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Floating Points: From Diasporic Spaces to Multicultural Places

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In the study of Asian immigrant communities and culture in North America, particularly in arts and literature, two intellectual approaches have emerged: the transnational which focuses on country and culture of origin regardless of the location of the Diaspora community; and, the national which de-emphasizes diaspora in favour of a racial character distinct to the new generations of Asians born and residing in the U.S. and Canada today. In her talk, Angela Pao engages both approaches by presenting the benefits and drawbacks of examining social and cultural institutions, artistic products, and processes through a transnational and consequently *de-territorialized* perspective, as opposed to a domestic one that continues to emphasize Asian histories specific to a destination country or territory. Race and the context of uneven social and power relations between immigrant and local communities, more specifically, are the primary bases on which Pao examines the development of Asian immigrant culture, in particular, Chinese literature in North America, and its usefulness in helping interpret the local and global Asian immigrant experiences.

I would like to thank Xu Xueqing 徐学清 and Zeng Li 曾理 for inviting me to speak at this conference. The invitation was an unexpected honour, but also seemed like a very timely one as I was just beginning a comparative study of Asian theatre companies in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Canada—companies like the Vancouver Asian Canadian Theater, and the fu-Gen Theater here in Toronto. So I greatly welcomed this opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues working on Chinese Canadian literature and culture. In my talk today, I would like to revisit some of the key concepts that have had various changes in fortune over the past two to three decades—especially the ideas of “Diaspora” and “multiculturalism.”

All scholars working on the literature and art of immigrants or ethnic minorities must make a fundamental decision regarding critical methodology: Will the most significant revelations come from using transnational approaches that conceive of such artists as members of a Diaspora, connected by common points of origination in East, Southeast, or South Asia? Or, should the material be examined through what could be called a comparative ethnic studies approach in which the questions being asked are directed towards understanding and intervening in the processes of collective identity formation in the nations where these artists and their audiences live and work?

Over the past two decades, a great deal has been written and said about the benefits and drawbacks of examining social and cultural institutions, artistic products, and processes through a transnational and consequently *de-territorialized* perspective as opposed to a domestic one that continues to emphasize national histories and boundaries. Some of the most important contributions to this discussion have been made by scholars who could be identified as members of the Chinese Diaspora: Sau-ling Wong, Rey Chow, Aihwa Ong, and Ien Ang to name just a few. As the work of these and countless other scholars have demonstrated, in practice, both sets of approaches have the potential to be valuable and complementary.

The benefits, indeed the necessity, of considering cultural production from both perspectives are readily apparent when we consider the development of literature and the

other arts in relation to the history of Asians in general and the Chinese in particular. There are legitimate, even compelling, reasons for emphasizing the continuities and connections that make the country and culture of origin the most prominent organizing factor. Historically, for instance, the same economic and political conditions in nineteenth-century China generated the first massive migrations of Chinese across the Pacific Ocean. Comparable legislative strategies were employed both north and south of the 49th parallel to control Chinese immigration and to forestall permanent residence and participation in civic life. Economic competition among labourers led to many incidents of anti-Chinese violence. Chinatowns with bachelor societies evolved as a result of immigration restrictions, then eventually faded as the discriminatory policies were eased in the 1940s when China, the U.S. and Canada were allies in World War II.

In the realm of popular representations, the same racist stereotypes of the Chinese “yellow peril” circulated freely across the border. The most prominent example is perhaps Bret Harte’s infamous 1870 poem, “Plain Language from Truthful James,” better known as “The Heathen Chinee.” Intended as a satire on working class anti-Chinese attitudes on the West Coast, the poem was first published in *The Overland Monthly Magazine*, a Californian periodical, in September 1870. The Chinese protagonist, tellingly named Ah Sin, is as deceptively childlike as he is not to be trusted. The narrator opens and closes his tale with the refrain:

That for ways that are dark
And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinee is peculiar,

So widespread was anti-Chinese sentiment at the time, however, that the poem became immensely popular as a truthful representation of Chinese immigrants and the threat they posed to American society. The poem was reprinted in leading East Coast and Midwest American periodicals, and by 1879 it had made its way north to inspire the cover illustration of the Montreal-based *Canadian Illustrated News* (Vol. XIX – No. 17). The engraving depicts not labourers, but a well-dressed tall

white man collaring a Chinese man with a queue and long thin mustache in front of a dockside Chinese laundry; the caption reads: “The Heathen Chinese in British Columbia.”

Such incidents and conditions could serve equally well for studies on racialization in Canada and the U.S., or for research on nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Chinese overseas communities in North America. Scholars and writers, however, have differed on the degree to which accommodation between the two perspectives is possible and what forms it might take. For some writers and critics, no accommodation is possible. This was the grounding position of the founders of the Asian American branch of American ethnic studies. It is most forcefully expressed in what came to be the manifesto of Asian American literary and cultural criticism (which I’m sure many people here are familiar with)—the original 1974 preface to *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, which was composed by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. They state:

We have been encouraged to believe that we have no cultural integrity as Chinese or Japanese Americans, that we are either Asian (Chinese or Japanese) or American (white), or measurably both. This myth of being either/or and the equally goofy concept of the dual personality haunted our lobes while our rejection by both Asia and white America proved we were neither one nor the other.... Neither Asian culture nor American culture was equipped to define us except in the most superficial terms (xii).

Instead, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors defined non-schizophrenic and solidly rooted Asian Americas—Chinese America, Japanese America, Filipino America, etc. These communities excluded those who had been born and raised in Asia—those who “were intimate and secure in their Chinese cultural identity in an experiential sense” (Chin *et al* 1974: xiv). To be identified as part of a Chinese or a Japanese Diaspora would be anathema to the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* and many other Asian Americans as well. Incorporation into a Diasporic paradigm would undermine the primary objective of “claiming America”, of being

recognized as Americans with all the rights and privileges of citizenship and affective affiliation. And indeed, we can see the psychological and material consequences of continued identification with the land of ancestral or parental origin in European countries like France and Germany, where it is common to refer to the children and grandchildren of immigrants as “second- or third-generation immigrants” even when they were born in France or Germany. This seems like an oxymoron by North American standards—and one that has had clearly discriminatory consequences.

Emerging somewhat later as a coherent academic discipline, and so taking shape under different historical conditions and in a different intellectual climate, Asian Canadian studies has not generally evinced the vehemence and the adamant separation of immigrant and native-born generations of Asian Canadians that characterized early Asian American studies. There is, however, a parallel agenda. As Peter S. Li puts it with regard to Chinese Canadians, the primary objective must be to understand how “the ‘Chinese race’ was socially constructed in Canadian society in the context of unequal power relations between the dominant majority and a subordinate minority.” He specifically points out the need to “abandon the limited cultural perspective in which the Chinese in Canada are seen as merely an extension of a foreign culture, detached from the structures and opportunities of Canada” (Li 1998: 11). In the field of Asian Canadian literature, scholars such as Donald Goellnicht and Guy Beauregard, notably in a series of essays published in *Essays on Canadian Literature* between 1999 and 2002, advocate and lay the groundwork for investigating Asian North American literatures and the academic disciplines that study them in terms of nation-specific conceptions of racial difference. Beauregard proposes four possible areas or questions for future research in this vein:

- 1) “race,” writing and deference—the problematic tendency of Asian Canadian literary critics “to defer to the authority of the discipline of Asian American studies due to its longer institutional history and deeper academic resources. In this binary formation, Asian American history and culture are

assumed to be normative. By contrast, Asian Canadian history and culture are considered to be, at best, a poor cousin, or, at worst, a deficient, late-blooming variation from an Asian American norm.

- 2) Canadian nationalist paternalism—the opposing view that Asian American history and culture are, at best, irrelevant to an understanding of Asian Canadian history and culture; at worst, Asian American critical discussions of Asian Canadian texts are a form of “colonization” or “cultural imperialism.”
- 3) rethinking the borders of Asian American literary studies—this thread would discuss the moves on the part of U.S. critics to absorb Asian Canadian texts and authors into an Asian American tradition without foregrounding their Canadian identities. (The most notable examples of this are Joy Kogawa and her book on the Japanese internment, *Obasan*, and Edith Eaton). The goal here is not so much to engage in a territorial battle, but to arrive at an understanding of the conditions and textual qualities that prompt and enable such moves.
- 4) rethinking the role of “race” in Canadian literary studies—this would involve a questioning of the “color-evasive” or “race-evasive” tendencies of Canadian literary studies.

(Beauregard 2002)

It cannot be denied that there are compelling reasons for working within nationalized critical frameworks, and many of the concerns regarding the political and intellectual risks of Diasporic paradigms are well-founded. Sau-ling Wong is widely considered to have provided the most balanced and insightful summation of these risks in her landmark article “Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads.” Prompted precisely by the move away from cultural nationalist concerns and towards a diasporic perspective that was affecting all Asian American disciplines in

the 1980s and 1990s, Wong made the case for employing the latter perspective selectively and demonstrated the need to reaffirm the founding principles of ethnic studies as set out by Ling-Chi Wang: self-determination; solidarity among American racial minorities; educational relevance; and an interdisciplinary approach (Wang 1993 cited in Wong 1995: 20). By the mid-1990s, all but the last of these were in danger of being undermined from within the field.

Also resistant to the seductive appeal of Diasporic models, critics like Ien Ang and Rey Chow felt that it was not the affiliations and allegiances assumed by a Diasporic paradigm that should be investigated, but the challenges to common assumptions about nationality and ethnicity that the notion poses. For Chow, “The liberating productivity of the diasporic perspective lies... in the means it provides to ‘*un-learn*’ that submission to one’s ethnicity such as ‘Chineseness’ as the ultimate signified” (Chow 1993: 50). Ang—an ethnic Chinese, Indonesian-born and European-educated, now living and working in Australia (Ang 2001: 3)—poses a similar question, “Can one say ‘no’ to Chineseness”; for Ang “Chineseness in diaspora” is a predicament to be explored (vii) rather than a communal identity to be celebrated. Ang favors hybridity (over Diaspora and multiculturalism) as the concept best able to “foreground complicated entanglement rather than identity, togetherness-in-difference” rather than the virtual apartheid implied by a Diasporic focus on ethnicity and heritage.

At the same time, however, there is an undeniable appeal to many of the ideas and feelings that not only analyze but celebrate Diasporic connections. Today, I would like to focus on two such texts: an essay by Emmanuel Ma Mung, “Groundlessness and Utopia: The Chinese Diaspora and Territory” published in Elizabeth Sinn’s anthology, *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas* (Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1998); and the collection of interviews gathered by Wei Djao in *Being Chinese: Voices from the Diaspora* (Univ. of Arizona Press, 2003). These texts offer insights into Diasporic formations and sensibilities that, I believe, are of special value to the field of literary studies.

It seems natural to begin with the narratives collected in Djao’s volume, for these are voices that are for the most

part uncensored by the pressures and preferences of authoritative academic discourses. The case studies collected in *Being Chinese* include accounts from respondents who themselves emigrated from China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong, and from others who are several generations removed from their emigrant ancestors. They represent 16 countries in Southeast and South Asia, North America, Europe, Africa, South and Central America, and Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean. (Djao herself is a multiple migrant: she was born in Shanghai, moved with her family to Hong Kong in the 1950s, and then came to Canada in the 1960s; now she lives and teaches in Seattle). These narratives confirm how varied and subjective the sense of being part of a Diaspora can be.

At one end of the spectrum is Fay Chung—a third-generation Chinese African whose grandparents immigrated to colonial Rhodesia at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Chung acknowledges that it has been “very valuable to have had inherited Chinese cultural and moral values” (82); but she does not feel her Chinese background is the dominant or defining aspect of her identity:

Ethnicity has been important insofar as I have fought against identity based solely on ethnic grouping all my life. It is my belief that human beings have other values that are more important than their racial, ethnic heritage. This is one of the reasons that I have identified with Africa and with Zimbabwe rather than with my own ethnic grouping,... I feel that although I am racially Chinese, I am more Zimbabwean and African in my interests and background (Djao 81).

In contrast, there is Walter Keoki Quan, who describes himself as a fifth-generation Chinese American and third-generation Chinese Canadian. His paternal great-grandfather was a gold-rush era sojourner in California, and in 1904, his grandfather came to Vancouver where he stayed. His mother’s family are Chinese Hawaiians—Quan’s great-great-grandfather moved to Hawaii from southern China as a rice planter. Despite this degree of temporal and spatial distance from China,

Quan strongly identifies as Chinese. He tells how he became outraged at a Chinese Cultural Centre event where a speaker maintained that “you couldn’t be Chinese unless you spoke a Chinese dialect.” Quan, who says he “nearly flunked out” of Chinese Mandarin 101 at the University of British Columbia, rejects the notion that a culture can only be carried by language. Not being a professional academic, Quan does not hesitate to say that he thinks “there is an essence of being Chinese.” He counters the pejorative banana metaphor for a diasporic Chinese who is yellow on the outside but white on the inside, with that of the pomelo. This is how Djao paraphrases Quan’s analogy:

His appearance is Chinese, yellow like the outer skin of the pomelo. His culture, that is, his way of life, is quite like the ‘big white pith’ inside the yellow exterior... because it is very much steeped in the dominant European Canadian culture of the larger society. But the pomelo has a core, the edible part, that is still yellow. The core of Quan’s being, like the pomelo, is yellow, that is, Chinese (Djao 189).

Responses such as these call into question the limits of Diaspora: are there concrete external and material indicators that allow researchers to define meaningful categories? Or, are these limits co-terminous with the life of what could be called a “Diasporic consciousness” that resides in individuals? In his comparative survey of *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen identifies nine features, both internal and external, that are common characteristics of Diasporic populations. He concludes that any given Diasporic community, ancient or modern, will exhibit several although not necessarily all of the following features:

- } External and historical (4)
 1. dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically;
 2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade, or to further colonial ambitions;

3. a return movement;
4. a troubled relationship with host societies.

} Internal and subjective (5)

1. a collective memory and myth about the homeland;
2. an idealization of the supposed ancestral home;
3. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time;
4. a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries;
5. the possibility of a distinctive, creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries.

(Cohen 1997: 180)

The question arises: Must an individual have been part of the group or generation that experienced the initial dispersal or that migrated from the homeland to be considered a Diasporic subject? Affirmative answers to this question are generally associated with a politicized standpoint that seeks recognition for an ethnic or racial minority group. (e.g. the Aiiieeeee! position). Far more common is the view that for an individual, a Diasporic identity is a state of mind that exceeds a particular act or event—that of dispersal or migration. This was Djao's conclusion—that the affective and cultural elements were paramount in developing and sustaining the Diasporic consciousness of her narrators. She writes:

As shown in the book, being Chinese is a state of mind and a feeling. The sentiment is at times vigorous, at other times fragile, and quite often deeply sustaining to those who feel it. Such a feeling is not jingoistic nationalism, for it transcends political allegiance... The feeling is one of identification with a place, a history, some elements of Chinese culture, a few motivating and guiding principles, or simply an awareness of whence they came. Their identity of being Chinese, and the elements of Chinese culture they have inherited and spread around the world, make up the global heritage that they in turn give to the world. (Djao 2003: xviii).

A few examples in Djao's volume indicate that *not* only need one not have originally resided in China, but one need not even be 100 per cent Chinese biologically to self-identify as being connected to a greater Chinese Diaspora. This is the case with a grandmother and her granddaughter who were born and raised in Europe. Sylvia Marie Chinque's father was a Chinese seaman from Guangzhou; her mother was half-English and half-Irish; they met and married in England in 1906. Sylvia Marie grew up in Liverpool's Chinatown, where her father managed a boarding house for Chinese sailors and was also active with Chinese community associations. She and her sister married Chinese men. Her eight children (all of whom are therefore three-quarters Chinese) form a mini-Chinese Diaspora: one daughter lives in Switzerland, two sons in Germany, two daughters in the U.S., a son and a daughter in Canada, and one son remained in England. The grand-daughter who participated in the project, Natascha, is three-eighths Chinese, her father having married a German woman. Primarily through her grandparents, there was regular contact with some aspects of Chinese culture during her childhood and adolescence: mainly foods they ate, her grandfather's stories, observing festivals. Now living in Vancouver, Natascha Chinque believes that being three-eighths Chinese has had an impact on her life and "helped [her] get closer to other Chinese" (Djao 2003: 61).

The diasporic sensibility, however, cannot be guaranteed by everyday practices (eating certain foods or wearing certain clothes) or, in the case of writers and artists, by stylistic choices. For instance, many North American-born Asian American and Asian Canadian writers incorporate Asian history and legends or folklore in their work, or else devise plots that move between Asia and the U.S. or Canada. This tradition is well represented by some of the most prominent Chinese American authors including Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Frank Chin, and Amy Tan. Characteristically, writers draw on their own ethnic heritage, even though in the case of second or third generation Asian Americans and Canadians they never lived in the country of their parents or more remote ancestors. (In this respect, David Henry Hwang's play, *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, inspired by a Japanese novella, is really atypical.) Far more representative would be

his *Golden Child*, which explores how contact with the West and Christianity affected a nineteenth-century Chinese family based on his own family history.

Hwang's plays also deal with contemporary Chinese American issues that involve close connections with China. His most recent work, *Yellow Face* (2007), is a semi-autobiographical comedy that, among other things, touches on the impact of campaign financing investigations that targeted Chinese American donors in the late 1990s. The protagonist of *Yellow Face* is a playwright listed in the program as DHH and called "David" by the other characters. David's life becomes complicated and the comedy darkens when his father, Henry Y. Hwang in real life, comes under investigation as one of the founders and vice-chairman of the Far East National Bank, the first Asian American-owned federally chartered bank in the continental United States. In the late 1990s, after the bank had received a total of \$92 million dollars from Chinese banks, the Justice Department and F.B.I. began looking for links to criminal activity, Chinese intelligence operations in the U.S., or foreign campaign financing. The story made front page news in major newspapers including the *New York Times*. As a former director and board member of the bank, in the play, David also gets questioned and plays the filial piety card to absolve himself of any responsibility. In real life, while the investigations revealed no illegal or improper activities, the incident gravely disillusioned the older Hwang, who had believed America was the land of opportunity where a Chinese immigrant could start out working in a laundry and end up in a corporate boardroom. Hwang's father had always told his children that when he lived in China, he knew that his "real life" was never that of an insignificant second son; instead, he said, "the 'real me' was Clark Gable, Frank Sinatra, and Humphrey Bogart"—the actors/characters he grew up watching in China. David Henry Hwang has said that, in addition to being a satirical study of race and ethnicity, *Yellow Face* became a tribute to his father, who died in 2005.

More cynical interpretations have suggested that these writers are profiting from a highly marketable, but entirely false cultural "authenticity" that requires them to stick to their own ethnic heritage. But even Frank Chin, who has been an

outspoken critic of what he sees as exoticizing elements in the work of Kingston and Tan, invokes the heroic tradition of Kwan Kung both in his critical and fictional writing, notably his novel *Donald Duk*. There is no doubt that Chin would reject characterization as a Chinese Diasporic author. Ultimately, then, just as it is up to the individual to claim a Diasporic identity, it is up to the individual writer to say whether or not he or she considers this literary technique to be a Diasporic gesture, and up to the critic to decide whether to situate the techniques and representations in a national or transnational context.

Coming from a different angle, Emmanuel Ma Mung's observations regarding the Chinese Diaspora grow out of the type of research that characterizes contemporary geography—that is, studies on the function of space and place in shaping economic, social, political, and cultural life. Working in France as director of a research unit on international migrations at the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS), Mung's thinking incorporates philosophical currents that are concerned with the nature of being; this perspective is largely foreign to the Anglo-American traditions of migration studies. Thus informed, his emphasis on individual Diasporic consciousness as a mode of being and on the centrality of human relations in forming the fabric of Diasporic communities seems highly compatible with literary or artistic creative endeavors. Mung describes the construction of an extraterritorial consciousness as a representation of oneself in space:

...the [diasporic] population tends to flourish in an imaginary, 'fantasized' space which has been reconstructed on an international scale. Identification with a national or territorial space has been transcended by a vision of oneself in a sort of extraterritoriality, and this perception, this feeling, is what forms the bond uniting the diaspora. The consciousness of oneself as being groundless also differentiates the diaspor from consecutive migrant groups, and to a certain degree, we might say that a diaspora exists when there is an **awareness** of diaspora.... It would thus be a subjective state; a dream; and therefore a utopia: a dream of oneself, one might say. But the diaspora is indeed

constructed on the basis of the utopia. This is the consciousness which enables new nodes to form and develops the web of networks (Mung 1998: 37).

The utopian construction involves an idealization of the land of origin through mythification and mystification, and a concurrent awareness that the Diasporic condition renders territorialization impossible. Accordingly:

...one can no longer identify with a precise, circumscribed territory, like that of a sedentary nation; one becomes part of a supra-national phenomenon. One can no longer count on the 'country', a human and territorial entity, instead, one must place one's faith in the group, a social entity. It is as though the attachment to the soil were transferred to the soul, identity, and being of the group. Of the two basic elements which contribute to the identity of a group, territory and being, the diaspora gradually comes to prefer the latter (Mung 1998: 40).

The resulting primacy of human relationships creates an "orientation towards a community-type organization rather than a national-territorial one." In this case, the community, which is both an imaginary and a material entity, is an international one. The resulting groundlessness or a-topia, Mung asserts, "makes it possible *to conceive of and then give body* to this utopia which consists of dreaming of oneself in a life that transcends territory, an existence that seeks to be simultaneously in the world and in many countries" (44).

From Diasporic Space to Multicultural Place

Visionary and appealing as this formulation may be, one cannot remain floating in the space of an ungrounded ideal forever: one must wake from a dream or come down to earth some time and some place. Only the most privileged cosmopolitans, the most unfortunate refugees, or the most committed political exiles never put down new roots with some degree of attachment to a new location. I would suggest

that the fortunate migrant touches ground in a multicultural place.

Multiculturalism has, of course, been a notoriously controversial and slippery concept and policy, nowhere moreso than in North America. In the U.S., the “multiculturalist project” came into ascendancy in the 1980s, in a move that served both progressive and conservative agendas. According to Robert Stam, from a progressive point of view, this project “calls for decisive changes, changes in the way we write history, the way we teach literature, the way we make art, the way we program films, the way we organize conferences, and the way we distribute cultural resources” (Stam 1997: 188–89). Multiculturalist policies and practices constitute a national diversity project. In Stam’s words, the task is “at once one of deconstructing Eurocentric and racist norms and of constructing and promoting multicultural alternatives” (Stam 1997: 189).

At the same time, speaking of different “cultures” rather than different “races,” and emphasizing “culture” rather than “color,” can be seen as a concession to the sensibilities of the white middle class. The rhetoric of “multiculturalism” has proven to be highly compatible with traditional American narratives of cultural pluralism, which include groups of European origin; consequently, this discourse reassures members of the dominant culture that diversity is “not political.” Canada, of course, became one of the first nations to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism with the passage of the Multiculturalism Act in 1988. In this context, multiculturalism can be defined as “a political doctrine that officially promotes cultural differences as an intrinsic component of the social, political and moral order. Defined in this manner, multiculturalism involves the establishment of a novel working relationship between the government and ethnic immigrants” (Elliott and Fleras 1990: 63).

Several leading cultural critics including Homi Bhabha and Ian Ang have pointed out the dangers and the shortcomings of multiculturalism as an official government policy. Essentially, in states that can no longer maintain their homogeneity, the diversity of cultures is preserved, but “within well-demarcated limits, so as not to disturb or

threaten the national unity” (Ang 2001: 14). The proclamation of multiculturalism simultaneously promotes and contains cultural difference.

Thus we have the “multicultural nation” or “the multicultural state”, in which differences are carefully classified and organized into a neat, virtual grid of distinct “ethnic communities,” each with their own “culture.” The problem with this conception of the multicultural society is that it does not respond to the dynamism that occurs when different groups come to live and interact together... (Ang 2001: 14).

There can be no denying that the limitations and obfuscations enabled by official multiculturalism exist and that multiculturalism as a policy and an ideology functions in the manner so astutely analyzed by many cultural critics. At the same time, I think most people would agree that an official multicultural policy is far preferable to the republican model of integrationism that prevails in countries like France. David Blatt offers a concise definition of this policy:

...the republican model conceives of integration as a process by which individuals subordinate their particularist origins and accept membership in a unitary nation-state defined by reference to shared universalist values, in contrast to the multicultural model associated with the United States and Great Britain, which preserves particularist identities and fosters group-based integration into the multicultural nation-state. Whereas multicultural states recognize ethnic communities and preserve cultural differences, republican states recognize only individuals and individual rights, and strive to overcome differences. Under the republican model, ethnic origin is deemed unacceptable as a basis for organization and mobilization by political actors, or for the conferring of rights, recognition, or entitlements by public authorities (Blatt 1997: 46).

In principle, the implied guarantee of individual rights and respect would create an ideal, even utopian, society; in practice, however, the result has been the active suppression of ethnic and religious differences in critical areas of public life. Government agencies will not support ethnically specific cultural institutions or activities. High profile cases in the past two years have involved public schools and religious beliefs. In the U.S., the foundational principle of separation of church and state is closely connected to the freedom of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment. In the educational system, this means that teachers and administrators must respect and accommodate the customs and tenets of all established religious groups, *e.g.* holy days, dietary restrictions, symbolic aspects of dressing. In France, on the contrary, the principle of separation of church and state has been cited to authorize the ban on headscarves in public schools. In order to maintain the appearance of being non-discriminatory and consistent with the foundational document of the French Republic, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the ban includes all religious symbols including Jewish *yarmulkes* or ostentatious crucifixes. But the timing and context made it clear that the directives were provoked by anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-immigration sentiments.

I would, however, like to suggest that there are important insights regarding how a Diasporic sensibility functions in a multicultural context that emerges when we consider not the nation or an entire society but particular neighborhoods. The neighbourhoods I have in mind are in the borough of Queens in New York City. Over the past four decades, there has been considerable transformation in terms of ethnic demographics, particularly in neighbourhoods that until the 1980s were predominantly, even overwhelmingly, Jewish: Forest Hills, Rego Park, Kew Gardens Hills, and Fresh Meadows. Since the 1980s, there has been a significant increase of immigrants from China and Korea, and more recently, since the 1990s, a large number of immigrants from the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia (notably Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkistan, and Uzbekistan). In this last case, the new residents are from a particular ethnic and religious group—Bukharian or Bukharan Jews. What has made

a noticeable impact is that the newer residents are largely wealthy business people, with the capital to radically alter the neighbourhoods into which they move, by tearing down existing houses and building new structures. (This is very much the same phenomenon well known in certain suburbs in Vancouver and Toronto, where wealthy Chinese immigrants have been constructing the large homes unfavourably characterized as “monster houses.”)

A 2008 *New York Times* article titled “Questions of Size and Taste in Queens” focused on the case of the Bukharians, which is particularly relevant because of the unique history of the Jewish Diaspora. It would not be overstating the case to say that, since the mid-twentieth century, the emigration of the Bukharians from the lands where they had resided for over 2,000 years constituted a modern exodus. The Bukharians had known and survived many waves of conflict and persecution, which became severe under Soviet rule. Since the fall of the Soviet Union with the establishment of the independent republics, a rise in Islamic fundamentalism, collapsing economies, and a loosening of immigration restrictions, an estimated 90,000 Jews have emigrated. Most went to Israel, but many others joined an already established community in Queens, which currently numbers between 40,000-50,000. This is obviously a very rich and complex case for analyses of ethnic, national and religious identity; but what I would like to take from it are the aspects that the Bukharans’ situation in Queens shares with that of Chinese and Koreans.

When wealthy Bukharans moved into Queens neighbourhoods, more often than not, they tore down stately Georgian or Tudor residences in Forest Hills, or more modest Cape Cod or bungalow-style houses in Fresh Meadows. In their place, they have erected imposing “white-brick edifices that borrow from old Europe, with sweeping balustrades, stone lions bracketing regal double doorways, chateau-style dormers and pitched roofs, Romanesque and Greek columns and ornate wrought-iron balconies accented with gold leaf that glints in the sun.” In the case of Chinese or Korean immigrants, the ornamental elements run to shiny chrome- or nickel-plated banisters and railings, often with matching gridded security doors. Many homeowners from all three cultures favor high

walls for privacy and security, and paved over front yards that are easy to maintain and increase the usable square footage for outdoor socializing. For the new residents, the bold architecture is not an ostentatious display of wealth, but an expression of family and community values—big houses are needed to accommodate multiple generations and to hold large family gatherings—and a realization of the American dream. Boris Kandov, president of the Buhkarian Jewish Congress of the U.S.A. and Canada, was interviewed for the article. He said: “Why are we in America?... Because we’re dreaming of this freedom! We were dreaming to build big house” (Semple 2008).

What distinguishes this situation from other instances of influxes into upper- and upper middle-class neighbourhoods in North America is the fact that the existing neighbourhoods were not predominantly or exclusively white Anglo residential areas. Rather, they were and are increasingly multicultural. The resulting tensions between longtime residents and new arrivals have *not* therefore been drawn along racialized or ethnic lines. Nor is there evidence of Diasporic cohesion. This is particularly striking in the case of the Jewish groups, for whom cultural identity and collective affiliations have been defined by a diasporic condition and sensibility for millennia. Many of the unhappy neighbours in Queens are Jewish themselves—but members or descendants of the Ashkenazi Jewish communities who fled the persecutions of Nazis and Communists during the early to mid-twentieth century. Instead of Diasporic links, forking histories and internal group fractions that go back decades, if not centuries, take precedence.

The situation in Queens does not by any means invalidate the body of work done on individual and collective racial or ethnic identities. It does, however, invite increased attention to the affective dimensions of ethnic minority identity and Diasporic consciousness as they are expressed in relation to the ever-shifting dynamics of multicultural neighbourhoods. This is a project with countless variations, but these could all be said to depart from a core insight by Chinese American humanist geographer Yi-fu Tuan, who speaks from a wide erudition and multiple vantage points

gained from his passages from Tientsin to Australia, the Philippines, England, and finally the United States. In *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1977), he distinguishes between “spaces” that are “undifferentiated and abstract” and “places” that have become familiar and are endowed with value:

The street where one lives is part of one’s intimate experience. The larger unit, neighborhood, is a concept. The sentiment one has for the local street corner does not automatically expand in the course of time to cover the entire neighborhood (Tuan 1977: 170).

The larger unit acquires visibility through an effort of the mind. The entire neighborhood then becomes a place. It is, however, a conceptual place and does not involve the emotions. Emotion begins to tinge the whole neighborhood—drawing on, and extrapolating from, the direct experience of its particular parts—when the neighborhood is perceived to have rivals and to be threatened in some way, real or imagined. Then the warm sentiment one has for a street corner broadens to include the larger area (Tuan 1977: 171).

In the case of multicultural neighbourhoods, these “warm sentiments” are shared by the residents and neighbors regardless of their own ethnic origins.

In stressing the qualities and power of the imagination and the role of affective responses, Emmanuel Ma Mung’s conception of Diasporic space as a space of human relationships and Yi-fu Tuan’s characterization of a neighbourhood as an emotion-charged place open the way for an exploration of culturally complex experiences as intimate experiences. The distance between the far-reaching Diaspora and the familiar street, moreover, may not be so great as generally supposed. The fact that they may be adjacent territories is also suggested by Robin Cohen:

Unlike adherence to an ethnicity, religion or diaspora, the nation-state is often too large and too amorphous an entity to be the object of intimate affection. One can marry a spouse of one's own kind and feel the warm embrace of kinship; one can kneel in common prayer with one's co-religionists; one can effect easier friendships with those of a common background. Bonds of language, religion, culture and a sense of a common history and perhaps a common fate impregnate a transnational relationship and give to it an affective, intimate quality that formal citizenship or even long settlement frequently lack. (Cohen 1997: 195).

In the sweeping reach of discussions about the transnational and national, about the global and the local, this dimension of the personal, but not necessarily private, has received scant attention. In an era dominated by visual and digital media in the realm of representation and by totalizing cultural theories in the realm of academia, the exploration of intimate spaces, places, and relationships is one that literary forms and literary studies are uniquely qualified to undertake.

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