought this was a story you could just watch unravel" (208). The novel's intimacy, direct calls, erotic imagery, and invocations of historical violence continually implicate the reader into the pleasures of travel.

Brown Illegibility

> Illegibility, then, has been and remains, a reliable source for political autonomy.
>
> —James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*

Gold by the Inch's second-person narration envisions the self as made up of multiple identities, where "you" acts as a center tethering them together. "You were not born pretty or a bitch," the narrator thinks, "you are a piece of work" (19). The second

person is "you" the voyeur, the central self, and the reader who watches the narrator as he transitions and moves about Thailand and Malaysia. Indeed, in both *Gold by the Inch* and *Leche*, the travelers' brown bodies permit access to new identities within Southeast Asia across a spectrum of race, class, gender, and sexuality. *Gold by the Inch* typifies transition in Southeast Asia on its first page, where it opens with a story of gender transition from Singapore's newspaper the *Straits Times*. The story details how Thai migrant factory workers in Singapore paint their fingernails red to "dupe murderous 'widow ghosts' who are hunting for husbands into thinking the men are really women" (3). These opening lines introduce a radically different form of gender transition than the individual (or liberal) transitions in the West, one that spotlights group-oriented transitions based on religion and superstition. These migrant workers are depicted not as enlightened, traveling subjects, but as foreign bodies who bring the transsexual with them as smuggled ghosts. The brown queer traveler thus discovers new gender and sexual norms that would be illegible if not impossible to imagine in the United States. At times these norms confuse the narrator: "I can see men touching other men here all the time. I see woman walking together hand-in-hand, but I don't know what union of our particular limbs mean" (21–22). At other times the norms seem imbricated within global capital. The narrator's cousin, Martina, works in a Penang microprocessor factory, where she informs him of *latah*, an affliction "in which subjects were unable to realize their own identity" and instead "could only imitate the actions of others, accompanied by cursing and swearing" (92). *Latah* becomes easily appropriated by the factory's management as a disciplinary instrument, to "make [the workers] do anything by simply feigning it." At the same time, the factory permits women to transition in ways previously unavailable. Martina points out that the women "try to copy men" by wearing "baggy jeans and basketball jerseys," and that "they forget their sex" (92).

If Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore offer new modes of transition, they are modes unavailable to white tourists, who will only be identified as just that. Indeed, the narrator's brown skin acts as the everyday embodiment of these transitions, a "suit" whose color can be either dirt, shit, or gold. On a beach in Penang, Malaysia, the narrator lies "under the sun, hoping it will bake the answer into my skin. Bake my belonging. But it's not me that's lying back this afternoon, just my skin" (121). In the West, his skin and mixed heritage are enigmatic, and mark him as an ambiguous Other.

In describing the brownness of Latino/as in the United States, José Muñoz formulated brownness as "the ways in which minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible" ("Feeling Brown, Feeling Down" 679). Brownness for Muñoz could not be white or black, but was always seen in relationship to them, complemented by a "self-knowing" that is "cognizant of the way in which it is not and can never be whiteness" (ibid., 680). Brownness thus begins like Chua's unnamed narrator—it rejects the promises of whiteness as the impossible ideal. For Muñoz, brownness becomes well defined only as it exists "in relation to an official 'national

affect,'" where feelings and erotics are normatively white ("Feeling Brown" 68). Of course, this national affect is only the racial identities of the United States reimagined as a global imaginary. But in one of his lectures before his early death, Muñoz sought to expand brownness into a transnational context that described not just brown subjects in the United States, but "the multitude," a "Brown Commons" of underprivileged and undervalued ("Brown Commons"). These novels of queer brown travel allow us to develop Muñoz's conceptions of brownness into the transpacific, where the "national affect" and white norm are displaced, scattered, and uncertain, and where brownness operates as a "commons" sensitive to other modes of affective belonging (feeling lower class, feeling female, feeling queer). These characters escape white normative modes of affect and erotics in America only to find themselves confronted with radically different sorts.

In *Gold by the Inch*, the unnamed narrator's desire to transition comes in part by his fixation on his grandmother, who in his mind was a figure of transition in dress and illegibility. He spends a month in Penang seeking his grandmother's story, a story that been hidden from him (70–71), knowing only that she was "the daughter of a Siamese father and a Nyonya mother" (134). He sees her as "the illegible Nonya," a matrix of various ethnicities: "Siamese, Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Acehnese, Tamil, Sinhalese, Portuguese" (134). She died during the Japanese Occupation amid rumors that she starved to death because members of the family withheld food from her, perhaps, as punishment for her sexual disobedience, "because she was having an affair with another man" (110). Seeking to rescue her from illegibility, the narrator discovers a picture of a woman who might be her at the Batu Ferringhi beachfront: "You could be any grandmother," he thinks. "There is a shape to your face … that reminds me of my own face in the mirror" (109). He gravitates to the image because of its artful fakeness: the sparse jewelry, the difficult smile, and the replicated background. The image, however, is merely a postcard dressed in a wooden frame, mark(et)ing his grandmother as "a sales pitch, a hot tropical fantasy" (109). When the narrator visits his grandmother's grave, he again finds that "[t]here is no prepackage of identity or ethnic heritage left to possess. No folk tales passed on from Grandmother's knee" (135). Finally, at the end of his journey, he asks a medium to conjure his grandmother's spirit. The spirit manifests and recalls sitting for the photograph he found, only to chastise the narrator for finding it. She says that she burned all the photographs but kept one for herself, thinking that "if my children didn't know what I looked like, then I could be everywhere for them" (141). In adopting the same desire for categorization as the colonial powers before him, the narrator realizes that making her legible has only betrayed her own attempts to obscure her life story. Her decision not to be remembered in a photograph was her own effort to control how her identity was envisioned throughout the years, to remain unexposed, "torn in pieces that never form a whole reflection" (142). The narrator here finds not identity in his grandmother, but the power of illegibility, that without image, without identity, she can continue on

through others, so that "I would never know where her body ended and mine began" (142).

As in *Gold by the Inch*, in *Leche* transnational travel offers a range of brown identities that Vicente was previously unfamiliar with, all of which are different types of being Filipino. In *Leche* it is 1991, and Vicente, now twenty-three and calling himself "Vince," has come to define himself as Filipino, that is, until he wins runner-up in the "Mr. Pogi" (cutie-pie) pageant and is given a free trip to the Philippines. In Hawai'i, Vince's identity as a Filipino came as a casual checkmark in the "Filipino" box, but in the Philippines he is seen as a *balikbayan*, a returned Filipino from overseas. In *Out of This Struggle* (1981), one of the first books on Filipino/a history in Hawai'i, the authors mark the Hawaiian Filipino as having "no discontinuity between the history of the Philippines and the history of overseas Filipinos" (Teodoro x). While Hawaiians like Vince may imagine the Filipina/o as diasporic, he is met with frustration at every attempt to authenticate himself as Filipino. Because his family fled during the Marcos years, Vince is associated with a legacy of neocolonial brain drain and self-exile. In contrast, by 1991 the Filipina/o heroes had become the overseas Filipina/o workers, or OFWs, who work in foreign countries as maids and entertainers, and who send money back through the overseas remittance program. Indeed, Vince's slippery grasp of his Filipino identity overlaps with the white tourist's dream to identify with the locals in order to escape the guilt of first-world citizenship, even as he pursues sexual escapades with them. But Vince's desire for this identity also maps his own critical political alignment, which is antagonistic to American imperialism. The constant hailing from Filipino/a children around him as "Joe" and the compliments he receives as a beautiful film-ready mestizo only reaffirm the alienation he experiences from both his Americanness and his Filipinoness.[46] Vince's devalued Filipino body in Hawai'i suddenly holds value that reproduces the unearned capital of colonial subjectivity, and contradicts his queer desires. Though the locals see him as a rich mestizo or a "Joe," Vince could only afford to come to the Philippines by exploiting his body in a beauty competition, or as he calls it, his "great humiliation," which, like his sexual abuse as a child, was orchestrated by Edgar. Vince's frustration stresses the desperation of asserting a political identity that does not travel easily. What seems resistant in a context of neocolonial Hawai'i becomes, in the Philippines, a mark of colonialism itself.

Leche is told in a postmodern pastiche style reminiscent of Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* and Linmark's previous novel, *Rolling the R's*. *Leche*'s variety of narrative voices—from tourist tips to academic treatises of Filipino/a culture— reflects different understandings of Filipino/a identity. In the main narrative the extended metaphor of the *balikbayan* box complicates notions of Filipinoness. The *balikbayan* box, a strengthened cardboard box that Filipino/a migrants have used for decades to send goods to the Philippines, becomes a symbol for the shifting Filipino/a identity as carrying colonial leftovers: "cans of Hormel corned beef, Libby's Vienna sausage, [and] Folgers" (2). Such foods, as Martin Manalansan has pointed out, are remnants of

American colonization, like the overseas Filipina worker herself. The *balikbayan* box reappears throughout the novel in italicized vignettes that portray Vince's dreams, where "a procession of canned goods, led by a can of Libby's Vienna sausage, floats past him" (14). In a later dream, a *balikbayan* box falls from the sky, killing one of Vince's white exboyfriends. The migrancy of the *balikbayan* box into Vince's dreams foreshadows the associations of the box with death and haunting, when Esther, a domestic worker from Hawai'i who Vince meets on the airplane, is murdered along with her two children for the goods inside her *balikbayan* box. The *balikbayan* box, seen as an object that can "invite crime" (124), here upends the privilege associated with migrants to mark them as precarious workers vulnerable to the violence of migrancy.

The *balikbayan* box unsettles Vince's understanding of Filipinoness, which, like his education in *Rolling the R's*, reflects American colonial education. In *Rolling the R's*, Vince's understanding of American diversity came from the Japanese American teacher Miss Takata, and in *Leche*, Vince's notion of Filipinoness comes from a Filipino American Ethnic Studies professor at the University of Hawai'i, Bonifacio Dumpit. Professor Dumpit's academically certified definitions from *Decolonization for Beginners: A Filipino Glossary* appear strewn throughout the narrative in grayed text boxes. These snippets ascribe Filipinoness to cultural objects, as Dumpit lectures, "a Filipino is not a Filipino until he has climbed into a jeepney and paid his share of the ride" (152). Vince derisively renarrates Dumpit's authority as sacrosanct because Dumpit himself identifies as a true Filipino, and his authority goes unquestioned by the students who remain astonished "at how much truth was in Dumpit's definition of a Filipino" (152). In light of Dumpit's authority, they accept the jeepney as "One hundred percent certified Pinoy" (152). Against this discourse, Vince remembers jeepneys only as producing feelings of claustrophobia, of being "trapped inside a box reeking of perspiration," a feeling of confinement akin to Filipino identity itself as narrated by an authority like Dumpit (153). The tourist tips and historical narratives, in other words, call into question the rarely questioned authenticity of the source, and slowly these authorial sources give way to Vince's own "low culture" modes of representation: the postcards he collects and writes upon, the creative Taglish signs he notes down, and the stories he collects of fellow migrants. While the tourist tips sections are written in a form that homogenizes locals, the concluding tourist tip accounts for the multiple forms of Filipinoness: "Remember: in Manila, contradictions are always welcome, including—and especially—yours" (316).

In their rejection of American forms of brownness, the queer brown travelers of *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch* confront the limits of brownness as a common identity. Chua's narrator, seemingly free to transition within brownness, finds himself marked by his American accent and loss of the local languages. In Malaysia, he lacks Hokkien, a language of Chinese diasporics and Peranakans. His family in Georgetown "smile at my awkwardness, my stumbling through the language. As if they are looking at something inhabited by more than one self" (52). The narrator blames this lack on his father, "Ba," who forbade him "to speak anything but English" because "it was the

key to everything in the world" (136).[47] The brown skin that gave him access is limited by his linguistic codes, which the narrator resents: "Every time I misunderstand a word I curse Ba. Curse him in the only Hokkien I have managed to retain" (137). Similarly, in *Leche*, language plays a crucial role in revealing the limits of transition. In Honolulu, Vince works for over a decade to gain recognition as something other than a Filipino worker or effeminate Asian American, losing his Tagalog and choosing to converse "in standard English with a minimal Filipino accent, so he could talk his way out of the plantation of stereotypes and discrimination" (104). Yet in the Philippines he must start from scratch, or be judged as a "brain drain" *balikbayan*. When, at the airport, an immigration officer tells Vince that his line "is for returning Filipinos only," Vince replies, "But I am a Filipino. I was born here. … It says so right there on my passport" (45). Vince attempts to conjure other symbols of recognition—his birthplace, his cultural identity ("In Hawaii, Filipinos don't see themselves as Americans"), and that the sign indicating the line does not say "nationals" (45). In response, the immigration officer corrects his Tagalog ("It's ba-LIK-bayan") and points out that the sampaguita flower, which decorates the sign, is the national flower, adding, "If you're a true Filipino, Mr. Vicente … you'd know that" (45). From the airport on, Vince's odyssey becomes a series of misrecognitions, as his inability to explain himself in Tagalog or pidgin English marks his brownness as a reflection of whatever identity others cast upon him. Just outside of the airport, Vince is confused for a woman's dead son because "you have his face" (48), and later a woman in mourning confuses him for her deceased niece's pen pal (198). As in *Gold by the Inch*, the traveler's inability to linguistically and knowledgably perform as a local limits his transitions only to the transpacific identities that signify mobility (38).

Queer Versatility

For both Vince and Chua's nameless narrator, their failure to obtain the identity they want also enables them to become more versatile, and to change the very meaning of success (or "inner fulfillment") in a system fueled by pluralist categories. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam argues that success is too often seen through a heteronormative and capitalist lens that equates success to "reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" (2). Within such a context, "failing, losing, forgetting … [and] not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (ibid., 2–3). Failure, in other words, offers queer subjects the means to change the meaning of success. In the global imaginary that these characters resist, success depends upon being assimilated into a state multicultural order, but one rampant with nationalist, racist, heteronormative, and moralistic presumptions. Thus the travelers of *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch* do not merely fail at normative notions of success, but also fail at being normatively gay.

Vince's failure begins in *Rolling the R*'s as a "closet case," where he appears unsatisfied and ashamed. In *Leche*, Vince's failures too take the form of sexual failures:

he has been "dry" for six months; he attains sexual pleasure from zero potential partners in the narrative; and when he is offered sex from a Filipino actor for a mere $12, Vince refuses, admittedly more out of pride than principle (179). In *Gold by the Inch*, the unnamed narrator fails by falling in love with the prostitute, Thong, and sees their relationship as a transgression: "I think I'm breaking rules, taking a prostitute on a date during the day … I'm transgressing roles, crossing borders, that kind of thing" (21). His biggest fear is feeling like "just another client" (29), and he tries (and fails) to invent a relationship "outside laws, rules, and habits" (106). In both novels, failure comes from the refusal to "give in" to another's terms, rather than becoming receptive to another's will. Both characters lack sexual versatility, where, as Vince states in a conversation with Edgar, "'Versatile' is the euphemism for a big bottom" (31). As both characters refuse to take part in sex work as a client, they both dismiss the sexual versatility of "big bottoming" that stresses gay sex as an indicator of personal (and political) pride. Vince's anxieties around gay sex, particularly in not having enough of it, emerge in his unwillingness to be versatile himself, or as Tan Hoang Nguyen puts it in his book *A View from the Bottom*, in refusing to adopt the effeminate and "passive" positioning of the bottom, which would work to reveal "an inescapable exposure, vulnerability, and receptiveness in our reaching out to other people" (2). For Nguyen, positioning oneself as a receptive bottom opens affective and social bonds that are otherwise closed in the powerpositioning of the top. As both characters in these novels project masculinity, their greatest anxiety is emasculation, a fear doubled by both their brownness and their queerness.

Vince's failure to be recognized as Filipino brings forth a cataclysmic self-shattering (rather than a self-fashioning) of his identity, forcing him to eventually let go of his identity and to take on a more receptive, versatile, and vulnerable position. His failure to gain recognition in the way he wants is complemented by the failure of his body to diarrhea (171), the failure to have a sustainable relationship (160), and the failure to have sex. It's not that Manila is hostile to him, but that he cannot help resisting Manila on its own terms, a "capital city of Vince's frustrations, daydreams, nightmares, reflections, and wonderment" (185). The act of travel produces failures, but also pleads with these characters to act receptivity, to own versatility, and to shatter identities that once seemed natural. Vince's "last straw" with Manila comes while buying batteries, as he writes, "I lost it. I started shouting. Two guards with guns had to escort me out" (187). Resigning himself to failure, Vince surrenders: he "doesn't qualify to be a Filipino," an identity that in Hawai'i was "never questioned" (249). For Vince being Filipino was a given, an easily checked-off box on "surveys, college grants, job applications, and affirmative action scholarship forms," but in the Philippines, "the ethnic ID Vince has been carrying around is no longer valid" (249). In his vulnerability he begins to consider alternative ways of being and performing, of claiming a more versatile attitude toward his own "ethnic ID": "He has to be cautious with what he says," he thinks, and to "choose his adjectives carefully" (262). Similarly, in *Gold by the Inch*, the narrator reflects on his own desire for Thong as a desire for a new "building"

that is "not described by the word *home*," but that can "find[] expression in other forms" (106, italics in original). Unable to be part of romantic relationships dependent upon monetary transactions, the narrator plunges into the vast, illimitable world of travel, armed with a new versatility, as a subject who, as Viet Thanh Nguyen says, "refuses to be hailed by dominant ideology [but] can also refuse to be hailed by resistant ideology" (*Race and Resistance*, 157).

The versatility of bottoming reclaims individual agency, but also limits it to the categories and expectations of the "viewer"—in this case, the top. Similarly, transitive culture does not eliminate, disrupt, or transcend identity categories so much as act upon them. For Paulo Freire, too, transitive consciousness was not yet about full agency, but about the ability to detect categories and conduct movement from one recognizable sphere into another, an "agency" insofar as the individual assumes a versatile position. One then does not identify with being the bottom so much as understand the point of view of the bottom, a view that "allows for the switching and assumption of multiple positions, but not the transcendence of them," so that the "feminine" abdication of power provides a kind of agency that is "already socially structured by existing relations of power" (12). In *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch*, brown queer transition rests on recognizing (and at times surrendering) privileges: Americanness, and straight male performativity. Indeed, Vince's masculinity emerged as a Filipino migrant in Hawai'i, where his "brown boy" body had been dominated by orientalist representations of the Asian male body as effeminate, soft, or childlike. But in the Philippines, the "Filipino Nation" has rarely ever been imagined as queer or anti-imperial, but instead as "Tagalog, colonial, bourgeois, Catholic, lowland, macho" and "heterosexist" (Garcia 12). Indeed, as Bobby Benedicto has argued, the queer Filipino or the *bakla* is seen from many in the Philippines as a derisive, Western caricature of the brown boy that "conflates homosexuality, transvestism or effeminacy, and lowerclass status," and belongs to a colonial American global imaginary (318). Indeed, as J. Neil C. Garcia has observed, queer literature in the Philippines does not follow the US model of pursuing national inclusion, but rather rejects attempts to see "Filipino" as anything but militant and masculine.[48]

One could say the same for the presumed "bottom" position of Thai and Malaysian men, whose "hand holding" most Americans (including Chua's narrator) would presume as homoerotic. But it is only through recognizing his failures to understand "his own culture" that Chua's narrator too can recognize his privilege. In the end, after Thong identifies him as "an American darker than the rest" (201), the narrator admits the artificiality of the belonging he sought: "You will build your love on a lie. A lie so beautiful that you will forget it's pure fiction" (205). Here the second person shifts from the fantasy of the "beautiful lie" of identity to the "view" of versatility, pushing the reader to recognize the narrator's own privilege as crucial to understanding the region, and to recognize the self as one who can always leave: "You call the airline. There are still seats on the plane back to New York the next day. Flights

to Hong Kong every few hours. Tokyo. Taipei. Dubai. Beirut. Berlin. Los Angeles. Flights to anywhere. The world is yours" (205). In accepting versatility, Chua's narrator accepts the performances of fetish and role-playing that Thong was able to provide on his own terms. In turn, the narrator no longer desires the reality behind the charade, and relinquishes the search for an ideal brown and queer belonging that cannot easily travel. What he has, instead, is the same quality that his missing grandmother cherished—transition.

Unsettled Arrivals

> "But how have I managed to arrive, when I have not yet left?"[49]
>
> —Italo Calvino

Rather than live within Thong's "beautiful lie," Chua's narrator chooses to find solace in the arbitrariness of his own identity, now armed with a better understanding of the limits and privileges of his own transitions. The narrator returns to global itinerancy, imagining globality not through a global imaginary built on tolerance, but through the transitions afforded by brown queer failure. The narrator begins to imagine himself within a state of nonarrival when he watches a white man with a US military gym bag who could be "businessman, tourist, torturer, Mr. America" and "Miss Military Adviser" (191). The narrator witnesses the man punch a local Thai man on a motorbike for driving in his path. The narrator feels his "fury melt[] into a low-grade sorrow. I'm overcome with something. Some need. Maybe it's the need to feel pity for Miss Military Adviser. Or the need to fuck him senseless" (192). The white man sees the various encounters of travel as mere obstacles in his "straight" path. Rather than something "to be shared or transformed through presence," the new spaces offer only "a place to own," a place "ripe for development" (192). The narrator realizes, in seeing his own desires mirrored in the white American, that the global imaginary has disconnected him from his own body as a mere obstacle: "my body," he thinks, "the obstacle to its linear progression." Where arrival is often imagined as the continuous evolution of the self, a form of renewal or reinvention, it also always anticipates an ending, an ownership of a space or an identity that one can settle into.

I hope to end this chapter on queer brown travelers by exploring their intentions to never arrive. As in *Gold by the Inch*, in *Leche*, Vince's failure to meet the standards of recognition in Manila causes him to seek out a queer refuge elsewhere, what José Muñoz might call a queer utopic space where queerness operates as a collectivity aimed at imagining "futurity and hope" (*Cruising Utopia* 11). Much of this alternative futurity emerges only after recognizing the limits of heteronormative (and homonormative) attitudes toward success and freedom, an awareness that can be attained by failing to find success. Muñoz conceives of queer utopia not within a queer identity (like transgender, gay, lesbian, or the like), but as a "formation based on an

economy of desire and desiring" that is "not yet here," but can be made present through "objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (ibid., 26).[50]

Vince finds such a utopic queer space in Leche, a daytime museum and night-time sex club often dismissed for having "too much mixed history" (282). The club contains a wide variety of patrons: Arabs, Filipina/o youth, Chinese Filipina/o matriarchs, transvestites, white expatriates, overseas workers from Tokyo (Japa-yukis), mestizo gay men, and prostitutes. As with Alfred Yuson's afterlife jungle café, Club Leche invokes a community characterized not by the hierarchy of identities outside of it, but by the interactions among its members, in this case, the fetish, role-play, and pleasures that coexist within the very real and complex colonial history. It is only within the walls of Leche, where Vince focuses on meeting his sexual desires, that he forgets himself (and his identity), and lets go of his own name, as he writes "Vicente" rather than "Vince" on the guest list: "Let it go, Vince," he thinks. "Just this once, let it go" (271). Queer utopia here is more than just a refusal to adapt to social norms, but entails a selfreflective virtuosity that discredits the standards for success expected outside of Leche's walls. It is a space where to fail to be recognized is to succeed in fulfilling sexual desires, and failure as a moral category means success in sex (what we might call "succsex"). Even the club's sexual identity is also in perpetual deferral, as Vince's Intramuros tour guide, Jonas, frequents the club with his ex-girlfriend because she was "turned on by watching guys make out" (264). Vicente asks, "Which makes you gay? Not gay? Semi-gay?" (264). Leche does not advertise a recognizable sexual identity, but is, as its transgender manager, Tita G, says, "the gatekeeper of secrets" (273).

Club Leche contains a "queer utopic memory" that narrates the Filipina/o past as producing well-fostered skills of adaptability and transition. Its history begins as a milk distribution center "started by wives of Spanish generals"; then in 1899 Americans transformed the building into an "orphanage for children whose parents were killed in the Philippine-American War," and then during the Japanese Occupation it was converted into a military headquarters until, finally, it was made into a brothel for Marcos's mistresses, before becoming a sex-club/film center/museum owned by a secret proprietor (probably Bino Boca, the novel's stand-in for the openly gay film-maker Lino Brocka) (260). The shifting purposes of the building reflect the varied strategies of dealing with transforming power structures. Tita G's focus on the history of Leche as a route to "de-tour" the facility marks its history of mixture and transition, as it has adjusted to new regimes of power by collecting the leftovers from every regime change: the orphans, the prostitutes, the censored films and books. It performs not a nostalgic recollection of the past but a queer utopian memory that seeks to form "a utopia in the present" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 37). Leche thus functions as an everyday semblance where queer utopia is imagined as an alternative to the utopic global imaginary. Like Chua's focus on global brown queer failures, this utopic imagining is not built upon state recognition, but "better relations within the social

that include better sex and more pleasure" (30). In rejecting the global imaginary of postracial success, both novels push us to imagine a brown queer global utopia of transitional "succsex," an ongoing and unfinished project that resigns itself to the failure of heteronormative and homonormative success. Their succsex is formed in the unexpected and illegible forms of desire, pleasure, and receptivity to others.

The de-tours of *Leche* and *Gold by the Inch* can be read as formative sojourns from an understanding of rigid brown identities to an understanding of the transitions that can occur by making oneself vulnerable. In their journeys, these travelers shift from masculinity to femininity, from power-top to receptive bottom, from prostitute to client, to seeing themselves within a rigid, essentialist identity to deploying recognizable signs of brownness, queerness, and language to "let go" of their former trappings. Both narrators realize that their desires to identify as Filipino, Malaysian, or Thai were not misplaced, but were effective means of controlling their identities only within an *American* context. Their failures were in presuming that the global imaginary of America was really global, rather than merely a form of pluralist governmentality masked as global. Thus their sense of their own brownness could not fit within Southeast Asian contexts, and they remained oblivious of the situation and expectations around them. Their mistake was in claiming an identity without foreknowledge or concern of the appropriate strategy and context.

Chua's narrator's journey ends with finding solace in the arbitrariness of his own identity. "Home," for the narrator, cannot exist in a place, but is the condition of exile, of traveling through different cultural forms and identities, where it is always "almost time to go" (208). Like *Leche*'s own Club Leche, these travelers are too products of imperial conflict, who have survived through methods of identity transition. Vince recognizes this when he reflects on the mixed "halo halo" nature of Leche, and realizes that Leche too resembles Filipinos, for "it is in their nature and dreams to roam, to seek a better life, to adapt and adopt another country" (306). As a communal space, Leche acts as a metaphor for transition as a cultural practice, as Vince says, "Maybe the ways of the West is just a switch that they can turn on and off whenever they like" (318). Rather than "Them, Filipinos, against me, American," Vicente understands that he, too, was engrained with this practice, "That I, too, can switch it on and off if I like" (319). This acceptance of "switching" as a mode that remakes the queer, the brown, and the traveler reinterprets cultural belonging as a property (a belonging) that says little about the material essence of an individual, but rather, is seen as a Nietzschean pure concept—a "conventional fiction for purposes of designation, mutual understanding, not explanation" (33).

Conclusion: Genre

This chapter has focused on expressions of brown illegibility, queer versatility, and transpacific travel. Like those in chapter 3, the novels read here explore how such concepts have been conditioned by colonial views of violence and sexuality, where

binaries like tolerant/intolerant, respected/deviant, and brown boy/white colonial have been informed largely by the presumption that Southeast Asia offers radically different form of sexualities than those found in the West (whether they are termed queer, perverse, sinful, or patriarchal). Similarly, both chapters have considered how transpacific Anglophone literature can dismantle these binaries through metafictional forms of satire and queer travel. In part III, I focus on how such aesthetic forms offer ways of imagining transitive cultures by operating within the confines of genre expectations and identities. If, for James C. Scott, legibility itself "is a condition of manipulation" (*Seeing Like a State* 183), then how does transpacific Anglophone literature represent the illegible, without quite conforming to the standards of legibility of pluralist governmentality? Responding to Scott's insight, Jack Halberstam calls on scholars to imagine how we can see "*unlike* a state," with "different aesthetic standards for ordering or disordering space, other modes of political engagement than those conjured by the liberal imagination" (*Queer Art of Failure* 10, italics in original). With this call in mind, I ask how genre forms of distance and speculation permit us to imagine an aesthetics of transition.

Notes

[1] Lee Shin decorates his house with "calligraphy, banners, flute, and decorated dragon" ("Wicks, Diaspora and Identity" 12).

[2] As Maniam writes in "The New Diaspora," "the problem for the Malaysian writer is in making the crossover to the other cultures, to get to know better the people of other races to be able to write about them" (40).

[3] "Transpacific," as defined by Janet Hoskins and Viet T. Nguyen, signifies a study that charts how the rise of Asian countries "is tied to a complicated history of competition, conflict, and negotiation with the west, with each other, and with their own minorities" (12).

[4] As Vijay Mishra has put it, the chameleon represents "replacing an old skin with a new one through molting, dispensing with singular narrative forms" (*Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 51–52).

[5] Instead of taking "a posture of adjustment" (5), Freire advocates for "the development of an especially flexible, critical spirit" (6). This spirit, which he calls transitive, is attuned to transitional epochs and accounts for the contradictions that emerge "between the ways of being, understanding, behaving, and valuing" (6).

[6] I am in agreement here with Alexander G. Weheliye, who argues that methods employing "agency" and "resistance" too easily assume full, coherent subjects, rather than allowing for "a more layered and improvisatory" subjectivity (2).

[7] Scott uses the term "metis," broadly understood as "a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment" (*Seeing Like a State* 313). I use "transitive" similarly, but in specifically responding to pluralist contexts.

[8] As Jay Prosser writes, transsexuals speaking of themselves as such constitute a paradox: "If the goal of transsexuality is to pass as not transsexual, what does it mean to come out and speak as a transsexual?" (317)

[9] As Judith Halberstam has argued, the transgender body has been a contradictory site where, on one hand, it has "emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 18), and on the other hand, marks the success of years of gender activism, where it is kept alive "as a meaningful designator of unpredictable gender identities and practices" (ibid. 21).

[10] Amy L. Brandzel calls this a split between coalitional and intersectional politics with anticoalitional, anti-intersectional politics. Brandzel sides with the former, arguing for "a political coalitional present to dismantle the heteronormative, white normative, and colonial normative structures of U.S. culture and politics" (316).

[11] Women of color feminism and queer of color feminism are two other sites of critique that have focused on the intersections "of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices" (Ferguson 4).

[12] One only needs browse websites to see this term employed by companies and universities who base their diversity on multiple denominations of Christianity or different white ethnic backgrounds.

[13] Kallen claimed the melting pot of "Americanism" was in fact synonymous with "AngloSaxonism," of people who were expected to be "individualist, English-speaking … [and] devoted to laissez-faire" economics ("Democracy versus the Melting Pot" 6).

[14] In Canada, "multiculturalism" emerged in a 1965 preliminary report, and became used formally in the 1988 Canadian Multicultural Act. Multicultural legislation also passed in Australia in 1972 to cope with the growing number of Asian immigrants. For more on Canadian multiculturalism, see chapter 3.

[15] Critics like Michael Warner have similarly pointed out how "consumer capitalism makes available an endlessly differentiable subject," encouraging ethnicity and difference through the consumption of products, brands, and cultural icons (384–385).

[16] The 1965 Immigration Act and the 1980 Refugee Act continued the shift away from an assimilationist-style social system toward a pluralist/multiculturalist one.

[17] As Neda Atanasoski puts it, contemporary imperialism "is contingent on multiculturalism as a value system and mode of knowledge about the world … through which the sanctity of human diversity is declared" (5).

[18] Furnivall pointed to this as the main drive toward colonial pluralism, since in such a diverse society "the disorganization of social demand allows the economic process of natural selection by the survival of the cheapest to prevail" (310).

[19] The colonial powers' system of pluralism was comprised of persons in "separate racial sections" to induce low labor costs, but who thought of themselves as "an aggregate of individuals" whose "social life is incomplete" (Furnivall 306).

[20] The lasting violence of imperial powers like the Romans and Greeks, for Herder, was due to assimilative projects that imposed an artificial set of values that violated "the organic unity of the original culture" (White 172).

[21] This absence of bureaucratic, normalizing forces has often been credited to various characteristics, such as archipelagos or "lowlands and highlands" (Reid), cultivated traditions of state resistance or anarchy (Scott, *Seeing Like a State*), or precolonial political forms of "galactic structures" of autonomous "satellite principalities" (Lieberman, "Local Integration" 485).

[22] While cultural diversity is often the point of departure for studies of Southeast Asia (Wolters), some historians have seen this diverse construct of precolonial Southeast Asia as more of a Western imagining than a historical fact (since "precolonial" already suggests the absence of a hegemonic state/culture). Yet the conceptions of post-independence Southeast Asia as pluralist have been more firmly established, since the very structure for multicultural governance was reinforced by Western colonial regimes that practiced "divide and conquer" rule (Emmerson).

[23] According to Anthony Reid, these nationalist forms were unlike those seen in Europe, where ethnic and state nationalisms "mutually reinforce each other to create cultural homogeneities," rather these semi-autonomous ethnic nationalities were often anti-imperial in more of a local (against state nationalism) than a foreign sense (against overseas colonization) (12).

[24] Chinese became identified as traders or "Jews of the East," while other ethnicities were divided into groups of soldiers, subjects, or rivals (Reid 89).

[25] Furnivall's *Colonial Policy and Practice*, often seen as a great forerunner to multiculturalist discourse, in fact illuminates how pluralist societies replace spirituality and cultural traditions with the desire for commerce, wealth, and the worship of "Mammon," the god of money.

[26] Overseas Chinese governments in Taiwan (the Kuomintang) and Singapore (the People's Action Party) were seen by the People's Republic as "running dogs," who chose Americanism (signified through capitalism and Western culture) over economic equality.

[27] Here I am thinking of Raymond Williams's definition of formations as "conscious movements and tendencies (literary, artistic, philosophical or scientific)" that are not identified through formal institutions (119).

[28] This legacy of producing "state nationalism" through multiculturalist policies continues today with the "1Malaysia" campaign.

[29] The contemporary mestizo class makes up less than 4 percent of the population (Capelli et al.), yet mestizos still garner over half of the country's personal income (Demko, Agel, and Boe).

[30] The export of Filipina/o bodies has brought significant economic gains in the form of remittances, an estimated $18.76 billion in 2010 (Remo).

[31] As Weheliye writes, diaspora discourse relies upon a nationalist comparative method that makes national borders and linguistic differences appear as ontological "truths," rather than as "structures or institutions" (31).

[32] As Martin J. Ponce has argued, Anglophone literature in places like the Philippines complicates approaches to reading minority literature, which privilege race and nation, because they are shaped by "overlapping forces of colonialism, imperialism, and migration" (18).

[33] In 1989, the Singaporean scholar Tai A. Koh criticized scholars who see Anglophone novels as "unworthy of consideration," and noted that most literary critics were unable to fully consider "the historical and cultural context in which such works are written and the reading is conducted" (277).

[34] In Singapore, for example, ethnic Chinese are expected to learn Mandarin as their ethnic language, even though most Singaporean Chinese have spoken Chinese Hokkien or Hakka.

[35] As the collaborator T. H. Padro de Tavera wrote in a letter to Douglas MacArthur, "[T]hrough [English] agency we may adopt its principles, its political customs, and its peculiar civilization, that our redemption may be complete and radical" (Constantino and Constantino, *Neocolonial Identity* 67).

[36] In my sixth chapter, I shift the generic conceptions of these novels toward speculative fiction to better account for their critiques of authenticity.

[37] Baldwin writes, "[T]he white man's motive was the protection of his identity; the black man was motivated by the need to establish an identity" (394).

[38] Halberstam writes that "the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility" that reflects the global elite's association with flexibility at the level of identity and personal choices (*In a Queer Time* 18).

[39] As Martin Manalansan and Lisa Duggan describe it, the homonormative is middle-class and white, and bases equality on domestic privacy, and bases freedom on the freedom to consume.

[40] Ellen Wu writes that bringing statehood to Hawai'i would sketch the territory "as proof of American multiracial 'democracy at work'" and would create a "vital link to Asia" (211).

[41] Similarly, Oscar Campomanes has sought to redefine Filipino American as a politically resistant identity that can remain unabsorbed by nationalist rubrics while reflecting a (neo) imperial history.

[42] In Stephen Sohn's essay on *Gold by the Inch*, he identifies the narrator's desire for Thong as a disguised attempt at denying his own complicity as a sex tourist ("'Valuing' Transnational Queerness").

[43] Pratt writes, "I use these terms ["autoethnography" and "autoethnographic expression"] to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms … autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (7).

[44] Urry writes of "sensescapes" as discursively mediated senses of spaces that "signify social taste and distinction, ideology and meaning" ("Transports of Delight" 243).

[45] As Ponce writes, the second person in *Rolling the R's* "shifts the politics of representation away from the burden of portraying 'social diversity' and toward an implication of readers themselves" (171).

[46] Being identified as "Joe," as Vernadette Gonzalez has put it, is to be seen as participating in tourist and militaristic acts that are "refracted through desires to identify with masculinities that have been mobilized in the service of extraterritorial domination" (7).

[47] This attitude toward English may be a subtle reference to Shirley Geok-lin Lim's memoir, where she describes her father as being "possessed by Western images," and speaking only English to his children (*Among the White Moon Faces* 42).

[48] The extent to which the *bakla* and feminine Filipino gay is a colonial imagined stereotype remains a contentious issue and has yet to resolve with academic consensus. Clearly, however, figures of feminine gays and *baklas* are rampant in Philippine cinema as well as in daily visual culture, and cannot be a mere American fetish.

[49] This quote, and these thoughts on arrival, were brought to my attention during a reading by Madeleine Thien and Rawi Hage.

[50] Joshua Guzmán writes that for Muñoz, brownness persists "in the here-and-now as the materiality of everyday life," while queer utopia is always on the horizon and not-yet here (60).