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## Asian-American Visibility: Movement Toward Authenticity and Exposing the White Gaze

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Asian-American Visibility: Movement Toward Authenticity and Exposing the White Gaze

By

Nora Tsou

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Humanities and Cultural Studies.

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## Abstract

Asian-Americans have a historical legacy and a multiplicity of narratives that are often rendered absent in American culture. Our oppression is not commonly spoken about, but it is relevant. By decentering Eurocentric thought as the only valid philosophy, herein this study I perform Asian-American philosophy through an analysis of philosophical and sociological texts on race. I continuously echo George Yancy and Gloria Anzaldua, philosophers of race, respectively, on the African-American and Latin-American experience, for their philosophy has greatly lead me to understanding my own. In order to conceptualize what oppressive struggles Asian-Americans face, I delve into research that exposes these struggles and the oppositional powers, especially the White gaze. I use my lived experience and meta-poetic prose to illustrate the complexity of my racialized being. This essay contemplates what it means for Asian-Americans to find a spatiotemporal place we can call an authentic home, doing so by addressing what it means to acquire a voice and by exposing the stereotyped constructions we are veiled under. This is a work of hope that the world can move away from structures of oppression. This is the beginning to my philosophical endeavor as an Asian-American woman to stir up trouble and challenge the status quo.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Davis, my faculty reader, who ensured my work would be brought to fruition. Through his patience and his encouragement, he helped guide me through the process of writing and revision. He has an eye for philosophical nuance, as well as a conviction to teach his students to see this world as what it truly is and what it truly could be. I would like to thank Dr. Bahler, a professor I had at the University of Pittsburgh, who took seriously the position and performance of a White ally. His teaching was my first introduction to philosophy of race and my first introduction to what it means to be a courageous philosopher. I would like to send thanks and love to my grandparents, Nai-Nai and Yeh-Yeh, for this paper is dedicated to them and their legacy as Chinese immigrants. Through my heritage and through the process of meeting philosophical voices along the way, this paper was possible.

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## **Preface**

Inside this work is an on-going contemplative process of what it means to be raced, or Asian-American, or woman, or constructed, or oppressed in America. Although this work does not encompass each name in its entirety, I hope that it may speak to each group, some truth that can bring one to an awakened space. Other than what is set in stone, this is a molding of words and hope, a love for wisdom and a strong desire to understand this world. As we enter farther into post-modernity, this philosophy pushes for an up-rooting and a re-interpreting of Eurocentric thought. It centers people of color and their philosophical tradition.

My encounter with philosophy was soul-touching and captivating, for it resided in me deeply, and drew me into its study like no other worldly thing had done before. On the path of philosophy, how undefined that may be, I was three years into my philosophical studies at the University of Pittsburgh when I took a Religion and Rationality course in which Dr. Bahler opened up a dialogue about race. And similar to how the first introduction of philosophy had struck a chord in me, this too struck the same chord of passion and responsibility. I engaged in the dialogue, my own reflection, and learned about a philosophical tradition previously unknown to me before. To this day, I carry on those studies. I heard Dr. Yancy speak at a symposium on the “Logic of Racism” where I witnessed his philosophy firsthand. I began to study his theories about the Black experience, the White gaze, and the suspense of self and knowledge in order to approach and rightfully see the other. As Yancy defines philosophy, I follow, with high regard, in his footsteps.

I have come to think of philosophy as asking of us nothing less than to face both who we are and the world with as much honesty as we can manage, to grieve that world and to

grieve our own mistakes within that world, and, yet, to be moved and transformed by the love of wisdom and the wisdom of love (Yancy, *Christology and Whiteness* 7).

The summer following, I took a California Ethnic Literature course at Sonoma State where I was introduced to Gloria Anzaldua, a Latina philosopher who sought voice and validity with her border tongue.<sup>1</sup> She argued that we must move away from dualistic, combative thinking, and enter a new, Mestiza consciousness (Anzaldua 100). To limit our way of being, as a reaction to the oppressor, is to never rise out of oppression and expand our thought about the world. A new consciousness is birthed out of oppressive pain, but it leads us to a reinterpretation of history and toward a new imagination (Anzaldua 104).

As I studied these philosophers, I felt as if my lived experience shared commonality with theirs, yet it was and is different, altered, and un-conflatable for good reason. Yancy and Anzaldua spoke, respectively, of the Black and Brown experience, but not of the Yellow experience. As Asian-American philosopher Emily S. Lee stated in conversation with Yancy, “I don’t know what is the shared experience, in that I do not think it is just feelings of alienation or marginalization. I hope it is more a sense of knowing there is more than the prevailing structures of existence and knowledge” (Lee). Lee finds a commonality among people of color that relates to their epistemology and lived experience in the world. To carry on traditional people of color

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<sup>1</sup> Border tongue: The tongue is birthed out of two or more cultures or identities, using the languages of those cultures to express an authenticity. “A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves...” (Anzaldua 77). “Ethnic identity is skin to my linguistic identity—I am my language” (Anzaldua 81). French Philosopher Helene Cixous also refers to a tongue’s border: “Languages pass into my tongue, understand one another, call to one another, touch and alter one another, tenderly, timidly, sensually” (Cixous 21-22).

ways of knowing, I enter the conversation to listen and to contribute; I stand on the side of history that fights not to be forgotten, and still to be heard.

Throughout this essay, I return to my lived experience, my empirical on-going memory of this world and the perceptions that follow, as a place of validity from which to speak. At times I am poetic, without being a poet, and I search for words, within being lost, as a way to make sense of my experience. I am outside and within the borderlands of this racial dialogue.<sup>2</sup> The borderland I reside in situates me with access to more than one domain of consciousness, more than one sight and way of being in the world.

I seek to contemplate the Yellow experience instead of define it, as its meaning is still emerging in my consciousness. Not only do I voice the Asian-American experience, but also I am the voice of her. She who is raced or oppressed and fighting for agency and personhood. She who is sister, me and not me, she who has yet to speak or to see, she does so through me here. As a marginalized woman of color, I have not had the same authority to speak as do White men in Eurocentric patriarchies. Before they speak, their voice is suspended with a social power that my voice does not have. Before we can join in conversation about the Beautiful with Plato, there are steps that must be taken to fight for a personhood and a position. Thus, my philosophical work cannot ignore or erase race, when in front of me stands a question about a person and her deprived personhood. I stand in solidarity with the causes and traditions of Yancy and Anzaldua. I speak as an act of responsibility to the self and to those within the same struggle. If freedom is

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<sup>2</sup> Borderland: This ambiguous space is the result of a meeting and a clashing of two or more cultures. The border reconfigures the land and reconfigures the psyche. “And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture...A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldua 25).

near or far, it is the hope and love in us that must strive for that freedom, indifferent of distance and obstacle.

## **Introduction**

The thinker must think for truth, not for fame.

—Du Bois

I did not foresee my arrival to this place I have yet to name. Within this vicinity of no name, I sense a belonging and a pressure that lifts me up and asks for great responsibility. I go under the question and up above it, but have yet to be right within the core of question. Perhaps not being in the question allows me to catch glimpse of it, to live beside it, to question it. What struggles do Asian-Americans face and how shall we overcome?

I am an Asian-American that has never considered herself Asian-American, but has no other name to call herself. I have no present space, no readily available ancestral home, as an Asian-American I am always outside of my identity. I knows myself through what I am not, and never claim who I am or who I ought to be. In my identity diaspora, I want my Asian-hood, but finds myself passing into alterity.

To hold onto and let go of identity in one same motion, moving within contradiction and not wanting a way out, I watch as my identity is transfigured by persons outside of my body. I watch as layers of history and culture press me down and tell me to stay. They call it power, power to press and oppress. I call it power to liberate, to remove the constructs as if the weight

could no longer tug at the feet, as if we could question what weight is, without being weighed down.

I could not come across one story that fit all Asian-Americans, rather I found the ways in which Asian-Americans are still coming to a racial understanding of themselves in the context of America. Feng writes that:

...the destabilization of Chinese American identity not only allows for, but actually contributes to, the construction of Asian American subjectivity. This can only be accomplished by focusing on process rather than end result, on the act of 'becoming' rather than the state of 'being' (Feng 186).

Rather than a firm and set being in the world, instead there is a process of becoming self and becoming authentic. In a process of becoming, there is a space and an emptiness that one can enter, so emerges a multiplicities of narratives that represent the Asian-American experience. One experience that I myself have encountered, and seen exhibited by others, is the phenomenon of the Latinized Asian. Insofar of the limited cultural understanding of Asian-Americans, the Asian goes outside of her race and into another, in order to feel at home and see her experience represented in a community. The Asian-American rhetoric is not fixed, but moving toward an understanding of ethnic self-hood. Its movement, in turn, moves the rhetoric about race in America, creating anxiety and disrupting the standing paradigm.

It is with best intention that I enter the place with no name to disrupt any commitment to preserve the systemic White supremacy in America. I speak in solidarity with women and people

of color in hope to expand a rhetoric about race. Oppressed people are always under a veil<sup>3</sup> and imposed upon them are ontological assumptions of our being. We are never fully seen, for we become extensions of the imagination of a White mind. The Eurocentric colonized thought, attempts to colonize the mind of people of color so that we remain forever veiled. To decolonize the mind<sup>4</sup> is to remove power as the highest act of the will, understanding that oppressive power opposes love. To write out of love and to undergo love in order to write is a responsibility, if I am to say anything true.

### **Acquisition of the I**

The oppressed has the hope pressed out of them, the miseducation<sup>5</sup> reinforced. When one does not question the system, one does not learn to reveal the depths of her own oppression.

Who was going to listen? Who was I? A woman, an Asian woman, a raced woman, a woman.

Resilient in nature, but constructed as weaker, passive, silent. I opened my mouth and only felt

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<sup>3</sup> Veil: The veil is a metaphor created by W. E. B. Du Bois to describe how Black people experience the world. “Leaving, then, the world of the White man, I have stepped within the Veil...” (Du Bois 3). “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (Du Bois 8). Yancy understands Du Bois’ veil as “Whether interpreted as symbolic of systemic racism/structural segregation or as that which ‘indicates, rhetorically, a knowledge of difference that is itself discursively based,’ the veil is fundamentally linked to the hegemonic performances of whiteness, performances that can lead to deep societal fissures or to profound levels of existential phenomenological fracture” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 85-86).

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks talks about a process of decolonization of the the mind in order to become whole. “Decolonization is a centering process” People of color decolonize their mind from a hegemonic Eurocentric thought in order to find the self; it shifts racial, gender and class identity (hooks, “Moving from Pain” 1:04:35).

<sup>5</sup> I am alluding to the book *The Mis-Education of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson and the album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* by Lauryn Hill. This term speaks to the white-washed miseducation we are taught from grammar school and onward, that passes off slavery and the oppression of people of color in America as a means to “our” progress. It speaks to the miseducation we receive in the media and the news that criminalizes people of color. It speaks to the miseducation people of color are taught through Eurocentric thought.

the butterflies in my gut. With history hanging over me, it tried to reach inside of me, ordered me to be subservient and scolded me for questioning the status quo.

Given a racial name and a role, we were told not to look for more. If we accepted things how they were, disruption would not occur and peace would be kept. Alas, a false peace, predicated on a deep despair that coursed through the blood of many generations oppressed by the vision of another, like a manifest destiny or a let's make America great again. A peace peeled back was nothing over than a deep set denial of the many people hurting under a system of "imperialist, White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" (hooks, "A Public Dialogue" 14:03).

I rise to say what matters, but before I speak, the other has layered me with biases that veil me from being heard or seen. I become covered and altered, for their perception of me overrules what I have yet to say. What I have yet to say is misconfigured and muffled. My intention, my purpose is no longer clear nor mine, it is projected onto me from another's mind as he sees my intention—before listening. Regardless whether it is an overt or implicit intention to misinterpret me, the miseducation and circulating language around "who raced woman are" has been perpetuating long before my birth.

How shall my disguised personhood, my voice veiled, speak honestly in a place yet to name, in a room with no listeners? But I must. Like the saying goes, *closed mouths do not get fed*. I must speak, even if it sounds timid like a leaf hitting the concrete. If it is quiet, it is there, it is disruption. Toes in the water first, then the torso. Then the ripple, the noise, the disruption.

A voice becomes a voice when it is listened to by another. That other could be the same self, re-absorbing and taking seriously the message that stands, taking it in compassionately and in its full value. But the self longs to be heard by the other. She wants welcome and acknowledgement, understanding and dialogue. To speak is to acquire the I. To listen is to accept

the other. We need both to acquire understanding. Acquiring the “I” needs the other; I am one “I” when you see me as one “you.” But as long as the Asian woman is a construction, she is not seen as a wholesome “you.” She is seen as “an Asian,” a “girl,” referred to her as a “she” and without further name.

When a voice is silenced, her personhood is masked and dusted, she fades out of memory. With no memory of her voice, her testimony, her witness, she is almost not there, but she was! She cried in streams and echoes and the people heard, but did not listen. Listen, to take those words as one’s own thought, as a lived thought, as reality. Listened to in its seriousness, taken as authentic and raw, vulnerable and without veil, the voice is acquired.

Without the I, one is coupled and grouped. She is in the monochromatic crew of people, constricted, each marching alike, each in melody with the other. She has no self autonomy, no self sovereignty, she is in the herd of the oppressed. Never does she walk without the group in her shadow, she walks for all. And for this, she is all, all is she, sheep disposable to the herder.

The space she lives in shrinks her down and minimizes her being, her potential. She moves and it contracts. Her expansiveness is limited without the I to expand into. What can she question if first not her I? Hence, she must need the I in order to inquire further into life. “...and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another” (Du bois 12).

It is first described as lived experience, as narrative and story. To say, this is the life I have faced and the life that has gone through me. This is empirical, lived, memory, weight. We are reflective beings. We think and we think about thinking. Our memories circulate. This is my being. We have faced an oppression we wish not on those still alive and not on future generations. We can change our constructions. We can imagine things beautiful. We have a love

for this world that is rooted in laughter and tears, you must listen. The harm is not permanent and the great is attainable. Even if muffled, the voice will disrupt the veil. There is some I underneath.

The process is not a walk, it is a fight. The one without voice battles the internalization of a colonized mind. She battles her counterparts that have yet to question the herd. The dominant system of power grants her no room to up rise, but she must surge forth. She has welled long enough, without so many words and no voice to speak from, she was welled to the point of her own rupture and she empties an authenticity.

### **Asian-American & Multiracial Asian-Americans**

I know my Chinese name, so I say it: Tsou. Tsou, like /so/, and sometimes voiced like /zo/. But you can hear the /t/, like tss, tssou, can you? There is no English word that parallels the almost silent /t/. My name needs explanation, clarification. Its spelling is un-pronounceable and un-manageable. It reveals, my heritage. My un-locatable face, not known, is closed in on. I stand marked and situated in otherness. Had my name been my Irish mother's maiden name, how differently I might see myself. It reveals, the power of language, for my biology is not altered, and yet my last name guides me toward the mirror, toward identity.

My name is a dignified emboldened crest, a passage to claim my Asian-hood. I see my name, and you will come to know me through it too. Tsou. A home word, a place from which I emerged. I leaned, I embraced, I did not know, I took hold of my Asian-hood. Never considered White by those who were, hence I was not considered half of my heritage. On paper I am Asian, but in person, am I Asian enough? I am almost always assumed to be Mexican or Latina, before I

am considered Filipina or Pacific Islander, before I reveal I am Chinese. I am ambiguous, not here not there, outside and yet stationed, standing, holding, somewhere.

The person without a written name is not remembered for long. The person needs name, longs for name, stretches to the horizons in search for what is home. Name to return, name to begin, name to liberate, name to grow out of.

The name creates a space from which to speak, so let me begin.

The term Asian-American birthed from the necessity of needing a name, a space and a voice in America. In order to participate in political American dialogue and the internal layers of culture, Asians desired to step into the arena with name. At the time I was born in 1997, the term Asian-American was already circulating, thus it was “externally imposed” onto me (Feng 190). Rather than creating name, I was told what my name should be, similar to the name one is given by their parents at birth. There is always a weight and a history that goes along with name. We may not know any greater power than that of language, a language that names and gives meaning.

The term Asian-American with its hyphenation illustrates the conjoining of two separate entities; each word on its own is insufficient to describe the reality of the Asian living in America. “To claim a hyphenate identity is to assert a subject position while simultaneously asserting the impossibility of stable positioning” (Feng 190). The hyphen, a metaphorical gap, bridges and also distances the two Asian and American (Feng 190). The gap, as it were, an absence, tells us of a space of incompleteness. The two spaces cannot be fused and morphed into one, but they can press on each other and stand in relation.

Feng recognizes a collective sentiment of the lack of identification and a dissatisfaction with the term Asian-American, yet it was used nonetheless as a place from which to begin (Feng

187). “Asian-American” conflates the different ethnic groups within the Asian community and their intra-group relations (LaBlance et al. 255). Asian people of different cultures, skin tones, languages, socio-economic levels, American born or immigrant, first generation or several generations in, residing on the West Coast, in the South or other locations, do not have the same lived experience. We may individually have Asian countries of ancestral origin, but may know little about that place and feel displaced from that ancestral context.

The word Asian and the word American each carry a tradition and history that holds much distance from each other. For the term to merge into new historical context, the joining of the two histories asks us what is combined and what must shift or be erased. However, it may be peculiar desire a racial name for the under-lying knowledge that race is constructed (Ho 11). Thus, we speak in imaginative terms and continuously re-inscribe the imaginative construct in order to describe a reality—a reality that was in part a result from language about race. Race as construct did not need to happen and could have been otherwise in another possible world.<sup>6</sup>

In the process of naming self and finding home within a name, Asian-Americans still search for that belonging. “The presence/absence of the hyphen underscores the need to stabilize momentarily a position from which to speak and to destabilize that position immediately” (Feng 191). Although we know the term does not gather in it our reality, we are compelled to use it in order to speak from an identity and form a community. Nonetheless, we are aware of its need for critique and evolution. “It is premature to celebrate the identification of process, for such celebration itself halts that process” (Feng 190). Instead of clinging to the term as fixed and

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<sup>6</sup> Best possible worlds: David Lewis is a concrete modal realist that posits the existence of other possible worlds as concrete entities. These possible worlds allow us to evaluate modal claims, such as counterfactuals (Menzel). Therefore, there could be another possible world where race is not a social construct. We can postulate what existence would be like in that world without race as a construct.

stagnant, Asian-Americans allow the term space to change in interpretation and meaning. For we may move away from it, as language and its word genealogy has stood testimony to this type of evolution. Instead of being Asian-American, we are using that word as root and becoming what is not yet named. Our evolution travels into what is unknown, for our very experience of this world has not yet been lived and our language must support that new experience.

### ***Multiracial Asian-Americans***

Within the Asian-American community exists the smaller community of multiracial Asian-Americans. As a multiracial Asian-American, one may be multiple Asian ethnicities, or one or more Asian ethnicities and one or more ethnicities exterior to the Asian population. As the Asian people are a minority in American, so the multiracial Asian is a marginalized subset of the already minority Asian-American group. Because multiracial Asians can come from many backgrounds, there is no one face or one look that can truly represent a multiracial Asian person (Nishime “Mixed race” 150). Thus, it is difficult for the multiracial person to feel reflected in family, popular culture or in the academic classroom. In my family, my maternal side and parental side come from different heritages. Thus, I do not look like my Chinese side or my Irish side, for I am a mixture of both ethnicities. In American culture, I may see parts of my multiracial identity represented in only mono-racial ways. Hence I never see myself, my full multiracial experience, represented and mirrored before my eyes.

The hybrid multiracial Asian, a person of two heritages, is placed in a binary paradigm. The hybrid identity is a “life of personal conflict...Discord was related to possessing dual heritages of highly dissimilar social statuses” (Smith and Maton 98). The possible geographical and culture distance between two ethnicities creates a tension, if not a combat, and reinforces dualistic thinking. While polarized thought pushes one to value this over the other, it is only

through the discomfort of cognitive dissonance that can hold contradiction and come to an understanding of the self.

I myself am Chinese and Irish and find this dynamic to be made of questions that take a lifetime. I am half first generation, for I have one parent that is an immigrant and systemically oppressed, while I have another parent that is privileged in the context of race (but also oppressed in the context of gender). Yet, throughout my life, I was never considered White by my White peers. I was in Kindergarten when two classmates used their fingers to slant their eyes and asked if I used chopsticks. I started to cry, and perhaps realized I was not the same as them and would never be so.<sup>7</sup> I grew up as not just a friend, but as the token Asian friend, always marked and labeled. I was told that I looked adopted, that my White mother and I looked nothing alike. Because she is a White woman, but I look Hispanic or ambiguous, there are complex ways in which she has and does perform as a White woman raising a colored/raced child. I live a raced life, where she, my mother, does not. I find this is not solely based on how we look, but the difference between how we process and understand the world.

My ethnic hybridity was a result of interracial marriage. Interracial marriage has been a question of law in America. Before 1967, there were anti-miscegenation laws<sup>8</sup> in practice in several states (Frederick). During the Japanese internment camps in America, there came into law a mixed marriage policy of 1942 (Ho 23). Japanese women could escape interment if they

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<sup>7</sup>Yancy speaks about a process in which the Black body is returned to the Black self as something unfamiliar. He uses W. E. B. Du Bois as an example. “There was a sudden annoying feeling of difference, which presumably did not exist prior to this encounter” Hence Du Bois underwent a distinctive phenomenological process of coming to *appear* to himself differently as one who is expelled” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 83). My Yellow body underwent a similar occurrence, where I was suddenly aware of my raced being in newfound ways.

<sup>8</sup> Anti-miscegenation laws: These laws perpetuated racial segregation through marriage. In Supreme Court Case *Loving v. Virginia*, 1967, criminalizing interracial marriage was declared unconstitutional (Frederick).

married a non-Japanese man, in the best case, a White man (Ho 23). The marriage policy had the intention to “facilitate erasure of Japanese ethnicity” (Ho 31). The program was designed to assimilate bi-racial Japanese children into Whiteness. The White and Japanese household would re-center the White man as paternal leader and the White lifestyle as normative. In its design to move toward Whiteness and White ways of being, interracial marriage between someone of color and someone White is problematic if it diminishes the culture of color. In knowing that American law pushed for the erasure of Japanese culture through the convention or marriage, one must not perpetuate that same ideology when joining an interracial marriage with someone White. Precisely because White supremacy pushed otherwise, the preservation and dignity of the minority culture must remain and the power not be distributed to the privileged. Interracial marriages as borderlands and borderland institutions must continue to resiliently exist in a culture that pushes for their erasure.

The life of someone multiracial and Asian is one of contradiction, comprised of multiple histories and historical being in the world. In this, one must constantly “negotiate relationship” of her ethnicities (Feng 192). To be multiracial is to be raced, for the question of race is always relevant to her lived experience. It is something she must contemplate, must work through, must doubt and transfigure. As Asian-Americans search for the meaning of their identity in terms of language, multiracial-ness and situated history, they undergo a process of becoming. Asian-Americans go into the place unknown with an opportunity to create new identity.

### **Asian-American Racial Positionality in America**

My autonomous positionality as a multiracial Asian in America, in a Chinese-Irish household, in Bay Area culture—where people take pride in the music, the language and the

style that is birthed out of here—is all fairly unique to my humanness. It differs from the position of another Asian-American in another neighborhood, or another home only a few blocks down. “Often the term positionality is used to refer to our locations in our communities and the world, based on our class, geopolitical place, nationality, citizenship, religion, and level of education...” (Bromley 47). As we hold different positions, whether in the classroom, work place, whether gendered or cast informed, we gain perspectives and knowledge that accord with these positions.

In order to make sense of the racial paradigm in America, one of racial positions, individuals within each race become conflated under the name of one racial group: Red, Black, Yellow, Brown, White. Nonetheless, we must understand America was primarily built on the assumption that minorities will never be equal to Whites (Kawai 114). Hence, all minorities are marked as non-White, raced, colored. People of color share the commonality of being raced, although our lived racial experiences and our histories in America are different.

Du Bois introduces a paradigm of racial positionality as he states “...for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (Du Bois 3). The color-line divides Black people and White people, where Black people live under the Veil. This binary language situates positions as one versus the other, as either-or. However, this leaves other racial groups in a place yet to name, for their very name is absent from the dialogue about race.

Another line occurs when people are confronted with the citizen, non-citizen line. This is a line that reflects a question of civic acceptance that targets immigrants (Xu 7). Civic acceptance is reflected in American law and politics, where laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 are enacted. Often times, Asian-Americans remain in the non-citizen domain, even if they are citizens. They are not civically accepted. The Asian-American has what is said to be a “truer” home, a foreign home, the place to which she belongs.

Another framework for understanding racial positionality is one of a hierarchy. This distorts the Black-White paradigm by including other races. The racial hierarchy forms a column, with White on top and Black on bottom (Xu 5). The races in between have less advantage than a White person, but have more advantage and mobility than a Black person. The hierarchy is explained in “terms of power and domination” where the minority population are moving up the column and “becoming White” (Xu 5-6). The column reinforces an understanding that one must be worse or better than the other in this one linear form of evaluation. In the late 1870s, a statement was made that “a White was considered worth 2 Chinese and a Chinese worth 2 Blacks” (Kawai 117). The Asian-American has been considered almost White or honorary White (LaBlance et al. 265). Because of the opportunities that Asians have, or rather allowed to have by Whites, they are seen as in the process of becoming White. However, this rhetoric assumes that to become, to move, to advance in this society is to become White. Opportunity is attached to Whiteness, and thus success and achievement as well.

To move away from a racial hierarchy, a more recent configuration of racial positions is called racial triangulation. Philosopher Dr. Claire Jean Kim, proponent of racial triangulation, “understands racial power as a matter of systemic tendency rather than individual intentionality” (Nishime, *Undercover Asian* 13). Racial positions do not reflect intrinsic characteristics of those racial groups, but rather how they are treated under the system of White supremacy. Triangulation reveals an anxiety in the construction of a racial hierarchy (Ho 2). This anxiety calls attention to the complexity of racial interaction, as it can no longer be simplified to a binary or a column. In triangulating the racial paradigm, one race can be removed from or outside of the experience of another race. For example, Asian-Americans may feel alienated and outside of dominant culture (Kawai 110). This may be a racial phenomenon that is specific to a certain race,

but may not occur for another race. However, each race remains raced, even if this phenomenon is not included in one's lived experience. This creates a "field or racial positions" that better represents racial experiences and the ways in which racial groups relate to each other (Xu 6). These positionalities expose different understandings of what it means to be raced in America. Asian minorities call to the attention of the complexity of racial positionality, a complexity that had been in existence, but may not have been exposed.

But like a spider web, where positions are the points that are intersected and interconnected, the spiders tug and pull on the web so that positions collide and shift. Where spiders feed on the fly that is trapped in the web, a weight that oppresses some of the web, sinews snap and positions diminish. White supremacy is like these spiders, feeding off of minorities at the expense of their opportunistic positionality. Whiteness feeds off of the weight at the expense of those carrying the weight. Yancy talks about the Black body as a host and the White body as that which is parasitic (Yancy "Interview" 35:10). Likewise, White supremacy as a spider is that which feeds off of oppression of its own creation—its own web.

### **Asian-American Stereotypes**

Stereotypes represent and refer to groups of people and the spaces they occupy. These spaces can be neighborhoods, homes and places of business. When people and their spaces are stereotyped, individual personhood is lost and reconstructed so that everyone in the group is seen homogenously. With a loss of individuality, people and their spaces are not known in themselves, in truth, but remain seen through the imaginative stereotype. These stereotypical assumptions tend to domesticate or criminalize people of color. When people of color are stereotyped, the White person remains in a position of dominance or in a position of needing

safety, reiterating the superiority and goodness of White people. First, I outline a stereotyped place, Chinatown. Then, I divulge into Asian-American stereotypes that sexualize Asian woman and that domesticate and criminalize Asian people.

### *Chinatown Anecdote*

Chinatown is a borderland where Chinese culture manifests itself in America as a community with shops and homes. Predominantly Chinese people live and work here. Chinatown is stereotyped as a space of entertainment for White people. It is carnivalesque<sup>9</sup> and gazed upon, movie-like, and made for the consumption of White people. There is an imagined distance so that White people do not meet Chinese people as fully present or fully human. In part, Chinatown presents itself in a masked aesthetic fraudulence, in order to attract White tourists. Thus, the distance between White people and Asian people must be overcome with contribution from both parties. Chinatown is a place yet to name, for it is both a place of false entertainment and a place of home, it is both authentic and inauthentic, and a result of systemic racism in America.<sup>10</sup>

Chinatown slumming tours<sup>11</sup> created an opportunity for White people to experience Asian culture. A White woman enters Chinatown, still at a safe distance from her seat on the

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<sup>9</sup> Carnavalesque: A carnivalesque approach to watching people of color situates the other as entertainment and inhuman. Dr. Greg Carr's, professor at Howard University, used this term to describe the type of study White Americans perform when studying ethnic people. "It's kind of like the zoo...we study lions and we get a lion and we get him to roar and take a picture with it and say we've engaged in studying a lion...That's kind of a White college approach in some ways...to ethnic studies, Black studies, Latino studies, Women's studies...it's carnivalesque" (Carr 8:15).

<sup>10</sup> In particular, I am referring to red lining, which was a racist housing practice that situated different racial groups into different neighborhoods. A person of color could be financially able to buy a house in a White neighborhood, but would be denied the opportunity (Gaspaire).

<sup>11</sup> Chinatown slumming tours: (See footnote 2 about borderlands). White Americans, usually of high socio-economic status, would visit Chinatown on a bus for their entertainment (Haenni 23).

rubberneck automobile, and looks upon the people as if she was on a safari looking upon animals. “With its ascending rows of seats, the rubberneck automobile looked like a moving theater, which suggests that rubbernecking revolved around *fantasies* of self-transformation, rather than physical mutations” (Haenni 22). Thus the White woman’s interest lies in the entertainment of fantasy, of her own imagination, of what Chinatown must be like, rather than what China town truly is. As well, she reserves her position on the rubberneck automobile, which implicates her as a person in need of safety and distance. She is met with the “decorated façades” of bright shops signs for markets and flashing lights for restaurants (Haenni 29). She sees the gift shops, the opium dens, the Chinese people participating in “foreign” culture speaking in “foreign” tongues and she is drawn to the aesthetic of it all. In the newness and unfamiliarity of her slumming tour experience, her sense perceptions and her subjectivity are altered as she undergoes an “intensified sensorial experience” (Haenni 30). Her sense memory expands as she smells Szechuan cuisine. She does not perform an act of cooking, but she experiences the smells of Chinese cooking. Without participating in the culture, her subjectivity is still transformed for she takes in a newness. As she consumes Chinatown, she does not need to ask “What is behind? What is the Chinese identity?” (Haenni 29). She sees these scenes as if they appear in a movie and does not think there is anything deeper than the scenes with which she is confronted. As she watches, her imagination is reinforced, shaping the Chinese people as objects of entertainment and never being prompted to question further.

Chinatown alters the White woman, with its aromas, decoration, languages and sounds. She is here for entertainment, to be drawn in, to be curious and gaze upon the town. At first, she dodges the eyes of the people in the town, but then she begins to meet their eyes (Haenni 30). There is something in this moment that is either dangerous or human. Either, she feels a

discomfort, but from a to-be-entertained position, she engages with the people as if they were on a screen, rather than individuals with personhood. She meets their eyes as an act of distance, with a lack of empathy. Or perhaps she meets their eyes curious to their personhood, approaching from a place of wanting to know the person of Chinatown and not just Chinatown as entertainment.

Chinatown is the “objectified and commodified urban ‘Other’” (Haenni 23). Chinatown relies on White tourists to take interest in their community. The desire to profit in a Capitalist society motivates Chinese people to put on the false aesthetic of Chinatown. Thus, the White tourists “do not know Chinatown is fake, and therefore do not know how to properly engage it” (Haenni 39). The fallacy falls on both the Asian-Americans and the White Americans. Du Bois writes that “Both must change, or neither can improve to any great extent... Only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line in this critical period of the Republic shall justice and right triumph” (Du Bois 133). Here Du Bois notes the relationship of the Black person and the White person in the Twentieth century. But this concept can be applied to the Yellow person and the White person as well. The front put up, as economic ploy, perhaps out of need, veils Chinatown’s authenticity. Chinatown hides its authenticity and may need to, at proper times, present itself with more vulnerability. Adjacently, White people need to deconstruct and expose their White gaze as a step or beginning toward approaching Chinatown as a place of humanity and complexity.

### ***China Doll and Dragon Lady***

Asian women face an intersectional two-fold oppression based on gender and race. In a culture that objectifies women, women are always evaluated in terms of attraction. The Asian woman is sexualized on basis of being a woman in a patriarchy, but she is stereotyped as docile

and willing, framing the White man and Whiteness at the center of her life. When she fits this standard, she is called a China doll. However, when she disrupts this assumption and appears different than what she is expected to be, she is evaluated as a dragon lady. These two stereotypes exist on continuum, respectively domesticating or criminalizing her.

The presentation of Asian woman in the pervading images in American culture construct her as an object of White male desire. She is “aesthetically pleasing, sexually willing, and speechless” (Kang 74). Her exoticism heightens her attractiveness, for she is unknown and intended to be conquered. She is what can be colonized by the imperialist Eurocentric male. The construction of the indigenous female body exploits the body as something of conquest and claim, rather than one of agency and reverence.

Not only does the male gaze<sup>12</sup> construct the female Asian body as such, but it constructs her psyche of motivation and desire. She is “comprehensible through her romance with the White male” (Kang 78). Her desire is constructed to “compliment” his. In coming in closer proximity with the White male and attaching herself to Whiteness, White remains the norm and the central subject. Not only does she desire the White male, but she hopes that he will rescue her from her failing culture. “The obedient and grateful female other saved from the deficiencies of her own culture” (Nishime, *Undercover Asian* 9). These stereotypes do not only circulate in popular cultural dialogue, but also contribute to political laws. The Japanese woman was able to “escape” her culture by participating in the mixed marriage policy of 1942 in order to avoid the Japanese internment camp. Hence, what may be a stereotype and register as implicit bias may

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<sup>12</sup> Male gaze: This is a term coined by Laura Mulvey. The gaze looks upon and objectifies the female body and constructs her desires and motivations (Mulvey 837). The male gaze is a result of patriarchy, which extends not only through White America but through racial groups as well.

also be perpetuated through legislation. This situates the White person as knight and hero, while the Asian female is victim and in need. The White Savior Complex perpetuates an idea that the White male must rescue the colored male or female. “Many Westerners believe harbor the belief that they are more advantaged than people in other parts of the world...Accordingly, some Westerners seek to ‘liberate’ less privileged people and societies in other parts of the world by acting on their behalf” (Jailani 53). The White Savior Complex also applies to White Americans and their beliefs about minorities in America. One can see this in movies like *The Blind Side* or *Freedom Writers*. This reinforces the White man or White woman as pure, as hero, and positions the person of color as someone in need of salvation.

Following the narrative of the White knight and Asian victim, the woman as China doll is the shy and passive female. However, when she deviates from this “norm,” she becomes the dragon lady, the devious scheming madam. (Kang 77). She is still sexualized and still desires Whiteness, but able to get the White man through tricks instead of docility. Because she disrupts the expectation of her domestication, she becomes villainous and criminal. If she is not obedient, she is disobedient and capable of deception. The categorization of her criminality as deceptive implies she cannot be understood. It is the White fear of seeing an Asian woman disrupt the China doll stereotype that turns her into the criminal dragon lady. Nonetheless, both stereotypes are hyper-sexualized and are understood in their relation to men. Silence is the commonality between the China doll and the dragon lady, but the China doll is silent in her passivity and docility, while the dragon lady uses silence to deceive. In its structured dichotomy, the same woman can be either doll or lady in light of who is observing her.

### ***Model Minority and Yellow Peril***

While the “China doll and dragon lady” stereotype and sexualize the Asian female body, the “model minority and yellow peril” comment on the Asian-American populous of both women and men. As well as the two female stereotypes, the model minority and yellow peril also exhibit a continuum construction. Kawai states “By seeing the two stereotypes as one, it will become more difficult for people of the yellow race to accept the model minority stereotype and enable us to critically view the position of the yellow race in U.S. racial relations” (Kawai 127). The model minority stereotype is problematic because it was appropriated by White America as a means to deny White supremacy and to critique Black people. Hence, stereotypes comment directly about a minority group and comment indirectly about another, attempting to divorce the two groups. Although the model minority is assumed a positive stereotype, it instead reflects the White gaze’s<sup>13</sup> need to domesticate and subordinate minority populations.

The yellow peril pre-dated the model minority as it circulated discourse in the “first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Kawai 111). This stereotype described the Asian as a threat to “civilization and Christianity” where Western society feared that the Yellow race would take over their existing good culture (Kawai 112). For example, the movie *Red Dawn*, released in 2012, was about North Korea<sup>14</sup> attacking America on American soil. The movie was created under the idea that Asian countries were growing in economic and militaristic power. This propaganda pushed the idea that Asian people were a threat to Western culture, and in return Asian people needed to be named the enemy and destroyed. Thus the Asian man is “superhuman in his intellect,” but “subhuman in his immorality and ruthlessness” (Kawai 113). He is never only human; he either

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<sup>13</sup> White Gaze: (See section labeled White Gaze, page 27).

<sup>14</sup> Red Dawn was originally about China invaders. However, the movie producers decided to change the antagonist to North Korea, in order to market the movie in China (Gustini).

exceeds human capacity of intellect, or he is void of humanity. Therefore, the White man can never see the Yellow man as human, but only in hyperbolic or diminished terms.

In juxtaposition, the model minority came into dialogue around the 1960s during the civil rights movement. The Asian-American child was painted as hard working, “law abiding, peace loving” and in accordance with American values (Chow). The first proponents of this idea were, in fact, Asian people attempting to be accepted by White people. However, this theory was appropriated by White Americans in an attempt to disprove institutional racism (Chow). As White America perceives Asian-Americans as able to heighten their financial status in America, Asian “success is used to deny the existence of institutional racism to prove that the US society is reasonably fair” (Kawai 114).

Around the civil rights movement, White America argued that Black people had the same mobility as Yellow people, but Yellow people were “silent and disciplined.” Yellow people were understood to be agreeable with White America, thus, more controllable. Under the model minority stereotype, they were not thought of as a challenge to White America. While White people historically and perpetually criminalize the Black person, they place the Yellow person in position as one who obeys. White America claimed that Black people had the same economic opportunities as Yellow people, and credited their lack of economic success to their presupposed criminality.

However, institutional racism does not effect Yellow people to the same extent as it does to Black people. “...Asians have faced various forms of discrimination, but never the systematic dehumanization that black people have faced during slavery and continue to face today.” (Chow). One can recognize the language used to describe Asian-Americans as “law-abiding,” directly opposes racially-coded political statements for more “law and order” that directly target

Black people (13<sup>th</sup>). Therefore, the attempt to disprove institutional racism through Asian-American success fails, for the two racial positions are not the same.

Not only does the appropriation of the model minority adjacently target Black people, it also pits two minorities against each other. Historically, people of similar interest, like slaves and indentured servants, have been pitted against each other by the government in order to prevent an uprising (Zinn 37). Instead of Yellow and Black people finding solidarity with each other, the model minority stereotype distances the two groups. "...the model minority stereotype contains 'deep-structural' meanings such as supporting colorblind ideology and dividing racial minority groups" (Kawai 114). This creates competition, resentment and misunderstanding of each other's situations. The model minority not only comments on Asian people, but it creates rhetoric about the relationships of raced groups in America. The stereotype's damage spans not only to who is being stereotyped, but also to who is being referenced to or excluded as result of the stereotype.

Similar to the China doll and dragon lady, the model minority and yellow peril exist on a "seamless continuum" (Kawai 110). The model minority is the domesticated, unthreatening version of the criminal yellow peril. The model minority tames the yellow peril to a degree that is acceptable, that stills subordinates the Asian person. For example, it is the Yellow woman doing well in the work place, but not doing better than the White man. In this White comfort, the White person may even compliment the Asian's hard work. Asian-American philosopher Emily S. Lee has experienced that "The person speaking to me usually thinks they are giving me a compliment" (Lee). However, the White person is unaware of how she is perpetuating a stereotype, along with its historical and racial meanings.

Her model minority success quickly switches to yellow peril if she outdoes the White person. A 1971 Newsweek headliner read "Success story: Outwhiting the White" (Kawai 116).

The implications of this headliner reinforce that White is synonymous to success. The Asian “Outwhites the White” in her ability to be superior in the work place, to hold a position of authority where the White man must answer to the Asian woman. This headliner does not mention Asian or Yellow. It instead maintains White as the epitome of accomplishment and superiority. In fact, the model minority as a term does not reflect in its meaning, the model citizen, but rather only a model for minorities. The term denies in itself an opportunity for the Asian to be a model for a White person—the Asian can only be a model for other minorities. The model minority is always subjugated by White American.

The domesticated stereotype reflects what is accepted or what is comfortable in light of White gaze. When the woman is China doll shy, or model minority hard working and disciplined, she is agreeable with the White man. But very quickly, she can become the dragon lady scheming woman or the yellow peril threatening woman when she appears un-comprehensible or deviates from the norm, putting the White man in a position of discomfort. In these two sets of stereotypes that exist on a continuum, the Asian woman or man is always deficient or excessive in agency. She is either too controllable to act or too devious to control. Because these images are pervasive in the collective conscious of America, she will always be implicitly seen through these stereotypes. Before she speaks, she is already disciplined. Before she acts, she is already shy. The gaze distorts the process of seeing the Asian woman and the Asian man in her and his autonomous personhood.

Stereotypes limit the ways in which White Americans see Asian-Americans and how Asian-Americans see themselves. Stereotypes can become internalized, such as the model minority being something that Asian-Americans feel they must demonstrate in order to be Asian-American. In actuality, these stereotypes keep Asian-Americans in subordinated positions, by

being good to the extent that Whiteness allows them to be, or by being bad because they diverge from the standard of domestication they are supposed to fit within.

### **White Gaze**

He sees me like he knows me, like I am underneath, left under the dusty microscope, studied to be forgotten, to be rendered invisible. He knows me so that he may never question me and never see more. As far as he knows me, is as far as he knows himself. I do not become and he does not become either. I am known through assumption, through construction of knowledge,<sup>15</sup> through imagination rendered true, I am known only through being un-known, virtually through never being seen...

The White gaze operates as a form of fallacious epistemology, “linked to various raced and racist myths [and] white discursive practices,” that uses denial in order to look upon the world from a position of superiority (Yancy, *Black Bodies* xviii). Under the White gaze, the system of White supremacy becomes elusive and Whiteness becomes a way to deny racism as well as a way to preserve racism. People of color are seen as constructions of White imagery; these constructions seep into the consciousness of people of color so that they see themselves doubled. The Asian-American populous is often seen as “naturally” successful, which undermines work ethic and obfuscates underrepresented Asian-American groups of lower socio-economic status. Thus, these groups become invisible. Whiteness may psychologically project their inner self and inner war onto scapegoating people of color. The White gaze must be

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<sup>15</sup> I allude to the book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, by Stephen Jay Gould. He exposes and debunks scientific knowledge, claimed as truth, that is deeply laden with human bias. For example, racial stereotypes have been proved in the name of science, later to be found un-true.

exposed in order for Whiteness to see itself and so the Asian-American or person of color, despite the White gaze, can reclaim herself and her liberty.

Systems of inequity remain intact through the obscurity and “structured blindness” of the very system and through the invisibility of those oppressed in that system (Yancy *Black Bodies* 22). America is a White supremacy because of its fundamentally racist structure, one that intended to keep “minorities in a subordinated position” and for its perpetuation of those institutions and laws (Kawai 114). The problem of the color-line, that Du Bois posited, has not yet been overcome, for racism has pervaded America’s institutions and consciousness in more insidious, deceptive and implicit ways. The only sight used to uphold this system is one that cannot see.

Thus, there is a two-fold denial, one that maintains the system of White supremacy, and one that maintains the invisibility of people of color. White people find themselves the originators of America’s White supremacy, but are unable to understand the effects on its people. From their positionality as oppressor, over-seer, one who holds the gaze, one who holds the truth, they have in turn created a blindness that hurts their ability to see what is true. When White people do not understand the system of racism, it becomes obscured by their claims that they are not racist. However, Yancy points out that “her racist actions are also habits of the body and not simply cognitively false beliefs...her constructed ignorance is *cultural*, and not just an individual act” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 22). Through a historical and generational miseducation, White people absorb racist propaganda that they perform mundanely and implicitly when they encounter racialized bodies. On a mundane level and on a structural level, the system perpetuates in its ability to obscure the performance of Whiteness.

The White person in the system of White supremacy inherits “the privileged status of being the ‘lookers’ and gazers, with all the power that this entailed” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* xviii). As the one who sees, she is the one who knows.

The White woman thinks that her act of “seeing” me is an act of “knowing” who I am, of knowing what I will do next, that is, hers is believed to be simply a process of unmediated or uninterpreted perception. However, her coming to “see” me as she does is actually a cultural achievement, a racist sociohistorical schematization, indeed, an act of epistemic violence (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 17).

As if she is perched in a tree above all else, she thinks she sees, she is in a higher position after all. With her bird’s eye view, she sees with a power of omniscience. But she does not descend so that her feet know the rocks or her knees know the waves. In knowing people of color, she fixes her state of knowing, which in fact limits her potential for knowledge and her potential to broaden her own horizon of being. “If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other. Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power” (Levinas 90). When the White gaze knows who I am, I am no longer a self, but an extension and formulation of the White mind. Under the power of the White gaze, my oneness and my alterity is diminished, for I am no longer ontological, but I am constructed, my nature vanishes.

The people of color that are made-invisible exist under clouded sight and are never released from the construction of the White gaze. The China doll and dragon lady stereotype saturates images of Asian woman and the rhetoric surrounding those images. The stereotype, nothing other than a construction of knowledge, a fabricated image, begins to take place and

precedence over all Asian woman and their autonomy. The Asian woman is no longer seen as individual. Instead, she is seen as the construction doll or dragon. Her personhood, her oneness becomes faded and erased, and instead she is invisible, standing face to face in front of the White gazer as a construction of the White imagination. In reference to the White person "...[his] perspective, [his] subjectivity, is deemed the only important perspective, the one that makes a difference, the one that has historically reaped the benefit of recognition within the context of white North America. (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 6). The White gazer, unaware of his positionality as one who holds the only valued truth, but always already having that power over the person of color, does not see his construction of the Asian woman. He does not see the construction as a construction, he does not see his process of constructing her, and he does not know he has missed the opportunity to rightly see the woman in herself.

In turn, the made-invisible person of color may not know to what extent she is not seen. However, she is accustomed to receiving certain habits and patterns of White behavior and acquires a "heightened sensitivity" to racial interaction in respect to White people coming into contact with her raced body (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 6). In the approach of a White person, the Asian woman's personhood and who she knows herself to be is disrupted.<sup>16</sup> Her personhood is intruded upon by the performance of the gaze that constructs her as stereotype. Her performance of herself is reduced, she feels limited, smaller, as if she cannot prove herself as otherwise of the stereotype. Her choice in action is reduced because her intention and action is muffled, stifled, deaden under the White gaze. "The movement from the familiar is what is also effected by the

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<sup>16</sup> Double consciousness: Du Bois defined double consciousness as a way in which one sees herself, at the site of her body, through the eyes of the other, who interprets her being much differently than who she knows herself to be. Dr. Yancy writes "...Du Bois was forced into a state of doubleness, seeing himself as other (the inferior Black) through the gaze of the young girl as the one (the superior white)" (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 85).

white woman's gaze...I feel trapped. I no longer feel bodily expansiveness within the elevator, but corporeally constrained, limited" (Yancy *Black Bodies* 15). Yancy speaks about his experience in an elevator, where he encounters an implicit racist performance by a White woman. In order to not be perceived a certain way, his body language becomes constricted and his self-awareness increases drastically (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 15). Likewise, in order to not be perceived as the China doll, the Asian woman may feel this same type of constraint and unfamiliarity as to ensure she does not perform like the China doll stereotype.

Under the White gaze and the model minority stereotype, the Asian-American's work is under-credited and racial oppression is considered insignificant. Her intellect is passed off as natural and so her work is passed off as easy (LaBlance et al. 255). The work ethic she uses to acquire such status in her profession, a work ethic she may pride herself in, becomes no longer intrinsic to her identity. This part of her is erased and not seen by her White co-workers.

If White people work alongside or see an Asian in their work place, race as significant to Asian people becomes ignored. No longer is "race relevant to the mental health of Asians in the U.S." (LaBlance et al. 254). This overlooks the systemic racism Asian-Americans face. It erases historical context, like the Chinese Exclusion Act, or overt racism, like the caricatures of Asian-Americans in movie with thick accents and stereotypical roles. Additionally, it conflates the different ethnic groups within the Asian community that face different levels of oppression.

Thirteen percent of Asian Americans and 17 percent of Pacific Islanders live below the federal poverty line, compared to 12 percent of the general population, according to the 2000 census. Among Asian Americans, many of the underrepresented groups have an

even higher rate of poverty. Thirty-eight percent of the Hmong population, for instance, are living below the federal poverty line (Huping 3-4).

The White gaze fails to recognize the underrepresented groups of Asian-Americans, thus, denying them visibility in popular culture or popular dialogue. As the White gaze sees Asian-Americans through the model minority, Asians are painted as easily economically successful and sound. In my work as a caregiver at a retirement home, a man told my boss, “You have a Chinese working here. That’s good to get some smart people in this place.” Meanwhile, Filipino, Tongan and Indian woman, all of Asian descent, work alongside me. I remain a stereotyped model minority Asian, perhaps because I am Chinese, while they are somehow excluded from the stereotype applied to their race and overlooked as belonging to the group of Asian-Americans. Moments such as this demonstrate the disparity between how different groups of Asians are perceived under the White gaze and its contradictions. Our daily interactions with people of color and with White people propel us to recognize our raced being in the world. Our racial identity is always present in our lives, but White America overlooks racial discourse that includes the Asian-American.

According to Anzaldua, the White gaze locks us into a role of one-versus-one combat, where White vulnerabilities and fears are projected onto the raced minority group. Anzaldua, speaking from the Brown experience, addresses the White audience and states:

To say you’ve split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the “negative” parts onto us.

(Where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is repression of shadow) (Anzaldua 108).

This projection attempts to maintain Whiteness as something intrinsically good and pure, in return defining minorities as intrinsically bad. To “disown” minority groups is to deny the ways in which all humanity is always ontologically connected. This disowning tears away at the sympathetic connection, so that the White woman in Chinatown can look upon the people as if they were animated dolls, void of a common humanity. Anzaldua states that these are causes of war, which demonstrates how both parties suffer under this shadow projection.

The White projection onto others is one that removes parts of the self and, thus, falsely removes the responsibility to face those parts. In Plato’s *The Republic*, the city has been interpreted as a metaphor for the soul, and visa versa. The rankings of the soul reflect the rankings in the city, and visa versa. What happens internally can be projected externally, simultaneously what happens externally can be internalized. Hence, the White person who cannot see the system or the person of color, in fact, cannot see his complete self. His inability to see spans from the external to the internal. This internal battle in not truly knowing the whole self causes discord to erupt. The battle is projected outward and scapegoats the minority population.

Anzaldua recognizes that challenging the White gaze situates an us-against-them dynamic. They dynamic limits us as reactionary, as always in a mode of defense and challenge.

A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of

violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant...Because the counterstance stems from a problem of authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life (Anzaldua 100).

She argues that the act of resistance is necessary. It seems as if her book *Borderlands* would not have been written if it was not some form of resistance to White supremacy. However, remaining in this counterstance limits the minority population to a population of reaction. Like two billiard balls in a constant motion of swinging back and forth only to hit each other, this perpetuation of reactionary motion leads to no growth. The reaction of defiance against the White gaze is a means to liberation, but it is not liberation itself. Dr. Carr, professor at Howard University in the Afro-American department, states "There's a political nature to all scholarship...This is a conversation you could only have in a Black space...because if you don't have it in a Black space, you're challenging the White space" (19:55). While Dr. Carr is contextualizing a conversation about Hip-Hop and the Black experience, this argument applies to Brown, Red and Yellow spaces, insofar as it challenges the White space. Writing a racial essay in a White space always echoes a need to defend or a need to negotiate what can be said, knowing it challenges the White gaze.

People of color cannot remove the White gaze, but we can situate ourselves in borderlands or culturally raced spaces where we have a freedom of conversation we do not have granted in White spaces. We find ourselves in a place we have yet to name, knowing we are reactionary to an oppression and a gaze. To know our self insofar as we are a response to that circumstance begs question to our authenticity. Our authenticity is in sprout, but we must learn

more about ourselves in our borderlands where the White gaze is under question and not deceptively invisible.

### **What Arose from Indignation**

The oppressed person feels a righteous anger, but she may be unaware of the causes for that anger. This anger may manifest as misdirected, one that fails to target the cause, but nonetheless there is a turmoil that builds as a result of denied liberation. Instead of a flourishing, there is contracting and a stifling of a thriving authentic voice in the world. This indignation, a feeling unfulfilling in itself, gives one the opportunity to turn in to one's self and reflect on this sentiment. It stirs one to question circumstance, question self. In her intuition she feels a moral no, a resistance to a system or people she does not want become. She says a moral no to imitating her surroundings. It is from a place of indignation that brings her to thought and to her consciousness of what she has experienced. It is from this passion that she thinks there must be a better way. She can no longer remain silent about her condition, but must ask herself for change.

What human struggle it is to desire a liberty and an integrity, met with loving respect from the other. In this desire, the person of color approaches the other in a modality of already decided intention, in hope that the gazer/interpreter will perceive this intention in its truth. Adjacently, the one who gazes, who receives the person of color's action, is the interpreter of such intention of act, and has the responsibility to see its truth and react accordingly. This interpreting may be less noticeable in bodily appearance, but it is not a passive act. As the person of color approaches the one await, the gazer's being and her knowledge of the situation yet to take place is suspended. As Westphal writes "...my gazing is *aufgehoben* or teleologically suspended in my being addressed" (Westphal 5). However, the White gaze distorts this process

of receiving and reading when she fails to suspend herself. In her knowing, rather in knowing the construction of the person of color, she has already dictated who this person is and how she will act. With no suspense of the self, she has no room to interpret the person of color's intentions truthfully.

When Yancy spoke at the University of Pittsburgh, he asked what it would look like for a White person to perform "who art thou? ...without a speech act" (Yancy, "A Letter"). With this question, the White person suspends her being and suspends her knowledge. In order to recognize the other as one who is "I," the White gazer's "identity is placed in abeyance" so that both the person of color and the White person "become after the question is answered" (Yancy, "A Letter"). For example, an Asian woman may approach the space of a White man. If the White man assumes she is a China doll, she becomes the China doll and he becomes a man who has stereotyped and sexualized a woman of color. However, the question of "who art thou...without a speech act" halts the process of assumption and the act-without-speech informs the person of color that she is not being misconstrued. This act of questioning disrupts the assumptions and constructions of knowledge that have been indoctrinated in the minds of the many White Americans. With this act, the White person has the chance to become different as well.

When the person of color is, in fact, unknown, she regains her agency and has the power to make herself known through her actions. She is received, not as construction, not as pre-imagined and therefore pre-destined, but with autonomous personhood. Anzaldua writes "I seek an exoneration, a seeing through the fictions of white supremacy, a seeing of ourselves in our true guises and not as the false racial personality that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves" (Anzaldua 109). Although this is hoped to be achieved, first there must be a process of White self reflection in order to accurately perform the "who art thou" question,

which must not be an interrogation. Whiteness must learn about itself in ways that do not include denial and “epistemic dishonesty” (Yancy “A Letter”). Presently, social relations between races are un-hinged and disconnected through constructions of the White gaze. We must learn about this process of disconnect before we start the process toward reconnection. We must cause rupture in what Whiteness stands for, for peeling back its mask simultaneously begins the process of removing our veil.

### **Phenomena of the Latinized Asian**

The Asian as a Latinized subject can result as a displacement from Asian-American culture. However, Latinization is not an end result, but a phenomenon that happens during the process of identifying a place of deep belonging and of becoming Asian-American. The Asian-American may feel as if her narrative and lived experience is reflected more apparently in Hispanic culture, rather than in Asian-American culture. In this section, I go into my lived experience in order to illustrate the process of my self understanding that brought me eventually to Latinization. However, Latinization has been present in my life, not only as a performance, but because I am perceived to be Latina by people of Latin ancestry and other races. Besides myself, during my studies I have encountered two other people, Carol Lem and Eddy Zheng, that demonstrate performances in Hispanic culture. This phenomenon reflects that Asian-Americans have a limited understanding of self and must broaden this narrative in order to include our own people. Additionally, there is a difficulty in navigating the terms Asian-American and Latin-American, as American is synonymous with Whiteness. Hence we are excluded from our very name. Otherwise, it brings into question the significance of ritual and performance as a way to understand home.

Inflections sounds like rain, rain with semantics, a comfort never understood, foreign inside the home, myself, a foreigner as home. From the voice of my grandmother I hear Mandarin. I hear short syllables, in my presence, but the meaning slips away as something I cannot capture. *¿Cómo se dices yes in Mandarin?* She loved me I knew, she talked to me through laughter and smiles. My first definition of love, laughter and smiles in the midst of incomprehension, of language barriers, of grandmother distanced from granddaughter, a severed bond. Love in a place of disconnect, laughter as an instrument of love.

I found comfort in the dialogue I could not understand. My grandparents and my father spoke around me and I was invited to join, but the language was not in my mind as meaning. It was in my mind as a safe haven for not needing semantic meaning. In fact, the meaning registered as emotive sound, and though I did not understand, I listened. It was soothing to hear rhythms as opposed to comprehension. Language intended for comprehension, this language in my mind as something other, but something home and dear to heart.

I listened as words poured into the air. Mandarin was intended for me, one line of my ancestors believed that I would carry on the language. I was stripped of my heritage. *Americanized*. Chinese father discontinuing his native tongue for what he thought was best for his children. My roots pushed further down. If I wanted them, I'd have to dig. I'd have to search in the soil for parts of me, lost parts, severed parts. Entering the world as a vase of roses, thorns, and roots. Entering as a form of imagination breaking into conscious lived experience. The whole vase and its roses breaking and snapping, so that the whole travels into search for the whole once more. Living in search of broken pieces, my hand shooting blindly into the soil, retrieving thorns, retrieving roses. Parts of me unknown to me. I still call them mine. The vase ruptures under consciousness. I needed to begin from a broken place. "I will keep broken things.

I will keep you: Pilgrim of sorrow. I will keep myself” (Walker).

I left home and found home in the same form, but in a shifted context, in a different language. Spanish like the soul of my counterpart twin. The bordering tongue of Mexico to California, California once Mexico. *Yo soy China, pero todavía aprendiendo español. Quiero saber español.* At first, I enjoyed the comfort of not knowing this language well. I enjoyed listening without understanding and it sounded beautiful to me. But it started to enter me, I began learning. And once I learned a little, I yearned to learn more. It isn't just words, it's the way dialogue is exchanged, that reflects a culture, a language. *¿Verdad que si? Si, es verdad.* It's true yes? Yes, it's true. Rhythmic in its reflection, reflection in the other before continuing independent thought. Connection before separation, it's in the dialogue. I was ruptured once more by a third tongue. I found refuge in it, its idiosyncrasies, but it is still outside of me. Where I cannot go. Where I can sense, but not live.

I did not attend Chinese school, to learn the language, to be with my people in a space of my people. I did not have the community, the culture, the home, the cousins, aunts or uncles. I longed for my Asian reflection, but I could not manifest it in my circumstances. And while I had no home for my relationship to my community, I had the geographical place of the Bay Area and California that cultured me. Marked as other, I searched for my others. So I looked in the faces of my Latina friends, the closest mirror I could find, and in return augmented my Asian identity in the struggle of not having, not having community, not having reflection nor home. Out of need came this authentic augmentation, a way out and a way in, a development of character I could not separate from, for I have no memory of another version of me.

I work at a taqueria, a borderland, where Spanish music moves through the rooms and Spanish language can be heard and can be read on the menu. For Hispanic people, this is a place

of home, a place of familiarity in a country where dominant spaces are White spaces created for White people. Earlier in this paper I address my dual heritage, where I am most often mistaken as Latina, by Hispanic people and by White people. While working at the taqueria, I was assumed Latina by the customers, and this led me to solidarity with Hispanic people, as well as undergoing the micro-aggressions Hispanic people face that result from the White gaze. Hispanic customers would speak to me in Spanish and I would hold my own in the Spanish conversation. They would ask me *¿de donde eres?* because they noticed the difference in my accent. I would explain that I was actually Chinese and they would often not believe me and tell me I look Mexican. Even before working at the taqueria, I experienced people thinking I was Latina, but the taqueria increased the frequency of such event.

My ethnic heritage and my cultural upbringing do not reflect the biological and lived experience of my Latina counterparts. My oppression is subsequently different because the structural barriers for Asian-Americans are different. When I fill out applications, my last name, Tsou, reads Asian. However, when I am face-to-face with many people, my face reads Latina. Thus I experience the micro-aggressions and implicit biases that Latina people experience.

For example, at the taqueria a White man calls “excuse me” and indicates through body language that he has a question. “Can I have a box to go?” A box, his hands form the shape of a box. “Yes, would you like a smaller one or a larger one?” “No. Can I have a box?” Suddenly, I realize my words are erased and I am not heard. My English words, that I intentionally used to tend to him more specifically, do not constitute his reality of our joint experience. The harsh “No” signals that there is no question of both of us being misunderstood. It is I that is at fault for our, per-say, lack of communication. The White man performs his Whiteness by acting as a knower. Before he walks into the taqueria, he has assumptions of the type of people that work

there. Before he hears me speak, he assumes (to his standard) that I do not speak. He assumes I cannot be understood and manifests his experience to that degree. He erases my language from his ears. He erases his chance to have dialogue with me. He *knows* I do not speak English, or I do not speak English well. My agency to serve him becomes limited. No action is required of me for him to know who I am, a poor English speaker. By never actually being seen by this White man, becomes the only way I am seen as a Latina woman. With his performance of Whiteness, I lose my English language, I become un-intellectual.

It is through these lived experiences where my empiricism overlaps with the lived experiences of Hispanic people. We share a solidarity insofar as I am taken as Mexican, and thus treated as such, treated as if I were one and the same and a part of the community. Otherwise, the White gaze sees me as Latina, in a modality that tears at my personhood. It is the features of my face and my dark hair, the context I live in that situates me around a Hispanic culture, who I am seen to be by others, and my performance of language and labor in at a taqueria that contributes to my Latinization.

In East L.A., poet Carol Lem lived, wrote and taught among Chicano people and came to know herself as Chicano although she is from Chinese descent.

I survived the border mentality that comes with living in an urban environment such as Los Angeles all my life...living on the borderlands is both a geographical and psychological reality for the majority of students, has given me a shared identity with the Chicano population there (Lem 188).

Although her ancestral line reduces her to solely Chinese, her lived experience and her performance of living resonates and accords with Chicano people. She does not disown her Chinese roots, but she finds that “Home comes out of this imagined place in the heart, something I create for myself each day” (Lem 188). In her creation of home, Lem found solidarity with racialized group in America that did not reflect her biology, but rather reflected her performance of race.

In Yuri Kochiyama’s memoir *Passing It On*, Kochiyama references a poem written by Eddy Zheng, a Chinese prisoner in San Quentin. “I’ve been a slave for 16 years under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment...I never been back to my motherland/ I started to learn Spanish/ Escribio una poema en español” (Kochiyama 148-149). Zheng relates to the Black experience by calling himself a slave, one who is enslaved by law. In order to express his racial identity, he writes in Spanish. Learning Spanish reflects his desire to learn and attach to a racialized experience of America, although he may not know how to perform one that attaches to his biological heritage. He performs race by writing in the Spanish language. As writing is a form of thought and a performance of those thoughts, he begins to think in a different language. He decenters White America by bringing in a new language. In return, he re-centers his racialized identity as practice and performance.

When we say Asian-American, African-American, Latin-American and Native-American, we refer to a person’s race in relation to their American nationality. However, when we refer to someone White, we simply say American, not European-American. Thus, the term American is synonymous with Whiteness. When I utter Asian-American, it is somehow unfitting, perhaps in light of not only attaching Asian to nationality, but attaching Asian to Whiteness. In attaching my Asian-hood to White America, I centralize Whiteness as the base of

my being in the world. I am off-White, Asian-American, off-American, Asian-White. If it is the linguistic basis of my being, I am never fully being in the world, because I am never fully “American.”

America as place of Yellow, Black, Brown, Red and White cultures allows one to assimilate not only into White-American culture, but into marginalized culture as well. As for Carol Lem and Eddy Zheng, perhaps they were Latinized in context of their lived experience and also in context of Asian and Hispanic experience in America, one of immigration, of coming into the Black-White paradigm, of coming into a history of slavery and yet never being brought to America against own will. There is commonality in an oppressive experience, as well as a commonality in navigating and learning about the world as embodied racialized beings in the web of a racial paradigm.

Lem and Zheng and myself perform Latin culture, thus, their performance as ritual becomes intrinsic to their identity. While we experience distance from our Asian-hood, whether it be rarely seeing Asian visuals in popular culture, or the images we do see fail to reflect our identity, whether our Asian community or the lack-there-of does not foster our personhood, we find ourselves searching for a place yet to name. Aware of our racialized lived experience, aware of our color and our solidarity with colors, the search for culture and home eventually leads us to parts and pieces of Latin culture. Thus, we assimilate into a lived experience that reflects our reality, as if the two cultures act as an imperfect mirror. There remain differences, but as raced people we see ourselves mirrored in Latin-American culture.

### **What Arose from Hope**

The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people.

—Anzaldua

She must speak. She must speak with a courage, with a willingness to empty truth in the face of suppression. Her speech as testimony is a great act of resistance, for many people remain silent, and this silence is compliant and in accord with systemic oppression. The voice in itself leads back to one's agency and personhood. The questioning "troublemaker" voice leads back to philosophy (Yancy, "Introduction: No Philosophical" 1). She performs an act of freedom when her voice is released from her body. When her intention for justice is extended outside of herself, her voice no longer solely impacts her, but it impacts the consciousness of those around her. When the woman with place she has yet to name, finds her "I" in an eternal search for wisdom, in dedication to people of color, her home is more a feeling of deep belonging than ever a set place. When this deep belonging is found, she feels a sense of return, more than a sense of discovery. Will a voice speak without hope? The voice that speaks is always accompanied with a hope. "Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope — a faith in the ultimate justice of things" (Du Bois 186). Philosophy is performed with a great hope in the questions of the world and what the world may become as a result.

I find myself in this place I have yet to name. It is a place larger than myself, for it includes the experiences of raced or woman or Asian or oppressed people that have not been represented by another in their lifetime. It is yet to have name to leave open the language that may be used to describe accurately such experience. It is study, contemplation and lived

experience that manifests this language, for a place yet to name always has the potential to be named. To echo Feng, the Asian-American experience is one of becoming. We navigate the experience as we live through it, our embodied experiences become clearer as our lives go on. Because Asian-Americans have a multiplicities of narratives, of country origins and cultures, our experiences truly form a web, inside the web positionality of race in America. A web is not rigid, but allows movement and augmented shape; this evolution is necessary in order to reflect the reality of Asian-American experience.

I found myself in this place I have yet to name, for my philosophical studies through the institutions I have attended had never named nor taught an Asian-American philosopher. Thus the practice of Asian-American philosophy was a discourse I had to find outside the classroom and curriculum. I knew I was not the White man whom which I was reading, but I did not know who I was in the context of philosophy. Yet my love for philosophy pushed me to keep studying and find racialized experiences to which I could relate, landing me first within the Black experience and the Latina experience. Now I realize the furtherance of my Asian-American philosophical studies is one that must also include African-American, Latin-American and Native-American philosophical studies. There is a liberation in finding epistemologies that do not support my oppression. These traditions are positioned from an epistemology that grows out of struggle for our truths to be heard and to be taken as serious endeavors.

Latinized Asian-Americans and Asian-Americans searching for an understanding of ethnic self-hood reflect the ways in which we interpret stereotypical images of ourselves in popular culture. Thus we do not feel Asian because we do not fit these stereotypes, and yet we implicitly think that is what being Asian means. In feeling displaced from our race, we assimilate into other racially lived experiences in order to feel a reflection of our reality. Asian-American

voices must represent our people in ways that have not yet been formulated, in order to lead Asian-Americans toward finding a reflection within our people.

People of color have been domesticated, criminalized, and sexualized so that these stereotypes take precedence over our personhood. The White gaze and its construction of knowledge is not something we should remain under. We must rise from within our oppression, react not for the sake of reaction, but in order to meet and experience a liberation that will not be granted in a White supremacy. A participation in cultural borderlands is a freedom and opportunity to begin to see ourselves without a veil. As we come to understand the implications of Whiteness, we see the ways in which it has shaped the understanding of ourselves as colored people. We must de-center the oppressor, so that we can fully be in the world.

To echo Yancy, philosophy is an honest practice, an honesty that cannot harbor denial or fear. Had I wanted to appease White professors or White counterparts, this paper would not have been written. Philosophy contains grief, precisely because it uncovers vulnerabilities in our human nature that we must take responsibility for, and only through mourning do we revive ourselves once again. To live life through denial, what is only to be a stage of grief, is to consequently not reach a place of love. Philosophy—*love for wisdom*—is a practice that always includes love when done authentically, for love is rooted in its name. It is in deep commitment to this that I meet these questions of Asian-American philosophy and all they may entail, to slowly uplift the veil, for a life's work in this love is a liberation and a hope to see us unveiled.

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