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Leslie Bow: Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion

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One

Introduction

THEORIZING GENDERED CONSTRUCTIONS OF ETHNIC AND NATIONAL COLLECTIVITY

Notes on the Notorious

A betrayal is a breach of trust. Its threat lies precisely in its rupturing the invisible cohesion of community. The charge of women's betrayal, of infidelity, has been represented as intrinsic to feminine nature; women have long been invested with both fickleness and the power to beguile. As agents and embodiments of inconstancy, women bear the blame for the dissolution of bonds between men. Allegations of feminine perfidy thus offer ready instances for understanding both the homosocial nature of collective associations, including ethnic and national ties, and the role of women in securing and maintaining these associations. As symbolic boundary markers for ethnic and national affiliations, women embody ethnic authenticity, patriotism, and class solidarity—and their repudiation. For Asian American women, these symbolic boundary markers are especially fraught.

Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion examines Asian American women's putative betrayals to bring to light the very terms of collective identification, subjectivity, and belonging. This book investigates implicit and explicit charges of disloyalty in Asian American women's writing in order to explore the gendered nature of literary rhetoric. How are Americanized gender norms deployed to understand, for example, the terms of U.S. citizenship, Asian ethnic solidarity, or postcolonial nationalisms? In examining the gendered discourse of political appeal in literature, this study reveals how mechanisms of affiliation are constituted and analyzes the stakes of their maintenance, particularly for women who transgress borders drawn by multiple loyalties. In doing so, I suggest that "betrayal" can constitute subversion of another kind, a subversion of repressive authority that depends on upholding strict borders between groups and individuals.

I begin with two exemplary female "traitors," the first charged with undoing a popular icon, and the second with betraying a nation. Both

examples highlight the connection between gender and regulation at work in Asian American women's literature.

It might be said that performance artist Yoko Ono's most significant cultural "happening" or Fluxus¹ event was the successful seduction of John Lennon in a London art gallery using the unlikely tools of a ladder, a magnifying glass, and the word "yes." Initiated by Lennon's interest in her *Ceiling Painting* (aka *Yes*), which required the viewer to climb a ladder in order to inspect the single, affirmative word attached to the ceiling, Lennon and Ono's connection was consolidated the moment she handed him a card that said, simply, "BREATHE." In 1966, Lennon was, for all intents and purposes, happily married to both wife Cynthia and to the other three lads who made up the Beatles. That a strange little Japanese artist could steal a married man from his wife, allegedly break up the Beatles, and transform Britain's greatest "magical song-maker and radical rocker" into a sibylline peace activist and later, househusband, was a series of events perhaps only slightly more remarkable than Ono's own transformation years later from reviled foreigner to shrewd American businesswoman and grieving widow—an accepted, if not much beloved, fixture in American popular culture.² Anointed "the High Priestess of the Happening," poet-composer-sculptor-performer Ono quickly became "a kind of psychic lightning-conductor for other people's hostility," particularly in the British press (Michael Bracewell cited in Simon Grant, "Ono! It's Her Again," *The Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1997, sec. 2, col. 3: 12). The hatred leveled at her was not so much due to her association with the avant-garde, although mainstream rock fans no doubt found incomprehensible Ono's attempts to eke profundity out of apparently nonsensical instructions or scripts ("Use your blood to paint . . . Paint until you die," "Stir inside of your brains with a penis" [Ono 1970, n.p.]) designed to "induce music of the mind in people." Lennon's remark, "they're dying for us to fall apart, for God knows what reason," was perhaps disingenuous for the very obviousness of that reason: the press and public were interested in Ono's downfall because of what was perceived to be her undue, corrupting influence on John, a *premeditated* engineering of Lennon's abandonment of his male comrades.³

Ono's notoriety was thus intrinsically tied to her perceived talent at both sexual and psychological seduction, an ability made all the more mysterious by her apparent lack of physical attractiveness ("I don't think she's ugly," a bewildered Lennon opined. "I think she's beautiful," cited in Cott and Doudna 1982, 38). Hers was a political seduction as well—a seduction away from bourgeois modes of perception and from the separation of art from everyday life, both tenets associated with the Fluxus movement. She would later note, however, that the "circus like atmo-

sphere” after their meeting signaled an end to “the quiet kind of conceptual games” that made up her art (cited in Haskell and Hanhardt 1991, 12). Later artistic involvements with Lennon were neither quiet nor simply conceptual, garnering the attention of the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), who watched their antiwar involvements with an eye to deportation.⁴ Earlier countercultural performances staged by the couple shocked bourgeois norms with an overtly challenging sexuality; as Lennon noted regarding their 1969 piece, *Bed-in* (aka *Bed Peace*) in the Amsterdam Hilton, “the press came, expecting to see us fuckin’ in bed. They’d all heard John and Yoko were going to fuck in front of the press for peace.” The phalanx of reporters who showed up were therefore relieved to see only a couple in bed in pajamas saying, “Peace, brother” (Cott and Doudna 1982,108). *Bed-in* was intended to convey the symbolic union of men and women, East and West. Yet contrary to her intent, Ono’s public reception revealed that their coupling had been taken another way; it was the West’s corruption by the East abetted by the distaff’s controlling influence, a perception later reinforced by her feminist phase as epitomized by the statement, “Woman is the Nigger of the World.”

Reaction to Ono reveals more than the fact that women often take the blame for men’s choices, including infidelity; it demonstrates the powerful mythmaking surrounding an Asian female public figure whose notoriety lay in an imagined seductive power. Ono’s “foreignness” was an intrinsic part of that notoriety although explicit references to her outsider status might often remain veiled; a memo to Beatles Fan Club members on the eve of the Lennon/Ono wedding urged in its pseudo-liberalism, “we should at least give Yoko the same chance we are going to be giving Linda and that Maureen and Patti got! I know this news is shocking, but I suppose if it will make John happy, we should all be very enthused too” (cited in Cott and Doudna 1982,36).⁵ But the marriage did not represent a betrayal of John’s female fans as much as it did a betrayal of man’s allegiance to other men; perceptions of Yoko’s difference potentially enhanced belief in the siren’s mysterious ability to break homosocial allegiance.

In connecting female sexuality and racial difference to seduction and betrayal, Ono’s example resonates with the conviction of another ethnic Japanese woman, first in the courts of public opinion, and later in U.S. federal court. While a young Yoko Ono experienced unaccustomed wartime deprivation outside Tokyo during World War II, nisei Iva Toguri d’Aquino was working as a disc jockey for Radio Tokyo’s popular English-language propaganda and entertainment program, “Zero Hour,” written and produced by a number of Allied POWs being held in Japan. In 1949, d’Aquino was convicted of one count of treason against the

United States as the infamous radio personality, Tokyo Rose. D'Aquino's alleged treason carried specifically gendered resonance: the accusation that she undermined Allied morale by broadcasting misinformation about Pacific losses was made more insidious by reports of her methods, namely, interspersing her record introductions with hints of women's infidelity back home. As one of the journalists who "broke" the Tokyo Rose story after the war melodramatically reported, "She would play nostalgic music, which they loved, and then inform them their wives and sweethearts were carrying on with 4F's and highly paid war-workers while they were giving their sweat, blood and lives in the heat, muck, rain and jungles of the Pacific." "Well, boys," Tokyo Rose was alleged to have said. "I'll be signing off for tonight. I'm going to get my loving tonight. How about you?" But as subsequent investigation bore out, Iva Toguri d'Aquino was merely in the wrong place at the wrong time; there was no English-speaking female radio announcer broadcasting under the name "Tokyo Rose" in the Pacific; moreover, the two witnesses whose testimony sealed a single treason conviction later recanted long after d'Aquino had served her six-year sentence. In fact, the Office of War Information had concluded prior to Japanese surrender, "There is no Tokyo Rose; the name is strictly a GI invention." Nonetheless, reports of Rose's seductive, American-accented, poisonous female voice were mythic constructions attributed to numerous exotic sources—among them, a beautiful Eurasian, the wife of the last Japanese ambassador to Washington, General Tojo's mistress, a hula dancer born in Maui, a Canadian nisei, and a white woman from St. Louis.⁶

D'Aquino's conviction is noteworthy not only for the role the postwar press played in agitating for her prosecution and exerting pressure on the attorney general to go forward with the case in spite of what was previously acknowledged to be flimsy evidence. More significant is that during the trial the "Tokyo Rose" fantasy was powerful enough to trump points of the defense that were at odds with popular belief, specifically that Iva Toguri d'Aquino neither looked nor, more important, sounded remotely like a sexy Asian Mata Hari. The two reporters who later claimed to have solicited Tokyo Rose's "confession" in the form of an interview in which d'Aquino testified she was "the one and only Tokyo Rose" were surprised and no doubt disappointed by her physical appearance; one noted that she "was a pleasant-looking girl, but by no stretch of the imagination a siren" while the other was considerably less charitable, describing her as "unattractive, even for a Japanese woman."⁷ D'Aquino later acknowledged their deflated hopes, conceding, "It should have been Ava Gardner, but instead it was me" (Duus 1979, 21). As the prisoner of war in charge of "Zero Hour," Australian Major Charles Cousens testified that he had chosen d'Aquino as a disc jockey precisely because her "comedy voice" would help undermine his captors' efforts at effective propaganda; he

wanted “a gin-fog voice, anything but femininely seductive,” a voice suitable for broadcasting largely innocuous radio program content described as “hokum” and “corn” mixed with popular music (Weyl 1950, 386).

The mystique surrounding Rose, the femme fatale with an insinuating insider’s knowledge of troop movements in the Pacific, was thus a powerful counter to the reality of Iva Toguri d’Aquino’s goofy, teasing broadcasts (“Like that? Well, be good and we’ll have an even better one directly . . . Please to listening!” [Kutler 1980, 453]). The sexual aura surrounding the legend granted d’Aquino a celebrity equal to General Tojo’s and out of proportion to her wartime involvement.⁸ One reporter asked American GIs in the United States and Japan what they thought should be done to “Tokyo Rose”; while some of the answers “were unprintable,” others responded, simply, “I’d sure like a date with her” (C. Lee 1947, 90). Popular understanding of “Rose’s” crime—inciting soldiers with images of the cuckold’s humiliation—exaggerated fears about the loss of military-as-sexual potency, an effect that was not, in the end, operative in the nineteen words for which d’Aquino was actually convicted (“Orphans of the Pacific, you are really orphans now. With all your ships sunk, how will you get home?”). For d’Aquino, promoting anxiety over women’s infidelity easily metamorphosed into the charge of her own national infidelity. The story of Tokyo Rose speaks to a belief in the power of sexual alliances to disrupt other collective alliances, specifically, loyalty to nation and comrades-in-arms.

Feminine power is often perceived to be located in the capacity to both maintain and disrupt loyalties; the perfidy of both Ono’s and d’Aquino’s supposed seductions lay in their ability to corrupt men’s identification with other men, undermining allegiance to the group or to the nation. Western public response to these figures also speaks to associations between female power and racial difference, associations that produced consequences for these Japanese/American women who, once accused of betrayal, became victims of the charge. I begin with the examples of Ono and d’Aquino because their inscription within American popular culture reveals to different degrees the underlying function of an accusation of betrayal: a means of determining cultural alliance, it is intended to deauthenticate some affiliations while reconsolidating others. The charge of betrayal, of disloyalty, exposes the competitive structure of overlapping group affiliations by signaling a transgression of solidarity. Ono’s and d’Aquino’s cases work somewhat differently: while both were seen as active catalysts inciting infidelity and subject to FBI inquiries on the basis of wartime involvement with the media, d’Aquino’s case was tried by the state as well as in the court of public opinion. D’Aquino was branded a traitor in the legal sense while Ono’s condemnation on the basis of her antiwar activism paled in comparison to her vilification for the more politically innocuous seduction of an international cultural icon. Ono’s

example is less directly a confrontation with American nationalism than D'Aquino's, but her calumny speaks to particularly American, racially motivated anxiety about incorporating difference. Although the FBI viewed Lennon as a potential threat to national security and his Englishness would mark him as "equally" an outsider, his alien status could be redeemed by American rock 'n' roll. In contrast, distaste for Ono's racially marked inscrutability and her allegiance to an incomprehensible avant-garde was later compounded by rumors of a financial ruthlessness coded in the United States as quintessentially Japanese by the 1980s.

Accusations of disloyalty clearly serve to regulate female sexuality but, as significantly, they police and uphold the identifications necessary for affiliation and connection. These two contextualized instances highlight the ways in which representations of seduction and betrayal consolidate alliances formed across, in these cases, national boundaries. The "love to hate her" aura of Ono and the infamy of Tokyo Rose speak to the racial vilification that appears as a predicate of national cohesion; femininity's association with inconstancy imbues this racialization with moral force. Such a discursive overlaying has specific consequences for Asian American women: How do they negotiate a process of racialization that represents sexuality as disruptive to nationalism and ethnic solidarity as homosocial bonds? In shifting to the more quotidian scenes that populate literature—scenes that do not reflect the scandal of Ono's or Toguri's stories but are nonetheless marked as scandalous—I want to analyze the charge of cultural betrayal as it comes to regulate group belonging. To be cast as a traitor, as beyond the pale of an at times unspoken collective, is to confront the fact that such affiliations have terms of admission, that they are neither natural nor, at times, uncoerced. The flashes of consciousness in the literary vignettes that follow precipitate an awareness of the way sexual identity overlaps ethnicity and national affiliation—and may appear to challenge it. With the recognition that disloyalty to group ties becomes sexualized through charges of infidelity, this study looks at the ways in which expressions of sexuality both signify and interrogate political alliance and ethnic collectivity.

Embodiment and the Rhetoric of Allegiance

"Every cultural change is signified through and on the body," Shirley Geok-lin Lim notes. "My Westernization took place in my body" (Lim 1996, 89). In making this connection, Lim highlights a specific interaction confronted by and commented on by Asian American women across ethnic boundaries. For example, Eleanor Wong Telemaque's *It's Crazy to Stay Chinese in Minnesota* depicts its seventeen-year-old Chinese Ameri-

can heroine pondering her sexuality in her attic bedroom amid leftover charity furniture, piles of movie magazines, and a hidden diary “filled with exclamation marks.” The daughter of an ardent Chinese nationalist turned midwestern restaurant owner, Ching is critically scrutinizing her breasts in front of the mirror when she is startled by a knock on the door: “What are you doing, Ching?” her aunt demands. Ching dives for her bathrobe and innocently lies, “I’m studying Chinese. I have learned how to write the characters for filial piety” (Telemaque 1978, 41).

The exchange characterizes the disjunction between Ching’s desires and ethnic expectation. Pressures of filial piety find expression in her father’s hope that she will one day save China from the Communists; her own wish is less ambitious—she wants to find a boyfriend and lose her virginity. Ching’s lament, “I don’t want to be Chinese, I want to be American!” (105), positions these identities as a contradiction. In the course of the novel, the concerns she aligns with Americanization—boys and sex—become increasingly at odds with her parents’ expectations for a Chinese daughter, one who is dutiful in respect to parents, docile in regard to marriage, and loyal to a country she has never seen. For Ching, control of her own body becomes the means by which she expresses resistance to her parents; losing her “hated hymen” comes to symbolize severing “the umbilical cord” that ties her, in her view, to ethnic belonging. The scene dramatizes dual affiliation as a matter of gender role expectation, with sexuality serving as the mediator between opposing cultural dictates. As the image reflected back by the bedroom mirror and the image her parents hold become increasingly discordant, Ching’s body becomes the site of struggle between duty and desire, ethnic loyalty and Americanization.

It is thus in *Bombay Talkie*, a novel about an Indian American woman’s return “home” to Bombay, that Ameena Meer’s Sabah initially takes pleasure in her (hetero)sexual appearance given the responses her miniskirt elicits on a San Francisco street from a group of Indian men. Their public appreciation graphs national resonance onto her bodily display: “‘Did you see that girl?’ one says in Hindi. ‘Hey,’ shouts the other, ‘Miss America!’” (Meer 1994, 8). Sabah’s choice of self-presentation is made ambivalent down the street, when she encounters the stares of her fellow diasporic countrywomen:

Farther down the road, there’s a group of their women, in salwar kameezes, their heads covered with scarves. Sabah cringes as they turn to look at her. She’s embarrassed. She knows them well. She feels like the paper doll who’s had the wrong outfit put over her body. (Meer 1994, 5)

As these gazes regulate Sabah’s sense of self, her connection to the nation—her ability to signify “Miss America”—is measured according to

her seemingly self-directed sexuality. It is this connection that becomes destabilized in the body's public display. Similarly, Ginu Kamani's short story, "Ciphers" in *Jungle Girl*, portrays the narrator's return to India for the first time since childhood and her encounter with a fellow Gujarati woman on a Bombay train, an encounter that turns into a guessing game about the narrator's ethnic identity as the curious onlooker struggles to locate her, despite—or perhaps because of—her short hair and Western dress. The narrator speculates that it is not the superficiality of attire that betrays origins; she thinks, "even in a sari, or other traditional Indian clothes, something in my eyes, and the set of my mouth, would give me away, would mark me as other, outsider oblique" (Kamani 1995, 7). The narrator senses the disapproving woman's fear, a fear of difference not based on the unconventionality of her hair and dress, but on the overtness of her desire:

It doesn't matter anymore what identity I was born into. . . . What matters is that I am *sexual*. . . . Being sexual has reshaped my knowledge, my feelings, my very breath. *That* is what fools you; that is what you turn away from in *yourself* when you turn away from me. (11–12)

Whether expressed as desire between women or as a woman's relationship to her own body, displaying specific attitudes toward eroticism trump ethnic markers.⁹ In commenting on his daughter's posture and stride, giveaways to her American acculturation, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's father challenges in *Farewell to Manzanar*, "How come your daughter is seventeen years old and if you put a sack over her face you couldn't tell she was Japanese from anybody else on the street?" (Houston and Houston 1973, 126). Feminine sexuality becomes the sign of acculturation in the public sphere.

What becomes clear is also that ethnic and national affiliation are determined in part by conflicts over how sexuality is performed, potentially situating the female body as a register of international and domestic political struggle, as a site of national divisions and loyalties. This book thus explores the ways in which Asian American women's ethnic and national identities are represented through gender issues—through contestations over women's roles, feminist solidarity, and expressions of feminine sexuality. Encompassing discussions of both cultural nationalism, broadly defined as Asian ethnic or racial alliance in the United States, as well as nationalism conventionally defined via citizenship, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion* nuances the interactions evident in these vignettes, the competition between national loyalty and sexual expression or alliance, between ethnic and gender communal identification. In doing so, it dialogues with current academic emphasis on globalization and transnationalism, the "imagined" nature of national communities, and postmodern theories of racial identity that privilege fluid movements among geo-

graphic locations, identities, and political affiliations. Complicating this emphasis on border shuttling, my interest lies in the ways that subjects are increasingly governed by the rhetoric of allegiance. As Asian American women's literature reveals, negotiating multiple affiliations becomes fraught as the language of betrayal comes to regulate fidelity and communal belonging. This work examines one pervasive figuration, that of feminine sexuality and feminism marking ethnic or national betrayal, particularly as sexuality mediates between progress and tradition, modernity and the "Old World," the United States and Asia. Sexuality becomes a gauge of progress, a gauge that informs the interface between Westernization and modernization.

Oppositions between cultural nationalist and feminist concerns have been clearly manifested in domestic American coalition politics as evidenced by the initial mutual exclusivity of the women's and civil rights movements. But the conflictual nature of multiple identifications is also reflected internationally; on the exclusivity of nationalist sentiment, V. Spike Peterson notes, "[I]ntergroup hostility is institutionalized to the extent that identification with a single, essentialized group—the nation—is promoted at the expense of multiple, fluid identifications and trans-group solidarities" (Peterson 1996, 7). Moreover, Third World feminists have documented the often antagonistic relationship between feminism and nationalism as feminism becomes positioned as an imported Western corruption of the indigenous traditions on which anti-imperialist movements have been founded. However, my emphasis here is not on representative social movements, but on the political resonance of imagined relations of affiliation as they serve distinct social purposes. My focus on the interstices of overlapping collectivities is not an attempt to privilege "in-betweenness" or, to invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, borderlands as a potentially radical site (Anzaldúa 1987). Rather, I suggest that the language of betrayal signals the artifice of naturalized racial, ethnic, or national belonging; the charge does not simply contest the authenticity of one's identity or commitment whether in regard to alliances characterized by biological inevitability or those politically chosen, but instead becomes a potent *rhetorical* figuration deployed to signal how affiliations are formed and then consolidated. Asian American women writers not only mediate sexuality's construction as a determiner of loyalty but manipulate that construction as a tool of political persuasion, reconceptualizing "disloyalty" as resistance to repressive authority. If women have reason to be, in terms Adrienne Rich has borrowed, "disloyal to civilization," then this betrayal of racism, patriarchy, or a repressive state constitutes a form of creative activism for Asian American women.¹⁰

This inquiry engages the rhetoric of betrayal to draw a connection between Asian immigrant writing that uses sexuality to articulate the terms of citizenship and national belonging, and American literature on Asia

that expresses the individual's relationship to the state through a similar gendered discourse as part of its geopolitical critique. In what follows I attempt to situate Asian American women not as cultural informants who write to affirm a preestablished sociological reality of ethnic experience, but as agents who craft rhetoric for their own political purposes.

“To Plant a Flag on Water”

Painting to Let the Evening Light Go Through

Hang a bottle behind a canvas.
Place the canvas where the west light
comes in.
The painting will exist when the bottle
creates a shadow on the canvas, or it does
not have to exist.
The bottle may contain liquor, water,
grasshoppers, ants or singing insects, or
it does not have to contain.
(*Yoko Ono, 1970*)

For Asian Americans the question of nationalism often appears in the form of the paradox of being simultaneously “American born and foreign”: “What a crazy riddle,” thinks Faye about Korean American identity in *Clay Walls*, “to be yet not to be” (R. Kim 1986, 299). That Asian Americans across ethnic groups are represented as perpetual outsiders is a compelling justification for that coalitional identity. Defined as an “enemy alien” in the country of her birth, poet Janice Mirikitani writes after Japanese American internment,

I do not know the face of this country
it is inhabited by strangers
who call me obscene names.

Jap. Go home.
Where is home?
(*Mirikitani 1987, 7*)

The speaker's question defines the border between inclusion and exclusion, enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, home and displacement: Is the barbed wire of the internment camp designed to keep her in or out? As the logic of racial exclusion freezes her into the position of perpetual alien, the speaker internalizes relocation as rootlessness: “Where is home?” she asks. “Who lives within me?” The poem signals the difficulty

of reincorporating the national division produced by the war into a subject who must contain national antagonisms. Mitsuye Yamada's "The Question of Loyalty" reflects a similar exploration in its depiction of an issei's dilemma when confronted with the loyalty oath required of interned Japanese Americans:

If I sign this
 What will I be?
 I am doubly loyal
 to my American children
 also to my own people.
 How can double mean nothing?
 (*Yamada 1982, 30*)

Political loyalties are positioned as mutually exclusive; their multiplicity renders them suspect. Yet Nellie Wong's poem, "Where is My Country," articulates a contrasting dynamic as her body becomes positioned as a fluid and shifting map expressive of various ethnic affiliations:

Where is my country?
 Salted in Mexico
 where a policeman speaks to me in Spanish?
 In the voice of a Chinese grocer
 who asks if I am Filipino?
 Channeled in the white businessman
 who discovers that I do not sound Chinese?
 Garbled in a white woman
 who tells me I speak perfect English?
 Webbed in another
 who tells me I speak with an accent?
 Where is my country?
 Where does it lie?
 (*N. Wong 1984, n.p*)

As ethnic specificity becomes subsumed within the larger category of racial difference, part of the answer to the speaker's question lies in her recognition that as a Chinese American her life is linked to those for whom she is mistaken. The compensation for the speaker's multiply signified, ethnic-as-national affiliation is kinship with others whose own ethnic difference is so easily transposed onto her body. Giselle Fong's poem, "Corrosion," reflects on the "they-all-look-alike" syndrome reflective of Asian racial formation in the United States as the speaker is quizzed, "Are you Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Hawaiian? Do you eat lice? Do

you know Bruce? / Oh AAAAH So, Sukiyaki!" (G. Fong 1990, 117). Fong's poem exposes the parallel between the racial stereotype and racial erasure, the paradox of prejudice, which "renders its victims simultaneously invisible and over-exposed" (Mukherjee 1981, 36). Ethnic homogenization is linked to the project of racial exclusion at the same time that it has the potential to contribute to pan-ethnic alliances.

These potent explorations of belonging and exclusion speak to the process of Asian racialization in the United States and to concepts of national affiliation that exceed both conventionally static definitions of citizenship and linear models of immigrant acculturation, and, as I discuss later, postmodern theories of identity. It is thus that critic Susan Koshy's argument about the inadequacy of "old" sociological patterns of acculturation associated with early Asian immigration resonates with literary representations expressive, not of a progressive embeddedness within national culture, but deterritorialized notions of home. Cynthia Kadohata's appropriation of the Japanese term *ukiyo*, the floating world, to convey family cohesion in the face of cultural and class disenfranchisement is a case in point. This emphasis on fluid national identification also implicitly challenges what has been situated as a master narrative in Asian American Studies, the opposition between cultural nationalism and assimilation. Lisa Lowe notes that the "trope that opposes nativism and assimilationism can be itself a 'colonialist' figure used to displace the challenges of heterogeneity, or subalterneity, by casting them as assimilationist or anti-cultural nationalist" (Lowe 1991, 76). Both "old" sociological models of acculturation and the master narrative that opposes ethnic solidarity to assimilation posit political affiliation as a linear, finite process, the former in its presumption of acculturation as a temporal movement and the latter in its attempt to fix an essential, normative politicized ethnic identity. Contestation between these "old" social science models of minority group interaction with the dominant culture and models of global migrations have, as Sau-ling Wong has noted, attained the status of a paradigm shift in Asian American Studies, a shift she characterizes as one away from domestic to diasporic or denationalizing perspectives (Sau-ling Wong, 1995a). Both Koshy's and Lowe's conceptualizations resonate with postmodern theories of identity and self-location as they shed light on the complex and ongoing processes of allegiance.

Reflecting Anzaldúa's borderlands, where those with multiple identifications refuse the fixity of self-location, the move away from "old" models of acculturation attempts to reconceptualize static definitions of identification and change. But this move is also the result of the critic's choice to privilege individual agency over the disciplining forces of power. Who controls the shifting and potentially multiple identifications, associations, and allegiances that govern self-conception? In emphasizing

the charge of betrayal in boundary maintenance, in demarcating authenticity or patriotism, I suggest that any recognition of the fluid nature of identities and identifications must also acknowledge the role of the nation-state in defining the limits of “home,” a point that may become lost in projecting the downfall of the state in its successfully maintaining allegiances in the era of globalization. For example, in drawing a distinction between immigrant and transnational paradigms within Asian American Studies, Koshy suggests that what renders obsolete finite immigration and assimilation patterns are the complex, nonstatic Asian migrations currently taking place in the era of transnational capital: “The earlier patterns of Asian immigrant experiences created more bounded immigrant communities where differentiations were experienced most keenly in separation from the dominant culture, from the home country, or across gender and generational divisions” (Koshy 1996, 339). Koshy’s assumption that the assimilatory process loses power in the current era of global economic transformation makes plausible her conclusion that “becoming American does not necessarily involve a loss of the home culture, or a choice between ethnicity or mainstreaming as in earlier patterns of immigration to this country” (335).

This assumption echoes characterizations of transnational diasporas as global communities linked by technological advancements in communication, characterizations that celebrate, in anthropologist James Clifford’s words, a “to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration” that “reduce distances, and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world’s places” (Clifford 1997, 247). Such portrayals reflect a belief in the globalization of culture, explicitly or implicitly challenging presumptions of American cultural and economic hegemony in favor of a two-way exchange or what Arjun Appadurai calls the indigenization of culture (Appadurai 1994). But the question remains: Has the American assimilative process lost its former power? Can one ignore the significant role of the American state in specifying the privileges bestowed by legal citizenship or defining and delimiting the “voluntary” identifications of individuals?

Koshy takes Asian American literary criticism to the task for failing to produce theories of literature adequate to understanding “the effects of transnational forces on Asian American ethnicity” in “newer” literary texts (Koshy 1996, 331). But, as I suggest in this study, her emphasis may be misplaced. It seems less important to account for the accuracy of a sociological model as it applies to something that might be called the literature of globalization, than to understand how loyalties are nurtured or attenuated. What gets overlooked in the debate—domestic or transnational, finite or fluid acculturation—is an understanding of the very structure of allegiance. To represent maintaining diasporic loyalties as a

resistant stance against a bullying America may merely romanticize individual agency. Such a move may discount the disciplining power through which civil and state institutions enforce allegiances and identifications, a power that Asian American women's literature eloquently interrogates. Moreover, it may also elide the pressures that ethnic groups themselves assert over individuals in the process of upholding group boundaries and self-definitions.

The vignettes I have highlighted here all speak to deterritorialized concepts of home. Certainly writers have rarely portrayed the acculturation process according to the finalities associated with sociological models of inevitable assimilation, indicating that such models were never adequate to describe the complexities of immigrant experience. However, I would argue that drawing a distinction between "old" domestic and "new" transnational paradigms is also illusory given that both patterns of migration are driven by responses to capital. In times of global economic restructuring it is clear that affiliations become *more* rather than less codified, suggesting that commodities may move more freely across national borders than do subjects.¹¹ The more significant issue may not concern the accuracy of specific paradigms—domestic or diasporic—but more appropriately the degree to which one can resist the hegemonic pressures of American culture both "at home" and abroad. At a moment in which scholars in the humanities find globalization to be a compelling analytic framework to celebrate or expose as a guise for neocolonialism,¹² economists provide cautions about overstating the porousness of national borders and the degree of world market globalization. In response to dire warnings about the erosion of state power in light of globalization, Hirst and Thompson note:

The state may have less control over ideas, but it remains a controller of its borders and the movement of people across them. Apart from a 'club-class' of internationally mobile, highly skilled professionals, and the desperate, poor migrants and refugees who will suffer almost any hardship to leave intolerable conditions, the bulk of the world's populations now cannot easily move. . . . In the absence of labour mobility states will retain powers over their peoples, they define who is and is not a citizen, who may and may not receive welfare. (Hirst and Thompson 1995, 420)¹³

Thus, with economic restructuring affiliations become subject to greater pressures of repudiation and substantiation both from within the "private" realm of voluntary group identification and the coercive regulation of identities enforced by the state. Gender becomes foregrounded in this regulation as the domestic space takes on greater significance in reproducing "voluntary" affiliations if the powers of the state in eliciting such affiliations become compromised (Peterson 1996).

In regard to Asian Americans, an effort to consolidate communal loyalties underlies the master narrative that opposes ethnic cultural nationalism and assimilation; it is a figuration that attempts to fix identification toward a specific purpose, in this case, toward a normative ethnic (and ultimately gendered) identity that symbolizes commitment and resistance through an odd mixture of asserting American nativism and ethnic particularism. This narrative associated with the “old” immigrant paradigm within Asian American Studies is thus not displaced but put in dialectical tension with transnational, global theoretical models of diaspora as both come to express cultural negotiation in terms of connection and disassociation. Such expressions serve to expose the stakes on which affiliations are created and upheld; thus, in commenting on the uneasy displacement of “American” in Asian American Studies Wong writes, “By definition, a world where most travel requires passports and visas is not ready for ‘world citizenship,’ a phrase that to me means as much as, or as little as, ‘just a human being,’” a point that reflects the reservations of economists to overemphasizing the dilution of national influences (Sau-ling Wong 1995, 19). Crucial to the study of a literature expressive of transformation, loss, transition, or migrancy, then, is the recognition that cultural movements are often charted through the *rhetoric of allegiance*.

The “crisis” of nationality in Asian American literary texts across historical time periods and ethnicities often appears as the question of reconfiguring loyalties and alliances: “The sea swallows everything. It is impossible to plant a flag on water,” a Korean ship’s captain passing as Japanese tells Haesu in *Clay Walls*. “Not so on land. Men plant their flags in the ground and begin the battle. We are born to our nationality by fate” (R. Kim 1986, 77). The captain’s “choice” to pass is coerced by the history of Japan’s colonization of Korea, but it nonetheless represents to the protagonist Haesu a complicity with the repressive state for personal gain. The captain’s justification of his passing, his assertion of the need to be free of encumbering alliances and “unresolveable commitments,” initially offends her Korean nationalism. Yet the captain’s example provides the catalyst for a revision of her own loyalties as she comes to feel suspended between a homeland under Japanese colonial rule and American racism. In a larger sense, the captain’s desire to seek a space in which national loyalties become fluid and shifting speaks to a dual tension in the formation of Asian American identity. While the sea signifies a place in which the self can be remade, its possibilities are not free-floating; it is often *necessary* to plant a flag in water. However much literature may express the desire for a deterritorialized concept of home, articulating belonging in terms of suspension or liminality, literature also indicates

the overdetermined stakes for sustaining liminality or multiple allegiances. For women who are controlled in the interest of demarcating identities or situated at the point where alliances are ruptured, the stakes are often higher.¹⁴

Immanuel Wallerstein notes that establishing boundaries through affiliation (and exclusion) lies at the basis of defining culture: “[C]ulture is a way of summarizing the ways in which groups distinguish themselves from other groups. It represents what is shared within the group, and presumably simultaneously not shared (or not entirely shared) outside it” (Wallerstein 1991, 158–59). This definition resonates with now axiomatic postmodern recognitions of the “imagined” nature of affiliations such as nationalism as well as the mutually constitutive nature of race, class, and gender (Anderson 1990). These recognitions were not revolutionary to Asian American Studies; the very designation “Asian American” early on acknowledged a politically defined coalitional identity rather than a naturalized one. But the awareness that these general theories of subject construction bear significance for the study of race enables the field’s resituation into larger national and potentially global discourses beyond a purely pluralistic concept of minority inclusion. In focusing on the ways in which subjects are constituted through exclusion and differentiation, two avenues of inquiry appear: analyzing the role that Asian racial difference plays in the construction of American national identity, and correlating the historical treatment of Asians in the United States to changing tides of American diplomacy in Asia to investigate domestic “Asianness” as a symptom of global diplomatic and economic relationships. Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* links both avenues of analysis by foregrounding two sites, which locate individuals in relation to nation: the legal/judicial system expressive of theoretical national enfranchisement promising equal political representation through citizenship, and the terrain of culture where “the individual invents lived relationship with the national collective” as he or she becomes “immersed in the repertoire of American memories, events, and narratives” (Lowe 1996, 2). In suggesting that the American citizen has been defined in opposition to the Asian immigrant, Lowe uncovers the ways in which Asian immigrants “have been fundamental to the construction of the nation as a simulacrum of inclusiveness” (5). As Asian subjects in the United States are constructed partly as a response to American economic and military interests in Asia, she suggests, legal definitions of belonging are likewise constituted by various projections of Asian difference.

Historically based and materialist, Lowe’s field-defining argument follows in a tradition of scholarship on race that highlights the mutually constitutive relations of the margin to the center in terms of psychological

projection; her analysis locates what has been repressed—in this case, the disenfranchised Asian—as central to national unity. It has been variously argued that American identity has been constructed in opposition to a perceived Other most often embodied by African American and Native American figures. Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, the most prominent of these, suggests that Africanness “provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity,” reflecting Frantz Fanon's recognition of the dependent construction of whiteness to blackness (Morrison 1993). In contrast and complement, Michael Rogin notes that “American literature, as critics from D. H. Lawrence to Richard Slotkin have argued, established national identity in the struggle between Indians, and whites” (Rogin 1992), a point that Carroll Smith-Rosenberg echoes in her exploration of white women's role in the construction of Europeans as the “true Americans” against the American Indian in the eighteenth-century.¹⁵ The work of these Americanists epitomizes the significant body of scholarship concerned with difference as a constitutive element in national construction, the ways in which American homogeneity depend on the projection of internal difference, a point echoed in colonial critique as in Homi Bhabha's recognition that “the production of discriminatory identities . . . secure[s] the ‘pure’ and original identity of [colonial] authority” (Bhabha 1994, 112). Such work reveals the consequences of placing populations in juxtaposition and competition, necessarily exposing the vilification and violence that attend the demands of homogenization that bolster political fictions of unity. It un-masks the exclusions at the heart of modern political theory, exclusions enabled by the ideal, as Iris Marion Young puts it, “Citizenship for everyone, and everyone the same qua citizen” (Young 1990, 114). This scholarship foregrounds the role of discursivity in securing the nationalist imaginary and justifying terms of American belonging based on an absent present racial hierarchy.

But the racial dynamics theorized in this scholarship vis-à-vis the nation may obscure the fact that “minority” groups invoke similar demands for homogenization and exclusion as predicates of their own group cohesion. The same dynamics these American Studies scholars uncover, as Lowe's work acknowledges, may apply to the construction of differences within ethnic groups themselves. In shifting the frame of reference from portrayals of a national Other to the cultural productions of those very Others, my aim is similar to these Americanists in its exploration of the ways group solidarity, not only domestic American but Asian national as well, is secured by those who appear to stand outside that solidarity. Intragroup cohesion is made possible, in other words, by those who are seen to have betrayed it.

In making this shift, this study suggests that not all forms of minority discourse contest national narratives; I investigate the ways in which Asian American texts may also serve the purposes of nationalism. It is generally recognized that literary representations of people of color *by* people of color exceed the reflexive, abject portrayals of racial subjects historically reflected in dominant cultural texts; the challenge they represent to these portrayals resists given narratives on race, which is why, Toni Morrison writes, the Africanist figure as a “metaphorical shortcut” is not open to her as an African American writer (Morrison 1993, x). More complexly, Lowe notes that as the sedimented contradictions between citizenship as the democratic promise of inclusion and the material realities of racial hierarchy erupt in Asian American cultural productions, they become contestatory sites of American national culture. But I also want to suggest that Asian American literary texts may also replicate normative American values (and apply them to Asia); in this, the “subversion” of my title thus takes on a multiple meanings by situating Asian American literature within and against national narratives.

The Americanist work on race discussed above suggests a tension between postmodernism and the activist intent of feminist and Ethnic Studies scholarship that helps define the dual reading strategies of my project. In suggesting that marginal groups come to delineate domestic national interests, these critics establish a theoretical basis for the centrality of the oppressed that does not merely respond to a desire for pluralist inclusion. The dialectical tension present in these arguments resonates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s conception of a “universalizing” model of approaching the homo/heterosexual opposition in queer theory distinct from what she calls a “minoritizing” model now associated with Gay and Lesbian Studies. It might be said that the latter model merely adds sexuality to “the more traditionally visible cruxes of gender, class, and race” by situating gays and lesbians as minority subjects with important stakes in the distinction between gay and straight. In contrast, privileging the universalizing model within her analysis, Sedgwick argues that the homo/heterosexual distinction has primary importance for “all modern Western identity and social organization (and not merely for homosexual identity and culture)” (Sedgwick 1990, 11). Highlighting the deconstructive nature of her argument, she notes,

The analytic move [the argument] makes is to demonstrate that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions—heterosexual/homosexual, in this case—actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence,

third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (Sedgwick 1990, 9–10)

The decision to choose a minoritizing or universalizing viewpoint in dealing with “minor” literatures reflects the political stakes confronted by feminist theorists. Does one favor a deconstructive stance that dismantles gender as a category of difference or a stance located in identity politics that maintains the concept of gender difference and works from and within it?¹⁶

Transposed to an Asian American context, the theoretical dilemma initiates this division: on the one hand, a deconstructivist reading of East-West would unmask the interdependent nature of global relations, and the inclusion-exclusion binarism that exposes how normative conceptions of American identity are produced. On the other hand, emphasizing a “minoritizing” stance establishes a constituency of subjects actively mediating their experiences within categories of class, race, gender, or nationality as well as establishing a commonality of experience about which something can be said. This latter model formed the basis of Asian American Studies; but while the necessity of asserting the visibility of another marginalized canon continues to be pressing as racial hierarchies become increasingly solidified, this assertion may also run the risk of including Asians within the history of race relations in a way that does not alter the American landscape, thereby failing to skirt the dangers of a reductive pluralism. As feminist theorists have cautioned, the addition of women’s experiences to history should not preclude an ideological examination of the systemic nature of differentiation (Scott 1992). In order to question the apparent exclusivity of these reading strategies for Asian American Studies, I want to turn briefly to literature itself.

Perhaps ironically but no less aptly given her infamous public persona, I take as an epigraph to this section, Yoko Ono’s “Painting to Let the Evening Light Go Through.” The “poem” illuminates politically invested deconstructive critical practice in suggesting that the painting/subject’s content can only exist through a trick of Western light, that its actual content is subordinate to the shadow it casts. In this the poem implies that the subject’s interiority is arbitrary, immaterial to its representation: “[the bottle] does not have to contain.” Moreover, it suggests that the shadow cast, the representation imposed from the West, *is* the content and that its existence is both temporal and contingent. Meant to be a metaphysical meditation, the piece nonetheless carries racial resonance akin to her sculpture, *Play it by Trust*, a white chessboard in which black as a contrasting color has been removed to render competitive play based on

visual differentiation impossible. Other works explore that interior/exterior distinction in ways that resonate with postmodern readings of race. In *Bag Piece* (1965), Ono and a male assistant enter a huge black bag, remove their clothes, take a “nap,” redress in the bag, and exit both the bag and the stage. She notes, “When you are in the bag, you can see outside. But when you are outside, you can only see the outline of the bag. It is very easy for us to clearly see outside and say ‘listen. I’m here—you can see what I am.’ But, of course, the other person can only see your outline” (Haskell and Hanhardt 1991, 72). In playing with notions of visual epistemology as well as the sexual titillation of voyeurism, *Bag Piece* questions the limits of reading surface. Like Ono’s “Painting,” it suggests that what is seen is never wholly embodied, but accessible only contingently through certain positionalities and times—and to extrapolate, only within certain configurations of power. Such is the political import of David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*, which, in the manner of Jean Genet’s *The Blacks*, exposes the mutuality of race, gender, and national subject positions.

A twist on the story of Madame Butterfly’s tragic East-West romance between Gallimard, a befuddled Frenchman, and his lover, Song, a cross-dressing Chinese spy, Hwang’s play also evokes the limitations of a purely deconstructivist, or in Sedgwick’s terms, universalist, model of analysis for a “minority” constituency. In conceiving *M. Butterfly*, Hwang was less interested in a “real” woman than the idea of the perfect woman; thus for both Hwang and his character’s “play” to work, there can be no space for an Asian female subject outside her Orientalist construction. In witnessing the entry of Comrade Chin, a Chinese woman, Gallimard, preferring Song’s camp rendition of Oriental femininity, recoils:

GALLIMARD (To Song): No! Why does she have to come in?

SONG: Rene, be sensible. How can they understand the story without her? (Hwang 1988, 47)

The fiction of the play depends on the simultaneous presence of Oriental femininity and the absence of the Asian woman. Gallimard’s Butterfly fantasy cannot be challenged by the appearance of a “real” woman; however, we must entertain the idea of authentic femininity against Song’s transvestism in order to “understand the story.” What must remain offstage is the recognition that Asian femininity is no less an artifice for Asian women than it is for Song; the play only works if we as spectators occupy the position of Gallimard, in the words of poet Frank O’Hara, willing to believe that there is real pleasure in loving a shadow and caressing a disguise. The political significance of the play lies in its exposing the mutually constitutive nature of social identity, in blurring the division between the material and the discursive.

But the absence of the “real” woman in *M. Butterfly* also suggests a pragmatic limitation to Sedgwick’s universalist questioning of humanity’s division into unequal categories of identity. For better or worse, speaking from specific subject positions carries increasing urgency as coalition politics are one of the few avenues through which citizens can be heard within American democracy. It is in recognition of this commitment to the goals of identity politics—however now maligned a term—that I invoke a category such as “Asian American women” even while acknowledging the insupportability of any naturalized concept of such a constituency, a point I address in the afterword. The tension Sedgwick recognizes, has been otherwise characterized as a divide between postmodern and materialist feminism, a divide that Judith Butler interrogates. In questioning the distinction between subjectivity and the body, she notes that discourse produces and regulates the very intelligibility and materiality of the body (Butler 1993). It is thus necessary to both invoke the Asian female subject and to uncover the discursive conditions of her speech and identity. The activist potential in “universalizing” or poststructuralist models of interpretation must be weighed against the “minoritizing” necessity of speaking about “real” women, about active subjects both determined by and capable of refiguring oppressive social structures.

My emphasis on rhetoric arises from this dual imperative. Following Foucault’s concept of the enabling, yet disciplining power of discourse to construct our notions of truth, of the material, I analyze the language and tropes in Asian American literature that construct as well as reflect the specific political realities of, for example, the emerging Cold War, domestic multiculturalism, human rights under globalization. These linguistic interventions are particularly American productions that are instrumentally informed by their authors’ position as Asian and American women. Nonetheless, the world in which these textual productions circulate is itself a rhetorically produced field, a point that bears critical scrutiny as this field governs literature’s reception, context, and persuasive appeal; as Foucault notes, “[I]n any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (Foucault 1980, 93). Most of the works addressed in these chapters have an implicit but more often explicit activist intent and investment. In analyzing this investment, I try to avoid presuming, as Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol caution, “a reality that exists independent of representation . . . wherein resistance remains the uninterrogated site of the real,” a point I return to in the afterword (Hesford and Kozol, forthcoming).

It is precisely this postmodern recognition of the discursivity of the material that theorists have found potentially liberating. Recent modes of theorizing race and gender delink identity from biological determinism and humanist notions of the subject. The very concept of “minority-hood,” Immanuel Wallerstein notes, is not necessarily numerically based on population but refers to degrees of social power (Wallerstein 1995, 83). Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s discussion of race as “a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference” (Gates, 1986, 5) complements what sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant posit as the process of racial formation or the ways in which “widely disparate circumstances of individual and group racial identities, and of the racial institutions and social practices with which these identities are intertwined, are formed and transformed over time” (Omi and Winant 1986, 69). In a similar vein, anthropologist Michael Fischer positions ethnicity as “something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual . . . not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation” (Fischer, 1986, 195). The “postessentialist” shift in theorizing race also foregrounds the subject’s political orientation over identity, a shift reflected in, for example, bell hooks’s distinction between “being” a feminist and advocating feminism: academics no longer speak of identities but of identifications (hooks 1989, 182). These postmodern theories of subjectivity open a space for challenging naturalized conceptions of identity. My emphasis on the trope of betrayal takes this shift as its point of departure, but it is also intended as a caution against downplaying the consequences of claiming multiple positionalities, shifting affiliations.

In theorizing identity away from biological inevitability, these changes emphasize the historical production of categories of difference and so stress the subject’s agency in reforming and reconfiguring those categories: W. E. B. Du Bois’s characterization of race as “two souls warring in one dark body” is rewritten from debilitating internal conflict to a potentially radical site for social revision. In “straddling the walls between abysses” or mediating allegiances to groups that characterize the facets of her identity as a lesbian Chicana writer, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa asserts, “Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me” (Anzaldúa 1983, 205). Trinh Minh-ha echoes Anzaldúa’s concept of “the borderlands” as a subversive positionality:

Since the self, like the work you produce, is not so much a core as a process, one finds oneself, in the context of cultural hybridity, always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not. When am I Vietnamese? When am I American? When am I Asian and when am I Asian-American or Asian-European? Which language should I speak, which is closest to myself, and when is that language more adequate than another? By working

on one's limits, one has the potential to modify them. Fragmentation is therefore a way of living at the borders. (Cited in interview with Pratibha Parmar, "Woman, Native Other," *Feminist Review* 36 [Autumn, 1990]: 72)

"Living at the borders," like metaphors of travel, migrancy, or the floating world, exemplifies the theoretical shift toward conceptualizing identity as fluid, shifting, continually negotiated and contextualized. In stressing the division between biology and cultural construction in the formation of an empowering Black consciousness Stuart Hall thus writes, "[I]t is not because of their skins, that they are Black in their heads" (Hall 1991, 20). The relationship among identity, performativity, and discursivity has also figured prominently in feminist theory, emphasizing, to paraphrase Hall, that is not because of their bodies that they are women in their heads.

What *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion* stresses, however, is that for subjects marked by race, gender, and nationality, negotiating what Maxine Hong Kingston's narrator in *The Woman Warrior* calls "boundaries not delineated in space" is potentially more fraught than these modes of theorizing difference imply. As Anzaldúa recognizes, "to live in the Borderlands" is to recuperate the self's fragmentation, but it is also a space of surveillance and violence (Anzaldúa 1987). While postmodern theories of marginalized identity seek to allow for the subject's intervention in potentially determining constructions of race and gender, they can also imply that identity formation takes place in a value-free space; more attention is devoted to furthering the concept that one can "shuttle between identities" than to analyzing how one goes about it or what it means to make that attempt. Thus, my interest lies in how, despite the demystification of socially constructed categories, the subject's struggle for self-definition is yet contained within ideological structures; in the theoretical emphasis on employing without avowing difference, discussions about how the subject negotiates contradictory positionings are often elided. In regard to Asian American women, what can become erased is the specificity of the intersection between gender and race, how it is often figured as the competition between collective alliances. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s comment, "Ethnic and national identities operate in the lives of individuals by connecting them with some people, dividing them from others," downplays the conflictual nature of that process of connection and division (Gates and Appiah 1992, 627). They mildly observe, "[I]mportant events occur in the landscape of identity when race and gender compete for and combine in a single body" (628). These "important events" bear greater consequences for those who embody the site of competition, Asian American women and other women of color.

Negotiating “Boundaries Not Delineated in Space”

For Asian American women as for other women of color, one upshot of multiple subject positioning is the often competitive relationship between feminism and cultural nationalism. The “either-or” view that one’s primary identity must be based either in peoplehood or in sisterhood sets up a mutually antagonistic opposition. As Trinh Minh-ha writes, it is “convincing to reject feminism as a whitewashed notion and a betrayal of roots values, or vice versa, to consider the promotion of ethnic identity treacherous to that of female identity or feminism” (Trinh 1989, 106). For many women at the beginning of the women’s movement, ethnic identification was not only seen as exclusive of feminism, but in competition with it and a matter of setting priorities: “Essentially,” stated one Asian American woman interviewed for a study on Asian American feminism, “I think I’m more Asian American than feminist” (cited in Cheng 1984, 11). Katheryn Fong reported on this either-or figuration during a 1974 conference on women in which an Asian American woman pronounced, “If I am forced to choose to fight against racism or sexism, my first battle must be to fight racism” (cited in K. Fong 1978, n.p.). The chorus of boos that this statement sustained from the feminist audience convinced Fong that “the priorities of the ‘women’s movement’ were not my priorities.” For other women of color confronted with the opposition between cultural nationalism and feminism, the choice to prioritize the struggle against racism is clear. During the crisis at the second Wounded Knee, the question of sexism seemed trivial to Lakota activist Mary Crow Dog:

At one time a white volunteer nurse berated us for doing the slave work while the men got all the glory. We were betraying the cause of womankind, was the way she put it. We told her that her kind of women’s lib was a white, middle-class thing, and that at this critical stage we had other priorities. Once our men had gotten their rights and their balls back, we might start arguing with them about who should do the dishes. But not before. (Crow Dog 1990, 131)

The absence or presence of “our men’s balls” is often positioned as a crucial determiner of a women of color’s feminist activism. In her research on the development of Chicana feminism, Alma M. Garcia writes, “[M]any Chicano males were convinced that Chicana feminism was a divisive ideology incompatible with Chicano cultural nationalism” (Garcia 1990, 424). And in her discussion on the emergence of Chinese American women’s social activism, Judy Yung notes that while the Chinese American newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* supported progressive gender reforms in China, it questioned the suffrage movement in the United States

and white women's voting rights when Chinese men denied naturalization were thus denied the right to vote (Yung 1990, 201). Feminism is often portrayed as irreconcilable to cultural nationalism through its association with the dominant culture: "When I first became a feminist," Michele Wallace writes, "my Black friends used to cast pitying eyes upon me and say, 'That's whitey's thing'" (Wallace 1982, 10). Marta Cotera notes that for Chicanas expressing feminism is sometimes taken as evidence of assimilating to the ideology of an "alien" culture that "actively seeks our cultural domination" (cited in Garcia 1990, 424).

The association between assimilation and feminism in the domestic context mirrors attempts to discredit feminism as a Western import in postcolonial nationalist movements where women's issues are represented as diluting anti-imperialist interests.¹⁷ This competitive construction is highlighted in the work of international feminist scholars who note that nationalist movements' appeal to indigenous traditions often sets women up as either custodians of cultural authenticity or as most vulnerable to corruption by foreign influences.¹⁸ As Geraldine Heng points out, this conflictual relationship is often tied to an ambivalence about modernization in the developing world:

The ease with which, historically, the 'modern' and the 'Western' have been conflated and offered as synonymous, interchangeable counters in both nationalist and Orientalist discourse have meant that a nationalists' accusation of modern and /or foreign—that is to say, Western—provenance or influence, when directed at a social movement, has been sufficient for the movement's delegitimization. (Heng 1997, 33)

These representations of feminism as a foreign ideology link internal ethnic dynamics in the United States to international dynamics of Third World nation formation, ethnic cultural nationalism to nationalism.¹⁹ The subordination of feminist to cultural nationalist or nationalist concerns reflects the belief that promoting group interests is predicated on competition; more specifically, as Peterson notes, patriarchal control of women as social reproducers of group identifications often precludes "women's identification with *women* as a group in favor of their identification with the (territorial, class, ethnic, race) group of which they are a member and which is based on male-defined needs" (Peterson 1995, 6). One issue within feminist analysis then becomes how to locate gender among other numerous and competing affiliations, whether to situate women's alliances with one another as merely another collective identity open to them or whether in fact gender difference can itself be read as a means of producing, solidifying, or transforming territorial, class, ethnic, or racial allegiances. Following my discussion of recent Americanist scholarship, I argue that it is the latter that poses a significant frame for

reading Asian American women's literature, particularly in light of the fact that, as Third World feminists have noted, women are made to serve as boundary markers among ethnic, national, and religious collectives (Kandyoti 1994).

This dynamic underlies Elaine Kim's analysis of the antagonisms between Asian American and feminist concerns. Kim links such antagonisms to increased autonomy and opportunities for Asian American women created by social upheavals upon immigration:

Contemporary Asian American discourse reflects tensions between nationalist and feminist concerns that are rooted in Asian American social realities. At times, what has been detrimental to men in the ethnopolitical territory they have defined has been of comparative benefit to the women. (E. Kim 1990, 73).

Kim notes that this increase in women's opportunities did not have a reciprocal effect on men: "Relative and limited increases in options for Asian women in American society have been made possible largely because Asian patriarchy was pushed aside or subsumed by an American patriarchy that did not, because of racism, extend its promise to Asian American men" (75). Kim's statement points to an important, if controversial, interaction between sexism and racism. While Asians often suffered class demotion due to the effects of racism in this country, Asian women benefited by the diminishment of traditional Asian patriarchal authority. This implies that the gender position of Asian women improved upon immigration as a direct result of disruption to the social fabric of the family—women's working outside the home, for example—if improvement is measured by the standard of increased autonomy. Kim's analysis dovetails with potentially conflictual relationships between feminism and nationalism in Asian postcolonial contexts where feminism—at least when expressed in terms of women's rights or as an increase in women's involvement in the public sphere—is equated with Westernization.

Part of the backlash to this sociohistorical reality, Kim suggests, is that the recovery of masculine authority comes at the expense of women: "Deprived of the rewards of patriarchal legitimacy, some Asian men have responded by attempting to reassert male authority over the cultural domain and over women by subordinating feminism to nationalist concerns." This masculine reassertion has been most publicly fostered by Chinese American writer Frank Chin, whose work draws a connection between assimilation and feminism in order to characterize Asian American women as racial traitors, as "Jade Snow Wong Pocahontas yellow." Such sentiments expressed over the course of twenty years are well known to Asian American scholars and writers, perhaps giving immoderate notoriety to Chin's manifesto-type pronouncements over his other

creative work. Paralleling debates in African American literature over feminist representations of black men, Chin charges that Kingston and other Chinese American writers have sold out to white feminism by falsifying Chinese history in order to pander to American publishers who “went crazy for Chinese women dumping on Chinese men.” In Chin’s taxonomy, expressing feminism becomes a bid for honorary whiteness (Chin 1991, 27). As he figures Chinese American cultural pride as the aggressive remasculation of a people rendered metaphorically impotent by racism, sexual domination of white women becomes symbolic of Chinese (male) enfranchisement: “And while your chained dog barked, Joy / A hundred years of Chinamen / In public / Took turns / At a piece of / White ass. // Father’s home” (Chin 1978, 133). The debate over Chinese American representation and authenticity has become central to discussions of Asian American literature to the point of obscuring the complex dynamic that underlies it. I have noted elsewhere that as this debate comes to impact the discipline of Asian American Studies, it complicates feminist critical positioning in the field.²⁰

To emphasize the trope of betrayal as it resonates with the opposition between cultural nationalism and feminism might seem to grant undue weight to a crusade often individualized as Chin’s, and to authorize its terms as a singular framework for debates within Asian American literature. But the underlying tensions—if not the substance and ultimate trajectory—of these attempts to regulate ethnicity are worth scrutiny, perhaps using another lens. As in his insistence on “real” and “fake” Chinese American, basic to Chin’s charge of ethnic feminist betrayal is an effort to establish an essential ethnic identity based on masculinist notions of resistant consciousness determined by simple oppositions—nationalist or assimilationist, Asian-identified or white-identified. This attempt to fix collective allegiance by dictating the terms of community testifies to the belief that coalitional uniformity is a necessary precondition to asserting social power and that this assertion is most appropriately expressed through masculinist rhetoric. Rather than dismiss the constructed antagonism between ethnic and gender loyalties as unadulterated misogyny, this work looks at the ways that oppositional definitions of community produce moments of narrative conflict that expose the very terms of communal belonging. I suggest that accusations of betrayal enable an understanding of the processes by which identifications (and thus identities themselves) emerge through contestation with competing group affiliations.

As Asian American women’s writing comments on these processes, it exposes the socially constructed and politically invested nature of affiliations. Gender, I suggest, offers ready tropes of difference (whether through discourses of maternity, sentimentality or inconstancy, for example) that serve to produce ethnic, racial, or national cohesion but also

enable certain types of activist appeal. For example, how can associations between gender and assimilability enacted within women's literature be read as a meditation on American national enfranchisement? Just as masculinity offered a rhetoric through which racial groups asserted presence and citizenship in the civil rights era, other gendered terms can likewise be deployed to describe specific relationships to the state or to expose the very homosociality that underwrites political group cohesion. As literature by Asian American women shows, such deployments both draw on and exceed representations of women's ethnic or national betrayal.

Asian American literary texts engaged with postcolonial Third World critique and those situated as immigrant literature situate overlapping collective affiliations as significant for understanding the production of identities with and against state interests. For example, how does feminine sexuality come to regulate, mediate, or control racial difference in the U.S.? In *Farewell to Manzanar*, a reflection on Japanese American internment, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston notes, "I knew intuitively that one resource I had to overcome the war-distorted limitations of my race would be my femininity" (Houston and Houston 1973, 117). Her comment reveals the unconscious negotiation of overlapping, often competitive prescriptions of race and gender. Her initial belief that participating in such gender-defined activities as baton twirling and homecoming would inscribe her as American suggests one link in the interaction between race and gender: that the accession to a feminine role colludes with racial acceptability. This conjoining is similarly reflected in Bharati Mukherjee's portrayal of an obnoxious yuppie whose taste for adventure finds expression in his relationship with his Filipina girlfriend. "There's a difference between exotic and foreign," he explains. "Exotic means you know how to use your foreignness, or you make yourself a little foreign in order to appear exotic. Real foreign is a little scary, believe me" (Mukherjee 1988, 81). Feminine sexuality here intercedes in "foreignness" to transform the fearful and unknown into the benign and alluring. The perceived association between gender and assimilability produces this consequence: femininity appears to domesticate racial difference. What, then, does Asian American women's literature confirm or expose about this collusion?

Chapter 2 investigates the ways in which women's commitment to nation comes to be expressed through feminine performativity as signifier of political fidelity. The chapter explores what Lauren Berlant calls the "fantasy of a national democracy . . . based on principles of abstract personhood" and the theoretical implications of racialized and gendered notions of citizenship (Berlant 1997, 18). The fact that likeness is a requisite for civic participation (Lowe 1994) indicates that national inclusion demands an identification with patriarchal nationalism; I argue that gender

role conformity ironically enables this identification. In *Farewell to Manzanar*, for example, hyperfeminine masquerade becomes a means of demonstrating loyalty in a postwar era when “real foreign” was “a little scary.” Similarly, Mukherjee’s first-person essay, “Love Me or Leave Me,” expresses national identification through desire for a sexually potent white woman. In situating women’s place in the nation as simultaneously one of gendered embodiment and racial erasure, the chapter contends that “privatized” issues of sexuality and identification carry national resonance and mark the notion of equal, homogeneous citizenship as a political fiction.

While feminism is often associated with cultural critique in its indictment of the patriarchal status quo, feminist texts do not necessarily counter national narratives in their interaction with racial discourses. Chapter 3 examines two popular Chinese American “feminist” texts that portray American culture as inherently *less* oppressive to women than their ethnic cultures; these narratives implicitly or explicitly link acculturation with increased women’s autonomy. In suggesting that liberal feminist narratives work to normalize ethnic difference by producing intelligible racial subjects, chapter 3 argues that such works consolidate First World/Third World distinctions through the inscription of subjects easily interpolated within the rubric of individual equality. By extolling ideas of women’s opportunity, for example, Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, an autobiography seeking to “contribute in bringing better understanding of the Chinese people so that in the Western world they would be recognized for their achievements,” produces an image of the good Chinese as capitalist entrepreneur that could be exported to Asia during the Cold War. In Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, feminist generational transmission implicitly supports the link between development and American acculturation through ideas of progressive self-betterment for each successive generation of women.

Such narrative plot structures complicate Lowe’s point that “the demand that the immigrant subject ‘develop’ into an identification with the dominant forms of the nation gives rise to *contradictory* articulations that interrupt the demands for identity and identification, that voice *antagonisms* to the universalizing narratives of both pluralism and development and that open Asian American culture as an alternative site to the American economic, political, and national cultural spheres” (Lowe 1996, 29, emphasis mine). The mutually reinforcing interaction between race and gender discourses endemic to certain feminist plot structures does not necessarily articulate antagonism to American ideology but can service national agendas. They suggest, for example, that advocating gender equality supports the need for contained collective oppositionality, a collectivity easily reconciled to a national rhetoric on tolerating or

celebrating individual difference. Multiculturalism is the other side of liberal feminism, both serving to produce, in Lowe's terms, the "simulacrum of inclusiveness" (Lowe 1996, 5).

Texts with an immigrant focus serve to validate First World conceptions about the Third World if they mark the connection between economic liberalism and "privatized" issues of self-fulfillment as a logical and inevitable result of Westernized modernization. Chapters 4 and 5 show that viewing nationalism and ethnicity as collective affiliations similarly contested and substantiated through the rhetoric of gendered loyalty erodes the presumed difference between American and Third World feminist treatments of sexuality—and between Asian American immigrant and Asian postcolonial literature. As theorists of Third World feminism have pointed out, an initial difference between Third and First World feminist treatments of sexuality was that the latter primarily addressed issues of male domination and questions of self-fulfillment or autonomy rather than engaging economic or national politics.²¹ Rather than substantiating or refuting either take on this difference, I suggest that Asian American representations of feminine sexuality invoke gendered discourses such as liberal feminism, maternity, or the psychologizing of women's battering that are familiar to a post-women's movement American readership in order to critique postcolonial Asian politics. These methods of rhetorical appeal characterize Asian American literature's American investment even as it envisions solutions to unresolved political conflicts on a global level.

The rhetoric of exclusion and belonging establishes a parallel between depictions of women's positioning in the patriarchal family and the national collective. Gender represents a potential disenfranchisement from the family as one arena of collective identification, a condition referred to as the "outward tendency in females." As Maxine Hong Kingston's narrator notes, "Females desert families . . . I was getting straight A's for the good of my future husband's family, not my own" (Kingston 1989, 47). "We were in the family but not of it," Su-ling Wong writes about women's place within Confucian tradition (Su-ling Wong 1952, 90). That gender represents a condition of impending "exile" raises questions about women's loyalty to the family collective echoing Virginia Woolf's famous dictum on women's ambivalent allegiance to patriarchal nationalism: "[A]s a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (Woolf 1938, 197). Woolf's assertion of women's transcendent global citizenship counters the obvious ways in which women or other feminine figures have been yoked to the promotion of nationalist imaginaries. Such representations signal women's place in nationalist movements as largely symbolic: women can represent nation but women are often denied the agency *as women* to express nationalist solidarity.

Reflecting the concerns of chapter 2, chapters 4 and 5 thus uncover the dynamics through which women's commitment to nation and political fidelity are measured through sexual alliances. The trope of betrayal thus narrates an individual's relationship to the state as literature exposes how charges of sexual disloyalty serve the purposes of government (or counterinsurgent) control. Engaging Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* in light of its activist agenda, chapter 4 argues that the autobiography relies on a gendered pacifism in order to advocate for United States/Vietnam reconciliation at a strategic moment in which Vietnam becomes open to Western investment. Hayslip's rendering of her experiences in the war zone as a kind of feminine picaresque, a *testimonio* of sexual trauma, resituates her from traitor to nationalist daughter with a healing message. Her advocacy of a gendered neutrality appealing to maternal duty ultimately substantiates her activist agenda centered on humanitarian aid. As a "Third World" commentary, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* is not an indictment of Western neocolonialism; rather, it makes a sentimental plea for increased American involvement in Vietnam's modernization.

Chapter 5 investigates the politicism inherent in the concept of human rights as it is deployed in Wendy Law-Yone's *Irrawaddy Tango* and Fiona Cheong's *The Scent of the Gods*. In representing methods of government repression such as torture, forced confession, and detention without trial, the novels critique the nationalist agendas of Burma and Singapore by appealing to the female body's sovereignty and the sovereignty of the domestic space of the home. Yet the novels depend on the construction of female subjects of state reprisal: as women's sexual transgression is portrayed as nationalist betrayal, the literature links the regulation of women's sexuality to the repression of dissent in the interest of consolidating state power and the submersion of individual rights for the collective good.

These two chapters nuance theories that position Asian American identity as a reflection of U.S. diplomacy in Asia; both engage the inverse dynamic by invoking specifically American discourses such as women's rights as civil rights to intervene in postcolonial politics. These commentaries carry implicit Western agendas even as they advance ideals seemingly transcendent of American national interests. The discussion of the "universal" concept of human rights in chapter 5 highlights literature's appeal to a *transnational* means of governance predicated on the rights of the Enlightenment subject. Similarly, Hayslip's call to action relies on a gendered pacifism marked as a moral obligation to justice that transcends the duties attached to citizenship in spite of the fact that her activism is authorized by her position in the West. Such Asian American texts about Asia constitute not an elision of "America" but an enactment of its values

and precepts, values that authorize a narrative appeal. These American investments do not specify a singular response to the historical conditions in which the texts were produced, namely, the movement toward increasing globalization. The texts discussed in chapters 4 and 5 do not echo warnings from the academic left that see economic globalization as either ungovernable or dictated by the West as a form of neocolonialism. Nor do they uncritically or explicitly advocate for participation in a world economy. Rather, these texts imply that Asian American literature engages global economic shifts through representations of postcolonial history without deflating the heterogeneity or specific immediacy of those responses.

Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion suggests a means of bridging the apparent divide between immigrant and transnational disciplinary paradigms. For example, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* could be said to exemplify models of acculturation associated with the first wave of Asian immigrants to the United States. As I discuss in chapter 3, Jade Snow's entrepreneurial method of "claiming America" had implications beyond a domestic context in an era of political uncertainty and economic expansion, a point fully appreciated by the U.S. State Department. Wong's values were deliberately exported to Asia by the State Department to inaugurate the conditions necessary for a developing world sympathetic to American capitalism. In this mission, gender is not merely a rhetorical afterthought but structures Wong's means of persuading her American (and later, Asian) readers that change does not involve loss, that business opportunities are unfettered by minority status. To mark a literature as internationalist, transnational, or diasporic as opposed to immigrant or "multicultural" does not speak to how literary texts are situated within the ideological tension between Neo-Marxist critiques of global capital and validations of liberalism and free market exchange that underwrite its transnational flow. The investment, then, should lie not in boundary marking but in developing dialectical readings that expose ideological continuities between national sites.

The goal of my textual inquiry is not to replay what Amy Tan calls "the tired and presbyopic, bifocal lens of two themes: immigration and assimilation,"²² but neither is it to dismiss a continually compelling lens in deference to current transnational paradigms. Rather, I want to emphasize the mutual dependency of discourses that draw a connection between Asian immigrant writing engaging gendered rhetoric and American literature on Asia that employs that same rhetoric as a tool of political persuasion. Foregrounding the dynamic between alliance and identity, this book looks at the ways in which Asian American women figure, mediate, and contest the articulation of ethnic, gender, and national affiliation in terms of competition. This focus renders ambivalent the assertion

of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*: "For every gesture of loyalty there doesn't have to be a betrayal" (Mukherjee 1989, 201). To explore depictions of loyalty and betrayal as part of literature's commitment to social justice and change, this study thus theorizes the complex negotiation between feminine accommodation and feminist resistance to question any naturalized connection between oppositionality and marginality and to look at the ideological constructs that govern women's alliances.

The project is not intended to develop a canon of literature by Asian American women (even one that could be "separate but [and] equal")²³ although there are clear disciplinary stakes for doing so. Such a project would seem merely to enforce what Robyn Wiegman calls "a methodological propulsion toward increasingly territorialized interpretations of social and subjective being" (Wiegman 1995, 130) or what Gayatri Spivak terms "identitarianism," the ways in which "ethnicist academic agendas make a fetish of identity" (Spivak 1993, 63). As Fredric Jameson notes, "One cannot acknowledge the justice of the general poststructuralist assault on the so-called 'centered subject,' the old unified ego of bourgeois individualism, and then resuscitate this same ideological mirage of psychic unification on the collective level in the form of a doctrine of collective identity" (Jameson 1986, 78). Rather, in positing commonalities around one trope in particular, that of betrayal, my intent is to locate Asian American women's literature as a site where questions can be posed about the gendered relationship of the individual to the state, about the status of the subject defined by group affiliation, and about the exclusions that produce national unity. *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion* gives most extended treatment to texts produced by Japanese, South Asian, and Chinese American women in its domestic focus, and to Vietnamese, Burmese, and Singaporean American women in its postcolonial focus. In spite of this book's subtitle, "Asian American Women's Literature," I cannot hope to approach representativeness; but this is not, in effect, my goal. This study is self-consciously concerned with the ways in which unity is itself a mirage that can be solidified or reconstituted around imaginary lines of affiliation—and the ways in which women are made to suffer the fallout of such actions.

Accusations of ethnic or national betrayal are intended to contest authenticity or commitment; by exposing the tenuousness of racial, ethnic, or national belonging, such accusations signal the politically invested interests in which affiliations are formed and consolidated. These interests often remain invisible until one transgresses "boundaries not delineated in space." Gender is central to this process as it becomes positioned as a difference that secures group cohesion. Such a positioning can certainly come at the expense of women, as my discussion of Ono's and Toguri's "infidelity" reveals, but in exposing what remains veiled, the charge of

betrayal can also betray normalizing processes of power. This book investigates the political uses of categories of identity as they are exposed in juxtaposition with other such categories in order to ask, “What relations do multiple affiliations create, and what are the stakes for individuals compelled to negotiate conflicts between them?” The following chapter explores these complex interactions between race and gender inscription in literature that portrays feminine sexuality as the resolution to a crisis of national citizenship.