

Paradise Disenchanted: Globalization,  
Postmodernism, and Their Discontents in Selected  
Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novels

A dissertation submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Tufts University

May 2019

Adviser: Modhumita Roy

## Abstract

My dissertation, *Paradise Disenchanted: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Their Discontents in Selected Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novels*, examines three late 20<sup>th</sup> century novels in English: Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995), and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). Drawing on theories on globalization and postmodernism, I argue that despite these authors' diverse socioeconomic conditions and varying ideological alliances with postmodernist culture, their novels all display, at various levels, discontent with globalization and its cultural politics as manifested in postmodernism. I also bring attention to the ideological nuances and differences in these novels. Particularly, Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (Chapter One) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (Chapter Three) present a stark contrast in their respective critique of globalization's economic ramifications and postmodernism's political impact from very different angles and concerns. Ultimately, the dissertation will reveal that although proponents of globalization and postmodernism make a series of promises, such as post-industrial and post-colonial economic development, accessible surplus consumer goods, and celebration of multiculturalism, the rosy picture of global paradise remains largely an unfulfilled and undelivered myth. While all three texts under discussion voice their disenchantment and dissent towards globalization and postmodernism, saliently, Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* stands out. The novel is daring in providing not only an artistic imagination of grassroots resistance, but also a sane caution against resistance pitfalls out of a dialectical and historical perspective.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many people deserve sincere thanks for their kindness and help to me in the process of writing this dissertation. For each of them, I am truly grateful. I would not have achieved this milestone without their support.

I thank the faculty of the Ph.D. program at Department of English, Tufts University, whose teaching has inspired my research interest. Thanks to Douglas Riggs who proved to be the best administrative support staff, helping to facilitate the defense and the graduation process.

My gratitude goes to the dissertation committee who has taken the time to read and provide valuable feedback on the many drafts of my dissertation to improve it. I am grateful to Nathan Wolff and Kristina Wright for graciously taking on this role at short notice.

Hats off to Elizabeth Ammons. Thank you for your wonderful guidance both as a professor and as Director of Graduate Studies in English. You command my respect for always being professional, kind, and driven. You are the definition of intellectual responsibility and activism. You stepped in at the later stage of the dissertation process and your effort has been truly instrumental and greatly appreciated.

Modhumita Roy, my advisor, I cannot say thank you enough. Your patience and support were indispensable in the fruition of this dissertation. Even in a very difficult time of your life, you continued to inspire me with your intellectual vigor and sharpness. You kept on pushing me to be a better thinker

and a stronger writer. You never gave up on me, and I am forever grateful for that.

I am grateful for the tremendous institutional support from Montgomery College, where I have worked and served its students with pride. The professional leave/sabbatical provided me much needed precious and quiet time to work on the dissertation. I am thankful to Dean Rodney Redmond for his kindness and insight throughout the process. His unwavering leadership support was crucial and will always be deeply appreciated. My thanks also go to my loving colleagues, especially the Fantastic Three: Jin Carvallo, Janice DuFour, and Karen Basuel, who were the most, ardent and gorgeous cheerleaders. Their care and encouragement meant so much to me. Angela Rhoe, you are an angel. You made me believe I could complete the dissertation, and now you are this baby's Godmother.

I am forever indebted to the unconditional love and support from my family without whom I would never be what I am today. Dad and Mom, your sacrifice makes me cry. You are the best parents in the world, and I owe you so much that I can never pay back. Yang, we went through together the highs and lows, thick and thin in life, and I am happy we are still here supporting each other. Finally, Julia, you are my sunshine, strength, and love. My life is blessed because of you.

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## Introduction

In 1984, the foremost American Marxist literary critic and theorist Fredric Jameson published the essay, “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” The essay would become a groundbreaking text in Marxist literary criticism and Jameson would go on to include it in a seminal namesake book in 1991 that firmly established his reputation as a leading figure in the field of literary and cultural studies. In “Postmodernism,” Jameson laid out a historical and dialectical correlation between postmodernism and late capitalism. Championing an almost anti-aesthetic approach, Jameson argued that theoretical debates on postmodernism cannot but be political. As he maintained, “every position on postmodernism in culture...is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today” (3). Fourteen years later in 1998, in “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” an essay collected in *The Cultures of Globalization*, Jameson took his argument one step further to identify late capitalism as the third stage of multinational capitalism, that is, the stage of globalization. In doing so, Jameson established a crucial link between globalization and postmodernism—a linkage that would spark and fuel continuous discussions and debates in decades to come. The central argument of this dissertation ought to be seen as part of the ongoing discussion that Jameson helped initiate.

In my dissertation, *Paradise Disenchanted: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Their Discontents in Selected Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novels*, I examine three

novels in English: Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995), and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), all written within a decade of each other. Building on Jameson's theory that postmodernism is the dominant cultural and political ideology in late/advanced capitalism, that is, the era of globalization, my argument is that despite these authors' diverse socioeconomic, class, racial, and gender backgrounds, and despite their different ideological relationships to globalization and postmodernist culture, they are all deeply affected by the ills and problems produced by globalization and postmodernism. Consequently, their novels all display a disenchantment with globalization and its cultural politics, postmodernism. Moreover, in part due to their different ideological attachments to globalization and postmodernism, the three novels imagine drastically different resolutions and resistances in the end. What is at stake here in my argument are:

1. The problematic of globalization and postmodernism shows little concern and discrimination in terms of who will be most affected. One's proximity to the core of globalization and its accompanying privileges, say, an elite white male American writer such as DeLillo, does not make the person immune to disillusionment and discontent towards globalization and postmodernist culture.
2. A writer can adopt and maneuver postmodernist style in his/her work while still resisting the ideological hegemony. In other words, the three literary texts under discussion may well engage postmodernism, especially in their aesthetics, yet they engage the fundamental beliefs with some

measure of skepticism and even antagonism.<sup>1</sup>

3. Envisioning an effective resistance against globalization and its cultural logic is in dire need. However, at least in the three novels examined here, such an endeavor remains an unresolved challenge.

### On Globalization and Postmodernism

In the 1991 lengthier book version, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argued that any assessment of postmodernism as a new culture must first understand the phenomenon in the historical conjuncture of late or advanced capitalism. Jameson also underscored the importance and the necessity of debating postmodernist culture through political and economic lenses as well as an aesthetic one. After all, as Jameson explained in the “Introduction,” using Raymond Williams’ now canonized terminology, postmodernism has become the hegemonic “structure of feeling” of late capitalism; that is, it is a particular configuration of the economic system that produces and shapes a cultural sea-change (xiv). Thus, in order to examine the cultural formation identified as “postmodernism,” one must necessarily attend to the economic/political formations within which the culture exists. In *The Cultures of Globalization* (1998), a collection of essays on globalization that he coedited with Masao Miyoshi, Jameson argued that globalization is the multinational stage of capitalism and it is within this particular economic arrangement that the cultural ideology of postmodernism is most visible. Thus, Jameson established a

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I am inspired by Michael Bérubé’s “Introduction: Worldly English.” He is interested in “how theories of postmodernity might engage global literatures in English,” and expects “there to be some measure of skepticism and/or antagonism in the engagement” (1-2).

dialectical dynamic between the economic conditions (globalization) and the corresponding cultural politics (postmodernism) in an era of advanced late capitalism (54). As a foremost scholar of postmodernism from a clearly Marxist standpoint, Jameson nonetheless stopped short of offering a clearly negative judgement of postmodernism. Instead, referring to a well-known passage from Karl Marx that “capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race and the worst,” Jameson applied the same dialectical perspective to the theoretical interrogation of postmodernism. Indeed, he urged us to “think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together” (47).

While Jameson remained relatively open to the contradictory possibilities—“catastrophe and progress all together”—offered by postmodernism, David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989) took a more directly critical approach. In this book, Harvey provided a lucid summary of the various theories and debates on postmodernism, offered a concise explanation of the related terminology, and based on historical materialism, engaged in a trenchant critique of postmodernism, focusing particularly on its political implications and ramifications. He pinpointed the “sea-change in cultural...practices” (postmodernism) at around 1972, and cited Terry Eagleton’s definition of postmodernism that emphasized its problematics: “playful,” “schizoid,” and “contrived depthlessness” (7). Harvey pointed to postmodernist theorists such as Foucault and Lyotard “explicitly attacking any notion that there might be a meta-language, meta-narrative, or meta-theory

through which all things can be connected or represented” (44-45). But, as Harvey forcefully asked, if “we cannot aspire to any unified representation of the world, or picture it as a totality full of connections and differentiations rather than perpetually shifting fragments, then how can we possibly aspire to act coherently with respect to the world” (52)? In other words, Harvey wondered, how can a decentralized and fragmented postmodern condition marked by political relativism and defeatism enable us to resist the reality of global capitalism? Harvey suggested that the unfortunate result of postmodern rejection of a conditional totality that is charged with inherent contradictions would be political inertia and inaction. I agree with his conclusion.

Two years after publishing the influential essay, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” Jameson sparked another debate on the issues of globalization, literature, and cultural studies with the publication of “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986). Despite the essay’s intent to encourage a metropolitan academic circle to read the literatures of postcolonial nations as “national allegories” in order to theorize more accurately the relevance especially of realism to contemporary world literature, critics seized on Jameson’s somewhat imprecise periodization of history. Aijaz Ahmad’s “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” is perhaps the most famous and trenchant refutation of Jameson’s text. Ahmed pointed out that the conception of “third-world” is a flawed categorization and therefore a problematic division of the world, because “analytically,” he wondered, “this classification leaves the so-called third world in a limbo; if only

the first world is capitalist and the second world socialist, how does one understand the third world? Is it pre-capitalist? Transitional? Transitional between what and what” (7)? Ahmed cited the case of India, both a former colony of Britain and a capitalist country, as a potent refutation to Jameson’s imagined notion of “third world.” In Ahmed’s reading, Jameson’s failure belied an unfortunate intellectual myopia not so different from that of the Orientalists (7-8). While many others have taken issue with Jameson’s essay, in a recent piece (2017), Jonathan Arac defended Jameson’s claim by observing that “Jameson was trying out the Marxist idea that the collective investments of Third World literature offered an important alternative to the subjectivity structures of late capitalism” (“Getting to World Literature,” 335). While I see merits in both sides, I appreciate the intent in Jameson’s essay. Although awkward and unpopular to some critics, I do believe the term, “third world,” offers an imperfect but useful conception to understand the current world system in which globalization produces drastically uneven zones in terms of economic and social development.

If Jameson’s “third world” classification enraged certain critics, Ankie Hoogvelt’s *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (1997) provided a mediating correction. The monograph is a major scholarly interjection into the debates around the discourse of globalization. Hoogvelt analyzed the global economy from the perspective of development studies, an emerging multidisciplinary approach that addresses the growing economic concerns of countries and regions affected by both decolonization and globalization. Her scholarship offered a critical insight into the

problematic of globalized capitalism and challenged the much-touted magic of globalization. Globalization, as Hoogvelt argued, the celebrated late 20<sup>th</sup> Century capitalist expansion, has not delivered its promise of universal economic growth, real capable consumers, and strong worldwide markets. Globalization as a system is divided into the core, peripheries and intermediate areas. The sweeping forces of technology and surplus consumer goods are mostly one-directional and privilege the U.S.-centered West. In Ian Baucom's phrase, globalization is actually based on the premise that "expansion contracts and contraction enriches."<sup>2</sup> What this premise means, I believe, is the spread of capitalist investment and development is extremely uneven among the core, peripheries and intermediate areas, so a large part of the world, the "third world"—again despite the term's imperfection—serves to benefit a few very restricted areas. In other words, the ultimate beneficiaries of globalization are mostly those living in the core area—the U.S. and the West. It is also important to be aware that since the majority of the "third world" is formerly Western colonies, their particular woes are both the result of colonialism and colonialism's ghost, neocolonialism in the globalization era.

The three novels in my dissertation, *Mao II*, *Native Speaker*, and *No Telephone to Heaven*, each in their own way exemplify, elaborate, and critique globalization and engage with postmodernism which, as the critics I referred to above argue, is the cultural logic of this economic system. *Mao II*'s author DeLillo and *Native Speaker*'s author Chang-rae Lee both live in New York City,

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<sup>2</sup> See Ian Baucom, "Globalit, Inc.; Or, the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies."

the apparent core area of globalization, yet their different racial and ideological backgrounds initiate very different concerns and solutions. *No Telephone to Heaven* brings the reader's attention to the periphery of globalization, the Caribbean, and adds to the critique a more radical perspective: a black female consciousness. Both the confluence and the stark contrast among these diverse authors reveal, at a deeper level, the problematic of and the angst produced by globalization and postmodernism.

### Shared Disenchantment, Different Resistances

The authors and texts I consider in this dissertation, while engaging in a critique of globalization, do not do so from the same political or ideological standpoint. In fact, my choice of the texts has been governed, in large part, by the heterogeneity of their engagements with the issues of postmodernism and globalization. For DeLillo, writing against postmodernism in *Mao II* is in effect a fictional effort to pay tribute to the dying white male authors and the high modernism they embody. As a result, the discontent with postmodernism in *Mao II* becomes largely a suspicion of or even phobia against American pop culture, media influence, and grassroots mass movements. By contrast, the other two novels are decisively less nostalgic towards classic modernism and its representative, white male artists. Especially in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, critiquing globalization and postmodernism presents a daring and difficult dialectical task. Cliff is interested in debunking the neocolonial narrative that aims at the continuation of colonial legacy. To fight against both the old- and neo-colonial discourses, Cliff must repudiate the apolitical nonchalant attitude, an

attitude produced by postmodern political relativism and defeatism, as David Harvey has argued. On the other hand, however, the dialectical nature of such a political task also requires imagining and utilizing resistance possibilities somehow still within, not outside, the globalization system and the cultural condition of postmodernism. As Jameson forcefully argues in “The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate,” “The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it” (63). In other words, even a conscious repudiation of postmodernism has entailed a necessary engagement with it, albeit through the agenda of resistance. Such is the dialectical nature of both engaging with and repudiating postmodernism in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Overall, my discussion of these novels will also be dialectical and pay special attention to the specifics and nuances of contradictory forces in the texts, such as the tension between postmodernist style and anti-postmodernist content and ideology. The burden of my argument will be to analyze the political, ideological, and cultural specificities of these texts from which emerge not only convergences—shared discontent--but also significantly different resistances.

To critique postmodernist cultural ideology requires, first of all, recognizing the prevailing postmodern attention to 1) the increasing economic dimension in the cultural sphere, i.e. the increasing marketing and commodification of cultural activities and products, and 2) conversely, the increasing culturalization of the economic sphere, such as the popular and familiar corporation mission statement that professes to build a socially responsible and

successful corporate culture.<sup>3</sup> It thus follows that the novels I am going to discuss are inevitably products of postmodernist culture and the prevailing globalized economy, and yet at the same time, they cannot be fully subsumed by those economic and political systems. The negotiation between what an author is concerned about ideologically and out of what material conditions an author voices the concern is never easy. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, for instance, we see the attempt to overcome one's identity ambiguity and early year trauma by imagining a different future based not on a Eurocentric white male capitalist model, but on the reclamation of an empowered black female consciousness. There is a celebration of that empowerment in the novel, but there is also a sane caution against pitfalls in identity choice. On the other hand, however, we also see how novels such as *Mao II* and *Native Speaker*, starting as critiques of U.S. society, which dominated the globalization narrative for most of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, are inevitably and quickly consumed and commercialized as bestsellers, circulating and celebrated in the elite liberal consumer market. Their commercial success as a result of mainstream critical acclaim, while not totally unwelcomed by their authors who are embedded in Western society, does lead to the eventual diminishment of critical edges in their works. Clearly, in this late advanced capitalist stage, the economy and the culture have deepened their intimacy and meshed into a pair of inseparable twins. The dilemma for any artistic intervention

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<sup>3</sup> Today, one can go to any big international corporation's website and unsurprisingly find a similarly worded mission statement. For example, on Nike's official website, the mission statement reads, as of February 2019, "Our mission is what drives us to do everything possible to expand human potential. We do that by creating groundbreaking sport innovations, by making our products more sustainably, by building a creative and diverse global team and by making a positive impact in communities where we live and work" (Nike Inc.).

in a globalized and postmodern era, that is, how to be critical and vigilant while inevitably embedded and implicated, is perhaps not a question of “if,” but a question of “when” and “how.”

Eventually, to counter the debilitating effect of globalization and postmodernism, these artists propose various solutions for their struggling postmodern and/or postcolonial characters: in *Mao II*, and *Native Speaker*, the therapy exists at an individual level with a return to the traditional Western humanist values where romance, repaired husband-wife relationships, and personal redemption compensate losses and promise hope. It is in *No Telephone to Heaven* that we see a more radical and bitter rejection of debilitating postmodern political inertia. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the vision of a collective struggle against neocolonialism and globalization is examined dialectically. Imitating a black female resistance history that is at once erased by colonizers and exploited by neocolonialists, the protagonist expresses her resolution in the ultimate radical form: sacrificial guerrilla resistance.

#### Chapter One: *Mao II*: The Swansong of High Modernism

In the first chapter, I argue that although DeLillo’s *Mao II* (1992) is a typical postmodernist novel by a foremost postmodernist novelist, it ought to be understood as a novel that writes against postmodern culture. The paradox lies in the fact that while *Mao II* is stylistically loyal to the postmodernist elements—non-linear structure, pastiche, and fragmentation, etc.—it is quintessentially a swansong of Arnoldian high culture and a tribute to residual high modernism, which, in the era of postmodern hegemony, is struggling. To resolve this high

culture complex within a culture of commodities, the novel anticipates the emergence of a new form of high culture, elite consumerism.

Stylistically, *Mao II* is saturated with images of late 20<sup>th</sup> century postmodern pop culture around the world, particularly New York City. The picture of globalization in *Mao II* is not peaceful and harmonious, but confusing and terrifying because the center does not hold. The novel opens with the depiction of a mass, non-Judeo-Christian, “pagan” wedding ceremony in Yankee Stadium, organized and presided over by a self-appointed god, a Korean man who cannot speak fluent English. A young naive white woman, Karen, enters into the scene, depicted as more interested in the Korean Master Moon than in Jesus Christ. 24/7 news casting of terrorists has achieved celebrity status on CNN so professional photographers find it more newsworthy and profitable to capture images of terrorists, instead of renowned Western authors. At the center of *Mao II* is a white, male, American novelist Bill Gray, whose declining fame and creative energy are faint echoes of the bygone high modernist era, and whose physical health and virility are approaching their final days. His last work is not the novel he has promised the publisher long ago, which is unfinished, but the invention of himself as a myth, and thus a mystical celebrity, by hiding in a secret suburb of New York City. The death of Gray as an arch-individualist, which occurs during his journey to meet a terrorist leader, signifies the end of the elite high modernist culture that DeLillo laments.

I argue that in *Mao II*, DeLillo presents postmodernist culture as vulgar, repulsive, and ridiculous, not so much because such cultural logic glorifies free

play or advocates an apolitical attitude as an escape for Western metropolitans, as many on the Left would argue. Nor is it because postmodernist culture produces the illusion of universal equality and multicultural celebration to be used as a convenient therapy for dealing with the exacerbating world crisis; rather, postmodernist culture offends Gray because it capitalizes on a populist mass culture, with all its kitsch and vulgarity, at the cost of phasing out the once dominant high modernist culture. Failing to understand the deep reasons behind terrorist acts, a lot of which are desperate gestures of resistance against neocolonialism and Western/ Christian ideologies as well as capitalism itself, DeLillo, mirrored in Gray, is much more preoccupied with the issue of who can qualify as the influencer of social consciousness in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century: the novelist, or the terrorist?

In all, *Mao II* demonstrates an uneasy relation between modernism and postmodernism through both the execution of postmodernist style in the novel and the thematic intolerance of postmodernist culture. While predicting the inevitable death of modernist high culture, DeLillo ultimately envisions a compensation for the loss of it--a replacement of it with elite consumerism--for its Western metropolitan white readers. At the end of the novel, Gray is dead, but he leaves behind him a young white couple, Karen and Scott, as the keepers, guardians and disciples of his novels. The couple's appreciation of and reverence for the novelist and his works are imagined as a quiet, rarefied middle-class family affair, insulating them from the invasion of NYC turmoil, suspicious pagan worship, and extreme cries against globalization: terrorism.

Chapter Two: *Native Speaker*: Silenced Asian Americans and Their Aborted  
Representational Politics

My second chapter focuses on Korean American writer Chang-rae Lee's well-received novel, *Native Speaker*. I argue that in order for Lee to write against globalization and postmodernist culture in *Native Speaker*, he must localize the task into an immediate question. What does it mean for a Korean American, living at the very center of globalization and multiculturalism, New York City, to become not only economically successful but also politically ambitious and active? Lee's answer in the novel is mostly a bleak picture in which the ambitious Asian American, John Kwang, is defamed and deserted. The façade of racial equality in the U.S. under the banner of multiculturalism is ruthlessly torn off, and Asian Americans, despite their emerging presence in the U.S., remain suspicious and embarrassing as the "perpetual foreigners."

The title, *Native Speaker*, also calls attention to the ideological functions of language, particularly English as a hegemonic language and its political function in maintaining white dominance. The protagonist, Henry Park, can only find proof of being a native speaker of English in writing spy reports that are highly valued by his white boss and invisible clients. The novel starts with his crumbling marriage with his white wife, a speech therapist and freelance poet. In the end, Henry saves the marriage after quitting his job and working as an assistant for his wife's English speech therapy class. Meanwhile, Henry's last work as a spy helps to bring down the rising political star, John Kwang. The fall of Kwang, a first-generation Korean American who is famed for his eloquent public speeches

delivered in English, together with Henry's marriage drama, propel the questions: who is the native speaker and its standard-bearer? Who has the power and agency to speak and write freely?

Unlike DeLillo, there is no sense of nostalgia for high modernism in Lee. In fact, Lee is comfortable in making fun of classical Western writers. In *Native Speaker*, Lee labels Percy Bysshe Shelley, the famous Romantic poet, "Peanut Butter Shelley" in a decidedly parodic deflation of the canonical figure. I suggest that informed by his specific racial background, Lee is more decisive and clear than DeLillo in the way he contests both high modernism and multiculturalism. Finally, I will also argue that, crippled in his understanding of Asian American women and lacking appreciation of feminist movements among Asian Americans, Lee can neither present positive female Asian Americans in *Native Speaker* nor envision an alternative future without having a white woman, Henry's white wife, Lelia, as the ultimate cultural ambassador and savior at the novel's end.

My argument in this chapter draws on current discourses on Asian American studies; in particular, I draw upon the work of Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* (1996). In this book, Lowe argued forcefully that through exclusion laws, the U.S. has historically exploited Asian immigrants in its economic development and nation building without granting them citizenship, thus effectively denying Asian Americans enfranchisement. When global capitalism restructured itself after World War II, again for the purpose of economic development and out of strategic concern, the U.S. lifted the immigration exclusion acts targeted at Asian Americans, but Asian Americans remain linguistically, culturally and politically

marginalized as “foreigner-within.” Citizenship for Asian Americans simply changed disenfranchisement into restricted enfranchisement. Lowe also cautions about the surging multiculturalism, which as part of postmodernist culture in the U.S., threatens to level out real economic differences and political inequalities by aestheticizing those problems. Lowe’s scholarship provides an illuminating theoretical basis for me to analyze *Native Speaker*’s depiction of multiculturalism and Asian American political engagements.

### Chapter Three: *No Telephone to Heaven*: Contradictions and Pitfalls of Resistance

I conclude my dissertation with Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*. Cliff’s novel, I argue, offers a radical critique of globalization and postmodernist culture as inextricably connected phenomena. Almost every urgent aspect concerning justice in the contemporary world is addressed in *No Telephone to Heaven*—slavery and colonialism in the past, neocolonial exploitation in the present, racism, sexism, class struggles, gender construction and identification. In addition, Cliff is prescient in focusing on environmental degradation and the need for conservation and protection. Cliff’s novel also touches upon the creation of hybrid identity in diaspora. One of the central questions the novel addresses is intellectual responsibility and political activism of citizens, even those in the diaspora. What arguably is most daring in *No Telephone to Heaven* is its dialectical understanding of the complex changing global reality. With that, Cliff creates an ending to warn against the illusion of any immediate tenable solution to neocolonialism and global capitalism.

Cliff's political vision and her artistic rendering of that vision are deeply rooted in a historical and dialectical understanding of the Caribbean's past and present. The protagonist, Clare Savage, a Creole woman, whose journey from and back to Jamaica is traced in the novel, is shown at the end no longer seeking any individualized identity, like Henry Park in *Native Speaker*; her search for an identity is only successful after she immerses herself in collective struggles. Her participation in the struggle also entails the excavation of memories, which, too, allows her to forge a solidarity with others. But *No Telephone to Heaven* is not all about the celebration of reclaimed black female consciousness and empowerment. Ultimately, Cliff is ambivalent about the constructiveness of Clara's identity choice of purging whiteness and embracing blackness, a shift from Euro-centrism to Afro-centrism. Cliff constructs a cautionary ending to question the effectiveness of resistance strategies that are based solely on a single essentialized perspective.

This last chapter on *No Telephone to Heaven* also identifies one crucial issue at stake in the critique of globalization and postmodernism with which I have been dealing throughout the dissertation. Leslie Sklair argues in "Social Movement and Global Capitalism" that, whereas contemporary capitalism is organized globally, radical resistance to it and social activism seeking justice can evolve into localized grassroots movements (291). This is a strategy artistically imagined and examined in *No Telephone to Heaven*, which reverses the direction of resistance from top-down to bottom-up and shies away from large-scale systematic change. However, the advocacy of such a strategy, although it can be

successful in some local areas, is fundamentally Foucauldian in style.<sup>4</sup> In my view, it is limited and can be disappointing given the complex web of globalization--its overwhelming influence--and last but not least, everyone's implicated role within it. The limitation of a nomadic and dispersive resistance is what Cliff cautions against in *No Telephone to Heaven* from a dialectical perspective. As Jameson reminds us, any meaningful debate on postmodernism must be from "a historical and dialectical view which seeks to grasp the present as History."<sup>5</sup>

In all, my dissertation examines three late 20<sup>th</sup> century novels in English to analyze and critique their shared discontent with globalization and postmodernism, and at the same time, their apparently differing political concerns and agendas. While these texts were written and published about three decades ago, each of them remains "surprisingly" relevant today: terrorism still dominates the national conversation and the media, Asian Americans are yet to achieve political prominence, and in the Caribbean, the struggle to be politically and economically stable and independent continues. As globalization and postmodernism deepen and expand their influence, artistic intervention, resistance, and vigorous theoretical debates remain as ongoing tasks.

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<sup>4</sup> As the foremost postmodernism theorist, Michel Foucault writes extensively on how power is decentralized, dissolved within the state, so what is productive is nomadic.

<sup>5</sup> See "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate," 65.

## Chapter One: *Mao II*: The Swansong of High Modernism

In 1991, American novelist Don DeLillo published *Mao II* to chronicle and dramatize the death of a fictional modernist novelist whose life-long faith in authorial power is challenged and crushed by the emergence of postmodernist culture. This preoccupation with the role—and the demise of—the author is not accidental. Rather, such a preoccupation connects DeLillo to a robust debate in literary critical culture.

In 1967, French poststructuralist Roland Barthes made a bold announcement in his landmark essay, “The Death of the Author.” Barthes began with a series of questions challenging the credibility of the authorial voice in Honoré de Balzac’s story, “Sarrasine” and concluded, “to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author” (55). Barthes contended that an author does not make the writing, because the “whole being of writing” is “a text consists of multiple writings,” and “there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, ... but the reader.” Two years later, in 1969, Michel Foucault, who was to become one of the most important postmodernist theorists, published his now famous essay “What is an Author?” in which he laid out his argument on authorship and authorial function. In many ways, Foucault’s argument had much in common with Barthes’ idea regarding the author as a decentralized and contingent self, no longer professing authority and control over the text. Both Barthes and Foucault, whose ideas have had a direct and powerful influence on postmodernist literary culture, reject an absolute authoritative

authorship and call for the death of an all-knowing novelist, be it Balzac in French realism or James Joyce in modernism. The timing of Barthes' and Foucault's publications is the late 1960s, a time period that David Harvey pinpoints to be when postmodernism emerges "as a full-blown though still incoherent movement out of the chrysalis of the anti-modern movement of the 1960s" (*The Condition of Postmodernity*, 7). What Barthes and Foucault argued for in theory not only ushered in a new era in literary criticism but also symbiotically nurtured a corresponding literary production in which a postmodernist novelist would consciously, as one assumes, disperse and diminish the central role of an author.<sup>6</sup>

What is especially interesting in *Mao II*, is who is pitted against a modernist writer in the novel. No longer do merely the open-ended reading and the reader's response pose threats to the author's authority, as Barthes and Foucault forcefully call for. Added to the changing postmodern globalization landscape is the emergence of a new social narrative, particularly a narrative of horror and spectacular images staged by terrorists, according to *Mao II*. The setting of the novel is the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bill Gray, the protagonist, is a white, male, American novelist, whose fading fame and waning creative energy are faint echoes of the bygone high modernist era; like his fame, his physical health and virility also seem to be approaching their final days. His final masterpiece is not the novel that he has promised the publisher long ago and which remains

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between literary criticism and literature may not necessarily be causal, but certainly symbiotic. As Joanne Creighton points out "writers and critics alike are nurtured by the prevailing climates of opinion, by similar ways of perceiving during particular time periods." Thus we have the co-existence of modernism and New Criticism, and of postmodernism and reader-response criticism, demonstrating that theory and literature of roughly the same period sharing "common epistemological assumptions. ("The Reader and Modern and Postmodern Fiction," 216).

unfinished, but the invention, with the aid of a pair of assistants, of himself as a myth by hiding in a secret suburban community of New York City. After agreeing to be photographed by Brita Nillson, a professional photographer in pursuit of well-known writers, Gray walks out of his hiding place and participates in the rescue of a Swiss poet kidnapped by a terrorist group in Beirut. Gray's journey eastward is a journey of no returns: taking him from New York to Boston, London, Athens, and Cyprus. He dies en route to Beirut before meeting the terrorists. Gray's aborted plan to sacrifice and exchange himself for the hostage and to confront the terrorist leader, Abu Rashid, is continued by Nillson, who has given up photographing writers; instead, she pursues terrorists as the new target of her camera. Meanwhile, in Gray's suburban house, the young white couple, Scott and Karen, former assistants to Gray, takes over the residence as the late writer's inheritors, keepers and disciples. They become the perfect elite consumerists to compensate for the bygone high modernism: Scott being an eagle-eyed businessperson in art investment and publication industry, and Karen being an avid consumer of postmodern media culture.

While the connection with postmodern theorizing, as exemplified by Barthes and Foucault, is illuminating, the focus of this chapter is more influenced by Fredric Jameson's attention to disjunctions between style and content as a way to uncover the novel's ideology. My focus, thus, is not on how *Mao II*'s depiction of Gray's death affirms Barthes' and Foucault's bold prediction of the demise of the author; instead, in a Jamesonian move, I want to call attention to the uneasy relationship between the novel's postmodernist style, and strangely, its core

modernist ideology. I argue that there is a tension between the renowned postmodernist novelist, DeLillo, and his deep-down nostalgia for and kinship with the values and ideals of high modernism--that is, reason, order, and a distinction between high culture and low culture.<sup>7</sup> What is at stake here is that despite DeLillo's proximity to the globalization core system and despite his privileges of being a white male writer, his acute awareness of the problems and ills produced by globalization and postmodernity pushes him to offer a critique of postmodernism and globalization in his novel. More importantly, due to his privileged position in terms of race, gender, and class, DeLillo's critique of postmodernism and globalization, I argue, can only find a solution in an attempt to reimagine and restore the "good old" high modernist days. This stance is in glaring contrast to the other two novels in my dissertation, *Native Speaker* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, whose critiques of globalization and postmodernism stem from different ideological concerns, and thus offer contrasting solutions.

DeLillo, as I will show, is quintessentially a high modernist writer nostalgic for a romantic vision of humanist ideals and pursuit of order—with a strong faith in seeking truth and unity through reason and democracy. In *Mao II*, DeLillo's critique of globalization and postmodernism not only originates from his observation of the changing socioeconomic landscape, but also at a deeper level from his quintessential aesthetic and ideological alliance with high modernism. High modernism in art and literature, to be distinguished from earlier modernism

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion on high modernism, see David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Chapter "Modernism," especially pages 35-38.

in the 1920s and 1930s, as David Harvey explains in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, became hegemonic after 1945 and shifted the modernist movement from Europe to the U.S. with a belief in “linear progress, absolute truths, and rational planning of ideal social orders” (35). In *Mao II*, DeLillo’s core antagonism with postmodernist culture, framed by his modernist aesthetic and political belief, is that postmodernism has replaced the once elite high culture with vulgar pop and media culture. In the novel, Karen, one of Gray’s assistants, is addicted to watching and absorbing 24/7 CNN news coverage on terrorist attacks, and she is described by Gray as carrying “the virus of the future” (119). DeLillo’s biggest concerns are binary oppositions rooted in high modernist thinking: the mass is pitted against the individual, postmodern vulgarity against modernist establishment, and chaos against reason. The result is, in *Mao II*, postmodernist culture is not only vulgar and ugly, but also terrifying and repulsive.

The novel begins at Yankee Stadium, where a mass wedding has been organized and is being presided over by a Moonie Master from Korea. Thousands of white American girls are set to wed strange Asian men. The whole spectacle horrifies Karen’s parents, who will later kidnap and deprogram their daughter from the foreign and pagan influences. As the plot unfolds, it also includes terrorists who have stolen the thunder in the media from renowned novelists. Gray laments that “what terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degrees to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thoughts” (*Mao II*, 157). In other words, no longer is a novelist capable of

shaping or affecting “the structure of feeling,” as Raymond Williams famously terms. By the end of the novel, DeLillo envisions and endorses the emergence of an elite consumerism as the rightful heir to high modernism. Whether inside *Mao II* or outside it, privileged Western consumers will continue to appreciate and protect Gray’s/DeLillo’s works. The death of Gray will only add more value to his antemortem publications and royalties will accrue. This will ensure a quiet and privileged life for the young white couple, Scott and Karen—not producers of any literary work but protectors and consumers--and insulate them from the turmoil of globalization and its disrupters: terrorists.

It is worth mentioning here that one of the creative drives behind *Mao II* is DeLillo’s support of Salman Rushdie, who was facing a *fatwa* or an Islamic death sentence, issued by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini. The controversy stemmed from the publication of the novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988).<sup>8</sup> *Mao II*, in fact, is written partly in response to what DeLillo viewed as the spread of Islamic “terrorism.” The *fatwa* was deemed by the West as a monstrous violation of artistic freedom, in which the author is terrorized for criticizing Islam. Moreover, DeLillo’s novel consciously integrates the issue of terrorism into its depiction of a postmodern world. Contemporary terrorism has a complex and paradoxical relation with postmodernist culture and globalization, as being both a disrupter of the social order and a benefactor of it by commodifying and trading Western hostages for money to fund the movement, thanks to the porousness of open

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<sup>8</sup> See *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* is partly inspired by the life of Muhammad, which is regarded as blasphemy by many Muslims.

markets. In the novel, as the terrorist leader Abu Rashid informs Nillson, “You sell this, you trade that. Always there are deals in the works. So with hostages. Like drugs, like weapons, like jewelry, like a Rolex or a BMW” (*Mao II*, 235). Further, according to the novel, terrorism from the Islamic world has affected traditional Western authors. That is, the terrorist usurps media attention that was once reserved for renowned modernist writers, so Gray laments that “what terrorists gain, novelists lose” (Ibid, 157), referring to the lost public interest in reading novels and in his view, the excessive consumption of news coverage of terrorist attacks. Eventually, photographer Nillson changes her target from writers to terrorists.

Despite Gray’s lamentation over the waning influence of novelists, in reality the publication of *Mao II* certainly added more fame to DeLillo. The novel cemented his status as one of the leading Western postmodernist writers along with Thomas Pynchon. Mainstream media’s accolades of the novel were immediate. For example, *The New York Times* claimed that in *Mao II* DeLillo is “one of the most ironic, intelligent, grimly funny voices to comment on life in present-day America.”<sup>9</sup> In the 1991 Penguin edition of *Mao II*, Pynchon’s endorsement of the novel was prominently displayed on the back cover: “This novel’s a beauty. A vision as bold and a voice as eloquent and morally focused as any in American writing.” The endorsement yokes together the two postmodern masters across the Atlantic, Pynchon and DeLillo. *Mao II* also received a Pen/Faulkner Award for Fiction, thereby consolidating DeLillo’s distinction as a

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<sup>9</sup> This accolade is printed at the back cover of the Penguin 1991 edition of *Mao II*.

leading American novelist. In 1999, DeLillo became the first American recipient of the Jerusalem Prize, and the canonization of DeLillo as one of the most consequent American authors in American literature continued. In the same year, 1999, the academic journal *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted an entire issue to DeLillo, though this was certainly not the first special issue of an influential academic journal paying tribute to DeLillo.<sup>10</sup> The *MFS* special issue was titled “DeLillo II,” an obvious nod to *Mao II*. The essays in the journal were subdivided into, “Postmodern Knowledge,” “Postmodern Art and Authorship,” and “Postmodern Identity,” all tellingly categorizing DeLillo as a postmodern novelist.

Indeed, *Mao II* is a novel not only saturated with postmodernist pop culture images and references in terms of its content; it also remains stylistically loyal to the signature features of parody, fragmentation, and decentered narrative structure, all of which are the hallmark of postmodernist fiction. The novel’s active engagement with postmodernist discourse like simulation/simulacra is also obvious.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, as I have noted earlier, there is a tension in DeLillo’s novel between a modernist aesthetic and politics and postmodernist style elements. DeLillo has been a favorite subject of literary criticism, admired especially by critics who are sympathetic to postmodernist style, but they have

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<sup>10</sup> In 1990, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* devoted a special issue to DeLillo. Obviously, the timing decided that no critical essays in that *SAQ* issue were on *Mao II*. Still, the special issue itself is testimony of the overall critical acceptance of DeLillo as one of the most important postmodern novelists.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Lewis’ essay, “Postmodernism and Fiction,” offers succinct a summary of the characteristics of postmodernist fiction, and he agrees with David Harvey that postmodernism is the dominant mode of literature in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a “displaced, globalized society” (111).

also noted the combination of style and politics. Some critics have pointed out the striking resemblance between DeLillo, the famous American postmodernist novelist, and Bill Gray, DeLillo's fictional modernist writer. John N. Duvall, for example, in his introduction for the aforementioned special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, "DeLillo II," contends that, "...although his [DeLillo's] subject matter has been postmodern culture, DeLillo still holds out an almost modernist hope for the vocation of the contemporary writer..." (561).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, of course, that modernist vision has been historically a white, middle-class, and Western male perspective. In *Mao II*, DeLillo's sympathy towards and empathy with Bill Gray are clear. While Gray's ambition to remain as the last great modernist proves quixotic--his novel fails and his sacrifice to save the hostage aborts, he dies with a grand humanist cause in the name of rescuing a fellow writer. Further, DeLillo makes sure that Gray's modernist legacy will be preserved and continue to be cherished: by the end of the novel, Nillson fulfills Gray's aborted mission to meet with the terrorists, and the young couple, Scott and Karen become loyal keepers of Gray's books and heritage. In his text, DeLillo imagines a new form of authorship and readership. The remaining question is: what kind of new authorship and readership does DeLillo conceive to compensate for the modernist loss in the new dominant cultural politics, postmodernism?

Critics have offered various answers to this question. For instance, Silvia Caporale Bizzini argues that there is a transformation from universal authorship to

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<sup>12</sup> Also see Peter Baker's essay, "The Terrorist as Interpreter: *Mao II* in Postmodern Context."

specific authorship in *Mao II*, and she bases her argument largely on Barthes's proclamation that authorship is now dead ("Can the Intellectual Still Speak?" 104-117). Mark Osteen also points out that in *Mao II* the Joycean model of authorship is displaced by spectacular authorship. By Joycean model, Osteen refers to Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, who uses silence and exile to shield himself from politics and religion. This is what Gray practices at the beginning of the novel, hiding and refusing any interview. Nevertheless, Gray eventually agrees to be photographed and walks out of his self-imposed exile to participate in the rescue of a kidnapped writer. He decides to do a public, televised reading of a poem written by the poet, and in doing so, Osteen argues, Gray shifts to spectacular authorship: using photographic or televised images to shape public consciousness ("Becoming Incorporated," 643-674). In "What is a Terrorist? Contemporary Authorship, the Unabomber, and *Mao II*," Ryan Simmons even suggests that DeLillo is making original linguistic connections between the author, the mass movement, and the terrorist (680).

Despite some variations, all these critics stress the transition of authorship in *Mao II* from a modernist model—the author is in control of the text—to a postmodernist one—the author no longer determines the meaning of the text. I am in agreement with such readings to a degree. As others have also noted, since DeLillo is obsessed with the issue of authorship in *Mao II*, it is not possible to read the novel without first associating it with Barthes's and Foucault's arguments on authorship, as I outlined earlier in the chapter. However, in my discussion, I

wish to go beyond the question of authorship.<sup>13</sup> My analysis of the novel is more concerned with how visions of authorship reveal DeLillo's aesthetic and ideological alliances to high modernism. The model of authorship, whether alive/dominant, or moribund/ residual, or in formation/ emerging, according to Raymond Williams,<sup>14</sup> is ultimately one reference pointing to the ongoing cultural hegemony. In *Mao II*, I argue, Gray's decline and death is less about the doomed days of an individual modernist writer per se, and more about the passing hegemonic status of high modernism itself. The historical and social context within which DeLillo is operating has firmly conditioned and framed his own expressed despair and later, reconfigured hope.

Postmodern America: "The future belongs to crowds."<sup>15</sup>

In analyzing *Mao II*, critics have also noted a certain kinship between DeLillo and Andy Warhol, the consummate American postmodernist artist and cultural icon, to suggest DeLillo's active participation in and contribution to American postmodernism.<sup>16</sup> Since the presence of Warhol's *Mao* series is deliberate in the novel—from the title to the textual allusions to Warhol's art--in this section, I look briefly at DeLillo's uneasy relation with postmodernism, particularly his

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<sup>13</sup> Critical focus on authorship will inevitably suggest that although the Author is proclaimed to be dead in the postmodern era, his ghost may have become even more eloquent.

<sup>14</sup> See Williams' "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (31-49).

<sup>15</sup> The quotation is the ending sentence of Prologue in *Mao II*, "At the Yankee Stadium." In this Chapter, a mass wedding at the Yankee Stadium is depicted: thousands of white American girls are married to Asian men, the ceremony is presided over by the Korean Moonie Master, and in the audience, parents of one of the protagonists, Karen, observe in shock and horror of their daughter's wedding ceremony (16).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in Jeffrey Karnicky's essay, "Wallpaper Mao: Don DeLillo, Andy Warhol, and Seriality," he addresses DeLillo's philosophy of images, which is identical to that of Andy Warhol's conceptions. Well-reasoned as his argument is, mine is a departure from such an identification of DeLillo's and Warhol's ideologies.

aesthetic and ideological departure from Warhol. Then, I discuss how *Mao II* offers a chaotic depiction of postmodernity in the U.S.

At first glance, the title of *Mao II* is an obvious reference to Warhol's famous multiple replicas of Mao Zedong's portrait. In case we have missed the reference, Warhol's portrait series is reproduced on the dust jacket of the novel. This is surely a well-conceived market strategy to pique the reader's curiosity; the use of the Warhol image also immediately bring to the reader's attention DeLillo's postmodernist engagement. Mao was considered a notorious Communist leader by the West, and his image is at once familiar and distant, especially for a Western audience. In freely replicating, coloring, and embellishing Mao's image in a series of silkscreen portraits, sometimes adding rough color to Mao's lips and sometimes highlighting Mao's mole to resemble Marilyn Monroe's famous beauty mark, Warhol instills an air of kitsch and playfulness into the original propaganda posters in Mao's China. Warhol may not have intended to subvert or even critique Marxism/Communism or Maoism in China, yet his conspicuous free play of Mao's portrait does offer an inadvertent, albeit playful, comment on a political culture that is fundamentally opposed to capitalism. The final effect of Warhol's art series is that Mao no longer acts as a disciple of Marxism, a proponent of an alternative social and economic system from capitalism, and the leader of a socialist revolution. Rather, Mao is appropriated and commodified by Warhol into a bankable and consumable capitalist sign, similar to what he does with a Coca-Cola bottle, Campbell's soup cans or Marilyn Monroe's face. While Mao's original portrait is hung at the entrance of Tiananmen Square and familiar

to generations of Chinese as a reminder of China's Communist revolution, Warhol's postmodernist maneuver dissolves the boundary between a Communist symbol and a capitalist sign, turning the *Mao* series into a commoditized piece of artwork, with investment value. In his essay, "Two's a Crowd: *Mao II*, Coke II and the Politics of Terrorism in Don DeLillo," Richard Hardack contends that Warhol's postmodernist *Mao* series "perversely heralds the apparent 'replacement' (but actual supplementation) of capitalism by the capitalist symbols of socialism" (375). Such perverse interpretations of Marxist symbols--and thus the evaporation of revolutionary energy from those symbols--are what Warhol has accomplished, even if inadvertently.

DeLillo's critical focus in the novel, however, is rather far away from Warhol's postmodernist free play, although at first glance Warhol's art piece and DeLillo's novel appear to have some commonalities. First, DeLillo's Gray is a consummate high modernist who shuns fame by hiding himself from the public almost as much as Warhol courts fame, even if that fame, as Warhol famously maintained, will last only fifteen minutes.<sup>17</sup>

Second, although DeLillo produces *Mao II* as a novelistic simulation of Warhol's artwork, in a second appropriation of Warhol's *Mao*, he ultimately negates Warhol's free play of signs and symbols. Cautiously distancing itself from postmodernist politics while simulating and parodying its style, *Mao II*

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<sup>17</sup> Warhol is famous for his claim, "everyone deserves fifteen minutes of fame." He not only produces series of portrait replicas on Mao, Marilyn Monroe, he does so on himself as well. By reproducing and making his own images serial, fun, and kitschy, his pursuit of free-play reaches its peak and renders himself as the iconic master of kitschification and self-commodification.

provides DeLillo a public venue in the form of novel to express his modernist anxiety over Warhol's apolitical blur of ideological differences, and finally to offer a critique of the postmodernist commodification and consumption of signs and spectacles. In other words, unlike Warhol, DeLillo wants to reinsert the political meanings of signs and symbols, rather than display them in an endless play. In *Mao II*, DeLillo brings Mao back to *normal*; that is, DeLillo's Mao carries the original association with a socialist revolution, as a grassroots leader who is the archenemy of Western "democracy" and liberalism. If Warhol appropriates Marxist/Communist sign systems and symbols and empties out their radical revolutionary meaning, DeLillo in *Mao II* restores to them the original association. When Gray, for example, engages in a series of heated debates about novelists and terrorism with George Haddad, a spokesman for the terrorist group said to be associated with "a Lebanese Communist Party" (*Mao II*, 123), Mao and Maoism are repeatedly invoked and debated. During one heated conversation, Gray asks Haddad, "Is it a little Maoist band you're speaking for, George?" To his question, Haddad replies with a confirmation and starts to defend Maoism and the personality cult in Mao's China, "We need a model that transcend all the bitter history. Something enormous and commanding. A figure of absolute being. This is crucial, Bill. In societies struggling to remake themselves, total politics, total authority, total being" (*Ibid*, 158). In a later debate, Haddad challenges Gray, "Mao said, 'Our god is none other than the masses of the Chinese people.' And this is what you fear, that history is passing into the hands of the crowd" (*Ibid*, 162). To that, Gray immediately presses the question, "How many dead during

the Cultural Revolution” (Ibid, 163)? For both Gray and DeLillo, the terrorist, like the “fifty million Red Guards” (Ibid, 158) in Mao’s China chanting and practicing Maoism, is the absolute antithesis of the individual writer in the West, “What terrorists gain, novelists lose. ... the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art” (Ibid, 157). This imagined battle between the terrorist and the white Western author in *Mao II* deserves more critical attention to which I return in the next part of my analysis.

If DeLillo is suspicious of and negative towards postmodernist culture, how does he in *Mao II* describe the late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S., whose cultural logic is predominantly postmodernism? The novel is an epic story of a modernist martyr, whose death DeLillo laments. Informing this modernist-crusade narrative are globalization and consumerist culture manifest domestically in every corner of the U.S. *Mao II* is a pastiche filled with episodes of surprises and ironies. In the novel, Gray’s assistant, Scott, has a sister in Kansas who marries a doctor, and struggles to conceive despite access to advanced medical science in the U.S. They adopt a Peruvian baby, who is luckier than the African-American baby deserted on a Manhattan street, whom Scott refuses to take home. The hard candy Karen purchases is made overseas and is described as cheap, ugly and tasteless, and it contrasts sharply with the very conventional homemade dinner in Gray’s suburban house, complete with roasted lamb, fresh bread, and choice wine. Clients in upscale Manhattan restaurants complain of the occasional water-main break and claim such inconveniences change New York City into war-torn Beirut. Meanwhile, Karen notices homeless people in New York City live “in a plastic

bag,” “sleeping bodies in the tunnels and ramps, heads hidden, sooty feet, tightly bundled objects clutched to the knees,” and “sooted-faced people pushing shopping carts filled with bundled things” (*Mao II*, 145 & 148). To Karen, a white woman living free under Gray’s roof as a private assistant, “it is hard to find a language for unfortunates,” lots of whom are immigrants who speak “multilingual English, like English in garbs and swoops, broken up and cooked” (*Ibid*, 145 & 149).

To be fair, DeLillo is acutely aware of the twists, the ironies and the dehumanizing effects of globalization on the poor and the non-white. His depiction is candid and not without sympathy for the disadvantaged and the deprived. However, his explanation for and his solution to social injustices are truncated by his own ideological subscription to Western liberalism. His interrogation of global capitalism stays at the level of criticizing media appetite for sensations and monolithic consumerism, both of which he equates with mass culture that threatens the order in high modernism. For instance, when Gray finally agrees to be photographed by Nillson, he bitterly confesses, “Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunman have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated” (*Mao II*, 40). While in the present moment, global capitalist expansion has initiated an intensified embrace of mass consumerism, which operates on the premise, “the more the better,” DeLillo sees in such behavior the erosion of individuality. Seeing Karen addicted to TV watching, Gray comments that she

carries “the virus of the future” (*Mao II*, 119). The Yankee Stadium episode where Karen is married to a strange Korean man and which horrifies Karen’s parents, is pointedly summarized by Gray as, “millennial hysteria.” Gray believes that the mass wedding compresses “a million moments of love and touch and courtship into accelerated mass, ... more anxious, more surreal, more image-bound, ... you take marriage, ... and you turn it into catastrophe, a total implosion of the future” (Ibid, 80). According to Gray, “The future belongs to crowds” (Ibid, 16), and it portends disasters.

*Mao II*’s antagonism towards mass culture is to be found on multiple fronts, the suspicion about multiculturalism in the U.S. being one of them. Indeed, multiculturalism is equated with foreign invasions in the novel. This white paranoia of a future envisaged as foreign invasions is introduced at the very beginning when *Mao II* opens with the mass pagan Moonie wedding in Yankee Stadium where under the arrangement of their Master, a self-claimed Messiah from Korea, more than three thousand devoted young white girls are married to strange Asian men they have never met before.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Yankee Stadium is strongly associated with the American spirit, symbolized in the national sport of baseball, which delivers “the democratic clamor, a history of sweat and play on sun-dazed afternoons, an openness” to arouse pride and patriotism (*Mao II*, 9), such historical and national cultural resonances have obviously lost their effectiveness in the face of the overwhelmingly strange spectacle of the mass

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<sup>18</sup> This novelistic episode is, of course, a reversal from the more commonplace reality in which white men marry Asian women, as “mail-order brides.”

wedding ceremony. Karen's father, Roger, who is in the audience trying to find his daughter below, can only work out in his binoculars "the mass, the crowd, the movement" (Ibid, 5), a dazzling and bewildering smeared impression. Although he has "a degree and a business and a tax attorney and a cardiologist and a mutual fund and whole life and major medical" (Ibid, 4), all these advantages of a solidly middle-class American life and his old college logic stop functioning here. To him, a confident, white, middle-class American from the Midwest, the pagan ceremony means the end of American history, as he bitterly comments, "I see a lot of faces that don't look like Americans.... Maybe they think we've sunk to the status of a less developed country. They are here to show us the way and the light" (Ibid, 5). Despite his shrewdness in business, Roger fails to see that the Moonies' threat is not only spiritual but also economic. As the text reveals, the Moonies are both an organized religious sect and a well-ordered commercial enterprise making substantial profits. Their organizational structure is simultaneously quasi-religious and quasi-capitalist. What is viewed by the white American middle-class as a foreign threat is in fact a mimic of U.S. capitalism. Not to be daunted by big international corporations, the Moonie Master, a Korean man, knows all too well how to make profit out of an internationalized religious institution.

This prologue is titled "At Yankee Stadium" and ends with an apocalyptic claim, "The future belongs to crowds" (*Mao II*, 16). DeLillo himself once observed in his essay "The Image and the Crowd": "An image is a crowd in a way, a smear of impressions. Images tend to ... create mass identity" (72-73). He

is concerned that the proliferation of images in postmodernity eliminates individuality. In *Mao II*, crowds and spectacles have been set up as frantic, illogical, and contagious like a virus, articulated through Roger's mouth and representing the worries of white American fathers. White patriarchal authority appears to be replaced by the strange yellow men. Moonies, led by an Asian man who can barely speak English, are also perceived as the unwanted products of capitalist expansion and postmodernism, which have led to the influx of new immigrants and the surge of multiculturalism.<sup>19</sup> For the white American middle-class, whose long tradition in fetishizing the individual and whose tendency to view everything foreign as suspicious invasions,<sup>20</sup> the presence of Moonies and all other multicultural practices produce equal amount of paranoia, sadistic desires and masochistic fantasies. As revealed later in the novel, Karen's parents employ professional Christian agents to kidnap and deprogram her from the Moonies, a process that is physically and spiritually brutal. The agents ruthlessly tear down Karen's Moonie uniform, indicating both spiritual and physical rape. In another instance, a cousin who once sexually abused Karen shows up in a neo-Nazi costume. He brings Karen American-made clothes to replace the acrylic dress made in Korea, already destroyed by the Christian agents. To Karen, the cousin and the agents are nothing but sadists trying to brainwash and deprogram her.

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion on how the restructuring of the U.S. economy post World War II helped to lift the immigration exclusion acts targeted at Asian Americans, see Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Emerson famously championed the American individualism. Ronald Takaki makes an eloquent study of Asian Americans' "perpetual foreignness" in *Strangers from a Different Shore*.

On the other hand, without discrediting her innocence and empathy, Karen's betrayal of her Christian upbringing and her temporary conversion to the Moonies are virtually the other side of the same white American consciousness of her parents, only she approaches the increasing multiculturalism in the U.S. from the opposite angle from her conservative parents. Whereas her parents' xenophobia is glaringly violent, so they would even entrust Karen to the care of sadistic Christian agents and the would-be Nazi cousin, Karen tends to create a fantasy of all things foreign as signs of stability and security. The Moonie Master is a Korean immigrant who chooses Asian men as husbands for white girls such as Karen, and silent and smiling Asian Americans, "strangers from a different shore," to use Ronald Takaki's ironical term, are projected in Karen's fantasy as simple, harmless and desirable objects. In the white American liberal mindset, immigrants, especially those from East Asia, are often symbolically registered as bearers of some opaque and inscrutable faraway traditions that have been lost to white America.<sup>21</sup> The result is that foreign presence becomes a conflicted site simultaneously desirable—for Karen, and horrible—for her parents.

The parents' conservative Christian deprogramming is brutal enough to scare Karen into wishing for an escape. She soon finds this in a substitute family in the novel in the East Coast. Gray's modernist novels fascinate her and they fill up the void left both by the Moonies and by the provincial hypocritical Christianity of Middle America. Gray becomes a substitute father for Karen.

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<sup>21</sup> This stereotype of harmless Asian Americans, of course, contrasts sharply with the Orientalist and colonial view that the Mid-East is a site of terrorists, which is dramatized in *Mao II*'s depiction of the terrorists in Beirut.

Unlike Roger's naked xenophobic paternal violence and abuse, Gray presents an image of refined white American liberalism. Religious battles between the orthodox and the pagan are despised by Gray; rather, he is more concerned with the battle between the Western writer and the Eastern terrorist to win over public consciousness, a battle that has been staged and escalated by the Western media in their sensational coverage of terrorist acts such as kidnapping and bombing. To the media, the terrorists' scripts and plots are more explosive and exploitable than a novel, fast and ready for instant consumption by an audience that is increasingly driven by visual images rather than verbal texts. At a deeper level, the competition between the terrorist and the Western writer is the result of the larger shifting cultural ideology that dooms the career of Gray. In an age of globalization, its cultural logic, postmodernism, requires the abandonment of the modernist ideals of beauty and order in favor of the blur and glut of images for instantaneous consumption. The marketplace dictates that for both Gray and Abu Rashid, the terrorist leader, little else really matters except for consumers' insatiable voyeurism, narcissism, and even hidden sadistic and masochistic desires to be projected and enacted in the fleeting images of terror. Almost twenty years after *Mao II*, such image consumptions in hyper-real space get hardwired in new media forms such as YouTube and Facebook, shared presumably by millions around the world simultaneously. In lieu of reading a classic American novel, TV viewers and YouTube fans solidify the dominance of postmodernist culture worldwide.

If DeLillo's/Gray's concern over media is produced by a modernist anxiety, contemporary thinkers like Leslie Sklair and Fredric Jameson offer their critiques from a different angle, the perspective of resistance and grassroots mobilization. Sklair uses the term the "culture-ideology of consumption" to describe the new transnational consumerism. According to Sklair, the cultural ideology of consumption does not yield a site of resistance, but more often than not, a site of homogenization. Be it the consumption of tangible material goods like Coca-Cola or the consumption of images on TV or the internet, consumerism offers a temporary and false solution to real social problems ("Social Movements and Global Capitalism"). Jameson describes the consumer habits and addictions to buying and spending as the "libidinalization of the market," which prepares for and ensures the accumulation of maximum profits for transnational corporations. The challenge thus arises to question if "consumerism were inconsistent with democracy, that the habits and addictions of postmodern consumption block or repress possibilities of political and collective action" ("Notes on Globalization as Philosophical Issue." 69).

What we have here are actually two schools of thoughts that critique consumerism and global capitalism but from contrasting perspectives. Pro-modernists like DeLillo resent consumerism and global capitalism because they level out individuality; in other words, they bury the middle-class elites in the crowds. Meanwhile, thinkers on the Left such as Sklair and Jameson argue that global consumerism disperses and disables effective collective movement against

capitalism. For the former, a future of crowds is to be feared; for the latter, a future of collective resistance is to be welcomed.

Before ending this part of my discussion, I need to point out that DeLillo's aesthetic alliance to high modernism does not necessarily make him deny the inevitable death of high modernism under the postmodern condition. As an artist, he laments the passing of his modernist ideals, but the best he can do is to envision a future for the residue of modernism. Early in the text, Karen seems to have found a substitute family with Gray as father and Scott as husband, and shortly afterwards the visiting photographer Nillson fills the tentative role of mother. When the four of them sit down for dinner in Gray's house, Gray raises the glass for a toast, "This place feels like home tonight. There's a wholeness, isn't there? A sense of extension and completion" (*Mao II*, 67). However, the unity is temporary and mostly symbolic. The modernist fantasy for order is quickly destabilized and shattered, as sexual relationships develop between Karen and Scott, Karen and Gray, Scott and Nillson, and Gray sexting with Nillson on the phone. Not until the death of Gray, the symbolic purge of high modernism from the household, will Scott and Karen function normally as a couple. DeLillo's message here, though tinted by his own modernist nostalgia, is unequivocal: as much as he is nostalgic for modernism and resents postmodern vulgarity, with postmodernism hegemony, modernism is at best a residual to be revered and rarified as elite consumer culture for a white liberal audience.

Postmodern World: “Our only language is Beirut.”<sup>22</sup>

No doubt, ills of globalization cannot just remain inside America. In *Mao II*, various international spaces are juxtaposed against each other and present another bleak and gloomy picture filled with chaos, confusions, and anarchy. Stark socioeconomic contrasts and imbalances exist between different zones of the globalization system. For instance, in the enriched core area like New York City, celebrities and the rich dress up for a glamorous gallery opening of a postmodernist painting exhibit; meanwhile, on TV images of China are shown with its streets crowded with bicycle peddlers. Nevertheless, ironical twists and striking resemblances from one zone to another will pop up, threatening to collapse the boundary between them. In New York City, the homeless become a reminder of the “third-world” slum inside the world’s sole superpower. In the City of Beirut, even with religious wars and terrorism, the sweep of global capitalism does not stop, which gives no care to the city’s bombs, dead bodies and broken families. Saliently on display in the streets of Beirut are revolutionary slogans and posters of both militia leaders and Hollywood stars. Advertisements for Tahiti vacations coexist with advertisements of Coke II—a local knock off of the iconic American drink. Yet the most surprising aspect of globalization is the omnipresence of trading and profiting, which not only supersedes the Western corporations but also nourishes terrorists in the East. In fact, terrorists survive and thrive on globalization despite their resistance to the system: global capitalism

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<sup>22</sup> The quote is from *Mao II*'s conclusion (“In Beirut,” 239). After Gray’s death, photographer Nillson gets the chance to interview and photograph the terrorist leader, Rashid, in war-torn Beirut. What Gray fails to do and whom he fails to meet, Nillson accomplishes. Through her lens, the scenario is a destructive war zone area symbolizing the chaos in postmodernity.

provides terrorists an ideal porous and fluid market for supplies of weapons and sustenance, not to mention the way in which the media in the West is a willing sponsor complicit in the grand spectacle of terrorism. In *Mao II*, the terrorist leader Rashid reminds the photographer Nillson of this inconvenient truth when she is on commission to photograph Rashid for a German news journal: “You sell this, you trade that. Always there are deals in the works. So with hostages. Like drugs, like weapons, like jewelry, like a Rolex or a BMW” (235). Thanks to global capitalism, it seems everything and everyone everywhere can be commodified, exchanged and cashed in, including a famed novelist like Gray if he sacrifices himself as a hostage. As if to preempt such a commodification of the high modernist, DeLillo disrupts Gray’s plan to become a hostage. In *Mao II*, Gray becomes the victim of a car accident when he is still in Cyprus and ready to leave for Beirut. He is not dead immediately, but the fatal injury, lacerating his liver, eventually dooms his planned meeting with Rashid. Despite Gray’s paranoiac inner arguments with the terrorist, both his humanist ideals and his crusade remain one-sided fantasies.

In “‘Here but Also There’: Subjectivity and Postmodern Space in *Mao II*,” Laura Barrett echoes Jameson’s thesis that in postmodernist culture, concentration on time has shifted to concentration on space, and that postmodern space is unmappable, creating disorientation and dislocation (788-810). Such a loss of orientation and place in postmodern global space would become all the more acute for a modernist thinker and defender, a loss that has been clearly felt and dramatized by every character in *Mao II*. Having said that, driven by the

modernist desire for order and unity, DeLillo also strives to give larger meanings and directions to Gray's eastward journey from New York to Beirut: the journey is a symbolic modernist crusade against the postmodernist frenzy during which Gray is going to sacrifice himself for the grand humanist cause. Each city Gray visits—New York, Boston, London, Athens, Cyprus and Beirut--is a specific global zone carrying a baggage of historically coded culture and ideology, and ready to confront each other: from the New World to the Old World, to the Western cultural origin, and to the East. As a modernist martyr with unwavering faith in individual freedom, Gray's nemesis is the terrorist in the East who he believes is "usurping" the author's authority in affecting public consciousness. While *Mao II* opens with a pagan ceremony at Yankee Stadium, it ends with Nillson fulfilling Gray's will to confront and photograph Rashid in Beirut, that is, to shoot/change Rashid into a frozen image using her camera.

"I'm playing the idea of death. ... Sitting for a picture is morbid business. A portrait doesn't begin to mean anything until the subject is dead" (*Mao II*, 42), is how Gray describes the photo-taking as a ritual of mediation and incorporation to produce twice-removed images, a ritual basically announcing the death of the photo subject once he/she is photographed and objectified. In this light, Gray's death is not a surprising dramatic turn: it has been planted when Nillson takes his picture early in *Mao II*. Ultimately, it can be read that in the novel, DeLillo deliberately exercises his authorial power to depict a symbolic death of Rashid by having the latter being *shot* by Nillson. The underlying message seems to be if Gray has to die for his modernist cause and become a martyr, in return Rashid

must offer his own death, in the form of a photo image and in a symbolic way, to honor Gray.

### The Author vs. The Terrorist

If a central issue in *Mao II* is the waning power of a modernist writer in the postmodernist condition, to DeLillo that threat is both domestic and international. While the prevailing postmodernism in the U.S. replaces modernist refinement with a vulgar consumer-media-driven culture, the terror and spectacle of repeated terrorist acts around the world are creating another visual narrative, more spectacular and popular than a modernist novel. In Leonard Wilcox's essay "Terrorism and Art: Don DeLillo's *Mao II* and Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*," Wilcox tries to argue for a connection between DeLillo's modernist ideology and his approach to terrorism in *Mao II* and Jean Baudrillard's postmodernist theorization of the "9/11" event and global terrorism (89-105). Sophisticated as Wilcox's reading is, I suspect that Baudrillard's radical interpretation of terrorism, which regards global terrorism as a symbolic exchange and sacrificial violence and as the most effective weapons against hegemonic Western ideology, is really what DeLillo intends in *Mao II*.

As a novelist, DeLillo's obsessions with conspiracy, media and terrorism are long-time, consistent preoccupations that recur as themes throughout his novelistic career,<sup>23</sup> but *Mao II* stands out because of its salient focus on a famed

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<sup>23</sup> Among DeLillo's other novels, *Libra* (1988) is about the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, while *White Noise*, *End Zone*, *Americana*, and *Underworld*, all deal with media frenzy, murder, conspiracy and terror, particularly in the context of the Cold War and its aftermath.

modernist writer who is threatened by another anonymous writer from the East, the terrorist. The novel's engagement in the politics of terrorism can be traced back to its creative origin, which I have mentioned earlier. *Mao II* was written partly as DeLillo's response to and protest against Khomeini's issuing of *fatwa* to Salman Rushdie in 1989 after the latter's publication of *The Satanic Verses*. As a Western liberal writer, DeLillo feels obligated to stand in solidarity with a non-white "third-world" writer who is regarded as a traitor in the Muslim world. In an interview, DeLillo made the connection between his novel and Rushdie's plight: "It's the connection between the writer as the champion of the self, and those forces that are threatened by this. Such totalitarian movements can be seen in miniature in the very kind of situation Rushdie is in. *He's a hostage*" (qtd. in Passaro, 77, my emphasis). From a Western liberal point of view, the Muslim world, trying to kill its dissenter's voice, is the real terrorist. Rushdie, meanwhile, mirrors the hostage character in *Mao II*, the Swiss poet waiting to be rescued by Gray. Indeed, much like Gray, who plans to participate in a public reading to lend support to the Swiss poet in the novel, DeLillo read from *The Satanic Verses* in New York in support of Rushdie.

At another level, DeLillo's perception of terrorism and of the intricate relation between the terrorist and the hostage is more complicated than mere resentment or sympathy. The publication of *Mao II* marks DeLillo's career peak: it brings him a Pen/Faulkner Award in 1991, and in 1999, the Jerusalem Prize from Israel for his artistic focus on individual freedom in society. Distinguished as those prizes are, even DeLillo scholars tend to agree that he "will almost never

win” “the Nobel Prize for Literature” (Duvall, 563), perhaps the most coveted international recognition and one for which Rushdie has been a stronger contender for years. In fact, Rushdie’s international fame reached its highest after *The Satanic Verses* controversy. In terms of career achievement and honors, DeLillo and Rushdie are actually pitted in an invisible game, a game in which a First-World writer, DeLillo, is overshadowed by the internationally more distinguished Third-World writer, Rushdie, who happens to be labeled a “terrorist” by parts of the Muslim world. If we take all the above complex contextual and textual information concerning *Mao II* into consideration, we may have a better clue to the pointed antagonism between the Western writer and the Eastern terrorist as dramatized in the novel. It is not a stretch to say that in *Mao II*, DeLillo imagines and maximizes the role of the terrorist, twisting the terrorist into an alter ego and a dangerous replica of the white male writer. Such a fantasy, that the terrorist has usurped the writer’s authority and that the aggressive terrorist is pitted against the lonely anguished white writer, seems to stem from the traditional white male’s narcissism and feeling of superiority.

When the photographer Nillson enters Gray’s secret residence to photograph him, she comments to Scott that she feels as though she is being led into a terrorist chief’s secret retreat in the mountains. Knowing Gray too well, Scott replies, “Tell Bill. He’ll love that” (*Mao II*, 27). Later, Gray tells Nillson:

There’s a curious knot that binds novelist and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. Do you ask your writers how they feel about this? Years

ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated....Because we're giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios. News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative. (Ibid, 41-42)

In this passage, Gray willingly associates himself with the terrorist image and the identification is a package of mixed feelings: envy and resentment, and ultimately a self-serving identity statement. Indeed, Gray's imagined kinship between himself and a terrorist is mostly self-serving, and he fails to acknowledge that the terrorist is actually the forever marginalized outlaw in the globalization system whose voice has been denied and silenced for too long to be rendered in a rational way. Peter Baker argues in "The Terrorist as Interpreter: *Mao II* in Postmodern Context,"

The language of the Law, the language of Western imperialism, even the language of liberal democracy, does not address all subjects and does not allow all subjects to formulate utterances (most notably those who are victims of genocide). Operating out of a determinant us/them opposition, the universalizing discourse of Western humanism

necessarily excludes and marginalizes certain utterances, prevents them from being heard or even made. The Abu Rashids of this world...are denied the fundamental conditions in which to formulate language in a meaningful way. (15)

What is crucial in Baker's argument is that the very reason that terrorists resort to violence and horror is that first and foremost, the oppressed and the marginalized are almost always excluded from the discourse of law that is mostly at the service of Western imperialism and democracy. Ultimately, it is not the terrorist who threatens the novelist; it is the very institution of Western democracy, with its marginalization and silencing of the oppressed that induces terrorism and eventually inflicts anxiety upon a novelist.

Echoing that argument in *Mao II*, the character Haddad, a scholar living in Athens and the intermediate between Abu Rashid and Gray, tries to educate Gray: "But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands. The way they [the terrorists] determine how we see them. The way they dominate the rush of endless streaming images" (*Mao II*, 157-158). Here, Haddad delivers some unpleasant truths to Gray: if we accuse the terrorist's deadly language of being murderous, we are actually accusing the West itself for being able to understand only a deadly language. The terrorist in the East has been credited with too much originality in the composing and staging of a terrorist script which is, if we look at the history behind the term "terror"—an issue I will return to in more detail shortly--never a strange phenomenon in Western history.

The terrorist is just more adaptive to postmodern consumer and media culture that relies and feeds on endless sensational images. Warhol's artistic terrorism against modernist art is hailed as iconoclastic, ushering in a new age of art that dissolves revolutionary signs and disables resistance culture. Postmodernism merges happily with global capitalism, but not when terrorists appropriate the same language to voice discontent and anger. Haddad is a political science professor sympathetic to Abu Rashid's Maoist organization and is depicted as a terrorist suspect. In the novel, the portrayal of Haddad is patronizing, contrasting with Gray's commanding and confident presence, but eventually Haddad's trenchant argument in defense of Rashid pushes Gray to vocalize his modernist ideals in unexpected bursts of anger,

No. It's pure myth, the terrorists as solitary outlaw. These groups are backed by repressive governments. They are perfect little totalitarian states.

... ..

Do you know why I believe in the novel? It's a democratic shout. ... And when the novelist loses his talent, he dies democratically, there it is for everyone to see, wide open to the world, the shitpile of hopeless prose. (Ibid, 158-159).

In his exasperation about the novelist's loss against terrorists, in despair, and in front of his imagined enemies, Gray elevates the death of a novelist to martyrhood.

Now, let me return to the term "terror." In the essay by Baker mentioned above, he reminds us that the word "terror" and its derivatives, "terrorism" and "terrorist," which are often paired with reason or enlightenment in the conceptual binary, actually have a deep root in European history. The French "Reign of Terror" during the 1789 revolution marks the historical moment when revolutionary forces turned into unrestrained cruelty. However, such a historical origin and resonance have been deliberately muffled in the current global context in which terms like "terrorism" and "terrorist" are invoked solely to "build ideological consensus for certain kinds of U.S. dominance abroad" (Baker, 9-10). *Mao II* was published in 1991, ten years ahead of the 9/11 tragedy, but the novel's plot of a democratic American writer pitted against an undemocratic terrorist leader, somehow anticipates the Bush Americanism and his rhetoric of the battle against terrorism. In *Mao II*, the language of Beirut is terror, which must eventually be muffled by the delicacy and quietness of suburban New York.

### *Mao II* and Elite Consumerism

As theorists such as Fredric Jameson and others have argued, one of the major features of contemporary postmodernist culture under the condition of global capitalism is the omnipresence of consumerism, "the cultural ideology of consumption" and "the libidinalization of the market." Jameson uses "the libidinalization of the market" to describe the sexualization of consumerism. It

happens with the “sweetening of this pill by all kinds of images of consumption such as: the commodity, as it were, becoming its own ideology... and what Leslie Sklair calls the new transnational ‘cultural ideology of consumption’” (“Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” 69). Consumerism offers a powerful allurement for economic and political homogenization. It disarms grassroots resistance movements because the possession of certain material goods creates the illusion that one has the capacity of spending and consuming, and thus is within the system. Consumerism also phases out the previous cultural hegemony, high modernism, as going to the mall shopping replaces highbrow cultural activities such as listening to opera in the music hall. For DeLillo, the modernist plight and tragedy in *Mao II* have to be resolved by envisioning and endorsing a rightful heir to that cultural residual in the postmodern world. Here Raymond Williams’ theory on the dominant, the residual, and the emerging cultures proves to be valuable in understanding DeLillo’s artistic vision in *Mao II*. For DeLillo, his idealized modernism is a residual culture besieged by the dominant postmodernism and is in the process of being recast into the emerging elite consumerism.

In *Mao II*, Gray’s legacy is preserved and cherished via two channels which ultimately converge into one. Internationally, Nillson travels around the world photographing terrorist leaders and shoots them into dead frozen images. Domestically, Scott and Karen live on in Gray’s reclusive suburban residence, keeping his manuscripts, secrets, real name and past love affairs, to protect his image, property and royalties, and waiting for the passing of time so that Gray’s unfinished novel will accumulate more speculations, curiosity, and value. Most

importantly, in the castle of the modernist crusader, Scott and Karen will be insulated from the outside frenzy and turmoil, enjoying the rare white middle-class peace so often lost on the multicultural NYC streets. They are both fascinated by Gray's novels, yet it seems more appropriate for them, in the postmodern environment, to rely more on viewing Gray's images captured by Nillson while keeping his works as abstract ideas in the attic and in their imagination. In other words, Gray's modernist heir and heiress must evolve into a new type: still white and elite, but also active participants of consumerism: elite consumers. Masao Miyoshi has argued in "'Globalization,' Culture, and the University," that "high culture as defined by Arnold and his modernist successors" will eventually be incorporated into "elite consumerism" (260). In the current global market, such elite consumerism tends to focus more on the saturations of images and senses, in the form of visiting art galleries, theaters, museums, tourism to exotic places and culinary adventures. Elite consumerism becomes the routine leisure entertainment for the well-off, well-educated, cosmopolitan middle-class, yet it also beckons alluringly to the under-privileged, who imagine they themselves will become similarly successful one day. The industry of knockoff luxury goods is certainly built upon that fantasy and illusion. Together, elite consumerism and, if I may suggest, pseudo-elite consumerism, highlight and differentiate each other, ultimately contributing to the growth of global libidinalization of the market.

To say that Gray's legacy is preserved partly in Nillson's photography enterprise, I need to resolve a seeming contradiction here. It is true that the

spectacular images produced by Nillson's camera are part of the image frenzy that Gray questions. True as well is the fact that Gray claims photographs take away his subjectivity and announce his symbolic death. Indeed, in its early stage, photography is embraced by Walter Benjamin as one of the revolutionary artistic practices in an age of mechanical reproduction in contrast to the traditional form of a novel. However, unlike some critics who stress the tension and the competition between Gray, the modernist writer, and Nillson, the postmodernist photographer,<sup>24</sup> I argue that in DeLillo's vision the two are actually reciprocal partners sharing ideological alliances and cementing each other's authority. The solidarity happens when both writing and photography are endangered by TV and the Internet in an age of hyper-real digitals, post-mechanical reproduction.

In *Mao II*, Gray and Nillson are a symbolic couple. The hierarchies between writing and photography, between men and women, are reinstated if only briefly. Their encounters and conversations are filled with amorous impulses. Nillson observes Gray chopping wood and exercising muscles in the yard when she is naked in front of the bathroom window. Gray claims the dinner with Nillson, Scott and Karen has made the house more like a family while becoming manifestly jealous about the intimacy between Nillson and Scott. After Nillson departs, Gray takes the initiative to call her, leaving a long monologue on her answering machine and imagining a different life with her in a Manhattan apartment. When Gray disappears to start the eastward journey, both Karen and

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<sup>24</sup> See for instance, Laura Barrett's essay "'Here but Also There': Subjectivity and Postmodern Space in *Mao II*" and Mark Osteen's "Becoming Incorporated: Spectacular Authorship and DeLillo's *Mao II*."

Scott assume he has escaped with Nillson. More importantly, Nillson is the ultimate agent to carry out Gray's unfulfilled wish. If Gray has to die for his modernist cause, Nillson will take up the unfinished task to confront the terrorist and immortalize Gray's modernist ideals in a new media, photo images. Gray and Nillson are never real rivals in a cultural and political battle; on the contrary, they are a spiritually engaged couple fighting the terrorist together. In no other place can we see the restoration and affirmation of the white male writer's authority so clearly as in Nillson's drastically different attitudes and behaviors towards Gray and Rashid. While she is gingerly handling the camera in front of Gray, she is audacious in taking pictures of Rashid. She asks humbly for Gray's permission to borrow a cigarette and smoke, yet in front of Rashid she smokes with ease. When Gray asks her the question about when women started to photograph men, Nillson is patient and tries to look up the answer in a dictionary. To compare, right in front of Rashid, she rips off his son's hood aggressively and takes a picture of the young boy to capture his anger and hatred. When resisted, she slaps the boy in the face. The neo-colonial arrogance, aggression and violence, if too indecent to be demonstrated openly and directly by Gray with his belief in non-violence, democracy and order, are played out thoroughly by Nillson.

However, the future of elite consumerism belongs best to the next generation: not Nillson to be exact, despite her active contribution and engagement, but the young white couple Karen and Scott, whose easy assimilation with postmodernist culture makes them ideal candidates.

In comparison and privileged by his gender, Scott is depicted to have taken fewer detours than Karen has in his quest for identity. He never joins any suspicious pagan worship, and once he is conquered by Gray's novels, he is determined to find the reclusive novelist. He succeeds, offering his service to the novelist as an assistant and housekeeper, and becomes steadfastly the steward of the household. He keeps Gray's secrets and manuscripts; he convinces Gray to delay publishing the novel; he introduces Nillson into Gray's hermit life. Well before Gray's tragic journey, Scott, the next generation, is virtually taking control in Gray's house. Scott is ardent in defending Gray's fame and works and is extremely disciplined and ordered--always cleaning and organizing, but he is also an intermediate between Gray's modernist ideals and the outside postmodernist culture. Scott discovers Karen who is described by Gray as a carrier of "the virus of the future" (*Mao II*, 119) and takes her to Gray's world. Scott has the business shrewdness to foresee the enormous ripple effect of Gray's works after his mysterious disappearance, knowing too well that only more value will be attached to those novels whose royalty right he carefully guards. Living with a modernist writer, Scott also buys and collects Warhol's postmodernist paintings as an investment. Appreciating both classic modernist novels and iconic postmodernist art works, Scott does not engage in any artistic production such as writing or painting: his main job is to have the eyes for the value behind those works, whatever style they belong to. He is the consummate postmodernist elite consumer.

Karen, on the other hand, is described as a vulnerable and mutable white girl who both carries and spreads “the virus of the future” (*Mao II*, 119). She undergoes a more turbulent and testing journey to settle on her identity. As I mentioned earlier, her temporary betrayal of her Christian upbringing and her rebellious conversion to the Moonie pagan religion have resulted in her parents’ most xenophobic and violent reaction: kidnapping her, and using both spiritual and physical abuse to deprogram her. Yet violence scares her further away; only Gray’s humanist ideals can appeal to her and return her to her lost sanity and peace. DeLillo sets up the younger couple Scott and Karen in a power relation identical to the gender hierarchy between Gray and Nillson. Arguably the most selfless and compassionate character in *Mao II*, Karen is deliberately infantilized and victimized because of her gender and her significant postmodern syndrome--an avid and addictive consumption of images, particularly those from TV. Her body is described as having an under-developed teenager shape. Her addiction to and absorption of the TV news broadcasting of terror and tragedies are similar to a naive kid’s fascination with the violence in video games and YouTube clips. Last but not least, her female body is multiply used and even raped: by her neo-Nazi cousin, by the Moonie discipline, by the Christian deprogramming agents, and by Scott and Gray. Whereas Scott is steadfast in his development as a postmodernist elite consumer, Karen’s growth into the role of Scott’s perfect partner has to be interrupted, delayed, corrected and reinstated.

Karen’s Moonie experience is largely the result of teen rebellion, naivety, and the fantasy of Asian Americans as harmless and desirable objects, so she will not

go back to it for fear of lacking material comfort. She later wanders into inner New York City, after she has lived with Scott and Gray, and that wandering terminates her spiritual quest and directs her to her due course as a domestic white housewife. In NYC, Karen witnesses and approaches those homeless people dressed and living in soot, who turn a deserted public park into the junkyard of American capitalism and whose real sordid lives replace the distant images of misery on TV. Despite her genuine sorrow for the poor, Karen is bewildered and feels powerless. Instead of seeking ways to educate and empower herself, she escapes again: back to Scott and back to the suburban haven, where she insulates herself from the miseries that she cannot bear to see and dare not address. In DeLillo's imagination, Karen is the postmodernist child to be rescued, and her struggle is a textbook example of how a lost white girl will ultimately reclaim her identity as an elite consumer. Karen's failure to imagine and start a positive life without having to relying on any man's teaching and material resources, be it her father's, the Moonie Master's, Gray's, or Scott's, is eventually a revelation of DeLillo's limited imagination, in the same way as he cannot objectively delve into the inner world of a terrorist to understand the terrorist's plight, even if he does not endorse violence.

Towards the end of *Mao II*, DeLillo writes about a peaceful and comfortable life for Scott and Karen with a renewed hope, as Scott carefully conceives a plan:

The manuscript would sit. He [Scott] might talk to Charles Everson [the publishing company boss], just a word concerning the fact it was finished. The manuscripts would sit, and word would get out, and the

manuscript would not go anywhere. After a time he might take the photographs to New York and meet with Brita and choose the pictures that would appear. But the manuscript would sit, and word would travel, and the pictures would appear, a small and deft selection, one time only, and word would build and spread, the novel would stay right here, collecting aura and force, deepening old Bill's legend, undyingly.

The nice thing about life is that it's filled with second chances. Quoting Bill. (*Mao II*, 224)

The hope is alive. Scott will use his business shrewdness to make Gray a more successful author than he was before his death. The strategy is to invest in time, build up a myth, and create a narrative of half mystery and half tell-all, which will eventually elevate Gray to the status of an undying legend. Ultimately, the survival of a high modernist writer all depends on the successful maneuver of commodification on the consumer market.

Ultimately, DeLillo, does not appear pessimistic about the future of the dying Author, nor does he totally fantasize about the emergence of elite consumerism which will preserve the legacy of high modernist culture. The cultural theorist Masao Miyoshi reminds us of the actual presence of such a new elite culture, which oftentimes appear in the form of visiting art galleries, theaters, museums, tourism to exotic places and culinary adventures.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Asian American writer Chang-rae Lee shows us, with a charged artistic voice in *Native Speaker*,

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<sup>25</sup> See his essay, "'Globalization,' Culture, and the University."

that for a marginalized minority writer, the struggle not to be silenced is still a long treacherous journey.

## Chapter Two

### ***Native Speaker: Silenced Asian Americans and Their Aborted Representational Politics***

In this chapter, I discuss Korean American novelist, Chang-rae Lee's debut novel, *Native Speaker* (1995). I am interested in how at the intersection of the new millennium and at the core of the globalization system, New York City, Lee offers a strikingly different picture of postmodernist culture, and of much celebrated U.S. multiculturalism in particular, through the eyes of Asian Americans. Particularly at stake here is the issue of Asian American identity and political activism at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the 1990s, globalization helped to relax the restrictions on Asian immigrants, and at the same time, postmodernism helped to usher in an era of identity fluidity and cultural diversity in the U.S. Glenn Omatsu offered an illuminating summary of the Asian American community during that period. According to Omatsu, on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Asian American community has become drastically different because the demographic and the political landscape for them has changed due to new immigrants and refugees. However, there existed a challenging paradox facing Asian Americans. On the one hand, there was a surge of interest in the Asian American community and its culture, thanks to the corresponding surge in multiculturalism. Yet on the other hand, there was a corresponding lack of robust Asian American consciousness in terms of identity and ideology. To use Omatsu's description, Asian Americans "have a political vacuum" (The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation:

Asian American activism from the 1960s to the 1990s,” 184). Omatsu’s summary provides a useful perspective to understand the cultural and political backdrop of Lee’s *Native Speaker*.

Upon its publication, *Native Speaker* was an immediate success. In an effort to endorse the novel and Lee as one of the finest emerging minority novelists in the 1990s, both the mainstream media and the Asian American scholarly journal *A. Magazine* quickly identified Lee as an Asian-faced Ralph Ellison and *Native Speaker* as a Korean American’s imagination of *Invisible Man*.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, their accolade is not ill grounded: much as *Invisible Man* is about the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century African American struggle for political visibility, *Native Speaker* presents a slightly later 20<sup>th</sup> century picture in which Asian Americans try to grapple with their still-to-be-defined political and cultural identity.

The protagonist of the novel is Henry Park, a second-generation Korean American, who although born and college educated in the U.S., can only validate his identity as a native speaker of English by working as a spy and writing eloquent spy reports. The job satisfies his hunger and need to be a writer when he cannot, dare not and fails to articulate his true feelings towards his family, particularly his estranged white wife, Lelia. Lelia has been traumatized by the loss of their toddler son, Mitt, who dies due to the neighborhood white children’s

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<sup>26</sup> *A. Magazine* claims “*Native Speaker* is, in many ways, a Korean American imagination of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.” Taking into consideration that *A. Magazine* was at the time the largest publication for English-speaking Asian Americans, such a comparison and label has the potential to fix and limit the critical reading of *Native Speaker* from the beginning.

mischief, and that is soon followed by the death of Henry's father. Lelia interprets Henry's inarticulateness as emotional and physical emasculation. Meanwhile, her occupation as an English speech therapist, a freelance poet, and thus an "authority" in the English language seems only to cultivate in Henry an even more complex and stronger attachment to the spy work—to be able to penetrate into the inner world of his target and write about it. Eventually, after his espionage activity and report help to terminate the political career of a fellow Korean American, John Kwang, an ambitious businessman-turned-city councilman, Henry quits the job and manages to mend his already deteriorating marriage with Lelia by working as her speech-class assistant.

In this chapter, however, I have no intention to make a comparative study between *Native Speaker* and *Invisible Man*, which will risk reducing the former into an auxiliary of the latter. I acknowledge echoes of Ralph Ellison's influential work in Lee's novel, especially the central issue of racial invisibility. It is also obvious that Lee appropriates African American political syntax in depicting Kwang, which I will discuss later, but my focus here is on how at a particular historical moment, the 1990s, Lee offers his critique of both global capitalism and postmodern culture, especially multiculturalism in the U.S., from the perspective of a marginalized Asian American. What is significant in *Native Speaker* is that Lee extends and deepens the discussion of racial invisibility. For Asian Americans, the discourse on race and racial profiling actually produce *both invisibility*—in terms of Asian Americans' marginalized socioeconomic-political status, and evidenced by the stereotypical images often associated with Asian

Americans as being timid, mysterious and inscrutable, *and visibility*—in terms of their distinct exterior physical differences from the White and the Black. What results is a *racial hyper-visibility*, as Tina Chen aptly terms it.<sup>27</sup> This racial hyper-visibility marks Asian Americans as the perpetual “Others,” theorized by Ronald Takaki, or in Lisa Lowe’s term, the “foreigner-within.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, although Lee appropriates the syntax of African American political discourse--Kwang’s public speeches are clearly modeled on the enduring, inspiring messages of Martin Luther King, Jr., Lee also questions the adequacy and the universality of such a syntax through the self-reflections of Kwang, as a rising Asian political star in his private moment. This duality of both inheriting King’s legacy and questioning its relevance to Asian Americans demands a dialectical inquiry into and revision of the traditional white-black racial paradigm in the U.S. The challenge to the old racial and political dynamics is further complicated in the novel by its novelistic depiction of 1990s racial tensions between African Americans and Korean Americans in the aftermath of the Rodney King Verdict and L.A. racial protest. Modeled on the L.A. riot, *Native Speaker* depicts racial confrontations between Korean Americans and African Americans in Flushing, New York, which becomes a particular political challenge for Kwang in the novel. Having said that, I must also stress that Lee’s questioning of traditional race thinking does not negate the possibilities and the significance of cross-race coalitions and resistance

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<sup>27</sup> Tina Chen’s essay, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts in *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee” offers a particular trenchant argument on racial in/visibility and hypervisibility.

<sup>28</sup> For reference, Ronald Takaki makes some brilliant observations on the condition of Asian Americans in his renowned study, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, particularly his acute analysis of Asian Americans being the “perpetual foreigners.” In *Immigration Acts*, Lisa Lowe comes up with the term the “foreigner-within” (5).

movements; on the contrary, his suspicion of the traditional white-black racial paradigm propels him to imagine in the novel a multi-racial alliance that Kwang's political campaign builds upon and strives to promote. His campaign office is mostly composed of young activists from various ethnic backgrounds. In doing so, Lee does offer an imagination of cross-race coalition movements.

In addition to the parallel with *Invisible Man*, given its plot and its publication four years after *Mao II* (1991), it is not a stretch to read *Native Speaker* as a counter narrative to Don DeLillo's lamentation on the plight of white male modernist writers besieged by globalization and postmodernist culture. Whereas in *Mao II* DeLillo is deliberately calling our attention to the era of high modernism when the author dominates and white individuality is fetishized, *Native Speaker* problematizes and recasts the conception of authorship through Asian American characters. In *Native Speaker*, authorship emerges as a collective and more diverse identity to contest the traditional solo hero figure in the Western model that DeLillo is nostalgic about. According to Lisa Lowe, Western modernist novels as an institutionalized cultural form have a special place in the formation of colonial empires and ensuing empire cultures, the U.S. included. With *bildungsroman* as the primary narrative form and very often a young white male as the protagonist, the Anglo-American novel "legitimizes particular forms and subjects of history and subjugates or erases others" (*Immigrant Acts*, 98).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Among the numerous works on the Western novels: its origin, history and ideological functions, I mainly rely on Lisa Lowe's "Decolonization, Displacement, Disidentification: Writing and the Questions of History" (Chapter 5 of *Immigrant Acts*) as a theoretical shortcut. I believe there must be other important works, yet Lowe's argument as part of the larger Asian American studies she engages in is most pertinent to the particular text under discussion here.

Those privileged “particular forms and subjects of history” can be traced and located in *Mao II* in the character of Bill Gray and his artistic enterprise, while the terrorist leader Abu Rashid becomes a subjugated foil for the white author.

In *Native Speaker*, however, minority non-white writers occupy pivotal positions. Conspicuously, Henry, the protagonist of the novel, narrates and persistently writes stories both of his own life and of others. At the same time, Henry’s stories are intricately stitched together with those authored by other non-white and/or white female writers/speakers such as Kwang and Lelia. The multiplicity of writers in *Native Speaker* is an obvious departure from *Mao II*’s insistence on the white male writer’s loneliness and singularity. Moreover, the pivotal positions these multiple minority or female writers occupy in *Native Speaker* contradict sharply the white nativist view implied in *Mao II*. In *Mao II*, the Moonie master from Korea and the pagan ceremony he leads are depicted as alien intrusions, and thus become telling reminders that Asian Americans are “perpetual foreigners” despite their legal citizenship in the U.S. With the façade of political equality in the Constitution and regardless of their having been naturalized national subjects, historically Asian Americans are rarely deemed as native speakers of the hegemonic language, English, not to mention being its accomplished writers. Lowe argues forcefully in *Immigrant Acts*, “the United States have placed Asians ‘within’ the U.S. nation-states, its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as ‘foreign’ and ‘outside’ the national polity” (8). In the age of globalization, the figure of ambiguous Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners” is further compounded by

the delicate international status of emerging Asian economies in the new global system. Lowe points out, the “emergence of successful capitalist states in Asia has necessitated global restructuring for U.S. capital, reinvigorating American anxiety about Asia” (Ibid, 18). Better off than much of the “Third World” but still struggling to compete with Western powers, these emerging Asian home countries become a macro index and reference for the “suspicious” and “embarrassing” Asian Americans.<sup>30</sup>

It is thus notable that in *Native Speaker*, Lee presents a Korean American John Kwang, a New York City Councilman and a competitive mayoral candidate who possesses superior oratory skills and delivers powerful public speeches in English. His voice is described as “strong and clear, unafraid to speak the language like a Puritan and like a Chinaman and like every boat person in between” (*Native Speaker*, 283). The command of oratory skills sets Kwang apart as a unique Asian American who can advance with more ease in political circles and whose public presence earns the respect of both white and the non-white people. What is suggested here in the above quote, interestingly, is not merely Kwang’s mastery of English. The passage also implies that English as a language, from its formation to its development, to its globalization, is always an adulteration and heteroglossia. The historical reference that, just like Chinamen and all other boat persons coming to the U.S., the Puritans were also immigrants

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<sup>30</sup> Asian American historian Ronald Takaki’s term, “strangers from a different shore,” describes a deep-rooted white nativist view towards Asian American immigrants. For a thorough critical analysis of how the U.S. immigrant acts, at different historical moments, both resolve the contradictions between its economic needs and political imperatives, and produce new contradictions out of the racialized economic and political foundations, also see Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.

coming from a boat, the Mayflower, further reminds readers that preceding the official grand history of the Founding Fathers in America is another erased history of violence against the real native speakers of this land--Native Americans--who have been systematically robbed of their land and become victims of genocide.<sup>31</sup>

What I want to argue in this Chapter is that *Native Speaker* is Lee's artistic imagination and interrogation of the continuous silencing of Asian Americans against the backdrop of global capitalism and homogenizing U.S. multiculturalism. Granted, in the novel the stereotypical Chinatown restaurant waiter/green grocer character is replaced by a college-educated, white-collar, middle-class Asian American professional, Henry Park. True also is the fact that the political advancement of Asian Americans is imagined and represented through the figure of John Kwang in *Native Speaker*. Yet with the portrayal of Henry's shattered domestic life, dubious spy career, and Kwang's political fallout, ultimately Lee points to the embarrassing and difficult cultural, political situations facing Asian Americans. That is, the text points to their failure and inability to articulate thoughts and feelings both in private and in public, in domains as minute as a domestic setting and as big as an open political platform. Set in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in New York City, the very center of global capitalism, *Native Speaker*'s critical targets are multiple social mechanisms and institutions. In the economic sphere, the novel testifies to the human objectification and alienation produced by global capitalist exploitation and labor

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<sup>31</sup> For a more elaborate analysis on this reference to the native language and Native Americans, see Rachel Lee's essay, "Reading Contests and Contesting Reading: Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and Ethnic New York."

relations. In particular, for minority immigrants the false promise of economic mobility demands the trade-off of one's authenticity and identity. In the cultural domain, the text points to the problematic in multiculturalism, a specific U.S. postmodernist cultural institution using the label of culture(s) to replace discourses on class, race and gender, which is in effect leveling and aestheticizing the real material differences in the country and thus has evolved into an officially sanctioned regulating narrative.<sup>32</sup> More significantly, *Native Speaker* extends its critique to the political terrain, the U.S. electoral political system that is often promoted worldwide as the ideal mode of liberal democracy. The aborted representational politics for Asian Americans and thus the loss of a public speaker for them to turn individual woes into collective community protest get manifest in the rise and fall of John Kwang, elected New York City Councilman and scandal-damaged mayoral candidate. Kwang's political tragedy poses a pressing question about the promise of opportunity and equality in the U.S. political system. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe argues that the U.S. liberal democracy is a political system that works synchronically, intricately and incessantly with exploitive global capitalism, so when capitalist expansion and restructuring requires an open door for Asian immigrations, historical exclusion acts are lifted, disenfranchisement is beautified into "restricted enfranchisement" (ix). Enfranchised but restricted. This is exactly the political predicament in *Native Speaker* illustrated through the character, John Kwang.

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<sup>32</sup> See Lowe's powerful critique of U.S. multiculturalism in *Immigrant Acts*. For a detailed reading of her arguments, see Chapter 4, "Imagining Los Angeles in the Production of Multiculturalism."

## Ethnic Informants: Can Asian Americans Speak?

Henry Park, the protagonist and narrator of *Native Speaker*, is not a stereotypical Asian American man. In terms of profession, he is neither the familiar Chinatown restaurant waiter nor the Wall Street wonder Asian boy who is playing the risky hedge fund game thanks to his talent in mathematics and computers. Henry is a spy, a performer and a writer who infiltrates into the inner worlds of other people to document, using his own words, “objectively” and “truthfully” the secret lives of those that his boss and clients are interested in. Instead of marrying inside the Korean immigrant community, he marries Lelia Boswell, a white liberal feminist. In a sense, Lelia is the epitome of pure whiteness, so much so that she complains of having no secret or flavor upon first meeting Henry, “It’s so depressing. ... An average white girl has no mystery anymore, if she ever did. Literally nothing to her name” (*Native Speaker*, 10). Everything about her, from the last name, Boswell, to her physical features, is a reminder of the unspoken white pedigree: the Massachusetts Commonwealth, the Puritan ancestors, the private New England school, and the bossy investment banking CEO father vacationing in Maine in the summer. Clearly, Henry’s attraction to Lelia lies in, if only partly, his hyper-visible exoticism as an Asian American, something both mysterious and attractive to Lelia.

On the other hand, however, thanks to her pure whiteness, Lelia can proudly assume the title, “the standard-bearer” of English for Henry (*Native Speaker*, 12), to use her own phrase. Lelia works as an English speech therapist, a linguistic coach, a freelance writer, a poet with publications in small serious

literary magazines, and finally a judge of Henry's emotional and moral failures. Henry makes the unconventional career choice not to be a hi-tech professional, a stereotype associated with the better-educated, younger generation Asian Americans. However, when Lelia feels estranged from him and faults him for lacking the proper display of emotion when mourning over their dead son, she composes a semi-poem to vent her frustration and relies on Asian American stereotypes. It is linguistically fragmented with various charges that borrow from the racist discourse on Asian Americans: "surreptitious/ B+ student of life/... illegal alien/ emotional alien/... Yellow peril: neo-American/... stranger/ follower/ traitor/ spy" (Ibid, 5). Her accusation ends on a separate crumpled scrap of paper beneath their bed with her final sentence about Henry, "False speaker of language" (Ibid, 6). By language, Lelia means English, not Korean. To Henry, the fragmented writing does not shock him with its grammatical and stylistic abnormalities and its violation of conventional English writing, authored by "the standard bearer" wife who claims him to be a "genre bug." Instead, he "appreciate[s] its count, the clean cadence" (Ibid, 5-6), the poetic license, "the difficult truths" that provide "visions of me [Henry] in the *whitest raw* light" (Ibid, 1, my emphasis). Lelia's postmodern style poem puts Henry on emotional and moral trial. The trope of "the whitest raw light" creates an image of a stage setting, which is, ironically, not too strange for a professional spy, Henry, who is experienced in masking and role-playing. Following the rule of professional espionage training, Henry immortalizes his wife's accusations in reciprocally postmodern style--reproduction/replica. He destroys the original copy, makes

three photocopies, carries one close to his bosom for constant reminder, and safeguards the rest carefully (Ibid, 4).

Granted, Lelia's charges against Henry can be understood as a natural display of frustration and anger from a grieving mother. Yet the vocabulary, paying homage to the stereotypical images of Asian Americans and including almost all the variations of those stereotypes that have appeared in different moments of U.S. culture, highlights the embarrassing cultural and economic conditions faced by Asian Americans. It is a situation that has been historically and racially determined and can be traced back all the way in the 1800s, and continued despite changing economic and cultural structures in the 1990s.<sup>33</sup> Henry and Lelia's troubled, multi-cultural, interracial domestic setting, instead of providing the couple an insulated domestic haven, gets blurred with the outside public space and becomes a synecdoche for the larger political and cultural realities in the U. S. The surging multiculturalism in the 1990s is the revision of the old "melting pot," as Lowe points out, an actual "'universalism' designed to accommodate the irreducible diversity of American society" (30). As the novel's plot unfolds, in Lelia and Henry's household, peace and harmony cannot arrive until the racial multiplicity is reduced into a single whiteness—Henry quits the job and works as Lelia's assistant in the end. Multiculturalism becomes regulating and restricting universalism.

Lelia, as a descendant of the "pure" stock of the Puritans, is naturally the standard-bearer of the English language so her occupation as a speech therapist is

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<sup>33</sup> See Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*, "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization."

most fitting. In contrast, her husband's career can hardly be a natural and voluntary choice. Henry is a second-generation Korean American who wants to be neither a computer programmer nor a green grocer like his father, George Washington Park, who, in order to survive in the U.S., sacrifices his esteemed engineering graduate degree earned in Korea. Following in the steps of the Founding President whose name is invoked in his adopted American name, Henry's father prospers as a modern slave owner by "gently and not so gently exploiting his own [immigrant workers]" (*Native Speaker*, 54). The workers are often recent immigrants, like Mr. Yoon and Mr. Kim. They "both had college degrees and knew no one in the country and spoke little English." The "twelve-hour days six days a week" work load "deplete themselves of every last bit of energy," and in the eyes of a young and sympathetic Henry, he bitterly knows too well how the workers' children, "lonely for their fathers, gratefully eating whatever was brought home to them," exotic fruits from faraway lands such as "overripe and almost rotten" mangoes, papayas, kiwis, or pineapples—strange tastes that offer no solace to the uprooted kids' loneliness and fear (*Ibid*, 54-55). No doubt at moments like this Henry confronts the cruelty of his father's business, and later develops his suspicion of and resentment about such economic success. It must be stressed, too, that if the Founding Father of the nation, George Washington, started and benefited economically from his slave plantation without having to feel guilty, the founding father of Henry's family has no such prerogative to start except for the Korean-style underground money club, the *ggeh*, for the first batch of capital cash. Meanwhile, if George Washington's slave

plantation were legal at the time, the underground *ggeh* for the impoverished needy immigrants is deemed by the legal system to be a crime. The father's path to the "American Dream" is built upon a capitalist-mode exploitation of his workers. Along with that are the father's wasted former education in exchange for survival and economic mobility. The high price also includes the father's exhaustion, anger, and frustration after work every day which are vented at home to his patient, meek wife and young, vulnerable son. One common explanation for this price paid for the American Dream is that as a first-generation immigrant, the father's English is broken so he cannot advance economically and socially without sacrifices. Hopefully, such sacrifices would not pass down to inflict the next generation, the American-born native speaker of English. However, for Henry, the reality is different. It is true that the father's economic success, at a high personal cost and through exploiting the cheap labor of other inarticulate immigrants, ensures that when the son Henry gets started, there will be no immediate financial pressure to demand a compromised career dream or even the sacrifice of individual interest. The problem for Henry is that his career passion has grown out of a twisted and traumatized childhood experience: from the non-aggressive parental violence which forces him to witness and endure his father's daily frustration and occasional bursts of anger, and most poignantly, from a school education that constantly informs him of his racial difference and inferiority, all of which complicates his racial and gender identification of himself.

Born and educated in the U.S., Henry is always questioned about his English proficiency because it sounds alien and unnatural. His early school year experience is a traumatic memory of having to undergo special training in a remedial speech class as if he were pathologically deficient. He is grouped together with other immigrant descendants and mentally retarded kids. More than once, he tortures himself with speech practice in front of the mirror, fantasizing that he is Alice Eckles, the white blond girl in a baby-blue cardigan in his class whose pronunciation of English is established as the model for other kids. (*Native Speaker*, 233-235). To become Alice Eckles is to become both white and feminine, which is Henry's secret wish behind the bathroom door. The twisted reimagination of both his race and gender is produced by a repressive U.S. classroom culture facilitated by a whole range of participants in *Native Speaker*, from the haughty white teacher to the bullying black kids. For the young Henry, the pleasure of reciting verses of Percy Bysshe Shelley lies less in appreciating the cadence, the rhythm, or the romantic visions of classical English poetry. Rather, it lies in the secret freedom and pleasure to call the revered poet as he wills, "Peanut Butter Shelley" (Ibid, 233). By secretly vulgarizing the great poet, Henry has an early taste of the immense gratification gained from subversive creations—a power to deconstruct idol figures such as Shelley while at the same time constructing his own identity as an author. When he grows up, he will regain such secret pleasure by writing his spy reports.

Henry's tormenting school years spent in mimicking standard white English do not pay off well. It is not so much because of his pronunciation per se

as it is because of his physical features as a non-white: upon their first meeting, Lelia studies and judges his English pronunciation closely with the intent to discover his racial identity. She comments to Henry, “If I had to guess, you’re not a native speaker... You tried not to but you were taking in the sound of the syllables. You’re very careful.” When Henry retorts, “So are you,” she proudly announces, “It’s my job, Mr. Henry Park. Unfortunately, I’m the standard bearer” (*Native Speaker*, 12). Lelia’s authority and judgment continue well into their marriage and reach their climax in indicting him of being a “false speaker” in the earlier mentioned fragmented poem (*Ibid*, 6). For Henry, the situation is even worse with white strangers. With all his transformative U.S. education to alienate him from Korean culture—Henry possesses only rudimentary Korean; when he is in silence, he is readily assumed to speak broken English because his facial features, his racial visibility as a non-white Asian man, have precluded his authenticity as an American. When Henry is a teenager unhappily working in his father’s grocery store in the summer, he pretends to be another silent immigrant worker and speaks as much Korean as he can. In doing so, he turns himself into an invisible alien to the rich white woman who shops in the store. Henry eavesdrops on her whispering behind his back when she takes for granted he cannot understand the spoof in English, “Oriental Jews.” The white woman does not know or care to know that Henry, one of the “Oriental Jews,” can actually “recite ‘some Shakespeare words’” in fluent English if he wants to (*Ibid*, 53). The reality is, in the U.S., the gauge to measure Henry’s English proficiency does not begin with his education, his graduation diploma, and his mastery of grammar and

style, but first of all, with his racial hyper-visibility, his non-whiteness as an Asian American.

In contrast, the spy job capitalizes on Henry's racial visibility and invisibility and taps into his potential to role-play volatile impostures as an ethnic informant. That is, with his Asian face, he can be interpreted freely as perhaps a Korean or a Chinese or a Japanese, to name just a few. Being a spy allows him to articulate and write in English when his articulations, the spy report, can become tactically useful for political or business intrigues and are highly valued by invisible clients. Indeed, Henry is paid handsomely for his work reports, which are often pinned up by his boss as sample essays to be emulated by his peers. Somehow, his workplace and work performance compensate for the school years spent in classroom humiliation and living with a distorted self-image. Unlike a computer programmer or a green grocer, Henry feels more American as an ethnic spy, a secret agent, a profession that, paradoxically, could satisfy his inner passion and desire to be truly acknowledged as a native speaker of English. Henry himself recognizes the allure of the spy job and rationalizes it in his confession, "Dennis Hoagland [the boss] and his private firm had conveniently appeared at the right time, offering the perfect vocation for the person I was... For that I felt indebted to him for life. I found a sanction from our work, for I thought I had finally found my truest place in the culture" (*Native Speaker*, 127). The culture is the U.S. multiculturalism of the 1990s, which seems to have pulled out anonymous minority cultures from the marginalized dark corners to display them in various shows, fairs, and exhibits to celebrate cultural hybridity and openness. However,

according to Lowe, “this official ‘multiculturalism’ is evidently quite different from the grassroots cross-racial coalitions that have worked for large-scale transformations of society” (*Immigrant Acts*, 30). Multiculturalism may challenge but does not necessarily and significantly change the hegemonic position of white culture, especially when there are no correlating fundamental structural changes in social politics and economy.<sup>34</sup> Henry’s license as a native speaker of English is therefore a conditional one, only valid when he acts as a spy infiltrating between the immigrant enclaves and the dominant white society.

Yet it must be added that the branding of Asian Americans as ethnic informants is by no means merely a personal or historical accident as dramatized in Henry’s case, nor is it without precedent. During World War II, the U.S. government employed Japanese Americans as informants about Japanese culture in the war against Japan. In the name of national interest and patriotism, those who were ready to demonstrate their loyalty to the U.S. while utilizing their Japanese root were rewarded, whereas the unruly “no-no boys” were penalized and incarcerated.<sup>35</sup> Decades later, spies like Henry are recruited to serve the globalization need. More and diverse new immigrants arrived in the U.S. after the 1970s to satisfy the labor needs for a changing global capitalism that restructured the economy both domestically and internationally. Among them, many were refugees from East Asia where the U.S. wars in the Far East had shattered their

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<sup>34</sup> In *Immigrant Acts*, Chapter 4, “Imagining Los Angeles in the Production of Multiculturalism,” Lowe has offered a powerful critique of the allure and pitfalls of U.S. multiculturalism and the dangers of equating it with real material advancement for minority immigrants. The backdrop of her discussion is Los Angeles in the 1990s with an increasingly larger population of Asian Americans, which makes her argument particularly useful in reading *Native Speaker*.

<sup>35</sup> See Yen Le Espiritu’s essay, “Changing Lives: World War II and the Postwar Years.”

original homes and turned their home countries into subordinate aides to the U.S. in the global capitalist competition.<sup>36</sup> Because the restricting immigrant acts had to be lifted to accommodate the transforming labor structures, the policing of the immigrants needed to be implemented more covertly yet no less actively. Surveillance on new immigrants then turned out to involve more than the usual governmental agencies such as the CIA or the INS, now with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>37</sup> The company Henry works in, the Glimmer and Co., is therefore established to fill the gap: they work on issues from which the government can remain detached publicly in its seeming non-action, but at the same time, the surveillance continues by purchasing secret information from private companies. When Henry asks the founder of Glimmer and Co., a white man named Dennis Hoagland, what it researches, the reply is “The one thing worth researching.... People” (*Native Speaker*, 165). As the plot unfolds, oftentimes these “People” turn out to be new immigrants, who are secretly watched, studied, branded and monitored by the invisible hands of the U.S. government. When the tide turns against them and when white nativism has to be appeased, immigrants-turned-citizens, i.e., neo-Americans, quickly become targets of intense scrutiny and surveillance in the name of national security. In *Native Speaker*, Kwang is scandalized and brought down not so much by the car accident with a wounded Korean prostitute discovered in his car. Rather, it is the

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<sup>36</sup> See Immigrant Acts, “Immigration, Citizenship, racialization.”

<sup>37</sup> The policing of immigrants became drastically overt and official after September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, the existence and operation of companies like The Glimmer & Co. are justified and endorsed, and they actually receive funds from the government as a necessary intelligence service, according to a 2010 investigation by *The Washington Post*, “A Hidden World, Going Beyond Control.”

fact that she is an illegal alien patronized by Kwang. Even worse, the Korean-style underground banking system, the *ggeh*, is later found to sponsor helpless illegal immigrants in the Flushing District that Kwang represents, which ultimately dooms Kwang's political career.

Glimmer & Co. is Henry's workplace, a spy machine fabricating secret information. Surfing the waves of globalization for maximum profits, the company builds itself upon a diverse body of employees in part thanks to U.S. multiculturalism. The operation of Glimmer & Co., in which each ethnic informant is assigned specific areas as his/her domain yet has no control over the information collected and ultimately has to report to the white boss/supervisor, mimics the popular managerial structure adopted by many big international corporations in their handling of the local business outside Euro-American continents. The white boss of Glimmer & Co. knows that his clients are invisible powers such as the CIA and the IRS. Contrary to the belief that the emergence and operation of international corporations disrupt the old nation-state concept and creates a borderless global community with unfettered exchange of material goods and cultural products, national interest demands that corporate profit cannot be free of its nationality and the ensuing ideological obligations. To put those ideological obligations in the U.S. political and cultural context, it means white supremacy and white nativism have to be strategically protected against the invasion of immigrants, though paradoxically, it is exactly those immigrants who provide the cheapest labor for capitalist production, creating maximum profits for corporations, and eventually an incredible market for American consumers with

high-quality products at asymmetrically low prices. The white nativists in *Native Speaker* make it clear that they resent illegal immigrants for taking away their jobs, jobs so sordid and lowly paid that they refuse to take them. They want justice rendered by the government by punishing all foreign strangers including naturalized U.S. citizens such as Kwang. Their hatred seems to be justified in the disclosure that Kwang's protégées in the Flushing District are funded by an underground bank that evades the monitoring of the IRS. Kwang is useful as an exotic decoration in the political landscape to validate the official multiculturalism, but at the same time, his downfall is conveniently attributed to personal failure instead of the hidden hierarchies and hypocrisy of cultural politics, which are effectively executed in the form of "restricted enfranchisement" (Lowe, ix). U.S. multiculturalism, with its promise of multi-racial and multi-gender diversity, actually levels out the real material differences in terms of race, class and gender, creating an illusion that an officially sanctioned celebration of multiple cultures in the form of ethnic cuisines, costumes and art crafts could replace the real inequalities and discriminations facing the minorities. Glimmer & Co., despite its multi-racial-employee constituents, is a poster company of quintessential white supremacy in the U.S.

The human subjectification and branding are not just inflicted on the "People" being spied on. They start with the employed ethnics spies themselves. Glimmer and Co. employs ethnic Americans to carry out espionage activities inside various ethnic enclaves, turning an ethnic human being into an ethnic

informant with an assigned mask, features and identity for each specific assignment. According to Henry,

Each of us engaged in our own kind, *more or less. Foreign workers, Immigrants, first-generational, neo-Americans*. I worked with Koreans, Pete [Ichibata] with Japanese. We split up the rest, the Chinese, Laotians, Singaporeans, Filipinos, the whole transplanted Pacific Rim. Grace [Paley] handled Eastern Europe; Jack, the Mediterranean and Middle East; the two Jimmys, Baptise and Perez, Central America and Africa. (*Native Speaker*, 17-18, my emphasis)

A close reading of that paragraph reveals that the compartmentalization and the capitalization of an ethnic informant's racial identity actually produces its own paradox and contradictions. On the one hand, for each particular espionage assignment, an informant like Henry has to act as a culturally convincing fixed persona, say, as a Chinese dealing with Chinese, to be presumably consistent and impermeable so that the imposture as a particular ethnic being can be acted out successfully. On the other hand, the various assignments actually atomize, fragmentize and pressure the informant to adjust to different situations with different imposed identities. In both cases, that is, both the typecast of an ethnic informant's singular racial identity in a specific assignment and the fungi-like multiple false identities for different assignments, can only take effect under the assumption that Asian Americans are homogenized as a racially uniform group. The result is Henry, a Korean American who actually speaks not much Korean, can put on diverse masks and penetrate the worlds of not only Koreans, but also

“the whole transplanted Pacific Rim.” Years of working in Glimmer & Co. have colored and marked Henry in a funny way (*Native Speaker*, 21). In a private moment with Lelia when listening to her candid discussion of her former sexual partners, Henry reflects on his own penetrated body, divided personality, and forced malleability: “So call me what you will. An assimilist, a lackey. A duteous foreign faced boy. I have been whatever you say or imagine, every version of the newcomer who is always fearing and bitter and sad” (Ibid, 60). The context of this self-degradation is the couple’s bedtime conversation when Lelia dominates the conversation. Meanwhile, the undercurrent is running wild in her husband’s mind. It is a bitter realization for Henry that, professionally and domestically, he has been rendered an inferior partner in terms of both race and gender.

In postmodern U.S. multiculturalism, fragmentations and fluidity, which are often idealized as better than wholeness, inflict on Henry painful and destructive schizophrenia. For Henry, each assignment is a penetration and intrusion into himself as well as his target. He almost betrays himself in the assignment with Emile Luzan, a Filipino psychologist in exile, while pretending to be a patient. Pressured and depressed by the losses of his son and his father and later his wife’s estrangement, Henry becomes “dangerously frank, inconsistently schizophrenic” during their regular couch talk, conflating the fabricated identity and narrative with his own troubled life (*Native Speaker*, 22). Instead of disguising himself as a patient, Henry *is* a patient in need of therapy. This torture from schizophrenia will reach its peak during Henry’s last spy adventure to bring down Kwang, the only and the last Korean American to whom he has

demonstrated true respect and admiration. Yet it is also revealed in the novel that not until the destruction of Kwang, a once politically successful and ambitious surrogate father figure for Henry, could the latter manage to convince himself to quit the spy job forever. The suggestion is that Henry's domestic and professional crisis must be resolved in the tragedy of Kwang, an established public figure representing the numerous, anonymous, and inarticulate immigrants in his Flushing District.

### Representational Politics for Ethnic Immigrants: Promises and Problems

In *Native Speaker*, Henry is a writer, not a speaker. He does not give speeches and he transfers his unspoken words into secret reports on the lives of others. Writing becomes the savior of his private life crisis. In contrast, Kwang is a public figure who makes frequent speeches that impress the audience. Kwang's own life is secretly observed and documented by a stranger, Henry. Meanwhile, Kwang's public speeches help to give a representational voice to hundreds of thousands of inarticulate immigrants to let their woes and plights be heard. Kwang is a political character that Lee proposes to counter Henry's image as an ethnic informant enmeshed in domestic chaos. The rise of Kwang as a promising political representative for Asian Americans is a rare depiction in Asian American literature at the time. Kwang's success and charisma beckon to us an alternative political landscape in the U.S. with more active and significant participation by Asian Americans, but his disastrous downfall also reflects the challenges and difficulties facing a politicized Asian American community. Both the promises

and the problems of Asian American representational politics are illustrated through the figure of Kwang in the novel.

By any standard, Kwang's path from a Korean War orphan to a self-made millionaire, and then to a rising political star with a JD-MBA from Fordham University, is a far more glamorous interpretation of the American Dream than that of Henry's father. The father's wealth and his fulfillment of the American Dream are built upon years of selling fruits and vegetables and toiling in the grocery store. Yet the real difference between Kwang and the father, according to Henry, is "a question of imagination" (*Native Speaker*, 139), or to put it more plainly, the political consciousness, confidence and aspiration. Henry summarizes his admiration for Kwang as such:

Before I knew of him, I have never even conceived of someone like him [John Kwang]. A Korean man, of his age as part of the vernacular. Not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a large public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family. He displayed an ambition I didn't recognize, or more, one I hadn't yet envisioned as something a Korean man would find significant or worthy of energy and devotion; he didn't seem afraid like my mother and father, who were always aware of those who would try to shame us or mistreat us. (*Native*

*Speaker*, 139)

Bold, ambitious, but most of all, political and public, these are the admiring qualities that distinguish Kwang from the likes of Henry's parents. As an elected City Councilman, Kwang has a larger extended family to care for, "John Kwang's people," most of whom are poor working-class immigrants in the Flushing District of New York City. Lee is careful to present a multiracial grassroots base for Kwang: "They were of all kinds, ... these various platoons of Koreans, Indians, Vietnamese, Haitians, Colombians, Nigerians, these brown and yellow whatever, whoever, countless unheard nobodies" (Ibid, 83). These are the people who offer decisive and firm support in Kwang's election since he reaches out to them to hear countless unheard stories of their sold cheap labor, their fear of deportation, and their longing for survival and justice. In return, Kwang's political speeches and work bring to light their woes and worries, and highlight the urgent need to address their predicament. He mediates the labor tensions between immigrant employers and employees, who are of different classes and sometimes different racial backgrounds, yet who are both concerned with survival and success in the U.S. Like a lubricant, he works assiduously with local African American ministers to repair the coalition system when conflicts arise between African Americans and Korean Americans in the novel.

Not only does Kwang work for the multiracial immigrants, he works with them as well. His campaign organization is depicted as a democratic partnership between volunteers of various ethnic origins. In contrast to the spy company owned by Dennis Hoagland, where the white boss would call up Henry at odd

hours such as four in the morning to do some work, despite Henry's ongoing marital crisis, Kwang manages to transform a political organization into an extended family driven by a shared dream for social fairness and advancement. His volunteers do not just work for him; they work for the belief in active political engagement and progressive citizenship that he promotes. The mood in his office is described as "messianic," with young volunteers often working on weekends to do extra work. Reciprocally, Kwang treats these young "Jews and Chinese and Hispanics" to big dinners in Korean restaurants, eating, drinking and talking together (*Native Speaker*, 144-144). One time, Henry witnesses Kwang kneel before a young volunteer to thank her for staying an extra shift. Kwang does that with natural self-humbling, a gesture that almost terrifies the volunteer, but is perceived as genuine by Henry. He sees in the action not a cringe-worthy ostentatious political show, but Kwang's spontaneous display of Confucianism, the "belief that everyone is at once a noble and servant and then just a man. Its adherents know no hubris" (Ibid, 147-148). Here, Kwang's charisma as a popular politician is attributed to his East Asian cultural origin: Confucianism, a different set of secular religious beliefs and ethics from Western Christianity. The Confucian teaching on gentleness, tolerance and self-humbling contributes a new perspective and dimension to Kwang's political campaign.

Perhaps all along, Kwang has intuitively applied an alternative vision to the traditional white-dominated politics in the U.S. We may also read this as Lee's artistic imagination of the U.S. political future. The remaining questions are: whereas an Eastern cultural background marks Kwang out as a fresh and

unique force, and thus a welcome newcomer to the political landscape that is eager for evidence of its openness in an age of multiculturalism, how long will such political tolerance and accommodation of Kwang last? What will happen after Kwang has out-used his freshness as a decorative figure for the so-called political diversity, particularly when his political maturity, influence and ambition make him a formidable rival for the establishment, such as the sitting New York Mayor De Roos in the novel? Lee is aware of these challenges. In fact, he realistically portrays those issues and develops them into political intrigues and scandals, which finally and effectively terminate Kwang's career. In *Native Speaker*, Kwang's exotic Oriental face used to make him a media darling, but with sex and murders lurking in the background, and more importantly, with the long-time public suspicion of his authenticity as an American, the honeymoon period quickly gives away to tabloid gossip targeted at him and eventually making him a public enemy. It is revealed later in the novel that De Roos, a fellow Democrat like Kwang and the sitting New York City Mayor, has employed Glimmer & Co. to collect adversary information against Kwang, and long before that, De Roos has also planted the mole, Eduardo Fermin, who becomes Kwang's favorite and most trusted aide, inside Kwang's campaign. The final discovery of the underground bank *ggeh*, sponsored by Kwang, is interpreted as a direct infringement on U.S. law and becomes the fatal evidence to prove Kwang's perpetual foreignness. The promise of a successful Asian American politician remains an aborted dream in *Native Speaker*.

Lee is also careful to remind us that if for a while the American public, the media and the political establishment are ready to open the door for Kwang out of curiosity and concern for diversity, another crucial reason why Kwang could enjoy certain political success lies in the fact that he has successfully Americanized and politicized himself. To put it in another way, Kwang does possess real, strong credentials, which include a graduate degree in law, mastery of English to become “part of the vernacular,” and conversion to Christianity. Kwang is inspired and enlightened by the Civil Rights Movement, and after that, he matures his political consciousness. He is committed to the effort to build upon the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., so he adopts King’s political syntax to promote racial reconciliation and harmony. Kwang also possesses an acute political awareness and builds and develops a multiracial coalition movement, particularly between African Americans and Asian Americans. Finally yet importantly, he consciously adopts the strategy to start his political career not as an Independent but as a member of the Democratic Party. Yet, against all those recommending qualities and necessities are Kwang’s race, as one of the first few Asian American politicians. There are almost no models before him when the novel was published, not in previous Asian American literature and not in American political reality either.<sup>38</sup> Yes, there is Dr. King, whose last name is a slippery suggestion of Kwang’s. There is also John F. Kennedy, whose name’s

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<sup>38</sup> *Native Speaker* was written before Gary Lock was elected as governor of Washington on November 5, 1996, whose governorship lasts for two terms and who was once Secretary of Commerce and Ambassador to China for President Barack Obama. In November 2001, six years after *Native Speaker*’s publication, John Liu was elected as the City Councilman for the Flushing District of Queens, the exact position that Kwang holds in *Native Speaker*.

abbreviation JFK comes to Henry's mind when he sees the embroidering of JK on Kwang's bathrobe (*Native Speaker*, 296). Lee deliberately invokes Dr. King and John F. Kennedy in depicting Kwang, and imagines an Asian American politician who can inherit the visions and impact of both King and Kennedy, such as their hope to heal national differences. Unfortunately, King's and Kennedy's "too young, too early" tragedies are also replicated in Kwang. Although there is no assassination of Kwang in the novel, the physical attack and violence he receives from the angry white mob outside his home are highly symbolic. They brutally strike him down "like a broken child" with "his wide immigrant face" (Ibid, 343). The violence is both physical and symbolic; it is the assassination of Kwang's political career and a blatant demonstration of the white nationalists' claim to their exclusive ownership of America.

Again, it is important to note that Kwang's disgraceful fall cannot be understood merely as the result of his own errors and misconduct--driving under the influence and prostitution; nor is it just the result of a familiar political feud and intrigue between De Roos and Kwang in which the latter becomes the unlucky one. The real problem is that in the U.S., according to Kwang, "It's still a black-and-white world" (*Native Speaker*, 195). Asian Americans, labeled as the "model minority" and thus often pitted against and isolated from other ethnic groups in the media, end up in a no-man's-land. In the novel, the death of a young black mother shot by a Korean shopkeeper, and after that, the death of a Korean college student trying to save the family shop from a firebomb attack trigger the racial tension and hostility between African Americans and Korean Americans in

Flushing. This is quickly politicized and interpreted by the media as a struggle between De Roos and Kwang, whose respective racial identities as a black Mayor and a Korean American City Councilman override their actual overlapping political agenda and commitment. Kwang in the novel, as the rival candidate for the mayorship, is expected to say more and explain more. He makes a lengthy and eloquent speech appealing for peace, racial healing and reconciliation. Trying to transcend the sensitive topic of racial hate, he redefines it as “self-hate” produced by historically discriminatory social conditions that are troubling both African Americans and Asian Americans (*Native Speaker*, 150-153). His rhetoric pays homage to the late Dr. King’s advocacy of love with the obvious intent to appease the anger of the African American community, but soon after his speech is over, in front of the media, a large audience, and the black ministers who are supporting him, he is assaulted by firebombs (Ibid, 154-155). Later in private, Kwang describes to Henry how he feels being treated as a token at the NAACP meetings and how he tends to be misunderstood as a “whitey’s boy.” Kwang also admits to Henry how he had witnessed the Civil Rights Movement when he is still a homeless new immigrant in the U.S., and how the radical spirit of that movement opens Kwang’s eyes to realize what a truly powerful America should be (Ibid, 194-195). The issue at stake here is: if the legacy of the radical 1960s emancipates Americans’ mind and inspires numerous political activists such as Kwang, the remaining challenges of that decade are still unresolved and felt in a particularly tangible and painful way by the likes of Kwang. So he asks Henry seriously:

Everyone can see the landscape is changing. ... And yet the politics,

especially minority politics, remain cast in terms that barely acknowledge us. It's an old syntax. ... [People are] still living in the glow of civil rights furor. There's valuable light there, but little heat. And if I don't receive the blessing of African-Americans, am I still a minority politician? ... I'm afraid the world isn't governed by fiends and saints but by ten thousand dim souls in between. I am one of them. Lately I've been feeling like the great enemy of the oppressed. ... You should know, how there must be a way to speak truthfully and not be demonized or made a traitor. (Ibid, 196-197)

For Kwang, an eloquent public speaker, the question still remains as to how he can speak: how to propose and speak in a new political syntax without being regarded as a traitor of the Civil Rights legacy and minority coalitions, how to speak truthfully that the Asian American community wants to and needs to be politically engaged and represented without being labeled as just a sub-group ethnic political bloc, and finally perhaps, how to speak loudly to the American public that immigrants who toil and sweat in the U.S. to produce national wealth would not have turned to *ggeh* if they could have received help from legal banks. Kwang is sincere in seeking answers to those pressing questions, but his listener, Henry, who himself has been labelled by his wife as a delusional "false speaker of the language," can only provide a feeble and passive solution: "[Speak] Very softly. And to yourself" (Ibid, 197). In Henry's eyes, if a successful politician,

namely Kwang, finds himself falter, silenced, and eventually denied the right to explain or contest, then the dream of a representational speaker for Asian Americans can go nowhere but be buried in private. In *Native Speaker*, Kwang's larger extended family, his devoted immigrant supporters, are dumbfounded and left speechless by the white mob's attack on Kwang (Ibid, 342). By the end of the novel, without Kwang to stand up for them, this family dissolves into scattered and struggling individuals.

### Oppositional Voices Compromised

Before concluding this chapter, I want to point out that *Native Speaker's* oppositional voice challenging global capitalism, U.S. multiculturalism and electoral politics loses its resonance when Lee's artistic imagination and political vision reach their limit. As much as Lee is concerned with the racialized economic, cultural, and political history and reality of the U.S., the gender implications of such an economy, culture and politics, which have historically reduced minority immigrant women to anonymous invisible women in various public discourses, are overlooked in *Native Speaker* with its less enthusiastic portrayal of women of color. This is especially perplexing given the contrasting depiction of Lelia, Henry's white wife. In the novel, Lelia's cultural difference and finesse are notable and highlighted, especially via descriptions of her as an emotionally rich and sophisticated woman, intellectually sensitive, a capable poet and a linguistic specialist. Minority women in *Native Speaker*, however, remain mostly shadow figures except perhaps Henry's mother. Yet despite relatively more portrayals, the mother is largely presented as a small, silent, and vulnerable

homemaker. By overlooking minority women characters and by devoting majority of attention to Lelia, a descendant of the Puritans and self-claimed “the standard-bearer” of Americanness, Lee reproduces the traditional white male discourse on race and gender. That discourse is based on the ideologies of patriarchal hierarchy, reflected in the images of Asian American women characters as weak, passive and unfathomable. At the same time, the discourse promulgates the racial superiority of whiteness, which somehow is echoed in *Native Speaker*. Lelia is depicted as possessing therapeutic healing power at once as an English speech therapist and a moral superior to Henry. Lelia’s list of accusations against Henry is filled with conventional stereotypes of Asian Americans like “yellow peril” and “traitor,” revealing a power relation in Henry’s marriage where whiteness dominates.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, while Lee’s disillusionment of Asian American political engagement is a reflection of the U.S. political reality in the early 1990s when Asian American politicians still waited to catch the national attention, his cynicism towards minority immigrants’ political enthusiasm, activism and possible changes is also on display. The novel ends synchronically in the deportation of Kwang to Korea, and restored domestic peace for Henry after the husband-wife reconciliation. In my view, the ending suggests the futility of political activism and it uses domestic gains as a solution to compensate for the political loss. It illustrates Lee’s partial subscription to a central postmodern

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<sup>39</sup> Tim Engles, in “‘Visions of me in the whitest raw light’: Assimilation and Doxic Whiteness in Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” criticizes Lelia as a “representative, motivating figure of whiteness” and the “largely unacknowledged locus of judgment for the various ‘Korean’ aspects of [Henry’s] identity.”

political attitude, political defeatism, a problem identified by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (52). Granted, representational politics has its allures and pitfalls: political representation does not necessarily mean political empowerment and resistance for the represented. Moreover, the desire for a spokesperson as a group representative and leader is itself a problematic fantasy of a totalizing narrative at the potential cost of homogenizing differences. For metropolitan white people in the U.S., who have been all too familiar with the dominance of white power in politics, representational politics can be fault-ridden and deceptive. However, for minority immigrants who cannot speak English clearly and fluently to articulate their losses and grief, and who rarely have a representative voice to turn their individual grief into public grievances, representational politics does offer a crucial outlet to achieve social justice. My critique of *Native Speaker's* failure in presenting a successful Asian American politician has less to do with Lee's understanding of the political reality, and more to do with what I believe to be his unwillingness to acknowledge the empowering effect produced by minority political representatives despite its necessary inadequacies. Lee seems more ready to resolve the crisis of an aborted Asian American politician in individual domestic space, that is, Kwang's shameful deportation vs. Henry's regained marital bliss, as if such a private and individual gain can be translated into an equal compensation for the loss of a political representative.

Last but not least, *Native Speaker's* counter-narratives to both stereotypical Asian American literature and traditional Western novels are

truncated by its ultimate reconciliations with the aforesaid prescribed forms it aims to rebel against. To be fair, Lee does break away from the confines of commonplace generational conflicts within the private family space in past Asian American stories,<sup>40</sup> recasting Henry's domestic turmoil—his troubled marriage and his inability to mourn the deaths of his son and his father properly—in the public sphere through his job and his identification of Kwang as a substitute father who happens to be a public figure. Secondly, regarding the *Bildungsroman* genre, Lee does problematize the racial identity of the protagonist of a traditional coming-of-age narrative, replacing the image of a white boy in a *Bildungsroman* who grows up learning to negotiate the conflicts between individual desires and pressures from social conventions. But, in the end of each contesting narrative above, *Native Speaker* compromises the resistant voice it seeks to express, and thus produces its own negations and contradictions. Henry betrays Kwang and terminates not only Kwang's career and life but also the dream of representational politics for the Flushing immigrant community. Henry quits his job, regains Lelia's trust and love, and stays at home helping and supporting her career as a speech therapist for immigrant children. Henry's individual domestic balance and bliss are reinstated, as if that would redeem the failure of Kwang and his aborted political ambition. Ultimately, Lee seems to suggest that the political arena offers no hope of survival for Asian Americans and that a normalized domestic space has to be white washed and sanitized to restore its proper function. In comparison,

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<sup>40</sup> Without dismissing its significant contribution to Asian American Literature, Amy Tan's famed *The Joy Luck Club* comes into mind as an example. See also Elaine Kim's discussion in *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*.

Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, which I will discuss in Chapter Three, offers a more radical imagination of resistance to both the traditional novel form and global capitalism. If *Native Speaker* finds its solution in domestic peace, *No Telephone to Heaven* depicts how individual trauma inflicted by globalization and neo-colonialism can find a remedy, albeit imperfect and tragic, in the form of collective resistance.

## Chapter Three

### *No Telephone to Heaven: Contradictions and Pitfalls of Resistance*

The last chapter of my dissertation focuses on the Caribbean writer Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). As I have pointed out in my "Introduction," *No Telephone to Heaven* stands out amongst the three novels covered in this dissertation because it offers the most radical critique of globalization and postmodernist culture as a whole package. Almost every urgent aspect concerning contemporary world justice is addressed in *No Telephone to Heaven*—slavery and colonialism in the past, neocolonial exploitation in the present, racism, sexism, class struggles, gender construction and identification. Cliff is also prescient in focusing on environmental degradation and the need for conservation and protection. The creation of hybrid identity in diaspora is touched upon, along with intellectual responsibility and political activism of citizens. Cliff's political agenda and her artistic imagination concerning postmodern globalization are deeply rooted in a historical and dialectical understanding of the national history of Jamaica. Consequently, the protagonist of the novel, Clare Savage, is no longer seeking any individualized success in an identity quest like the male protagonists in *Mao II* and *Native Speaker*; instead, her identity search is accomplished after immersing herself in collective struggles, which also entails the excavation of memories. Clare's eventual and resolute decision to join a revolutionary guerrilla organization is a decisive departure from Bill Grey's and Henry Park's more self-centered identity journeys.

In “Caliban’s Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot” (1991), published four years after *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff offered a glimpse into the authorial intention in her novels. She reflected on her own colonial-style educational experience in Jamaica, in which the language, history, values, and discourse of the British Empire are fed to her to “civilize” the colonized child. The expectation was she, along with many other Caribbean intellectuals with similar educational experience, would continue to practice, peddle, and promulgate the colonial discourse, and by extension, the colonial empire in the postcolonial era. However, rebelling against that expectation, Cliff appropriated the classical trope of the colonizer and the colonized which is dramatized in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, combining characters Caliban and Ariel to create a bold image of an unruly Caribbean intellectual in her fictions, Clare Savage, protagonist of two inter-related fictions, *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Abeng* (1984). Cliff stated that her deliberate endeavor in the two novels was to reimagine and unearth a precolonial resistance history that would eventually inspire Clare to carve out an identity based on black female consciousness, and thus find meaning and wholeness out of a postcolonial/postmodern condition that was “fragmented, damaged, [and] incomplete” (36-51).<sup>41</sup> In short, Cliff wrote *No Telephone to Heave*, along with *Abeng*, with a clear anti-colonial agenda. Her political agenda becomes additionally significant given the reality that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, globalization and neocolonialism have coupled with each other. In “A Borderless

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<sup>41</sup> For typical symptoms of postmodernism, David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*, especially Chapter 3, “Postmodernism,” offers a succinct and illuminating discussion. Fragmentation is famously one of the symptoms.

World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism,” Masao Miyoshi argued that in the age of globalization, “TNCs [transnational corporations] rationalize and execute the objective of colonialism with greater efficiency and rationalization.” That is, we live in “an age not of postcolonialism but of intensified colonialism, though under an unfamiliar guise [globalization]” (224).<sup>42</sup>

Some critical responses to *No Telephone to Heaven* strike a positive tone in celebrating the significance of Clare’s identity choice: her decision to abandon privileged whiteness and embrace a female black consciousness rooted in an anti-colonial resistance history. It is read as a brave choice to achieve self-realization and empowerment by foregoing privileges and thus to be unabashedly celebrated. For instance, Belinda Edmonson believes that *No Telephone to Heaven* succeeds in deconstructing a reductive gender and race ideology, which is solely white, male, and European. As a result, Edmonson argues that the novel offers some rare hope in producing not merely “an imaginary nor an imitation universe,” but a bold radical vision based on revolutionary actions (“Race, Privilege, and the Politics of (Re)Writing History,” 190). Meanwhile, there are also scholars such as Roberto Strongman who bring attention to the non-linear postmodernist narrative structure in *No Telephone to Heaven*. This breakaway from the chronological order in a typical *Bildungsroman*, as Strongman maintains, allows Cliff to unearth and highlight a pre-colonial history in Jamaica, a narrative that is fused with militant female warriors and cannot be contained and regulated by the normalizing

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<sup>42</sup> Ankie Hoogvelt’s *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (1997) is also useful for me to understand the intimate relation between globalization and neocolonialism.

colonial discourse (“Postmodern Developments in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*”).

In contrast, according to some other critical readings, *No Telephone to Heaven* does not always yield a clear and convincing depiction of decisively female empowerment and triumph under the postmodern and postcolonial condition. For instance, Maria Helena Lima contends that Cliff’s reconceptualization of the established genre, the *Bildungsroman*, relies so much upon an allegorical and symbolic history that it produces an ahistorical space that renders meaningful social changes impossible. Ultimately, Lima concludes, the tragic ending compromises the radical message in the novel (“Revolutionary Developments: Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* and Merle Collins’s *Angel*”). Also notably, in “Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*,” Jennifer Smith questions the limitation of the repeated trope of the female body as a site of blood and death in the novel. Drawing on Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Smith points out the problematic of a relationship among blood, land, and identity. Smith wonders if such a reliance on the traumatized female body actually replicates the familiar colonial discourse in which the colonized land is imagined as a conquered female body. In doing so, Smith believes it has drastically weakened the anti-colonial message in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Although their approaches to the novel differ from each other, both Lima and Smith challenge the resistance strategy and female empowerment in *No Telephone to Heaven*. I find their critique interesting and illuminating, but rather

than regarding the tragic ending and bloody female body in *No Telephone to Heaven* as unfortunate authorial flaws, I see them as Cliff's deliberate and purposeful novelistic intervention to serve her overall critique of globalization, postmodernism, and neocolonialism, from a dialectical perspective.

In this dissertation, what interests me the most and what I believe to be most daring in *No Telephone to Heaven* is its acute dialectical understanding of the complex changing global reality. The novel provides a sharp lens through which the overwhelming power of global capitalism and its cultural logic, postmodernism, are critiqued and challenged, yet without indulging in an otherwise utopian solution. Despite Cliff's original authorial intention and belief in an untamed, free, and empowered voice of Caliban's daughter--Clare, as discussed in "Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot," the text itself demonstrates an astute rejection of the illusion of any immediate tenable solution to neocolonialism and global capitalism. In fact, in 1993, two years after publishing "Caliban's Daughter," Cliff confirmed in an interview with Meryl Schwartz, that the "only proper position for me to take [if returning to Jamaica] would be somebody who would be dedicated to extreme political change. And I don't see that degree of change as a possibility in Jamaica" ("An Interview with Michelle Cliff," 600). Cliff also acknowledged, "the forces of the capitalist world are so ranged against movements of self-definition in the Caribbean that change is almost impossible at this point" (611). I argue, ultimately, Cliff is ambivalent towards the constructiveness of an unmediated, essentialized identity that risks neglecting the inherent contradictions within identity politics. With this dialectical

understanding, Cliff creates a cautionary ending in *No Telephone to Heaven* to question the effectiveness of resistance strategies that are based solely on a single essentialized perspective. When contradictions in identity struggles remain unresolved and resistance pitfalls are overlooked, *No Telephone to Heaven* suggests that Clare's resistance is a path to tragedy with no return.

It is useful here to zoom in briefly on the historical context of the 1980s, which informs and births *No Telephone to Heaven*. The 1980s in the West is marked by Reagan-Thatcher era neoliberalism<sup>43</sup> and the beginning of the end of the Socialist Camp headed by the former Soviet Union. It is also the burgeoning period when China, under an iron-fist reign of the Chinese Communist Party and paying a nominal allegiance to Marxist ideology, adopts a state-controlled capitalist economic model to steadily transform itself into a capitalist powerhouse shrouded in a threadbare socialist costume on the global stage. The seed is sown that Marxism, authoritarian rule, nationalist sentiment, hundreds of years of humiliation inflicted by Western imperialism, and ultimately, capitalist speculation and accumulation would combine to produce a China Frankenstein in the following decades. In short, the late 1980s sees the end of the Cold War in which the West, led by the U.S., finally defeats its socialist enemy. The reshuffled world order is left literally with only one superpower, the U.S. In subsequent years, the defunct former socialist countries in Europe reclaim capitalism and democracy, joining the European Union and NATO. Meanwhile, the Caribbean islands, part of the "third world," become the backyard of America after their

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<sup>43</sup> See *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* by Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy for details.

independence from the old colonial rule of Britain. Their geopolitical and economic functions seem to solely complete the U.S. atlas as a convenient source of natural resources and a destination of vacation resorts. Bygone are the days when the Queen and Mother Country, the UK, stayed firm and relevant in the region; what remain clear and certain are, 1) the U.S. has superseded the UK as the neo-colonial power in the Caribbean islands, such as Jamaica, since globalization has remained for decades after World War II U.S.-centered and U.S.-led. In areas historically affected by colonialism, the U.S. hegemony also ushers in the marriage of globalization and neocolonial exploitation. 2) When globalization and neocolonialism are coupled, while *development* has replaced capitalist expansion/exploitation as the new and more benign buzzword in the globalization narrative, unlike the Chinese miracle, the Caribbean islands remain economically dependent, vulnerable, environmentally disrupted, fragile, and politically unstable, violent. The sweeping force of late capitalism, i.e. globalization, implicates all parts of the world into one gigantic yet incongruous totality. Failing to smooth out the unevenness in the global fabric, globalization extends and exacerbates the gap in geopolitical and economic development, a gap that can be dated back to the colonial period.<sup>44</sup> For the Caribbean, or West Indies, the ghost of colonialism still heavily haunts it. Further, unlike the state-controlled capitalism in China where authoritarian government precludes any attempt at drastic changes that are not uncommon in an electoral democracy, the region is undergoing an extremely difficult, painful and uncertain postcolonial

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<sup>44</sup> See Ankie Hoogvelt's *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (1997) for a detailed elaboration on this topic.

transformation. The class and racial divides and struggles, among other social-political issues, are also complicated by the emergence of brown-skinned elites on the islands—middle-class Creoles, alternatively named as “backra,” “white cockroach,” or “white chocolate,” in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Despite their wealth and privilege, their socioeconomic and political power is both contingent and precarious depending on different socioeconomic contexts.<sup>45</sup>

In 1987, Michelle Cliff published the novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, a sequel to the prior semi-autobiographical fiction, *Abeng* (1984). As a Jamaican lesbian writer residing in the U.S. and infusing the novel with her own identity quest experiences as a liminal Creole woman in the Caribbean, Cliff is concerned with the problem of post-colonial and postmodern identity, the erasure and the later rediscovery of Jamaican history, and most pressingly, the strategy and the effectiveness of anti-globalization and anti-colonial resistance efforts in a hostile postcolonial/postmodern world. All those issues are raised, imagined, and tested in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the protagonist, Clare Savage, is a light-skinned Creole woman whose life is truncated in her 30s. Although the beginning and the end of the novel indicate that, in a cinematic style, the actual story happens and finishes within just a few hours in which Clare and her comrades stage an aborted attack on a Hollywood movie set, the bulk of the novel, almost 200 pages, is a postmodern-style, non-linear, coming-of-age narrative of Clare’s

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter 2 in *No Telephone to Heaven* offers a vivid and disheartening picture of such a social crisis, particularly with the murder of Paul H’s family.

late teen and adult life. Her identity quest is a circular migration taking her from Jamaica to the U.S., the UK, the European continent, and finally back to Jamaica. Clare struggles to fight against the fragmentation in her identity and life, in Cliff's words, a "fragmented, damaged, [and] incomplete" self ("Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot," 36-51). She seeks wholeness, consistency, purpose and meaning. She stumbles and struggles to discover that her identity is deeply rooted in the buried Jamaican history with a particular emphasis on black female empowerment and resistance, mystified in the legend of the Nanny. Clare and a group of guerrilla soldiers ambush a Hollywood movie set that is attempting to rewrite and commodify the story of the Nanny, but some unknown military force ultimately quells their planned resistance. Throughout her teen and adult years, Clare longs for the recognition of and admission into her darker-skinned matrilineal line: grandmother, mother, and sister, and in sacrificing herself for a revolutionary cause on her homeland, she somehow fulfills that dream, because in death and underneath the soil, her bones will lie undistinguished from those of her darker-skinned matrilineal kin.

Throughout the novel, there is a palpable, intimate, and sometimes even heart wrenching depiction of Clare's struggles and successes. Ultimately, there is also a candid and almost clinical acknowledgment of Clare's limitations and losses. The deeper lesson is, while on the one hand Clare transforms herself from a motherless, abandoned, wandering, privileged Creole woman into a revolutionary warrior trying to revive the legacy of the Nanny, she is, on the other hand, succumbing to an unmediated and polarized notion that an identity is only

desirable and meaningful when it is purged of all its contradictions. In her case, the binary racial forces-- blackness from her mother and whiteness from her father--trouble and affect her entire teen and adult life. Karl Marx reminds us that, “capitalism is at one and the same time the best thing that has ever happened to the human race and the worst.” Jameson applies the same dialectical perspective to the theoretical interrogation of postmodernism, so he urges us to “think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together” (“Introduction,” 47). I believe Cliff uses a similar dialectical approach to examine Clare’s identity choice. After all, Clare is conditioned, together with all her biological and ancestral baggage, by the overarching historical and socioeconomic factors that cannot offer an immediate and tenable answer to overcome the inherent contradictions in her identity. Meanwhile, the guerrilla resistance Clare joins in is a communal grassroots movement that mirrors the Foucauldian formula of a decentralized power struggle in the postmodern era. The last chapter in *No Telephone to Heaven* is titled “Film Noir.” It beckons to the classic Hollywood genre famed for its visual style and crime plot.<sup>46</sup> This is undoubtedly intended as a mockery of the Hollywood movie production that Clare and her comrades plan to attack in an ambush. Yet perhaps more tellingly, the fact that the guerrillas are crushed by some military helicopters that hang above, watch over, and zoom in on them, presents the reader with another critical cinematic lens: a troubling and tragic one for sure, through which the theatrical

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<sup>46</sup> *Film Noir: A Critical Introduction* by Ian Brookes, sheds light on my understanding of the novel. From the setting, the tone, the angle, to the ending, the cinematic aura and the lens in the last chapter, all suggest the tragic futility of the guerrilla resistance from Clare’s organization.

element and style of Clare's resistance effort are also closely examined. *No Telephone to Heaven*, with its telling title, points to the real difficulty of negotiating various socioeconomic contradictions in postmodern/postcolonial Jamaica; it cautions against identity purging, and eventually reminds the reader of the challenge of not imitating but, instead, imagining effective resistance strategies and movements.

#### Understanding the Contradictions in *No Telephone to Heaven*

Contradictions abound in *No Telephone to Heaven*. After all, it is written at the historical juncture when the Caribbean is undergoing the pain of postcolonial changes. It is a novel that sets out to critique debilitating postmodern cultural symptoms such as fragmentation, but also demonstrates the inevitable and conscious influence from the same cultural discourse it tries to resist. In fact, Cliff consciously deploys and maneuvers postmodernist style to suit her content and critique: fusing a postcolonial struggle story with vernacular, myth, legend, modern and postmodern elements to contrast and highlight their respective heritage, influence, and limitation. The result is, stylistically speaking, a pastiche if not in its totality, a fiction interspersed with distinctively diverse genres: scholarly study, poetry, Jamaican proverb and myth, *New York Times* articles, encyclopedia and dictionary entries, to name a few. The intent is not to create a dazzling spectacle, which is typical of the postmodernist novels that Don DeLillo is famed for, but to ground the central narrative in a rich and deep historical and socioeconomic context. Nowhere is it more clear in regards to the purpose of such a collage than in the novel's first chapter, "Ruin." It starts with a definition of

the term “Ruininate” as offered by geographer Barry Floyd in *Jamaica: An Island Microcosm* (1969), a study of Jamaican society, including the problems and woes facing small Jamaican farms:

Ruininate: “This distinctive Jamaican term is used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into ... ‘bush.’

... Ruinate of all forms is an all-too-frequent sign on the Jamaican landscape, despite population pressure on the land. (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 1)

By foregrounding Floyd’s human geographical study ahead of the first chapter when Clare and her guerrilla comrades are being introduced, Cliff provides the reader with crucial historical and social insight into the novel. The deserted farmland that Clare inherits was once carefully attended by her grandmother, Miss Mattie, but has fallen into ruins and will be repurposed by Clare’s comrades as a revolutionary base. The land is the bearer of Clare’s maternal family history and her own childhood memory, a witness of community changes, and the final resting place of Clare’s life journey after a bloody struggle. At another level, it is also a fitting symbol of the woeful postcolonial landscape in Jamaica as defined by Floyd: deserted and ruined, yet harboring the hope of rebirth and reconstruction. From the very beginning of *No Telephone to Heaven*, postmodernist style elements, such as pastiche of writings from other disciplines and genres, are deployed as useful style choice to serve the political agenda of the novel.

On the other hand, readers cannot but notice how intertextuality informs and propels the narrative. There is a salient reference in *No Telephone to Heaven* to *Jane Eyre* and such an overt intertextuality has been picked up and discussed by previous scholarship on *No Telephone to Heaven*.<sup>47</sup> During Clare's short residence in the UK, she starts to identify herself with Jane Eyre, but the identification is immediately dismissed and replaced by Bertha Mason (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 115-116). Living through a lonely life in London, Clare comes to an even sharper awareness of her unique liminal identity in the Queen's England: more than being motherless like Jane Eyre, she is as dubious, wild, and unfit as Bertha Mason in London. However, what I find more interesting is another covert intertextuality between *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Abeng*, the latter depicting Clare's childhood struggle to be accepted by her maternal side. By the end of *Abeng*, Clare is banished out of her grandmother's countryside estate because she accidentally uses a gun to kill the matriarch's bull. To Miss Mattie, the grandmother, this is ample proof of Clare being "Dad's girl," light-skinned and essentially white. The father's side, the Savage family, is a line of crazy plantation owners and judges with a violent history as their name suggests. From early on, Clare's future is decided by her family--including the matrilineal line that is grounded in the black community--to become a privileged white girl despite her strong desire to forge a closer relation with the maternal side. The intertextuality between *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* is significant because it serves as an intertextual reminder of and deepens the reader's understanding of

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Belinda Edmondson's essay, "Race, Privilege, and the Politics of (Re) Writing History: An analysis of the Novels of Michelle Cliff."

the difficulty of Clare's identity quest. The childhood trauma haunts her entire teen and adult life as a girl and a woman--always in exile, without the care and the mentoring of a mother. It is the driving force behind her resolute separation from the paternal line, and it explains her later action to donate the inherited estate to the revolutionary cause. She believes in doing so she would replicate her grandmother's community role and influence in the past, and thus, she would somehow atone for her childhood "crime," as innocent as it was.

Moreover, just as Jamaica's history and development are continuously disrupted by colonialism and postcolonialism, the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven* refuses to follow a straightforward linear structure commonly adopted in a coming-of-age fiction, the *Bildungsroman*. As much as Clare's story takes the center stage in *No Telephone to Heaven*, there are repeated ruptures throughout the narrative with diversions to and insertions of other characters' stories. The novel starts with Clare, 36 years old, and her comrades on a truck loaded with weapons, ready for the ambush in rural Jamaica circa 1982. However, in the next chapter, the scene flashes back to suburban Kingston in the 1970s with the story of Paul H and Christopher during the Christmas season. Christopher, the homeless garden boy, kills Paul's entire brown middle-class family, housemaid included, in a random act of violence. Narrated from both perspectives, Paul's and Christopher's, the violence and the madness of Christopher become a series of coherent and inevitable actions to be explained by the deepening class gap and worsening clashes in Jamaica. The novel then shifts back to Clare, following her teen and early adult years' struggle to find meaning and solace in the U.S. and

UK, but the narrative is also interspersed with depictions of Clare's mother, Kitty, who cannot bear the daily experience of racism in the U.S. and who eventually relinquishes her immediate family, including Clare, to return to Jamaica. Stories of Harry/Harriet, a Creole transgender who turns out to be the most inspiring and supportive friend in Clare's revolutionary awakening, and of Bob, a black traumatized Vietnam War veteran in self-exile who cannot offer the love Clare looks for, are also inserted throughout the novel. When the flashback is finally over, Clare, granddaughter of Miss Mattie and heiress of the Ruinate, and Christopher, servant and murderer of Clare's relatives, reunite on the same movie set, albeit being oblivious to each other's presence and purpose. They die under the same ruthless machine guns as martyrs for different causes: Clare in the fight against Hollywood commodification of the story of the Nanny, and Christopher as a hired temporary actor for the movie production.

The brief synopsis here offers a glimpse of the uneven and nonlinear structure of *No Telephone to Heaven*, which has been noticed by many critics. As I summarized earlier, Roberto Strongman argues that *No Telephone to Heaven* departs from the linear coherent narrative "symptomatic of modernity's configuration of history as a continuous stream of temporal progression," and using postmodernist devices such as flashback, Cliff challenges a modernist conception of time and history ("Postmodern Development in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican*"). I agree with Strongman's observation but with reservation. Instead of seeing the postmodernist qualities in *No Telephone to Heaven* as both a means and an end, I

see a different agenda in Cliff's stylistic choice. From a dialectical perspective, writing in the postmodernist style does not necessarily mean a writer is subscribing to its ideology. The content can rebel against the form, especially and in the vein of postmodernism, since meaning is indeterminable. As a writer writing against postmodern ideology, Cliff may well engage with postmodernism, especially in aesthetics, yet her engagement with the style is also overshadowed by skepticism and antagonism. Cliff is aware of the omnipresent globalization and its cultural logic, postmodernism, including everyone's implicated role in them. Our embedded situation in such an overarching socioeconomic-political system has conditioned our choices, including how we understand and articulate ourselves, and how we resist the systematic pressure to remain fragmented and politically stuck in inertia. In this light, Cliff does not shy away from the challenge and she convincingly adopts elements of postmodernist style in her composition of *No Telephone to Heaven*: using pastiche, intertextuality, non-linear narrative, and flashback to draw a palpable intimate picture of Clare's identity and political struggles that are embedded in a postcolonial and postmodern environment.

So far, I have discussed the contradictions Cliff faces in style and content, and how she carefully negotiates with them. It is important to understand Cliff's conscious style maneuver because for one thing, for the purpose of this dissertation, it shows how Cliff differs from Don DeLillo's cultural and political sensitivity in *Mao II*, the latter being out of nostalgia for modernism, as I argue in Chapter One. For another reason and more importantly, the presence of

contradictions and the complexity of negotiating them produce more than just a conscious and sensible style choice. As the next two parts will reveal and explain, they are precisely why Cliff further raises the problem of Clare's identity decision and resistance method out of a dialectical understanding.

### The Problematic of Identity Purging

As summarized earlier, some critics have read Clare's reclamation of a black female consciousness and her renunciation of her Creole privilege as decisively triumphant. For instance, Belinda Edmondson argues that *No Telephone to Heaven* demonstrates Cliff's awareness of the crucial role of black consciousness in empowering not only black people but also whites in the Caribbean. Being a Creole in the Caribbean, socially and economically speaking, means being white. It is in this light, as Edmondson maintains, that Clare's reclamation of her maternal black identity becomes an indispensable step towards resistance against the reductive colonial discourse and ideology ("Race, Privilege, and the Politics of (Re) Writing History: An Analysis of the Novels of Michelle Cliff,"). Eventually, "the search for a black history/identity is intimately bound up with a latent feminism as well as with a revolutionary social consciousness" (Ibid, 182).

At one level, it does seem that Clare's identity choice—purging whiteness born with and inherited from the paternal side—is unabashedly positive. As an intertextual reading of *Abeng* reveals, she is banished from grandmother's estate as a young girl in Jamaica. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, she is again deserted in the U.S., by her mother and left to the care of her dad while undergoing the

uneasy changes of puberty. Both punishments come from the assumption that because Clare is much more light-skinned than others in the family, she “naturally” leans towards whiteness. The rationale is problematic and built upon an essentialized notion of race. Instead of questioning this flawed notion and logic, Clare follows it and decides to renounce her whiteness and become the last heiress of the Ruinate. To Clare, purging whiteness out of her identity is a necessary action. She feels not only fortunate but also blissful in doing so. In her own words, Clare describes the excitement upon returning to the Ruinate, “I was fortunate to know her [Kitty] here... No, I was blessed to have her here. Her passion of place. Her sense of the people. Here is her; leave it at that.” (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 173-174). The exuberance here is overflowing, and as Jennifer Smith observes, the word change from “fortunate” to “blessed” indicates Clare’s memory and projection of Kitty have been elevated to the spiritual level (“Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*,” 150). Clare worships her mother, Kitty, with all the hunger of a deserted daughter, but this is also where the problem arises, which ultimately complicates Clare’s identity struggle and decision. She longs for the irrevocably lost maternal love and she idolizes it, but even in her celebration of becoming the owner of the estate, uncertainty and fear are unmistakably mingled with joy. In fact, it is immediately revealed in the text that Clare can only utter those words of admiration for Kitty inside herself, for “she could not trust her voice” (Ibid, 174). Clare is haunted by the fear that she is still an unacceptable daughter of Kitty. The return to the maternal territory, both physically and metaphorically, is blissful and

daunting at the same time. Her self-doubt over her legitimacy propels the reader to wonder: to what extent is she really empowered even after repudiating whiteness out of her identity?

This is not to dismiss completely the significance of Clare's final embrace of black consciousness. By identifying herself with the matrilineal, darker-skinned women who are fondly remembered by the community as generous and nurturing figures, and by forsaking the paternal side, the light-skinned descendants of plantation owners who are notorious for debauchery, no longer is Clare attached to the last name "Savage" vested by her father. There emerges a new "Clare," with a clear strong black consciousness and identity to embrace and celebrate. No doubt, earlier critics have elaborated on this. However, my question is, at what price? The resolution to renounce white privileges is certainly brave and applaudable, but the issue becomes complicated by the very contradictions embedded in her dual identity as a Creole woman: her racial and class status are always arbitrary and contingent, changing from an elite white middle class person in Jamaica to a marginal minority immigrant in the U.S.. The fact is there is no easy escape for Clare from her light skin, an absurd but forever powerful racial marker-- not completely white, neither is she black. Bleaching or blackening, she always risks being fake. The imagination that purging whiteness out of her duality would automatically grant her black female power is also challenged by two crucial questions that beg for answers. First, does a rebel against postmodern/postcolonial oppression, even for the purpose of resisting postmodern fragmentation, necessarily entail a pure and purged identity, and therefore the

need to flip from a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric perspective without any critical mediation? Second, what are the ramifications of such a purged identity, particularly on a woman's body?

To the first question, the transgender character Harry/Harriet provides an illuminating contrast to Clare. Whereas it takes the space of almost an entire novel for Clare to find her true self in life, Harry/Harriet has been decisive and unwavering in the gender transformation from Harry to Harriet. Born as a mulatto without ever knowing the mother, Harry/Harriet experiences an even more traumatized childhood, as h/she tells Clare, "Don't forget, mi mumma was a maid, and my father, her employer. And dem keek me and let she go" (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 124). At ten years old, Harry/Harriet is brutally raped by a white officer at Up Park Camp, "a big man in a khaki uniform, braided and bemedaled, in the garison of Her Majesty, did to me what he did. What else to expect but guilt ... or shame ...whiteman, Black bwai" (Ibid, 128). Yet immediately, Harry/Harriet makes it clear to Clare that the rape, as painful as it is, "did not make me the way I am. No, darling, I was born this way, that I know. Not just sun, but sun and moon" (Ibid, 128). To Clare, who suffers from her mother's abandonment in teenage years and who dreams to be reclaimed by the mother, an undivided racial identity--solely black, seems to be the only option for redemption. It is inconceivable to her that Harry/Harriet would be born transgender, unabashedly both "sun and moon." When Clare finally returns to Jamaica, exhausted and sick, she wakes up in the hospital to discover Harry/Harriet has completed the gender transformation. Harriet proudly announces, "Harriet, now, girlfriend ...finally."

No surgery has been performed to clean out the “sun” and purge Harry out of Harriet’s body, because “No, man. Cyaan afford it ... but the choice is mine, man, is made. Harriet live and Harry be no more” (Ibid, 168). Wearing a ribboned cap as a sign of a registered nurse, Harriet becomes the healer to attend to Clare’s physical and emotional wounds after she loses fertility.

Harriet’s gender transformation is both deliberate and natural. It is an empowerment out of self-will, self-love and self-assertion. The description of Harry/Harriet allows Cliff to present a subtle but interesting contrast to Clare’s struggle in her identity choice. Harriet never feels the need to construct a gender identity by purging the other side, so physical alterations are unnecessary. When still being Harry, he feels comfortable wearing bikinis and exposing a hairy chest on the beach; after becoming Harriet, she is equally at ease wearing a nurse’s dress with noticeably missing breasts. For Harriet, a meaningful and positive identity construction does not have to erase the inherent contradictions within oneself, because identity pursuit, be it gender, race, or class, is almost always a choosing inundated with contradictory forces, and it does not have to follow any particular formula. Ignoring contradictions, identity purging and sanitizing will not yield wholeness; they simply toss out the inner contradictions and pretend that fragmentation is over. Clare, however, chooses differently: she deliberately replicates her life and actions upon grandmother and mother, even though they reject her when she direly needs their love and guidance, and even though their absence and neglect actually contribute to the costly price of her struggle. The

price, as it turns out, is the sacrifice of her female body as a site of loss, barrenness, and even death. This leads to the second question.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff presents a troubling picture of the female body as a sacrificial site of blood and death. I find it useful here to quote Jennifer Smith's incisive argument in "Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*," which notices Cliff's ambivalence towards the protagonist's choice,

The imbrications of menstruation, miscarriages, hemorrhages, and womb images alongside death suggest that relying on a relationship among blood, land, and identity is always already limiting, even as the novel maintains that such relationships remain the best hope for resisting oppression. The lack of future in the text indicates that the body as the sole means of connection to the past cannot survive and it cannot suffice. (141)

The quote highlights the problematic of imagining a relationship between the female body, land, and identity as a viable and plausible resistance method. Such a connection, even if in an effort to reclaim a feminized and inspiring black history, nevertheless repeats the familiar colonial narrative in which the female body becomes synonymous with the colonial land to be conquered by the white colonizer. Whereas in the colonial era, both the colonized female body and the land are sexually and economically exploited, in the postcolonial rebuilding of a nation, the two are often conflated again to create a national identity in which the newly independent country, such as Jamaica, is depicted as a nurturing mother

figure, despite the reality that women, their voices and concerns, are usually dismissed from the nation building agenda. Thus, the colonial legacy and logic continue in this problematic analogy.

True, out of a different purpose, which is to invert the analogy, Cliff also feminizes the Jamaican land in *No Telephone to Heaven*, particularly the grandmother's Ruinate, as a space pregnant with multiple and contradictory meanings: lush with overgrown wild greens, unattended and deserted, forgotten and later reclaimed, bearer of the matrilineal history. However, instead of solely glorifying and celebrating the land, Cliff also carefully and subtly reveals its problems, especially its uncertain future since the heiress, Clare, has lost her reproductive ability and would rather sacrifice herself for the resistance movement with the belief that in so doing her youthful folly and crime can be pardoned and redeemed. Cliff reminds us that whereas the Ruinate is projected in Clare's memory as a healing and holy repository fused with a rich and nurturing black female history, it is also the end of her carefree childhood. It is a place she can only visit and reclaim after its past owners, the grandmother and the mother, have passed away and no one else in the family wants to inherit it. The maternal side punishes Clare out of an unmediated Afrocentric perspective, and yet Clare accepts such a punishment and resorts to the same perspective despite enormous pain as a young girl and a woman. This high price ticket into the matrilineal community certainly complicates and undermines the significance of Clare's identity choice.

In purging whiteness and embracing black consciousness, Clare is faced with another dilemma: can and should she eschew the trauma as a deserted granddaughter and daughter while identifying with them, without resentment? The answer is not easy. When Harry/Harriet reflects on the rape by the white officer, there is a plain refusal to abstract the physical and psychological pain, “Not symbol, not allegory, not something in a story or a dialogue by Plato. No, man, I am merely a person who felt the overgrown cock of a big whiteman pierce the asshole of a lickle Black bwai—there it is. That is all there is to it” (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 130). In doing so, Harry/Harriet seeks to face and overcome the pain in a most open and honest way: yes, I am hurt, seriously and enormously, and I hate it. Harry/Harriet’s pain is inflicted by the white officer and he refuses to abstract the pain. On the other hand, what if the pain is inflicted by the exact family member who is supposed to provide love and care? Clare cannot articulate her pain unequivocally as a deserted daughter, as plainly and defiantly as Harry/Harriet, because with her growing sense of social injustice in the systems of race, class, and gender, she observes, faces, and experiences similar racial and gender oppressions to those that her darker-skinned mother endures and resists. This heightened awareness prompts Clare to empathize and identify with her mother and to align with the mother’s choice, even if that choice has left an indelible mark of trauma in her life. When Kitty relinquishes the mother duty, her care and love towards Clare, she keeps another daughter, Jennie, because Jennie is younger and darker-skinned than Clare. The mother’s consideration of which daughter to take and which to leave behind takes into

account the skin color. The decision itself is informed by an essentialized Afrocentric perspective. The pain inflicted on Clare is deep, yet she must forget it in order to feel accepted by the mother. When the logic of an empowering, progressive, and feminist ideology requires of Clare the action of forgetting: eschew and efface the pain and the trauma of being deserted, then the logic is, perhaps, not different from the trauma and the atrocity that colonialism and racism exert to obliterate black women's identities and erase black history.

Granted, Clare's mother, Kitty, makes her choice to protest racism in the U.S., and in doing so, she asserts her subjectivity and agency. As a wife and woman, she is a courageous warrior, but as a mother, to what extent she really positively models and influences Clare remains dubious. It is worthwhile here to look at the final straw that precipitates Kitty's decision. Kitty's short stint at White Sanitary Laundry in New York City ends up in unredeemable guilt. Out of frustration, she tucks in the laundered garments anonymous satirical notes commenting on racism, but her protest, once noticed by the white clients, inadvertently and counter-productively leads to the firing of her co-workers, Virginia and Georgia, two black women from the South. The laundry owner, a white man Mr. B., refuses to accept Kitty's confession that she is the real person responsible for this business damage,

“Mr. B. I did it. I am the one responsible.”

“A nice girl like you? Don't be crazy.”

“But I did.”

“No. No, I can’t believe that.”

*(No Telephone to Heaven, 84)*

Mr. B. cannot believe a “nice girl” such as Kitty to be the person because 1) despite her immigrant status, Kitty is from a middle class background, she owns property in Jamaica, and she has a decent education; and 2) Kitty is a Creole woman with “apricot colored skin” (Ibid, 70), so relatively speaking, she is more white and more trustworthy than the two Southern black women are. Class and race, arbitrary but always dictating in the U.S., become absurd yet hard evidence for Mr. B.’s strong conviction that Virginia and Georgia commit the crime, without realizing neither of them has sufficient education to write those satirical angry notes mocking white hypocrisy.

Burdened by her guilt and with no way to find the two women, Kitty “committed an act of luxury” by announcing her return to Jamaica (*No Telephone to Heaven, 84*). Indeed, it is a luxury, for she has the family estate to return to, though in contrast, according to Mr. B., it will not be easy for Virginia and Georgia to find a stable job and worse than that, he will not offer any references for them (Ibid, 83). For the three black women, the future looks very different: Kitty has a home to return, to escape racism, and to build a new identity because of which she is later remembered fondly as a loving and giving woman; Virginia and Georgia do not know where their next meal will come from and they simply evaporate from the whole story. Innocent and inadvertent as her action is, Kitty becomes complicit with her white boss. Her error echoes Clare’s accidental killing of the grandmother’s bull, but Kitty is much luckier than Clare since the

mother has the means as a grown-up to escape and redeem her guilt. One cannot but wonder if Kitty deserts Clare, the more mature and white daughter of the two, to punish her own crime in the firing of Virginia and Georgia. After all, the two women are fired because Kitty is whiter in skin color. This carefully inserted story, while offering an explanation of Kitty's abrupt departure, also calls into question of Clare's projection and adulation of Kitty, and furthermore, her desperate effort to imitate the missing mother. The ensuing plot shows that while there are gains for Clare that come out of the identity purging, such as finally being welcomed back to the Ruinate, there is also real bodily and emotional pain from miscarriages, hemorrhages, and the loss of reproductiveness.

When Clare finally quits graduate study in Classics in London, she travels in Europe with Bobby, an African-American Vietnam War veteran. Clare tries hard to love Bobby and desperately attends to his leg wounds in an almost religious way. To Clare, Bobby is the representation of a pure and unadulterated black male, a polar image to her own father who bestows on her light skin and middle-class privilege, both of which serve to alienate her from the mother. She speaks enviously of Bobby's racial purity, "You are lucky, Bobby. So lucky ... to be one and not both" (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 153). Talking about her own family, Clare tells Bobby, "I don't remember if she [Kitty] ever told me she loved me. And if she loved me how could she have left me?" (*Ibid*, 154) This hunger for maternal love, coupled with the resentment of her whiteness inherited from the father, makes it even more urgent for Clare to declare her love to Bobby, "Yes, you can trust me. I am Clare. I love you" (*Ibid*, 159).

Clare's love for Bobby is mingled with religious zeal in trying to find the leg cure and demonstrated with a maternal passion and instinct that she herself is deprived of in her teens, at a time when she is in dire need of them. Bobby's leg is wounded because of the deployment of Agent Orange by the U.S. military in the Vietnam War. The toxin is deep in the bone and it cannot be cured: it "was live and refused to heal" (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 143). Compounding the physical wound is Bobby's recurring nightmare in which he is forced to rape a 15-year-old Vietnam girl and see her shot to death by fellow white soldiers. When Clare gradually realizes she cannot heal the wound, she hopes to bear a baby for Bobby, an idea that is met with Bobby's cold but sane reminder,

... you better think abortion, honey. Unless you want a little Black baby with no eyes, no mouth, no nose, half a brain, harelip, missing privates, or a double set like some fucking hyena, missing limbs, or limbs twisted beyond anything you might recognize, organs where they are not meant to be, a dis-harmony of parts.

(ibid, 156)

Bobby's rejection is curt and clear: there will be no perfection and harmony in our baby as you imagine. Clare's dream to produce and nurture a pure black next-generation is mostly a fantasy. That same night, Clare discovers she has shed so much blood on the bedsheet that Bobby is literally "streaked in her blood." Cliff offers an ambivalent description of the hemorrhage, "it could have been a late, heavy period for all she knew, or a baby with half a brain" (Ibid, 157), inviting the reader to associate the blood with either menstruation or miscarriage. In either

case, the image invokes profound pain and unspeakable emotional loss. Soon, Clare leaves Bobby for Jamaica despite her wish to love him dearly. The desertion, out of despair and coupled with guilt, mirrors Kitty's action when she leaves Clare to her own care. In her adult life, Clare tries hard to imitate Kitty, the mother, which unfortunately includes the abandonment of one's love. Upon arrival in Jamaica, Clare is seriously sick and eventually loses fertility.

In her pursuit of love and even the production of a black baby, Clare imagines loving a pure black man so that she can avoid Kitty's marriage dilemma and failure; she imagines her love, both tender and stubborn, can heal Bobby's wound; she imagines giving birth to a baby to bear witness of her longing for blackness. To her, they are more than just a trial on romance; they also symbolize her imagined solution to a divided fragmented identity. Yet with all her imagination and imitation, the facts that she cannot heal Bobby, that she possibly loses a baby, that she finally deserts Bobby, and that she becomes a barren woman after a severe hemorrhage indicate no clear future for the Ruinate, they all eventually point to the problematic of an identity pursuit based on a flawed notion of racial purity.

### Pitfalls of Resistance

Building upon the problematic of Clare's identity choice, Cliff further discusses and questions the resistance strategy in *No Telephone to Heaven*. To be fair to Clare, as Cliff artfully suggests, the imagination to construct a new purged identity is not merely a personal choice; it is also the result of unspoken but rigid pressure from the resistance organization that Clare eventually joins. After Clare's

loss of fertility and before she is accepted into the guerrilla group, she is interviewed by a nameless movement leader, a black woman, and is tested with a host of curt and scorching questions that seem to preach the idea that identity purity precedes political enthusiasm and awareness. Here are some pointed questions and Clare's answers:

To whom do you owe your allegiance?

I have African, English, Carib in me.

Can we trust you?

... ..

Do you think you are morally superior to someone of my color?

No.

Politically?

No.

Intellectually?

No.

Are you certain?

You are the color of my grandmother.

As you well know, that could be as nothing.

I am as certain as I can be.

... ..

How would you feel about killing someone?

... ..

Why are you asking me this?

We need to know who you are. . . .

Would you kill if your child got polio,...?

I don't have any children.

Imagine that you did.

*(No Telephone to Heaven, 189-191)*

The exchange is lengthy, and at times, Clare has to look to Harriet to seek the right answer. Whereas the woman sounds assertive in pressing for Clare's answers, she also appears impatient in knowing about Clare and her history. There is little room for Clare to hesitate and reflect, and her personal struggle, experience, observation and awareness do not seem to qualify as strong credentials. Yet her skin color, among all other markers, is the first determinant in the test. The interview seems to be dogged on its pursuit of ideological purity and absolute determination. It seems to dismiss contradictory forces within race, class, and gender as irrelevant, and relies on the notion that ideological alliance must be single and pure. The pursuit of identity and ideological purity has a parallel nation-scale enactment in reality, the Cultural Revolution in China circa the 1960s and the 1970s. By the late 1970s, China had disavowed its ties to the ultra-left

Maoism that had become an ideological frenzy in the Cultural Revolution. The failure of the Cultural Revolution serves as an illuminating backdrop to understand both the enthusiasm and the defeat of the guerrilla movement in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, there remains a lingering question concerning the resistance form and strategy. When a resistance movement influenced by Marxism, which is in theory a dialectical historical materialism, would require “purity” as its admission prerequisite, as evidenced by the curt interview that Clare undergoes, and thus forcefully purges any inherent contradictions and historical baggage out of one’s identity, the new identity does not necessarily become pure and strong. In many ways, such a purging risks polarizing and essentializing the identity pursuit while ignoring the accompanying contradictions inherent in one’s identity. The danger of such a choice is a subtle but consistent message in *No Telephone to Heaven*, especially in the final chapter when the guerrilla attack is ruthlessly crushed.

It is to be noted that resistance to globalization and neocolonialism does not necessarily entail a nostalgic return to the high modernism informed by an Enlightenment rationale, which is in essence white, male, and Euro-centric. The same can be said of unmediated replacement of the Eurocentrism with Afrocentrism to fantasize a pristine pre-colonial history as if it were then an exploitation and struggle free paradise. In the novel’s final chapter, “Film Noir,” without reducing the inspirational message and the significance of female empowerment in the legend of the Nanny, Cliff cautions against the mystification

of the Nanny and how an unmediated model of resistance based on the female warrior will not necessarily lead to effective and radical changes. Again, there is a pointed parallel between what the Hollywood movie is set to depict--replacing Nanny, an old, wild and fearful woman warrior in the legend--with a stylized image of a femme fatale in an exotic tropical setting, and how Clare and her comrades are determined to disrupt the film crew, in full military gear and style. In this struggle between the neo-colonial commercial exploitation of the indigenous people and history, and the anti-colonial resistance trying to protect that history, readers see similar efforts to revive and represent a particular historical segment in highly stylized forms, albeit to serve drastically different purposes.

During the interview, Clare is pressed to imagine being a desperate mother willing to kill, an idea justified by the sordid social urgency in Jamaica. In reality, however, when planning the first resistance effort, she and her comrades choose to devote their precious virgin fight and political future to the defense of part of the indigenous history. The intent is applaudable, but it also implies a political strategy in which fighting for a symbolic meaning outweighs the real urgency in life. Clare does not and would not want to dismiss the crucial symbolic meaning of such a resistance, but she does remain unconvinced of the effectiveness of such a political strategy, which prioritizes the symbolic over the reality. The strategy puts *the signifier*—the guerrillas styled as warriors in the bush, over *the signified*—what they can really deliver, what agenda they will achieve, and

whether they can succeed.<sup>48</sup> The machine guns, ruthless and fully equipped, leave no pause for the warriors to respond, “surprise and sadness held them [the guerillas] still. There was no time left to them” (*No Telephone to Heaven*, 208). The disturbing deaths of these resistance soldiers, Clare’s included, while heart wrenching and saddening, also expose the immaturity and the limitation of a resistance effort that is succumbing to an alluring rhetoric, in which the symbolic and the sacrificial take precedence over the real urgencies in life. It is doomed to failure given the particularly difficult and challenging socioeconomic condition: in a globalized neo-colonial context, Western capitalism and the local government, backed by the local elites, are tied together and oftentimes the same. As one of the Hollywood movie producers cockily announces in the novel, “As far as this place is concerned, don’t worry. They’ll manage. You can’t beat the prices. And, besides, they need the money ...real bad. They’re trapped. All tied up by the IMF. All thanks to Manley and his bleeding heart” (*Ibid*, 201). The movie production is facilitated by the locals in every aspect; to quote the same producer, “Landscape. Extras up the ass. Weather. And a fucking army complete with helicopters” (*Ibid*, 203).

As I have argued, Cliff is ambivalent and cautionary about the idea that imitating a history based on imagination without a dialectical understanding and intervention, despite its creative energy and potential, may not always generate effective outcomes and entail positive changes. This ambivalence is particularly

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<sup>48</sup> According to David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, one big indicator of postmodernism is its privileging of the signifier over the signified. In this light, Cliff offers another critique of the depicted guerrilla action--postmodern in style whereas attempting to counter the postmodern commodification by Hollywood.

pointed in the final chapter, fittingly titled, “Film Noir,” which offers troubling cinematic lenses for the reader to question the purpose, the meaning, and the effectiveness of Clare’s final strike against neocolonialism. Clare and her comrades’ ambush against a Hollywood movie set is planned as a refutation and refusal of the commercialized cultural exploitation of the story of the Nanny by neocolonial multinational corporations. However, the focus of the first resistance, the style of the attack, the unexpected ruthless intervention of some military force, and particularly the juxtaposition of Christopher, with his twisted, violent life trajectory and absurd participation in the movie set, all present a troubling tragic ending.

Christopher’s life, vulnerable, tragic, but also absurd, serves as a purposeful reminder of both the significance and the limitation of Clare’s resistance effort. Christopher, motherless and homeless, works for Paul H’s middle-class family as a garden boy. Haunted by his grandmother’s death, he tries to seek peace by giving her a proper burial in Paul’s family estate, for she used to work for the family as a faithful maid. Deprived of education and any sense of middle-class etiquette, he intrudes into the master’s bedroom where he never before dares to set foot in, wakes up the brown master and mistress in the middle of the night, and begs them for a burial ground for his grandmother. His request is met with ridicule, refusal, and chastisement. Not understanding their heartlessness and with rage and revenge coming from years of pent-up angry energy, he kills not only the whole family but also the housemaid who is cooking for him, in a most violent and sadistic manner. Christopher remains at large and wanders in the poorest part

of Kingston as self-proclaimed black Jesus, becoming an exotic local celebrity who attracts the Hollywood movie producers. This leads to his final convergence with Clare, a distant cousin of Paul, on the same movie set. Christopher is hired to play De Watchman, an incarnation of beastly savage male power who will attack the Nanny in the typical Hollywood farcical style. Peeping at the whole movie set, including Christopher, are Clare and her comrades from the surrounding thick bush. The chapter title, "Film Noir," is enacted in a bizarre scenario to present not only the absurdity of the Hollywood movie production in an unabashedly neocolonial fashion, but also the unconscious yet ironical participation of the guerrillas, who have literally become part of the movie scene. Film noir is a movie genre famed for its crime plot and pessimistic dark tone. Through three cinematic lenses—the camera in the movie production, the guerrilla's peeping eyes at the movie set, and finally, the helicopter's watchful gaze from above the night sky, the accidental murderer (Christopher) and the would-be killers (the guerrillas) all merge at the same point. In this final moment of *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff deliberately converges and blurs two characters, Christopher and Clare: the former is unfortunate, impulsive, unorganized, and isolated, one of the "wretched of the earth" that the resistance movement should rescue but has forgotten, whereas the latter is born privileged, educated, and voluntary in a conscious collective movement. Still, they share the same tragic ending: complete silence after the machine guns, death. In doing so, with almost a clinical detachment, Cliff casts her final doubt over and caution against the strategy and the effectiveness of Clare's resistance action.

At another level, although Clare's sacrificial death may be personally anticipated and fulfilling, it is hardly productive in effecting real systematic changes. Despite all her effort to fight against the postmodern tendency of fragmentation and the postcolonial exploitation, Clare's guerrilla-style resistance includes almost every postmodern element, especially in a Foucauldian sense: it is local—originating from and rooted in the community, decentralized--a grassroots movement rising from the bottom, symbolic--going against the Hollywood appropriation of the Jamaican history, and sacrificial—dying under the machine guns. Clare's anti-globalization and anti-colonial struggle picks up the very style it sets out to resist and ends in the erasure of her voice.

Last but not least, replicas, or reproductions, a signature of postmodernism that Andy Warhol famously plays around with in his iconic postmodernist paintings such as *Mao*, are also implied as another major flaw in Clare and her comrades' resistance strategy. Heavily influenced by Maoism and its advocating of guerrilla warfare, Clare and her organization adopt the strategy while failing to properly evaluate the difficulties they face. Their ambush is planned: they figure out where and how to feed themselves and obtain weapons, but it is also insufficiently, if not poorly, thought through and executed: sadly missing is their estimate and prediction of a hostile intervention that may be backed up by the government. Cliff purposely situates the novel in the 1980s when Maoism in China is eclipsed by a government led and coordinated zeal to participate in the global capitalist economy. It is hard to miss such a contextual irony and not to

grapple with the difficulty of any effective resistance in the age of deepening and strengthening globalization.

In “Caliban’s Daughter,” Cliff has acknowledged that the fatalist ending is purposeful,

Clare Savage has cast her lot, quietly and somewhat tentatively, but most definitely. She ends her life literally burned into the landscape of Jamaica, as one of a small band of guerrillas engaged in a symbolic act of revolution. While essentially tragic, I see it and planned it as an ending that completes the circle, actually triangle, of the character’s life. (45)

Predicting and planning an ending that is almost necessary and inevitable, which “completes the circle,” Cliff demonstrates her awareness of the tragic futility for Clare. The historical and socioeconomic context in Jamaica simply does not allow a feasible and effective systematic change. In 1993, two years after publishing “Caliban’s Daughter,” Cliff further confesses in an interview with Meryl Schwartz, that the “only proper position for me to take [if returning to Jamaica, added by me for clarity] would be somebody who would be dedicated to extreme political change. And I don’t see that degree of change as a possibility in Jamaica” (“An Interview with Michelle Cliff,” 600). She also admits that “the forces of the capitalist world are so ranged against movements of self-definition in the Caribbean that change is almost impossible at this point” (611). The pursuit of a purged identity, as demonstrated through Clare’s struggle, is tragic. Without a dialectical understanding and negotiation of the complex contradictions, a

resistance action based on racial and ideological purity will fail at both personal and collective levels.

*No Telephone to Heaven*, in my view, despite its depiction of an identity construction based on black female empowerment, is not always uncritical and unreserved. Cliff reminds us subtly of the problematic of identity purging which overlooks inner contradictions and which can be as arbitrary as the racist Eurocentric construction of racial hierarchy. She also casts doubt over the strategy of a resistance movement that hinges on replicating various cultural influences, such as postmodernism, which is contrary to their mission, and Maoism, which is already renounced in its origin, post-Mao China. In doing so, without necessarily negating the significance of anti-globalization and postcolonial resistance, Cliff constructs a nuanced and cautionary novel that ultimately deepens the critique on globalization, postmodernism, and neocolonialism. Cliff's observation and cautionary message in *No Telephone to Heaven*, acute and profound, invites the reader to explore and pursue possibilities in changes that must be informed by and based on a dialectical and historical understanding of identity, empowerment, and resistance in an increasingly complicated global web of advanced capitalism. *No Telephone to Heaven* may end with a cautionary tragedy, but overall the text itself does illustrate successfully what Jameson has forcefully argued for in terms of critical inquiry into postmodernism, the cultural logic of globalization. That is, Cliff provides "a historical and dialectical view which seeks to grasp the present as History."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Jameson's essay "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate," 65.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, *Paradise Disenchanted: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Their Discontents in Selected Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novels*, I have examined three novels in the 1980s and 1990s—Don DeLillo’s *Mao II*, Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*, and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*. All of these texts demonstrate that despite the allure, promise, and much touted benefits, the global expansion of advanced capitalism and its cultural logic, postmodernism, have produced more socioeconomic and geopolitical unevenness, disparity, and overwhelmingly debilitating cultural symptoms associated with postmodernity. Informed by diverse socioeconomic and ideological backgrounds, writers discussed in this dissertation approach globalization and postmodernism from various angles. In *Mao II*, DeLillo mourns the fact that the authority of a high modernist white male writer is usurped by the postmodern spectacle produced by the media-driven pop culture and the ceaseless staging, broadcasting, and spotlighting of terrorist attacks. In *Native Speaker*, Lee depicts Asian Americans who, at the junction of the new millennium, are still struggling to grapple with their identity and find their political voice, not to mention to become politically ambitious and successful. Finally, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, the false promises of globalization and postmodernism zoom in on postcolonial Jamaica, where a Creole woman’s heart wrenching search for identity and her sacrificial resistance provide powerful dialectical lenses of and critical inquiry into the contradictions, complexities and challenges posed by globalization and neocolonialism.

The novels I have chosen and interpreted are by no means written by writers of a homogeneous class, racial, gender, and ideological background, so their critiques of globalization and postmodernism unsurprisingly differ from each other. Yet ultimately, they all demonstrate a profound level of disenchantment and discontent with the advanced late capitalism and the cultural logic of such an economic behemoth. Further, what has become all the more significant and troubling is that through the diverse lenses of these texts, readers in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, privileged with historical hindsight, cannot but see the deepening irony between what has been promised and touted as a rosy post-industrial and post-colonial future in which the whole world is compacted into a harmonious global village, versus the stark reality in which socioeconomic, ideological, geopolitical and religious divisions and conflicts are exacerbated daily and more severely. Today, decades after those novels' debut and as globalization's tentacles are only growing stronger and extending farther, more urgent and dire global issues arise. For instance, the emergence and the invasive presence of social media, occupies a similar role in our social life to its predecessors such as TV.<sup>50</sup> While it is still subject to continuous vigorous debate and scrutiny, certainly social media has failed to deliver its promise of positive connectiveness in numerous instances that have contributed to the deepening chasm in the world.<sup>51</sup> The novels under discussion in this dissertation cannot and do not depict pictures and realities

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<sup>50</sup> In all three texts, *Mao II*, *Native Speaker* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, there are repeated episodes and descriptions of how the protagonists spend time watching and digesting TV programs. Fredric Jameson observes in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, that watching TV and going to the mall become the two life staples in the West in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>51</sup> From Brexit to the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election to the buzz word "misinformation," no one can deny the infamous role of social media in all those events despite its claim to make the world a connected better place.

decades later, yet from what DeLillo, Lee, and Cliff have presented in their respective texts, for contemporary readers, an uncanny sense of *Déjà Vu* is hard to miss while reading and reflecting on these novels and the current world situation simultaneously.

My dissertation is informed by theories on globalization and postmodernism by scholars such as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey. In the tradition of Marxist theory, their studies in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and *The Condition of Postmodernity* respectively, reveal and highlight the intricate relation between a late capitalist economy and the accompanying cultural logic. What globalization alluringly proclaims--the production of more material goods and wealth to be spread out all over the world--and what postmodernism tantalizingly promotes--the democratization of culture aided by omnipresent and instantaneous media--do not live up to the fantasy. Instead of eliminating the existing social disparity and economic crisis, globalization and postmodernism actually fuel and exacerbate those problems. In fact, globalization and postmodernism produce more discontent and disenchantment, as evidenced by the three novels from different angles and concerns.

In reality and in an almost surreal way, the discontent towards globalization and postmodernism certainly continues into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, albeit in recent time it has taken a sinister turn. The Trump era ushers in the resurgence of anti-globalization rhetoric in which nationalism, coupled with blatant xenophobia, sexism and racism, rises and flaunts,

embarrassing and threatening the liberal globalists who have carefully constructed a globalization narrative based on the celebration of a sanitized multiculturalism. Meanwhile, even as the center still holds, which means the U.S.-led Western hegemonies still dominate much of the global stage, the world's geopolitics is changing. The osmosis effect of capitalist economy, when being executed in a highly centralized country such as China, is developing at a breakneck speed thanks to its maximum mobilization of all social forces and resources under one-party rule, although it must be stressed that the Chinese miracle itself is also a much inflated and masked story in which numerous ordinary Chinese people across generations are victimized in the brutal process of capital accumulation. The communist China is flexing its muscles and challenging the U.S. hegemony, claiming itself as the new globalization leader and trying to rewrite and influence a new set of global rules,<sup>52</sup> but to what extent it brings real positive hope to a new and better future remains a big question. Needless to say, the economic success of China cannot be attributed to the ideology of socialism, and thus, be celebrated as the triumph of Marxism.<sup>53</sup>

With the changing global scenario in mind, my dissertation on the three late 20<sup>th</sup> century novels seems to remain both relevant and it raises more questions. One would wonder what new political and cultural theories might be

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<sup>52</sup> China's "Road and Belt" initiative, by loaning and constructing infrastructures in Asia, Africa, and beyond, outsources its surplus labor and industry to the needy developing countries and is already criticized by some scholars as a neo-colonial project to expand the Chinese influence.

<sup>53</sup> For decades in China, the apparent discord and irony between what is ideologically upheld as sacred-- Communism, and what is in effect the execution of a capitalist economy, is carefully and constantly explained and justified as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in school textbooks and media propaganda. My education in China, from elementary school to the undergraduate, was permeated with yearly compulsory political classes repeating that message which, to many ordinary Chinese, is ridiculous and laughable.

formulated to help us approach and navigate the complex reality, and eventually, to provide fresh theoretical and critical insights into the literature we read, feed and inspire ourselves with. One would also wonder, for instance, with the growing concerns over climate change and calls for a concerted international effort to combat it, what is the role of globalization in the worsening environmental crisis given globalization's omnipresent invasive industrial production and consumption? For clearly in advanced capitalism, consumption is no longer a basic activity out of human necessity but is more a dictating cultural practice. Meanwhile, as technology and globalization reciprocally aid the development of each other, self-commodification via Facebook and Instagram such as the Kardashians reaches a new high that threatens to eclipse Andy Warhol's iconic postmodern fame. Such phenomena would invite more interesting and challenging readings of novels such as *Mao II*. On the other hand, machines powered by Artificial Intelligence, AI, threaten to replace human labor in more and more sectors of the global economy, a trend that produces more anxieties and concerns as we ponder the already vulnerable Jamaican economy depicted in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Eventually, one cannot but wonder, how DeLillo, Lee and Cliff would respond to the rise of surging anti-globalization rhetoric championed by Donald Trump, which starts from the other extreme pole of ideology and which is fused with so much bigotry and hate? Those are concerns and questions beyond the scope of my dissertation, yet ultimately, they point to the urgency of continuous vigorous debate on globalization and postmodernism both in theory and in the art of imagination and resistance.

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